



Code of Conduct for Employees

Shire of Meekatharra
20 February 2021

PREAMBLE

The Code of Conduct provides employees in Local Government with consistent guidelines for an acceptable standard of professional conduct. The Code addresses in a concise manner the broader issue of ethical responsibility and encourages greater transparency and accountability in individual Local Governments.

The Code is complementary to the principles adopted in the Local Government Act and Regulations which incorporates four fundamental aims to result in:-

- (a) better decision-making by local governments;*
- (b) greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments;*
- (c) greater accountability of local governments to their communities; and*
- (d) more efficient and effective local government.*

The Code provides a guide and a basis of expectations for employees. It encourages a commitment to ethical and professional behaviour and outlines principles in which individual and collective Local Government responsibilities may be based.

STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT

The Code of Conduct observes statutory requirements of *the Local Government Act 1995* (s.5.51A – Code of Conduct for Employees), *Local Government Regulations Amendment (Employee Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*.

1. ROLE OF EMPLOYEES

Definition

local government employee means a person —

- (a) employed by a local government under section 5.36(1) but does not include the CEO; or*
- (b) engaged by a local government under a contract for services;*

The role of employees is determined by the functions of the CEO as set out in S 5.41 of the Local Government Act 1995:

“The CEO’s functions are to:

- (a) advise the council in relation to the functions of a local government under this Act and other written laws;*
- (b) ensure that advice and information is available to the council so that informed decisions can be made;*
- (c) cause council decisions to be implemented;*
- (d) manage the day to day operations of the local government;*
- (e) liaise with the mayor or president on the local government’s affairs and the performance of the local government’s functions;*
- (f) speak on behalf of the local government if the mayor or president agrees;*
- (g) be responsible for the employment, management supervision, direction and dismissal of other employees (subject to S 5.37(2) in relation to senior employees);*
- (h) ensure that records and documents of the local government are properly kept for the purposes of this Act and any other written law; and*
- (i) perform any other function specified or delegated by the local government or imposed under this Act or any other written law as a function to be performed by the CEO.”*

1.1 Principles affecting the employment of employees by the Shire

The following principles, set out in section 5.40 of the Act, apply to the employment of the Shire’s employees:

- “(a) employees are to be selected and promoted in accordance with the principles of merit and equity; and*
- (b) no power with regard to matters affecting employees is to be exercised on the basis of nepotism or patronage; and*
- (c) employees are to be treated fairly and consistently; and*
- (d) there is to be no unlawful discrimination against employees or persons seeking employment by the Shire on a ground referred to in the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 or on any other ground; and*
- (e) employees are to be provided with safe and healthy working conditions in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984; and*
- (f) such other principles, not inconsistent with this Division, as may be prescribed.”*

2. CONFLICT AND DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

2.1 Conflict of Interest

- (a) Employees will ensure that there is no actual (or perceived) conflict of interest between their personal interests and the impartial fulfilment of their professional duties.
- (b) Employees will not engage in private work with or for any person or body with an interest in a proposed or current contract with the Local Government, without first making disclosure to the Chief Executive Officer. In this respect, it does not matter whether advantage is in fact obtained, as any appearance that private dealings could conflict with performance of duties must be scrupulously avoided.
- (c) Employees will lodge written notice with the Chief Executive Officer describing an intention to undertake a dealing in land within the local government district or which may otherwise be in conflict with the Council's functions (other than purchasing the principal place of residence).
- (d) Employees who exercise a recruitment or other discretionary function will make disclosure before dealing with relatives or close friends and will disqualify themselves from dealing with those persons.
- (e) Employees will refrain from partisan political activities which could cast doubt on their neutrality and impartiality in acting in their professional capacity. An individual's rights to maintain their own political convictions are not impinged upon by this clause. It is recognised that such convictions cannot be a basis for discrimination and this is supported by anti-discriminatory legislation.

2.2 Financial Interest

Employees will adopt the principles of disclosure of financial interest as contained within the Local Government Act.

2.3 Disclosure of Interest

Definition:

In this clause, and in accordance with Regulation 19AA of the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 –

“interest” means an interest that could, or could reasonably be perceived to, adversely affect the impartiality of the person having the interest; and includes an interest arising from kinship, friendship or membership of an association.

- (a) A person who is an employee and who has an interest in any matter to be discussed at a Council or Committee meeting attended by the person is required to disclose the nature of the interest:
 - (i) in a written notice given to the CEO before the meeting; or
 - (ii) at the meeting immediately before the matter is discussed.
- (b) A person who is an employee and who has given, or will give, advice in respect of any matter to be discussed at a Council or Committee meeting not attended by the person is required to disclose the nature of any interest the person has in the matter:
 - (i) in a written notice given to the CEO before the meeting; or
 - (ii) at the time the advice is given.
- (c) A requirement described under items (a) and (b) exclude an interest referred to in Section 5.60 of the Local Government Act 1995.
- (d) A person is excused from a requirement made under items (a) or (b) to disclose the nature of an interest if:
 - (i) the person's failure to disclose occurs because the person did not know he or she had an interest in the matter; or
 - (ii) the person's failure to disclose occurs because the person did not know the matter in which he or she had an interest would be discussed at the meeting and the person discloses the nature of the interest as soon as possible after becoming aware of the discussion of a matter of that kind.
- (e) If a person who is an employee makes a disclosure in a written notice given to the CEO before a meeting to comply with requirements of items (a) or (b), then:
 - (i) before the meeting the CEO is to cause the notice to be given to the person who is to preside at the meeting; and
 - (ii) immediately before a matter to which the disclosure relates is discussed at the meeting the person presiding is to bring the notice and its contents to the attention of the persons present.

- (f) If:
- (i) to comply with a requirement made under item (a), the nature of a person's interest in a matter is disclosed at a meeting; or
 - (ii) a disclosure is made as described in item (d)(ii) at a meeting; or
 - (iii) to comply with a requirement made under item (e)(ii), a notice disclosing the nature of a person's interest in a matter is brought to the attention of the persons present at a meeting, the nature of the interest is to be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

3. PERSONAL BENEFIT

3.1 Use of Confidential Information

Employees shall not use confidential information to gain improper advantage for themselves or another person or body in ways which are inconsistent with their obligation to act impartially and in good faith, or to improperly cause harm, detriment or impairment to any person, body, or the Council.

Due discretion shall be exercised by all those who have access to confidential or sensitive information. Every matter dealt with by, or brought before, a meeting sitting behind closed doors, shall be treated as strictly confidential, and shall not without the authority of the Council be disclosed to any person other than the Council members and/or employees of the Shire (and in the case of employees only so far as may be necessary for the performance of their duties) prior to the discussion of the matter at a meeting of the Council held with open doors.

Nothing in this section prevents an officer from disclosing confidential information:

- to a legal practitioner for the purpose of obtaining legal advice; or
- if the disclosure is permitted by law.

3.2 Intellectual Property

The title to Intellectual Property in all duties relating to contracts of employment will be assigned to the Local Government upon its creation unless otherwise agreed by separate contract.

3.3 Improper or Undue Influence

Employees will not take advantage of their position to improperly influence Council Members or other employees in the performance of their duties or functions, in order to gain undue or improper (direct or indirect) advantage or gain for themselves or for any other person or body.

Employees shall not take advantage of their position to improperly influence any other person in order to gain undue or improper (direct or indirect) advantage or gain, pecuniary or otherwise, for themselves or for any other person or body. Similarly, employees shall not take advantage of their positions to improperly disadvantage or cause detriment to the local government or any other person.

3.4 Gifts - Employees

Definitions:

In this clause, and in accordance with Regulation 19AA and 19AB of the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996:

“activity involving a local government discretion” means an activity —

- (a) that cannot be undertaken without an authorisation from the local government; or*
- (b) by way of a commercial dealing with the local government;*

“associated person” means a person who —

- (a) is undertaking or seeking to undertake an activity involving a local government discretion; or*
- (b) it is reasonable to believe, is intending to undertake an activity involving a local government discretion;*

“code of conduct” means a code of conduct under section 5.51A;

“gift” has the meaning given in section 5.57; but does not include —

- (i) a gift from a relative as defined in section 5.74(1); or*
- (ii) a gift that must be disclosed under the Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997 regulation 30B; or*
- (iii) a gift from a statutory authority, government instrumentality or non-profit association for professional training; or*
- (iv) a gift from WALGA, the Australian Local Government Association Limited (ABN 31 008 613 876), the Local Government Professionals Australia WA (ABN 91 208 607 072) or the LG Professionals Australia (ABN 85 004 221 818);*

“local government employee” means a person —

- (a) employed by a local government under section 5.36(1) but does not include the CEO; or*
- (b) engaged by a local government under a contract for services;*

“prohibited gift”, in relation to a local government employee, means —

- (a) a gift worth the threshold amount or more; or*
- (b) a gift that is 1 of 2 or more gifts given to the local government employee by the same person within a period of 1 year that are in total worth the threshold amount or more;*

“threshold amount”, for a prohibited gift, means \$300

- (a) A person who is an employee is to refrain from accepting a prohibited gift from an associated person.
- (b) A notifiable gift is a gift that is:
 - a. worth between \$50 and \$300; or

- b. is one of 2 or more gifts given to the employee by the same person within a period of 6 months that is in total worth between \$50 and \$300
- (c) A person who is an employee and who accepts a notifiable gift from a person who:
 - (i) is undertaking or seeking to undertake an activity involving a local government discretion; or
 - (ii) it is reasonable to believe is intending to undertake an activity involving a local government discretion,is to notify the CEO, in accordance with item (c) and within 10 days of accepting the gift, of the acceptance.
- (c) The notification of the acceptance of a notifiable gift must be in writing and include:
 - (i) the name of the person who gave the gift; and
 - (ii) the date on which the gift was accepted; and
 - (iii) a description, and the estimated value, of the gift; and
 - (iv) the nature of the relationship between the person who is an employee and the person who gave the gift; and
 - (v) if the gift is a notifiable gift under paragraph (b) of the definition of “notifiable gift” (whether or not it is also a notifiable gift under paragraph (a) of that definition):
 - (1) a description; and
 - (2) the estimated value; and
 - (3) the date of acceptance,of each other gift accepted within the 6 month period.
- (d) The CEO is to maintain a register of notifiable gifts and record in it details of notifications given to comply with a requirement made under item (c).
- (e) This clause does not apply to gifts received from a relative (as defined in s.5.74(1) of the *Local Government Act 1995*) or an electoral gift (to which other disclosure provisions apply).
- (f) This clause does not prevent the acceptance of a gift on behalf of the local government in the course of performing professional or ceremonial duties in circumstances where the gift is presented in whole to the CEO, entered into the Register of Notifiable Gifts and used or retained exclusively for the benefit of the local government.

4. CONDUCT OF EMPLOYEES

4.1 Personal Behaviour

- (a) Employees will:
 - (i) act, and be seen to act, properly and in accordance with the requirements of the law and the terms of this Code;
 - (ii) perform their duties impartially and in the best interests of the Local Government uninfluenced by fear or favour;

- (iii) act in good faith (i.e. honestly, for the proper purpose, and without exceeding their powers) in the interests of the Local Government and the community;
- (iv) make no allegations which are improper or derogatory (unless true and in the public interest) and refrain from any form of conduct, in the performance of their official or professional duties, which may cause any reasonable person unwarranted offence or embarrassment; and
- (v) always act in accordance with their obligation of fidelity to the Local Government.

4.2 Honesty and Integrity

Employees will:

- (a) observe the highest standards of honesty and integrity, and avoid conduct which might suggest any departure from these standards;
- (b) bring to the notice of the Mayor/President any dishonesty or possible dishonesty on the part of the Chief Executive Officer, and in the case of an employee to the Chief Executive Officer.
- (c) be frank and honest in their official dealing with each other.

4.3 Personal Communications and Social Media

- (a) Personal communications and statements made privately in conversation, written, recorded, emailed or posted in personal social media, have the potential to be made public, whether intended or not.
- (b) Employees must not, unless undertaking a duty in accordance with their employment, disclose information, make comments or engage in communication activities about or on behalf of the Local Government, its Council Members, employees or contractors, which breach this Code of Conduct.
- (c) Employee comments which become public and breach the Code of Conduct, or any other operational policy or procedure, may constitute a disciplinary matter and may also be determined as misconduct and be reported under the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*, in accordance with the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*.

4.4 Performance of Duties

- (a) While on duty, employees will give their whole time and attention to the Local Government's business and ensure that their work is carried out efficiently, economically and effectively, and that their standard of work reflects favourably both on them and on the Local Government.

4.5 Compliance with Lawful Orders

- (a) Employees will comply with any lawful order given by any person having authority to make or give such an order, with any doubts as to the propriety of any such order being taken up with the superior of the person who gave the order and, if resolution cannot be achieved, with the Chief Executive Officer.
- (b) Employees will give effect to the lawful decisions and policies of the Local Government, whether or not they agree with or approve of them.

4.6 Administrative and Management Practices

Employees will ensure compliance with proper and reasonable administrative practices and conduct, and professional and responsible management practices.

4.7 Corporate Obligations

(a) Standard of Dress

Employees are expected to comply with neat and responsible dress standards at all times. Accordingly, Management reserves the right to adopt policies relating to corporate dress and to raise the issue of dress with individual employees.

(b) Communication and Public Relations

- (i) All aspects of communication by employees (including verbal, written or personal), involving the Local Governments activities should reflect the status and objectives of that Local Government. Communications should be accurate, polite and professional.

5. DEALING WITH COUNCIL PROPERTY

5.1 Use of Local Government Resources

Definition:

In this clause, and in accordance with Regulation 19AE of the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 –

Resources of the local government includes –

- (i) local government property; and*
- (ii) services provided, or paid for, by the local government*

Employees will:

- (a) be scrupulously honest in their use of the Local Government's resources and shall not misuse them or permit their misuse (or the appearance of misuse) by any other person or body;

- (b) use the Local Government resources entrusted to them effectively and economically in the course of their duties; and
- (c) not use the Local Government's resources (including the services of other Council employees) for private purposes (other than when supplied as part of a contract of employment), unless properly authorised to do so, and appropriate payments are made (as determined by the Chief Executive Officer).

5.2 Travelling and Sustenance Expenses

Employees will only claim or accept travelling and sustenance expenses arising out of travel-related matters which have a direct bearing on the services, policies or business of the Local Government in accordance with Local Government policy, awards and the provisions of the Local Government Act.

5.3 Access to Information

Employees will ensure that Council Members are given access to all information necessary for them to properly perform their functions and comply with their responsibilities.