
Communiqué

Premier's Local Government Council meeting – 14 December 2017

The Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) met in Hobart on 14 December 2017 to discuss and progress a range of joint reform measures aimed at delivering improved local services and effective representation for Tasmanian communities.

The Premier, the Hon Will Hodgman, chairs the PLGC, which also includes the Minister for Planning and Local Government, the Hon Peter Gutwein, the elected members of the General Management Committee of the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) including the President, Mayor Doug Chipman, and members of the PLGC Officials Committee. The PLGC noted the outcome of the debate in the Legislative Council on the Government's water and sewerage legislation and the continued divergence in the positions of the sector and the State Government on this issue.

The Premier and the President of LGAT reaffirmed the shared commitment, goodwill and collective duty of both levels of Government to work across a broad range of issues important to Tasmanians, notwithstanding there will be times where there may be a difference of view on a specific matter.

Voluntary amalgamations and shared services arrangements

The PLGC noted the significant and encouraging progress on work to assess the feasibility of voluntary council amalgamations and strategic resource sharing arrangements, and agreed to continue to advocate for reform where there is compelling evidence of broader community benefit.

Key highlights since the last PLGC meeting included:

- the commencement of a Local Government Board review into the potential amalgamation of Sorell and Tasman Councils, initiated at the request of those Councils;
- the commencement of a feasibility study by the George Town and West Tamar Councils into the possible amalgamation of the two Councils;
- the completion of the Northern Tasmanian Councils and Cradle Coast Authority shared services studies, which have identified significant potential benefits and service efficiencies. The Northern Tasmania Councils have endorsed their study and are now moving to implement its recommendations; and
- discussions on a strategic alliance between councils in the greater Hobart area, which would aim to deliver an integrated approach to issues such as planning, transport and economic development.

The PLGC discussed a number of important, common themes that have emerged from the studies undertaken to date, including that:

- the development of common IT platforms (infrastructure, networks, and applications) is a critical enabler for strategic resource-sharing between councils;
- efficiencies in council 'back-office' services will generate new opportunities for councils to re-invest in new and/or improved community-facing services; and
- commitment to implementation will require strong political will and support at the individual council level and, at least to some extent, the relinquishing of councils' local interests in favour of a 'whole of region' vision for more efficient and high-quality services.

2018 local government elections

The PLGC identified the forthcoming 2018 council elections as an important opportunity to enhance the sustainability of local government in Tasmania. The PLGC affirmed the commitment of both levels of Government to promoting, in the lead-up to the 2018 council elections:

1. the important – and increasingly complex - role of local government in serving and representing the interests of local Tasmanian communities, whilst discharging statutory obligations such as acting as a planning authority;
2. the encouragement of candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds, so that elected members reflect a broad cross-section of the community and the value diversity brings;
3. the continuous improvement in the professionalism, capacity, and integrity of councils and councillors;
4. a recognition of the valuable role that a councillor plays in local communities and the personal satisfaction councillors can gain from helping their communities; and
5. an increase in active community engagement and participation at the local government level, both at and between council elections.

The PLGC agreed to use this statement of principle as the basis for focusing and promoting the PLGC's efforts on a range of potential joint initiatives in the lead-up to the 2018 elections.

Planning reforms

The PLGC noted the collaborative efforts between the State Government and the work with the local government sector to assist with the development of Local Provision Schedules following recent changes to planning legislation, including work to promote these changes to the community.

These are important economic reforms that the State Government and local government have recognised their joint obligation to pursue for the benefit of Tasmanians. While significant progress and achievements have occurred, the PLGC acknowledged that there remains a significant body of practical implementation work to be done, which will need to be jointly undertaken if the benefits of reform are to be maximised.

Monitoring council performance

The PLGC affirmed its commitment to supporting the development of a statewide performance measurement program for Tasmanian councils, and noted recent recommendations by the Productivity Commission for improvements in this area.

The PLGC noted progress on initiatives currently underway to improve local government data accessibility and performance monitoring, including the *Local Government Data, Analysis, Transparency, Accountability* ('LG DATA') project. LG DATA has the dual objectives of enhancing transparency of local government performance and helping councils to identify opportunities to improve performance.

The PLGC noted that joint efforts between the State Government and the local government sector to improve financial and asset management practices are yielding positive and tangible results in terms of overall council performance. The Auditor-General's 2016-17 annual report on the performance of local government entities shows that there continues to be steady improvements to the aggregate performance and sustainability of councils over time, particularly with respect to the increasing number of councils with no underlying deficit.

Waste Management

The PLGC agreed that improving waste recovery rates in Tasmania can realise economic benefits and the need to continue to work collaboratively to address current and emerging waste management issues. The State Government's draft strategy, outlining their waste management priorities, is almost complete and local government looks forward to further engagement to finalise this work.

The PLGC also noted the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and LGAT to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the EPA and local government and support the identification and progression of agreed priorities.

Community safety

The PLGC discussed the importance of coordinated efforts by the Commonwealth Government, State Government and local governments in relation to community safety and emergency responses, as discussed at the special COAG meeting on counter-terrorism in October 2017.

Other topics

The PLGC noted action and progress on a range of other matters of importance to the local government sector, including:

- recommendations from the Glenorchy City Council Board of Inquiry Final Report;
- amendments to the *Local Government Act 1993* recently passed by the Tasmanian Parliament;
- the review of councillor allowances currently being undertaken by the Tasmanian Industrial Commission; and

- the review of the Code of Conduct for councillors, aimed at ensuring that the code is operating effectively and is not having any unintended consequences.

Other items discussed by the PLGC included a report by the Director of Local Government on compliance activities, including issues and recent reforms in other jurisdictions; economic regulation of council camping facilities; and the Local Government Relief and Recovery Policy.

The PLGC will meet again in 2018 following the State Government election. Further information on the PLGC is available on the LGD website:

www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local_government/plgc.