Proposed local government regulatory reforms – informal meetings

Information paper on future amendments under consideration in relation to the regulation of informal meetings

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Introduction

The Queensland Government is delivering a rolling reform agenda in the local government sector. The reforms further strengthen the transparency, accountability and integrity measures that apply to the system of local government in Queensland.

Accountability and integrity Bill

The Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2019 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly in November 2019 and includes amendments relating to state elections, Ministerial conduct, and conduct in local government.

The Bill has been referred to the Economics and Governance Parliamentary Committee to conduct an inquiry. More information regarding the making of submissions, public hearings and the inquiry in general can be found on the Committee’s website at www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/EGC.

Changes in the Bill affecting local government include:

- new register of interest requirements
- new and clarified conflict of interest requirements
- new requirements for political advisors and councillor support staff
- provisions relating to the dissolution of a local government and administrators
- changes for filling councillor and mayor vacancies.

The Bill creates two categories of conflicts of interest:

- prescribed conflicts of interest
- declarable conflicts of interest.

The Bill also prescribes the disclosure obligations that apply where a councillor first becomes aware that the councillor has a conflict of interest in a matter at a council or committee meeting, or if they first become aware of the conflict of interest in other circumstances such as an informal meeting or workshop.

Meetings regulatory amendments

In addition to the Bill there are also a number of future regulatory amendments required. This includes changes to requirements for meeting agendas, minutes, informal meetings, and when matters can be considered in closed meetings.

More detailed information on the Bill and proposed regulatory changes for meetings is available in the Integrity and Accountability Bill information paper at www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/resources/local-government-reform/electoral-accountability-integrity-bill-info-paper.pdf.

Informal meetings

The government is carefully considering how informal council meetings are regulated. Currently, only council and committee meetings are regulated.

On the following page is a summary of the reforms currently under consideration in relation to the regulation of informal meetings.
**Proposed informal meetings regulatory reforms**

| Definition of informal meeting | • A meeting of councillors, regardless of whether other persons may attend—  
| | (a) that is organised by decision of the local government, a committee of the local government, the mayor or the chairperson of a committee of the local government; and  
| | (b) at which matters that may result in a decision of the local government are discussed; and  
| | (c) that is not a local government meeting.  
| • Examples of informal meetings—  
| | • a site visit for a development application under the Planning Act  
| | • a workshop to develop the local government’s budget  
| | • a briefing session on issues to be discussed at a local government meeting  
| Requirement for a local government to prepare and adopt a policy about informal meetings | • The policy must provide for:  
| | (a) a notice of each informal meeting to be made publicly available before the meeting is held, stating:  
| | (i) the day, time and location of the meeting; and  
| | (ii) whether the meeting is open to the public; and  
| | (iii) the purpose of the meeting; and  
| | (b) the circumstances in which a councillor is expected to attend an informal meeting; and  
| | (c) monthly reports to be presented at a meeting of the local government stating for each informal meeting held during the previous month:  
| | (i) the name of each councillor who attended the meeting; and  
| | (ii) each class of persons (e.g. members of the public, officers) who attended the meeting, other than councillors; and  
| | (iii) the matters discussed at the meeting.  
| Conflicts of interest (COI) | • A councillor who has a prescribed COI cannot attend an informal meeting for the agenda item which discusses the matter in question.  
| | • A councillor who has a declarable COI in a matter to be addressed in an informal meeting cannot attend the informal meeting for that agenda item unless the local government has previously approved their participation in that matter under the provisions of the legislation. |
More information

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring the community and stakeholders are aware of the legislated and proposed reforms and their impacts.

The Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs (DLGRMA) is available to answer questions on (07) 3452 6747 and by email to lgreforms@dlgrma.qld.gov.au.

You can also visit the department’s website at www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/lgreform for more information including resources and fact sheets.