

INTERNAL REPORTING MANAGEMENT – PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Responsible Department:	Corporate and Community Services
Responsible Section:	Corporate and Community Services
Responsible Officer:	Director Corporate and Community Services

Objective

To provide a mechanism that encourages and facilitates the disclosure, in the public interest, of corrupt conduct, maladministration, serious and substantial waste and government information contravention within Narrabri Shire Council by the following:

- Both council staff and councillors.
- Permanent employees, whether full-time or part-time
- Temporary or casual employees.
- Consultants working for Council
- Individual contractors working for council.

This policy also applies to other people who perform public official functions where their conduct and activities could be investigated by an investigating authority. This includes volunteers and those contracted to work for the Council.

Policy

1. What should be reported

You should report any suspected wrongdoing you see within the *Narrabri Shire Council* Reports about the five categories of serious wrongdoing – corrupt conduct, maladministration, serious and substantial waste of public money, government information contravention, and local government pecuniary interest contravention – will be dealt with under the PID Act as public interest disclosures and according to this policy.

a. Corrupt conduct

Corrupt conduct is the dishonest or partial exercise of official functions by a public official.

For example, this could include:

- the improper use of knowledge, power or position for personal gain or the advantage of others.
- acting dishonestly or unfairly, or breaching public trust.
- a council official using their position in a way that is dishonest, biased or breaches public trust.

For more information about corrupt conduct, see the NSW Ombudsman's guideline on [what can be reported](#).

b. Maladministration

Maladministration is conduct that involves action or inaction of a serious nature that is contrary to law, unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory or based wholly or partly on improper motives.

For example, this could include:

- making a decision and/or taking action that is unlawful.
- refusing to grant an approval for reasons that are not related to the merits of their application.

For more information about maladministration, see the NSW Ombudsman's guideline on [what can be reported](#).

c. Serious and substantial waste in local government

Serious and substantial waste is the uneconomical, inefficient or ineffective use of resources that could result in the loss or wastage of local government money. This includes all revenue, loans and other money collected, received or held by, for or on account of the council.

For example, this could include:

- poor project management practices leading to projects running over time.
- having poor or no processes in place for a system involving large amounts of public funds.

For more information about serious and substantial waste, see the NSW Ombudsman's guideline on [what can be reported](#).

d. Government information contravention

A government information contravention is a failure to properly fulfil functions under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act).

For example, this could include:

- destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released.
- knowingly making decisions that are contrary to the legislation.
- directing another person to make a decision that is contrary to the legislation.

For more information about government information contravention, see the NSW Ombudsman's guideline on [what can be reported](#).

e. Local Government pecuniary interest contravention

A local government pecuniary interest contravention is a failure to fulfil certain functions under the *Local Government Act 1993* relating to the management of pecuniary interests. These include obligations to lodge disclosure of interests returns, lodge written declarations and disclose pecuniary interests at council and council committee meetings. A pecuniary interest is an interest that a person has in a matter because of a reasonable likelihood or expectation of appreciable financial gain or loss to the person.

For example, this could include:

- a senior council staff member recommending a family member for a council contract and not declaring the relationship.
- a general manager holding an undisclosed shareholding in a company competing for a council contract.

For more information about local government pecuniary interest contravention, see the NSW Ombudsman's guideline on [what can be reported](#).

f. Other wrongdoing

Although reports about the previous four categories of conduct can attract the specific protections of the PID Act, you should report all activities or incidents that you believe are wrong.

For example, these could include:

- harassment or unlawful discrimination.
- reprisal action against a person who has reported wrongdoing.
- practices that endanger the health or safety of staff or the public.

These types of issues should be reported to a supervisor, in line with the Narrabri Shire Council's policies.

Even if these reports are not dealt with as public interest disclosures, Narrabri Shire Council will consider each matter and make every attempt to protect the staff member making the report from any form of reprisal.

2. When will a report be protected?

The Narrabri Shire Council will support any person that reports wrongdoing. For a report to be considered a public interest disclosure, it has to meet all of the requirements under the PID Act. These requirements are:

- The person making the disclosure must honestly believe on reasonable grounds that the information shows or tends to show wrongdoing.
- The report has to be made to a position nominated in this policy or an investigating authority.

Reports by staff and councillors will not be considered to be public interest disclosures if they:

- mostly question the merits of the policy of the governing body of the council.
- are made with the sole or substantial motive of avoiding dismissal or other disciplinary action.

3. How to make a report

You can report wrongdoing in writing or verbally. You are encouraged to make a report in writing as this can help to avoid any confusion or misinterpretation.

If a report is made verbally, the person receiving the report must make a comprehensive record of the disclosure and ask the person making the disclosure to sign this record. The individual making the report should keep a copy of this record.

4. Can a report be anonymous?

There will be some situations where you may not want to identify yourself when you make a report. Although these reports will still be dealt with by the Narrabri Shire Council, *it is best if you identify yourself.* This allows us to provide you with any necessary protection and support, as well as feedback about the outcome of any investigation into the allegations.

It is important to realise that an anonymous disclosure may not prevent you from being identified. If we do not know who made the report, it is very difficult for us to prevent any reprisal action.

5. Maintaining Confidentiality

Narrabri Shire Council realises many staff will want their report to remain confidential. This can help to prevent any action being taken against you for reporting wrongdoing.

We are committed to keeping your identity, and the fact you have reported wrongdoing, confidential. However, there may be situations where this may not be possible or appropriate. We will discuss with you whether it is possible to keep your report confidential.

If confidentiality cannot be maintained, we will develop a plan to support and protect you from risks of reprisal. You will be involved in developing this plan. You will also be told if your report will be dealt with under the Council's Code of Conduct, as this may mean certain information will have to be tabled at a council meeting.

If you report wrongdoing, it is important that you only discuss your report with the staff of the Narrabri Shire Council responsible to deal with it. This will include the disclosures coordinator and the General Manager. In the case of a report about the General Manager, you should only discuss your report with the Disclosures Coordinator and the Mayor.

Where your complaint is made under the Council's Code of Conduct and relates to the General Manager or a Councillor, you may be required to discuss it with a conduct reviewer.

6. Who can receive a report within Narrabri Shire Council

You are encouraged to report general wrongdoing to your supervisor. However the PID Act requires that for a report to be a public interest disclosure, it must be made to a public official in accordance with the Council's disclosure policy.

Any supervisor who receives a report that they believe may be a public interest disclosure must refer the individual making the report to one of the positions listed below. If your report involves a Councillor, you should make it to the General Manager. If your report relates to the General Manager, you should make it to the Mayor.

The following positions are the only staff within the Narrabri Shire Council who can receive a public interest disclosure.

a. General Manager

You can report wrongdoing directly to the General Manager. The General Manager is responsible for:

- deciding if a report is a public interest disclosure.
- determining what needs to be done next, including referring it to other authorities.
- deciding what needs to be done to correct the problem that has been identified.
- ensuring there are systems in place in to support and protect people who report wrongdoing.

- dealing with disclosures made under the Council's Code of Conduct in accordance with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct procedures.
- referring actual or suspected corrupt conduct to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

General Manager: Stewart Todd
Post: 46-48 Maitland Street Narrabri NSW 2390
Telephone: 02 67 996 833
Email: council@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

b. Mayor

If you are making a report about the General Manager, you should make your report to the Mayor. They are responsible for:

- deciding if a report is a public interest disclosure.
- determining what needs to be done next, including referring it to other authorities.
- deciding what needs to be done to correct the problem that has been identified.
- dealing with disclosures made under the council's code of conduct in accordance with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct procedures.

The Mayor must make sure there are systems in place in the Narrabri Shire Council to support and protect people who report wrongdoing.

If the report is about the General Manager, the Mayor is also responsible for referring actual or suspected corrupt conduct to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Mayor: Cr Ron Campbell
Post: 46-48 Maitland Street Narrabri NSW 2390
Telephone: 02 6799 6833
Email: cr.campbell@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

c. Disclosures coordinator

The Disclosures Coordinator has a central role in dealing with reports made by staff and Councillors. They receive them, assess them, and refer them to the people within or contracted by the Council to

be dealt with appropriately.

Disclosures Coordinator: Director Corporate and Community Services - Mr Lindsay Mason
Post: 46-48 Maitland Street Narrabri NSW 2390
Telephone: 02 6799 6866
Email: dcs@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

d. Disclosures officers

Disclosures officers are responsible for receiving, forwarding and/or dealing with reports made in accordance with this policy.

Disclosure Officer 1: Director Infrastructure Delivery – Mrs Eloise Chaplain
Post: 46-48 Maitland Street Narrabri NSW 2390
Telephone: 02 6799 6866
Email: did@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

7. Who can receive a report outside of the Narrabri Shire Council

Staff and Councillors are encouraged to report wrongdoing within the Narrabri Shire Council, but internal reporting is not your only option. If you follow the guidance below, you can make a public interest disclosure to:

- an investigating authority. If your report is about both the General Manager and the Mayor, you may wish to consider making the report to an investigating authority.
- a Member of Parliament or a journalist, but only in limited circumstances outlined below.

a. Investigating authorities

The PID Act lists a number of investigating authorities in NSW that staff and Councillors can report wrongdoing to and the categories of wrongdoing each authority can deal with.

In relation to Council, these authorities are:

- The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) — for corrupt conduct.

- The Ombudsman — for maladministration.
- The Chief Executive of Office of Local Government, **Department** of Planning, Industry and Environment, for disclosures about local government agencies.
- The Information Commissioner — for disclosures about a government information contravention.

You should contact the relevant authority for advice about how to make a disclosure to them. Contact details for each investigating authority are provided at the end of this policy.

You should be aware that it is very likely the investigating authority will discuss the case with the Narrabri Shire Council. We will make every effort to assist and cooperate with the investigating authority to ensure the matter is dealt with appropriately and there is a satisfactory outcome. We will also provide appropriate support and assistance to individuals who report wrongdoing to an investigating authority.

b. Members of Parliament or journalists

To have the protections of the PID Act, a person reporting wrongdoing to a Member of Parliament (MP) or a journalist must have already made substantially the same report to one of the following:

- the General Manager.
- a person nominated in this policy.
- an investigating authority in accordance with the PID Act.

Also, the Narrabri Shire Council or investigating authority that received the report must have either:

- decided not to investigate the matter.
- decided to investigate the matter, but not completed the investigation within six months of the original report.
- investigated the matter but not recommended any action as a result.
- not told the person who made the report, within six months of the report being made, whether the matter will be investigated.

Most importantly – to be protected under the PID Act – if you report wrongdoing to an MP or a journalist you will need to be able to prove that you have reasonable grounds for believing that the disclosure is substantially true and that it is in fact substantially true.

If you report wrongdoing to a person or an organisation that is not listed above, you will not be protected under the PID Act. This may mean you will be in breach of legal obligations or our Code of Conduct – by, for example, disclosing confidential information.

For more information about reporting wrongdoing outside the Narrabri Shire Council, contact the disclosures coordinator or the NSW Ombudsman's Public Interest Disclosures Unit. Their contact

details are provided at the end of this policy.

8. Feedback to the individual who reported wrongdoing

The individual who reported wrongdoing will be told what is happening in response to their report. When you make a report, you will be given:

- an acknowledgement that your disclosure has been received.
- the timeframe for when you will receive further updates.
- the name and contact details of the people who can tell you what is happening.

The PID Act requires that you are provided with an acknowledgement letter and a copy of this policy within 45 days after you have made your report. We will attempt to get this information to you within two working days from the date you make your report.

After a decision is made about how your report will be dealt with, you will be given:

- information about the action that will be taken in response to your report.
- likely timeframes for any investigation.
- information about the resources available within Narrabri Shire Council to handle any concerns you may have.
- information about external agencies and services you can access for support.

This information will be given to you within 10 working days from the date you make your report.

During any investigation, you will be given:

- information on the ongoing nature of the investigation.
- information about the progress of the investigation and reasons for any delay.
- advice if your identity needs to be disclosed for the purposes of investigating the matter, and an opportunity to talk about this.

At the end of any investigation, you will be given:

- enough information to show that adequate and appropriate action was taken and/or is proposed to be taken in response to your disclosure and any problem that was identified.
- advice about whether you will be involved as a witness in any further matters, such as disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

Behaviour of all people involved in the PID process needs to adhere to Council's Code of Conduct. A breach of the Code of Conduct could result in disciplinary action.

9. Protection against reprisals

The PID Act provides protection for people reporting wrongdoing by imposing penalties on anyone who takes detrimental action substantially in reprisal for them making the public interest disclosure. It may also be a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

The Narrabri Shire Council will not tolerate any reprisal action against a person who report wrongdoing. The criminal penalties that can be imposed include imprisonment or fines. Detrimental action is also misconduct that justifies disciplinary action. People who take detrimental action against someone who has made a disclosure can also be required to pay damages for any loss suffered by that person.

Detrimental action means action causing, comprising or involving any of the following:

- injury, damage or loss.
- intimidation or harassment.
- discrimination, disadvantage or adverse treatment in relation to employment.
- dismissal from, or prejudice in, employment.
- disciplinary proceedings.

a. Responding to reprisals

The Narrabri Shire Council will act to protect those who report wrongdoing from reprisals.

When a report is received, we will ensure that a thorough risk assessment is conducted. This will identify any risks to the member of staff or Councillor who reported the wrongdoing, as well as strategies to deal with those risks.

If you believe that detrimental action has been or is being taken against you or someone else who has reported wrongdoing in reprisal for making a report, you should tell your supervisor, the Disclosures Coordinator or the General Manager immediately, or in the case of an allegation of reprisal action by the General Manager, the Mayor.

All supervisors must report any suspicions they have that reprisal action against a staff member is occurring, or any reports that are made to them, to the Disclosures Coordinator or the General Manager, or in the case of an allegation of reprisal by the General Manager, to the Mayor.

If the Disclosures Coordinator becomes aware of or reasonably suspects that reprisal action is or has been taken against a person who has made a disclosure, they will ensure that the matter is reported under the Council's Code of Conduct and dealt with in accordance with the Council's Code of

Conduct procedures.

If you report reprisal action, you will be kept informed of the progress of any investigation and the outcome.

The General Manager may issue specific directions to help protect against reprisals, including:

- issuing warnings to those alleged to have taken reprisal action against the individual who made the disclosure.
- relocating the member of staff who made the disclosure or an officer the subject of the allegations within the current workplace.
- transferring the member of staff who made the disclosure or the staff member who is the subject of the allegations to another position for which they are qualified.
- granting the member of staff who made the disclosure or the subject officer leave of absence during the investigation of the disclosure.

In relation to staff who make reports, such directions will only be made if the member of staff agrees to it. The Disclosures Coordinator will make it clear to other staff that this action was taken in consultation with the staff member and with management support – and it is not a punishment. If you have reported wrongdoing and feel that any reprisal action is not being dealt with effectively, contact the Ombudsman, the ICAC, or the Chief Executive of the Division of Local Government – depending on the type of wrongdoing you reported. Contact details for all these investigating authorities are included at the end of this policy.

b. Protection against legal action

If you make a disclosure in accordance with the PID Act, you will not be subject to any liability and no action, claim or demand can be taken against you for making the disclosure. You will not have breached any confidentiality or secrecy obligations and you will have the defence of absolute privilege in defamation.

10. Support for those reporting wrongdoing

The Narrabri Shire Council will make sure that staff who have reported wrongdoing, regardless of whether they have made a public interest disclosure, are provided with access to any professional support they may need as a result of the reporting process – such as stress management, counselling services, legal or career advice.

We also have staff that will provide support for those who report wrongdoing. They are responsible for initiating and coordinating support, particularly to those who are suffering any form of reprisal.

Support Officer: Director Strategy, Planning and People – Mr Andrew Brown
Post: 46-48 Maitland Street Narrabri NSW 2390
Telephone: 02 6799 6866
Email: andrewb@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

All supervisors must notify the Disclosures Coordinator if they believe a staff member is suffering any detrimental action as a result of disclosing wrongdoing.

11. Sanctions for making false or misleading disclosures

It is important that all staff and Councillors are aware that it is a criminal offence under the PID Act to wilfully make a false or misleading statement when reporting wrongdoing. It may also be a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and may result in disciplinary action. In the case of Councillors, such disciplinary action may be taken under the misconduct provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 and may include suspension or disqualification from civic office.

12. Support for the subject of a report

The Narrabri Shire Council is committed to ensuring people who are the subject of a report of wrongdoing are treated fairly and reasonably. If you are the subject of a report, you will be:

- Reasons supporting the implementation of the Alcohol-Free Zone or Alcohol-Free Area
- treated fairly and impartially.
- told your rights and obligations under our policies and procedures.
- kept informed during any investigation.
- given the opportunity to respond to any allegation made against you.
- told the result of any investigation.

Review

This policy will be reviewed by Council with each newly elected Council or change of Legislation. For any advice or guidance about this review, contact the NSW Ombudsman's Public Interest Disclosures Unit.

More information

More information around public interest disclosures is available on our intranet. Staff and councillors can also access advice and guidance from the disclosure's coordinator and the NSW Ombudsman's website at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

References:

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.
- Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994

For Disclosures about Corrupt Conduct: Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)		For Disclosures about maladministration: NSW Ombudsman	
Phone:	02 8281 5999	Phone:	02 9286 1000
Toll Free:	1800 463 909	Toll Free:	1800 451 524
Facsimile:	02 9264 5364	Facsimile:	02 9283 2911
Email:	icac@icac.nsw.gov.au	Email:	nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
Web:	www.icac.nsw.gov.au	Web:	www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
Address:	Level 7, 255 Elizabeth street Sydney NSW 2000	Address:	Level 24, 580 George street Sydney NSW 2000
For Disclosures about breaches of the GIPA Act: Information and Privacy Commissioner		For Disclosures about Council: Office of Local Government	
Phone:	1800 472 679	Phone:	02 4428 4100
Toll Free:	1800 472 679	Toll Free:	02 4428 4100
Facsimile:	02 6446 9518	Facsimile:	02 4428 4199
Email:	ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au	Email:	olg@olg.nsw.gov.au
Web:	www.ipc.nsw.gov.au	Web:	www.olg.nsw.gov.au
Address:	Level 7, 201 Elizabeth street Sydney NSW 2000	Address:	5 O'Keefe Avenue, Nowra NSW 2541

For Disclosure about Police Misconduct: Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	
Phone:	02 9321 6700
Toll Free:	1800 657 079
Email:	contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au
Web:	www.lecc.nsw.gov.au
Address:	Level 3, 111 Elizabeth Street Sydney NSW 2000

History:

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
811/2011	December 20, 2011	Adopted
58/2013	February 5, 2013	Reviewed
953/2013	December 17, 2013	Reviewed
		Amended – 10 March 2017- Administrative amendments made to staff contact details within policy
164/2017	August 15, 2017	Reviewed
	April 17, 2020	Amended – Administrative amendments made to staff contact details within policy and change to name of government cluster that Office of Local Government belongs to.
	May 11, 2020	Rebranded
	February 25, 2021	Amended – Administrative amendments made to staff contact details within policy.
	August 30, 2021	Amended – Administrative amendments made to staff contact details within policy.

