Wodonga Council is comprised of seven councillors who are elected for a four-year term. The current council was elected at the general election held in October 2016.

The councillors elect a Mayor from among their number. Neither the Mayor nor the councillors have the legal authority to make decisions on behalf of the council.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for the day-to-day management of council responsibilities and services, including the direction and control of council staff.

**DECISION-MAKING**

Wodonga Council is empowered by law to make decisions on many matters of importance to the community. Decisions are made either in formally constituted council meetings, or under the delegated authority of the council.

Decisions made at a formal council meeting provide the direction and authority for the ongoing operation of the council. The decisions give direction to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and are implemented by council staff.

It is also at council meetings that the Mayor and councillors decide the policy direction of the council and make decisions on other statutory matters such as adoption of the Council Plan and Annual Budget.

**PUBLIC ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The community is welcome to attend meetings of the Wodonga Council. Attending council meetings can be a good way to understand how council makes decisions.

Seating is provided in the public gallery at the rear of the Council Chamber, ground floor, 104 Hovell Street, Wodonga.

The meetings are also live-streamed on the council’s YouTube channel. The video recording of the meeting is also available for subsequent viewing.

The business to be dealt with at a council meeting is set out in the agenda. The CEO is responsible for preparing the agenda. No other business can be dealt with unless admitted as Urgent Business by resolution of the council.

The council meeting agenda is available in electronic format five days prior to the meeting, and in hard copy three days prior from the council’s customer focus centre or can be viewed at Wodonga Library. Copies are also available at each council meeting.

In certain limited circumstances, the council may decide to close the meeting to the public for the consideration of confidential information. Such information could include an individual’s personal or financial circumstances, contractual or legal matters. The grounds for closing the meeting are defined in more detail within Section 89 of the Local Government Act 1989 (the Act).
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

While Council meetings are an opportunity to observe the council at work they are not the place for members of the public to address councillors or to interrupt the meeting proceedings.

However, the Meeting Procedure Local Law provides that the public may submit a question to the council. Questions will be accepted up to 10 minutes prior to the commencement of an ordinary council meeting. Persons must be present in the public gallery in order for the question to be read.

Question time is usually listed at item 15 on the agenda.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

The Mayor chairs all council meetings at which he or she is present. If the Mayor is absent another councillor will be elected to chair the meeting.

Councillors, when speaking, always address the Mayor or the chair of the meeting. This is out of respect to the mayor and the role of chairperson in these meetings. Ultimately the debating is between the representatives of council, being the councillors. Everyone else is an observer to the meeting.

The council considers each item in the order in which it is listed on the agenda. However, in some circumstances the council may change the order of business.

The agenda usually contains officer reports on each item. Councillors use these reports as a source of information and advice to assist their decision making. The officer reports generally include a recommendation that the council may adopt or change.

All councillors present at a council meeting may vote on every motion, unless they have a conflict of interest.

Council decisions are made by a majority of the councillors present at the meeting voting in favour, provided a quorum (at least four councillors) is present. If there is a tied vote the chairperson has a second casting vote.

The senior officers in the organisation, being the CEO and Directors, generally attend council meetings and are supported by governance and communications officers. Council officers are present to provide advice only, as required, and do not contribute to the decision making process.

Minutes for meetings are available on council’s website within 48 hours following the meeting. Minutes are considered to be ‘draft’ until they have been confirmed at the next meeting of the council.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Under the Act, councillors must declare a conflict of interest as defined under the Act. Councillors declare their interests at the beginning of the meeting, and then again when the item is under consideration. A councillor with a conflict of interest is required to leave the meeting for the duration of that item. The councillor will only return to the meeting once the item has been dealt with.

COUNCIL STAFF AS DELEGATED DECISION MAKERS

In some cases delegating specific powers, duties or functions to staff members can speed up the council decisions and ensure that council meetings are not tied down by procedural and everyday administrative decisions. It also enables council to use the technical knowledge, training and experience of officers to support their decisions.

Decisions to delegate specific powers to staff or special committees are made at a formal council meeting and specify what the delegate is empowered to do. They are required to observe the strategies, policies and guidelines adopted by the council and may be required to report periodically to the council on decisions made.

The council delegates to staff such as the CEO, environmental health officers, and planning officers. The CEO is also empowered to sub-delegate to other officers. Council staff members are required to act impartially, with integrity and to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest.