

Council Policy – Election Caretaker

Responsible Directorate	Corporate Services
Responsible Business Unit/s	Governance
Responsible Officer	Manger Governance
Affected Business Unit/s	All

Objective

The objective of this policy is to:

- reinforce the limitations and restrictions prescribed in the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act) preventing the carrying out of significant acts that would bind an incoming Council prior to an ordinary election, another election or in other circumstances, prescribed in the Act,
- prevent the use of public resources in ways that are, or are perceived to be, advantageous to or promoting the sitting elected members that are seeking re-election, or new candidates, and
- ensure the Shire of Ashburton (the Shire) administration acts impartially in relation to all candidates.

Scope

This policy applies to all elected members and employees of the Shire, and candidates in local government elections.

Policy Statement

Caretaker period

Local government elections are one of the most significant decisions made by the community and they set the direction of the Shire into the future. It is important that the Shire allows for a free and open election without interference from the Shire and the decisions it needs to make.

To achieve this, prior to any election or in other specified circumstances in the Act, Council acknowledge the need to embrace and the support the caretaker provisions, during which:

- no significant acts should be made except in prescribed circumstances (refer to section 3.73 of the Act),
- no community engagement should occur except where required by law, and

- no media engagement should occur that promotes or could be seen to promote elected members or candidates who are seeking re-election.

Significant Acts

So far as reasonably practicable and unless the approval of the Department CEO is obtained prior, or the Act otherwise provides the statutory ability, the local government must not do a significant act during any caretaker period, and instead ensure that significant acts are either:

- considered by the Council prior to the commencement of the caretaker period, or
- scheduled for determination after the close of a caretaker period.

Community engagement

The CEO should:

- ensure that all community engagement is finished prior to the caretaker period or scheduled to begin after the close of any caretaker period,
- where community engagement needs to be conducted, ensure the community engagement could not be perceived to be about an election issue or otherwise influence the outcome of any election, and
- where a proposed decision could result in a need for community engagement, include information in that report detailing the decision could result in the need for community engagement and that either an exemption to the policy should be made or that the engagement will commence after the close of any caretaker period. .

This policy does not prevent any mandatory public consultation required by the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act), *Planning and Development Act 2005* or any other relevant written law, the Shire must undertake to fulfil its statutory functions.

Media

The CEO should ensure that:

- any reference to elected members in Shire media distributed during a caretaker period must not include promotional text relating to elected members. Any of the Shire's media that are potentially affected by this policy will be reviewed by the CEO to ensure it complies with this policy,
- the Shire's website doesn't contain any material which is precluded by this policy during any caretaker period. Any references to the election will only relate to the election process. Information about elected members will be restricted to names and contact details, and

- the Shire does not print, publish or distribute, or cause, permit or authorise others to print, publish or distribute on behalf of the Shire, any advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice that contains 'electoral material' during the caretaker period.

Candidates and/or elected members are permitted to publish campaign material on their own behalf but must not claim that the material originates from or is authorised by the Shire.

The use of photographs or articles featuring elected members whose terms of office expire at the next ordinary election shall not be used in any media funded by the Shire in the period commencing 1 August to election day, in the year of the ordinary election, with the exception of their portraits on display at the various Shire venues, the Shire website and in each edition of the Shire's newsletter during that period.

No media advice will be provided to elected members in relation to election issues or in regards to publicity that involves elected members seeking re-election.

Promotion of an election

This policy does not prevent publications by the Shire which merely announce the holding of the election or relate only to the election process itself or are required to be published by the Shire pursuant to the Act and *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*.

For any election, inclusive of local, State and Federal elections, the Shire should:

- encourage the community to ensure their enrolment is up to date,
- promote the call for candidates to nominate for local government elections, and
- encourage all electors to vote.

Use of Shire resources

In accordance with the Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates, Shire resources are only to be used for Council business. Shire resources must not be used for electoral purposes. The Shire's resources include employees, information, equipment, and stationery. This prohibition applies to any local, State or Federal election.

Elected members must not use or access Shire resources to gain media attention in support for their, or any other candidate's, election campaign, for any local, State or Federal elections.

Elected member access to information

During the caretaker period, elected members can access Council information relevant to their role as an elected member. Any Council information accessed must not be used for electoral purposes.

Events and functions

Elected members may continue to attend events and functions hosted by external organisations during the caretaker period.

Elected members that are also candidates are not be permitted to make speeches or addresses at events, functions or community engagement activities organised or sponsored by the Shire, during the caretaker period.

Definitions

Caretaker period is as prescribed in Section 1.4A of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Community engagement means the process of providing stakeholders with opportunities to be informed, consulted and engaged in relation to a proposed decision of the Shire.

Department CEO mean the Chief Executive Officer of the State Department responsible for local government.

Election day means the day fixed under the *Local Government Act 1995* for the holding of any poll needed for any election.

Electoral material means any digital communications, advertisements, handbill, pamphlet, notice, letter or article that is intended or calculated to affect the result in an election but does not include:

- any materials produced by the Shire relating to the election process by way of information, education or publicity, or
- materials produced by or on behalf of the Returning Officer for the purposes of conducting an election.

Events and functions mean gatherings of internal and external stakeholders to discuss, review, acknowledge, communicate, celebrate or promote a program, strategy or issue which is of relevance to the Shire and its stakeholders, and may take the form of launches, promotional activities and social occasions such as dinners and receptions.

Significant Act is as prescribed in Section 3.73(1) of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Media includes any form of multimedia content including publications, advertising, news articles, social media, the website and videos.

Relevant policies/documents

Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates
Council Policy – Election Signs

Relevant legislation/local laws

Local Government Act 1995

Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997

Office use only				
Relevant delegations	Nil			
Council adoption	Date	14 February 2023	Resolution #	019/2023
Reviewed/modified	Date	20 May 2025	Resolution #	077/2025
	Date		Resolution #	
	Date		Resolution #	
Next review due	2029			