

	M265 MEMBERS COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE	Version No:	4
		Issued:	15 October 2019
		Next Review:	October 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

The Code of Conduct for Council Members was gazetted on 29th August 2013 and is applicable to the Members of all South Australian Councils.

The Code of Conduct applies to all Council Members across the Local Government sector and may be the subject of a Council investigation or an Ombudsman investigation, depending on the nature of the issue.

The Code of Conduct also contains sanctions which may be imposed by Council on a Council Member where a breach of the Code is found to be sustained.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The procedure contained in this Policy applies when a complaint is received against a Member of the City of Mount Gambier under the Code of Conduct for Council Members.

3 BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Breaches of the Code of Conduct may relate to behaviour (Part 2 of the Code) or misconduct (Part 3 of the Code). Criminal or corruption matters subject to separate legislation are referred to in the appendix of the Code of Conduct for Council Members and this policy covers the referral of these types of complaints to other agencies.

4. ALLEGED BREACH

4.1 Where an alleged breach occurs the complainant should report the allegation, in writing, to the Council, addressed to the CEO. The allegation should:

- be specific
- provide as much supporting evidence as possible to assist an investigation
- provide the name of the Council Member who has allegedly breached the Code.

Complainants can, at any time, take the alternative option of lodging the complaint with the Office of Public Integrity, which will direct the complaint in accordance with the ICAC Act. Act.

4.2 The CEO will be responsible for receiving and managing the referral of a complaint to the Principal Member and will advise the Principal Member (or if it relates to the Principal Member, his/her deputy) of receipt of a complaint.

The Principal Member (or deputy) will determine whether the complaint relates to:

- behavior which falls under Part 2 of the Code
- misconduct which triggers action under Part 3 of the Code or
- criminal or corrupt behaviour

Complaints relating to misconduct or criminal behaviour must be referred to the appropriate authorities immediately. (See below at clauses 6 and 7)

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Council maintains jurisdiction where the complaint deals with conduct that falls into Part 2 of the Code. Part 2 deals with conduct that reflects reasonable community expectations of how Council Members should conduct themselves. Robust debate within Council which is conducted in a respectful manner is not a breach of this Part.

Having regard to the seriousness of the allegation and information provided, the Principal Member may:

- a) seek to resolve the matter internally, which may include conciliation or mediation
- b) refer the complaint to the Local Government Governance Panel
- c) dismiss the allegation.

4.3 Within three days of receipt of an allegation, the Council Member who is the subject of the complaint will be advised by the Principal Member of the complaint and its substance. The Council Member will also be advised of the manner in which the Principal Member intends to deal with the complaint.

5.1 ALLEGED BREACH OF PART 2-INTERNAL RESPONSE

5.1.1 Only matters which are determined to be of a minor nature will be dealt with internally and only with the agreement of the parties.

The Principal Member may hold meetings with the complainant and the Council Member and may seek mediation and conciliation between the parties in an attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties.

This may be appropriate, for example, where the complainant is also a Council Member. Member.

5.1.2 The Principal Member must ensure that the principles of procedural fairness and appropriate record keeping in Council's Corporate Record System are observed.

5.1.3 Where the matter is resolved by the Principal Member to the satisfaction of all the parties, the matter will be closed and no further action will be taken. The Principal Member will send written confirmation to all the parties confirming that the matter has been resolved.

5.1.4 Where the matter cannot be resolved, the Principal Member will refer the original complaint to the Local Government Governance Panel or such other independent investigator as the Chief Executive Officer and Presiding Member consider appropriate to the content and circumstances of the complaint.

Neither the Principal Member nor the CEO will investigate a complaint.

5.2 PART 2 – REFERRAL TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT GOVERNANCE PANEL

Where there has been an allegation that a Council Member has breached Part 2 of the Code, other than a matter of minor nature resolved in accordance with clause 5.1, the complaint may be referred to the independent Local Government Governance Panel (or alternative independent investigator) by the Principal Member under this procedure, without further reference to Council.

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Complaints referred under this clause 5.2 will specify the ground/s of the complaint, set out the circumstances of the complaint and be accompanied by any other material that is available to support the complaint.

The procedure to be followed by an independent investigator will be in accordance with the Governance Panel's procedures available on the Governance Panel webpage on the LGA's website under *Rules of Engagement*.

Any matter referred to an independent investigator may be dismissed if it is frivolous, vexatious, misconceived or lacking in substance.

A complaint that is forwarded to an independent investigator will be assessed in the first instance. The applicable facts will be considered from the material provided and may form a provisional recommendation that further investigation is unnecessary, as it would be unlikely to result in a breach finding. In these circumstances, Council will consider the recommendation and determine whether to proceed to a full investigation.

Where a complaint progresses to an investigation, a report will be prepared and provided to the Principal Member. The report may recommend to the Council appropriate action in relation to the matter, including the imposition of any of the sanctions available to a Council under clause 2.25 of the Code of Conduct (see below).

5.2.1 A breach of Part 2 of the Code must be the subject of a report to a public meeting of the Council (clause 2.24 of the Code). The report may be tabled at the Council meeting. If the report is not tabled, a Council report of the breach will be made in writing and will include any recommendations made. The outcome of the item will be minuted.

The Council may, by resolution, take any of the following actions:

- Take no action;
- Pass a censure motion in respect of the Council Member;
- Request a public apology, whether written or verbal;
- Request the Council Member to attend training on the specific topic found to have been breached;
- Resolve to remove or suspend the Council Member from a position within the Council (not including the Member's elected position on Council)
- Request the member to repay monies to the Council.

5.2.2 Where a report finds no breach of the Code, the report will not be made public, except at the request of the Council Member who was the subject of the complaint. If such a request is made, a copy of the report will be tabled at the next practicable Council meeting. If no such request is received, no further action will be taken, although a summary report may be made to the Council regarding other observations or recommendations made by the Panel that are of broader application.

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5.2.3 The complainant will be notified by letter of the outcome of the investigation. Where the full investigation report is to be tabled at a Council meeting, the complainant will be entitled to a copy of the report at, or following, the Council meeting which receives the report. If the full report is not presented at a Council meeting, the complainant will not be provided with a copy of the report.

5.3 APPEALS

Council will not enter into any appeal process in relation to Part 2 of the Code.

6 PART 3-MANDATORY CODE (MISCONDUCT)

6.1 Any person may report an alleged breach of Part 3 of the Code to the Council, the Ombudsman or the Office for Public Integrity. Alleged breaches of this Part made to Council or to the Office for Public Integrity may be referred to the Ombudsman for investigation.

6.2 Under the Code of Conduct, a Council Member who is of the opinion that a breach of Part 3 of the Code has occurred, or is currently occurring, must report the breach to the Principal Member of the Council or Chief Executive Officer, the Ombudsman or the Office for Public Integrity.

6.3 A failure to report an alleged or suspected breach of Part 3 of the Code is in itself a breach under Part 2 of the Code.

6.4 A failure of a Council Member to co-operate with the Council's process for handling alleged breaches of Part 2 of the Code may be referred for investigation under Part 3.

6.5 A failure of a Council Member to comply with a finding of an investigation under Part 2 of the Code, adopted by the Council, may be referred for investigation under Part 3.

6.6 Repeated or sustained breaches of Part 2 of the Code by the same Council Member may be referred, by resolution of the Council, to the relevant authority as a breach of Part 3.

6.7 A report from the Ombudsman that finds a Council Member has breached Part 3 of the Code of Conduct must be the subject of a report to a public meeting of the Council.

The Council must pass a resolution to give effect to any recommendations received from the Ombudsman, within two ordinary meetings of the Council following the receipt of these recommendations.

7 CRIMINAL MATTERS – APPENDIX TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT

7.1 The matters within the Appendix to the Code of Conduct are matters for which a criminal penalty attaches. These matters must be reported to the Office of Public Integrity.

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In addition, allegations of a breach of any of the offence provisions in the *Local Government Act* must also be reported to the Office of Public Integrity. (See Council's *Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy* for further information on reporting requirements or the *Directions and Guidelines* issued by the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption).

- 7.2** In compliance with the Independent Commissioner against Corruption Act 2012, referral of such complaints to the Office of Public Integrity will remain confidential.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

This procedure will be available for inspection at the Council offices listed below during ordinary business hours and available to be downloaded, free of charge, from Council's internet site: www.mountgambier.sa.gov.au.

Principal Office, Civic Centre, 10 Watson Terrace, Mount Gambier SA 5290

Copies will be provided to interested parties upon request.

Email city@mountgambier.sa.gov.au

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File Reference:	AF18/51
Applicable Legislation:	Local Government Act 1999 Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2012
Strategic Reference:	
Related Policies:	C305 Council & Committee - Caretaker Policy F225 Fraud & Corruption Prevention Policy P900 Public Interest Disclosure Policy W150 Whistleblower's Protection Policy (revoked)
Related Procedures:	
Related Documents:	Code of Conduct for Council Members, as published in the SA Government Gazette 29 August 2013 <i>ICAC Directions and Guidelines</i>

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Responsibility:	MANAGER EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION
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