



**Policy #63**

**Complaints Handling Policy**

**Approved by Council on: 2016-04-20**

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## **Complaints Handling Policy**

### **Purpose**

The Township of Southgate is committed to a consistent and uniform process to respond to complaints received from members of the public. This policy is intended to enable the Township to promptly and effectively address program and service delivery concerns raised by members of the public pertaining to facilities, services, staff, programs or operational issues. This policy outlines the process to be followed and service standards expected for the handling of public complaints.

### **Legislative Authority**

Bill 8, the Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)

### **Application**

This policy applies to complaints that are received by phone, at the municipal office counter, by email, by mail or by fax.

This policy does not apply to:

- Requests for service;
- Feedback;
- Compliments;
- Inquiries;
- Anonymous Complaints;
- Request for Accommodations pertaining to Accessibility;
- Complaints regarding staff members that are employed by a service provider contracted by the municipality;
- Issues addressed by legislation, or an existing Municipal By-law policy or procedure;
- A decision of Council;
- Internal employee complaints;
- Matters handled by tribunals, Courts of law, quasi-judicial boards, etc.

This policy does not apply to:

- 1) External Committees, Board & Authorities receiving funding from the Township.
- 2) The Township of Southgate elected Council.

## **Procedures**

### *1.0 Definitions*

**Anonymous Complaint** - A phone call, or letter received expressing "dissatisfaction" about a facility, service, staff, operational issue or program that has no return address or contact information provided for follow up.

**Complaint** – any expression of dissatisfaction regarding programs and service delivery concerns pertaining to facilities, services, staff, programs or operational issues provided by the Township of Southgate. The term "dissatisfaction" is key to the definition of a complaint. Complaints imply that the Complainant is unhappy and that they require a follow up response in regards to the issue.

**Complainant** – the person who is dissatisfied and filing the complaint with the Township, anyone who uses or is affected by Township services can make a complaint including: residents, people who work in or visit the Township, local business or community groups.

**Compliment** – an expression of appreciation for satisfactory or above-satisfactory service.

**Feedback** – input from a person that is neither positive, nor negative but provides input or ideas for consideration. Feedback of a positive or general nature, comments on a facility, service, staff, operation or program that do not require a response.

**Inquiry**- A request for information or knowledge about the Township facilities, services, staff, programs or operations are not complaints.

**Service Request** – a request for a specific service provided by the Township of Southgate or an agent working on behalf of the Township are not complaints.

### *2.0 Scope*

This policy is not meant to address:

- a) Complaints about non-municipal services
- b) Issues already addressed by legislation, or an existing Municipal By-law, policy or procedure
- c) A decision of Council or a decision of the Committee of the Whole; or
- d) Internal employee complaints
- e) A decision of a Committee of Council or Local Board

### *3.0 Policy Requirements*

The Township of Southgate will deal with all complaints promptly, courteously, impartially and professionally. All complainants will be treated with respect and will not receive adverse treatment or any form of reprisal.

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 may be required by law. If the matter goes to mediation, it may be necessary to release the complainant's name and contact information during the resolution process. Complaints received by one department are to be limited to that specific department unless the complaint involves more than one department.

### **What is a complaint?**

Complaint – any expression of dissatisfaction about the action or lack of action taken regarding operations, programs, facilities or services provided by the Township of Southgate or by a person or body acting on behalf of the Township of Southgate.

All complaints filed necessitate a response.

Anonymous complaints will be documented as received but shall not be acted upon.

### **Who can make a complaint?**

Any person who is dissatisfied and filing the complaint with the Township, anyone who uses or is affected by Township services can make a complaint. This includes:

- residents
- people who work in or visit the Township
- local businesses
- community groups

Some individuals may require assistance to make a complaint, and complaints can be made on their behalf, provided that the person affected has given their consent.

Complaints can be submitted:

- By telephone at 519-923-2110;
- By email;
- By mail;
- By fax at 519-923-9262;
- In person at the Township of Southgate Municipal Office; or
- By any other software initiated by the township to handle incoming complaints.

### **Service Standards**

The following Service Standards will be adhered to in the handling of all complaints received.

- Complainants must receive an acknowledgement of receipt of their complaint and the complaint must be recorded by the department in receipt of the complaint by the within five business days. This acknowledgement must identify who will be following up on the complaint as well as their contact information.
- A final response or update must be sent to the complainant within 20 business days, barring exceptional circumstances.
- Complaints that require multiple departmental responses will be collaborated on by affected departments and one final response will be sent.
- The CAO and/or Council shall be consulted only as deemed appropriate by the Department Head.

### **Compliance**

Department Heads are responsible for ensuring departmental logging, monitoring, tracking and ongoing compliance with the Corporate Complaints Handling Policy whether through Southgate supplied software or other means as may be available.

#### *4.0 Responsibilities*

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

**Department Heads:** are responsible for facilitating prompt response to all complaints by their staff to ensure that service standards are achieved. They are also responsible for ensuring the receipt, tracking and response of all complaints according to the service standards set out. Department Heads hold responsibility for departmental compliance to the Complaints Handling Policy.

**CAO:** Will monitor reports and receive input to ensure all employees and Department Heads are following the established Complaints 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 his/her attention.

#### *5.0 Appendices*

Appendix "A" Sample Acknowledgement and Receipt Form Letter

Appendix "B" Sample Letter Advising of Delay Letter

Appendix "C" Sample Complaint Resolution Letter

*\*These appendices are samples only.*

## Appendix "A"

### SAMPLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND RECEIPT LETTER

[Insert date]

[Insert name and address]

Dear [insert Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr Surname]

Thank you for your letter dated [insert date] concerning [insert summary of letter]. I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your concern.

I will review the matter/s you have raised and the information you have provided. If further investigation is required, I will coordinate the investigation. This process should be completed within 20 working days. If there are any delays, you will be informed of the progress.

We are always striving to improve our services at the Township of Southgate, so thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. Please don't hesitate to contact me at [contact info] if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely

[Insert name and contact details]

Appendix "B"

SAMPLE LETTER ADVISING OF DELAY

[Insert date

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[Insert name and address]

Dear [insert Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr Surname]

Thank you for your feedback dated [insert date] concerning [insert summary of letter]. It is important that we get feedback about our service, so I appreciate that you took the time and effort to let me know about your experience. Complaints should be resolved within 20 days following receipt. I am writing to you to inform you that due to [insert reasoning for delay] there has been a delay resolving this issue.

To date we have [insert progress summary].

I am hoping to get back to you as soon as possible with a complete response.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you have further questions with regard to the complaint management process.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to my attention as we rely on comments such as yours to improve on the service we provide in the Township of Southgate.

Yours sincerely

[Insert name and contact details]

Appendix "C"

SAMPLE COMPLAINT RESOLUTION LETTER

[Insert date]

[Insert name and address]

Dear [insert Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr Surname]

Thank you for sharing your experience with the Township of Southgate [insert department]. It is important that we get feedback about our service, so I appreciate that you took the time and effort to let me know about your experience.

In relation to [set out complaint issue 1], [insert name of department] investigated the incident based on the information you provided. [Detail how the investigation was conducted. Summarize the facts.] What we discovered throughout the investigation, [insert conclusions and actions taken].

On behalf of the Township of Southgate [department] I would like to express my regret [or insert other appropriate remedy] that the service that was provided to you [or insert appropriate person] did not meet your expectations. If you wish to have this matter reviewed further please provide a written outline of your remaining concerns to the Township of Southgate CAO.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

[Insert name and contact details]