

Speech Notes for Mark Shelton MP Minister for Local Government

Premier's Local Government Council
11am - 1pm, 6 September 2019
Premier's Reception Room

SNAPSHOT

Who is in the audience? Hon Will Hodgman MP, Premier
Mayor Cr Christina Holmdahl, LGAT President
Lord Mayor Cr Anna Reynolds, Hobart City Council
Members of the LGAT General Management Committee (GMC)
Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) Officials

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Hon Will Hodgman MP, Premier
- Mayor Cr Christina Holmdahl, LGAT President
- All members of the PLGC

Introduction

- Thank you Premier and good morning everyone.
- I am pleased to be here today and would like to start by welcoming the new and continuing members of the LGAT General Management Committee.
- Ladies and Gentlemen the relationship between the local government sector and the Tasmanian Government has been consistently strong over a long period of time.
- The close connection of networks throughout Tasmania enables us to work closely on issues of joint interest, which is an approach not always achieved in other states of Australia.

- The Premier's Local Government Council appears to me to be a great forum that enables both levels of government to discuss and importantly, progress various matters such as those that are up for discussion today.
- I really do look forward to working with the LGAT General Management Committee – both within and outside of the PLGC forum.

Sector experience

- As a former Councillor and Mayor of Meander Valley Council I am well aware of the challenges that Councils across Tasmania face.
- I know from experience that the issues councils are dealing with are increasingly diverse. Community expectations have extended into areas that have not traditionally been considered by many, to be Council Core Business.
- In recent years local government expenditure has increased significantly in the context of changed and expanded roles and expectations from the community.
- Whilst it is clear that expectations of local government are increasing, at the same time, councils are facing pressures to maintain and grow their rate base.
- The challenges facing metropolitan councils are different, but they are challenges all the same. Metropolitan councils must find ways to respond to population growth. Matters like traffic congestion and ensuring housing supply are regional issues that require regional responses.
- In this context it is critically important for Councils, and where possible and appropriate, work collaboratively with the Tasmanian and Australian governments.
- A great example of this is the Launceston and Greater Hobart City deals that provide the framework to address issues that are strategically critical.
- Whilst the National City Deal framework does focus predominantly on metropolitan areas this Government will always look to support regional areas of Tasmania through discussions on councils' priorities that are aligned to the best interests of their communities.

- With regard to the best interests of the communities and what is important to them, I'd like to focus on one of the major reform areas of the local government review and that is Part C – Councils Connected to their Communities.
- The adoption of a formalised Community Engagement framework will in my view help to ensure that there is greater clarity from communities on what they want from their elected members and what they expect from their Councils.
- Whilst I acknowledge that from time to time there can be tensions around council tables where there are differing individual and collective views on Council priorities, I would ask that leaders within our sector, never lose sight of why we are elected and take time out to reflect on what our residents are telling us about their priority needs.

Priorities

- I have taken on the Local Government portfolio at a point where the Government has commenced a major Review of the Local Government Legislative Framework.
- The kinds of reforms that we are currently proposing as part of the Review, such as the Regional Councils option, are aimed at providing the sector with new tools to address contemporary local government challenges and opportunities.
- It is encouraging that the community has been highly engaged throughout the Review's consultation phases, and what we have heard is that a focus on local needs and issues is important to the community.
- Additionally, the community has also indicated that they want their councils to operate efficiently.
- Most structural reform options at the local government level can bring about efficiencies but, in the view of some, at the expense of local representation.
- The advantage of the proposed Regional Councils option is that it provides scale efficiencies while continuing local representation and therefore a focus on local needs of the community.

- The intent of the Regional Councils option is to provide a mechanism by which two or more councils can collaborate formally for the benefit of all councils involved and their communities. A Regional Council and existing local councils would be served by one administrative body.
- These are the kinds of modern, future focused reforms that are contained in the Reform Directions paper. If progressed, reforms such as the Regional Councils option promise to ensure the sector is resilient to the population and other changes that are to come in the next few decades.
- The Review is, of course, part of the Government's broader work programme.
- We have recently consulted the community on a number of further changes to the *Burial and Cremation Act* which will likely see a new bill on the Parliamentary agenda before the end of the year.
- The Government is taking action in response to recent incidences of dog attacks, including amending the *Dog Control Act* to strengthen penalties. This is with a view to introducing legislation in the Spring Session of Parliament.
- We are also finalising a position in respect to the issues arising from the application of charitable rates under the *Local Government Act*. Consultation with the sector and other stakeholders on this matter has already commenced.
- The Act Review consultation processes have highlighted a strong interest from the community and the sector around better information on how their council is tracking in terms of performance.
- I am aware that the former LGAT President at the December 2017 PLGC meeting flagged his interest in the significant work that has been done in Victoria around the 'Know Your Council' website in particular.
- The Local Government Division has developed an option for a locally-based Tasmanian performance monitoring platform and builds upon the existing annual Consolidated Data Collection process and leverages the capabilities of its service provider, KPMG.

- Conversations on this issue are ongoing and I am keen to place this matter on the agenda for further discussion at the December 2019 meeting.

Conclusion

- Given what I have just outlined, it is clearly a busy time for the State Government and the local government sector.
- The Government recognises that the sector requires a modern, flexible legislative framework that enables it to fulfil its essential, yet increasingly demanding role in serving and representing the Tasmanian community.
- As the Minister for Local Government, I am making it a priority to deliver a best-practice legislative framework that does just that.
- I thank you for the opportunity for me to outline my thoughts on some of the additional matters I have raised.