

# *Council Policy*

Informal Council and Council Committee  
Gatherings and Discussions



# COUNCIL POLICY

 <p><b>Adelaide Hills</b> COUNCIL</p>	<h2 style="margin: 0;">INFORMAL COUNCIL AND COUNCIL COMMITTEE GATHERINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</h2>
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<b>Policy Number:</b>	GOV-12
<b>Responsible Department(s):</b>	Governance & Performance
<b>Relevant Delegations:</b>	Nil
<b>Other Relevant Policies:</b>	<i>Council Member Conduct Policy Code of Practice for Access to Council, Council Committee and Designated Informal Gathering Meetings &amp; Documents Code of Practice for Council Meeting Procedures</i>
<b>Relevant Procedure(s):</b>	Nil
<b>Relevant Legislation:</b>	<i>Local Government Act 1999 Local Government (General) Regulations 2013 Local Government (Procedures at Meetings) Regulations 2013</i>
<b>Policies and Procedures Superseded by this policy on its Adoption:</b>	Informal Council Gatherings Policy, Item 14.12, 125 – 28/6/16
<b>Adoption Authority:</b>	Strategic Planning & Development Policy Committee
<b>Date of Adoption:</b>	8 November 2016 – full Policy 23 April 2019 – amendment to clause 8.1 only
<b>Effective From:</b>	22 November 2016
<b>Minute Reference for Adoption:</b>	Item 12.2, 53
<b>Next Review:</b>	No later than November 2019 or as required by legislation.

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## INFORMAL COUNCIL AND COUNCIL COMMITTEE GATHERINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Informal gatherings provide a valuable opportunity to enhance Council decision-making processes by providing opportunities for Council Members to become better informed on issues and seek further clarification. Informal gatherings, however, should not be used, or be seen to be used, as a replacement for full debate and decision-making at Council meetings or Council Committee meetings. Open and transparent Council meetings and Council Committee meetings underpin representative democracy and ensure public confidence in Council's decision-making processes.

### 2. POLICY OBJECTIVE

- 2.1 The policy aims to ensure that the statutory requirements for openness and transparency in Council decision-making are observed; while providing an opportunity for confidential discussions among Council member where this is warranted by the nature of the gathering or subject matter to be discussed.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 ***“Designated informal gathering or discussion”*** is an event organised and conducted by or on behalf of the Council or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to which Members of the Council or Council Committee (as the case may be) have been invited and 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. (Regulation 8AB(2), *Local Government (General) Regulations 2013*)

### 4. SCOPE

- 4.1 This policy applies to informal gatherings of the Council or a Council Committee, including designated informal gatherings or discussions.
- 4.2 An informal gathering which does not involve 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, is not a 'designated informal gathering or discussion'.

### 5. INFORMAL GATHERINGS OR DISCUSSIONS

#### 5.1 Purpose

- 5.1.1 Section 90(8) of the *Local Government Act 1999* (the Act) allows informal gatherings or discussions to be held provided that the gathering or discussion does not obtain, or effectively obtain, a decision on a matter outside a formally constituted meeting of the Council or Council Committee.

- 5.1.2 The Act sets out the following examples of informal gatherings or discussions:
- 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.
- 5.1.3 Informal gatherings of Council Members or Council Committee Members (either with or without Council staff) are, by their nature, non-compulsory. However, all Council Members and Council Committee Members are encouraged to attend relevant informal gatherings, particularly where the informal gathering or discussion is intended to provide history, context or additional information to Council Members or Council Committee Members.
- 5.1.4 Informal gatherings or discussions will be chaired by the CEO or another senior Council officer. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the purpose, intent and outcomes of the designated informal gatherings or discussions are consistent with section 90 of the Local Government Act.

## **5.2 Administration**

- 5.2.1 A schedule of specific informal gatherings, (i.e. workshops and professional development/training sessions), is decided by Council. Generally workshops (which include briefings) and professional development sessions are each held on a monthly basis unless there is conflict with stipulated dates for Council or Committee meetings.
- 5.2.2 Other informal gatherings, including social gatherings, will be held as required by determination of the CEO.
- 5.2.3 A schedule of planned workshop and professional development sessions will be published on Council's website. Ordinary Council meeting agendas also will provide the dates/venues of the following three months workshops and professional development sessions together with Council and s41 Committee meetings and Community Forums
- 5.2.4 With the exception of social gatherings or events and activities arranged by the CEO to encourage informal communication between Council Members or between Council and Committee Members and Council employees, the following provisions will apply:
- (a) A record of the persons invited to attend and informal gathering and those persons present at the informal gathering will be maintained by Council Administration
  - (b) An outline of topics and activities will be prepared for each informal gathering and the CEO will aim to circulate the outline to the invitees to provide reasonable notice for preparation, particularly where there is pre-reading recommended.

- (c) Informal gatherings or discussions are not subject to the procedural meeting requirements of the Act and *Local Government (Proceedings at Meetings) Regulations 2013*.
- (d) The Council's Annual Report will include details of informal gatherings held by Council in the preceding financial year, including their purpose, the matters discussed at workshops and professional development/training sessions and whether the public were able to attend

## **6. PURPOSE OF DESIGNATED INFORMAL GATHERINGS OR DISCUSSIONS**

- 6.1 Designated informal gatherings or discussions may be used to:
  - discuss issues that involve strategy or policy or other matters of Council administration
  - brief Council Members or Council Committee Members on issues relating to their functions.
- 6.2 Designated informal gatherings and discussions will be used solely for the purpose of information sharing and not for the purpose of determining, or effectively determining, matters which should be determined at a formally constituted meeting of the Council or Council Committee.
- 6.3 Both the CEO and the Council are responsible for ensuring designated informal gatherings or discussions are conducted in accordance with the Act.
- 6.4 Formal minutes will not be recorded of a designated informal gathering or discussion. Notes of a designated informal gathering or discussion may be tabled at the Council meeting following the designated informal gathering or discussion.

## **7. PURPOSE OF DESIGNATED INFORMAL GATHERINGS OR DISCUSSIONS TO BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, EXCEPT IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

- 7.1 Designated informal gatherings or discussions will be held at a place open to the public, except where the designated informal gathering or discussion has been declared by the Council or Chief Executive Officer to be a 'confidential informal discussion'.
- 7.2 The Council or CEO may, on a case-by-case basis, declare a designated informal gathering or discussion to be a 'confidential informal discussion' where the designated informal gathering or discussion is either:
  - (i) a planning session of a general or strategic nature; or
  - (ii) is a briefing session relating to information or a matter of a confidential nature within the ambit of section 90(3) of the Local Government Act (see Appendix 1).
- 7.3 If a designated informal gathering or discussion has been declared to be a 'confidential informal discussion', then the designated informal gathering or discussion may be attended by Council Members, the CEO and any other person invited to attend by the Council or the CEO.

- 7.4 If a confidential informal discussion declaration has been made in respect of only some of the matters to be discussed at a designated informal gathering or discussion, then these confidential matters will be scheduled to be discussed at the end of the agenda for the designated informal gathering or discussion. The designated informal gathering or discussion will be open to the public until immediately prior to the discussion on confidential matters commencing.
- 7.5 An informal gathering or discussion of the Council or a Council Committee which is not a designated gathering or discussion will not be open to the public, unless otherwise determined by the Council or CEO.

## **8. PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION RELATING TO DESIGNATED INFORMAL GATHERINGS OR DISCUSSIONS**

- 8.1 Not less than three (3) clear days prior to a designated informal gathering the CEO will make every reasonable effort that the following information will be published on the Council's website:
- (i) the place, date and time at which the designated informal gathering or discussion will be held;
  - (ii) the matter that is to be discussed at the designated informal gathering or discussion;
  - (iii) whether or not the designated informal gathering or discussion is to be held at a place open to the public.
- 8.2 Where a confidential informal discussion declaration applies to a designated informal gathering or discussion, the reason for the designated informal gathering or discussion being held entirely or partially in confidence must be published on the Council's website.

## **9. DELEGATION**

- 9.1 The CEO has the delegation to approve, amend and review any procedures that shall be consistent with this Policy.

## **10. AVAILABILITY OF THE POLICY**

- 10.1 This Policy will be available for inspection at the Council's Offices during ordinary business hours and via the Council's website [www.ahc.sa.gov.au](http://www.ahc.sa.gov.au). Copies will also be provided to the public upon request, and upon payment of a fee in accordance with the Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.

## Appendix 1

### Information and matters within the ambit of section 90(3), Local Government Act

- (a) information the disclosure of which would involve the unreasonable disclosure of information concerning the personal affairs of any person (living or dead);
- (b) information the disclosure of which:
  - (i) could reasonably be expected to confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the Council is conducting, or proposing to conduct, business, or to prejudice the commercial position of the Council; and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (c) information the disclosure of which would reveal a trade secret;
- (d) commercial information of a confidential nature (not being a trade secret) the disclosure of which:
  - (i) could reasonably be expected to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied the information, or to confer a commercial advantage on a third party; and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (e) matters affecting the security of the Council, Members or employees of the Council, or Council property, or the safety of any person;
- (f) information the disclosure of which could reasonably be expected to prejudice the maintenance of law, including by affecting (or potentially affecting) the prevention, detection or investigation of a criminal offence, or the right to a fair trial;
- (g) matters that must be considered in confidence in order to ensure that the Council does not breach any law, order or direction of a court or tribunal constituted by law, any duty of confidence, or other legal obligation or duty;
- (h) legal advice;
- (i) information relating to actual litigation, or litigation that the Council or Council Committee believes on reasonable grounds will take place, involving the Council or an employee of the Council;
- (j) information the disclosure of which:
  - (i) would divulge information provided on a confidential basis by or to a Minister of the Crown, or another public authority or official (not being an employee of the Council, or a person engaged by the Council); and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (k) tenders for the supply of goods, the provision of services or the carrying out of works;
- (l) information relating to a proposed amendment to a Development Plan under the *Development Act 1993* before a Development Plan Amendment proposal relating to the amendment is released for public consultation under that Act;
- (m) information relevant to the review of a determination of a Council under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*.