



1 February 2025

**Submission to Office of Local Government
Re: discussion paper – “A new model code of meeting practice”**

Introduction

North Sydney Council welcomes the opportunity to give feedback on the discussion paper and agrees with the Office of Local Government (OLG) that reform is required in this area.

Council supports most of the proposed changes, including the general principles, and refining the rules for attendance by Councillors and staff. We are also supportive of the measures to depoliticise the role of the General Manager (or Chief Executive Officer) in relation to Notices of Motion and questions without notice.

Council has feedback on other aspects of the discussion paper that we offer below.

Requiring information considered at closed meetings to be made public after it ceases to be confidential

While Council is generally supportive of this proposal, it will have to be approached cautiously to ensure that legal privilege is not waived prematurely, thereby prejudicing Council’s position in any current or future legal action, or that commercially sensitive or personal information is not made public without the consent of the individual or companies providing that information.

Attendance of staff at Council meetings

The proposed change to clause 5.43 to support Council’s authority to choose which staff should attend meetings is not supported.

The General Manager has statutory responsibility for staff within Council, including determining staff members’ delegations, responsibilities and deliverables, including their attendance and performance within the parameters of a Council meeting. The General Manager is also responsible for staff working conditions including hours of employment.

The proposed changes to the Code regarding the management of acts of disorder are supported but should always be enacted by a resolution of Council and not solely in the hands of the Mayor or Chair of the meeting. This will ensure such decisions have majority support of the governing body and the potential for any abuse of power is reduced.

Promoting the dignity of the council chamber

The current Code of Meeting Practice permits Councillors to attend meetings remotely for a range of reasons, including travel. The proposed Model Code omits any reference to travel as a reason to attend meetings remotely, specifying only ill health, another medical reason or unforeseen caring responsibilities.

Council believes that allowing Councillors to attend meetings remotely while travelling assists them in being able to effectively balance their civic and personal/work responsibilities. Without this option, the attractiveness of the role of Councillor is limited for those who might be required to travel often in their work commitments.

Restricting briefing sessions

Council agrees that the debate and deliberation of reports, recommendations, notices of motion and Mayoral Minutes and indeed of any current issue that leads to a decision or resolution of Council should be in the public domain to support transparency and accountability in decision making.

However, Council also believes that a distinction needs to be made regarding the circumstances where Councillors should receive information, learning and support, as well as the opportunity to participate in strategic planning initiatives.

North Sydney Council would like to reiterate its position as outlined in the response to the *“Councillor conduct and meeting practice: a new framework”* discussion paper and propose that the following forums remain as closed sessions;

- Confidential matters, including those with legal privilege,
- Councillor induction, support and training sessions,
- Workshops to develop strategies (which will be exhibited before implementation).

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the review.

Yours sincerely,

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North Sydney Council