



Attachment 1 to Item 4.4.3

Draft Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy

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Councillor and Staff Interaction

DRAFT COUNCIL POLICY

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1. TITLE

- 1.1 Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy (the Policy) provides a framework for Councillors when exercising their civic functions by specifically addressing their ability to interact with, and receive advice from, authorised staff.
- 2.2 The Policy complements and should be read in conjunction with Council's Code of Conduct.
- 2.3 The aim of the Policy is to facilitate a positive working relationship between Councillors, as the community's elected representatives, and staff, who are employed to administer the operations of the Council. The Policy provides direction on interactions between Councillors and staff to assist both parties in carrying out their day-to-day duties professionally, ethically and respectfully.
- 2.4 It is important to have an effective working relationship that recognises the important but differing contribution both parties bring to their complementary roles.

3. APPLICATION

- 3.1 This Policy applies to all Councillors and Council staff.
- 3.2 This Policy applies to all interactions between Councillors and staff, whether face-to-face, online (including social media and virtual meeting platforms), by phone, text message or in writing.
- 3.3 This Policy applies whenever interactions between Councillors and staff occur, including inside and outside of work hours, and at both Council and non-Council venues and events.
- 3.4 This Policy does not confer any delegated authority upon any person. All delegations to staff are made by the General Manager.
- 3.5 Council's Code of Conduct provides that Council officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to Council's policies. A breach of this Policy will be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 This Policy supplements and is consistent with the provisions of Council's Code of Conduct that deal with the relationships between Council officials, and access to information and Council resources.
- 4.2 In 2022, the Office of Local Government released a non-compulsory Model Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy and represents a 'best practice' approach. The Model Policy has been adapted for use as this Policy.



5. POLICY OBJECTIVES

5.1 The objectives of the Policy are to:

- a) establish positive, effective and professional working relationships between Councillors and staff defined by mutual respect and courtesy
- b) enable Councillors and staff to work together appropriately and effectively to support each other in their respective roles
- c) ensure that Councillors receive advice in an orderly, courteous and appropriate manner to assist them in the performance of their civic duties
- d) ensure that Councillors have adequate access to information to exercise their statutory roles
- e) provide direction on, and guide Councillor interactions with, staff for both obtaining information and in general situations
- f) maintain transparent decision making and good governance arrangements
- g) ensure the reputation of Council is enhanced by Councillors and staff interacting consistently, professionally and positively in their day-to-day duties
- h) provide a clear and consistent framework through which breaches of the Policy will be managed in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

6. PRINCIPLES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Several factors contribute to a good relationship between Councillors and staff. These include goodwill, understanding of roles, communication, protocols, and a good understanding of legislative requirements.

6.2 Councillors and Council staff must have a clear and sophisticated understanding of their different roles, and the fact that these operate within a hierarchy. Council staff are accountable to the General Manager, who in turn, is accountable to the Councillors.

6.3 Section 232 of the Local Government Act 1993 (the Act) states that the role of a Councillor is as follows:

- a) to be an active and contributing member of the governing body
- b) to make considered and well-informed decisions as a member of the governing body
- c) to participate in the development of the integrated planning and reporting framework
- d) to represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community
- e) to facilitate communication between the local community and the governing body
- f) to uphold and represent accurately the policies and decision of the governing body
- g) to make all reasonable efforts to acquire and maintain the skills necessary to perform the role of a Councillor.

6.4 Council staff's role is to advise Councillors, implement Council's decisions and to oversee service delivery.



- 6.5 It is beneficial if Council staff recognise the complex political environments in which elected members operate and acknowledge that they work within a system that is based on democratic governance. Councillors similarly need to understand that it is a highly complex task to prepare information and provide quality advice on the very wide range of issues that Council operations cover.
- 6.6 Council commits to the following principles to guide interactions between Councillors and staff:
- a) **Equitable and consistent:** Ensuring appropriate, consistent and equitable access to information for all Councillors within established service levels
 - b) **Considerate and respectful:** Councillors and staff working supportively together in the interests of the whole community, based on mutual respect and consideration of their respective positions
 - c) **Ethical, open and transparent:** Ensuring that interactions between Councillors and staff are ethical, open, transparent, honest and display the highest standards of professional conduct
 - d) **Fit for purpose:** Ensuring that the provision of equipment and information to Councillors is done in a way that is suitable, practicable and of an appropriate size, scale and cost
 - e) **Accountable and measurable:** Providing support to Councillors in the performance of their role in a way that can be measured, reviewed and improved based on qualitative and quantitative data.
- 6.7 Councillors are members of the Council's governing body, which is responsible for directing and controlling the affairs of the Council in accordance with the Act. Councillors need to accept that:
- a) responses to requests for information from Councillors may take time and consultation to prepare and be approved prior to responding
 - b) staff are not accountable to them individually
 - c) they must not direct staff except by giving appropriate direction to the General Manager by way of a Council or Committee resolution, or by the Mayor exercising their functions under Section 226 of the Act
 - d) they must not, in any public or private forum, direct or influence, or attempt to direct or influence, a member of staff in the exercise of their functions
 - e) they must not contact a member of staff on Council-related business unless in accordance with this Policy
 - f) they must not use their position to attempt to receive favourable treatment for themselves or others.
- 6.8 The General Manager is responsible for the efficient and effective day-to-day operation of the Council and for ensuring that the lawful decisions of the Council are implemented without undue delay. Council staff need to understand:
- a) they are not accountable to individual Councillors and do not take direction from them. They are accountable to the General Manager, who is in turn accountable to the Council's governing body
 - b) they should not provide advice to Councillors unless it has been approved by the General Manager or a Council officer with a delegation to approve advice to Councillors
 - c) they must carry out reasonable and lawful directions given by any person having the authority to give such directions in an efficient and effective manner



- d) they must ensure that participation in political activities outside the service of the Council does not interfere with the performance of their official duties
- e) they must provide full and timely information to Councillors sufficient to enable them to exercise their civic functions in accordance with this Policy.

7. THE COUNCILLOR REQUESTS SYSTEM

- 7.1 Councillors have a right to request information provided it is relevant to Councillor's exercise of their civic functions. As a general rule, this includes information relevant to matters before a Council meeting, either currently, within the current term of Council, or known to be coming before Council in the near future. This right does not extend to matters about which a Councillor is merely curious.
- 7.2 Councillors do not have a right to request information about matters that they are prevented from participating in decision-making on because of a conflict of interest, unless the information is otherwise publicly available.
- 7.3 Councillors can use the Councillor Requests System to:
 - a) request information or ask questions that relate to the strategic position, performance or operation of the Council
 - b) bring concerns that have been raised by members of the public to the attention of staff
 - c) request IT or other support from the Council administration.
- 7.4 Councillors must, to the best of their knowledge, be specific about what information they are requesting, advise whether it is urgent or time critical, and make their requests respectfully. Where a Councillor's request lacks specificity, the General Manager or authorised staff member is entitled to ask the Councillor to clarify their request and the reason(s) why they are seeking the information.
- 7.5 Where practicable, Councillors should put requests for information in writing. Councillors should use the Councillor Request System to ensure their requests can be actioned quickly and to allow for appropriate record keeping. Complex, important or time-critical matters may be supported by telephone communications.
- 7.6 Staff must make every reasonable effort to assist Councillors with their requests and do so in a respectful manner.
- 7.7 The General Manager or the authorised staff member will aim to provide a response to urgent requests within 24 hours, general requests within five working days and more complex requests within ten working days. Where a response cannot be provided within that timeframe, the Councillor will be advised, and the information will be provided as soon as practicable.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

- 8.1 Councillors are required to treat all information provided by staff appropriately and to observe any confidentiality requirements, including compliance with:
 - a) Council's Privacy Management Plan
 - b) the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
 - c) the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002
 - d) the Privacy Code of Practice for Local Government.



- 8.2 Councillors do not have the authority to release information to the public on behalf of Council. Any information provided to Councillors under the provisions of this Policy is considered confidential information held by the Councillor. Councillors must not circumvent the provisions of the Government Information (Public Access) (GIPA) Act 2009 by providing access to information directly to members of the public. Members of the public wishing to access Council information should be advised to contact Council officers for assistance lodging a GIPA request.
- 8.3 Staff will inform Councillors of any confidentiality requirements for information they provide so Councillors can handle the information appropriately.
- 8.4 Where a Councillor is unsure of confidentiality requirements, they should contact the General Manager, or the authorised staff member.
- 8.5 Once information has been provided in response to a Councillor's request, the Councillor must ensure that they comply with their responsibility under Section 439 of the Act to act honestly and exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence, by properly examining and considering the information.
- 8.6 The Councillor must not use the information for private purposes, or to seek to obtain any financial benefit or other advantage for themselves or any other person or body.

9. REFUSING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- 9.1 The General Manager may refuse access to information requested by a Councillor if:
- a) the information is not necessary for the performance of the Councillor's civic functions, or is considered operational in nature, or
 - b) responding to the request would, in the General Manager's opinion, result in an unreasonable diversion of staff time and resources, or
 - c) the Councillor has previously declared a conflict of interest in the matter and removed themselves from decision-making on it, or
 - d) the General Manager is prevented by law from disclosing the information.
- 9.2 Where the General Manager refuses to provide information requested by a Councillor, they must act reasonably. The General Manager must advise the Councillor in writing of their reasons for refusing access to the information requested. The General Manager may propose alternative options for providing information, such as a workshop, meeting or verbal response instead of typed lengthy responses. Paper-based records can also be made available for viewing on Council premises if required.
- 9.3 Where a Councillor's request for information is refused by the General Manager on the grounds referred to under Clause 9.1 (a) or (b), the Councillor may instead request the information through a resolution of the Council by way of a Notice of Motion. This clause does not apply where the General Manager refuses a Councillor's request for information under Clause 9.1 (c) or (d).
- 9.4 Nothing in Clauses 9.1, 9.2 or 9.3 prevents a Councillor from requesting the information in accordance with the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.
- 9.5 Where a Councillor persistently makes requests for information which, in the General Manager's opinion, result in a significant and unreasonable diversion of staff time and resources the Council may, on the advice of the General Manager, resolve to limit the number of requests the Councillor may make.



10. RECORDKEEPING RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.1 Councillor requests are State records and must be managed in accordance with the State Records Act 1998.
- 10.2 All requests for information and advice made by Councillors, and the responses to those requests, must be treated as Council records and managed in accordance with the legislation.
- 10.3 Council staff handling Councillor requests are required to document their interaction with Councillors, including making records of telephone calls and email exchanges, in accordance with the legislation.
- 10.4 Councillors are not permitted to destroy, alter, or dispose of original version of Council information or records. Councillor enquiries about alteration or disposal of Council records must be directed to Council's General Manager or a senior staff member who will consult with Council's Governance branch regarding the requirements of the State Records Act 1998.
- 10.5 Councillors are responsible for the safe keeping and secure disposal of their confidential business papers.

11. ACCESS TO COUNCIL STAFF

- 11.1 Councillors may directly contact members of staff that are listed in Schedule 1 of this Policy. The General Manager may amend this list at any time and will advise Councillors promptly of any changes.
- 11.2 Councillors can contact staff listed in Schedule 1 about matters that relate to the staff member's area of responsibility.
- 11.3 Councillors should, as far as practicable, only contact staff during normal business hours.
- 11.4 If Councillors would like to contact a member of staff not listed in Schedule 1, they must receive permission from the General Manager.
- 11.5 If a Councillor is unsure which authorised staff member can help with their enquiry, they can contact the General Manager who will provide advice about which authorised staff member to contact.
- 11.6 The General Manager or a member of the Executive Leadership Team may direct any staff member to contact Councillors to provide specific information or clarification relating to a specific matter.
- 11.7 A Councillor or member of staff must not take advantage of their official position to improperly influence other Councillors or members of staff in the performance of their civic or professional duties for the purposes of securing a private benefit for themselves or for another person. Such conduct should be immediately reported to the General Manager or Mayor in the first instance, or alternatively to the Office of Local Government, NSW Ombudsman, or the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption.



12. COUNCILLOR ACCESS TO COUNCIL BUILDINGS

- 12.1 Councillors are entitled to have access to the Council Chamber, Committee rooms, the Mayor's Office (subject to availability), Councillors' rooms, the Windsor meeting room (with prior booking). Councillors are also entitled to access public areas of Council's buildings during normal business hours for meetings. Councillors needing access to these facilities at other times must obtain approval from the General Manager.
- 12.2 Councillors must not enter staff-only areas of Council buildings without the approval of the General Manager.

13. APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE INTERACTIONS

- 13.1 Examples of appropriate interactions between Councillors and staff include, but are not limited to:
- a) Councillors and Council staff are courteous and display a positive and professional attitude towards one another
 - b) Council staff ensure that information necessary for Councillors to exercise their civic functions is made equally available to all Councillors, in accordance with this Policy and any other relevant Council policies
 - c) Council staff record the advice they give to Councillors in the same way they would if it was provided to members of the public
 - d) Council staff, including Council's Executive Leadership Team members, document Councillors requests via the Councillor Requests System
 - e) Council meetings and Councillor briefings are used to establish positive working relationships and help Councillors to gain an understanding of the complex issues related to their civic duties
 - f) Councillors and Council staff feel supported when seeking and providing clarification about Council-related business
 - g) Councillors forward requests through the Councillor Requests System and staff respond in accordance with the timeframes stipulated in this Policy.
- 13.2 Examples of inappropriate interactions between Councillors and staff include, but are not limited to:
- a) Councillors and Council staff conducting themselves in a manner which:
 - i) is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
 - ii) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of Council's Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory
 - b) Councillors approaching staff and staff organisations to discuss individual or operational staff matters (other than matters relating to broader workforce policy such as, but not limited to, organisational restructures or outsourcing decisions), grievances, workplace investigations and disciplinary matters
 - c) staff approaching Councillors to discuss individual or operational staff matters (other than matters relating to broader workforce policy such as, but not limited to, organisational restructures or outsourcing decisions), grievances, workplace investigations and disciplinary matters



- d) subject to Clause 9.1, staff refusing to give information that is available to other Councillors to a particular Councillor
- e) Councillors who have lodged an application with the Council, discussing the matter with staff in staff-only areas of Council
- f) Councillors being overbearing or threatening to staff
- g) staff being overbearing or threatening to Councillors
- h) Councillors making personal attacks on staff or engaging in conduct towards staff that would be contrary to the general conduct provisions in Part 3 of the Code of Conduct in public forums including social media
- i) Councillors directing or pressuring staff in the performance of their work, or recommendations they should make
- j) staff providing ad hoc advice to Councillors without recording or documenting the interaction as they would if the advice was provided to a member of the community.

13.3 Where a Councillor engages in conduct that, in the opinion of the General Manager, puts the health, safety or welfare of staff at risk, the General Manager may restrict the Councillor's access to staff.

13.4 Any concerns relating to the conduct of staff under this Policy should be raised with the General Manager.

14. COMPLAINTS

14.1 Complaints about a breach of this Policy should be made to the General Manager if the complaint is about a Councillor or Council staff, or the Mayor if the complaint is about the General Manager.

14.2 Clause 14.1 does not operate to prevent matters being reported to the Office of Local Government, the NSW Ombudsman, the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption or any other external agency.

15. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Confidential Information	Any information to which access is restricted to authorised persons only, and to which access can be granted by authorised persons only, for reasons that can be justified by legislation.
Information	Information contained in a record held by Council, including hard copy or paper records; electronic records contained in the electronic records management system, other databases, or software programs; audio or visual recordings.
Records	Defined in the Australian Standard on Records Management as "Information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business." More simply, a record is anything which contains information or evidence of a business transaction. Records can include, but are not limited to, hard copy and electronic documents, emails, photographs, minutes, audio or video recordings, diary entries, and file notes.



16. RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Government Information (Public Access) Regulation 2018
- Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002
- Local Government Act 1993
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- Privacy Code of Practice for Local Government 2019
- State Records Act 1998

Related policies

- Access to Information Policy
- Council's Code of Conduct
- Privacy Management Plan

Templates

- Informal Access Application form
- Formal Access Application form

Fact Sheet

- Informal GIPA Applications
- Formal GIPA Applications

DRAFT



SCHEDULE 1 AUTHORISED STAFF CONTACTS FOR COUNCILLORS

1. Clause 11.1 of this Policy provides that Councillors may directly contact members of staff that are listed below. The General Manager may amend this list at any time.
2. Councillors can contact staff listed below about any matters that relate to the staff member's area of responsibility.
3. Councillors should as far as practicable, only contact staff during normal business hours.
4. If Councillors would like to contact a member of staff not listed below, they must receive permission from the General Manager or their delegate.
5. If a Councillor is unsure which authorised staff member can help with their enquiry, they can contact the General Manager who will provide advice about which authorised staff member to contact.
6. In some instances, the General Manager or a member of the Council's Executive Leadership Team may direct a Council staff member to contact Councillors to provide specific information or clarification relating to a specific matter.

Position
General Manager
Executive Assistant to the General Manager and Mayor
Director City Planning
Executive Assistant to the Director City Planning
Director Corporate Services
Executive Assistant to the Director Corporate Services
Director Infrastructure Services
Executive Assistant to the Director Infrastructure Services
Chief Financial Officer
Legal Counsel
Manager Communications and Events
Manager Governance
Coordinator Administration Support
Manager Information Services