

Understanding the Council Meeting Agenda

Narration script ·

Slide 1 — Understanding the Council Meeting Agenda (title slide)

Welcome to Understanding the Huon Valley Council Meeting Agenda.

If you have ever opened a council agenda and wondered why it is set out the way it is — why the Mayor says certain things at certain times, why some items are just noted, why the meeting closes to the public — this is the answer.

Almost nothing in the agenda is there by choice. Nearly every item is required by law, most by a specific regulation. We will work through it in order, and explain the rule behind each part.

Slide 2 — Before You Begin

This presentation is designed for prospective candidates, election candidates, councillors and community members.

You may pause at any time.

It is drawn from Council's own Meeting Explanatory Notes and the Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations 2025. References appear at the bottom of each slide so you can look them up.

Slide 3 — Why the Agenda Looks Like This

Section 18 of the Local Government Act says a meeting of Council is to be conducted in accordance with prescribed procedures. Those procedures are the Meeting Procedures Regulations 2025.

Three consequences follow. First, the agenda is a legal instrument, not a running sheet. The general manager prepares it, and it lists every matter to be discussed.

Second, only what is listed can be discussed.

Third, business is conducted in the order set out in the agenda unless Council determines otherwise by absolute majority. Council can change the order — but it has to decide to.

Slide 4 — Before the Meeting

An ordinary meeting is held at least once each month. A meeting is not to start before five o'clock unless an absolute majority determines otherwise — Huon Valley Council traditionally meets at six. Council reviews its meeting times after each election.

Notice goes to councillors in writing at least four days, and not more than fourteen, before an ordinary meeting. For a special meeting, at least two days. The notice is given with the agenda.

The public gets notice too — ordinary meeting times are advertised once a year, and any change is advertised separately.

Slide 5 — The Three Documents

What people call the agenda is actually three documents.

The Agenda is a simple list of items to be considered. The Council Reports contain the standard motion for each item, the officers' reports — the qualified advice — and their recommendations. That is the substance. The Attachments hold the documents referred to in those reports.

Councillors get all three electronically through DocsonTap. The public can access them at Council offices and on the website, with two exceptions: planning attachments can be inspected but not copied, because of copyright in development application material, and Closed Council material is not available at all.

Slide 6 — The Shape of the Agenda

The agenda is structured into seven blocks, in this order.

Administrative and legislative. Public participation — question time, deputations and petitions. Council acting as a planning authority. Councillor monitoring and review. Councillor participation — questions and notices of motion. Departmental reports. And Closed Council.

Once you know that shape you can find anything. It also tells you how the meeting is designed: the public gets its say early, and the decisions come later.

Slide 7 — Opening the Meeting

The meeting opens with three things, each of them required.

The Mayor confirms the audio visual recording has started, and states that everyone attending is to be respectful and considerate, and that offensive, defamatory or threatening language or conduct is not acceptable. Regulation 8 requires that statement.

The Mayor then acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, and pays respect to them, their customs, and their elders past, present and emerging.

Then attendance — councillors and officers present, apologies, leave of absence and any absence, all recorded.

Slide 8 — Declarations of Interest

This is one of the most important items in the meeting, and it comes early for a reason.

Section 48 provides that a councillor must not participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which the councillor has an interest, or is aware — or ought to be aware — that a close associate has an interest.

The mechanics matter. Declare before any discussion on that matter commences. Leave the room during the discussion. Notify the general manager in writing within seven days.

You will be prompted — the Mayor is to ask councillors to indicate any interest in any item on the agenda.

The interest provisions sit in Part 5 of the Act. Council's Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy add to them.

Slide 9 — Confirming Minutes and Recording Votes

Minutes are circulated as soon as practicable, and at least by the next ordinary meeting, then confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor. In confirming them, debate is allowed only on their accuracy — not on the merits of what was decided. If you want to reopen a decision, this is not the moment.

The other thing here is voting. The Mayor is to ensure the vote of each councillor is recorded. Where the vote is unanimous the Mayor states that for the record; otherwise the Mayor names those voting for and against.

Every councillor's vote on every motion goes on the public record. There is no anonymous vote at a council meeting.

Slide 10 — Legislative Items and Urgent Matters

Two items that appear only occasionally.

Legislative items are for tabling documents legislation requires to be tabled — certificates of election and declarations of office after an election, or the determination of a Code of Conduct Panel.

Urgent matters are the exception to the rule that only what is on the agenda can be discussed. Four things must line up: Council resolves by absolute majority; the general manager has reported why it could not be included; the matter is urgent; and qualified advice has been provided.

That last one is not optional. Section 65 forbids Council from deciding a matter requiring qualified advice without having and considering it. Urgency does not suspend that.

Slide 11 — Public Participation

Now the part of the meeting that belongs to the community.

Public question time runs for a minimum of fifteen minutes. A question may be given in writing at least seven days before, or asked from the floor. The Mayor may refuse a question, or require it in writing for a later meeting, and must give reasons for a refusal. Questions and answers are not debated.

Deputations are separate — Council may by resolution invite a person to address the meeting.

Then petitions. A petition may be given to the general manager or a councillor, and is tabled at the next ordinary meeting. Within forty-two days the general manager advises whether it complies, and Council determines what action to take. The subject matter and number of signatories go in the minutes.

Slide 12 — Council Acting as a Planning Authority

At a point in the meeting the Mayor will say: the Council is acting as a Planning Authority as at such a time. And later, that it is no longer acting as one.

That is not ceremony. Regulation 25 requires it, and both times go on the record.

The general manager arranges the agenda so planning authority items are sequential, sitting together under one item number rather than scattered through the meeting.

And under Regulation 29 the reasons for a planning authority decision must be recorded in the minutes — a requirement that does not attach to ordinary council decisions.

This is where the hat changes. Module Nine covers what that means for how you decide.

Slide 13 — Reports, Workshops and Oversight

The general reports item looks like a formality — everything is received and noted. It is not.

What comes through here is the general manager's monthly operational report, minutes of the Audit Panel and the Performance Review Committee, reports from LGAT and other representative bodies, reports from joint authorities and Council-owned companies including TasWater, and Mayor and councillor reports.

The purpose sits in section 28. This item exists so councillors, sitting collectively, can monitor the implementation of strategies, plans and the budget; the efficient provision of services and management of assets; the fair and equitable treatment of employees; and the manner in which services are provided.

Councillors may ask questions on any of it. If you want to hold the organisation to account, this is where you do it.

Workshops are recorded here too — the agenda must give the date and purpose of any workshop held since the last meeting.

Slide 14 — Councillor Questions

Councillors have two ways of asking a question.

On notice: written notice to the general manager at least seven days before the meeting, and the answer must be in writing.

Without notice: asked of the Mayor, or through the Mayor of another councillor or the general manager, and answered verbally. Nobody is obliged to answer a question without notice, and there is no debate on the question or the answer.

Either way the form matters. A question must be concise and clear, with minimal preamble, and must not be a statement. You may not offer argument, opinion, inference or imputation beyond what is needed to explain the question. The Mayor may refuse a question that is defamatory, offensive, unlawful or unrelated to Council's activities.

Slide 15 — Notices of Motion

A notice of motion is how a councillor puts something on the agenda.

Written notice goes in at least seven days before the meeting, with supporting information and reasons. The councillor who gave the notice must move it, or it lapses — and cannot substitute a different or amended motion. The wording you lodge is the wording you are stuck with.

The general manager may, after consulting the Mayor, refuse a motion that is defamatory, offensive, unlawful, or unrelated to the activities or functions of Council.

And before you lodge one, Council's Governance and Meeting Procedures Framework asks you to consider five things: cost and budget; alignment to the Annual Plan and strategic priorities; resource and workload impact; whether there is another way of progressing it; and whether qualified advice is needed under section 65.

Slide 16 — Departmental Reports

Departmental reports are where officers raise the general business of Council for decision, with qualified advice and recommendations. They come from the Chief Executive Officer, General Counsel, and the Directors of Corporate Services, Infrastructure and Assets, and Community and Place.

Two requirements sit underneath every one. Section 65(1) requires the general manager to ensure any advice given to Council comes from a person with the qualifications or experience necessary to give it. And section 65(2) forbids Council deciding a matter requiring that advice without having it available and considering it. Not receiving it — considering it.

One piece of navigation: an asterisk after an item number means the report has attachments.

Slide 17 — Closed Council

All meetings of Council are open to the public. The exception is where Council decides, by absolute majority, to close the meeting because one of the matters listed in Regulation 17(2) is to be discussed.

That list is closed and specific. Personnel and industrial relations matters. Commercial information, contracts and tenders. Security of the Council, councillors, employees or property. Proposals to acquire or dispose of land. Personal and confidential information. Leave of absence requests and parental leave notifications. Litigation. And the personal hardship of a resident or ratepayer.

The motion to close is procedural — no discussion, no debate. The general manager can only be excluded where the matter concerns their own employment or performance.

And here is the part people miss. Confidentiality is decided, not assumed. In closed session Council must consider whether each discussion, decision, report or document stays confidential or is released. That decision forms part of the resolution on every item.

Slide 18 — After the Meeting

After the meeting the general manager prepares the minutes.

They must record, as a minimum: each matter discussed and each decision made; where required, that a decision was carried by absolute majority; a summary of any deputation; each motion moved; any declaration of interest; each councillor and public question with the answer or a summary of it; information relevant to any refused question; and each absence of a councillor, with the times of leaving and returning.

The minutes are circulated as soon as possible and placed on Council's website — but they are not confirmed until the next ordinary meeting.

Slide 19 — Read the Explanatory Notes

Everything in this presentation comes from one document, and that document is published.

Council's Council Meeting Explanatory Notes set out the agenda item by item, with the regulation or section behind each one. It is the reference version of what we have just walked through, and it goes into more detail than a presentation can.

You will find it on the Council website, at huonvalley.tas.gov.au — under Council, then Council Elections, then the Candidate and Councillor Knowledge Series.

Read it. And if anything in it raises a question, Council officers are available to answer it. That applies whether you are a councillor, a candidate thinking about standing, or a member of the community who simply wants to understand how the meeting works.

Thank you for watching.