

Assessment Panel Members – Code of Conduct

Introduction

Under Schedule 3 of the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (PDI Act) the Minister may adopt a code of conduct to be observed by members of an assessment panel established under the PDI Act. This code of conduct sets out standards of conduct and professionalism that are to be observed by all members of assessment panels under the PDI Act. This code of conduct must be read in conjunction with the Act.

For the purposes of the PDI Act, a key requirement is that all members of assessment panels must carry out, and be seen to carry out, their functions with the highest ethical standards so as to maintain public confidence in the integrity of development assessment under the Act.

The code is the key tool to ensure that all members of assessment panels act honestly and ethically with a high degree of accountability. If a member of an assessment panel has any doubt in regard to any function they may perform under the Act they should seek the advice of the panel's assessment manager or some other appropriate person.

While some members of an assessment panel may also be bound by other codes of conduct or professional standards issued by their respective professional associations, they have no legal status under the Act. If there is a conflict between a requirement in this code of conduct and any other professional code or standard, this code prevails for the purposes of the Act.

Legislative framework

Under section 15 of the PDI Act, all members of assessment panels are subject to a statutory duty as described in the section as follows:

- (1) *It is expected that a person or body that—*
 - (a) *seeks to obtain an authorisation under this Act; or*
 - (b) *performs, exercises or discharges a function, power or duty under this Act; or*
 - (c) *takes the benefit of this Act or is otherwise involved in a process provided by this Act, will—*
 - (d) *act in a cooperative and constructive way; and*
 - (e) *be honest and open in interacting with other entities under this Act; and*
 - (f) *be prepared to find reasonable solutions to issues that affect other interested parties or third parties.*

- (2) *Without limiting subsection (1), a person or body performing, exercising or discharging a function, power or duty under this Act must-*
- (a) *exercise professional care and diligence; and*
 - (b) *act honestly and in an impartial manner; and*
 - (c) *be responsible and accountable in its conduct; and*
 - (d) *comply with any code of conduct, service benchmark or other requirement that applies in relation to the person or body.*
- (3) *The Minister may, after taking into account the advice of the Commission, establish and maintain service benchmarks for the purposes of this section.*
- (4) *The principles and benchmarks under this section— (a) do not give rise to substantive rights or liabilities; but (b) may lead to action being taken on account of a breach of a code of conduct or professional standard that applies in relation to a relevant person or body.*

Code of conduct requirements

In acting as a member of an assessment panel, a member must comply with the following requirements.

General duties

1. A member of an assessment panel must in performing, exercising or discharging a function, power or duty under the PDI Act, act in accordance with the general duties as set out in section 15 of the PDI Act.

Act in the public interest

2. A member of an assessment panel must act in a manner that promotes or protects the public interest.

Procedures

3. A member of an assessment panel must ensure that the procedures specified in the Act or prescribed in the *Planning Development and Infrastructure (General) Regulations 2017* are complied with.
4. A member of an assessment panel must comply with the panel procedures in relation to public comments and communication with the media

Regard for honesty

5. A member of an assessment panel must act with integrity, good faith and equity and must not discriminate toward any person in performing their duties.
6. A member of an assessment panel must advise the assessment manager and the Commission immediately if the member:
 - a. is the subject of a formal investigation into, or have been found to have, breached any other code of conduct, ethical standards or similar, either in another State or through a professional body of which they are a member; or
 - b. has been found guilty of a breach of any Act related to planning, building or a development related matter.

Conflict of interest

7. A member of an assessment panel who has a direct or indirect personal or pecuniary interest in a matter before the council development assessment panel (other than an indirect interest that exists in common with a substantial class of persons)—
 - a. must, as soon as he or she becomes aware of his or her interest, disclose the nature and extent of the interest to the panel; and
 - b. must not take part in any hearings conducted by the panel, or in any deliberations or decision of the panel, on the matter and must be absent from the meeting when any deliberations are taking place or decision is being made.
8. A member of an assessment panel will be taken to have an interest in a matter for the purposes of item 7 if an associate of the member (within the meaning of section 3 (7) of the PDI Act) has an interest in the matter.
9. If an interest has been declared by a member of an assessment panel the nature of the interest must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Making decisions and taking action

10. A member of an assessment panel must take all reasonable steps to obtain all relevant facts and information when making a decision on a matter before the panel.
11. A member of an assessment panel must ensure that the member's decisions and actions are reasonable, fair and appropriate to the circumstances, based on consideration of all relevant facts obtained, and supported by adequate documentation.
12. A member of an assessment panel must not approach or discuss with an applicant or representor any application which is either before the panel or will come before the panel at some future time expect during the course of a panel meeting where the application forms part of the agenda and the applicant or representor has a right to be heard by the panel.
13. Except where required as part of the assessment of a particular decision such as a formal panel viewing of a site of a proposed development, you should not enter the site even if invited by the land owner or a neighbouring property owner or any other person.
14. A member of an assessment panel must not:
 - a. engage in consultation outside of the panel process with any party on a proposed development application that is likely to be heard by the panel;
 - b. give advice to an applicant or other third party on a development application after it has been lodged outside of a panel meeting;
 - c. speak at a public meeting for or against a proposal where the purpose of the meeting is to discuss either a proposed development or a development application unless required by the Act;
 - d. express an opinion on a development application or a proposed development outside of a panel meeting; and
 - e. engage in any other act or omission which may give rise to a reasonable presumption that you have prejudged a development proposal or application.

Public comment

15. Only the presiding member or another person determined by the panel is permitted to speak publicly to the media and address the public on behalf of the panel. No other panel member may make comment to the media or the public in relation to any matter before the panel or any decision of the panel.

Protection and use of information

16. A member of an assessment panel must maintain the integrity and security of confidential information in their possession and must not use confidential information gained by virtue of the member's official position for the purpose of securing a private benefit for the member or any other person.
17. A member of an assessment panel must not disclose information acquired in the course of their professional work other than if consent of the relevant person has been granted or where there is a legal or professional duty to disclose such information.

Proper exercise of power

18. A member of an assessment panel must not take advantage of the member's position, power or duties for the purpose of obtaining, either directly or indirectly, any preferential treatment or other improper advantage for the member or any other person.

Gifts and benefits

19. A member of an assessment panel must not seek or accept a gift or benefit that is intended to, is likely to or could be perceived as likely to, cause them to act in an unfair or biased manner in the course of the member's duties.
20. A member of an assessment panel must take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person related to the member does not receive gifts or benefits that could appear to be an attempt to influence or secure or have the effect of influencing or securing a favour from the member of an assessment panel. A person is related to a member of an assessment panel for the purpose of this provision if the person is spouse, de facto partner, sibling, parent or child of the member of the assessment panel.

Bias

21. A member of an assessment panel should always have regard to any affiliation, disposition or any material, pecuniary or other interest that would lead to a reasonable apprehension that they may be biased in carrying out any aspect of their role under the Act.