



Overview of Local Government

What do you think councils will be responsible for in the future?

Many respondents want councils to be responsible for community development/events/advocacy and planning. A similar number of respondents believe councils should simply look after the basics - roads, rates and rubbish. A number also thought that councils should be maintaining the local infrastructure, maintenance and care of public spaces and facilities. There was a strong focus on wanting local area services only and community activities that directly benefit the local community.

What council activities should be driven or determined by communities?

Responses strongly suggest the community wants much higher levels of engagement with, and consultation by, councils. Things that affect the community were of the highest importance to respondents. Community development, infrastructure projects and decisions on parks/recreation or sporting facilities were clearly stated as a priority for consultation.

Given the varying sizes of councils, what consideration should be given to costs of services and the councils' capacity to deliver these?

While not in scope, a significant number of responses believe amalgamation or larger councils would help resolve these issues. Many felt that smaller municipalities shouldn't receive lower services as a result (especially for core services). Shared services or lowering administration costs, including less administrative staff, were a clear priority. Submissions suggested that councils should prioritise services in accordance with budgets. Effective budget management, grants and ensuring value for money also featured. User-pays models were proposed, as was ensuring funding was appropriate for the population/area being serviced.



Council Governance and Powers

What is vital to good governance in local government?

Respondents highlighted the following as being key to good governance:

- Communication and genuine consultation with communities
- Transparency in council decision-making through limited closed meetings
- Strong accountability measures and good procedures
- Leaders who genuinely act in the public interest and without self-interest and
- Good management of conflicts of interest.

What aspects of good governance should be prescribed in a legislative framework?

Responses indicated the importance of accountability measures (including financial). These predominately focused on transparency; measures to ensure the integrity of councillors, including appropriate oversight; conflict of interest management; consultation; professional development and support for a councillor code of conduct. There were also some references to culture and encouraging councillors to take a more conciliatory approach.

What statutory powers do councils need to deliver the services that communities require, or expect to receive, from councils now and into the future?

Responses varied between proposals that councils' powers should be more limited to their direct service delivery functions or that current levels were appropriate. While out of scope, planning was a key issue with most submissions expression frustration with the current process, either due to inconsistency, expense or conflicts of interest. Some submissions suggested a stronger role in environmental (including coastal management) or planning enforcement, or that existing powers be enforced more consistently.

How are the strategic decisions of councils best made?

The strong majority stated that strategic decisions of councils are best made in consultation with communities, with major decisions needing to demonstrate engagement. Long-term plans and visions were important, as was transparency. Other clear themes were that decisions should be informed by qualified or expert advice and could involve consultation with affected stakeholders. Some submissions suggested compulsory voting would assist.

What mechanisms best support strategic, operational and technical decisions and actions?

Responses to this question were disparate but highlighted themes such as eliciting (and considering) community and stakeholder input, access to expert/staff advice, transparency of operations and decisions, and appropriate compliance measures. Involving experts and having good processes and procedures was considered important. Some submissions referred to amalgamations, the independence and training of elected members, and an independent corruption oversight body.



Democracy and Engagement

What is the best way to engage Tasmanians in voting for local government?

The majority of respondents want more engagement with councils, both during elections and throughout the term, as well as more social media/radio communications, complemented with grassroots level engagement. Respondents want increased public presence of candidates and an understanding of their policies/views and what they stand for. Consolidation of councillor numbers and term limits were raised. Results show many respondents support compulsory voting, with a small number stating the current process is adequate. Support for online/electronic voting was also demonstrated.

Who should be allowed to participate in local government elections?

Both residents and ratepayers considered they should continue to have a right to vote. Ratepayers felt strongly that paying property rates entitled them to a vote. Many responses indicated concerns with non-citizens, temporary residents or non-local people voting. A review of the General Manager's Roll and the principle of 'one person, one vote' was strongly supported. Candidacy should be open to all, however training would be beneficial, as would a maximum number of candidates.

How can local government attract skilled, diverse and representative electoral candidates?

Better public knowledge of the role was a clear stand-out response. Education and training, either before or after elections, limits on candidates or minimum requirements and maximum terms were raised. Respondents want elected members role to be taken more seriously, with better pay or career opportunities (including as a full time role) to encourage good candidates. Compulsory voting and

amalgamations were raised in responses to this question. A strong message of more community involvement, improved efficiency and transparency was also a theme.

What should be required of candidates in local government elections before, during and after elections?

There was strong feedback that candidates should be ethical (no criminal history), transparent and accountable. Declaration of conflicts of interests featured strongly in submissions. Many respondents felt that candidates should be publicly available to the community to allow for a clear understanding of why they are standing and what their positions/views are on issues. Respondents want community-focused individuals who understand the local area and community and who will be accessible to the community after the election. A common theme emerging from submissions was that candidates should have good knowledge of the elected member role and the skills to undertake it.

What decisions should councils continue to be able to make during an election period?

Many respondents wanted councils to only make operational/emergency decisions during an election period, with no major decisions (including development decisions) that would/could bind an incoming council. There was no clear view on whether the current system could achieve this or if caretaker provisions were required.

In what ways should councillors engage with, and represent, communities in the digital age?

There was strong feedback for more engagement generally, especially through professional social media accounts, blogs, newsletters, surveys, and website updates on issues affecting the community (as opposed to personal pages). The responses indicated people want elected members to be contactable and responsive. There is acknowledgement that the engagement should consider less technologically savvy community members and cater for them also. Social media, online surveys, websites, email newsletters featured highly but balanced with face-to-face engagement and traditional media to be inclusive to all members of the community. Live streaming of meetings was also raised.

On what matters should councils engage with communities?

There was significant feedback that the community wants more engagement, with many specifically wanting more engagement on issues that affect community members. Planning and development and council spending were featured prominently as matters where the community wants a say. Respondents expressed a desire to be asked about their views through simple surveys or other means, not onerous engagement processes.

How can community engagement be strengthened and measured?

Responses indicated the community wants stronger engagement through simple processes (surveys/polls/forums). Submissions stated that elected members should engage with them directly and they want to be able to trust the consultation process. A desire for public forums, community panels and meetings was clearly articulated in submissions in addition to a call for online engagement methods. Respondents strongly called for enhanced transparency through evidence of engagement processes, including feedback on the results as well as councils' decisions. Respondents expressed a strong desire to feel heard by councils. Actively listening to community's views was deemed important by respondents.



Council Revenue and Expenditure

How can councils ensure transparency in funding decisions; both how it is raised and spent?

There was a strong emphasis in the responses on the importance of councils making budgetary and financial information publically available and consulting with their communities in relation to funding decisions. Preferred publication methods included council websites, social media and email circulars. Simple, plain English delivery of information that makes it accessible to all was also considered important. State Government oversight and scrutiny of financial records by independent experts was also identified as a means of assuring ratepayers that council funding decisions are made ethically.

How can councils determine how best to raise revenue for specific purposes?

Feedback suggests councils should involve the community when determining revenue raising methods for specific purposes by seeking opinions, feedback or even votes on specific issues. Some respondents stated that it is the role of general managers and their staff to make this determination. Some thought that councils should engage experts or request State Government guidance in determining how best to raise revenue.

How should councils engage communities when raising revenue?

Publishing information on expenditure was the strongest response to this question. The majority of respondents indicated that communication through surveys, online voting, social media, email notices and community forums is the most appropriate way to engage communities in relation to revenue raising matters that affect them. A desire for transparent and honest communication from councils was highlighted repeatedly.

How should councils determine the services they deliver to their communities in exchange for rates and charges?

The majority of respondents indicated consulting with communities in relation to what they require and consider fair is the preferred method. The provision of essential services, such as rubbish collection, and setting rates that take in to account socio-economic considerations (user pays and needs based) and the needs of communities recurringly emerged in response to this question. Good budgeting and council decisions were also raised as key issues.

How should councils decide where to make trade-offs (more or less rates vs more or less services)?

Community consultation emerged as a key consideration for councils. Some felt essential services should be maintained and communities consulted on any additional services or projects councils may consider. Others felt that trade-offs should not be considered in any form, and that any emerging costs should be planned for as part of the nature of a growing community and be met through appropriate budget planning measures or State/Federal Government funding.



Performance Transparency and Accountability

How can the right balance between autonomy and accountability be delivered?

Greater transparency and accountability by councils, to their communities, emerged as a key priority for respondents. The establishment of policies and procedures to ensure appropriate behaviour, State Government oversight, good leadership and accountable behaviour by councils were all suggested; as was an independent misconduct investigation body. Some respondents indicated that autonomy and accountability are not mutually exclusive and therefore there is no conflict between these objectives.

Who should have oversight and regulation of councils' performance and how should it occur?

Ministerial oversight was suggested as the appropriate method of oversight by most respondents. This suggestion was closely followed by respondents indicating that a dedicated, independent body or State Government agency should have oversight of councils' performance. Some respondents also felt that oversight should be provided by ratepayers, through independent commissions or an electoral process. A small number of respondents felt councils should be self-regulated or regulated through the Local Government Association of Tasmania.

What mechanisms should there be to respond or intervene when a council is not performing as required?

The early intervention of an independent body or the State Government rated equally in responses. The power to dismiss councils that are not performing was a recurring theme, while some respondents felt ratepayers should be able to participate in the intervention process via mechanisms such as a no confidence vote. While Ministerial intervention was highlighted by some respondents, the majority seemed to favour intervention by a State Government agency or an independent commission. Mentoring or support to resolve issues was proposed. A small cohort felt the status quo was adequate.

What information should councils make available to the public and how should they be able to access it?

The majority of respondents wanted access to 'everything' or more transparency in published material. The predominant areas were financials, planning and development information, performance data and information on decisions that affect the community, including voting records of those making the decisions. Meeting minutes and records featured highly.

Most respondents indicated that information should be available online. Some also acknowledged information should be at request or in person. Some respondents also indicated they would appreciate a regular email or newsletter update or library/notice board available to residents/ratepayers with easy-to-read information.

What information would be useful to councils to drive performance improvements?

A number of responses indicated that councils should engage with their communities in seeking opinions and feedback on issues through satisfaction surveys. Respondents submitted that councils don't value community feedback or use it to drive improvements. Comparative information and information against key performance criteria (KPIs) was a feature, specifically measurable strategic planning objectives. Education on good governance was raised as useful. Legislated reporting was also considered valuable. Views that the standard information (economics/population/strategic planning) would assist was consistent.

What is one thing you would change about the current local government legislative framework, and why?

Respondents particularly want more transparency, accountability and oversight, including an easier complaints system. Clearer rules for elected members/education on the system and less power for General Managers featured. Responses commonly called for more State oversight of councils. Changes to the electoral system was also commonly raised, including calls for compulsory voting, changes to the election of mayors, and the introduction of maximum terms. While out of scope, responses called for amalgamations, less councillors and less political alliances. Additionally many responses extended to removing planning/development from councils or changing the planning scheme.