

Forums of Council – Workshops and Agenda Briefings

Policy Objective

Local government forums range from a once-only event to discuss and explore a particular issue, to a number of sessions to address matters such as a specific project or the compilation of a report for internal or external use, through to forums held at regular intervals with a consistent structure and objectives.

Policy Statement

Forums of Council:

Council Workshops

Background

Council Workshops involve Council members and employees meeting to propose, discuss and formulate philosophies, ideas, strategies and concepts for the development of the local government and the district. Council Workshops often involve projects that are in the early planning stage and are some time away from being presented to Council for decision. In discussing such issues, employees are looking for general guidance from the Council members as they research the matter and draft the agenda report.

Council members and employees are also looking to present ideas and concepts for future consideration. If the response is favourable, employees can proceed with their research and eventually report on the matter.

Further, on occasions requests are made from external parties to present or workshop a matter with Council members.

Examples of the type of issues Council Workshops may cover include –

- current matters of a local or regional significance;
- matters relating to the future development of the local government;
- the development of internal strategic, planning, management and financial strategies and documents;
- development of the selection criteria and performance objectives for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO); and
- reports from Working Groups, Consultation Forums or other non-formal activities involving Councillors or employees.

Behind Closed Doors

Behind closed doors and in a relatively informal manner are the two notable characteristics of Council Workshops. Holding such meetings behind closed doors is justified in that many of the ideas and concepts are preliminary and while looking for that creative gem, some may be radical, expensive or impractical and never adopted.

Managing Council Workshops

Unless otherwise determined by the CEO in consultation with the Shire President, Council Workshops will be held monthly on a day to be determined annually by Council.

Workshops are currently held between 12.00pm – 5.00pm on the second Tuesday of each month. Debating, collective decision making or revelation of one's intention on how they will vote at a future Council or Committee Meeting is not permitted. Expressing an opinion or seeking clarification on matters under discussion generally, however, is appropriate and welcome.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for finalising the Council Workshop Agenda and using his/her best endeavours to ensure statutory processes, existing Council strategic priorities and projects are prioritised for inclusion.

The Shire President will Chair these meetings or if the Shire President is not available then the Deputy Shire President. If neither are available, the Council members present shall choose a person who shall preside over the Workshop so as to ensure the guidelines as addressed in this policy are adhered to.

A general record should be kept of the Council Workshop noting attendance, requests for further information and interests declared. No minutes as such will be taken, nor will specific discussions, actions or outcomes be recorded, received or adopted at a later date.

Councillor Reports

At each Council Workshop, Councillors will be provided the opportunity to report on issues that have arisen over the previous period. These may include discussions that have come from attendance at Council Committee meetings, working groups, ratepayers/electors or third parties that require further information clarification on employee's actions to date or general information.

Project Updates

At each Workshop, the Chief Executive Officer shall cause presentations to be made in relation to the following;

- a) Monthly Snapshot; and/or
- b) New Ideas.

Agenda Briefings

Background

For proper decision-making, Council members must have the opportunity to gain maximum knowledge and understanding of any issue presented to the Council on which they must vote. It is reasonable for Council members to expect that they will be provided with all the relevant information they need to understand issues listed on the agenda for the next or following Ordinary Council Meetings.

The complexity of many items means that Council members may need to be given additional context or information to that contained in the agenda report and/or they may need an opportunity to ask questions of relevant employees.

This is best achieved by Council members convening as a body to become better informed on issues listed for Council decision. Such assemblies have been termed Agenda Briefings. It is considered they are more efficient and effective than Council members meeting employees on an individual basis for such a purpose with the added benefit that all council members hear the same questions and answers. To protect the integrity of the decision-making process it is essential that Agenda Briefings are run with strict procedures.

Managing Agenda Briefings

Agenda Briefings will be held on the Monday or Tuesday preceding the monthly Ordinary Meeting of Council (OMC).

For Special Meetings of Council (SMC) the timing of the Agenda Briefing will be at the discretion of the CEO in consultation with the Shire President.

The Shire President shall Chair these meetings or if the Shire President is not available then the Deputy Shire President. If neither are available, the Council members present shall choose a person who shall preside over the Agenda Briefing so as to ensure the guidelines as addressed in this policy are adhered to.

Agenda Briefings shall not be open to the public and therefore no debate on the items shall be entered into during the Agenda Briefing as there shall be no opportunity for a collective Council decision or implied decision that binds the local government. Fundamental to this decision is that any debate shall be held at Council meetings so as to ensure the public in attendance at a Council meeting can see and hear the decisions and debate around Council decisions.

The purpose of the Agenda Briefing is to allow questions in relation to the item or to request further information from the CEO (employee) in relation to the item in a collective environment. Where questions are Taken on Notice, answers will be distributed to all Councillors and Directors prior to the OMC.

A Councillor may still choose to raise issues associated with the Agenda independently through the CEO or Director.

A general record should be kept of the Agenda Briefing noting attendance, requests for further information and interests declared. No minutes as such will be taken, nor will specific discussions, actions or outcomes be recorded, received or adopted at a later date.

Conduct at All Forums of Council

Councillors and employees shall adhere to the provisions of the Shire of Broome Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates and the Shire of Broome Code of Conduct for Employees, in relation to their conduct at all forums.

Forums shall run in a formal manner with all questions being directed through the Chairperson.

Quorum

A quorum does not apply to Forums, however if deemed necessary, the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Shire President may reschedule a Forum.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

No Council member or staff member shall raise any matter at a Forum of Council for which they have or may perceive to have a Financial or Proximity Interest.

As a matter of probity and integrity, members and employees are required to make disclosures of interest in accordance with sections 5.59 – 5.90 of the *Local Government Act 1995* (Financial and Proximity Interests) and clause 22 of the Shire of Broome Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates. (Impartiality Interests).

It is noted that this is above and beyond the scope of the legislation, however is required to ensure a high level of governance and transparency.

Members shall make written disclosures of Interest to the Chair at all Forums.

Where the declaration is Financial, or a Proximity Interest the Councillor or employee shall leave the room for the duration of the discussions regarding the item so as not to add to the discussion in any manner and ensure appropriate independence for those members remaining.

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4.	16 November 2023		Council Policy Review – Minute No. C/1123/041				