
University of New England
Council (1:2026)
Council Room, Booloominbah, Armidale and Zoom Video Conference
Tuesday 10 Feb 2026

Present:

Dr Sarah Pearson, Chancellor
David van Aanholt, Deputy Chancellor, Chair of Finance and Infrastructure Committee, and Council Member
Prof Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer
Prof Adrian Walsh, Chair of Academic Board
Megan Aitken
A/Prof Onoriode Coast, (via Zoom)
Ian Gillespie
Phil Hess
Chanel Hopkinson
Kristy Sillman

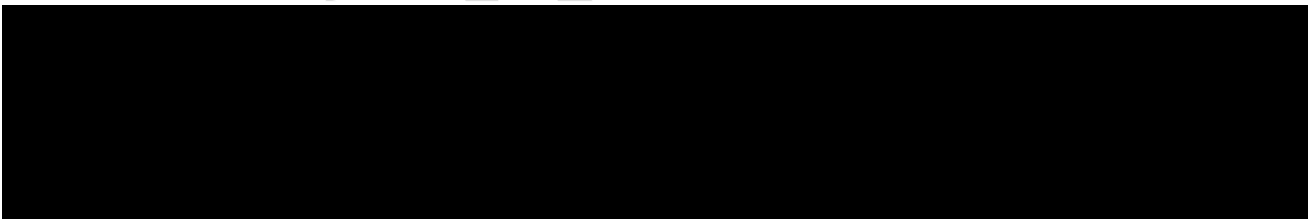
In attendance:

Prof Chris Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Karma Auden, Chief Financial Officer
Prof Simon Evans, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Kus Pandey, Acting Director Governance and University Secretary
Anthea White, Director People and Culture
Rebecca Cawood, Director, Office of Strategy Management

Apologies:

Colin Murray

IN-CAMERA SESSION



OPEN SESSION

1. Procedural Matters

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.07am and declared the meeting open.

1.1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting; congratulating Associate Professor Coast on his promotion, David van Aanholt on his role as Deputy Chancellor, and Ian Gillespie on his role as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee. The Chair encouraged members to attend the May 2026 graduations.

1.2. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair provided an Acknowledgement of Country.

1.3. * Apologies

Apologies for Colin Murray were received.

1.4. * Conflicts of Interest

Council members were asked to disclose any material interest, consistent with Schedule 2A Clause 5 of the University of New England 1993 Act (NSW). Council members were asked to update their Disclosed Register of Interest with the Secretariat as required. The Chair reminded members to complete the annual Conflict of Interest forms.

Although not members of the Council the Acting Director of Governance and University Secretary (Kus Pandey) and the Senior Manager (University Secretariat) left the room for item 6.3 Appointment of University Secretary.

1.5. * Order of Business

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
OC/26/01/01

2. * Celebrating Success

Council welcomed Sophie Florance, Advisor from the Student Accessibility and Wellbeing Office (SAWO), who presented on behalf of the Manager, Ms Jules Kryger. SAWO's role at the intersection of access, equity, and student experience, removes barriers to facilitate meaningful participation in learning and University life. The presentation highlighted that approximately 20% of UNE students identified as having a disability or health condition at admission, with 1,500 to 1,600 students actively registered with SAWO each year through study access plans. Sophie reported on key initiatives including the successful trial of Kumo Study, a neurodivergence support program that filled 200 licenses in Trimester 3 with 63 students on the waitlist, and the upcoming Brickfield plugin for the Learning Management System to support accessible content creation. Sophie advised that SAWO received the University's Together We Rise Award in 2025 for proactive accessibility engagement with internal and external partners, including the Armidale Regional Council. A significant milestone was the launch of Student Assist, an online system for managing study access plans, with the University positioned as an early adopter and industry leader, allowing substantial input into the program's development and significantly reducing administrative burden across schools and examination teams. Council members commended the presentation, congratulated Sophie Florance and the SAWO team on its award and expressed appreciation for the team's work in supporting the University's commitment to leaving no one behind. Strong alignment with UNE Values was also commended.

3. * Safety and Risk Management

Council considered safety and risk management matters. The Vice-Chancellor reported that Trimester 1 commencement represented the primary safety concern, with incoming first-year residential students the key priority. Significant work had been undertaken to transform the physical environment around Robb College, and student leaders across all Colleges had been extensively trained on mental health awareness and creating a welcoming culture, with senior leaders and Junior Common Room members participating in training together for the first time. Council meetings would not be scheduled during this period in future years to allow Executive participation in student training. Council suggested regular inter-college meetings for student leaders to share experiences, which the Vice-Chancellor confirmed was being progressed.

A Council member raised concerns about oversight of Higher Degree Research international students remaining on campus during holiday periods, which Council referred to the Executive.

The Chancellor suggested that whilst Council already discusses staff and student wellbeing at every Council meeting, it should be added as its own standing agenda item to formalise this focus. Council and Exec agreed to this action.

4. * People and Culture

4.1 People and Culture Policy Review Project

The Director of People and Culture, Anthea White attended the meeting at 9.26 am.

The Chair invited the Director of People and Culture, Ms Anthea White to speak. The Director of People and Culture reported that the University had very out-of-date policies and identified gaps, including requirements from new national codes and areas such as antisemitism. The Governance project team had categorised policies, completed a prioritisation exercise, and developed a 12 to 18-month plan with two consultation phases to gather community feedback. The University had benchmarked against other institutions, noting varying approaches across the sector. Council discussed the policy architecture, with the Policy Team proposing two rules with simplified policy and procedure structures beneath them, as well as a reduction in the number of policies, noting policies were to be reviewed through anti-racism and gender lenses. There would be two consultation periods for each theme of approximately three weeks each with multiple feedback mechanisms including a SharePoint site, presentations, and a dedicated inbox, and the Student Council would be included as a stakeholder group. The project aimed to complete the bulk of work within the current calendar year and would serve as a model for the Governance team to use when reviewing other University policy areas.

4.2 *Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Submission

Council discussed the Workplace Gender Equality Agency submission, including Controlled Entities in the corporate group for the first time. The Director of People and Culture reported a gender pay gap

of 11% (a 0.2% improvement), with 62% of the workforce female and the biggest gap at lower levels and middle management. Council discussed whether the statement adequately balanced achievements with challenges. It was noted that the structural issue that the gender pay gap could not be realistically addressed without reorganising institutional pay scales, noting minimal differences between some classification levels (\$28 to \$128 per annum) provided little incentive for progression, and that this would require addressing through future enterprise bargaining. Council members raised concerns about language appearing overly optimistic and requested amendments to acknowledge areas requiring improvement and reference the next steps and metrics already outlined in the document. Council approved the submission subject to these amendments.

Operational Action: The Director of People and Culture to implement the following amendments to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency Annual Report prior to submission/publication:

1. add acknowledgment of areas requiring improvement - Council requested language be added to acknowledge challenges alongside achievements, rather than appearing "overly optimistic"
2. reference the plan and next steps - Council asked that the statement reference the next steps already outlined on page 20 of the document, including targets and metrics that would be set and reported to WGEA
3. check inclusion of prior training - Council asked whether Council's prior attendance at gender-based violence training could be added as an achievement
4. Provide more balanced language - Council requested the language around the 0.2% improvement be reconsidered to avoid appearing to overstate minimal change

AOC/26/01/01

Resolution: Council

1. NOTED the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Industry Benchmark and Executive Summary reports (Attachments A to C)
2. APPROVED publication of the UNE Gender Pay Gap Employer Statement by late February 2026 (Attachment D).

[D26/8273]

OC/26/01/02

The Director of People and Culture, Anthea White left the meeting at 10.06 am.

5. Chancellor's Reports

5.1. Chancellor's Report to Council

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chancellor Open Report to Council [D26/4553].

OC/26/01/03

5.2. * Council Self-Review Report 2025

Item 5.3 and 5.4 were considered together.

The Chancellor thanked Council members for their participation and noted that the questions had been improved from the previous year. Council discussed the report findings and agreed that the University was in a good place and making progress, with many areas already being addressed including risk management maturity uplift, Controlled Entities oversight, Council diversity, terms of reference, and information quality. A Council member offered to provide examples of standardised reporting formats to improve the quality and consistency of papers presented to Council and Committees. The Chancellor provided an update on Council membership recruitment, confirming progress on identifying candidates with higher education leadership experience, Indigenous representation, and digital expertise. The Chancellor advised that Professor Peter Coaldrake would conduct an external Council review during the year.

Resolution: Council NOTED the 2025 UNE Council Self-Review Report, report [D26/10991]
OC/26/01/04

5.3. * Standing Committee of Council Self-Review Report 2025

Resolution: The Standing Committee of Council NOTED the 2025 Self-Review Report, report
D26/10993
OC/26/01/05

5.4. * Committee Architecture Review

Council discussed the Council Architecture Review report. The Acting Director Governance and University Secretary, Kus Pandey provided background on the project, explaining that the team was hired in May 2024 to review the Council Committee architecture, and the work had continued despite changes in the Director Governance and University Secretary role. The report proposed Model 2 with six Committees to address identified skills gaps and regulatory requirements.

A robust discussion was held, focussing on how best to structure Council decision-making aligned to strategy, utilising Committees to ensure sufficient time was allocated to discussing topics that needed more time whilst enabling full Council meetings time for strategy and high-level risk discussions. UNE staff workload was also considered, as well as Council engagement in Committees, Council meetings and Graduation ceremonies. It was felt that the suggested model would place undue workload on staff, that some suggested Committees appeared operational in nature, and that topics relating to strategy should remain whole of Council matters.

Council reached consensus on a simplified structure. Council agreed to maintain Finance and Infrastructure and Audit and Risk Committees, create a new People and Culture Committee combining the current Nominations, Remuneration, and Honorary Degrees Committees with additional focus on staff and student wellbeing and culture, and disband the Standing Committee in favour of using flying minutes with clear quorum requirements.

Council agreed that all Council members, including elected members, would be eligible for Committee membership based on skills rather than member category, and that training in conflicts of interest would be arranged to help Committee members manage these. Controlled Entities would be monitored through both Audit and Risk and Finance and Infrastructure Committees. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed UNE Foundation would remain as a Controlled Entity. Council agreed that Committee Terms of Reference should be simplified as per the recommendations and should clarify delegations, and that Committees should continue to perform preparatory work for Council rather than making final decisions on strategic matters.

The Vice-Chancellor proposed structuring the Council agenda around the seven principles of the Strategic Plan, using a quorum approach for urgent decisions rather than a Standing Committee, and creating a People and Culture Committee focused on streamlining information rather than generating additional work.

Resolution: Council

1. APPROVED a restructured Committee architecture comprising three Committees:
 - a Audit and Risk Committee (maintaining current scope)
 - b Finance and Infrastructure Committee (maintaining current scope)
 - c People and Culture Committee (combining Nominations, Remuneration, and Honorary Degrees Committees with expanded scope for staff and student wellbeing and culture)
2. DISESTABLISHED the Standing Committee effective immediately, with urgent matters to be dealt with by flying minute requiring majority of Council members to approve
3. CONFIRMED that all Council members, including elected members, are eligible for Committee membership based on skills and expertise
4. REQUESTED the Acting Director Governance and University Secretary to:
 - a Draft simplified Committee Terms of Reference clearly specifying delegations
 - b Explicitly include Controlled Entities oversight in the Terms of Reference for both Audit and Risk Committee and Finance and Infrastructure Committee
 - c Present draft Terms of Reference to the 10 April 2026 Council Meeting for approval
5. NOTED that the Council agenda will be structured around the seven principles of the University's Strategic Plan.

OC/26/01/06

Operational Action: Acting Director of Governance and University Secretary to arrange Conflict of Interest training for Council members.

AOC/26/01/02

Operational Action: Acting Director of Governance and University Secretary to establish minimum standards for Council member attendance and participation, including requirements for graduation attendance, strategy sessions and Council meetings.

AOC/26/01/03

Standing Orders were suspended at 11.09 am and resumed at 11.19 am

6. Vice-Chancellor's Business

6.1. * Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Management Report

Council received the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Moran's report. The Vice-Chancellor reported positive external feedback on the new Strategic Plan, describing it as "a real plan" with realistic objectives, and expressed enthusiasm about sharing it with community and alumni.

The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on the Australian Tertiary Education Commission Bill, noting the Minister had removed core independence provisions and was facing sector opposition. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised that needs-based funding and managed growth provisions were critical to mitigate large universities affecting smaller institutions' sustainability.

The Chief Financial Officer presented student enrolment data showing the University was tracking approximately 5% ahead of the previous year but below budget targets. A projected shortfall of 191 EFTSL translated to a net revenue gap of \$2.5 million (as at that day's data), though this included Commonwealth Grant Scheme protection of \$2.4 million. The shortfall would require an additional 1.3% reduction in payroll budget on top of the Financial Rectification Plan targets. Key monitoring dates were identified as 2 March (last day to add units) and 23 March (census date). Continuing student load was performing better than commencing load, indicating retention measures were effective. College enrolments showed significant growth, with one College full and maintaining a waiting list. The Vice-Chancellor noted revenue allocated to growth would be adjusted if growth did not occur, providing some flexibility.

Council discussed distributing the Strategic Plan to key stakeholders including ministers and government officials, with messaging tailored to productivity for the Treasurer and student outcomes data for the Minister for Education.

Operational Action: Congratulations to Professor Peter Anderson and Kate Pardey will be sent in the Chancellor's name on behalf of Council

Professor Peter Anderson was awarded the Indigenous Researcher Award for his paper at the Australian Association for Educational Research conference, recognising his significant research contributions and excellence within the field.

Kate Pardey and her team won the 2025 NAGCAS Excellence Award in Supporting Student Success, recognising their outstanding contributions and innovative work in enhancing student outcomes.

AOC/26/01/04

Operational Action: Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor to develop stakeholder distribution list for Strategic Plan and coordinate messaging.

AOC/26/01/05

Resolution: Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Report. [D26/9859]

OC/26/01/07

6.2. * Governance and Compliance Implications of Recent Regulatory Changes

The Chair invited the Acting Director Governance and University Secretary, Kus Pandey to speak to the report. Council considered governance and compliance implications of recent regulatory changes.

Council discussed holding an informal joint Council and Academic Board session, agreeing to arrange timing offline. Council agreed to amend the report to reflect that all Council members are eligible for Committee membership based on skills. Council noted that significant work had already been undertaken at the University to address toxic culture.

The Chair of Academic Board, Professor Adrian Walsh clarified that the University already reviews staffing profiles for courses through existing course review and monitoring processes, and requested the report be amended to reflect that staffing profiles, including issues of staff seniority and the balance of fixed-term versus continuing staff, should be reported to Academic Board rather than reviews being conducted by Academic Board.

It was noted that the Strategic Plan already commits to reducing marginalisation, and suggested that the implementation of the strategy provides a natural opportunity to consider the involvement of academic leadership in academic governance.

It was confirmed programs of activity are already in place to address some of the changes, and that further gap analysis work was underway within the Acting Director of Governance and University Secretary.

Resolution: Council NOTED Governance and Compliance Implications of Recent Regulatory Changes report.

OC/26/01/08

6.3. * Appointment of University Secretary

Acting Director Governance and University Secretary, Kus Pandey and Senior Manager (University Secretariat) Nathalie Heaton left the meeting at 12.05 pm.

It was agreed that the Acting Director Governance is the appropriately placed and qualified member of staff to hold the position of University Secretary.

Resolution: Council APPROVED the appointment of Kusum Pandey to the role of University Secretary, effective from 1 December 2025 to 30 November 2026 [D26/8654].

OC/26/01/09

Acting Director Governance and University Secretary, Kus Pandey and Senior Manager (University Secretariat) Nathalie Heaton returned to the meeting at 12.15 pm.

6.4. * Business Plan

Council discussed the 2026 Business Plan. The Vice-Chancellor explained Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were drawn from continuity with previous work and the new Strategic Plan. A member raised concerns that research KPIs (10% annual increase target) were not bold enough and lacked sufficient metrics beyond grant funding and HDR enrolment. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Chris Armstrong explained the broader details behind the chosen KPIs as well as an 8-part research performance framework with 50-60 additional metrics that is reported to Academic Board separately, and the 10% annual target would achieve 50% increase by 2030. Council requested the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) review whether research targets were sufficiently ambitious. Council also agreed to replace the "marketing strategy" key measure under financial sustainability with "delivery of the financial rectification plan." Council approved the business plan subject to these amendments.

Resolution: Council APPROVED the 2026 Business Plan subject to the following amendments:

1. The Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) to review research targets to confirm they are sufficiently bold and ambitious, with delegated authority to finalise; and
2. Under Financial Sustainability key measures, replace "marketing strategy" with "delivery of the financial rectification plan." [D26/11316]

OC/26/01/10

7. * Student Member Report (Verbal Report)

Student Member Representative, Kristy Sillman reported the Student Council is planning an AI-focused forum in Trimester 1 to gather feedback from staff and students. Student Council elections will occur this year, with a new team expected by September. Representatives are resigning as the election year progresses, impacting workload capacity. The Student Member Representative is conducting a self-audit of Student Council performance and acknowledged the team has not achieved anticipated engagement with the University. She reflected that managing a team of 14 students who are over-committed to other activities alongside their studies was a learning experience. The Vice-Chancellor requested the Deputy Executive Principal – Education Futures, Professor Leopold Bayerlein be included in the AI forum to explain the University's AI assessment systems, noting some students appeared fearful about AI use and academic integrity concerns.

8. * Chair of Academic Board Report (Verbal Report)

The Chair invited the Chair of Academic Board, Professor Adrian Walsh to speak. The Chair of Academic Board reported no meetings since the last Council but noted upcoming Committee meetings (Teaching and Learning, Research, and Curriculum).

9. * Strategy Session Outcomes and Proposed Recommendations (Verbal Report)

A Council member reflected on the previous day's strategy session, questioning whether Council had been sufficiently bold in identifying innovative risk categories for new revenue opportunities. The member noted the approach was conservative and suggested considering a separate set of higher-risk opportunities in the risk register to remain true to the University's values of ambition and calculated risk-taking.

Members raised concerns about a newspaper article claiming university degrees were becoming "worthless" due to AI and cheating, suggesting the sector should communicate its responses more effectively. The Vice-Chancellor cautioned against "joining a battle" with media, emphasising the importance of protecting the University's small cohort of high-level AI expertise (approximately a dozen key people including the new Chief Information and Digital Officer, LabNext70, and skilled academics). The Vice-Chancellor outlined three AI focus points: enterprise operations, teaching and learning advances, and establishment of an AI Research Institute. Council discussed being bolder with AI strategy and whether Council agendas should include regular AI updates. It was agreed that LabNext70 would present at the next Council meeting, potentially as a dedicated session

[Postscript: A Council session with LabN70 and the new Chief Information and Digital Officer has been organised to be held on 10 April 2026].

10. Regulatory Reports (Unstarred)

10.1. Amendment to the Graduation Rule: 12-Month Implementation Review – Rolling Conferrals

Resolution: Council NOTED the Amendment to the Graduation Rule: 12-Month Implementation Review – Rolling Conferrals report. [D26/7247]

OC/26/01/11

10.2. Information Systems and Record Keeping Management Report for 2025

Resolution: Council NOTED the Information Systems and Record Keeping report. [D26/9526]

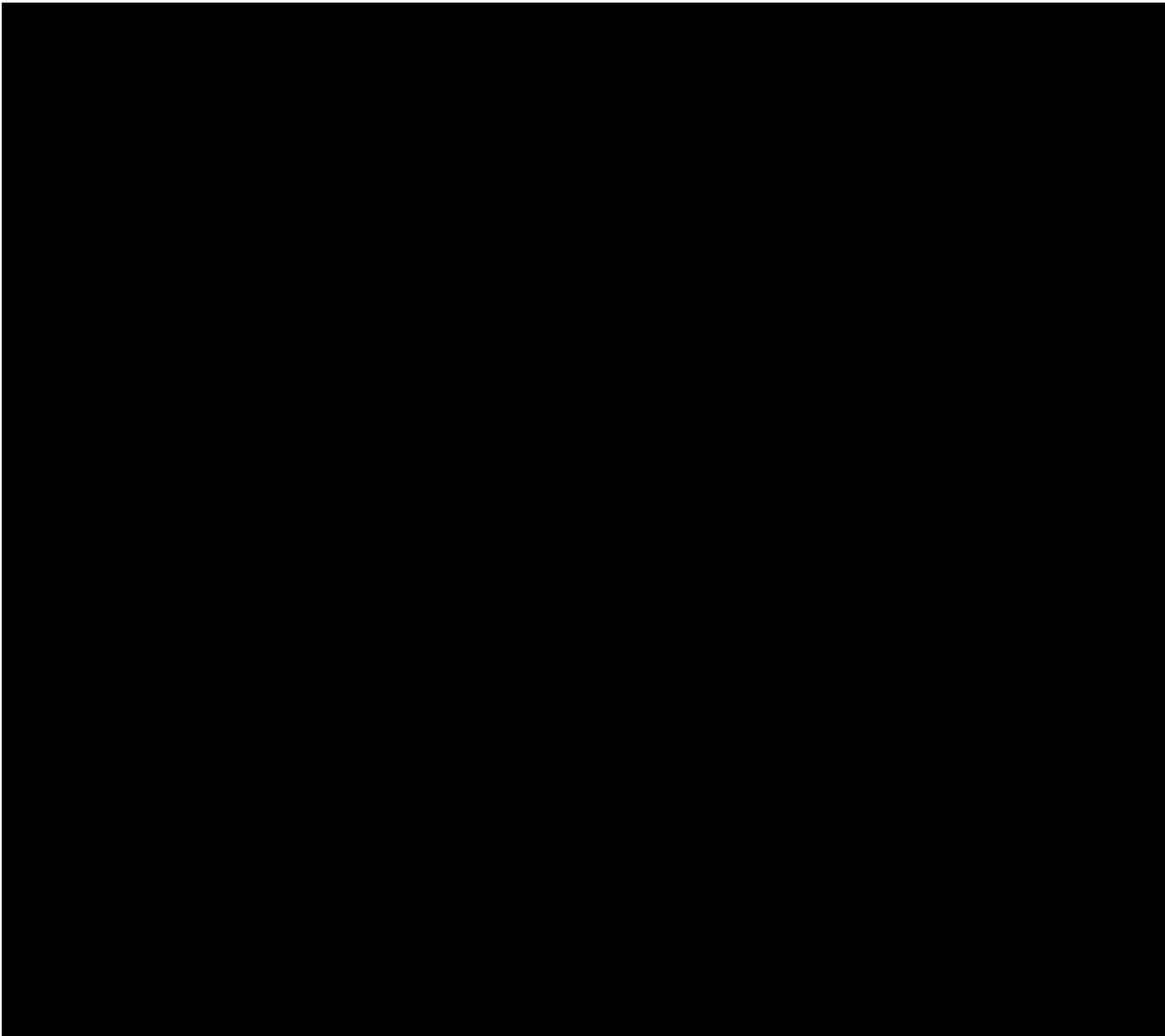
OC/26/01/12

10.3. Project Policy Update

Resolution: Council NOTED the Policy Project Update report. [D26/9588]

OC/26/01/13

CLOSED SESSION



CC