



Informal Gatherings Policy

Adopted

18 May 2016
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resolution of 18 September
2019

Recommendation Number

14 / 0516

Review Date:

May 2018

1 Policy Statement

Open and transparent Council meetings underpin representative democracy and ensure public confidence in the Council's decision-making processes. 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.

2 Policy Objective

To ensure Council Members have sufficient opportunity to conduct planning sessions, to receive informal briefings and educational sessions, and convene other informal gatherings without prejudicing the requirements for openness and transparency as required by the *Local Government Act 1999*.

Section 90(8) of the Local Government Act allows informal gatherings to be held provided that the discussion does not lead to a decision, or effectively obtain a decision, on a matter that would ordinarily be dealt with at a Council Meeting. This policy reflects the intention of the legislation for informal gatherings to be used for briefing, planning and educational sessions and is aimed at avoiding any perception that informal gatherings will be used to build consensus for Council agenda items.

3 Scope

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 Chief Executive Officer or by the Elected Council. 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.

Informal gatherings and discussions of these kinds will be used solely for the purpose of information sharing and not for the purpose of debating issues,

building consensus positions or otherwise discharging the Council's deliberative and decision-making functions.

3 Scope

Informal gatherings of Council Members, or Council Members and Council Staff are, by their nature, a non-compulsory meeting of the Council. All Council Members are encouraged to attend as these sessions, particularly those designed to provide history, context or additional information to assist Council Members to carry out their functions.

Both the Chief Executive Officer and the Council are responsible for ensuring informal gatherings and discussions are conducted in accordance with the Local Government Act. Informal gatherings may be chaired by the Chief Executive Officer or another Senior Council Officer or the Presiding member of Council if chairing is required.

4 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

1. 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.

- 2 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.

4 Policy Statement

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 1. above.

5 Further Information

Members of the public may inspect this Policy on Council's website www.southernmallee.sa.gov.au and at the principal office of the Southern Mallee District Council at Day Street, Pinnaroo SA 5304.

On payment of a fee, a copy of this Policy may be obtained from the Council, or otherwise may be downloaded for free from the Council's website.

Any queries in relation to this Policy should be directed to the Chief Executive Officer contactable at the principal office on 8577 8002.

6 Policy Review

This policy will be within two years or as required by Council.

The Council may at any time alter this policy, or substitute a new policy.

7 Other Relevant Policies/Procedures