

Management report to Council

Agenda item 6.3

Revised Public Transparency Policy

Council

Presenter: David Thompson, Director Governance

28 May 2024

Purpose and background

1. To consider adopting the revised Public Transparency Policy.
2. The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) requires Council to adopt and maintain a Public Transparency Policy (the Policy). The City of Melbourne adopted the Policy on 25 August 2020. The Policy was scheduled to be reviewed on 31 August 2021.
3. Transparency, accountability and good governance are key themes in the Act. The Act stipulates a Council provides good governance if it performs its role in accordance with nine overarching governance principles and five supporting principles. Public transparency is one of the five supporting principles. The public transparency principles are:
 - 3.1. Principle A

Decision making processes must be transparent except when the Council is dealing with information that is confidential under the Act or any other Act.
 - 3.2. Principle B

Council information must be publicly available unless either -

 - o the information is confidential by virtue of the Act or any other Act
 - o public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.
 - 3.3. Principle C

Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community.
 - 3.4. Principle D

Public awareness of the availability of Council information must be facilitated.
4. Council officers have reviewed the Policy. All proposed changes are shown using the track changes tool. The revised Policy using the track changes tool is at Attachment 2 and a clean copy of the revised Policy is at Attachment 3.

Key issues

5. Local Government Victoria has produced (see Attachment 4) a document to assist the community and sector understand the public transparency principles.
6. The revised Policy addresses each of the public transparency principles and sets out:
 - 6.1. the types of information that will be publically available and accessible as of course
 - 6.2. the types of information that will not be publicly available and accessible
 - 6.3. processes by which request for Council Information will be assessed and determined

- 6.4. methods by which Council Information will be provided to persons making requests
 - 6.5. the factors that may be taken into account when assessing and determining whether the release of Council Information would be contrary to the public interest.
7. The revised Policy (see Attachment 3) has been developed incorporating the requirements of the Act, guidance provided from Local Government Victoria, collaboration with colleagues at other councils and assistance from Council's lawyers.

Recommendation from management

8. That Council resolves:
- 8.1. To adopt the revised Public Transparency Policy as contained in Attachment 3 to the report from management.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (page 2 of 31)
2. Current Public Transparency Policy with tracked changes (page 4 of 31)
3. Revised Public Transparency Policy (page 18 of 31)
4. Local Government Act 2020 – Principles Public Transparency (page 30 of 31)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. It is considered the proposed actions in this report and the revised Policy do not infringe unreasonably upon any prescribed human rights, freedoms or responsibilities.

Finance

2. Other than Council officer time in revising the Public Transparency Policy there are no financial and resource implications associated with the report.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

4. In revising the Policy no Occupational Health and Safety issues or opportunities have been identified.

Stakeholder consultation

5. No community consultation has been sought in the preparation of this report.

Environmental sustainability

6. No environmental issues were identified.



Public Transparency Policy

Adopted by Melbourne City Council on ~~25 August 2020~~ 28 May 2024

1. Commitment

The Council is an open and transparent organisation. We encourage opportunities for the community to take part in our activities and decision making, and we share information about our decisions and performance.

2. Purpose

This purpose of this Policy is to:

- 2.1 give effect to the Public Transparency Principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) and formalise Council's support for transparency in its decision making processes
- 2.2 describe the ways in which Council Information will be made publicly available
- 2.3 specify which Council Information must be made publicly available as a matter of course
- 2.4 describe the categories of Council Information that may be unavailable to the public.

This Policy is adopted under section 57 of the Act and gives effect to the Public Interest Transparency Principles outlined in section 58 of the Act.

3. Objective

The objective of this Policy is to formalise Council's support for transparency in its decision-making processes and availability of Council Information to achieve the purpose stated in Part 2 of this Policy.

4. Scope

This Policy applies to Councillors and Officers.

5. Definitions

In this Policy, the following words and phrases mean:

'Act' means the *Local Government Act 2020*.

'Chief Executive Officer' includes an Acting Chief Executive Officer.

'Closed Meeting' means a Meeting that is closed to members of the public.

'Community' means the residents and ratepayers of, and visitors to, the Municipal District including traditional owners of the land in the Municipal District and may, depending on the context, refer to all of those people or to particular subsets of those people.

'Confidential Information' means confidential information as defined in section 3(1) of the Act or by virtue of any other Act.

'Council' means Melbourne City Council.

'Council Information' means all documents and other information held by Council.

'Council Offices' means the offices of Council located at the Town Hall Administration Building, 120 Swanston Street, Melbourne.

'Council Website' means Council's website at www.melbourne.vic.gov.au

'Governance Rules' means the governance rules adopted by Council under section 60 of the Act, as amended from time to time.

'Health Information' means health information as defined in section 3(1) of the *Health Records Act 2001*.

'Meeting' means a meeting of Council or a Delegated Committee of Council.

'Municipal District' means the municipal district of Council.

'Officer' means a member of Council staff, and includes the Chief Executive Officer.

'Personal Information' means personal information as defined in section 3(1) of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

'Public Transparency Principles' means the public transparency principles set out in section 58 of the Act and reproduced in Part 7 of this Policy.

'Requestor' means a person making a request to access Council Information under and in accordance with this Policy.

6. Responsibility for this Policy

- 6.1 The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the application and operation of this Policy.
- 6.2 The Chief Executive Officer may, from time to time, authorise another Officer or Officers to fulfil any of the Chief Executive Officer's functions and duties under this Policy.
- 6.3 Where another Officer is, or other Officers are, authorised under clause 6.2, any reference in this Policy to the Chief Executive Officer is to be read as a reference to that Officer or those Officers.

7. Public Transparency Principles

- 7.1 The Public Transparency Principles are set out in section 58 of the Act as follows:
 - 7.1.1 Council decision-making processes must be transparent, except when Council is dealing with information that is confidential by virtue of the Act or any other Act.
 - 7.1.2 Council Information must be publicly available, unless either:
 - (a) the information is confidential by virtue of the Act or any other Act; or
 - (b) public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.
 - 7.1.3 Council Information must be understandable and accessible to members of the Municipal Community.
 - 7.1.4 Public awareness of the availability of Council Information must be facilitated.
- 7.2 Council will give effect to and implement the Public Transparency Principles in accordance with this Policy.

8. Council Decision-Making Processes

- 8.1 Council will ensure that the decision-making processes that it adopts are transparent and open to the Community so that the Community is provided with an opportunity for meaningful engagement with Council and its decision-making processes.
- 8.2 Without limiting the generality of clause 8.1, Council's decision-making processes will:
 - 8.2.1 be conducted in accordance with the Act and the Governance Rules

8.2.2 be conducted in a forum that is open to, and accessible by the Community, unless considering Confidential Information

8.2.3 be informed by the:

(a) views of those members of the Community whose rights and interests will be directly affected by the decision; and

(b) responses, if any, to any process of community engagement conducted by Council in respect of the decision, whether in accordance with its Community Engagement Policy or otherwise.

8.3 Further details of Council's decision-making process can be found in Chapter 1 of the Governance Rules.

9. Availability of Council Information

9.1 All Council Information will be made available to the public, unless either the:

9.1.1 Council Information is Confidential Information

9.1.2 release of the Council Information is assessed by the Chief Executive Officer as being contrary to the public interest.

9.2 A list of the categories of Council Information which will generally, subject to this Policy, be made available either on the Council Website, at the Council Offices or on request, is set out at Appendix 1 to this Policy.

10. Publications and Social Media

10.1 Council publishes a range of newsletters, reports and handbooks for residents, businesses and visitors to the Municipal District. These publications are available on the Council Website, at the Council Offices or on request to Council. Some of these publications are also available at our public libraries.

10.2 Council will use its social media channels to publish and promote Council Information, such as Council Meetings and community consultation, to encourage community engagement and transparency.

11. Accessibility of Council Information

11.1 Council Information will be made available on the Council Website, at the Council Offices and/or on request.

11.2 Council will, to the extent possible, facilitate access to Council Information by:

11.2.1 making Council Information available in accordance with this Policy

11.2.2 endeavouring to make Council Information accessible electronically, and in hard copy where requested

11.2.3 endeavouring to convert Council Information to different accessible formats where necessary for members of the Community for whom either:

(a) English is their second language; or

(b) their disability requires an alternative means of access to be provided.

11.3 Where a request is made for access to Council Information that is not on the Council Website or otherwise available at the Council Offices, the Chief Executive Officer will:

11.3.1 review the request

- 11.3.2 assess whether the Council Information requested is Confidential Information, or its release would be contrary to the public interest
- 11.3.3 notify the Requestor of the outcome of that assessment.
- 11.4 If the Council Information requested is assessed under clause 11.3 as not being Confidential Information, or its release is assessed as not being contrary to the public interest, the Council Information will be provided to the Requestor.
- 11.5 The Council Information will be provided to the Requestor by email unless either the:
 - 11.5.1 Requestor seeks access in a different form, including by reference to the matters stated in clause 11.2.3, in which case the Council Information will be provided in that form, unless it is impracticable to do so; ~~or-~~
 - 11.5.2 The Chief Executive Officer, having regard to the nature of the Council Information requested, determines that the Council Information should be provided in a different form, such as by inspection.
- 11.6 Council will provide such support to the Requestor as it considers reasonable to ensure that the Council Information provided is understood by them.
- 11.7 If, under clause 11.3, the Council Information requested is assessed as being Confidential Information, or its release is assessed as being contrary to the public interest, the Requestor will be advised:
 - 11.7.1 that the request has been denied
 - 11.7.2 of the reasons for the request being denied
 - 11.7.3 of alternative mechanisms by which they may seek access to the Council Information (e.g., by making a request made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*).
- 11.8 Any request for access to Council Information by way of an alternative mechanism under clause 11.7.3 will be assessed according to the process applicable to it.
- 11.9 Where:
 - 11.9.1 Council Information requested is assessed under clause 11.3 as being Confidential Information, or its release is assessed as being contrary to the public interest; ~~but~~
 - 11.9.2 it is practicable for that Council Information to be provided with deletions so that it is suitable for release to the Requestor; ~~and~~
 - 11.9.3 the Chief Executive Officer believes that the Requestor would want the Council Information in that format,

the Council Information will be provided in that format.

12. Council Information that is Not Available

Some Council information may not be made publicly available. This will occur if the information is Confidential Information, or its release would be contrary to the public interest.

12.1 Confidential Information

- 12.1.1 What constitutes Confidential Information is set out in section 3(1) of the Act and includes information within the following categories:

Type	Description
Council business information	Information that would prejudice 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.
Legally 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, or the disclosure of which would involve an interference with personal privacy under the <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> .
Private commercial information	Information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets or that, if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.
Confidential meeting information	Records of Council and Delegated Committee meetings that are closed to the public under section 66(2)(a) of the Act <u>to consider confidential information</u> .
Internal arbitration information	<p>Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>in an application made for an internal arbitration process;</u> • <u>provided to, or produced by, a Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar for the purposes of an internal arbitration process, other than the findings and reason; or</u> • <u>provided to, or produced by, an arbiter for the purpose of an internal arbitration process, other than the findings and the reasons.</u>
Councillor Conduct Panel information	<p>Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided to, or produced by, a Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar, for the purposes of an application to form a Councillor Conduct Panel • provided to, or produced by, a Councillor Conduct Panel for the purposes of conducting a hearing, other than a decision or reasons for a decision • comprising any part of a statement of reasons or other document under the control of a Councillor Conduct Panel that the Councillor Conduct Panel determines contains confidential information.

Type	Description
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> .

12.1.2 In the interests of transparency, Council may, by resolution, determine to release information to the public even though it is Confidential Information.

12.1.3 A decision under clause ~~012-1.2~~ will generally only be made if Council, on the advice of the Chief Executive Officer, is satisfied that releasing the Confidential Information would not:

- (a) be inconsistent with any legal or contractual obligation
- (b) cause disadvantage to any person, including Council
- (c) otherwise be contrary to the public interest.

12.2 Contrary to the Public Interest

12.2.1 Council Information will not be made publicly available if doing so would be contrary to the public interest.

12.2.2 When assessing whether making certain Council Information publicly available would be contrary to the public interest, the Chief Executive Officer will have regard to, among other things:

- (a) the sensitivity of the Council Information
- (b) whether the Council Information comprises a draft, or otherwise is no longer current
- (c) any adverse effect that releasing the Council Information would have on the effectiveness of Council's decision-making processes.

12.2.3 Without limiting clause 12.2.2, factors that might lead to a decision that the release of Council Information is contrary to the public interest might include whether release would be likely to:

- (a) disclose Personal Information or Health Information of an individual other than the Requestor
- (b) disclose information or opinions of a preliminary nature such that they might either:
 - (i) mislead the Community with respect to Council's position on a matter; or
 - (ii) have a substantial adverse effect on the economy of the Municipal District
- (c) prejudice discussions or negotiations between Council and any other party, in relation to a contract, legal proceedings or any other matter
- (d) impair or otherwise impact on:
 - (i) Council's ability to obtain information in future that is similar in nature to the Council Information
 - (ii) negotiations with respect to employment arrangements for Officers
 - (iii) defence, prosecution and settlement of legal proceedings

- (e) impact on the reasonable allocation of Council's resources, including in responding to requests for Council Information that are assessed by the Chief Executive Officer as being frivolous, vexatious or repetitious in nature.

13. Public Awareness of Availability of Council Information

Council will ensure public awareness of this Policy and the availability of Council Information by:

- 13.1 publishing this Policy on the Council Website
- 13.2 making this Policy available for public inspection at Council's offices
- 13.3 converting this Policy to such accessible formats, having regard to clause 11.2.3, as the Chief Executive Officer determines
- 13.4 ensuring that all Officers:
 - 13.4.1 are aware of this Policy and its effect
 - 13.4.2 direct members of the Community to this Policy when access to Council Information is sought.

14. Copyright

14.1 The intellectual property of some Council Information available for public access belongs to third parties and is the subject of copyright. Access to this information is provided to members of the community in accordance with the relevant legislation. Copyright laws will apply to this information and Requestors are advised to seek the consent of the copyright owner before considering reproducing the information in any way.

14.15. Human Rights Charter

This Policy has been assessed against the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* as being consistent with that Act and, in particular, as promoting the rights of members of the Community:

- 14.15.1 not to have their privacy interfered with (section 13)
- 14.15.2 take part in public life (section 18), by having the opportunity to:
 - 14.15.2.1 participate in the conduct of Council's affairs
 - 14.15.2.2 have access to Council and Council Information.

14.16. Dissatisfaction with the Application of this Policy

14.16.1 If a Requestor is dissatisfied with Council's application of, or believes that Council has acted inconsistently with, this Policy, they can report their dissatisfaction to Council's ~~Coordinator~~ ~~Council Business Director~~ ~~Governance~~ ~~Governance~~ by:

- 14.16.1.1 email to privacy@melbourne.vic.gov.au
- 14.16.1.2 telephone on 9658 9658.
- 14.16.2 If the Requestor believes that the matter remains unresolved, it can be reported to the Victorian Ombudsman by:
 - 14.16.3 making a complaint online at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/complaints>

[15.4.16.4](#) telephone on [03-9643-62221800 806 314](#).

16.17. Application of this Policy

[16.4.17.1](#) This Policy applies to all Council Information, except Council Information which is made available, or is otherwise accessible, under another Act (other than an Act which refers to this Policy).

[16.2.17.2](#) Without limiting the generality of clause [16.4.18.1](#), this Policy does not apply to Council Information which is:

[16.2.17.2.1](#) required to be made available under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

[16.2.17.2.2](#) required to be made available under the *Building Act 1993*

[16.2.17.2.3](#) otherwise required to be made available on payment of a fee or charge.

17.18. Responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Council	Champion-Uphold the commitment and principles for public transparency through leadership, modelling practice and decision-making.	Ongoing
Executive Leadership Team	Champion-Uphold behaviours that foster transparency and drive the principles through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation of this policy.	Ongoing
Management Leadership Team	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
Director Governance	To monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing
Coordinator Manager Council Business	To monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing

18.19. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Council will review this Policy periodically to ensure that it continues to reflect the expectations of the Community with respect to the availability and accessibility of Council Information.

19.20. Related Policies and Legislation

Council's:

- [Complaint Handling Policy](#)
- [Council Plan](#)
- [Councillors Code of Conduct](#)
- [Staff Code of Conduct](#)

- Governance Rules
- City of Melbourne Open Data Principles
- Community Engagement Policy (~~to be developed~~)
- Privacy Policy
- Health Records Policy

Copyright Act 1986 (Cth)

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Local Government Act 2020

Local Government Act 1989

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Public Records Act 1973

Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

20.21. Responsibility for this Policy

Responsible Director: Director Governance

Date Adopted: By Council on ~~25 August 2020~~ 28 May 2024

Date of Next Review: ~~31 August 2024~~ 31 May 2026

Appendix 1

For the purposes of clause 9 of this Policy, the following Council Information will generally, and subject to this Policy, be made available either on the Council Website or on request by a member of the Community.

1. Documents such as:

- Plans and Reports adopted by Council including but not limited to the Council Plan, Workforce Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, Revenue and Rating Plan, Emergency Management Plan and Road Management Plan
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Council Policies
- Adopted Budgets
- Annual Reports
- Project and Service Plans
- Service Agreements, Contracts, Leases and Licences
- ~~Relevant~~ Relevant technical reports and/or research that inform Council's decision-making
- Terms of Reference for Delegated Committees and Advisory Committees

2. Process information such as:

- application processes for approvals, permits, grants, access to Council services
- decision-making processes
- Guidelines and Manuals
- Community Engagement Processes
- Complaints Handling Processes.

3. The following Council Information will be available on Council's website:

- Council and Delegated Committee Meeting Agendas and Reports to Council and Delegated Committees
- Submissions to Council or Delegated Committees
- Minutes of Council meetings and meetings of Delegated Committees
- Audit and Risk Committee Charter
- ~~Terms of Reference for Delegated Committees and Advisory Committees~~
- List of Delegated Committees established and/or abolished during the financial year
- Chief Executive Officer's employment contract
- Information about the Organisations and Associations of which the City of Melbourne is a member
- ~~Submissions received under section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989~~
- Councillor allowances

- Gift Registers for Councillors
- Travel Registers for Councillors and Council Staff
- Travel by non-City of Melbourne passengers
- Registers of Conflicts of Interest disclosed in open session by Councillors
- ~~Senior Officers' remuneration register~~
- Registers of Leases entered into by Council
- Register of Delegations
- Registers of Authorised Officers
- Register of Donations and Grants
- Register of Election Campaign Donations
- Summary of Personal Interests under section 135(1) of the Act~~(provision under the Act yet to come into operation)~~
- Schedule of Councillor access to event tickets
- Gift Register for Staff
- aAny other Registers or Records required by the Act or any other Act.

4. Under various other Acts administered by the Council, the following information will be made available upon request:

- Register of Planning Permits
- Register of Planning Applications on Advertising
- Copy of Planning Permits and Endorsed Plans (by application, charges will apply)
- Register of Building Permits, Occupancy Permits and Temporary Approvals
- Copies of Building Permits, plans and documentation (by application, charges will apply)
- Register of Animal Registrations
- Copy of the final Delegates Report prepared for a finalised planning permit application
- Register of Public Roads



Public Transparency Policy

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 - 11.7.1 that the request has been denied
 - 11.7.2 of the reasons for the request being denied
 - 11.7.3 of alternative mechanisms by which they may seek access to the Council Information (e.g., by making a request made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*).
- 11.8 Any request for access to Council Information by way of an alternative mechanism under clause 11.7.3 will be assessed according to the process applicable to it.
- 11.9 Where:
 - 11.9.1 Council Information requested is assessed under clause 11.3 as being Confidential Information, or its release is assessed as being contrary to the public interest; but
 - 11.9.2 it is practicable for that Council Information to be provided with deletions so that it is suitable for release to the Requestor; and
 - 11.9.3 the Chief Executive Officer believes that the Requestor would want the Council Information in that format,the Council Information will be provided in that format.

12. Council Information that is Not Available

Some Council information may not be made publicly available. This will occur if the information is Confidential Information, or its release would be contrary to the public interest.

12.1 Confidential Information

- 12.1.1 What constitutes Confidential Information is set out in section 3(1) of the Act and includes information within the following categories:

Type	Description
Council business information	Information that would prejudice 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.
Legally 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, or the disclosure of which would involve an interference with personal privacy under the <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> .
Private commercial information	Information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets or that, if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.
Confidential meeting information	Records of Council and Delegated Committee meetings that are closed to the public to consider confidential information.
Internal arbitration information	<p>Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in an application made for an internal arbitration process; • provided to, or produced by, a Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar for the purposes of an internal arbitration process, other than the findings and reason; or • provided to, or produced by, an arbiter for the purpose of an internal arbitration process, other than the findings and the reasons.
Councillor Conduct Panel information	<p>Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided to, or produced by, a Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar, for the purposes of an application to form a Councillor Conduct Panel • provided to, or produced by, a Councillor Conduct Panel for the purposes of conducting a hearing, other than a decision or reasons for a decision • comprising any part of a statement of reasons or other document under the control of a Councillor Conduct Panel that the Councillor Conduct Panel determines contains confidential information.

Type	Description
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> .

12.1.2 In the interests of transparency, Council may, by resolution, determine to release information to the public even though it is Confidential Information.

12.1.3 A decision under clause 12.1.2 will generally only be made if Council, on the advice of the Chief Executive Officer, is satisfied that releasing the Confidential Information would not:

- (a) be inconsistent with any legal or contractual obligation
- (b) cause disadvantage to any person, including Council
- (c) otherwise be contrary to the public interest.

12.2 Contrary to the Public Interest

12.2.1 Council Information will not be made publicly available if doing so would be contrary to the public interest.

12.2.2 When assessing whether making certain Council Information publicly available would be contrary to the public interest, the Chief Executive Officer will have regard to, among other things:

- (a) the sensitivity of the Council Information
- (b) whether the Council Information comprises a draft, or otherwise is no longer current
- (c) any adverse effect that releasing the Council Information would have on the effectiveness of Council's decision-making processes.

12.2.3 Without limiting clause 12.2.2, factors that might lead to a decision that the release of Council Information is contrary to the public interest might include whether release would be likely to:

- (a) disclose Personal Information or Health Information of an individual other than the Requestor
- (b) disclose information or opinions of a preliminary nature such that they might either:
 - (i) mislead the Community with respect to Council's position on a matter; or
 - (ii) have a substantial adverse effect on the economy of the Municipal District
- (c) prejudice discussions or negotiations between Council and any other party, in relation to a contract, legal proceedings or any other matter
- (d) impair or otherwise impact on:
 - (i) Council's ability to obtain information in future that is similar in nature to the Council Information
 - (ii) negotiations with respect to employment arrangements for Officers

(iii) defence, prosecution and settlement of legal proceedings

(e) impact on the reasonable allocation of Council's resources, including in responding to requests for Council Information that are assessed by the Chief Executive Officer as being frivolous, vexatious or repetitious in nature.

13. Public Awareness of Availability of Council Information

Council will ensure public awareness of this Policy and the availability of Council Information by:

- 13.1 publishing this Policy on the Council Website
- 13.2 making this Policy available for public inspection at Council's offices
- 13.3 converting this Policy to such accessible formats, having regard to clause 11.2.3, as the Chief Executive Officer determines
- 13.4 ensuring that all Officers:
 - 13.4.1 are aware of this Policy and its effect
 - 13.4.2 direct members of the Community to this Policy when access to Council Information is sought.

14. Copyright

14.1 The intellectual property of some Council Information available for public access belongs to third parties and is the subject of copyright. Access to this information is provided to members of the community in accordance with the relevant legislation. Copyright laws will apply to this information and Requestors are advised to seek the consent of the copyright owner before considering reproducing the information in any way.

15. Human Rights Charter

This Policy has been assessed against the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* as being consistent with that Act and, in particular, as promoting the rights of members of the Community:

- 15.1 not to have their privacy interfered with (section 13)
- 15.2 take part in public life (section 18), by having the opportunity to:
 - 15.2.1 participate in the conduct of Council's affairs
 - 15.2.2 have access to Council and Council Information.

16. Dissatisfaction with the Application of this Policy

16.1 If a Requestor is dissatisfied with Council's application of, or believes that Council has acted inconsistently with, this Policy, they can report their dissatisfaction to Council's Director Governance by:

16.1.1 email to privacy@melbourne.vic.gov.au

16.1.2 telephone on 9658 9658.

16.2 If the Requestor believes that the matter remains unresolved, it can be reported to the Victorian Ombudsman by:

16.2.1 making a complaint online at <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/complaints>

16.2.2 telephone on 1800 806 314.

17. Application of this Policy

17.1 This Policy applies to all Council Information, except Council Information which is made available, or is otherwise accessible, under another Act (other than an Act which refers to this Policy).

17.2 Without limiting the generality of clause 17.1, this Policy does not apply to Council Information which is:

17.2.1 required to be made available under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

17.2.2 required to be made available under the *Building Act 1993*

17.2.3 otherwise required to be made available on payment of a fee or charge.

18. Responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Council	Uphold the commitment and principles for public transparency through leadership, modelling practice and decision-making.	Ongoing
Executive Leadership Team	Uphold behaviours that foster transparency and drive the principles through policy, process and leadership. Monitor implementation of this policy.	Ongoing
Management Leadership Team	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
Director Governance	To oversee implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing
Manager Council Business	To monitor implementation of this policy and conduct periodic reviews to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing

19. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Council will review this Policy periodically to ensure that it continues to reflect the expectations of the Community with respect to the availability and accessibility of Council Information.

20. Related Policies and Legislation

Council's:

- Complaint Handling Policy
- Council Plan
- Councillors Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Governance Rules
- City of Melbourne Open Data Principles
- Community Engagement Policy
- Privacy Policy

- Health Records Policy

Copyright Act 1986 (Cth)

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Local Government Act 2020

Local Government Act 1989

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Public Records Act 1973

Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

21. Responsibility for this Policy

Responsible Director: Director Governance

Date Adopted: By Council on 28 May 2024

Date of Next Review: 31 May 2026

For the purposes of clause 9 of this Policy, the following Council Information will generally, and subject to this Policy, be made available either on the Council Website or on request by a member of the Community.

1. Documents such as:

- Plans and Reports adopted by Council including but not limited to the Council Plan, Workforce Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, Revenue and Rating Plan, Emergency Management Plan and Road Management Plan
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Council Policies
- Adopted Budgets
- Annual Reports
- Project and Service Plans
- Service Agreements, Contracts, Leases and Licences
- Relevant technical reports and/or research that inform Council's decision-making
- Terms of Reference for Delegated Committees and Advisory Committees

2. Process information such as:

- application processes for approvals, permits, grants, access to Council services
- decision-making processes
- Guidelines and Manuals
- Community Engagement Processes
- Complaints Handling Processes.

3. The following Council Information will be available on Council's website:

- Council and Delegated Committee Meeting Agendas
- Submissions to Council or Delegated Committees
- Minutes of Council meetings and meetings of Delegated Committees
- Audit and Risk Committee Charter
- List of Delegated Committees established and/or abolished during the financial year
- Chief Executive Officer's employment contract
- Information about the Organisations and Associations of which the City of Melbourne is a member
- Councillor allowances
- Gift Registers for Councillors
- Travel Registers for Councillors and Council Staff

- Travel by non-City of Melbourne passengers
- Registers of Conflicts of Interest disclosed in open session by Councillors
- Registers of Leases entered into by Council
- Register of Delegations
- Registers of Authorised Officers
- Register of Donations and Grants
- Register of Election Campaign Donations
- Summary of Personal Interests under section 135(1) of the Act
- Schedule of Councillor access to event tickets
- Gift Register for Staff
- Any other Registers or Records required by the Act or any other Act.

4. Under various other Acts administered by the Council, the following information will be made available upon request:

- Register of Planning Permits
- Register of Planning Applications on Advertising
- Copy of Planning Permits and Endorsed Plans (by application, charges will apply)
- Register of Building Permits, Occupancy Permits and Temporary Approvals
- Copies of Building Permits, plans and documentation (by application, charges will apply)
- Register of Animal Registrations
- Copy of the final Delegates Report prepared for a finalised planning permit application
- Register of Public Roads



The *Local Government Act 2020* is a principles-based Act, removing unnecessary regulatory and legislative prescription.

Public transparency

Transparency is a fundamental tenet of democratic governance. Openness, accountability and honesty are essential to build high levels of accountability and trust amongst citizens and enable fully informed engagement in the democratic process. Without transparency effective community engagement, planning, financial management and any number of other council responsibilities cannot be properly performed.

One of the overarching principles of the new *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) is that “the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured” (s. 9(2)(i)).

Various sections of the previous Act and regulations specified transparency and consultation requirements including about the timing and location of council meeting notices, council websites, and the information to be published on them, documents a council must make available for public inspection, amongst many other things. This will no longer be the case, councils must develop their own policies, in line with these underpinning principles.

The use of prescription as the basis for a council’s disclosure and engagement with their community has significant disadvantages. It encourages a compliance approach where entities may consider that it is sufficient to tick legal boxes. Sometimes compliance-based rules can encourage an attitude of avoidance.

Under the previous Act certain matters were automatically considered confidential – this included

personnel information, contracts, and matters that might prejudice the council or any person. The new Act assumes, instead, that all matters must be public, except in very specific and limited circumstances. Detailed requirements included in the old Act are replaced as far as possible by high-level principles about transparency in decision making and community accountability.

While many of the matters that could be considered confidential under the old act will remain so under the new Act, this is now limited to matters that are either:

- confidential by virtue of the *Local Government Act 2020* or any other Act, or
- public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.

Councils should note that the public transparency principles, at section 58 of the Act, must be applied to all aspects of a council’s operations and decision making. Of particular note is the circumstances in which a council meeting may be closed to the public, see section 66 Meetings to be open to the public unless specified circumstances apply.

It must also be noted that simply having council information available to the public will not meet the requirements of the Act. Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of a council’s community and public awareness of the availability of this information must be facilitated.

Transparency and accountability will strengthen governance and accountability across the sector, so that the community can have confidence in the way their council works.

What it means

The Act says that a council must adopt and maintain a public transparency policy. The policy must, amongst

other things, give effect to the public transparency principles listed at section 58 of the Act:

- Council decision making processes must be transparent except when the Council is dealing with information that is confidential by virtue of this Act or any other Act;
- Council information must be publicly available unless—
- the information is confidential by virtue of this Act or any other Act; or
- public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest;
- Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community;
- public awareness of the availability of Council information must be facilitated.

Additionally, council information must be understandable and accessible; community members must understand how they can access council information.

Expectation

Councils should have regard to the principles underpinning Victoria's *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. This Act establishes a “*general right of access to information... limited only by exceptions and exemptions necessary for the protection of essential public interests...*” and “*making available to the public information about the operation of agencies and, in particular, ensuring that rules and practices affecting member of the public in their dealings with agencies are readily available...*” (s 3, *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, Government of Victoria).

When developing or applying a public transparency policy, councils must have regard for the other principles contained within the Act. For example, a community engagement should be used in the development of a council's public transparency policy; strategic planning should be undertaken with regard to public transparency.

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