

Cowichan Bay Waterworks District Complaints Policy

Policy No. 21 01 2022
Amendment No. 23 08 28

Purpose

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

Guiding Principles

Cowichan Bay Waterworks District is committed to high standards of practice in our work. The District values feedback and input from service users, ratepayers and landowners and continuously strive to improve services. This complaints process is guided by the following principles¹:

Accessible

Cowichan Bay Waterworks District complaint's process is publicly available on our website, and service users, ratepayers and landowners are informed of their right to complain about the organization. Complaints are accepted in a variety of ways (i.e. phone, mail, email and in-person).

Fair

All complaints will be handled in a manner that is impartial and fair. Our process provides the opportunity for service users, ratepayers and landowners to submit relevant information and have an opportunity to be heard before the review of the complaint is finalized. We thoroughly and objectively review the complaints we receive and are committed to keeping people informed of the progress of their complaint.

Person-Focused

The District recognize that service users, ratepayers and landowners have different needs, and each person has their own unique history that they bring to the interaction with the agency. CBWD commits to listening to service users' concerns, treat them with dignity and respect, and maintain confidentiality throughout the complaints process.

Responsive

We will respond to complaints within 14 business days, and will seek to resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity. Complaints that cannot be resolved at first contact, or those that raise more serious concerns about our organization, will be forwarded to the Trustees for further review /investigation within 45 business days. Cowichan Bay Waterworks District is committed to these time frames and will inform service users, ratepayers and landowners of the progress of their complaint and reasons for any delay in the complaint resolution process.

¹ See the Complaints Handling Guide produced by the Office of the British Columbia Ombudsperson

Definitions

Complaint – A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an aspect of CBWD programs, services or people. It can include concerns about staff conduct, quality of service, delay in providing a response, or the reasonableness of a decision made or action taken by a member of staff or the Trustees. It can also include the response provided by a staff member to a complaint or concern raised about our organization or a decision made by the elected Trustees.

Confidentiality of Complaints

Cowichan Bay Waterworks District commits to maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy throughout the complaints process in accordance with BC's Freedom of Information and *Protection of Privacy Act*. We will only collect and disclose information to those staff who are involved in the review of the complaint. Documents relating to a complaint investigation are securely stored and only accessible to those staff involved in the review of the complaint. Complaint outcomes may be anonymized and shared within our organization to promote continuous quality improvement.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AGENCY

Step 1

The District Administrator is responsible for receiving, recording and assessing complaints, and will attempt to resolve the matter if possible. At this stage, staff have responsibility for explaining the complaints process to the person reporting the concern. The District Administrator will forward complaints that are not resolved or that require further review to Stage 2 of the complaints process to the Trustees.

Step 2

The Trustees are responsible for reviewing and conducting investigations of complaints that are not resolved by the District Administrator.

Step 3

At any point in the complaints process, a person may choose to seek external review of the matter through the BC Office of the Ombudsperson

COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURES

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution

Receiving complaints

Complaints can be submitted to Cowichan Bay Waterworks District in the following ways:

- **Mail / Courier / By Hand:** 1760 Pavenham Road, Cowichan Bay BC V0R 1N1
- **Email:** info@cowichanbaywater.com
- **Telephone:** 250 748 1687
- **In-person:** 1760 Pavenham Road, Cowichan Bay, BC.

Hours of Operation are Tuesday to Thursday, 9 am to 4 pm.
Translation services can be made available when requested.

Acknowledging complaints

All complaints will be acknowledged within 10 working days. 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

The District Administrator will conduct a preliminary assessment to confirm the issues raised by the complainant fall within the scope of this policy and will attempt to seek early resolution of complaints wherever possible.

Authority to dismiss complaint

Complaints that are not accepted for review under this complaints policy may be dismissed by the District Administrator for the following reasons:

- the issue is not within the jurisdiction for review by the agency
- the concerns raised have previously been investigated by the organization, responded to, and no new issues have been reported
- the issues raised by the complainant are currently before the courts
- the complaint appears vexatious
- 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 within 30 business days of receiving the complaint, with reasons provided for the decision to dismiss the complaint.

Recording complaints

When recording the complaint in the complaint tracking system, the following information will be documented.

- the complainant's name and contact information
- when and how the complaint was received
- main issues raised in complaint, including relevant facts provided by the complainant
- any documentation submitted or interview notes taken during interaction with complainant
- the outcome sought by the complainant (if known)
- any attempts made to resolve the complaint informally, including action taken by staff
- any barriers or additional support the person making the complaint may need, such as accommodation for a demonstrated medical illness or access to an interpreter

Stage 2: Investigation

Investigating complaints

If a complaint is not resolved by the District Administrator, the complainant may ask for it to be forwarded for further review by the Trustees. Requests for review should be acknowledged within 30 business days, include information about the staff member responsible for conducting the review and the anticipated timeline for completion of the review. Complaint investigations will be guided by the principles of administrative fairness and will be conducted in a fair, timely and impartial manner.

Concluding complaints

A final letter is due at the conclusion of a complaint investigation and provided to the complainant within 30 business days. This report/letter must be written in clear and accessible language, and include information about the issues raised by the complainant, the evidence considered during the review of the complaint, including the information provided by the complainant. If certain evidence was discounted in the review process, explain why (for example, issues with witness credibility or reliability of evidence) the analysis of this information in the context of the agency's rules and standard procedures, what decision was reached (i.e. whether the complaint was substantiated or not,) any action taken by the agency in response to the complaint and information about any appeal or review options.

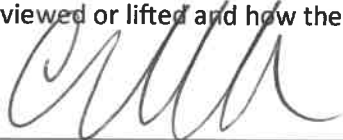
Remedies – If investigation of a complaint reveals that Cowichan Bay Waterworks District has made an error in providing its services to the public, we will take steps to fix the problem. The following remedies may be appropriate for substantiated complaints:

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

[See Step 3 in Roles and Responsibilities on page 2].

Stage 3 Warning, Appeal and Review

As a last resort and after a written warning has been issued, Trustees may establish unique/special conditions for an individual[s] whose complaints are out of scope, unreasonable, unrealistic, repetitive, abusive, or that do not contain new information, in order to manage district resources and unreasonable conduct and behaviour by that individual. This may include terms as to how, why, when and where future correspondence may be received or submitted, such as limiting the frequency of receiving complaints, limiting the method of complaints, and/or limiting the type of complaint [unresolved or new issues only], how long the condition may be in place, how and when the condition may be reviewed or lifted and how the condition may be appealed.



Calvin Slade, Chairperson



Cheryl Wirsz, District Administrator

Appendix 1 - Process Summary

- 1. Complaint made to District Administrator**
- 2. Internal review**
- 3. Written response**
- 4. Trustee review upon written request**
- 5. Potential as a delegation at the next available Board meeting**
- 6. Written response**
- 7. Written warning if complaint continues and is out of scope, or conduct is unreasonable, unrealistic, repetitive, abusive, or does not contain new information**
- 8. As a last resort, imposition of a Service Restriction²**
 - a. Who is included**
 - b. What is restricted**
 - c. When communication can occur**
 - d. Where communication can occur**
 - e. Why**
 - f. How can communication occur [email, Canada Post, telephone etc]**
- 9. Appeal process / Written Response**
- 10. Review after set time frame**
 - a. Amend**
 - b. Remain in place**
 - c. Lift**
- 11. Appeal process / Written Response**
- 12. Ombudsperson appeal**

Appendix 2 - Debriefing and Supporting Staff Who Handle Complaints

Dealing with unreasonable conduct can have an impact on job satisfaction and staff morale. Organizations must ensure that they provide adequate support to the people who respond to complaints and the issues they raise. Even in the absence of unreasonable conduct, dealing with complaints, and specifically complaints about one's own work, can be difficult and can affect staff well-being and feelings toward service users.

It is the role of supervisors to support staff through this process. This can be achieved through:

- ensuring that an organization has policies in place on how to deal with unreasonable conduct by people making complaints
- providing opportunities for internal debriefing sessions with peers and supervisors, where employees have an opportunity to discuss what happened with a difficult complaint and learn from the experience
- providing opportunities to express their thoughts and emotions after an incident
- providing access to external counselling services

Unresolved stress experienced by staff can be unintentionally imparted back to service users, impair staff functioning and result in the escalation of an interaction or complaint into one of serious proportions. Conversely, organizational and personal self-care has major positive implications for staff's interactions with service users. When a complaint or difficult interaction is handled well, organizations should provide feedback and show staff they are valued for the work they do.

² Staff and Trustees are to be guaranteed a safe workplace under the *Workers Compensation Act of BC*