



POLICIES, PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES

What are they and which should I use?

INTRODUCTION

The following Resource Tool aims to provide guidance on developing a policy, procedure or guideline and when it is appropriate to use which one.

It is noted that each Council may be different in its terminology and potentially their definitions, in particular the use of procedures, guidelines and frameworks. Councils are welcome to use this document as a base and/or customise for their own corporate reference document library.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES

The following provides a brief overview of the relationship between policies, procedures and guidelines. It is important to remember that most often a Policy comes first, being the principles your activity will work to support. Procedures are more specific and give more direction about how policies will be carried out:

- policies are the guiding principles of council (sometimes required by legislation); they are what council believes in and is guided by; they assist Councillors, staff and members of the public in achieving equity and transparency in the development of decision-making.
- procedures are step-by-step directions based on our policies; they are like a recipe for how you will achieve your policies and any other organisational process to ensure consistency to approaches, who will do it and when.
- guidelines are set of prescription activities, best or safest practice.

It is noted that there is one other corporate legislative tool employed by local governments – Local Laws. These are a legislative requirement, and their development must meet legislative requirements. Their aim is to regulate and manage activities in your region.

POLICIES

Policies are clear, simple (high level) statements of how council intends to conduct its services, actions or business. They provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision making. A policy sets out council position on a specific matter but does not necessarily prescribe in detail how to perform certain functions. The main characteristics of policies are that they are formally documented, approved and reviewed. Compliance is required, and non-compliance may be actionable through appropriate conduct policy documents.

Policies don't need to be long or complicated – a couple of sentences may be all you need for each policy area. Policies relate to issues where Council requires a certain line of action to be followed; consistently. Policies should not be used for adhoc, once off decision making and are generally

adopted by Council. Further information on approval authorities and the process is available in the Corporate Policy Framework Guideline.

Definition of a Policy

A policy is a concise formal statement that outlines non-discretionary governing principles and intentions, in order to guide council practices. Policies are a formal statement of intent that mandate principles or standards that apply to council governance, operations or to the practice and conduct of its elected members and employees/contractors. In short, policy provides members of council with the approved way of operating in relation to a particular matter.

The Role of Policy

Policy plays an important role within council operations and decision making. It provides the principles which dictate how the members of council should act.

Those principles are derived from and shaped by: the law and regulations that govern council; national/industry standards, best practice and community expectations; and the values and mission council articulates in its strategic plan.

It is the role of policy to:

- Set standards and a position of Council;
- Ensure compliance with legal and statutory responsibilities;
- Guide council towards the achievement of its strategic plan;
- Provide a framework for action and decision making; and
- Improve the management of risk.

Policies are intended to be long term in application. They are reviewed at least annually.

Authors should consider risk management principles during policy development, and they should not be reactive in nature.

Policies are not to be used as a regulatory tool. Local Laws, which are bound by legislative requirements, are the tool used by local government to regulate and manage activities in the region. However, a policy may be adopted by Council to enhance Council's commitment to a matter of this nature that is of significant importance to Isaac.

PROCEDURES

Procedures describe how each policy or any other task/function will be put into action (operational) in your organisation. Each procedure should outline:

- Who will do what.
- What steps need to taken (in what order and including approvals, as per delegations of authority).
- Which forms or documents to use.

Procedures can be used for any area of business in the day-to-day operations of the organisation. Each area of Council is responsible for preparing and maintaining their procedures, ensuring they reflect the intent of the policy. The procedure must be referenced in the relevant policy.

Procedures might just be a few bullet points or instructions. Sometimes they work well as forms, checklists, instructions or flowcharts.

Procedures set out, often in a step-by-step fashion, council requirements for a particular course or mode of action and/or decision making. In relation and support of Policies, procedures clearly define how a policy will be implemented, by whom, what documents need to be completed, timeframes, systems used, etc.

Procedures should be reviewed on a regular basis and as an operational document can be approved at any time by the relevant delegated officer. They must reflect any changes in operational systems and should be reviewed upon any legislative or policy changes.

Procedures often elaborate on, and give effect to, a by-law, rule, agreement, code or policy and define the area in which the policy is operative. When specifically linked to a policy, compliance with procedures is mandatory, unless otherwise resolved by the approving authority.

Procedures necessarily require approval by an appropriately delegated officer. Approval is usually through either the ELT or relevant Director or Manager.

GUIDELINES

Guidelines set out Councils requirements for, or prescription of, best or safest practice. They are interpretive statements and as with policies and procedures may need appropriate approvals as per your organisational protocols.

A guideline does not need a policy as a head of power, however by nature can be seen as an organisational guide to a good business or governance practice. Sometimes a guideline will be the subset document to a Framework.

A guideline can provide an overview of how to perform a task or provide high-level guidance to make the actions of its employees more predictable, and presumably of higher quality. A guideline is similar to a rule/policy, but are legally less binding as justified deviations. For example, application of criteria through a matrix scenario to make a decision, however that Guideline is a set and endorsed governance protocol to assist officers make decisions.

Other forms of governance documents

Other forms of documents could include, but not limited to,:

- Frameworks;
- Strategies; or
- Management Plans.

APPROVALS

<Councils need to be cognisant of the appropriate approval authorities that have been established for their organisation>

Governance Advisory Service Reference documents via LG Central

- Corporate Policy Framework & Guideline
- Policy Development Tips and Hints

Other internal Documents councils may have may include, but not limited to:

- [Council's Style Guide](#)