

## Caretaker Policy

Strategic Reference	Outcome 5 – Leadership Strategy 3.4 – Council reports openly and transparently on its performance. Strategy 3.5 – Council staff and elected members act with integrity and accountability. Strategy 3.7 – Council Members demonstrate ‘good governance’ in their roles. Strategy 3.8 – Council Members actively communicate and consult with the community.
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Responsibility	Community & Corporate Department
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Next review date	Within 6 months prior to each Periodic Election
Applicable Legislation	Section 91a Local Government (Elections) Act 1999
Related Policies	Community Engagement Policy
Related Documents	Local Government Association – Caretaker Guidelines

### 1. Background

In accordance with Section 91A of the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 (the Act), Council must adopt a caretaker policy governing the conduct of the council and its staff during the election period of a general election. At a minimum, this policy must prohibit the making of a designated decision, as defined by the Act.

Further to the above, it is the intent of this policy to ensure that the actions of Council, Council Members, and employees of the Coorong District Council do not influence the election process, provide for a fair and equitable election for all candidates, and that no decisions are made which will inappropriately bind the incoming Council.

## **2. Definitions**

**Chief Executive Officer** means the appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Acting CEO or nominee.

**Council staff** means any person that is employed full-time, part-time or casually by the Council who receives remuneration for their work.

**Council Member** means an elected member of the Coorong District Council.

**Designated decision** means a decision:

- (a) relating to the employment or remuneration of the Chief Executive Officer, other than a decision to appoint an acting Chief Executive Officer or to suspend the Chief Executive Officer for serious and wilful misconduct;
- (b) to terminate the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer
- (c) to enter into a contract, arrangement or understanding (other than a contractor for road construction, road maintenance or drainage works) the total value of which exceeds whichever is greater of \$100,000 or 1% of the Council's revenue from rates in the preceding financial year, except if the decision:
  - i. relates to the carrying out of works in response to an emergency or disaster within the meaning of the *Emergency Management Act 2004* (SA), or under section 298 of the *Local Government Act 1999* (SA);
  - ii. is an expenditure or other decision required to be taken under an agreement by which funding is provided to the Council by the Commonwealth or State Government or otherwise for the Council to be eligible for funding from the Commonwealth or State Government;
  - iii. relates to the employment of a particular Council employee (other than the Chief Executive Officer);
  - iv. is made in the conduct of negotiations relating to the employment of Council employees generally, or a class of Council employees, if provision has been made for funds relating to such negotiations in the budget of the Council for the relevant financial year and the negotiations commenced prior to the election period; or
  - v. relates to a Community Wastewater Management Systems scheme that has, prior to the election period, been approved by Council

**General election** means a general election of council members held:

- a. under section 5 of the Local Government (Elections) Act; or
- b. pursuant to a proclamation or notice under the *Local Government Act 1999* (SA).

**Minister** means the Minister for Local Government or other minister of the South Australian government vested with responsibility for the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999.

### **3. Application of this policy**

- 3.1 This policy applies throughout the election period for a general election. For the purposes of the Local Government Elections of November 2022, the policy commences on 6 September 2022 and ends at the conclusion of the election, when results have been declared.
- 3.2 This policy applies to:
- the Council; and
  - Council staff

### **4. Prohibition on designated decisions**

- 4.1 The Council is prohibited from making a designated decision during an election period.
- 4.2 A decision of the Council includes a decision of:
- a committee of Council; and
  - a delegate of Council
- 4.3 So far as is reasonably practicable, the Chief Executive Officer should avoid scheduling significant decisions (including major policy decisions) for consideration during an election period and ensure that such decisions:
- are considered by Council prior to the election period, or
  - are scheduled for determination by the incoming Council
- 4.4 A 'significant decision' is any major policy or other decision which will significantly affect the Council area or community or will bind the incoming Council.
- 4.5 A 'major policy' decision includes any decision (not being a designated decision):
- to spend unbudgeted monies;
  - to conduct unplanned public consultation
  - to endorse a new policy;
  - to dispose of Council land;
  - to approve community grants;
  - to progress any matter which has been identified as an election issue; and
  - any other issue that is considered a major policy decision by the Chief Executive Officer
- 4.6 The determination as to whether or not any decision is significant will be made by the Chief Executive Officer, after consultation with the Mayor. The Chief Executive Officer must keep a record of all such determinations made by the Chief Executive Officers (including by previous Chief Executive Officers) and make this list available to candidates upon request.
- 4.7 Where the Chief Executive Officer has determined that a decision is significant, but circumstances arise that require the decision to be made during the election period, the Chief Executive Officer will report this to the Council.

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- 4.8 The aim of the Chief Executive Officer's report is to assist Council Members assess whether the decision should be deferred for consideration by the incoming Council.
- 4.9 The Chief Executive Officer's report to Council will address the following issues (where relevant):
- why the matter is considered 'significant';
  - why the matter is considered urgent;
  - what are the financial and other consequences of postponing the matter until after the election, both on the current Council and the incoming Council;
  - whether deciding the matter will significantly limit options for the incoming Council;
  - whether the matter requires the expenditure of unbudgeted funds;
  - whether the matter is the completion of an activity already commenced and previously endorsed by Council;
  - whether the matter requires community engagement;
  - any relevant statutory obligations or timeframes; and
  - whether dealing with the matter in the election period is in the best interests of the Council area and community.
- 4.10 Council will consider the Chief Executive Officer's report and determine whether or not to make the decision.

## **5. Prohibition of the use of council resources**

- 5.1 Council resources must not be used for the advantage of a particular candidate or group of candidates.
- 5.2 For clarity, neither the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999* nor this Caretaker Policy prohibits a council providing resources to all members of the public, which incidentally includes all candidates for election.
- 5.3 The following Council resources must not be used for the advantage of a particular candidate or group of candidates and may only be used by Council Members, where necessary, in the performance of their ordinary duties as a Council Member:
- Council-owned/issued Information Technology items (ie. iPad)
  - Council vehicles
  - Council provided business cards
  - Requests to Council employees to perform tasks which would confer an advantage on a candidate or group of candidates
  - The ability to issue invitations to Council events
  - Council produced promotional documents and/or brochures
- 5.4 Despite paragraph 5.1, the use of the following Council resources are not restricted to candidates for election, subject to availability:
- Hire of town halls (Coonalpyn, Moorlands, Taillem Bend and Tintinara)
  - Taillem Bend Town Hall Function Centre
  - Tintinara Health & Recreation Centre

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### **6. Consequence of contravening this policy**

- 6.1 A designated decision made by Council during an election period is invalid, except where an exemption has been granted by the Minister.
- 6.2 Any person who suffers loss or damage as a result of acting in good faith on a designated decision made by the Council in contravention of this policy is entitled to compensation from the Council for that loss or damage.

### **7. Application for exemption**

- 7.1 If the Council considers that it is faced with extraordinary circumstances which require the making of a designated decision during an election period, the Council may apply in writing to the Minister for an exemption to enable the making of a designated decision that would otherwise be invalid under section 91A of the *Local Government (Elections) Act* and this policy.
- 7.2 If the Minister grants an exemption to enable the making of a designated decision that would otherwise be invalid under section 91A of the *Local Government (Elections) Act* and this policy, then the Council and Council staff will comply with any conditions or limitations that the Minister imposes on the exemption.

### **8. Continuing the Functions of the Council during the Caretaker Period**

- 8.1 Nothing in this policy prevents the Mayor, Council Members or staff carrying on the business of the Council during the caretaker period. The Mayor will continue to accept invitations to attend community functions, as will Council Members, particularly when those functions are in recognition of activities of community groups whether having gained the support of the Council through grants or not.
- 8.2 The CEO will ensure as far as is practical that Council initiatives will not be launched during the caretaker period, although established events scheduled at this time will continue to be held.
- 8.3 Council will not allow questions or statements from the gallery during a full council meeting during the election period.

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### **9. Document History**

This policy, in its entirety, will lapse at the 2026 Local Government election. This policy will be prior to the aforementioned general election, as required, or due to any legislative changes.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Adopted</b>	<b>Minute No</b>	<b>Description of change(s)</b>
1	16 March 2010	095/10	New policy
2	19 August 2014	190/14	Cyclical review
3	17 July 2018	129/18	Cyclical review
4	15 March 2022	048/22	Cyclical review  Minor formatting  Provision of specific information regarding the election period and application of policy (clause 3)  Removal of operational information (ie. publications, media release, events) which are either replicated elsewhere in policy or referenced in Caretaker Guidelines