

Camden Residents' Action Group

Incorporated

Camden – Still a Country Town

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Attention: Charles Weber,
Manager Legal and Governance

2 December 2025

Dear Sir,

Draft Code of Meeting Practice

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Camden's proposed Code of Meeting Practice which is consistent with the Office of Local Government's 2025 model code¹, the mandatory provisions of which are to be adopted by 31 December 2025. We understand that the model code is intended to promote community confidence in councils and their decisions including by increasing transparency and accountability of Councillors and requiring that all information upon which decisions are made is available to the public.

Our feedback is from the perspective of how the draft meeting rules facilitate Camden councillors to transparently and accountably represent the community they serve and facilitate confidence that issues in the community can be raised and addressed in a timely manner.

Our comments and associated questions follow.

¹ Office of Local Government August 2025 *The model code of meeting practice for local councils in NSW*. Available at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/councils/governance/model-code-of-meeting-practice/model-code-of-meeting-practice-for-local-councils-in-nsw/>

1. We note that a mandatory provision of the model code² is a prohibition of Councillor briefing sessions on business listed on the agenda for meetings of the council or committees of the council and that councillors can only request information that is also available to the public.

Currently the public has access to information (business paper and attachments) a few days before the meeting. This information is often voluminous, highly detailed and often technical. Community members often struggle to even read through the documents let alone seek clarification. Councillors can no longer be briefed on the contents.

- Does this necessarily mean that meeting information will be published well ahead of the meeting to allow Councillors, who need to fully across all the information in order to make decisions on behalf of the community, enough time to digest the material?
 - Will Councillors be given time to publicly seek additional clarification from staff in the council meeting itself?
 - Will another means of informing Councillors about development and community matters be provided (that is not definitionally a briefing on an agenda item) and will the public be able to attend such information sessions?
2. Public forums are of course mandatory and we note that the public address session, that was held within Camden's meetings, is to be held separately immediately prior to meetings beginning in 2026.

Under the model code Councils are free to extend engagement with the community and determine the rules of conduct of public forums such as time limits per speaker, the number of items a person can speak on, and submission deadlines for supporting materials.

Currently public addresses are limited to 4 minutes on one topic per meeting agenda item, with a limitation of 1 speaker for and 1 speaker against each agenda item and a total of 7 speakers. The draft code does not change these discretionary rules.

Looking at other draft codes there is a wide variation in approach to hearing from the community which is often best placed to provide local, relevant and timely insight. Despite the model code's principles³ of basing decisions on relevant quality information and respecting the needs and interests of the local community, the model code has not mandated that the community voice is easily heard.

² Office of Local Government August 2025 *The model code of meeting practice... Sections 3.31; 3.32 Prohibition of pre-meeting briefing sessions*

³ Office of Local Government August 2025 *The model code of meeting Practice... Section 2 Meeting principles*

We suggest that the public forum rules should facilitate community engagement to the extent practically possible. Wollondilly for example does not limit speakers to items on the meeting agenda (general issues can be raised), limits speakers to 2 both 'for' and 'against' each agenda item and allows 5 minutes to each speaker on three topics with seemingly no specific limit on the number of speakers.

A more generous approach to community forums can alert Councillors to issues of immediate importance to the community that are not on the meeting agenda. Allowing more community say on agenda items is particularly valuable given that Councillors cannot be briefed on them. More public input potentially means that decisions are based on more relevant and insightful information and more likely to be in the interests of the community. We understand that it can on occasion result in longer public forum sessions, but less restrictive rules can only help councillors serve the interests of the community and instil confidence in Council.

- Can the Public Forum rules in Camden's draft Code of Meeting Practice be amended to allow addresses on non-agenda items, allow more speakers and allow more time per speaker (similar to Wollondilly rules)?
3. Camden's proposed code also includes a non-mandatory supplementary section, *Receipt of Petitions* through which the community voice can also be heard. We appreciate that Camden Council formally accommodates and welcomes this form of community engagement. Our question relates to this subsection:

21.5 On receipt of a valid petition, a report will be submitted to the next available meeting of Council. The report is to note the nature of the petition and number of signatories. The Chairperson must not permit discussion or debate on the petition with the petition being noted for further consideration in conjunction of the subject matter. (Supplementary)

In relation to the clause *further consideration in conjunction with the subject matter*, we are unclear on the mechanism and timeline of the further consideration mentioned.

We assume that flagging the petition creates an agenda item that can be spoken to in a public address, but it is unclear why it cannot be discussed by Councillors if they wish. A possible procedure may be to include an agenda item to vote on whether the issue raised in the petition should be discussed at the council meeting in which it is flagged, or deferred to the next council meeting pending further information. Inclusion of more detail about the petition procedure in the code would provide comfort to a community dealing with a potentially important and urgent issue, that it will be discussed in good time and that any help forthcoming is likely to be timely.

- Could this subsection on petitions be clarified and extended to include the mechanism and timeline of considering issues raised in petitions in a way that facilitates community engagement with Council about what is raised?

Thank you for considering our input and we trust that the adopted Code of Meeting Practice will facilitate and improve community representation and confidence in council decision making.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenda Davis".

Glenda Davis

President