



dorset
COUNCIL

Our Ref: DOC/25/2324

13 March 2025

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Hon. Kerry Vincent MLC
Minister for Local Government

Local Government Priority Reform Program 2024-26

EMAIL: lgconsultation@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Vincent

DISCUSSION PAPER REGARDING PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE *LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1993*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Council's submission in relation to the discussion paper regarding proposed reforms to the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act). Council notes the consultation period ends midnight, 21 March 2025.

First and foremost, Dorset Council overall support reforms to the Act. The Act is over three decades old and must be brought in line with contemporary thinking and practices, notwithstanding that the Act has been amended over that time. Council notes the following commentary from the discussion paper, page 6:

"The purpose of the consultation is not to test the merits of the proposed reforms. We believe this has already been done and the evidence base supporting their introduction is well established.

What we want to do now is to ensure the design of the amendments we are developing to implement the reforms are practical, effective, and aligned with the needs of Councils and the community.

When providing comments and submissions in response to the proposed reforms, we would encourage councils, other stakeholders, and the broader community to consider potential technical concerns and implementation challenges for the proposed amendments to ensure we can develop legislative proposals that are fit for purpose and will have a real impact.”

Council has formulated its submission considering the above commentary and focused its submission on potential technical concerns and implementation challenges for the proposed amendments to the Act.

Performance Improvement Direction Provisions

Council is supportive of early intervention provisions page 14 of the Discussion Paper. A Board of Inquiry should be the absolute last resort and any investigations into Council by the Office of Local Government should be known by the respective council. In Dorset Council’s Local Government Investigation, which then resulted in a Board of Inquiry, it should have been known to the incoming General Manager in December 2022 that Dorset Council was under investigation, along with incoming Councillors in the October 2022 elections. This knowledge may have influenced these individuals as to their willingness to be involved in this process, either as a Council Officer, or a Councillor.

Sequencing of Reform Program of Works

While Council is broadly supportive of the reforms, it must be recognised that the reforms are complex, are heavily intertwined and will put a strain on Council resourcing, including Council Officer and Councillor workloads. Council submits that the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) and Tasmanian councils are given the opportunity to submit and comment in relation to the sequencing of the broad program of works to ensure that the program is sequenced in a way that ensures efficiency and effectiveness of the roll-out of the respective projects to limit, as far as possible, the impacts on Council resourcing. An example of this is Council strategic planning, including the four-year strategic plan. This exercise should be undertaken before a workforce development plan. Reason being that strategic plan priorities and activities drive the required need for cash holdings to fund initiatives, along with the workforce needs to enact the strategic plan. If these exercises are conducted in the incorrect sequence, it may result in various projects having to be undertaken again, or material amendments required.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Council submits that the following strategic priorities (page 31-34) of the reform program may result in ICT implementation challenges:

- **Strategic priority 9:** Improving consistency in data collection and reporting methodologies
- **Strategic priority 10:** Enhancing transparency of information in council rates notices

Both of these strategic priorities will have material impacts on Council’s ICT systems, process and procedures, along with resourcing requirements. ICT providers are national, and in some cases international corporates. In Dorset Council’s case, the ICT provider has less than 5 councils in Tasmania on their platform, as such it may prove difficult for Council to influence these providers to change systems, fields, data requirements for Dorset Council’s and Tasmanian council specific system and data requirements. Any customisations to underlying

software, if at all possible, are extremely expensive. If ICT systems are already configured to meet the needs of strategic priority 9 and 10, by the very nature that “mainland” councils collect this data, there may be significant time and effort for potential customised reporting (the actual creation of customised reports by Council’s ICT supplier), and for existing data and associated fields to be reallocated within the system to meet the needs of priority 9 and 10 which will have very heavy cost and resourcing requirements.

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please contact John Marik: General Manager via phone: 03 6352 6576 or email: john.marik@dorset.tas.gov.au in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Marik', followed by a horizontal line.

John Marik
General Manager