



Caretaker Policy

Strategic Reference	4.2 Ensure a strong, knowledgeable and functioning Elected Member body 4.4 Employ good governance practices across Council
File Reference	
Responsibility	Chief Executive Officer
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1. **Policy Statement**

It is long established democratic principle that outgoing elected bodies should not use public resources for election campaigning, nor make decisions which may unreasonably, inappropriately or unnecessarily bind on an incoming Council.

This policy affirms Council's commitment to fair and democratic elections and adherence to this principle. This policy addresses the commitments with the requirements of Section 91A of the Local Government [Elections] Act 1999 [SA].

2. **Objectives**

To ensure that sitting Elected Members, Candidates, Staff and the Community are aware of their responsibilities and the decision making and resource use limitations that exist during the Election Caretaker Period

To ensure fairness and transparency is afforded to both sitting Elected Members and intending Candidates during the Caretaker period of local elections

To ensure that Council complies fully with the requirements of the Local Government [Elections] Act 1999



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3. Definitions

In this policy;

Chief Executive Officer means the appointed Chief Executive Officer or Acting Chief Executive Officer or nominee.

Council Staff means any person that is employed full-time, part-time or casually by the Council who receives remuneration for their work.

Council Member means an Elected Member of the Southern Mallee District Council.

Election Period means the period commencing on the day of the close of nominations for a general election and expiring at the conclusion of the general election.

Designated decision means a decision;

- [a] Relating to the employment or remuneration of the Chief Executive Officer, other than a decision to appoint an acting Chief Executive Officer or to suspend the Chief Executive Officer for serious and willful misconduct.
- [b] To terminate the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer
- [c] To enter into a contract, arrangement or understanding [other than a contract for roadworks, road maintenance or drainage works] the total value of which exceeds whichever is the greater of \$100,000 or 1% of the Council's revenue from rates in the preceding financial year, except if the decision ;
 - [i] Relates to the carrying out of works in response to an emergency or disaster within the meaning of the Emergency Management Act 2004 [SA] or under Section 298 of the Local Government Act 1999 [SA]
 - [ii] Is an expenditure or other decision required to be taken under an agreement by which funding is provided to the Council by the Commonwealth or State Government or otherwise for the Council to be eligible for funding from the Commonwealth or State Government.
 - [iii] Relates to the employment of a particular employee [other than the Chief Executive Officer]
 - [iv] Is made in the conduct of negotiations relating to the employment of Council employees generally, or a class of Council employees, if provision has been made for funds relating to such negotiations in the



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3. Definitions

budget of the Council for the relevant financial year and the negotiations commenced prior to the election period; or

- [v] Relates to a Community Wastewater Management Scheme that has, prior to the election period, been approved by the Council; or
- [d] Allowing the use of Council resources for the advantage of a particular candidate or group of candidates [other than a decision that allows the equal use of Council resources by all candidates]

General Election means a general election of Council Members held ;

[a] under Section 5 of the Local Government [Elections] Act; or

[b] pursuant to a proclamation or notice under the Local Government Act 1999 [SA]

Minister means the Minister for Local Government or other minister of the South Australian government vested with responsibility for the Local Government [Elections] Act

4. Application of Policy

This policy applies throughout the election period for a general election. For the purposes of the Local Government Elections of November 2018, the policy commences on 18 September 2018 and ends at the conclusion of the election, when results have been declared.

This policy applies to ;

- * the Council; and
- * Council staff

This policy is to be taken to form part of the Code of Conduct for Council Employees gazetted for the purpose of Section 110 of the Local Government Act.



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5. **Prohibition on Designated Decisions**

The Council is prohibited from making a designated decision during an election period.

A decision of the Council includes a decision of;

- * A committee of Council; and
- * A delegate of Council.

6. **Treatment of Other Significant Decisions**

So far as is reasonably practicable, the Chief Executive Officer should avoid scheduling significant decisions [including major policy decisions] for consideration during an 'election period' and ensure that such decisions:

- [a] are considered by Council prior to the ' election period ' or
- [b] are scheduled for determination by the incoming Council

A 'significant decision' is any major policy or other decision which will significantly affect the Council area or community or will bind the incoming Council.

A 'major policy' decision includes any decision [not being a designated decision] :

- [a] to spend unbudgeted monies
- [b] to conduct unplanned public consultation
- [c] to endorse a new policy
- [d] to dispose of Council land
- [e] to approve community grants
- [f] to progress any matter which has been identified as an election issue &
- [g] any other issue that is considered a major policy decision by the CEO

The determination as to whether or not any decision is significant will be made by the Chief Executive Officer, after consultation with the Mayor or Chairperson



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6. Treatment of Other Significant Decisions

Where the Chief Executive Officer has determined that a decision is significant, but circumstances arise that require the decision to be made during the election period, the Chief Executive Officer will report this to the Council.

The aim of the Chief Executive Officer's report is to assist Council Members assess whether the decision should be deferred for consideration by the incoming Council.

The Chief Executive Officer's report to Council will address the following issues [where relevant]:

- [a] why the matter is considered ' significant '
- [b] why the matter is considered urgent
- [c] what are the financial and other consequences of postponing the matter until after the election, both on the current Council and the incoming Council
- [d] whether deciding the matter will significantly limit options for the incoming Council
- [e] whether the matter requires the expenditure of unbudgeted funds
- [f] whether the matter is the completion of an activity already commenced and previously endorsed by Council.
- [g] whether the matter requires community engagement
- [h] any relevant statutory obligations or timeframes and
- [i] whether dealing with the matter in the election period is in the best Interest of the Council area and community

Council will consider the Chief Executive Officer's report and determine whether or not to make the decision



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7. Consequence of Contravening this Policy

A designated decision made by Council during an election period is invalid, except where an exemption has been granted by the Minister.

Any person who suffers loss or damage as a result of acting in good faith on a designated decision made by the Council in contravention of this policy is entitled to compensation from the Council for that loss or damage.

A breach of this policy is a breach of the Code of Conduct for Council Members and Code of Conduct for Council Employees.

8. Application for Exemption

If the Council considers that it is faced with extraordinary circumstances which require the making of a designated decision during a election period, the Council may apply in writing to the Minister for an exemption to enable the making of a designated decision that would otherwise be invalid under Section 91A of the Local Government [Elections] Act and this policy.

If the Minister grants an exemption to enable the making of a designated decision that would otherwise be invalid under Section 91A of the Local Government [Elections] Act and this policy, then the Council and Council Staff will comply with any conditions or limitations that the Minister imposes on the exemption.

9. Outline

This Policy applies during an '*election period*' of Council to cover:

- (a) designated decisions as defined in the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* that are made by Council; and
- (b) use of Council resources, including:
 - materials published by Council;
 - attendance and participation at functions and events;
 - access to Council information;
 - media services issues; and
 - responsibilities of Council staff;

This Policy applies to both the elected Council (Council Members) and to staff and captures all 'designated decisions' of Council, a committee of Council, or a delegate of the Council – refer to Clause 6.2.



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9. Outline

This Policy forms part of (and is to be read in conjunction with) the Council's Code of Conduct for Elected Members and the Code of Conduct for Employees in accordance with section 91A(7) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999*.

This Policy applies to all general elections

10. Election Period

During an 'election period', Council must assume a '*Caretaker mode*', which means that it:

- must avoid designated decisions which are prohibited by section 91A of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* (refer clause 6.2);

An '*election period*':

- (a) **commences** 90 days before 'conclusion of election'; and
- (b) **terminates** at the 'conclusion of the election' (as defined at Section 4(2) of the *Local Government Act 1999*) for the relevant periodic or general election being the time at which the last result of the election is certified by the returning officer.

11. Purpose

During a Local Government 'election period', Council will assume a 'Caretaker mode', and will avoid actions and decisions which could be perceived as intended to affect the results of an election or otherwise to have a significant impact on or unnecessarily bind the incoming Council.

The purpose of this Policy is to clearly set the parameters that Council will operate within during a Caretaker period. Caretaker provisions are required pursuant to section 91A of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* and are generally regarded as necessary for the promotion of transparent and accountable government during an 'election period'.



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12. Significant Decisions

12.1 Scheduling consideration of designated decisions

The Chief Executive Officer must ensure that 'designated decisions' are not scheduled for consideration during the 'election period'.

12.2 Decisions made prior to an 'election period'

This Policy applies to actual decisions made during an 'election period', not the announcement of decisions made prior to the 'election period'.

13. Use of Council Resources

Council notes that Section 91A(8)(d) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* requires Council to prohibit the use of Council resources for the advantage of a particular candidate or group of candidates. This includes a candidate or candidates who are currently Elected Members of the Council.

Council resources cover a wide range of personnel, goods, services, information and opportunities and may include:

- materials published by Council;
- attendance and participation at functions and events;
- access to Council information; and
- media services issues.

Council Members and staff will ensure that due propriety is observed in the use of Council resources and must exercise appropriate judgement in this regard.

13.1 Council Publications during an 'Election Period'

13.1.1 Prohibition on publishing certain materials during an 'election period'

Subject to the operation of Section 12(b) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* Council must not:

- (a) print, publish or distribute; or
- (b) cause, permit or authorise others to print, publish or distribute on behalf of Council, any advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice that contains 'electoral material' during an 'election period'.



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13. Use of Council Resources

13.1 Council Publications during an 'Election Period'

13.1.1 Prohibition on publishing certain materials during an 'election period'

For the purposes of this Policy 'electoral material' means material which is calculated (i.e. intended or likely) to affect the result of an election. However, it does not include any materials produced by Council relating to the election process by way of information, education or publicity, or materials produced by or on behalf of the returning officer for the purposes of conducting an election.

This Policy does not prevent publications by Council which merely announce the holding of an election or relate only to the election process itself for the purposes of Section 12(b) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* or otherwise. Council may provide information, education and publicity designed to promote public participation in the electoral processes for its area, and to inform potential voters about the candidates who are standing for election in its area. It will not publish material that refers to, or comments on, an issue submitted to or is otherwise before voters in connection with the election.

Council Members are, however, permitted to publish campaign material on their own behalf, but cannot assert for that material to be originating from, or authorised by, Council (eg by the use of Council logos).

NOTE: 'Publication' means any type of publication, including but not limited to leaflets, newspapers, posters, email, website, radio etc.



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13. Use of Council Resources

13.1.1 Council website

During an 'election period', new material which is prohibited by this Policy will not be placed on the Council website. Any information which refers to the election will only relate to the election process by way of information, education or publicity. Information about Council Members will be restricted to names, contact details, titles, membership of committees and other bodies to which they have been appointed by the Council.

The Council's website will include an express link or reference to the Local Government Association publication of candidate profiles and electoral statements for the purposes of section 19A of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999*.

13 Use of Council Resources

13.2 Council Publications during an 'Election Period'

13.1.3 Other Council publications

Insofar as any Council publications, such as the Annual Report, are required to be published during an 'election period', the content contained within them regarding Council Members will be restricted to that strictly required by the *Local Government Act 1999* and Regulations.

Council publications produced before an 'election period' containing material which might be construed as electoral material will not be circulated or displayed during the 'election period'. However, they may be made available to members of the public on request.

13.3 Attendance at Events and Functions During an 'Election Period'

In this clause, reference to events and functions means gatherings involving external stakeholders to discuss, review, acknowledge, communicate, celebrate or promote a program, strategy or issue which is of relevance to Council and its community and may take the form of conferences, workshops, forums, launches, promotional activities, and social occasions such as dinners, receptions and balls.



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13. Use of Council Resources

13.2.1 Events etc staged by external bodies

Council Members may continue to attend meeting, events and functions staged by external bodies during an 'election period'. This includes but is not limited to LGA and regional LGA meetings, including the LGA Annual General Meeting held in October.

13.2.2 Council events and functions

Council organised events and functions held during the 'election period' will be reduced to only those essential to the operation of the Council.

13.2.3 Addresses by Council Members

Council Members must not give speeches or keynote addresses at Council organised or sponsored events and functions during an 'election period'. Council Members may, however, make short welcome speeches at Council organised or sponsored events and functions during an 'election period'.

13 Use of Council Resources

13.2 Attendance at Events and Functions During an 'Election Period'

13.2.4 Publication of promotional material

In preparing any material concerning a Council organised or sponsored function or event which will be published or distributed during the 'election period', such preparation will be consistent with Clause 7.1 of this policy.



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13. Use of Council Resources

13.3 Access to Council Information

Council Members continue during an 'election period' to have a statutory right to access Council information relevant to the performance of their functions as a Council Member. This right should be exercised with caution and limited to matters that the Council is dealing with within the objectives and intent of this Policy. Any Council information so accessed that is not publicly available must not be used for election purposes.

All candidates (including those that are Council Members) have equal rights of access to public information relevant to their election campaigns from Council administration. Neither Council Members nor candidates will be provided with information or advice from Council staff that might be perceived to support an election campaign, and there shall be transparency in the provision of all information and advice during an 'election period'.

13.3.1 Information and briefing material

Information and briefing material prepared or secured by staff for a Council Member during an 'election period' must be necessary to the carrying out of the Council Member's role and, where appropriate, provided to any candidate seeking the same information. Queries by staff regarding the provision of information will be directed to the Chief Executive Officer in the first instance.



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13 Use of Council Resources

13.4 Media Service

Council's media services are directly managed by or under the supervision of the Chief Executive Officer, are provided solely to promote Council activities or initiatives and must not be used in any manner that might favour a candidate during an 'election period'.

13.4.1 Media advice

Any request for media advice or assistance from Council Members during an 'election period' will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. No media advice will be provided in relation to election issues or in regard to publicity that involves specific Council Members.

13.4.2 Media releases / spokespersons

Media releases will not refer to specific Council Members. Where it is necessary to identify a spokesperson in relation to an issue, the Chief Executive Officer will generally be the appropriate person.

13.4.3 Publicity campaigns

During the 'election period', publicity campaigns, other than for the purpose of conducting the election in accordance with the requirements of Section 12(b) of the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999*, will be avoided wherever possible. Where a publicity campaign is deemed necessary for a Council activity, it must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

In any event, Council publicity during an 'election period' will be restricted to communicating normal Council activities and initiatives without any variation in form or size.

13.4.4 Council Members

Council Members will not use their position as an elected representative or their access to Council staff and other Council resources to gain media attention in support of an election campaign.



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13 Use of Council Resources

13.4.5 Council employees

During an 'election period', no Council employee may make any public statement that relates to an election issue unless such statements have been approved by the Chief Executive Officer

13.5 Council Staff Responsibilities During an Election Period

Prior to any election period, the Chief Executive Officer will ensure that all members of Council staff are advised in relation to the application of this Caretaker Policy.

13.5.1 Correspondence

All correspondence addressed to Council Members will be answered by the Chief Executive Officer during the election period.

13.5.2 Activities that may affect voting

- (a) Council staff must not undertake an activity that may affect voting in the election, except where the activity relates to the election process and is authorised by the Chief Executive Officer;
- (b) Council staff must not authorise, use or allocate a Council resource for any purpose which may influence voting in the election, except where it only relates to the election process and is authorised by the Chief Executive Officer; and
- (c) Council staff must not assist Council Members in ways that are or could create a perception that they are being used for electoral purposes. In any circumstances where the use of Council resources might be construed as being related to a candidate's election campaign, the incident must be reported to and advice sought from the Chief Executive Officer.

13.6 Equity in Assistance to Candidates

Council confirms that all candidates for the Council election will be treated equally.



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13. Use of Council Resources

13.6.1 Candidate assistance and advice

Any assistance and advice provided to candidates as part of the conduct of the Council elections will be provided equally to all candidates. The types of assistance that are available will be documented and communicated to candidates in advance.

13.6 Equity in Assistance to Candidates

13.6.2 Election process enquiries

All election process enquiries from candidates, whether current Council Members or not, are to be directed to the Returning Officer or, where the matter is outside of the responsibilities of the Returning Officer, to the Chief Executive Officer or his/her nominee.

13.6.3 Expenses incurred by Council Members

Payment or reimbursement of costs relating to Council Members out-of-pocket expenses incurred during an 'election period' will only apply to necessary costs that have been incurred in the performance of normal Council duties. No reimbursements will be provided for campaigning, or for expenses that could be perceived as supporting or being connected with a candidate's election campaign.

13.6.4 Council branding and stationery

No Council logos, letterheads, or other Council branding or Council resources or facilities may be used for, or linked in any way with, a candidate's election campaign.

13.6.5 Support staff to Council Members

Council staff who provide support to Council Members must not be asked to undertake any tasks connected directly or indirectly with an election campaign for a Council Member.



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13 Use of Council Resources

13.6.6 Equipment and facilities

Equipment and facilities provided to Council Members for the purpose of conducting normal Council business must not be used for campaigning purposes.

13.7 Public Consultation during an 'Election Period'

13.7.1 Prohibition

It is prohibited under this Policy for discretionary public consultation to be undertaken during the 'election period' on an issue which is contentious unless Council specifically resolves otherwise.

For the purpose of this provision, discretionary public consultation means consultation which is not legislatively mandated and is a process which involves an invitation or invitations to individuals, groups or organisations or the community generally to comment on an issue, proposed action or proposed policy.

This Policy does not prevent any mandatory public consultation required by the *Local Government Act 1999* or any other Act which is required to be undertaken to enable the Council to fulfil its functions in relation to any matter or decisions which are not prohibited by law or by this Policy.

13.7.2 Approval for public consultation

Where public consultation is approved to occur during an 'election period', the results of that consultation will not be reported to Council until after the 'election period', except where it is necessary for the performance of functions as set out at clause 7.7.1 above.

13.7.3 Community meetings

Community meetings will not be held during an 'election period'.



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14. Handling Code of Conduct Complaints during an Election Period

Any complaint against a Council Member who is also a candidate for re-election made under the Council's Code of Conduct for Council Members during an 'election period' will not be heard or determined by the Council during that period.

The Chief Executive Officer, upon receiving a complaint against a Council Member, who is also a candidate for re-election about conduct specifically in relation to this Policy (considered part of Council's Code of Conduct), will refer the complaint to the independent Local Government Governance Panel established by the Local Government Association [or Council's own independent assessor] for assessment and investigation.

14. Handling Code of Conduct Complaints during an Election Period

If the complaint is, in the opinion of the Chairperson of the Governance Panel [or Council's own independent assessor], not so serious as to warrant urgent determination, consideration of the complaint must be deferred until after the 'election period'.

If the Council Member against whom the complaint is made is not returned to office after the election, the complaint will lapse.

An example of a serious complaint which would warrant urgent determination is where a complaint of a deliberate and wilful breach of this Policy is made, and is supported by sufficient evidence for the Chairperson of the Governance Panel to be satisfied that the conduct of the Council Member was not an honest or innocent mistake.

Where a complaint is made against a Council Member for a breach of this Policy and is deferred until after the 'election period', the Chief Executive Officer will remind the Council Member of the content of this Policy and will provide them with a copy of it.

Council recognises that the Electoral Commissioner has the role of investigating any alleged breach of the *Local Government (Election) Act 1999*, including alleged illegal practices.

15. Related Policies

Elected Members Code of Conduct
Code of Conduct for Council Employees

16. Related Documents

Nil



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17. **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed within two years or as Council requires.

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

18. **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.