

Strathbogie Shire Councillors

Statement of Intent

Internal Working Document

Introduction

This Statement of Intent (SOI) does not seek to over-ride or alter the Charter of Mutual Respect and Councillor Code of Conduct. It is a deliberate action taken by all councillors to restore and enhance respect, courtesy, and collegiality into the Council room and in dealings with the CEO and Council staff. The SOI is a compact between the councillors to act in accordance with the SOI between each other and with employees of the Council. It is not, and never has been designed, to be weaponised for the execution of codes of conduct. At the heart of the SOI is an expectation and desire by all councillors that their colleague councillors and staff's workplace is physically and psychologically safe.

SOI

We, the councillors, agree to commit to the below behaviours in how we deal with each other in all our interactions.

- 1. Councillors' role:** As councillors we recognise and agree to be responsible for the strategic policy and direction, review of strategic implementation and budget of the Council based on objective evidence and in the best interests of the Council as a whole. Although we are advocates for our community and own aspirations when the time comes to make a decision, we will exclusively consider the best interests of the community and act in a lawful manner with good governance.
- 2. Executive Role:** As Councillors we recognise and respect that members of the executive are charged with supplying the councillors with the best evidence for decision making and executing the council strategy. Each member of the executive brings specific knowledge and skills to any council forum, and it is legitimate and reasonable for that executive member to be respectfully questioned on their specific responsibilities within the matrix of organisational relevance and responsibility and to be allowed to respond fully.
- 3. Councillor Conduct:**
It is recognised that councillors are elected representatives of the Council and hold important positions to agitate policy, hold the council to account and be advocates for the best interests of the council as a whole. By the very nature of council, processes will at times involve disagreement and conflicting views and necessarily this may cause personal and community disappointment. It is not an easy environment to maintain respect and generosity and the lines of councillor and executive responsibility can at times be grey - not black and white. Therefore, there is a constant need to reflect, be mindful and forgiving

and to speak with this in mind when the possibility of hurt is obvious. The key behaviours are:

- a. Respect the chair even if you feel you are getting the wrong end of the stick.
- b. Respect the decision of Council - never go out to criticise the council or individual councillors.
- c. Be aware of each other's disabilities and difficulties and be generous and supportive of each other.
- d. Be mature, i.e no face pulling, nasty side comments, finger pointing, or other actions designed to anger, hurt, intimidate or ridicule another person.
- e. Let people finish what they have to say without interjecting (so long as they are entitled to speak and with respect to the chair to manage the situation)
- f. Be a community leader - be what your community would expect you to be when dealing with their money and their community. Always be respectful, prudent, thoughtful, careful, generous and driven by the best evidence (not by an anecdote of community members)
- g. Listen carefully. Show you are listening and allow everyone, when they are permitted to speak, to be heard.
- h. Treat people fairly, respectfully and generously even if you disagree with them, be they of a different gender, race or other attribute. Be aware that this will make them feel that they are respected, safe, valued and important.
- i. Work collegially to make the Council function as best as it can.
- j. Put a stop to personal attacks, vitriol, hurtful commentary, or any other behaviour that would have the effect of hurting, humiliating or intimidating another person.
- k. Ensure that Councillors respect the roles of the executive as employees and as persons and undertake to provide a safe working environment for the executive and staff of the council.

History and Roll Out

1. Councillors acknowledge that it has been a difficult year. Our collective ability to ensure a safe and respectful workplace and to demonstrate good governance has not been constantly successful. Councillors acknowledge that they hold an important role in setting the tone, ensuring they uphold their commitments to the Local Government Act 2020, the Councillor Code of Conduct and, the Charter of Mutual Respect. We understand that our inability to do so consistently means we are failing in our duty of care. We accept that we can demonstrate the behaviour and leadership expected of us by following our Councillor Code of Conduct, our Charter of Mutual Respect, and the Municipal Monitor's 10 Point Plan. We believe that It is vital for our community, the organisation and our democratic institution that we succeed as a Council.

2. At the heart of our problem is the hurt and anger that has damaged our goodwill and collegiality over time. This means that some of us have struggled to function properly and that some feel the deep hurt that is exacerbated by continued failure to address the underlying problems of distrust.
3. This lack of cohesion is not what our community expects from us - it expects a mature, cohesive policy development body that oversees the monies and responsibilities of the community in a fair, respectful and careful way. We need to work more closely together to achieve this.
4. We recognise as Councillors the urgent need to work together to revitalize the council and create a better future for our community. We recognise our election was a precious gift of trust we must honour and fight to maintain. So, we sponsor and support this SOI, and are committed to it. If we all commit, we can more effectively deliver the social program our community elected us to do.
5. We recognise this is a personal compact between councillors which will be reinforced as we drive further improvements in our conduct and behaviours.
6. We the undersigned councillors adopt and commit to complying with this SOI.
7. For the first month of its operation, we will internally manage any breaches of the SOI in order to build trust, respect, and safety between us as councillors. We commit to calling out breaches, listening to any call out, reflecting and solving the issues before they spiral into misconduct. Thereafter we will invite the executive to feel free to raise breaches with us and to work with them in how we would like it managed so that we create a respectful environment lead by councillors.
8. The SOI will be fully reviewed three months after it commences operation.

Signed and Dated by Strathbogie Shire Councillors

Cr Laura Binks, Mayor

Date



Cr Paul Murray, Deputy Mayor

Date

Cr Reg Dickinson

Date

Cr Sally Hayes-Burke

Date

Cr Chris Raeburn

Date

Cr Robin Weatherald

Date