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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

14 December 2021

# Huon Valley Council undertakes training for managing conflict of interest

Huon Valley Councillors will undergo training in February to ensure current and future Councillors are better supported in identifying and managing conflict of interest in recruitment processes.

WLF Accounting and Advisory has been appointed as the preferred consulting firm to develop guidelines to support the Code of Conduct in respect to the identification and management of conflicts of interest and to provide training to Councillors in relation to the management of conflicts of interest in accordance with the guidelines developed.

Once established the new guidelines will be used as a tool for recruitment and other situations particularly where panels or committees are used for decision making by the Council or on behalf of Council.

The development of guidelines and training were among the key recommendations in the Review of the Recruitment Process for the New General Manager Appointment Report undertaken by Edge Legal. It was at the Special Meeting on 15 September that Council resolved to accept the recommendations in the report.

Mayor Bec Enders said the Director of Local Government and the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) were consulted to identify appropriate trainers.

"It was clearly a matter of concern for the Director of Local Government, along with community interest, that this Council does not continue for the next twelve months

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without resolving the issues that were raised in the Edge Legal report as well as the Auditor General's report."

Due to concerns raised about the robustness of the General Manager recruitment process, the Council commissioned an independent review of the recruitment process.

The review undertaken by Edge Legal found there were no breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct, the Local Government Act or the Huon Valley Council Governance Framework, and equally important, no evidence the recruitment was tainted by actual bias. However, the review did find Council's management of the recruitment process fell below expected standards for the management of conflicts.

The Report of the Auditor General, No.2 of 2021-22, 'Council General Manager recruitment, appointment and performance assessment', also found the conflict of interest was managed inadequately.

Mayor Enders said Council accepted the findings of both the Edge Legal and the Auditor General's reports.

"A commitment has been made to the community about undertaking this training and about making sure Council's guiding documentation is updated to reflect the better practices. These actions will ensure that any future council won't find itself in this position again."

Two quotations were received for the identifying and managing conflict of interest training and training in the effective use of panels and committees. Council resolved to engage WLF Accounting and Advisory at a cost of \$7,200 plus GST.

Mayor Enders said it is remiss that none of the Council's current policies and procedures relevantly define conflict of interest or contain guidance as to management strategies.

"The Council's Recruitment Panel believed it had handled the process as best as it could at the time. As soon as it became aware of the conflict, control measures were put in place to manage the conflict."

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The training in the effective use of panels and committees will involve:

- functions and scope for a Panel or Committee established by the Council and reporting requirements back to the Council for further
- guidance on when consensus cannot be achieved
- how to engage in robust but respectful discussion
- the importance of note taking
- how to give adequate reasons for decisions reached.

**For more information: Mayor Bec Enders (03) 6264 0300**