

HSC Governing Policy – Culture and Behaviour

Setting Governing Policy

The following provides an overarching background to the setting of individual Governing Policy.

Purpose: The purpose of Hepburn Shire Council is to help bring about and administer the needs and wellbeing of its municipality. Achievement of high performance to our purpose is reflected in Council's vision - *Our Council: the desired state of community recognition of Council*.

Setting Tone: Council is the critical social system charged with leadership responsibility for setting the strategic direction and maintaining oversight of Hepburn Shire. In this role the culture, behaviour and actions of Council are highly visible to our municipality and other stakeholders.

As such, the *'tone at the top'* displayed by this social system can directly impact on community recognition through the culture and behaviour of the organisation.

Council is the highest level decision-making cohort in the organisation. At the apex of this decision-making is Governing Policy: *the direction from Council of what their intentions are in terms of governance – 'tone from the top'*.

Councillor Code of Conduct: Ethics and public accountability are essential features of effective local government. They refer to the culture, processes, structures and rules that ensure those in public office act in the wider public interest, rather than their own self-interest. They are an essential feature of good governance. Ethics are the rules that define the conduct of councillors in order to ensure that the public is treated fairly and with equality. Sound ethics help councillors make better decisions in the public interest, as well as help people evaluate the decisions taken on their behalf by Council.

Governing Policy: Governing policies act as guidelines for the CEO and Executive in the development of matching Managing (Council) Policy and Procedures - through which to run the organisation.

Core Values: Core values support the vision, shape the culture and reflect what Council values. They are the essence of the organisation's identity, and the principles and beliefs that underpin the decision-making processes.

Culture Setting: Culture is both a risk and an opportunity. If not taken seriously by Council it can lead to the destruction of community values - *the non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community's citizens wish to maintain* - and community respect for Council.

Culture is also a key organisational capability and fundamental to an organisation's long-term sustainable success and helps characterise the Shire in its community. It is crucial to the achievement of the Council Plan and other strategic goals, and is critical to the well-being of our CEO and his staff. Positive and aligned corporate cultures can motivate employees to perform and engage with their work, align behaviours to common values and purpose, share knowledge and insights, be more productive and responsive, and build trust. Organisational culture is the responsibility of the CEO.

As Council we have a duty to care. The collection of Governing Policy represents the guiding principles that lay down a desired governance framework that can help our people understand the difference between right and wrong, and our community better understand the role of Council.

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Culture defines how people behave both around others and when they are alone.

The culture of an organisation influences what it does, its relationships with stakeholders and its reputation. It can also be an important determinant of whether the organisation is able to achieve its strategic objectives and deliver on its purpose¹.

Ethics in engagement is vital. Community trust in Council's integrity is critical to the effectiveness of our vision, purpose, employees and volunteers.

Ethics keeps the process open, honest, inclusive, far-reaching, respectful, fair, collaborative, and informative. Without ethics, participants, and community, lose faith in the engagement process, they don't trust it, they feel used, marginalised, unheard and irrelevant.

Ethics protects the organisation and participants, and upholds the principle of *Our Council*.

Culture setting in Hepburn Shire Council manifests at the two levels - Council and Management, and is reflected both externally and internally through the Mayor/Councillor/CEO – CEO/Management relationships and their respective feed-back loops.

Council has a role to play to help maximise the chance of a positive culture and minimise the chances of a poor, destructive or negative culture in the organisation.

Our organisation's governance culture is driven by the values, attitudes and behaviours of Council itself to governance – including Council's internal dynamic. The resulting governance culture, in turn, drives, or at least heavily impacts, the broader organisational culture².

That Council:

- 1.1. Through a climate of mutual trust, respect and honesty will create a dynamic both amongst councillors and between Council and Management which makes for open discussion, debate and constructive dissent. This dynamic features councillors who can disagree without being disagreeable, with better decision-making being the result;
- 1.2. Will establish a sense of individual accountability amongst councillors that drives them to take their role seriously, work hard and be present and active in their participation in the meetings and work of Council, even in areas in which they may not be so comfortable;
- 1.3. Promotes a culture across the organisational that permeates all aspects of its business, including attitudes towards risk-taking, customer engagement and treatment, compliance with rules, competence, innovation, plain speaking, diversity and inclusion, and empowerment of staff to make decisions;
- 1.4. Desires that Hepburn Shire Council be an employer of choice, and an organisation that:
 - demonstrates zero tolerance to any form of harassment;
 - promotes an awareness of whistleblowing and encourages the use of Protected Disclosure legislation and other mechanisms;
 - promotes respect by staff among fellow staff and all external stakeholders;
 - promotes the use of language and symbols that endear the organisation to its community;
 - promotes in all actions and at all levels – *Our Council*.

¹ AICD Principle 9: Culture and Ethics

² Adapted from Proust, E., 2018, *Opening Address - Australian Governance Summit - Trust, Innovation and Sustainability*, AICD