



NORTHERN MIDLANDS COUNCIL

POLICY MANUAL

COMMUNICATIONS

Originated Date: Adopted 2 May 2005 – Min. No. 117/05 (as Policy 41)

Amended Date/s: Amended 20 November 2006 – Min. No. 413/06
Amended 21 January 2013 – Min. No. 09/13

Applicable Legislation: *Local Government Act 1993*

Objective To establish guidelines to ensure a co-operative and beneficial working relationship between Councillors and Officers is maintained.

Administration: Governance

Review Cycle/Date: Next review 2019

1. OBJECTIVES

Good governance relies on successful working relationships between all parties and a sophisticated understanding of role differences.

Communities expect their Councils to be well managed and run in a cost-effective manner. If elected members are to provide the necessary assurance to their communities about the performance of the Council, they must be kept appropriately informed by the General Manager.

Elected members need access to information on a wide range of subjects, and often need to discuss ratepayer issues with members of staff. The General Manager needs to ensure elected members have appropriate access to such information, and that they are readily able to raise any concerns they may have about the administration of the Council.

It is also important that there is ongoing communication between elected members, the General Manager and the Administration to ensure that the Council's goals, policies and strategies are implemented and objectives met.

However, certain protocols and procedures are necessary to ensure accountability, and a Communication Policy is essential to set out these guidelines to avoid confusion and misunderstandings, and to facilitate communication and understanding between the respective parties and the roles they play.

Councillors need to understand that accountable advice needs to go through an organisational process, and that staff have work priorities and reporting responsibilities.

Officers need to understand that they are accountable, through the management structure, to the whole Council, but also that elected members need prompt and reliable advice to perform their duties.

Protocols and procedures assist both elected members and Council's employees to understand the nature of these interactions and communications.

This policy has been put in place to ensure a co-operative working relationship between Councillors and officers is maintained. The guidelines are designed to assist Councillors receive prompt attention in the execution of their duties as well as enabling officers to manage work demands and allow the tracking of requests through to completion.

This policy also aims to assist officers in fulfilling their obligations to act at all times with integrity and in a way that shows proper concern for the public interest.

The policy also aims to ensure that due process is followed and that all Councillors and officers are accorded procedural fairness in their dealings with each other.



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2. ROLES

2.1 COUNCILLORS

Councillors have a number of roles to fulfil and they must do this with the support of the General Manager and Administration that is available.

Councillors represent and promote the interests of the community as a whole. Councillors, as the governing body of the corporation, have the responsibility of directing and controlling the affairs of the Council, setting goals, policies and strategies in accordance with the Local Government Act and monitoring and evaluating the performance of the Council against its own policies and plans.

2.2 MAYOR

The Mayor has a distinctive role within the Council, incorporating many facets of local government as set out in the Local Government Act. These include governance, chairing council meetings, external relations, supporting the community, spokesperson, media relationships and ceremonial.

The Mayor is in a position to facilitate good relationships with and between Councillors, between Councillors and the Administration, and between the Mayor and the General Manager.

2.3 GENERAL MANAGER

The General Manager has a statutory responsibility to manage the organisation in the implementation of the goals, policies and strategies endorsed by the Council. The General Manager is responsible for staffing, including the organisational structure, and resources and all matters relating to the operational management of the Northern Midlands Municipal Area. The General Manager is the link between the elected members and the Administration.

2.4 ADMINISTRATION

The role of the Administration is to implement Council's goals, policies and strategies, and to advise and support Council. They may also assist an elected member with advice or information.

3. RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 COUNCILLORS/GENERAL MANAGER

The relationship between Council and the General Manager should be based on mutual trust and respect.

The General Manager has a formal accountability to the elected members sitting as Council. The General Manager and the Councillors are likely to be in regular contact about issues, problems and information, in both formal and informal settings. The General Manager must thus accommodate Councillors who have different objectives and ways of working.

The General Manager is also an adviser to the Council, providing accurate and timely reports as required by the Council. The Council should seek and consider the General Manager's advice on matters of policy.

The General Manager will also have a close working relationship with the chairperson of any Council committees.

3.2 MAYOR/GENERAL MANAGER

This relationship is crucial if the good relationships are to be maintained between elected members and the Administration. A good relationship can result in good planning, identification and resolution of issues, good communication between all parties, and thus promote good governance.

Both parties are in a position to inform the other of issues and matters relevant to the other's performance of their duties. Regular meetings are necessary to enhance communication and planning, and to prevent the other being caught off guard or not fully informed.

A clear understanding of their different roles is essential and should be the subject of ongoing discussion.



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3.3 COUNCIL/ADMINISTRATION

The relationship between Council and its Administration is critical to achieving good governance and the objectives of Council.

The Administration is accountable to the Council through the General Manager. Council is responsible, through the General Manager, for Administration.

Both parties need to understand, respect and support the other's roles. Administration needs to respect the complex political environments in which Councillors operate. Councillors need to understand the complexity for the Administration in providing quality advice and service on a very wide range of issues.

4 PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES

- 4.1 The General Manager shall ensure that Councillors are given access to the information requested, that is in the possession of the Council, considered necessary for them to properly perform their functions and fulfil their responsibilities as elected members.
- 4.2 Councillors should, when receiving approaches from members of the community, encourage them to use the formal channels of access to information through the Customer Service Request system.
- 4.3 All aspects of communications from and between Councillors and officers should reflect the status and objectives of the Council.
- 4.4 Communications should be accurate, polite and professional.
- 4.5 Councillors should provide Customer Service Requests directly to the Customer Service Officers for processing. Confidential issues, such as set out in Section 10 of Schedule 4 of the Local Government Act, 1993, should be referred directly to the General Manager. These issues shall be recorded but not listed in the Customer Service Requests circulated to Councillors for information.
- 4.6 Councillors should, if at all possible, approach the General Manager or relevant Managers for help or advice on matters, other than customer service requests, in the first instance.

In any other case, if a Councillor wishes to meet with an officer about a particular matter the Councillor shall advise the General Manager and inform the officer of

- 4.6.1 the purpose of the meeting,
- 4.6.2 the subject matter of the meeting, and
- 4.6.3 the parties that will be present at the meeting;

and the officer shall be entitled to

- 4.6.4 refer the matter to the respective Manager,
- 4.6.5 have a person of their choosing attend the meeting with the Councillor.

- 4.7 Councillors may deal directly with a particular officer on a matter of continuing concern where the matter has previously been brought to the attention of the relevant Manager or where an arrangement has been made to the satisfaction of the Manager.
- 4.8 If a Councillor has raised an enquiry that is likely to be ongoing and/or unreasonably extend the resources of the Council, the Councillor shall be advised of the situation and the request may be reported to the Council for direction.
- 4.9 If a Councillor asks for help or advice from an officer other than under these guidelines then the employee concerned shall inform the General Manager of the request as soon as possible.
- 4.10 Officers are not permitted to contact Councillors outside of formal meetings to discuss council business unless authorised to do so by the General Manager.



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- 4.11 Councillors should not contact officers outside of formal meetings to discuss council business unless the officer's manager and/or the General Manager are aware of the contact.
- 4.12 These Guidelines do not apply to social or casual contact between Councillors and Council Officers, whether during or outside of formal work hours, other than where Council business discussed.

These guidelines have been put in place to ensure a co-operative and beneficial working relationship between Councillors and officers is maintained. These guidelines are designed to assist Councillors receive prompt attention in the execution of their duties as well as enabling Officers to manage work demands and allow the proper tracking of requests to completion.

These guidelines are also designed to assist officers in fulfilling their obligations to act at all times with integrity and in a way that shows proper concern for the public interest.

NOTES

Sources:

- *Draft Model Code of Conduct - NSW Department of Local Government.*
- *CEO's Guidelines for Requests for Help or Advice by Councillors - Pine Rives Shire Council*
- *The Principles of Good Governance Within Local Government – produced by the Good Governance Advisory Group*
- *Managing the Relationship Between a Local Authority's Elected Members and its Chief Executive*
- *Establishing a Regulated Code of Conduct for Elected members and Committee Members (Discussion Paper) – Western Australian Local Government Association.*
- *Code of Conduct for Elected Members and Employees – City of Wanneroo*

Though some of these references appear to address particular Codes of Conduct each does deal with the relationship between the various parties at Council, and provided useful guidelines as to communication procedures and protocols.