



BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

Type:	Council – Elected Members		
Owner:	Council		
Responsible Officer:	Mayor		
Approval Date:	28/01/2025	Next Review:	30/11/2025
Records Number:	179575	Council/CEO Decision:	OMC-2025-007
Legislation Reference:	section 121 of the <i>Local Government Act 2019</i>		

1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is made under section 121 of the *Local Government Act 2019* (the Act) and sets out how the Council will manage a complaint that a council member has contravened the Code of Conduct.

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to elected members, Council employees, contractors, volunteers, and public associated with Katherine Town Council.

3 DEFINITIONS

CEO means Chief Executive Officer.

Code of Conduct means the Code of Conduct set out in Schedule 1 of the Act.

Complainant means the person who lodges a Code of Conduct complaint against a council member (this person can be a council member or a member of the public).

Respondent means the council member who is alleged to have contravened the Code of Conduct.

4 DETAILS

In managing complaints and contraventions of the Code of Conduct, Council's guiding principles are to:

- (a) promote behaviour among all council members that meets the standards set out in the Code of Conduct, with a restorative approach that seeks to focus on constructive outcomes;
- (b) emphasise a preference that disputes and allegations be identified and resolved before they escalate to the stage of a formal complaint; and

- (c) recognise the leadership role of the Mayor and the responsibility of all members to work together collaboratively pursuant to their corporate responsibilities; and
- (d) use the council-led complaints process as the formal method of resolving complaints that cannot be otherwise resolved.

4.1 Conflict resolution

The Act provides that the Mayor is to promote behaviour amongst all council members that meets the standards set out in the Code of Conduct. Any council member who is aggrieved in relation to a potential Code of Conduct matter should raise the grievance in the first instance with the Mayor to seek a resolution. If the grievance is in relation to the Mayor, the grievance should be raised with the Deputy Mayor.

In response to a potential Code of Conduct complaint matter, the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) will engage in informal discussions with the affected parties, as appropriate, to seek to resolve the matter so that it does not escalate into a formal complaint. The Mayor or Deputy Mayor may take advice with regard to dealing with the matter and, subject to Council's budget, make use of internal or external resources. For example, the Mayor or deputy may take expert advice or involve a person to assist in discussions with the parties.

4.2 Confidentiality

Information regarding a complaint is confidential, including the complaint form, statements from any parties, and reports provided by the CEO regarding the status of a complaint.

Complaints will only be formally discussed by the Council or council panel during confidential sessions. Minutes kept by the Council or a council panel are confidential information in accordance with regulation 49(f) of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2021* and Council's policy in relation to confidential information.

In accordance with the legislation, the CEO will provide a report on the progress of any undecided complaint in the confidential session of each ordinary council meeting.

4.3 Complaint requirements

A complaint alleging a contravention of a Code of Conduct must:

- (a) be in the approved form (which includes a statutory declaration and is available on the Council's website); and
- (b) be made within three (3) months of the alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct.

A Code of Conduct complaint must be lodged with the CEO, who will assess whether or not the complaint complies with the above requirements. If it appears that a complaint does not comply with the above requirements, the CEO must notify the complainant of the issues with the form of the complaint as soon as practicable and allow the complainant the opportunity to re-lodge a revised complaint.

A Code of Conduct complaint that is lodged in writing to the CEO, whether or not it complies with the above requirements for a Code of Conduct complaint, must be referred to the Council by the CEO.

4.4 Notifications to parties

When a complaint is received, the CEO will provide notifications to the complainant and the respondent, in accordance with the requirements of the Act and *Local Government (General) Regulations 2021*.

The CEO carries out the role of secretariat in relation to a complaint and communicates with complainant, respondent and any relevant witnesses on behalf of the Council or council panel.

4.5 Referral to LGANT

The CEO will refer the matter to LGANT if a complainant council member or respondent has elected to refer the complaint to LGANT under section 124(3) of the Act.

Note: A complainant who is not a council member does not have the option to request referral to LGANT.

In July 2024, the LGANT Board introduced a Code of Conduct Complaint Lodgement fee for all Code of Conduct Complaints referred to LGANT. The lodgement fee will cover the preliminary administrative costs of processing the complaint. This cost will be incurred by the Council. At the council's discretion, these costs may be passed on to the elected member(s) who are the complainant.

4.6 Initial consideration by Council

The CEO will refer the complaint to the Council for consideration in confidential session in the next council meeting, unless the complaint has been referred to LGANT in accordance with clause 4.5 above.

Before the council meeting, the CEO will establish a list of suitable third parties who do not have a conflict of interest and are willing to accept a referral of the matter.

The CEO will provide a copy of the complaint and any response from the respondent, the list of suitable third parties and a draft term of reference for Council's consideration.

The complainant, respondent and any council member with a conflict of interest in relation to the complaint are required to leave the meeting room during any discussion, consideration or decision relating to the complaint.

When considering a Code of Conduct complaint, Council has the following three options:

- 1) refer the complaint to a third party for advice – with Council to decide the complaint (see clause 4.7); or
- 2) refer the complaint to a council panel – for the panel to decide the complaint (see clause 4.8); or
- 3) decide the matter as the Council (see clause 4.9).

4.7 Referral to third party

Council may decide to refer the complaint to an independent third party for advice and recommendations by taking into the consideration the following:

- (a) whether the complainant or respondent requested the involvement of a third party;
- (b) the costs, if any, of referring the matter to a third party;
- (c) whether the advice of a third party is reasonably expected to assist in achieving constructive outcomes for the parties involved;
- (d) whether advice of a third party is reasonably expected to be received and able to be considered by the Council prior to the expiry of the 90-day period.

Council will not refer the matter to a third party unless satisfied of (c) and (d).

Examples of a third party are: an alternative dispute practitioner; a mediator; a person experienced in local government matters; and a person experienced in conflict resolution.

Where the matter is referred to a third party, the terms of reference will include that the third party is to do the following:

- (a) consider the complaint and discuss with each of the parties;
- (b) explore and follow up avenues for resolution between the parties;
- (c) if resolution is not achievable, then the third party is to:
 - (i) ensure natural justice is provided to both parties;
 - (ii) interview any witnesses if necessary, to form a view;
 - (iii) provide a written report to Council by a specified date covering the process, summary of evidence, attempts to resolve and recommendation;

- (iv) provide a draft decision notice that may be used if council decide to adopt the recommendation.

Upon receiving the advice and any recommendations from the third party, provided the Council is satisfied that each party has been able to put their case and respond to any allegations of the other party, the Council will then decide the complaint. The Council is not bound by any advice or recommendations received from the third party.

Once the written report and draft decision notice is provided to the third party, the Council must decide the complaint (see clause 4.9.2).

4.8 Referral to council panel

Council may decide to refer the complaint to a council panel for decision.

In order to fulfil the secretariat role in managing the Code of Conduct complaints process, the CEO will be in attendance at all council panel meetings.

If the Council decides to refer the complaint to a council panel, the Council will establish a council panel for the complaint.

The composition of the council panel will be the following:

- (a) the Mayor (as chair of the council panel) – unless the Mayor is the complainant, respondent or has a conflict of interest;
- (b) if the Mayor is the complainant, respondent or has a conflict of interest – the Deputy Mayor will be the chair of the council panel;
- (c) if neither the Mayor or Deputy Mayor meet the requirements – the Council will choose a council member who is not the complainant or respondent and does not have a conflict of interest to chair the council panel;
- (d) two other council members – who are not the complainant or respondent and do not have a conflict of interest.

4.9 Council or council panel process

The Council or the council panel will consider the complainant's written complaint and, if received, the respondent's written response to the complaint. In keeping with natural justice principles, the CEO will ensure that each party has a fair opportunity to provide comment on submissions from the other party.

4.9.1 Requests for information

If the Council or council panel requires further information to determine whether or not a contravention of the Code of Conduct occurred, the Council or council panel may request information from the complainant, respondent, or any relevant witnesses. The request for information will specify:

- (a) the information that is being sought;
- (b) that the information is to be provided as a written statement (including a statutory declaration); and
- (c) a reasonable timeframe to receive the statement (between 3 and 14 days).

4.9.2 Decision

The Council or council panel will decide the complaint after the following steps have been completed:

- (a) the members have considered the written complaint;
- (b) the members have considered all written submissions and statements; and
- (c) the members have read and considered the report from the third party (if applicable).

The Council can make the following decisions:

- (a) to take no action (and not make a decision about whether the respondent contravened the Code of Conduct);
- (b) that the respondent did not contravene the Code of Conduct; or
- (c) that the respondent contravened the Code of Conduct.

If the complainant is found by the Council or council panel to have contravened the Code of Conduct, the Council or council panel may decide to:

- (a) take no action (for example, if it is evident that appropriate steps have already taken place to address the conduct or the issues has been resolved between the affected parties); or
- (b) either or both of the following:
 - (i) issue a reprimand to the respondent (for example, a reprimand may be a formal expression of disapproval in writing in the decision notice);
 - (ii) recommend that the complainant, respondent or any other person attend training, mediation or counselling by a specified date.

In choosing from the above options, preference will be given to the option that the Council or council panel considers most likely to result in a constructive outcome.

If training, mediation or counselling is recommended to a council member, the council member may use their professional development allowance, if available, towards the cost of the training, mediation or counselling.

Elected members can vote to sanction other elected members through a process often referred to as “censure” or “reprimand.” This is used to address misconduct or behaviour that is deemed inappropriate or disruptive to the functioning of the governing body.

Authority and Rules: Local government bodies usually have bylaws or codes of conduct that outline acceptable behaviour for elected members. These rules provide the framework for maintaining order and professionalism.

Misconduct Identification: When an elected member’s behaviour is considered to violate these rules, other members can propose a sanction. This could be due to actions like unethical behaviour, disrupting meetings, or not adhering to agreed-upon procedures.

Voting Process: The proposal to sanction is typically brought up in a formal meeting. The governing body discusses the issue, and then a vote is taken. A majority vote is usually required to pass the sanction.

Types of Sanctions: Sanctions can vary but often include formal reprimands, removal from certain positions or committees, or restrictions on certain privileges. However, they do not usually include removal from office, as this is often beyond the power of the governing body.

Purpose: The main goal of these sanctions is to maintain the integrity and functionality of the governing body, ensuring that all members adhere to the established rules and work effectively together.

1. **Code of Conduct:** Each local government council has a code of conduct that outlines the expected behaviour of elected members.
2. **Complaint and Investigation:** If a member is believed to have breached this code, a complaint can be lodged. This complaint is then investigated, often by an independent panel or the council itself.
3. **Sanctions:** If the investigation finds that the member has breached the code, the council can vote to impose sanctions. These can include formal reprimands, removal from certain positions, or other penalties.
4. **Voting Process:** The decision to sanction a member is made through a formal vote during a council meeting. A majority vote is typically required to pass the sanction.

This process helps maintain the integrity and functionality of the council by ensuring that all members adhere to the established rules and work effectively together.

4.9.3 Decision notice

After the Council or council panel decides the complaint, the CEO is to, as soon as practicable, draft a written decision notice that sets out the following matters:

- (a) the Council or council panel's decision and the reasons for it; and
- (b) any right the person to whom the notice is to be given has, under the *Local Government Act 2019* or another Act, to apply for a review of the decision, to apply for a consideration of the matter or to appeal the decision.

The draft decision notice is to be electronically provided to the council member who chaired the meeting in which the Council decided the complaint, or if a council panel decided the complaint, to all members of the council panel. The decision notice is to be authorised by the chair or the council panel and may be authorised remotely, if this is more practicable in the circumstances.

Within 90 days of receipt of the complaint was initially received by the CEO, and as soon as practicable after a decision has been authorised by the chair or council panel, the CEO will provide the authorised decision notice to the complainant and the respondent.

The decision notice will set out the decision and the reasons for the decision. It will also state that within 28 days of receiving the notice, either party may apply to LGANT to reconsider the complaint.

4.9.4 Summary of decision

After the expiry of the 28-day appeal period, the CEO will seek advice from LGANT as to whether any of the parties have applied to LGANT for consideration of the complaint under section 126(3) of the Act.

If no parties have applied to LGANT for consideration of the complaint, the CEO will prepare a summary of the decision to be reviewed by the Council or council panel in the confidential session of the next meeting of the Council or council panel.

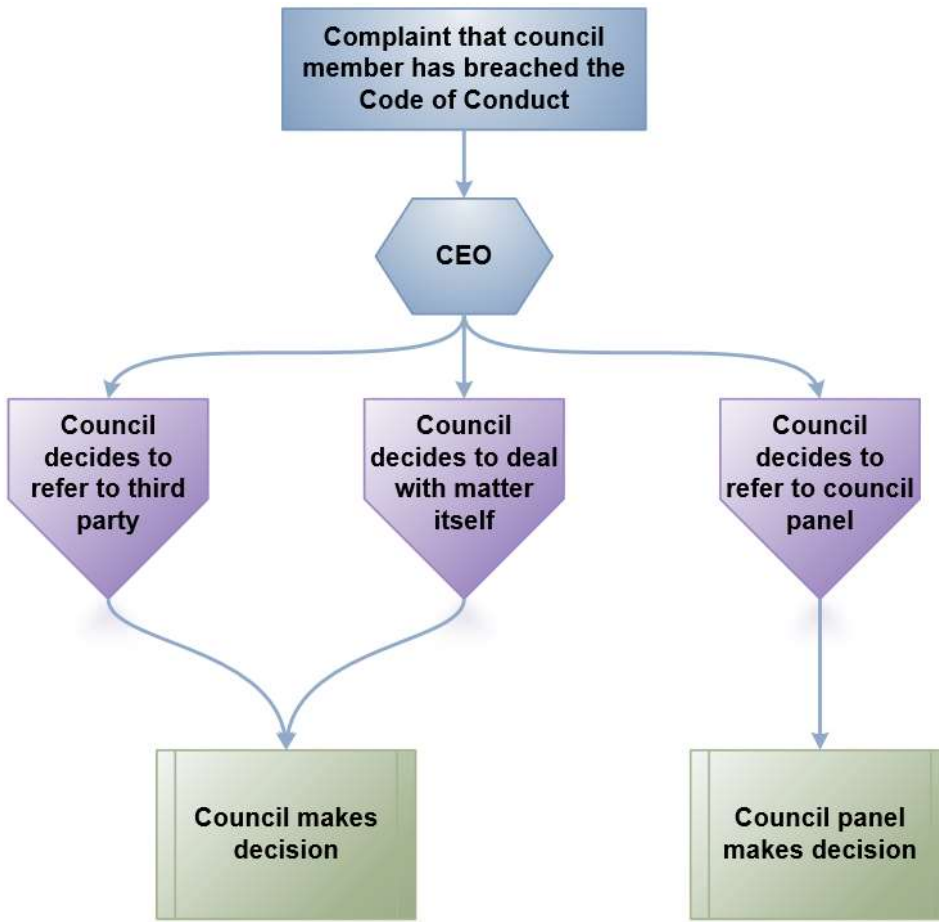
The summary of the decision is to set out the following information:

- (a) the names of the complainant and respondent;
- (b) the date of the decision;
- (c) a concise description of the conduct alleged to have been a contravention of the Code of Conduct;
- (d) if a Code of Conduct was found to be contravened – the item(s) of the Code of Conduct that the respondent contravened; or
- (e) if a Code of Conduct was not found to be contravened – that no contravention of the Code of Conduct was established by the Council or council panel; and
- (f) any actions or recommendations made by the Council or council panel.

The Council or council panel will consider the summary of the decision and, subject to the Council's or council panel's approval of the information that is to be included, finalise the summary.

The approved summary is to be tabled in the open section of the next ordinary council meeting as part of Council's public business papers.

4.10 Flowchart



5 ASSOCIATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

Elected Members Code of Conduct

Breach of Code of Conduct Complaint Form

6 REFERENCES AND RELATED LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 2019

Revision History

Version	Approval date	Details of change	Responsible officer
1	24/11/2020	Created and adopted	Policy Review Committee
2	20/06/2023	Reviewed – changed to new template, minor administrative amendments and inclusion of flowchart.	Governance and Executive Officer
3	25/10/2024	Addition regarding sanctions and LGANT fee	Manager Governance and Risk