

Policy Section:	1. Corporate Governance
Policy Name:	INFORMAL GATHERINGS
Classification:	Public – Council Policy
Adopted:	9 July 2019
Frequency of Review:	Within 12 months after each general election of Council
Last Review:	May 2019
Next Review Due:	May 2023
Responsible Officer(s):	Chief Executive Officer
Policy and Code of Practice Manual File Ref:	CC10/2601
Council File Reference:	CR19/24487
Legislation Authority:	Local Government Act 1999 Local Government (General) Regulations 2013
Related Policies and Codes:	Code of Practice for Council Meeting Procedures Code of Practice for Access to Council and Committee Meetings and Council Documents Code of Practice for Committee Meeting Procedures Code of Practice for Working Groups
Related Procedures:	Informal Gatherings Procedures

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Open and transparent Council meetings underpin representative democracy and ensure public confidence in Council's decision-making processes. Informal gatherings, where appropriate, provide a valuable opportunity to enhance the decision-making processes by providing opportunities for Council Members to become better informed on issues and seek further clarification.
- 1.2 The objective of this Policy is to ensure Council Members have sufficient opportunity to conduct planning sessions, to receive informal briefings, workshops and educational sessions, and convene other informal gatherings without prejudicing the requirements for openness and transparency as required by the *Local Government Act 1999*.
- 1.3 Section 90(8) of the Local Government Act allows informal gatherings to be held provided that the discussion does not lead to a decision, or effectively obtain a decision, on a matter that would ordinarily be dealt with at a Council meeting. This Policy reflects the intention of the legislation for informal

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gatherings to be used for briefing, planning and educational sessions and is aimed at avoiding any perception that informal gatherings will be used to build consensus for Council agenda items.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 Informal gatherings, briefing sessions, workshops, planning sessions and other discussions captured under this Policy are those gatherings that are arranged by the Council, either by the Chief Executive Officer or by the Elected Council. Section 90(8) of the *Local Government Act* provides a list of non-exclusive examples of informal gatherings, which are:
- a) Planning sessions associated with the development of policies or strategies
 - b) Briefing or training sessions
 - c) Workshops
 - d) Social gatherings to encourage informal communication between members or between members and staff.
- 2.2 Informal gatherings and discussions of these kinds are not for the purpose of debating issues, building consensus positions or otherwise discharging Council's deliberative and decision-making functions.
- 2.3 Informal gatherings of Council Members, or Council Members, Council Staff and consultants are, by their nature, a non-compulsory meeting of the Council. All Council Members are encouraged to attend these sessions, particularly those designed to provide history, context or additional information to assist Council Members to carry out their functions.
- 2.4 Both the Chief Executive Officer and the Elected Council are responsible for ensuring informal gatherings and discussions are conducted in accordance with the Local Government Act.
- 2.5 Informal Gatherings will be chaired by the Mayor or their delegate.
- 2.6 Public participation does not form part of this Policy. Where community feedback is sought the Public Consultation Policy will be enacted. Council Code of Practice for Council and Committee Meetings provides for public address by way of either deputation or public open forum at a formal Council/Committee meeting.

3. STATEMENT

Informal gatherings will not be used for the purpose of conducting the general business of the Council or to stifle debate on issues that may subsequently be dealt with by the Council at a formal meeting. However informal gatherings may be used to discuss issues that involve strategy or policy or other matters of Council administration and to brief Council Members on issues relating to their decision-making function.

4. WORKSHOPS & BRIEFING SESSIONS

- 4.1 Workshops and briefing sessions that are convened to consider matters that will form part of the Council's meeting agenda will be advertised and open to the public.

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- 4.2 A schedule of planned briefing sessions/workshops and the matters to be discussed will be published on the Council's website in the Council Diary and will include:
- date
 - time
 - place
 - the matter to be discussed
 - if the session is open or closed
- 4.3 On a case-by-case, a designated informal gathering or discussion may be declared to be a 'confidential informal 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).

An informal gathering or discussion of the Council or a Council committee which is not a designated gathering or discussion will not be open to the public, unless otherwise determined.

5. TRAINING SESSIONS & SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- 5.1 Training sessions involving Council Staff and Council Members will not be open to the public. These sessions are purely for professional development.
- 5.2 Social gatherings of Council Staff and/or Council Members to encourage informal communication will not be open to the public. These sessions are important for team building and morale.

6. OTHER INFORMAL GATHERINGS

For all other informal gatherings, public access will be determined by the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer on a case by case basis. The Council is aware of the need to balance openness and transparency with opportunities for private discussions between Council Members and Council Members and Council Staff.

7. AGENDAS AND MINUTE TAKING

Informal gatherings will not involve a formal minute taking process. A report to Council will be provided including information from a briefing session/workshop if and when deemed appropriate by the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer.

8. REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The Policy will be reviewed after each general election of Council.

The Chief Executive Officer will report to Council on the outcome of the evaluation and if relevant make recommendations for amendments, alteration or substitution of a new Policy.

The Policy will not be altered or substituted so as to affect a process already commenced.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about this Policy can be obtained by:-

Telephone: 8522 9211
Email: council@gawler.sa.gov.au
Appointment: Town of Gawler Administration Centre, 43 High Street, Gawler East.
Letter: PO Box 130, Gawler SA 5118

10. AVAILABILITY OF POLICY

The Policy is available for inspection during ordinary business hours at the Council principal office, Town of Gawler Administration Centre 43 High Street, Gawler East or is available on the Council website at www.gawler.sa.gov.au.

A copy of this Policy will be provided to interested parties upon request, for a fee as contained in the Register of Fees and Charges.