

FILE NO: PSC2010-00009

TITLE: PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES

OWNER: GOVERNANCE SECTION MANAGER

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure Port Stephens Council (Council) complies with section 42 of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act).
- 1.2 Council takes reports of serious wrongdoing seriously. Council is committed to building a 'speak up' culture where public officials are encouraged to report any conduct that they reasonably believe involves wrongdoing.

2. CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 The previous Internal Reporting policy framework under the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994 is now required to be replaced with this policy with the introduction of the PID Act.
- 2.2 The integrity of Council relies upon our staff, volunteers, contractors and subcontractors speaking up when they become aware of wrongdoing.
- 2.3 This policy sets out:
 - how Council will support and protect you if you come forward with a report of serious wrongdoing
 - how we will deal with the report and our other responsibilities under the PID Act
 - who to contact if you want to make a report
 - how to make a report
 - the protections which are available to you under the PID Act.
- 2.4 This policy also documents our commitment to building a speak up culture. Part of that speak up culture is having in place a framework that facilitates public interest reporting of wrongdoing by:
 - protecting those who speak up from detrimental action
 - imposing duties on agencies who receive reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

2.5 In NSW, that framework is the PID Act.

2.6 This policy should be read in conjunction with a number other relevant policies such as the Code of Conduct, Fraud and Corruption Control policy, Gifts and Benefits policy, Pecuniary Interest Returns policy and the Statement of Business Ethics. These policies, together with this policy are available from Council's website at <https://www.portstephens.nsw.gov.au/council/policies-and-guidelines/policies>. Council employees will also be able to access the policies internally from Myport (the intranet).

3. SCOPE:

3.1 The policy applies to, and for the benefit of, all public officials within or engaged by Council. This definition may also extend to those external to Council. You are a public official if you are:

- a person employed in or by an agency or otherwise in the service of an agency
- a person having public official functions or acting in a public official capacity whose conduct or activities an integrity agency is authorised by another Act or law to investigate
- an individual in the service of the Crown
- a statutory officer
- a person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of an agency, including a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer
- an employee, partner or officer of an entity that provides services, under contract, subcontract or other arrangement, on behalf of an agency or exercises functions of an agency, and are involved in providing those services or exercising those functions
- a judicial officer
- a Member of Parliament (**MP**), including a Minister
- a person employed under the Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013.

3.2 The General Manager, other nominated disclosure officers and managers within Council have specific responsibilities under the PID Act. This policy also provides information on how people in these roles will fulfil their responsibilities. Other public officials who work in and for the public sector, but do not work for Council may use this policy if they want information on who they can report wrongdoing to within Council.

3.3 Complaints that does not fall under the scope of the Act, may be considered under other complaint policies found on Council's website, such as the Complaints Handling Policy and the Code of Conduct.

3.4 How to make a report of serious wrongdoing

Reports, complaints and grievances

3.4.1 When a public official reports suspected or possible wrongdoing in the public sector, their report will be a Public Interest Disclosure (PID) if it has certain features which are set out in the PID Act.

3.4.2 Some internal complaints or internal grievances may also be PIDs, as long as they have the features of a PID. If an internal complaint or grievance is a report of serious wrongdoing, we will consider whether it is a PID. If it is a PID, we will deal with it as set out in this policy, but we will also make sure we follow the Code of Conduct.

3.4.3 It is important that we quickly recognise that we have received a PID. This is because once a PID is received, the person who has made the report is entitled to certain protections and we have certain decisions that we have to make on how we will deal with the PID and how we will protect and support the person who has made the report.

When will a report be a PID?

3.4.5 There are three types of PIDs in the PID Act. These are:

- a) **Voluntary PID:** This is a PID where a report has been made by the public official because they decided, of their own accord, to come forward and disclose what they know.
- b) **Mandatory PID:** This is a PID where the public official has made a report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.
- c) **Witness PID:** This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

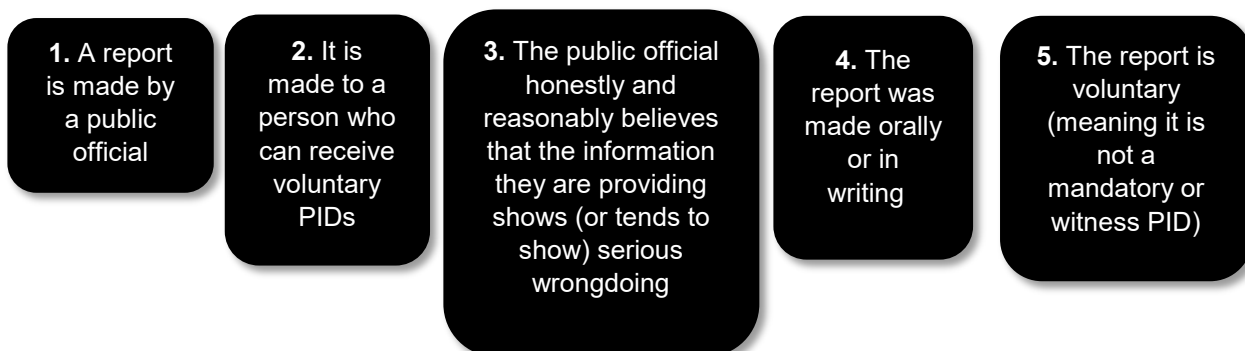
3.4.6 This policy mostly relates to making a voluntary PID and how we will deal with voluntary PIDs. People who make a mandatory PID or a witness PID are still entitled to protection. More information about protections is available in clause 3.5 of this policy.

3.4.7 You can find more information about mandatory and witness PIDs in the Ombudsman's guidelines 'Dealing with mandatory PIDs' and 'Dealing with witness PIDs'.

3.4.8 Voluntary PIDs are the kind of PIDs most people have in mind when they think about public interest reporting and ‘whistleblowing’.

3.4.9 They involve a public official making a report because they have information that they believe shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing, where they are not under a legal obligation to make that report and where it is not an ordinary part of their role to report such wrongdoing.

3.4.10 A report is a voluntary PID if it has the following five features, which are set out in sections 24 to 27 of the PID Act:



3.4.11 If the report has all five features, it is a voluntary PID.

3.4.12 You will not be expected to prove that what you reported actually happened or is serious wrongdoing. You do have to honestly believe, on reasonable grounds, that the information you are reporting shows or tends to show serious wrongdoing.

3.4.13 Even though you do not have to prove the serious wrongdoing happened or provide evidence, a mere allegation with no supporting information is unlikely to meet this test.

3.4.14 If we make an error and do not identify that you have made a voluntary PID, you will still be entitled to the protections under the PID Act.

3.4.15 If you make a report and believe we have made an error by not identifying that you have made a voluntary PID, you should raise this with a nominated disclosure officer or your contact officer for the report. If you are still not satisfied with this outcome, you can seek an internal review or we make seek to conciliate the matter. You may also contact the NSW Ombudsman. Further information on rights to internal review and conciliation is found in clause 3.10 of this policy.

Who can make a voluntary PID?

3.4.16 Any public official can make a voluntary PID — see clause 3.1 of this policy
You are a public official if:

- you are employed by Council
- you are a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer who provides services, or exercises functions, on behalf of Council, or
- you work for an entity (such as a non-government organisation) who is contracted by Council to provide services or exercise functions on behalf of Council — if you are involved in undertaking that contracted work.

3.4.17 A public official can make a PID about serious wrongdoing relating to any agency, not just the agency they are working for. This means that we may receive PIDs from public officials outside Council. It also means that you can make a PID to any agency, including an integrity agency like the Independent Commission Against Corruption (**ICAC**) and the NSW Ombudsman. Annexure B of this policy has a list of integrity agencies.

What is serious wrongdoing?

3.4.18 Reports must be of one or more of the following categories of serious wrongdoing to be a voluntary PID (in addition to having the other features set out here). Serious wrongdoing is defined in the PID Act as:

- **corrupt conduct** — such as a public official accepting a bribe
- **serious maladministration** — such as an agency systemically failing to comply with proper recruitment processes when hiring staff
- **a government information contravention** — such as destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released under a Government Information Public Access application
- **a local government pecuniary interest contravention** — such as a senior council staff member recommending a family member for a council contract and not declaring the relationship
- **a privacy contravention** — such as unlawfully accessing a person's personal information on an agency's database
- **a serious and substantial waste of public money** — such as an agency not following a competitive tendering process when contracting with entities to undertake government work.

3.4.19 When you make your report, you do not need to state to Council what category of serious wrongdoing you are reporting or that you are reporting serious wrongdoing.

Who can I make a voluntary PID to?

3.4.20 For a report to be a voluntary PID, it must be made to certain public officials.

Making a report to a public official who works for Council.

3.4.21 You can make a report inside Council to:

- the General Manager
- a disclosure officer for Council — a list of disclosure officers for Council and their contact details can be found at Annexure A of this policy
- your manager this is the person who directly, or indirectly, supervises you. It can also be the person who you directly, or indirectly, report to. You may have more than one manager. Your manager will make sure that the report is communicated to a disclosure officer on your behalf or may accompany you while you make the report to a disclosure officer.

Making a report to a recipient outside of Council

3.4.22 You can also make your report to a public official in another agency (meaning an agency you do not work for) or an integrity agency. These include:

- the **head of another agency** — this means the head of any public service agency
- an **integrity agency** — a list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy
- a **disclosure officer for another agency** — ways to contact disclosure officers for other agencies is located in an agency's PID policy which can be found on their public website
- a **Minister or a member of a Minister's staff** but the report must be made in writing.

3.4.23 If you choose to make a disclosure outside of Council, it is possible that your disclosure will be referred back to Council so that appropriate action can be taken.

Making a report to a Member of Parliament or journalist

3.4.24 Disclosures to MPs or journalists are different to other reports. You can only disclose a report of wrongdoing as a voluntary PID to an MP or journalist in the following circumstances:

- You must have first made substantially the same disclosure (described here as a 'previous disclosure') to someone who can receive disclosures.
- The previous disclosure must be substantially true.
- You did not make the previous disclosure anonymously.

- You did not give a written waiver of your right to receive information relating to your previous disclosure.
- You did not receive the following from Council:
 - notification that Council will not investigate the serious wrongdoing and will also not refer the previous disclosure to another agency, or
 - the following information at the end of the investigation period:
 - notice of Council's decision to investigate the serious wrongdoing
 - a description of the results of an investigation into the serious wrongdoing
 - details of proposed or recommended corrective action as a result of the previous disclosure or investigation.

3.4.25 Investigation period means:

- after six months from the previous disclosure being made, or
- after 12 months if you applied for an internal review of the Council's decision within six months of making the disclosure.

3.4.26 If all the above requirements are met, your disclosure to an MP or journalist may be a voluntary PID.

What form should a voluntary PID take?

3.4.27 You can make a voluntary PID:

- **in writing** — this could be an email or letter to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs.
- **orally** — have a private discussion with a person who can receive voluntary PIDs. This can be face-to-face, via telephone or virtually.
- **anonymously** — write an email or letter or call a person who can receive PIDs to make a report without providing your name or anything that might identify you as the maker of the report. A report will only be considered anonymous if there is no reasonable or practical way of communicating with the person making the report. Even if you choose to remain anonymous, you will still be protected under the PID Act. It may be difficult, however, for Council to investigate the matter(s) you have disclosed if we cannot contact you for further information.
- PIDs can be emailed to PID@portstephens.nsw.gov.au

What should I include in my report?

3.4.28 You should provide as much information as possible so we can deal with the report effectively. The type of information you should include is:

- date, time and location of key events
- names of person(s) involved in the suspected wrongdoing, their role, title and how they are involved
- your relationship with the person(s) involved, such as whether you work closely with them
- your explanation of the matter you are reporting
- how you became aware of the matter you are reporting
- possible witnesses
- other information you have that supports your report.

What if I am not sure if my report is a PID?

3.4.29 You should report all wrongdoing you become aware of regardless of whether you think it is serious wrongdoing. It is important for Council to understand what is or may be occurring.

3.4.30 We are then responsible for making sure your report is handled appropriately under the PID Act, or if it is not a PID, in line with our other procedures. Even if your report is not a PID, it may fall within another one of Council's policies for dealing with reports, allegations or complaints.

Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID

3.4.31 The General Manager and/or the Governance Section Manager can, in certain circumstances, determine that a report is a voluntary PID even if the report does not otherwise have all the features of a voluntary PID. This is known as the 'deeming power'.

3.4.32 By deeming that a report is a voluntary PID, it ensures that reporters are provided with protections under the PID Act.

3.4.33 If you make a report that has not met all the requirements of a voluntary PID, you can refer your matter to the General Manager and/or Governance Section Manager to request that they consider deeming your report to be a voluntary PID.

3.4.34 A decision to deem a report to be a voluntary PID is at the discretion of the General Manager and/or Governance Section Manager. For more information

about the deeming power, see the Ombudsman's guideline 'Deeming that a disclosure is a voluntary PID'.

Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?

3.4.35 All enquiries can be directed to the Governance Section Manager, Legal Services Manager or the Governance Coordinator at Council.

3.4.36 Should you visit to raised concerns confidentially, it may be appropriate to contact the Governance Section Manager, Legal Services Manager or the Governance Coordinator to arrange a meeting at a suitable location and time.

3.5 Protections

How is the maker of a voluntary PID protected?

3.5.1 When you make a voluntary PID you receive special protections under the PID Act.

3.5.2 Council is committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect you from detriment as a result of having made a PID. We are also committed to maintaining your confidentiality as much as possible while the PID is being dealt with.

3.5.3 We will not tolerate any type of detrimental action being taken against you because you have made a report, might make a report or are believed to have made a report.

3.5.4 The maker of a voluntary PID is protected in the following ways:

i) Protection from detrimental action

- A person cannot take detrimental action against another person because they have made a voluntary PID or are considering making a PID. Detrimental action includes bullying, harassment, intimidation or dismissal.
- Once we become aware that a voluntary PID by a person employed or otherwise associated with Council that concerns serious wrongdoing relating to Council has been made, Council will undertake a risk assessment and take steps to mitigate the risk of detrimental action occurring against the person who made the voluntary PID.
- It is a criminal offence for someone to take detrimental action against a person because they have made or may make a voluntary PID. It is punishable by a maximum penalty of 200 penalty units or imprisonment for five years or both.

- A person may seek compensation where unlawful detrimental action has been taken against them.
- A person can apply for a court order (injunction) where detrimental action is threatened or has occurred (for example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement).

Note that a person who makes a PID can still be subject to reasonable management action (such as ordinary performance reviews and performance management). Provided such action is not taken because of the PID, it is not detrimental action under the PID Act.

ii) Immunity from civil and criminal liability

Some public officials are often subject to a duty of confidentiality that prevents them disclosing certain information that they obtain or become aware of at work. Sometimes, in order to make a PID, public officials will need to breach or disregard such confidentiality duties. If that happens, a public official cannot be disciplined, sued or criminally charged for breaching confidentiality.

iii) Confidentiality

Public officials and agencies must not disclose information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID unless doing so is permitted by the PID Act.

iv) Protection from liability for own past conduct

The Attorney General can give the maker an undertaking that a disclosure of their own past conduct will not be used against them if a person discloses their own wrongdoing or misconduct while making a report. This undertaking can only be given on application by an integrity agency to the Attorney General.

Protections for people who make mandatory and witness PIDs

3.5.5 Apart from PIDs that are made voluntarily by public officials, there are other types of reports that are recognised as PIDs under the PID Act:

- **A mandatory PID:** This is a PID where the public official has made the report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.
- **A witness PID:** This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

3.5.6 Protections for makers of mandatory and witness PIDs are detailed in the table below.

Protection	Mandatory PID	Witness PID
Detrimental action — It is an offence to take detrimental action against a person based on the suspicion, belief or awareness that a person has made, may have made or may make a PID.	✓	✓
Right to compensation — A person can initiate proceedings and seek compensation for injury, damage or loss suffered as a result of detrimental action being taken against them.	✓	✓
Ability to seek injunction — An injunction can be sought to prevent the commission or possible commission of a detrimental action offence against a person. For example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement.	✓	✓
Immunity from civil and criminal liability — a person will not incur civil or criminal liability if the person breaches a duty of confidentiality while making a disclosure. This means that legal action cannot be taken against a person for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or • breaching another restriction on disclosure. 	✓	✓

3.6 Reporting detrimental action

3.6.1 If you experience adverse treatment or detrimental action, such as bullying or harassment, you should report this immediately. You can report any experience of adverse treatment or detrimental action directly to Council, or to an integrity agency.

3.6.2 Reports of detrimental action may be reported to the Governance Section Manager, Legal Services Manager or the Governance Coordinator or alternatively through the confidential email address at pid@portstephens.nsw.gov.au

3.6.3 A list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy.

3.7 General support

- 3.7.1 Council will assign a key contact person to each maker of a PID at the time of lodgement. This person will support you through the process and take steps to protect your interest, specially in relation to the risk of detrimental action.
- 3.7.2 PID makers may also contact the Employee Assistance Program provider NewPysch by telephone 02 4926 5005 or <https://www.newpsych.com.au/eap-counselling>
- 3.7.3 Alternatively, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman should you have any questions about the PID Act and reporting generally. The NSW Ombudsman can be contacted at <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/>

3.8 Roles and responsibilities of Council employees

3.8.1 General Manager

- a) The General Manager is responsible for:
- fostering a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged
 - receiving disclosures from public officials
 - ensuring there is a system in place for assessing disclosures
 - ensuring the Council complies with this policy and the PID Act
 - ensuring that the Council has appropriate systems for:
 - overseeing internal compliance with the PID Act
 - supporting public officials who make voluntary PIDs, including by minimising the risk of detrimental action
 - implementing corrective action if serious wrongdoing is found to have occurred
 - complying with reporting obligations regarding allegations or findings of detrimental action
 - complying with yearly reporting obligations to the NSW Ombudsman.
- b) Disclosure coordinator

The Disclosures Coordinator has a central role in the Council's internal reporting system. The Disclosures Coordinator can receive and assess reports, and is the primary point of contact in the Council for the reporter.

The Disclosures Coordinator has a responsibility to:

- assess reports to determine whether or not a report should be treated as a public interest disclosure, and to decide how each report will be dealt with (either under delegation or in consultation with the General Manager)
- deal with reports made under the Council's Code of Conduct in accordance with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct procedures
- coordinate the Council's response to a report
- acknowledge reports and provide updates and feedback to the maker
- assess whether it is possible and appropriate to keep the maker's identity confidential
- assess the risk of reprisal and workplace conflict related to or likely to arise out of a report, and develop strategies to manage any risk identified
- where required, provide or coordinate support to staff involved in the reporting or investigation process, including protecting the interests of any officer the subject of a report
- ensure the Council complies with the PID Act
- assist the General Manager with yearly reporting obligations to the NSW Ombudsman.

c) Disclosure officers

Disclosure officers are responsible for:

- receiving reports from public officials
- receiving reports when they are passed on to them by managers
- ensuring reports are dealt with appropriately, including by referring the matter to the Disclosure Coordinator
- ensuring that any oral reports that have been received are recorded in writing.

d) Managers

The responsibilities of managers include:

- receiving reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- passing on reports they receive to a disclosure officer or the disclosure coordinator.

- e) All employees

All employees must:

- report suspected serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- use their best endeavours to assist in an investigation of serious wrongdoing if asked to do so by a person dealing with a voluntary PID on behalf of Council
- treat any person dealing with or investigating reports of serious wrongdoing with respect.

All employees must not take detrimental action against any person who has made, may in the future make, or is suspected of having made, a PID.

3.9 How Council will deal with voluntary PIDs

How Council will acknowledge that we have received a report and keep the person who made it informed

3.9.1 When a disclosure officer in Council receives a report which is a voluntary PID, or looks like it may be a voluntary PID, they must ensure the PID is provided to the Disclosure Coordinator to ensure the person who made the report will receive the following information:

- i) You will receive an acknowledgment that the report has been received. This acknowledgement will:
 - a) state that the report will be assessed to identify whether it is a PID
 - b) state that the PID Act applies to how Council deals with the report
 - c) provide clear information on how you can access this PID policy
 - d) provide you with details of a contact person and available supports.
- ii) If the report is a voluntary PID, we will inform you as soon as possible how we intend to deal with the report. This may include:
 - a) that we are investigating the serious wrongdoing
 - b) that we will refer the report to a different agency (if appropriate) to deal with the voluntary PID. If we do this, we will provide you with details of this referral
 - c) If we decide to not investigate the report and to not refer it to another agency for it to be investigated, we will tell you the reasons for this decision. We will also notify the NSW Ombudsman of this decision.
- iii) If we decide to investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with updates on the investigation at least every three months. During this time, if you would like more frequent updates, you should contact the contact person who was nominated when you made the report.

- a) If we investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with the following information once the investigation is complete:
 - a description of the results of the investigation — that is, we will tell you whether we found that serious wrongdoing took place.
 - information about any corrective action as a result of the investigation/s — this means we will tell you what action we took in relation to the person who engaged in the serious wrongdoing or if the serious wrongdoing was by Council, what we have put in place to address that serious wrongdoing.
- b) Corrective action could include taking disciplinary action against someone or changing the practices, policies and procedures that we have in place which led to the serious wrongdoing.
- iv) There may be some details about both the findings made as a result of the investigation and the corrective action taken that cannot be revealed to you. We will always balance the right of a person who makes a report to know the outcome of that report, with other legal obligations we have.
- v) If you have made an anonymous report, in many cases we may not be able to provide this information to you.

How Council will deal with voluntary PIDs

3.9.2 Once a report that may be a voluntary PID is received Council will look at the information contained in the report to see if it has the features of a voluntary PID. This assessment is undertaken to identify whether the report is a voluntary PID or another type of disclosure, and to make sure that the right steps are followed. If it is a voluntary PID, we will ensure that we comply with the requirements in the PID Act.

3.9.3 The report will be referred to the Disclosure Coordinator for assessment and the ongoing management of the report.

3.9.4 The maker of the PID may contact the Disclosure Coordinator at any time to make enquiries.

Report not a voluntary PID

3.9.5 Even if the report is not a voluntary PID, it will still need to be dealt with in a manner consistent with Council's Code of Conduct or Complaints Handling Policy processes by the Governance Section.

3.9.6 If the report is not a voluntary PID, we will let you know that the PID Act does not apply to the report and how we will deal with the concerns raised in the report.

3.9.7 If you are not happy with this assessment or otherwise disagree with it, you can raise it with the person who has communicated the outcome with you or a disclosure officer, request an internal review or request that the matter be conciliated. Council can, but do not have to, request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

Cease dealing with report as voluntary PID

3.9.8 Council may stop dealing with a voluntary PID because it is not actually a voluntary PID (meaning it does not have all the features of a PID).

3.9.9 Where Council ceases to deal with a PID the maker of the PID will be advised in writing and reasons will be provided as to why Council has ceased to deal with the PID.

Where a report is a voluntary PID

3.9.10 If the report is a voluntary PID:

- i) In most cases we will conduct an investigation to make findings about whether the serious wrongdoing disclosed in the report occurred, who was involved, who was responsible, and whether the people involved, or the Council engaged, in serious wrongdoing. There may be circumstances where we believe an investigation is not warranted — for example, if the conduct has previously been investigated.
- ii) There may also be circumstances where we decide that the report should be referred to another agency, such as an integrity agency. For example, reports concerning possible corrupt conduct may be required to be reported to the ICAC in accordance with section 11 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988.
- iii) Before referring a matter, we will discuss the referral with the other agency, and we will provide you with details of the referral and a contact person within the other agency.
- iv) If we decide not to investigate a report and to not refer the matter to another agency, we must let you know the reasons for this and notify the NSW Ombudsman.
- v) There may be occasions where Council will engage an external investigator to conduct the investigation. Where will occurs you will be notified and provided with a support person within Council to support you through the process.

How Council will protect the confidentiality of the maker of a voluntary PID

3.9.11 Council understand that people who make voluntary PIDs may want their identity and the fact that they have made a report to be confidential.

3.9.12 Under the PID Act, information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID (known as identifying information) is not to be disclosed by a public official or an agency.

3.9.13 There are certain circumstances under the PID Act that allow for the disclosure of identifying information. These include:

- i) where the person consents in writing to the disclosure
- ii) where it is generally known that the person is the maker of the voluntary PID because of their voluntary self-identification as the maker
- iii) when the public official or Council reasonably considers it necessary to disclose the information to protect a person from detriment
- iv) where it is necessary the information be disclosed to a person whose interests are affected by the disclosure
- v) where the information has previously been lawfully published
- vi) when the information is disclosed to a medical practitioner or psychologist for the purposes of providing medical or psychiatric care, treatment or counselling to the individual disclosing the information
- vii) when the information is disclosed for the purposes of proceedings before a court or tribunal
- viii) when the disclosure of the information is necessary to deal with the disclosure effectively
- ix) if it is otherwise in the public interest to disclose the identifying information.

3.9.14 Council will not disclose identifying information unless it is necessary and authorised under the PID Act.

3.9.15 Council will put in place steps to keep the identifying information of the maker and the fact that a report has been made confidential. It may not be possible for Council to maintain complete confidentiality while we progress the investigation, but we will do all that we practically can to not unnecessarily disclose information from which the maker of the report can be identified. We will do this by:

- i) We will limit the number of people who are aware of the maker's identity or information that could identify them
- ii) If we must disclose information that may identify the maker of the PID, we will still not disclose the actual identity of the maker of the PID, unless we have their consent to do so

- iii) We will ensure that any person who does know the identity of the maker of a PID is reminded that they have a legal obligation to keep their identity confidential
- iv) We will ensure that only authorised persons have access to emails, files or other documentation that contain information about the identity of the maker
- v) We will undertake an assessment to determine if anyone is aware of the maker's identity and if those persons have a motive to cause detrimental action to be taken against the maker or impede the progress of the investigation
- vi) We will provide information to the maker of the PID about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and advising them how best to protect their identity, for example, by telling them not to discuss their report with other staff, family or friends.

3.9.16 If confidentiality cannot be maintained or is unlikely to be maintained, Council will:

- i) advising the person whose identity may become known
- ii) updating the Council's risk assessment
- iii) implementing strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action
- iv) providing additional supports to the person who has made the PID
- v) reminding persons who become aware of the identifying information of the consequences for failing to maintain confidentiality and that engaging in detrimental action is a criminal offence and may also be a disciplinary matter.

How Council will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action

3.9.17 Council will not tolerate any detrimental action being taken by any person against a person who has made a PID, investigators, witnesses or the person the report is about.

3.9.18 Council will assess and take steps to mitigate detrimental action from being taken against the maker of a voluntary PID, the person whose conduct is the subject of a PID, investigators and witnesses.

3.9.19 Council will take steps to assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action by:

- i) explaining that a risk assessment will be undertaken (including reassessing the risk throughout the entirety of the matter)
- ii) providing details of the unit/role that will be responsible for undertaking a risk assessment
- iii) explaining the approvals for risk assessment, that is, role of the person who has final approval
- iv) explaining how the Council will communicate with the maker to identify risks

- v) listing the protections that will be offered, that is, the Council will discuss protection options with the maker which may including remote working or approved leave for the duration of the investigation
- vi) outlining what supports will be provided.

3.9.20 Detrimental action against a person is an act or omission that causes, comprises, involves or encourages detriment to a person or a threat of detriment to a person (whether express or implied). Detriment to a person includes:

- i) injury, damage or loss
- ii) property damage
- iii) reputational damage
- iv) intimidation, bullying or harassment
- v) unfavourable treatment in relation to another person's job
- vi) discrimination, prejudice or adverse treatment
- vii) disciplinary proceedings or disciplinary action, or
- viii) any other type of disadvantage.

3.9.21 Detrimental action does not include:

- i) lawful action taken by a person or body to investigate serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- ii) the lawful reporting or publication of a finding of serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- iii) the lawful making of adverse comment, resulting from investigative action
- iv) the prosecution of a person for a criminal offence
- v) reasonable management action taken by someone in relation to a person who made or may make a PID. For example, a reasonable appraisal of a PID maker's work performance.

How Council will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence

3.9.22 If Council become(s) aware of an allegation that a detrimental action offence has occurred or may occur, Council will:

- i) take all steps possible to stop the action and protect the person(s)
- ii) take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone that has taken detrimental action
- iii) refer any evidence of a detrimental action offence to the Commissioner of Police and the ICAC or the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (whichever is applicable)
- iv) notify the NSW Ombudsman about the allegation of a detrimental action offence being committed
- v) all referrals for alleged detrimental action offences will be undertaken by the General Manager and/or the Disclosure Coordinator

- vi) the person subject of the detrimental action may contact the Disclosure Coordinator at any time concerns detrimental action/s.

What Council will do if an investigation finds that serious wrongdoing has occurred

3.9.23 If, after an investigation, it is found that serious wrongdoing or other misconduct has occurred, Council will take the most appropriate action to address that wrongdoing or misconduct. This is also known as corrective action.

3.9.24 Corrective action can include:

- i) a formal apology
- ii) improving internal policies to adequately prevent and respond to similar instances of wrongdoing
- iii) providing additional education and training to staff where required
- iv) taking employment action against persons involved in the wrongdoing (such as termination of employment, relocation, a caution or reprimand)
- v) payment of compensation to people who have been affected by serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.

3.9.25 The procedure for taking corrective action will include:

- i) Only relevant manager/s will receive information about the findings of the investigation to assist with the implementation of any changes in process or policy. This may vary depending on the complexity of the investigation, however the sharing of information will be kept to a minimum.
- ii) The Disclosure Coordinator will liaise with the relevant areas of Council to ensure the corrective actions are implemented.
- iii) The Disclosure Coordinator will be responsible for notifying the maker of the corrective action/s.

3.10 Review and dispute resolution

Internal review

3.10.1 People who make voluntary PIDs can seek internal review of the following decisions made by Council:

- i) that Council is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- ii) to stop dealing with the report because Council decided it was not a voluntary PID
- iii) to not investigate the serious wrongdoing and not refer the report to another agency

- iv) to cease investigating the serious wrongdoing without either completing the investigation or referring the report to another agency for investigation.

3.10.2 Council will ensure internal reviews are conducted in compliance with the PID Act.

3.10.3 If you would like to make an application for an internal review, you must apply in writing within 28 days of being informed of Council's decision. The application should state the reasons why you consider Council's decision should not have been made. You may also submit any other relevant material with your application.

3.10.4 Applications for an internal review can be confidentially emailed to pid@portstephens.nsw.gov.au

3.10.5 An internal review will be conducted by a delegate appointed by the General Manager, a person not involved in the initial decision.

3.10.6 An internal review will be completed within 28 business days. If this not be possible Council will contact the applicant.

Voluntary dispute resolution

3.10.7 If a dispute arises between Council and a person who has made a report which is, or may be, a voluntary PID, we may request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the dispute. Conciliation is a voluntary process and will only be suitable for disputes where Council and the maker of the report are willing to resolve the dispute.

3.11 Other obligations

Record-keeping requirements

3.11.1 Council must keep full and accurate records with respect to all information received in connection with the PID Act. This ensures that Council complies with its obligations under the State Records Act 1998.

3.11.2 Council records are stored in the Electronic Document Records Management System (EDRMS). Each PID will be allocated a separate file and appropriate security levels will be put in place to ensure confidentiality.

Reporting of voluntary PIDs and Council annual return to the Ombudsman

3.11.3 Each year Council provide an annual return to the NSW Ombudsman which includes:

- information about voluntary PIDs received by Council during each return period (yearly with the start date being 1 July)
- action taken by Council to deal with voluntary PIDs during the return period
- how Council promoted a culture in the workplace where PIDs are encouraged.
- the Governance Section Manager will be responsible for ensuring the information mentioned above is collected, submitting the annual return and capturing the information within the EDRMS.

How Council will ensure compliance with the PID Act and this policy

3.11.4 Council will monitor the compliance of the PID Act and this policy through the internal audit program, the Governance Section, and reports to the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee.

3.11.5 Council will seek to correct any non-compliance as soon as reasonable practicable to ensure non-compliance is not repeated.

4. DEFINITIONS:

4.1 An outline of the key definitions of terms included in the policy.

Council	means Port Stephens Council
EDRMS	means Electronic Document Records Management System
ICAC	means Independent Commission Against Corruption
PID	means Public Interest Disclosure
PID Act	means Public Interest Disclosure Act

5. STATEMENT:

5.1 Port Stephens Council is committed to ensuring that disclosures of corruption, maladministration or serious and substantial waste are dealt with in an appropriate way; maintaining confidentiality and providing support for all parties. Council encourages individuals to come forward with any matter that they become aware where wrongdoing may have occurred.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES:

6.1 The Mayor and General Manager are responsible for implementing and complying with on the policy.

- 6.2 The Governance Section Manager is responsible for implementing, complying with, monitoring, evaluating, reviewing and providing advice on the policy.
- 6.3 Disclosure officers are responsible for complying with and providing advice on the policy.
- 6.4 Supervisors and managers are responsible for implementing, complying with, and providing advice on the policy.
- 6.5 Any error or issue found in the policy should be referred to the Governance Section Manager at Council.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS:

- 7.1 Port Stephens Council Code of Conduct
- 7.2 Local Government Act 1993
- 7.3 Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022
- 7.4 Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- 7.5 Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988

Annexure A — Names and worksites of disclosure officers for Council. Please refer to the MyPort for contact details.

Position	Work site	Contact
General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0246
Governance Section Manager (Disclosure Coordinator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0187 pid@portstephens.nsw.gov.au
Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0245
Director Corporate Strategy and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Soldiers Point Holiday Park • Shoal Bay Holiday Park • Thou Walla Sunset Retreat • Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary 	02 4988 0255
Director Community Futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Visitor Information Centre 	02 4988 0255
Director Facilities and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Raymond Terrace Depot • Nelson Bay Depot • Medowie Depot • Port Stephens Children's Services • OOSH Raymond Terrace • OOSH Clarence Town • OOSH Seaham • OOSH Grahamstown • OOSH Boomerang Park • OOSH Fern Bay • OOSH Tomaree • OOSH Shoal Bay • OOSH Medowie • OOSH Wirreanda • Family Day Centre 	02 4988 0255
Assets Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Raymond Terrace Depot • Nelson Bay Depot 	02 4988 0255

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medowie Depot 	
Capital Works Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Raymond Terrace Depot • Nelson Bay Depot • Medowie Depot 	024988 0255
Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Visitor Information Centre 	02 4988 0255
Community Services Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Salamander Waste Transfer Station • Raymond Terrace Library • Tomaree Library and Community Centre • Port Stephens Children's Services • OOSH Raymond Terrace • OOSH Clarence Town • OOSH Seaham • OOSH Grahamstown • OOSH Boomerang Park • OOSH Fern Bay • OOSH Tomaree • OOSH Shoal Bay • OOSH Medowie • OOSH Wirreanda • Family Day Centre 	02 4988 0255
Development and Compliance Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Financial Services Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Holiday Parks Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halifax Holiday Park • Soldiers Point Holiday Park • Shoal Bay Holiday Park • Thou Walla Sunset Retreat • Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary 	02 4988 0255

Organisation Support Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Public Domain and Services Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Raymond Terrace Depot • Nelson Bay Depot • Medowie Depot 	02 4988 0255
Strategy and Environment Section Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Legal Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Governance Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Enterprise Risk Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
HR Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building 	02 4988 0255
Mechanical Maintenance & Cleaning Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raymond Terrace Depot 	02 4988 0255
Mechanical Maintenance & Cleaning Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nelson Bay Depot 	02 4988 0255
Library Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raymond Terrace Library • Tomaree Library and Community Centre 	02 4988 0255
Waste Management Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salamander Waste Transfer Station 	02 4988 0255
Children Services Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Port Stephens Children's Services • OOSH Raymond Terrace • OOSH Clarence Town • OOSH Seaham • OOSH Grahamstown • OOSH Boomerang Park • OOSH Fern Bay • OOSH Tomaree • OOSH Shoal Bay • OOSH Medowie • OOSH Wirreanda • Family Day Centre 	02 4988 0255
Holiday Parks Operations Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halifax Holiday Park 	02 4988 0255

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soldiers Point Holiday Park• Shoal Bay Holiday Park• Thou Walla Sunset Retreat• Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary	
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Annexure B — List of integrity agencies

Integrity agency	What they investigate	Contact information
The NSW Ombudsman	Most kinds of serious maladministration by most agencies and public officials (but not NSW Police, judicial officers or MPs)	<p>Telephone: 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday</p> <p>Writing: Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000</p> <p>Email: info@ombo.nsw.gov.au</p>
The Auditor-General	Serious and substantial waste of public money by auditable agencies	<p>Telephone: 02 9275 7100</p> <p>Writing: GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001</p> <p>Email: governance@audit.nsw.gov.au</p>
Independent Commission Against Corruption	Corrupt conduct	<p>Telephone: 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday</p> <p>Writing: GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364</p> <p>Email: icac@icac.nsw.gov.au</p>
The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption	Serious maladministration by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	<p>Telephone: 02 9228 3023</p> <p>Writing: PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001</p> <p>Email: oicac_executive@oicac.nsw.gov.au</p>
The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	<p>Telephone: 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079</p> <p>Writing: GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001</p> <p>Email: contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au</p>
The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the LECC and LECC officers	<p>Telephone: 02 9228 3023</p> <p>Writing: GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001</p> <p>Email: oilcc_executive@oilcc.nsw.gov.au</p>

Policy

Office of the Local Government	Local government pecuniary interest contraventions	Email: olg@olg.nsw.gov.au
The Privacy Commissioner	Privacy contraventions	Telephone: 1800 472 679 Writing: GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au
The Information Commissioner	Government information contraventions	Telephone: 1800 472 679 Writing: GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au

CONTROLLED DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

This is a controlled document. Hardcopies of this document may not be the latest version. Before using this document, check it is the latest version; refer to Council's website: www.portstephens.nsw.gov.au .			
EDRMS container No.	PSC2010-00009	EDRMS record No.	23/334505
Audience	Elected members, Council employees, Council contractors, volunteers		
Process owner	Governance Section Manager		
Author	Governance Section Manager		
Review timeframe	3 years	Next review date	30 October 2026
Adoption date	24 October 2023		

VERSION HISTORY:

Version	Date	Author	Details	Minute No.
1.0	24 October 2023	Governance Section Manager	New policy in accordance with the Public Disclosure Act 2022 and the NSW Ombudsman's model policy.	256