



COUNCIL TO ADOPT RECOMMENDATIONS OF INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

An Independent Investigator's report on Dubbo Regional Council (DRC) and the way it handled former Code of Conduct complaints has made eight recommendations for Council to adopt, to address systemic issues regarding the management of Code of Conduct complaints. These issues, in the main, involve a failure to consistently apply the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*. While the report in its entirety is confidential, Council's CEO Murray Wood will now seek legal advice around releasing a summarised version of the report, to ensure community confidence in the process.

"I understand some members of the community will be frustrated that the findings of the Independent Investigator remain confidential; however, disclosing information from within the report is in itself against the recommendations of the investigator, and goes against the Code of Conduct and the Local Government Act. However, I am obliged to refer any findings of misconduct relating to former Councillors and former staff to the Office of Local Government and other relevant agencies for their

consideration. So the community can be assured any concerns raised will be addressed appropriately,” said DRC CEO Murray Wood.

Mr Wood says the Independent Investigator’s report identified there were some areas of improvement including the implementation of a checklist for the initial triage of Code of Conduct complaints, and ensuring that Code of Conduct complaints are dealt with only by authorised people.

“The terms of reference for the independent investigator allowed them to make recommendations about reforms to Council’s relevant procedures and policies, and also to determine whether Council had applied appropriate procedures and complied with legal regulatory obligations. This represents an opportunity to improve our policies and processes, to ensure our community and elected body can have confidence that Code of Conduct matters are dealt with effectively and efficiently,” said Mr Wood.

Other recommendations of the report suggest that Council ensure that Preliminary Assessments and investigations are not carried out by any person directly employed by Council, and that Council undertakes additional training of Council staff as to the handling of any Code of Conduct complaints, including recording, preliminary assessment, investigation and resolution stages.

“The report also found that Council needs to reinforce the obligation of Councillors and Council staff not to directly engage in interactions, or provide instruction or directions to staff relating to Council business. This will be incorporated into the induction processes for new Councillors following the election in December, and is addressed in the draft Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy,” said Mr Wood.

In addition to the Pinnacle Integrity report, and the draft Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy, a draft Councillor Requests Procedure was presented at Monday night's meeting. All of these documents have been prepared after the Minister for Local Government Shelley Hancock issued a Performance Improvement Order (PIO), which required DRC to undertake specific actions. "One of those actions was to establish a procedure and associated policy around staff-councillor interactions. The draft Councillor and Staff Interaction policy will be placed on public exhibition for no less than 28 days, inviting the public to make submissions. The Councillor Requests Procedure will not need to go on public exhibition, but it will be referred to the Office of Local Government, as required by the PIO," said Mr Wood.

Last Edited: 17 Jul 2023