

Fourth and final Candidates Information Session 16 July 2024

Questions received from attendees.

	Question	Response
1.	<p>What are a Councillor's Personal Liability for decisions on all aspects of Council decisions, particularly financial issues?</p> <p>As a Company Director I am very aware of these responsibilities and what can be covered by Director Indemnity Insurance, but am unclear about Councillor's responsibilities.</p>	<p>Council is a member of Statewide Mutual, a discretionary mutual scheme for local government.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1993 also provides councillors with a level of protection from civil liability action for undertaking council-related and council-endorsed activities. Protection from civil liability is only provided where a councillor's actions are undertaken in good faith and for purposes related to council activities.</p> <p>In the event that a councillor does not understand an issue, it is the obligation of that councillor to seek and be guided by their own legal advice.</p> <p>Generally speaking, councillors at meetings of council (or council committees) are protected from defamation by the defence of 'qualified privilege', but only to enable them to speak freely and publicly in undertaking their duties in council meetings. Any comment or statement a councillor makes at a council meeting must be relevant to the council business, made in good faith and without malice.</p> <p>The above is from the 2021 Office of Local Government Councillor Handbook.</p>
2.	<p>How does the council manage conflicts of interest among councillors, and what guidelines are in place to ensure ethical conduct?</p>	<p>Councillors must become fully aware of the detailed requirements regarding disclosure of interests under the Code of Conduct. Comprehensive training will be provided on this.</p> <p>It is up to the Councillor to manage their own conflicts and disclose them as per the legislation, regulations and Council's Code of Conduct.</p>
3.	<p>As Councillors, how can we ensure the highest standards of probity to ensure no corruption without personal reprisal?</p>	
4.	<p>What qualifications are required to be a Councillor?</p>	<p>There are no special qualifications to become a councillor other than a desire to serve your community. If you are eligible to vote at an election for your council, you can also stand as a candidate for election to the council.</p>

		<p>You must be eligible to vote within the local government area. However, you don't have to live in the specific ward you are running in.</p> <p>This information and more can be found in the OLG candidate guide.</p>
5.	Who decides who can become a Councillor?	At local government elections voters in each local government area elect councillors to their local council.
6.	What commitment (hours per week) is required of a Councillor, and can some of the work be done from home?	There will be at least one night per week that Councillors will need to attend Council meetings or briefings (the current schedule is Tuesday nights).
7.	What is an average time commitment required for Councillors and Mayor/Deputy Mayor?	<p>Councillors will need to attend all induction and professional development training, which will occur, for the most part, outside standard work hours.</p> <p>Councillors will also need to schedule ample time to read meeting business papers (Council meeting agendas and reports), which can be lengthy. For reference, current Council meeting business papers can be accessed via Council's website. A standard week could require 5- 15 hours of work from a Councillor, depending on the matters at hand and their personal working style.</p>
8.	What paperwork or information do you need before applying or when you apply is needed eg. 3 forms of ID? Working with Children Check? Latest Police Check? Show you are on the Electoral roll etc?	We suggest that you contact the NSW Electoral Commission for questions relating to your nomination and campaign.
9.	What is the best strategy to ensure best chances of election?	
10.	Do we need to have an agenda to get picked as a Councillor?	
11.	Are Councillors that were on the previously dismissed Council and responsible for creating a debt of approximately \$560M due to deplorable management & oversight able to be candidates for the upcoming election. If so, why?	<p>As a result of the public inquiry, no former councillor was barred from office and therefore, as long as they meet the criteria to be a candidate, they can run.</p> <p>It will be up to the community to decide if they want to vote them in.</p>

12.	Can you provide examples of council or meeting schedules from other councils and explain the purpose of each type of meeting?	<p>In basic terms, councillors will be expected to attend Ordinary Council Meetings (11 per year) and any Extraordinary Council Meetings (usually one or two), as well as briefing sessions (approx. 12 per year).</p> <p>In addition, there may be Committees/Advisory Groups/working groups that Councillors can elect to be a part of. These are determined by the Councillors within the first three months of their terms.</p> <p>Please see the Central Coast Council Committee page for more information.</p> <p>There will also be budget/annual plan meetings and other meetings to do with strategies/plans that will be scheduled as required throughout the year.</p>
13.	How are decisions made within the council, and what processes ensure transparency and community involvement?	<p>Council decisions are made at public meetings of which members of the public can attend and request to speak on an item.</p> <p>The specific format of the meeting is detailed in the Code of Meeting Practice</p> <p>Other forms of community involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Committees – some community members may be members • Public consultation on major plans, strategies and other projects • Popup stalls at events • Telephone surveys • Online surveys • Forums/workshops.
14.	What strategies does the council use to engage with the community and gather input on key issues?	<p>Council has a detailed Community Engagement and Participation Plan, as well as an Engagement Schedule for the year.</p>
15.	What kind of training and support is provided to new councillors to help them understand their roles and responsibilities?	<p>Council has a Councillor induction and training policy, which is publicly available on our website.</p> <p>Councillors will be provided with a comprehensive induction program which includes financial management specific to local government.</p>
16.	How does the Council collaborate with other councils and government bodies to address regional issues?	<p>Council meets with key stakeholders such as Ministers, MPs and the office of the Local Government NSW, liaises with State and Federal Government agencies, networks and forums.</p> <p>Councillors also attend the annual National General Assembly and Local Government Conference.</p>
17.	What are the specific roles and responsibilities of a councillor, and	<p>Under the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>, each councillor has a responsibility to:</p>

	<p>how do they interact with council staff and the community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be an active and contributing member of the governing body • make considered and well informed decisions • participate in developing council’s integrated planning and reporting framework • represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community • facilitate communication between the local community and the governing body • uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the governing body • make all reasonable efforts to acquire and maintain the skills necessary to perform the role of a councillor. <p>Councillors are both individually and collectively accountable to the local community for the performance of the council. Additional information can be found in the Office of Local Government candidate guide.</p>
18.	<p>How is the council’s budget allocated, and what funding is available for community projects and initiatives?</p>	<p>Money is allocated to projects according to the annual budget, Delivery Program and Operational Plan which are reviewed and adopted by the elected Council. Therefore, allocation of resources is a Councillor responsibility.</p> <p>Council funds its projects through various revenue sources, including general rates income, annual charges, income raised through fees and charges, grants provided by other levels of government, income received through Developer Contributions and other sources of income. Council’s main income source, general rates, is limited by the annual rate peg increase determined by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.</p>
19.	<p>What are some of the key challenges currently facing the Central Coast Council, and how are they being addressed?</p>	<p>There are a number of challenges to a large and complex local government like Central Coast Council.</p> <p>Amongst these challenges are:</p> <p>Council, like many other councils in NSW, faces the challenge to be able to afford maintaining and renewing its existing assets, and keeping up with growth in its asset base, whilst having its growth in annual rates income limited by the rate peg approved by the Independent and Regulatory Tribunal.</p> <p>Council faces increasing costs and higher standards to be met for assets such as roads, drainage, community buildings. In addition, new assets are being created placing additional pressure on the already limited funds available. At the same</p>

		<p>time Council is subject to costs imposed by other levels of government.</p> <p>Council needs to continually review its financial position to ensure it can continue to support the required service levels and meet the community's expectations, over the long term.</p> <p>Council monitors its financial sustainability through its annual update of its Long-Term Financial Plan, supported by the Financial Sustainability Strategy adopted in November 2023.</p> <p>The impact of climate change on our very sensitive environment and public and private assets. Over the last decade we have seen extreme weather events occur more frequently. Leading to bushfire, flood and coastal erosion. Our historical settlement pattern has led to Council assets such as roads and buildings being under threat from time to time as well as private housing impacted more regularly. Council needs to consider its infrastructure renewal very carefully to be resilient, as well as encouraging individuals to be careful about protecting their property. Council also has to consider the potential impact of natural hazards on future development through the strategic planning and development assessment process.</p> <p>We need to keep a focus on the infrastructure backlog and efficient service delivery. One of the key initiatives undertaken by Council to address this has been developing the 10 years of pipeline projects that links to strategic plans and Asset management plans. This also assists a phased and well planned project delivery timeframe that is supported by appropriate funding, approvals / design, enabling works and good communication during the delivery component.</p> <p>Council has the largest local government run water and sewer business in the state. It is also the only one regulated by IPART – who treat it in the same manner as corporations like Sydney Water and Hunter Water. However, Council's regulatory and accounting framework differs from this. An IPART determination in 2019 led to an over 20% decrease in water and sewer charges per year across the next three years. This was a major contributor to Council's financial crisis which peaked in 2020.</p> <p>The regulatory and governance framework for the business needed to be clarified to allow a focus on delivering the best service at the lowest cost. We have worked with the NSW Government and the Opposition and legislative changes will</p>
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		<p>address some of these issues. The changes mean that Council's water and sewer business will now be operated as a Utility under the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> and will no longer be subject to the Water Management Act., removing the dual legislative framework that Council had been subject to. Council will now also be permitted to combine the cash held for water and sewer into a single fund, thereby increasing flexibility in managing this cash in line with priorities.</p> <p>Given the events of 2020 and some of the drastic actions that had to be taken to correct this, re-earning the trust of the community is an important task. It cannot be understated the importance of the role of an effective elected Council will have in this. By their very nature they will be able to better argue and communicate the reasons behind decisions. Most Council decision are unanimous, but there will always be contentious ones. The elected Council making those decisions after debate in a public setting can assist in creating better community understanding of the situation and finalising the matter.</p> <p>It will be important to remember that what might seem as an 'obvious' solution to an issue, may not necessarily be the appropriate solution. This is because there are often underlying complex technical, legal, economic or scientific constraints which are not always easily communicated to the broader public. The incoming Council will have a critical task in showing leadership to help inform the community about these complex matters, and the technical information that may otherwise get lost, in order to help communicate the reasoning behind our decisions to the community.</p>
20.	What is your commitment to young people in the Community?	<p>Council's Central Coast Youth Strategy is our strategic direction for the delivery of contemporary youth services, programs, activities, and events that meet the needs of a diverse population. It's a plan for Council to work alongside the local youth sector, schools, young people and the community to make the Central Coast an even better place. Key themes identified through engagement with our young people include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy and Healthy, • Including Us, Feeling Safe, • Somewhere to Live, • Living Green and Skilled and Ready. <p>Each theme has goals with deliverable actions to meet the needs of our community's young people as identified through the engagement process. Through the delivery of these actions, Council demonstrates its commitment to young people in the community.</p> <p>Current actions being delivered, but not limited to, include:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovered Competition, • Battle of the Bands, and other events • Youth For Youth (Y4Y) Action Team Leadership Program, • Central Coast Skatepark Series, <p>along with various partnership programs and term programs all aimed at skill development and service provider awareness.</p>
21.	It was a request/recommendation that previous Councillors were not allowed to nominate. Question: can it be a requirement that they clearly state that they have been Councillors in the past?	Previous Councillors are entitled to run. There is no requirement for them to state that they have been Councillors in the past.
22.	After the elections and a new Mayor is elected will the administrator have some hand over sessions with the elected Mayor?	No. The Administrator's appointment officially concludes upon the declaration of the poll by the NSW Electoral Commission. This means, when the results of the 14 September 2024 election are finalised (which the NSW Electoral Commission have indicated can take up to three weeks post close of voting). However Council has prepared a thorough induction program to assist incoming councillors .
23.	What are your strategies to engage and retain community sector practitioners? E.g., professional development, mental well-being etc..	<p>Council provides a range of services and support to engage and retain staff at Council including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible Work Arrangements, • Employee assistance programs, • Fitness passport, • health and wellbeing leave and support, • Access to health screening such as skin cancer screening and flu vaccinations.
24.	How will Councillors be able to advocate for and reflect community enquiries and concerns?	<p>Councillors are encouraged to talk to the community about matters that are relevant to Council. Whilst consultation results will be provided to Councillors, it is important for Councillors to talk directly to the community to gauge their opinions.</p> <p>When it comes to personal, operational matters and complaints, Councillors will be encouraged to provide contact details for constituents to contact Council directly to report these matters.</p>
25.	How much is the total debt of Council (and please do not refer to Council Financial documents) and how does Council propose to pay this off?	<p>As at 30 June 2024, Council had just under \$192M in borrowings, with \$20M of this amount being a current liability.</p> <p>Council has been focusing on repaying debt taken out in 2020 as emergency funding during a period of serious financial challenges. Two emergency loans were taken out at the time. A \$100 million loan, which has been fully repaid in December</p>
26.	What is the current debt or financial position?	

		<p>2023, and a \$50 million loan that Council is aiming to fully repay by November 2025.</p> <p>The repayment of all loans and associated interest is included in Council's Long-Term Financial Plan, and in the annual budget.</p>
27.	Could you please explain why we need a referendum to decrease the number of Councillors?	<p>The constitutional referendum provides an opportunity for Central Coast voters to have their say. The results of the referendum will be binding, meaning that whatever the majority of voters determine will be enacted by the Council, and it cannot be revoked without another referendum.</p> <p>Information about the referendum can be found on Council's website, including detailed information about the 'yes' and 'no' cases, to allow community members to make an informed decision.</p>
28.	Can the new Council revoke the referendum result or put a new referendum to the community?	
29.	What is Council doing to truthfully and transparently to inform the community of the pros and cons of decreasing the wards to three wards.	
30.	If there are 9 Councillors only, for a population around 400,000, will they be full time Councillors?	
31.	Rik Hart has previously said that the next Council can reverse the referendum decision. How would that be done?	
32.	What about community representation if there is a reduction in Councillors – isn't it an insult to Local Government democracy?	
33.	Having fewer people on Council, has meant that one person – the Administrator, has impacted the protection of previously protected lands, and sold off our amenity, why is fewer Councillors better?	
34.	Was any thought given to no wards, an undivided Local Government area with 9 Councillors as the referendum question?	Yes, there was. However, 3 options were put to the community in a targeted consultation, and the preference was the referendum question that we currently have.
35.	How do the individual Councillors engage with the CEO?	Councillors can submit a Councillor Request, they can call him, email him or arrange a meeting. It should be noted that a

		Council Resolution is the only mechanism to direct the CEO to undertake a particular action.
36.	How do Councillors get information on the financial performance of the Council. If they see issue what can individual Councillors do to stop things going south.	Councillors are expected to attend all briefings and ask questions about financial matters. To stay abreast of Council's finances, Councillors are expected to read Council's monthly finance reports (which are presented at Council meetings), consider quarterly budget reviews, and adopt the annual budget. Councillors are able to request further information from Council including on financial matters through the Councillor Request Portal and in line with the relevant policies.
37.	Do the Councillors get a monthly update on the progress of debt payments?	
38.	What is the timeline after the election?	There will be several full day (weekend) and evening training sessions commencing immediately after polls are declared. The NSW Electoral Commission have indicated that it is unlikely that the polls would be declared before the 3 rd of October. The first Council meeting must be held within 2 weeks of the polls being declared.
39.	When will elected Councillors take on their role after the election?	
40.	Is there resources made available for neurodivergent members of our community? Councillor handbook and ECT	Yes, we have the capability to work with Neuro divergent Councillors. We have undertaken training for staff and supervisors on Embracing and Managing neurodiversity in the workplace to create an environment that is inclusive and supportive of neurodivergent conditions. If any of our Councillors disclose to us that they are neurodivergent, we would work with them and the appropriate staff to consider any reasonable adjustments or support they may require.
41.	What resources can a Councillor seek to complete their duties and to act in the best interest of their community? excluding the remuneration.	For information on what Councillors will be provided, please consult the Councillor Expenses and Facilities Policy . Councillors will be informed of their entitlements under this policy when they commence.
42.	Is quid quo pro Councillor to Councillor deal making a slippery slope? Is a reasonable compromise more effective in the long run?	Councillors need to work together. Without teamwork and cohesion between the Councillors the community objectives will not be achieved. Council resolutions need a majority vote. An individual Councillor will not be able to achieve their objectives without a resolution of the Council.
43.	In 2009 the NSW Local Government Act was amended to 'transform' planning to cover Social, Economic, Environment, Governance. This is at the core of	The CEO's presentation at this event commenced with the community strategic plan as a key task of Council which looks across all those issues. It also discussed the demographics of the community and a range of the characteristics of the community that Council should be aware in developing a policy.

	Council's purpose, why no mention of it?	<p>A video was played that outlines a number of key pieces of data about our community make up.</p> <p>It also identified the geographical areas where the Australian Bureau of Statistics have recorded the three areas with highest disadvantage and areas with the least disadvantage across the Central Coast Council area.</p> <p>There have been a number of presentations at this and earlier candidate sessions that mentioned governance. This presentation was to discuss more of the operations of the Council and some of the key tasks that incoming Council may need to perform.</p>
44.	The word "organisation" has been used many times but where does "community" come into the equation?	The presentation was made by the CEO whose principal role is to lead the staff organisation in implementing the programs and policies specified by the Council. There was a specific slide on community engagement, a video of the Coast Community's demographics and a specific discussion about the value of education and improving social outcomes.
45.	David, you mentioned back when you first started it would take a few years for the public to trust the Council. Are we still on track and when will we get there?	Trust takes years to earn and can be lost very quickly. So, it will take a number of years of keeping commitments to re-earn the trust that was lost. That being said, the successful return of an elected council and particularly an effective Mayor can provide this with a boost.
46.	<p>Do you see a model where Councillors can talk directly to staff and better understand the challenges the operational staff undergo?</p> <p>The current separation does not work well.</p>	<p>The model that we currently work under is in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>, and all Councils in NSW work under this Act.</p> <p>As with any legislation changes or amendments applicable to Council, if the Act was amended to change this model, Council will take the appropriate steps to ensure it complies with any new requirements.</p>
47.	Does Council have a mature ongoing internal audit function, broader than for financial audit? How does that function?	<p>The Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) has an important role in the governance framework of Council and is a requirement under section 428A of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>.</p> <p>For more information on ARIC, visit the Committee's webpage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
48.	Where did they get all those statistic numbers from with regards to if Central Coast had 100 population? I believe some of those numbers are unrealistic.	Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2021 . All indicators are exclusive of "not stated" and "not applicable" resources.

49.	Is there a lingering cultural divide across Council operations from the days of Gosford Council vs Wyong? How is that managed?	The organisation is well integrated now. Council has worked hard to implement a 'one-way' approach in all areas of its operations over the last 4 years.
50.	I really value the vision David Farmer shared tonight. I'd like the community to hear more from him. Can Councillors entrust David to speak more on the vision he shared?	Generally, the Mayor is the public spokesperson for Council. The CEO is the conduit between the Council administration and the elected body. He will be leading the induction training for the new Councillors, to provide this information and more to set the new Councillors up for success in their new role performing their civic duties.
51.	What training and education of Councillors will you be pursuing in the early period of the new Council.	<p>Council has developed an induction and ongoing professional development program for the Mayor and Councillors to ensure they can fulfil their statutory roles and responsibilities. As part of this program, the Mayor and each Councillor will have a professional development plan that identifies specific gaps in their capabilities (i.e. their knowledge, skills and attributes) and identify professional development activities to build these capabilities.</p> <p>Councillors will also be provided with a comprehensive Induction Training Program. Once this is complete, a capability assessment and professional development plan will be developed for each Councillor.</p> <p>Refer to Councillor Induction and Professional Development Policy.</p>
52.	How many, if any, Advisory Committees of Council are in place? How is the need for one determined and how are they established and maintained? How are they managed?	<p>This last term of Council (including Administration) had 8 Advisory Committees under s.355 of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>. Reconvening of any or all of these committees will be done by resolution of the Councillors. Reconvening of the existing committees essentially treats the committee as new, and their delegated functions and members must be adopted by Council. Expressions of Interest for any committees established by Council will be published and applicants may apply to be on the committee.</p> <p>Committees are formed and governed under s.355 of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>. In addition, each committee will have a Terms of Reference, , that details the purpose of the committee, rights, responsibilities, obligations and relevant guidelines and policies for the management of a committee.</p> <p>Section 355 Committees are required to be representative of the local community or interest groups of the facility or function, which the Committee manages. Whilst no particular qualifications are necessary, a positive commitment to the</p>

		activities of the committee and a willingness to be actively involved in committee issues is essential, as is basic knowledge of meeting procedures and Council's Code of Conduct .
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All questions that were submitted for this event relating to Councillors and the election have been responded to above. All general enquiries can be submitted via our [online Customer Service system](#).

Further questions for the Office of Local Government can be sent to: olg@olg.nsw.gov.au