



GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY
POLICY

Effective: **Day Month Year**



PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY POLICY

Version:	2
Business Unit:	Corporate Governance
Responsible Officer:	Manager Corporate Governance
Adopted By:	Council on Day Month Year
Next Review:	Day Month Year

1. PURPOSE

This policy supports Council in its ongoing drive for good governance, promotes the importance of open and accountable conduct, and provides guidance on how Council information is to be made publicly available.

Council must adopt and maintain a public transparency policy under section 57 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act). This policy gives effect to the Public Transparency Principles outlined in section 58 of the Act.

2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of Council's Public Transparency Policy is to formalise its support for transparency in its decision-making processes and raise public awareness of the availability of Council information. As a result, this policy seeks to promote:

- a) Greater clarity in Council's decision-making processes;
- b) Increased confidence and trust in the community through greater understanding and awareness;
- c) Council decisions enhanced by accountability to the community;
- d) Improved Council performance;
- e) Access to information that is current, easily accessible and disseminated in a timely manner;
- f) Reassurance to the community that Council is spending public monies wisely.

This policy covers documentary information, process information and how information will be made available to the public. It is an integral part of Council's governance framework.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to Councillors and Council staff.

4. DEFINITIONS

Reference term	Definition
Council	Means the Greater Shepparton City Council.
Community	Community is a flexible term used to define groups of connected people. In this Policy it is used to describe people of a municipality generally, including individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in or pass through the municipality. More specifically, it can refer to everyone affiliated with the municipality, or smaller groups defined by interest, identity or location, and not necessarily homogenous in composition or views.

	Different types of communities often overlap and extend beyond municipal boundaries. Communities may be structured, as in clubs or associations or unstructured, such as teens. Communities are flexible and temporary, subject to individual identity and location.
Closed Meetings	When Council resolves to close the meeting to the general public, in order to consider a confidential matter regarding issues of a legal, contractual or personnel nature and other issues deemed not in the public interest.
Consultation	The process of seeking input on a matter.
Informal Meeting of Councillors	A scheduled or planned meeting including three or more Councillors and at least one Council Officer where that meeting has the purpose of discussing the business of Council or briefing Councillors, and is not a Council Meeting, Delegated Committee Meeting or a Community Asset Committee Meeting.
Public Participation	Public participation encompasses a range of public involvement, from simply informing people about what Council is doing, delegating decisions to the public and community activity addressing the common good.
Stakeholder	An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of Council and are directly impacted by their outcomes.
Transparency	A lack of hidden agendas or conditions, and the availability of all information needed in order to collaborate, cooperate and make decisions effectively. Importantly, “transparency” is also a human rights issue: the right to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in public affairs.
Immediate Family Member	The legal spouse, children or stepchildren of the employee.

5. POLICY

5.1 What Council Will be Transparent With

a. Decision Making at Council Meetings

- Will be undertaken in accordance with the Act and the Governance Rules.
- Will be conducted in an open and transparent forum, unless in accordance with the provisions in the Act and Governance Rules.
- Will be informed through community engagement, in accordance with the Community Engagement Principles and Council’s Community Engagement Policy.
- Will be made fairly and on merit, and where any person whose rights will be directly affected by a decision of the Council, that person will be entitled to communicate their views and have their interests considered.

b. Council Information

A list of available information is provided in the Part II Statement published by the Council in accordance the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. Part II of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* requires government agencies and local councils to publish a number of statements designed to assist members of the public in accessing the information it holds. This information may include documents such as:

- Plans, Reports and Strategies adopted by Council;
- Policies and Instruments of Delegation;
- Governance Rules;

- Project and service plans;
- Grant application, tenders and tender evaluation material;
- Service agreements, contracts, leases and licences;
- Council leases, permits and notices of building and occupancy;
- Relevant technical reports and / or research that informs decision making; and
- Information listed in Council's Part II Statement published in accordance with *the Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Process information such as:

- Practice notes and operating procedures;
- Application processes for approvals, permits, grants, access to Council services;
- Decision making processes;
- Guidelines and manuals;
- Community engagement processes; and
- Complaints handling processes.

The following Council records will be made publicly available on Council's website or upon request:

- Council and Delegated Committee meeting agendas and minutes.
- Reporting to Council.
- Summary of matters discussed at Informal Meetings of Councillors.
- Reporting from Advisory Committees to Council through reporting to Council.
- Audit and Risk Management Committee Performance Reporting.
- Terms of reference or charters for Advisory Committees.
- Registers of gifts, benefits and hospitality offered to Councillors or Council Staff.
- Registers of travel undertaken by Councillors or Council Staff.
- Registers of Conflicts of Interest disclosed by Councillors or Council Staff.
- Submissions made by Council.
- Registers of donations and grants made by Council.
- Registers of leases entered into by Council, as lessor and lessee.
- Register of Delegations.
- Register of Authorised officers.
- Register of election campaign donations.
- Summary of Personal Interests.
- Any other Registers or Records required by legislation or determined to be in the public interest.

Council will make available the following records for inspection.

- Summary of Personal Interests register.
- Submissions received under section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* until its repeal or received through a community engagement process undertaken by Council; and
- Other records as outlined on Council's website.

c. Publications

Council publishes a range of newsletters, reports and handbooks for residents, businesses and visitors to Council. These publications can be downloaded from Council's website or members of the public may contact Council for a copy of a document.

5.2 Access to Information

- Information may be made available on the Council website, at Council offices, or on request.
- Members of the public can make different kinds of information requests to the Council (e.g. informal requests for documents and information or formal freedom of information requests).
- Council will use social media to publish or stream information such as Council Meetings.
- Consideration will be given to accessibility and cultural requirements.
- Council will facilitate public awareness of the availability of Council information.
- Consideration will be given to confidentiality in accordance with the Act and public interest test where appropriate.
- Council will respond to requests for information in alignment with the Act including the Public Transparency Principles, and this policy.

5.3 Information Not Available

Some Council information may not be made publicly available. This may occur if the information is confidential information as defined in the *Local Government Act 2020* or if the information is prohibited from release or subject to a secrecy provision under another Act. Additionally, information may not be made available if its release would be contrary to the public interest.

"Confidential information" is defined in section 3 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. It includes the types of information listed in the following table.

Type	Description
Council business information	Information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.
Security information	Information that is likely to endanger the security of Council property or the safety of any person if released.
Land use planning information	Information that is likely to encourage speculation in land values if prematurely released.
Law enforcement information	Information which would be reasonably likely to prejudice the investigation into an alleged breach of the law or the fair trial or hearing of any person if released.
Legal privileged information	Information to which legal professional privilege or client legal privilege applies.
Personal information	Information which would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs if released.

Type	Description
Private commercial information	Information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets or that would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage if released.
Confidential meeting information	Records of a Council and delegated committee meetings that are closed to the public to consider confidential information.
Internal arbitration information	Confidential information relating to internal arbitration about an alleged breach of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.
Councillor Conduct Panel confidential information	Confidential information relating to a Councillor Conduct Panel matter.
Confidential information under the 1989 Act	Information that was confidential information for the purposes of section 77 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> .

Where information is not confidential, and not already available, Council will consider the public interest and the resources required when considering informal requests for information.

5.4 Responsibilities

It is the role of all Council employees to promote and facilitate access to Council information in accordance with the public transparency policy.

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Council	Champion the commitment and principles for public transparency through leadership, modelling practice and decision-making.	Ongoing
Executive Leadership Team	Champion behaviours that foster transparency and drive the principles through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation of this policy.	Ongoing
Senior Leadership Group	Manage areas of responsibility to ensure public transparency, good governance and community engagement is consistent with this policy.	Ongoing
All Staff	Public transparency is the responsibility of all employees as appropriate to their role and function. All staff respond to requests for information and facilitate provision of information in consultation with their manager and in alignment with the Policy.	Ongoing
Manager Corporate Governance	To monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing
Team Leader Governance	To monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing

5.5 Human Rights Charter

This policy has been reviewed against and complies with section 13 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, as this Policy aligns with and provides for the protection of an individual's right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. It is also in line with section 18 which recognises a person's right to participate in the conduct of public affairs.

5.6 Non-Compliance with this Policy

If a member of the community has concerns regarding Council's compliance with this policy or wishes to question a decision about the release of information, this should be raised directly with the officer handling the matter in the first instance. If dissatisfied with the response, the matter can be referred to Council's Governance Compliance Officer who will review the matter.

If not satisfied with Council's decision, the matter can be raised directly with the Victorian Ombudsman's office on 1800 806 314 or using the website – www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au.

5.7 Other Ways to Access Information

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* gives an individual a right of access to documents that Council holds. A request for access to documents can be made to Council under this Act. Council is committed to, where possible, proactive and informal release of information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Professional Standards issued by the Victorian Information Commissioner.

A list of available information is provided in the Part II Statement (Statement) published on Council's website in accordance the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. This Statement requires government agencies and local councils to publish a number of statements designed to assist members of the public to access the information they hold.

If you cannot find the information you require, call us directly as we may be able to assist you.

6. RELATED POLICIES

- Community Engagement Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Records and Information Management Policy

7. RELATED LEGISLATION

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*

8. REVIEW

The Manager Corporate Governance is responsible for reviewing this Policy every four years and within twelve months of each Council election.

DOCUMENT REVISIONS

Version #	Date Adopted	Date Effective
1	18 August 2020	18 August 2020
2	XX Month Year	XX Month Year