COUNCILLOR INDUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A GUIDE FOR COUNCILS

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INTRODUCTION

Councillors are from a range of diverse backgrounds and bring different and valuable skills to the role. Despite this, few new councillors have extensive knowledge of the system of local government, how a council works or the full range of their roles and responsibilities.

From their first council meeting councillors will be required to make important decisions on behalf of their communities and take responsibility for those decisions. Those decisions often involve significant use of public money, assets or natural resources.

Some councillors may need to develop skills in areas that are unfamiliar to them. These may include skills in understanding council meeting procedures, the rules of debate or interpreting financial statements, to name just a few.

A number of councillors may have specific needs or require assistance. For example, for those with a physical disability or impairment that affects their mobility, hearing or vision or those whose first language is not English.

Even experienced councillors say they can find it challenging to keep abreast of changes to the legislative and policy context for local government as well as changes to a council's policies and procedures.

No matter what the individual circumstances of the councillors on a council, their role is an important one and their responsibilities are wide-ranging.

This Guide seeks to help councils ensure that councillors have every opportunity to clearly understand their role and responsibilities and to develop the skills and knowledge to perform their job well and in the best interests of the community they represent.

This Guide provides information for councils to assist with the development and implementation of councillor induction and continuing professional development programs. Councils are strongly encouraged to implement such programs.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

The Guide is divided into three parts.

Part A provides guidance to councils on developing and implementing an induction program for their newly elected councillors. An induction program is the starting point of a professional development program for councillors.

Part B provides guidance to councils on developing and implementing ongoing training and professional development programs that assist councillors to continue to develop their skills and knowledge throughout their term in office as the need and opportunity arises.

It is acknowledged that many councils have councillor induction programs in place and a number have continuing professional development programs. It is also recognised that local needs and circumstances vary as do the skills and needs of individual councillors.

This Guide is designed to be used flexibly by councils. It includes:

- a framework for the development of councillor induction and continuing professional development programs

- information about the developmental stages of each program and what to consider at each stage

- checklists of what could be included in each program to assist councils to develop the content of their programs to ensure that they best suit local needs and circumstances

- information on learning and professional development opportunities available to councillors.

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PART A
INDUCTION PROGRAMS FOR COUNCILLORS

Benefits of a councillor induction program

An induction program is important as it enables councillors to quickly become familiar with how the council works, the 'rules' under which a council operates and the complexities of the role.

An induction program 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 foundations for a successful term in office for new councillors.

Benefits of an induction program for councillors include:

- Understanding of the new council and the local government area

- Meeting, building rapport, sharing knowledge and experiences, forming positive working relationships with other councillors and key staff

- Understanding key legislation and legislative role and responsibilities

- Briefing on the 'big picture', including key issues and tasks for the new council

- Understanding key council information, policies and procedures

- Enabling more active and rapid participation in the business of the council

- Increasing confidence in ability to undertake the role

- Providing clarity for new councillors about what the role entails

- Providing an opportunity for appropriate mentoring relationships to be established between experienced and new councillors

- Providing essential information to assist councillors to function well in their role and to make informed and effective decisions from the start of their term in office

- Opportunity for all councillors, both new and experienced, to receive essential information in a structured and consistent way

- Opportunity to meet, build rapport and form positive working relationship with senior staff

Because local government is complex and changing, all councillors, both new and experienced, should attend a council's induction program at the commencement of each term.

What information do new councillors initially need?

In the first few weeks new councillors will need to know:

- ✓ The legislation or 'rules' under which councils operate
- ✓ Their roles and responsibilities and formal obligations
- ✓ What the council does and how the council operates
- ✓ Council's management structure and key staff
- ✓ Key policies and procedures
- ✓ Meeting times, venues and procedures
- ✓ Where to go to get more information or assistance
- ✓ Information on the mayoral process (where applicable)
- ✓ Information to appoint councillors to committees.

The following is a checklist of suggested content for councillor induction programs.

Councillor Induction Program - Content Checklist

Induction Program	
Topic Area	**Suggested Content**
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
Legal and political context of local government	✓ Destination 2036 ✓ The relationship of State and Federal tiers of government to local government ✓ A Council's Charter under the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) ✓ Roles and responsibilities of oversight agencies such as the Division of Local Government, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Ombudsman's Office
Roles and responsibilities of councillors and staff	✓ Provisions in the Act regarding the role of councillors, the mayor and the General Manager; and delegations ✓ Balancing the dual role of a councillor as a member of the governing body and as an elected representative ✓ Councillors' role: guide the strategic direction of the council; staff role: implement the decisions of the council ✓ Responsibility of councillors in overseeing performance of the General Manager ✓ Council's policy on councillor/staff interaction
Legal and ethical responsibilities and risk management	✓ General legal responsibilities of councillors as members of the governing body under the Act and other legislation ✓ Up-to-date accountability and compliance requirements ✓ Code of Conduct ✓ Risk management ✓ Personal legal responsibilities (for example, WH&S, anti-discrimination, privacy, records

Induction Program	
Topic Area	**Suggested Content**
	management, surcharging)
Decision making	✓ Meeting procedures, the provisions of the Act and the Regulation, and Council's own Code of Meeting Practice
	✓ Closed meetings, business papers, minutes and councillor access to information
Overview of the key functional areas of council operations, staffing and major policy documents	✓ Council's organisational structure, with a focus on key directorates, senior staff and functions
	✓ Planning and other regulatory functions, assets and infrastructure, financial management, community services and governance
	✓ Council's key policies and its responsibility for their review
Strategic planning, including community engagement, change management and the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework	✓ Strategic and operational planning and reporting processes of Council, including land use planning and the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework
	✓ Mechanisms for ensuring structured and representative community engagement and participation in planning processes
	✓ Current strategic and operational plans and progress in implementation
	✓ Change management processes
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
Customer services and complaints handling	✓ Customer service in local government
	✓ Council's complaints handling process and how councillors should handle constituents' concerns so that it is consistent
Teamwork, communication and managing different viewpoints in local government	✓ Development of teamwork skills
	✓ Development of conflict resolution skills
	✓ What supports or undermines the effective functioning of council

Induction Program	
Topic Area	**Suggested Content**
Support available to assist councillors in the role	✓ Councillor annual fees ✓ Council's policy on the provision of councillor expenses and facilities ✓ Councillor training and development needs analysis and programs ✓ Informal and formal mentoring strategies

Developing and delivering a councillor induction program

Councillor induction programs are a vital way to ensure new councillors get the information they need to be effective leaders.

Planning and preparation

Forward planning by a council will allow time for a well-structured and effective induction program to be developed. It is suggested that an induction program is planned and budgeted for within, or linked to, a council's training and development plan for councillors. The development and adoption of a councillor training and development plan by Council is discussed in Part B of this Guide.

Forward planning will also enable all of the candidates for elections to be aware of the proposed timetable for the induction program. Candidates may then make tentative arrangements to enable them to attend the induction program if they are elected.

Timing

Preliminary induction training by councils should take place as soon as possible after the polls are declared following a new election and prior to the first council meeting. This should aim to provide councillors with the basic information they need to function in their role, including in meetings.

The rest of the induction program should then be delivered within approximately two months of the polls being declared.

Some councils prefer to deliver the full induction program as soon as possible to provide councillors with all of the information and induction training they need from the start of their term in office. However, this approach can risk the councillors feeling overloaded with information.

Some councils prefer to deliver induction training approximately six weeks after the election so that new councillors have the opportunity to gain some practical experience first. However, this approach can risk councillors not being effective or feeling confident in their role during the weeks preceding the induction training.

Some councils choose to do a mixture of both by staging the induction program over a number of weeks. Ultimately the optimum timing for delivery of an induction program will vary depending on local circumstances.

Preparation of an induction manual

Councils should develop materials such as an induction manual or handbook to support councillors in the first weeks following the induction. This resource may also include relevant background reference material for the longer term. It may be provided prior to or at induction training.

How the information is presented will affect how useful it is. For example, some councils have found that a manual is most likely to be used if the information is presented in a folder. Some councils may consider also providing the

information as an on-line resource. An on-line resource may be easier for councils to keep updated, and can make topic searching easier for users.

Suggested topics for an induction manual include:

- Basic information about the Council

- Profiles (demographic, economic etc) of the local government area

- Information about council meetings

- Key planning and policy documents and information

- Key legislation

- Information about support for councillors

- Other useful resources, such as *Bluett's Local Government Handbook NSW*, and/or details about where they may be accessed.

Appendix A provides a checklist of the content that could be included in an induction manual or on-line resource. It is suggested that on-line resources include hyperlinks to electronic versions of any plans, policies etc referred to in the councillor induction manual.

Structure and Delivery

Where possible or practicable, councillor induction should be conducted in a way that avoids councillors being overloaded with information. This may be achieved by limiting the length of sessions, having a number of short sessions in lieu of one longer session and/or through using a range of delivery modes and materials.

Some councils structure their councillor induction programs intensively over two or more days - possibly a weekend - while others choose to hold shorter, evening sessions over several weeks. Others choose a combination of both.

Councils may consider making use of resource sharing arrangements with other councils, including Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs), when planning and delivering their induction programs. For example, one part of the induction may be provided at the regional level to cover the more generic and regional issues and another part within the council to cover local issues, policies and procedures.

The program may be delivered using a variety of methods, in a combination of the following strategies:

- Intensive blocks over two or more days (including weekend retreats)

- Evening or dinner sessions over several weeks

- A mix of regional and local level induction sessions

- Briefings from the General Manager and other senior staff

- A guided tour of council's administration building/s, depot, council facilities and local government area

- In-house workshops by council staff and/or professional training providers

- Seminars and conferences

- Panel discussions

- Mock council meeting/s

- Training booklets and discussion papers distributed to councillors to work through at their own pace

- On-line information and/or training resources

Where possible, presentations should be supported by written materials, including an induction manual or handbook that councillors can retain and refer back to.

By-elections

An appropriate induction program should also be organised by councils for newly elected councillors as a result of a by-election for casual vacancies.

Evaluation

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

Evaluation helps a council to determine what elements of the induction program worked well and why. It also helps determine what could be improved and whether there were any gaps or issues that may need to be addressed with the councillors at a later date.

The methodology for the evaluation should be determined when the induction program is being developed to ensure that relevant data is collected.

PART B
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COUNCILLORS

Due to the intensive nature and short timeframe of a typical induction program, all of the training and skills development needs of councillors are unlikely to be met.

Councillors should have access to continuing, needs-based training and skills development opportunities throughout their term to enhance the councillors' effectiveness.

Commitment to continuing professional development for councillors

Continuing professional development for councillors is an investment which will enhance the effectiveness of the council's performance in achieving its goals. The council's commitment is needed to ensure an appropriate program is developed.

Policy on the provision of expenses and facilities to councillors

An existing mechanism through which a commitment to continue professional development may currently be met is a council's policy on the provision of expenses and facilities to councillors.

A councillor expenses and facilities policy must be prepared in accordance with section 252 of the *Local Government Act 1993* and the Division's *Guidelines on the provision of expenses and facilities to mayors and councillors in NSW.* These policies must be reviewed and adopted by councils on an annual basis. The guidelines are available on the Division's website.

Clear and adequate provision for relevant training and professional development activities should be included in these policies as legitimate expenses incurred by councillors to assist them to undertake their civic duties.

Other mechanisms

Councils may also wish to consider other mechanisms to reinforce their commitment to councillor training and development and provide a structured approach to implement this.

This may be done through developing and adopting a motion or a charter as a statement of commitment to support councillor training and development. Alternatively, councils may wish to develop and adopt a separate training and development policy. These should include details of how this commitment will be realised in practice.

Identifying training and development needs

The development of an effective training and development plan is based on identifying the skills and knowledge required by councillors to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively.

As well as standard requirements for professional skills sets, individual councils may provide specific services or have particular environmental, social or economic challenges facing their local community that a training and development program should address.

Once the council has determined and prioritised the skills and knowledge required, each councillor will need to assess the level of their abilities and identify areas where they require training and development. This should be done by both new and experienced councillors. Experienced councillors who have previously attended training on a specific topic or issue may still require additional training.

The gap between the skills and knowledge (or competencies) required by the council and those of individual councillors or groups of councillors will form the basis of a training and skills development plan that may be then implemented over time, according to priority.

Self assessment

An example of a simple self-assessment checklist for councillors to identify areas for knowledge and skills development can be found in **Appendix B**. The checklist can be used by councillors to help them to prioritise areas to cover in an ongoing training and development program. Councils may wish to have councillors complete the self-assessment checklist anonymously in the first instance to encourage a frank response.

Such a checklist may be adapted to suit individual councils and should be reviewed on a regular basis to check progress and identify any additional areas for training or development.

A self-assessment tool should be used in conjunction with other activities to collect information regarding the training and development needs of councillors such as questionnaires, interviews or workshops.

A Competency-Based Approach

Another approach that some NSW councils have found useful is to use a councillor competency framework. Such a framework sets out the skills, knowledge and attributes required to be an effective councillor and may define levels of effectiveness.

This could include:

1. Leadership

2. Governance

3. Land use planning

4. Strategy

5. Relationship management

6. Financial management

7. Environmental and asset management

These competencies are drawn from the Municipal Association of Victoria's Councillor Competency Framework. Further details are available on the Municipal Association of Victoria's website at www.mav.asn.au.

Development of a training and professional development plan

Based on the analysis of councillor training and development needs, councils should develop and adopt a councillor training and development plan each year to ensure that councillors have ongoing access to training and professional development opportunities that address their needs as well as those of the council.

A councillor training and development plan may include things such as:

- Training/development need for the council as a whole and for individual councillors

- Priorities

- Timeframe for delivery

- Assigning responsibility for organising training/development

- Approval process

- Estimated cost

- Delivery mode/s

Each year the council should allocate a budget to support the councillor training and development activities to be undertaken that year. Progress against expenditure of the budget allocation should be reported on a quarterly basis as part of the budgetary cycle.

Council will need to determine the size of the budget allocation, which may change annually, depending on training needs. For example, when a new council is elected there will be a need to budget for an induction program. The Delivery Program financial estimates and the Long Term Financial Plan will reflect the varying training and development budget requirements over the term of the council.

Delivery

A range of delivery methods and materials should be used to support the training and development needs of councillors. A council's training and development plan should include possible delivery methods for each training need identified during the needs analysis phase.

Councils should consider making use of resource sharing arrangements with other councils, including Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs), when planning and delivering their training and development programs.

Training and development programs should be delivered using a combination of the following strategies:

- In-house workshops, seminars and briefing sessions conducted by the council with appropriate staff, trainers and guest speakers.

- Attendance at workshops, seminars and conferences offered by training providers and industry bodies including the Local Government Association of NSW and the Shires Association of NSW (and their training arm, Local Government Learning Solutions), Local Government Managers Australia, and other industry bodies and/or private providers offering courses for councillors to gain new skills and knowledge and to network with other councillors. Further details are provided in **Appendix C** of this Guide.

- Printed material, including training booklets and discussion papers, that may be distributed to councillors for information

- On-line training modules (for example, Blue Mountains City Council and Randwick City Council have developed on-line training programs)

Evaluation

As with the councillor induction program, the training and development program should be evaluated to assist a council to determine the program's effectiveness and to identify improvements.

APPENDIX A
COUNCILLOR INDUCTION MANUAL - CONTENT CHECKLIST

Induction Manual	
Topic Area	**Suggested Content**
Basic information about the council	✓ Composition and structure
	✓ Organisational chart
	✓ Key function and service areas, senior staff and contacts
	✓ Information and/or chart showing the relationships between councillors and council staff and decision making processes
	✓ Council facilities and LGA map
Profile of the local government area	✓ Wards, population statistics, land use, business use and major features
Information about council meetings	✓ Agenda and minutes of recent meetings
	✓ Meeting times and frequency, venues, deadlines and delivery of minutes
	✓ Council committees and their composition
Key planning and policy documents and information	✓ Current Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan and Resourcing Strategy
	✓ Most recent annual report
	✓ End of Term report of last Council
	✓ Code of conduct
	✓ Meetings code of practice
	✓ Policy on the provision of councillor expenses and facilities
	✓ Delegations
	✓ Policy on access to information
	✓ Other relevant plans, policies and procedures
	✓ Policy register/list of policies
Key legislation	✓ Advise where a copy of key legislation or relevant excerpts from legislation such as the *Local Government Act 1993* and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 is available
	✓ List of key legislation under which councils have

Induction Manual	
Topic Area	**Suggested Content**
	governance responsibilities (for example, the EP&A Act and the POEO Act) as well as personal responsibilities under legislation (for example, the WH&S Act and the State Records Act)
	✓ How to access up-to-date versions of the legislation on line (www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)
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
Other useful resources and/or details about where they may be accessed.	✓ Induction program presentations and materials
	✓ Contact details for key organisations such as the Division of Local Government and the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW
	✓ A copy of useful publications such as the Division and Associations' joint publication, *Councillor Guide*, DLG Circulars and how councillors may subscribe to mailing list, and *Bluett's Local Government Handbook NSW*

APPENDIX B
SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE SELF-ASSESSMENT - CHECKLIST FOR COUNCILLORS

The following is a list of the key skills and knowledge areas of effective councillors. This list will identify some possible training and developmental areas for you as a councillor and will assist council to prioritise the training and development opportunities provided to councillors.

If you consider that you possess the characteristic to a satisfactory level, place a tick in the check-box.

- ☐ Important skills:
- ☐ Leadership skills
- ☐ Relationship management
- ☐ Communication skills including negotiating, conflict resolution, advocacy and lobbying
- ☐ Presentation skills
- ☐ Problem solving and analytical skills
- ☐ Teamwork skills
- ☐ Organisational skills

Knowledge of:

- ☐ Federal, State and Local Government relationships
- ☐ How local government councils operate
- ☐ Role of a councillor
- ☐ Councillor, General Manager and staff relationships
- ☐ Code of Conduct and conflict of interests
- ☐ Key aspects of the *Local Government Act 1993*
- ☐ Environmental planning and assessment processes
- ☐ Whole of community representation
- ☐ Social justice principles
- ☐ Meeting regulations and procedures
- ☐ Strategic management planning and reporting
- ☐ Financial management requirements in the Local Government Act and Local Government (General) Regulation and reporting processes
- ☐ Asset management
- ☐ Knowledge of the demographic profile of my council area and the social, environmental and economic issues facing my community

APPENDIX C
FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNCILLOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. **Local Government Association of NSW and the Shires Association of NSW (the Associations).**

As the peak organisation representing elected representatives in NSW, the Associations provide a range of professional development and training opportunities to their members.

As a service to their members, the Associations provide professional development and training specifically catering to the needs of councillors to assist them to understand their role and enhance their skills.

The public workshops are delivered in large regional centres, as well as in metropolitan areas and for Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs). In-house workshops at the council's own premises and weekend workshops are also available.

Workshop facilitators are experts in their field and have proven experience in the local government industry. The workshops are based on good practice adult learning principles and practice with opportunities for participants to be active learners and to be able to reflect on their experiences.

The Associations' Councillor Professional Development Program includes the following modules:

- Elected life – An essential Induction for NSW Local Government Councillors
- Asset Management for Councillors
- Climate Change Training for Councillors
- Conflict of Interest & the Model Code of Conduct
- Community Leadership
- Councillors as Change Initiators
- Development Approvals – the Heritage Perspective
- Dynamic Presentation Skills
- Effective Chair in Local Government (half day)
- Effective Meeting Skills
- Engaging with the Community
- Financial Issues in Local Government
- Good Governance
- Handling Difficult People for Councillors
- Long Term Strategic and Financial Planning
- Managing Time and Stress
- Media Skills (basic and advanced programs available)
- Mediation Skills for Councillors
- Performance Management of Senior Staff
- Pitching for Success
- Planning Legislation Skills and Knowledge
- Preventing Bullying and Harassment for Councillors

- Speed Reading Skills for Councillors
- Strategic Management
- Understanding Sustainability for Councillors

The Associations' learning arm, Learning Solutions, also offer executive coaching for councillors as well as in-house training tailored to an individual council's needs.

A comprehensive calendar of workshops in Sydney and in regional areas and details about the content of these programs are available on the Associations' website at www.lgsa.org.au.

2.   Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG)

The Centre is funded by the Australian Government. Its mandate is to enhance professionalism and skills in local government, showcase innovation and best practice, and facilitate a better-informed policy debate. The Centre aims to build on existing programs and networks and offers the Excellence in Local Government Leadership Program nationally. Further information can be obtained from ACELG's website www.acelg.org.au.

3.   Local Government Training Institute

This division of Hunter Councils Inc offers a range of local government specific short courses for councillors as well as council staff and members of the public. Further information can be obtained from www.lgti.com.au.

4.   Australian Institute of Company Directors

This national organisation for directors' mission is to make a difference in the quality of governance and directorship and offers Governance Essentials for Local Government, a local government sector-specific version of the Foundations of Directorship program. Further information can be obtained from www.companydirectors.com.au.