

POLICY

Public Interest Disclosure (PID)

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	SO 5.1 Effectively and efficiently manage the business of Council, while encouraging an open and participatory Council with an emphasis on transparency, community engagement, action and response.



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 Upper Hunter Shire Council (UHSC) we take reports of serious wrongdoing seriously. We are committed to building a 'speak up' culture where public officials are encouraged to report any conduct what 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 UHSC 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 agencies who receive 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 following policy documents:

- Code of Conduct
- Competitive Neutrality Complaints Policy
- Complaints Handling Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Control Policy
- Statement of Business Ethics
- Grievance Resolution Operational Policy
- Preventing and Responding to Workplace Aggression and Violence Operational Policy.

Accessibility of this policy

This policy is available on UHSC's publicly available website as well as on its intranet.

A copy of the policy will also be provided to all staff of Council on their commencement. A hard copy of the policy can be requested from the Disclosures Coordinator.



Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to, and for the benefit of, all public officials in NSW. 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 (including Councillors) 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 Government Minister
- a person employed under the *Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013*.

The General Manager, Disclosure Coordinator, nominated disclosure officers and those who manage staff within UHSC 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 UHSC may use this policy if they want information on who they can report wrongdoing to within UHSC.

Who does this policy not apply to?

This policy does not apply to:

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

This means that if you are not a public 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 UHSC. This can be done by utilising the provisions of Council's Code of Conduct, Competitive Neutrality Complaints Policy or Complaints Handling Policy as the case may be.



What is contained in this policy?

This policy will provide you with information on the following:

- ways you can make a voluntary PID to UHSC under the PID Act
- the names and contact details for the nominated disclosure officers in UHSC
- the roles and responsibilities of people who hold particular roles under the PID Act and who are employees of UHSC
- 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
- UHSC procedures for dealing with disclosures
- UHSC procedures for managing the risk of detrimental action and reporting detrimental action
- UHSC record-keeping and reporting requirements
- how UHSC 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 the Disclosure Coordinator or a nominated disclosure officer within UHSC
- contact the PID Advice Team within the NSW Ombudsman by phone: (02) 9286 1000 or email: pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au, or
- access the NSW Ombudsman's PID guidelines which are available on its website.

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 public 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 Code of Conduct, Competitive Neutrality Complaints Policy, Complaints Handling Policy, Fraud and Corruption Control Policy, Statement of Business Ethics, Grievance Resolution Operational Policy and Preventing and Responding to Workplace Aggression and Violence Operational Policy.

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.

(b) When will a report be a PID?

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

1. *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.
2. *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.
3. *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.

Some agencies are more likely than others to receive mandatory PIDs, particularly if they have staff with certain legal obligations to report serious wrongdoing.

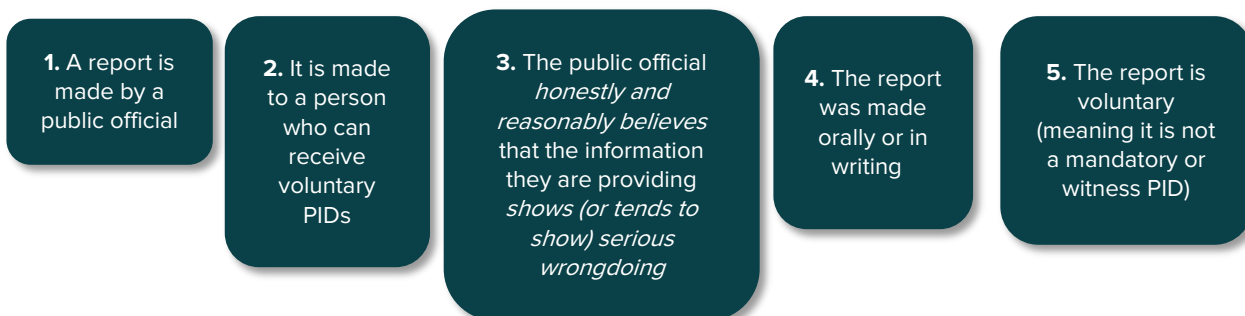
You can find more information about mandatory and witness PIDs in the Ombudsman's guidelines 'Dealing with mandatory PIDs' and 'Dealing with witness PIDs'.

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

They involve a 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.



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:



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 the Disclosure Coordinator or 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 may 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 public official can make a voluntary PID — see ‘Who this policy applies to’. You are a public official if:

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

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 our agency. 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 public official accepting a bribe, a councillor voting in favour of a development in which the councillor has an undisclosed financial interest, etc
- *serious maladministration* — such as an agency systemically failing to comply with proper recruitment processes when hiring staff, agency procedures that are unfairly discriminatory, etc
- *a government information contravention* — such as destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released under a Government Information Public Access application, knowingly making decisions that are contrary to the GIPA Act, etc
- *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 senior staff member holding an undisclosed shareholding in a company competing for a Council contract, etc
- *a privacy contravention* — such as unlawfully accessing a person's personal information on an agency's database, an agency's poor email practices resulting in repeated failures by staff to ensure that emails containing personal information go to the correct recipient, etc
- *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, the purchase of unnecessary or inappropriate goods and services, etc.

When you make your report, you do not need to state to us 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 public officials.

Making a report to a public official at UHSC

You can make a report inside UHSC to:

- The General Manager
- The Mayor – if the complaint is about the General Manager
- The Disclosures Coordinator
- a disclosure officer for UHSC — a list of disclosure officers for UHSC 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 (and could be a Supervisor, Manager or Director). 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 UHSC

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*.

If you choose to make a disclosure outside of UHSC, it is possible that your disclosure will be referred back to us 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 UHSC:
 - notification that UHSC 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 UHSC'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.

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.
- *orally*— have a private discussion with a person who can receive voluntary PIDs. This can be face-to-face, via telephone or virtually. Where reports of wrongdoing are made



orally, we will need to prepare written report about what you have said and will need to get you to confirm the veracity of that report.

- 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 us 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 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 us to understand what is or may be occurring.

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 the Council's policies for dealing with reports, allegations or complaints.

(i) Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID

The General 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'.

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 General Manager 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 General Manager. 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?

You can contact the Disclosure Coordinator or Disclosures Officers if you have any concerns or questions. Any discussions will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Their contact details are contained in Annexure A.

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.

We are 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 UHSC that concerns serious wrongdoing relating to UHSC 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 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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



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.

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.	✓	✓



<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or • breaching another restriction on disclosure. 		
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3. Reporting detrimental action

If you experience adverse treatment or detrimental action, such as bullying or harassment, you should report this immediately. Reports of detrimental action should be made to your supervisor, the Disclosure Coordinator or the General Manager. In the case of an allegation of reprisal by the General Manager, you can alternatively report this to the Mayor. Contact details can be found at Annexure A of this policy.

You can also report any experience of adverse treatment or detrimental action directly to an integrity agency. A list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy.

4. General support

UHSC will make sure that those who have reported wrongdoing, regardless of whether their report is treated as a PID, are provided with access to any professional support they may need as a result of the reporting process – such as stress management or counselling services.

Access to support may also be available to others involved in the reporting process where appropriate. Reporters and others involved in the process can discuss their support options with the Disclosures Coordinator.

Impacted staff members will also be provided the appropriate contact information to access Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) Services. Where necessary Council will contact EAP to discuss appropriate support and counselling for staff.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Certain people within UHSC have responsibilities under the PID Act.

(a) Councillors

All Councillors are obliged to:

- report all known or suspected wrongdoing and support those who have made reports of wrongdoing
- if requested, assist those dealing with the report, including supplying information on request, cooperating with any investigation and maintaining confidentiality
- treat any staff member or person dealing with a report of wrongdoing with courtesy and respect
- respect the rights of any person the subject of reports.



Councillors must not:

- make false or misleading reports of wrongdoing
- victimize or harass anyone who has made a report.

Additionally, the behaviour of all Councillors involved in the internal reporting process must adhere to UHSC's Code of Conduct. A breach of the code could result in disciplinary action.

(b) Mayor

The Mayor can receive reports from staff and Councillors about the General Manager. Where the Mayor receives such reports, the Mayor has a responsibility to:

- assess the reports to determine whether or not they should be treated as a public interest disclosure, and to decide how they will be dealt with
- deal with reports made under the Council's Code of Conduct in accordance with the Council's adopted code of conduct procedures
- refer reports to an investigating authority, where appropriate
- liaise with the disclosures coordinator to ensure there are strategies in place to support reporters, protect reporters from reprisal and manage workplace conflict that may arise in relation to a report.

(c) General Manager

The General Manager is responsible to:

- foster a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged
- receive disclosures from public officials
- ensure there is a system in place for assessing disclosures
- ensure the Council complies with this policy and the PID Act
- ensure 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 reporting obligations to the NSW Ombudsman.

(d) Disclosures Coordinator

The Disclosures Coordinator can receive and assess reports, and is the primary point of contact at UHSC 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)
- coordinate Upper Hunter Shire Council's response to a report
- acknowledge reports and provide updates and feedback to the reporter
- assess whether it is possible and appropriate to keep the reporter'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 UHSC complies with the PID Act
- provide reports to the NSW Ombudsman in accordance with the PID Act.

(e) Disclosure officers

Disclosure officers are responsible for:

- receiving reports from public officials
- receiving reports when they are passed on to them by Directors, Managers and Coordinators/Supervisors
- 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.

(f) Directors

Directors should be aware of the internal reporting policy and are responsible for creating a local work environment where staff are comfortable and confident about reporting wrongdoing. They have a responsibility to:

- encourage staff to report known or suspected wrongdoing within the organisation and support staff when they do
- receive reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- pass on reports they receive to the Disclosures Coordinator or a disclosure officer.
- implement local management strategies, in consultation with the Disclosures Coordinator, to minimise the risk of reprisal or workplace conflict in relation to a report
- notify the Disclosures Coordinator or General Manager immediately if they believe a staff member is being subjected to reprisal as a result of reporting wrongdoing, or in the case of suspected reprisal by the General Manager, notify the Mayor.



(g) Managers

Managers should be aware of the internal reporting policy and are responsible for creating a local work environment where staff are comfortable and confident about reporting wrongdoing. They have a responsibility to:

- encourage staff to report known or suspected wrongdoing within the organisation and support staff when they do
- receive reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- pass on reports they receive to the Disclosures Coordinator or a disclosure officer.
- implement local management strategies, in consultation with the Disclosures Coordinator, to minimise the risk of reprisal or workplace conflict in relation to a report
- notify the Disclosures Coordinator or General Manager immediately if they believe a staff member is being subjected to reprisal as a result of reporting wrongdoing, or in the case of suspected reprisal by the General Manager, notify the Mayor.

(h) Coordinators and Supervisors

Coordinators and supervisors should be aware of the internal reporting policy and are responsible for creating a local work environment where staff are comfortable and confident about reporting wrongdoing. They have a responsibility to:

- encourage staff to report known or suspected wrongdoing within the organisation and support staff when they do
- receive reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- pass on reports they receive to the Disclosures Coordinator or a disclosure officer.
- implement local management strategies, in consultation with the Disclosures Coordinator, to minimise the risk of reprisal or workplace conflict in relation to a report
- notify the Disclosures Coordinator or General Manager immediately if they believe a staff member is being subjected to reprisal as a result of reporting wrongdoing, or in the case of suspected reprisal by the General Manager, notify the Mayor.

(i) 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 UHSC
- treat any person dealing with or investigating reports of serious wrongdoing with respect.

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.



6. How we will deal with voluntary PIDs

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

When a report is received in UHSC 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 an 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 UHSC will deal 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, as far as practicable, we will provide you with the following information once the investigation is complete:
 - o a description of the results of the investigation — that is, we will tell you whether we found that serious wrongdoing took place.
 - o information about any corrective action as a result of the investigation/s.
 - 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 UHSC will deal with voluntary PIDs

Once a report that may be a voluntary PID is received, UHSC 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.

All reports will be promptly and thoroughly assessed to determine what action will be taken to deal with the report.

The Disclosures Coordinator is responsible for assessing reports, in consultation with the General Manager (or the Mayor, as appropriate). All reports will be assessed on the information available to the Disclosures Coordinator at the time. It is up to the Disclosures Coordinator to decide whether an investigation should be carried out and how that investigation should be carried out. In assessing a report, the Disclosures Coordinator may decide that the report should be referred elsewhere or that no action should be taken on the report.

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 our Grievance Handling Policy or through an alternate 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. We can, but do not have to, request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

Cease dealing with report as voluntary PID

UHSC 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).

In such circumstances, we will advise you and provide reasons why we consider that your report is not a 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 involved, or the agency 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.
- Depending upon the nature of the report, it may be appropriate for Council to appoint an external investigator to deal with the matter. Such a decision will be made by the Disclosures Coordinator in conjunction with the General Manager (or the Mayor, as appropriate). In such circumstances, the Disclosures Coordinator will advise the maker of the report and in most cases the internal investigator will maintain contact with the maker of the report in relation to the conduct of their investigation.
- 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 UHSC 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 public official or an agency.

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 public official or UHSC 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 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. Some examples of how the confidentiality of the maker of a report might be protected are set out below:

- We will limit the number of people who are aware of the maker's identity or information that could identify them.
- 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 that contain information about the identity of the maker.



- 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.
- 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 maintained, UHSC will:

- Advise the person whose identity may become known
- Update the Council's risk assessment and risk management plan
- Implement strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action
- Provide additional support to the person who has made the PID
- Remind persons who become aware of the identifying information of the consequences of failing to maintain confidentiality and that engaging in detrimental action is a criminal offence and may also be a disciplinary matter.

(d) How UHSC will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action

UHSC 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.

We 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.

We will take the following steps to assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action:

- When you report wrongdoing, UHSC will undertake a thorough risk assessment to identify the risk to you of detrimental action in reprisal for reporting, as well as indirect but related risks of workplace conflict or difficulties. The risk assessment will also identify strategies to deal with those risks and determine the level of protection and support that is appropriate.
- Depending on the circumstances, UHSC may:
 - relocate the reporter or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation within the current workplace
 - transfer the reporter or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation to another position for which they are qualified
 - grant the reporter or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation leave of absence during the investigation of the disclosure.

These courses of action are not punishment and will only be taken in consultation with the reporter.

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 maker's work performance.

(e) How UHSC will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence

If UHSC becomes aware of an allegation that a detrimental action offence has occurred or may occur, we 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.

The Disclosure Coordinator is responsible for dealing with allegations of a detrimental action offence and will keep the maker of a report updated.

(f) What UHSC 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, UHSC will take the most appropriate action to address that wrongdoing or misconduct. This is also known as corrective action.

The results of an such an investigation will be provided to the General Manager (or the Mayor, as appropriate) and to the elected Council in a confidential meeting, to consider any recommendations made. Any decisions made by the elected Council will be implemented and the maker of the report will be informed.



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, a caution or reprimand)
- payment of compensation to people who have been affected by serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.

7. Review and dispute resolution

(a) Internal review

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

- that UHSC is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- to stop dealing with the report because we 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.

UHSC 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 our decision. The application should state the reasons why you consider that decision should not have been made. You may also submit any other relevant material with your application.

A request for an internal review should be forwarded to the Disclosure Coordinator. Contact details for the Disclosure Coordinator can be found at Annexure A. An internal review should take no longer than 28 days. We will advise you if the internal review will take longer than this period.

(b) Voluntary dispute resolution

If a dispute arises between UHSC 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

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

Details of information regarding PIDs will be held in Council's document management system with access restricted to appropriate persons.

(b) Reporting of voluntary PIDs and UHSC annual return to the Ombudsman

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

- information about voluntary PIDs received by UHSC during each return period (yearly with the start date being 1 July)
- action taken by UHSC to deal with voluntary PIDs during the return period
- how UHSC promoted a culture in the workplace where PIDs are encouraged.

Additionally, this information is included in Council's Annual Report.

The Disclosures Coordinator is responsible for reporting PID information and statistics to the NSW Ombudsman and for ensuring that this information is included in Council's Annual Report.

(c) How UHSC will ensure compliance with the PID Act and this policy

The Council's Senior Management Group (SMG) shall be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of Council's PID policy. In this regard, details of any PIDs received (without reference to the maker of the PID) will be immediately reported to the SMG.

A standing item will be included in the agenda of meetings of Council's Audit Risk and improvement Committee (ARIC) providing information about any PIDs received since the previous meeting.



Annexure A – Names and contact details of internal contacts for UHSC

General Manager

Name: Greg McDonald

Phone: (02) 6540 1100

Email: gmcdonald@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

Mayor (for reports about the General Manager only)

Name: Cr Maurice Collison

Phone: (02) 6540 1100

Mobile: 0407 232 552

Email: cr.collison@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

Disclosures Coordinator

Name: Ian Roberts

Mobile: 0417 423 776

Email: iroberts@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

Disclosures Officers

Name: Wayne Phelps

Phone: (02) 6540 1100

Mobile: 0400 453 269

Email: wphelps@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

Name: Melanie Caban

Phone: (02) 6540 1100

Mobile: 0429 831 650

Email: mcaban@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au



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)	Telephone: 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday Writing: Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 Email: info@ombo.nsw.gov.au
The Auditor-General	Serious and substantial waste of public money by auditable agencies	Telephone: 02 9275 7100 Writing: GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: governance@audit.nsw.gov.au
Independent Commission Against Corruption	Corrupt conduct	Telephone: 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday Writing: GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364 Email: icac@icac.nsw.gov.au
The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption	Serious maladministration by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	Telephone: 02 9228 3023 Writing: PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au
The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	Telephone: 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079 Writing: GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au
The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the LECC and LECC officers	Telephone: 02 9228 3023 Writing: GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: oilccec_executive@oilccec.nsw.gov.au
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



References and Related Legislation

- Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022
- Local government Act 1993
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2015

Version History

Version No.	Date	CM Ref	Reason for Review
1.	25/09/2023	CD-28/23	To revise Council's Public Interest Disclosures Policy following the enactment of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022.