

Governance and Corporate Leadership

GL6 Councillor Agenda Briefings and Concept Forum Sessions



24 May 2017

This policy was adopted by Council to set governing principles in place that align the strategic direction of the organisation with Goal 2 – Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

Objectives

The purpose of Councillor Agenda Briefings and Concept Forums is to:

1. Provide relevant information so that Councillors are better informed when participating in Council decision making processes.
2. Provide a forum for two-way communication between elected members and key staff members on important 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 elected members on a range of relevant topics

Policy

The Department of Local Government and Communities (Operational Guideline Number 05) acknowledges that many local governments, especially those in rural areas, need from a time management viewpoint 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.

The following strict guidelines, however, are to apply to Councillor Agenda Briefings and Concept Forum Sessions to ensure openness and accountability is safeguarded:

1. Agenda Briefing 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.
2. Agenda Briefing Sessions are open to all elected members and generally to all members of the public and press. The Chief Executive Officer is to be in attendance and other relevant Directors and staff as required by the CEO for the provision of information to elected members.
3. Matters of a confidential nature to be included in a future Council agenda or on the current Council agenda will be discussed at closed briefing sessions. Otherwise normal briefing sessions will be open to the public at a suitable publicly accessible time.
4. As recommended by the Department of Local Government and Communities, sessions considered by the CEO in consultation with the Shire President to be Concept Forums will be closed to the public to facilitate the open discussion of preliminary ideas and concepts by Councillors.
5. Agenda Briefing sessions and Concept Forums are to be held on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month prior to Council Meetings with additional sessions or

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workshops as required and called by Council or the President or convened by the CEO in liaison with the President.

6. Briefings on Agenda items where possible will be discussed at briefing sessions a minimum of two weeks in advance of the Council meeting at which the item is on the agenda. From a time management perspective this may not always be possible or cause additional delays in processing applications so matters will at times need to be discussed at an open Agenda Briefing on the afternoon prior to the Council meeting.
7. Briefings will be open unless matters of a confidential nature are discussed as the community expectation is for a full and open debate to be held in public at the Council meeting without discussions behind closed doors immediately prior to the meeting. To assist Councillor understanding complex future agenda items should be broken down and presented to Council at preceding briefing sessions in advance of the item appearing on the agenda paper. A case for discussing an agenda item immediately prior to a meeting identified in the DLG Operational Guidelines is when a Councillor has additional or alternative information to that contained in a staff report which may cause problems at the meeting if Councillors and staff are not previously informed (see also 10 below).
8. Notice of Agenda Briefings and Concept Forums will be given in the Councillors' Update and by separate notice via email invitation and will include a list of topics or a program with any accompanying information, agenda items or discussion papers. Councillors wishing to have an item included on the program are to advise the CEO and the 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 in the local newspaper. Agenda Briefings will be held in the Council Chambers.
9. Strategic Planning and Concept forums and workshops will generally be held in the Council Chambers or at other venues either inside or outside of the Shire Offices to facilitate informal discussion.
10. All Sessions will generally involve information being given by the relevant officer and other parties with questions and discussion from the floor being directed through the chair or by breaking into smaller workshop discussion groups before returning to the whole group for the sharing of ideas. On occasions an external facilitator may be required to assist Council.
11. Councillor Agenda Briefings and Concept Forum Sessions are to be chaired by the President. The CEO is responsible for the presentation of information and for providing direction to staff.
12. To facilitate participation and the exchange of ideas formal standing orders will not apply to both information Agenda Briefings and to Concept Forums apart from being used as a general guide to Councillor conduct in conjunction with the Shire's Code of Conduct and Rule of Conduct Regulations. Councillors with a conflict of interest either financial , proximity or affecting impartiality are required to disclose and absent themselves from the sessions as required under the Act.
13. It is anticipated that Concept Forum sessions will result in one or more of the following outcomes:
 - capacity building and up skilling of Councillors
 - discussion 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

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- the brainstorming of ideas
 - policy development and direction (but not adoption)
 - ongoing discussion of the Shire's strategic direction
14. It is anticipated that Agenda Briefing Sessions will result in one or more of the following outcomes:
- breaking down of complex issues before Council
 - clarification of items on the Council agenda
 - requests for additional information on items on the Council agenda
15. Time will be set aside for the discussion of complex and high community impact items on the agenda for subsequent Council meetings. The exception will be in special circumstances where elected members are presenting or seeking additional information and explanations from staff particularly where it is likely to lead to the non-adoption or significant variation of the officer recommendation and it has not been possible to convey that information earlier. In normal circumstances Councillors should seek to obtain advice from staff through the CEO and Directors at the earliest opportunity and prior to the meeting day.
16. When Shire Planning matters are being discussed Councillors are required to avoid expressing their opinions for or against the proposal prematurely. They are required to maintain an independent unbiased viewpoint and gather and assess all relevant information including listening to the debate of their fellow Councillors in a formal meeting prior to voting. All Agenda Briefing sessions are to be received and viewed as part of a fact finding process leading up to the final decision at a formal Council meeting.
17. Elected members, staff, consultants and other participants shall disclose their financial and conflicts of interest in matters to be discussed in Agenda Briefings and Concept Forums. Interests shall be disclosed at the start of the session and in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1995 as they apply to ordinary Council meetings. Persons disclosing a financial interest shall not participate in that part of the briefing session or workshop 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 Rules of Conduct Regulations.
18. Notes will be produced as a record of the fact that an information briefing or workshop was held, giving a list of those attending, a brief summary of the issues(s) and relevant discussion.

These notes will be:

- circulated to all elected members
- used by relevant staff
- be available to members of the public on request
- be maintained in the records management system
- be included in the agenda of a Council meeting on a bi-monthly basis.

Staff are to use notes from information workshops as a resource when preparing Council reports. These notes do not represent the formal views of the Council and as such are not to be construed as giving specific direction to staff on a particular matter.

Application

This policy is to apply to all Councillor Agenda Briefings and Concept Forum sessions. The CEO is responsible for the administration of the sessions in terms of staff attendance, convening sessions, notice of the items to be discussed at the session, and the keeping of a record of the

proceedings including reporting details of the sessions on a bi-monthly basis. The policy is to be reviewed every three years.

Document and version control table		
Strategic outcome	Community Strategic Plan 2033, Corporate Business Plan 2016-2020 Goal 2 Welcoming and Inclusive Communities	
Responsible Directorate	CEO	
Authority of original issue	Council	
Date of original issue	27 August 2009	
Contact officer	EA CEO	
Date of next review	May 2020	
Document No.	N129858	
Version	Date issued	Brief description
1.0	27/8/2009	Initial issue
2.0	23/1/2013	Major review
2.1	13/11/2016	Reviewed and amended to allow open briefings to occur
3.0	24/5/2017	Full review

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