

Local Government Election Bill Submission

Cr Anne-Marie Loader, 31/03/2025

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Discussion Paper regarding possible reforms in the way local government elections are managed. This submission will focus on a few key issues raised in the discussion paper. The comments below are made as an individual councillor.

Election Format:

During the 2022 Local Government election campaign, I noticed that for some voters, the mailout of ballot papers was slow. I agree with Scenario B (page 10, Discussion Paper: Local Government Electoral Bill). This hybrid model creates greater flexibility and, more importantly, certainty: each voter can vote in a convenient and timely manner. A hybrid model is particularly valuable for voters who live outside urban areas. More issuing places, as well as telephone voting, mean that fully participating in the election is available for all.

Deputy Mayor Position:

Direct elections ensure that voters have a full say in who takes on the role of deputy mayor. It is necessary, however, to objectively examine the role of deputy mayor. A review of the Local Government Act 1993 27 (1A) states that the deputy mayor's main function is to act for the mayor in their absence. This position doesn't appear to have any more responsibility than a councillor apart from this. It would be straightforward enough to appoint a councillor to act for the mayor in times of absence without the role of deputy mayor in the mix. That said, I don't believe there has been sufficient consultation to bring this change for the next Local Government Elections in 2026. Should this change be made, I don't agree that the deputy mayor allowance should be redistributed to the councillors. I do agree that a councillor delegated to act as mayor should receive an appropriate allowance for the period.

Local Government Technical Reforms:

Reform 5: I support increasing the number of elector signatures required to support a notice of nomination to the lesser of 30 or one percent of the number of electors in the municipal area. A candidate should show that they have support and are serious about standing. The two-stage nomination process will make it fair and provide serious candidates time to collect signatures.

Reform 10: Prior to the 2022 Local Government Election, I completed the online modules for candidates. They were good, but the platform for learning was clunky and difficult to navigate. Firstly, if this becomes mandatory, the Learning to Lead platform needs reviewing. I know that not all councillors have completed the Learning to Lead material; if that is the case and this becomes law, will they be required to complete the training? It would seem fair that they do. Reform 10 does not indicate exactly what the commitment will be for candidates to undertake this training or the timeframes for availability and completion. While I think this is a good idea because it will help potential candidates understand the requirements of the role, it is difficult to support it due to the lack of detail in the Discussion Paper. If the training was to become available for a 12 to 18 month period prior to an election, with completion prior to the nominations opening, that would be reasonable. A lesser timeframe could become a pressure point and put potential candidates off standing.

Reform 12: I don't support allowing the Director of Local Government to provide a statement with candidate information. It's important to keep candidate information separate from council performance data to ensure voters make unbiased decisions.

Reform 13: I don't support requiring the Tasmanian Electoral Commission to publish party endorsements in the candidate information booklet and on ballot papers. This could unfairly highlight party affiliations and influence voters, undermining the neutrality of local government elections. Candidates can already declare party endorsements in their statements, so this measure is unnecessary. It's important to keep the election process fair and unbiased.

Reform 19: In addition to what's proposed with this reform, I question the need for candidates to publish their address on all material. This can put potential candidates off standing because of privacy concerns. Candidates associated with political parties often use office addresses; independents usually have no alternative but to provide their home address. I would like to see a system where the full address of a candidate is recorded with the TEC, but only their town name included on advertising.

I look forward to being able to comment on the draft legislation when it is available.

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