

Freedom of Information Part II Information Statement

December 2014

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Introduction

Mount Alexander Shire Council publishes a wide variety of information both on line and in a range of print formats. Information and advice is also part of providing services face-to-face to customers.

This Part II Information Statement describes how Council is making information readily available to community members. Making information easily accessible reduces the need for members of the public to submit requests under the Freedom of Information Act 1982.

Council's web-site includes a wide range of information of interest to community members.

Please note this statement provides a summary of the types of documents held by Council and how to locate them. It does not represent an exhaustive list of the information that is publicly available. Community members wishing to access other information are encouraged to contact Council's Customer Service Centre to be referred to the most appropriate service unit. Statement 1: Organization and Functions

Council Structure

Mount Alexander Shire Council is the local government responsible for planning and delivery of a range of services to the townships of Castlemaine, Maldon, Baringhup, Muckleford, Newstead, Guildford, Fryerstown, Yapeen, Harcourt, Sutton Grange, Barfold, Redesdale, Metcalfe, Elphinstone, Taradale, Chewton, Campbells Creek and surrounds.

Functions of Council

The primary objective of Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions.

In seeking to achieve its primary objective, Council manages a broad range of functions, activities and services which facilitate the following objectives:

- promoting the social, economic and environmental viability and sustainability of the municipal district;
- ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively and services are provided in accordance with the Best Value Principles to best meet the needs of the local community;
- improving the overall quality of life of people in the local community;
- promoting appropriate business and employment opportunities;
- ensuring that services and facilities provided by the Council are accessible and equitable;
- ensuring the equitable imposition of rates and charges;
- ensuring transparency and accountability in Council decision making.

To achieve the above objectives Council provides the following services, either directly or under contract:

- aged and disability services
- animal management
- arts, recreation and cultural development
- building services
- community buildings
- community development
- emergency management
- environment and sustainability
- events support
- filming in the Shire
- environmental health
- heritage services
- library services
- local law enforcement
- maternal and child health services
- parks and leisure
- public conveniences
- planning and development services
- visitor information centres
- rates and property services
- recreation services and facilities
- road, bridge and footpath maintenance and works
- street lighting
- tourism promotion
- waste

Decision Making Powers

Local government is established under the Local Government Act 1989, along with various Regulations made under that Act.

In addition to the Local Government Act, Council exercises powers, duties and functions under a wide range of Acts. Some of the most frequently administered Acts, Regulations and laws are:

- Mount Alexander Shire Council Local Laws
- Building Regulations 2006
- Country Fire Authority Act 1958
- Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978
- Domestic Animals Act 1994
- Emergency Management Act 1986
- Environment Protection Act 1970
- Food Act 1984
- Heritage Act 1995
- Health Act 1958
- Impounding of Livestock Act 1994
- Planning And Environment Act 1987
- and associated regulations
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Records Management Act 1973
- Residential Tenancies (Caravan Parks And Movable Dwellings Registration And Standards) Regulations 2010
- Road Management Act 2004 and associated regulations
- Road Safety Act 1986
- Subdivision Act 1988

Community Engagement and Consultation

Council consults with the community on a wide range of issues. In many cases legislation sets standards and provides minimum requirements in regard to notifications and referrals. However Council recognises that its community is made up of varying

groups/stakeholders that have a wide range of views and different preferences for communication. Therefore several communication methods are normally used to maximise awareness and participation.

Community consultation is guided by Council's Community Engagement Framework available in the *Key Publications* section on Council's web-site. The Framework is based on a model developed by the IAP2, the Spectrum of Public Participation.

Council may use any of the following methods:

- Letters to directly affected households or groups
- Council Column - a weekly public notice in the local newspaper
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Shire News - a newsletter delivered every two months to households throughout the Shire
- Council's website
- Media releases, fact sheets and advertisements
- Dissemination of project bulletins, information flyers and brochures
- Participation in advisory committee or reference groups
- Roundtables with invited stakeholders
- Personal contact or face-to-face briefings/meetings
- Attendance at community meetings
- Feedback at Council offices
- Public exhibition of documents with submissions invited

Any member of the public may freely ask a question or make a statement about any issue at the commencement of every Ordinary Meeting of Council. Details of meeting dates, times and locations are available on Council's web-site under *Your Council*.

Libraries or Reading Rooms

Mount Alexander Shire Council is a member of the Goldfields Regional Library Corporation which operates the Castlemaine library in Mechanics Lane, Castlemaine. This library houses a public reading room with newsletters and magazines as well as access to the library collection. It provides internet access to the public which can be used to access Council's web-site.

Statement 2: Categories of Documents

The Mount Alexander Shire Council creates a large number of documents and records in the course of its work. There are four main types of files maintained by Council in its central filing system.

General Files

General files contain information of a subjective nature which is not related to a property file. The list of file titles is wide and varied and includes Contract Management files, Committee files, correspondence files, Leases and Agreements.

Client files

These files contain information related to the assessment and provision of services to clients of Council's home and community services. Client files are also kept for individual children receiving maternal and child health services.

Property Files

Property files contain information on the technical aspects of the property, including:

- Building
- Engineering
- Environmental Health
- Local Laws
- Planning
- Rates and Ownership

Personnel Files

These files contain information on individual employees, including personal CV's, conditions of employment, performance reviews, salaries etc. Much of this material is confidential and cannot be accessed without appropriate authority.

Other Documents

Other types of documents that Council maintains include:

- policy, procedures and guidelines
- briefings and reports, both internal and external
- applications for permits or services
- registers
- permits and licences
- meeting records
- financial records

Secondary storage and archived files

Secondary and archival records may be stored off-site, at commercial storage facilities, as well as at the Public Records Office Victoria or Places of Deposit i.e. historical societies. Archival records which have been transferred to the Public Records Office Victoria are deemed as 'permanent retention' records and have been transferred under '*PROS 09/05 Retention and Disposal Authority of Records of Local Government Function*' and PROS 07/01 Retention and Disposal Authority for Common Administrative Functions. These records can be accessed by Council staff with sufficient notice.

Council's primary, secondary and archival records are maintained in Council's document management system, TRIM.

Non (hard copy) file type records

Large quantities of information are also stored and accessed using non-file media such as in electronic databases, and audio-visual material including plans, drawings and maps.

Statement 3: FOI Arrangements

The Freedom of Information Act establishes a legally enforceable right for the community to access information from certain records held by Council.

Details of how to apply and how Freedom of Information requests are handled by Council is available on Council's web-site at *Your Council* → *Requesting Information From Council*

Statement 4: Publications

Information Available for Inspection

A range of public information that is available for public inspection is not included on this website. Much of this information is contained in large documents or registers, from which specific detail can be sourced.

The following documents are available for public inspection at the Council offices during normal office hours; however, for practical reasons, you may require a prior appointment.

- Current allowances fixed for the Mayor and Councillors under section 74 or 74A of the Act
- Details of senior officers' total salary packages for the current financial year and the previous year
- Details of overseas or interstate travel
- Names of Council officers who were required to submit a return of interest during the financial year and the dates the returns were submitted
- Names of Councillors who submitted returns of interest during the financial year and the dates the returns were submitted
- Agendas for and minutes of ordinary and special meetings held in the previous 12 months (except if closed to members of the public under section 89 of the Act)
- List of all special committees established by Council and the purpose for which each committee was established
- List of all special committees established by the Council which were abolished or ceased to function during the financial year
- Minutes of meetings of special committees established under section 86 of the Act and held in the previous 12 months (except if closed to members of the public under section 89 of the Act)
- The register of delegations kept under sections 87, 88 and 98 of the Act
- List of submissions received in accordance with section 223 of the Act during the previous 12 months
- Agreements to establish regional libraries under section 196 of the Act
- List of property, finance and operating leases involving land, buildings, plant, computer equipment or vehicles entered into by the Council
- The register of authorised officers appointed under section 224 of the Act
- List of donations and grants made by the Council during the financial year
- List of the names of the organisations of which the Council was a member during the financial year
- Contracts required to be listed valued at \$100,000 or more.

Applications to inspect the Register of Interests (primary returns or ordinary returns of a Councillor, member of a special committee or nominated officer) must be in writing to the Chief Executive Officer, on the nominated form available from Customer Services, and indicate the name of the person whose records they wish to inspect.

Statement 5: Rules, Policies and Procedures

In addition to documents made available for public inspection under Section 11 of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2004*, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* requires Council to make available certain documents for inspection and purchase. This statement applies to documents that are provided by Council for the use or guidance of Council or its officers in:

- making decisions/recommendations; and
- providing advice to persons outside Council with respect to rights, privileges, benefits, obligations, penalties.

This list is not an exhaustive list of documents used by Council or its officers; it is an example of the types of documents which are frequently referred to. Many of the documents are available directly for download through Council's website or by contacting the Council's Freedom of Information Officer.

Relevant policies adopted by Council are available on Council's web-site under *Your Council → Policies*. There are also a range of internal operational policies adopted by the Chief Executive Officer. These can be accessed by request to the Freedom of Information Officer.

Council has developed a broad range of strategies, plans and master plans to guide its decision making, planning and budgeting. These are available on Council's web-site at *Your Council → Key publications*. The current Council Plan, Annual Plan, Budget and Long Term Financial Plan can also be found here. Previous versions of these documents are available by contacting Council's Freedom of Information Officer.

Council Local Laws are key legislation administered and enforced by Council. These are available on the web-site at *Your Council → Council Services → Local Laws*.

Statement 6: Report Literature

Council publishes final reports of major projects on its web-site. Quarterly performance reports and financial reports are included in Council meeting agendas, usually as separate attachments. Minutes and agendas of Council meetings are available on Council's web-site. Minutes of meetings earlier than those on the web-site can be accessed by request to Council's Freedom of Information Officer.

If searching for a specific topic, more thorough results may be obtained by conducting a full search of Council's website or by contacting the Freedom of Information Officer directly.