
MEDIA RELEASE

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HAVE YOUR SAY ON NEW CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILS

The Office of Local Government is reminding councils and members of the community to have their say on tough new Code of Conduct requirements before the December 4 deadline.

The draft new *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW* was released for public comment in October.

The code, which would apply to 1500 councillors and almost 50,000 council staff, has been reworked to provide a strong integrity framework to enhance ethical standards and improve transparency and accountability in local government.

Councillors, local government professionals and residents have been urged to provide feedback on the draft code which would impose a range of strict new requirements including:

- New standards relating to discrimination and harassment, bullying, work health and safety, behaviour at meetings, use of social media, access to information and maintenance of council records;
- Banning council officials from accepting gifts valued at more than \$50 and introducing mandatory reporting of all gifts regardless of value in the council gift register;
- New requirements for councillors and council staff to keep records of meetings and other communications with planning applicants and objectors and for councillors to disclose them in writing at council meetings;
- Councillors with a pecuniary interest or a significant non-pecuniary conflict of interest cannot access council information about the matter in which they have the interest;
- Suspensions for pecuniary interest breaches will count towards the “three strikes and you’re out” scheme introduced in 2015 where councillors face automatic disqualification when they are suspended three times for misconduct.

Breaches of the Model Code of Conduct by councillors can result in a range of penalties including censure, findings of inappropriate conduct, suspension and even disqualification from office.

Once submissions have closed, the new Model Code of Conduct will be finalised and implemented and councils will have six months to review their own codes of conduct to ensure they meet the new requirements.

The Model Code of Conduct was introduced in 2005 to ensure consistent integrity standards in all councils in NSW. It is routinely reviewed and updated to reflect changing community expectations and standards of behaviour.

The draft Model Code of Conduct is currently on public exhibition and written submissions can be made until Monday, December 4 by emailing olg@olg.nsw.gov.au. More information can be found on the Office of Local Government’s website at <http://bit.ly/2zbcJdq>.

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