

Councillor Information Sessions Policy

CCS

22 May 2024



This policy was adopted by Council to set governing principles in place that align with the Strategic Community Plan 2040: Focus Area Performance: Outcome PF.1: Responsible planning and ownership of outcomes.

Objectives

To ensure that Councillor Information Sessions:

1. Provide relevant information to ensure Councillors are better informed when participating in Council decision making processes.
2. Provide a forum for two-way communication between Councillors and key staff on Council related matters.
3. Provide an inclusive opportunity for general community members and the press to receive the same information on Agenda Items being provided to Councillors on a range of relevant topics.

Application

This policy applies to all Councillors and officers attending Councillor Information sessions.

Definition

Agenda Briefing Session refers to the non-statutory meeting held by Council to ask questions, receive presentations and seek clarity of officer reports on the upcoming agenda.

Concept Forum Session refers to the non-statutory meeting held by Council to provide input and guidance on the development of matters that have a strategic impact and/or relate to the delivery of the Strategic Community Plan.

Information Sessions refers collectively to; Agenda Briefings, Concept Forums, and Q&A Sessions.

Officer report refers to a report presented to Council by an officer of the Shire, which includes professional advice and a recommendation, from which a Council decision is sought at the Ordinary Council Meeting.

Q&A Sessions refers to a non-statutory meeting held by Council to ask questions on the published agenda.

Policy

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) (Operational Guideline Number 05) acknowledges that many local governments, especially those in rural areas, need to conduct pre-meeting forums as Councillors need an opportunity to discuss issues within the freedom of a forum rather than in a formal Council meeting.

COUNCILLOR INFORMATION SESSIONS

1. Agenda Briefings

Matters dealt with at agenda briefings may include;

- breaking down of complex issues before Council;
- clarification of items on the Council agenda;
- requests for additional information on items on the Council agenda; and
- discussion of confidential items on the agenda and which will be discussed with members of the public excluded.

2. Concept Forum Sessions

Concept forum sessions generally relate to strategic matters that are not yet on a Council meeting agenda.

Matters to be discussed at a concept forum may include:

- a statement of governance processes and effectiveness;
- a statement of principles on key issues;
- guidance to the CEO on further avenues of research;
- compiling a list of critical issues resulting from the briefing;
- the brainstorming of ideas;
- policy development and direction (but not adoption); and
- ongoing discussion of the Shire's strategic direction.

3. Q&A sessions

Q&A Sessions will relate to the upcoming published Ordinary Council Meeting Agenda, questions will be restricted to items listed on the agenda and may be asked by Councillors or members of the public.

4. Confidentiality

Agenda briefings and Q&A sessions are open to all Councillors and generally to all members of the public and press. Matters of a confidential nature included in a Council agenda will be discussed at closed agenda briefing sessions and Q&A sessions in accordance with the provisions of the LG Act (i.e. not open to the public).

Concept forums are generally closed to the public to facilitate the open discussion of preliminary ideas and concepts by Councillors but may be open to the public where the CEO or Shire President believe it would be beneficial.

5. Councillor Information Session - Principles

The following guidelines apply to Councillor Information Sessions to ensure openness and accountability is safeguarded:

- a) Information Sessions are not to become "de facto" meetings and there must be no implication of debate, or collective or collaborative decisions being made or implied.
- b) Agenda Briefing sessions and Concept Forums are to be held prior to Council Meetings with additional sessions as required and called by Council or the Shire President or convened by the CEO in liaison with the Shire President.

- c) Notice of Councillor Information Sessions will be given by via email invitation and will include a list of topics or a program. Councillors wishing to have an item included on the program are to advise the CEO and the Shire President via email at the earliest opportunity. The public will be informed of items which will be discussed in Agenda Briefing sessions by advertisement along with the items on the Council agenda on the Shire website.
- d) Councillor Information Sessions are not the appropriate forum for members of the public, community groups or proponents to present to Council . This should happen at Council meetings either as a deputation o. Where Councillor information sessions are open to the public the Shire President may permit Councillors to ask questions of other parties who are in attendance.
- e) Members of the public are not permitted to ask questions of Councillors or officers at Councillor Information Sessions unless it is a Q&A Session. At Q&A sessions, both Councillors and members of the public are permitted to ask questions. Questions must be related to items listed in the upcoming Ordinary Council Meeting Agenda.
- f) Councillor Information Sessions are to be chaired by the Shire President. The CEO is responsible for the presentation of information and for providing direction to staff.
- g) Councillors and staff must disclose conflicts of interest in matters to be discussed in Information Sessions. Interests must be disclosed at the start of the session and in accordance with the provisions of the LG Act as they apply to Ordinary Council meetings. Persons disclosing a financial interest must not participate in that part of the session relating to their interest and leave the room unless the forum otherwise allows. Interests affecting impartiality should also be disclosed and dealt with in accordance with the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*.
- h) Site visits during agenda briefings that relate to applications before Council should be attended by all Councillors, the CEO, relevant officers and the applicant. For practical reasons members of the public may not be able to attend these site visits.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for the administration of the Councillor Information Sessions in terms of officer attendance, convening sessions, notice of items to be discussed at the session, and the keeping of a record of the proceedings including reporting details of the sessions on a quarterly basis.

Relevant legislation

Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

Local Government Act 1994

Related documents

Nil

Document and version control table

Responsible Directorate	Office of the CCS		
Contact officer	Governance Officer – Council Support		
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Version	Date	Decision Ref.	Brief description
1.0	27/8/2009	N129858	Initial issue
2.0	23/1/2013	OM1301/6	Major review
2.1	24/5/2017	OM201718	Reviewed and amended to allow open briefings to occur
3.0	11.05.2022	OM2022/74	Full Review <i>Title change, simplified wording, added definitions, removal of 'workshops', clarification of open/closed sessions</i>
3.1	22/05/2024	OM2024/81	Reviewed and amended to include provisions for a monthly Council Meeting, including Q&A Sessions.