



Town of Cottesloe

COMPLAINT ABOUT ALLEGED BREACH FORM

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES

Schedule 1, Division 3 of the Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

- NOTE:** A complaint about an alleged breach must be made
- (a) in writing in the form approved by the local government
 - (b) to an authorised person
 - (c) within one month after the occurrence of the alleged breach.

Name of person who is making the complaint:
Name: _____ Given Name(s) Family Name
Contact details of person making the complaint:
Address: _____ Email: _____ Contact number: _____
Name of the local government (city, town, shire) concerned:
Town of Cottesloe
Name of council member, committee member, candidate alleged to have committed the breach:
_____ _____
State the full details of the alleged breach. Attach any supporting evidence to your complaint form.
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Date of alleged breach:
_____ / _____ / 20____
Signed:
Complainant's signature: _____ Date of signing: _____ / _____ / 20____

Received by Authorised Officer:

Authorised Officer's Name: _____

Authorised Officer's Signature: _____

Date received: _____ / _____ / 20____

NOTE TO PERSON MAKING THE COMPLAINT:

This form should be completed, dated and signed by the person making a complaint of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. The complaint is to be specific about the alleged breach and include the relevant section/subsection of the alleged breach.

The complaint must be made to the authorised officer within one month after the occurrence of the alleged breach.

Signed complaint form is to be forwarded to: town@cottesloe.wa.gov.au for the attention of the CEO



Western Australia

Local Government Act 1995

**Local Government (Model Code of Conduct)
Regulations 2021**

As at 03 Feb 2021

Version 00-a0-01

Published on www.legislation.wa.gov.au

Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

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Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

Part 1 — Preliminary

1. Citation

These regulations are the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*.

2. Commencement

These regulations come into operation as follows —

- (a) Part 1 — on the day on which these regulations are published in the *Gazette*;
- (b) the rest of the regulations — on the day on which the *Local Government Legislation Amendment Act 2019* sections 48 to 51 come into operation.

Part 2 — Model code of conduct

3. Model code of conduct (Act s. 5.103(1))

The model code of conduct for council members, committee members and candidates is set out in Schedule 1.

Part 3 — Repeal and consequential amendments

Division 1 — Repeal

**4. *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007*
repealed**

The *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007* are repealed.

Division 2 — Other regulations amended

**5. *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996*
amended**

- (1) This regulation amends the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996*.
- (2) After regulation 34C insert:

Part 9A — Minor breaches by council members

**34D. *Contravention of local law as to conduct*
(Act s. 5.105(1)(b))**

- (1) In this regulation —
local law as to conduct means a local law relating to the conduct of people at council or committee meetings.
- (2) The contravention of a local law as to conduct is a minor breach for the purposes of section 5.105(1)(b) of the Act.

Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

Part 3 Repeal and consequential amendments

Division 2 Other regulations amended

r. 6

6. Local Government (Audit) Regulations 1996 amended

- (1) This regulation amends the *Local Government (Audit) Regulations 1996*.
- (2) In regulation 13 in the Table:
 - (a) under the heading “**Local Government Act 1995**” delete “s. 5.103” and insert:

s. 5.104

- (b) delete:

Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007		
r. 11		

7. Local Government (Constitution) Regulations 1998 amended

- (1) This regulation amends the *Local Government (Constitution) Regulations 1998*.
- (2) In Schedule 1 Form 7 delete “*Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007.*” and insert:

code of conduct adopted by the ³ under section 5.104 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Schedule 1 — Model code of conduct

[r. 3]

Division 1 — Preliminary provisions

1. Citation

This is the *[insert name of local government] 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 behaviour 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; and

(b) act with honesty and integrity; and

(c) act lawfully; and

(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; and
 - (b) participate in decision-making in an honest, fair, impartial and timely manner; and
 - (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; and
- (b) make decisions on merit, in the public interest and in accordance with statutory obligations and principles of good governance and procedural fairness; and
- (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; and
- (b) must deal with the media in a positive and appropriate manner and in accordance with any relevant policy of the local government; and
- (c) must not use offensive or derogatory language when referring to another person; and
- (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; and
- (b) must not make a statement that the member or candidate knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, is false or misleading; and
- (c) must not repeatedly disrupt the meeting; and
- (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; and
- (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 and withdrawals of 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 behaviour 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.

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; or
 - (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; or
 - (b) to the extent specified by the council and subject to such other conditions as the council determines; or
 - (c) that is already in the public domain; or
 - (d) to an officer of the Department; or
 - (e) to the Minister; or
 - (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.



Notes

This is a compilation of the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*. For provisions that have come into operation see the compilation table.

Compilation table

Citation	Published	Commencement
<i>Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021</i>	SL 2021/15 2 Feb 2021	Pt. 1: 2 Feb 2021 (see r. 2(a)); Regulations other than Pt. 1: 3 Feb 2021 (see r. 2(b) and SL 2021/13 cl. 2)

Defined terms

[This is a list of terms defined and the provisions where they are defined.

The list is not part of the law.]

Defined term	Provision(s)
Act.....	Sch. 1 cl. 2(1)
candidate	Sch. 1 cl. 2(1)
closed meeting	Sch. 1 cl. 21(1)
complaint	Sch. 1 cl. 2(1)
confidential document.....	Sch. 1 cl. 21(1)
document.....	Sch. 1 cl. 21(1)
electoral purpose	Sch. 1 cl. 17(1)
interest.....	Sch. 1 cl. 22(1)
local government employee	Sch. 1 cl. 20(1)
non-confidential document	Sch. 1 cl. 21(1)
publish.....	Sch. 1 cl. 2(1)
resources of a local government.....	Sch. 1 cl. 17(1)



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries



*Local Government
Act 1995 Review*
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT REVIEW ►► DELIVERING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Guidelines on the Model Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates

February 2021

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Model Code of Conduct

Introduction

Local government is vital for the delivery of key services and infrastructure in the community. Individuals who are, or seek to be, members of local councils and council committees are entrusted by their community to represent local views, make sound decisions, and utilise public funds effectively to deliver services and amenities for their community. As such, a high standard of professional and ethical conduct is expected of council members and committee members in local governments, as well as candidates in local government elections.

A review of the *Local Government Act 1995* (Act), including consultation with community and sector stakeholders, led to the implementation of priority reforms under the *Local Government Amendment Act 2019* (Amendment Act).

The Amendment Act was developed in response to stakeholder feedback that there was a need for governance reforms, including a Code of Conduct for council members, committee members and candidates that clearly reflects community expectations of behaviour and supports consistency between local governments in relation to the overall process for managing alleged breaches of that Code.

As a result, key reforms under the Amendment Act include the introduction of a Model Code of Conduct (Model Code) that must be adopted by local governments and applied to council members, committee members and candidates; as well as a separate Code of Conduct for Employees.

The Model Code replaces the previous statutory requirement for local governments to develop and implement an individual code of conduct for their council members, committee members and employees.

The *Model Code of Conduct Regulations 2021* (Regulations) have been developed to give effect to the Amendment Act, and provide for:

- overarching principles to guide behaviour;
- behaviours and complaints which are managed by local governments; and
- rules of conduct, contraventions of which are considered by the independent Local Government Standards Panel (Standards Panel) where appropriate.

Definitions

The Model Code defines key terms to aid understanding and compliance. Where a term is not defined in either the Regulations or the Act, then the generally accepted meaning of the term applies. Some additional guidance is provided as follows:

Candidate: an individual is considered a candidate when their nomination for election is accepted by a Returning Officer under section 4.49 of the Act. The Model Code applies to the individual from that point. Any alleged breach of the Model Code may only be addressed if and when the individual is elected as a council member.

Council member: references to ‘council member’ in the Regulations mean an individual who has been elected as a council member under the Act. The requirements of the Regulations also apply to a council member who is a committee member on a council committee.

Committee member: under the Regulations, a ‘committee member’ includes any council member, local government employee or unelected member of the community who has been engaged by the council to participate in a council committee.

Evidence: references to ‘evidence’ in the Regulations means the available facts or information indicating whether an allegation is true or valid. Local governments must use evidence provided by the complainant and by the person to whom the complaint relates, as well as other relevant information, to decide whether an alleged breach of the Model Code has occurred.

Local government(s): per the approach in the Act, references to ‘local government’ in the Regulations mean the body corporate that is the local governing body made up of the council, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and administrative staff appointed and managed by the CEO.

Where a statutory function entails decision-making on governance matters, the council is responsible for making those decisions. This includes decisions on complaints regarding the conduct of council members, committee members and candidates, as set out in the Regulations.

Further guidance on certain terms in the Model Code is provided in these Guidelines.

Purpose

The purpose of the Model Code is to guide the decisions, actions and behaviours of members, both in council and on council committees, and of candidates running for election as a council member.

Members must comply with the provisions in the Model Code in fulfilling their role and responsibilities in council and on council committees, as set out in the Act.

An individual who has nominated as a candidate for election as a council member is also required to demonstrate professional and ethical behaviour during their election campaign. If elected, the individual must continue to comply with the Model Code in council and on council committees.

It is the individual responsibility of council members, committee members and candidates to become familiar with the Model Code, these Guidelines and any relevant policies of their local government, and to follow the Code at all times.

Where the behaviour of a council member, committee member or candidate does not comply with the Code, it is intended that the local council address the behaviour through education and other remedial actions that the council considers appropriate, rather than formal sanctions.

Where an individual does not comply with any action required by the council, then the council may determine that the matter is to be referred to the Standards Panel as an

alleged contravention of a rule of conduct. The Standards Panel has the authority to make binding decisions regarding allegations of minor misconduct.

Adoption

Section 5.104 of the Act requires that local governments adopt the Model Code as their Code of Conduct within three months of the Regulations coming into operation (by 3 May 2021). Note: The operational requirements of Division 3 require local governments to take certain initial actions within three weeks (by 24 February 2021).

In accordance with section 5.104(4), the Model Code applies until the local government adopts it as their Code. This means that the principles, behaviour requirements and rules of conduct of the Regulations apply to council members, committee members and candidates even if their local government has not yet adopted the Model Code.

While local governments may not amend Division 2 (Principles) or Division 4 (Rules of Conduct), additional behaviour requirements can be included in Division 3 (Behaviours) if deemed appropriate by the local government. Any additions must be consistent with the Model Code of Conduct (section 5.104(3) of the Act).

In preparing the Code for adoption, local governments are encouraged to review their existing Code and consider incorporating any additional behaviour requirements that are not represented in the Model Code. This may include specific dress standards or the appropriate use of technology.

To adopt the Code, a resolution passed by an absolute majority of the council is required. Once the Code is adopted, it must be published on the local government's official website (section 5.104(7)).

Division 2 – General Principles

This section of the Regulations set out the fundamental rules that council members, committee members and candidates are expected to adhere to, promote and support. Adhering to these rules will assist individuals to comply with the behaviours outlined in Division 3 and 4.

The principles outline the overarching approach that members and candidates should demonstrate in their role as public representatives, or potential public representatives. Individuals should consider all behaviours in light of these principles, including any behaviour and conduct that is not covered specifically in Division 3 and 4.

The principles are grouped into three key areas: Personal Integrity; Relationships with others and Accountability. Additional guidance on these areas is provided as follows:

Integrity and conflicts of interest

Members and candidates are generally active in their local area which may lead to a conflict between the public interests of the community and the personal interests of the individual, their family members and associates.

It is the individual responsibility of members and candidates to disclose any such conflicts and ensure that they are managed appropriately to comply with the Model Code and serve their community as expected by the local electors.

Individuals should also consider perceived and potential conflicts of interest. While an individual may be confident of the integrity of their actions, it is important to reflect on how their actions may appear to others, and/or how an action taken now could lead to a conflict of interest in future. If an interest is identified, the individual should disclose and manage this to avoid a conflict with the public interest.

Avoidance of reputational damage

Elected members and candidates may hold strong concerns in relation to actions, or a lack of action, by their local government on certain matters.

It is the individual responsibility of members to ensure that they comply with the Model Code by raising concerns in a respectful and constructive manner and working effectively with their colleagues for their community, as expected by the local electors.

During an election campaign, it is the individual responsibility of candidates to ensure that any concerns they raise regarding the current local government is based on accurate information and expressed in a respectful and constructive manner that demonstrates to local electors their suitability as a potential public representative.

Decision-making and accountability

Council and committee members regularly make decisions that impact on their local area. The community expects that members will make council and committee decisions based on information that is relevant and factually correct. This will vary according to the decision to be made and the information available to the council members and committee members at that time.

In general, individuals are responsible for ensuring their decisions are based on information that is accurate and pertinent to the matter at hand; and can be reasonably considered accurate and relevant by others.

As part of being accountable to their community, council members and committee members should accept responsibility for the decisions they make in the performance of their role.

Division 3 – Behaviour

This section of the Regulations sets the standards of behaviour which reflect the general principles outlined in Division 2.

It is the individual responsibility of members and candidates to demonstrate, promote and support professional and ethical behaviour as provided in the Model Code.

Complaints regarding alleged breaches of the Model Code in Division 3 are managed by the local council as the decision-making body of the local governments. The division also provides a process for responding to alleged breaches. The emphasis is on

education and development, rather than punitive sanctions, with the aim of establishing or restoring positive working relationships and avoiding further breaches.

Failure to comply with this Division may give rise to a complaint regarding the conduct of a council member, committee member or candidate, which may lead to the council making a formal finding of a breach and requiring remedial action by the individual.

A local government may wish to develop further guidance on dealing with complaints through the introduction of a complementary policy and/or procedure on complaints management to the extent it is not provided for in the Regulations. There are resources on effective complaints management available on the Ombudsman WA's website at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au.

Complaints

Process for making a complaint

Clause 11 of the Regulations provides that a person can make a complaint alleging a breach of Division 2 within one month of the alleged breach occurring.

Local governments should ensure that making a complaint is a simple and accessible process so that any member of the local community can raise concerns about the conduct of council members, committee members and candidates.

Local governments should make it clear that it is important a complainant provides details in their complaint, with supporting information where feasible to do so, because the complaint will form part of the evidence considered by the council when deciding whether a breach of the Model Code has occurred.

Action required

Local governments must authorise at least one person to receive complaints regarding members and candidates. While the Regulations do not include specific requirements and a local government may decide that the complaints officer is appropriate, other options could include:

- President or Mayor,
- Deputy President or Mayor (especially for complaints about the President or Mayor),
- Chief Executive Officer, or
- External consultant

To account for any breaches occurring on the first day that the Regulations take effect, local governments must authorise at least one person within three weeks of the Regulations taking effect (by 24 February 2021).

The Regulations also provide that complaints are to be made in writing in a form approved by the local government.

Action required

Local governments must determine whether there will be a specific template for complaints and process for how they are to be lodged.

Local governments may choose to:

- establish a specific email address for conduct complaints
- provide a name/position to whom complaints should be addressed
- prepare a complaint form to allow the complainant.
- engaged an independent person to support the resolution of a complaint. Local governments may consider sharing the services of an independent person.

The Department has prepared a template form for complaints to assist local governments. The template is available on the department's website at www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au.

The authorised person(s) should acknowledge the receipt of every written complaint in a timely manner. As part of the acknowledgment process, the complainant should be provided information on how the complaint will be progressed and an expected timeframe for the matter to be finalised. This may include providing the complainant with a copy of the complaint policy where available.

Dealing with a complaint

The Regulations do not specify a timeframe by when complaints should be dealt with, however, a timeframe could be included in a local government's policy.

In the interests of procedural fairness, all complaints should be dealt with in a timely manner and allow all parties the opportunity to provide information regarding the alleged conduct.

Clause 12 of the Regulations outlines the process for dealing with complaints regarding the conduct of elected members and candidates. The Model Code leaves it open to local governments to determine the most appropriate and effective process for how this is undertaken. Options could include:

- The President/Mayor or Deputy consider all complaints
- Delegation of complaints to the CEO to prepare a report for the council
- Appointment of an independent/external consultant to review complaints and provide a report to the council
- Establish a committee to review complaints and report to the council. The committee may include independent members.

Local governments should consider how they are going to respond to complaints, and whether complaints are going to be addressed based on seriousness or impact of the allegation or on the order in which complaints are received.

Action required

Local governments must determine who will be considering complaints received and how complaints will be prioritised and managed.

Clause 12(2) of the Regulations require that the person to whom the complaint relates is given a reasonable opportunity to be heard. This should include providing a copy of the complaint to that person in a timely manner and allowing them an opportunity to respond to the allegations in writing. The information provided by that person will assist the local government in forming a view as to whether a breach has occurred.

Making a finding

Clause 12(1) requires the local council to consider whether the alleged matter which is the subject of a complaint, did occur and make a finding on whether the matter constituted a breach of the Code of Conduct.

The local council should use the same approach as the Standards Panel in their deliberations and decision-making; that is, based on the complaint and other evidence received by the council, the council must be satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, it is more likely than not that a breach occurred.

Information provided by the complainant and information provided by the person to whom the complaint relates will assist the council to make a finding.

Action Plans

Clause 12(4) provides that if the local council makes a finding that a breach of the Code of Conduct did occur, the council may determine that no further action is required; or that an action plan must be prepared and implemented.

An action plan should be designed to provide the member with the opportunity and support to demonstrate the professional and ethical behaviour expected of elected representatives.

The action plan does not need to be complex. The plan should outline:

- the behaviour(s) of concern;
- the actions to be taken to address the behaviour(s);
- who is responsible for the actions; and
- an agreed timeframe for the actions to be completed.

An action plan should not include measures that are intended to be a punishment, and instead should focus on mechanisms to encourage positive behaviour and prevent negative behaviour from occurring again in future.

The Code requires that in preparing the action plan, consultation must be undertaken with the elected member to whom the plan relates. This is designed to provide the member with the opportunity to be involved in matters such as the timing of meetings or training. Note: some members may not be willing to engage with the opportunity to participate in the process.

The council or a delegated person should monitor the actions and timeframes set out in the action plan. This is important because if the member does not comply with the

action/s within the agreed timeframe, then under the Regulations it is considered a contravention of a rule of conduct.

Dismissal of complaints

While local governments are required to consider all complaints, they can be dismissed if:

- the behaviour occurred at a council or committee meeting and the behaviour was dealt with at that meeting (clause 13), or
- the complaint is withdrawn (clause 14).

Clause 13 allows a complaint to be dismissed if the behaviour occurred at a council or committee meeting, and that behaviour was addressed at the time. This could have been by the presiding member, or remedial action was taken in accordance with the local government's standing orders or local law.

Where agreement cannot be reached

Circumstances may arise when a local council cannot agree on the resolution of a complaint or whether the complaint can be dismissed under clause 13.

In these situations, the local government may decide to engage an independent person to review the complaint and make recommendations on appropriate actions.

Withdrawal of a complaint

Clause 14 provides the option for a complaint to be withdrawn before it is considered by the council.

Local governments may elect to include in their complaints policy the option for mediation between the complainant and the member. Mediation may resolve any specific issues before the council is required to make a finding and may lead to the complainant withdrawing the complaint. Clause 14 requires a withdrawal to be made in writing and provided to the person(s) authorised to receive complaints.

Division 4 – Rules of Conduct

Contraventions of rules of conduct are matters that:

- negatively affect the honest or impartial performance of an elected member;
- involve a breach of trust placed in the elected member; or
- involve the misuse of information or material.

Division 4 sets out rules of conduct for elected members and candidates that relate to the principles in Division 2 and the behaviours in Division 3. This Division also introduces a new rule of conduct to address situations where an elected member does not undertake the actions required by the local council following a breach of the Model Code. A contravention of this rule of conduct is considered a minor breach, as defined in the Act.

The process for complaints under Division 4 is outlined in the Act. Complaints in the first instance are directed to the complaints officer at the local government. The Act provides that the complaints officer is the CEO or another officer with delegated responsibility.

A council may decide to refer an alleged contravention of Division 4 to the independent Standards Panel in accordance with the Act. As the Panel does not have investigative powers, decisions are made based on the information received by the Panel from the local government. The Standards Panel must be satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, it is more likely than not that a breach has occurred for the Standards Panel to make a finding of breach.

Where the Standards Panel makes a finding against an elected member or candidate, sanctions will be imposed in accordance with the Part 5 Division 9 of the Act.

Nothing in this Division removes the obligations placed upon council members and employees (including the CEO) of the local government under the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*.

Further information on the Standards Panel process is available on the Department's website.

Further information

The aim of the Model Code of Conduct is to foster a high standard of professional and ethical conduct by council members and candidates, and to support consistency across local governments in relation to their response to complaints regarding conduct.

Local governments are encouraged to seek guidance and advice on specific matters whenever necessary. For queries, please contact: actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au