Office of the Municipal Auditor General,
The Corporation of the City of Windsor

AUDITOR GENERAL COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION REPORT
Treatment of Citizen – Exclusionary Communication

Issued: April 9, 2026
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Contents

Executive Summary

Background

The Office of the Auditor General (AG) received a complaint from a member of the public regarding the City's handling of communications related to a planned sidewalk construction project and subsequent interactions with City staff. The complainant reported difficulty obtaining information regarding the project and coordinating potential private work, and later alleged that interactions with City representatives were dismissive and that communication channels were restricted without clear explanation, duration, or appeal options.

Investigation Approach

The investigation examined whether the City had appropriate governance, procedures, and controls in place to manage citizen inquiries, respond to requests related to construction activities, and administer communication restrictions in circumstances involving high-volume or inappropriate contact. The Office reviewed relevant policies and procedures, available correspondence and documentation, and conducted interviews with relevant City personnel.

Scope Limitation

The investigation relied primarily on documentation and correspondence available to the Office, as well as information obtained through interviews. Due to the volume and length of system call logs and recordings, detailed reperformance of all customer contact interactions was not undertaken. Where detailed interaction evidence was not reviewed, conclusions were formed using the best available evidence.

Summary of Procedures and Findings

Allegation #1 — Unfair communication barriers (planned construction project)
Rating: Not Warranted. Based on the information reviewed, the complainant's concern was premised on the expectation that the City would undertake work on private property; however, the City does not perform such work. As a result, the concern itself was not valid, and the evidence does not support that the City created an unfair communication barrier.

Allegation #2 — Disrespectful handling of public communication and complaints
Rating: Partially Warranted. While limiting communication channels may be appropriate in certain circumstances, the restriction approach reviewed lacked procedural safeguards commonly associated with transparency and fairness, including defined duration, review intervals, and an appeal or reconsideration process.

Allegation #3 — Complex escalation process and unjust termination of communication channels
Rating: Partially Warranted. The investigation identified governance and control gaps related to identifying, documenting, approving, reviewing, and monitoring labour-intensive or

inappropriate contacts, including unclear ownership of communication restrictions and inconsistent documentation of restriction parameters.

Recommendations:

The report includes recommendations to strengthen governance over communication restrictions, including assigning clear accountability for maintaining the restricted-person mechanism and implementing centralized tracking and standardized documentation for cases involving labour-intensive or inappropriate contact.

Assessment of Administration's Proposed Actions

Administration has provided responses to the findings. The actions described indicate that the recommendations will be incorporated into the policy and process review elements.

As a result, the planned actions are likely to resolve the underlying issues; however, the Auditor General will assess the effectiveness and sufficiency of any actions taken as part of future findings-validation work (timing to be determined).

Complaint Disposition:

The investigation found that while the City maintains processes for construction notifications and for managing labour-intensive or inappropriate contact with staff, governance controls surrounding the documentation, approval, oversight, and periodic review of communication restrictions were not fully defined or consistently applied at the time of the complaint. These control gaps increase the risk of inconsistent communication management, unclear expectations for staff and residents, and potential perceptions of unfairness in how communication restrictions and escalation processes are applied.

Background Information

The Office of the Auditor General received a complaint regarding the City's handling of a resident's communications in connection with a planned sidewalk construction project and subsequent interactions through the City's customer contact channels. The complainant reported contacting the City regarding the project and seeking information about the possibility of coordinating potential private work adjacent to the City's construction activities. The complainant alleged that attempts to obtain information and communicate with the identified City contact went unanswered, and that subsequent interactions with City representatives were handled in a dismissive manner. Following escalation, the complainant further alleged that the City imposed restrictions on the available communication channels without clearly explaining the rationale for the decision, the duration of the restriction, or any process for review or appeal. The concerns raised were:

1. **Unfair communication barriers related to a planned construction project**
    - The complainant reported contacting the City years in advance of the planned sidewalk work and believed additional work could be privately contracted to expand the scope and address a drainage issue.
    - Once construction began, the complainant reported multiple attempts to contact the identified City point of contact without receiving responses and believed they were being deliberately ignored.

1. **Disrespectful handling of public communication and complaints**
    - From a customer-contact perspective, the complainant reported feeling mistreated due to repeated unanswered calls, incorrect transfers, and a lack of prompt responses.
    - The complainant disputed that their communications were threatening, while City records referenced the conduct differently, contributing to disagreement about how the behaviour should be characterized and managed.
    - The complainant alleged that communication channels were restricted to limited methods (designated email address and voicemail inbox, and written letter) and that no in-person meeting was offered as an alternative channel to address or de-escalate the situation.

1. **Unclear escalation governance and communication restrictions**
    - The complainant alleged they did not receive clear communication on the rationale for the City's restriction decision, the process used to impose it, or the scope of the restriction, and that they received mixed messaging about which channels were permitted.
    - The complainant alleged the restriction was effectively indefinite and that no appeal pathway or review schedule was communicated, despite references in City material to appeal concepts in related contexts.

These matters are significant because public trust depends on the City maintaining clear, fair, and transparent access to municipal services while also protecting staff and ensuring City resources are not wasted.

Scope & Limitations

Scope of Review

The investigation included

- **Review of construction-notification and resident inquiry practices**, including construction notice content and the process for residents to raise special requests and receive follow-up from the identified City contact.
- **Review of customer-contact handling and escalation practices** as they relate to high-frequency resident inquiries, including how inquiries are triaged, transferred, and responded to across 311 and other channels.
- **Examination of policies/procedures used to manage inappropriate or labour-intensive interactions**, including the "Escalating Interactions and Handling Labour-intensive Callers" procedure and related expectations for documenting interactions (e.g., use of an Inappropriate Interaction Service Request).
- **Review of the Inappropriate/Labour-intensive People (ILIP) list** to understand how communication parameters are recorded and applied when an individual is deemed labour-intensive, including the stated reasons for inclusion and the protocol staff are expected to follow.
- **Review of escalation history and related correspondence** documenting how concerns about the complainant were shared internally and how communication restrictions evolved over time (e.g., escalation emails and follow-ups).
- **Benchmarking of comparator municipal approaches** to defining and managing excessive/vexatious contact, including escalation ladders, time-limited restrictions, and appeal pathways, to inform leading practice expectations relevant to this case.

Limitations

The following limitations were noted:

- The investigation relied on documentation and correspondence; system call logs and complete interaction recordings were available, but due to the volume and length, they were not examined in detail.
- No independent re-performance of Contact Centre controls was conducted beyond documentation review and interviews.
- The investigation does not assess matters involving threats of physical violence or staff safety, which are managed through the City's trespass policy.
- Based on the available evidence, the Office reached conclusions regarding governance, policy clarity, and control design relevant to the allegations reviewed.

Contextual Information

The investigation considered relevant City policies and procedures, including trespass-related policy provisions and internal customer-contact escalation guidance. In practical terms, these materials set expectations for how frontline staff manage difficult interactions (e.g., when an interaction may be terminated, when it should be escalated to a supervisor/manager, and how the interaction should be documented for oversight and follow-up).

The City's internal escalation guidance also contemplates multiple channels of contact and relies on incident documentation to enable supervisory review of inappropriate or labour-intensive interactions.

Peer municipal policies and other public-sector practices reviewed for benchmarking purposes were used to identify common elements such as progressive escalation ladders, time-limited restrictions with review periods, and documented appeal pathways.

The investigation also noted the City's ongoing work to formalize public conduct expectations and improve consistency in how inappropriate or labour-intensive interactions are handled, which provides context for why clearer standards and workflows are relevant to this complaint.

Relevant Processes:

1. Escalating Interactions and Handling Labour-Intensive Callers Procedure:

The City provides guidance to Customer Contact Centre Staff on handling labour-intensive callers. The document includes scripts to follow, escalation practices, and guidance on behaviour that should not be tolerated.

In its directions on interactions with labour-intensive people, the procedure includes the following examples of labour-intensive individuals:

- People who monopolize time with multiple requests. (over 15 minutes in time or 5 service requests per interaction)
- People who repetitively or vexatiously contact the service or multiple departments
- People who have been provided service/information but are unaccepting of the response
    - The procedure does not distinguish between requests in which a warranted concern has not received an appropriate response and those that have.
- People who may have underlying health concerns and are unaware of the impact on their behaviour

2. Inappropriate/Labour-Intensive People List:

The Inappropriate Labour/Intensive People List is an internal reference list that captures individuals whose interactions with City contact channels are considered inappropriate and/or unusually resource-intensive, along with the specific handling instructions staff should follow (e.g., scripted responses, routing to a single contact point, limiting channels, monitoring, or ending calls). Nine individuals were noted on the list regarding corporate-wide protocols.

Reasons for inclusion on the list were not limited to the examples of labour-intensive individuals provided in the Customer Contact Centre Escalation Procedure noted above. Observed reasons for inclusion on the list include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Threats or safety-related behaviours (entries that instruct escalation to supervision/police where threats occur).
- Disrespectful, disparaging, condescending, rude, or inappropriate language toward staff
- Repeated requests to file complaints against staff/challenge staff integrity (see note below).
- Contacting multiple City officials/departments to escalate issues (repeatedly reaching out across many offices rather than using standard routes).
- Excessive or repetitive contact that consumes disproportionate staff time/resources.
- Non-productive calls that monopolize staff time (e.g., attempting long, philosophical/controversial conversations; calls with unclear service purpose; difficulty moving the caller along).
- Refusal to provide identifying details needed to assist (e.g., not giving name, postal code, or other information required to provide service/referrals).

Note: The Handling Labour-Intensive Callers Procedure does not distinguish between warranted repeated calls and repeated calls regarding concerns that have already been responded to.

Investigation Procedures

The investigation undertook the following procedures:

1. **Review of construction notices and resident communication** – Reviewed the City's process for notifying residents of upcoming construction, including expected service standards for issuing notices and providing a City point of contact

2. **Customer-contact handling and channel analysis (311 and other routes)** – Assessed how the complainant's repeated inquiries were handled across customer-contact channels, drawing on available escalation history evidence to understand reported issues (transfers, responsiveness, and follow-up).

3. **Review of internal interaction-termination and escalation guidance** – Examined the City's internal customer contact guidance describing when interactions may be terminated, when escalation to supervisors/managers is expected, and the documentation mechanism used to capture inappropriate or labour-intensive interactions for supervisory review.

4. **Communication restriction governance and "restricted person" protocol review** – Reviewed the internal labour-intensive/inappropriate listing mechanism and associated protocols used to guide staff on permitted communication parameters for known individuals (including how background/rationale is captured and what instructions staff are expected to follow.

5. **Sampling of Individuals from the Labour Intensive/Inappropriate Persons List** – Selected two individuals from the list and reviewed the supporting case documentation (restriction letters/notices, escalation emails, call logs and other support) to assess how communication restrictions were evidenced and how the list was developed.

6. **Escalation-history reconstruction** – Compiled and reviewed available escalation-history records and correspondence summarizing how concerns were escalated internally over time, including what actions were taken, by whom, and what follow-up steps were documented.

7. **Benchmarking against peer municipal practices** – Reviewed comparator municipal policies and public-sector practices to identify common governance features relevant to this case, including definitions (unreasonable/vexatious), progressive escalation ladders, time-limited restrictions with review periods, and documented appeal pathways.

Findings by Allegation

The following assessment is made strictly from a governance, controls, and process perspective. The ratings (Warranted / Partially Warranted / Not Warranted) indicate whether the evidence available supports the allegation as stated.

ALLEGATION #1 – Unfair communication barriers concerning a planned construction project

Allegation
It was alleged that the City created unfair communication barriers during a planned sidewalk construction project, including failing to respond to the complainant's inquiries about potential scope extensions and related drainage concerns.

Evidence Reviewed and Findings

- Construction notification process and sample construction notices:
  - The construction notice process includes issuing notices to impacted property owners that identify project scope, timeline, and City staff contact information
  - No specific details were included in construction notices on City practices regarding work on private property
  - Project managers communicate standard messaging, verbally, to residents on private property work norms, if required
- Work order records for sidewalk reconstruction projects
  - The Office observed an instance where construction start dates referenced in notices did not align with the recorded work order timing

Investigator's Understanding

- **Notification exists, but clarity may vary:** Construction notices are issued to impacted property owners and include core details of the project, however additional information regarding private property work expectations is not consistently included.
- **Special requests process is informal and not tracked:** Residents are expected to call the City contact listed on the notice; however, there is no formal mechanism to track special requests or whether follow-up occurred, increasing the risk of missed or inconsistent responses.
- **Private property work expectations may not be consistently communicated:** There are no formal standards/training to ensure consistent messaging to residents on private property work norms. In addition, restoration activities (e.g. contractors repairing accidental damages) may be misinterpreted by residents, reinforcing the need for clear, consistent explanations.

Allegation Rating
Not warranted. The evidence reviewed does not support the allegation that the City created unfair communication barriers concerning the planned construction project. The complainant's concern was

based on an expectation regarding private property work that falls outside the City's scope. Accordingly, the allegation that the City created unfair communication barriers is not supported.

ALLEGATION #2 – Disrespectful handling of public communication and complaints

Allegation

It was alleged that the complainant's inquiries and complaints were handled in a disrespectful or dismissive manner, and that the City's response (including communication restrictions) lacked procedural safeguards commonly associated with fairness and transparency.

Evidence Reviewed and Findings

- Internal 311 policy guidance on interacting with labour-intensive individuals.
  - Simple scripts are provided to frontline staff as guidance when interacting with labour-intensive or inappropriate individuals.
- Based on a Sample for a Communication Restriction Notice.
  - Email addresses, voicemail lines, and physical mail addresses were provided as alternative means of communication, but no in-person meeting was offered.
  - Sample notices noted the rationale for the communication restriction, including the resident's strain on City resources and alleged bullying behaviour.
  - Sample communication restriction notices were found without defined review or expiration dates, indicating that the duration of the restriction was unspecified.
  - Sample communication restriction notices were found with no appeal pathways noted.
- Sample Email correspondence supporting the Communication Restriction.
  - Email chains indicate that City personnel, at times, continued to communicate outside the designated channel after restrictions were issued.
- Benchmarking of comparable municipal policies/public documents addressing definitions and escalation protocols for excessive/vexatious citizen contact.
  - Comparator municipalities often distinguish staff safety/abuse scenarios from labour-intensive contact and embed clearer thresholds and review features to reduce inconsistency and perception risk.
  - The City applies a simpler separation: when a member of the public becomes threatening to employees' safety, the incident is escalated to the City's trespass policy, no longer governed by the inappropriate and labour-intensive processes investigated by the AG.

Investigator's Understanding

- **Restrictive measures lacked documented safeguards:** While limiting channels can be a reasonable control in some circumstances, the documentation reviewed did not specify a defined review period or expiration date, and no appeal or reconsideration pathway was identified in the correspondence.

Allegation Rating

Partially warranted. The evidence supports that the restriction approach lacked safeguards commonly associated with procedural fairness (clear duration, review, appeal, and documented alternatives). However, some form of contact management may be appropriate in certain circumstances; the core issue is the governance surrounding how it was applied.

ALLEGATION #3 – Complex internal escalation process and unjust termination of communication channels

Allegation

It was alleged that the City's internal escalation process for labour-intensive/inappropriate contact are unclear and inconsistently governed, resulting in unjust or inconsistently applied termination of communication channels and mixed messaging about restrictions.

Evidence Reviewed & Findings

- Review of internal 311 policy guidance on interacting with labour-intensive individuals
    - The Escalating Interactions and Handling Labour-Intensive Callers Procedure's standards for labour-intensiveness include calls that are over 15 minutes in duration or calls with five or more service requests in a single interaction.
    - Criteria for restricting channels appear clearer for single-incident misconduct (e.g., threats) than for other forms of labour intensiveness.
    - Escalation guidance is provided to frontline staff.
    - Ultimate "ownership" and accountability for handling labour-intensive individuals, as well as for communication restrictions, are not clearly established.
    - The procedure directs that, after an interaction ends, Customer Service Representatives enter an Inappropriate Interaction Service Request, which alerts supervisors to review and follow up.
    - No automated process was noted in the reviewed documentation to aid proactive monitoring and flagging of inappropriate individuals, or to support centralized oversight of labour-intensive interactions.
- Review of the internal Inappropriate/Labour Intensive People List (ILIP), which included both Samples 1 and 2.
    - As of July 21, 2025, nine individuals are subject to corporate-wide protocols and guidance, and ten individuals are subject to department-specific protocols and guidance.
    - Various background information is provided on the context that led to their communication restriction and the inappropriate behaviour they engaged in.
    - For certain individuals, scripting is provided to guide frontline staff in any encounters.
- Review of 311 Escalation History and Related Internal Email Correspondence, specific to Sample 1.
    - No issues were found in complaints escalating from 311 staff when encountering inappropriate or labour-intensive persons.

  - Email correspondence before the communication restriction notice suggests City staff were uncertain what formal process (if any) applied when internal complaints were raised about a labour-intensive caller.
  - The City used a past example of a communication restriction as guidance, adapting prior precedent in the absence of clearly documented procedural guidance.
- Review of call logs for the listed labour-intensive individuals (Samples 1 and 2) from 311
  - Sustained call activity over multiple quarters is evidenced, with quarterly volumes ranging from 2 to 25 calls.
  - The communication restriction for sample 1 occurred during the same period as the peak call volume (Q2 2022, with 25 calls).
  - Both individuals repeatedly engaged in calls exceeding 15 minutes
  - Following the communication restriction for sample 1, calls fell for the remainder of the year.

Investigator's Understanding

- **Samples Indicate Control Effectiveness:** Sample support investigated indicates that the listed individuals engaged in labour-intensive behaviour. This indicates the tool can be applied effectively in some cases, even where the broader escalation ladder is not highly prescriptive.
- **Thresholds are unclear for labour-intensive cases:** Internal procedures may lack sufficient detail in defining labour intensity. This could increase the likelihood of misunderstanding and inconsistent application.
- **Ownership/accountability is not clearly established:** There may be uncertainty about which function ultimately "owns" communication restrictions and the associated list, creating a risk of inconsistency.
- **No clear review/expiry or appeal pathway:** A review of communication restriction notices found that review dates or expiry criteria were not identified for restrictions/list inclusion, and that the appeal pathway was unclear, limiting transparency and oversight.

Allegation Rating

Partially Warranted. The evidence indicates potential gaps in governance and control design for identifying, restricting, documenting, reviewing, and monitoring labour-intensive/inappropriate contacts at the time of the complaint. These gaps contributed to inconsistent application and unclear expectations for communication among both staff and members of the public.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are intended to address identified control and governance gaps. Management responses and action plans are to be completed by Administration.

1. Formalize governance over communication restrictions.

Formalize governance over communication restrictions by assigning an accountable owner for the restricted-person/list and the public-facing IVL policy (Inappropriate, Vexatious and Labour-Intensive) and requiring scheduled behavioural review at defined intervals.

The City should designate a clear, accountable owner (role/department) responsible for approving and maintaining communication restrictions and the associated restricted person/listing mechanism (Note: this accountable owner refers to the department or function responsible for maintaining the process and overseeing overall communication, rather than the individual decision-maker or escalator of specific concerns). Supported by Legal and other operational stakeholders, this accountable owner should also lead the development, publication, and maintenance of a consolidated, public-facing IVL policy that sets out definitions, escalation thresholds, and the escalation ladder.

Restrictions should be subject to prescribed review periods at a defined interval, and restriction notices should clearly state:

- the rationale for the restriction
- permitted communication channels
- the next scheduled review date
- the process by which the individual may appeal or request reconsideration

Management Response:

As part of Administration's commitment to good governance and continuous improvement, the policy and associated procedures will be reviewed and updated to accommodate this recommendation. This review will ensure the framework remains current, relevant, and aligned with organizational objectives, and will require coordinated input across multiple departments, with support from Legal and other operational stakeholders. Implementation will include appropriate training and clear communication to ensure consistent understanding and application across the organization.

Responsible Party/Title: Commissioner of Corporate Services

Due Date: Q4 2026

2. Implement centralized tracking and standardized documentation for IVL cases

Implement centralized tracking and standardized documentation for IVL cases to support consistency, monitoring, and auditability.

The City should implement a standardized method to track activity from individuals on the Inappropriate/Labour-Intensive People list, which could include:

- warning steps taken
- restriction decisions
- adherence to designated communication channels
- attempted contacts outside permitted channels

The tracking mechanism should support consistent documentation of escalation decisions, monitoring of compliance with restrictions, and management oversight.

This should include controls to ensure confidentiality and need-to-know access and should support trend analysis and oversight.

Note: This is not a complete documentation of all interactions; it is a formal report of the basis for an initial addition to the IVL, evidence of communication, therefore, evidence of ongoing review of the case as per the review/assessment plan and a log of any known recurring issues or support that would be part of any regular review process.

Management Response:

As part of Administration's commitment to good governance and continuous improvement, the policy and associated procedures will be reviewed and updated to accommodate this recommendation. This review will ensure the framework remains current, relevant, and aligned with organizational objectives, and will require coordinated input across multiple departments, with support from Legal and other operational stakeholders. Implementation will include appropriate training and clear communication to ensure consistent understanding and application across the organization.

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