



Policy:	7.1.2
Approved By:	Trust Council
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Policy Holder:	Legislative Services Manager

HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure Islands Trust 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 about our service. To ensure that best effort is used to handle formal complaints regarding Islands Trust administrative practices, processes and procedures (excluding land use bylaw infractions) in a fair, equitable and timely manner in accordance with the Administrative Fairness Principles Policy.

Guiding Principles

Islands Trust is committed to high standards of practice in our work. We value feedback and complaints from our service users and continuously strive to improve our services. Our complaints process is guided by the following principles:

<u>Accessible</u>	Islands Trust complaints process is publicly available on our website, and service users are informed of their right to complain about our organization. Complaints are accepted in a variety of ways (i.e., submission of an online complaint form, submission of an email to the appropriate manager of CAO, or mail or delivery of a letter to any Islands Trust office.)<List Ways>.
<u>Fair</u>	All complaints will be handled in a manner that is impartial and fair. Our process provides the opportunity for service users 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.
<u>Person-Focused</u>	We recognize that service users have different needs, and each person has their own unique history that they bring to the interaction with our agency. We commit to listen to our service users' concerns, treat them with dignity and respect, and maintain confidentiality throughout the complaints process.
<u>Responsive</u>	We will respond to complaints within XX 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 for further review/investigation within XX business days. Islands Trust is committed to these time frames and will inform our service users of the progress of their complaint and reasons for any delay in the complaint resolution process.

Roles and Responsibilities of Staff

<u>Step 1</u>	Islands Trust staff are 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. will forward complaints that are not resolved or that require further
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	review/investigation to Stage 2 of the complaints process.
Step 2	Islands Trust Management are responsible for reviewing and conducting investigations of complaints that are not resolved by staff. If a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the person raising the concerns following investigation, further internal review may be conducted by management. If appropriate, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) will be offered to attempt to resolve the complaint.
Step 3	At any point in the complaints process, a person may choose to seek external review of the matter through the following review options: Include Options

A. Definitions

Formal complaints are limited to those submitted in writing and directed to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).

Islands Trust refers to the following decision-making bodies: Trust Council, a local trust committee and the Executive Committee, as well as trustees or staff.

Ombudsperson Office referrals of complaints should be directed to the CAO.

Review Bodies include the CAO and the Executive Committee whose roles are explained in Section B.

Verbal concerns should be handled by trustees and staff within the spirit of this policy.

B. Principles

1. **Confidentiality** - To protect the privacy of the complainant, formal complaints should be handled in a confidential manner by trustees and staff upon receipt from the complainant and upon referral by the CAO or the Executive Committee, unless the complainant provides a written waiver of this provision to the CAO. The complainant and complaint will be made known to the affected staff, trustees or local trust committee.
2. **Availability** - The provisions of this policy should be available to every person or organization, including Islands Trust trustees and staff affected by a decision or action of the Islands Trust.
3. **Notification** - Trustees and staff should advise parties who might be adversely affected by a decision or action of the Islands Trust, or upon request, of the provisions of this policy should they wish to dispute a matter.
4. **Acknowledgement** - All formal complaints should be acknowledged, stating the expected process and time-frame to be taken to respond to the complaint, as well as any limitations of the review process with respect to the complaint.
5. **Accountability** - All formal complaints should be responded to, with reasons, with a view to using best efforts to resolve the complaint.
6. **Ombudsperson Office** - Referrals from, requests for assistance to, or complaint file communications with the Ombudsperson, shall be directed through the CAO, or, alternatively, the Islands Trust Chairperson.

7. **Corporate secretary's Role** - The Corporate secretary is to coordinate the handling of administrative fairness complaints in an objective manner.
8. **Executive Committee's Role** - The Executive Committee's role, within the provisions of Section 4(3) of the *Islands Trust Act*, is to review matters related to the day-to-day business of the Islands Trust and activities of a local trust committee, and, in that context, it may observe, advise and offer recommendations on such matters to a local trust committee or Trust Council, and seek remedies as required in matters for which it has jurisdiction.
9. **Access to Information** - Complainants should be given access to public information that would assist them in stating their complaint in a timely manner within the provisions of the Islands Trust's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy bylaw(s), policies and procedures, and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.
10. **Ombudsperson Act** - Complainants, while being encouraged to utilize the provisions of this policy to have their complaints addressed by the Islands Trust, should also be advised of the services of the Ombudsperson's Office and provisions of the *Ombudsperson Act*.
11. **Scope of Authority** - The review bodies, being the CAO and Executive Committee, do not have the power to judicially review the conduct of Trust Council, a local trust committee, or a trustee or staff person and are limited to making recommendations to decision-making bodies of the Islands Trust, to modify their own decisions or actions, and to direct staff on remedial efforts appropriate to their respective personnel authority - Executive Committee to CAO and CAO to all other staff.
12. **Consultation** - It is expected that the primary purpose of this policy's processes is to maximize communication among all affected parties to a complaint.
13. **Accessibility** - The cost and complexity of the Islands Trust's administrative fairness complaint handling process should not constitute a deterrent or present unreasonable obstacles to a complainant submitting a formal complaint.
14. **Chief Administrative Officer's Role** – The CAO's role is to request staff action, as required, and to conduct reviews involving staff matters.

C. Procedure

1. Receipt of Formal Complaints

1.1 **Informal Complaints** - Every effort should be made to direct verbal complaints to the appropriate Islands Trust decision-making body, trustee or staff person, and to notify the complainant of the provisions of this policy for pursuing a formal complaint.

1.2 **Formal Complaint** - Complainants should be informed that, in order to have complaints formally processed under the provisions of this policy, they must be in writing directed to the CAO for complaints regarding staff, and to the Chair for complaints regarding local trust committees or trustees.

1.2.1 **Complaint Content** - Complainants must state the specific nature of a formal

complaint and provide their name, address and phone number before complaints will be processed under the provisions of this policy.

- 1.2.2 Confidentially - Complainants must also acknowledge in writing that such complaints are not considered confidential with respect to affected staff or local trust committees.
- 1.2.3 Complaint File - A copy of the formal complaint should be forwarded to the corporate secretary, who is to open a file respecting the complaint.
- 1.2.4 Complaint Tracking - The corporate secretary is responsible for logging the complaint in an Administrative Fairness Complaint Log, and for tracking all steps of the complaint-handling process to its conclusion.
- 1.2.5 Referral - The corporate secretary will refer the formal complaint to the appropriate decision-making body, and/or trustee or staff person, for consultation in acknowledging the complaint.
- 1.2.6 Acknowledgement - The corporate secretary should acknowledge the formal complaint within 10 days, unless otherwise communicated to the complainant, in writing, advising the complainant as to whom the complaint has been referred to, the complaint handling process, expected timelines to deal with the complaint, and legal, legislative and/or policy limitations with respect to responding to the complaint.

2. Stage I Investigation

2.1 **Staff-Related Complaints** - Staff investigation of formal complaints, as requested by the CAO, are expected to adhere to the following process:

2.1.1 Referral

The CAO should refer appropriate complaints to the relevant staff person and his/her supervisor with a copy of the acknowledgement letter for the investigation within timelines provided by the CAO.

2.1.2 Complainant Contact

The staff person and/or supervisor should promptly contact the complainant to arrange a meeting by telephone, or, if desired by the complainant, with a view to addressing the complaint.

2.1.3 Investigation

The staff person should thoroughly ascertain the facts and issues, and prepare a report containing the facts, issues, and results of efforts to address the complaint in consultation with his/her supervisor.

2.1.4 Response

The staff person should communicate, in writing, his/her efforts to address the complaint, with reasons, to the complainant, with a copy to the CAO, corporate secretary, his/her immediate supervisor, and the appropriate decision-making body, as required.

2.2 **Decision-making Bodies** - Staff investigations at the request of the Executive Committee involving matters directly related to decisions of decision-making bodies are expected to adhere to the following process.

2.2.1 Notice to Complainant

Reasonable and timely notice, in writing, should be given to the complainant of a complaint investigation by a decision-making body.

2.2.2 Complainant Contact

If required or requested by the corporate secretary or the complainant, the complainant should be given an opportunity to provide information to support his/her position, in person, or in writing, in addition to the original written complaint.

2.2.3 Investigation

Staff reports as per clause 2.1.3 should be directed to the appropriate decision-making body with a copy to the CAO and the corporate secretary.

2.2.4 Decision

The decision-making body, in consideration of the relevant facts, issues and staff advice should determine, by resolution, its response to the complainant.

2.2.5 Response

The staff person should communicate to the complainant, in writing, the decision-making body's decision, with reasons in response to the complaint, with a copy to the CAO, the corporate secretary, and the Executive Committee.

2.3 **Trustee Related Complaints** - Must be directed to the Islands Trust Chair or the Executive Committee. The Chair or Executive Committee will refer complaints to the relevant trustee, with a copy of the acknowledgement letter for his/her investigation and response to the complainant, using steps 2.1.1 to 2.1.4. Reviews will be handled by the Executive Committee.

3. **Appeals**

3.1 **To the Chief Administrative Officer** - In the event the complainant is not satisfied with the efforts of the designated staff person and/or supervisor to address the complaint, the CAO is to address the complaint utilizing steps outlined in 2.1.1. to 2.1.4 with a copy of the written documentation to the Executive Committee, corporate secretary and appropriate staff, trustee and/or decision-making body.

3.2 To the Executive Committee

3.2.1 CAO Efforts

In the event the complainant is not satisfied with the efforts of the CAO to address the complaint, the Executive Committee is to conduct a review of the matter in accordance with clause 3.2.4.

3.2.2 Decision-Making Body Efforts

In the event the complainant is not satisfied with the efforts of an Islands Trust decision-making body to address the complaint, or at the request of that decision-making body by way of resolution, the Executive Committee is to conduct a review of the matter in accordance with clause 3.2.4.

3.2.3 Trustee Efforts

In the event the complainant is not satisfied with the efforts of a trustee to address the complaint, or at the request of that trustee, the Executive Committee is to conduct a review of the matter in accordance with clause 3.2.4.

3.2.4 Executive Committee Review

Executive Committee review is to proceed in the following manner:

3.2.4.1 The Executive Committee should give reasonable and timely notice to persons, including the complainant, who might be affected by the review process.

3.2.4.2 The Executive Committee should advise the complainant of the Executive Committee's limited mandate as appropriate to deal with the complaint.

3.2.4.3 Persons who might be affected by the review should be given an opportunity to provide information to support their positions in addition to the original written complaint of the complainant.

3.2.4.4 A member of the Executive Committee who was involved in the local trust committee land use planning decision, resolution or bylaw complained of, or is the subject of the complaint, is not to take part in the review. The Conflict of Interest Guidelines apply to members of the Executive Committee conducting the review.

3.2.4.5 The Executive Committee, in consideration of the relevant facts, provides advice to staff and, in its scope of authority, should determine, by resolution, its response to the complainant.

3.2.4.6 The Islands Trust Chair should communicate, in writing, the Executive Committee's decision, with reasons, to the complainant, with a copy to the CAO, corporate secretary, and relevant staff and/or decision-making body.

4. Coordination

- 4.1 **Tracking** - The corporate secretary is to maintain a tracking system to ensure attention is being given to all complaints and to monitor communications with the complainant.
- 4.2 **Regular Reporting** - The corporate secretary is to keep statistical and qualitative descriptions of complaints and the results of internal complaint processes, and to report quarterly to the Executive Committee and Trust Council via the CAO.
- 4.3 **Annual Reporting** - The corporate secretary is to provide information on the statistical and qualitative descriptions of complaints, including reviews, to be included in the Islands Trust's annual report.
- 4.4 **Complaint Files** - The corporate secretary is responsible for maintaining files containing documentation related to a formal complaint.
- 4.5 **Complaint Records** - All trustees and staff are to provide a record of discussions and meetings relevant to a formal complaint to the corporate secretary.

D. Legislated References

Ombudsperson Act

Policy and Procedures Manual:

Administrative Fairness Principles (7.1.1)

Bylaw Compliance and Enforcement (5.5.1)

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (7.6.1)

E. Links to Supporting Forms, Documents, Websites, Related Policies and Procedures n/a