

# PREMIER'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL

## Meeting Minutes

2.00-3.30pm Friday 8 December 2023  
Premier's Reception Room, Level 11, 15 Murray St Hobart

<b>PLGC Members</b>		
	Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP	Premier (Chair)
	Hon Nic Street MP	Minister for Local Government
	Cr Mick Tucker	President, Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) General Management Committee (GMC) Mayor, Break O'Day Council
	Cr Paula Wriedt	Vice President, LGAT GMC Mayor, Kingborough Council
	Cr Leigh Gray	Mayor, Brighton Council
	Cr Cheryl Fuller	Mayor, Central Coast Council
	Cr Mary Duniam	Mayor, Waratah-Wynyard Council
	Cr Mary Knowles	Mayor, Northern Midlands Council
	Cr Helen Burnet	A/Lord Mayor, Hobart City Council
	Cr Danny Gibson	Launceston City Council
<b>PLGC Officials</b>		
	Matthew Atkins	General Manager, Devonport City Council
	Dion Lester	Chief Executive Officer, LGAT
	Ben Morris	Policy Director, LGAT
	Mat Healey	A/Deputy Secretary, Policy and Delivery, DPAC
	Melanie Brown	A/Executive Director, OLG, DPAC
<b>Secretariat</b>		
	Daniel Hall	Policy Analyst, OLG
	Luke Murphy-Gregory	Assistant Director, OLG
<b>Ministerial support</b>		
	Melissa Geard	Adviser to Minister Street
	Vince Taskunas	Chief of Staff to Minister Street

	Brett Whiteley	Principal Adviser to the Premier
<b>Guests</b>		
	Sarah Russell	Director, Climate Change Office, ReCFIT
	Jeremy Harbottle	A/Director, CARCRU, Department of Justice
	Bastiaan Van Impe	Department of Justice

### Apologies

- Des Jennings, General Manager, Northern Midlands Council.
- Ian Nelson, General Manager, Clarence City Council

### Introduction

The Premier welcomed PLGC members and paid respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. He recognised the PLGC members' contributions and leadership throughout the year. The Premier acknowledged that the local government sector was becoming an increasingly challenging area to work in due to changing roles, social media, and the increasingly vitriolic criticism of elected local government officials by a small but active element of the community. He briefly discussed the upcoming agenda items.

### Agenda Item 1: Minutes – PLGC meeting 27 July 2023

The minutes from PLGC meeting 27 July 2023 were accepted unchanged.

It was noted that updates on the range of initiatives and action items discussed at the previous meeting would be provided as the meeting progressed.

### Agenda Item 2: Minister's Update

The Minister for Local Government provided a brief outline of the program of work that had been undertaken across 2023 including:

- delivery of the Final Report of the Future of Local Government Review;
- the release for consultation of a new draft framework to better manage the personal interests of councillors;
- revisions to the Code of Conduct framework;
- development of a best practice guide for the recruitment and performance management of general managers;
- development of a draft framework for managing unreasonable conduct;
- continued progression of the Learning and Development Framework for councillors.

The Minister thanked the PLGC members for working constructively with the Future of Local Government Review process and reiterated the Government's commitment that any recommendations stemming from the FOLG Review would be brought to the LGAT General Management Committee for discussion before being publicly

released. The President of LGAT acknowledged that commitment and thanked the Minister.

### Agenda Item 3. Local Government Climate Capability Program

Dr Sarah Russell, Director of the Climate Change Office in Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania was introduced to provide a briefing on the Local Government Climate Capability Program.

It was noted that:

- The local government sector does significant work on climate change and the climate capability program has been driven by local government advocacy, lobbying and consultation.
- The aim of the program is to support councils to identify what they want and what they need.
- The program will focus on knowledge and data sharing and building capability within the local government sector to address the impacts of climate change.
- The Government, LGAT and regional councils will develop the program through a co-design process based on the principles of a partnership approach, collective responsibility, integrated decision making and transparency in reporting.
- Five hundred thousand dollars has been allocated to the program by the Government.
- The program is divided into two stages:
  - Gap identification mapping and needs analysis; and
  - Deliverables such as training tools and resources.

### Agenda Item 4: Governance Initiatives – Update

PLGC discussed updates on the progress of a range of governance initiatives.

It was noted that:

- Work to develop a contemporary framework to better manage the interests of elected officials in local government has progressed, with the discussion paper 'Managing conflicts of interest of councillors - framework proposal' made available for consultation on 8 November 2023.
  - Further clarification was requested on what information councillors would be asked to provide in personal interest returns under a managing interests framework, with the President of LGAT noting concerns a number of councillors had raised with him directly about the potential scope of personal information that would need to be disclosed.
- The *Local Government (Code of Conduct) Amendment Act 2023* has passed through Parliament, and amendments will commence in 2024.

- The Managing Unreasonable Behaviour in Local Government Framework is close to being finalised and made accessible for councils to implement.
- The draft *Best-practice Recruitment and Performance Management Guide for General Managers* is currently being consulted on with councils.
- The PLGC Officials considered the proposal from the previous PLGC meeting to create a new Governance Group and reflected that, under a culture of continuous improvement, efforts to identify gaps or reform opportunities for the sector may be managed on a continuous basis through the existing monthly meetings between the Office of Local Government and LGAT and through LGAT's regular engagement with GMC.

Actions:

- Further information about personal interest returns would be added to the managing interests consultation paper and the consultation period would be extended to the end of January 2024.
- The previously identified action to 'create a Governance Group to guide the implementation of various governance reform initiatives' would be modified by instead agreeing that engagement on governance reform initiatives should be embedded in existing 'business as usual' interfaces and forums.

## Agenda Item 5: Learning and Development Framework – Update

PLGC discussed updates on the progress of the Learning and Development Framework. .

It was noted that, since the last PLGC meeting, the Governance Group and team at the OLG have made significant progress including:

- Progressing a communication strategy and identifying Learn to Lead in local government as the branding/marketing name of the Framework,
- Developing a new Learn to Lead website.
- Releasing two new learning modules that are now available to councillors through the website as well as beginning the production of several more.
- Developing a Councillor Learning and Development Policy and a Councillor Capability Review and Development Plan which will be made available for consultation in 2024.

It was noted that the Future of Local Government Review Final Report contained three recommendations relevant to the Learning and Development Framework, namely:

- the development of an elected member capability and professional development plan;
- the requirement for prospective nominee councillors to attend a prescribed, mandatory education session; and

- that the Tasmanian Government and the local government sector should jointly develop and implement a contemporary, best practice learning and ongoing professional development framework for elected members.

The issue of councillors completing the learning and development training was raised, and the idea of mandating the completion of the training modules discussed (including potentially tying a portion of councillor allowances to completion of compulsory modules), as was the idea of compulsory public reporting the names of councillors who have or have not completed learning modules.

It was agreed that mandatory reporting of the names of councillors and the learning modules that they have completed should be included in the Councils Annual Report to provide transparency and accountability.

## Agenda Item 6: Future of Local Government Review

The Final Report of the Future of Local Government Review was released for public comment on 17 November.

The Report presents an integrated suite of 37 recommendations, covering both structural and non-structural reforms. It outlines a process for voluntary council amalgamations supported by transition and community support packages developed with the State Government. It also recommends some mandatory service sharing between councils, and makes a range of specific recommendations, including on council revenue, community engagement, monitoring and reporting, asset management and councillor education.

The PLGC noted the report and indicated that LGAT was unlikely to make a submission on behalf of the sector but would instead support and encourage individual councils to make submissions.

## Agenda Item 7: Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework

PLGC discussed how Local Governments across Tasmania will be required, by law, to comply with the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework (the Framework), pursuant to the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023*.

Jeremy Harbottle, A/Director of the Child Abuse Royal Commission Response Unit from the Department of Justice, was available to assist the PLGC with any questions.

The local government sector has previously indicated that it regards consistent statewide implementation as a priority. It regards its responsibilities under the Framework as complex and presenting some challenges in terms of the changes that will be required.

The President of LGAT stated that the sector endorses all actions that will help to keep children safe. He indicated that LGAT required resources to assist and train

councils in relation to the Framework and asked if the Government could provide resources to help councils through the transition.

The Premier stressed that partnerships with local governments were important in keeping children safe. He stated that the Government had accepted all the recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Setting and had allocated \$55 million to implement the recommendations. He indicated that the Government was committed to investing in the implementation of the recommendations and that budget bids were currently being submitted to access this funding.

The establishment of the new Office of the Independent Regulator to oversee the operation of the new Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework was discussed. It was noted that staff for the office were being employed the following week and that the Regulator would be announced soon and would start in the new year. The role of the Regulator to provide oversight and educate councils and other organisations about the requirements of the Framework was clarified.

The current policies and capacity of councils to prioritise and promote the safety of young people and respond to any incidents while complying with the Framework was discussed. Concern was expressed that there was a gap between what was required from the Framework of councils and what councils have the capacity to do.

It was noted that while there will be some changes with the introduction of the Framework councils should have appropriate policies and procedures already in place to comply with current regulations and standards. It was suggested that the Framework will be adaptable to different situations and both large and small organisations.

Action: ensure further engagement between LGAT and the Minister for Justice to discuss the local government sector's concerns related to the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework.

## Agenda Item 8: Other Business and Meeting Close

The Fire Levy, and consultation process related to the planned changes, was discussed. The President of LGAT noted the sector's dissatisfaction with how consultation on the fire levy changes had been communicated and managed. The Premier noted the concerns but reiterated the need for sustainable funding and resourcing of the SES and Fire Service, and that the proposed changes were aimed at delivering that outcome.

The Premier thanked those present for their contributions and acknowledged the work that had been done throughout the year.

Meeting closed at 2:23 pm

## Actions arising

Agenda Item	Actions arising - PLGC 8 December 2023	Who	When	Status
4	Further information about personal interest returns would be added to the managing interests consultation paper and the consultation period extended to the end of January 2024.	OLG	By 15 Dec 2023	Complete – Reform now progressed as part of the Priority Reform Program
4	The previously identified action to ‘create a Governance Group to guide the implementation of various governance reform initiatives’ would be modified by instead agreeing that engagement on governance reform initiatives should be embedded in existing ‘business as usual’ interfaces and forums.	OLOG and LGAT		Complete
5	Include mandatory reporting of the names of councillors and the learning modules that they have completed in council’s Annual Reports.	DPAC	Ongoing	Progressed as part of the Priority Reform Program
7	Ensure further engagement between LGAT and the Minister for Justice to discuss the local government sector’s concerns related to the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework.	DPAC, LGAT	Ongoing	Further clarification as required