STRATHCONA COUNTY

Policy

Accountability and Transparency

References: Municipal Government Act, RSA 2000
MGA s. 170-175; MGA s. 180-181; MGA s. 192-198;
MGA s. 217; MGA s. 227; MGA s. 230; MGA s. 270
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, RSA 2000
Strathcona County Bylaw – The Meeting Procedures
Strathcona County Bylaw – Priorities Committees
Strathcona County Bylaw – Boards and Committees
Strathcona County Bylaw – Councillor Code of Conduct

Cross-reference: GOV-001-013 Elected Officials' Remuneration; GOV-001-026 Elected Officials Business Expense Policy; GOV-001-029 Organizational Roles and Responsibilities; GOV-002-034 Open Data; GOV-002-025 Public Engagement; FIN-001-007 Investments; FIN-001-010 Financial Reporting; FIN-001-025 Debt Management; FIN-001-024 Financial Reserves.

Policy Statement

The County is committed to the fundamental principles of accountability and transparency since they are essential to ensuring effective local government and building public trust.

The County is responsible to operate in a transparent and accountable manner and provide good governance by ensuring:

1. The County is accountable to citizens for the efficient provision and performance of its services.
2. County business is conducted openly, honestly, and with integrity.
3. Council decision-making is open and transparent.
4. Transparency and openness are balanced with financial, legal, legislative and privacy constraints and obligations.
5. Effective policies, procedures, and practices are developed to support and enhance accountability and transparency.
6. Public access and participation are made paramount to ensure that decision-making addresses citizens' needs.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define the manner in which Council and Strathcona County will ensure that they are transparent and accountable to the public for their actions.

Definitions

Accountability – The principle that Strathcona County is responsible to the public for decisions and actions.

Transparency – The principle that Strathcona County provides access to understandable information, has an open and clear decision-making process, and actively encourages public participation in its decision-making processes to enhance public trust.

Guidelines

Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms and Practices

Transparency is the foundation of accountability. Strathcona County abides by policies, procedures, and practices aimed at ensuring and enhancing accountability and transparency. A number of these policies, procedures, and practices are highlighted in the various sections that follow.

1. Councillor Expectations and Responsibilities

Strathcona County's Council believes that citizens are entitled to fair, ethical, and accountable local government and expect the highest standards of conduct from locally elected officials.

2. Reporting of Councillor Expenses

Providing routine disclosure of information on expenses incurred by County officials enhances public confidence in the oversight of expenses incurred by those in office. For this reason, the Mayor and Councillors provide expense reports on a quarterly basis that highlight spending. The reports organize expenses according to four main categories and are published on Strathcona County's public website.

3. Reporting of Council Activities

As provided in the *Priorities Committee Bylaw*, the Mayor and Councillors may also provide reports for information purposes on recent activities of interest to the Priorities Committee. These reports can be on matters related to a ward or to the municipality as a whole. Further, Councillors also prepare reports on the activities of boards and committees to which they have been appointed by Council at least once per year. These reports will be included as information items in the Priorities Committee agenda packages.

4. Council and Committee Meetings

The County is accountable and transparent to citizens by providing governance in an open manner.

5. Access to Council Records and Decisions

The County is committed to making information easily accessible to citizens. The following policies and practices will enhance citizens' access to Council records and decisions.

- All regularly scheduled Council and Council Committee agendas are posted online on the Strathcona County website for the public to access at least 4 days prior to the meeting date.
- Past Council and Priorities Committee meetings can be accessed by the public on the County's website.
- All reports considered by Council and Priorities Committee are made available to the public at the meeting at which they are being considered as well as on the Strathcona County website except where Council determines that a report or document should be confidential under the Municipal Government Act or the FOIP Act.
- Agenda cover pages for closed Council meetings are made public containing as much information as possible on the items for discussion without revealing confidential or personal information.
- All Policies adopted by Council are posted in the Municipal Policy Handbook and made available to the public on the Strathcona County website.

6. Open Data

The County is committed to following the principles of open data, which are based upon a global standard set by the Sunlight Foundation.

The County is committed to continuing to improve access to data and will continue to expand the number and types of data sets provided.

7. Plain Language

The County has an obligation to communicate effectively and in a way that is easily understood by the intended audience. To achieve this end, the County is committed to using plain language in its communications. Plain language means using a conversational tone, speaking directly to the intended audience, and providing information that helps meet the audience's needs. The County will use its best efforts to ensure that information shared with citizens and stakeholders is clear, concise, and logically organized.

8. Public Engagement

The County recognizes the value that citizens contribute to planning, delivering, and evaluating the County's programs and services. Strathcona County will engage the public throughout its decision-making process.

9. Financial Accountability, Oversight and Reporting

The County is committed to accountability and transparency in financial management. The County provides citizens with comprehensive financial information through the budget and financial reporting processes. The annual Business Planning and Budget package provides information about the cost of providing core municipal services, any increases, decreases or adjustments, and how they align with the strategic plan. The quarterly financial reporting and Annual Report provides financial statements and highlights key accomplishments.

10. Performance Measurement and Reporting

Strathcona County is accountable to citizens and provides enhanced transparency by using results-oriented tools to measure progress towards service standards, goals, and Council priorities.

Strathcona County is dedicated to producing performance information that measures progress in key areas of responsibility including the delivery of all programs and services.

As part of Strathcona County's ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability, department business plans are reported on bi-annually. Department business plan progress reports include updates on key performance indicators and measures, as well as status updates on initiatives. Department business plan progress reports are used to report back to Council on the progress of the Corporate Business Plan.

Policy Record

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