Council Policy – Forums of Council – Strategic 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

The objective of this Policy is to establish a clear, consistent and well-governed framework for informal forums involving Elected Members and the Administration. The framework supports early strategic discussion, informed decision-making and constructive working relationships while preserving Council meetings as the formal decision-making forum.

Scope

This Policy applies to Elected Members, employees, presenters and other participants in Strategic Concept Forums, Question and Answer Agenda Forums, and Workshops collectively referred to as Forums of Council.

Policy Principles

Forums of Council will be planned and conducted in accordance with the following principles:

Purposeful and Executive-led	The Executive will lead the presentation of matters and facilitate discussion to understand Elected Member views, questions and the need for further information.
No decision-making	A Forum is not a meeting of Council or a committee and must not be used to debate, determine or imply a collective Council position.
Predictable and sustainable scheduling	Forums will ordinarily commence at 6.00pm. The annual schedule will provide at least one Monday each month without a scheduled Forum or meeting, unless an urgent or time-critical matter requires otherwise. This supports sustainable workloads, provides an opportunity for recovery and contributes to maintaining an effective, high-performing Council and Executive team.
Accessible locations	Forums may be held at different suitable Shire venues, including the Byford Administration office, where this supports accessibility, engagement or the subject matter.
Pre-recorded presentations	The CEO may approve the provision of pre-recorded presentations where it is useful and appropriate.

Clear chairing arrangements	The CEO will chair Strategic Concept Forums and Workshops. The Shire President will chair Question and Answer Agenda Forums.
Equal information	Information and responses of general relevance will be made available to all Elected Members to support a common understanding.
Respectful participation	Participants will act professionally, respect the distinct roles of Council and the Administration, and comply with applicable codes of conduct.

Forums of Council framework

Forums are informal briefing and discussion mechanisms. They allow information to be shared, questions to be explored, and individual views to be heard before a matter is developed or presented to Council. They do not replace the statutory decision-making processes of Council or a committee.

- No resolution, vote, consensus test or show of hands is to be taken.
- No participant is to be asked to state or reveal how they intend to vote at a future Council or committee meeting.
- Guidance expressed at a Forum is non-binding and does not constitute a direction from Council.
- Any matter requiring a decision or formal direction must be presented to a properly convened Council or committee meeting.
- Discussion is limited to the published topic or agenda item, unless the Chair permits a directly related matter to be raised.

Scheduling and administration

Council will determine the annual schedule of Forums. The Chief Executive Officer may, in consultation with the Shire President, amend the schedule or reschedule or cancel a Forum, having regard to Council business, organisational capacity and the availability of Elected Members.

- Forums will ordinarily be scheduled to commence at 6pm on the second and fourth Monday of the month. If it is a five-week month, an additional Forum will be scheduled.
- A Forum may be scheduled on another day where the CEO determines that a matter is urgent, time-critical or cannot reasonably be accommodated elsewhere.
- The CEO may combine Forum types on the same evening where their respective purposes and procedures remain clear.
- The notice or agenda should identify the Forum type, date, time, location, Chair, topics and presenters.
- A Forum may be held at the Shire Administration Centre or another suitable Shire venue, including the Byford Administration Office.

Strategic Concept Forums

Purpose

A Strategic Concept Forum provides an early, structured opportunity for the Executive and relevant employees to present strategic matters, emerging issues, concepts and options, and to understand the individual views, questions and information requirements of Elected Members. It is intended to inform further research, stakeholder engagement and report preparation, not to secure a collective position.

Suitable matters

- matters of local or regional significance;
- the future development of the district or local government;
- significant service, revenue, expenditure or resourcing considerations;
- strategic, corporate, financial, asset or workforce planning;
- major project updates, emerging risks and new initiatives;
- Council policy development or review;
- reports from Elected Members; and
- outcomes from working groups, consultation forums or other non-formal activities.

Topic requirements

A proposed new concept should, so far as practicable:

- identify its relationship to the Council Plan 2023-2033 or another adopted strategic objective;
- outline the issue, intended outcome and key options;
- identify likely financial, workforce, asset, risk and long-term community implications; and
- state the feedback or information sought from Elected Members.

An Elected Member may request a topic by submitting the approved topic request form to the Office of the CEO. The CEO will determine when and how the topic is scheduled, having regard to relevance, readiness, priority and available resources.

Chair and participation

The CEO will chair a Strategic Concept Forum. The Executive will lead presentations and facilitate discussion. Relevant employees or external presenters may attend at the invitation of the CEO.

Question and Answer Agenda Forums

Purpose

A Question and Answer Agenda Forum allows Elected Members to seek clarification and additional information about items listed on an upcoming Council agenda. It supports informed decision-making by allowing all Elected Members to hear the same questions and responses.

Conduct

- The Forum will ordinarily be held on the Monday preceding the Ordinary Council Meeting, with additional sessions arranged by the CEO, in conjunction with the Presiding Member, if required.
- Questions must relate to an item on the relevant Council agenda or information reasonably required to understand that item.
- Debate, advocacy, negotiation of a collective position and statements of voting intention are not permitted.
- Where a question cannot be answered at the Forum, the response will be provided to all Elected Members before the Council meeting where practicable.
- An Elected Member may also seek information through the channels established in the Shire's Communication Protocol.

Chair

The Shire President will chair a Question and Answer Agenda Forum. If unavailable, the Deputy Shire President will chair. If both are unavailable, the Elected Members present will select an Elected Member to chair the Forum.

Workshops

A Workshop is a focused session used to develop understanding, build capability or examine a defined matter in greater depth. A Workshop may include briefings, facilitated exercises, scenario testing or training.

- The CEO will determine the scheduling and format of Workshops and may consult the Shire President.
- The CEO will chair a Workshop.
- Where a Workshop concerns the CEO performance review process, it will be chaired by the independent consultant appointed under the relevant Council policy.
- Discussion must remain within the scope of the Workshop agenda.
- Debate, collective decision-making and disclosure of intended voting positions are not permitted.

Recorded presentations

The CEO may provide recorded presentations for internal information, induction, training or briefing purposes.

Recorded presentations will be made available to all Elected Members via a shared platform.

General provisions

Attendance threshold

A Strategic Concept Forum and Workshop should ordinarily proceed only where at least three Elected Members are present. As this is an administrative threshold rather than a statutory quorum, the CEO may defer, cancel or proceed with a briefing where appropriate, provided the integrity and equal distribution of information standards are maintained.

Records

A general record will be kept for each Forum, including the date, time, location, attendees, apologies, interests disclosed and requests for further information. The record is not a set of minutes and must not record or imply a decision, resolution or collective direction.

Conduct

Elected Members and employees must comply with the applicable code of conduct and any reasonable direction of the Chair. Questions and contributions are to be made through the Chair and in a respectful, concise and relevant manner.

Interests and confidentiality

Elected Members and employees must disclose relevant interests before discussion of a matter and comply with the *Local Government Act 1995*, *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996.*

Members shall make written disclosures of interest to the Chair of the relevant Forum.

Where the declaration is a Financial or a Proximity Interest the Elected Member or employee must 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.

Information identified as confidential, embargoed, legally privileged or otherwise restricted must be handled in accordance with applicable law and Shire requirements.

Public access

Forums are not open to the public. The closed format supports candid questions and preliminary discussion. It does not alter the requirement for Council decisions and debate to occur at a properly convened meeting open to the public except where the meeting is lawfully closed.

Definitions

Executive means the CEO and Directors, or employees acting in those positions.

Forum of Council means a Strategic Concept Forum, Question and Answer Agenda Forum, or Workshop conducted under this Policy.

Question and Answer Agenda Forum means a briefing forum concerning items listed on an upcoming Council agenda.

Strategic Concept Forum means an early-stage forum for strategic matters, concepts, options and emerging issues.

Workshop means a focused briefing, development, training or facilitated discussion session.

Related Documents

- Council Plan 2023 – 2033
- Council Policy - Serpentine Jarrahdale Communication Protocol
- Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates
- Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale Recordkeeping Plan

Legislation / Local Law Requirements

- *Local Government Act 1995*
- *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996*
- *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*
- *State Records Act 2000*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1992*

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
3	19 October 2026	OCM-307-2026	Policy updated and restructured to incorporate principles, change of title to Strategic Concept Forums and CEO as Chair for certain forums.