

Council Policy – Forums of Council – Policy Concept Forums, Question & Answer Agenda Forums and Workshops

Responsible Directorate	Corporate Services
Responsible Business Unit/s	Corporate Performance
Responsible Officer	Manager Corporate Performance
Affected Business Units	All

Objective

Local government forums range from a once-only event to discuss and explore a particular issue, to a number of sessions to address matters such as a specific project or the compilation of a report for internal or external use, through to forums held at regular intervals with a consistent structure and objectives.

This Policy establishes guidelines and procedures for the effective conduct and management of these local government forums.

Scope

The Policy applies to Elected Members, Employees and participants involved in Policy Concept Forums, Question and Answer Sessions and Workshops (Local Government Forums).

Policy

Policy Concept Forums

Background

Policy Concept Forums (PCF) involve Elected Members and employees meeting to propose, discuss and formulate philosophies, ideas, strategies and concepts for the development of the local government and the district. Such forums often involve projects that are in the early planning stage and are sometime away from being presented to Council for decision. In discussing such issues, employees are looking for general guidance from the Elected Members as they research the matter and draft the report. Elected Members and employees are also looking to present ideas and concepts for future consideration. If the response is favourable employees can proceed with their research and eventual report on the matter.

Examples of the type of issues concept forums may cover include:

- current matters of a local or regional significance;
- matters relating to the future development of the local government;
- significant revenue-raising requirements or expenditure needs;
- the development of internal strategic, planning, management and financial documents; and
- reports from Working Groups, Consultation Forums or other non-formal activities involving Elected Members or employees.

Behind Closed Doors

Behind closed doors and in a relatively informal manner are the two notable characteristics of PCFs. Holding such meetings behind closed doors is justified in that many of the ideas and concepts are preliminary and while looking for that creative gem some may be extreme, expensive or impractical and never adopted.

Managing Policy Concept Forums

Unless otherwise determined by Council, Policy Concept Forums will be held on the 1st and 4th Monday of the calendar month.

Additional PCFs may be scheduled at the request of the CEO, in consultation with the President.

Quorum (Non-Technical)

To ensure integrity of information flow/guidance and to avoid repetition, there shall be a requirement that a minimum of three Elected Members are to be in attendance for a PCF to proceed. If a non-technical quorum is unable to be achieved the forum is to lapse and reconvene again at the next month's cycle, or sooner if required.

Project Updates

The Chief Executive Officer may cause presentations to be made in relation to the following:

- Presentations on Achieving Major Projects;
- New Ideas; and
- Council Policy Review.

For a new concept to be put forward it must meet the following criterion:

- Have reference to the Council Plan 2023-2033; and
- Indicate what is the resourcing requirement for the project to proceed, indicative costs in relation to cash, workforce planning, asset management and generational cost indications.

Elected Member Reports

At every PCF each Elected Member may present a report to the Forum on issues that have arisen over the previous period. These may include discussions that have come from ratepayers/electors or third parties that require further information clarification on employee's actions to date or general information.

As a guideline, Elected Members may take the opportunity to present a report to Elected Members present in a written format that can be kept for record keeping purposes.

Elected Members may also request matters, such as new ideas, to be discussed at a PCF. A PCF Topic Request Form needs to be completed and emailed to the PA CEO for it to be scheduled on the agenda.

Questions & Answers Agenda Forums (QAAF)

Background

For informed decision-making, Elected Members must have the opportunity to gain maximum knowledge and understanding of any issue presented to the Council on which they must vote. It is reasonable for Elected Members to expect that they will be provided with all the relevant information they need to understand issues listed on the agenda for the next or following

Ordinary Council meetings. The complexity of many items means that Elected members may need to be given information additional to that in an employee's report and/or they may need an opportunity to ask questions of relevant employees. Many local governments have determined that this can be achieved by the Elected Members convening as a body to become better informed on issues listed for Council decision. Such assemblies have been termed agenda forums. It is considered they are much more efficient and effective than Elected members meeting employees on an individual basis for such a purpose with the added benefit that all Elected members hear the same questions and answers. To protect the integrity of the decision-making process it is essential that agenda forums are run with strict procedures.

Managing Questions & Answers Agenda Forum (QAAF)

QAAF's will be held on the Monday preceding the Ordinary Council meeting; however, additional QAAF's may be held before an Ordinary Council Meeting as required.

QAAF's shall not be open to the public and therefore no debate on the items shall be entered into during the QAAF's and there shall be no opportunity for a collective Council decision or implied decision that binds the local government. Fundamental to this decision is that any debate shall be held at Council meetings so as to ensure the public in attendance at a Council meeting can see and hear the decisions and debate around Council decisions.

The purpose of the QAAF is to allow questions in relation to the item or to request further information from the Chief Executive Officer (employee) in relation to the item in a collective environment. Where questions are Taken on Notice, answers will be distributed to all Elected Members, the CEO and Directors prior to the Ordinary Council meeting.

An Elected Member may still choose to raise issues associated with the Agenda independently through the Chief Executive Officer or another Senior Officer as defined in the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale's Communications Protocol.

Workshops

The preferred scheduling of Workshops will be determined by the CEO and the Shire President. Debating, collective decision-making or revelation of one's intention on how they will vote at a future Council or Committee Meeting is not permitted. Expressing an opinion or seeking clarification on matters under discussion generally however, is appropriate and welcome.

Discussion is limited to the subject on the Workshop Agenda.

General Provisions for Local Government Forums

Management

The Shire President shall Chair these local government forums, or if the Shire President is not available then the Deputy Shire President. If either is not available, the Elected Members present shall choose a person who shall preside over the meeting so as to ensure the guidelines as addressed in this policy are adhered to.

A general record should be kept of the local government forum, noting attendance, requests for further information and interests declared. No minutes as such will be taken, nor will specific discussions, actions or outcomes be recorded, received or adopted at a later date.

Conduct

Elected Members and employees shall adhere to the relevant Shire Code of Conduct in relation to their conduct.

The local government forum shall run in a formal manner with all questions being directed through the Chairman.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

No Elected Member or staff member shall raise any matter at a local government forum for which they have or may perceive to have a Financial or Proximity Interest.

As a matter of probity and integrity, members and employees are required to make disclosures of interest in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995* and the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996*.

It is noted that this is above and beyond the scope of the legislation, however, is required to ensure a high level of governance and transparency.

Members shall make written disclosures of interest to the Chair of the relevant local government forum.

Where the declaration is Financial or a Proximity Interest the Elected Member or employee shall leave the room for the duration of the discussion regarding the item so as not to add to the discussion in any manner and ensure appropriate independence for those members remaining.

Definitions

Local government forum means a Policy Concept Forum, Question and Answer Forum or Workshop

Related Documents

- Council Plan 2023 - 2033

Legislation / Local Law Requirements

- *Local Government Act 1995*

Amendment Record

Relevant Delegations		Nil	
		Date	Resolution Number
Council Adoption		18 December 2017	OCM179/12/17
Version	Date	Resolution Number	Amendment Details
2	17 March 2025	OCM068/03/25	New template and amendments to reflect change to timing of workshops and legislative change