

LGMA QUEENSLAND

**INDUCTING
NEW AND EXISTING
COUNCILLORS**

This document was produced by
the LGMA Queensland
Governance Village



INDUCTING NEW AND EXISTING COUNCILLORS

Any local government election or by-election has the potential to change the composition of a council.

Councillors can better assist and represent their constituents and community if they have a well-balanced understanding of the local government environment and their responsibilities and obligations.

Immediately after an election, there is an obligation on councils to ensure that newly elected councillors are provided with the information necessary to ensure that they can quickly attain a clear understanding of the system of local government, how their council works and a full knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. Equally, an election presents an opportunity to foster and build positive relationships with existing and new councillors and build a strong council that works together for the community they represent.

This guide aims to provide councils with the tools to implement and conduct councillor induction so that councillors can perform their roles responsibly and effectively.

From their first council meeting, councillors will be required to make important decisions on behalf of the community and take responsibility for those decisions. Many of these decisions will involve significant expenditure of public money, assets or resources.

Councillors are from a range of diverse backgrounds and life experiences and bring different and valuable skills to the role. However, they will have varying degrees of understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Some councillors may also require skills development in areas that are unfamiliar to them e.g. council meeting procedures, rules of debate and reading financial statements. Other councillors may have a physical disability or impairment that affects their vision, hearing or mobility. Similarly, may not be highly literate or English may not be their first language.

A change in council is also an opportunity to refresh the knowledge of the more experienced councillors so that they are aware of any legislative or policy changes or council procedures.

This resource seeks to help councils to ensure that councillors are given every opportunity to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for them to perform their job well and in the best interests of the community they represent. This induction activity should complement the elected member training that is provided by the Department of Local Government and Planning (DLGP) and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).

Purpose of Inducting Councillors

A formalised induction process is important to provide councillors with essential information to orient them to their new role. It enables councillors to become quickly familiar with how council works, the rules under which a council operates, the complexities of their role and an understanding of their council.

It also provides an opportunity to set a positive tone, establish clear roles and responsibilities and to build positive working relationships from the outset. This lays the foundation for a successful term in office and allows council to be effective in achieving its goals.

The benefits of an effectively inducting both new and experience councillors include:

- Orientation to council and the local government arena;
- Opportunity to meet, build rapport and build positive working relationships with other councillors and key staff;
- Provides information/updates on key legislative and the councillor's legislative role and responsibilities;
- Provides a briefing on the big picture and identifies key issues and tasks for the new council;
- Provides information/updates on key information, policies and procedures; and
- May provide a reality check for new councillors about what the role entails.

All councillors, both new and existing, need to attend the induction. This may also provide the perfect opportunity for appropriate mentoring relationships to be established between experienced and new councillors and to commence building a functional team dynamic.

The induction process provides the administrative body of council with the opportunity to provide the essential information to assist councillors to perform well in their role and make informed and effective decisions from the start of their term in office. It is important that this information is provided to all councillors in a structured and consistent way. It is also an opportunity for council staff to meet, build rapport and form positive working relationships with councillors.

What information do councillors initially require:

- The legislation or rules under which councils operate;
- What their roles, responsibilities and formal obligations are;
- What the council does and how it operates;
- The organisational structure of council and the key staff;
- Key policies and procedures;
- Meeting times, venues and procedures; and
- Where to go for further information or assistance.

Timing

Induction begins as soon as possible after the polls are declared and prior to the first council meeting. An initial session should aim to provide councillors with the basic information they need to function in their role, including in meetings.

Delivery of Programme

Where possible, induction should be delivered in such a way that it doesn't overload councillors with too much information at one time. It may be necessary to have a number of short sessions or utilise a range of delivery modes and materials. Utilising case studies to demonstrate appropriate behaviour helps newly elected councillors understand their responsibilities and may remind experienced councillors of areas that they may need to review.

Developing a number of quizzes to facilitate evaluation of each councillor's understanding at the end of each session is also recommended. These do not have to be formal or even serious, but will help identify areas where additional skills or knowledge development may be required.

A variety of delivery strategies will ensure that the different learning styles of each councillor are catered for. Where possible, presentations and information provided should be supported by written materials that councillors can retain and refer to when necessary.

Providing this written material in an easy-to-update format will ensure that council has an up-to-date Councillor Manual at all times, which will be beneficial in the event of a councillor being elected as a result of a by-election.

Remember, this is a perfect opportunity to build relationships. For this reason, it may be preferable to arrange for someone other than the Chief Executive Officer to facilitate the delivery of the induction. Instead, schedule a range of facilitators and presenters to keep councillors engaged and allow the CEO to be involved with the relationship building exercises. Senior managers or key staff could be invited to deliver sessions as well as existing or previous experienced councillors.

Make time during the sessions to have fun and to establish personal relationships. Team building exercises or social activities will help to build a stronger, more cohesive team.

Induction Programme Content

The induction content should include information on each of the following topics:

- Legal and political context of local government
- Roles and responsibilities of councillors and staff
- Legal and ethical responsibilities and risk management
- Decision making
- Overview of the key functional areas of council operations, staffing and major policy documents
- Strategic planning, including community engagement and change management
- Financial processes and management
- Customer services and complaint handling
- Teamwork, communication and managing different viewpoints
- Orientation to council facilities and local government area (including a tour where appropriate)
- Support to assist councillors in the role.

Below is a list of the suggested content that could be covered under each of these topics:

1. Legal and Political Context of Local Government

- ❑ Familiarisation with the *Local Government Act 2009* and Regulation including the local government principles
- ❑ Familiarisation with other local government Acts
 - Sustainable Planning Act
 - Environmental Protection Act
 - Integrity Act (Lobbying and Lobbyist Code)
 - Right to Information and Information Privacy Acts
- ❑ Roles and responsibilities of other agencies e.g.
 - Department of Local Government and Planning
 - Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)
 - Local Government Managers' Association Queensland
 - Crime and Misconduct Commission
 - Ombudsman's Office
 - Queensland Audit Office
 - Office of Information Commissioner
 - Integrity Commissioner
 - Local Government Grants Commission
 - LG Super

2. Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors and Staff

- ❑ Provisions in the Act relating to the role of:
 - Councillors
 - the Mayor
 - Chief Executive Officer
- ❑ Delegations
- ❑ Balancing the dual role of a councillor as a member of the governing body and as an elected representative
- ❑ Councillors guide the strategic direction of the council, staff implement the decisions of the council
- ❑ Responsibility of councillors in overseeing the performance of the Chief Executive Officer
- ❑ Interaction between councillors and staff

3. Legal and Ethical Responsibilities and Risk Management

- ❑ General legal responsibilities of councillors as members of the governing body under the Local Government Act and other legislation
- ❑ Up to date accountability and compliance requirements
- ❑ Councillor Code of Conduct including Complaints Management Process; plus Council's Code of Conduct for staff
- ❑ Risk Management
- ❑ Personal legal responsibilities (e.g. OH&S, privacy, records management, surcharging)
- ❑ Material Personal Interests and Conflicts of Interest

- Councillor and Related persons Register of Interests
 - Policies and delegations registers
 - Register of election gifts
 - Discretionary funding
4. Decision-Making
- Meeting procedures, the provisions of the Act and Regulation and Council's Code of Meeting Practice.
 - Closed meetings, business papers, minutes and councillor access to information.
5. Overview of Key Functional Areas of Council Operations
- Council's organisational structure with a focus on key directorates and staff
 - Planning and other regulatory functions, infrastructure, financial management, community services, governance
 - How council will undertake it's required review of all key policies
 - Media policy and support
 - Community Engagement plan
 - Disaster Management plan
6. Strategic Planning
- Strategic and operational planning and reporting processes of council, including land use planning
 - Mechanisms for ensuring structured and representative community consultation and participation in planning processes
 - Current strategic and operational plans and progress in implementation
 - Change management processes
7. Financial Processes and Financial Management
- Responsibilities of councillors for the financial management of council
 - Financial processes and relationship with other planning processes
 - Tools to understand, interpret, develop and effectively manage financial resources of council
8. Customer Services and Complaints Handling
- Customer service in the local government sector
 - Council's complaints' handling process and how councillors should handle constituent's concerns so that these are complementary (including adhering to privacy requirements)
9. Teamwork, Communication and Managing Differing Viewpoints
- Development of teamwork skills
 - Development of conflict resolution skills
 - What support or undermines the effective functioning of council

10. Orientation to Council Facilities and Local Government Area

- Orientation to council chambers, offices and facilities available to councillors
- Demographic profile of local government area
- Social, environmental and economic issues
- Guided tour of local government area including council facilities, significant sites and projects/assets
- History and local culture
- Disaster management processes
- Political landscape
- State and Federal members
- Local media
- Neighbouring councils
- Local conventions, customs and practices
- Local advisory committees and boards

11. Support to Assist Councillors in the Role

- Councillor annual fees
- Policy on the provision of councillor expenses and facilities
- Councillor training and development needs analysis and programs
- Conferences and seminars
- Informal and formal mentoring strategies

12. Housekeeping

- Office accommodation
- Executive Support
- Council vehicle and fuel card
- Pay including account details, superannuation, salary sacrifice
- Technology usage
 - Website
 - social media
 - use of council logos
 - mobile phone
 - computer and/or iPad
- Stationery (letterhead and business cards etc.)
- Insurance

Induction Handbook

Councils should develop materials for inclusion in an induction handbook to support councillors in the first weeks, following induction. It may be appropriate to provide the handbook in written form as well as on-line for easy reference.

Suggested topics for inclusion in the handbook are:

- Basic information about the council
- Demographic and economic profiles of the local government area
- Information about council meetings
- Key areas of the legislation
- Key planning and policy documents and information
- Information about support for councillors

1. Basic Information about Council

- Composition and structure
- Organisational chart
- Key function and service areas, staff and contacts
- Information and/or chart showing the relationships between councillors and council staff and the decision making processes
- Council facilities and map

2. Profile of the Local Government Area

- Divisions, population statistics, land use, business use and major features and council facilities

3. Information about Council Meetings

- Agenda and past minutes
- Meeting times and frequency, venues, deadlines and delivery of minutes
- Council committees
- Meetings code of practice

4. Key Legislation

- Copy of key legislation or relevant excerpts from legislation such as the *Local Government Act 2009* and the *Local Government Regulation 2010*
- List of key legislation under which councils have governance responsibilities (e.g. EP&A Act and the PEO Act) as well as personal responsibilities (OH&S Act and Records Management Act)
- Copy of relevant forms or information about registers to declare interests

Key Planning and Policy Documents and Information

- Current strategic and operational plans
- Current budget
- Current annual report
- Current community engagement plan
- Current disaster management plan
- Code of conduct for councillors
- Policy on provision of councillor expenses and facilities
- Delegations
- Policy on access to information
- Other relevant plans, policies and procedures
- Policy register/list of policies
- How to access up to date versions of the legislation

5. Information about support for Councillors

- Councillor expenses and facilities and how to make requests and claims
- Training and skills development needs assessment
- Training and skills development programs
- Contact details of council officer/s that councillors may contact for information

6. Other useful resources

- Induction program presentations and materials
- Contact details for key organisations
- Copies of other useful publications

Evaluations

An induction process should be evaluated to assist a council to determine its effectiveness and identify improvements.

Evaluation helps a council to determine what elements of the process worked well and why and also helps to determine if there are any gaps or issues that may need to be addressed with particular councillors at a later date.

After the Induction

This should be the first step in a continuing review and delivery of training and development needs of councillors throughout their term.

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If you have any further questions or would like any additional assistance with preparing or delivering Councillor Induction please feel free to contact:

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