

MEETING ATTENDANCE BY ELECTRONIC MEANS POLICY

1. Objective

To provide a framework for the conduct of electronic meetings of Council, its committees, forums and workshops. The Policy also provides clear guidance on Council's requirements for Members of Council and Committees attending meetings by electronic means, including defining:

- the requirements for requests for attendance at meetings by electronic means, and grounds for refusal;
- suitable locations for both open and confidential meetings; and
- suitable equipment.

This Policy aims to ensure consistency, clarity and secure participation when Members attend meetings remotely, and to outline the circumstances in which attendance by electronic means may be approved.

2. Definitions

Council Forum means an informal briefing or workshop of Council Members organised by the Shire of Plantagenet.

Electronic Meeting means a Meeting convened entirely by electronic means under regulation 14D of the Regulations.

Meeting means an Ordinary Council Meeting, Special Council Meeting, or Committee Meeting, including the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee, and any other Committee established by the Council.

Member means a Member of the Council or Committee of the Council.

Policy means this Shire of Plantagenet Meeting Attendance by Electronic Means Policy.

Regulations means the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996.

3. Attendance at meetings by electronic means

- a) Requests by Members to attend a Meeting or Council Forum, must be made prior to the commencement of the Meeting or Council Forum. Where possible, the request should be made in writing at least one (1) week prior to the meeting to the CEO. The Chief Executive Officer will develop a form for such requests to be made.
- b) All urgent or late requests may still be considered, recognising that circumstances may arise at short notice.
- c) All requests to attend by electronic means are to be considered by the President. If the President refuses the request, the Member may elect to have the request considered by Council.
- d) A request must identify the location; confirm the Member will be in a private and quiet space; and that the equipment and network to be used comply with this policy. The request may be refused if this information is not provided.

- e) Requests must be refused if the Member's attendance by electronic means would result in the Member attending more than half of the meetings of Council or the Committee in the period of twelve (12) months from the day on which the Meeting requested to be attended by electronic means is proposed to be held.
- f) In accordance with regulation 14C of the Regulations, neither the President nor Council may refuse a request to attend a meeting by electronic means by either:
 - i) a Member who is a person with a disability as defined by section 3 of the Disability Services Act 1993; or
 - ii) by a Member who is unable, or considers it inappropriate, to be present in person at the Meeting in the circumstances of a public health emergency, state of emergency or natural disaster.
- g) A request to attend by electronic means must be refused if the Member is not in a suitable location as defined by this Policy.
- h) There is no limit on the number of Council Forums a Member may attend by electronic means.

4. Electronic Meetings

- a) When Council determines to convene any electronic meeting (including but not limited to a Meeting or Council Forum), Members may attend the meeting from a suitable location.
- b) Attendance by a Member at an Electronic Meeting is not counted towards the 50% cap in place on a Member's attendance by electronic means authorised under regulation 14C(b) of the Regulations.

5. Suitable Networks and Equipment

- a) Attendance at Meetings or Council Forums by electronic means must be via Shire approved device (e.g., laptop or tablet). This is to ensure the device complies with the Shire's security controls, including device hardening, patching, and antivirus requirements.
- b) Members are required to install and use a Shire approved and configured Multi Factor Authentication app.
- c) Members may participate in Meetings by telephone, where no alternative is available.
- d) It is the responsibility of Members to ensure their electronic device has sufficient battery power for the duration of the Meeting.
- e) The equipment must have the capability of allowing the Member to clearly hear the Meeting proceedings, and to be heard. Where the equipment is video camera enabled, the video should be switched on.
- f) Public wi-fi networks may be vulnerable to cybersecurity threats and must not be used. A private home or business internet connection, or hotspot from a trusted source is suitable.
- g) Members are responsible for maintaining the security of their devices. Members are required to connect their devices to the internet and ensure that all critical security patches and software updates are applied in a timely manner, including before meetings.

6. Suitable Location

- a) A Suitable Location for the purposes of this Policy is defined as being in Australia. Council may, in extenuating circumstances, approve participation from a country outside of Australia, subject to network security confirmation by relevant Shire Officers.
- b) Approval to participate from a country outside of Australia does not guarantee participation. Modern security systems can block international access from countries that are assessed in real-time as a high-risk threat, preventing meeting participation.
- c) The Member should participate in the meeting within a private and quiet space.
- d) For the purposes of a Confidential Session under 5.23(2) of the Local Government Act 1996 ("the Act"), a Member must ensure they cannot be observed or overheard by any other person. If this cannot be ensured, the Member must immediately seek the attention of the Presiding Member and advise they are leaving the meeting until they cannot be observed or overheard by any other person.

7. Conflicts of Interest

Where a Member attending a Meeting by electronic means has disclosed an interest under Part 5, Division 6 of the Act, and are to leave the proceedings of the Meeting during the consideration of the relevant item, the Member must leave the Meeting (for example by exiting the videoconference or terminating the telephone call) so they cannot see nor hear any of the proceedings. This must be confirmed with Shire Officers by the Presiding Member before the Meeting will proceed further. Shire Officers will contact the Member at the conclusion of the item and invite them to resume their participation in the Meeting.

The Minutes should record the time the Member left and re-joined the Meeting.

8. Loss of connectivity

In the event of a loss of connectivity with a Member attending a Meeting by electronic means, the times of the loss and resumption of connectivity is to be recorded in the Minutes.

9. Voting procedures

The Presiding Member at a Meeting with Members attending by electronic means, must call a roll of those Members to state whether they are 'for' or 'against' the motion under consideration.

Shire staff may assist in confirming votes for accuracy.

Document Control			
Owner	CEO	Division	Office of the CEO
Reviewer	Executive Manager Corporate and Community Services	Approval	Council
Document Compliance			
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> 		
Other			
Document Management			
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