



Policy: Council

ENFORCEMENT POLICY



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Policy Statement

Council will take a consistent and transparent approach to decision making and a proportional approach to compliance and enforcement.

Policy Ref. No:	<i>21</i>	PCT Endorsement Date:	<i>9 February 2017</i>
TRIM Record No:	<i>17/111951</i>	ELT Meeting Date:	<i>1 March 2017</i>
Distribution:	<i>Public</i>	Public Exhibition Details:	<i>5 April 2017- 2 May 2017</i>
Status:	<i>Draft Stage Awaiting Adoption</i>	Council Meeting Date:	<i>27 June 2017</i>
Scope:	<i>Public, staff, Councillors, certifiers</i>	Council Minute No:	<i>192</i>
Lifespan:	<i>4 years (to be reviewed within 12 months following an election)</i>	Responsible Directorate/Group:	<i>Development & Customer Services – Building and Compliance Services</i>
Next review:	<i>December 2021</i>	Contact Position:	<i>Manager Building and Compliance Services</i>

Version History

Version	Adoption Date	Reason for Change
2017	27 June 2017 (Minute no. 192)	Periodic update.
2006	26 September 2006 (Minute no. 721)	Replaced 1997 Prosecution Policy

Definitions

Term	Definition
Complaint	<p>A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made about council services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.</p> <p>For the purposes of this policy, a complaint does not include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a report alleging unlawful activity (see definition below) • a request for information about a council policy or procedure • a request for an explanation of actions taken by council • a request for internal review of a council decision.
Enforcement	Actions taken in response to serious or deliberate contraventions of laws.
Regulation	Using a variety of tools and strategies to influence and change behaviour to achieve the objectives of an Act, Regulation or other statutory instrument administered by council.
Report alleging unlawful activity	<p>An expression of concern or a request for service in relation to alleged unlawful activity, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.</p> <p>Such reports are usually lodged with Blue Mountains Council as Customer Service Requests.</p>
Unlawful activity	<p>Any activity or work that has been or is being carried out contrary to the below and/or failure to take required action in order to be compliant with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • terms or conditions of a development consent, approval, permit or licence • an environmental planning instrument that regulates the activities or work that can be carried out on particular land • a legislative provision regulating a particular activity or work • a required development consent, approval, permission or licence.

Related Documents

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- Blue Mountains City Council, *Code of Conduct*
- Blue Mountains City Council, *Unreasonable Conduct of Complainant*
- Blue Mountains Council, *Local Approvals Policy*

Related Legislation:

This policy relates to various legislation including, but not limited to:

- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW)
- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000* (NSW)
- *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW)
- *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* (NSW)
- *Protection of the Environment and Operations Act 1997* (NSW)
- *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW)

- *Food Act 2003* (NSW)
- *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW)
- *Swimming Pools Act 1992* (NSW)
- *Biosecurity Act 2015* (NSW)

Policy details and information

The Enforcement Policy builds on the previous version adopted by Council in 2006 and it continues to reflect the need for the decision making process of the Council authorised officers to be carried out in a transparent, efficient, fair and consistent manner having regard to all the circumstances.

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1. Introduction

Council's regulatory responsibilities are applicable to actual unlawful activity, as well as a failure to take action (in order to be compliant with certain legal requirements). For simplicity, this policy refers to both an act and/or an omission by an alleged offender as 'unlawful activity'.

This policy distinguishes between a 'report alleging unlawful activity' and a 'complaint'.

For the purposes of this policy, a report alleging unlawful activity is where an individual expresses concern in relation to alleged unlawful activity, or they request service from council about such matters. Council considers that a response or resolution to a report alleging unlawful activity is explicitly or implicitly expected by the individual, or may be legally required.

A complaint is where an individual expresses dissatisfaction about council services, staff or the handling of a complaint. Therefore, a complaint may arise where an individual claims that council staff have failed to take action in relation to a report alleging unlawful activity. A complaint will be recorded separately and responded to in accordance with council's complaints management process and procedures.

2. Purpose and scope

This policy provides information for all internal and external stakeholders and interested parties about council's position on compliance and enforcement matters in the local government area.

The purpose of this policy is to provide structure for consistency and transparency in decision making, and to facilitate a proportional approach to compliance and enforcement. It is also intended to assist council staff to act promptly, effectively and consistently in response to allegations of unlawful activity.

This policy outlines matters to be considered at the various stages of the enforcement process from the receipt and investigation of reports alleging unlawful activity, through to what enforcement option council will choose and whether to commence criminal or civil proceedings.

In certain circumstances, council will have shared enforcement responsibilities with other regulatory authorities. This policy sets out a collaborative and cooperative approach to such matters. Advice and guidance is also provided on the role of council in building and construction compliance matters where there is a private certifier, and the role of councillors in enforcement.

Responsible council staff are not limited by this policy in their use of discretion and exercise of official functions. The full circumstances and facts of each case need to be considered and a decision made on the merits.

3. Organisational approach

Blue Mountains City Council acknowledges that it has an obligation under section 8 of the *Local Government Act 1993* to ensure that it carries out its functions in a way that facilitates local communities that are strong, healthy and prosperous. In the course of its normal operation, Council receives numerous reports and complaints about unlawful activity.

a) Why are compliance and enforcement important?

- to prevent or minimise harm to health, welfare, safety, property and the environment;
- to improve the safety and amenity of residents and visitors to the area;
- for the collective good, the welfare of the community or the public interest;
- to promote social policies (e.g. to preserve or protect the environment);
- to manage risks;
- to uphold social order;
- to meet the expectations of the community;
- to encourage reports about possible unlawful activity from the community;
- to make the community aware of their legal obligations and how to comply;
- to ensure Council meets its statutory responsibilities.

b) What activities are regulated by council?

Council enforces a variety of legislation relating to:

- Roads, footpaths & parking;
- Environmental protection;
- Pollution control;
- Control of animals;
- Unauthorised development;
- Non-compliance with conditions of Development Consent;
- Public health and safety;
- Food safety;
- Fire safety and essential services;
- Tree preservation;
- Swimming pools;
- Unauthorised land use; and
- Heavy vehicle enforcement.

c) What proactive and reactive compliance and enforcement activities does council undertake?

A proactive compliance inspection program assists councils to meet their statutory requirements, respond to common complaints, and maintain a positive monitoring presence with operations that pose significant environmental risk. A proactive program also provides the opportunity for councils to actively work with particular industries to improve compliance levels and environmental outcomes.

Developing an effective proactive compliance program may reduce the amount of reactive incidents councils need to respond to. In this regard, Council has a number of proactive compliance and enforcement activities, including:

- Swimming pool inspection program;
- Food shop inspections;
- Parking enforcement;

- Dog off-leash area patrols;
- Dangerous dogs;
- Noxious weeds program;
- On-site sewage inspection programs;
- Skin penetration establishments;
- Mortuaries; and
- Caravan parks.

Council's reactive compliance and enforcement work largely involves the investigation of Customer Service Requests.

4. Policy objectives

The intent of this policy is to establish clear guidelines and protocols for council staff in the management of council's regulatory activities.

It provides workable guidelines on:

- responding to reports alleging unlawful activity;
- assessing whether reports alleging unlawful activity require investigation;
- deciding on whether enforcement action is warranted;
- options for dealing with confirmed cases of unlawful activity;
- taking legal action; and
- implementing shared enforcement responsibilities.

The policy also provides advice and guidance on:

- the role of the Principal Certifying Authority;
- and the role of Councillors in enforcement.

5. Application

This policy applies to regulatory issues within council's area of responsibility including, but not limited to:

- development and building control;
- pollution control;
- environmental health;
- public health and safety;
- noxious weeds;
- water and sewer;
- septic systems;
- control over animals;
- food safety;
- building fire safety;
- tree preservation; and
- Companion animal management.

6. Compliance and enforcement principles

The following are the principles that underpin council actions relating to compliance and enforcement:

Principle	Action
Accountable and transparent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• acting in the best interests of public health and safety and in the best interests of the environment;• ensuring accountability for decisions to take or not take action;• acting fairly and impartially and without bias or unlawful discrimination;• providing information about compliance and enforcement priorities and reasons for decisions to improve understanding and certainty and promote trust by the regulated community;• ensuring meaningful reasons for decisions are given to all relevant parties, particularly when there is a departure from this policy;• acting on any complaints or concerns about the conduct of compliance officers in accordance with council's complaints management process and procedures; and• advising people and organisations subject to enforcement action of any avenues available to seek an internal or external review of a decision.
Consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring all compliance and enforcement action is implemented consistently;• encouraging reports about possible unlawful activity by acting reasonably in response to the circumstances and facts of each matter.
Proportional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring the level of enforcement action is proportionate to the level of risk and seriousness of the breach;• making cost-effective decisions about enforcement action;• taking action to address harm and deter future unlawful activity.
Timely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensuring responses to reports alleging unlawful activity and decision making in relation to those is timely.

7. Responsibility

Council receives information about alleged unlawful activity from members of the public, contact from other government agencies and information gathered by its officers during proactive inspections.

All council staff who deal with reports alleging unlawful activity are responsible for implementing this policy. Council staff are also responsible for ensuring that any other possible unlawful activity identified as a result of an inspection, proactive enforcement or other activity is brought to the attention of the appropriate business unit of council.

Council staff are required to:

- treat all relevant parties with courtesy and respect;
- communicate with all relevant parties and provide feedback on the progress of an investigation and any reasons for delay without compromising the integrity of the investigation;
- make full and proper records in relation to the assessment and investigation of reports alleging unlawful activity, including reasons for any decisions;
- inform all relevant parties of reasons for decisions;
- provide as much information as possible to all relevant parties about the outcomes of investigations to show that adequate and appropriate action was taken and/or is proposed to be taken in response to a report of alleged unlawful activity;
- provide information to all relevant parties about any avenues to seek an internal or external review of a decision.

All reports alleging unlawful activity are to be entered into council's case management systems (e.g., Pathways, Works Record Requests) and actioned in a timely manner by the appropriate business unit.

Only council staff with appropriate delegations from the general manager can undertake investigations or compliance and enforcement action in relation to this policy.

8. Responding to concerns about unlawful activity

Council will record and assess every report alleging unlawful activity.

Council will respond to every such report unless the person raising the matter has indicated they do not wish to receive a response about council's handling of the matter, or the report is anonymous.

Generally speaking, council's objectives when dealing with reports alleging unlawful activity are to:

- maintain the collective good and welfare of the community;
- prevent or minimise harm to health, welfare, safety, property or the environment;
- consider the broader public interest having regard to council's priorities and any resource limitations;
- consider the report fairly and impartially.

Not all reports will need to be investigated. A preliminary assessment of all matters will be made to determine the priority for a response, and whether investigation or other action is required.

An investigation of alleged unlawful activity may take a significant amount of time to complete, particularly where the issues are complex. If council decides to investigate, staff will give the person who reported the alleged unlawful activity regular feedback on the progress of the investigation, and any reasons for delay. This does not mean that the individual can expect to be given details about every aspect of the investigation or information that would compromise the integrity of the investigation.

Decisions about what action should be taken by council are made at the council's discretion. This means the objective is that reports alleging unlawful activity will be resolved to the satisfaction of council, not necessarily the person raising the matter. Council will generally try to resolve matters as quickly and informally as possible so as to avoid the need to take formal action.

Council staff will endeavour to manage the expectations of people who report alleged unlawful activity, and in particular explain that in the absence of sufficient evidence of unlawful activity, council may be unable to take further action. They will also explain that council does not have unlimited resources and powers to deal with reports alleging unlawful activity. If council is unable to fully investigate or take action on a matter because it is restricted by any legal or resource limitations this will be explained to the individual.

While there are certain statutory requirements that must be met in relation to notices and orders council staff will ensure that all explanatory communications are made in plain English and explain any technical language the law requires to be used.

Confidentiality of people who report allegations of unlawful activity

Council, as a general rule, treats all reports of unlawful activity in confidence and as a matter of course does not disclose the name or details of persons lodging those reports. People who report allegations of unlawful activity should not expect that their identities will remain confidential from the subject of their report in all circumstances. Council will take seriously any concerns an individual may have about their physical safety being endangered as a result of making a report. However, this may limit council's ability to investigate the matter.

Council may have to disclose information that identifies them in the following cases:

- the disclosure is necessary to investigate the matter;
- their identity has already been disclosed to the subject of their report directly or in a publicly available document;
- the report is subject to a *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* application;
- the individual consents in writing to their identity being disclosed;
- the disclosure is required to comply with principles of procedural fairness; and/or
- the matter proceeds to court.

What council expects from people who report allegations of unlawful activity

Council expects that people who report allegations of unlawful activity will cooperate and act in good faith in respect of any investigations conducted by council. This includes:

- providing a clear description of the problem (and the resolution sought, if relevant);
- giving all available and relevant information to council, including any new information about the alleged activity that may become known to the person following the making of their report;
- not giving any information that is intentionally misleading or wrong;

- cooperating with council's inquiries and giving timely responses to questions and requests for information;
- treating council's staff with courtesy and respect; and
- allowing the investigation to be completed without prematurely taking the matter to other agencies unless referred to by council.

If these expectations of the individual are not met, council may need to set limits or conditions on the continuation of the investigation or may need to restrict any further communications with the individual.

Any unreasonable conduct will be dealt with in accordance with Council's *Unreasonable Complaint Conduct Policy*.

What parties can expect from council staff

People who report alleged unlawful activity, as well as individuals or businesses that are subject to investigation and any enforcement action can expect that council staff will:

- treat them with courtesy and respect;
- advise them of the outcome of the allegation reported, including a full explanation of the reasons why that outcome was considered to be reasonable in the circumstances;
- clearly explain decisions in plain English;
- provide information about any relevant internal and external appeal processes that may be available;
- carefully assess any new information provided by any party after a decision has been made and advise whether further action will be taken.

Complaints about council's enforcement actions

Any complaints about council's handling of reports alleging unlawful activity will be recorded separately and handled in accordance with council's complaints management process and procedures.

Where a person or organisation subject to enforcement action merely disputes council's decision to take enforcement against them, they will be directed to make representations in accordance with any relevant internal and external appeal processes.

Complaints about the conduct of compliance officers in will be acted on in accordance with council's complaints management process and procedures and the code of conduct.

Anonymous reports

Anonymous reports will be recorded and assessed in accordance with the above requirements. However, because it is not possible to seek clarification or additional information about a matter, it may be more difficult to evaluate the allegations and therefore these reports are less likely to warrant investigation. Unless the report relates to a serious and significant matter (e.g. significant threat to health or safety, or threat of significant harm to the environment) it will generally not be investigated.

Unlawful activity outside business hours

Unlawful activity can occur outside business hours. In particular, council may receive reports about matters such as offensive noise and failure to comply with limitations on hours of operation during nights and weekends.

Due to resource and operational capability restraints on council, urgent investigations into alleged unlawful activity outside business hours will be assessed on the basis of risk of harm to health, welfare, safety, property or the environment or it is otherwise in the public interest to take such action. Where the matter is not urgent or significant, investigations will be undertaken over ensuing days.

Neighbour disputes

Council will at times receive reports from parties involved in neighbour disputes seeking council's involvement. When a dispute between two neighbours is a civil matter, council will often have no authority to resolve the issue in dispute and will not investigate the matter. Some reports will raise several matters, some of which will require council's involvement and some of which will be personal to the parties.

Council staff will thoroughly assess such reports to determine whether there is evidence of any possible unlawful activity requiring action by council. Care will be taken to explain which aspects of a report council can deal with and which cannot be dealt with and why. Where possible, individuals will be provided with information about how to resolve neighbour disputes including referral information resources such as LawAccess NSW and Community Justice Centres.

It is possible that one party will provide further information about a matter which changes council's decision about whether it will become involved. In such circumstances, council staff will carefully consider the matter before taking action and document reasons for the new decision. Relevant parties will be advised about the reasons council has changed its position on a matter. Council staff will not change a decision about whether or not council should be involved purely as a response to the conduct of an individual such as persistent demands or threats.

9. Investigating alleged unlawful activity

Not all reports alleging unlawful activity will warrant investigation. A preliminary assessment of all matters will be made to determine whether investigation or other action is required. Council will prioritise matters on the basis of risk to public safety, human health and environment having regard to any legal or resource limitations.

If there is insufficient information in the report to undertake a preliminary assessment, further information may need to be sought from the person who made the report or an inspection undertaken. Staff may also need to consult council records or other internal business units to understand the relevant history and context of a matter, or seek legal advice.

Circumstances where no action will be taken:

Council will take no further action if, following a preliminary assessment, it is identified that:

- Council does not have jurisdiction to investigate or is not the appropriate authority to take action on the issues raised. Where there is another appropriate authority or course of action, council may bring the matter to the attention of the authority or provide information and contact details to the individual. For example NSW WorkCover for workplace safety matters, the NSW Environment Protection Authority for possible environmental offences and Community Justice Centres NSW for personal disputes;

- the report relates substantially to a matter previously determined by council and no new or compelling information is presented which would cause council to change its earlier decision. In this case, staff will acknowledge the report and advise that no further action will be taken as no new information had been provided (other than where the person has previously been advised they would receive no further response);
- the allegations relate to a lawful activity (e.g. where there is an existing approval or the activity is permissible without council approval or consent being required);
- the report is not supported with evidence or appears to have no substance;
- the relevant manager, director or the general manager determines that investigation or other action would have an unreasonable impact on resources and/or is unlikely to achieve an outcome sufficient to justify the expenditure of resources;
- the report is anonymous and does not raise any matter of a serious or significant nature;
- civil disputes between parties.

Relevant factors guiding decisions as to whether to take action:

When deciding whether to investigate, council will consider a range of factors including whether:

- the activity is having a significant detrimental effect on the environment or it constitutes a risk to public safety;
- the report is premature as it relates to some unfinished aspect of work that is still in progress;
- the activity or work is permissible with or without permission;
- all conditions of consent are being complied with;
- much time has elapsed since the events the subject of the report took place;
- another body is a more appropriate agency to investigate and deal with the matter;
- it appears there is a pattern of conduct or evidence of a possible wide spread problem;
- the person or organisation reported has been the subject of previous reports;
- the report raises matters of special significance in terms of the council's existing priorities;
- there are significant resource implications in relation to an investigation and any subsequent enforcement action;
- it is in the public interest to investigate the report.

The above are factors for council to consider and weigh in making a determination. Council staff are not limited in their use of discretion by these considerations and may decide to investigate based on these and other factors.

The objective of the processes council staff use when investigating incidents of alleged unlawful activity is to:

- determine the cause of the incident;
- determine if there has been a contravention of law, policy or standards;
- gather evidence to the required standard to support any required enforcement action;
- determine any necessary action to mitigate the possibility of reoccurrence of similar incidents.

Any decision not to investigate an allegation of unlawful activity will be recorded and the reasons for that decision clearly stated.

10. Taking enforcement action

When deciding whether to take enforcement action in relation to a confirmed case of unlawful activity, council will consider the full circumstances and facts of the matter and the public interest. The following common considerations will assist council staff in determining the most appropriate response in the public interest:

Considerations about the alleged offence and impact:

- the nature, extent and severity of the unlawful activity, including whether the activity is continuing;
- the harm or potential harm to the environment or public health, safety or amenity caused by the unlawful activity;
- the seriousness of the breach, including whether the breach is merely technical, inconsequential or minor in nature;
- the costs and benefits of taking formal enforcement action as opposed to taking informal or no action;
- the time period that has lapsed since the date of the unlawful activity.

If there is actual or potential detriment to the natural or built environment, to the health or safety of residents or the amenity of an area, this would normally warrant a decision to take action to remedy or restrain the breach. It is also important to consider whether the unlawful activity is ongoing or has ceased.

Consideration should be given to whether the likely costs and benefits of any enforcement action is justifiable where breaches result in no material impacts upon any other party or the health, safety and amenity of the environment and community. A breach of a technical, inconsequential or minor nature, in the absence of any other aggravating factor, will generally not warrant a decision to take action to remedy or restrain the breach.

Legislation may provide time limits in which to commence proceedings and take enforcement action, and sometimes prosecution will be statute barred despite good evidence that unlawful activity has taken place.

In addition, consideration should be given to the time which the offence or breach occurred and the 'reasonableness' of taking enforcement action if a significant time has lapsed since the time of the offence or breach.

Considerations about the alleged offender:

- any prior warnings, instructions or advice that was issued to the person or organisation reported or previous enforcement action taken against them;
- whether the offence was committed with intent (e.g. for financial advantage);
- whether the person or organisation reported has been proactive in the resolution of the matter and assisted with any council requirements and instructions;
- any mitigating or aggravating circumstances demonstrated by the alleged offender;
- any particular circumstances of hardship affecting the person or organisation reported.

If prior warnings, instructions or advice have been issued to the person or organisation reported which was not followed, a more formal and coercive enforcement approach is likely to be more appropriate.

Where the offence was committed deliberately, recklessly or with gross negligence it may be appropriate that cases of this nature are more likely result in prosecution. Where an offence

was committed as a result of an accident or genuine mistake, providing education and guidance or a formal warning may be more suitable in achieving desired outcomes.

Where the offender has been proactive in the resolution of the matter and has assisted council in the resolution of the matter, it may be that the public interest would not be best served by prosecuting the offender, especially if the offending conduct or work has been rectified. If the offender has demonstrated a lack of contrition and is uncooperative with the investigation or remediation, a prosecution or monetary penalty would appear more appropriate.

Any genuine mitigating circumstances of the offender such as age, physical or mental health, disability and any financial hardship of the offender resulting in an inability to pay will also need to be considered.

Considerations about the impact of any enforcement action:

- the need to deter any future unlawful activity;
- whether an educative approach be more appropriate than a coercive approach in resolving the matter;
- the prospect of success if the proposed enforcement action was challenged in court;
- the costs and benefits of taking formal enforcement action as opposed to taking informal or no action;
- what action would be proportionate and reasonable in response to the unlawful activity;
- whether the council has created an estoppel situation.

Consideration should be given to the deterrent effect, both on the offender and others. Prosecutions, because of their great stigma if a conviction is secured, may be appropriate even for minor unlawful activity where they might contribute to a greater level of overall deterrence.

When deciding whether to take an educative approach or enforcement approach, consideration should be given to the following matters:

- the reasonable likelihood that the person may have known or should have known the relevant requirements or rules;
- the level of contrition shown by the responsible person;
- whether the parties have previously been advised of the regulatory requirements or provisions;
- whether or not any previous warnings or instructions have been provided;
- the apparent level of intent shown by the responsible person.

It may not be appropriate to take enforcement action if the chances of success, in the event of an appeal or hearing, are unlikely. In such situations, officers need to identify the causes of that likelihood and address them in the particular case or as a general issue.

Consideration should be given to what is reasonable in the particular circumstances that apply. This includes a reasonable proportionality between the ends to be achieved and the means used to achieve them.

Consideration is to be given to what is reasonable in the circumstances and ensure the action is not disproportionate to the level of harm or damage arising from the breach.

Legal proceedings are expensive. When doing a cost-benefit analysis, costs and benefits should be assessed broadly and indirect costs and benefits should also be considered.

Estoppel is a legal rule which prevents a person from later denying something which may have previously been relied on, and acted upon by another person.

Consideration should be given to whether the actions of council have created a reasonable expectation that no enforcement action would be taken.

Considerations about the potential for remedy:

- whether the breach can be easily remedied;
- whether it is likely consent would have been given for the activity if it had been sought;
- whether there is a draft planning instrument on exhibition that would make the unauthorised use legal.

If there is evidence of a significant issue of unlawful activity and that matter can be easily remedied by some action on the part of the person the subject of the report, there is a less compelling case for enforcement action, depending on the other circumstances of the case such as the conduct of the offender.

If retrospective approval is possible, it may be reasonable to allow an opportunity to obtain this prior to taking other enforcement action. In some cases, compliance by informal means may be the most efficient way to resolve the matter and other enforcement action may not be necessary.

This needs to be balanced with other considerations such as the public interest in enforcing the law.

Legal or technical issues

Where legal and/or technical issues are in question, council staff will consider whether legal advice or professional advice from duly qualified staff or other experts should be obtained and considered. Council may also require a person subject to possible enforcement action to obtain professional advice in relation to issues of concern to council for assessment as to whether further action is required.

Requirements of council staff considering enforcement action

Prior to taking enforcement action, council staff will take into account the above considerations as well as the evidence gathered during their investigation. Council staff must act impartially, be mindful of their obligations under council's code of conduct and not act as a decision-maker in relation to any matter in which they have a personal interest. Enforcement action will not be taken purely as a response to the conduct of an individual such as persistent demands or threats.

Council staff are required to maintain records about critical thinking and decision-making processes in relation to reports alleging unlawful activity and any enforcement action, as well as records of interactions with relevant parties. Council staff will at all times adhere to council's internal approval processes prior to the commencement of any enforcement action.

Council staff will take steps to ensure that any enforcement action is taken against the correct person or organisation. Where there are multiple possible parties to an alleged unlawful activity, it will generally not be appropriate to take enforcement action against every person who may be liable for the alleged unlawful activity. In such circumstances, council staff will be guided by legal advice in determining the appropriate persons to pursue.

In addition to this policy, councils may develop guidelines for staff about specific types of regulatory activity and the circumstances in which enforcement action will or will not be taken.

11. Options for dealing with confirmed cases of unlawful activity

Council will try to use the quickest and most informal option to deal with unlawful activity wherever possible unless there is little likelihood of compliance with such options. Council staff will use discretion to determine the most appropriate response to confirmed cases of unlawful activity and may take more than one approach.

Council has a range of enforcement action available to it in response to unlawful activity including education, formal warning/cautions, Notices/Orders, volunteer agreements, Penalty Infringement Notices (fines), and court proceedings.

Any enforcement action taken by council will depend on the full circumstances and facts of each case, with any decision being made on the merits.

At all times, council's key concerns are:

- to prevent or minimise harm to health, welfare, safety, property or the environment;
- to influence behaviour change for the common good and on behalf of the community.

The following enforcement options to be considered by council are ordered to reflect an escalation in response that is proportionate to the level of risk, the seriousness of the confirmed breach or the need for a deterrent:

Level of risk	Enforcement options
Very low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• take no action on the basis of a lack of evidence or some other appropriate reason;• provision of information/advice on how to be compliant.
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• negotiating with the person to obtain voluntary undertakings or an agreement to address the issues of concern;• issuing a warning or a formal caution.
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• issuing a letter requiring work to be done or activity to cease in lieu of more formal action;• issuing a notice of intention to serve an order or notice under relevant legislation, and then serving an order or notice if appropriate.
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• issuing a penalty notice;• carrying out the works specified in an order at the cost of the person served with the order.
Very High	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• seeking an injunction through the courts to prevent future or continuing unlawful activity;• commence legal proceedings for an offence against the relevant Act or Regulation.

Following up enforcement action

All enforcement action will be reviewed and monitored to ensure compliance with any undertakings given by the subject of enforcement action or advice, directions or orders issued by council. Reports alleging continuing unlawful activity will be assessed and further action taken if necessary. Should initial enforcement action be found to have been ineffective, council staff will consider other enforcement options.

12. Taking legal action

The council and its delegated staff will be guided by legal advice in deciding whether to commence criminal or civil proceedings and will consider the following:

- whether there is sufficient evidence to establish a case to the required standard of proof;
- whether there is a reasonable prospect of success before a court;
- whether the public interest warrants legal action being pursued.

Whether there is sufficient evidence to establish a case to the required standard of proof

Council considers the decision to take legal action a serious matter, and as such will only initiate and continue proceedings once it has been established that there is admissible, substantial and reliable evidence to the required standard of proof.

The basic requirement of any **criminal** prosecution is that the available evidence establishes a prima facie case. The prosecutor is required to prove the elements of the offence beyond reasonable doubt.

In **civil** enforcement proceedings, council will require sufficient evidence to satisfy the court that an actual or threatened breach has occurred on the balance of probabilities.

Whether there is a reasonable prospect of success before a court

Given the expense of legal action council will not take legal action unless there is a reasonable prospect of success before a court. In making this assessment, council staff will consider the availability, competence and credibility of witnesses, the admissibility of the evidence, all possible defences, and any other factors which could affect the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Whether the public interest requires legal action be pursued

The principal consideration in deciding whether to commence legal proceedings is whether to do so is in the public interest. In making this determination, the same factors to be considered when taking enforcement action apply. (See Section 10, Taking enforcement action).

The following considerations relate more specifically to the decision to commence legal proceedings and will assist council and its delegated staff in making this determination:

- the availability of any alternatives to legal action;
- whether an urgent resolution is required (court proceedings may take some time);
- the possible length and expense of court proceedings;
- any possible counter-productive outcomes of prosecution;

- what the effective sentencing options are available to the court in the event of conviction;
- whether the proceedings or the consequences of any resulting conviction would be unduly harsh or oppressive.

Time within which to commence proceedings

Council staff must be aware of legislative time limits in which enforcement proceedings must be commenced. Sometimes legal action will be statute barred despite good evidence that unlawful activity has occurred.

13. Shared enforcement responsibilities

Some reports will raise matters involving shared regulatory responsibilities between council and other authorities including the Environment Protection Authority, the NSW Police Force, the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, NSW Fair Trading, NSW Food Authority and Crown Lands.

Council recognises that collaboration and cooperation between authorities to address issues of shared regulatory responsibility is the best approach. To this end, where there are shared legislative responsibilities, council staff will liaise with relevant authorities to establish:

- which authority will take the leading role on any joint investigation;
- which activities each authority will carry out;
- responsibilities for updating an individual where relevant;
- protocols for exchanging confidential information between the relevant authorities.

Council will reasonably endeavour to respond to requests for information or assistance on joint regulatory matters in a timely manner.

14. Role of council where there is a private certifier

Council retains its regulatory role and enforcement powers where a private certifier has been appointed the Principal Certifying Authority (PCA). However, if a private certifier is appointed the PCA, it is not council's responsibility to ensure building and construction compliance. Generally Council will refer any reports relating to minor or technical non-compliance issues to the PCA for investigation and action in the first instance.

Private certifiers have limited enforcement powers as the PCA. They have the power to issue a notice of intention to issue an order to the owner or builder to comply with the conditions of consent or rectify any breaches. A copy of any notice of intention issued by a private certifier must be provided to council for assessment as to whether council will enforce the notice by issuing an order.

Council and private certifiers will work together to resolve any issues when they arise to achieve compliance with the development consent or complying development certificate. Council staff will take steps to ensure individuals are clear about which agency performs which role.

15. Role of councillors in enforcement

Decision making relating to the investigation of reports alleging unlawful activity and taking enforcement action is the responsibility of appropriately authorised council staff or the council itself.

Councillors should encourage members of the public to make reports regarding alleged unlawful activity or customer service requests directly through Council's Customer Service Team. Where Councillors wish to make representations on behalf of a resident they may forward those concerns to councillorrequests@bmcc.nsw.gov.au to be managed as a Councillor CSR.

Individual councillors do not have the right to direct or seek to influence council staff in their day-to-day activities. Councillors can help individuals who raise concerns with them by satisfying themselves that their council's policies are being carried out correctly, however they cannot ignore or alter a policy in order to satisfy the demands of special groups.

The general manager may present certain decisions to be ratified by the elected council if this is necessary or desirable, and the councillors may also have the right to call for a report about particular issues to a council meeting.

16. Delegations

Council staff delegations for taking action under this policy are included in council's Delegation Register.

17. Other resources

The NSW Ombudsman website has the following helpful resources at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au:

- *Managing unreasonable complainant conduct – a model policy and procedure*
- *Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Manual 2012*
- *The Rights Stuff – Tips for making complaints and solving problems*
- *Effective complaint handling guidelines – 2nd edition*
- *Managing information arising out of an investigation – Balancing openness and confidentiality*
- *Reporting of progress and results of investigations*
- *Good Conduct and Administrative Practice*
- *Options for Redress*
- *Investigating Complaints – A manual for investigators*
- *Enforcement guidelines for councils*
- *Better Service and Communication for Council*

See also:

- Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (2014), *Prosecution Policy of the Commonwealth: Guidelines for the making of decisions in the prosecution process*
 - NSW Planning (2010), *Prosecution Guidelines*.