

**THE NATIONAL TREASURY
COMPLAINTS HANDLING
POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

JULY, 2015

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Part 1

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Treasury is committed to provision of quality services to its customers and addressing all customer care issues.

A complaint system enables:

- ❖ Management to respond to enquiries of the customer.
- ❖ Enhancement of the level of awareness amongst staff and focusing attention on serving the customer.
- ❖ Staff members to learn how the level of service they are providing is regarded by their customers, which in turn will lead to increased morale and value for money.
- ❖ an organization to measure progress and identify areas for improvement, thereby setting the agenda for the future.
- ❖ The Ministry to identify Divisions/Subdivisions as well as individuals that require training in customer care and strengthens the relationship with their customers.

The prime purpose of a complaint system is to learn lessons from the various complaints and develop strategies to deal with and rectify the situation. The consistent and comprehensive recording of complaints and the analysis of their implications are therefore important. The resulting information is to be channeled to those who can take appropriate action to prevent problems recurring, including policy makers at local and national level and finally to give feedback to complainants, other service users and staff members on what action has been taken.

1.2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy document is to provide staff members and management with guidelines to enable them to understand the complaint system and raise awareness at the National Treasury. It recommends ways to deal with customers and their complaints. It also provides guidance on how to analyze the outcome.

1.3. MANAGEMENT

The Cabinet Secretary will be the final forum for resolving complaints and the Principal Secretary will be responsible for regular review of complaint reports and ensuring that complaints handling is built into the Ministry's priority areas.

1.4. SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF

It is mostly front-line staff members in the Ministry who have to deal with complaints, particularly those made in person and by telephone. It is crucial that the resulting pressures are recognized and that staff members are given maximum support to do their work.

To provide this support management shall:

- ❖ Ensure that complaints are not seen in isolation, but as part of overall customers care.
- ❖ Recognize complaints handling as an integral part of everyone's work.
- ❖ Involve staff members in developing complaints procedures and offer them training.
- ❖ Empower officers handling complaints and Directors to deal with complaints so that they feel "ownership". Discretion to resolve complaints, offering immediate redress, should be delegated.
- ❖ Recognize and reward expertise in complaints handling and praise staff members for handling complaints well.

1.5. RESOURCES

The introduction of the complaint management system does not necessarily require new and or extra resources. Management should allocate the responsibility to a complaints desk officer or officers who has/have the necessary skills to co-ordinate complaints in a professional way.

The following initiatives will be introduced in the Ministry without taking up disproportionate resources:

- ❖ Inserting more information about the stages of complaints review in the next print of a complaint leaflet.
- ❖ Distributing service delivery charter pamphlets more widely to the various stakeholders.
- ❖ Asking complainants what they would like to have done.

- ❖ Responding to complaints promptly using the most appropriate channel of communication.
- ❖ Issuing a statement from senior management confirming the importance of an effective complaint handling procedure and drawing up a redress menu.
- ❖ Delegating power to resolve complaints to the lowest level possible.
- ❖ Meeting with representatives of service users to discuss concerns and complaints.

1.6. ATTITUDE

It is imperative for the success of the complaints system , that staff members have the right attitude towards complaints.

This involves:

- ❖ Listening sympathetically to people who complain.
- ❖ Recognizing that complaints handling is an integral part of the staff members responsibility –not an annoying intrusion.
- ❖ Understanding the benefits of good complaint handling and the consequences of poor complaints handling.
- ❖ Welcoming complaints as an opportunity to put things right, to learn lessons and improve services.

1.7. FAIRNESS

All complaints need to be dealt with impartially. An ideal solution will be when an officer outside the Department or Division where the complaints arose looks at the complaints, rather than the staff member involved.

1.7.1. Ways to Promote Fairness

- ❖ Be open - publish complaints information, which will be understood by those involved
- ❖ Be impartial - avoid any bias in favor of the complainant, a staff member of the Ministry
- ❖ Be thorough – Find out the relevant facts, talk to people involved on both sides of the complaint and verify explanations where possible.
- ❖ Be equitable – treat people in similar circumstances in similar ways.

1.7.2. Fairness to Staff

Management needs to ensure that staff members are treated fairly. If a complaint is made against a staff member, he/she must be informed immediately of any complaints about their service, conduct or behaviour. The staff member should further be given an opportunity to put their side of the story and keep them informed of progress and the outcome thereof.

1.7.3. Monitoring Fairness

The responsible officer will monitor responses to complaints to ensure that no one is treated unfairly. To ensure this, regular monitoring of randomly selected complaints cases is needed and surveys of people who have made complaints, by asking them if they are satisfied with the way or how their complaints were handled.

1.8. CONFIDENTIALITY

Procedures should ensure confidentiality, so that customers are not deterred from making complaints. Complaints against the service of a staff member will only be known to those examining it and the staff member concerned. It is crucial to note that the need for confidentiality will not be used by managers as an excuse for not publishing information about complaints, however such information should be anonymous to maintain confidentiality.

1.9. BLAME CULTURE

In order to avoid a situation where staff members fear complaints, an environment needs to be created where complaints are seen as opportunities to identify failures in services or systems. Staff members must feel confident that the procedures support them. A better understanding of the customers' perspective needs to be encouraged and developed and weaknesses in systems should be identified. Complaints procedures must be separated from disciplinary procedures.

1.10. DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

There will be occasions when staff members will be in contact with someone who is unpleasant and very difficult to deal with.

The following steps will assist staff members in handling the situation successfully:

- ❖ Let customers vent their anger.
- ❖ Apologize for the inconvenience.
- ❖ Show willingness to assist the customer.
- ❖ Ask the customer to explain exactly what happened and then act accordingly.
- ❖ Lean slightly towards the customer to show that you are listening and that you are concerned about the customer's problem.
- ❖ Make notes.
- ❖ Inform the customer about the next steps.
- ❖ Give the responsible staff members' name and telephone number for further reference.

Under no circumstances should the staff member blame the customers or any other person for any of his actions.

1.11. TRAINING

Handling complaints is as vital as providing the service in the first place. All front –line staff members need to have knowledge of the complaint procedures.

Training in the following is needed to handle complaints:

- ❖ Telephone Techniques
- ❖ Procedures Knowledge (Complaint System User-Manual)
- ❖ Anger Delusion Techniques
- ❖ Interpersonal (Communication) Skills
 - Listening Skills
 - Questioning Skills

In addition, training should be a continuous process, therefore staff members should be allowed to attend refresher courses on a regular basis especially those who deal with complaints as a substantial part of their everyday work.

Part 2

HANDLING AND REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

2.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

There shall be three broad categories for dealing with complaints in the Ministry.

- ❖ Locally, by Departments and individuals. This encourages speedy response and ownership of complaints, though may mean much useful complaints information is never collated centrally to show where improvements can be made.
- ❖ Centrally, by National Treasury complaints desk officers. This helps to ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently and central records can be compiled.
- ❖ The National Treasury complaints committee which will meet periodically but at least once in every quarter to review action taken on all complaints received in the Ministry and provide guidance with respect to resolution of public complaints.

The Ministry will thus adopt a complaints handling system involving a combination of the above options. This complaint system encourages local ownership and response in dealing with complaints by the specific departments, with a clear central monitoring system which allow an overview of all complaints received in the Ministry and a remedial strategy.

The benefits of having a combination of the three options in dealing with complaints are as follows:

- ❖ Initial ownership and responsibility for investigation and response to complaints received will remain with the specific department responsible for the failure in service delivery.
- ❖ Complaint desk officer should not operate in isolation, but maintain close and active links with all parts of the Ministry.
- ❖ The desk officers should have an overview of all complaints across the Ministry, and be responsible for keeping the Principal Secretary informed.

2.2. PROCEDURES OF HANDLING COMPLAINTS

2.2.1 Importance of effective complaint handling.

When a customer makes a complaint, they are doing so because they are unhappy with the service they have received and wish further action to be taken. They want their rights to be acknowledged and be given assurance that action will be taken to prevent the situation recurring in the future.

Whatever the nature of the complaint, the one thing the customer will always expect is some form of action, whether it be an apology and/or explanation, and will be most dissatisfied if this does not happen.

The complainant who receives prompt action is quickly to reach a conclusion that will praise the way the complaint was handled. This will negate any ill feeling that was caused by the issue which initiated the customer's complaint.

2.2.2 Recording Information

It is important to capture and record complaints about both service and policy issues' whether dealt with informally or formally, in person, by telephone or in writing.

It will provide a written record for future reference and gives the opportunity for any misunderstandings or errors to be identified and then rectified. If no written confirmation is received by the customer, and a misunderstanding occurred. It will be difficult to prove any error.

Criteria for recording information are:

- ❖ Records need to be consistent and comprehensive, covering both informal and formal complaints.
- ❖ The method of recording must be simple, practical and not a burden on the time of the member's time that received the complaint.
- ❖ Information recorded should be useful, enabling the Ministry to track, monitor and respond to complaints and highlight particular areas where services appear to be falling.

If a customer is not satisfied with the service received, he/she will first make the complaint to the complaint desk officer(s) of the Ministry, who will record such a complaint in the Customer Complaint Form and channel it to the director of the department concerned. Complaints can be received in writing, in person or through complaint boxes and/or by telephone.

The following information needs to be recorded on the Customer Complaint Form (Part one).

- ❖ Name and postal address (and if possible telephone number) of complaint,
- ❖ Date of complaint received;

- ❖ Details of the complaint, categorized by subject or issue to facilitate analysis;
- ❖ What redress the person would like;

Immediate action will subsequently be taken on the complaint and the complainant be notified accordingly. The Director of specific functional area should inform the Complaint desk officer whether the complaint has been resolved successfully or referred to a higher authority for further guidance. A copy of the customer complaint form appears herein as *Annex I, whereas a summary of the complaints handling process is attached as Annex II.*

2.3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMPLAINT DESK OFFICER (S)

The complaints desk officers will, inter alia, be responsible for the following:-

- ❖ Overview of complaints received in all Departments of the Ministry by receiving complaints recording them in the Customer Complaint Form and channeling them to Directors of respective Departments.
- ❖ Analyzing complaints information
- ❖ Compiling complaints reports, which should include:
 - the volume of complaints broken down into difference categories
 - achievements against published standards
 - a comparison with previous periods
 - problem areas
 - propose action for improvements

The complaint report must be submitted to the Public Complaints Committee on a Quarterly basis for review and further guidance.

All complaints received in the Ministry need to be recorded on the Customer Complaint form as well as in the Complaint Register by the complaints desk officer(s).

2.4 FUNCTIONS OF THE PUBLIC COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

The mandate of the Ministerial Public Complaints Committee will include:-

- ❖ Review and continuously update the complains handling infrastructure and mechanism
- ❖ Develop and continuously update the Ministry's complaints handling policy and procedures
- ❖ Review action taken on all complains received at the National Treasury either through the Complaints desk officers or through the various departments
- ❖ Put in place a mechanism that will ensure prompt resolution of all complains that are presented to the Ministry and timely submission of quarterly reports to the Commission on Administrative Justice in the prescribed format.
- ❖ Provide advise on pertinent issues regarding management and resolution of complaints.
- ❖ Avail periodic reports to the appointing authority as may be deemed appropriate.
- ❖ Perform any other related tasks as may be assigned by the appointing authority from time to time.

The committee members will be formally appointed by the Principal Secretary with the Committee's Terms of Reference clearly specified in the appointment letter. The committee's membership will include a chairperson to be appointed by the Principal Secretary, the complaints desk officer(s), a secretariat and at least one officer from departments with high incidences of complaints. The secretariat will be charged with the responsibility of coordinating the committee meetings in consultation with the chair and maintenance of appropriate records of the committee's work.

2.4. THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

When receiving complaints staff members must be clear about why customers are not satisfied-find out whether it was the decision made or the way they were treated.

Staff members also need to find what customers would like to happen, whether they want –

- ❖ an apology
- ❖ the decision to be revised;
- ❖ the proper service that should have been provided in the first place;
- ❖ change the way things are done.

(Redress mechanism is discussed in paragraph 2.6)

The staff member, who is in first contact with the customer is responsible to deal effectively with the first stage of the complaint, namely to:

- ❖ Obtain some background information on the nature of the complaint.
- ❖ Receive written complaints and gather relevant information from the records.
- ❖ Inform the customer about the next step.
- ❖ Hand over the Customer Complaint form to the next person in the line of complaint for further action.

2.4.1. Principles for procedures to be followed when dealing with complaints are as follows:

If a customer phones the Ministry:

- ❖ Staff members are expected to give their name and telephone number.
- ❖ The response should be clear and easy to understand.
- ❖ Talk preferable to the customer in the language he/she best understands. If the staff member is not able to speak the language of the customer the official language needs to be used.
- ❖ If the staff member cannot answer the inquiry/complaint immediately, he/she must inform the customer when to expect a full reply.
- ❖ Remind the customer to note the staff members name as well as when and what was said for further reference.

If a customer writes to the Ministry:

- ❖ Letters must be replied to within ten days after receipt.
- ❖ If it is not possible to answer all questions within that time limit, staff members must inform customers in writing and/or by telephone when to expect a full reply.
- ❖ All letters written must include the responsible staff members' name, office and telephone number.
- ❖ Remind customers to keep a copy of the letter and any replies they receive for further reference.

If a customer visits the Ministry:

- ❖ When the customer has made an appointment, it is expected of staff members not to let him/her wait longer than ten minutes.
- ❖ Staff members must aim to answer questions immediately.
- ❖ If it is not possible to answer a question immediately, staff members must inform the customer of the reason why and indicate when an answer can be expected from the office.

2.5. METHODS OF RESPONSE

There are three methods of response namely:

Telephonic Response

Staff members can reply telephonically which is quicker, cheaper and a more effective method of responding to a complaint, though this may still need to be followed up by a written response to ensure that there is no misunderstanding.

Written Response

Staff members can reply in writing to answer all the points of concern, be factually correct, avoid jargon, be signed by the by the responsible staff member and contain a contact telephone number.

Meeting Response

A meeting between the staff member and the customer can also be an effective way of resolving complaints. The complainants will be satisfied that staff members are taking their concern seriously and devote time to resolve it.

2.6. REDRESS

The main reason for having a complaint system is to provide redress to the individual who makes a complaint.

Redress is needed to enable customers to identify service failures against standards and offer appropriate redress to the failure in service. Staff-members must make sure that the redress offered is the redress customers want and must recognize that most customers do not want the same thing to happen again. Customer Surveys must be done to ensure that customers are satisfied with the redress made.

It is vital for staff members to know and have a common understanding on what redress they may offer. This will help to ensure both consistency of response and that the most appropriate redress is made.

Options for redress may include:

- ❖ An apology
- ❖ An explanation

- ❖ An assurance that we will avoid same mistakes from happening again
- ❖ Investigate each case by its own merit.

2.7. ANALYZING INFORMATION

Complaints received are the main source of information for the Ministry about what customers think of the services rendered and where things are going wrong. These enables the different Departments and/or the Complaint Desk Officer(s) to carry out customer surveys on complaints procedures, the fairness of response, the way the complaint was handled and satisfaction with redress offered.

Ways on how information can be obtained about dissatisfaction with services other than just analyzing the complaints received are:

- ❖ Informal staffs meetings, where users' concerns can be raised
- ❖ Formal surveys of a representative sample of service users.

2.7.1. Publishing Complaint Information

Publishing complaint information is in line with the Principle of general public service accountability and informs customers about performance against standards. It demonstrates that customer complaints are taken seriously and that it is worthwhile making a complaint. It also allows the Ministry to show how improvements have been made as a result of complaints.

The Ministry may publish information at intervals to be determined by the Public Complaints Committee in ways that reach all users. The complaints desk officers will serve as a provider of complaint information to be published.

Such information should include:

- ❖ Numbers and types/categories of complaints;
- ❖ Level of satisfaction with response;
- ❖ Action taken as a result of complaints to improve services.

Methods of publication could include Annual reports, Newsletter, posters and articles in the local and national press.

PART 3

REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This Complaints Policy and Procedures shall be used as a reference tool by all National Treasury staff and stakeholders. The provisions contained herein shall be reviewed from time to time as may be determined by the Ministry in order to keep it current.

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

