

**SOUTHLAND**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



## **Code of Conduct – Council, all Committees and Community Boards**

**1 November 2019**

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## **Part One: Introduction**

Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act) requires Council to adopt a code of conduct. Once adopted, all elected members are required to comply with the code.

In the context of this report, the term “elected members” refers to the Mayor, Councillors, members of committees and Community Board members.

This code of conduct provides guidance on the standards of behaviour that are expected from all the elected members of the Southland District Council. The code applies to elected members in their dealings with:

- each other
- the Chief Executive
- all staff employed by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council
- the media
- the general public.

This code also applies to all Council committees, Subcommittees and Community Boards.

The objective of the code is to enhance:

- the effectiveness of the Council as the autonomous local authority with statutory responsibilities for the good local government of the Southland District
- the credibility and accountability of the Council within its community
- mutual trust, respect and tolerance between the elected members as a group and between the elected members and management.

This code of conduct seeks to achieve its objectives by recording:

- an agreed statement of roles and responsibilities (recorded in Part Two of this Code)
- agreed general principles of conduct (recorded in Part Three of this Code)
- specific codes of conduct applying to particular circumstances or matters (also recorded in Part Three of this Code).

Elected members are primarily accountable to the electors of the district through the democratic process. However, elected members must note that the Auditor-General may hold them to account for unlawful actions or expenditure or for breaches of the Local Authorities (Members’ Interests) Act 1968.

The code of conduct that follows is based on the following general principles of good governance:

- **Public interest.** Elected members should serve only the interests of the district as a whole and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any one person.
- **Honesty and integrity.** Elected members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour.
- **Objectivity.** Elected members should make decisions on merit including making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits. Elected members should also note that, once elected, their primary duty is to the interests of the entire district, not the ward or community that elected them.
- **Accountability.** Elected members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should cooperate fully and honestly with the scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.
- **Openness.** Elected members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of the Council, and should be prepared to justify their actions.
- **Personal judgment.** Elected members can and will take account of the views of others, but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them, and act in accordance with those conclusions.
- **Respect for others.** Elected members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the Council staff.
- **Duty to uphold the law.** Elected members should uphold the law, and on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust the public places in them.
- **Stewardship.** Elected members must ensure that the Council uses resources prudently and for lawful purposes, and that the Council maintains sufficient resources to meet its statutory obligations.
- **Leadership.** Elected members should promote and support these proposals by example, and should always endeavour to act in the best interests of the community.

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## **Part Two: Roles and Responsibilities**

This part of the code describes the roles and responsibilities of elected members, the additional roles of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and the role of the Chief Executive.

### **Mayor**

The Mayor is elected by the district as a whole and as one of the elected members shares the same responsibilities as other members of Council. The Mayor also has the following roles as a:

- presiding member at Council meetings. The Mayor is responsible for ensuring the orderly conduct of business during meetings (as determined in standing orders);
- advocate on behalf of the community. This role may involve promoting the community and representing its interests. Such advocacy will be most effective where it is carried out with the knowledge and support of the Council;
- ceremonial head of Council;
- providing leadership and feedback to other elected members on teamwork and Chairmanship of committees; and
- Justice of the Peace (while the Mayor holds office).

The Mayor must follow the same rules as other elected members about making public statements and committing the Council to a particular course of action, unless acting in accordance with the rules for media contact on behalf of the Council under a delegation of authority from the Council.

Recent changes to the Local Government Act 2002 have provided additional powers to the Mayor. These powers relate to:

- The appointment of the Deputy Mayor and Committee Chairpersons
- The determination of the Committee structure
- Leadership of budget, plans and key policy discussions.

### **Deputy Mayor**

The Deputy Mayor may be appointed by the Mayor. If the Mayor declines to do this, then the Deputy Mayor must be elected by the members of Council, at the first meeting of the Council. The Deputy Mayor exercises the same roles as other elected members, and if the Mayor is absent or incapacitated, the Deputy Mayor must perform all of the responsibilities and duties, and may exercise the powers, of the Mayor (as summarised above). The Deputy Mayor may be removed from office by resolution of Council.

### **Committee Chairpersons**

As noted above, the Mayor has the power to appoint Chairpersons and to form Committees. If the Mayor declines to do this then the Council may create one or more committees of Council. A committee Chairperson presides over all meetings of the committee, ensuring that the committee acts within the powers delegated by Council, and as set out in the Council's Delegations Manual. Committee Chairpersons may be called on to act as an official spokesperson on a particular issue. They may be removed from office by resolution of Council.

### **Councillors**

Councillors acting as the Council, are responsible for:

- the development and adoption of Council policy
- monitoring the performance of the Council against its stated objectives and policies
- prudent stewardship of Council resources
- employment of the Chief Executive
- representing the interests of the residents and ratepayers of the Southland District Council. (On election, the members' first responsibility is to the district as a whole.)

Unless otherwise provided in the Local Government Act 2002 or in standing orders, the Council can only act by majority decisions at meetings. Each elected member has one vote. Any individual elected member (including the Mayor) has no authority to act on behalf of the Council unless the Council has expressly delegated such authority.

### **Community Boards**

Within the Southland District there are nine community boards:

- Ardlussa Community Board
- Fiordland Community Board
- Northern Community Board
- Oreti Community Board
- Oraka Aparima Community Board
- Stewart Island/Rakiura Community Board
- Tuatapere Te Waewae Community Board
- Waihopai Toetoe Community Board
- Wallace Takitimu Community Board

The community board elected members, acting as the community board, have the role to:

- represent, and act as an advocate for, the interests of its community
- consider and report on all matters referred to it by the Southland District Council, or any matter of interest or concern to the community board
- maintain an overview of services provided by the Southland District Council within the community
- prepare an annual submission to the Southland District Council for expenditure within the community
- communicate with community organisations and special interest groups within the community
- undertake any other responsibilities that are delegated to it by the Southland District Council.

### **Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive is appointed by the Council in accordance with section 42 of the Local Government Act 2002. The Chief Executive is responsible for implementing and managing the Council's policies and objectives within the budgetary constraints established by the Council. In terms of section 42 of the Act, the responsibilities of the Chief Executive are:

- implementing the decisions of the Council
- providing advice to the Council and community boards
- ensuring that all responsibilities, duties and powers delegated to the Chief Executive or to any person employed by the Chief Executive, or imposed or conferred by any Act, regulation or bylaw are properly performed or exercised
- managing the activities of the local authority effectively and efficiently
- maintaining systems to enable effective planning and accurate reporting of the financial and service performance of the local authority
- providing leadership for the staff of the local authority
- employing staff on behalf of the local authority (including negotiation of the terms of employment for the staff of the local authority).

The Chief Executive is accountable to Council directly and not to Community Boards.

Under section 42 of the Local Government Act 2002 the Chief Executive employs all other staff on behalf of the local authority.

### **Meeting Attendance**

Elected members are expected to attend and participate in all Council meetings, Standing Committee meetings and Subcommittee meetings to which they have been appointed, unless they have submitted an apology or obtained a leave of absence in advance for non-attendance.

All Councillors are expected to attend all workshops and those hearings that are held as part of the consultation process on Council documents, such as the Annual Plan and Long Term Plan.

From time to time, working parties will be established by the Council or a Standing Committee to achieve specific outcomes. Elected members are expected to make themselves available to be appointed to an equitable share of these working parties, and to attend all meetings of those to which they are appointed.

### **Appointments to Other Bodies**

At the first meeting following the triennial elections and on other occasions (as appropriate) Council will appoint elected members to a variety of other bodies.

These appointments will be made on the basis of the best person for the specific role bearing in mind the skills required, the views of the Council and location of the elected member.

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### **Part Three: Relationships and Behaviours**

This part of the code sets out the agreed standards of behaviour. Some of the matters described in this part of the code reflect other legislation such as the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968. The majority of the code is material that the Council has decided to include of its own initiative.

#### **Relationships with Other Elected Members**

Successful teamwork is a critical element in the success of any democratically elected organisation. No team will be effective unless mutual respect exists between members. With this in mind elected members will conduct their dealings with each other in ways that:

- maintain public confidence in the office to which they have been elected
- are open and honest
- focus on issues rather than personalities
- avoid aggressive, offensive or abusive conduct
- treat people with courtesy and respect.

Elected members shall maintain the respect and dignity of their office in their dealings with each other, Council officers and the public.

Elected members will create a supportive and inclusive environment by:

- Take all reasonable steps to participate in activities scheduled to promote a culture of mutual trust, respect and tolerance including attending post-election induction process
- Taking part in any assessment of council's overall performance and operating style during the triennium
- Taking all reasonable steps to ensure they possess the skills and knowledge to effectively fulfil their declaration of office and contribution to the good governance of the Council's district.

Elected members should also note that discussions are not subject to privilege.

Elected members will act in good faith (i.e. honestly, for the proper purpose, and without exceeding their powers) in the interests of the Council and the community.

Elected members should remember that they have no personal power to commit the Council to any particular policy, course of action or expenditure and must not represent they have such authority if that is not the case.

Elected members will make no allegations regarding other elected members or Council officers which are improper or derogatory.

In the performance of their official duties, elected members should refrain from any form of conduct which may cause any reasonable person unwarranted offence or embarrassment.

### **Relationships with Staff**

The effective performance of Council also requires a high level of cooperation and mutual respect between elected members and staff. To ensure that level of cooperation and trust is maintained, elected members will:

- recognise that the Chief Executive is the employer (on behalf of Council) of all Council employees, and as such only the Chief Executive may hire, dismiss or instruct or censure an employee
- make themselves aware of the obligations that the Council and the Chief Executive have as employers and observe those requirements at all times
- treat all employees with courtesy and respect (including the avoidance of aggressive, offensive or abusive conduct towards employees)
- observe any guidelines that the Chief Executive puts in place regarding contact with employees
- not do anything which compromises, or could be seen as compromising, the impartiality of an employee
- avoid publicly criticising any employee in any way, but especially in ways that reflect on the competence and integrity of the employee
- raise concerns about employees only with the Chief Executive, and concerns about the Chief Executive only with the Mayor or the Executive Committee.

Elected members should be aware that failure to observe this portion of the code of conduct may compromise the Council's obligations to act as a good employer and may expose the Council to civil litigation and audit sanctions.

Elected members should raise operational issues with the Chief Executive in the first instance. If it is a routine matter such as repairing a pothole, cutting of vegetation or footpath repairs, the issue should be logged with Customer Support who will enter the issue into our Request for Service system (RFS). This enables progress on these issues to be monitored.

### **Relationships with the Community**

Effective Council decision-making depends on productive relationships between elected members and the community at large.

Members should ensure that individual citizens are accorded respect in their dealings with the Council, have their concerns listened to, and deliberated on in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Members should act in a manner that encourages and values community involvement in local democracy.

### **Contact with the Media**

The media plays an important part in local democracy. In order to fulfil this role the media needs access to accurate, timely information about the affairs of Council. From time to time, individual elected members will be approached to comment on a particular issue either on behalf of Council, or as an elected member in their own right. This part of the code deals with the rights and duties of elected members when speaking to the media on behalf of Council, or in their own right.

The following rules apply for media contact on behalf of Council:

- the Mayor is the first point of contact for the official view on any issue. Where the Mayor is absent, any matters will be referred to the Deputy Mayor or relevant committee Chairperson
- the Mayor may refer any matter to the relevant committee Chairperson or to the Chief Executive for their comment
- no other elected member may comment on behalf of Council without having first obtained the approval of the Mayor.

Elected members are free to express a personal view in the media provided the following rules are observed:

- media comments must not state or imply that they represent the views of Council
- where an elected member is making a statement that is contrary to a Council decision or Council policy, the member must not state or imply that his or her statements represent a majority view
- media comments must observe the other requirements of the code of conduct, or legislation e.g. not disclose confidential information, or compromise the impartiality or integrity of staff.
- the elected member should ensure that any comments made do not compromise Council's statutory responsibilities. In other words, it would not be appropriate to comment on matters before the Regulatory and Consents Committee, where this might compromise the statutory decision-making processes.

### **Meeting Decisions**

Every elected member who has the right to speak can lawfully express his or her opinion at any Council or Committee meeting within the limits imposed by Standing Orders. These meetings are open to the media and their comments may be reported.

Once a matter has been determined at a Council meeting, it becomes the Council's position until it is lawfully changed by a subsequent Council decision. All elected members and staff will respect this position.

The Mayor can make statements that accurately report Council decisions.

Committee Chairs can make statements that accurately report their Committee's decisions, or factual statements about Council or Committee decisions.

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### **Confidential Information**

In the course of their duties elected members will occasionally receive information that may need to be treated as confidential. This will generally be information that is either commercially sensitive or is personal to a particular individual or organisation.

Elected members must not use or disclose confidential information for any purpose other than the purpose for which the information was supplied to the elected member. Decisions on whether confidential information is able to be released are to be made by the Chief Executive in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

Elected members should be aware that failure to observe these provisions will impede the performance of Council by inhibiting information flows and undermining public confidence in the Council. Failure to observe these provisions may also expose Council to prosecution under the Privacy Act 1993 and/or civil litigation.

### **Information Received in Capacity as an Elected Member**

Any information received by an elected member in his/her capacity as an elected member is official information under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA). As such the Council has a requirement to hold that information in accordance with the provisions of LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005. As such a copy of any such information should be provided to the Chief Executive so that it can be held in accordance with Council record management policies.

This duty of disclosure will require elected members to whom information may be offered on the basis that confidence be preserved to inform the intended provider of the information of the duty of disclosure and to decline to receive the information if that duty is likely to be compromised.

### **Responding to Queries Involving Liability Issues**

Elected members need to ensure they respond to queries in an appropriate manner and with due regard to the legal position of Council. At times, elected members are asked to become involved in legal disputes or insurance claims. Such matters should be referred to the Chief Executive. It is important that Council act in an appropriate manner with regard to legal and insurance issues. Often our insurance cover depends on the way we address or manage an issue.

### **Training, Conferences and Induction**

Following the triennial election, the Chief Executive will organise induction training for all elected members who require it. This will address the role of elected members and provide valuable information about what an elected member needs to know.

Council has a budget for training and development of elected members. From time to time consideration will be given to attendance at the Local Government New Zealand Conference, Local Government New Zealand Zone meetings and New Zealand Planning Institute Conference. Other conferences or meetings may also be considered.

If an elected member wishes to attend a conference or meeting, then he or she should discuss this with the Mayor.

In the case of a Community Board elected member, an approach should be made to the Chairperson.

Costs incurred with attending training and conferences will be managed in accordance with the Elected Member Remuneration and Reimbursements Policy and the Sensitive Expenditure Policy.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

Elected members must be careful that they maintain a clear separation between their personal interests and their duties as an elected member. This is to ensure that people who fill positions of authority carry on their duties free from bias (whether real or perceived). Elected members therefore need to familiarise themselves with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968 which concerns financial interests, and with other legal requirements concerning non-financial conflicts of interest.

The Act provides that an elected member is disqualified from office, or from election to office, if that member is concerned or interested in contracts under which payments made by or on behalf of the local authority exceed \$25,000 in any financial year.

Additionally, elected members are prohibited from participating in any Council discussion or vote on any matter in which they have a pecuniary interest, other than an interest in common with the general public. The same rules also apply where the elected member's spouse contracts with the authority or has a pecuniary interest. Elected members must declare their interests at Council meetings where matters in which they have a pecuniary or other conflict of interest arise.

Elected members shall annually make a general declaration of interest as soon as practicable after becoming aware of any such interests. These declarations are recorded in a register of interests maintained by Council. The declaration must notify the Council of the nature and extent of any interest, including:

- any employment, trade or profession carried on by the elected member or the elected member's spouse for profit or gain
- any company, trust, partnership etc for which the elected member or their spouse is a director, partner, trustee or beneficiary
- the address of any land in which the elected member has a beneficial interest and which is in the Southland District Council
- the address of any land where the landlord is the Southland District Council and:
  - the elected member or their spouse is a tenant, or
  - the land is tenanted by a firm in which the elected member or spouse is a partner, or a company of which the elected member or spouse is a director, or a trust of which the elected member or spouse is a trustee or beneficiary
- any other matters which the public might reasonably regard as likely to influence the elected member's actions during the course of their duties as an elected member.

If the elected member is in any doubt as to whether or not a particular course of action (including a decision to take no action) raises a conflict of interest, then the elected member should seek guidance from the Chief Executive immediately.

Elected members may also contact the Office of the Auditor General for guidance as to whether that member has a pecuniary interest. If there is a pecuniary interest, the elected member may seek an exemption to allow that elected member to participate or vote on a particular issue in which they may have a pecuniary interest. The latter must be done before the discussion or vote. The Chief Executive must also seek approval from the Office of the Auditor General for contractual payments to elected members, their spouses or their companies that exceed the \$25,000 annual limit.

Failure to observe the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968 could potentially invalidate the particular decision made, or the action taken, by Council. Failure to observe these requirements could also leave the elected member open to prosecution under the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968. In the event of a conviction elected members can be ousted from office.

### **Standing Orders**

Elected members must adhere to any standing orders adopted by Council under the Local Government Act 2002. These standing orders are subject to the same legal requirements as a code of conduct with regard to their adoption and amendment.

## **Ethics**

Southland District Council seeks to promote the highest standards of ethical conduct amongst its elected members. Accordingly, elected members will:

- claim only for legitimate expenses as laid down by any determination of the Remuneration Authority then in force, and any lawful policy of Council developed in accordance with that determination
- not influence, or attempt to influence, any Council employee to take actions that may benefit the elected member, or the elected member's family or business interests
- Only use Council resources (including facilities, staff, equipment and supplies) effectively and economically in the course of their duties, and within other guidelines, and not in connection with any election campaign or other personal business.
- not solicit, demand, or request any gift, reward or benefit by virtue of their position
- notify the Chief Executive if any gifts are accepted
- where a gift to the value of \$300 excluding GST or more is offered to an elected member, immediately disclose this to the Chief Executive for inclusion in the register of interests.

Acceptance of substantial gifts, favours or hospitality may be construed as a bribe or perceived as undue influence. Working meals and social occasions should be undertaken in an appropriate manner.

## **Disqualification of Members from Office**

Elected members are automatically disqualified from office if they are convicted of a criminal offence punishable by two or more years' imprisonment, or if they cease to be or lose their status as an elector or are convicted of certain breaches of the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968.

Under the Local Government Act 2002, local authorities, when adopting a code of conduct, must consider whether or not they will require elected members to declare whether they are an undischarged bankrupt. This Council believes that bankruptcy does raise questions about the soundness of a person's financial management skills and their judgment in general. The Council therefore requires elected members who are declared bankrupt to notify the Chief Executive as soon as practicable after being declared bankrupt.

## **Part Four: Compliance and Review**

This part deals with ensuring that elected members adhere to the code of conduct and mechanisms for the review of the code of conduct.

### **Compliance**

Elected members must note that they are bound to comply with the provisions of this code of conduct (Local Government Act 2002, Schedule 7, section 15(4)).

Elected members are also bound by the Local Government Act 2002, the Local Authorities (Members' Interests) Act 1968, the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the Secret Commissions Act 1910, the Crimes Act 1961 and the Securities Act 1978. The Chief Executive will ensure that an explanation of these Acts is made at the first meeting after each triennial election and that copies of these Acts are freely available to elected members.

Short explanations of the obligations that each of these has with respect to conduct of elected members is attached in the Appendix to this code.

All alleged breaches of the code should be reported to the Mayor or Chief Executive. Any allegation of a breach of a code of conduct must be in writing, make a specific allegation of a breach of the code of conduct, and provide corroborating evidence.

In response to a breach, the Executive Committee will investigate the alleged breach and prepare a report for the consideration of Council. Before beginning any investigation, the committee will notify the elected member(s) in writing of the complaint and explaining when and how they will get the opportunity to put their version of events.

The Council will consider the report in open meeting of Council, except where the alleged breach relates to the misuse of confidential information, could impinge on the privacy of a member of staff or of the general public or other good reason, as defined in LGOIMA, exists for considering it in public excluded.

### **Responses to Breaches of the Code**

The exact nature of the action the Council may take depends on the nature of the breach and whether there are statutory provisions dealing with the breach.

Where there are statutory provisions:

- breaches relating to members' interests render elected members liable for prosecution by the Auditor-General under the Local Authority (Member's Interests) Act 1968
- breaches which result in the Council suffering financial loss or damage may be reported on by the Auditor-General under the Local Government Act 2002, which may result in the elected member having to make good the loss or damage
- breaches relating to the commission of a criminal offence may leave the elected member liable for criminal prosecution.

In these cases the Council may refer an issue to the relevant body, any member of the public may make a complaint, or the body itself may take action of its own initiative.

Where there are no statutory provisions, the Council may take the following action:

- censure
- removal of the elected member from Council committees and/or other representative type bodies
- dismissal of the elected member from a position as Deputy Mayor or Chair of a committee.
- request an apology
- removal of certain council-funding privileges (such as attendance at conferences)
- restricted entry to Council offices such as no access to staff areas
- limitations on any dealings with council staff so that they are confined to the CE only

A decision to apply one or more of these actions requires a Council resolution to that effect.

Council may decide that a penalty will not be imposed where a respondent agrees to one or more of the following:

- Attend relevant training course and/or;
- Work with a mentor for a period of time and/or;
- Participate in voluntary mediation (if the complaint involves a conflict between two members) and/or;
- Tender an apology.

### **Review**

Once adopted, a code of conduct continues in force until amended by the Council. The code can be amended at any time but cannot be revoked unless the Council replaces it with another code. Once adopted, amendments to the code of conduct require a resolution supported by 75 per cent or more of the elected members of the Council present.

Council will formally review the code as soon as practicable after the beginning of each triennium. The results of that review will be presented to Council for their consideration and vote.

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## **Appendix to the Code of Conduct**

### **Legislation Bearing on the Role and Conduct of Elected Members**

This is a summary of the legislation requirements that has some bearing on the duties and conduct of elected members. Copies of these statutes can be found in the Council library or in the office of the Chief Executive.

#### **Local Authority (Members' Interests) Act 1968**

This Act regulates situations where an elected member's personal interests impinge, or could be seen as impinging on their duties as an elected member.

The Act provides that an elected member is disqualified from office if that elected member is concerned or interested in contracts under which payments made by or on behalf of the local authority exceed \$25,000 in any financial year.

Additionally, elected members are prohibited from participating in any Council discussion or voting on any matter in which they have a pecuniary interest, other than an interest in common with the general public. The same rules also apply where the elected member's spouse contracts with the authority or has a pecuniary interest.

Members may also contact the Office of the Auditor General for guidance as to whether that elected member has a pecuniary interest, and if so, may seek an exemption to allow that elected member to participate or vote on a particularly issue in which they may have a pecuniary interest. The latter must be done before the discussion or vote. The Chief Executive must also seek approval from the Office of the Auditor General for contractual payments to elected members, their spouses or their companies that exceed the \$25,000 annual limit.

Failure to observe these requirements could also leave the elected member open to prosecution under the Local Authority (Members' Interests) Act 1968. In the event of a conviction elected members can be ousted from office.

#### **Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987**

The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 sets out a list of meetings procedures and requirements. Of particular importance for the roles and conduct of elected members is the fact that the Chair has the responsibility to maintain order at meetings, but all elected members should accept a personal responsibility to maintain acceptable standards of address and debate. No elected member should:

- create a disturbance or a distraction while another elected member is speaking
- be disrespectful when they refer to each other or other people
- use offensive language about the Council, other elected members, any employee of the Council or any member of the public.

The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 sets out the rules around provision of information. This is summarised as follows:

### **Official Information**

The term “Official Information” refers to all information (with a few exceptions) held by a local authority. The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 requires all official information to be available to the public unless there are good reasons for withholding it.

### **Requesting Information**

In brief, the Act states:

- requests should be made with “due particularity” (rather than asking for all files about a general topic, which creates a large amount of work) (section 10)
- it is the duty of Council to assist people making requests (section 11)
- the Council must convey its decision on whether to grant the request within 20 working days and must also indicate any charges (section 13)
- information in documents may be made available by providing an opportunity for reading it or by providing a copy of it or by providing a summary or excerpt; however, it should be made available in the way preferred by the requestor unless there are reasons for not doing so (section 15).

### **Refusing Requests for Information**

A request may be refused (section 17) if:

- there is good reason to withhold it under section 6 or 7 of the Act
- the information will soon be publicly available
- the local authority does not actually hold the information
- the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research
- the request is frivolous or vexatious.

Where a request is refused the Council must give its reasons and advise the requestor that there is a right to have the decision review by the Ombudsmen.

Sections 6 and 7 give the following reasons for withholding information:

- making it available would be likely to prejudice the maintenance of the law, or endanger safety
- withholding the information is necessary to:
  - protect privacy
  - protect information where its release would disclose a trade secret or would prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied, or who is the subject of the information
  - avoid offence to tikanga Maori or avoid disclosure of wahi tapu locations

- protect any obligations of confidentiality where making it available would affect the future supply of information or would otherwise damage the public interest
- maintain free and frank discussion or protect officers and elected members from harassment
- maintain legal professional privilege
- enable the Council to carry out without prejudice or disadvantage commercial activities or negotiations
- prevent the use of information for improper gain.

### **Crimes Act 1961**

Under this Act it is unlawful for an elected member (or officer) to:

- accept or solicit for themselves (or anyone else) any gift or reward for acting or not acting in relation to the business of Council
- use information gained in the course of their duties for their, or another person's, monetary gain or advantage.

These offences are punishable by a term of imprisonment of seven years or more. Elected members convicted of these offences will also be automatically ousted from office.

### **Securities Act 1978**

The Securities Act 1978 essentially places elected members in the same position as company directors whenever Council offers stock to the public. Elected members may be personally liable if investment documents such as a prospectus contain untrue statements and may be liable for criminal prosecution if the requirements of the Act are not met.

Please note that Council is not required to produce a prospectus following the enactment of the Securities (Local Authority Exemption) Amendment Act 2008. In its place a shorter investment statement is required.

### **Local Government Acts 1974 and 2002**

The various provisions of the Local Government Act 1974 and 2002 form the basis of local government. Local government is a creature created by statute and in place to meet the requirements of the Local Government Act.

Elected members should be aware of the purpose of local government (section 10 Local Government Act 2002)

1. The purpose of local government is:
  - (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and
  - (b) to meet the current and future needs of communities for good quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses.

2. In this Act, good quality, in relation to local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions, means infrastructure, services and performance that are:
- (a) efficient; and
  - (b) effective; and
  - (c) appropriate to present and anticipated future circumstances.

In performing its role a local authority must have particular regard to the contribution that the following core services make to its communities

- (a) network infrastructure;
- (b) public transport services;
- (c) solid waste collection and disposal;
- (d) the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards;
- (e) libraries, museums, reserves, recreational facilities and other community infrastructure

- “(1) In performing its role, as outlined in section 14 of the Local Government Act 2002, a local authority must act in accordance with the following principles:
- (a) a local authority should -
    - (i) conduct its business in an open, transparent and democratically accountable manner; and
    - (ii) give effect to its identified priorities and desired outcomes in an efficient and effective manner.
  - (b) a local authority should make itself aware of, and should have regard to, the views of all of its communities; and
  - (c) when making a decision, a local authority should take account of:
    - (i) the diversity of the community, and the community’s interests, within its district or region; and
    - (ii) the interests of future as well as current communities; and
    - (iii) the likely impact of any decision on the interests referred to in subparagraphs (i) and (ii)
  - (d) a local authority should provide opportunities for Maori to contribute to its decision-making processes;
  - (e) a local authority should collaborate and co-operate with other local authorities and bodies as it considers appropriate to promote or achieve its priorities and desired outcomes, and make efficient use of resources; and
  - (f) a local authority should undertake any commercial transactions in accordance with sound business practices; and
  - (fa) a local authority should periodically -
    - (i) assess the expected returns to the authority from investing in, or undertaking a commercial activity; and
    - (ii) satisfy itself that the expected returns are likely to outweigh the risks inherent in the investment or activity; and
  - (g) a local authority should ensure prudent stewardship and the efficient and effective use of its resources in the interests of its district or region; and

- (h) in taking a sustainable development approach, a local authority should take into account:
  - (i) the social, economic, and cultural interests of people and communities; and
  - (ii) the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment; and
  - (iii) the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.”

Sections 44-46 of the Local Government Act 2002 outline action that can be taken by the Auditor General to recover a loss incurred by a local authority:

“(1) For the purposes of this section and sections 45 and 46, a local authority is to be regarded as having incurred a loss to the extent that any of the following actions and omissions has occurred and the local authority has not been fully compensated for the action or omission concerned:

- (a) money belonging to, or administrable by, a local authority has been unlawfully expended; or
- (b) an asset has been unlawfully sold or otherwise disposed of by the local authority; or
- (c) a liability has been unlawfully incurred by the local authority; or
- (d) a local authority has intentionally or negligently failed to enforce the collection of money it is lawfully entitled to receive.”

The Auditor General has the right to recover any such loss from each member of the local authority jointly and severally.

The Local Government Act deals with issues of governance, structure of local government, planning, decision-making and accountability, regulatory and enforcement, offences, penalties and other proceedings.

### **Resource Management Act 1991**

This Act governs how Council should deal with land use and other planning processes. The Resource Management Act sets out to provide a range of rules that support a sustainable environment but also permits local autonomy based around the development of a District Plan that applies to each individual local authority.

### **Privacy Act 1993**

The Privacy Act 1993 explains how Council should manage issues to do with information it holds to conduct its business. This could involve individual records relating to ratepayers or staff records for employees of Council.

Council must comply with the requirements of this Act and as part of this process a staff member has been appointed as the designated Privacy Officer. Any queries in relation to the Privacy Act should be directed to the Chief Executive in the first instance.

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**Health and Safety at Work Act 2015**

Council has obligations to provide a safe working place for staff and members of the public. Attendance to health and safety concerns is part of the responsibility of each staff member and elected member.

Significant penalties exist where the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 are not adhered to.

**Public Audit Act 2001**

Council is publicly accountable under the provisions of the Public Audit Act 2001. As a result of this, an annual audit is undertaken under the direction of the Auditor General. This audit reviews the financial and non-financial performance of Council through the development and reporting of the Annual Report.