



Cottesloe
RESIDENTS & RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION
ARN A1005384K

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Communications Policy – submission

The Communications Policy is currently a broad document that should be revised to reflect changes in resident and ratepayer expectations, changes imposed by the state govt and changes in technology. The Communications Policy would be better if under-pinned with Actions and Outputs such as Strategy, Action, Purpose, Timeline and Responsibility. It is currently a blunt instrument. For example, ‘provide a continuous improvement system for Council communication’ yet there is no supporting documentation on how this is to be implemented, achieved and measured. Likewise, ‘timely’ and ‘correspondence’ are terms that have little relevance in today’s world.

Lack of transparency experienced by the DAP approach for development influences the perception of Councils and Council relationship with their community. Lack of transparency by Mayor Lisa Scaffidi and administration within the City of Perth is another example. The Town of Cottesloe is geographically small in size with a small ratepayer base. With these two factors in mind there should be no barriers to open and transparent communication within the Town of Cottesloe.

It is important to promote a positive image of Cottesloe and its Council and ensure the community is well informed on Council’s role and activities.

Transparency

Promote open and transparent local govt that will meet local needs and demands. Be publicly accountable. For example, release documents and data through existing and new online and social media outlets. Introduce Facebook.

Development

Recently, in response to a development application, Council approved a rezoning from R20 to R60 without community consultation. According to media reports, the developer had been in discussion with Council staff for 12 months. As part of a revised Communication Policy, all discussions relating to changes to the Town Planning Scheme should be identified and immediately made known to Councillors and the community. Town of Cottesloe staff should take steps to communicate all development, change of use, infill and amendments to residents and ratepayers. There should be no instance of ‘commercial in confidence’ nor ‘privacy’ or ‘confidentially’. All meetings between administration staff and developer/architects should be made known to the community at the **first** point of contact whether the development/change of use continues or otherwise. Administration staff should uphold the local planning scheme on behalf of local residents and ratepayers, and not bend to development pressures.

Council Briefing Principles

This document appears to have been written in isolation from the Communication Policy. Changing from a Committee system to Council Briefing may be acceptable, but Item 13 of the Principles does not promote transparency.

'Notes from Council Briefings will be retained for administration purposes only and will not be publicly distributed unless authorised by the Chief Executive Officer' seeks to hide proceedings from residents and ratepayers. The purpose of Council is to serve the needs of ratepayers not the needs of administration staff.

Recommendation: EITHER return to a Committee system where all Minutes will be distributed via the website OR provide full disclosure of Council Briefings with Notes of Briefings available on the website. Electronic recording of proceedings similar to that of Subiaco Council would raise the bar and provide transparency on Council deliberations.

Item 5 and Item 10 also provide avenues for non-disclosure and Item 7 allows members of the public to speak 'only to the business on the agenda'.

Recommendation: No matter should be confidential and matters not ready in time for Council Briefing should be deferred until such time the matter can be considered with full disclosure.

Adopt technology

Maintain a website that is relevant, current and a frontline source of information. Review the current website and develop a communication system that will encourage interaction.

- Remove outdated content within 5 days
- free of broken links
- home page updated weekly
- all committee Minutes, Notes on the website within 2 days
- review community feedback forms
- respond immediately to queries, complaints, feedback or submissions

Recommendation: **Implement a quality website**

Implementation will require a commitment to communication by both elected members and administration staff at all levels. The CEO and Managers in particular hold a high degree of responsibility to communicate openly and actively in developing an positive communication culture. Unless there is a legal requirement to do so, no matter should be deemed confidential and all decisions should be made public.