

Motions and Decision Making — Part 1: Bringing a Motion to Council

Narration Script

Huon Valley Council | Candidate and Councillor Knowledge Series

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Slide 1 — Title — Motions and Decision Making — Part 1: Bringing a Motion to Council

Welcome to Motions and Decision Making, part of the Huon Valley Council Candidate and Councillor Knowledge Series.

Every decision this Council has ever made started life as a motion. Someone moved a form of words, someone seconded it, the chamber debated it, and a majority voted it through. That is the whole of Council's decision-making power, and it belongs to you.

This is Part 1 of two. It covers how a motion gets to Council. Part 2 covers what happens once it's on the floor.

Slide 2 — Before You Begin

A note on what this module is. It's specific to Huon Valley Council. It covers the Meeting Procedures Regulations, which apply to every Tasmanian council, but also how we apply them here through Council's Governance and Meeting Procedures Framework. Other councils do some of this differently.

It builds on what has come before. Good governance, impartiality, conflicts of interest and the obligation on employees to give frank and fearless advice all reappear here. Where a topic is covered in depth elsewhere in the series, we'll point you to it rather than teach it twice.

And nothing here replaces the Regulations. Divisions 2 and 3 of Part 2 are short. Read them alongside this.

Slide 3 — Council Decides by Resolution

Start with the foundation. Council can only make a decision by resolution — a motion put to a properly convened meeting and passed by the required majority. There is no other way.

That tells you something about the job. No individual councillor decides anything — not the Mayor, not the longest-serving councillor. Authority belongs to the Council sitting together, and the resolution is what gives the Chief Executive Officer the authority to act.

Most motions carry by a simple majority of those present and voting. Some need an absolute majority — that's more than half of all councillors, whether they're in the room or not. For the newly elected Council of seven councillors, that's four. Quorum works the same way: you need four councillors present before the meeting can transact any business at all.

You don't need to memorise which decisions require an absolute majority. Where one is required, the report will say so, and the minutes must record it.

Slide 4 — The Officer Recommendation

Almost every item on the agenda arrives with an officer recommendation attached, and understanding where that recommendation comes from changes how you use it.

It is not handed down. Recommendations are commonly developed with councillors — circulated for comment, worked through at workshops, shaped by your feedback before the item reaches the chamber. Decision making here is teamwork, not councillors versus the administration.

At the same time, employees owe you frank and fearless advice. They must tell you what they actually think, including when it isn't what you want to hear. That obligation is covered in depth in the good governance module.

And a recommendation is exactly that. It does not bind you. You aren't required to move it or to follow it — but you should consider it with due respect.

Qualified advice is different again. Where a matter requires the advice of a qualified person, Council must not decide it without having that advice and considering it. That's section 65, and it isn't optional.

Slide 5 — What Makes a Good Motion

Think of a motion as an instruction. Once it's carried, someone has to pick it up and act on it.

So it needs to be clear — plain words, one possible reading. Someone sitting in the gallery should be able to hear it and know exactly what Council has just decided.

It needs to be certain. Who does what, and by when. "That Council investigate options" is not a decision — it's a conversation with no end point.

It needs to be within power, because Council can only do what the law allows. And it needs to be capable of being implemented — with no budget, no resource and no timeframe, the resolution will simply sit there, and in twelve months someone will ask what happened to it.

Get this wrong and employees can't implement the decision, the meaning gets argued over for months, and the community is left uncertain and dissatisfied — the opposite of what you were elected to do.

Slide 6 — Before You Put a Motion

Council's Framework sets out what you should turn your mind to before submitting a motion on notice. There are five things.

The cost, and whether there's budget. Whether it aligns with the Annual Plan and Council's strategic priorities. Whether the resources exist to deliver it, and what it does to workloads. Whether there's a better way of achieving the same thing. And whether section 65 advice is required.

Council acknowledges in the Framework that it should not decide a motion on notice unless it has received advice relevant to those matters. So working through the list isn't optional courtesy — it's what allows Council to make the decision at all.

It's also easier with help. Ask the relevant Director what your motion would mean in practice — what it costs, what it displaces, whether it can be delivered. Then get drafting advice from the Office of General Counsel.

You're also encouraged, though not obliged, to circulate it to other councillors first. No surprises makes for a better debate.

Slide 7 — Motions with Notice

A notice of motion is how you put an item of your own onto the agenda. It is one of the most direct tools you have.

Give the Chief Executive Officer written notice at least seven days before the meeting, with supporting information and your reasons. Those seven days include weekends and public holidays, but not the day of notice or the day of the meeting.

In practice, if a meeting is to be held on a Wednesday then a Notice of Motion must be received no later than the Tuesday of the preceding week.

Later than that, or during the meeting, and it isn't automatically refused — the Mayor, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, may allow debate or set it aside for a later agenda.

Two things to watch. You must move your own motion, and move it as given. If you don't move it, it lapses, and you cannot substitute a different motion on the night. The words you lodge are the words the chamber gets.

And a motion can be refused — one that, in the opinion of both the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor, is defamatory, offensive, unlawful, or unrelated to Council's activities or functions.

Slide 8 — Motions Without Notice

You can also move a motion at the meeting without notice. The Regulations allow it, but limit it.

The critical limit is this: a motion without notice must relate to something already listed on the agenda. It cannot introduce a new subject. Only matters on the agenda can be discussed at all.

At Huon Valley Council the Mayor will require a written copy first, unless it's uncomplicated and clearly recorded. That isn't obstruction — it's how the chamber makes sure everyone is voting on the same words.

The Mayor, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, decides whether the motion proceeds or is set aside for a later meeting.

And don't confuse this with urgent business. Bringing on a matter not listed at all requires an absolute majority, a report from the Chief Executive Officer on why it couldn't be listed and why it's urgent, and any qualified advice needed.

Slide 9 — Moving and Seconding

The mechanics are straightforward, and getting them right is most of what makes a meeting run well.

One councillor moves, another seconds. Until that happens the Mayor cannot allow the motion to be debated at all. In practice the motion moved will very often be the officer recommendation, or the recommendation with changes — which makes sense, given it was developed with councillors.

Once moved and seconded, the mover has the right to speak to it. The Mayor then calls for debate from the floor.

One rule that surprises people: if the Mayor moves or seconds a motion, the Mayor must vacate the chair until that motion has been dealt with. The Deputy Mayor takes over for that item.

And to withdraw a motion you've moved, you need the consent of your seconder, or of the meeting. Once it's on the floor it isn't yours alone any more.

Slide 10 — Five Things to Remember

Five things to take away from Part 1.

One. Council speaks only through resolutions. A motion moved, seconded and carried is the only way Council decides anything at all.

Two. A motion is an instruction, so write it like one. Clear, certain, within power, and capable of being delivered.

Three. Do the work before the meeting. Cost, alignment, resourcing, alternatives, and whether section 65 advice is needed. Talk to the Director, and get drafting advice from the Office of General Counsel.

Four. A recommendation is advice, not an instruction. It was shaped with councillors, and it does not bind you — but consider it with due respect.

Five. Nothing happens until a motion is moved and seconded. And if the Mayor moves or seconds, the Mayor leaves the chair.

In Part 2 we pick it up from there — debate, amendments, procedural motions, and the vote.