

# Central Coast Council

## Public Forum Policy



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Revision: 2

Policy No.: **CCC112**

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## 1. Policy Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this Policy is to provide members of the community with the relevant processes and procedures for addressing Council on items to be considered at an Ordinary Meeting of Council, Extraordinary Meeting of Council, or meeting of Committees of the Council.
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## 2. Policy Scope

- 2.1. This Policy covers any person who wishes to speak at a Public Forum held prior to an Ordinary Council Meeting, Extraordinary Council Meeting or meeting of Committees of the Council.
  - 2.2. Legal representatives acting on behalf of others are not to be permitted to speak at a Public Forum unless they identify their status as a legal representative when applying to speak at the Public Forum.
  - 2.3. Serving Councillors, Members of Federal and State Parliament, as well as nominated candidates at Federal, State or Local Government elections are not permitted to speak at a Public Forum.
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## 3. Policy Statement

- 3.1. Council is committed to the principle of open government and encourages community involvement in its decision-making. This is achieved by the community having appropriate access to Council and having Council meetings open to the public.
  - 3.2. The Public Forum process seeks to increase transparency and assist Council in its decision-making process by providing an opportunity for members of the community to address Council on items of business under consideration.
  - 3.3. Council does not make decisions at a Public Forum. These sessions are an opportunity for members of the public to speak on items of business to be considered at the relevant Council or committee meeting.
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## 4. Procedures

- 4.1. Council may hold a Public Forum prior to an Ordinary Meeting of Council for the purpose of hearing verbal submissions from members of the public on items of business to be considered at the Ordinary Council Meeting. Public Forums may also be held prior to Extraordinary Council Meetings and meetings of committees of the Council.
- 4.2. Only items included in the agenda of the proceeding Council or committee meeting can be discussed at the Public Forum. Speakers will address the Public Forum in the order of the Agenda for the Ordinary Council Meeting.

- 4.3.** Public Forums may be held by audio-visual link.
- 4.4.** Public Forums will be recorded by means of an audio or audio-visual device and made publicly available on Council's website.
- 4.5.** Public Forums are to be chaired by the Mayor or their nominee and to be rotated on a 6-monthly basis.
- 4.6.** At the start of each Public Forum, the Chairperson must inform the persons attending that:
  - 4.6.1. the Public Forum is being recorded and made publicly available on Council's website, and
  - 4.6.2. persons attending the Public Forum should refrain from making any defamatory statements.

### **Requesting to speak at a Public Forum**

- 4.7.** To speak at a Public Forum, a person must make an application to Council by completing the approved form. The approved form includes a template for written submissions/speaking notes. Applications to speak at the Public Forum must be received by 10 AM on the day of the Public Forum and must identify the item of business on the Agenda of the Council Meeting the person wishes to speak on, and whether they wish to speak 'for' or 'against' the item.
- 4.8.** A person may apply to speak on no more than two items of business on the Agenda and must note a preference of topic. If multiple applications are received for the same topic, the speaker's preferred topic will be prioritised.
- 4.9.** If more than one application is received for the same topic by multiple speakers listing it as their priority, the deciding factor will be whichever application was received first.
- 4.10.** The Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may refuse an application to speak at a Public Forum. The Chief Executive Officer or their delegate must give reasons in writing for a decision to refuse an application.

### **Speaking at a Public Forum**

- 4.11.** Each speaker will be allowed three (3) minutes to address the Council. Any extension of time granted by the Chairperson should not exceed two (2) minutes.
- 4.12.** No more than eight (8) speakers in total are to be permitted to speak at each Public Forum.
- 4.13.** If more than eight (8) speakers apply to speak at a Public Forum, the applications will be processed in order of receipt.
- 4.14.** No more than two speakers are to be permitted to speak 'for' or 'against' each item of business on the Agenda for the Council Meeting.
- 4.15.** If more than the permitted number of speakers apply to speak 'for' or 'against' any item of business, the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may request the speakers nominate amongst themselves who will address the Council on

that item of business. If the speakers are not able to agree on who will address the Council, the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate is to determine who will address the Council at the Public Forum.

- 4.16.** If more than the permitted number of speakers apply to speak 'for' or 'against' any item of business, the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may, in consultation with the Mayor or the Mayor's nominated Chairperson, increase the number of speakers permitted to speak on an item of business, where they are satisfied that it is necessary to do so to allow the Council to hear a fuller range of views on the relevant item of business.

### **Provision of supporting material**

- 4.17.** Approved speakers at the Public Forum are to register with Council any written, visual or audio material to be presented in support of their address to the Council at the Public Forum, and to identify any equipment needs by 10 AM on the day of the Public Forum. The Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may refuse to allow such material to be presented.
- 4.18.** Supporting material provided by Speakers will not be displayed on Council's website.

### **Conduct at the Public Forum**

- 4.19.** Speakers at a Public Forum must not digress from the item on the Agenda of the Council Meeting they have applied to address the Council on. If a speaker digresses to irrelevant matters, the Chairperson is to direct the speaker not to do so. If a speaker fails to observe a direction from the Chairperson, the speaker will not be further heard.
- 4.20.** A Councillor (including the Chairperson) may, through the Chairperson, ask questions of a speaker following their address at a Public Forum. Questions put to a speaker must be direct, succinct and without argument.
- 4.21.** Speakers are under no obligation to answer a question put through the Chairperson. Answers by the speaker, to each question, are to be limited to one (1) minute.
- 4.22.** Speakers at a Public Forum cannot ask questions of the Council, Councillors or Council staff.
- 4.23.** After a speaker has addressed the Council and any subsequent questions and answers have been finalised, the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee may, with the permission of the Chairperson, address the Council for up to three minutes in response to the speaker. .
- 4.24.** Where an address made at a Public Forum raises matters that require further consideration by Council staff, the Chief Executive Officer may recommend that the Council defer consideration of the matter pending the preparation of a further report on the matters.
- 4.25.** When addressing the Council, speakers at a Public Forum must comply with Council's [Code of Meeting Practice](#) and all other relevant Council codes, policies

and procedures. Speakers must refrain from engaging in disorderly conduct, publicly alleging breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct or making any other potentially defamatory statements.

- 4.26.** If the Chairperson considers that a speaker at a Public Forum has engaged in conduct of the type referred to in Clause 4.25, the Chairperson may request the person to refrain from the inappropriate behaviour and to withdraw and unreservedly apologise for any inappropriate comments. Where the speaker fails to comply with the Chairperson's request, the Chairperson may immediately require the person to stop speaking.
  - 4.27.** Clause 4.26 does not limit the ability of the Chairperson to deal with disorderly conduct by speakers at a Public Forum in accordance with the provisions of Part 15 of the [Code of Meeting Practice](#).
  - 4.28.** Where a speaker engages in conduct of the type referred to in Clause 4.25, the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may refuse further applications from that person to speak at a Public Forum for such time as the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate considers appropriate.
  - 4.29.** Councillors (including the Mayor) must declare and manage any conflicts of interest they may have in relation to any item of business that is the subject of an address at a Public Forum, in the same way that they are required to do so at a Council or Committee Meeting. The Council is to maintain a written record of all conflict of interest declarations made at a Public Forum and how the conflict of interest was managed by the Councillor who made the declaration.
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## 5. Responsibilities

### **Compliance, monitoring and review**

- 5.1.** Suspected breaches or misuse of this procedure are to be reported to the Chief Executive Officer. Alleged breaches of this procedure shall be dealt with the Code of Conduct and the Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct.

### **Records management**

- ~~**5.2.** Staff must maintain all records relevant to administering this protocol in accordance with Council's [Information and Records Management Policy](#).~~

## 6. Policy Definitions

<b>Act</b>	means the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW).
<b>Chairperson</b>	<p>in relation to a meeting of Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>means the person presiding at the meeting as provided by section 369 of the Local Government Act 1993; and Clauses 6.1 and 6.2 of the Code of Meeting Practice; and</li></ul> <p>in relation to a meeting of a Committee of the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>means the person presiding at the meeting as provided by Clause 20.11 of the Code of Meeting Practice.</li></ul>
<b>Chief Executive Officer (CEO)</b>	means the Chief Executive Officer of Central Coast Council who undertakes the functions of the General Manager under the <a href="#">Local Government Act 1993</a> , or in the absence of that person, the Staff designated to act for the Chief Executive Officer. Where this Code refers to General Manager it represents Chief Executive Officer and simply reflects the legislation.
<b>Code of Meeting Practice</b>	means Council's Code of Meeting Practice adopted by Council pursuant to the <a href="#">Local Government Act 1993</a> .
<b>Committee of the Council</b>	means a Committee established by the Council in accordance with Clause 20.2 of the Code of Meeting Practice (being a Committee consisting only of Councillors) or the Council when it has resolved itself into Committee of the Whole under Clause 12.1.
<b>Council</b>	means Central Coast Council.
<b>Council Official</b>	means it has the same meaning as it has in Council's Code of Conduct.
<b>Day</b>	means calendar day, unless otherwise stipulated by the Act, Regulations, or this Code.

## 7. Policy Administration

<b>Business Group</b>	Office of the Chief Executive Officer
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>Associated Procedure (if any, reference document(s) number(s))</b>	Nil
<b>Policy Review Date</b>	Four years from date of adoption unless legislated otherwise
<b>File Number / Document Number</b>	D15975479
<b>Relevant Legislation (reference specific sections)</b>	<p>This Policy supports Council's compliance with the following legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Local Government Act 1993</i></li> </ul>
<b>Link to Community Strategic Plan</b>	<p>Theme 4: Responsible</p> <p><b>Goal G: Good governance and great partnerships</b></p> <p>R-G2: Engage and communicate openly and honestly with the community to build a relationship based on trust, transparency, respect and use community participation and feedback to inform decision making.</p>
<b>Related Policies / Protocols / Procedures / Documents (reference document numbers)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Information and Records Management Policy</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Code of Conduct</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Delegations Register</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Code of Meeting Practice</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy</a></li> <li>▪ Councillor and Staff Interaction Procedure</li> </ul>



## 8. Policy Authorisations

No.	Authorised Function	Authorised Business Unit / Role(s)
1	Refuse applications to speak at a Public Forum	Chief Executive Officer or their delegate

## 9. Policy History

Revision	Date Approved / Authority	Description Of Changes
1	22 February 2022 Minute No. 27/22	Public Forum provisions removed from Council's Code of Meeting Practice to create a stand-alone policy.
2	26 August 2025 Minute No. 762/25 (adoption)	Updated to new template, minor wording and format changes