

General Purposes Committee Meetings – An Explanation

1. Introduction

Residents and others are welcome to attend General Purposes Committee meetings. Seating is provided in the public gallery at the rear of the Council Chamber. Media representatives also attend and report on proceedings. When attending meetings, visitors are bound by the Rules of Procedure and are not permitted to participate or interrupt the meeting procedures.

2. Agenda and Minutes

Before each General Purposes Committee meeting an Agenda is prepared detailing the items that are to be presented to the General Purposes Committee meeting.

The Recommendations as set out in the Agenda are simply proposals to the General Purposes Committee for its consideration. The Committee may adopt these proposals, amend the proposals, determine a completely different course of action, or it may decline to pursue any course of action.

The decisions of the General Purposes Committee must be referred to a Council meeting for adoption. This is because the General Purposes Committee is an advisory Committee and cannot make decisions in its own right. The General Purposes Committee Agenda and the General Purposes Committee Minutes are linked by the common Item Numbers and Titles.

3. General Information about General Purposes Committee Meetings

The General Purposes Committee's main purpose is to consider presentations and submissions from groups or individuals. For an item to be listed on an agenda it must be referred by Council. One of the most important functions undertaken by the Mayor and Councillors is to attend and participate in the decision making process at Council meetings and meetings of Committees, such as the General Purposes Committee. Decisions made at a General Purposes Committee Meeting are submitted to Council so that direction and authority can be given on the ongoing operation of the Council in relation to General Purposes matters decided. The decisions give direction to the Chief Executive Officer and are implemented by staff employed by the City of Casey.

Council is a corporate body and as such it can only make decisions by resolution, i.e. a motion has to be put to a properly convened meeting and passed by the required majority of members. A Council can only make decisions and pass resolutions about matters falling within its jurisdiction, otherwise it will be deemed to be acting "ultra vires" – acting beyond its powers.

The Council is able to establish Advisory Committees, such as the General Purposes Committee. Decisions of all Advisory Committees are not binding on Council until Council adopts the Committee's minutes.

Formal meeting procedures are followed. All members present at the General Purposes Committee meeting must vote on every motion put to the meeting. The Chairperson has a casting vote if there is an equality of votes.

An Agenda, listing the issues and relevant reports for discussion at the meeting, is made available to the public in advance so that everyone has the opportunity to be aware of matters before Council. Copies are available through Council's website, by visiting the Council Offices or at the Customer Service Centres. Members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings. Meetings are only closed to the public when topics of a confidential nature are discussed, such as an individual's financial circumstances, a particular staff member, proposed developments or legal matters.

4. Behaviour Expected from the Public

As mentioned earlier, General Purposes Committee meetings are a formal meeting. This means that visitors are bound by the Rules of Procedure and are not permitted to participate or interrupt the meeting procedures.

Council's Meeting Procedures Local Law gives the Chairperson the power to order a person to leave the meeting room if the person interjects or attempts to disrupt the meeting.

A person asked to leave the Meeting by the Chairperson, and not doing so, is guilty of an offence.

5. Presentations to the General Purposes Committee

Presenters and submitters are generally allowed ten minutes for presentation. Questions may be addressed to the presenter and are at the discretion of the Chairperson.

6. The Business of the General Purposes Committee Meeting

All business to be dealt with is listed in the General Purposes Committee Agenda.

▶ Opening of the Meeting

The Chairperson will open the Meeting. The Meeting is recorded for the purpose of accuracy of the Minutes.

▶ Apologies

If any Councillor had advised that they are unable to be in attendance, then their absence will be dealt with at this stage.

▶ Declarations by Councillors

Councillors are required to declare any Conflicts of Interest, including direct and indirect conflicts of interest and personal interests in any items on the agenda. This is a requirement of the Local Government Act. It is usual for Councillors to declare their interest at this point of the Meeting and then immediately before consideration of the relevant item. A Councillor declaring a Conflict of Interest or a Personal interest must leave the Council Chamber before consideration of the matter and must remain outside the Council Chamber until after a vote has been taken on the item.

For a personal interest a Councillor must seek leave of Council to abstain (be absent) from consideration of the item. In the vote on this request the Councillor with the personal interest must leave the Council Chamber. If the request is granted then the Councillor will remain outside until after the item is concluded.

▶ Consideration of Officer's Reports

In this Section of the Agenda are all the reports prepared by Council Officers. There are generally between one and five reports dealing with various presentations and/or submissions.

7. Conduct of the Meeting

The presenter or submitter will generally speak before any motions or discussion by Councillors. Questions from Councillors to the presenter or submitter will follow and then a Councillor will move a motion.

There are a number of “Rules” used for running the Meeting. Generally they are contained within Council’s Meeting Procedures Local Law. Several of the important requirements of the Local Law are as follows:-

▶ **Motions**

All motions must be moved and seconded ie. 2 Councillors must indicate their support for a proposed motion before it is accepted for debate at the Meeting.

▶ **Discussion of Items**

If a Councillor indicates opposition, the item will be discussed or debated allowing each Councillor with the exception of the mover of a motion to only speak once. The mover is allowed to sum up at the end of debate and speak a second time. Councillors, however, may ask questions during debate on an issue and this is not counted as “speaking”.

▶ **Putting Motions to the Vote**

If no Councillor indicates opposition, the Chairperson must invite the mover to introduce the motion if he or she wishes. If the mover does not wish to speak the Chairperson must declare the motion carried without it being voted on. If the mover speaks and no other Councillor wishes to speak then the Chairperson must declare the motion carried without it being voted on.

Alternatively, after all Councillors who wish to speak have been given the opportunity the Chairperson will ask the mover of the motion to sum up, after which the motion is immediately put to a vote.

● **Requests for a Division**

Any Councillor may call for a ‘Division’ which is a formal method of recording which Councillors have voted ‘For’ and which Councillors have voted ‘Against’. In a division, a Councillor can change their vote from when the initial vote on an item was taken. The Chairperson will first call for all those in favour of the motion to stand in their places and their names will be read out by the Chairperson. The Chairperson will then ask for those against the motion to stand and their names will also be read out. The Chairperson will then declare the result.

▶ **Casting Vote**

If there is an equal number of Councillors voting For and Against on an issue, whether in a normal vote or in a Division, the Chairperson has a second vote, called a ‘Casting Vote’. A Casting Vote may only be used after the Chairperson’s deliberative vote is cast and the Chairperson should declare that he or she is exercising their Casting Vote. A Casting Vote is common to all organisations in the event that there is an equality of votes, otherwise some issues could not be resolved.

8. Conduct of the Meeting Cont.

▶ **Moving of Amendments**

With the exception of Councillors who have already spoken on an issue, including movers and seconders, an Amendment may be moved by a Councillor. An Amendment will also need a seconder and the purpose of an Amendment is to alter the motion currently being considered. If an Amendment is moved and seconded, debate will then continue on the Amendment until it is dealt with. If the Amendment has been carried, then it will form the “substantive motion” (replacing the original motion). If no other Amendments have been foreshadowed, then the substantive motion will be put for a vote to the Meeting.

If the Amendment is lost then debate will resume on the original motion. Further Amendments are also able to be moved and seconded, but they are not able to be substantially similar to an Amendment already dealt with.

▶ **Use of Titles at General Purposes Committee Meetings**

A General Purposes Committee Meeting is a formal Meeting and accordingly Councillors and Officers must refer to each other by their formal Titles.

▶ **Time Limits**

The time limit for the mover of a motion to speak is five minutes and the mover is also able to speak for two minutes in exercising their right of reply. All other Councillors speaking during a Meeting are only able to speak for up to three minutes, although any Councillor may seek an extension of time.