

# Agenda

## Special Council Meeting

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I hereby give notice that a Special Meeting of Council will be held on:

**Date:** Tuesday, 8 July 2025  
**Time:** 5:30pm  
**Location:** Council Chambers Darrandirra  
Level 1, Civic Centre  
Harry Chan Avenue, Darwin  
**Webcasting:** [MS Teams Link to Webcast](#)

Simone Saunders

Chief Executive Officer



**ORDINARY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

The Right Worshipful, the Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis (Chair)

Deputy Lord Mayor Morgan Rickard

Councillor Jimmy Bouhoris

Councillor Kim Farrar

Councillor Mirella Fejo

Councillor Sylvia Klonaris

Councillor Mick Palmer

Councillor Peter Pangquee

Councillor Vim Sharma

Councillor Ed Smelt

Councillor Amye Un

Councillor Rebecca Want de Rowe

Councillor Sam Weston

**OFFICERS**

Chief Executive Officer, Simone Saunders

General Manager Community, Matt Grassmayr

General Manager Corporate, Natalie Williamson

General Manager Innovation, Alice Percy

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**WEBCASTING DISCLAIMER**

The City of Darwin is live webcasting the Open Section of Special Ordinary Council Meetings. Audio-visual recording equipment has been configured to avoid coverage of the public gallery area and the City of Darwin will use its best endeavours to ensure images in this area are not webcast. However the City of Darwin expressly provides no assurances to this effect and in the event your image is webcast, you will by remaining in the public gallery area be taken to have given the City of Darwin a non-exclusive licence to copy and broadcast your image worldwide for no reward.

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## Order of Business

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- 1      ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**
- 2      THE LORD’S PRAYER**
- 3      MEETING DECLARED OPEN**
- 4      APOLOGIES AND LEAVE OF ABSENCE**
  - 4.1    APOLOGIES**
  - 4.2    LEAVE OF ABSENCE GRANTED**
  - 4.3    LEAVE OF ABSENCE REQUESTED**
- 5      ELECTRONIC MEETING ATTENDANCE**
  - 5.1    ELECTRONIC MEETING ATTENDANCE GRANTED**
  - 5.2    ELECTRONIC MEETING ATTENDANCE REQUESTED**
- 6      DECLARATION OF INTEREST OF MEMBERS AND STAFF**
- 7      MOVING OF ITEMS**
- 8      DEPUTATIONS AND BRIEFINGS**

Nil

## 9 ACTION REPORTS

### 9.1 REVIEW OF CARETAKER POLICY

**Author:** A/Manager Office of Council and CEO  
**Authoriser:** Chief Executive Officer  
**Attachments:** 1. Caretaker Policy - Tracked Changes [↓](#)  
2. Caretaker Policy - Revised Version [↓](#)

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THAT the report entitled Review of Caretaker Policy be received and noted.
2. THAT Council adopt the revised Caretaker Policy at **Attachment 2**.

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to adopt the revised Caretaker Policy.

#### KEY ISSUES

- Officers have conducted a review to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.
- The revised Caretaker Policy is provided at **Attachment 2**.

**DISCUSSION**

In accordance with section 161 of the *Local Government Act 2019 (NT)* a Council must, by resolution, adopt a caretaker policy governing the conduct of Elected Members and workplace participants during the period that:

- commences on the nomination day for a general election as prescribed by regulation
- ends when the result of the general election is declared in accordance with the regulations.

The scope of the review included:

- compliance with the *Local Government Act 2019*, relevant legislation, and existing City of Darwin policies

The policy at **Attachment 1** with tracked changes. The revised Caretaker Policy is provided at **Attachment 2**.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL RESOLUTION**

At the 26 November 2024 meeting Council resolved:

**RESOLUTION ORD517/24**

1. THAT the report entitled Review of Caretaker Policy be received and noted.
2. THAT Council adopt the revised Caretaker Policy at **Attachment 2**.

**CARRIED 8/0**

At the 27 October 2020 meeting Council resolved:

**RESOLUTION ORD247/20**

1. THAT the report entitled Elected Member Policy Review be received and noted.
2. THAT Council adopts the Policy Expenses, Facilities and Support;
3. THAT Council adopts Policy Code of Conduct;
4. THAT Council adopts Policy Protocols and Interactions;
5. THAT Council adopts Policy Caretaker; and
6. THAT Council rescinds Policy the following policies:
  - Policy 014 Elected Member Code of Conduct
  - Policy 015 Deputy Lord Mayor
  - Policy 016 Elected Members Indemnity
  - Policy 017 Elected Members Allowances and Expenses
  - Policy 018 Lord Mayor
  - Policy 027 Elected Members Access to Council Information
  - Policy 028 Elected Members Gifts and Benefits
  - Policy 036 Caretaker Period
  - Policy 061 Elected Member Induction and Training
  - Policy 062 Elected Member IT Support
  - Policy 087 Related Party Disclosures
  - Policy 090 Elected Member and Staff Interaction

**CARRIED 13/0**

<b>STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT</b>	6 Governance Framework 6.4 Accountability
<b>BUDGET / FINANCIAL / RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	Nil
<b>LEGISLATION / POLICY CONTROLS OR IMPACTS</b>	<b>Legislation:</b> <i>Local Government Act 2019 (NT)</i> <i>Local Government (General) Regulations (NT)</i> <b>Policy:</b> Elected Member Protocols and Interactions Policy Elected Member Expenses, Facilities and Support Policy
<b>CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT &amp; COMMUNICATION</b>	Nil
<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b>	<p>The report author does not have a conflict of interest in relation to this matter.</p> <p>The report authoriser does not have a conflict of interest in relation to this matter.</p> <p>If a conflict of interest exists, staff will not act in the matter, except as authorised by the CEO or Council (as the case requires).</p>





# Caretaker policy

## No. 1052.100.E.R

### 1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to govern the conduct of Elected Members and workplace participants during the local government general election caretaker period.

### 2 Scope

This policy applies to Elected Members and workplace participants.

This policy commences on the nomination day for a general election and ends when the result of the general election is declared.

This policy does not apply during a by-election or when Council has been placed under Official Management in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2019* (NT).

### 3 Policy statement

#### 3.1 Major decisions

The Council will not make any major decisions during the caretaker period.

Major decisions include:

- a decision that binds an incoming Council to a decision or policy position or amending Council’s delegations
- a decision relating to the employment or remuneration of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), other than to appoint an acting CEO or suspend or terminate the CEO for serious or wilful misconduct
- a decision to enter into a contract, arrangement or understanding that exceeds Council’s delegations to the CEO, except in the case of an emergency or disaster event as declared by the Commonwealth or Northern Government.
- a decision committing council funds outside the adopted budget
- ~~a decision to enter into a contract, arrangement or understanding whereby the total value exceeds \$100,000, other than a contract for the appointment of staff in accordance with Council’s adopted budget and staffing structure and other than the CEO, except in the case of an emergency or disaster event as declared by the Commonwealth or Northern Territory Government~~
- a decision allowing the use of Council resources for the advantage of a particular candidate or group of candidates, such as:

.....

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2	ORD517/24	26 November 2024	26 November 2028
Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer			
Electronic version current. Uncontrolled copy valid only at time of printing.			



- o accessing Council branding, letterhead, media or related facilities for a candidate's campaign. It is appropriate however for an Elected Member to make it clear in written communication that they are currently an Elected Member
- o directing staff directly or indirectly in relation to an election campaign or associated activity
- o accessing Council resources, except to enable them to perform the role of an Elected Member
- o claiming reimbursement for campaign expenses
- o undertaking public consultation activities except where there is a statutory requirement to do so
- o undertaking an activity that may influence the outcome of the election, except where that activity relates to the election process and is authorised by the CEO
- o workplace participants assisting Elected Members with their election campaign at any time, including outside working hours, except where the assistance is for the equal benefit of all candidates.

Major decisions do not include:

- a decision that relates to the carrying out of works in response to an emergency or disaster
- ~~a n-urgent-a~~ matter that can't be reasonably deferred ~~that cannot wait~~ until a newly elected council makes a decision on that matter
- a matter that has the possibility of legal or significant financial repercussions if a decision on the matter is deferred until the new council has been elected
- an expenditure or other decision required to be taken under an agreement by which funding is provided to the Council by the Commonwealth or Northern Territory Government or otherwise for the Council to be eligible for funding from the Commonwealth or Northern Territory Government
- the signing of an agreement where the majority of the negotiations were undertaken or resolved by Council prior to the caretaker period commencing.

## 3.2 Community engagement

### Communications

City of Darwin media, websites, social media and newsletters will not be used in any way that promotes or criticises any particular Elected Member or candidate.

City of Darwin will continue to communicate with the public about normal Council operations.

The CEO will be the preferred spokesperson for official communications however the Lord Mayor may, in their capacity as Council's principal representative speak on behalf of Council.

### Public consultation

Any public consultation will be deferred until after the caretaker period, unless:

- it is mandatory public consultation required under legislation
- the consultation cannot reasonably be deferred.

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Events and functions

Elected Members will not use council events and functions held during the caretaker period for campaigning.

No events or functions relating to opening or launching facilities will be held during the caretaker period.

Electoral information

City of Darwin will only publish electoral information that is educational or promotional material relating to the election process and voter engagement.

3.3 Council resources

City of Darwin resources may be used to help with running the general election or to encourage voter participation and not for the purposes of campaigning for a candidate.

Council meetings will not be scheduled during the caretaker period. A Special Council Meeting may be convened on an urgent issue that requires a decision.

Elected Members and workplace participants must:

- include a caretaker statement in each report submitted to Council where the Council's decision would, or could, be a Major Policy Decision. The caretaker statement will state:  
*The decision the Council may make in relation to this item could constitute a 'Major Policy Decision' within the context of the Caretaker Policy, however, an exemption should be made because .... (insert the circumstances for making the exemption).*
- ensure Council's advertising and marketing materials adhere to election campaign guidelines and rules
- report any incidents of non-compliance with this policy to the CEO.

The CEO will give written notice to Elected Members and workplace participants prior to the commencement of the caretaker period, any changes to business requirements during this period and that the caretaker principles in this policy will apply.

4 Definitions

**Campaigning** includes campaigning activity, wearing or displaying campaign material, refer to definitions of 'campaigning activity' and 'campaign material' at sections 268 – 268A of the *Electoral Act 2004*.

**Caretaker Period** means the period that commences on the nomination day for a local government general election and ends when the results of the general election are declared in accordance with the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021*.

.....

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**Elected Member** for the purpose of this policy are the Lord Mayor and Councillors who are elected by the community.

**Major decisions** are those decisions that have a significant impact on Council operations and activities, or are otherwise political sensitive, and a reasonable person would not consider the decision to be part of the normal council operations.

**Nomination day** means the day that nominations close for a local government general election.

**Workplace participants** means City of Darwin employees, volunteers, work experience placements, contractors, consultants, and labour-hire staff.

5 Legislative references

Local Government Act 2019 (NT)  
Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021 (NT)  
Electoral Act 2004

6 Procedure and related documents

Schedule 1 Code of Conduct  
City of Darwin Code of Conduct  
Elected Member Protocols and Interactions Policy  
Elected Member Expenses, Facilities and Support Policy

7 Responsibility / application

Elected Members and the CEO are accountable for the overall establishment and periodic review of this policy.

Elected Members, the CEO and workplace participants are responsible for complying with this policy.

This policy will be reviewed every four years, or as required.

.....

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    - directing staff directly or indirectly in relation to an election campaign or associated activity
    - accessing Council resources, except to enable them to perform the role of an Elected Member

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- o claiming reimbursement for campaign expenses
- o undertaking public consultation activities except where there is a statutory requirement to do so
- o undertaking an activity that may influence the outcome of the election, except where that activity relates to the election process and is authorised by the CEO
- o workplace participants assisting Elected Members with their election campaign at any time, including outside working hours, except where the assistance is for the equal benefit of all candidates.

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**10 CORRESPONDENCE****10.1 INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE - LGANT - BOARD MEETING COMMUNIQUE**

**Author:** A/Manager Office of Council and CEO

**Authoriser:** Chief Executive Officer

**Attachments:**

1. Incoming Correspondence - LGANT Board Meeting Communique - 18 June 2025 [↓](#)
2. Incoming Correspondence - ALGA Board Meeting Communique - 9 May 2025 [↓](#)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

THAT the report entitled Incoming Correspondence - LGANT - Board Meeting Communique be received and noted.



### 18 JUNE 2025 LGANT BOARD MEETING COMMUNIQUE

The LGANT Board met for its third meeting of 2025 on Wednesday 18 June at the LGANT office in Darwin and online.

Kate O'Brien from Central Land Council presented to the Board to explain S19 Leases.

The Board approved and adopted the first tranche of LGANT's updated organisational policies. The Board also discussed and endorsed the Risk Dashboard Report and Risk Profiles which were developed in conjunction with JLT at a workshop on 20 May.

The Board discussed and endorsed LGANT's draft Reconciliation Action Plan (Reflect), which outlines how LGANT will take practical and meaningful action to advance reconciliation. It will now be submitted to Reconciliation Australia for final endorsement.

The Board endorsed nominations to represent LGANT on a range of external committees. These include:

1. NT Councils Discretionary Trust Advisory Committee:
2. Ministerial Advisory Council for Multicultural Affairs
3. Place Names Committee for the Northern Territory
4. Northern Territory Subdivision Development Guidelines Management Committee

The Board also discussed and endorsed the draft Operational Plan 2025-26 for the LGANT Strategic Plan, which was endorsed by members at the May 2025 symposium.

The Board accepted Groote Archipelago Regional Council as full members.

The Board approved the proposed 2025-2026 operational roadworks budget and program, including the expenditure for the construction of Bonya Access stage 2 road pavement sealing project.

The LGANT President provided an update on the ALGA Board and talked to the communique from the 9 May 2025 ALGA Board meeting (refer attached).

The LGANT CEO provided an update on LGANT's recent work on the local government legislative reform, the completion of the Local Buy MOU, and our success in getting a grant from the NTG for a candidate campaign in the lead up to the local government election. The CEO also provided a review of LGANT's recent May symposium and informed the Board of the addition of staff member Michelle van Zanden, Project and Advocacy Advisor.

The Board will next meet on 27 August 2025.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss these matters further, please reach out to Mary Watson, LGANT CEO, at [mary.watson@lgant.asn.au](mailto:mary.watson@lgant.asn.au) or on 0417 864 183.

Alternatively, you can contact members of the LGANT Board:

President: Hon Kon Vatskalis	City of Darwin	<a href="mailto:lord.mayor@darwin.nt.gov.au">lord.mayor@darwin.nt.gov.au</a>	0499 384 233
Vice President (municipal): Allison Bitar	Alice Springs Town Council	<a href="mailto:abitar@alicesprings.nt.gov.au">abitar@alicesprings.nt.gov.au</a>	0491 055 224
Vice President (regional and shire): Brian Pedwell	Victoria Daly Regional Council	<a href="mailto:brian.pedwell@vicdaly.nt.gov.au">brian.pedwell@vicdaly.nt.gov.au</a>	0429 341 336
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Doug Barden	Litchfield Council	<a href="mailto:doug.barden@litchfield.nt.gov.au">doug.barden@litchfield.nt.gov.au</a>	0429 875 390
Lis Clark	Katherine Town Council	<a href="mailto:elisabeth.clark@ktc.nt.gov.au">elisabeth.clark@ktc.nt.gov.au</a>	0439 501 348
Peter Clee	Wagait Shire Council	<a href="mailto:peter.clee@wagait.nt.gov.au">peter.clee@wagait.nt.gov.au</a>	0418 894 404
Lynette De Santis	Tiwi Islands Regional Council	<a href="mailto:lynettejane.desantis@tiwiislands.nt.gov.au">lynettejane.desantis@tiwiislands.nt.gov.au</a>	0419 033 821
James Woods	West Arnhem Regional Council	<a href="mailto:james.woods@westarnhem.nt.gov.au">james.woods@westarnhem.nt.gov.au</a>	0497 919 225



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### 9 May 2025 ALGA Board Meeting Communique

The ALGA Board met for its second meeting of 2025 on Friday 9 May at the Local Government NSW offices in Sydney.

The Board discussed ALGA's draft Budget for 2025-26 before it was presented to the ALGA General Meeting for final endorsement.

The Board endorsed an operational plan for 2025-26 which outlines how the Secretariat will address ALGA's strategic priorities over the coming financial year.

The Board also discussed and endorsed a value proposition statement for ALGA which outlines the value that the association provides to its members, the federal government and other stakeholders.

The Board heard an update on climate adaptation modelling work ALGA commissioned from Nation Partners and Ricardo, which will be launched at ALGA's 2025 National General Assembly.

The Board discussed outcomes from ALGA's 2025 federal election campaign, and discussed opportunities for continued improvement and coordination across future advocacy campaigns.

The Board discussed the need for continued pressure to ensure that the Parliamentary inquiry into local government sustainability's final report is released, and that the federal government's response includes an increase in untied, formula-based funding for all councils.

The ALGA CEO provided an update on a range of issues including the 2025 Local Roads , Transport and Infrastructure Congress, creation of a new Local Government Lived Experience Panel as part of the Commonwealth's Renewable Energy - Developer Rating Scheme, follow up actions from the Local Government Tech Leadership Summit, and the Indigenous Led Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The ALGA President and State and Territory Presidents presented reports highlighting emerging national and jurisdictional issues.

The ALGA Board will next meet on 23 June 2025.

P 02 6122 9400

ABN 31 008 613 876

**Building Better  
Communities.**

**10.2 OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE - MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2019**

**Author:** A/Manager Office of Council and CEO

**Authoriser:** Chief Executive Officer

**Attachments:** 1. Outgoing Correspondence - Minister for Local Government and Community Development - egislative Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019 [↓](#)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

THAT the report entitled Outgoing Correspondence - Minister for Local Government and Community Development - Legislative Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019 be received and noted.



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P 08 8930 0300  
E [darwin@darwin.nt.gov.au](mailto:darwin@darwin.nt.gov.au)

Hon Steven Edgington MLA  
Minister for Local Government and Community Development  
GPO Box 3146  
Darwin NT 0801

Dear Minister Edgington

### **Submission on 2025 Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019**

City of Darwin (CoD) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed 'tranche 2' amendments to the Local Government Act 2019 NT. This submission has been prepared following discussion with CoD elected members.

#### **Part A**

#### **1. Delegations**

##### **1.1 Tenders**

The discussion paper suggests greater clarity is needed on when and how information about the outcomes of delegated tender decisions should be reported back to councils, and about exempt procurement decisions.

Regarding tenders, CoD suggests that Regulation 36 be amended as follows to clarify the requirement for a CEO to update council only, in particular where a delegation is in place.

Reg 36(8) be amended to read as:

- (8) The CEO or chief executive must provide a separate update report under subregulation (6) to the council or local government subsidiary if the council or local government authority is not updated on all tender procurement in a report at least quarterly.

Reg 36(9) be amended to read as:

- (9) The council or local government subsidiary may only accept a tender for the provision of supplies:

- (a) from among those that submitted tenders; and

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(b) after receiving the report from the CEO or chief executive under subregulation (8),  
unless council has delegated to the CEO the authority to approve tender procurement.

Regarding exempt procurement, CoD suggests that if increased transparency of exempt procurement pursuant to Regulation 38 is required, then the requirement of councils to publish a notice on the council's website be required on a quarterly basis.

## 1.2 Committees

The discussion paper raises concerns about delegation of council powers or functions to a council committee that includes non-elected members.

CoD does not support this change in its entirety. CoD's position is that delegation should not be made to a committee comprising non-elected members, however where committees comprise only elected members then it is appropriate to allow Council to delegate powers to this committee. CoD continues to support a committee comprising of non-elected members as they have a valuable role to play in the provision of advice to councils and where external, independent expertise is valuable, for example audit and risk committees. This aligns with best practice. Such committees that contain non-elected members, should not be delegated council powers or functions and should not seek to direct staff or elected members.

## 1.3 Delegation of certain transactions and waivers of fee for service

Further, the discussion paper indicates amendments to section 40(4) of the Act will need to be considered.

CoD delegation of authority allows contracts amounts up to a certain Council agreed values to be done under delegated/sub-delegated powers; above this Council delegates to CEO to execute. This means the power to incur financial liabilities is currently permitted under the Act to be delegated to the CEO (with Council resolution limits imposed). As such the power to enter into a contract is delegated to the CEO if the contract is below that delegated threshold value. The clarification or limitations of Council's delegation to the CEO in this area, are better addressed as a policy decision of Council rather than a change in the already comprehensive specifications in the Act.

COD does not support any amendment to the Act that would limit the ability of councils to delegate to the CEO or allow the CEO to sub-delegate. Any such change would significantly inhibit CoD's operations.

Further, CoD recommends that section 40 of the Act be amended to remove the note for the sub-section which confuses rather than clarifies. A council resolution is already required to make this delegation.





## **2. Miscellaneous Amendments**

### **2.1 Offences for conflicts of interest**

CoD has no objections to this amendment, noting this is a minor amendment.

### **2.2 Ordinary and Special Meetings**

CoD does not support this change which amounts to causing red tape. The Department can already monitor timing of publication of notices in relation to meeting dates.

### **2.3 Holding of Elections**

CoD has no objections to this amendment.

## **3. Tenders by council or local government subsidiaries and procurement exemptions**

Regarding tenders, the discussion paper suggests there is confusion about the requirement for a CEO to provide a tender report to council per Regulation 36(8) and suggests updating this Regulation to state that the report be provided to council at its next ordinary meeting. The discussion paper also indicates the Regulation can be further updated to clarify the reporting process required when a tender process has been delegated.

CoD has no objections to this change where a council has not delegated tender procurement to a CEO.

CoD has concerns about amending the Regulation to state that a tender report is required for delegated tender decisions however the provision of a report on tenders over the \$150,000 and to report on the use of exempt procurement on a quarterly basis is reasonable.

CoD would support an amendment to introduce a quarterly reporting requirement for tender procurement delegated to a CEO. This would offer the right balance between preserving confidential information and enabling elected members to monitor and understand council finances. More regular reporting is not supported as it undermines the efficacy of a delegation to a CEO and will require additional resourcing, in effect representing an increase in red tape.

Regarding procurement exemptions, the discussion paper proposes updating Regulation 38 to state that a quarterly report is required to be presented to Council articulating the instances and reasons if a council elects not to seek quotations or to go to tender.

CoD does not support this proposed change. Regulation 38 already clearly outlines the scenarios in which exempt procurement is available. Diverting to council for each and every instance of this is simply not feasible and demonstrates limited understanding of council operations. This would also be a drain on elected member time reporting on matters the Regulation already clearly addresses.







#### **4. Amendments to Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021**

CoD has no objections to these amendments. Enabling the NT Electoral Commission to publish candidate statements is particularly welcomed for the benefit it will bring to informing the electorate about candidates standing for election.

#### **Part B**

#### **5. Payment of Superannuation to Elected Members**

The discussion paper proposes an opt-in mechanism for councils to pay superannuation to elected members as a portion of members' fees.

CoD does not object to the proposal for an opt-in mechanism for each council.

However, clarity would be required at law on what 'opt in' means, including whether decision to opt in would be by unanimous or majority resolution and whether individual Elected Members could still opt-out where a Council opts in recognising that the change to payment of superannuation may not suit individual Elected Members, including because the issue of employee status not resolved and tax implications.

CoD also suggests that if this is implemented, the council ratifies payment of superannuation and that Minister signs off to overcome elected members being conflicted by endorsing payment of superannuation, particularly if over and above current allowances.

Clarity would also be sought on what elements of a members' fees would attract superannuation guarantee payments, and it is noted there may be some administrative complexities in making superannuation payments to Elected Members relative to staff, for instance at CoD Elected Members are paid allowances by the Finance Team rather than payments through Payroll.

Financial implications and capacity for all Councils and Local Authorities also needs to be considered and balanced.

#### **6. Conditional Rating and Rates Exemptions for social and affordable housing**

##### **6.1 Conditional Rating**

The discussion paper includes proposals to phase out rule allowing mining tenements to be grouped for rating purposes and make clear that councils can apportion rates on conditionally rateable land.

CoD has no objections to the proposals, noting they are not specifically applicable to the Darwin municipality. CoD queries the ten-year phase-out and whether this aligns with transition periods for other legislative change.





## 6.2 Rates Exemptions for social and affordable housing

The Act currently provides that land used for a non-commercial purpose by a public benevolent institution (PBI) or a public charity is exempt from rates.

The discussion paper suggests section 222(1)(g) of the Act could be clarified to more explicitly define “non-commercial” use in the context of housing provided by charitable organisations that charge rent and to clarify the CEO (Housing)’s ongoing liability for rates.

CoD strongly supports greater clarity in the Act to ensure the original intention, that is public housing, whether managed privately through a Community Housing Provider or the CEO (Housing), continue to pay rates.

To clarify, CoD recommends that NTG should formally clarify their prior indicated intention to continue paying rates on housing stock that has been transferred from the NTG to a housing provider and for the outsourcing of the NTG responsibility for future housing to a Community or Social Housing Provider in the NTG, this should be an enduring obligation. Further, anything less than this amounts of ‘cost shifting’ between the two spheres of government, exposing the local government sector to significant income loss in the future which could only be managed through the requirement of large rate increases to the community and/or a reduction of overall services to remain financially sustainable. Both unintended consequences would be to the detriment of the wider community.

Community Housing Providers already receive tax relief in comparison to other housing providers. Therefore, to determine that a market rent discount given by Community Housing Providers which is less or equivalent to the tax relief does aligns them with all other providers that are considered commercial in nature.

Furthermore, the City of Darwin requests that Department extends the changes in the Act to define ‘non-commercial’ for registered charitable organisations and PBI’s, not only in the context of housing but for all organisations. Any changes in the legislation in this respect needs to be limited in the Act to transition in with retrospective reclassifications at the discretion of the councils.

Finally, CoD agrees consultation with the housing sector, councils and broader charitable sector is required before any amendment to the Act.

## 7. Appointment of principal member of council

The discussion paper flags possible amendment of the Act to remove the option for direct election of principal members, suggesting this would strengthen consistency and provide sector-wide governance alignment.

CoD’s position is that flexibility should be preserved and that in the Darwin municipality, as in other LGAs that would be affected by this change, there is an expectation of direct election of their principal member.

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It is noted the discussion paper refers to consistency as a goal but offers no benefits from this change to multiple LGAs that warrant changing the status quo, particularly when the impact is politically contentious.

The discussion paper also proposes that councils with appointment of principal member be given until the fourth ordinary meeting after a general election to appoint a principal member, to “enable elected members to properly gauge if a person is suitable”. This proposal is not relevant to CoD at the present time owing to direct election in place, however it is noted that the reasoning for the change is politically troublesome, with judgments about the suitability or unsuitability of elected members for leadership a matter for the electorate, not Departmental officials. Further, CoD suggests that delaying appointment of the Chair until the fourth ordinary meeting does not solve the problem the paper suggests it is trying to solve with considerations other than who will be the most effective chair likely to be relevant to elected members making this decision.

CoD also highlights the factual inaccuracies and misrepresentations included in this section of the discussion paper.

## Part C

### 8. Conduct framework for local government councillors in the Northern Territory

The discussion paper includes a proposed framework including:

- Raising awareness of councillor roles and responsibilities
- Councillor induction, professional development training and commitment to the Code
- Required training for Chair and Deputy Chair
- Council Governance Checks
- Standing Council Governance and Code Committee
- Independent Assessor
- Escalation to Code of Conduct Panel
- Code of Conduct Panel Findings Implemented
- Resourcing and Costs
- Elected Mayors
- Media Policy
- Eligibility/Disqualification





- Defining Levels of Complaints

### **Overarching feedback on proposed Code of Conduct framework**

CoD endorses a mandatory Code of Conduct framework with core components legislated supported by departmental guidance and templates. Mandatory elements of the framework, such as training and code of conduct framework, should be funded by the NTG, not local governments.

Further, the discussion paper allows for the introduction of a Governance Controller, which based on previous briefing could be imposed upon a council at the discretion of the CEO of the Department where a council is “not performing its responsibilities appropriately.” CoD notes although this threshold is the same as for the existing Financial Controller, the threshold is too vague and/or too low as the risks from poor administration are not necessarily equivalent to those of inappropriate financial management. CoD requests clarity on how a Governance Controller would report back on findings and whether this would be analogous to a compliance review and what impact imposition of a Governance Controller would have on the scheduling of a compliance review. CoD recommends if a Governance Controller is to be included in legislative amendments, that the threshold be narrowed to seriously or systemically poor administration and that the Minister, rather than the Departmental CEO, have the ability to appoint a Governance Controller, to create political accountability for a decision to intervene in what is another sphere of government.

CoD supports a mandatory framework (clarification question 1 – option 1)

#### **8.1.1 Raising awareness of councillor roles and responsibilities**

CoD has no objections to this suggested approach. CoD supports efforts to attract more and suitable candidates to run in local government elections across the territory.

#### **8.1.2 Councillor induction, professional development training and commitment to the Code**

CoD has no objections, agrees face to face training delivery is optimal, recommends all training should be funded by the NTG and is comfortable with Elected Members signing an agreement to represent all the people in the council area and to uphold values, culture and standards of the council and its community. Noting that all Elected Members currently sign a declaration at their inauguration.

#### **8.1.3 Required training for Chair and Deputy Chair**

CoD supports the introduction of compulsory Chair training, noting for councils where the Deputy Chair rotates among Elected Members that this training be offered to all Elected Members of that council as optional training.

CoD supports the Department delivering the training (clarification question 1 - option 1) and outcome that a Chair/Deputy Chair who does not complete the training is ineligible to act as Chair until the training is completed (clarification question 2 - option 2).



#### 8.1.4 Council Governance Checks

The discussion paper proposes a minimum of twice-per-year structured governance checks.

CoD does not object to voluntary governance checks with the council or Department conducting the governance checks, depending on the requirement, and at the direction of Elected Members. That is, the council will be expected to undertake the governance check, but with the option for a council to request the Department to complete the activity.

CoD supports voluntary governance checks (clarification question 1 - option 3) and proposes a new option for who conducts the governance checks (clarification question 2 – new option).

#### 8.1.5 Early intervention – Standing Council Governance and Code Committee

The discussion paper proposes councils establish a new standing governance and Code of Conduct committee, including an independent membership being an independent chair.

CoD's position is this is not needed and insofar as it duplicates the existing Council and its ability to make decisions relating to governance or Code of Conduct issues, amounts to red tape, will have an operational impost on councils resourcing an additional committee. It is viewed as a duplication that will not resolve any of the current legislative and practical issues as raised by the sector. Further, it doesn't overcome the issue of code of conduct matters needing a truly independent mechanism to dismiss vexatious complaints or otherwise respond to complaints where elected members are not best placed to decide over complaints concerning one or more of the collective. CoD agrees that where an elected member does not follow direction of council – not a standing committee – that the matter may be escalated to the Independent Assessor so long as the Independent Assessor can mandate the remedial orders available to a council and sanctions such as suspension are available to the Independent Assessor as outlined on page 18 of Discussion Paper C.

CoD does not support this committee, nor as an optional governance arrangement for councils (clarification question 1 – option 3) and this means that there is no option required for councils nominating and vetting own candidates for Chairs or councils joining regional pools to share members (clarification question 2 – option 2 or 3).

#### 8.1.6 Independent Assessor

The discussion paper proposes an Independent Assessor for escalated conduct complaints to consider complaints where prevention and internal intervention strategies, including a Standing Council Governance and Code Committee, have been unsuccessful.

CoD notes there is some confusion in the discussion paper about the role of the Independent Assessor as having a triage (initial assessment) role compared with dealing with escalated complaints.

CoD supports the introduction of an Independent Assessor, however referral to the Independent Assessor should be optional for councils and some complaints may be initially referred to the

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Independent Assessor were given their nature, such as vexatious complaints from a member of the public, independent triage may be required. Otherwise, CoD agrees that option to engage an Independent Assessor be considered after early intervention strategies have been considered, noting CoD does not agree that a Standing Council Governance and Code Committee should be required and therefore Council may directly refer to the Independent Assessor.

CoD supports the Independent Assessor being vested with sanctions as outlined on page 18, including the ability to consider failure to action remedial orders recommended by the council, and with the exception of the ability to appoint a Governance Controller and they should not have the ability to disqualify a member which needs to rest with the Minister. However, given the vesting of such powers, CoD recommends that Independent Assessors should be admitted professional lawyers to meet a high standard of ethics and to ensure trust and confidence in the model. Alternatively, the Independent Assessor should not be vested with the most serious of sanctions outlined.

CoD supports a Department endorsed panel (clarification question 1 – option 1), an alternative option for engaging an Independent Assessor (clarification question 2 – other option) and alternative option for low-level matters being at council discretion (clarification question 3 – other option).

#### **8.1.7 Escalation to Code of Conduct Panel**

The discussion paper outlines a proposed Panel structure whereby the Panel would assess and decide only those complaints referred to it from the Independent Assessor, and that only substantial, more serious complaints would be referred.

CoD supports this approach if and where the Panel includes a suitable qualified independent legal expert and is chaired by an independent member. The panel should include independent Elected Member representation however not in the majority. That is, legal and governance expertise should be prioritised. In these circumstances, CoD is supportive of the Panel being vested with serious sanctions including the power to suspend, or fine, noting that dismissal should be via recommendation only to the Minister.

#### **8.1.8 Code of Conduct Panel Findings Implemented**

CoD supports most of the available sanctions and their escalation for the Independent Assessor and Code of Conduct Panel other than to appoint a Governance Controller which CoD does not support. CoD does not support mandating of a Standing Governance and Code Committee but notes the sanction decisions available to such a committee duplicate those available to an Independent Assessor, weakening the justification for such a committee.

CoD notes that this section indicates that an Independent Assessor may refer a complaint back to Council if Council has not exhausted resolution options and recommends this be clarified for the situation where a complaint is referred directly to the Independent Assessor for triaging given due to the nature of the complaint, independent assessment is best early on, for example where a complaint is from a member of the public who is a vexatious complainant, or where the complaint is





in relation to multiple Elected Members – or an entire Council. Further, CoD notes that standing representation of legal and governance experts on a panel may be more cost efficient. Finally, CoD recommends that the Department publish a public register of Code of Conduct breaches established by the Independent Assessor or Code of Conduct Panel for all councils in line with the Department's role as regulator and to create additional accountability. Disqualification should be via panel recommendation to the Minister.

#### **8.1.9 Resourcing and Costs**

The discussion paper proposes the relevant council is responsible for the costs of the Independent Assessor and sitting costs of the Code Panel. CoD agrees with a cost recovery mechanism, however, suggests more information is required on how this would work. Broader changes, or a triage process for complaints, within the legislation to reduce or avoid costs incurred by frivolous or vexatious applications is also welcomed.

#### **8.1.10 Elected Mayors**

CoD notes the unfortunate use of inflammatory language and misinformation in the discussion paper about a council being "trapped with a chair that is not modelling good behaviour". Comment is made about the substantive proposal under Chapter 5.

#### **8.1.11 Media Policy**

The discussion paper promotes a single-spokesperson policy for councils.

CoD notes that for councils where there is direct election of the principal member, it is expected that the principal member will be the official and main spokesperson for the council.

CoD supports mandating that all councils have a media policy outlining who can speak on behalf of council, noting that Elected Members other than the principal member may be spokesperson when the principal member is on leave, or when they are otherwise a more suitable spokesperson, including due to a conflict.

Finally, CoD supports delivery of media training for all Elected Members and that this be funded by the NTG.

CoD supports mandatory media policy but flexibility in approach (clarification question 1 – option 2) and that media training be strongly encouraged for all members (clarification question 2 – option 1).





### 8.1.12 Eligibility/Disqualification

The discussion paper flags possible changes to the eligibility and disqualification criteria for elected members with criteria drawing on broader range of disqualifying behaviours.

CoD supports changes to eligibility and disqualification with more serious penalties for the most serious breaches, including bullying/harassment/discrimination or psychosocial offences, however, also recommends that these more serious penalties be available for repeated lower-level breaches. Further, CoD suggests more consideration of how eligibility and disqualification is operationalised by Northern Territory Electoral Commission processes such as introducing probity checks. Finally, CoD suggests that fairness and cultural factors should not be considered, rather a level playing field that raises the bar is required and reasonable for holders of public office.

CoD supports disqualification triggered by serious misconduct or repeated breaches (qualification question 1 – option 1) and suggests fairness and cultural factors should not be considered, particularly for serious breaches (clarification question 2 – other option).

### 8.1.13 Defining Levels of Complaints

The discussion paper flags use of defined levels of complaint, distinguishing between misbehaviour, repeated misbehaviour and serious misconduct.

CoD supports a tiered structure such as that outlined and which aligns with escalation of sanctions, including more serious sanctions available for repeated less significant breaches and failure to complete remedial orders.

CoD supports determination of complaint classification by the Independent Assessor (clarification question 1 – option 1) with a standard model used (clarification question 2 – option 1).

I look forward to your response to the above feedback.

If you have any queries in the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to myself, the Lord Mayor, or our Manager Advocacy and Policy Scott Walker on [scott.walker@darwin.nt.gov.au](mailto:scott.walker@darwin.nt.gov.au)

Yours sincerely

Simone Saunders  
Chief Executive Officer

20 June 2025

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**11      REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Nil

**12      QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

Nil

**13      GENERAL BUSINESS**

Nil

**14 CLOSURE OF MEETING TO THE PUBLIC**

THAT pursuant to Section 99 (2) of the Local Government Act 2019 and Regulation 8 of the Local Government Regulations the meeting be closed to the public to consider the Confidential Items of the Agenda.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Council considers the confidential report(s) listed below in a meeting closed to the public in accordance with Section 99(2) of the *Local Government Act 2019*:

**18.1 Waste Proposal**

This matter is considered to be confidential under Section 99(2) - 51(c)(i) of the Local Government Act, and the Council is satisfied that discussion of this matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest as it deals with information that would, if publicly disclosed, be likely to cause commercial prejudice to, or confer an unfair commercial advantage on, any person.

**19.1 Incoming and Outgoing Correspondence - Heritage Council Northern Territory - Proposed Heritage Site**

This matter is considered to be confidential under Section 99(2) - 51(c)(iv) of the Local Government Act, and the Council is satisfied that discussion of this matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest as it deals with information that would, if publicly disclosed, be likely to subject to subregulation 51(3) – prejudice the interests of the council or some other person.

**15      ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING AND MEDIA LIAISON**