

17 November 2025

Our ref.: Government Relations/State
Liaison; ss/ib

Doc. ID:

Office of Local Government
Department of Premier and Cabinet
PO Box 123
HOBART TAS 7001

Sent via email: lg.consultation@dpac.tas.gov.au

SUBMISSION ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (TARGETED REFORM) BILL 2025 – EXPOSURE DRAFT

Central Coast Council appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2025 – Exposure Draft. We commend the Tasmanian Government for progressing reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency across the local government sector.

The Council support the intent of the proposed amendments and broadly support their design, with some exceptions and suggested changes, as detailed below.

It is important to Council that public trust be preserved throughout this reform process. To counter possible misinterpretations, it is recommended that the reforms intent is communicated clearly, emphasising their role in supporting good governance rather than being perceived as punitive measures.

The additional administrative burden placed on councils by the proposed amendments is significant, particularly for smaller councils. For these reforms to be effective, the Tasmanian Government must support and resource the sector in the implementation and ongoing delivery of these reforms. Mandating and enforcing requirements for councillor and candidate learning and development must also be weighed against the community's right to determine its own representatives.

With reference to Central Coast's previous submission to the discussion paper in February 2025, Council has reviewed the proposed amendments and workshopped this submission on 10 November 2025, with formal consideration and endorsement given at its 17 November 2025 Council meeting.

Council's responses to the 10 proposed reforms are presented in the table below.

REFORM	COMMENT
1. Serious councillor misconduct provisions	<p>Council supports stronger provisions and sanctions for serious misconduct, including behaviour which materially and negatively impacts the reputation of a council.</p> <p>While serious misconduct is to be defined as a “serious or significant contravention of the code”, with criteria yet to be developed (by Order), it is expected that serious misconduct would relate to examples like: dishonesty (including fraud, theft), physical violence, gross negligence, wilful and/or repeated misconduct, bullying, sexual harassment, disclosure of confidential information, and failure to disclose a conflict of interest.</p> <p>Clear definitions (once developed) will reduce ambiguity and ensure consistent application across councils.</p> <p>It is noted the powers for referral to TASCAT are only for the Director of Local Government. This is appropriate and negates possible claims of politically motivated referrals if the powers rested with the Minister.</p>
2. Broadened performance improvement directions (PIDs)	<p>Expanding PIDs without clear, objective criteria risks arbitrary ministerial intervention. It could erode local autonomy, particularly if minor procedural errors trigger state oversight.</p> <p>It is recommended that PIDs are issued under clear criteria, and are issued with timeframes for suggested improvements; otherwise, it could create ambiguity about the urgency and expectation of compliance.</p>
3. Temporary advisors for councils	<p>The discretionary power afforded to the Minister for Local Government in appointing advisors could lead to inconsistent application and a potential politicisation of the advisory role, compromising the perceived impartiality and effectiveness of the reform. Ensuring that the focus remains on empowering councils rather than creating a reliance on external oversight is crucial for achieving sustainable governance improvements.</p> <p>It is recommended that the reform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and communicate clear guidelines that define the scope of the advisor's role, ensuring that it is understood as advisory rather than authoritative. This would clarify their responsibilities and help maintain council autonomy. • Implement a consultative process involving councils when appointing advisors. This could include input from council members and staff to ensure that the advisor's expertise aligns with the council's specific needs. • Encourage councils to participate in training and development programs to strengthen their governance capabilities. This can help build confidence

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	<p>among council members and staff while minimising the perceived need for external intervention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of advisor interventions on council operations. Regular feedback loops can help refine the process and ensure that the advisors' contributions are effective and constructive. • Clearly outline the limitations of the advisors' authority to prevent potential overreach. To avoid conflicts, this should be framed within the context of existing governance structures. <p>By addressing these recommendations, the reform may be better received by councils and more effectively contribute to improved governance outcomes</p>
<p>4. Mandatory councillor learning and development</p>	<p>The intent of the proposed reform is supported. However, the following recommendations are made to ensure its effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training should sit outside the responsibility of individual councils to ensure consistency. • Consider a range of formats for delivery, such as online courses, workshops, and webinars, to accommodate different learning styles and schedules. This flexibility would help councillors fit training into their busy lives and recognises that the role of a councillor is not full-time, with councillors often also having other employment or business interests. • Create mechanisms for councillors to provide feedback on training programs and assess their effectiveness. This feedback loop could lead to continuous improvements and adjustments to the training content and delivery methods. • Councillors have diverse backgrounds and experience. Allow for recognition of prior learning and experience so that councillors with relevant qualifications or experience can be exempted from certain training requirements. This approach respects the knowledge that experienced councillors already possess. <p>By implementing these recommendations, the concerns around the reform can be effectively addressed, ensuring that mandatory training for councillors is beneficial, relevant, and supportive of their diverse needs.</p> <p>In regard to mandatory pre-election education (completion of an information session) also planned to be introduced through the new Local Government Elections Bill, care must be taken to ensure this is not prohibitive to diverse representation, limiting the public's right to self-governance.</p>

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5. Role statement and Local Government Charter	<p>Embedding a charter clarifies roles and may strengthen collaboration between state and local government. It also has the capacity to improve community understanding of council functions.</p> <p>However, councils need flexibility and discretion when progressing initiatives for their communities. An overly prescriptive charter that mandates the role of councils could hinder opportunities. Councils often step in to provide services where there is market failure, for example. A degree of flexibility is required within any charter to enable each council to respond to the unique needs of their community. It is recommended that the core functions of councils be defined and then also identify principles for when councils might move into areas outside the defined scope.</p> <p>A well-articulated framework for ongoing collaboration would also be beneficial and would allow local councils to engage in meaningful partnerships with state entities to ensure a unified approach to regional development, land use planning, climate change adaptation, and emergency preparedness.</p>
6. Improved strategic planning and reporting framework	<p>The proposed reform represents steps towards a more responsive and effective local government sector – aligning strategic plans with community wellbeing priorities makes planning more meaningful and evidence-based.</p> <p>Resourcing is likely to be a practical challenge for implementing the proposed reforms. Some councils are likely to have resourcing gaps related to staffing, technology, and budget to implement the reform effectively. It is recommended that capacity-building measures be built into the reform, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement training programs for council staff and elected officials focusing on community engagement strategies, strategic planning, and data analysis. This can build the necessary skills to navigate the new requirements and enhance overall capability. • Support the reform through the provision of detailed guidelines and templates for community engagement plans and workforce development plans. These resources can provide a clear framework for councils to follow, simplifying the planning process and ensuring consistency across the sector. • Foster collaboration among councils to share best practices, lessons learned, and tools. Establishing networks or partnerships can facilitate knowledge exchange and help councils learn from one another’s experiences. LG Professionals could be engaged to facilitate this.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear metrics to evaluate the success of community wellbeing initiatives. Identifying specific indicators will help councils track progress and assess outcomes. <p>These recommendations can help councils navigate the practical challenges of implementing the reforms.</p> <p>It is noted that Central Coast has recently developed a new community engagement plan and is currently developing a workforce plan.</p>
7. Consistency in data collection and reporting	<p>Improved data collection and statewide community oversight should enable the state to identify systemic performance or capacity issues more effectively, with the proviso that one-size-fits-all metrics have limitations across diverse local government areas and smaller councils may face prohibitive administrative costs.</p> <p>One key aspect of this reform should include qualitative interpretive analysis alongside quantitative metrics. This approach will not only provide a more nuanced understanding of council performance but also empower communities to engage meaningfully with the data.</p> <p>By translating raw numbers into actionable insights, the risk of misinterpretation is reduced, providing a clearer understanding of performance. The proposed reform represents a valuable opportunity to strengthen local government performance monitoring.</p>
8. Enhanced transparency of information in council rates notices	<p>It should be noted that the proposed nature of the disclosures is usually best provided in practice alongside the rates notice rather than on the rates notice itself.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that the reform supports greater transparency, however, in practice, it will result in increased rating enquiries and potentially greater negative sentiment towards the sector.</p> <p>Flexibility in messaging and communications with ratepayers is required each year. Rating policy and valuation changes are complex to explain and understand. Councils are best placed to determine the most relevant information to assist ratepayer understanding. They are also motivated to do so to reduce the impact on frontline staff.</p> <p>Not all changes in rate notices arise from price changes alone. The communication approach may vary from one year to the next depending on valuation cycles, movements and their associated impacts, and rating policy changes.</p>

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	Rate changes over a five-year period would be better disclosed and explained in council rating strategies and/or Financial Management Strategies.
9. Mandated Internal Audit	<p>While the success of the reform will depend on its implementation and the commitment of councils to prioritise internal audits, it has the potential to improve governance, compliance, and accountability across councils.</p> <p>The principle of enhanced internal audit is supported, however greater definition of how and when these will be required must be understood – and they may present prohibitive costs to smaller councils.</p>
10. Miscellaneous amendments	<p>The remote attendance reform improves confidentiality and security for remote meetings, ensuring privacy and procedural integrity – noting the importance of restricted this to genuine reasons such as illness or caregiving.</p> <p>Streamlined Code of Conduct processes reduce delays and enhance transparency by ending confidentiality once a determination is made.</p>

Council recognises the importance of this reform process in strengthening governance and community confidence in local government operations. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Tasmanian Government and the Office of Local Government as these reforms are finalised.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Searle
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Copy to LGAT – reception@lgat.tas.gov.au