

Minutes – PLGC Meeting – 12 December 2024

Premier's Reception Room, Level 11 Executive Building, 15 Murray St, Hobart.
2:00pm - 4:00pm

PLGC Members	
Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP	Premier
Hon Kerry Vincent MLC (Chair)	Minister for Local Government
Mayor Mick Tucker	President, Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) General Management Committee (GMC) Break O'Day Council
Mayor Paula Wriedt	Vice President, LGAT GMC Kingborough Council
Mayor Cheryl Fuller	Central Coast Council
Mayor Mary Duniam	Waratah-Wynyard Council
Mayor Mary Knowles	Northern Midlands Council
Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds	Hobart City Council
Mayor Wayne Johnston	Meander Valley Council
PLGC Officials	
Matthew Atkins	General Manager, Devonport City Council
Ian Nelson	General Manager, Clarence City Council
Des Jennings	General Manager, Northern Midlands Council
Dion Lester	Chief Executive Officer, LGAT
Ben Morris	Policy Director, LGAT
Michael Mogridge	A/Executive Director, Office of Local Government (OLG), DPAC
Secretariat	
Mel Brown	A/Director, Local Government Reform, OLG
Cameron Valentine	Policy Analyst, OLG
Ministerial support	
Mikayla Fuller	Adviser to Minister Vincent

Observers	
Luke Murphy-Gregory	Assistant Director, OLG
Sulfi Newbold	Principal Policy Analyst, OLG

Apologies:

- Mayor Leigh Gray, Brighton Council
- Mat Healey, A/Deputy Secretary, Premier's Implementation and Delivery, DPAC

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Update

Minister Vincent welcomed members to the 12 December PLGC Meeting, his first as Minister for Local Government. The Minister signalled his intent to reset parameters for consultation with local government, establishing both a strong personal channel of communication with LGAT and ensuring reciprocity in the relationship between the sector and State Government. The Minister also indicated a willingness to appear at LGAT General Management Committee (GMC) meetings on request or as available to better support those channels of communication and collaboration.

Mayor Tucker welcomed the new Minister to the role and communicated his keenness to work with the Tasmanian Government in good faith to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes, while still holding the Government to account in his capacity as chief advocate for the sector. Both the Minister and LGAT noted they look forward to a new era of collaboration.

Agenda Item 2 - Draft Minutes – PLGC Meeting 8 December 2023

Mayor Tucker requested that the minutes from the previous meeting be amended to better reflect the veracity of the sector's disappointment with the consultation process regarding previously proposed changes to the State Fire Levy. It was agreed that the minutes would be amended and recirculated for endorsement out of session.

The remainder of the December 2023 PLGC minutes were accepted.

<p>Action: Amend minutes from previous meeting to reflect robustness of discussions around Fire Levy.</p>
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Agenda Item 3 - Update on the Local Government Strategic Reform Program 2024-2026

Mike Mogridge, Director OLG, gave a presentation on the Local Government Priority Reform Program 2024-2026, noting the Government's plan to release a discussion paper on 13 December 2024. The presentation provided an overview of key priorities, engagement expectations and timeframes.

Members discussed the discussion paper consultation period, noting that the end of February deadline would be difficult for the sector due to the lack of Council meetings and workshops, and staff leave arrangements over the Christmas and

January period. It was agreed that the consultation window would be extended to the 21 March 2025.

Action: Extend consultation on Amendment Bill discussion paper to 21 March 2025.

During discussion on the reforms, members raised several issues and concerns for further consideration relating to remote meeting attendance, elections reform, meeting procedures, and councillor remuneration. Specifically –

- Remote meeting attendance reforms may result in some unintended consequences, including:
 - Creating unintended costs to duplicate infrastructure for livestreaming and dial in.
 - Ensuring prescribed circumstances permitting remote attendance are robust to ensure it only occurs in instances of genuine need (and that physical attendance remains the primary and favoured form of meeting attendance)
 - Managing the attendant security and confidentiality risks of remote attendance via phone or internet (e.g. unauthorised third parties listening or observing).
- Concerns were raised around the prospect of changing the method for electing the position to Deputy Mayor to ‘around the table’, noting potential issues such as factionalism. It was noted that that Tasmania is the only jurisdiction where the Deputy Mayor is elected by popular vote, and that this option is being considered to offset the increasing costs of council elections.
- Mayor Wreidt noted the increased utilisation of council premises as ballot return centres. With the advent of compulsory voting in 2022, this led to an increase in abuse directed at council staff from people returning their ballots, demonstrating a need for better community wide communication to electors supporting any changes to voting procedures.
- In relation to meeting procedures, Mayor Wreidt suggested that the Government consider including greater rigour around conduct and record keeping for council workshops in the Meeting Procedures Regulations.
- Members also queried if paying councillors superannuation would be considered as part of the proposed amendments to the Regulations. Mr Mogridge noted that in 2004 a 9 per cent increase to allowances was introduced to factor in the prevailing compulsory employee superannuation contribution amount, and in recognition that councillors do not receive superannuation. Mr Mogridge noted the Government will review allowances under the existing methodology when it re-makes the General Regulations and is committed to a wholesale review of councillor allowances and numbers in 2026, consistent with Future of Local Government Review recommendations.

It was noted that all issues discussed would be further considered by the Government in developing the reforms, and that the consultation period would provide the opportunity to raise them in a more formal capacity.

Agenda Item 4 - Supporting Effective Local Government Consultation

The Premier arrived at the start of this item at 3pm.

Mayor Tucker spoke to the item, noting the sector's ongoing frustration with the Tasmanian Government's approach to engaging with the sector regarding legislative and policy reform impacting councils and communities. Mayor Tucker drew parallels between the process surrounding proposed changes to the Fire Service Levy and the more recent proposal to introduce the Development Assessment Panel (DAP) legislation, stating his firm view that neither provided adequate opportunity for the sector to raise – and for the Government to respond to – legitimate concerns with legislative design and implementation.

Cr Wreidt noted, in respect of the DAP legislation, that the Greater Hobart Councils had been open to potential reform but believed the legislation as presented was technically deficient and was disappointed that these concerns had seen those councils presented in media commentary from the Government as 'anti-reform'.

Mr Lester noted that consistent and meaningful engagement approaches need to be embedded across agencies. Mr Lester acknowledged there are exemplars of engagement occurring currently, which are built on strong, ongoing relationships yielding positive outcomes (particularly when it comes to State Roads), but there are equally examples where consultation can appear token or insufficient. He noted further that the previously observed 'standard' five-week period for consultation with the sector is insufficient, particularly where major policy or legislative changes are proposed which require the careful consideration by elected members of council's position.

It was agreed that there needs to be a renewed framework for better and more effective engagement and consultation between the State and local government. Mr Lester noted that the proposed Charter presents a long-term opportunity to enshrine consultation principles and approaches, but will take time to deliver. Recognising this, members agreed that LGAT and OLG will progress the development of an interim consultation agreement.

Action: LGAT and OLG to progress an interim consultation agreement between the sector and State Government.

Item 5 – Establishment of the Learning and Development Framework and ongoing management

The Minister introduced the item before passing to Mr Mogridge to speak to the paper. The Minister noted that a significant amount of work has gone into the development of the framework over the past few years, recognising the input of both OLG and the Governance Group. It was proposed for discussion that, now that the

framework has been established, that the sector is best placed to assume custodianship of the framework.

Mayor Johnston observed that some councillors refuse to participate in training due to State and Federal politicians not being subject to same requirements. The Minister noted that significant education and training is required in State Politics. Members noted that the contemporary role of a councillor has changed and is now highly technical and professional. There needs to be a 'lifting of the bar' at all levels of politics for our community.

Members noted and accepted the need for a sustainable model for the future of the framework. LGAT noted that as the peak body for the sector it believes it is best placed to take carriage of the framework, however it holds reservations including concerns regarding the optics of LGAT having to seek revenue from councils to sustain the framework, particularly where there are mixed views across the sector as to its perceived utility and value. Members suggested that in order to mitigate this, the State Government could provide ongoing funding to support the mandatory components of the framework.

It was determined that OLG will be working with LGAT to facilitate the full transition of administrative and financial responsibility by 30 June 2025, and that the Minister will publish a statement in the first quarter of 2025 signalling the intent to transfer arrangements.

Action: LGAT and OLG to progress the transition of administrative and financial responsibility of the Learning and Development Framework to LGAT.

Agenda Item 6 - Other Business

PLGC Meetings in 2025

Members discussed PLGC meeting frequency, with members confirming they are happy to continue to meet bi-annually, and noting the Minister will also attend LGAT GMC when possible. Dates for 2025's PLGC meetings will be confirmed early in the New Year.

Action: Circulate 2025 PLGC dates early next year.

Mayor Tucker acknowledged ongoing concerns with small pockets of poor elected member behaviour, and the need to have mechanisms which can proactively prevent misconduct from disrupting and damaging councils. It was noted that reducing councillor numbers may have the potential to lift improve capability overall. The review of councillor allowances and numbers to be undertaken after 2026 provides a good opportunity to consider this issue and whether better governance outcomes might be achieved through providing higher levels of remuneration to a smaller number of elected members.

Planning

Mr Lester noted LGAT has convened a group of experts to troubleshoot planning issues, and correspondence outlining issues will be sent to the Department of State

Growth. The Minister also noted that his Office has engaged with the Office of the Minister for Planning in relation to key issues.

Closing Remarks

The Premier and Minister thanked members for the honesty of discussions today on behalf of LGAT, with particular thanks given to the Acting Director of Local Government, Mr Mogridge, for his commitment and the work delivered by the OLG.

The Premier closed the meeting noting the Government is committed to resetting the relationship with the sector going into 2025, and recognising that the current Minister is uniquely placed to do that, given his experience and background in the sector.

Meeting closed at 4pm.

Actions arising

Action	Status
Amend minutes from previous meeting to reflect robustness of discussions around Fire Levy.	Complete
Extend consultation on Amendment Bill discussion paper to 21 March 2025.	Complete
LGAT and OLG to progress an interim consultation agreement between the sector and State Government.	In progress
LGAT and OLG to progress the transition of administrative and financial responsibility of the Learning and Development Framework to LGAT.	In progress
Circulate 2025 PLGC dates early next year.	In progress