

ANNUAL REPORT GUIDELINES

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

July 08

Annual report

An annual report is the key mechanism by which councils report to and are accountable to their communities.

Section 72 of the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) requires councils to prepare an annual report and make copies available for public inspection.

The Act specifies the matters that must be contained in the annual report and requires councils to invite the public to make submissions on the report for discussion at its annual general meeting.

Guidelines

These guidelines have been prepared to assist councils in producing an annual report in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

The guidelines contain a checklist of the specific requirements in Sections 72 and 77 of the Act. Additional requirements are detailed in regulations 23, 27 and 36 of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2005*.

There is also a standard item in the partnership agreements between the State Government and local councils that they include a report on the operations of the agreement in their annual reports.

Best practice suggestions

The guidelines also contain best practice suggestions for improving the standard and usefulness of the annual report. The suggestions are included in the Annual Report Checklist.

Other legislation

The annual report may also be an appropriate vehicle for meeting the requirements of other legislation which call for councils to report to the public. Councils should refer to the other relevant state and commonwealth legislation, that is, Tasmania's *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002*.

Part I Local Government Act 1993

Matter	Section/ Regulation	Requirement	Comments on good practice ¹
Annual report	Section 72(1)	<p>A council must prepare an annual report containing specified information.</p> <p>The council is required to invite the community to make submissions on the report for discussion at its annual general meeting (section 72(3)). Such a meeting can be held no later than 15 December each year (section 72B(1)(a)).</p>	<p>Prepare and adopt an annual report as soon as possible after the end of the financial year, as recent information is of most relevance to readers. Copies of the report should be available by 1 November to provide the community sufficient time to read the report before the council's annual general meeting.</p>
Annual plan summary	Section 72(1)(a)	<p>A summary of the annual plan for the preceding financial year.</p> <p>Section 71(2) states that an annual plan is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be consistent with the strategic plan; • include a statement about how the council will meet the goals and objectives of the strategic plan; • include a summary of the estimates adopted under section 82; and • include a summary of the major strategies to be used to achieve the council's public health goals and objectives. 	<p>This statement can be linked with the activities and performance statement.</p>

Public health statement	Section 72(1)(ab)	<p>A statement of the public health goals and objectives for the preceding financial year, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extent to which the council has carried out its functions under the <i>Public Health Act 1997</i> and the <i>Food Act 2003</i>; • resources allocated to public health; • extent to which its goals, policies and programs met the public needs; and • details of the completion of any strategies (section 72(1A)) 	
Activities and performance statement	Section 72(1)(b)	<p>A statement of council's activities and performance in respect of the preceding financial year's goals and objectives.</p>	<p>Expand aspects of this information in an 'Overview and Highlights' section and report on specific issues and council programs.</p> <p>Outline the council's strategic and annual plans, major projects and initiatives and where further details can be obtained.</p> <p>Report on factors affecting performance, and the extent to which targets were achieved. Include reasons for significant variations, both positive and negative, and on performance over time.</p> <p>Report on future directions, projections and predictions.</p> <p>The information should be easily understood and relevant to the local community.</p>

Financial statements	Section 72(1)(c)	Financial statement for preceding financial year	<p>The information should be in a user-friendly form and be meaningful to non-financial readers.</p> <p>Include clear, concise notes explaining major changes in assets and liabilities, significant budget variations, relevant details from previous years, and performance over time.</p> <p>Include a budget outline for the coming year giving an overview of council funds and where they are to be spent. This information could be expressed graphically and numerically.</p>
Enterprise powers statement	Section 72(1)(ca)	A statement of council activities and performance undertaken under section 21 (enterprise powers) and compared to the objectives for the preceding financial year.	
Councillor allowances and expenses statement	Section 72(1)(cb)	A statement of total allowances and expenses paid to the mayor, deputy mayor and councillors.	A table format is recommended.
Councillor attendance statement	Section 72(1)(cc)	A statement detailing the attendance of each councillor at council and committee meetings during the preceding financial year.	<p>A table format is recommended.</p> <p>A general report on committees could be included covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure and members • major tasks and achievements • time and location of meetings, and whether they are open to the public • extent of use of confidentiality provisions during committee hearings

Senior employee total annual remuneration statement	Section 72(1)(cd)	<p>A statement in accordance with subsection (4) relating to total annual remuneration to council employees in senior positions.</p> <p>Under subsection (4) the statement is to list the number of employees in groups according to the total annual remuneration as specified in subsection (5). Groups should have a maximum of \$20 000 between the highest and lowest total annual remuneration.</p> <p>Under subsection (5) the total annual remuneration of an employee means the total of the following for the financial year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • salary payable to an employee • amount of employer contribution to the employee's superannuation • value of use of any motor vehicle provided to the employee • the value of any other allowances or benefits paid or payable to, or provided for the benefit of, the employee 	<p>A table format is recommended.</p> <p>Additional information could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisational chart • names, roles, responsibilities and profile of key staff • staffing overview, including number and type of employees
Audit opinion	Section 72(1)(d)	A copy of the audit opinion for the preceding financial year.	

Land donated under section 177 statement	Section 72(1)(da)	<p>A statement specifying details of any land donated by council under section 77, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name of the recipient • reasons for the donation • value of the land 	A table format is recommended. If no land is donated, include a statement to this effect.
Any other prescribed matters	Section 72(1)(e)	Other matters prescribed in the <i>Local Government (General) Regulations 2005</i> – refer to the information provided part 2 of the checklist.	
Availability of the annual report	Section 72(2)	<p>The general manager is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • submit two copies of the report to the Director of Local Government; • submit one copy to the Director of Public Health; • make available copies free of charge or on payment of a prescribed fee (maximum of five fee units – Schedule 3 of the <i>Local Government (General) Regulations 2005</i>); and • advertise the availability of the report in a daily newspaper circulated in the municipal area. 	<p>A council must invite the community to make submissions on its report for discussion at its annual general meeting (section 72(93)). The meeting must be held no later than 15 December each year (section 72B(1)(a)). Copies of the report should therefore be available by 1 November each year to provide the community with sufficient time to read the report prior to the council's annual general meeting.</p> <p>This should include one of the major newspapers (the Mercury, the Examiner or the Advocate) as well as local newspapers/ newsletters. The advertisement should invite community to make submissions on its report for discussion at its annual general meeting, as per section 72(3)</p>
Community submissions	Section 72(3)	A council must invite the community to make submissions on its report for discussion at its annual general meeting.	<p>Councils should explore means of encouraging participation. A copy of the annual report should be provided on the council's website.</p> <p>The report should clearly outline how the community can comment on the report – including details of the deadline for written submissions, and details for verbal submissions at the annual general meeting.</p>

Additional publications

Australasian Reporting Awards

Australasian Reporting Awards (ARA) criteria for guidance in annual report contents sets out a series of principles and expectations for best practice annual reports. It is widely accepted internationally as a most comprehensive guide for both the public and private sectors, and for effectively communicating with stakeholders. These criteria can be downloaded from www.arawards.com.au

Global Reporting Initiative

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is an international benchmark in reporting. It provides guidelines that are sector specific and country specific. Sustainability Reporting Guidelines are the cornerstone of the GRI framework. The latest version of the guidelines, G3, can be downloaded from <http://www.globalreporting.org/>

Annual Report Guidelines

In July 2003, the South Australian Local Government Association prepared guidelines to assist councils in the preparation of annual reports within the context of the *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)*. The guidelines include central themes for councils, such as autonomy, performance and accountability. A copy of the guidelines can be downloaded from www.lga.sa.gov.au

Disclaimer: Information contained in this document is for information and general guidance only. Such information is not professional legal opinion.