



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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1 Introduction

The Suburban Land Agency (SLA) is committed to provide high quality, professional services to its stakeholders, including residents of the Canberra region.

This Policy is based on three guiding principles:

1. Commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

SLA recognises an individual's right to submit a complaint or feedback about our conduct, processes, and actions. SLA acknowledges complaints and feedback provide a valuable opportunity to improve business practices and service delivery.

2. Accessible and transparent.

SLA recognises processes for providing complaints and feedback should be easily understood by, to all relevant parties. SLA will clearly outline complaint submission and handling mechanisms.

3. Objective and fair.

SLA is committed to managing complaints and feedback in a consistent, fair and impartial manner.

1.1 Purpose

This Policy reflects SLA's commitment to providing an accessible, fair, and transparent complaint and feedback process for all our clients and stakeholders.

SLA commits to managing all complaints appropriately and fairly, as per the process outlined in this document.

1.2 Scope

This Policy applies to all complaints made by the public to SLA about our services or staff. This includes complaints about SLA from the public received via referral from a member of the ACT Legislative Assembly (MLA).

Out of scope

- SLA is not responsible for the subject of the complaint (e.g., another Directorate or private sector company is responsible).
- The complaint is more appropriately investigated by another body (e.g., ACT Policing).
- The complaint relates to legislation that establishes a different mechanism for the resolution (e.g., employment related matters, Public Interest Disclosures, corruption complaints made under the *Integrity Commission Act 2018* or Freedom of Information matters).

SLA employment-related matters

Allegations of staff misconduct or wrongdoing and other employment related matters should be sent to EPDSLHR@act.gov.au and will be handled according to the relevant Enterprise Agreement and Public Sector Management Act and Standards and ACT Public Service Misconduct Guidelines and any relevant administrative policy.

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Public Interest Disclosures

Complaints considered a Public Interest Disclosure should immediately be forwarded to an SLA Disclosure Officer for consideration in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines 2021. Current SLA disclosure officers are listed on [SLA SharePoint](#).

Types of activity by an ACT Public Sector employee or entity that may be considered for Public Interest disclosure include:

- illegal activities;
- misuse or waste of public money or resources;
- misconduct;
- maladministration;
- a danger to the health or safety of the public; or
- a substantial and specific danger to the environment. Refer [Public Interest Disclosure \(Integrity Commission – Managing Disclosures and Conducting Investigations\) Guidelines 2021](#) and the [SLA intranet](#) for more information on Public Interest Disclosures.

2 Roles & Responsibilities

The following table and [Attachment A](#) outline the roles and responsibilities undertaken in this Policy.

Position/Line Area	Responsibility
Executive Branch Manager, Governance, Corporate and Legal Services	Escalation point for complaints as required
SLA Executive	Review and approve responses as appropriate
SLA Staff	Adhere to Policy requirements
SLA Governance	Monitor performance and provide advice against Policy requirements. Assign assessments and responses to Line Areas. Maintain SLA complaints register
SLA Reception	Forward received complaints to SLA Governance
SLA Line Area	Forward received complaints to SLA Governance. Where appropriate, and delegated, assess and prepare executive responses to complaints

3 Complaint Management Procedures

3.1. Making a complaint

How to make a complaint

Complaints may be received via correspondence (including but not limited to email, mail, text etc.) or in person (including but not limited to conversations, meetings, phone calls). Complaints differ from informal feedback, comments, questions or suggestions for improvement.

Any SLA employee, including SLA reception, who receives notice of a complaint should pass that complaint to SLA Governance.

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Contact options

Email (preferred): suburbanland@act.gov.au or SLAGovernance@act.gov.au

Post: Executive Branch Manager
Governance, Corporate and Legal Services
Feedback and Complaints
Suburban Land Agency
PO Box 158
Canberra City ACT 2600

To an individual employee: refer to the ACT Government Directory (www.directory.act.gov.au)

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SLA is unable to provide a formal response to anonymous complainants.

Where insufficient detail is provided, SLA Governance may contact the complainant, if known, to obtain further detail as outlined below:

- Clear overview of the issue
- Time, date and place of the issue
- Contact details (where applicable, unless submitted anonymously)
- Outcome desired (e.g., an apology, different decision, review of a process)

3.2. Triage

SLA takes a tiered approach to complaint handling, as detailed below:

1. **Feedback or queries (including opportunities for improvement and issues) are not considered to be complaints for the purpose of this policy** – SLA encourages the ACT community to have conversations about issues at the local, staff level before, or instead of, escalating to formal complaints.

SLA generally receives feedback or issues directly to SLA staff in person or via phone or email. If via phone, the receiving officer should, where possible, create a written record of the conversation. The record can be as simple as a note in the daily reception summary or a file note with summary of action and outcome and must be saved in Objective. It may additionally be saved in Salesforce or other SLA customer relationship management (CRM) software, if appropriate.

SLA staff and/or managers should engage directly with the stakeholder to address informal issues, feedback or questions. In responding, officers should:

- Engage respectfully.
- Remain objective and impartial.
- Focus on concerns raised.

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- Consider other parties or factors that may be involved in the matter.
 - Escalate, if appropriate.
2. **Acknowledgement of complaint** – Unless the complaint is anonymous, or received via referral from an MLA, SLA Line Areas must refer the complaint to SLA Governance in the first instance. Governance will then provide written acknowledge of any complaint received, within five working days of receipt.

I refer to your notice of complaint received by the Suburban Land Agency (SLA) on [insert date received]. We are currently processing your query.

3. **Registration** – SLA Governance will register the complaint in the SLA Complaints Register, including:
- a. name of complainant (if known)
 - b. details of complaint
 - c. date received
 - d. Line Area/ staff member looking into the matter
 - e. responsible Executive
 - f. current status
4. **Referral** - SLA Governance will refer the complaint to the appropriate SLA Line Area for formal complaint handling (outlined at 3.4).

Where SLA is not appropriately placed to respond, SLA Governance will refer the complaint to another ACT Public Service Directorate.

3.3. Privacy and Confidentiality

SLA is committed to handling a complainant’s personal information in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2014* (ACT).

Further, SLA will consult the applicant before proceeding with a complaint investigation where confidentiality is a barrier, including any limitations that may place on an investigation, if any.

3.4. Complaint handling

The below process doesn’t apply to complaints received via an MLA. For these items, the responsible Line Area should conduct an assessment, and prepare a draft response from/to the relevant MLA for executive approval. SLA Executive Support will facilitate progression and approvals.

Standard process

Assessing and responding to complaints is the responsibility of the Line Area who will determine how to best assess and respond to the complaint. This includes developing a detailed response outlining the background, decision, and proposed actions, including approvals, if required.

Line Areas must also contact the complainant via email, cc SLA Governance, within ten days of receiving the complaint to inform them of the steps being taken to assess and respond, and to keep them informed on progress of their complaint. Possibly outcomes include:

- Complainants preferred outcome
- Anonymous complaints: documented only
- Complaint not progressed – no further action: e.g. insufficient detail, for referral or no possible resolution.
- Respond without assessment: for simple complaints requiring little or no investigation.

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Investigation:

This should consider who is involved; when did it happen; what happened; what can be done to remedy the wrong; what can be done to ensure it doesn't happen again; and the timeframe for the investigation.

Within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint, Line Areas should prepare a letter to the complainant, from the relevant Executive, advising them of SLA's response, including where relevant, a summary of the outcome of the assessment and any decision.

If Line Areas can't determine a resolution, complaints may be escalated to the Executive Branch Manager, Governance, Corporate and Legal Services for escalation.

3.5. Review of outcome

Any SLA employee, including SLA reception, who receives a request for review of outcome/decision should pass the request to SLA Governance. SLA aims to respond to requests for review of outcomes of complaints within 15 working days.

Review of outcome will be restricted to checking compliance with any relevant policies, procedures, or published information. If the review of decision confirms the earlier advice provided, SLA will not conduct any further investigation.

When a request to review a decision is received, SLA Governance will send it to the Senior Director in the responsible area. If appropriate, the Senior Director should conduct an additional assessment as outlined above and submit a formal response to the relevant Executive for approval.

Where the matter cannot be resolved in a manner the person is seeking, or SLA is unable to investigate a complaint, the reasons must be fully explained to the complainant. This correspondence should also include options to access alternate complaint resolution methods.

Where SLA is appropriately placed, and has enough information to assess a complaint, investigations should take place prior to any referral or escalation to an outside entity.

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<p>ACT Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal For reviews of reviewable decisions made under certain legislation</p>	<p>Ph: (02) 6207 1740 ACT Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal</p>
<p>ACT Human Rights Commission For complaints relating to children and young people, disability and community services, health services and human rights and discrimination</p>	<p>Ph: (02) 6205 2222 ACT Human Rights Commission</p>
<p>ACT Ombudsman For complaints about the Directorate's administrative actions and decisions</p>	<p>Ph: 1300 362 072 ACT Ombudsman</p>
<p>Fair Work Commission In respect of dispute resolution of provisions in the Enterprise Agreement and Unfair Dismissal</p>	<p>Ph:1300 799 675 Fair Work Commission</p>
<p>Fair Work Ombudsman For complaints about contraventions of workplace laws, including enterprise agreements</p>	<p>Ph: 13 13 94 Fair Work Ombudsman</p>
<p>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission For complaints of discrimination and breaches of human rights</p>	<p>Ph: 1300 656 419 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</p>
<p>Office of the Australian Information Commissioner For complaints about breaches of privacy</p>	<p>Ph: 1300 363 992 Office of the Australian Information Commissioner</p>
<p>ACT Integrity Commission For corruption, maladministration, or conduct that poses a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or the environment.</p>	<p>Ph: (02) 6205 9899 ACT Integrity Commissioner Complaints ACT Integrity Commissioner Enquires</p>

3.6. Closure

SLA Executive Support will send all Executive signed correspondence to the complainant/s, cc SLA Governance within 20 working days from when the matter was first raised. SLA Governance will save a copy of all sent correspondence to Objective and update the complaints register.

3.7. Reporting

SLA will use information contained in the register to identify any systemic issues and report to executive and Board.

4 Review

This Policy will be reviewed every two-years, or as required.

5 Related Legislation, Policies and Standards

- *City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017*
- *Freedom of Information Act 2016*
- *Information Privacy Act 2014*
- *Privacy Act 1988*
- *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012*
- *Integrity Commission Act 2018*
- *Public Sector Management Act 1994*

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- *Territory Records Act 2002*
- *Public Sector Management Standards 2016*

6. Definition/Glossary

Complainant – Person or entity affected by the actions or inaction of the organisation, who makes a complaint to the organisation.

Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction however made about the conduct, actions or lack of action by SLA staff.

External Review – review by a third party such as the Ombudsman’s Office or Integrity Commission.

Feedback, concerns or opportunities for improvement – information received by SLA about SLA’s conduct, processes or actions which allows the SLA to evaluate the effectiveness of the conduct, processes, or actions. The preferred response is informal and direct engagement with the stakeholder, prior to any escalation, if required.

Maladministration – A matter of administration contrary to the law in force or unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory, if negligent, or based wholly or partly on improper motives.

Misconduct – Disgraceful or improper conduct in an official capacity; or disgraceful or improper conduct in a private capacity that reflect seriously and adversely on SLA and the public sector as a whole.

7. Document Governance

Position/Line Area	Role	Responsibility
Chief Executive Officer	Document approver	Approving authority
Executive Branch Manager, Governance, Corporate and Legal Services	Document sponsor	Responsible for authorising Policy position and intent
Governance	Document Custodian	Responsible for drafting, amending, and implementing this Policy.

8. Version History

The following table details the published date and amendment details for this document.

Version	Date	Amendment details
1.0	19/12/2023	CEO approval and publication

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Attachment A: Tasks, timeframes and responsible areas

Task	Completion Timeframes (working days)	Responsibility
Register the complaint in the SLA Complaints Register	Five days	Governance
Written acknowledgment of complaint/s to complainant, unless complaint is anonymous	Five days	Governance
Refer complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to the appropriate SLA line area, or - to another ACT Public Service Directorate or externally, as appropriate 	Five days	Governance
Contact complainant re steps being taken to assess and respond.	10 days from receipt of complaint	Senior leader of relevant line area cc Governance
Assess and develop detailed response	15 days	Senior leader of relevant line area
Response letter to the complainant	20 days	Relevant executive, through SLA Executive Support
<i>If required.</i> <i>Response to request for review</i>	15 days	<i>Senior leader of relevant line area in collaboration with Governance</i>
Matter closed	5 days from formal response to complainant on the outcome of the complaint	Governance

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