



# Council Member Access to Information Policy

<b>Reference Number:</b>	1.1
<b>Type:</b>	Council Policy
<b>Category:</b>	Council Members
<b>Relevant Community Plan Outcome:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Our values, leadership and collaborative approach are bold and courageous and enables us to deliver value for our Community and create a leading liveable City</li><li>• People learn throughout their lives; they have skills and abilities to achieve great outcomes for themselves, their families and the opportunity to become leaders in their communities</li></ul>
<b>Responsible Officer(s):</b>	Manager Governance & Operational Support
<b>First Issued/Approved:</b>	June 2007
<b>Minutes Reference:</b>	CoS 4/07/2023, Item 4.23
<b>Last Reviewed:</b>	July 2022
<b>Next Review Due:</b>	July 2024
<b>Applicable Legislation:</b>	Local Government Act 1999; Local Government (Procedure at Meetings) Regulations 2013; Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935; Freedom of Information Act 1991 Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2012
<b>Related Policies:</b>	Council Member Code of Conduct Policy; Privacy Policy
<b>Related Procedures:</b>	Code of Practice for Meeting Procedures

## 1. Purpose

Council Members require access to certain information in order to perform their functions and duties, in particular to assist them in making informed decisions. The Local Government Act 1999 (the LG Act) provides the legislative basis for this access.

This policy seeks to facilitate appropriate access by Council Members to relevant documents and other information held by Council.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to the Council Members of the City of Charles Sturt.

### 3. **Policy Statement**

The objectives of this policy are:

- to promote the accessibility of information to Council Members;
- to balance the important considerations of access to information by Council Members, and the need to carefully manage sensitive, personal, private and confidential information, the public availability of which may cause detriment to the Council, the community or another party; and
- to facilitate informed decision making in an environment of mutual trust and respect for the respective functions, roles and responsibilities of Council Members and staff.

### 4. **Legislation**

The primary legislative provisions regarding Council Members' access to information are Section 61 of the LG Act and Regulation 18 of the Local Government (Procedure at Meetings) Regulations 2013. Essentially this entitles a Member of Council *"without charge, to access any relevant council document" "at any reasonable time, in conjunction with the performance or discharge of the functions or duties of the Member"*.

Section 59 of the LG Act sets out the role of a Council Member. Section 62(3) of the LG Act covers improper use of information. Section 251(1) of the Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 addresses the issue of abuse of public office.

### 5. **Policy Application**

In general, a Council Member will be provided access to all documents held by Council unless they are irrelevant to the Member's function or duties.

Council Members will not be granted access to documents regarding the personal affairs of Council staff, except for the Register of Interests that is required to be maintained under Section 116 of the LG Act and be made available for Council Members' inspection upon request (LG Act, Section 118).

### 6. **Policy Procedures**

A request for access to a Council document under Section 61 of the LG Act may be directed in the first instance to the Chief Executive Officer. The request may be made in person, by phone or in writing, eg by email. The request should identify the document/s being sought with enough detail for the document/s to be identified and retrieved and state the reason(s) for the request.

#### **6.1 Consideration of Request**

Unless there is a clear reason to the contrary, a Council Member will be provided access to the document/s if they are held by Council. Where access to a document is not provided, the reason is to be provided to the Council Member in writing.

## **6.2 *Provision of Access to Documents***

The form of access to the document/s will be negotiated with the Council Member to accommodate the particular needs of the Member and administrative efficiency.

Where the document is publicly available, eg posted on Council's website, the Member may be provided with a hard copy or sent a link to the relevant page on the website.

Where access is granted to a document that is not publicly available and there is no sensitivity to the document, a copy of the document will be provided to the Member in an agreed form and may be provided to other Members if relevant.

Where there is a degree of sensitivity or there are other reasons to restrict distribution of the document/s (eg if the documents contain legal advice, confidential information or internal corporate information) access may be limited to 'view only' access at a mutually convenient time at the Civic Centre, Woodville. Email advice confirming the 'view only' access arrangements will be sent to the Member. A Council Member may seek to have the decision to only grant 'view only' access reviewed by Council.

All documents covered by the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2012 are excluded in accordance with the provisions of that Act or at the direction of the Commissioner.

## **7. Requests for other information**

Where the information being sought is not in the form of existing Council document/s, and the request requires more than a simple response, it will be treated as a request for a report to Council. The timeframe for reporting will be driven, to an extent, by the time required to research the information and prepare the report in a way that responds effectively to the issues raised and the urgency of the matter.

## **8. Other Considerations**

This policy does not limit the rights of a Council Member to use the Questions on Notice (Reg 9) or the Notice of Motion (Reg 12) provisions of the Local Government (Procedures at Meetings) Regulations 2013 to seek answers to questions or to request that a report be prepared on certain issues.

Nor does this policy restrict a Council Member from exercising their rights as a citizen to use the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 1991 to seek access to certain documents held by Council.