



4/006 Elections – Caretaker Period

Objective

The objective of this policy is to ensure the Town’s activities and Elected Members are undertaken in a manner that supports a high standard of integrity during local government election periods.

The primary objective of this Policy is to avoid the Council of the Town of Port Hedland making major decisions, prior to election, that would bind an incoming Council, prevent the use of public resources in ways that are seen as advantageous to, or promoting, the sitting Elected Members who are seeking re-election, or new candidates, and ensuring the Town of Port Hedland administration acts impartially in relation to candidates.

This Policy applies during a ‘Caretaker Period’ (see below for definition) to cover:

- a. Decisions that are made by the Council;
- b. Materials published by the Council;
- c. Attendance and participation in functions and events;
- d. Use of the Town’s resources;
- e. Access to Council information.

Part 1 - Introduction

1.1 Application

This Caretaker Policy applies to Elected Members, electoral candidates and employees of the Town of Port Hedland.

1.2 Scheduling Consideration of Major Policy Decisions

So far as is reasonably practicable, the Chief Executive Officer should avoid scheduling major policy decisions for consideration during a Caretaker Period, and instead ensure that such decisions are either:

- a. Considered by the Council prior to the Caretaker Period; or
- b. Scheduled for determination by the incoming Council.

Where extraordinary circumstances prevail, the Chief Executive Officer may submit a major policy decision to the Council in accordance with Part 3 of this policy.



1.3 Decision Made Prior to a Caretaker Period

This Policy only applies to actual decisions made during a Caretaker Period, not the announcement of decisions made prior to the Caretaker Period. Whilst announcement of earlier decisions may be made during a Caretaker Period, as far as practicable any such announcements should be made before the Caretaker Period begins.

All documentation prepared for Council meetings will be carefully vetted by the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that no agenda item is included that could potentially influence voters' intentions at the election or could encourage Mayor or Councillor candidates to use the item as part of their electioneering.

Elected Members commit to refraining from moving motions or raising matters at a meeting that could potentially be considered an electoral matter.

Part 2 – Implementation of Caretaker Practices

2.1 Role of the Chief Executive Officer in Implementing Caretaker Practices

The role of the Chief Executive Officer in implementing the caretaker practices outlined in this policy is as follows:

- a. The Chief Executive Officer will ensure as far as possible, that all Elected Members and Town officers are aware of the Caretaker Policy and practices 30 days prior to the start of the Caretaker Period.
- b. The Chief Executive Officer will ensure, as far as possible, that any major policy or significant decisions required by the Council are scheduled for Council resolution prior to the Caretaker Period or deferred where appropriate for determination by the incoming Council.
- c. The Chief Executive Officer will endeavour to make sure all announcements regarding decisions made by the Council, prior to the Caretaker Period, are publicised prior to the Caretaker Period.



Part 3 – Extraordinary Circumstances Requiring Exemption

3.1 *Extraordinary Circumstances*

The Chief Executive Officer may, where extraordinary circumstances prevail, permit a matter defined as a 'major policy decision' to be submitted to the Council. The Chief Executive Officer is to have regard to a number of circumstances, including but not limited to:

- a. Whether the decision is 'significant';
- b. The urgency of the issue (that is - can it wait until after the election);
- c. The possibility of legal and/or financial repercussions if it is deferred;
- d. Whether the decision is likely to be controversial; and
- e. The best interests of the Town of Port Hedland.

3.2 *Appointment or Removal of the Chief Executive Officer*

Whilst the definitions of this policy establishes that a Chief Executive Officer may not be appointed or dismissed during a Caretaker Period, in the case of an emergency, the Council may act to appoint an Acting Chief Executive Officer, or suspend the current Chief Executive Officer (in accordance with the terms of their contract), pending the election, after which date a permanent decision can be made.

Part 4 - Caretaker Statement

To ensure the Council complies with the commitment to appropriate decision making during the Caretaker Period a Caretaker Statement will be included in every report submitted to the Council for a decision. The Caretaker Statement will specify one of the following:

- a. "The recommended decision is not a 'Major Policy Decision' within the context of Council Policy 4/006 'Elections - Caretaker Policy'."
- b. "The recommended decision is a 'Major Policy Decision' within the context of Council Policy 4/006 'Elections – Caretaker Policy' however; an exemption should be made due to extraordinary circumstances (insert the circumstances for making the exemption)".



Part 5 – Town Of Port Hedland Publications

5.1 Prohibition on Publishing Local Government Electoral Material

The Town shall not print, publish or distribute, or cause, permit or authorise others to print, publish or distribute on behalf of the Town any advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice that contains 'electoral material' during the Caretaker Period.

5.2 Electoral Material Relevant to Prohibition

Without limiting the generality of the definition of 'electoral material', material will be considered to be intended or likely to affect voting in the election if it contains an express or implicit reference to, or comment on:

- a. The election; or
- b. A candidate in the election; or
- c. An issue submitted to, or otherwise before, the voters in connection with the election.

5.3 Candidate and/or Elected Member Publications

Candidates and/or Elected Members are permitted to publish campaign material on their own behalf but cannot claim for that material to be originating from or authorised by the Town. For example, use of the Town of Port Hedland crest or logo is prohibited as is use of any of the Town's photographs or images.

5.4 Election Announcements

This policy does not prevent publications by the Town which merely announce the holding of the election or relate only to the election process itself.

5.5 Town of Port Hedland Publications

Any reference to Elected Members in the Town's publications printed, published or distributed during the Caretaker Period must not include promotional text. Any of the Town's publications that are potentially affected by this policy will be reviewed by the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that any circulated, displayed or otherwise publicly available material during the Caretaker Period does not contain material that may be construed as 'electoral material'.

5.6 Town of Port Hedland Website

During the Caretaker Period the Town's website will not contain any material which is precluded by this policy. Any references to the election will only relate to the election process. Information about Elected Members will be restricted to names, contact details, titles, membership of special committees and other bodies to which they have been appointed to by the Council. Information about candidates on the Town's website will be restricted to their candidate profiles only.

Part 6 - Public Consultation during the Caretaker Period

6.1 Prohibition

It is prohibited under this policy for public consultation to be undertaken during the Caretaker Period (either new consultation or existing) on an issue which is contentious, unless the consultation is a mandatory statutory process or prior approval is given by the Chief Executive Officer.

Part 7 - Attendance and Participation at Events / Functions / Meetings

7.1 Public Events Hosted by External Bodies

Elected Members may continue to attend events and functions hosted by external bodies during the Caretaker Period.

7.2 Town of Port Hedland Organised Civic Events/Functions

Civic events/functions organised by the Town and held during the Caretaker Period will be reduced to only those essential to the operation of the Town, and should not in any way be associated with any issues considered topical and relevant to the election. All known candidates are to be invited to civic events/functions organised by the Town during the Caretaker Period, however, only sitting Elected Members will be formally acknowledged at such events/functions.

7.3 Addresses by Elected Members

Elected Members that are also candidates should not, where possible, be permitted to make speeches or addresses at events/functions organised or sponsored by the Town during the Caretaker Period. Elected Members may make short welcome speeches at events and functions organised or sponsored by the Town during the Caretaker Period subject to prior approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

7.4 Delegates to Community and Advisory Groups

Elected Members appointed to community groups, advisory groups and other external organisations as representatives of the Town shall not use their attendance at meetings of such groups to either recruit assistance with electoral campaigning or to promote their personal or other candidates' electoral campaigns.

7.5 Questions and Statements at Council or Committee Meetings

All candidates, whether current Elected Members or not, are required to declare that they are a candidate for the upcoming election prior to asking questions or making a statement at Council or Committee Meetings.

Part 8 - The Use of Town Of Port Hedland Resources

The *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007* provide that the Town's resources are only to be utilised for authorised activities (for example – prohibits the use of employees for personal tasks and prohibits the use of equipment, stationery, or hospitality for non-Council business). This includes the use of resources for electoral purposes. It should be noted that the prohibition on the use of the Town's resources for electoral purposes is not restricted to the Caretaker Period.

The Town's staff must not be asked to undertake any tasks connected directly or indirectly with an election campaign and should avoid assisting Elected Members in ways that could create a perception that they are being used for electoral purposes. In any circumstances where the use of Town resources might be construed as being related to a candidate's election campaign, advice is to be sought from the Chief Executive Officer.

Photos, videos or images taken by or provided by the Town are not to be used by Elected Members for the purposes for electioneering or in support of their election campaign. This applies equally to images on the Town's website that may be able to be copied.

General correspondence addressed to Elected Members will be answered as usual. However, Elected Members will only sign necessary minimum correspondence during the caretaker period. Correspondence in respect to significant, sensitive or controversial matters should be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer for consideration and signing.



Part 9 - Access to Council Information and Assistance

9.1 Elected Members Access to Information

During a Caretaker Period, Elected Members are able to access Council information relevant to the performance of their functions as an Elected Member. However, this access to information should be exercised with caution and limited to matters that the Council is dealing with within the objectives and intent of this policy. Any Council information so accessed must not be used for election purposes.

9.2 Electoral Information and Assistance

All candidates will have equal rights to access public information, such as the electoral rolls (draft or past rolls) and information relevant to their election campaigns from the Town administration. Information, briefing material and advice prepared or secured by Town officers for an Elected Member must be necessary to the carrying out of the Elected Member's role and must not be related to election issues that might be perceived to be of an electoral nature (refer to Part 8 of this policy).

Any assistance and advice provided to candidates as part of the conduct of the local government election will be provided equally to all candidates. The types of assistance that are available will be documented and communicated to candidates in advance. Types of assistance may include advice on manipulation of electoral roll data and interpretation of legislative requirements, amongst other matters.

Candidates may obtain advice or assistance from the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) as they are responsible for managing the Town of Port Hedland elections.

9.3 Information Request Register

An Information Request Register will be maintained by the Chief Executive Officer during the Caretaker Period. This Register will be a public document that records all requests for information made by Elected Members and candidates, and the response given to those requests, during the Caretaker Period. Town officers will be required to provide details of requests to the Chief Executive Officer for inclusion in the Register.

9.4 Media Advice

Any requests for media advice or assistance from Elected Members during the Caretaker Period will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. No media advice will be provided in relation to election issues or in regard to publicity that involves specific Elected Members. If satisfied that advice sought by an Elected Member during the Caretaker Period does not relate to the election or publicity involving any specific Elected Member(s), the Chief Executive Officer may authorise the provision of a response to such a request.

9.5 Publicity Campaigns

During the Caretaker Period, publicity campaigns, other than for the purpose of conducting (and promoting) the election will be avoided wherever possible. Where a publicity campaign is deemed necessary for a Town activity, it must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer. In any event, the Town's publicity during the Caretaker Period will be restricted to communicating normal Town activities and initiatives.

9.6 Media Attention

Elected Members will not use their position as an elected representative or their access to Town officers or resources to gain media attention in support of their or any other candidate's election campaign.

9.7 Town of Port Hedland Employees

During the Caretaker Period no Town employee may make any public statement that relates to an election issue unless the statements have been approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

9.8 Election Process Enquiries

All election process enquiries from candidates, whether current Elected Members or not, will be directed to the Returning Officer or, where the matter is outside of the responsibilities of the Returning Officer, to the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

Definitions

'Caretaker Period' means the period of time when the caretaker practices are in place prior to the election. The caretaker practices will apply from the close of nominations being 37 days prior to the Election Day in accordance with Section 4.49(a) of the *Local Government Act 1995*, until 6pm on Election Day.



'Election Day' means the day fixed under the *Local Government Act 1995* for the holding of any poll needed for an election.

'Electoral Material' means any digital communications, advertisement, handbill, pamphlet, notice, letter or article that is intended or calculated to affect the result in an election but does not include:

- (a) An advertisement in a newspaper announcing the holding of a meeting in accordance with Section 4.87(3) of the *Local Government Act 1995*.
- (b) Any materials exempted under Regulation 78 of the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*.
- (c) Any materials produced by the Town relating to the election process by way of information, education or publicity, or materials produced by or on behalf of the Returning Officer for the purposes of conducting an election.

'Events and Functions' means gatherings of internal and external stakeholders to discuss, review, acknowledge, communicate, celebrate or promote a program, strategy or issue which is of relevance to the Town and stakeholders and may take the form of conferences, workshops, forums, launches, promotional activities, social occasions such as dinners and receptions.

'Local Government Election' means all ordinary and extraordinary Councillor and Mayoral elections.

'Major Policy Decision' means any:

- (a) Decisions relating to the employment, termination or remuneration of the Chief Executive Officer or any other designated senior officer, other than a decision to appoint an Acting or Deputy Chief Executive Officer, or suspend the current Chief Executive Officer (in accordance with the terms of their contract), pending the election.
- (b) Decisions relating to the Town entering into a sponsorship arrangement with a total Town contribution value exceeding \$10,000 (excluding GST).
- (c) Irrevocable decisions that commit the Town to substantial expenditure or significant actions, such as that which might be brought about through a Notice of Motion by an Elected Member.
- (d) Irrevocable decisions that will have a significant impact on the Town of Port Hedland or the community.
- (e) Reports requested or initiated by an Elected Member, candidate or member of the public that, in the Chief Executive Officer's opinion, may be perceived within the general community as an electoral issue that reflects upon the Council's decision-making process, and has the potential to call into question whether decisions are soundly based and in the best interests of the community.

'Public Consultation' means a process which involves an invitation to individuals, groups or organisations or the community generally to comment on an issue, proposed action or proposed policy.



Relevant legislation	<i>Local Government Act 1995 Part 4</i> <i>Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1996</i>
Delegated authority	-
Business unit	Governance
Directorate	Corporate and Performance

<i>Governance to complete this section</i>			
Version Control	Version No.	Resolution No.	Adoption date
	V01	-	28 August 2013
	V02	CM201617/203	24 May 2017
Review frequency	Annually		

Document Control Statement – The electronic reference copy of this Policy is maintained by the Governance Team. Any printed copy may not be up to date and you are advised to check the electronic copy at <http://www.porthedland.wa.gov.au/documents/public-documents/policies> to ensure that you have the current version. Alternatively, you may contact the Governance Team.