

# COUNCILLOR-STAFF INTERACTION AND EMAIL POLICY 2014

## Principles

Councillors and staff will at all times be cognisant that good working relationships rely on open, clear and professional communications between each other. They will also be aware of the legislative provisions relating to Improper influence and/or direction of Council staff, in relation to advice (oral or written) which is prohibited under S76E of the Act.

To ensure that Councillors can undertake their representative and strategic policy making as well as associated duties, Councillors rely on a responsive, informed and professional organisation under the direction of the CEO.

To promote good governance, clear and effective communication protocols for Councillors and Council staff are essential. When communicating via email or in person, Councillors will therefore clearly indicate

- what action, if any they are requesting advice on
- their view on the urgency of the matter raised, and/or
- if they are sharing their opinions, and no further action is required

## Interaction Protocols to Support Principles

At Wyndham, there are a number of Councillor and Staff Interaction Protocols which will be applied in order to support the above principles:

- The Council employs the CEO, and the CEO is responsible for all staffing matters, including how resources are allocated
- The CEO, Directors and Managers are charged with responding to Councillor enquiries efficiently, and will do so by prioritising the most urgent matters that align with Council's priorities and organisational service standards for responses
- An active 'triage' system will be implemented to support the prioritising of the most urgent Councillor Enquiries, and this will be overseen by the Manager, City Governance supported by the Coordinator, Customer Service and others as required
- All Councillor Enquiries should be submitted to [crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au](mailto:crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au) or conveyed verbally to the Manager, City Governance supported by the Coordinator, Customer Service

- In line with this 'triage' system, there are three main types of Councillor Enquiries, including:
  - **Confidential and Sensitive Information:** If Councillors are making confidential or extremely sensitive enquiries or comments on a specific matter they should do so via the CEO, or if the matter specifically relates to a particular directorate, the Councillor should email the relevant Director. In both instances, Councillors should also cc [crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au](mailto:crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au)
  - **Proacts (Customer Request Management):** – Councillors are to lodge resident requests verbally or via email with the Coordinator Customer Service for logging into the Proact tracking system
  - **All other Councillor Enquiries:** Councillors should send all other Councillor Enquiries to [crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au](mailto:crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au) and allow the active triage system to prioritise and respond to these. Councillors may choose to cc the Director or Manager responsible, however both will be automatically updated as part of the triage system
  - All Councillor Enquiries will receive an acknowledgement no later than 2 business days after their receipt, including initial indications of how the matter will be handled and by whom, with estimated times for a final response
- Contact with Managers or Council staff is appropriate where Councillors are seeking clarification or further specific information on matters already sent to Councillors for their information by that Manager or staff member
- Where a Manager, or one of their staff, services a committee or a forum attended by a Councillor, it is also appropriate for the Councillor to seek information directly from that Manager or staff member, provided the request is also cc'd to [crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au](mailto:crenquiries@wyndham.vic.gov.au)
- Council staff are to inform their Director/Manager of any contact made directly to them by Councillors if the contact is outside of this protocol
- As per the Media Relations Protocol, the Mayor and Councillors are to deal respectively with the Manager Communications and Events for all communications and media matters, and
- All Councillors will be provided with regular reports on the progress of ProActs (Customer Request Management) and all other Councillor Enquiries on at least a fortnightly basis.

## Email Protocols to Support Principles

At Wyndham, there are a number of Email Protocols which will be applied in order to support the above principles:

1. Irrespective of whether emails/messages are sent on Council computers (phones) or on personal computers (phones), the emails/messages are subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requirements, and data protection legislation and may become disclosable and therefore available to the public
2. Care needs to be given to the subject and content of all emails and other written communication

3. An understanding that while emails/messaging may seem harmless and can encourage a more informal communication style, they are a business communication tool and can cause all kinds of image and legal problems for the Council or the individual Councillor or staff member if not used appropriately and efficiently. Apply the same professionalism you do to other forms of communication such as telephone or face-to-face
4. The requirement that Councillors and Staff abide by their obligations under the Local Government Act 1989 and all other legislation pertaining to their role and conduct is understood to apply to email and other written communication. As well as these obligations, Council agrees that any inappropriate email will be dealt with only by the Mayor and CEO if the email in question:
  - offends
  - is disrespectful or unprofessional
  - is threatening, bullying or causes humiliation or embarrassment
  - is discriminatory or defamatory
  - contains improper influence and/or direction
  - contains information which is untrue, misleading or deceptive, or it
  - discloses personal or confidential information.
5. Avoid sending any confidential or sensitive information. It is easy for someone else to forward the messages you thought were confidential
6. When responding to emails/messages do not respond in haste, particularly if you are angry – wait to calm down so your response is more measured and you are not in breach of these or other legislative obligations.
7. Follow the email communication protocols mentioned above in the Councillor- Staff Interaction section of this Policy. Only cc an email to the person you are expecting to receive a response or action from, or the people you think have to be in the loop in relation to your email as the more contract points involved in an email, the less clear and efficient the response can be.

For more sensitive matters, it is advisable to first clarify the issues and concerns you may have directly with the CEO or a Director before you commit views to an email, as you may be able to resolve your concerns more effectively. If you still hold concerns after these discussions, these sensitive matters should then be raised confidentially between the Councillors and/or the CEO.