

11 November 2025

The Honourable Kerry Vincent MLC
Minister for local Government
GPO Box 123
Hobart TAS 7001

Via email only: lgconsultation@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2025 Submission

I write in response to your request for feedback and provide the Meander Valley Council's (Council) submission to the proposed Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2025. Council's position on the proposed amendments and new clauses was approved at the 11 November 2025 ordinary meeting of Council. We have appreciated the availability of information sessions on the proposed changes provided by the Office of Local Government.

Council notes that there are several proposed additions being introduced, including a Workforce Development Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy, Internal Audit function, Mandatory Information in Rates Notices. It is anticipated that for the majority of councils in Tasmania, the ability to achieve compliance with the proposed new mandatory requirements will require consultants to develop this work. The existing workforce simply will not have the capacity, and in some cases experience, to take on new projects of this nature. The development of these new additions would come at a cost which would unfortunately need to be passed on to the property owners of each respective Local Government Area, if pursued by the Tasmanian Government. At a time when the demand for council services has never been higher and many property owners are experiencing cost of living pressure, we highlight this point.

We provide the following specific comments on the proposed legislative changes:

Proposed Legislation
<p>19A: Clarifying the role of Council <i>The current section 20 of the Act will be removed and replaced with different wording.</i></p> <p>20: Introducing a Local Government Charter <i>A Charter for Local Government is intended to be produced which provide clarity and specific guidance to support councils in performing their role and specifies the core functions of councils.</i></p>

Council Feedback
The proposal to introduce a Charter, in consultation with the Local Government sector, is supported.
Proposed Legislation
28AB: Introducing mandatory learning and development <i>The Director is to approve for the purposes of this Act a course of mandatory core learning and development activities for councillors. A councillor must complete the course of learning and development activities approved by the Director within 12 months after the election of the councillor.</i>
Council Feedback
Council believes that learning and development is an important aspect of continuous development in Local Government. As Councillors, our declaration of office states that we will engage in ongoing professional development, all opportunities should be encouraged. It is recommended that the learning and development activities be completed on an optional basis, and not mandatory as proposed. There should not be a one size fits all approach to learning and development, it is recognised that people learn in different ways. It is recommended that a range of techniques should be made available for Councillors to undertake learning and development.
Proposed Legislation
28AC: Introducing the need for a Policy for continuing professional development <i>The General Manager must prepare a policy for Council adoption in relation to the continuing professional development of councillors within 6 months of an election.</i>
Council Feedback
It is unclear at this time what will be required from the proposed new Policy and is therefore difficult to comment on. There is, however, a level of apprehension that the General Manager is being required to prepare a professional development policy for the Councillors, who employs the General Manager.
Proposed Legislation
28Z: Changes to code of conduct complaint initial assessment <i>Introducing an ability for a code of conduct complaint, on an initial assessment, to be referred to the Director of Local Government if the General Manager reasonably considers that the complaint includes conduct that is capable of amounting to serious councillor misconduct. Introduces an ability to hear complaints jointly if they relate to the same contravention.</i>
Council Feedback
The proposed new clause is supported.
Proposed Legislation
28Z: Introducing provisions around serious councillor misconduct <i>If the Director determines that the conduct of the councillor is capable of amounting to serious councillor misconduct, determine that the Director will conduct an investigation into that conduct. If satisfied, the Director can refer the application to the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (TASCAT).</i>

Council Feedback

In the event of serious breaches of the code of conduct, and in the event of unlawful actions by a Councillor, Council is generally supportive of the ability for the Minister (following a finding from TASCAT) to suspend, dismiss and prohibit an individual from the role of Councillor.

Proposed Legislation**62: Introducing the requirement for a workplace development strategy.**

Council would be required to develop and maintain a workplace development strategy that addresses the immediate and long-term human resourcing requirements of the council.

Council Feedback

While the details are unclear, it is expected that this will require consultants to assist with development and establishment of the strategy, at cost to Council. This strategy may be complex to achieve, depending on the definition of a Workplace Development Strategy and the required contents. It is recommended that this requirement be on a non-compulsory basis, rather than mandatory as proposed. It is further strongly recommended that the terminology be changed to "Workforce" Development Strategy if the focus is on the human resource functions of Tasmanian councils, rather than all aspects of the "Workplace".

Proposed Legislation**70DA: Introducing the need for a community engagement strategy**

A council must establish and implement a strategy for engagement with the community when developing the council's plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its major activities. The scope and types of performance indicators and metrics that are to be used; and the methodologies and protocols for the measurement, reporting and presentation of performance data.

Council Feedback

While the details are unclear, it is expected that a consultant engagement would be required in order to develop a community engagement strategy, at the Council's cost. It is recommended that this requirement be on a non-compulsory basis, rather than mandatory as proposed.

Proposed Legislation**84A: Introducing the requirement for mandatory performance reporting**

The Minister may, by order, specify performance reporting requirements that are to apply in relation to councils.

Council Feedback

Our Council is very supportive of mandatory performance reporting, a position provided to the Tasmanian Government in previous submissions. The proposed legislation does not outline details of the proposed performance reporting required, it is therefore difficult to provide a fully considered position. While generally supportive, our Council strongly suggests that the Tasmanian Government must develop the reporting platform (at their cost), and council officers complete the data inputs as required.

Proposed Legislation

84B: Introducing the need for internal audit

The Minister may, by order, specify requirements that are to apply to councils in relation to the conduct of internal audits.

Council Feedback

The details of what is proposed by internal audit is unclear, this could take many forms. In principle Council is supportive of the introduction of an internal audit function, however recommend that this be on a non-compulsory basis rather than mandatory as proposed.

Proposed Legislation

122A: Introducing mandatory information in rates notices

The Minister, by order, may specify the information that, in addition to the information required under section 122(1), is to be included by the general manager in a rates notice.

Council Feedback

Many councils, including the Meander Valley Council, provide property owners with information on the cost areas of their council at the time of sending their rates notice. This is a difficult proposal to comment on without the relevant detail of what would be required. However, it is believed that this is a reactive requirement based on a small proportion of the Tasmanian community making representation to the State Government. It is likely that all councils would need to incur costs with their software consultants to achieve compliance, on this basis this new requirement is generally not supported. Our Council believes that the proposed Section 84A will achieve the desired performance comparison.

Proposed Legislation

214: Introducing the ability for temporary advisors to be put in at Council

*A person appointed to be a temporary advisor to a council.
Without limiting the situations in which the Director may make a recommendation under subsection (1), the Director may make a recommendation under that subsection if, in the Director's opinion, the council or councillor has failed to comply with a statutory requirement under this or any other Act or under subordinate legislation made under this or any other Act. There is evidence that suggests emerging governance or operational deficiencies at the council that, if not addressed, have the potential to negatively impact the effective delivery of the council's functions and services to the community; or the council has requested the appointment of a temporary advisor.*

Council Feedback

While our Council is generally supportive of the role of a temporary advisor, before the Tasmanian Government were to consider the severe steps of appointing a commissioner, we disagree that the threshold for appointment be "failed to comply with a statutory requirement under this or any other Act or under subordinate legislation made under this or any other Act". The benchmark for appointing a temporary advisor should be much higher, such as "a systematic pattern of failing to comply with statutory requirements", or words similar to that effect.

If you require any additional information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 0417 316 208 or by email wayne.johnston@mvc.tas.gov.au.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Johnston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wayne" and the last name "Johnston" clearly distinguishable.

Wayne Johnston

Mayor