



## Informal Gatherings Policy

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<b>File Number</b>	<b>9/POL/IGD/2</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>
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<b>Last reviewed at Council Meeting</b>	<b>21 April 2020</b>
<b>Minute Number</b>	<b>20925/1</b>
<b>Due date of next Review</b>	<b>April 2024</b>

## Purpose

The Policy aims to ensure that the statutory requirements for openness and transparency in Council decision-making are observed; while providing an opportunity for confidential discussions among Council members where this is warranted by the nature of the gathering or subject matter to be discussed.

## Overview

Informal gatherings provide a valuable opportunity to enhance Council decision-making processes by providing opportunities for Council Members to become better informed on issues and seek further clarification without being subject to the procedural meeting requirements of the Local Government Act and Local Government (Proceedings at Meetings) Regulations 2013.

However Informal gatherings should not be used, or be seen to be used, as a replacement for full debate and decision-making at Council meetings or Council committee meetings. Open and transparent Council meetings and Council committee meetings underpin representative democracy and ensure public confidence in Council's decision-making processes.

## Alterations to Policy

On 15 March 2020, the Chief Executive of the Department for Health and Wellbeing in the State of South Australia, pursuant to section 87 of the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011*, declared that an emergency which threatens to cause the death of, or injury or other damage to the health of any person is occurring or about to occur in relation to the transmission of COVID-19, and declared the emergency to be a public health emergency.

On 22 March 2020, the State Co-ordinator for the State of South Australia declared, pursuant to section 23 of the *Emergency Management Act 2004*, that a Major Emergency is occurring in respect of the outbreak of the Human Disease named COVID-19 within South Australia.

On 30 March 2020 the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Local Government issued a notice pursuant to section 302B of the *Local Government Act 1999* (Notice No 1) varying or suspending the operation of the specified provisions of the *Local Government Act 1999* as set out in Schedule 1 to Notice No 1. Notice No 1 commenced operation on 31 March 2020.

For the period Notice No 1 has effect (as provided for in Notice No 1), this Informal Gatherings Policy is altered as set out below and those alterations have effect notwithstanding any other provision in this Informal Gatherings Policy to the contrary.

The alterations to this Policy are made consistent with Notice No 1 and the Council's Code of Practice for Access to Meetings and Code of Practice for Meeting Procedures.

For the avoidance of doubt, save for the alterations to the Informal Gatherings Policy as set out below, this Informal Gatherings Policy otherwise applies to all informal gatherings of the Council.



## Definitions

**electronic means** includes a telephone, computer or other electronic device used for communication.

## Attendance at Informal Gatherings

Members of the Council may participate in an informal gathering of the Council by electronic means.

A member of the Council participating in an informal gathering by electronic means is taken to be present at the informal gathering provided that the member:

- (a) can hear all other members present at the informal gathering; and
- (b) can be heard by all other members present at the informal gathering.

Form of Participation by Electronic Means

Where:

- (a) a Council member is to participate in an informal gathering by electronic means; and
- (b) the electronic means has the functionality to allow the Council member to participate in the informal gathering by being heard but not seen or by being both seen and heard; and
- (c) the electronic means of the Council has the functionality to allow the council member to be heard but not seen or to be both seen and heard,

the member must participate by being both seen and heard.

## Public Access to Designated Informal Gatherings

During the period within which Notice No. 1 applies, public access to designated informal gatherings may be provided in accordance with Sections 90(1a) and 90(1b) of the *Local Government Act 1999* however, as outlined in this Policy, minutes will not be recorded.

## Scope

This Policy applies to informal gatherings of the Council or a Council Committee. This includes both 'Informal Gatherings' and 'Designated Informal Gatherings' or discussions.

The *Local Government (General) Regulations 2013* defines 'Designated Informal Gatherings or discussion' as:

*an event organised and conducted by or on behalf of the Council or Chief Executive Officer to which members of the Council or Council Committee have been invited and that involves discussion of a matter that is, or is intended to be, part of the agenda for a formal meeting of the Council or Council Committee.*

Alternatively, an event organised and conducted by or on behalf of the Council or Chief Executive Officer to which members of the Council or Council Committee have been invited that does not involve discussion of a matter that is, or is intended to be, part of the agenda for



a formal meeting of the Council or Council committee, is not a 'Designated Informal Gathering or discussion' but rather an 'Informal Gathering or discussion'

### **Purpose of 'Informal Gatherings or Discussions'**

Section 90(8) of the Local Government Act allows informal gatherings or discussions to be held provided that the gathering or discussion does not obtain, or effectively obtain, a decision on a matter outside a formally constituted meeting of the Council or Council committee.

The Local Government Act sets out the following examples of informal gatherings or discussions:

- 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 of Council members or Council Committee members (either with or without Council staff) are, by their nature, non-compulsory. However, all Council members and Council Committee members are encouraged to attend relevant informal gatherings, particularly where the informal gathering or discussion is intended to provide history, context or additional information to Council members or Council Committee members.

### **Purpose of 'Designated Informal Gatherings or Discussions'**

Designated informal gatherings and discussions will be used solely for the purpose of information sharing and not for the purpose of determining, or effectively determining, matters which should be determined at a formally constituted meeting of the Council or Council Committee.

Designated informal gatherings or discussions may be used to:

- discuss issues that involve strategy or policy or other matters of Council administration
- brief Council members or Council Committee members on issues relevant to matters which in the future will be included on the agenda of a formal meeting of the Council or Council committee.



# Policy

## **Designated Informal Gatherings or discussions to be open to the Public, except in Special Circumstances**

Designated informal gatherings or discussions will be held at a place open to the public, except where the designated informal gathering or discussion has been declared by the Council or Chief Executive Officer to be a 'confidential' informal gathering or discussion.

The Council or Chief Executive Officer may, on a case-by-case, declare a designated informal gathering or discussion to be a 'confidential informal gathering discussion' where the designated informal gathering or discussion is either:

- (i) a planning session of a general or strategic nature; or
- (ii) is a briefing session relating to information or a matter of a confidential nature within the ambit of Section 90(3) of the Local Government Act (see attachment).

## **Informal Gatherings or discussions not required to be open to the Public**

An informal gathering or discussion of the Council or a Council Committee which is not a Designated Informal Gathering or discussion will not be open to the public unless otherwise determined by the Council or Chief Executive Officer.

## **Procedures Applying to Designated Informal Gatherings or Discussions**

Both the Chief Executive Officer and the Council are responsible for ensuring designated informal gatherings or discussions are conducted in accordance with the Local Government Act.

Designated informal gatherings or discussions are not subject to the procedural meeting requirements of the Local Government Act and Local Government (Proceedings at Meetings) Regulations 2013.

Informal gatherings or discussion will be chaired by the Chief Executive Officer or another Senior Council Officer, Mayor and/or suitable person appropriate to the nature and/or business of the gathering to ensure that the purpose, intent and outcomes of the meeting fall within the permitted parameters of the legislative provisions. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the purpose, intent and outcomes of the designated informal gatherings or discussions are consistent with Section 90 of the Local Government Act.

Formal minutes will not be recorded of a designated informal gathering or discussion. Notes of a designated informal gathering or discussion may be tabled at the Council meeting following the designated informal gathering or discussion.

If a designated informal gathering or discussion has been declared to be a 'confidential informal discussion', then the designated informal gathering or discussion may be attended by Council members, the Chief Executive Officer and any other person invited to attend by the Council or the Chief Executive Officer.



If a confidential informal discussion declaration has been made in respect of only some of the matters to be discussed at a designated informal gathering or discussion, then these confidential matters will be scheduled to be discussed at the end of the agenda for the designated informal gathering or discussion. The designated informal gathering or discussion will be open to the public until immediately prior to the discussion on confidential matters commencing.

## **Publication of Information relating to Designated Informal Gatherings or Discussions**

For all designated informal gatherings or discussions, the following information will be published on the Council's website:

- (i) the place, date and time at which the designated informal gathering or discussion will be held;
- (ii) the matter/s that are to be discussed at the designated informal gathering or discussion;
- (iii) whether or not the designated informal gathering or discussion is to be held at a place open to the public.

Where a confidential informal gathering or discussion declaration applies, the reason for the designated informal gathering or discussion being held entirely or partially in confidence must be published on the Council's website.

## **Availability/Accessibility**

This Policy and Council's Fees and Charges Register are available to be downloaded free of charge from Council's website: [www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au](http://www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au).

This Policy is available for inspection at Council's principal office during ordinary business hours. Hard copies, for a fee in accordance with Council's schedule of Fees and Charges can be provided upon request.

## **Legislative Framework / Other References**

- *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)*
- *Local Government (General) Regulations 2013*
- *Electronic Participation in Council Meetings Notice (No 1) 2020*



## Document History

This Policy shall be reviewed within 12 months of a general election or more frequently if legislation or Council requires.

Version	Adopted	Minute No	Description of Change
2	10 May 2016	18165/4	Amendment adopted.
3	13 December 2016	18936/2	Amendment adopted.
3.1	December 2017		Updated with new Policy document format and layout. Content of Policy not changed.
4	9 April 2019	20749/2	More clarity provided regarding requirements associated with Designated Informal Gatherings and Informal Gatherings.
5	21 April 2020	20925/1	Inclusion of provisions following the issue of <a href="#">Electronic Participation in Council Meetings Notice (No 1) 2020</a> .





# Attachment A

## Information & matters within the ambit of Section 90(3), Local Government Act

- (a) information the disclosure of which would involve the unreasonable disclosure of information concerning the personal affairs of any person (living or dead);
- (b) information the disclosure of which:
  - (i) could reasonably be expected to confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the Council is conducting, or proposing to conduct, business, or to prejudice the commercial position of the Council; and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (c) information the disclosure of which would reveal a trade secret;
- (d) commercial information of a confidential nature (not being a trade secret) the disclosure of which:
  - (i) could reasonably be expected to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied the information, or to confer a commercial advantage on a third party; and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (e) matters affecting the security of the Council, members or employees of the Council, or Council property, or the safety of any person;
- (f) information the disclosure of which could reasonably be expected to prejudice the maintenance of law, including by affecting (or potentially affecting) the prevention, detection or investigation of a criminal offence, or the right to a fair trial;
- (g) matters that must be considered in confidence in order to ensure that the Council does not breach any law, order or direction of a court or tribunal constituted by law, any duty of confidence, or other legal obligation or duty;
- (h) legal advice;
- (i) information relating to actual litigation, or litigation that the Council or Council committee believes on reasonable grounds will take place, involving the Council or an employee of the Council;
- (j) information the disclosure of which:
  - (i) would divulge information provided on a confidential basis by or to a Minister of the Crown, or another public authority or official (not being an employee of the Council, or a person engaged by the Council); and
  - (ii) would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest;
- (k) tenders for the supply of goods, the provision of services or the carrying out of works;
- (l) information relating to a proposed amendment to a Development Plan under the *Development Act 1993* before a Development Plan Amendment proposal relating to the amendment is released for public consultation under that Act;
- (m) information relevant to the review of a determination of a Council under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*.

