



CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS AND DOCUMENT

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Responsible Department	Office of Chief Executive Officer		
Responsible Officer	Chief Executive Officer		
Applicable Legislation	Local Government Act 1999		
Related Documents	Internal Review of a Council Decision Policy and Procedure		
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Next Review date	Dec 2023 Once in every term of Council and within twelve (12) months after the conclusion of a periodic election, in line with legislative changes or by resolution of Council.		

1. STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

- 1.1 The District Council of Elliston supports the principle that the procedures to be observed at a meeting of Council, or a Council Committee, should contribute to open, transparent and informed decision-making and encourage appropriate community participation in the affairs of the Council.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This Code sets out the commitment of the District Council of Elliston to provide public access to Council and Council committee meetings and documents and outlines the policies and procedures contained within the Local Government Act 1999, to restrict public access.
- 2.2 The Code includes:
- 2.2.1 information on the relevant provisions of the Act;
 - 2.2.2 Council's policy on public access and participation;
 - 2.2.3 the process that will be adopted where public access to a meeting or a document is restricted;
 - 2.2.4 grievance procedures to be followed if a member of the public believes that the Council has unreasonably restricted public access on a particular matter.

- 2.3 This Code sets out the policy of Council for access to meetings and documents and includes information relating to:
- 2.3.1 access to the agenda for meetings;
 - 2.3.2 public access to meetings;
 - 2.3.3 the process to exclude the public from meetings;
 - 2.3.4 matters for which the Council, or a Council committee, can order that the public be excluded;
 - 2.3.5 how the Council will approach the use of the confidentiality provisions in the Act;
 - 2.3.6 public access to documents, including minutes;
 - 2.3.7 review of confidentiality orders;
 - 2.3.8 accountability and reporting to the community, and the availability of the code; and
 - 2.3.9 grievances about the use of the code by Council.

3 PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE AGENDA FOR MEETINGS

- 3.1 At least three clear days¹ before the Council or Council committee meeting (unless it is a special meeting) the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) must give written notice of the meeting to all Elected Members setting out the date, time and place of the meeting. The notice must contain or be accompanied by the agenda for the meeting.
- 3.2 The notice of meeting and agenda will be placed on public display at the office of the Council that is open to the public for the general administration of Council business at 21 Beach Terrace, Elliston and on Council's website www.elliston.sa.gov.au
- 3.3 Items listed on the agenda will be described accurately and in reasonable detail.
- 3.4 The notice and agenda will be kept on public display and continue to be published on the website until the completion of the relevant Council or Council committee meeting.
- 3.5 Copies of the agenda documents and non-confidential reports that are to be considered at the meeting will be made available to members of the public in attendance.
- 3.6 A reasonable number of copies will also be available for public inspection as soon as practicable after they are supplied to the Members of Council.
- 3.7 Members of the public may obtain a copy of the agenda and any particular reports for a fee to cover the costs of photocopying, in accordance with a Council's schedule of fees and charges.

¹ 'clear days' means that the time between the giving of the notice and the day of the meeting, but excluding both the day on which the notice was given and the day of the meeting, eg notice is given on a Thursday for a following Monday meeting, the clear days are Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

- 3.8 Agenda papers provided to members of Council, or members of a Committee, may include an indication from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) that the Council or Committee may determine to consider an item in confidence, with the public to be excluded from the meeting during discussions of that item. Where such an indication is made, the CEO must specify the basis under which the confidentiality order could be made in accordance with section 90(3) of the Local Government Act 1999.

4 PUBLIC ACCESS TO MEETINGS

- 4.1 The principle of open and accountable government is strongly supported.
- 4.2 Council and Council Committee meetings are open to the public and attendance is encouraged, noting there may be circumstances where the Council (or the Council committee) believes it is necessary in the broader community interest to exclude the public from the discussion (and, if necessary, decision) of a particular matter.
- 4.3 The public will only be excluded when considered proper and necessary i.e. the need for confidentiality outweighs the principle of open decision-making.
- 4.4 Council encourages public attendance at meetings of the Council and Committees through public notification of meetings by public notices displayed at the Council Office and publishing agendas and minutes on Council's website www.elliston.sa.gov.au.

5. INFORMATION AND BRIEFING SESSIONS

- 5.1 Council or the CEO are permitted to facilitate an 'information or briefing session' where more than one member of the Council or Council Committee is invited.
- 5.2 A matter must not be dealt with at an information or briefing session in such a way so as to obtain, or effectively obtain, a decision outside of a formally constituted meeting of Council or Committee.
- 5.3 An information or briefing session on a matter that will be included on a council agenda must be open to the public, However, Council or the CEO may order that the information or briefing session be closed to the public if the matter listed for discussion falls within the confidentiality provisions listed in section 90(3) of the Local Government Act 1999 (Act).
- 5.4 Whether or not an information or briefing session has been open to the public, the following information must be published as soon as practicable after the holding of the session³:
- the place, date and time of the session;
 - the matter discussed at the session; and
 - whether or not the session was open to the public.

² See sections 83(5) (Council) and 87(10) (Committee) of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

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6. PROCESS TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM A MEETING

- 6.1 The practice of the District Council of Elliston is to deal with the agenda items in the order listed in the agenda.
- 6.2 Before a meeting orders that the public be excluded to enable consideration of a particular matter in confidence, Council or a Council Committee must, in public, formally determine if this is necessary and appropriate, and then pass a resolution to exclude the public while dealing with that particular matter.
- 6.3 If this occurs then the public must leave the room.
- 6.4 This means that all members of the public (including staff), unless exempted by being named in the resolution as entitled to remain, are required to leave the room.
- 6.5 Once Council or a Council Committee has made the order, it is an offence for a person, who knowing that an order is in force, to enter or remain in the meeting room.
- 6.6 It is lawful for an employee of the Council or a member of the police to use reasonable force to remove the person from the room if he or she fails to leave on request.
- 6.7 Once discussion on that particular matter is concluded, the public are then permitted to re-enter the meeting. If there is a further matter that needs to be considered in confidence it is necessary to repeat the formal determination process and to resolve to exclude the public as above.
- 6.8 Council or the Council Committee can permit a particular person or persons to remain in the meeting by including reference to them within the resolution. An example would be allowing a ratepayer who is suffering personal hardship to remain in the meeting when their circumstances concerning the payment of rates is being discussed

7. MATTERS FROM WHICH THE PUBLIC CAN BE EXCLUDED

- 7.1 In accordance with the requirements of section 90(3) of the Act, Council, or a Council Committee, may order that the public be excluded to receive, discuss or consider any of the following information or matters in confidence:
 - (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;
- (m) information relating to a proposed amendment to a proposal to prepare or amend a designated instrument under Part 5 Division 2 of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 before the draft instrument or amendment is released for public consultation under that Act;
- (n) information relevant to the review of a determination of a Council under the Freedom of Information Act 1991.
- (o) information relating to a proposed award recipient before the presentation of the award.

7.2 The Act provides for a definition of “personal affairs”, being a person’s financial affairs, criminal records, marital or other personal relationships, personal qualities, attributes or health status, or that person’s employment records, employment performance or suitability for a particular position, or other personnel matters relating to the person, but does not include the personal affairs of a body corporate.

NOTE: This is an inclusive (not exhaustive) list of personal affairs matters and other matters may also constitute a person's personal affairs.

8. USE OF CONFIDENTIALITY PROVISIONS

- 8.1 With respect to matters on a Council agenda, where a person provides information to Council and requests that it be kept confidential, Council is not able to even consider this request unless the matter is one that falls within section 90(3). If this is the case, Council will then be in a position to consider the request on its merits.
- 8.2 In considering whether an order should be made under section 90(2), it is irrelevant that discussion of a matter in public may⁴:
- 8.2.1 cause embarrassment to the Council or Committee concerned, or to members or employees of the Council; or
 - 8.2.2 cause a loss of confidence in the Council or Committee;
 - 8.2.3 involve discussion of a matter that is controversial within the Council area; or
 - 8.2.4 make the Council susceptible to adverse criticism.
- 8.3 If a decision to exclude the public is taken, the Council or the Council committee is required to make a note in the minutes of the making of the order and specify:
- the grounds on which it was made;
 - the basis on which the information or matter falls within the ambit of each confidentiality ground; and
 - (if relevant,) why receipt, consideration or discussion of the information or matter in public would be contrary to the public interest..
- 8.4 Once discussion of the matter is concluded, the meeting must then consider if it is necessary to make an order identifying the document(s) (or parts of the document(s)) associated with that item (including minutes) that are to remain confidential.
- 8.5 If the meeting determines that it is necessary to keep a document(s) (or parts of document(s)) confidential, then a resolution for an order to this effect is required in accordance with section 91(7) of the Act.
- 8.6 Council or the Council Committee can only resolve to keep minutes and/or documents confidential under section 91(7) if they were considered in confidence at a Council or Committee Meeting pursuant to sections 90(2) and 90(3).
- 8.7 Council will not consider a number of agenda items "in confidence" together i.e. en bloc. It will determine each item separately and consider the exemptions relevant to each item.
- 8.8 Once discussion of the matter is concluded and the public have returned, the decision in relation to the matter will be communicated unless the Council

⁴ Section 90(4), *Local Government Act 1999*

has resolved to order that the resolution remain confidential. Details relating to any order to keep information or a document confidential in accordance with section 91(7) will also be made known.

8.9 In accordance with section 91(8) Council or the Council Committee must not make an order to prevent:

- The disclosure of the remuneration or conditions of service of an employee of the Council after the remuneration or conditions have been set or determined; or
- The disclosure of the identity of a successful tenderer for the supply of goods or the provision of services (including the carrying out of works), or of any reasons adopted by Council as to why a successful tenderer has been selected; or
- The disclosure of the amount or amounts payable by the Council under a contract for the supply of goods or the provision of services (including the carrying out of works) to, or for the benefit of the Council after the contract has been entered into by all parties to the contract; or
- the disclosure of the identity of land that has been acquired or disposed of by the Council, or of any reasons adopted by the Council as to why land has been acquired or disposed of by the Council.

8.10 Where keeping a document confidential is considered necessary, a resolution to this effect is required which shall include:

- the grounds for confidentiality; and
- the duration of the order or the circumstances in which the order will cease to apply, or a period after which the order must be reviewed – if the order has a duration of more than twelve (12) months, the order must be reviewed at least once in every year; and
- (if applicable) whether the power to revoke the order will be delegated to an employee of the Council.⁵

8.11 In all cases the objective is that the information be made publicly available at the earliest possible opportunity and that the community is informed of any Council order and the associated implications

9. REVIEW OF CONFIDENTIALITY ORDERS

9.1 A confidentiality order made under section 91(7) of the Act must specify the duration of the order or the circumstances in which the order will cease to apply, or a period after which the order must be reviewed. In any event, any order that operates for a period exceeding 12 months must be reviewed at least once in every year.

9.2 An order will lapse if the time or event specified has been reached or carried out. There is no need for the Council to resolve for the confidential order to be lifted. Once the order has lapsed, the minutes and/or documents automatically become public. At this point in time, the Council will make this information publicly available by publishing it on the Council's website.

9.3 Orders that exceed twelve (12) months must be reviewed annually and the Council must assess whether the grounds for non-disclosure are still relevant and, if so, provide the relevant grounds and reasons for the minutes

⁵ section 91(9), *Local Government Act 1999*

and/or documents remaining confidential. The conduct of the annual review can be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer and sub-delegated to an employee of the Council if appropriate. If there are any items that require a fresh confidentiality order because the original order is about to expire, then the reviewer will prepare a report to Council making recommendations with respect to each item to be retained in confidence. Each item must then be addressed separately and assessed against section 90(3) and section 91(7) of the Act. While a Council may delegate the power to undertake an annual review, the Council cannot delegate the power to apply sections 90(3) and 91(7) of the Act.

- 9.4 A Council may resolve to exclude the public from a meeting to discuss and undertake consideration of the recommendations arising from the annual review in confidence, subject to the application of the relevant ground under section 90(3) of the Act. Section 90(3) of the Act must be applied separately to each item and not en bloc.
- 9.5 Council or Council Committee may delegate to an employee of the Council the power to revoke an order made in accordance with section 91(7) of the Act. Such delegation may be subject to conditions.

10. ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING TO THE COMMUNITY

- 10.1 Consistent with the principle of accountability to the community, a report on the use of sections 90(2) and 91(7) by the Council and Council Committees must be included in the annual report of a Council as required by Schedule 4 of the Act. This supports commitment to the principle of accountability to the community. The report should include the following information, separately identified for both Council and Council Committees:
- Total number of orders made under sections 90(2) and 90(3) and 91(7) in the relevant financial year;
 - The date and subject of each order made under sections 90(2) and 90(3) and 91(7) in the relevant financial year;
 - In relation to each ground specified in section 90(3), the number of times in the relevant financial year that an order was made under section 90(2) and 90(3) for each ground;
 - the number of orders made under section 91(7) that expired, ceased to apply or were revoked during the relevant financial year and the date and subject of each such order; and
 - the number of orders made under section 91(7) since 15 November 2010 that remained operative at the end of the end of the relevant financial year.

11. PUBLIC ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS AND MINUTES

- 11.1 The Act requires Councils to make available a large number of documents. Many of these are set out in Schedule 5 with other requirements contained in other sections of the Act.
- 11.2 Schedule 5 documents must be published on a website determined by the CEO. Councils must also, upon request provide a person with a printed copy of any document referred to in Schedule 5. Provision of printed copies of a document may require payment of a fee (if any) set by Council (see Council's fees and charges schedule for any relevant fees).

- 11.3 Requests to access Council and Council Committee documents that are not otherwise publicly available, can be made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*. Inquiries in relation to the process for seeking access to documents held by Council should be directed to Council's accredited Freedom of Information Officer.
- 11.4 Minutes of a meeting of Council or a Council Committee will be publicly available, on Council's website within five (5) days after the meeting and printed copies of minutes can be provided to a person on request on payment of a fee (if any) set by Council (see Council's fee and charges schedule for any relevant fee).

12. AVAILABILITY OF THE CODE

- 12.1 A copy of this Code of Practice will be made available on the internet at www.elliston.sa.gov.au. District Council of Elliston will also, on request, provide a person with a copy of the Code of Practice on payment of a fee (if any) fixed by the Council⁶ (see Council's fees and charges schedule for any relevant fee:).

13. GRIEVANCE

- 13.1 Council has established procedures for the review of decisions under section 270 of the Act for: ‘
- Council, and its committees;
 - employees of the Council; and
 - other persons acting on behalf of the Council.
- 13.2 Should a person be aggrieved about public access to either a meeting or a document they can lodge an application for review of that decision under the procedures established by Council.
- 13.3 The Internal Review of Council Decisions Policy and Procedure is available on Council's website: www.elliston.sa.gov.au

14. REVIEW OF THE CODE

- 14.1 Council will review the Code of Practice within 12 months after the conclusion of each periodic election in line with any legislative changes or by resolution of Council.

⁶ Section 132(1) and Schedule 5

15. COUNCIL CONTACT PERSON

For further information contact:

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Version Control

Version no.	Date adopted by	Synergy Record	Amendments Made	Prepared by:
1	Feb 2019		New Document	
2	April 2020		Amended to comply with LGA model template and added electronic attendance at Council meetings	
3	November 2021		Amended to comply with LGA model template for information or briefing sessions – Local Government Act Reform Bill September 2021	
4.	21 February 2023	NGR234358 9.63.1/2	Amended to comply with legislation to review this Code within twelve (12) months after the conclusion of each periodic election. Reference to electronic attendance at meetings removed. Complies with LGA model template incorporating LG Reform measures	Executive Assistant