

**Keywords:** *Informal, gatherings, meetings, public access*

<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	<i>As with "Access to Meetings – Code of Practice" this policy forms a basis for Council's Corporate Plan to be open, informative and transparent</i>
<b>Classification:</b>	<i>Governance – Informal Gatherings</i>
<b>First Issued/Approved:</b>	<i>January 2014</i>
<b>Review Frequency:</b>	<i>Annually</i>
<b>Last Reviewed:</b>	<i>8 November 2017</i>
<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<i>2018</i>
<b>Responsible Officer(s):</b>	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
<b>Council File Reference:</b>	<i>Council Policies (P)</i>
<b>Applicable Legislation:</b>	<i>Sec 90(8a) &amp; (8b) of the Local Government Act 1999 Regulation 8AB, Local Government Act (General) Regulations 2016</i>
<b>Relevant Policies:</b>	<i>Access to Meetings - Code of Practice; Public Consultation; Statutory Code of Conduct Elected Members &amp; Committee Members; Statutory Code of Conduct- Council Employees; Confidentiality Provisions - Code of Practice; Procurement (Contracting and Tendering) Policy and Procurement Procedure; Order Making Policy; Review of Council Decisions (including Handling Complaints).</i>
<b>Related Procedures:</b>	<i>(In accordance with relevant Legislative Acts)</i>
<b>Delegations:</b>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

### 1. Purpose

Section 90 of the Act provides that members of Council, a committee and staff can participate in informal gatherings or discussion provided that a matter which would ordinarily form part of the agenda for a formal Council or Committee meeting is not dealt with in such a way as to obtain, or effectively obtain, a decision outside a formally constituted meeting of the Council or committee. Informal gatherings, where appropriate, provide a valuable opportunity to enhance the decision-making processes by providing opportunities for council members to become better informed on issues and seek further clarification. The traditional use of these meetings has been for consideration of strategic directions for the Council, the preparation of the annual budget and Elected Member training sessions.

### 2. Principles

Informal gatherings, briefing sessions, planning sessions and other discussions captured under this policy are those gatherings that are arranged by the council, either by the CEO or by the elected council that involves discussion of a matter that is, or is intended to be, part of the agenda for a formal meeting of the council or council committee. Section 90(8) of the Local Government Act provides a list of non-exclusive examples of informal gatherings, which are:

- planning sessions associated with the development of policies or strategies;

- briefing or training sessions;
- workshops;
- social gatherings to encourage informal communication between members or between members and staff.

Both the CEO and the council are responsible for ensuring informal gatherings and discussions are conducted in accordance with the Local Government Act. The co-ordination and chairing of these sessions is managed by the Chief Executive Officer or another senior council officer to ensure they are conducted in accordance with legislative requirements and, at the same time, provide the desired outcomes / benefits for members and staff.

These sessions benefit Members of Council as they provide a forum for discussing issues and options in an informal environment, not constrained by formal meeting procedures that dictate how and when a member might speak to a matter which enables Members to question, clarify and develop greater understanding of issues, which supports and contributes to informed decision making in the appropriate forum.

These sessions allow input into policy and strategic framework development, which can also include community members, consultants and staff. These sessions are used primarily as effective two-way communication between Elected Members and Elected Members & senior staff.

No decisions can be made at informal gatherings of Council or Council Committee Members.

## **Policy Statement**

### **General Business of the Council**

Informal gatherings will not be used for the purpose of conducting the general business of the council or to stifle debate on issues that may subsequently be dealt with by the council at a formal meeting. However informal gatherings may be used to discuss issues that involve strategy or policy or other matters of council administration and to brief council members on issues relating to their decision-making function.

### **Timing of, and Access to, Informal Gatherings of Council**

(i) Where informal gatherings, such as workshops and briefing sessions, are scheduled regularly to coincide with the council's meeting cycle and to consider matters that will form part of the council's meeting agenda, the gatherings will be advertised and open to the public. Any ad hoc informal gatherings or discussions that are convened to discuss items that will form part of the council's meeting agenda will also be advertised and open to the public.

A schedule of planned briefing sessions will be published on the council's website.

If a topic falls into a category that would normally be kept confidential if it arose at a council meeting, the item will be placed last and the gathering will be closed when that item is reached.

(ii) For all other informal gatherings public access will be determined on a case by case basis. The council is aware of the need to balance openness and transparency with opportunities for private discussions between council members and council members and staff.

### **Agendas and Minute Taking**

Informal gatherings will not involve a formal minute taking process. However, a list of the matters to be discussed at an informal meeting may be published on the council's website in accordance with (i) above. Any notes taken at these sessions will be tabled at the next council meeting.

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*Printed copies are considered uncontrolled.*

*Before using a printed copy, verify that is the current version.*