

Complaint Handling Policy

Purpose

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre recognizes the importance of public feedback and welcomes complaints as a valuable form of comment regarding our services and operations. Information gained from complaints helps improve the quality of the services provided by the municipality and the client experience of residents, businesses and visitors to our community.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the municipality provides a fair, effective and transparent response to complaints and concerns raised by our service users. This policy sets out the procedures for receiving, reviewing, recording and responding to complaints.

Scope

Complaints covered by this policy include:

- Breach of Middlesex Centre policies
- Health and safety matters
- Maintenance
- Property damage
- Conduct towards Municipal Staff

Complaints not covered by this policy include:

- Matters addressed by legislation, or an existing municipal by-law, policy or procedure
- Requests for service or general inquiries
- Decisions of Council, committees or a local board
- Complaints regarding the conduct of Council members (Members of Council are subject to a separate Council Code of Conduct.)
- Matters that are handled by tribunals, courts of law, or quasi-judicial boards
- Those related to services and programs for which the municipality is not responsible
- Those which lack specific details making the complaint difficult, if not impossible, to assess or follow-up on
- Those related to human rights, harassment, and/or discrimination which are covered in separate policies

Definitions

“Appeal Body” means the group established to hear appeals on formal complaint decisions and which has the authority to render a final decision on behalf of the municipality. The appeal body shall be composed of the members of the municipality’s Senior Management Team.

“Complainant” means a person who makes a complaint.

“Complaint” means an expression of dissatisfaction about the action or lack of action taken regarding operations or services provided by the Municipality of Middlesex Centre or by a person or body acting on behalf of the Municipality of Middlesex Centre.

“Contractor” means a person or company hired by the municipality to complete a specific task or service

“Municipality” means the Municipality of Middlesex Centre.

“Municipal Staff/Employees” means all those who work for (full-time, part-time, contract, co-op, etc.) and/or volunteer with the municipality. In this policy, the term staff does not include members of Council, as they have a separate Code of Conduct to which they are accountable.

“Parties” means all those involved in a complaint including the complainant and the persons at whom the complaint is directed.

Roles & Responsibilities

Employees: All employees are to have knowledge and awareness of the municipality’s requirement to receive complaints, the process through which a complaint can be made and the service standards that apply to complaints.

Directors: Department directors are responsible for facilitating prompt response to all complaints by their staff to ensure that service standards are achieved. Directors hold responsibility for departmental compliance with the Complaint Handling Policy.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO): The CAO is responsible to monitor reports and receive input to ensure all employees and directors are following the established Complaint Handling Policy and that service standards are being achieved. They are also responsible for ensuring the receipt, tracking and response of all complaints that require their attention.

Procedure

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre will deal with all complaints promptly, courteously, impartially and professionally. Complaint investigations will be guided by the principles of administrative fairness and will be conducted in a timely and impartial manner. There will be no retaliation by the municipality or municipal staff against a person or agency making a complaint in good faith.

All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and other applicable legislation. The identity of the complainant will be made known only to those who need to know in order to consider the complaint. All participants in the complaints process shall keep the details of the complaint confidential except as required by law.

Who can make a complaint: Anyone who uses or is affected by municipal services can make a complaint. This includes residents, people who work in or visit the municipality, businesses and community groups. Anonymous complaints are not accepted.

Receiving complaints: The Office of the Clerk receives all incoming complaints. Complaints can be submitted to the municipality:

- By mail: Municipality of Middlesex Centre, 10227 Ilderton Road, Ilderton, ON, N0M 2A0
- Via the municipal website: middlesexcentre.ca/complaints

Middlesex Centre is committed to being responsive to the needs of all its service users. If you require an alternative format to submit a complaint, please contact Middlesex Centre at customerservice@middlesexcentre.ca or 519-666-0190 / 1-800-220-8968.

Acknowledging complaints: All complaints will be acknowledged within five (5) working days by email or mail. This acknowledgement will include information about the staff member who has primary responsibility for handling the complaint, as well as information about the complaints process, including applicable timeframes.

Assessing complaints (Informal Process): The applicable department director or their delegate will conduct a preliminary assessment to confirm the issues raised by the complainant fall within the scope of this policy. Staff will attempt to seek early resolution of complaints wherever possible. The director will respond to the complainant via email or phone within ten (10) business days and will keep a record of the response as per the municipality's record retention by-law. If a complaint is made against a director, the CAO or designate shall conduct the investigation.

Authority to dismiss complaint: Complaints that are accepted for review under this complaints policy may be dismissed by staff for the following reasons:

- the complaint is not within the scope of the policy as outlined above
- the concerns raised have previously been investigated by the municipality and no new information or issues have been reported
- the issues raised by the complainant are currently before the courts
- the remedy sought by the complainant is not achievable

When a complaint is dismissed for any of the reasons above, the complainant will be notified, with reasons provided for the decision to dismiss the complaint.

Investigating complaints (Formal Process): If a complaint is not resolved through the informal resolution process, the complainant may ask for it to be forwarded for further review by the CAO or their delegate. If the complaint is against the CAO, the Director of Corporate Services will conduct the formal review. If the CAO and Director of Corporate Services are both listed in the

complaint, the investigation will move to another director, or, in the case of all directors being listed, the Manager of Legislative Services/Municipal Clerk.

As part of a formal investigation of a complaint, staff will:

- Conduct an assessment of the main issues raised, and the outcome or remedy the person is seeking and gather necessary evidence.
- Analyze information provided in the context of Middlesex Centre's policies and standard procedures.
- Interview employees or members of the public involved in the issue.
- Issue a decision letter to the complainant at the conclusion of a complaint investigation outlining what decision was reached, any action taken by the municipality in response to the complaint, and information about any appeal or review options. The decision letter will be provided within thirty (30) business days of the complaint submission unless extenuating circumstances occur.
- File a copy of the decision letter in accordance with the municipality's record retention by-law.

Appeal: Upon receipt of a decision letter, a complainant may appeal the decision to the Appeal Body. The Appeal Body will review the merits of the appeal and issue a final letter of decision regarding the complaint within ten (10) business days. Once the municipality has communicated a decision regarding an appeal, there is no further appeal process at the municipal level. Unresolved issues can be addressed at the Provincial level through the Ontario Ombudsman.

Remedies: If investigation of a complaint reveals that Middlesex Centre has made an error in providing its services to the public, the municipality will take steps to fix the problem. The following remedies may be appropriate for substantiated complaints:

- an acknowledgement and apology for the error
- waiving a fee or penalty
- issuing a payment or refund
- expediting an action
- changing our policies and procedures to prevent re-occurrence

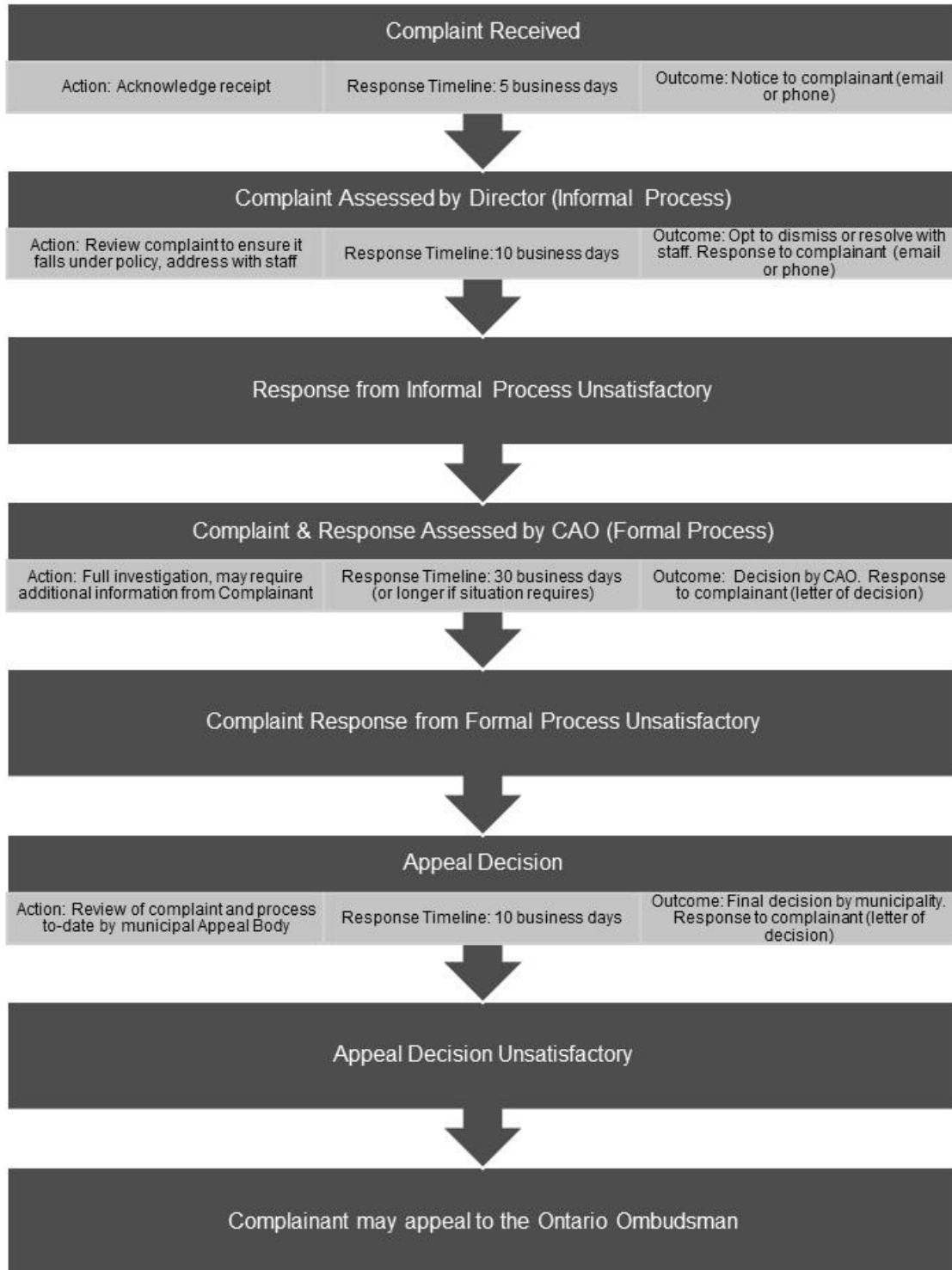
Unreasonable conduct: Middlesex Centre commits to responding fairly to complaints and treating people with dignity and respect throughout the complaint resolution process. We expect that people making complaints to our organization will treat municipal staff in the same manner.

In cases where a service user becomes unreasonable in their interactions with our staff such that it creates health, safety, resource or equity issues for our organization, we will take steps to address the behaviour and may limit access to municipal staff and services as necessary. In such cases the following policies/standards apply:

- Workplace Violence & Harassment Policy and Program
- R-Zone Policy

Complaint Resolution Path

The following chart provides a high-level overview of the complaint resolution path outlined above.



Monitoring/Contraventions

The CAO will monitor compliance with this policy and will follow up with appropriate departments as required. The CAO shall terminate an investigation if he/she is of the opinion that the matter is frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith, or that there are no grounds or insufficient grounds for an investigation.

Compliance

Department directors and the CAO are responsible for implementation and ongoing compliance with the Complaints Handling Policy.

Reporting

The Office of the Clerk will prepare an annual summary indicating the number of complaints received, the number of complaints outstanding, and response timelines. This will be reported to Council as part of the annual Customer Service report.

Feedback

Individuals are encouraged to provide feedback regarding the complaint handling policy and the associated processes. This feedback will be reviewed by staff and consideration will be given to opportunities for enhancement and improvement of the policy.

Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed once every four years or as required in response to changes in legislation or direction of Council.