6.02.9  Elected Officials Communication protocols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directorate</th>
<th>Business and Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Officer</td>
<td>Executive Manager</td>
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Introduction

The purpose of this procedure is to provide clarification about the process and protocols related to demonstrating effective communication principles and practices between and from Elected Officials to Council members, Council staff, its agents and the Bega Valley Shire community.

This procedure also relates to how the General Manager, Group and Executive Managers liaise with Elected Officials and Council staff. It is the responsibility of these officers to share information in a timely manner, and to ensure the information provided is accurate. All requests for information by an Elected Official shall be forwarded in the first instance to the General Manager who will facilitate a prompt and professional response. Such requests for information and the subsequent responses will be copied to all Councillors ensuring all elected officials may be equally informed.

The General Manager and his or her delegated officers will use a variety of methods to share information with Elected Officials, including:

- Having an ‘open door’ philosophy
- Regular Councillor workshops
- Access to emails and telephone calls
- Council’s public website
- Formal systems of accessing information

Personnel from the General Manager’s office will provide Council specific administrative support to Elected Officials such as scheduling of public meetings, travel bookings for Council purposes, receipt of phone messages and some word processing. As personnel may have work commitments with high priority, sensitivity to workload is appreciated. In the event requested information requires significant time, the Elected Official must direct his or her request to the General Manager.

Customer Request Management (CRM) System

To facilitate the management and processing of notifications received from its Elected Officials, Council will make use of its Customer Request Management (CRM) System. A task will be created in the CRM System by any employee who received correspondence from an Elected Official in relation to matters of public interest, such as compliments, complaints, or general notifications. The task will be labelled ‘Councillor Notification’.

Notifications can be submitted by Councillors in the following ways:

- over the phone,
- in person, or
- via email (in writing)

Once received, the notification will be recorded as a task within the CRM system and will be forwarded to the relevant Council Officer with the appropriate delegated authority to respond to such notifications.

All Councillors will be provided with a copy of the response which will be written in Plain English. Responses will be provided in a reasonable and timely manner and will be stored in Council’s records management system – Content Manager.

The purpose of the CRM is to ensure all notifications received by Councillors are responded to in a professional manner, with the correct information, and without duplication or contradiction.
Legislative Framework and Principles

The protocol for effective communication is based on those behaviours outlined in the Model of Code of Conduct which specifies the appropriate behaviour for Elected Officials and employees. This communication protocol is also being guided by a number of Council’s policies and procedures. In particular, to successfully implement and adhere to this protocol, elected Officials and employees must be familiar with the following documents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Behaviour of Councillors and Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Customer Service</td>
<td>• Code of Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Code of Meeting Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• GIPA Act Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Customer Service Commitment and Standards of Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Delegations Register Part 1</td>
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Principles

The principles underpinning this procedure are that:

- Elected Officials have the responsibility to represent the interests of residents and ratepayers by effectively facilitating the communication between the community and Council.
- Elected Officials have the responsibility of providing community leadership and guidance on all matters before them.
- Council has an objective to provide a high level of open, transparent, responsive and accountable governance.
- Council aims to be responsive to the needs, interests and aspirations of individuals and groups within its Community.
- Council’s Elected Officials, employees and its agents will act in a fair, honest and professional manner in exercising their role and responsibilities under this and other relevant policies and procedures.

Related procedures

Code of Conduct

Council is a body politic. The Elected Officials are the governing body of the Council and have the responsibility of directing and controlling the affairs of Council in accordance with the Local Government Act (1993) (the Act). Council is responsible for policy determinations – including those relating to workforce policy.

Under the Council adopted Office of Local Government’s (OLG) Model Code of Conduct, Elected Officials have a number of obligations, which include how they communicate and interact with each other, members of our Community, and with Council employees.

Part 8 of the Model Code deals specifically with relationships between Elected Officials and staff and provides an overview of how Officials must interact with Council employees. Under part 8, an Elected Officials must not:

a. Direct Council staff other than by giving appropriate direction to the General Manager in the performance of Council’s function by way of Council or Committee resolution;
b. In any public or private forum, direct or influence or attempt to direct or influence, any other member of the staff of Council or a delegate of the Council in the exercise of the functions of the member or delegation (Schedule 6A of the Act);

c. Contact a member of the staff of the Council on Council-related business unless in accordance with the policy and procedures governing the interaction of Councillors and staff that have been authorised by the Council and the General Manager;

d. Contact or issue instructions to any of Council’s contractors or tenderers, including Council’s legal advisors. This does not apply to Council’s external auditors or the Chair of Council’s Audit Committee who may be provided with any information an individual Councillor deems reasonably necessary to enable the external auditor or Audit Committee to effectively perform their functions.

Furthermore, Part 8.5 of the Model Code of Conduct requires that Elected Officials must not engage in any of the following interactions, which are considered inappropriate:

a. Approach staff and staff organisations to discuss individual or operational staff matters other than broader workforce policy issues;

b. Enter discussions with Council staff regarding any individual or operational matters other than broader workforce policy issues;

c. Discuss with Council staff in a staff only designated area any development application that an individual Councillor has lodged with Council.

d. Be overbearing or threatening to Council staff

e. Make personal attacks on Council staff in a public forum;

f. Direct or pressure Council staff in the performance of their work, or recommendations they make. Any staff performance issues should be discussed in private with the General Manager;

g. Attend on-site inspection meetings with lawyers and/or consultants engaged by Council associated with current or proposed legal proceedings unless permitted to do so by the General Manager.

The Model Code of Conduct also deals specifically with how Elected Officials are required to behave regarding access to information, their obligations during meetings, the use and security of confidential information, and how Elected Officials are expected to manage the use of personal information.

Code of Meeting Practice

Council’s Code of Meeting Practice sets out the primary means by which Council makes its decisions. Included in the ‘Code’ are the expected and acceptable protocols to be followed by Elected Officials during Council meetings, in both open and closed sessions. In particular, the Code of Meeting Practice outlines protocol for:

- Chairing of meetings
- Adjournment of meetings
- Making motions during meetings
- Mayoral minutes/Announcements
- Conduct of debate
- Points of Order
- Voting
- Dealing with disorder
- Asking of questions to Councillors and Employees
The Code of Meeting Practice is designed to facilitate effective and appropriate communication, which in turn promotes sound decision making and enhances Council’s public image. The effectiveness of communication of Elected Officials is enhanced through the implementation of the Code of Meeting Practice.

GIPA Act Guidelines

The Government Information Public Access (GIPA) Act 2009 specifies how Council facilitates and coordinates the public’s access to government records. The GIPA Act Guidelines detail Council’s procedures supporting access to information. The guidelines help ensure Council complies with the requirements of the following pieces of legislation:

- Government Information Public Access (GIPA)
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection (PPIP)
- Health Records and Information Privacy (HRIP)
- Copyright

The principles of the GIPA Act are for Council to be open, accountable and transparent, to allow appropriate access to information and to be proactive in releasing information to the public at no cost. These principles can be delivered through effective communication between Elected Officials, Council staff, and members of the community.

To ensure effective communication occurs, Elected Officials have the responsibility of being familiar with the requirements of the GIPA Act, in particular what constitutes a ‘government record’. A ‘record’ is any paper or other material on which there is writing. This includes not only paper but other material on which there are marks, symbols or perforations which have some kind of meaning to a person who is qualified to interpret them. Government records typically include:

- Hard copy documents
- Emails
- Memorandums
- Information recorded on disc, tape or any material producing sound
- Images
- Notes written on scrap paper, post-it notes or in diaries

Elected Officials will be provided with information in order for them to deliver their civic functions. This information will be provided through the General Manager’s office by relevant Council Officers. When accessing information in the course of their duties, Elected Officials must be aware of their need to comply with Council’s
policies and procedures for Record Management and Access to Information, as well as the protocols outlined in this document.

**Customer Service Commitment and Standards of Service**

Council’s Customer Service Commitment and Standards of Service procedure is designed to ensure all customers are treated fairly and reasonably. This includes both internal and external customers such as Elected Officials, contractors, agencies and other government departments. Procedure 5.13.2 requires Council’s employees to respond to customer enquiries in an efficient manner by providing guidance on how to deal with customers on a day-to-day basis.

The Customer Service Commitment and Standards of Service will be implemented by Council employees when dealing with Elected Officials and other internal stakeholders.

**Standards of Service**

How Elected Officials and employees communicate on a daily basis will be reflected in the standards of service specified in Council’s *Customer Service Commitment and Standards of Service* procedure. This procedure focuses particularly on the following methods of communication:

- Telephone calls
- Email correspondence
- Face-to-face interaction

**Telephone Calls**

If calling about a formal Council matter, in order to contact the General Manager, Director or Executive Manager, Elected Officials can call the Executive Assistants of the General Manager and Mayor’s Office, or customer service on (02) 6499 2222. All non-emergency related phone calls will be returned within 24 hours of receipt.

When making an enquiry over the phone, Councillors must adhere to the requirements of behaviours stipulated in the Model Code of Conduct.

During normal Council business hours, Elected Officials are also able to contact Customer Service on (02) 6499 2222, who will register your call using Council’s Customer Request Management (CRM) system. Elected Officials should note **Council’s business hours are 9am until 4.30pm, Monday-Friday** excluding public holidays. Council also provides out of hours contact for emergency situations. This service is coordinated through a Duty Officer system. In the event of an emergency, Elected Officials can contact Council by calling 6499 2222.

Additionally, where an emergency matter requires an immediate response (particularly if it occurs on a weekend/public holiday), Elected Officials are able to contact the General Manager via direct telephone who will as required, contact the relevant Director/Executive Manager for immediate action.

If on the other hand, Elected Officials are calling on a personal matter, they should contact the Customer Service Team who will record their request and enter it into Council’s Customer Request Management (CRM) system for processing by the most appropriate Council officer. The contact details for the Customer Service Team are provided below:

**Emails**

Under the Model Code of Conduct, Elected Officials must not directly email Council staff except for the General Manager or Director/Executive Manager. All emails from Elected Officials should be directed to the General Manager’s Office in the first instance. Alternatively, departmental matters can be emailed to respective Group or Executive Managers, who will then forward on to respective delegates as required.
Any email sent to the General Manager, Director/Executive Manager should be sent during operating hours if practicable. There should be no expectation of an immediate reply to an email if it is sent outside of Council’s usual business hours. If an urgent matter arises outside of Council’s normal operating hours, Elected Officials should contact by telephone the General Manager who will assist them, rather than sending an email.

For generic, first point of contact enquiries the most appropriate email address for Elected Officials to send correspondence is ExecAssist@begavalley.nsw.gov.au.

If the issue being raised deals with a particular matter, Elected Officials may send correspondence directly to the General Manager using his or her individual email address. Elected Officials are also able to email Council using its generic email address. Correspondence sent to the generic address will be registered upon receipt by Records staff and forwarded to the appropriate senior officer.

Specific matters relating to the performance of staff or Council should be emailed directly to the General Manager. If the issue pertains to the performance of the General Manager, Elected Officials must email any information directly to the Mayor.

In order of suitability, Elected Officials are able to email the following addresses to contact Council.

1. General Manager’s Office
2. The General Manager
3. Directors or Executive Managers
4. Council’s general email address
Table 1.2 Summary of Council Officer Email addresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Email address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Manager’s Office</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ExecAssist@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">ExecAssist@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager – Transport and Utilities Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager – Strategic Business Services</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager – Planning and Environment Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager – Community Relations and Leisure</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Manager – Organisational Development and Governance and Public Officer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au">council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Council staff will respond to all emails within **three working days**. This timeframe is the same for any correspondence received from Councillors.

When writing emails to staff namely the General Manager, Directors/Executive Managers, Elected Officials are encouraged to use appropriate email etiquette. The information provided in table 1.3 provides suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of written communication via emails and are recommendations only.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject line</td>
<td>This information should be included to summarise the message. This will help the reader identify the topic of the email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid making assumptions</td>
<td>Include enough contextual information at the beginning of the email for the recipient to know what the email is about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be concise</td>
<td>Keep messages brief and to the point without having the make the recipient guess the meaning and purpose of your message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply within 24 hours</td>
<td>If practicable, reply within 24 hours of receiving the message. Council’s general expectation is that emails will be replied to within three working days of receipt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow time for a reply</td>
<td>Email messages are not required to be answered immediately. Be careful not to expect an instant reply – not everyone is online 24 hours a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the blind copy function</td>
<td>When sending a bulk email, use the ‘BCC’ function. This helps manage the privacy of the recipient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t SHOUT at people or threaten them</td>
<td>Do not use capital letter (UPPERCASE), or oversized fonts. The reader will likely feel they are being shouted at or even threatened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid angry outbursts</td>
<td>Try to avoid sending or replying to emails if you are emotional at the time. As a guide, ask yourself ‘would I say this to a person’s face?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct punctuate and grammar</td>
<td>Use punctuation in a normal manner. One exclamation point is just as effective as five!!!!! Use correct grammar and spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Check your spelling. If you don’t know how to spell something, look it up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid using ‘Reply All’ unless necessary</td>
<td>Before clicking on the reply all button, double check if all recipients need to be replied to. If not, just send your reply to relevant parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms and abbreviations</td>
<td>Do not overdo acronyms or abbreviations. Remember the reader may not know everything you are talking about. Using acronyms assumes the reader already knows what your email is about. In the first instance of using an acronym, expand its meaning followed by the acronym in brackets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Face-to-face interactions

Whilst performing their civic duties an Elected Official may need to interact with Council’s staff on a day-to-day level. This interaction may be with any of the following Council personnel:

- The General Manager
- Directors/Executive Managers
- Line Managers
- Supervisors
- Coordinators
- Team Leaders
- Service level staff
- Volunteers

In any circumstance where Elected Officials and employees interact, both parties must adhere to the requirements of behaviour specified in Council’s Code of Conduct. As a ratepayer, Elected Officials are entitled interact with Council Officers in a professional and accountable manner.

As stipulated in procedure 6.13.2, interactions between Elected Officials and Council staff will occur during operating hours – specifically between the hours 9am until 4.30pm, Monday-Friday (excluding public holidays). If the matter cannot be resolved in person, Elected Officials should put their requests in writing and address them to:

The General Manager
Bega Valley Shire Council
PO Box 492
Bega NSW 2550

Delegations Register – part 1

Council’s Delegation Register – part 1, sets out the delegated decision making authority of the Mayor, Standing Committees, Section 355 Committees, and the General Manager. These delegations, in conjunction with the Code of Conduct; the Code of Meeting Practice; and the GIPA Act Guidelines must be adhered to by Elected Officials whilst communicating with other Councillors, Council Officers, and members of the public.