



Policy Name: Informal Gatherings Policy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Open and transparent meetings of Council underpin representative democracy and ensure public confidence in 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 STATEMENT

This Policy provides for council members to 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 (the Act).

Section 90(8) of the 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 meeting of Council. 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. PRINCIPLES

"Informal gatherings" are gatherings of some or all Elected Members to discuss council business that are arranged by the council (either by the CEO or by the elected council) other than proceedings which are subject to formal notification and minuting e.g. General Council and Committee Meetings. Section 90(8) of the Act provides a list of examples of informal gatherings:

- 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 will be used solely for the purpose of generating ideas, sharing information and seeking further information on issues. Staff may receive guidance from informal gatherings as to what topics and information is to be presented to formal meetings but informal gatherings are not to be used for building consensus positions, or making council decisions in any way.

## **4. POLICY SCOPE AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **General Business of the Council**

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 however encouraged to attend these sessions. Attendance will be noted and included in the annual report.

Informal gatherings will not be used for making council decisions or to stifle debate on issues that may subsequently be dealt with by the council at a formal meeting.

### **Timing of, and Access to, Informal Gatherings of Council**

- (i) Notification of planned briefing sessions will be published on the council's website. The notification may include topics which are planned to be discussed at the informal gathering.
- (ii) For all 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 to progress Council business.

### **Chairing, Agendas and Minute Taking**

Informal gatherings may nominate the Mayor, any other elected member or any staff member to chair the gathering. Informal gatherings will be chaired informally.

Both the CEO and the person chairing the meeting are responsible for ensuring informal gatherings are conducted in accordance with the Act.

Information/draft documentation may be provided to Elected Members to accompany the discussion. Such documents are considered internal working documents of council.

Informal gatherings will not involve a formal minute taking process.

### **Interpretation**

This Policy must be enacted in conjunction with any legislative change or regulations.

## **5. AVAILABILITY OF THE POLICY**

The public may inspect a copy of this Policy, without charge, at the Council offices during office hours.

A copy of the Policy will be made available on the Council Website ([www.cooberpedy.sa.gov.au](http://www.cooberpedy.sa.gov.au)).

Further enquiries about the Policy should be directed to the Chief Executive Officer or by telephoning Council on 8672 4600.

## **6. REFERENCES**

Local Government Act 1999

Local Government (Accountability and Governance) Amendment Bill 2015

Code of Practice – Access to Council Meetings and Documents

## **7. REVIEW AND EVALUATION**

This Policy will be reviewed within 12 months after a General Election and as required.