

County of Essex Policy and Procedures Manual

Accountability and Transparency Policy

Policy Number:	2008-002
Policy Type:	Corporate Policy
Approval Authority:	Essex County Council
Office of Responsibility:	Legislative and Community Services
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Replaces Policy:	N/A

1.0 Introduction

Section 270(1)5. of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c. 25 (the "**Municipal Act**") requires that all municipalities adopt and maintain a policy with respect to "[t]he manner in which the municipality will try to ensure that it is accountable to the public for its actions, and the manner in which the municipality will try to ensure that its actions are transparent to the public."

This Accountability and Transparency Policy (the "**Policy**") was developed to ensure compliance of the Corporation of the County of Essex (the "**County**") with the requirements of Section 270 of the *Municipal Act*, but the Policy also outlines the prescribed methods of operating, which guides the decision-making process, administrative actions, and the provision of services.

2.0 Scope

This Policy applies to Members of Council, Committees, and Boards, as well as to employees of the County.

3.0 Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy, and to provide context for this Policy, in addition to terms defined in the body of this Policy above, the following terms shall have the following meanings, and shall be used to assist in the interpretation of this Policy:

"Accountability" means the principle that the County will be responsible to its stakeholders for decisions made and policies implemented, as well as its actions or inactions.

"Council" means the Council of the County of Essex.

"Member" means a member of Council, a Committee of Council, and/or a local Board of the County.

"Transparency" means the principle that the County actively encourages and fosters stakeholder participation and openness in its decision making processes. Additionally, transparency means that the County's decision making process is open and clear to the public.

4.0 Purpose

The County is committed to providing efficient and accessible government services to its residents and being accountable and transparent to the public.

County Council acknowledges that it is responsible to provide good government for its stakeholders in an accountable and transparent manner by:

- a) adhering to the Code of Conduct for Members of Essex County Council and Members of its Local Boards
- b) encouraging public access and participation to ensure that decision making is responsive to the needs of its constituents and receptive to their opinions;
- c) delivering high quality services to the County's citizens;
and,
- d) promoting the efficient use of public resources.

Accountability, transparency, and openness are standards of good government that enhance public trust. They are achieved through the County adopting measures ensuring, to the best of its ability, that all

activities and services are undertaken utilizing a process that is open and accessible to its stakeholders. In addition, wherever possible, the County will engage its stakeholders throughout its decision-making process, which decision making process will be open, visible, and transparent to the public.

5.0 Policy

The principles of accountability and transparency shall apply equally to the political process and decision making and to the administrative management of the County.

5.1 Legislated Requirements

The County is accountable and transparent to the public by fulfilling various legislated responsibilities and complying with requirements related to the disclosure of information, and by taking steps to ensure the County is compliant with legislative requirements as they are updated from time to time.

5.2 Financial Accountability, Oversight and Reporting

The County is accountable and transparent by identifying the source of County funds, and how those funds are used to deliver services. The following are examples of how the County promotes financial accountability and oversight:

- production of annual and interim financial status reports;
- internal and external audits;
- preparing, deliberating, adopting and adhering to an annual budget for operational and capital needs;
- long term financial planning;
- completion of annual compliance and financial reporting; and
- review and adherence to financial policies related to Procurement, Investments, Capital Financing and Debt, Commodity Price Hedging, Asset Management etc.

The County further supports open and transparent government by making important financial documents available for public review, including:

- [Audited Financial Statements](#) – Statements prepared by the County's Director of Financial Services/Treasurer and reviewed by an independent, external auditor.
- [Financial Information Returns](#) – The FIR is the data collection tool used by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to collect financial and statistical information on municipalities. The FIR is a standard document comprised of a number of schedules which are updated each year to comply with current legislative and reporting requirements.
- [Public Sector Salary Disclosure](#) – A list of all County Employees earning more than \$100,000 per annum.

5.3 Performance Measurement and Reporting

The [Strategic Plan](#) for the County of Essex was adopted County Council on December 20, 2023. The plan is a guide for council and staff for 2024-2027 and beyond. It sets out how the Corporation of the County of Essex will create value for its partners, local communities, and residents over the coming years.

It connects the day-to-day work of Administration to the County's overall strategic direction, and it informs organizational strategies, initiatives and budgets. It aims to create a strong foundation for collaborative relationships amongst Members of Council, between Council and Administration, and between the County and its partners and local municipalities.

Regular reporting relating to the implementation of the Strategic Plan and how decisions of Council align with the Strategic Plan, inform the public about the progress being made by the County in advancing the goals and aspirations contained in the Strategic Plan.

The County prepares, analyses, and submits various types of performance reporting to meet statutory reporting requirements and for internal management purposes.

5.4 Internal Accountability and Ethical Standards

The County has established policies, procedures and practices that govern internal accountability and ethical standards through, among others, the following initiatives:

- appointment and retention of competent leadership;
- adoption of a Code of Conduct;

- adoption of a Council/Staff relations policy;
- establishment of a fair and consistent performance management and evaluation process;
- public recruitment of lay members of Advisory Committees, and Boards;
- adoption of technology use policies;
- adoption of consultative policies and practices;
- health and safety training, programs and policies;
- fair and transparent hiring practices; and
- adherence to a continuous improvement philosophy in regards to accountability and transparency

5.5 **Open Government, Public Participation and Information Sharing**

The County strives to be open, transparent and accountable to those it serves through the implementation of processes outlining how, when, and under what rules meetings will take place.

Council and committee meetings will be open to the public when and as required under the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Members of the public will have an opportunity to make delegations at these meetings in accordance with the County's Delegation Policy.

The County welcomes public participation and information sharing as part of the delivery of its programs and decision-making processes. The County's communications strategies will ensure timely dissemination of notices, decisions, and other matters concerning the affairs of the County. Such information will be made available to the public through the County's website, social media channels, print material, and mainstream media as appropriate.

The County's commitment to accountability and transparency is guided and facilitated via, among others, the following:

- County of Essex Strategic Plan
- Adoption of an Annual Budget
- Adoption of a Procedure By-law

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- Public distribution of Council and Committee Agendas and Minutes including posting all minutes and agendas on the County's public website
- Public recruitment of lay members of Advisory Committees, and Boards
- Provision of Notice By-law
- Records Management Program Policies
- Appointment by-laws for both an Integrity Commissioner, and a Closed Meeting Investigator
- Employee and Council Codes of Conduct
- Delegations to County Council Policy

6.0 Responsibilities

Members of Council and County Administration are each responsible for adhering to the parameters of this Policy and for ensuring accountability for their decisions and actions and for providing transparency of the County's operations.

7.0 Monitoring/Contraventions

The County Clerk shall be responsible for receiving complaints and/or concerns related to this Policy. Upon receipt of a complaint and/or concern, the County Clerk shall notify:

- a) in the case of staff, the Department Head responsible for the area and the Director, Human Resources;
- b) in the case of a closed meeting, the County's Closed Meeting Investigator; and
- c) in the case of Council, the County Warden.

Should you have any questions about this policy and/or the County's commitment to accountability and transparency, you may contact:

County Clerk

360 Fairview Avenue West
Essex, ON N8M 1Y6
clerks@countyofessex.ca

8.0 Related Legislation

- Section 270(1)5. *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c. 25

9.0 Summary of Amendments

Date	Amendment(s)
2008-01-31	Council Report 2007-R016-CS-1130-MB initiated policy. Essex County Council adopted policy by Resolution 27/08.
2024-12-04	Policy updated to reflect current practices

Appendices

None