

Riverina Water County Council

## **Code of Conduct**

### **Part 2**

## **Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct**

**March 2013**

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## PART 1 INTRODUCTION

These procedures have been developed for the purpose of providing guidance in the administration of Councils code of conduct and are based on the “Model Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct” which was prepared for Councils by the Division of Local Government. The commencement date for the revised Code of Conduct and these procedures is 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

Transitional arrangements applicable to the revised Code of Conduct framework were provided as follows;

- Complaints made or to be finalized before 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013 to be dealt with under previous Code of Conduct and associated procedures
- Complaints received after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013 but where the alleged conduct occurred prior to this date to be assessed against standards provided under the previous Code but using these new procedures
- Complaints relating to alleged conduct that occurred after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013 to be assessed against this new Code and Procedures

## PART 2 DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the procedures, the following definitions apply:

“the Act”	the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> “administrator” an administrator of a council appointed under the Act other than an administrator appointed under section 66
“code of conduct”	a code of conduct adopted under section 440 of the Act
“code of conduct complaint”	a complaint that alleges conduct on the part of a council official acting in their official capacity that on its face, if proven, would constitute a breach of the standards of conduct prescribed under the council’s code of conduct
“complainant”	a person who makes a code of conduct complaint
“complainant councillor”	a councillor who makes a code of conduct complaint
“complaints coordinator”	a person appointed by the general manager under these procedures as a complaints coordinator
“conduct reviewer”	a person appointed under these procedures to review allegations of breaches of the code of conduct by councillors or the general manager
“council committee”	a committee established by resolution of council
“council committee member”	a person other than a councillor or member of staff of a council who is a member of a council committee
“councillor”	a person elected or appointed to civic office and includes a Mayor/ Chairperson

“council official”	includes councillors, members of staff of council, administrators, council committee members, conduct reviewers and delegates of council
“delegate of council”	a person (other than a councillor or member of staff of a council) or body and the individual members of that body to whom a function of the council is delegated
“the Division”	the Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet
“investigator”	a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee
“the Regulation”	the <i>Local Government (General) Regulation 2005</i>
“subject person”	a person whose conduct is the subject of investigation by a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee under these procedures

### PART 3 ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

#### The establishment of a panel of conduct reviewers

3.1 The council must by resolution establish a panel of conduct reviewers.

Council’s resolution appointing the panel of conduct reviewers is attached as a separate document. This information does not form part of the “Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct”

3.2 The council may by resolution enter into an arrangement with one or more other councils to share a panel of conduct reviewers.

3.3 The panel of conduct reviewers is to be established following a public expression of interest process.

3.4 An expression of interest for members of the council’s panel of conduct reviewers must, at a minimum, be advertised locally and in the Sydney metropolitan area.

3.5 To be eligible to be a member of a panel of conduct reviewers, a person must, at a minimum, meet the following requirements:

- a) an understanding of local government, and
- b) knowledge of investigative processes including but not limited to procedural fairness requirements and the requirements of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994*, and
- c) knowledge and experience of one or more of the following:
  - i) investigations, or ii) law, or
  - iii) public administration, or iv) public sector ethics, or
  - v) alternative dispute resolution, and
- d) meet the eligibility requirements for membership of a panel of conduct reviewers under clause 3.6.

3.6 A person is not be eligible to be a member of the panel of conduct reviewers if  
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they are

- a) a councillor, or
- b) a nominee for election as a councillor, or c) an administrator, or
- d) an employee of a council, or
- e) a member of the Commonwealth Parliament or any State Parliament or Territory Assembly, or
- f) a nominee for election as a member of the Commonwealth Parliament or any State Parliament or Territory Assembly, or
- g) a person who has a conviction for an indictable offence that is not an expired conviction.

- 3.7 A person is not precluded from being a member of the council's panel of conduct reviewers if they are a member of another council's panel of conduct reviewers.
- 3.8 A panel of conduct reviewers established under this Part is to have a term of up to four years.
- 3.9 The council may terminate the panel of conduct reviewers at any time by resolution.
- 3.10 When the term of the conduct reviewers concludes or is terminated, the council must establish a new panel of conduct reviewers in accordance with the requirements of this Part.
- 3.11 A person who was a member of a previous panel of conduct reviewers established by the council may be a member of subsequent panels of conduct reviewers established by the council.

#### The appointment of complaints coordinators

- 3.12 The general manager must appoint a member of staff of the council to act as a complaints coordinator. Where practicable, the complaints coordinator should be a senior and suitably qualified member of staff.
- 3.13 The general manager may appoint other members of staff to act as alternates to the complaints coordinator.

For the purposes of sections 3.12 and 3.13 the persons appointed to the positions of complaints coordinator and alternate complaints coordinator by the General Manager are contained in the Delegations register.

An extract of this information is attached with this documentation but does not form part of the "Procedures for the Code of Conduct".

- 3.14 The general manager must not undertake the role of complaints coordinator.
- 3.15 The person appointed as complaints coordinator or alternate complaints coordinator must also be a nominated disclosures coordinator appointed for the purpose of receiving and managing reports of wrongdoing under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994*.
- 3.16 The role of the complaints coordinator is to:
- a) coordinate the management of complaints made under the council's code of conduct,
  - b) liaise with and provide administrative support to a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee,
  - c) liaise with the Division of Local Government, and
  - d) arrange the annual reporting of code of conduct complaints statistics.

## PART 4 HOW MAY CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

### What is a “code of conduct complaint”?

- 4.1 For the purpose of these procedures, a code of conduct complaint is a complaint that alleges conduct on the part of a council official acting in their official capacity that on its face, if proven, would constitute a breach of the standards of conduct prescribed under the council’s code of conduct.
- 4.2 Only code of conduct complaints are to be dealt with under these procedures. Complaints that do not satisfy the definition of a “code of conduct complaint” are to be dealt with under council’s routine complaints management processes.(Policy5.19–Complaints Management)

### When must a code of conduct complaint be made?

- 4.3 A code of conduct complaint must be made within three months of the alleged conduct occurring or within three months of the complainant becoming aware of the alleged conduct.
- 4.4 A complaint made after 3 months may only be accepted if the general manager, or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, the Chairperson, is satisfied that there are compelling grounds for the matter to be dealt with under the code of conduct.

### How may a code of conduct complaint about a council official other than the general manager be made?

- 4.5 All code of conduct complaints other than those relating to the general manager are to be made to the general manager in writing.
- 4.6 Where a code of conduct complaint about a council official other than the general manager cannot be made in writing, the complaint must be confirmed with the complainant in writing as soon as possible after the receipt of the complaint.
- 4.7 In making a code of conduct complaint about a council official other than the general manager, the complainant may nominate whether they want the complaint to be resolved by mediation or by other alternative means.
- 4.8 The general manager or, where the complaint is referred to a conduct reviewer, the conduct reviewer, must consider the complainant’s preferences in deciding how to deal with the complaint.
- 4.9 Notwithstanding clauses 4.5 and 4.6, where the general manager becomes aware of a possible breach of the council’s code of conduct, he or she may initiate the process for the consideration of the matter under these procedures without a written complaint.

### How may a code of conduct complaint about the general manager be made?

- 4.10 Code of conduct complaints about the general manager are to be made to the Chairperson in writing.
- 4.11 Where a code of conduct complaint about the general manager cannot be made in writing, the complaint must be confirmed with the complainant in writing as soon as possible after the receipt of the complaint.
- 4.12 In making a code of conduct complaint about the general manager, the complainant may nominate whether they want the complaint to be resolved by mediation or by other alternative means.

- 4.13 The Chairman or, where the complaint is referred to a conduct reviewer, the conduct reviewer, must consider the complainant's preferences in deciding how to deal with the complaint.
- 4.14 Notwithstanding clauses 4.10 and 4.11, where the Chairperson becomes aware of a possible breach of the council's code of conduct by the general manager, he or she may initiate the process for the consideration of the matter under these procedures without a written complaint.

## **PART 5 HOW ARE CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS TO BE MANAGED?**

### How are code of conduct complaints about staff (other than the general manager) to be dealt with?

- 5.1 The general manager is responsible for making enquiries or causing enquiries to be made into code of conduct complaints about members of staff of council and for determining the outcome of such complaints.
- 5.2 Where the general manager decides not to make enquiries into a code of conduct complaint about a member of staff, the general manager must give the complainant reasons in writing for their decision.
- 5.3 Without limiting clause 5.2, the general manager may decide not to enquire into the matter on grounds that the complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith.
- 5.4 Enquiries made into staff conduct that might give rise to disciplinary action must occur in accordance with the relevant industrial instrument or employment contract and make provision for procedural fairness including the right of an employee to be represented by their union.
- 5.5 Sanctions for staff depend on the severity, scale and importance of the breach and must be determined in accordance with any relevant industrial instruments or contracts.

### How are code of conduct complaints about delegates of council and council committee members to be dealt with?

- 5.6 The general manager is responsible for making enquiries or causing enquiries to be made into code of conduct complaints about delegates of council and council committee members and for determining the outcome of such complaints.
- 5.7 Where the general manager decides not to make enquiries into a code of conduct complaint about a delegate of council or a council committee member, the general manager must give the complainant reasons in writing for their decision.
- 5.8 Without limiting clause 5.7, the general manager may decide not to enquire into the matter on grounds that the complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith.
- 5.9 Sanctions for delegates of council and/or members of council committees depend on the severity, scale and importance of the breach and may include one or more of the following:
- a) censure,
  - b) requiring the person to apologise to any person or organisation adversely affected by the breach,
  - c) prosecution for any breach of the law,

- d) removing or restricting the person's delegation, or
- e) removing the person from membership of the relevant council committee.

- 5.10 Prior to imposing a sanction against a delegate of council or a council committee member under clause 5.9, the general manager or any person making enquiries on behalf of the general manager must comply with the requirements of procedural fairness. In particular:
- a) the substance of the allegation (including the relevant provision/s of council's code of conduct that the alleged conduct is in breach of) must be put to the person the subject of the allegation, and
  - b) the person must be given an opportunity to respond to the allegation, and
  - c) the general manager must consider the person's response in deciding whether to impose a sanction under clause 5.9.

How is code of conduct complaints about conduct reviewers to be dealt with?

- 5.11 The general manager must refer all code of conduct complaints about conduct reviewers to the Division for its consideration.
- 5.12 The general manager must notify the complainant of the referral of their complaint in writing.
- 5.13 The general manager must implement any recommendation made by the Division as a result of its consideration of a code of conduct complaint about a conduct reviewer.

How is code of conduct complaints about administrators to be dealt with?

- 5.14 The general manager must refer all code of conduct complaints about administrators to the Division for its consideration.
- 5.15 The general manager must notify the complainant of the referral of their complaint in writing.

How are code of conduct complaints about councillors to be dealt with?

- 5.16 The general manager must refer the following code of conduct complaints about councillors to the Division:
- a) complaints alleging a breach of the pecuniary interest provisions of the Act,
  - b) complaints alleging a failure to comply with a requirement under the code of conduct to disclose and appropriately manage conflicts of interests arising from reportable political donations (see section 328B),
  - c) complaints alleging a breach of Part 8 of the code of conduct relating to the maintenance of the integrity of the code, and
  - d) complaints the subject of a special complaints management arrangement with the Division under clause 5.40.
- 5.17 Where the general manager refers a complaint to the Division under clause 5.16, the general manager must notify the complainant of the referral in writing.
- 5.18 Where the general manager considers it to be practicable and appropriate to do so, the general manager may seek to resolve code of conduct complaints about councillors, other than those requiring referral to the Division under clause 5.16, by alternative means such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation or apology instead of referring them to the complaints coordinator under clause 5.20.
- 5.19 Where the general manager resolves a code of conduct complaint under clause 5.18 to the general manager's satisfaction, the general manager must notify the complainant in



writing of the steps taken to resolve the complaint and this shall finalise the consideration of the matter under these procedures.

- 5.20 The general manager must refer all code of conduct complaints about councillors other than those referred to the Division under clause 5.16 or resolved under clause 5.18 to the complaints coordinator.

How are code of conduct complaints about the general manager to be dealt with?

- 5.21 The Chairperson must refer the following code of conduct complaints about the general manager to the Division:
- a) complaints alleging a breach of the pecuniary interest provisions of the Act,
  - b) complaints alleging a breach of Part 8 of the code of conduct relating to the maintenance of the integrity of the code, and
  - c) complaints the subject of a special complaints management arrangement with the Division under clause 5.40.
- 5.22 Where the Chairperson refers a complaint to the Division under clause 5.21, the Chairperson must notify the complainant of the referral in writing.
- 5.23 Where the Chairperson considers it to be practicable and appropriate to do so, he or she may seek to resolve code of conduct complaints about the general manager, other than those requiring referral to the Division under clause 5.21, by alternative means such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation or apology instead of referring them to the complaints coordinator under clause 5.25.
- 5.24 Where the Chairperson resolves a code of conduct complaint under clause 5.23 to the Chairperson's satisfaction, the Chairperson must notify the complainant in writing of the steps taken to resolve the complaint and this shall finalise the consideration of the matter under these procedures.
- 5.25 The Chairperson must refer all code of conduct complaints about the general manager other than those referred to the Division under clause 5.21 or resolved under clause 5.23 to the complaints coordinator.

Referral of code of conduct complaints to external agencies

- 5.26 The general manager, Chairperson or a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee may, at any time, refer a code of conduct complaint to an external agency or body such as, but not limited to, the Division, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the NSW Ombudsman or the Police for its consideration, where they consider such a referral is warranted.
- 5.27 Where the general manager, Chairperson, conduct reviewer or conduct review committee refers a complaint to an external agency or body under clause 5.26, they must notify the complainant of the referral in writing where it is appropriate for them to do so.
- 5.28 Referral of a matter to an external agency or body shall finalise consideration of the matter under the code of conduct unless the council is subsequently advised otherwise by the referral agency or body.

Disclosure of the identity of complainants

- 5.29 In dealing with matters under these procedures, information that identifies or tends to identify complainants is not to be disclosed unless:
- a) the complainant consents in writing to the disclosure, or
  - b) it is generally known that the complainant has made the complaint as a result of the complainant having voluntarily identified themselves as the

- person who made the complaint, or
- c) it is essential, having regard to procedural fairness requirements, that the identifying information be disclosed, or
- d) a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee is of the opinion that disclosure of the information is necessary to investigate the matter effectively, or
- e) it is otherwise in the public interest to do so.

5.30 Clause 5.29 does not apply to code of conduct complaints made by councillors about other councillors or the general manager.

5.31 Where a councillor makes a code of conduct complaint about another councillor or the general manager and the complainant councillor considers that compelling grounds exist that would warrant information that identifies or tends to identify them as the complainant not to be disclosed, they may request in writing that such information not be disclosed.

5.32 A request made by a complainant councillor under clause 5.31 must be made at the time they make a code of conduct complaint and must state the grounds upon which the request is made.

5.33 The general manager or Chairperson or, where the matter is referred, a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee must consider a request made under clause 5.31 before disclosing information that identifies or tends to identify the complainant councillor but are not obliged to comply with the request.

5.34 Where a complainant councillor makes a request under clause 5.31, the general manager or Chairperson or, where the matter is referred, a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee shall notify the councillor in writing of their intention to disclose information that identifies or tends to identify them prior to disclosing the information.

#### Code of conduct complaints made as public interest disclosures

5.35 Code of conduct complaints that are made as public interest disclosures under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994* are to be managed in accordance with the requirements of that Act, the council's internal reporting policy and any guidelines issued by the NSW Ombudsman that relate to the management of public interest disclosures.

5.36 For a code of conduct complaint to be dealt with as a public interest disclosure, the complainant must state at the outset and in writing at the time of making the complaint that it is made as a public interest disclosure.

5.37 Where a councillor makes a code of conduct complaint about another councillor or the general manager as a public interest disclosure, before the matter may be dealt with under these procedures, the complainant councillor must consent in writing to the disclosure of their identity as the complainant.

5.38 Where a complainant councillor declines to consent to the disclosure of their identity as the complainant under clause 5.37, the general manager or the Chairperson must refer the complaint to the Division for consideration. Such a referral must be made under section 26 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994*.

#### Special complaints management arrangements

5.39 The general manager may request in writing that the Division enter into a special complaints management arrangement with the council in relation to code of conduct complaints made by or about a person or persons.

5.40 Where the Division receives a request under clause 5.39, it may agree to enter into a

special complaints management arrangement where it is satisfied that the number or nature of code of conduct complaints made by or about a person or persons has:

- a) imposed an undue and disproportionate cost burden on the council's administration of its code of conduct, or
- b) impeded or disrupted the effective administration by the council of its code of conduct, or
- c) impeded or disrupted the effective functioning of the council.

- 5.41 A special complaints management arrangement must be in writing and must specify the following:
- a) the code of conduct complaints the arrangement relates to, and b) the period that the arrangement will be in force.
- 5.42 The Division may by notice in writing, amend or terminate a special complaints management arrangement at any time.
- 5.43 While a special complaints management arrangement is in force, an officer of the Division (the assessing Divisional officer) must undertake the preliminary assessment of the code of conduct complaints specified in the arrangement in accordance with the requirements of these procedures except as provided by clause 5.44 below.
- 5.44 Where, following a preliminary assessment, the assessing Divisional officer determines that a code of conduct complaint warrants investigation by a conduct reviewer or a conduct review committee, the assessing Divisional officer shall notify the complaints coordinator in writing of their determination and the reasons for their determination. The complaints coordinator must comply with the recommendation of the assessing Divisional officer.
- 5.45 Prior to the expiry of a special complaints management arrangement, the Division shall, in consultation with the general manager, review the arrangement to determine whether it should be renewed or amended.
- 5.46 A special complaints management arrangement shall expire on the date specified in the arrangement unless renewed under clause 5.45.

## **PART 6 PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### Referral of code of conduct complaints to conduct reviewers

- 6.1 The complaints coordinator must refer all code of conduct complaints about councillors or the general manager submitted to the complaints coordinator within 21 days of receipt of a complaint by the general manager or the Chairperson.
- 6.2 For the purposes of clause 6.1, the complaints coordinator will refer a complaint to a conduct reviewer selected from:
- a) a panel of conduct reviewers established by the council, or
  - b) a panel of conduct reviewers established by an organisation approved by the Chief Executive of the Division.
- 6.3 In selecting a suitable conduct reviewer, the complaints coordinator may have regard to the qualifications and experience of members of the panel of conduct reviewers.
- 6.4 A conduct reviewer must not accept the referral of a code of conduct complaint where:
- a) they have a conflict of interests in relation to the matter referred to them, or
  - b) a reasonable apprehension of bias arises in relation to their consideration of the matter, or

- c) they or their employer has entered into one or more contracts with the council in the 2 years preceding the referral and they or their employer have received or expect to receive payments under the contract or contracts of a cumulative value that exceeds \$100K, or
  - d) at the time of the referral, they or their employer are the council's legal service providers or are a member of a panel of legal service providers appointed by the council.
- 6.5 For the purposes of clause 6.4(a), a conduct reviewer will have a conflict of interests in a matter where a reasonable and informed person would perceive that they could be influenced by a private interest when carrying out their public duty (see clause 4.1 of the Model Code of Conduct).
- 6.6 For the purposes of clause 6.4(b), a reasonable apprehension of bias arises where a fair-minded observer might reasonably apprehend that the conduct reviewer might not bring an impartial and unprejudiced mind to the matter referred to the conduct reviewer.
- 6.7 Where the complaints coordinator refers a matter to a conduct reviewer, they will provide the conduct reviewer with a copy of the code of conduct complaint and any other information relevant to the matter held by the council.
- 6.8 The complaints coordinator must notify the complainant in writing that the matter has been referred to a conduct reviewer and advise which conduct reviewer the matter has been referred to.

#### Preliminary assessment by a conduct reviewer

- 6.9 The conduct reviewer is to undertake a preliminary assessment of a complaint referred to them by the complaints coordinator for the purposes of determining how the complaint is to be managed.
- 6.10 The conduct reviewer may determine to do one or more of the following in relation to a complaint referred to them by the complaints coordinator:
- a) to take no action, or
  - b) to resolve the complaint by alternative and appropriate strategies such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation or apology, or
  - c) to refer the matter back to the general manager or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, the Chairperson, for resolution by alternative and appropriate strategies such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation, or apology, or
  - d) to refer the matter to another agency or body such as, but not limited to, the ICAC, the NSW Ombudsman, the Division or the Police, or
  - e) to investigate the matter, or
  - f) to recommend that the complaints coordinator convene a conduct review committee to investigate the matter.
- 6.11 In determining how to deal with a matter under clause 6.10, the conduct reviewer must have regard to the complaint assessment criteria prescribed under clause 6.27.
- 6.12 The conduct reviewer may make such enquiries the conduct reviewer considers to be reasonably necessary to determine what option to exercise under clause 6.10.
- 6.13 The conduct reviewer may request the complaints coordinator to provide such additional information the conduct reviewer considers to be reasonably necessary to determine what option to exercise in relation to the matter under clause 6.10. The complaints coordinator will, as far as is reasonably practicable, supply any information requested by the conduct reviewer.

- 6.14 The conduct reviewer must refer to the Division any complaints referred to him or her that should have been referred to the Division under clauses 5.16 and 5.21.
- 6.15 The conduct reviewer must determine to take no action on a complaint that is not a code of conduct complaint for the purposes of these procedures.
- 6.16 Where the conduct reviewer completes their preliminary assessment of a complaint by determining to exercise an option under clause 6.10, paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), they must provide the complainant with written notice of their determination and provide reasons for it and this will finalise consideration of the matter under these procedures.
- 6.17 Where the conduct reviewer refers a complaint to another agency or body, they must notify the complainant of the referral in writing where it is appropriate for them to do so.
- 6.18 The conduct reviewer may only determine to investigate a matter or to recommend that a conduct review committee be convened to investigate a matter where they are satisfied as to the following:
- a) that the complaint is a “code of conduct complaint” for the purposes of these procedures, and
  - b) that the alleged conduct, on its face, is sufficiently serious to warrant investigation, and
  - c) that the matter is one that could not or should not be resolved by alternative means.
- 6.19 The conduct reviewer may only determine to recommend that a conduct review committee be convened to investigate a matter after consulting with the complaints coordinator and where they are satisfied that it would not be practicable or appropriate for the matter to be investigated by a sole conduct reviewer.
- 6.20 The conduct reviewer must complete their preliminary assessment of the complaint within 28 days of referral of the matter to them by the complaints coordinator.
- 6.21 The conduct reviewer is not obliged to give prior notice to or to consult with any person before making a determination in relation to their preliminary assessment of a complaint except as may be specifically required under these procedures.

#### Referral back to the general manager or Chairperson for resolution

- 6.22 Where the conduct reviewer determines to refer a matter back to the general manager or to the Chairperson to be resolved by alternative and appropriate means, they must write to the general manager or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, to the Chairperson, recommending the means by which the complaint may be resolved.
- 6.23 The conduct reviewer must consult with the general manager or Chairperson prior to referring a matter back to them under clause 6.22.
- 6.24 The general manager or Chairperson may decline to accept the conduct reviewer’s recommendation. Where the general manager or Chairperson declines to do so, the conduct reviewer may determine to deal with the complaint by other means under clause 6.10.
- 6.25 Where the conduct reviewer refers a matter back to the general manager or Chairperson under clause 6.22, the general manager or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, the Chairperson, is responsible for implementing or overseeing the implementation of the conduct reviewer’s recommendation.
- 6.26 Where the conduct reviewer refers a matter back to the general manager or

Chairperson under clause 6.22, the general manager, or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, the Chairperson, must advise the complainant in writing of the steps taken to implement the conduct reviewer's recommendation once these steps have been completed.

#### Complaints assessment criteria

- 6.27 In undertaking the preliminary assessment of a complaint, the conduct reviewer may have regard to the following considerations:
- a) whether the complaint is a "code of conduct complaint",
  - b) whether the complaint is trivial, frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith,
  - c) whether the complaint discloses prima facie evidence of a breach of the code,
  - d) whether the complaint raises issues that would be more appropriately dealt with by another agency or body,
  - e) whether there is or was an alternative and satisfactory means of redress available to the complainant in relation to the conduct complained of,
  - f) whether the complaint is one that can be resolved by alternative and appropriate strategies such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, informal discussion, negotiation or apology,
  - g) whether the issue/s giving rise to the complaint have previously been addressed or resolved,
  - h) whether the conduct complained of forms part of a pattern of conduct,
  - i) whether there were mitigating circumstances giving rise to the conduct complained of,
  - j) the seriousness of the alleged conduct,
  - k) the significance of the conduct or the impact of the conduct for the council,
  - l) how much time has passed since the alleged conduct occurred, or
  - m) such other considerations that the conduct reviewer considers may be relevant to the assessment of the complaint.

## **PART 7 OPERATIONS OF CONDUCT REVIEW COMMITTEES**

- 7.1 Where a conduct reviewer recommends that the complaints coordinator convene a conduct review committee to investigate a matter, the conduct reviewer must notify the complaints coordinator of their recommendation and the reasons for their recommendation in writing.
- 7.2 The complaints coordinator must convene a conduct review committee comprising three conduct reviewers selected from:
- a) a panel of conduct reviewers established by the council, or
  - b) a panel of conduct reviewers established by an organisation approved by the Chief Executive of the Division.
- 7.3 In selecting suitable conduct reviewers for membership of a conduct review committee convened under clause 7.2, the complaints coordinator may have regard to the following:
- a) the qualifications and experience of members of the panel of conduct reviewers, and
  - b) any recommendation made by the conduct reviewer about the membership of the committee.
- 7.4 The conduct reviewer who made the preliminary assessment of the complaint must not be a member of a conduct review committee convened under clause 7.2.
- 7.5 A member of a panel of conduct reviewers may not be appointed to a conduct review committee where they would otherwise be precluded from accepting a

referral of the matter to be considered by the committee under clause 6.4.

- 7.6 Where the complaints coordinator convenes a conduct review committee, they will advise the complainant in writing that the committee has been convened and the membership of the committee.
- 7.7 Where, after a conduct review committee has been convened, a member of the committee becomes unavailable to participate in further consideration of the matter, the complaints coordinator may appoint another person from a panel of conduct reviewers to replace them.
- 7.8 Meetings of a conduct review committee may be conducted in person or by teleconference.
- 7.9 The members of the conduct review committee must elect a chairperson of the committee.
- 7.10 A quorum for a meeting of the conduct review committee is two members.
- 7.11 Business is not to be conducted at any meeting of the conduct review committee unless a quorum is present.
- 7.12 If a quorum is not present at a meeting of the conduct review committee, it must be adjourned to a time and date that is specified.
- 7.13 Each member of the conduct review committee is entitled to one vote in relation to a matter. In the event of an equality of votes being cast, the chairperson will have a casting vote.
- 7.14 If the vote on a matter is not unanimous, then this should be noted in the report of the conduct review committee in which it makes its determination in relation to the matter.
- 7.15 The chairperson may make a ruling on questions of procedure and the chairperson's ruling is to be final.
- 7.16 The conduct review committee may only conduct business in the absence of the public.
- 7.17 The conduct review committee must maintain proper records of its proceedings.
- 7.18 The complaints coordinator shall undertake the following functions in support of a conduct review committee:
  - a) provide procedural advice where required,
  - b) ensure adequate resources are provided including secretarial support,
  - c) attend meetings of the conduct review committee in an advisory capacity, and
  - d) provide advice about council's processes where requested.
- 7.19 The complaints coordinator must not be present at, or in sight of a meeting of, the conduct review committee where it makes its final determination in relation to the matter.
- 7.20 The conduct review committee may adopt procedures governing the conduct of its meetings that supplement these procedures. However any procedures adopted by the committee must not be inconsistent with these procedures.

## PART 8 INVESTIGATIONS

### What matters may a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee investigate?

- 8.1 A conduct reviewer or conduct review committee (hereafter referred to as an "investigator") may investigate a code of conduct complaint that has been referred to them by the complaints coordinator and any matters related to or arising from that complaint.
- 8.2 Where an investigator identifies further separate possible breaches of the code of conduct that are not related to or arise from the code of conduct complaint that has been referred to them, they are to report the matters separately in writing to the general manager, or, in the case of alleged conduct on the part of the general manager, to the Chairperson.
- 8.3 The general manager or the Chairperson is to deal with a matter reported to them by an investigator under clause 8.2 as if it were a new code of conduct complaint in accordance with these procedures.

### How are investigations to be commenced?

- 8.4 The investigator must at the outset of their investigation provide a written notice of investigation to the subject person. The notice of investigation must:
- a) disclose the substance of the allegations against the subject person, and
  - b) advise of the relevant provisions of the code of conduct that apply to the alleged conduct, and
  - c) advise of the process to be followed in investigating the matter, and
  - d) invite the subject person to make a written submission in relation to the matter within 28 days or such other reasonable period specified by the investigator in the notice, and
  - e) provide the subject person the opportunity to address the investigator on the matter within such reasonable time specified in the notice.
- 8.5 The subject person may within 14 days of receipt of the notice of investigation, request in writing that the investigator provide them with such further information they consider necessary to assist them to identify the substance of the allegation against them. An investigator will only be obliged to provide such information that the investigator considers reasonably necessary for the subject person to identify the substance of the allegation against them.
- 8.6 An investigator may at any time prior to issuing a draft report, issue an amended notice of investigation to the subject person in relation to the matter referred to them.
- 8.7 Where an investigator issues an amended notice of investigation, they will provide the subject person with a further opportunity to make a written submission in response to the amended notice of investigation within 28 days or such other reasonable period specified by the investigator in the amended notice.
- 8.8 The investigator must also, at the outset of their investigation, provide written notice of the investigation to the complainant, the complaints coordinator and the general manager, or in the case of a complaint about the general manager, to the Chairperson. The notice must:
- a) advise them of the matter the investigator is investigating, and
  - b) in the case of the notice to the complainant, invite them to make a written submission in relation to the matter within 28 days or such other reasonable period specified by the investigator in the notice.



### Written and oral submissions

- 8.9 Where the subject person or the complainant fails to make a written submission in relation to the matter within the period specified by the investigator in their notice of investigation or amended notice of investigation, the investigator may proceed to prepare their draft report without receiving such submissions.
- 8.10 The investigator may accept written submissions received outside the period specified in the notice of investigation or amended notice of investigation.
- 8.11 Prior to preparing a draft report, the investigator must give the subject person an opportunity to address the investigator on the matter being investigated. The subject person may do so in person or by telephone.
- 8.12 Where the subject person fails to accept the opportunity to address the investigator within the period specified by the investigator in the notice of investigation, the investigator may proceed to prepare a draft report without hearing from the subject person.
- 8.13 Where the subject person accepts the opportunity to address the investigator in person, they may have a support person or legal advisor in attendance. The support person or legal advisor will act in an advisory or support role to the subject person only. They must not speak on behalf of the subject person or otherwise interfere with or disrupt proceedings.
- 8.14 The investigator must consider all written and oral submissions made to them in relation to the matter.

### How are investigations to be conducted?

- 8.15 Investigations are to be undertaken without undue delay.
- 8.16 Investigations are to be undertaken in the absence of the public and in confidence.
- 8.17 Investigators must make any such enquiries that may be reasonably necessary to establish the facts of the matter.
- 8.18 Investigators may seek such advice or expert guidance that may be reasonably necessary to assist them with their investigation or the conduct of their investigation.
- 8.19 An investigator may request that the complaints coordinator provide such further information that the investigator considers may be reasonably necessary for them to establish the facts of the matter. The complaints coordinator will, as far as is reasonably practicable, provide the information requested by the investigator.

### Referral or resolution of a matter after the commencement of an investigation

- 8.20 At any time after an investigator has issued a notice of investigation and before they have issued a draft report, an investigator may determine to:
- a) resolve the matter by alternative and appropriate strategies such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation or apology, or
  - b) refer the matter to the general manager, or, in the case of a complaint about the general manager, to the Chairperson, for resolution by alternative and appropriate strategies such as, but not limited to, explanation, counselling, training, mediation, informal discussion, negotiation or apology, or
  - c) refer the matter to another agency or body such as, but not limited to, the ICAC, the NSW Ombudsman, the Division or the Police.

- 8.21 Where an investigator determines to exercise any of the options under clause 8.20 after the commencement of an investigation, they must do so in accordance with the requirements of Part 6 of these procedures relating to the exercise of these options at the preliminary assessment stage.
- 8.22 Where an investigator determines to exercise any of the options under clause 8.20 after the commencement of an investigation, they may by written notice to the subject person, the complainant, the complaints coordinator and the general manager, or in the case of a complaint about the general manager, the Chairperson, discontinue their investigation of the matter.
- 8.23 Where the investigator discontinues their investigation of a matter under clause 8.22, this shall finalise the consideration of the matter under these procedures.
- 8.24 An investigator is not obliged to give prior notice to or to consult with any person before making a determination to exercise any of the options under clause 8.20 or to discontinue their investigation except as may be specifically required under these procedures.

#### Draft investigation reports

- 8.25 When an investigator has completed their enquiries and considered any written or oral submissions made to them in relation to a matter, they must prepare a draft of their proposed report.
- 8.26 The investigator must provide their draft report to the subject person and invite them to make a written submission in relation to it within 28 days or such other reasonable period specified by the investigator.
- 8.27 Where the investigator proposes to make adverse comment about any other person (an affected person) in their report, they must also provide the affected person with relevant extracts of their draft report containing such comment and invite the affected person to make a written submission in relation to it within 28 days or such other reasonable period specified by the investigator.
- 8.28 The investigator must consider written submissions received in relation to the draft report prior to finalising their report in relation to the matter.
- 8.29 The investigator may, after consideration of all written submissions received in relation to their draft report, make further enquiries into the matter. Where as a result of making further enquiries, the investigator makes any material change to their proposed report that makes new adverse comment about the subject person or an affected person, they must provide the subject person or affected person as the case may be with a further opportunity to make a written submission in relation to the new adverse comment.
- 8.30 Where the subject person or an affected person fails to make a written submission in relation to the draft report within the period specified by the investigator, the investigator may proceed to prepare and issue their final report without receiving such submissions.
- 8.31 The investigator may accept written submissions in relation to the draft report received outside the period specified by the investigator at any time prior to issuing their final report.

### Final investigation reports

- 8.32 Where an investigator issues a notice of investigation they must prepare a final report in relation to the matter unless the investigation is discontinued under clause 8.22.
- 8.33 An investigator must not prepare a final report in relation to the matter at any time before they have finalised their consideration of the matter in accordance with the requirements of these procedures.
- 8.34 The investigator's final report must:
- a) make findings of fact in relation to the matter investigated, and, b) make a determination that the conduct investigated either,
    - i. c o n s t i t u t e s a breach of the code of conduct, or
    - ii. d o e s not constitute a breach of the code of conduct, and c) provide reasons for the determination.
- 8.35 Where the investigator determines that the conduct investigated constitutes a breach of the code of conduct, the investigator may make one or more of the following recommendations:
- a) that the council revise any of its policies or procedures,
  - b) that the subject person undertakes any training or other education relevant to the conduct giving rise to the breach,
  - c) that the subject person be counselled for their conduct,
  - d) that the subject person apologise to any person or organisation affected by the breach in such a time and form specified by the recommendation,
  - e) that findings of inappropriate conduct be made public,
  - f) in the case of a breach by the general manager, that action be taken under the general manager's contract for the breach,
  - g) in the case of a breach by a councillor, that the councillor be formally censured for the breach under section 440G of the Act,
  - h) in the case of a breach by a councillor, that the council resolves as follows:
    - i. t h a t the councillor be formally censured for the breach under section 440G of the Act, and
    - ii. that the matter be referred to the Division for further action under the misconduct provisions of the Act.
- 8.36 Where the investigator determines that the conduct investigated does not constitute a breach of the code of conduct, the investigator may make one or more of the following recommendations:
- a) that the council revise any of its policies or procedures,
  - b) that a person or persons undertake any training or other education.
- 8.37 In making a recommendation under clause 8.35, the investigator may have regard to the following:
- a) the seriousness of the breach,
  - b) whether the breach can be easily remedied or rectified,
  - c) whether the subject person has remedied or rectified their conduct,
  - d) whether the subject person has expressed contrition, e) whether there were any mitigating circumstances,
  - f) the age, physical or mental health or special infirmity of the subject person,
  - g) whether the breach is technical or trivial only, h) any previous breaches,
  - i) whether the breach forms part of a pattern of conduct,
  - j) the degree of reckless intention or negligence of the subject person,
  - k) the extent to which the breach has affected other parties or the council as a whole,
  - l) the harm or potential harm to the reputation of the council or local government arising from the conduct,
  - m) whether the findings and recommendations can be justified in terms of the

- public interest and would withstand public scrutiny,
- n) whether an educative approach would be more appropriate than a punitive one,
- o) the relative costs and benefits of taking formal enforcement action as opposed to taking no action or taking informal action,
- p) what action or remedy would be in the public interest?

8.38 At a minimum, the investigator's final report must contain the following information:

- a) a description of the allegations against the subject person,
- b) the relevant provisions of the code of conduct that apply to the alleged conduct investigated,
- c) a statement of reasons as to why the conduct reviewer considered that the matter warranted investigation,
- d) a statement of reasons as to why the conduct reviewer considered that the matter was one that could not or should not be resolved by alternative means,
- e) where the matter is investigated by a conduct review committee, a statement as to why the matter was one that warranted investigation by a conduct review committee instead of a sole conduct reviewer,
- f) a description of any attempts made to resolve the matter by use of alternative means,
- g) the steps taken to investigate the matter, h) the facts of the matter,
- i) the investigator's findings in relation to the facts of the matter and the reasons for those findings,
- j) the investigator's determination and the reasons for that determination,
- k) any recommendations.

8.39 The investigator must provide a copy of their report to the complaints coordinator, the subject person and the complainant.

8.40 Where the investigator has determined that there has not been a breach of the code of conduct, the complaints coordinator must provide a copy of the investigator's report to the general manager or, where the report relates to the general manager's conduct, to the Chairperson and this will finalise consideration of the matter under these procedures.

8.41 Where the investigator has determined that there has been a breach of the code of conduct and makes a recommendation or recommendations under clause 8.35, paragraph (a), the complaints coordinator must provide a copy of the investigator's report to the general manager. Where the general manager agrees with the recommendation/s, the general manager is responsible for implementing the recommendation/s.

8.42 Where the investigator has determined that there has been a breach of the code of conduct and makes a recommendation or recommendations under clause 8.35, paragraphs (b) or (c), the complaints coordinator must provide a copy of the investigator's report to the general manager or, where the report relates to the general manager's conduct, to the Chairperson. The general manager is responsible for arranging the implementation of the recommendation/s where the report relates to a councillor's conduct. The Chairperson is responsible for arranging the implementation of the recommendation/s where the report relates to the general manager's conduct.

8.43 Where the investigator has determined that there has been a breach of the code of conduct and makes a recommendation or recommendations under clause 8.35, paragraphs (d) to (h), the complaints coordinator must, where practicable, arrange for the investigator's report to be reported to the next ordinary council meeting for

the council's consideration unless the meeting is to be held within the 4 weeks prior to an ordinary local government election, in which case the report must be reported to the first ordinary council meeting following the election.

#### Consideration of the final investigation report by council

- 8.44 The role of the council in relation to a final investigation report is to impose a sanction where an investigator determines that there has been a breach of the code of conduct and makes a recommendation in their final report under clause 8.35, paragraphs (d) to (h).
- 8.45 The council is to close its meeting to the public to consider the final investigation report where it is permitted to do so under section 10A of the Act.
- 8.46 Where the complainant is a councillor, they must absent themselves from the meeting and take no part in any discussion or voting on the matter. The complainant councillor may absent themselves without making any disclosure of interests in relation to the matter unless otherwise required to do so under the Act or the Code.
- 8.47 Prior to imposing a sanction, the council must provide the subject person with an opportunity to make an oral submission to the council. The subject person is to confine their submission to addressing the investigator's recommendation/s.
- 8.48 Once the subject person has completed their oral submission they must absent themselves from the meeting and, where they are a councillor, take no part in any discussion or voting on the matter.
- 8.49 The council must not invite oral submissions from other persons for the purpose of seeking to rehear evidence previously considered by the investigator.
- 8.50 Prior to imposing a sanction, the council may by resolution:
- a) request that the investigator make additional enquiries and/or provide additional information to it in a supplementary report, or
  - b) seek an opinion by the Division in relation to the report.
- 8.51 The council may, by resolution, defer further consideration of the matter pending the receipt of a supplementary report from the investigator or an opinion from the Division.
- 8.52 The investigator may make additional enquiries for the purpose of preparing a supplementary report.
- 8.53 Where the investigator prepares a supplementary report, they must provide copies to the complaints coordinator who shall provide a copy each to the council, the subject person and the complainant.
- 8.54 The investigator is not obliged to notify or consult with any person prior to submitting the supplementary report to the complaints coordinator.
- 8.55 The council is only required to provide the subject person a further opportunity to address it on a supplementary report where the supplementary report contains new information that is adverse to them.
- 8.56 A council may by resolution impose one or more of the following sanctions on a subject person:
- a) that the subject person apologise to any person or organisation affected by the breach in such a time and form specified by the resolution,
  - b) that findings of inappropriate conduct be made public,
  - c) in the case of a breach by the general manager, that action be taken under the general manager's contract for the breach,
  - d) in the case of a breach by a councillor, that the councillor be formally censured

for the breach under section 440G of the Act,  
 e) in the case of a breach by a councillor:  
 i. that the councillor be formally censured for the breach under section 440G of the Act, and

ii. that the matter be referred to the Division for further action under the misconduct provisions of the Act.

- 8.57 The council is not obliged to adopt the investigator's recommendation/s.  
 Where the council does not adopt the investigator's recommendation/s, the council must resolve not to adopt the recommendation and state in its resolution the reasons for its decision.
- 8.58 The council may, by resolution, impose a sanction on the subject person under clause 8.56 different to the sanction recommended by the investigator in their final report.
- 8.59 Where the council resolves not to adopt the investigator's recommendation/s, the complaints coordinator must notify the Division of the council's decision and the reasons for it.

## **PART 9            RIGHTS OF REVIEW**

### Failure to comply with a requirement under these procedures

- 9.1 Where any person believes that a person has failed to comply with a requirement prescribed under these procedures, they may, at any time prior to the council's consideration of an investigator's final report, raise their concerns in writing with the Division.

### Practice rulings

- 9.2 Where a subject person and an investigator are in dispute over a requirement under these procedures, either person may make a request in writing to the Division to make a ruling on a question of procedure (a practice ruling).
- 9.3 Where the Division receives a request in writing for a practice ruling, the Division may provide notice in writing of its ruling and the reasons for it to the person who requested it and to the investigator, where that person is different.
- 9.4 Where the Division makes a practice ruling, all parties are to comply with it.
- 9.5 The Division may decline to make a practice ruling. Where the Division declines to make a practice ruling, it will provide notice in writing of its decision and the reasons for it to the person who requested it and to the investigator, where that person is different.

### Requests for review

- 9.6 A person the subject of a sanction imposed under Part 8 of these procedures other than one imposed under clause 8.56, paragraph (e), may, within 28 days of the sanction being imposed, seek a review of the investigator's determination and recommendation by the Division.
- 9.7 A review under clause 9.6 may be sought on the following grounds:  
 a) that the investigator has failed to comply with a requirement under these procedures, or  
 b) that the investigator has misinterpreted or misapplied the standards of conduct prescribed under the code of conduct, or  
 c) that the council has failed to comply with a requirement under these procedures

in imposing a sanction.

- 9.8 A request for a review made under clause 9.6 must be made in writing and must specify the grounds upon which the person believes the investigator or the council has erred.
- 9.9 The Division may decline to conduct a review, where the grounds upon which the review is sought are not sufficiently specified.
- 9.10 The Division may undertake a review of a matter without receiving a request under clause 9.6.
- 9.11 The Division will undertake a review of the matter on the papers.  
However, the Division may request that the complaints coordinator provide such further information that the Division considers reasonably necessary for it to review the matter. The complaints coordinator must, as far as is reasonably practicable, provide the information requested by the Division.
- 9.12 Where a person requests a review under clause 9.6, the Division may direct the council to defer any action to implement a sanction. The council must comply with a direction to defer action by the Division.
- 9.13 The Division must notify the person who requested the review and the complaints coordinator of the outcome of the Division's review in writing and the reasons for its decision. In doing so, the Division may comment on any other matters the Division considers to be relevant.
- 9.14 Where the Division considers that the investigator or the council has erred, the Division may recommend that a decision to impose a sanction under these procedures be reviewed.
- 9.15 In the case of a sanction implemented by the general manager or Chairperson under clause 8.42, where the Division recommends that the decision to impose a sanction be reviewed:
- a) the complaints coordinator must provide a copy of the Division's determination in relation to the matter to the general manager or the Chairperson, and
  - b) the general manager or Chairperson must review any action taken by them to implement the sanction, and
  - c) the general manager or Chairperson must consider the Division's recommendation in doing so.
- 9.16 In the case of a sanction imposed by the council by resolution under clause 8.56, where the Division recommends that the decision to impose a sanction be reviewed:
- a) the complaints coordinator must, where practicable, arrange for the Division's determination to be tabled at the next ordinary council meeting unless the meeting is to be held within the 4 weeks prior to an ordinary local government election, in which case it must be tabled at the first ordinary council meeting following the election, and
  - b) the council must:
    - i. review its decision to impose the sanction, and
    - ii. consider the Division's recommendation in doing so, and
    - iii. resolve to either rescind or reaffirm its previous resolution in relation to the matter.
- 9.17 Where having reviewed its previous decision in relation to a matter under clause 9.16 the council resolves to reaffirm its previous decision, the council must state in its resolution its reasons for doing so.

## **PART 10 PROCEDURAL IRREGULARITIES**

- 10.1 A failure to comply with these procedures does not, on its own, constitute a breach of the code of conduct except as may be otherwise specifically provided under the code of conduct.
- 10.2 A failure to comply with these procedures will not render a decision made in relation to a matter invalid where:
- a) the non-compliance is isolated and/or minor in nature, or
  - b) reasonable steps are taken to correct the non-compliance, or
  - c) reasonable steps are taken to address the consequences of the non-compliance.

## **PART 11 PRACTICE DIRECTIONS**

- 11.1 The Division may at any time issue a practice direction in relation to the application of these procedures.
- 11.2 The Division will issue practice directions in writing, by circular to all councils.
- 11.3 All persons performing a function prescribed under these procedures must consider the Division's practice directions when performing the function.

## **PART 12 REPORTING ON COMPLAINTS STATISTICS**

- 12.1 The complaints coordinator must arrange for the following statistics to be reported to the council within 3 months of the end of September of each year:
- a) the total number of code of conduct complaints made about councillors and the general manager under the code of conduct in the year to September,
  - b) the number of code of conduct complaints referred to a conduct reviewer,
  - c) the number of code of conduct complaints finalised by a conduct reviewer at the preliminary assessment stage and the outcome of those complaints,
  - d) the number of code of conduct complaints investigated by a conduct reviewer,
  - e) the number of code of conduct complaints investigated by a conduct review committee,
  - f) without identifying particular matters, the outcome of code of conduct complaints investigated by a conduct reviewer or conduct review committee under these procedures,
  - g) the number of matter reviewed by the Division and, without identifying particular matters, the outcome of the reviews, and
  - h) The total cost of dealing with code of conduct complaints made about councillors and the general manager in the year to September, including staff costs.
- 12.2 The council is to provide the Division with a report containing the statistics referred to in clause 12.1 within 3 months of the end of September of each year.

## **PART 13 CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 13.1 Information about code of conduct complaints and the management and investigation of code of conduct complaints is to be treated as confidential and is not to be publicly disclosed except as may be otherwise specifically required or permitted under these procedures.

### **Code Procedure Flowchart**