

6.3 RECORDING COUNCILLOR CONTACT WITH DEVELOPERS

Submitting Councillor: Dr Anjalee de Silva

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Notes the October 2021 report from the Victorian Ombudsman “Investigation into allegations of collusion with property developers at Kingston City Council”;*
- 2. Notes the Ombudsman’s comments regarding meetings with property developers, including her recommendation that “it would be prudent for both Council staff and Councillors to record such meetings and for Council to keep a register of these”;*
- 3. Re-affirms its commitment to the highest possible levels of transparency with regard to Council’s decision-making as to planning and development;*
- 4. Directs Officers to provide advice to Council on the relevant recommendations from the Ombudsman contained in this report, including as regards the development of a public register of contact with developers.*

BACKGROUND

In July 2020 the Ombudsman commenced an investigation into allegations about planning processes and approvals at the City of Kingston, referred from the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

The Ombudsman states her investigation into matters at Kingston City Council:

“...has its origins in public concerns about the development of land within their community. This is an issue that affects many, if not all, councils and communities, where there will be bitterly divided views, often changing over time, about whether the advantages of development outweigh its disadvantages.”¹

For several years IBAC has also been investigating similar matters at the City of Casey as part of Operation Sandon.²

RATIONALE

¹ Ombudsman Victoria, 2021, [Investigation into allegations of collusion with property developers at Kingston City Council](#).

² IBAC, 2021, [Operation Sandon](#).

While Council prides itself on aiming for the highest standards of governance, this motion will serve to improve standards of transparency.

Over recent years there have been a number of high-profile matters relating to probity and corruption in local government, including these two examples in our region. By ensuring the highest standards of transparency, Council will increase community confidence and trust, particularly in relation to its management of development and planning proposals.

If Council were to implement such a policy, it would establish itself as a leader in this area across Victoria and mitigate some of the unavoidable reputational damage experienced by all Councils resulting from recent investigations.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This motion has no net financial impact.