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PRACTICE NOTE NO 9 - COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT IN COUNCILS

Purpose

To advise councils of the release of *Practice Note No 9 - Complaints Management in Councils*, a joint publication of the Department of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman.

Background

Practice Note No 9 - Complaints Management in Councils has been prepared by the Department of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman to assist councils in the management and handling of complaints. It has been designed for use by councils to develop and implement effective complaints management systems.

An effective complaints management system is an essential part of the provision of quality service in local government. It is one method of measuring community satisfaction and provides a useful source of information and feedback for improving a council's services. Complaint handling is also a key component of sound corporate governance and is fundamental to ensuring an appropriate level of accountability in the exercise of council functions.

This publication provides an analysis of the reasons people complain, and outlines how complainants should be treated. It also provides a model approach to complaint handling and sets out the essential features of a complaints management system. It also addresses the issue of dealing with unreasonable conduct by complainants.

The information in this practice note is based on the 2004 edition of the NSW Ombudsman's *Effective Complaint Handling Guidelines*. This is consistent with the Australian Standard, *Customer Satisfaction – Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organizations* (ISO 10002:2006, MOD). The practice note also incorporates research recently undertaken by the NSW Ombudsman on managing the impact of unreasonable conduct of complainants on complaint handling agencies, as contained in their *Unreasonable Complainant Conduct-Practice Manual 2009*. This information has been adapted to specifically address the needs of councils.

Recommended action for councils

Councils are strongly encouraged to develop complaint handling policies and procedures that incorporate the essential features of an effective complaints management system described in the Practice Note. Where councils have an existing complaints management system, they are encouraged to review it to ensure that it is consistent with best practice as described in the Practice Note.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross Woodward', written in a cursive style.

Ross Woodward
Deputy Director General (Local Government)
Department of Premier and Cabinet