



Governance

Improving School Governance

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Education
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1.0 Introduction

Overview

School councils play a key role in Victorian government schools, and being a member of the school council is a rewarding and challenging experience. Acting as a team, council supports the principal to enhance the educational opportunities for students.

Good governance strengthens community confidence in the school council and helps to ensure the council's reputation is maintained and enhanced. Good governance enables the council to perform efficiently and effectively and to respond strategically to changing demands and educational challenges.

Good governance relies on the professional leadership of the principal, who is a council member and the council's executive officer, the school council president and the school council. The establishment and implementation of appropriate processes achieve a balance between formal meeting procedures and a friendly atmosphere of cooperation. Council members can strengthen their performance by developing the skills, knowledge and contributions through professional development.

Goal

This module provides participants with an understanding of:

- the framework within which school councils operate
- what school councils do
- school council operations
- important features of the school.

Overview continued

Although each councillor brings their own valuable life skills and knowledge to the role, councillors may need to develop skills and acquire knowledge in areas that may be unfamiliar to them. These might include developing an understanding of strategic planning, interpreting data or financial statements, working effectively as a council or understanding legislative and policy requirements.

This training module will help councillors understand their roles and responsibilities and develop the skills and knowledge to perform their governance tasks successfully.

In addition to this governance module, there are three other training modules to support councillors in the areas of strategic planning, finance and policy development and review.

A module for school council presidents is also available.

1.1

Legislative framework

Why is this topic important?

School councils operate within the Victorian government school system under a legislative framework.

The system has a strong history of establishing efficient and effective mechanisms that:

- meet the expectations of Victorians for well-governed schools
- reflect local and Department of Education and Training (the Department) values
- meet the needs of local communities served by particular schools.

On completing this unit, school councillors should:

- know the legal requirements which apply to school councils
- understand the framework under which they operate.



Legislation

All school councils in Victoria are established and operate under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act)*.

Each school council is established by an Order of the Minister for Education, which, together with the Act, specifies the council's membership, size and configuration; its objectives, powers, functions and accountabilities; and the role of its executive officer, who is the principal.

School councils are also regulated by the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (the Regulations) and school councillors are subject to the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities made under the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

It is important that school councillors understand the key features of the relevant legislation because it affects all aspects of their work: how they interact with the community, develop and consider options, make decisions and generally conduct themselves both during and outside of council meetings.

A well-informed and effective school council strengthens community confidence in the school and helps to protect and build the school's reputation.

The Act lists a school council's objectives as being:

- assisting in the efficient governance of the school
- ensuring that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interests of the students
- enhancing the educational opportunities of the students at the school
- ensuring the school and the council comply with any requirements of the Act, the Regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act.

School councils that oversee or operate an outside school hours care (OSHC) or kindergarten service also need to understand the different legislative framework that applies.

The National Quality Framework provides a national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of early childhood education and care services, which includes OSHC and kindergarten services. The National Quality Framework operates under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (the National Law) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (the National Regulations).

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority supports the implementation of the National Quality Framework and works with state and territory regulatory authorities to implement and administer this framework.

School councils hold a duty under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* to ensure that the school, as a workplace, is, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.

This means that the duty will extend to all matters over which school council has management and control. This includes matters such as engagement of goods and services, oversight of the management of contracts, and the maintenance of school buildings, grounds and facilities. The duty extends to all persons affected by the conduct of the school, including students, parents, visitors and contractors.

School council membership

Each school council's constituting Order makes provision for its structure and membership:

- **Parent members**

Parents of students at the school must comprise more than one third of the school council's total membership. 'Parent' includes a guardian or person responsible for the maintenance or with custody of a student of the school. Department of Education and Training (DET) employees (except for the principal, who is a member of the DET employee member category) are eligible for membership in this category as long as they have children attending the school and the Department employees do not work at the school of that school council.
- **DET employee members**

DET employee members must not be more than one third of the school council's total membership. The principal is automatically included in this membership category and has full voting rights. Other DET school staff (teaching and non-teaching) are elected to this category. To be eligible for election to this category, a person must be a member of the DET employee electorate of the school.
- **Community members**

At some schools the council's membership schedule may include this category. If a council has the option to include Community members, the council decides who to approach and co-opt into this position. Community members are co-opted by the school council to bring additional skills and perspectives to council decision making. Community members hold the same rights, responsibilities and terms of office as elected members. Parents are eligible to be co-opted to a Community member position but Department employees are not. Students may also be co-opted to a Community member position.
- **Student members**

Schools that provide secondary level education must have two student members on council unless an exemption has been granted. 'Student' describes a student who is enrolled at and attends the school and is in year 7 or above. To be eligible for election, a student must be a member of the student body of the school.

Code of conduct for school councillors

School councils in Victoria are public entities as defined by the *Public Administration Act 2004*. School councillors are directors of public entities and must abide by the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities (Code of Conduct) issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commission.

The Code of Conduct sets the standard of behaviour and requires councillors to:

- **act with honesty and integrity** – (be truthful, open and clear about their motives and declare any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest and duty)
- **act in good faith in the best interests of the school** – (work cooperatively with other councillors and the school community, be reasonable, and make all decisions with the best interests of students foremost in their minds)
- **act fairly and impartially** – (consider all relevant facts of an issue before making a decision, seek to have a balanced view, never give special treatment to a person or group and never act from self-interest)
- **use information appropriately** – (respect confidentiality and use information for the purpose for which it was made available)
- **use their position appropriately** – (not use their position as a councillor to gain an advantage)
- **act in a financially responsible manner** – (observe all the above principles when making financial decisions)
- **exercise due care, diligence and skill** – (accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school)
- **act consistently with legislative and policy requirements when making decisions**
- **notify the school council if they become a candidate for an election in any state, local or federal election** and not use the council's resources in connection with their candidature
- **demonstrate leadership and stewardship** – set a good example, encourage a culture of accountability, and child safety, manage risks effectively and responsibility to keep the school strong and sustainable.

Public Sector Values

School councillors must abide by and demonstrate the Victorian Public Sector Values set out in the Code of Conduct. These values are **Responsiveness, Integrity, Impartiality, Accountability, Respect, Leadership and Human Rights.**

The Values underpin the behaviours that the government and community expect of all directors of public entities, including school council members.

A failure to uphold the Values can result in reputation damage for the school council and Government, and can undermine confidence in democracy. Breaches of the Code of Conduct are taken very seriously.



Why do we need Values?

Values describe a commonly understood set of expected behaviours.

The Values set out the way that school councillors, as directors of public entities, should think and act. These behaviours increase trust and confidence in our work. The public expect employees and school council members to act in accordance with the Values. Doing so is central to building and sustaining trust in the important work we do.

Values-driven behaviour strengthens our capabilities and improves outcomes. When school council members act in accordance with the Code of Conduct and the Values, it strengthens the school's capacity to operate effectively and achieve its objectives.

The Values have been adopted by the Department as the DET Values and complement each school's values and teachers' professional standards, such as the Codes of Conduct and Ethics issued by the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

For all school staff and school council members, behaving with integrity and respect in everyday decisions and actions goes to the heart of the community's trust in our public education system.

Working together

School councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct and work together in the best interests of the school, including:

- assisting in the efficient governance of the school
- ensuring that the council's decisions affecting students are made having regard to the best interests of the students
- enhancing the educational opportunities of students
- ensuring the school council adheres to all legal and Department requirements.

The Managing School Council Conduct document provides information and advice on the Code of Conduct and managing conflict on council should it arise. In an environment where mutual trust and respect prevail, conflict can be a positive force. It can encourage people to find creative solutions, clarify an issue, increase the involvement of members, encourage growth, and strengthen relationships. However conflict can divert energy from the group, compromise morale and create disharmony.

The Managing School Council Conduct document is located on the Department's web page titled School Councils: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx>.

Confidentiality

School councillors bring diverse views to the council and work together to develop a shared vision for the improvement of student outcomes.

School council decisions can affect the school and its stakeholders, and they generally need to be clearly communicated to, and understood, by the community. Councillors must feel confident their deliberations and any differing views during council discussions are treated confidentially by other members.

School councillors must only use the information they gain in the course of their duties as a school councillor for its intended purpose of achieving school council functions. School councillors must not use information to obtain an advantage for themselves or another person or to cause detriment to the school council.



RESPONSIVENESS

We respond in a timely way with our best work



INTEGRITY

We are honest, ethical and transparent



IMPARTIALITY

We behave in the best interests of the public by making fair and objective decisions



ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others to account for the work that we do



RESPECT

We value others and accept their differences



LEADERSHIP

We are genuine, supportive and do the right thing



HUMAN RIGHTS

We uphold and respect the rights of others

Resources and links

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority and the National Quality Framework

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/>

Benefits, Gifts and Hospitality Policy

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/gifts.aspx>

Department of Education and Training Values

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/Public-Sector-Values.aspx>

Education and Training Reform Act 2006

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/legislation/Pages/act2006.aspx>

Ethical Decision Making

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/ethicaldecisionmaking.aspx>

Procurement Policy for Victorian Government Schools

[https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/PD/PPVS/Procurement Policy for Victorian Government Schools v1 March 2017.pdf](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/PD/PPVS/Procurement%20Policy%20for%20Victorian%20Government%20Schools%20v1%20March%202017.pdf)

Victorian Public Sector Commission Codes and Standards

<https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/code-of-conduct-for-victorian-public-sector-employees-of-special-bodies/public-sector-values/>

1.2

What school councils do

Why is this topic important?

Under the Act and a school council's constituting Order, a school council has a particular function in establishing the school's broad direction and vision. Councillors need to understand what their role is, the powers, functions and duties of the school council and how they are required to work with the principal and the school community.

On completing this unit, councillors should understand:

- how the legislative functions of school councils translate into governance roles and responsibilities including those that require decisions of council
- the distinctions in roles and responsibilities of school council and those of the school principal
- how partnerships can assist the school council in performing its functions, powers and roles.

Functions of a school council

The functions and powers of a school council are specified in the Act and include:

- establishing the broad direction and vision of the school within the school's community¹
- participating in the development, monitoring and endorsement of the School Strategic Plan (SSP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP)
- approving the annual budget and monitoring expenditure²
- developing, reviewing or updating school policies that fall within a school council's responsibilities
- raising funds for school-related purposes³
- having general oversight over the school's grounds and buildings⁴
- providing the cleaning and sanitary services that are necessary for the school⁵
- ensuring that all money coming into the council is used for proper purposes relating to the school⁶
- the provision of meals and refreshments for the staff and students of the school and charging for those meals or refreshments⁷
- entering into contracts, such as for cleaning in regional schools or construction work⁸
- reporting annually to the school community and to the Department
- creating interest in the school in the wider community⁹
- taking into account the views of the school community¹⁰
- managing the hire, licence and shared use of school facilities¹²
- if desired, making provision for a preschool program
ie. kindergarten or outside school hours care service at the school or other premises controlled by the Minister.¹³

School council is generally also involved in the school principal selection process. When this occurs, a panel of councillors and Department staff is formed to review applications, interview shortlisted applicants and recommend one or more applicants to the Secretary of the Department to employ. Regional office staff are also involved and principal selection panel members are provided with principal selection panel training.

The school council president, on request from the Regional Director, provides input to principal contract renewal discussions. The president advises the school council of that input at the next school council meeting.

1. *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)* s 2.3.5(a). 2. Ibid s 2.3.5(g). 3. Ibid s 2.3.5(c). 4. Ibid s 2.3.5(e). 5. Ibid s 2.3.5(f). 6. Ibid s 2.3.5(g) 7. Ibid s 2.3.5(h). 8. Ibid s 2.3.6(1)(a) 9. Ibid s 2.3.27. 10. Ibid s 2.3.5(j). 11. Ibid s 2.3.5(i). 12. Ibid s 2.3.5(d). 13. Ibid s 2.4.5(b).

What a school council is not authorised to do

A school council is not authorised to:

- acquire land or lease land or premises
- employ teachers for longer than 12 months or with no fixed date for the termination of that employment.

Unless authorised by or under the Act, Regulations or a Ministerial Order, a school council is not able to:

- hire or licence school facilities for a purpose that is not educational, recreational, sporting or cultural or involves the construction and long term shared use of buildings and facilities
- purchase a motor vehicle, boat or plane for the school
- enter into hire purchase agreements for the school
- obtain credit facilities or loans on behalf of the school
- form or become a member of a corporation
- provide for any matter or thing outside of Victoria unless it is related to an excursion by school students or the professional development of school staff.

Indemnity for school council members

School councillors are indemnified against any liability in respect of any loss or damage suffered by the council or any other person in respect of anything necessarily or reasonably done, or omitted to be done, by the councillor in good faith in:

- the exercise of a power or the performance of a function of a councillor, or
- the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the exercise of a power or the performance of a function of a councillor.

In other words, school councillors are not personally liable for any loss or damage suffered by council or others as a result of reasonable actions taken in good faith.



Distinctions in roles and responsibilities

Understanding the functional split between school councils and the principal of the school is critical for the effective functioning of the council.

The school council has a limited governance and oversight role whereas the principal manages the day to day activities of the school and is responsible for ensuring the delivery of a comprehensive education to every student with the knowledge, capabilities and attributes for their future role in society. The principal also holds a duty of care for, and is responsible for the care, safety and welfare of the students at the school.

The following table shows a range of school activities that school councils may be involved in:

Area of activity	The principal ...	The school council ...
Strategic direction of the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leads development of curriculum – teaching and learning programs • determines teacher, subject and time allocations; timetable; class sizes; and structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the broad direction and vision for the school, using guidelines provided by the Department
Student dress code policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements the student dress code developed by school council in consultation with the wider community • considers and, where appropriate, grants exemptions to dress code guidelines for individual students • enforces the student dress code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops student dress code policy in close consultation with the wider school community • consults with the school community before adopting changes to this policy
Staff employment and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is responsible (as delegate of the Secretary of the Department) for the employment and management of persons in the Teaching Service (including non-teaching staff) • manages the performance, development and conduct of DET and school council staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves employment of some staff e.g. casual replacement teachers, canteen or maintenance staff, however, not on-going staff • recommends to the Secretary of the Department the appointment of a principal in accordance with principal selection processes
Camps and excursions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is responsible for approving day excursions. All relevant principals are responsible for approving day excursions involving another school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is responsible for approving interstate and international visits, excursions requiring sea or air travel, excursions involving weekends or vacations, and adventure activities. All relevant school councils are responsible for approving listed joint activities involving another school

Area of activity	The principal ...	The school council ...
Buildings and grounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is responsible for maintenance of school buildings and grounds • monitors implementation of contracts • exercises a general oversight of school buildings and grounds to ensure they are kept in good condition and order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oversees school cleaning, and in regional schools only, enters into contracts for school cleaning • enters into contracts for building and grounds improvements • makes decisions about the hiring and shared use of school facilities in accordance with Department policy requirements
Child Safe Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements Child Safe Standards policies and procedures • with staff, develops strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school and allocates roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies • informs the school community about the strategies and roles and responsibilities • with staff, periodically reviews the effectiveness of the strategies and revises them if appropriate • with staff, ensures the school implements practices for a child-safe environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the Child Safe Standards • reviews existing contracts in consultation with the principal and ensures future contracts address the requirements of the Child Safe Standards
School review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeps the whole school community and council informed about the school review • leads the Pre-review Self-evaluation in consultation with the whole school community • is a member of the core School Review Panel • presents the findings of the review report to the school staff and school council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participates in the Pre-review Self-evaluation • value-adds to the review as defined in the terms of reference (e.g. participation in focus groups etc.) • is presented with the findings of the report and accepts the report <p>The school council president:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a member of the core School Review Panel
Strategic and Annual Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engages the staff and school community in development of the School Strategic Plan following review • engages the staff and school community in the development of the Annual Implementation Plan • engages the staff and school community in the monitoring of progress against annual targets • endorses the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributes to the finalisation of the School Strategic Plan following the school review • contributes to the development of the Annual Implementation Plan • president endorses the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan in SPOT • ensures regular monitoring of the Annual Implementation Plan, including key risks to achievement

Area of activity	The principal ...	The school council ...
Annual report to the school community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepares, with the school council, the Annual Report endorses the Annual Report attests to the contents of the Annual Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the Annual Report by April 30 president attests to the contents of the Annual Report in SPOT by April 30
Outside school hours care or kindergarten service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> engages the school community in the decision-making process to establish or change operating models or service provider informs the school community and school council about the service on a regular basis may be nominated by school council as the person with management or control for a school council managed operating model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> decides whether to establish a service or change operating models or service provider is the legal entity under the National Law of a school council managed operating model, and therefore has the role of approved provider. As approved provider, the council nominates people with management or control, noting this does not take away from the approved providers' legal responsibilities in a third-party-provider operating model, selects, engages and contract-manages the preferred provider, and endorses the licence agreement negotiated with a third party receives regular program reports from the OSHC or kindergarten provider regularly monitors the provider's compliance with the requirements of the National Law should be consulted on the development of the service's Quality Improvement Plan and be provided with a copy of the service's Assessment and Rating report

Delegations

The Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 allow school councils to delegate their powers and duties. A school council must generally obtain approval from the Minister for Education to delegate a power or duty to a person or body other than the principal.

A school council cannot delegate any of its functions or powers in relation to the approval of the school budget or Annual Report.

The delegation must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting of school council and a register of delegations must be kept by the school council. The delegation must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting of school council and a register of delegations must be kept by the school council. The instrument setting out the delegations, and the terms and conditions of the delegations, must be signed by the president of the school council and delivered to the delegates.

A person or body to whom a delegation has been made must provide a written report about any activities performed as a delegate at each ordinary meeting of the school council. Further information on delegations can be found in the School Council Quick Reference Guide at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx>

Strategic planning

One of the key functions of school councils is to contribute to the establishment of the broad vision and direction for the school. The school council president must also endorse a number of school planning and implementation documents in the Strategic Planning Online Tool (SPOT) on behalf of the council. Accessing the SPOT system requires the use of an eduMail account which should be regularly checked by the president to ensure they are up to date with any Department requirements.

Strategic planning is the process for reflecting on past performance, establishing future directions and deciding what will build success.

In other words, it involves the school community considering the following questions:

- where have we been?
- where do we want to go?
- how will we get there?
- how will we know if we have been successful?

The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) Improvement Cycle outlines a clear cycle for developing the School Strategic Plan and planning for improving student outcomes.

The cycle includes:

- **Evaluate and diagnose** – monitoring and reviewing the school's performance against its current School Strategic Plan through:
 - annual self-evaluation
 - Pre-review Self-evaluation (every four years)
 - conducting a school review to examine the school's performance over the previous strategic plan period and to plan for improvement, including undertaking a process by which the school's compliance with registration requirements is checked (every four years)
 - publishing an Annual Report for the school community (including parents/guardians, students and other interested people) about the school's successes and challenges in implementing the strategic plan and improving student outcomes.
- **Prioritise and set goals** – developing a four-year School Strategic Plan that outlines goals, targets and key improvement strategies and expected outcomes in a school-based plan that is sensitive to local needs, based on data (including key risks to achievement) and aligned to FISO, including the FISO four statewide priorities and six high-impact Improvement Initiatives.
- **Develop and plan** – developing Annual Implementation Plans that describe how the key improvement strategies and other specific projects in the School Strategic Plan will be implemented, monitored and evaluated each year. This links to performance and development plans for the principal and teachers.
- **Implement and monitor** – collaboratively monitoring and reviewing the impact of the school's improvement strategies and initiatives are having on student learning, including key risks to achievement. The risks associated with the delivery of the Annual Implementation Plan and the School Strategic Plan should be reviewed, discussed and approved by the school council.

The following table provides an overview of how the principal and staff, school council and school community would typically be involved in the strategic planning process. Senior Education Improvement Leaders, who work within each of the regions, also play an important role in the strategic planning process. These roles and responsibilities are examined in detail in the Strategic Planning module.

The principal ...	The school council ...	The Senior Education Improvement Leader ...
Evaluate and diagnose		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans and manages the Pre-review Self-evaluation (in consultation with the school improvement team) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews the plan and timeline for the Pre-review Self-evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports the school in undertaking a Pre-review Self-evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises consultations, gathers and analyses data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in working groups and involves the community in consultations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> works with the principal to access and interpret data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> oversees the drafting of the Pre-review Self-evaluation report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the final Pre-review Self-evaluation report in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides feedback and endorses the Pre-review Self-evaluation report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans for the school review and provides performance data to the School Review Panel as a member of the core School Review Panel, analyses the Pre-review Self-evaluation report and other school data in preparation for the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> president, as a member of the core School Review Panel, analyses the Pre-review Self-evaluation report and other school data in preparation for the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as a member of the core School Review Panel, analyses the Pre-review Self-evaluation report and other school data in preparation for the review
Prioritise and set goals		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> finalises the School Strategic Plan using the directions provided in the school review report in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports the development of a long-term view of the school's directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports the school council to prepare the draft School Strategic Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises consultations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involves the community in consultations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews the draft School Strategic Plan and provides advice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the School Strategic Plan and the president endorses the plan in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtains endorsement for the School Strategic Plan from the Regional Director
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates and implements the School Strategic Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates and monitors the School Strategic Plan 	

The principal ...	The school council ...	The Senior Education Improvement Leader ...
Implement and monitor		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeps the school community informed about progress in implementing the School Strategic Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitors progress in implementing the School Strategic Plan, including key risks to achievement 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> drafts and signs the Annual Report in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the Annual Report to the school community in SPOT president signs the Annual Report in SPOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides quality assurance of the Annual Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises a public meeting to present the Annual Report to the school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reports to the school community on the school's performance 	

School council self-assessment

School councils operate effectively when there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and a clear and consistent process for decision-making.

The school council self-assessment tool is designed to assist school councils in evaluating their effectiveness as a collective and identify areas for improvement.

Councillors should use the tool to reflect on their roles and the effectiveness of the school council as a whole. The council can then discuss the results in small groups or as a whole team and develop an improvement plan.

Most school councils will identify some areas for improvement. For example, they may agree that some council operational practices could be refined or improved or they may wish to build particular knowledge and capabilities by undertaking training.

As a result of the self-assessment, councils may review and revise their Standing Orders, their sub-committees and the effectiveness of their meetings. It is important that school councils and individual councillors work collaboratively and with purpose.

The self-assessment tool can be found at School Council Self-Assessment Tool: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx>

Finance

It is a legal requirement that school councils ensure that funds coming into the school council are being properly used and authorised.

To this end, school councils are responsible for overseeing a functioning and effective system of internal controls in accordance with the Finance Manual for Victorian Government Schools.

Internal controls are the procedures that ensure:

- all financial activity within the school is sound, accurate and legal
- the school's assets are safe
- school council can rely on the accuracy of the financial information it receives.

School council also helps develop the school's program (non-staff) budget that shows how the school will allocate its resources to implement the key improvement strategies in the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan. Council then monitors the school's financial performance against the budget in conjunction with the principal.

Finally, council is responsible for how the school raises funds (over and above the funding provided by the government). It must manage any financial and reputational risks that could arise, and ensure that all legal and policy requirements are met.

It is recommended all school councils have a treasurer (although this is not mandatory). Most school councils have a finance sub-committee which handles many of the council's routine financial responsibilities. The treasurer is the convener of the finance sub-committee, and is elected from council members (preferably a non-Department employee). The Business Manager/bursar should not hold this position. It is recommended the office bearer position of treasurer be elected at the first meeting of the school council after the declaration of the poll for the annual school council election, in line with current practice.

The following table provides an overview of how the principal and staff, school council and the school community would typically be involved in school financial management. These roles and responsibilities are examined in more detail in the finance module.

The principal ...	The school council ...
Internal controls	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puts in place a system of internal controls consistent with Department policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensures the school has and uses a system of internal controls consistent with Department policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducts school financial business in line with the system of internal controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adheres to internal controls such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appointing a school councillor (normally the school council president or another member who has been delegated the authority by the school council) to approve payments and sign cheques; this councillor cannot be the Business Manager - approving an investment policy, if appropriate - approving trading operations - ensuring issues raised by auditors are addressed - identifying and managing conflicts of interest - monitoring and overseeing offers and provision of gifts, benefits and hospitality within schools and at least annually, reviews the School Register for compliance with policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides financial reports to council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considers financial reports
Budgeting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the budget timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves the budget timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops program budgets with staff and salary and revenue budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviews budget submissions and program priority list (done by the finance sub-committee if school council has one)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluates program outcomes, prepares and prioritises budget submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviews and approves the budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates the budget to staff 	
Financial Reports	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepares financial reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitors revenue and expenditure against the budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explains financial reports to the finance sub-committee and school council, and recommends action as appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • takes action to address issues arising from the financial reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements the council's decisions 	
Fundraising	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assists with the review of fundraising proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves fundraising activities • review approved fundraising profit and loss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advises council about available cash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops an investment policy (if required)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops a parent payments policy • implements policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributes to and approves the parent payments policy

Investment register

From 14 February 2019, schools are no longer permitted to establish new term deposits or extend existing term deposits. All term deposits with a maturity beyond 14 February must be rolled into the Centralised Banking System (CBS) linked High Yield investment account upon maturity.

The school should retain its current investment policy and register until all investment accounts have been transferred to the Centralised Banking System. Once school investments have been transferred the school is no longer required to maintain an investment policy or register.

Contracts and contract management

A school council can purchase goods, equipment and materials for carrying out its functions, subject to Part 2.3 of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. School councils are strongly encouraged to use Department templates for the purchase of goods and services. If a supplier insists on using their own Agreement or you would like to amend a template Agreement, it is recommended the principal seek advice from the Legal Division.

School councils must:

- provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health for all, employees, independent contractors and contractor's employees
- ensure that contractors are competent and able to control their own systems of work
- retain a general supervisory power over any work undertaken by a contractor
- define the contractor's respective areas of responsibility, particularly where there is more than one contractor involved
- examine carefully the contractual arrangements, and
- ensure that the activities undertaken do not put staff, students or the contractors at risk.

School councils should use the standard contracts available from the Legal Division which include:

- maintenance or cleaning services
- school canteen licence
- hiring school premises by third parties
- school uniforms
- Outside School Hours Care licence
- Pre-school licence.

School councils must ensure that the school complies with the Department's Procurement Policy and the Finance Manual for Victorian Government Schools.

Policy development and review

A school council is responsible for developing particular policies to reflect the school’s values and support the school’s broad direction, as outlined in its strategic plan: for example, student dress code policy. Legislation and other regulations require councils to develop some but not all local school policies. They may develop other policies that are within the scope of their functions and powers to address local needs.

Many Department policies will apply to all Victorian government schools and individual schools will not be required to develop local policies on these topics. Instead, schools are required to implement whole-of-Department policies at the local level.

School council members need to know which policies they are required to develop at the local level. This includes the implementation of specific government policies and guidelines that fall within their functions and powers, as set out in the Act and the constituting Order. In some cases, there are requirements that school council be consulted even if they are not the decision maker for the final policy content: for example, a Student Engagement policy.

Many policies, including day-to-day operational policies and procedures in schools are developed by the principal and implemented by the principal

and staff: for example, Anaphylaxis Management policy. The principal may choose to consult with the staff, students, school council or a sub-committee of school council on selected policies where relevant.

School council policies may be written for the purpose of informing the school community about school functions and responsibilities, managing change, promoting consistency, meeting legal and regulatory standards and ensuring decision-making is transparent. Policy development provides council the opportunity to engage with the school community on matters of importance to that community.

School councils should review their policies regularly to ensure that they remain relevant and valid. They may decide to update a policy, bring a number of policies into a single policy or decide that a particular policy is no longer required.

The Improving School Governance module – Policy and Review, provides further information on the school council’s role in policy development, review and approval.

The following table provides an overview of what the principal and leadership team, the school council and the school community are responsible for in terms of policy development.

The principal ...	The school council ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advises council about the need for the school policy to meet government policy and guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determines the need for policy on local issues within its powers and functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributes to policy development as a member of council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops policy, including consulting with the school community if required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regularly reviews existing policies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oversees policy compliance monitoring

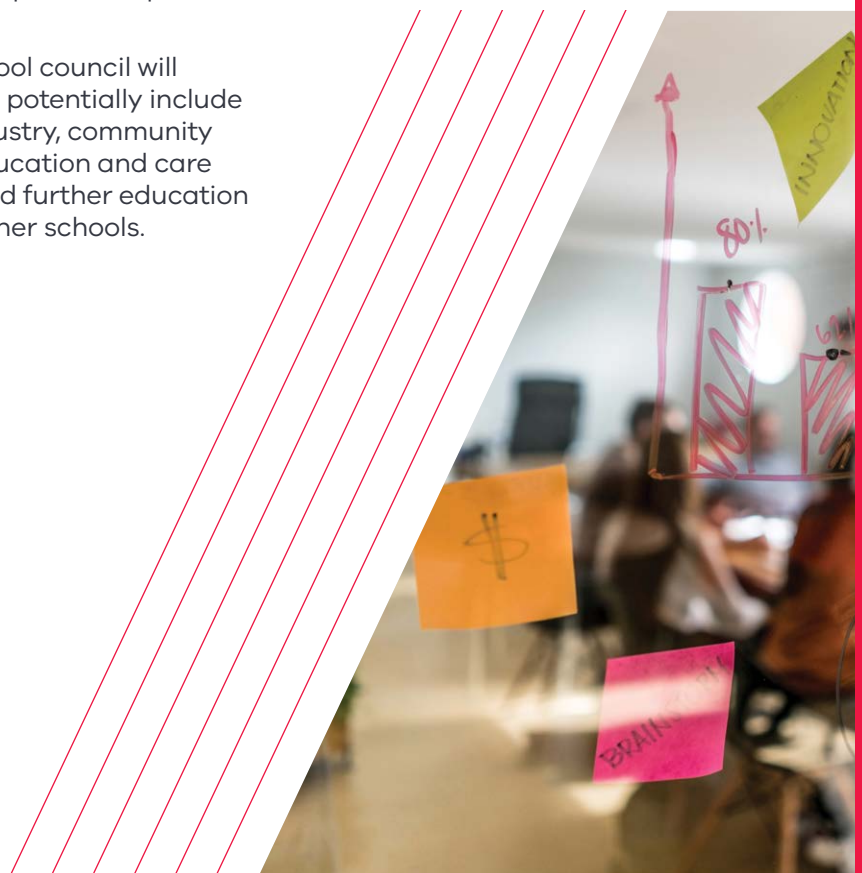
Partnerships with others in the school community

In an effective school council, processes are characterised by a mutual sharing of information, knowledge and ideas.

There is a focus on dialogue in which all school council members are able to exchange information, share experiences, honestly express perspectives, pose questions, clarify viewpoints, explore relevant research and develop a shared vision and way forward.

Effective school councils are conscious of the need for positive working relationships and partnerships within the school community.

The main partnerships that a school council will have are described below and will potentially include partnerships with businesses, industry, community organisations, early childhood education and care services, universities, technical and further education institutions, such as TAFEs and other schools.



The principal

The principal holds two roles.

The principal is the school council's executive officer and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the school council, ensuring school councils have adequate and appropriate advice on educational and other matters, and providing support and resources for the conduct of school council meetings.

The principal, as an employee of the Secretary of the Department, is also responsible for the organisation, management and administration of the school and implementing Department policies. In practice, the principal is the leader of the school and is the Department representative in the school. The principal and school council must have a close working relationship to bring together the school's strategic and operational activities.

Staff

Staff are represented on school councils. Staff are directly affected by school council's strategic planning work (setting the school's long-term direction), policy development and budgeting (allocating resources for their programs).

Students

School councillors are required by legislation to ensure that decisions affecting students of the school are made in the best interest of the students.

Students are represented on school councils of schools that provide secondary school level education. Student members will be involved in discussions and decisions on matters relating to the school and have the same voting rights as other council members. School council might also have links with the student representative body. At times a school council will consult with all students, particularly in relation to policy development on topics which have an impact on students.

The school community

The school community includes staff, students and parents. The broader community may comprise businesses, industry, services clubs, sports clubs, early childhood services and other interested individuals and organisations. Parent and community representatives on school council contribute community perspectives to all deliberations. They also build links with and explain the school's values and directions to the community.

Community members can also be represented on council if the constituting Order includes this membership category. This is an optional category. Department employees are not able to be Community members.

The Department

All Victorian government school councils must comply with relevant legislation, Ministerial Orders and Ministerial Directions as well as guidelines and Department policies, where required to do so by the Minister.

High risk areas for conflicts of interest

Any interaction between the school council and school community raises the potential for conflicts of interest.

Some examples of conflict of interest risks may arise when a school council undertakes the following activities or in the following areas:

- recruitment and selection activities
- procurement activities
- funding allocation activities
- previous associations
- gifts, benefits and hospitality.

Conflicts of interest in recruitment might include:

- family relationships or friendships with an applicant
- close working relationship with an applicant
- a hostile relationship with any applicant.

If you are involved in any type of recruitment or selection process, you must consider whether you have a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest. If so, or if you are unsure, you must declare the conflict of interest to the school council at the earliest possible stage.

Conflict of interest risks can affect any stage of procurement. Regardless of the monetary value, these risks must be proactively managed throughout the life of a procurement project.

Conflicts of interest in procurement or funding allocations might include:

- gifts, benefits or hospitality being offered to employees involved in the procurement process
- family relationships or friendships with a supplier
- close working relationships as a result of regular business with a supplier.

Other interests and associations that may result in potential, perceived or real conflicts of interest are:

- external consulting
- other (external) employment
- private tutoring
- out-of-hours sporting or community activities
- using contractors for private works
- personal relationships with employees
- group affiliations
- other public duties (e.g. member of local council or political party)
- family and other relationships.

For more information on conflicts of interest and how to appropriately manage conflicts, see the Legal Requirements section of this manual.

Integrity Liaison Officers are located in each regional office and provide advice to principals and school council presidents on the management of conflicts of interest.

Resources and links

Conflict of Interest Guide

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/Conflict-of-Interest.aspx>

Gifts Benefits and Hospitality

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/gifts.aspx>

Human Resources – Principal Selection

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/careers/Pages/selectprin.aspx>

Procurement Policy

[https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/PD/PPVS/Procurement Policy for Victorian Government Schools v1 March 2017.pdf](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/PD/PPVS/Procurement%20Policy%20for%20Victorian%20Government%20Schools%20v1%20March%202017.pdf)

Risk Management Overview

[https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/School.aspx#/app/content/2367/support_and_service_\(schools\)%252Frisk_management%252Frisk_management_explained%252Frisk_management_overview](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/School.aspx#/app/content/2367/support_and_service_(schools)%252Frisk_management%252Frisk_management_explained%252Frisk_management_overview)

Risk Management Policy

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/risk.aspx>

School Council – Purchasing Goods and Services - Log in required

[https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/Services/legal/Pages/School Council - Purchasing Goods or Services.aspx](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/Services/legal/Pages/School%20Council%20-%20Purchasing%20Goods%20or%20Services.aspx)

School Financial Guidelines

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/guidelines.aspx>

Strategic Planning Online Tool – SPOT

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/fiso-spot.aspx>

Victorian Public Sector Employment Principles and Standards

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/employcond/Pages/principles-standards.aspx>

1.3

Council operations

Why is this topic important?

Clarity in the following two areas assists school councils to operate effectively and efficiently:

- the roles and responsibilities of members, particularly office bearers such as the principal and the president
- the way in which the school council establishes a set of rules, such as Standing Orders, to ensure that its meetings run smoothly and enable it to optimally fulfil its governance functions.

On completing this unit, school councillors should understand:

- the roles and responsibilities of the school principal and school council president
- the roles and responsibilities of school council sub-committees
- the need for Standing Orders.

Roles and responsibilities of the principal and school council president

To avoid confusion over the role of the school principal and that of the school council president, the table below provides a brief outline of the differences between their respective roles and responsibilities.

The principal ...	The school council ...
<p>As executive officer of the school council, the principal is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing school council with timely advice about educational and other matters related to school council functions and powers • preparing the school council's agenda in consultation with the school council president • reporting regularly to the school council about the school's performance against its School Strategic Plan • making sure that council decisions are implemented • providing adequate support and resources for the conduct of school council meetings • communicating with the school council president about school council business • confirming in the school's Annual Report that the school has met the Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) registration requirements • ensuring that new council members are inducted • creating an eduMail account for the school council president and encouraging them to check their account regularly • recording the president's details on CASES21. 	<p>The role of the school council president is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively chair school council meetings (ensure that everyone has a say in meetings and that decisions are properly understood and well-recorded) • be a signatory to contracts, the School Strategic Plan and financial accounts • together with the school council, endorse the school Pre-review Self-evaluation, terms of reference for the school review, School Strategic Plan, Annual Implementation Plan and Annual Report and communicate this information to the school community • ensure school council stays focused on improving student outcomes • with the principal, be school council's spokesperson and official representative on public occasions • with the principal, confirm in the school's Annual Report that the school has met VRQA registration requirements • when votes are tied, have a second or casting vote • access email communications each week from the Department through the president's eduMail account and communicate these to school council members where relevant.

Roles and responsibilities of school council sub-committees

Sub-committees assist school council in the work that needs to be done and report regularly at school council meetings. These committees provide advice and make recommendations to school council, which has the final responsibility for making decisions.

The decision-making responsibilities of the school council should not be compromised by the work of any sub-committee.

The membership, purpose and terms of reference of sub-committees are determined by the school council. Members of a sub-committee may be school council and non-school council members. Sub-committees must have at least three members, including at least one school council member. Sub-committees should have procedures for developing agendas and ensuring minutes are taken at sub-committee meetings and reported to the school council.

All school councils are encouraged to have a finance sub-committee. Some examples of other areas in which sub-committees may assist school council perform their functions include buildings and grounds (facilities), local policy development and review, student leadership, information technology, community building or community relations, OSHC, and kindergarten or canteen if the school provides these services.



Standing Orders

A school council may develop and agree to Standing Orders to assist it to operate effectively and efficiently. It is good practice to establish Standing Orders and review them each year following completion of the election process.

Standing Orders typically comprise:

- an introduction – that outlines the purpose of the Standing Orders, their influence in promoting teamwork, avoiding conflict, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the council, the school councillors' code of conduct and the importance of following the Standing Orders
- reference to the constituting Order – which lists the membership structure by membership category and numbers
- an outline of office bearer positions and sub-committees
- a description of meeting procedures – how the school council will operate, including length of meetings, agendas, minutes, quorum requirements, meeting arrangements, open and closed meetings, effective decision-making, member absence from meetings, arrangements for extensions of meetings and meeting etiquette.

Legal requirements

The Regulations set out certain legal requirements in relation to conducting school council meetings. These requirements cannot be overridden by the Standing Orders determined by a school council. Set out below are the legal requirements and Department guidelines for the operation of school council meetings. School councils may approve additional guidelines to assist in effectively and efficiently conducting meetings.

Number of school council meetings each year

A school council must meet at least eight times a year and at least once every school term.

Who presides at a meeting

The school council president must preside at school council meetings. If the president is unable to preside, the meeting must be conducted in the following manner:

- if a vice-president has been appointed by the school council, the vice-president must preside at the meeting if available
- if the school council has not appointed a vice-president, or the vice-president is unable to preside, the school council must decide on a member of the council (other than an employee of the Department) to preside. A Department employee is ineligible to be school council president or chair a school council meeting.

Quorum at a school council meeting

A school council meeting must operate and make decisions with a quorum. Ordinarily, a quorum requires not less than one half of school council members currently holding office to be present at

the meeting and the majority of members present must not be Department employees. Any parent members on school council who also work for the Department are counted as Department employees for the purpose of a quorum.

However, some school councils' constituting Orders (particularly those with nominee members) provide that a majority of the school council's total membership is not required to consist of persons who are not employees of the Department. In these cases, a quorum for a school council meeting is constituted if not less than one half of the members of the school council currently holding office are present.

A member of the school council may be present in person or by video conferencing or teleconferencing.

If at the end of 30 minutes after the appointed time for a school council meeting there is not a quorum, the meeting must stand adjourned to a time and place determined by the school council members present.

Decisions and voting

Decisions of school council must be made with quorum and must be supported by the majority of the members of the school council who are eligible to vote and are present at the school council meeting. Decisions are made by voting. School councillors need to ensure their vote is based solely on the best interests of the students. All decisions of council, the motions as well as the name of the person that moved the motion and the seconder, should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Tied votes

When a vote is tied, the school council president has a second or casting vote.

Conflict of interest

Conflicts of interest are an inevitable part of organisational life and many arise without any wrongdoing.

The public trusts school councillors to behave in an ethical and impartial manner. Conflicts of interest that are not effectively identified or managed put the school council and the school's reputation at risk and jeopardise the public's confidence in our school system.

A conflict of interest occurs when a school councillor's personal interests may influence, or may be seen to influence, their public duty. A personal interest may arise from a member's personal preference, relationship, connection, bias, property, hobby, or a desire to help family and friends. Personal interests can also be pecuniary (financial) or non-pecuniary.

Actual conflicts of interest occur when a school councillor's private interest can influence their current public duty.

Potential conflicts of interest occur where an actual conflict of interest may arise in the future.

Perceived conflicts of interest occur where a reasonable person might suspect that a school councillor is subject to a real conflict of interest, whether or not one actually exists. Perceived conflicts may be just as damaging as 'actual' conflicts. Any reasonable perception that you, or your

friends or family, are benefiting from the exercise of your public duty could result in the loss of public trust. You are obliged to identify these risks, and take action, in consultation with the principal and the president to mitigate them.

If a school council member or a member of his or her immediate family has an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest (either a pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest) in a subject or matter under discussion at a school council meeting, the member must declare the conflict of interest. If the school council decides that the conflict of interest is material, the councillor must not be present during the relevant discussion unless invited to do so by the chair of the meeting and must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter. A school councillor's temporary absence for this purpose does not affect the meeting quorum. The declaration of interest should be included in the minutes of the meeting. If the conflict of interest involves a principal or Business Manager it must be entered onto the Conflict of Interest Register on eduPay and managed appropriately.

Member absence

If a member is unable to attend a school council meeting, an apology should be submitted to the executive officer (the principal) in advance of the meeting and it should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Minutes

Minutes are the official record of the proceedings at a school council meeting. Generally, a designated council member records a summary of what has been discussed, any decisions made and any actions to be taken before the next meeting. The minutes are written up under the agenda item headings and circulated by the principal to members before the next school council meeting where they are considered and confirmed.

The school council should keep the community informed about its operations by publishing a report following a meeting in the school newsletter and/or on the school website.

A person does not have a right of access to the minutes of a school council meeting or other documents or records of a school council under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*.

Public reporting meeting

A school council must call a public meeting, where any member of the public can attend, at least once each year and report the proceedings of the council since the date of the previous public meeting. The council must present the Annual Report to the public meeting and, if the school council accounts have been audited, present a copy of the audited accounts.

Open and closed meetings

School council meetings would normally be open to the school community and conducted according to standard meeting requirements. Visitors or observers can be present at the council meetings with the agreement of the principal and a decision of school council. Visitors may be invited to speak but must do so through the invitation of the person chairing the meeting (usually the school council president). They have no voting rights. There may be times when, for the purpose of confidentiality or other reasons, the council meeting, or part of the meeting, needs to be closed, such as considering a principal selection report.

Extraordinary meeting

An extraordinary meeting of a school council may be held at any time decided by the council, if all members are given reasonable notice of the time, date, place and object of the meeting.

The president, or if absent, the principal, must call the extraordinary meeting of the school council if either of them receives a written request to do so from three members of the council.

The business of an extraordinary meeting must be confined to the purpose for which the meeting is called.

Extended leave of school council member

A school council member may apply in writing to the president for extended leave of up to three consecutive meetings. If leave is granted to a member, his/her membership is excluded in determining the requirement for a quorum of not less than half the members of the school council currently holding office.

Casual Vacancies

A school council fills a casual vacancy by co-opting an eligible person to the relevant category. The person nominated to fill the casual vacancy serves the unexpired portion of the vacating member's term of office.

A casual vacancy is created when: a person dies; becomes bankrupt; is of unsound mind; resigns; is sentenced for an indictable offence; was at the time of election or co-option ineligible; becomes ineligible; is a registered offender within the meaning of the *Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004*; is absent from three consecutive school council meetings without special leave previously granted by the school council and subject to a decision of the school council; in the DET employee member category and goes on any form of leave with or without pay for more than six months; or where the maximum number of DET employee members is exceeded.

Other considerations

Agenda

The agenda lists the business that school council will consider at the meeting. Some items are for information only, some for discussion and others for decision. In order to avoid the agenda being crowded with too much business to consider, a significant amount of work may be undertaken by sub-committees. Reports from these sub-committees are considered at council meetings when appropriate.

Most information regarding agenda topics to be discussed in council meetings will be provided by the principal or in reports from relevant individuals or sub-committees. Meeting papers should be sent out prior to the meeting date to allow councillors to reflect on the issues, to gather more information if necessary and to canvass the opinions of school community members. The wisest decisions are made from a sound knowledge base.

Effective and informed decision-making

For effective and informed decision-making at council meetings, there needs to be:

- a carefully prepared agenda and papers that are distributed at least five working days before the meeting
- frank and open discussion
- accurate records of decisions
- access to independent and external professional advice where appropriate.

Meeting etiquette

When discussing a topic, it is good practice (but not necessarily documented in the Standing Orders) that:

- only one person talks at a time
- all requests to speak are directed to the chairperson
- all speakers are listened to in respectful silence
- no 'side conversations' are held
- members listen to the discussion carefully in order to avoid making points that have already been made or asking questions which have already been answered
- when the chairperson indicates that the topic of discussion is closed, no further comments are made
- no-one uses jargon or insider knowledge
- all electronic devices (such as mobile phones and pagers) are silenced and no calls are taken during the meeting
- regardless of how difficult or challenging the topic, everyone stays calm.

Length of meeting

School council meetings should require no longer than 2.5 hours, regardless of the setting. If business has not been concluded by the scheduled closing time for the meeting, the chair should ask school councillors whether they wish to defer the rest of the business until the next meeting or to extend the meeting by a specified period of time (for example, 15 minutes). A motion is necessary if the school council wants to extend the meeting.

Resources and links

School Councils

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/councils.aspx>

School Council Meetings

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncilsmeet.aspx>

Conflict of Interest

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/Conflict-of-Interest.aspx>

Gifts Benefits and Hospitality

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/gifts.aspx>

Victorian Public Sector Commission – *Public Administration Act 2004*

<https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/about-vpssc/legislative-framework-the-public-administration-act-2004/>

Outside School Hours Care Services

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/Pages/oshc.aspx>

Strategic Planning Online Tool (SPOT)

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/fiso-spot.aspx>

1.4

Understanding the school

Why is this topic important?

To provide good governance, school councillors need to understand their school, what it seeks to achieve, and how it functions. This means knowing about the organisation itself including areas such as the curriculum, teaching and learning program, support services, staffing structure, specialist programs, student numbers and demographics and physical facilities.

On completing this unit, school councillors should:

- be able to find information about the school
- be able to identify who's who at the school
- know about regional support services available to the school
- be aware of the school's curriculum, teaching and learning program and student assessment and reporting practices.



Finding out information about the school

The principal or school council president will usually welcome new school councillors with a package of information about the school.

This could include:

- promotional information given to families of prospective students
- the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan
- the school's Annual Report
- a map of the school noting the major facilities
- a list of any specialist programs (such as Performing Arts or English as an Additional Language)
- minutes of the last school council meeting
- a list of school policies and procedures and information about where to find Department policies applying to schools such as the School Policy and Advisory Guide.

As the school council's role is to establish the broad direction and vision for the whole school, councillors should extend their knowledge beyond one specific area. Good sources of information are the principal and the school's most recent Annual Report to the school community.

Who's who at the school

As well as meeting the principal and teachers who are members of the school council, it is useful to find out who's who among the teaching staff. Government schools have three classes of employee: principal class, teachers and education support.

The principal is responsible for the delivery of a comprehensive curriculum plan, governance (in conjunction with the school council) and managing financial and human resources. A school might also have one or more assistant principals responsible for significant areas or functions within the school (such as Transition, Years P–2 or VCE).

Leading teachers may have responsibilities across a range of school operations. They typically coordinate a number of staff to improve teaching and learning. Leading teachers usually have titles such as year level coordinator, transition coordinator or literacy coordinator.

The majority of teachers in a school are classroom teachers. They plan, prepare and teach programs to achieve specific student outcomes.

Each school also has education support employees who work in school administration and operations and support teachers and students in the delivery of educational programs. They include Business Managers, office managers and education staff.

If the school is operating a school council managed kindergarten or outside school hours care service, the school also employs the staff in the service.

When there is an agenda item concerning areas for which senior staff are responsible, school councillors may request them to address the council meeting.

Regional support services available to the school

The Department's regional offices support early childhood services, schools and higher education and skills service providers. The Department has four regions in Victoria: North-Eastern Victoria Region, North-Western Victoria Region, South-Eastern Victoria Region and South-Western Victoria Region.

Regions are responsible for supporting and monitoring the provision of early childhood and higher education and skills services along with planning, managing, supporting and reporting on the delivery of outcomes for children and students 0–18 years. Through its regional offices, the Regional Services Group plays a key role in supporting schools by providing a range of services including facilitating the establishment of networks and services for local communities.

Regional offices offer advice and guidance in a wide range of areas including school management, workforce planning, leadership, youth pathways, transitions and student wellbeing.

Curriculum and student assessment

Foundation to Year 10

Curriculum

The Victorian Curriculum Foundation–10 (F–10) sets out what every student should learn during their first 11 years of schooling. The curriculum is the common set of knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development and active and informed citizenship. The Victorian Curriculum F–10 incorporates the Australian Curriculum and reflects Victorian priorities and standards.

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 sets out a single, coherent and comprehensive set of content descriptions and associated achievement standards to enable teachers to plan, monitor, assess and report on the learning achievement of every student.

Schools may also use the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) when developing teaching and learning programs for Foundation–2. The VEYLDF describes the key knowledge and skills for children from birth to eight years.

Teaching and Learning program

Victorian schools value digital learning. This takes place in a technology-rich environment using computers and other devices such as iPads, digital cameras and a range of online resources and software for learning and teaching. Starting from Foundation, schools are integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into their teaching and learning program in ways that not only increase children's digital literacy, but improve their ability to create, investigate, collaborate

and share knowledge. In some cases, ICT is overcoming barriers of isolation created by living in a remote location or having a disability.

Languages education is a core part of the curriculum and all schools are provided with additional funding in their Student Resource Package (SRP) to support the provision of a languages program. Schools have the flexibility to choose the language/s they provide in consultation with their community. Advice on how to select a language is available on the Department's website. Students (Years F–12) who do not have access to the study of a specific language in their school can attend language programs outside school hours at the Victorian School of Languages or at community language schools.

Assessment

All students are involved in an annual program of standardised assessment in addition to assessments completed by class teachers. Under the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed annually on the same days using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. The school receives feedback about the test results. The resulting data, which identifies individual student achievement also rates the school's performance on a national scale.

Councillors can view NAPLAN results on the MySchool website. The NAPLAN results in literacy and numeracy are presented in a way that shows each school's performance against statistically similar schools (based on student backgrounds) and all other Australian schools.

Senior secondary

Victorian government secondary schools offer a variety of curriculum options for senior secondary students to pursue interests, qualifications and their future beyond school. These are described below.

Victorian Certificate of Education

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is a course of study designed to be completed over a minimum of two years. It is usually undertaken over Years 11 and 12. It prepares students for university and further training or employment, and is an internationally recognised qualification. There are more than 90 studies (subjects) in the VCE. Students can start their VCE as early as Year 10 and about half of Year 10 students undertake one or more VCE units. It is also possible to undertake a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship within the VCE.

A VCE 'study' or subject is broken up into four units over two years. Each unit is half a year or two terms in length and is numbered 1, 2, 3 or 4. Units 1 and 2 can be taken as single units, but Units 3 and 4 must be taken as a sequence of two units. Students are awarded the VCE by satisfactory completion of a minimum of 16 units.

The school's VCE coordinator ensures each student is undertaking the right number of units and the right combination of units to meet VCE requirements.

Within the 16 units students must satisfactorily complete at least three units from the English group. They also need three sequences of Units 3 and 4 studies in addition to the English requirement. These sequences can be from VCE studies or from vocational education and training (VET).

Students in Year 12 may also undertake a first year university study that counts towards satisfactory completion of their VCE; this is called the Higher Education Studies in the VCE program.

The VCE (Baccalaureate) is an additional form of recognition for those students who choose to undertake the demands of studying both a higher-level mathematics and a language in their VCE program of study. To be eligible to receive the VCE (Baccalaureate) the student must satisfactorily complete the VCE and receive a study score for each prescribed study component. The VCE program of study must include: a Units 3 and 4 sequence in English or Literature or English Language with a study score of 30 or above, or a Units 3 and 4 sequence in EAL with a study score of 33 or above; a Units 3 and 4 sequence in either Mathematics Methods (CAS) or Specialist Mathematics; a Units 3 and 4 sequence in a VCE Language; and at least two other Units 3 and 4 sequences.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an accredited hands-on option for Year 11 and 12 students, offering practical work-related experience and learning. Like the VCE, the VCAL is an accredited secondary certificate. Students who undertake the VCAL are likely to be interested in further training at VET providers, doing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or getting a job directly after finishing school.

The VCAL is offered at three levels: Foundation, Intermediate or Senior. Students enrol in a VCAL learning program at the level that matches their skills and abilities. For example, a Year 11 student may study at either the Foundation or Intermediate level. Students can gain one or more VCAL qualifications at different levels depending on their abilities and learning goals.

Students in Intermediate and Senior VCAL must undertake VET studies (see following section) as part of their qualification. If students start their VCAL and then decide they would like to complete their VCE, they can transfer between certificates. The VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook provides further advice for students wishing to transfer from the VCAL to the VCE.

The VCAL has four curriculum areas, called strands. These strands are Literacy and Numeracy Skills, Industry Specific Skills, Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills. A student's VCAL learning program must include at least one unit from each strand.

A student is awarded a VCAL certificate when they successfully complete the course requirements outlined in the VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook. A unit of study can be one VCAL unit, one VCE unit or approximately 90 hours of VET units of competency and/or further education modules.

The school's VCAL coordinator is responsible for ensuring that VCAL students undertake the right number and combination of units to achieve their certificate.

Vocational Education and Training

Students who are interested in undertaking a vocationally-oriented study program in a specific industry have the option of choosing to complete a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program as part of their VCE or VCAL studies.

VET programs provide students with a nationally recognised training qualification in conjunction with their VCE or VCAL.

VET programs are typically delivered through partnerships between schools and training providers. They enable students to take part in structured workplace learning and gain practical skills in the industry in which they are interested. VET programs include school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

Programs undertaken as part of the VCE or VCAL provide students with a pathway to university, further training or employment.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

In the past, many young people had to leave school to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship. With the introduction of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, students can have the best of both worlds. Students taking part in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships undertake part-time paid employment, and structured training, while completing their VCE or VCAL.

The student enters into a training contract with an employer, and has a training plan signed by the school that is formally registered with the VRQA. The school-based apprenticeship and traineeship becomes part of their study timetable, with the student spending some time during the normal school week in their employment and training.

Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships undertaken outside of school can also contribute to the VCE or VCAL.

Structured workplace learning

As part of a nationally recognised VET program, secondary school students can undertake structured workplace learning to acquire skills and knowledge in an industry setting. In Victoria, structured workplace learning is an important part of VET programs undertaken by VCE and VCAL students.

Reporting

The VRQA State Register provides a rich source of information on individual schools including their latest:

- Government School Performance Summary
- Annual Report to the school community.

Support to school councillors

The School Operations and Governance Unit (SOGU) of the Regional Services Group provides advice and guidance to school councils on a range of governance issues. Councillors can contact SOGU directly at school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au or 03 7022 1343 or 03 7022 1345 for information and advice.

Councillors can also contact their regional office for information and advice.

School councillors can also find information and advice on the Department's webpage School councils <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx> and in the School Policy Advisory Guide at School Councils: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/pages/councils.aspx>

The Department offers comprehensive face to face training free of cost to school councils of Victorian Government schools. The training is based on four modules of the Improving School Governance (ISG) materials; Governance, Strategic Planning, Finance and School Council President. Face to face training is accessed by contacting the provider, Synergistiq on 03 9069 5598 or email: sct@synergistiq.com

The ISG modules are also available online. To access the online training, see: **Improving School Governance** <http://www.schoolgovernance.vic.edu.au>

Resources and links

Community Language Schools

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/languages/Pages/clsschools.aspx>

MySchool website

<http://www.myschool.edu.au/>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vet/programs/sbat.aspx>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority F–10 Curriculum

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/f10index.aspx>

VET Programs for secondary students

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/vet.aspx>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Vocational Education and Training (VET)

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vet/index.aspx>

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/Adults/vcal_adult.aspx

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/index.aspx>

Victorian School of Languages

<http://www.vsl.vic.edu.au/>

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority State Register

<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/StateRegister/Search.aspx/Search?SearchType=0>

Handout A1

Role of school councillors: scenarios

Scenario	Within the functions of school council? Yes	Within the functions of school council? No	Issues and how they might be resolved
<p>1. The school council at a school in regional Victoria is recommending at tomorrow's council meeting that the school cleaning contract be awarded to Nifty Cleaners. You have just been made aware that the owner of Nifty Cleaners is the brother-in-law of a school councillor.</p>			
<p>2. A local franchise of a fast food company has offered to donate four trampolines with attached safety netting to the school. Their logos would be attached to the equipment but there would be no other advertising. Should the school council accept the offer?</p>			
<p>3. A couple of parents have expressed concern to you about the performance of a particular member of staff. Should school council consider instigating a performance review process for the school's teachers?</p>			
<p>4. At the request of a group of parents, the school council has decided to investigate the feasibility of running a before and after school care program.</p>			
<p>5. School council approves the school's budget for the forthcoming school year at its December meeting.</p>			

Scenario	Within the functions of school council? Yes	Within the functions of school council? No	Issues and how they might be resolved
<p>6. School council is considering whether its role includes encouraging parents, students and community members to contribute to the development of the School Strategic Plan.</p>			
<p>7. It has been suggested that school council establish a standard contract and users' guide for groups and individuals who want to hire the school hall.</p>			
<p>8. Several school councillors feel it is time that the school uniform policy was reviewed.</p>			
<p>9. As a councillor of a primary school, you are aware that some parents in your small community do not want multi-aged classes next year. Should this issue be raised at the next council meeting?</p>			
<p>10. You were elected to council as a parent member. You are also a member of the school's parents and friends group. Council has proposed changes to its camps and excursions policy, changes that are opposed by the group. The group has asked you to vote against the recommendations when they are put at the council meeting. As a school council member, how would you respond?</p>			

Handout B1

Sample Standing Orders for a School Council

These sample Standing Orders are intended as a guide only. A school council may determine its own Standing Orders but they must be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the Act, the Regulations, the constituting Order of the school council and Department guidelines.

School Council Standing Orders

Introduction

The purpose of these Standing Orders is to assist school council to operate efficiently and effectively within the legal framework and Department guidelines for school councils.

School council membership

The membership of the school council according to its constituting Order is:

No.	Category	No.	Category	No.	Category	No.	Category	No.	Category
	Member		Parents		Department employees		Students		Community members

Co-option of community members

The community members included in the constituting Order will be co-opted to the school council at a special meeting of council held as soon as practicable after the declaration of the poll and before office bearers are elected. If the appointment of the community members either cannot be resolved at the special meeting called or on the resumption of the adjourned special meeting, the school council may proceed to the first meeting of the school council to elect office bearers.

Office bearers

The school council will have the following office bearer positions:

- president
- vice-president
- treasurer.

Office bearers will be elected at the first meeting of the school council after declaration of the poll each year and following a special meeting to co-opt community members.

Election of office bearers

In the election of an office bearer, if the votes are tied, the school council will decide the outcome by either holding a new election or drawing of lots. If a new election is held and is also tied, the school council may decide the election by the drawing of lots or decide to conduct further elections until the election of office bearers is decided.

Sub-committees

The school council will have the following sub-committees:

- Finance
- Education
- Grounds and buildings.

It is recommended that there is a sub-committee for the outside school hours care or kindergarten service if one is provided by the school.

Each sub-committee will be chaired by a member of school council, unless otherwise decided by the council. A sub-committee must include at least one school council member and have at least three members.

Meetings

Regular

The school council will meet twice a term on the first Monday of each month. The meeting will commence at 7pm and will finish no later than 9.30pm unless agreed by the school council. Meetings will be held in the conference room.

Public reporting (annual) meeting

The school council will call a public meeting at least once each year and at that meeting will:

- (a) report the proceedings of the council for the period since the date of the previous public meeting
- (b) present the Annual Report published by the council
- (c) if the accounts of the school council have been audited, present a copy of the audited accounts

The school council may, from time to time, call additional public meetings.

Extraordinary meeting

- An extraordinary meeting of the school council may be held at any time decided by the school council, if all members are given reasonable notice of the time, date, place and subject of the meeting
- The president of the school council or, in the absence of the president, the principal must call an extraordinary meeting of the school council if either of them receives a written request to do so from three councillors
- The president or the principal must call this meeting by sending a notice to all school council members, providing reasonable notice of the time, date, place and subject of the meeting
- The business of an extraordinary meeting will be confined to the subject for which it is called.

Quorum for meetings

- For a quorum to be achieved at a council meeting, not less than one half of school council members currently holding office must be present and a majority of the members present must not be DET employees. Any parent members on the council who also work for the Department are counted as DET employees for the purpose of a quorum
- If at the end of 30 minutes after the appointed time of the council meeting there is no quorum present, the meeting will stand adjourned to a time and place determined by the councillors present
- A member of the school council may be present at a council meeting, in person or by video conferencing or teleconferencing.

School council decisions

- Decisions of the school council will be by a majority of those eligible to vote and who are present at the meeting, where the majority are non-DET members. A vote by proxy is not valid
- Members will vote on a matter and the number of votes for and against will be recorded in the minutes
- Voting will normally be by a show of hands, but a secret ballot may be used for particular issues.

Tied votes

When a vote is tied (i.e. an even number of people are for and against a decision), the president (presiding member) has a second or casting vote.

Absence of the president and other members from a meeting

- If the president is unable to preside at a school council meeting, and if a vice-president has been appointed, the vice-president shall preside at the meeting
- If the president is unable to preside at a school council meeting, and there is no vice-president appointed, the school council will elect a member of the school council to chair the meeting (other than an employee of the Department)
- If a council member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology should be submitted to the principal prior to the meeting.

Conflict of interest

If a school council member or a member of his or her immediate family has any perceived or actual conflict of interest (either financial or non-financial) in a subject or matter under discussion at a school council meeting, that councillor:

- must declare the conflict of interest
- must not be present during the discussion unless invited to do so by the person presiding at the meeting
- must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter
- may be included in the quorum for that meeting.

The declaration of interest will be included in the minutes of the meeting. If the conflict of interest involves a principal or Business Manager it must be entered onto the Conflict of Interest Register on eduPay and managed appropriately.

Extended leave of a council member

- A school councillor may apply in writing to the president for extended leave of up to three consecutive meetings
- If a councillor is granted extended leave, their membership is excluded in determining the requirement for a quorum of not less than half the members currently holding office.

Agenda

The principal will ensure an agenda is prepared for each regular meeting and distribute the agenda, draft minutes from the previous meeting and meeting papers such as sub-committee reports, principal's and president's reports to school council members no less than five days before the meeting.

Open and closed meetings

- School council meetings will generally be open to the school community but the principal and school council may decide that only councillors may be present at a meeting or part of a meeting
- If the meeting is open, visitors may speak by invitation of the presiding member.

Length of meetings and extensions of meeting times

If business has not been concluded within 2.5 hours of the council meeting commencing, the presiding member will ask school councillors if they wish to defer the rest of the business until the next meeting or to extend the meeting. A motion is necessary if council wants to extend the meeting. The meeting will be extended for no more than 15 minutes.

Minutes

- The principal will ensure a record of each school council meeting is kept and that draft minutes are prepared after each meeting and distributed to school council members prior to the next meeting. The principal may delegate this responsibility to another person
- The minutes will record the type of meeting (regular, extraordinary or public); date, time and venue of meeting; names of attendees and apologies received from members; name of presiding officer; a record of the business of the meeting including the decision on the minutes of the previous meeting; inward and outward correspondence and reports of any sub-committees tabled; and decisions including motions and any amendments, names of movers and seconders, whether the motion was carried or rejected and the number of votes for and against
- When school council minutes are submitted for confirmation, only questions regarding their accuracy as a record of the meeting are to be raised
- Once the minutes have been accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting, they are to be signed by the school council president or the person who presided at the meeting
- Business arising from the minutes is dealt with after the minutes have been confirmed.

Conduct of meetings

- School councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct and locally agreed etiquette.

School council principles

The school council will operate according to the following principles:

- respectful partnerships
- clear and honest two-way communication
- transparent processes
- democratic, informed decision-making
- personal and professional integrity.

In the conduct of meetings, the following etiquette will be observed by members:

- only one person talks at a time
- all requests to speak are directed to the presiding member
- all speakers are listened to in respectful silence
- no 'side conversations' are held
- members will listen to the discussion carefully in order to avoid making points that have already been made or asking questions which have already been answered
- when the presiding member indicates that the topic of discussion is closed, no further comments are made
- members will not use jargon
- members will ensure that all electronic devices, such as mobile phones, are silenced and no calls are taken during the meeting
- members will stay calm regardless of how difficult or challenging the topic.

