

ONE TEAM

Communication Protocols for Council Members and the Administration

A guide for the Council Members and the Administration of Adelaide Hills Council on agreed communication protocols when communicating with each other

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Background

At various times throughout 2013, Council Members and senior staff of AHC workshopped various approaches to communicating and engaging with one another. These workshops included preferred ways or styles of communicating, using a range of example scenarios. Key points were captured at the workshop and used to shape this plan, which serves as a guide for the CEO, staff and Council Members to refer to – and be aware of – to achieve a consistent and constructive approach when communicating and engaging with each other.

Principles

Governance at AHC is heavily based on the principles of **respect, reputation and risk**. In particular, the principle of *respect* applies to all parties in all moments of communication. The risk of ineffective or a lack of communication can adversely impact on the relationships that exist between Council Members and the Administration – and subsequently Council Members and community members. Further, respect between Council Members and the Administration may be compromised and the reputation of the Administration (in the eyes of the Council Members) and of the organisation (in the eyes of the community) may be adversely affected.

We also recognise that *trust = speed = performance*. In other words, the greater the trust between the Administration and the elected Council, the greater the performance of Council. Communication is a core element to developing that trust.

Objectives

1. To improve the exchange of information between Council Members and the Administration
2. To ensure a greater appreciation of the roles, responsibilities and needs of all parties to this plan
3. To improve the governance, efficiency and impact of communication between the Administration and the elected Council
4. To ensure Council Members and the Administration are kept informed about council operations

Links

These protocols are not only the result of an initial workshop in April 2013. There have been a number of workshops and professional development sessions where both Council Members and senior staff participated and interacted, the outcomes of which have strengthened the approaches outlined in this plan. This includes the development of an AHC Behavioural Standards document, the result of two professional development workshops in August and September 2013. These standards, as part of the Council Member Conduct Policy adopted in January 2014, now serve to complement the principles and behavioural standards outlined in the Code of Conduct for Council Members that was gazetted in August 2013.

All of the development sessions in the 2013 - 2015 period have contributed to the shaping of this document.

More specifically, the intent behind these protocols has links with a number of recent and planned initiatives within AHC, all designed to improve the accountability and constructive nature of our communication, including:

- The introduction of the Action List on Council agendas (tracking and reporting the progress of Council and SPDPC resolutions)
- The Council Member Professional Development Program – which includes senior staff in this development process
- The Leadership Development Program for staff
- The development of the Customer Service and Community Engagement frameworks and the Marketing and Communication Plan.

Key Intent 1: Clarity of Information and Communication

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use plain English in reports / correspondence (active voice, present tense) b. Use consistent layout and formatting (i.e. templates) c. Use font type and size that is easy to read (consider using Verdana text or similar) d. Place recommendations up-front in Council / SPDPC reports e. Keep reports and information papers brief / succinct while providing sufficient information to enable good decision making f. Consider the implications of recommendations across the various areas of impact (legal, financial, environmental, community, etc)
Administration & Council Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. Keep the focus on constructive and respectful language and behaviour in our communication at all times h. Use appropriate (personal and respectful) salutations and sign-offs in all email correspondence. Avoid using bold or capitals. i. Provide the context in subject heading and initial part of the communication j. Advise of relevant outcomes from key seminars or meetings k. Respond to emails within 7 days of receipt

Key Intent 2: **No Surprises**

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Inform / advise Council Members prior to notices or possible articles / stories appearing in the press b. Make Council Members aware of issues (or potential issues), Ward specific or Council-wide, prior to them being made public
Council Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Provide notice of media and public statements to staff in a timely manner, which may be immediately following the event d. Make staff aware of issues (or potential issues) prior to these issues being made public by anyone (eg at Council meetings or community forums) if the Council Member is aware of the issue e. Provide a 'heads-up' to relevant staff on matters that they intend to raise via MWN or QWN and when they know an issue will be raised during the public forum f. Make staff aware of issues as soon as possible after they are brought to the attention of Council Members by members of the community

Key Intent 3: **Timely and Targeted**

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Distribute all agendas at least 5 clear days prior to the meeting b. Provide regular and timely information reporting to Council Members and staff on legislative or regulation updates; progress on key projects / programs; and other items of interest c. Ensure clear communication exists (and is updated) on the EM Portal as to which Director / Manager is responsible for what service d. Invitations to key events are placed in each Council Member's calendar and forward imminent events via scanning and email, where possible e. Regularly review the EM Portal to ensure up-to-date (and ease of access to) information
Council Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Submit any MON and QON 7 clear days prior to the meeting (as per the Meeting procedures) g. Encourage community members to make service complaints or requests directly to Council's Contact Centre or the website in the first instance h. Forward correspondence they receive from the community to staff to enable timely follow-up and for recording in the records management system (the Administration may not have received the same correspondence) i. Speak with staff prior to meeting with community members / groups on Council-related issues. j. Make an appointment time to meet with staff, should the meeting require more than a 5-10 minute discussion
Administration & Council Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> k. Assess prior to sending or responding to emails, precisely who needs to know (who needs to be copied in?) l. Agree staff contact point for each Directorate / Department, including email and phone contact m. Use 'reply all' in emails sparingly n. Communicate with each other in a reasonable, respectful and timely manner. For example, we will respond to written correspondence within 7 days of receipt and we will answer your call straight away in most instances but if we can't we will call you back within 1 day.

Key Intent 4: **Input and Updates**

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Where appropriate, Council Members are provided the opportunity to input (via email or a workshop and from a tabled report to Council/SPDPC) when a formal submission/comment is sought on a matter of importance to Council or where relevant to a local issue b. Workshop with Council Members the development of new or substantially changed policy or related policy positions prior to being formally presented for consideration c. Provide a schedule (nature and timing) of planned capital works and programmed maintenance works (including suburbs) on the EM portal and updated at least quarterly d. Provide the regularly updated meeting planner – including upcoming reports, workshop & PD items - on the EM Portal e. Field staff equipped to respond to queries from the community about the works being undertaken
Council Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Advise staff if they believe a formal submission / comment from Council is required in response to a request for feedback (e.g. as a result of an LGA circular) g. Advise staff of suggested items for the meeting planner