



POLICY – INTERACTION BETWEEN COUNCILLORS AND STAFF

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INTRODUCTION

Good governance is dependent on a good relationship between elected members and the organisation, and an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both groups.

Councillors and staff should strive for a work-life balance between their work commitments and their personal, community and cultural responsibilities and obligations.

This policy provides the framework for appropriate interactions between Councillors and staff and should be read in conjunction with Council's Code of Conduct.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Councillors and Council employees, including casual employees engaged by Council.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure Councillors receive advice to assist them in the performance of their official functions in an orderly, courteous and regulated manner.
- Ensure Councillors have adequate access to information to exercise their official functions.
- Ensure Councillors have clarity on which staff they can communicate with and the process for contacting staff.
- Ensure staff understand their obligations in providing information to Councillors.
- Ensure transparent decision making and governance processes.

RELATED POLICIES

Council's Code of Conduct
Records Management Policy
Customer Service Policy

LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 1993
Local Government (General) Regulation 2005
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

DEFINITIONS

Councillor	Any person elected or appoint to civic office, including the Mayor.
Executive Officers	General Manager, Directors or Executive Managers.
Public Officer	Executive Manager Corporate Governance

PRINCIPLES

Part 7 of the Code of Conduct identifies the relationship obligations of Councillors and staff and determines inappropriate interactions.

Interactions that are not conducted in accordance with this policy may be considered inappropriate.

Staff and Councillors are encouraged to advise the General Manager where an interaction is considered inappropriate.

1. Appropriate Staff Contacts

The General Manager authorises the following staff interaction:

- Contact between Councillors and Executive Officers for matters specific to the Executive Officer's area of individual responsibility.
- Contact with Council's Customer Service Staff for standard service requests.
- Contact with other specific staff is appropriate as part of a Councillor's role on a Council Committee, at Council events or meetings, and similar situations.
- In some instances, the General Manager or Executive Officers will direct individual staff to contact Councillors to provide specific information or clarification relating to a specific matter.

Apart from these instances, all communication with Councillors is to be made via the General Manager or relevant Executive Officer.

2. Personal Interaction Between Councillors and Staff

Whilst this policy, and Council's Code of Conduct governs the interactions between Councillors and staff, it does not prevent Councillors and staff from communicating generally. From time to time, Councillors and staff may be present at social and community events. In such situations, both parties must refrain from discussing matters relating to Council business.

3. Method of Councillor Contact

3.1 Emails

Councillors are requested to use email as the primary method of contacting the General Manager or Executive Officers where appropriate. Emails will be responded to in accordance with Council's Customer Service Policy.

Email contact:-

General Manager – gm@narromine.nsw.gov.au

Council Office – mail@narromine.nsw.gov.au

Councillors and staff should use the reply to all function with discretion. Consider whether “all” really need to be aware of your reply to conduct business.

3.2 Phone Calls/SMS Messaging:-

It is acknowledged that Councillors will require personal contact with the General Manager when **urgent** matters arise and when an immediate response is required. In these instances Councillors are requested to contact the General Manager as follows:

During office hours between 8.30 am to 5.00 pm (Monday to Friday).

Outside office hours between 7.30 am to 8.30 am and 5.00 pm to 6.30 pm (Monday to Friday).

Other times – Councillors should only contact the General Manager at any other time in cases of **genuine emergency**.

It is noted that some Council events are conducted outside of work hours and phone calls or messages regarding these specific events may be appropriate.

3.3 Customer Service and After Hours Requests:-

Councillors can contact the Customer Service Office on 6889 9999 during office hours (Monday to Friday) for standard works requests. Council also has an on-call officer available at all times to respond to urgent matters. Outside of office hours, Councillors may leave a message and phone calls will be returned by the General Manager or Executive Officers in accordance with Council's Customer Service Policy.

4. Staff Contacting Councillors

It is acknowledged that staff will be required, on occasion, to contact Councillors. In these circumstances, staff will adhere to these protocols:-

(a) Email

Authorised staff are to use email as the primary method of contacting Councillors. Emails should be addressed to the Councillor's corporate email address and must be copied to the General Manager. Official corporate records are to be kept in Council's electronic document records management system in accordance with Council's Records Management Policy.

(b) Calls to Councillors

Calls to Councillors will be made in response to a request or where an email is considered inappropriate. Authorised staff will not call Councillors outside of office hours unless it is urgent, in response to a request to call or a message left.

It is noted, that some events are conducted outside of work hours and phone calls or messages regarding these specific events may be appropriate.

5. Phone Calls – Residents

Residents seeking assistance should be directed to Council's Customer Service Centre on 02 6889 9999 between Monday to Friday 8.00 am to 5.00 pm. All calls outside of these hours are redirected to Council's after hour's service.

It is not appropriate for Councillors to provide residents with a staff member's direct contact details. Similarly, staff will not provide residents with Councillors contact details, other than the details which Councillors have designated for public use.

6. Correspondence – Residents

Correspondence received from residents will only be circulated to Councillors when the author has specifically requested it be forwarded to Councillors.

7. Accessing Information

The General Manager and the Public Officer are responsible for ensuring that Councillors and administrators can gain access to information necessary for the performance of their official functions. The General Manager and Public Officer are also responsible for ensuring that members of the public can access publicly available Council information under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. Further information relating to information access is available in Council's Code of Conduct.

Councillors are required to treat all information provided by staff appropriately and to adhere to any confidentiality requirements. If a Councillor is unsure of whether a document or advice is confidential, they should seek advice from the General Manager or Public Officer.

Where possible, staff will clearly identify information which is confidential to assist Councillors in the appropriate handling of such information.

8. Personal Enquiries

Councillors and staff must follow the same process as all other members of the public if they require information, action or advice in relation to a personal or private matter.