# Mock Council Meeting Information Paper

An effective way to introduce students to the role and function of Local Government and the Chamber environment is to conduct a mock Council meeting.

## Preparation for the Mock Council Meeting

Classes who have prepared for the mock Council Meeting generally perform well, are confident, relaxed and able to learn from and enjoy the meeting experience. On the other hand the experience can be confusing, difficult and uncomfortable for students who have come to the mock Council meeting unprepared.

Preparing for the meeting does not need to take a lot of time and effort and can actually add to the whole experience of the program. Below is a checklist to help you prepare.

* Elect one Mayor and six Councillors. Hold classroom elections, selecting volunteers for the role or use another method to choose your "Elected Members". The chosen students should want one of these roles and should be relatively confident in speaking out and articulating their ideas.
* Develop two proposals to be put to the "Council" and discussed. Proposals should be in the form of a specific request to Council for a particular action and be comprehensive enough to fill 15 minutes of debate. If a proposal has not been thought through it is extremely difficult to discuss and the meeting loses momentum. A list of suggested topics are listed below.
* Use Props. Some students might present written or illustrated proposals (for example, a theme park) to support their issue. Others may build models or provided samples. Props and cues such as these have worked very well and assisted the students involved. They also add colour and atmosphere to the experience.
* Think about the topic. The local Messenger, Advertiser, Council Reports, Student Workbook and students imaginations can all be used to arrive at the proposal for discussion. Allow students themselves to select topics and develop proposals to be discussed.
* Encourage Participation. Students who are not playing a role of either Mayor or Councillor play the role of the community. Encourage these "residents" to take on and dress up as a particular character. Having characters of various ages, backgrounds, personalities etc. adds to the fun, atmosphere and real life feel of the meeting. It also encourages everyone to be actively involved in the meeting. Students may also choose to play the part of Council employees (such as engineer or dog catcher) or other government official (environment or police official).

Meetings must be conducted in an orderly manner and be open so that the public can attend, in most cases. The meeting procedures ensure that all Council Members have the same opportunity to participate in the debate and have their views heard.

The Local Government Act has specific requirements about how meetings must be conducted and there is a set of regulations, which must be followed. Councils must produce a code of practice and review this code within the first year of every new Council. The Act allows some flexibility so the procedures listed below may not be exactly the same for all Councils.

1. The Mayor or Chairperson of the Council Presides over the meeting (if the Mayor or Chairperson is not present a "deputy" can take on this role. If there is no Deputy Mayor or Deputy Chairperson, the Council can choose one Council member to run the meeting.
2. A meeting can not be held unless there is a "quorum" - this means that there must be at least ? the number of members + 1 more (ie if there are 10 Councillors then you need 6 to make the quorum.)
3. An agenda is prepared and sent to all Council Members 3 days before each meeting. The agenda describes the items that will be discussed at the meeting.
4. When an issue is ready to be discussed the Mayor will read out the agenda item and ask someone to "move the motion". Another Council Member must also "Second the motion" This process means that the matter is then open for discussion by all Council Members. If no one moves and/or seconds the motion, the motion is 'lost' and the presiding member will move to the next item of business on the agenda.
5. Once a Motion has been moved and seconded, the Council Member (who moved or seconded it) can "talk to the motion" - this means they can discuss what the motion means and any issues around the topic (they cannot be interrupted during this limited time).
6. Other Council Members then have an opportunity to ask questions, or to speak to the motion and portray their views on the matter. They can support the motion, speak against the motion, or suggest alternative views or actions.
7. The Mayor will then call for a vote and every Member must either vote in favour or against the motion.
8. A motion is passed when the majority of those present, vote in favour of the motion.
9. Once a motion is moved and seconded, a Council Member can move a motion which in effect can change the original motion. This is called an Amendment, and is governed by a process of its own.
10. The Mayor does not have a vote in normal motions. They can only vote if the vote is tied and therefore gets the deciding (casting) vote.

## Exceptions

1. If a Council has a Chairperson instead of a Mayor then the Chairperson can vote on normal business, but if a vote is tied the Chairperson does not get a deciding (casting) vote.
2. If someone on the Council has a conflict of interest on a motion then they must leave the chamber for the discussion and vote (for example Councils can vote to include a nominee on another Committee - if one of the nominees is a Council Member they must not be present to see how the vote works out).
3. Council Members indicate to the Mayor/Chairperson that they would like to speak on a motion. The Mayor/Chairperson will invite them to speak, and control who speaks next.

Council Staff may be asked a question on any matter by a Council member. This question is directed to the staff member, through the Mayor/Chairperson. The Mayor/Chairperson then decides if the staff member can answer the question or provide any other information that is relevant to the discussion.

A new Council will set the time and place of meetings of the Council. Meetings must be publicly advertised. This is done by putting a notice of the meeting and a copy of the agenda in the main Council office.

Residents can ask to be heard at a meeting but must request to do so in writing before the meeting. Some Councils have special times either at the beginning or end of the meeting where members of the public can ask questions. The Code of Practice of each Council sets out the process for this to happen.

Minutes of the meeting must be kept. These must be sent out to the Council Members within 5 days following the meeting. The Council agenda contains matters that are of interest to the public.

However sometimes a Council must consider a matter that is of a sensitive nature and it may not be in the 'public interest' for this matter to be discussed in public. The Local Government Act lists a number of matters that Council is able to discuss 'inconfidence' and in these circumstances, a Council may exclude the public from that part of the meeting where the item is considered.

## Step 1: Introducing the Players

Introducing the Council Chamber:

* The Council Chamber is used for Council meetings.
* The Mayor sits at the head of the Chamber along with the Chief Executive Officer.
* Some senior staff attend the meeting to ensure any questions raised by the elected members can be answered. They also present reports and provide advice.

Mayor's Role:

* The Council's first citizen
* Elected by all voters
* Takes control of Council meetings
* Has the casting vote

Chairperson's Role:

* The Council's first citizen
* Elected by other Councillors
* Takes control of Council meetings
* Votes on normal business and does not have the casting vote

*(DELETE either Mayor of Chairperson depending on the structure your Council adopts)*

Chief Executive Officer:

* Is in charge of Council operations.
* Implements Council's policies and acts on decisions
* Oversees the provision of roads, footpaths, street cleaning and lighting, rubbish collection, health and building control.

Councillors or Elected Members

* Represent the people in their Ward
* Elected by voters within their wards
* Services are voluntary
* Explain the ward structure in your Council area

Council Meetings

* Held every month
* Elected members are required to attend
* Council meetings are where issues are discussed and decisions made

The Public Gallery

* The gallery is where members of the general public and other guests sit.
* Members of the public are not permitted to enter into the debate at meetings and must remain silent at all times. They can leave quietly at any stage of the meeting.

## Step 2: Script for Meeting

A student Mayor, Councillors and residents need to be selected. (see Preparation for Meeting)

* Authentic Mayoral robes, a gavel and other props should be used.
* A student Mayor, Councillors and residents need to be selected.
* At all times, the student who is the Mayor is addressed by Council staff members and members of the general public as 'Your Worship' - highlighting the importance of the position.

Entrance Procession

* Councillors and ratepayers to be in position.
* All are upstanding for the entrance of the Mayor.
* The Mayor indicates that they may be seated.
* Councillors to be reminded that they are no longer students but are adult Councillors who are representing the community and need to think on behalf of all residents not just what they personally think is a good idea.
* Those taking the part of ratepayers encouraged to become different members of the community.

During the meeting

* Mayor: I declare the meeting open. Does anyone have a topic they wish to discuss?
* Councillor: 'I would like to discuss an issue on behalf of ratepayers in my area. There is a concern about …..

The Mayor chairs the meeting and controls the discussion.

All discussion must go through the Mayor as the chair of the meeting.

The Mayor calls for order if necessary, using the gavel.

When the Mayor feels that there has been enough discussion he/she calls for a motion.

* Mayor: 'There has been enough discussion. I call for a motion.'
* A Councillor puts forward a motion by saying "I put forward a motion that we….."
* Councillor: 'I put forward a motion that we…..'
* The Mayor calls for a Seconder to the motion
* Mayor: 'Who is prepared to second the motion.'

Another Councillor seconds the motion

It is then put to the vote

* Mayor: 'All in favour of the motion raise your hand…Those against. The Motion is carried/lost. I declare the meeting closed.'

## Suggested Topics for Debate at the Mock Council Meeting

* A proposal from Council to provide a skate park in a local reserve. It might be near a retirement village or local businesses. This gives residents a chance to air their opinions/concerns re vandalism, crime etc.
* Cat control issues - such as Council to introduce registration of cats or limiting number of cats per household or night-time curfew on cats.
* Demolishing an historical home and surrounding trees and gardens to make way for three storey units.
* Any environmental issues - such as development at the beach, factory near a river etc.
* Dog issues: Dogs to be on leads at all times, Council reserve to be turned into Dog Park, One of Councils beaches to be a dog free zone.

*Content within this Information Paper courtesy of Sue Aplin, Charles Sturt Council.*