



Central Coast Council

Enforcement Policy

September 2019

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PREAMBLE

Local government is charged with legislative responsibilities which protect individuals and the community as a whole. The Central Coast Council's customers include both those on whom the law places a duty and those whom the law protects. While it is ultimately the responsibility of individuals and other bodies to comply with the law, Council staff are required to carry out activities which enforce compliance.

This Policy outlines the Council's approach to enforcement matters and provides staff with direction about the manner in which enforcement activities are to be undertaken.

In addition to enforcement, the Council carries out a range of activities to ensure compliance such as community education programs to encourage conformance.

Enforcement activities include:

- . patrolling streets and public places;
- . inspecting premises either on a routine programmed basis or on a random basis; and
- . responding to enquiries and complaints.

PURPOSE

- . To provide consistency in enforcement action in matters of non-compliance;
- . To ensure transparency, procedural fairness and natural justice principles are applied; and
- . To ensure that enforcement action is proportionate to the alleged offence in each case.

DEFINING ENFORCEMENT

The Council adopts a broad definition of "enforcement" which combines the provision of advice and assisting compliance with formal action where necessary. This is intended to encourage higher levels of voluntary compliance with legal requirements by individuals, businesses and other bodies.

Notwithstanding the above, the Council will take immediate action when required (for example to ensure public health and safety or to protect the environment) and take firm action against those who act unlawfully when circumstances warrant.

APPLICATION

This Policy applies to the Council's responsibility for administration and enforcement of legislation including, but not limited to:

- . *Local Government Act 1993*
- . *Building Act 2016*
- . *Dog Control Act 2000*
- . *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994*
- . *Food Act 2003*
- . *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*
- . *Local Government (Highways) Act 1982*
- . *Public Health Act 1997*
- . *Litter Act 2007*
- . *Road Rules 2009*
- . *Traffic Act 1925.*

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement actions are taken within the context of both a legal and policy framework. Council staff will carry out their enforcement related work with due regard to the following principles.

1 Proportionality

A proportionate response means that the Council's actions will be scaled to the seriousness of the breach.

The Council recognises that most individuals want to comply with the law and will assist compliance by being open and helpful, offering informal advice and providing the chance to discuss compliance problems.

Attention will be focussed on those whose activities give rise to the most serious risks, or where potential hazards are least well controlled. Depending on the seriousness and persistence of the infringement, the Council will minimise the costs to the person or body infringing the law by enforcing the minimum action necessary to secure future compliance.

Prosecution will generally be used as a last resort, or for continuous serious offences.

2 Consistency

The Council will take a similar approach in similar cases to achieve similar outcomes.

While decisions on enforcement require the use of professional judgement and discretion to assess varying circumstances, officers will:

- . follow standard operating procedures wherever possible;
- . ensure fair, equitable and non-discriminatory treatment; and
- . record any deviation from standard operating procedures and the reasons.

3 Transparency

The Council will be open and transparent about the manner in which it undertakes enforcement activities and the laws it enforces. It will consult on and provide ready access to published standards and levels of service and performance that can be expected and be clear and open about what is expected from those on whom the law places a duty (duty holders).

In educating the community at large and dealing with duty holders, the Council will make a clear distinction between what is legally required and what is desirable but not compulsory.

Staff will be open to discussing potential and actual compliance failures, before, during, and after formal action has been taken.

When remedial action is needed the Council will explain clearly and in plain language why the action is necessary. Where practicable, it will give notice of its intent to commence formal action. Where it is not practical to give notice, the reasons why will be recorded in accordance with the Council's Records Management protocols.

4 Accountability

The Council will point out what action is required to achieve compliance and the timeframe for undertaking that action. Advice will be provided on the process for seeking a review of, or how to appeal against that decision.

AUTHORISATION OF OFFICERS

Only officers who are competent by training, qualification and/or experience will be authorised to take enforcement action. Officers will also have sufficient training and understanding of the Council's policies and procedures to ensure a consistent approach to their duties. Any decision to act other than in accordance with this Policy must have approval from the relevant Director or Group Leader.

Officers are required to show their authorisations on demand or in accordance with any specific legislative requirement.

DECISION MAKING

Where non-compliance is discovered as a result of enforcement activities, options available to the Council to seek or promote compliance include:

- . explaining legal requirements and, where appropriate, the means to achieve compliance;
- . providing an opportunity to discuss points of issue where appropriate;
- . allowing reasonable timeframes to achieve compliance;
- . facilitating mediation between affected parties;
- . issuing a verbal or written warning; or
- . enforcement actions such as issuing an infringement notice, issuing an order/direction or prosecution or seizing items.

Enforcement decisions must be fair, consistent, balanced and relate to common standards that ensure the public is adequately protected. Where a decision is made not to investigate a complaint, the decision and reasons will be recorded in accordance with the Council's records management protocols and the complainant will be advised.

In coming to a decision on the most appropriate means of enforcement, the officer shall consider, amongst other relevant factors:

- . the seriousness of the offence;
- . the degree of wilfulness involved;
- . past history;
- . the consequences of non-compliance;
- . the likely effectiveness of the various enforcement options;
- . deterrence;
- . the effect on the community and other people;
- . consistency of approach to similar breaches/offences; and
- . any specific legislative requirement; for example s.200 of the *Local Government Act 1993* requires the issue of an Abatement Notice in particular circumstances.

The following factors are to be ignored when choosing an enforcement strategy:

- . any element of discrimination or bias against the person such as ethnicity, nationality, political association, religion, gender, sexuality or beliefs; and
- . possible political advantage or disadvantage to a government, person holding (or a candidate for) public office, or any political group or party.

Where a complainant is referred to an officer for investigation and he/she is aware of a personal association or relationship with the alleged offender, complainant or any other person involved:

- . an alternative person will investigate and make decisions where possible; and
- . the facts about any conflict/ relationship will be relayed to that officer's direct report by him/her and recorded in Council's record management system.

Written documentation will:

- . include all the information necessary to make clear what needs to be done to comply with legal requirements, the required time-frame, and if necessary, the reasons for these actions and potential penalties for failing to comply with the request;
- . include the legislation contravened, measures necessary to ensure compliance and the consequences of non-compliance; and
- . clearly differentiate between legal requirements and recommendations of good practice.

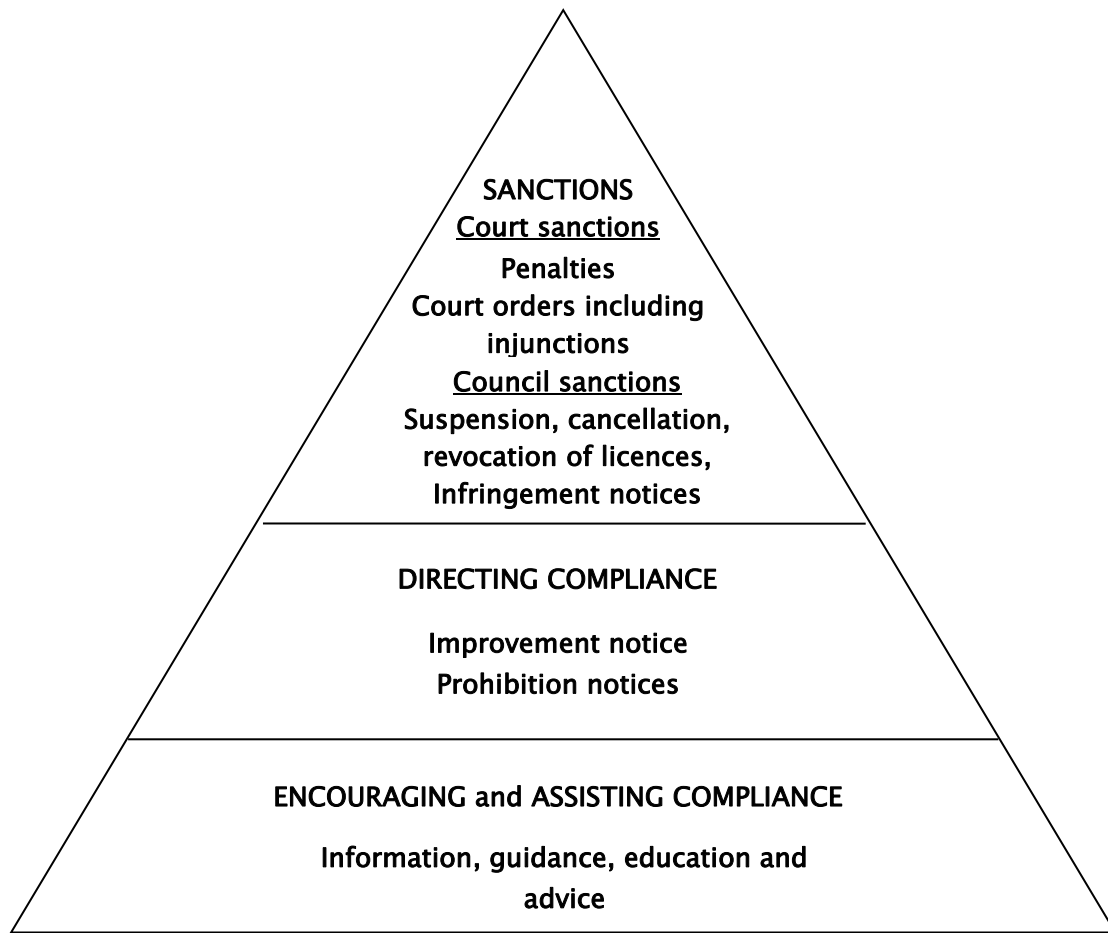
ENFORCEMENT OPTIONS

The following diagram represents, in the general sense, the relative volume or proportionate use of enforcement tools and the ability to escalate if an initial intervention does not achieve the desired outcome.

The lowest level of the pyramid involves an approach which is employed most frequently, often in combination with other tools, to assist duty holders achieve compliance. Sanctions (such as court actions) are at the top of the pyramid and are applied less frequently.

This does not mean that the Council will always commence with provision of information and advice, and only use other tools in an escalated manner.

The Council will commence their intervention using the tools that are most appropriate in the circumstances. Some tools are alternatives while others may be used in combination. Using a range of tools in the lower levels of the pyramid may often achieve compliance without needing to escalate to the more serious levels of sanctions.



1 No Action

No action will be taken when, after investigation, no breaches of the legislation are discovered.

It may also be appropriate to take no action when:

- . the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or trivial in nature;
- . there are insufficient prima facie grounds to commence an investigation;
- . another agency would be better suited to deal with the complaint;
- . the Council has no jurisdiction; or
- . taking action may prejudice other major investigations.

2 Informal Action and Warnings

Informal action to achieve compliance with legislation may include:

- . offering verbal or written advice;

- . verbal warnings and requests for action; or
- . written warnings.

Advice from officers will be put clearly and simply and will be confirmed in writing.

The circumstances in which informal action may be appropriate include:

- . the act or omission is not serious enough to warrant formal action;
- . the duty holder's past history reasonably suggests that informal action will secure compliance;
- . confidence in the individual/other body is high;
- . the consequences of non-compliance will not pose a significant risk; or
- . where informal action may prove more effective than a formal approach.

Where statutory action is not possible, but it would be beneficial in a wider public safety context to urge a particular outcome, such action will be taken by a senior officer of the Council and the reasons recorded in accordance with the Council's records management protocols. The recipient will be made aware that the requested actions are not legally enforceable.

3 Mediation

Where practical, the Council will make mediation available. Mediation is a possible alternative where, after investigation, an officer determines that the problems being complained of are incapable of resolution through other formal or informal means. The use of mediation services may also be appropriate where an aggrieved individual has no wish to pursue action to resolve a complaint by legal means.

4 Formal Action

4.1 Service of orders and directions

Various pieces of legislation specify the procedures which councils must follow, in order to:

- . advise of the intention to issue an Order;
- . invite submissions with respect to the matter;
- . order a person to do or refrain from doing a thing under specified circumstances; and/or
- . issue directions specifying how the Order may be complied with.

Orders include 'show cause' directions such as notices served under s.237 of the *Building Act 2016*. This would routinely be the first action taken for alleged offences under the *Building Act 2016*.

Other orders require persons to take action to resolve a breach, such as notices under s.200 of the *Local Government Act 1993*, orders under s.247 of the *Building Act 2016* or a notice under s.60 of the *Food Act 2003*. A notice under s.60 of the *Food Act 2003* is routinely the first formal action taken for breaches of that Act.

Council officers will use professional judgement and discretion to assess the variables relating to each matter under consideration, including the reasonableness of the actions required by an Order/direction and the timeframe to comply.

Only in circumstances such as a threat to life or immediate threat to public health or safety will an Order be made without giving notice of intention. In these circumstances immediate compliance to resolve a situation can be required.

In most cases the person receiving the Order has a right of appeal to the appropriate court if the Order is considered unreasonable. If an Order is served for which an appeal is possible, the Council will advise the recipient in writing of the right to appeal and the relevant legal provisions at the time of serving the Order.

Where there is evidence that an offence has been committed the Council may issue a notice or launch a prosecution in addition to serving an Order. This will only be done where it is determined that the conduct of the recipient justifies taking both steps.

4.2 Action in regard to a default

Failure to comply with Orders may incur further enforcement action such as service of an infringement notice or launch of a prosecution.

Where action regarding a default is provided for by legislation and the necessary work has not been carried out in the time allowed without good reason, the Council may undertake the required work. Before doing the work the Council will consider whether there is a realistic prospect that the person responsible will complete the work within a reasonable time. Where work in default is undertaken the Council will seek to recover all costs over a fair period, using all statutory means available.

The decision to carry out action in default will be made by the General Manager or delegate.

Where an offence has been committed the Council may issue a Notice or launch a prosecution in addition to taking action to fulfil an Order. This will only be done where the conduct of the recipient justifies taking such steps. Factors such as giving false information, the obstruction of Council staff and the harm or risk of harm caused by the recipient's delay will be considered in determining additional enforcement actions.

4.3 Service of an infringement notice

A person receiving a notice may be prosecuted for the alleged offence if the notice is not complied with. Hence there must be substantial, reliable and admissible evidence that an identifiable person or organisation has committed the alleged offence. In other words, there must be sufficient evidence on the face of it to enable a conclusion to be reached that there is a reasonable prospect of being able to prove an offence beyond reasonable doubt.

The following circumstances are likely to warrant a notice:

- . certain breaches of the legislation administered by the Council;
- . failure to correct an identified problem after having been given reasonable opportunity to do so by an authorised officer;
- . failure to comply with the requirements of an Order;
- . confidence in the individual/ other body is low; or
- . a warning has been given for a similar offence.

Infringement notices may be served under legislation including the *Building Act 2016*, the *Dog Control Act 2000*, the *Food Act 2003*, the *Traffic Act 1925*, the *Litter Act 2007* and the *Public Health Act 1997*. Offences under the Dog Control, Litter and Traffic Acts will routinely be dealt with initially by serving an infringement notice.

4.4 Prosecution

For the purposes of this Policy 'prosecution' includes actions in the Magistrates Court, Supreme Court or tribunals such as the Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal.

A prosecution will only proceed where there is a reasonable prospect that an offence can be proved beyond reasonable doubt.

The following circumstances are likely to warrant a prosecution:

- . a flagrant breach of the law such that public health, safety and welfare have been put at risk;

- . the alleged breach is too serious or the risks too great to be dealt with by means of a notice;
- . a failure to correct an identified serious problem after having been given reasonable opportunity to do so;
- . a failure to comply with the requirements of an Order;
- . an established and recorded history of similar offences;
- . an unwillingness, on the part of the individual or other body, to prevent a recurrence of the problem; or
- . the recovery of the costs of the investigation or remedial work or financial compensation that are required by the Council or an aggrieved party.

Where circumstances warrant a prosecution all relevant evidence and information will be considered to enable a consistent, fair and objective decision to be made.

Before a prosecution is recommended there must be substantial, reliable and admissible evidence that an identifiable person or organisation has committed the offence.

A decision to prosecute must be in the public interest. In considering whether prosecution is in the public interest, the following additional factors will be considered:

- . whether the offence was premeditated;
- . the need to influence the offender's future behaviour;
- . the effect on the offender's or witness's physical or mental health, balanced against the seriousness of the offence;
- . the availability and efficacy of any alternatives to prosecution;
- . the prevalence of the alleged offence and the need for deterrence, both personal and general; and
- . the likely length, expense and outcome of a trial.

The final decision to prosecute will be made by the General Manager or delegate.

4.5 Withdrawal of action

A person who is served with formal action such as an infringement notice may apply in writing to have that action withdrawn or set aside. Any such request will be dealt with in accordance with any relevant legislative provisions. A report provided by the relevant Department will be provided to the General Manager whose decision it will be whether or not to grant the request.

5 Submitting Complaints

The Council becomes aware of unlawful activities in a variety of ways including proactive surveillance, regular patrols and complaints from members of the public.

Complaints from members of the public can be submitted to the Council in writing, verbally or electronically. In all cases the complaint will be recorded in the Council's records and/or request management systems, and referred to the relevant Council officer for any necessary investigation.

The name, address and contact details of the person submitting the complaint will be recorded. This information is critical as the Council may need to rely on evidence from the complainant to prove any offence. The complainant will be advised of any action taken or the reasons if no action is taken.

The Council will take all reasonable measures to protect the privacy of the person submitting a complaint and generally details will not be released. However, the Council may be required to disclose this information in circumstances including:

- . access to that information is permitted under relevant legislation;
- . the information is disclosed as part of legal proceedings;
- . the nature of the complaint makes it a necessity.

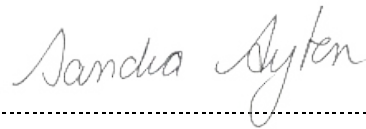
A complainant may be asked to submit a written, rather than verbal, complaint if it is necessary to establish sufficient grounds for an investigation. Anonymous complaints may not establish sufficient grounds for an investigation and will be dealt with at the discretion of the relevant Council officer.

REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every three years, unless organisational and legislative changes require more frequent modification.

Date of approval: 16/ 9/2019

Approved by:



Sandra Ayton
GENERAL MANAGER
September 2019