Procedure for Policy Development

August 2011

This procedure will be reviewed biennially by: Governance

Next review date: August 2013

Policy Control Schedule

Document Title:	Procedure for developing and approving policy documents at Ashfield Council
Summary:	This policy paper outlines the procedure to be followed for the development and revision of policy documents at Ashfield Council.
Record Number:	2011
Date of Issue:	August 2011
Approval:	General Manager [ ] Council [ ]
Version Control:	Draft 1: 14 April 2011 Draft 2: 24 May 2011
Policy Location:	Governance Manager
Relevant References:	A simple Guide to Policy Development, Queensland Local Government Association.
Main Legislative or Regulatory References:	Local Government Act 1993
Applicable Delegation of Authority:	N/A
Related Ashfield Council Policy:	Delegations Register Evaluation and Periodic Review of Policy
Related Ashfield Council procedures (as applicable):	

Policy Background

Under the Local Government Act 1993, Chapter 3, Part 8, Councils have a range of functions in their charter including:

- to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively;
- to exercise community leadership
- to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and actively promotes the principles of multiculturalism
- to promote and to provide and plan for the needs of children
- to properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible, in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- to have regard to the long term and cumulative effects of its decisions
- to bear in mind that it is the custodian and trustee of public assets and to effectively plan for, account for and manage the assets for which it is responsible
- to engage in long-term strategic planning on behalf of the local community
- to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights
- to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government
- to keep the local community and the State government (and through it, the wider community) informed about its activities to ensure that, in the exercise of its regulatory functions, it acts consistently and without bias, particularly where an activity of the council is affected
- to be a responsible employer.

In order to give effect to these functions, a range of policies and procedural directives are required to ensure uniformity in approach, understanding, and administration. This approach also underpins accountability and transparency.

Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a definition and framework for the development of policy documents and related procedures for Ashfield Council.

The Policy Development Framework Policy is to apply to all Ashfield Council staff.

Policy Objectives

Ashfield Council's Mission is to service the people of Ashfield equitably, effectively and efficiently, to create a better environment and quality of life, as well as satisfy the expressed need of the community within the limits of the resources available.

The principles of this policy are therefore to provide a system to underpin accuracy of information, clarity in meaning and equity in purpose.

The objectives of this policy include:

- To ensure there is a uniform system for the development and approval of policy,
- To support quality information utilisation and dissemination,
- To underpin a system of consultation and inclusion for relevant stakeholders.

Access and Implementation

Section 3 refers to the steps required.

1.   Sources of Policy

Policy may come from a variety of sources –

- **Regulation Oversight Organisations**

Oversight bodies routinely request Councils to amend, review or develop a policy position or procedure on a range of matters. These organisations include the Division of Local Government (DLG) /NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, the NSW Ombudsman, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and similar entities.

- **Legislative Requirements**

There is a raft of State and Commonwealth legislation which require Councils to develop a policy position on issues across the spectrum of Local Government responsibilities. A significant amount of policy development is in response to regulatory requirements.

- **State and Commonwealth Government Responses**

Council may also wish to develop policies to respond to issues raised by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments.

- **Councillors**

Issues may be brought to the attention of Councillors by community members. A Councillor should direct these issues to the General Manager or raise them at appropriate workshops, Council or committee meetings.

- **Council staff**

Council planning days, strategic planning processes, Council reports and community events may highlight issues that could be subject to a policy position consideration. The corporate and management plans may also be the documents that lead into a requirement for policy or procedural development.

- **Community**

The General Manager and Council staff may receive written and verbal requests from the community which may require the application of policy.

2.   Types of Policy

(i)   Statutory

Statutory policies are those policies that are adopted by Council due to a legislative requirement. These policies influence the strategic direction of Council's business.

(ii)   Strategic

Strategic policies are those policies that are adopted by Council due to its' desire to influence the direction of an issue or assist in the delegated decision making for Council staff. Strategic policies should follow the jurisdiction provided to Council through its community strategic plan and management plan. These may include but are not exclusive of the cultural, arts, economic development policies of Council.

(iii)   Administrative

These policies or procedures are approved by the General Manager and outline the manner in which operational issues should or may occur. These policies should reflect the delegations approved for various levels of Council staff and influence the day-to-day operations of the Council.

3. How Council develops a policy position
There are several stages in the development of a policy and these are outlined below. In all respects each stage reflects a common sense approach and inclusive method -

(i)   Research and data/information gathering

- Research/development of a draft policy document will be based on a variety of possible sources such as regulatory requirements, a request from Council, an auditors report, a directive from the Division of Local Government and various other potential sources.
- The initial research phase is critical in: 1) establishing the principle sources of information and relevance; 2) ensuring all regulatory elements, as required, are included; 3) addressing the specific issue which is the subject of the policy.
- There are a number of methods to gather information including:
  - a literature review,
  - surveys: either statistical or non statistical/ formal or informal,
  - collection of qualitative or non qualitative information,
  - existing policy documents from other local government bodies,
  - best practice guidelines from Australian Standards.

(ii)   Structure of a policy document
Policy papers should include a set structure in the presentation of information and should be in a standardised format. This will include completion of: -
- Approval & Records Checklist (Appendix 1)
- Cover Sheet
- Policy Control page (Example is provided on this paper)
- Policy template document under the various headings (Appendix 2).
- Appendices (being copies of templates, checklists or proformas which are the subject of or referred to, in the policy document)
- The policy document should be marked "Draft' either through the use of a watermark and/or by insertion in the title page until the policy or procedure is formally adopted.

(iii)   Stakeholder Consultation
- The draft must be circulated for comment/consultation to interested parties and stakeholders (for example key operational staff, the Management Team, reference groups, other staff (as identified).
- This stage is essential to capture additional information/ knowledge and to ensure that any policy encompasses operational practice or is informed by any potential impact of change. It is also a key step to enable 'buy-in' from those who have most of the responsibility for implementation or are likely to be affected.
- The principle of 'no surprises' for stakeholders also underpins this stage.
- Community engagement may be necessary for some policies. The rule should be to engage early, engage often and structure appropriate engagement to the particular issue.

(iv)   Response and development
- Following discussion with stakeholders and interested parties, input is incorporated into the revised document then recirculated for agreement.
- It is essential that any revised draft document is recirculated for i) a quality check, ii) for any additional corrections or clarifications; (iii) readability and internal logic for users.
- Use of plain English is strongly recommended as the policy will be read by a diverse audience.

(v)   Approval

- The final draft version is provided to the executive management team, General Manager and depending on delegation may require approval by Council.
- It is important that the appropriate delegated authority level is confirmed prior to any promulgation and dissemination.
- The determination of the appropriate final approval level (General Manager, Council) will need to be confirmed on a case-by-case basis and will dependent on the subject of the policy.

(vi)   Promotion and Dissemination

- Upon approval of a policy paper/statement it is a critical step to ensure there is effective promulgation of a policy to staff and stakeholders.
- For effective dissemination, policy documentation should not only be available but promoted explicitly.
- Policy documents should be available on the intranet, Council website (internet), listed on a document register (in accordance with the provisions of the GIPA Act), the Council's policy register and be available in hard copy.

(vii) Public Exhibition of draft policy

- Some policies may be legislatively required to be placed on public exhibition or Council may determine to seek community input.
- Public exhibition is required for a minimum of 28 days and all efforts should be undertaken to ensure draft policy documents are advertised as broadly as possible.
- At the conclusion of the exhibition period, all submission and comments received are to be considered and a further report provided to Council encompassing the findings.
- It is at this final stage, that the document will be adopted as policy.

4.   Who can develop policies at Ashfield Council

Policies can be initiated by various staff and units in Ashfield Council. Examples are provided for reference in the table below. It is therefore essential that for uniformity, retention of standards and commonality of communication across the process that the procedures outlined are followed.

Unit	Examples of policies
General Manager	Council issues and adopted motions
Governance section	Conflict of interest, probity, communication with Councillors
Program Managers	Specific programs
Finance section	Accounting, financial, procurement
Human Resources	Work practices and industrial relations

Note: All draft policies should, as a matter of course, be submitted to the Governance Section prior to sign-off approvals.

5.   Review and Evaluation

This policy will be subject to biennial review and evaluation of effectiveness. Evaluation of a policy will include input from staff with responsibility for operational implementation.

May 2011

Appendix 1

Policy and Procedure Checklist

Appendix 2

Ashfield Council

[Insert title here]
[Insert date here]

This policy will be reviewed annually by:

Next review date:

Policy Control Schedule

Document Title:	
Summary:	
Record Number:	
Date of Issue:	
Approval:	
Version Control:	
Policy Location:	
Relevant References:	
Main Legislative or Regulatory References:	
Applicable Delegation of Authority:	
Related Ashfield Council Policy:	

Policy Background

This section should outline the background to the policy. For example, it is a legislative requirement? A Council directive ? An audit requirement or some other reason.? Is this a replacement for a previous policy?

Policy Purpose

In this section the author of the policy should outline the purpose of the policy as a clear short statement. For example 'The purpose of this policy is to advise staff of the Council's position on street performances".

Policy Objectives

This section should specifically state the objectives which the policy is seeking to achieve as an expansion of the policy purpose. In this respect short definitive statements are required such as (example only):
"To provide criteria for street performances
"To outline the procedures for obtaining a street performance permit"

Access and Implementation

Under this section heading, the availability of the policy to stakeholders should be stated (ie Councillors, Council staff, contractors, ratepayers etc) and the avenues for access (website, printed material, intranet etc). Public exhibition details should also be added if this avenue of communication is utilised.