



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries



Local Government
Act 1995 Review
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT REVIEW ►► DELIVERING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Guidelines for Local Government CEO Recruitment and Selection, Performance Review and Termination

***Local Government (Administration) Amendment
Regulations 2021***

February 2021

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Preface

The *Local Government Legislation Amendment Act 2019* includes a requirement for model standards covering the recruitment and selection, performance review and termination of employment of local government Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). These reforms are intended to ensure best practice and greater consistency in these processes between local governments.

The accompanying guidelines outline the recommended practice for local governments in undertaking these processes. These guidelines will assist local governments in meeting the model standards prescribed in the *Local Government (Administration) Amendment Regulations 2021*.

The standards and guidelines have been developed by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (Department), in consultation with representatives from the Public Sector Commission, the Ombudsman, the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) and Local Government Professionals WA (LGPro). The Department gratefully acknowledges the participation and contribution of these representatives.

The Department notes that the content of these guidelines does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the organisations or individuals that have been consulted.

Part 1 – Recruitment and Selection

One of the fundamental roles of the council is the employment of the local government's CEO. The CEO is responsible for implementing the council's strategic vision and leading the local government administration.

Principles

A local government must select a CEO in accordance with the principles of merit, equity and transparency. A local government must not exercise nepotism, bias or patronage in exercising its powers. Additionally, a local government must not unlawfully discriminate against applicants. Section 5.40 of the *Local Government Act 1995* (Act) lists a number of general principles of employment that apply to local governments.

Recruitment and Selection Standard

The minimum standard for recruitment and selection will be met if:

- S1.1** The council has identified and agreed to the qualifications and selection criteria necessary to effectively undertake the role and duties of the CEO within that particular local government context.
- S1.2** The council has approved, by absolute majority, the Job Description Form (JDF) which clearly outlines the qualifications, selection criteria and responsibilities of the position. The JDF is made available to all applicants.
- S1.3** The local government has established a selection panel to conduct the recruitment and selection process. The panel must include at least one independent person who is not a current elected member, human resources consultant, or staff member of the local government.
- S1.4** The local government attracts applicants through a transparent, open and competitive process (this is not necessary for vacancies of less than one year). The local government must advertise a vacancy for the position of CEO in the manner prescribed.
- S1.5** The local government has assessed the knowledge, experience, qualifications and skills of all applicants against the selection criteria.
- S1.6** The local government has verified the recommended applicant's work history, qualifications, referees and claims made in their job application.
- S1.7** The appointment is merit-based, with the successful applicant assessed as clearly demonstrating how their knowledge, skills and experience meet the selection criteria.

Recruitment and Selection Standard cont.

- S1.8** The appointment is made impartially and free from nepotism, bias or unlawful discrimination.
- S1.9** The council has endorsed by absolute majority the final appointment.
- S1.10** The council has approved the employment contract by absolute majority.
- S1.11** The local government re-advertises the CEO position and undertakes a recruitment and selection process after each instance where a person has occupied the position for ten (10) consecutive years.

Guidelines

Recruitment and selection process

The council of the local government should act collectively throughout the recruitment and selection process. To uphold the integrity of the process, the council must resist any attempt to influence the outcome through canvassing or lobbying.

The local government should carefully consider the role of the CEO. This includes the CEO's legislated powers and functions and their role as the head of the administrative arm of the local government. In determining the selection criteria for the position of CEO, it will be important for a local government to consider the needs of the community and the specific skills and experience that will be required of the CEO in that particular local government. The competencies the council looks for in its CEO should reflect the council's strategic community plan.

Once the essential skills and experience which form the selection criteria for the position have been established, the local government must set out the selection criteria (essential and desirable) and the responsibilities of the position in a Job Description Form (JDF). If emphasis is placed on certain selection criteria, this should be highlighted in the JDF so that applicants are aware of this. For example, some level of project management experience will usually be an important criterion, but if the local government is undertaking a major development such as a new recreation centre, added emphasis may need to be given to this criterion.

The JDF must be approved by an absolute majority of the council.

Advertising

The local government should ensure that applicants are clearly informed about the application process, such as the application requirements, the closing date for applications and how applications are to be submitted. It is essential that this process is transparent and that each step in the process is documented. Associated records must be kept in a manner consistent with the *State Records Act 2000* (WA).

It is a requirement that a local government is to give Statewide public notice if the position of CEO becomes vacant. Statewide public notice must contain:

- details of the remuneration and benefits offered;
- details of the place where applications are to be submitted;
- the date and time applications close;
- the duration of the proposed contract;
- a web address where the JDF can be accessed;
- contact details for a person who can provide further information; and
- any other relevant information.

In order to attract the best possible pool of applicants for the position of CEO, it is recommended that local governments use a diverse range of advertising methods, mediums and platforms (in addition to the advertising requirement under section 5.36(4) of the Act). For example:

- advertising on the local government's website;
- posting on online jobs boards (e.g. SEEK);
- sharing the advertisement via professional networks; and
- undertaking an executive search.

A local government must publicly advertise the CEO position if the same person has remained in the job for 10 consecutive years. This requirement does not prevent the incumbent CEO from being employed for another term, provided they are selected in accordance with the standards for recruitment and selection.

Selection panel and independent person

Local governments are required to establish a selection panel to conduct and facilitate the recruitment and selection process. The selection panel should be made up of elected members (the number of which is determined by the council) and must include at least one independent person. The independent person cannot be a current elected member, human resources consultant, or staff member of the local government. Examples of who the independent person could be include:

- former elected members or staff members of the local government;
- former elected members (such as a Mayor or Shire President) or staff members of *another* local government;
- a prominent or highly regarded member of the community; or
- a person with experience in the recruitment of CEOs and senior executives.

The panel are responsible for assessing applicants and making a recommendation to council regarding the most suitable applicant or applicants. The essence of the role of an independent panel member is to bring an impartial perspective to the process and reduce any perception of bias or nepotism.

It is essential that prior to a person's appointment to a selection panel they are informed of the duties and responsibilities of their role and that of the panel. It is recommended that local governments develop a policy or terms of reference to facilitate this process that incorporate the standards for recruitment at Division 2 of the *Local Government (Administration) Amendment Regulations (No.2) 2020*. A policy should include important information that outlines:

- The primary functions of the panel;
- Roles and responsibilities of panel members;
- Composition of the panel;
- Duration of term;
- Desirable criteria for appointment to the panel;
- A requirement that panel members sign a confidentially agreement and agree to the duties and responsibilities of their role; and
- Any other information the local government deems necessary for the panel to effectively carry out their role.

Independent human resources consultant

A local government should seek independent advice from a human resources consultant where the council lacks the capacity or expertise to facilitate the recruitment and selection process (or any aspect of it). A member of the human resources team within a local government should not be involved in the recruitment of a new CEO.

The consultant should not be associated with the local government or any of its council members. The consultant can be an independent human resources professional, recruitment consultant, or recruitment agency.

An independent human resources consultant can provide advice to the selection panel on how to conduct the recruitment process, or a local government may engage a consultant to support it in undertaking certain aspects of the recruitment process, such as one or more of the following:

- development or review of the JDF;
- development of selection criteria;
- development of assessment methods in relation to the selection criteria;
- drafting of the advertisement;
- executive search;
- preliminary assessment of the applications;
- shortlisting;
- drafting questions for interview;
- coordinating interviews;
- preparing the selection summary assessment and recommendation;

- arranging for an integrity check and/or police clearance; and
- assisting the council in preparing the employment contract.

The consultant is not to be directly involved in determining which applicant should be recommended for the position, their role is not one of decision-maker.

It is recommended that rigorous checks be conducted on any independent consultants before they are engaged to ensure they have the necessary skills and experience to effectively assist the council. Local government recruitment experience may be beneficial but is not a requirement.

The independent human resources consultant must be able to validate their experience in senior executive recruitment and appointments. It is important to note that if the local government uses a consultant or agency to assist in finding applicants, they will require an employment agent licence under the *Employment Agents Act 1976* (WA).

A good independent human resources consultant will bring expertise, an objective perspective and additional human resources to what is a complex and time-consuming process. Given the time and effort involved in finding a competent CEO, and the cost of recruiting an unsuitable CEO, there can be a good business case for spending money on a human resources consultant.

If a decision is made to engage an independent human resources consultant, it is imperative that the council maintains a high level of involvement in the process and enters into a formal agreement (contract) with them. In order to manage the contract efficiently, and ensure an effective outcome, regular contact with the consultant is required during the recruitment process. As with any contractor engagement, the local government must ensure their procurement and tender processes comply with the Act and the procurement policy of the local government.

Council's responsibilities

A human resources consultant cannot undertake the tasks for which the council is solely responsible. An independent consultant cannot and should not be asked to:

- Conduct interviews: This should be done by the selection panel. However, council may decide to interview applicants recommended by the selection panel. A consultant can provide support with interviews, providing advice on the recruitment and selection process and writing up recommendations. The consultant may also arrange referee reports and checks of applicants.
- Make the decision about who to appoint to the position of CEO: Only the council can make this decision, drawing upon advice from the selection panel.
- Negotiate the terms and conditions of employment: Noting that the consultant should be able to provide advice on remuneration constraints and other terms and conditions.

Creating Diversity

In order to ensure all applicants are given an equal opportunity for success, selection methods need to be consistent and objective. In a structured interview, each applicant should have the opportunity to answer the same primary questions with follow-up questions used to illicit further detail or clarification. Behavioural-based interview

questions are objective and gauge the applicants' suitability, reducing biases in assessment (see examples below).

Basing a selection decision on the results of a number of selection methods can help to reduce procedural shortcomings and ensure the best applicant is chosen. Psychometric, ability and aptitude testing are considered to be valid, reliable and objective. While applicants with extensive experience and reputable education may appear to be more qualified, an objective assessment of each person's ability and personal traits can help to provide a clearer picture of the applicant.

Where possible, it is recommended that local governments ensure diversity on the selection panel. This may be achieved by ensuring gender, ethnicity, age and experiential diversity is represented on the panel. Diversity is also a consideration when selecting an independent person for the selection panel, particularly where there is a lack of diversity on the council. A diverse selection panel will assist in making quality decisions regarding suitable applicants.

Individuals are often unaware of biases they may have. For this reason, it is helpful for the selection panel to undertake training about unconscious biases. Awareness of unconscious biases assists individuals in preventing those biases from interfering in their decision making. For example, if there are considerable discrepancies in the assessment scores between two panel members, discussion will be required to ensure bias has not influenced these scores. Allowing team members to acknowledge and recognise prejudices is essential to managing those biases. The following biases should be addressed:

- "Similar-to-me" effect - if interviewers share the same characteristics with the applicants or view those characteristics positively, they are more likely to score them highly;
- "Halo" effect – interviewers may let one quality (such as race, gender, looks, accent, experience, etc.) positively or negatively affect the assessment of the applicant's other characteristics.

Due Diligence

It is essential that the local government ensures that the necessary due diligence is undertaken to verify an applicant's qualifications, experience and demonstrated performance. This includes:

- verifying an applicant's qualifications such as university degrees and training certificates;
- verifying the applicant's claims (in relation to the applicant's character, details of work experience, skills and performance) by contacting the applicant's referees. Referee reports should be in writing in the form of a written report, or recorded and verified by the referee;
- requesting that an applicant obtains a national police clearance as part of the application process; and
- ensuring no conflicts of interests arise by looking to outside interests such as board membership and secondary employment.

A council may wish to contact a person who is not listed as an applicant's referee,

such as a previous employer. This may be useful in obtaining further information regarding an applicant's character and work experience, and verifying related claims. The applicant should be advised of this and be able to provide written comments to the council.

A search of social media and whether an applicant has an online presence may also assist in identifying potential issues. For example, an applicant may have expressed views which are in conflict with the local government's values. This should be made clear in the application information. To ensure the integrity of the recruitment process, a council must act collectively when performing due diligence.

Selection

Once the application period closes, the selection panel, or consultant on behalf of the selection panel, must assess applications and identify a shortlist of applicants to be interviewed.

In shortlisting applicants for the interview phase, the selection panel should consider the transferable skills of applicants and how these would be of value in the role of CEO. The selection panel should not overlook applicants who do not have experience working in the local government sector.

It is important that the assessment process is consistent for all applicants. For example, each applicant is asked the same interview questions which are related to the selection criteria and each are provided with the same information and undertake the same assessments.

Elected members should declare any previous association with an applicant or any potential conflict of interest at the time of shortlisting if they are part of the selection panel. Similarly, if the interviews involve the full council, the elected member should make an appropriate declaration before the interviews commence. If the potential conflict of interest is significant or a member's relationship with an applicant may result in claims of nepotism, patronage or bias, the council may need to consider whether to exclude the elected member from the process. The decision should be documented and recorded for future reference.

Selecting an applicant should be based on merit; that is, choosing an applicant that is best suited to the requirements of the position and the needs of the local government. This involves the consideration and assessment of applicants' skills, knowledge, qualifications and experience against the selection criteria required for the role. As part of the selection process, a council may consider it appropriate for each of the preferred candidates to do a presentation to council.

The appointment decision by the council should be based on the assessment of all measures used, including:

- assessment technique(s) used (e.g. interview performance);
- quality of application;
- referee reports;
- verification and sighting of formal qualifications and other claims provided by the applicant; and
- other vetting assessments used (e.g. police checks, integrity checks, etc.).

Employment contract

In preparing the CEO's employment contract, the council must ensure the contract includes the necessary provisions required under section 5.39 of the Act and associated regulations.

Section 5.39 of the Act provides that a CEO's employment contract must not be for a term exceeding five years. The term of a contract for an acting or temporary position cannot exceed one year.

Further, the employment contract is of no effect unless it contains:

- the expiry date of the contract;
- the performance review criteria; and
- as prescribed under regulation 18B of the Administration Regulations, the maximum amount of money (or a method of calculating such an amount) to which the CEO is to be entitled if the contract is terminated before the expiry date. The amount is not to exceed whichever is the lesser of:
 - the value of one year's remuneration under the contract; or
 - the value of the remuneration that the CEO would have been entitled to, had the contract not been terminated.

It is recommended that the council seeks independent legal advice to ensure that the contract is lawful and able to be enforced. In particular, advice should be sought if there is any doubt as to the meaning of the provisions of the contract.

Councils should be aware that CEO remuneration is determined by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal and the remuneration package may not fall outside the band applicable to the particular local government.

The CEO's employment contract should clearly outline grounds for termination and the termination process in accordance with the standards in regulations.

The council of the local government must approve, by absolute majority, the employment contract and the person they appoint as CEO.

Appointment

A decision to make an offer of employment to a preferred applicant must be made by an absolute majority of council. If the preferred applicant accepts the offer and the proposed terms of the contract without negotiation, there is no further requirement for council to endorse the applicant and the contract. However, if there is a process of negotiation to finalise the terms and conditions of the contract, council is required to endorse the appointment and approve the CEO's employment contract by absolute majority. In both instances, the employment contract must be signed by all parties.

The council should notify both the successful individual and the remaining unsuccessful applicants as soon as possible before publicly announcing the CEO appointment.

The successful applicant should not commence duties with the local government as CEO until the employment contract has been signed.

The unsuccessful applicants (including those not interviewed) should be notified of the outcome of their application. It is recommended that the local government creates a template letter for unsuccessful applicants that can be easily personalised with the applicants' details and sent out quickly.

The council should keep a record of their assessment of the unsuccessful applicant(s) and provide the unsuccessful applicant(s) with the opportunity to receive feedback on their application, or interview performance if they were granted an interview. Should an unsuccessful applicant request feedback, it is recommended that a member of the selection panel provides this. If a recruitment consultant is used, they may undertake this task.

Confidentiality

The local government should ensure that all information produced or obtained during the recruitment and selection process is kept confidential. This includes applicants' personal details, assessment details, the selection report and outcome of the process. This ensures privacy requirements are met and maintains the integrity of the process. It is recommended that selection panel members and councillors sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure that they are aware of their obligations.

CEO induction

Local governments should ensure that they provide the CEO with all of the necessary information on the local government's processes, policies, procedures and systems at the commencement of the CEO's employment.

New CEOs are eligible to participate in the Local Government CEO Support Program which is a joint initiative of the Department and LG Pro to provide mentoring and general support to those appointed to the position of CEO in a local government for the first time. The program runs for six to nine months from the time a CEO is appointed and involves the CEO being matched with a mentor that best meets their needs.

The program provides the CEO with an opportunity (through meetings and on-going correspondence) to discuss a wide range of issues with their appointed mentor in the strictest confidence. The program is aimed at addressing the individual needs of the CEO. Examples of issues that may be covered include the following:

- Role of the CEO
- Governance
- Strategic and long-term planning
- Legislative framework
- Relationships and dealing with council members
- Risk management
- Resource management
- Managing the business of Council
- Family considerations

Part 2 – Performance Review

Principles

The standards regarding CEO performance review are based on the principles of fairness, integrity and impartiality.

Performance Review Standards

The minimum standard for performance review will be met if:

- S2.1** Performance criteria is specific, relevant, measurable, achievable and time-based.
- S2.2** The performance criteria and the performance process are recorded in a written document, negotiated with and agreed upon by the CEO and council.
- S2.3** The CEO is informed about how their performance will be assessed and managed and the results of their performance assessment.
- S2.4** The collection of evidence regarding performance outcomes is thorough and comprehensive.
- S2.5** Assessment is made free from bias and based on the CEO's achievements against documented performance criteria, and decisions and actions are impartial and transparent.
- S2.6** The council has endorsed the performance review assessment by absolute majority.

Guidelines

Section 5.38 of the Act provides that, for a CEO who is employed for a term of more than one year, the performance of a CEO is to be reviewed formally at least once in every year of their employment.

In addition to this minimum requirement, it is recommended that the council engages in regular discussions with the CEO regarding their performance against the performance criteria, including progress and ways that the CEO can be supported. Any changes to the CEO's performance agreement such as changes to the performance criteria should also be discussed, and agreed to, between the council and the CEO, as the matter arises.

Employment contract and performance agreement

Section 5.39, of the Act requires the employment contract to specify the performance criteria for the purpose of reviewing the CEO's performance. This will include ongoing permanent performance criteria. A local government may wish to have a separate additional document called a "performance agreement" which includes the

performance review criteria in the employment contract, additional criteria (e.g. the performance indicators in relation to specific projects) and how the criteria will be assessed. The performance agreement should be negotiated and agreed upon by the CEO and the council. The performance agreement may also set out the CEO's professional development goals and outline a plan to achieve these goals.

Performance Criteria

Setting the performance criteria is an important step. One of the CEO's key responsibilities is to oversee the implementation of council's strategic direction, and so it is important to align the CEO's performance criteria to the goals contained in the council's Strategic Community Plan and Corporate Business Plan. Accordingly, as these plans are updated, the CEO's performance criteria should be updated to reflect the changes.

In leading the administrative arm of a local government, the CEO is responsible for undertaking core tasks, the achievement of which will contribute to the effectiveness of the council. It is important that the outcomes associated with these tasks are measurable and clearly defined. These could be in relation to:

- service delivery targets from the council's Strategic Community Plan;
- budget compliance;
- organisational capability;
- operational and project management;
- financial performance and asset management;
- timeliness and accuracy of information and advice to councillors;
- implementation of council resolutions;
- management of organisational risks;
- leadership (including conduct and behaviour) and human resource management; and
- stakeholder management and satisfaction.

Performance criteria should focus on the priorities of the council and, if appropriate, can be assigned priority weighting in percentages. The council and CEO should set goals related to target outcomes for future achievement in the performance criteria. Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based.

Following the determination of the performance criteria and goals, the council will need to determine how to measure the outcomes of each criteria. It is important to relate performance indicators to the selection criteria used in selecting the CEO. For example, if the CEO has been selected due to their financial experience and ability to improve the local government's finances, indicators regarding improved revenue and reduced expenses are obvious starting points.

Considering the context within which the local government is operating is important. For example, if a significant financial event occurs, such as a downturn in the economy, financial performance indicators will likely need to be adjusted. It is important that such contextual factors are given appropriate weighting and that goals are flexible to allow regular adjustment. Adjustments may be initiated by either the CEO or the council. Councils need to be realistic in terms of their expectations of a CEO's performance and provide appropriate resources and support to facilitate the

achievement of performance criteria.

Performance review panel

It is recommended that the council delegates the CEO performance review to a panel (e.g. comprising certain council members and an independent observer). The panel has a duty to gather as much evidence as possible upon which to base their assessments. The role of the review panel includes developing the performance agreement in the first instance, conducting the performance review and reporting on the findings and recommendations of the review to council. It is also recommended that council develop a policy to guide the performance review process. A policy might include the composition of the panel, primary functions, the role and appointment of an independent consultant, and the responsibilities of review panel members.

Independent consultant

If a council lacks the resources and expertise to meet the expected standard of performance review, the council should engage an external facilitator to assist with the process of performance appraisal and the development of the performance agreement. The local government should ensure that the consultant has experience in performance review and, if possible, experience in local government or dealing with the performance review of senior executives. The consultant should not have any interest in, or relationship with, the council or the CEO.

With guidance from the performance review panel, a consultant can facilitate the following tasks:

- setting performance criteria;
- preparing the performance agreement;
- collecting performance evidence;
- writing the performance appraisal report;
- facilitating meetings between the performance review panel;
- assisting with the provision of feedback to the CEO;
- formulating plans to support improvement (if necessary); and
- providing an objective view regarding any performance management-related matters between the concerned parties.

Assessing performance

It is a requirement of the regulations that the process by which the CEO's performance will be reviewed is documented and agreed to by both parties. Council and the CEO must also agree on any performance criteria that is in addition to what is specified in the CEO's contract of employment. The option to include additional criteria for performance review purposes by agreement provides a degree of flexibility for both parties in response to changing circumstances and priorities.

It is essential that CEO performance is measured in an objective manner against the performance criteria alone. It is important that reviews are impartial and not skewed by personal relationships between the review panel and the CEO. Close personal relationships between the panel members and the CEO can be just as problematic as extremely poor relationships. Evidence of CEO performance may come from an array of sources, many of which the CEO themselves can and should provide to the

council as part of regular reporting. These sources include:

- achievement of key business outcomes;
- interactions with the council and progress that has been made towards implementing the council's strategic vision;
- audit and risk committee reports;
- workforce metrics (e.g. the average time to fill vacancies, retention rate, information about why people leave the organisation and staff absence rate);
- incident reports (e.g. results of occupational health and safety assessments, the number and nature of occupational health and safety incident reports, and the number and nature of staff grievances);
- organisational survey results;
- relationships (e.g. with relevant organisations, stakeholder groups, and professional networks); and
- insights from key stakeholders (this could be done by way of a survey to obtain stakeholder input).

It is important that, in addition to looking at the achievement of key performance indicators (KPIs), the council considers the following:

- How the CEO has achieved the outcomes. In particular, whether or not their methods are acceptable and sustainable.
- The extent to which current performance is contingent upon current circumstances. Has the CEO demonstrated skills and behaviours to address and manage changes in circumstances which have affected his or her performance? (for example, the impact of COVID-19.)
- What the CEO has done to ensure the wellbeing of staff and to maintain trust in the local government.

The council should consider the attention the CEO has given to ensuring equal employment opportunity, occupational health and safety, privacy, managing potential conflicts of interest, and complying with procurement process requirements.

Addressing performance issues

Once the CEO's performance has been assessed, it is essential that any areas requiring attention or improvement are identified, discussed with the CEO and a plan is agreed and put in place to address these. The plan should outline the actions to be taken, who is responsible for the actions and an agreed timeframe.

The performance review panel must decide on an appropriate course of action that will address the performance issue. This may include professional development courses, training, counselling, mediation, mentoring or developing new work routines to ensure specific areas are not neglected. The performance review panel should then arrange for regular discussion and ongoing feedback on the identified performance issues, ensuring improvements are being made.

It is important to keep in mind that a local government falling short of its goals is not always attributable to the CEO. External factors may have resulted in initial performance expectations becoming unrealistic. Failure to meet performance criteria does not necessarily mean the CEO has performed poorly and, for this reason,

performance and outcome should be considered separately. Where ongoing issues have been identified, the council will need to take a constructive approach and seek to develop the CEO's competency in that area.

While there are obligations on the council to manage the CEO in regard to their performance, when it extends into potential wrongdoing (misconduct), the council should be referring the matter to the Public Sector Commission or Corruption and Crime Commission. This provides an independent process to follow and ensures probity, natural justice and oversight of allegations.

Confidentiality

The council must ensure that accurate and comprehensive records of the performance management process are created. Any information produced must be kept confidential.

Part 3 – Termination

Principles

The standards for the termination of a local government CEO's employment (other than for reasons such as voluntary resignation or retirement) are based on the principles of fairness and transparency. Procedural fairness is a principle of common law regarding the proper and fair procedure that should apply when a decision is made that may adversely impact upon a person's rights or interests.

Termination Standards

The minimum standards for the termination of a CEO's contract will be met if:

- S3.1** Decisions are based on assessment of the CEO's performance as measured against the documented performance criteria in the CEO's contract.
- S3.2** Performance issues have been identified as part a performance review (conducted within the preceding 12 months) and the CEO has been informed of the issues. The council has given the CEO a reasonable opportunity to improve and implement a plan to remedy the performance issues, but the CEO has not subsequently remedied these issues to the satisfaction of the local government.
- S3.3** The principle of procedural fairness is applied. The CEO is informed of their rights, entitlements and responsibilities in the termination process. This includes the CEO being provided with notice of any allegations against them, given a reasonable opportunity to respond to those allegations or decisions affecting them, and their response is genuinely considered.
- S3.4** Decisions are impartial and transparent.
- S3.5** The council of the local government has endorsed the termination by absolute majority.
- S3.6** The required notice of termination (which outlines the reasons for termination) is provided in writing.

Guidelines

Reasons for termination

The early termination of a CEO's employment may end due to:

- poor performance;
- misconduct; or
- non-performance or repudiation of contract terms.

There is a difference between poor performance and serious misconduct. Poor performance is defined as an employee not meeting the required performance criteria or demonstrating unacceptable conduct and behaviour at work, it includes:

- not carrying out their work to the required standard or not doing their job at all;
- not following workplace policies, rules or procedures;
- unacceptable conduct and behaviour at work;
- disruptive or negative behaviour at work;
- not meeting the performance criteria set out in the employment contract and/or performance agreement unless these are outside the CEO's control;
- not complying with an agreed plan to address performance issues;
- failing to comply with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* and other relevant legislation;
- failing to follow council endorsed policies.

Serious misconduct can include when an employee:

- causes serious and imminent risk to the health and safety of another person or to the reputation or revenue of the local government; or
- behaves unlawfully or corruptly; or
- deliberately behaves in a way that's inconsistent with continuing their employment.

Examples of serious misconduct can include:

- matters arising under section 4(a), (b) and (c) of the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*;
- theft;
- fraud;
- assault;
- falsification of records;
- being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at work; or
- refusing to carry out appropriate and lawful resolutions of council.

Misconduct is also defined in section 4 of the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003* (WA). Under this Act, misconduct can be either serious or minor and the obligation to notify the Public Sector Commission (PSC) or the Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC) is paramount.

Termination on the basis of misconduct is covered by employment law. A local government should seek independent legal, employment or industrial relations advice prior to a termination. A council should also seek independent advice during the termination process including advice on the relevant employment legislation affecting CEO employment and the application of that legislation to their specific circumstances. This will ensure that a council complies with employment law during the entire termination process.

A local government is required to endorse the decision to terminate a CEO's employment by way of an absolute majority decision. A local government must certify that the termination was in accordance with the adopted standards in regulations.

Opportunity to improve and mediation

If a CEO is deemed to have been performing poorly, the council must be transparent and inform the CEO of this. It is important that the CEO is given an opportunity to remedy the issues within a reasonable timeframe as agreed between the CEO and the council. The council should clearly outline the areas in need of improvement, and with the CEO's input, determine a plan to address any issues. If a plan for improvement is put in place and the CEO's performance remains poor, then termination may be necessary. If a local government decides to terminate the employment of the CEO it must have conducted a performance review in the previous 12 months in accordance with section 5.38 of the Act.

Where the concerns or issues relate to problematic working relationships or dysfunctional behaviour, it is recommended that a council engages an independent accredited mediator to conduct a mediation between the parties. A mediation session may be useful in assisting parties to understand and address issues before the situation escalates to a breakdown in the working relationship (which affects the ability of the CEO to effectively perform their duties) and the subsequent termination of the CEO's employment.

Termination report

The council should prepare a termination report which outlines the reasons for termination, the opportunities and assistance provided to the CEO to remedy any issues, and an explanation of the CEO's failure to do so. Council must provide prior opportunities and support to the CEO to assist them in remedying the issues which form the basis of the termination. It is a requirement of the regulations that council must provide written notice to the CEO outlining the reasons for their decision to terminate. In addition, council must certify that the termination of the CEO's employment was carried out in accordance with the standards set out in regulations.

Confidentiality

Local governments should ensure that the termination process is kept confidential. The CEO is to be informed of their rights and entitlements. Notice of termination of employment is required to be given in writing. Where possible, the news of termination of employment should also be delivered in person. The CEO should be provided with a letter outlining the reasons for, and date of, the termination of their employment.

Before making any public announcements on the termination of the CEO, a council should ensure that the entire termination process is complete, including that the CEO has been informed in writing of the termination.

Disclaimer

It is outside the scope of these guidelines to provide legal advice, and local governments should seek their own legal advice where necessary. Guidance as to legal requirements and compliance in relation to the termination of employment is provided by the Fair Work Commission at www.fwc.gov.au, the Fair Work Ombudsman at www.fairwork.gov.au and the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission at www.wairc.wa.gov.au.