

POLICY NO.	M.38
POLICY SUBJECT	Concept Forums
ADOPTION DATE	26 April 2018 (C.10/0418)
LAST VARIATION DATE	29 November 2018 (C.04/1118)
LAST REVIEW DATE	16 December 2021 (C.02/1221)

Background

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and Communities (via Operational Guideline Number 05) acknowledges that many local governments, especially those in rural areas, need from a time management viewpoint to introduce procedures such as the holding of forums - as councillors need an opportunity to discuss issues within the freedom of a forum rather than in a formal Council meeting.

The forum approach has allowed the ordinary meeting of council to focus on the decision-making needs of the local government, leading to better informed elected members and a more efficient and effective decision-making regime.

Frequency of Concept Forums

Concept forums will be held once per month excluding the month of December each year and the month of October every 2nd year, coinciding with ordinary local government elections. Concept Forums will be held on the 2nd Thursday of the month starting at 5:30pm.

Subject Matter of Concept Forums

Concept forums involve councillors and staff meeting to propose, discuss and formulate philosophies, ideas, strategies and concepts for the development of the local government and the district. Such forums often involve projects that are in the early planning stage and are some time away from being presented to council for decision. In discussing such issues, staff are looking for guidance from the elected members as they research the matter and draft the report. Councillors and staff are also looking to present ideas and concepts for future consideration. If the response is favourable staff can proceed with their research and eventual report on the matter.

Examples of the type of issues concept forums may cover include –

- Discussion on current matters of a local or regional significance;
- Discussion on matters relating to the future development of the local government;
- Discussion on significant revenue-raising requirements or expenditure needs;
- Development of internal strategic, planning, management and financial documents, including the annual budget;
- Discussion on governance processes and effectiveness;
- The brainstorming of ideas;
- Policy development and direction (but not adoption); and
- Breaking down of complex issues scheduled to come before Council in the medium to longer term

Guidelines for the Operation of Concept Forums

1. Concept Forums are not a decision-making process. Formal decisions are still to be referred to the Council meeting.

2. Concept Forums are held behind closed doors (not open to the public) and operate in a relatively informal manner. Holding these meetings behind closed doors is justified, as many of the ideas and concepts are preliminary. Privacy and informality allows Councillors to propose ideas, ask questions and discuss issues for the better understanding of those in attendance. Such forums assist individuals to become better informed and to clarify their views.
3. Concept Forums are to be chaired by the Deputy Shire President as a professional development opportunity. If both the President and Deputy President aren't in attendance the balance of the councillors present are to elect a chair for the forum.
4. To facilitate participation and the exchange of ideas formal standing orders will not apply to Concept Forums apart from being used as a general guide to Councillor conduct in conjunction with the Shire's Code of Conduct and Rule of Conduct Regulations. Councillors should declare a conflict of interest as they would for a Council or Committee Meeting.
5. Minutes of Concept Forums are not compiled however the CEO (or his/her delegate) is to ensure that appropriate notes are taken in order to record the general thrust of discussion – noting again that no decisions are made at these forums. The CEO will ensure notes are distributed to elected members, noting they are not to be released for public viewing. Such notes will be distributed to Councillors within five (5) working days. These notes do not represent the formal views of the Council with any subsequent decisions being made at a Council meeting or under delegated authority. The findings of the forums will however provide direction to staff in presenting future reports to Council on those specific issues.