



Edward  
River  
COUNCIL

# PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE (PID)

## POLICY & PROCEDURE

# Model Public Interest Disclosure Policy

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## Purpose

All agencies in NSW are required to have a Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Policy under section 42 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act)*.

At Edward River Council we take reports of serious wrongdoing seriously. We are committed to building a 'speak up' culture where Council officials are encouraged to report any conduct that they reasonably believe involves wrongdoing.

The integrity of our Council relies upon our staff, volunteers, contractors and subcontractors speaking up when they become aware of wrongdoing.

This policy sets out:

- how Edward River 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.

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 Council when it receives reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

In NSW, that framework is the PID Act.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Council's Code of Conduct and other related policies available on Council's website.

## Accessibility of this policy

This policy is available on Council's website (at [www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au](http://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au)) as well as on Sharepoint, Council's intranet.

An introduction to this policy is included in Council's induction process for all new staff.

A hard copy of the policy can be requested from Council's Manager Governance, Safety & Risk.

## Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to, and is for the benefit of, all Council officials. You are a Council official if you are:

- a person employed in or by Council or otherwise in the service of Council
- a person having official functions or acting in a Council official capacity whose conduct or activities an integrity agency is authorised by another Act or law to investigate
- a person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of Council, 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 Council or exercises functions of Council, and are involved in providing those services or exercising those functions.

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

## Who does this policy not apply to?

This policy does not apply to:

- people who have received services from Council and want to make a complaint about those services
- people, such as contractors, who provide services to Council. For example, employees of a company that sold computer software to Council.

This means that if you are not a Council official, this policy does not apply to your complaint (there are some circumstances where a complaint can be deemed to be a voluntary PID, see section 1(i) of this policy for more information).

However, you can still make a complaint to Edward River Council. This can be done by writing to the Chief Executive Officer outlining the nature of your complaint, emailed to [council@edwardriver.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@edwardriver.nsw.gov.au) or posted to PO Box 270, Deniliquin, NSW, 2710. More information about making a complaint to Council can be found on Council's website at [www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au](http://www.edwardriver.nsw.gov.au).

## Compliance with the PID Act

Edward River Council will periodically review this Policy and Procedure to ensure it continues to align with the requirements of the PID Act. Reviews will occur at intervals of not more than two years, and edits will be recorded in the Version Control table at the end of this document.

Council's Manager Governance, Safety & Risk can be contacted if an error or other issue is found with this Policy & Procedure. Approval for authorising edits made in response lies with Council's Chief Executive Officer.

The periodic review of this document will also consider if it is meeting its purpose.

## What is contained in this policy?

This policy will provide you with information on the following:

- ways you can make a voluntary PID to Edward River Council under the PID Act
- the names and contact details for the nominated disclosure officers in Council
- the roles and responsibilities of people who hold particular roles under the PID Act and who are employees of Council
- what information you will receive once you have made a voluntary PID
- protections available to people who make a report of serious wrongdoing under the PID Act and what we will do to protect you
- Council procedures for dealing with disclosures
- Council procedures for managing the risk of detrimental action and reporting detrimental action
- Council record-keeping and reporting requirements
- how Council will ensure it complies with the PID Act and this policy.

If you require further information about this policy, how public interest disclosures will be handled and the PID Act you can:

- confidentially contact a nominated disclosure officer within Council
- contact the PID Advice Team within the NSW Ombudsman by phone: (02) 9286 1000 or email: [pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au), or
- access the NSW Ombudsman's PID guidelines which are available on its website at [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au).

If you require legal advice with respect to the PID Act or your obligations under the PID Act, you may need to seek independent legal advice.

## **1. How to make a report of serious wrongdoing**

### **(a) Reports, complaints and grievances**

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

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 our complaints handling and grievance procedures.

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.

Council will deal with all complaints, internal grievances and other misconduct matters sensitively and appropriately, in accordance with its policies.

Staff are encouraged to report any wrongdoing or misconduct, not only reports of serious wrongdoing as defined by the PID Act, so that Council may deal with these issues appropriately. In the first instance, reports of wrongdoing or misconduct should be made to your line manager, or their line manager if they are absent or it is otherwise not appropriate to report to your direct line manager. Council's grievance and complaints policies will inform the steps to be taken in response to reports made.

### **(b) When will a report be a PID?**

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

2. *Voluntary PID*: This is a PID where a report has been made by the Council official because they decided, of their own accord, to come forward and disclose what they know.
3. *Mandatory PID*: This is a PID where the Council 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 Council.
4. *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.

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 section 2 of this policy.

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

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

They involve a Council 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.

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:

1. A report is made by a Council official

2. It is made to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs

3. The Council official *honestly and reasonably believes* that the information they are providing *shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing*

4. The report was made orally or in writing

5. The report is voluntary (meaning it is not a mandatory or witness PID)

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

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.

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.

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.

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 section 7 of this policy.

### (c) Who can make a voluntary PID?

Any Council official can make a voluntary PID — see ‘Who this policy applies to’. You are a Council 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.



A Council official can make a PID about serious wrongdoing relating to *any* agency, not just the council they are working for. This means that we may receive PIDs from Council officials outside our organisation. 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.

### (d) What is serious wrongdoing?

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 Council official accepting a bribe
- *serious maladministration* — such as Council 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 a Council database
- *a serious and substantial waste of public money* — such as Council not following a competitive tendering process when contracting with entities to undertake government work.

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.

### (e) Who can I make a voluntary PID to?

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

#### ***Making a report to a Council official who works for Council***

You can make a report inside Council to:

- The Chief Executive Officer
- 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***

You can also make your report to a Council 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, including another local council
- 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 that 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*.

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

***Making a report to a Member of Parliament or journalist***

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 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.

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 agency's decision within six months of making the disclosure.

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

**(f) What form should a voluntary PID take?**

You can make a voluntary PID:

- *in writing* — this could be an email or letter to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs.

- *verbally* — 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.

### **(g) What should I include in my report?**

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/description 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.

### **(h) What if I am not sure if my report is a PID?**

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.

Council is 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.

### **(i) Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID**

The Chief Executive Officer 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'.

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

If you make a report that has not met all the requirements of a voluntary PID, you can refer your matter to the Chief Executive Officer to request that they consider deeming your report to be a voluntary PID.

A decision to deem a report to be a voluntary PID is at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer. For more information about the deeming power, see the Ombudsman's guideline 'Deeming that a disclosure is a voluntary PID'.

### **(j) Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?**

If you have concerns or require further information, you may speak to one of the following people:

- Council's Manager Governance, Safety & Risk
- Another member of Council's Leadership Team
- One of Council's Disclosure Officers (see Annexure A)
- The NSW Ombudsman's Officer ([Making a public interest disclosure \(whistleblowing\) - NSW Ombudsman](https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/making-a-public-interest-disclosure-whistleblowing) at [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au))

## **2. Protections**

### **(a) How is the maker of a voluntary PID protected?**

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

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.

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.

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

- *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, we 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.

- *Immunity from civil and criminal liability*

Some Council 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, Council officials will need to breach or disregard such confidentiality duties. If that happens, a Council official cannot be disciplined, sued or criminally charged for breaching confidentiality.

- *Confidentiality*

Council officials and public 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.

- *Protection from liability for own past conduct*

The Attorney General can give the report 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.

### (b) Protections for people who make mandatory and witness PIDs

Apart from PIDs that are made voluntarily by Council 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 Council 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.

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

Protection	Mandatory PID	Witness PID
<b>Detrimental action</b> — 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.	✓	✓
<b>Right to compensation</b> — A person can initiate proceedings and seek compensation for injury, damage or loss suffered as a result of detrimental action being taken against them.	✓	✓
<b>Ability to seek injunction</b> — 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.	✓	✓

Protection	Mandatory PID	Witness PID
<p><b>Immunity from civil and criminal liability</b> — 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or</li> <li>• breaching another restriction on disclosure.</li> </ul>	✓	✓

### 3. Reporting detrimental action

If you experience adverse treatment or detrimental action, such as bullying or harassment, because you have made or may make a PID, you should report this immediately. You can report any experience of adverse treatment or detrimental action directly to Council or to an integrity agency. A list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy.

Within Council, reports of detrimental action can be made to the Manager Governance, Safety & Risk or to a member of Council's Executive Team.

### 4. General support

If you have questions generally about the PID Act and reporting, you will find answers on the NSW Ombudsman's website: [Making a public interest disclosure \(whistleblowing\) - NSW Ombudsman](https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/making-a-public-interest-disclosure-whistleblowing) at [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au).

If you make a PID report, a key contact person within Council will be identified in consultation with you. This person will take steps to protect your interests, for example if you are at risk of detrimental action. In most circumstances, the key contact person will be Council's Manager Governance, Safety & Risk. However, you will have an opportunity to help identify the most appropriate contact person, taking into account the particular circumstances of your PID report.

Council also makes available, free of charge, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that all staff are able to use if they need wellbeing support at any time. Council's EAP provider is Relationship Matters (telephone 03 8650 6262).

## 5. Roles and responsibilities of Council employees

Certain people within Council have responsibilities under the PID Act.

### Chief Executive Officer

#### (a) The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for:

- fostering a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged
- receiving disclosures from Council 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 Council 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 officers

Disclosure officers are responsible for:

- receiving reports from Council 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 appropriate complaint manager (Council's Manager Governance, Safety & Risk)
- ensuring that any verbal reports that have been received are recorded in writing.

#### (c) Managers

The responsibilities of managers include:

- receiving reports from people who report to them or who they supervise
- passing on reports they receive to a disclosure officer.

#### (d) 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.

No employee may take detrimental action against any person who has made, may in the future make, or is suspected of having made, a PID.

## **6. How we will deal with voluntary PIDs**

### **(a) How Edward River Council will acknowledge that we have received a report and keep the person who made it informed**

When a disclosure officer in Council receives a report which is a voluntary PID, or looks like it may be a voluntary PID, the person who made the report will receive the following information:

- You will receive a written acknowledgment that the report has been received. This acknowledgement will:
  - state that the report will be assessed to identify whether it is a PID
  - state that the PID Act applies to how Council deals with the report
  - provide clear information on how you can access this PID policy
  - provide you with details of a contact person and available supports.
- 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:
  - that we are investigating the serious wrongdoing
  - 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
  - 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.
- 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.
  - 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.
  - 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.
- 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.



- If you have made an anonymous report, in many cases we may not be able to provide this information to you.

## **(b) How Council will deal with voluntary PIDs**

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.

### ***Report not a voluntary PID***

Even if the report is not a voluntary PID, it will still need to be dealt with in a manner consistent with Council's Grievance Handling Management Practice or through an alternative process.

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.

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 may request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

### ***Cease dealing with report as voluntary PID***

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). Council will advise you if a decision is made to stop dealing with a report as a voluntary PID, and provide reasons why the matter is not deemed to have the features of voluntary PID.

### ***Where the report is a voluntary PID***

If the report is a voluntary PID:

- 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 or the agency involved engaged in serious wrongdoing. There may be circumstances where we believe an investigation is not warranted — for example, if the reported conduct has previously been investigated and resolved.
- 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*.
- 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.
- 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.

### **(c) How Council will protect the confidentiality of the maker of a voluntary PID**

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

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 Council official or an agency.

However, there are certain circumstances under the PID Act that allow for the disclosure of identifying information. These include:

- where the person consents in writing to the disclosure
- where it is generally known that the person is the maker of the voluntary PID because of their voluntary self-identification as the maker
- when the Council official or Council reasonably considers it necessary to disclose the information to protect a person from detriment
- where it is necessary, the information be disclosed to a person whose interests are affected by the disclosure
- where the information has previously been lawfully published
- 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
- when the information is disclosed for the purposes of proceedings before a court or tribunal
- when the disclosure of the information is necessary to deal with the disclosure effectively
- if it is otherwise in the public interest to disclose the identifying information.

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

We will put in place steps to keep the identifying information of the report maker and the fact that a report has been made confidential. It may not be possible for us 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:

- limiting the number of people who are aware of the report maker's identity or information that could identify them.
- 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.
- 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.
- We will ensure that only authorised persons have access to emails, files or other documentation about the PID, including documents that contain information about the identity of the report maker.

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.

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

- advise the person whose identity may become known
- implement strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action
- providing additional supports to the person who has made the PID
- remind 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.

#### **(d) How Council will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action**

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.

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.

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

- explaining that a risk assessment will be undertaken, and a risk management plan will be created (including reassessing the risk throughout the entirety of the matter)
- providing details of the unit/role that will be responsible for undertaking a risk assessment
- explaining the approvals for risk assessment and the risk management plan, that is, role of the person who has final approval
- explaining how Council will communicate with the report maker to identify risks
- listing the protections that will be offered, that is, Council will discuss protection options with the report maker which may including remote working or approved leave for the duration of the investigation
- outlining what supports will be provided.

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:

- injury, damage or loss
- property damage
- reputational damage
- intimidation, bullying or harassment
- unfavourable treatment in relation to another person's job
- discrimination, prejudice or adverse treatment
- disciplinary proceedings or disciplinary action, or
- any other type of disadvantage.

Detrimental action does not include:

- lawful action taken by a person or body to investigate serious wrongdoing or other misconduct

- the lawful reporting or publication of a finding of serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- the lawful making of adverse comment, resulting from investigative action
- the prosecution of a person for a criminal offence
- 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 report maker's work performance unrelated to or regardless of the PID report.

### **(e) How Council will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence**

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

- take all steps possible to stop the action and protect the person(s)
- take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone that has taken detrimental action
- 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)
- notify the NSW Ombudsman about the allegation of a detrimental action offence being committed.

Anyone who has experienced or witnessed a possible detrimental action offence can make an allegation to a disclosure officer that a detrimental action has occurred. The disclosure officer will provide the person subject to the alleged detrimental action with updates regarding any investigation into the allegation, and will liaise with that person to identify any support they may require while the investigation is underway.

In all instances of an allegation of a detrimental action offence, the person who is subject to the alleged detrimental action will be provided with contact information for Council's Employee Assistance Program.

### **(f) What Council will do if an investigation finds that serious wrongdoing has occurred**

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.

Corrective action can include:

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

Following an investigation that finds that serious wrongdoing or other misconduct has occurred, the findings will be reported to the Chief Executive Officer who will consider the recommendations made by the investigation.

In consultation with the Manager People & Culture, the Chief Executive Officer will formally determine what steps are to be taken to address the investigation's recommendations and ensuring that any required corrective action takes place.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Chief Executive Officer will write to the report maker to notify them of the outcome of the investigation and the corrective actions that are to be implemented in response.

## **7. Review and dispute resolution**

### **(a) Internal review**

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

- that Council is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- to stop dealing with the report because Council decided it was not a voluntary PID
- to not investigate the serious wrongdoing and not refer the report to another agency
- to cease investigating the serious wrongdoing without either completing the investigation or referring the report to another agency for investigation.

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

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.

Applications for internal review should be made to the Manager Governance, Safety & Risk, the Director Corporate Services or the Chief Executive Officer. The person receiving the application for internal review will provide you with a timeframe for conducting and completing the review of the decision, which will be not more than 28 days from receipt of the application for internal review.

### **(b) Voluntary dispute resolution**

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.

## **8. Other Council obligations**

### **(a) Record-keeping requirements**

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*.

Information related to voluntary PIDs received, investigation findings, applications for internal review, referrals to external agencies and any other related information will be filed within Council's records management system. Access to this information will be restricted to Council officers with responsibility to investigate and make findings on PID reports. All nominated disclosure officers will have access to that part of the records management system established for recording PIDs received.

### **(b) Reporting of voluntary PIDs and Council's annual return to the Ombudsman**

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

- information about voluntary PIDs received by Council during each return period (yearly for the period 1 July to 30 June)
- 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 Manager Governance, Safety & Risk will oversee the collection of information about voluntary PIDs in Council's records management system, and will prepare and submit the annual return to the NSW Ombudsman by the designated due date.

### **(c) How Council will ensure compliance with the PID Act and this policy**

The Manager Governance, Safety & Risk is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of Council's PID Policy & Procedures, and will provide a report to the Executive Team at least once per Council term (depending on the number of voluntary PIDs made, if any). This report may include:

- The number and nature of voluntary PIDs made since the last report
- The findings of any investigations in response to PIDs made
- Updates to internal policies to improve prevention of and responses to similar instances of wrongdoing
- The nature of education and training to staff to increase awareness of the PID Act and this policy, or to implement the findings from a PID investigation
- Recommendations for periodic internal audit of Council's PID processes
- Recommendations for these reports available to the Audit, Risk & Improvement Committee and/or Council.

## Annexure A — Names and contact details of disclosure officers for Council

Location	Disclosure officers	Contact details
Generally	Chief Executive Officer	Each of these Disclosure Officer can be contacted by Edward River Council staff via internal communications methods, including in person, by telephone, via email or Teams message.
	Directors	
	Manager Governance, Safety & Risk	
	Chief Financial Officer	
Civic Place, Town Hall and Estates Building	Chief Executive Officer	Other people may contact the nominated Disclosure Officers by calling: 03 5898 3000 and asking to speak to the relevant officer, stating that the matter is confidential.
	Director Corporate Services	
	Director Infrastructure	
	Chief Financial Officer	
Library	Coordinator Library	
Peppin Heritage Centre	Team Leader Visitor Services	
Depot (Wanderer Street)	Manager Transport	
	Manager Facilities & Open Spaces	
	Manager Utilities	

## Annexure B — List of integrity agencies

Integrity agency	What they investigate	Contact information
<b>The NSW Ombudsman</b>	Most kinds of <b>serious maladministration</b> by most agencies and Council officials (but not NSW Police, judicial officers or MPs)	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@ombo.nsw.gov.au">info@ombo.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Auditor-General</b>	<b>Serious and substantial waste of public money</b> by auditable agencies	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9275 7100 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:governance@audit.nsw.gov.au">governance@audit.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>Independent Commission Against Corruption</b>	<b>Corrupt conduct</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au">icac@icac.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au">oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au">contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission</b>	<b>Serious maladministration</b> by the LECC and LECC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:oiilecc_executive@oiilecc.nsw.gov.au">oiilecc_executive@oiilecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>Office of the Local Government</b>	<b>Local government pecuniary interest contraventions</b>	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:olg@olg.nsw.gov.au">olg@olg.nsw.gov.au</a>
<b>The Privacy Commissioner</b>	<b>Privacy contraventions</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>



<b>The Information Commissioner</b>	<b>Government information contraventions</b>	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>
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## Version Control

<b>Title</b>	Public Interest Disclosure Policy & Procedure		
<b>ECM Doc Set ID</b>	269833		
<b>Date Endorsed</b>	25 September 2023		
<b>Council Minute No.</b>	N/A		
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Manager Governance, Safety & Risk		
<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Modified By</b>	<b>Modifications Made</b>	<b>Date Endorsed by Chief Executive Officer</b>
7	Governance Coordinator	Updated Policy & Procedure developed in line with model policy issued by NSW Ombudsman in response to revised PID Act (2022). Replaces Doc ID 27202 (10/09/2020)	25 September 2023