

City of Greater Geraldton

4.2 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES

SUSTAINABILITY THEME

Leadership

OBJECTIVES

To guide decisions actions and behaviours of council members, elected and unelected committee members and candidates in local elections. The intent is that local governments will address behaviour through education rather than sanctions.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Code of Conduct applies to council members, committee members, elected and unelected, and candidates in local elections.

POLICY DETAILS

Division 1 - Preliminary provisions

1. Citation

This is the City of Greater Geraldton's Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

2. Terms used

(1) In this code –

Act means the Local Government Act 1995;

candidate means a candidate for election as a council member;

complaint means a complaint made under clause 11(1);

publish includes to publish on a social media platform.

(2) Other terms used in this code that are also used in the Act have the same meaning as they have in the Act, unless the contrary intention appears.

Division 2 - General principles

3. Overview of Division

This Division sets out general principles to guide the behavior of council members, committee members and candidates.

4. Personal Integrity

(1) A council member, committee member or candidate should:

(a) act with reasonable care and diligence;

(b) act with honesty and integrity;

(c) act lawfully;

(d) identify and appropriately manage any conflict of interest; and

- (e) avoid damage to the reputation of the local government.
- (2) A council member or committee member should:
 - (a) act in accordance with the trust placed in council members and committee members;
 - (b) participate in decision-making in an honest, fair, impartial and timely manner;
 - (c) actively seek out and engage in training and development opportunities to improve the performance of their role; and
 - (d) attend and participate in briefings, workshops and training sessions provided or arranged by the local government in relation to the performance of their role.

5. Relationship with others

- (1) A council member, committee member or candidate should:
 - (a) treat others with respect, courtesy and fairness; and
 - (b) respect and value diversity in the community.
- (2) A council member or committee member should maintain and contribute to a harmonious, safe and productive work environment.

6. Accountability

A council member or committee member should:

- (a) base decisions on relevant and factually correct information;
- (b) make decisions on merit, in the public interest and in accordance with statutory obligations and principles of good governance and procedural fairness;
- (c) read all agenda papers given to them in relation to council or committee meetings; and
- (d) be open and accountable to, and represent, the community in the district.

Division 3 - Behaviour

7. Overview of Division

This Division sets out:

- (a) requirements relating to the behaviour of council members, committee members and candidates; and
- (b) the mechanism for dealing with alleged breaches of those requirements.

8. Personal integrity

- (1) A council member, committee member or candidate:
 - (a) must ensure that their use of social media and other forms of communication complies with this code; and
 - (b) must only publish material that is factually correct.
- (2) A council member or committee member:
 - (a) must not be impaired by alcohol or drugs in the performance of their official duties; and
 - (b) must comply with all policies, procedures and resolutions of the local government.

9. Relationship with others

A council member, committee member or candidate:

- (a) must not bully or harass another person in any way;
- (b) must deal with the media in a positive and appropriate manner and in accordance with any relevant policy of the local government;
- (c) must not use offensive or derogatory language when referring to another person;
- (d) must not disparage the character of another council member, committee member or candidate or a local government employee in connection with the performance of their official duties; and
- (e) must not impute dishonest or unethical motives to another council member, committee member or candidate or a local government employee in connection with the performance of their official duties.

10. Council or committee meetings

When attending a council or committee meeting, a council member, committee member or candidate:

- (a) must not act in an abusive or threatening manner towards another person;
- (b) must not make a statement that the member or candidate knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, is false or misleading;
- (c) must not repeatedly disrupt the meeting;
- (d) must comply with any requirements of a local law of the local government relating to the procedures and conduct of council or committee meetings;
- (e) must comply with any direction given by the person presiding at the meeting; and
- (f) must immediately cease to engage in any conduct that has been ruled out of order by the person presiding at the meeting.

11. Complaint about alleged breach

- (1) A person may make a complaint, in accordance with subclause (2), alleging a breach of a requirement set out in this Division.
- (2) A complaint must be made:
 - (a) in writing in the form approved by the local government; and
 - (b) to a person authorised under subclause (3); and
 - (c) within 1 month after the occurrence of the alleged breach.
- (3) The local government must, in writing, authorise 1 or more persons to receive complaints.

12. Dealing with complaint

- (1) After considering a complaint, the local government must, unless it dismisses the complaint under clause 13 or the complaint is withdrawn under clause 14(1), make a finding as to whether the alleged breach, the subject of the complaint has occurred.
- (2) Before making a finding in relation to the complaint, the local government must give the person to whom the complaint relates a reasonable opportunity to be heard.
- (3) A finding that the alleged breach has occurred must be based on evidence from which it may be concluded that it is more likely that the breach occurred than that it did not occur.

- (4) If the local government makes a finding that the alleged breach has occurred, the local government may:
 - (a) take no further action; or
 - (b) prepare and implement a plan to address the behavior of the person to whom the complaint relates.
- (5) When preparing a plan under subclause (4)(b), the local government must consult with the person to whom the complaint relates.
- (6) A plan under subclause (4)(b) may include a requirement for the person to whom the complaint relates to do 1 or more of the following —
 - (a) engage in mediation;
 - (b) undertake counselling;
 - (c) undertake training;
 - (d) take other action the local government considers appropriate.
- (7) If the local government makes a finding in relation to the complaint, the local government must give the complainant, and the person to whom the complaint relates, written notice of:
 - (a) its finding and the reasons for its finding; and
 - (b) if its finding is that the alleged breach has occurred — its decision under subclause (4).

13. Dismissal of complaint

- (1) The local government must dismiss a complaint if it is satisfied that:
 - (a) the behaviour to which the complaint relates occurred at a council or committee meeting; and
 - (b) either:
 - (i) the behaviour was dealt with by the person presiding at the meeting; or
 - (ii) the person responsible for the behaviour has taken remedial action in accordance with a local law of the local government that deals with meeting procedures.
- (2) If the local government dismisses a complaint, the local government must give the complainant, and the person to whom the complaint relates, written notice of its decision and the reasons for its decision.

14. Withdrawal of complaint

- (1) A complainant may withdraw their complaint at any time before the local government makes a finding in relation to the complaint.
- (2) The withdrawal of a complaint must be:
 - (a) In writing; and
 - (b) Given to a person authorised under clause 11(3).

15. Other provisions about complaints

- (1) A complaint about an alleged breach by a candidate cannot be dealt with by the local government unless the candidate has been elected as a council member.
- (2) The procedure for dealing with complaints may be determined by the local government to the extent that it is not provided for in this Division.

15 A. Fraud Control

- (1) The City of Greater Geraldton (the City) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability in all its operations. The City has zero tolerance to fraud, corruption or misconduct (fraud or corruption). Suspected fraud or corruption will be reported, investigated and resolved in accordance with internal policies and procedures of the City, and the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*. All legal obligations to the principles of procedural fairness will be met.
- (2) Fraud is defined by Australian Standard AS8001:2021
'dishonest activity causing actual or potential gain or loss to any person or organization including theft of moneys or other property by persons internal and/or external to the organization and/or where deception is used at the time, immediately before or immediately following the activity.'
- (3) Corruption is defined by Australian Standard AS8001:2021
'dishonest activity in which a person associated with an organization (e.g. director, executive, manager, employee or contractor) acts contrary to the interests of the organization and abuses their position of trust in order to achieve personal advantage or advantage for another person or organization. This can also involve corrupt conduct by the organization, or a person purporting to act on behalf of and in the interests of the organization, in order to secure some form of improper advantage for the organization either directly or indirectly.'
- (4) Fraud and corruption constitute a significant risk to the City of Greater Geraldton, and therefore a culture of ethical conduct must be developed to recognise and avoid fraud and corruption and to deal appropriately with any cases which may occur.
- (5) Council members and committee members are expected to behave ethically and honestly when performing their functions and during their interactions with each other, the community and all stakeholders of the City. They have a duty to ensure that City assets are safeguarded from fraud and corruption and to ensure that council's powers, duties and responsibilities are exercised in an open, fair and proper manner to the highest standards of probity. These issues need to be borne in mind when considering reports, making decisions and scrutinising council's activities.
- (6) Council members and committee members must consider and support all policies and measures taken to prevent, deter, detect and resolve instances, or suspected instances, of fraud or corruption throughout the City including:
 - The City of Greater Geraldton Fraud and Corruption Control Plan
 - Council policy 4.22 Fraud Control, Write off Debts & Waive Fees and Charges
 - Other relevant policies and procedures

Reporting Suspected Unethical, Fraudulent, Dishonest, Illegal or Corrupt Behaviour

- (1) Council members and committee members may report suspected unethical, fraudulent, dishonest, illegal or corrupt behaviour to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In accordance with the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*, if the CEO suspects on reasonable grounds that the alleged behaviour may constitute misconduct as defined in that Act, the CEO will notify:
 - The Corruption and Crime Commission, in the case of serious misconduct; or
 - The Public Sector Commissioner, in the case of minor misconduct.
- (2) Suspected serious misconduct may also be reported directly to the Corruption and Crime Commission or suspected minor misconduct to the Public Sector Commissioner. Council members or committee members may also choose to make a Public Interest Disclosure to report suspected unethical, fraudulent, dishonest, illegal or corrupt behaviour, using the City of Greater Geraldton Public Interest Disclosure Procedures, published on the City of Greater Geraldton's website.

Division 4 - Rules of conduct

Notes for this Division:

- (1) Under section 5.105(1) of the Act a council member commits a minor breach if the council member contravenes a rule of conduct. This extends to the contravention of a rule of conduct that occurred when the council member was a candidate.
- (2) A minor breach is dealt with by a standards panel under section 5.110 of the Act.

16. Overview of Division

- (1) This Division sets out rules of conduct for council members and candidates.
- (2) A reference in this Division to a council member includes a council member when acting as a committee member.

17. Misuse of local government resources

- (1) In this clause -

electoral purpose means the purpose of persuading electors to vote in a particular way at an election, referendum or other poll held under the Act, the *Electoral Act 1907* or the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*;

resources of a local government includes:

 - (a) local government property; and
 - (b) services provided, or paid for, by a local government.
- (2) A council member must not, directly or indirectly, use the resources of a local government for an electoral purpose or other purpose unless authorised under the Act, or by the local government or the CEO, to use the resources for that purpose.

18. Securing personal advantage or disadvantaging others

- (1) A council member must not make improper use of their office:
 - (a) to gain, directly or indirectly, an advantage for the council member or any other person; or
 - (b) to cause detriment to the local government or any other person.

- (2) Subclause (1) does not apply to conduct that contravenes section 5.93 of the Act or The Criminal Code section 83.

19. Prohibition against involvement in administration

- (1) A council member must not undertake a task that contributes to the administration of the local government unless authorised by the local government or the CEO to undertake that task.
- (2) Subclause (1) does not apply to anything that a council member does as part of the deliberations at a council or committee meeting.

20. Relationship with local government employees

- (1) In this clause -
local government employee means a person -
- (a) employed by a local government under section 5.36(1) of the Act; or
 - (b) engaged by a local government under a contract for services.
- (2) A council member or candidate must not:
- (a) direct or attempt to direct a local government employee to do or not to do anything in their capacity as a local government employee;
 - (b) attempt to influence, by means of a threat or the promise of a reward, the conduct of a local government employee in their capacity as a local government employee; or
 - (c) act in an abusive or threatening manner towards a local government employee.
- (3) Subclause (2) (a) does not apply to anything that a council member does as part of the deliberations at a council or committee meeting.
- (4) If a council member or candidate, in their capacity as a council member or candidate, is attending a council or committee meeting or other organised event (for example, a briefing or workshop), the council member or candidate must not orally, in writing or by any other means:
- (a) make a statement that a local government employee is incompetent or dishonest; or
 - (b) use an offensive or objectionable expression when referring to a local government employee.
- (5) Subclause (4)(a) does not apply to conduct that is unlawful under *The Criminal Code* Chapter XXXV.

21. Disclosure of information

- (1) In this clause -
- closed meeting* means a council or committee meeting, or a part of a council or committee meeting, that is closed to members of the public under section 5.23(2) of the Act;
- confidential document* means a document marked by the CEO, or by a person authorised by the CEO, to clearly show that the information in the document is not to be disclosed;
- document* includes a part of a document;
- non-confidential document* means a document that is not a confidential document.

- (2) A council member must not disclose information that the council member:
 - (a) derived from a confidential document; or
 - (b) acquired at a closed meeting other than information derived from a non-confidential document.
- (3) Subclause (2) does not prevent a council member from disclosing information:
 - (a) at a closed meeting;
 - (b) to the extent specified by the council and subject to such other conditions as the council determines;
 - (c) that is already in the public domain;
 - (d) to an officer of the Department;
 - (e) to the Minister;
 - (f) to a legal practitioner for the purpose of obtaining legal advice; or
 - (g) if the disclosure is required or permitted by law.

22. Disclosure of interests

- (1) In this clause -
 - Interest*
 - (a) means an interest that could, or could reasonably be perceived to, adversely affect the impartiality of the person having the interest; and
 - (b) includes an interest arising from kinship, friendship or membership of an association.
- (2) A council member who has an interest in any matter to be discussed at a council or committee meeting attended by the council member must disclose the nature of the interest:
 - (a) in a written notice given to the CEO before the meeting; or
 - (b) at the meeting immediately before the matter is discussed.
- (3) Subclause (2) does not apply to an interest referred to in section 5.60 of the Act.
- (4) Subclause (2) does not apply if a council member fails to disclose an interest because the council member did not know:
 - (a) that they had an interest in the matter; or
 - (b) that the matter in which they had an interest would be discussed at the meeting and the council member disclosed the interest as soon as possible after the discussion began.
- (5) If, under subclause (2)(a), a council member discloses an interest in a written notice given to the CEO before a meeting, then:
 - (a) before the meeting the CEO must cause the notice to be given to the person who is to preside at the meeting; and
 - (b) at the meeting the person presiding must bring the notice and its contents to the attention of the persons present immediately before any matter to which the disclosure relates is discussed.

- (6) Subclause (7) applies in relation to an interest if -
 - (a) under subclause (2)(b) or (4)(b) the interest is disclosed at a meeting; or
 - (b) under subclause (5)(b) notice of the interest is brought to the attention of the persons present at a meeting.
- (7) The nature of the interest must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

23. Compliance with plan requirement

If a plan under clause 12(4) (b) in relation to a council member includes a requirement referred to in clause 12(6), the council member must comply with the requirement.

KEY TERM DEFINITION

As provided within the Code of Conduct.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Director of Corporate Services is responsible for implementing this policy.

WORKPLACE INFORMATION

- Local Government Act 1995*
- Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*
- City of Greater Geraldton Local Laws
- The Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913*

POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Directorate		Officer	Review Cycle	Next Due
Corporate Services		Manager Corporate Compliance and Safety	Biennial	2024
Version	Decision Reference	Synopsis		
2.	CCS736 29/11/2022	Policy Review		