



Recognising and upholding excellence in local government

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10 April 2023

Victoria Nelson - Sunshine Coast Regional Council (SCRC)

By Email:

[victoria.nelson@sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au](mailto:victoria.nelson@sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au)

Dear Victoria

**RE: Information Classification and Review survey**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report and survey from SCRC.

Council is to be congratulated on undertaking the review initially and for seeking further comments.

As OSCAR seeks member input to submissions we have copied the survey into a word document to enable member responses to be included. It also allows more detailed responses.

OSCAR's response based on the survey is as follows.

**1. Overall, do you think the recommendations of this report, if implemented, will give the community better access to Council information?**

**NO** – but with some changes the goal of giving the community better access to Council information could be achieved. This would be predicated by the responses as per question 2.

**2. Can you tell us a bit more about why you answered this way?**

OSCAR response would be "yes" if the following was undertaken:

- i. At the core of transparency is an open and respectful culture. It is critical that Council as a whole, including both employed and elected representatives adopt an approach that rebalances the agenda to asking what the reason is information should not be released in full. The default position is open release.
- ii. That **all** bullet points and particularly bullet point 2 in Recommendation 1 of the *GWI Future State Report* (page 6 of the WGI Report) be included in the Council Recommendation 6 – more detail follows in response to Question 3. Is there any particular reason for GWI Recommendation 1 being Recommendation 6 in Council's list of recommendations? It could appear to be sending a message to the community re the importance of this aspect.
- iii. If prior to the implementation phase a detailed implementation plan is developed and made public including:
  - Timing of and timely implementation of the various components of the project. The project has been underway for some considerable time and the community wants to see positive outcomes.
  - Who will be responsible for the overall delivery of the project

- How the project will be delivered
- How the success of the outcomes of the project will be measured, evaluated and reported – what performance KPI's will be established (more details in response to Q5).

**3. Do you believe that the recommendations in the report are the right approach?** That is, will they achieve our objectives of increasing transparency, and building confidence and trust that Council is managing information appropriately and as openly as possible?

**Yes** – to Recommendations 1-5 but **not** recommendation 6 as predicated by the following responses.

OSCAR response is "yes" the recommendations in the report are the right approach as long as the response 2(ii) above is included in the recommendations and 2(iii) above is implemented, that is the detail and the extent of implementation are undertaken, including the following:

- i. *Create a register on Council's website to: – Inform the community of information that has been classified as confidential, including the reason for the required confidentiality (aligned to s 254J of the Local Government Regulation 2012) and predicted review/release date. Provide the community with links to Council meeting reports that are no longer classified as confidential. The full GWI Future State Report recommendation is included as Appendix 1.*
- ii. if the recommendations of the report are implemented in full and all Policy development as proposed is undertaken including the following processes:
  - Oversight of the project sits within the Governance group and reported on quarterly to an Ordinary Meeting of the Council
  - Responsibility for the currency and review of all policies sits within the Governance group with individual or groups of policies allocated to the other group Executives for maintenance and review of said policies, that is the 'owner' of specific policies
  - The use of the term "appropriately" is not used as a 'weasel' word to explain/excuse all actions and responses.
  - All policies include the following information for each individual policy:
    - ✚ Title of policy
    - ✚ Responsible officer
    - ✚ Date of development of policy
    - ✚ Review date
    - ✚ Report to Council date

**4. Could you tell us the reason for your answer?**

If one extrapolates from this report Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 and the recent updating in December 2022 of the SCRC's Policy – Councillor and Council employee participation on Development Assessment Matters which had not been updated since 2008, it would appear that SCRC must improve the updating of many of its policies and the development of new policies.

We appreciate that officers and Councillors are not excited by policy development but it is one of the necessary Governance functions of not only Local, State and

Commonwealth Governments but also Corporations, Businesses, Schools and many other organisations. It could be said to be about “keeping one’s house in order”!

### 5. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

i) In Question 2 we responded 2(iii) that “How the success of the outcomes of the project will be measured, evaluated and reported – what performance KPI’s will be established (more details in response to Q5).”

With respect we make the following suggestions/examples for KPIs:

- Reduction of RTI requests
- Reduction in use of confidential items at council meetings and closed sessions
- Openness of councillors/senior executives in their approach to key constituent groups.
- Ongoing surveys including 6 monthly surveys on the implementation of the recommendations of the GWI report.
- Reduction in complaints from residents

ii) In an ideal world there should be very few RTIs but never nil. All too often RTI requests are laborious, complex and costly to both applicants and Council in time and money, so where the need for RTIs can be reduced is an outcome the Community would welcome. Council should be open to receiving groups such as OSCAR in calling for explanatory briefing on decisions made or major issues of concern. In a number of cases this already occurs and OSCAR acknowledges such.

iii) With reference to organisational culture, RTI can become a bureaucratic process in its own right. There is a stage before an RTI is even contemplated and that is ensuring openness and transparency is being displayed by decision makers. And they in turn are being held accountable by reference to agreed KPIs and commitment to undertaking future environmental scanning/surveying by council of its clients etc.

iv) There needs to be a culture of open discussion and disclosure that actually minimises RTIs in the future. Trust, respect and mutual understanding could be some core values set in a new strategy moving forward.

### **Appendix 1 –Recommendation 1 (GWI) Information Classification and Management Review – Future State Report**

Recommendation	Description	Why it is important
<p>Improve how Council communicates its processes and efforts to make Council meeting information available to the public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a page on Council’s website that is dedicated to outlining:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Council decision-making processes</li> <li>– Reasons for a Council meeting to be closed</li> <li>– The types of Council meeting information that will be considered confidential in accordance with Local Government Regulation 2012 (Qld)</li> <li>– Which information from Council meetings will be immediately available to the public</li> <li>– How and when Council meeting information will be</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves community perception of Council’s commitment to operate in a spirit of openness and accountability in alignment with the RTI Act.</li> <li>• Improves information findability on the Council website.</li> </ul>

	<p>available to the public if that information is classified as confidential under Local Government Regulation 2012 s 254J.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a register on Council’s website to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inform the community of information that has been classified as confidential, including the reason for the required confidentiality (aligned to s 254J of the Local Government Regulation 2012) and predicted review/release date.</li> <li>– Provide the community with links to Council meeting reports that are no longer classified as confidential.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop a communications plan to ensure the community is aware of how Council is ensuring transparency by improving publication of its practices around the management of confidential meeting information.</li> <li>• Reassess community perceptions (within 6 months after the implementation of changes to the website) by sending the same survey form “Information Classification and Management at Sunshine Council” to the same recipients to identify the impacts of the changes made.</li> </ul>	
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**6. Do you consent to you and/or your organisation being listed as a contributor to this project? \***

Yes

**7. Your name / your organisation's name**

Melva Hobson President OSCAR

Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents.

**8. Please include your email below if you'd like to be kept informed about how we are progressing with this project. We may survey you again in a few months to see if our actions are working.**

OSCAR Email: mail@OSCAR.org.au

Yours sincerely



Melva Hobson PSM  
President  
OSCAR  
(Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents)