



# Becoming a Councillor

**A Guide For  
Prospective  
Councillors**

# About this Guide

## Acknowledgements

This guide has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) to assist those standing as candidates in Local Government elections.

It is based on a similar guide prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria and LGAT wishes to thank MAV for generously allowing use of 'Citizen to Councillor' as the base for the Tasmanian guide.

LGAT is the voice of Local Government to other governments, interested stakeholders and the wider community. LGAT works to protect the interests and rights of councils, to promote the efficient operation of Local Government and to foster strategic and beneficial relationships. LGAT provides specialist services to its member councils including policy and strategic support, information and learning for Local Government elected members and officers and procurement of employee relations and insurance services.

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# Introduction

Councillors, elected by residents and ratepayers, have an exciting and challenging role to fulfill. They must be in touch with their community and balance the needs of the community within a framework of financial accountability. The work of councillors is varied and occurs within a highly political environment.

Standing for election provides you with a great opportunity to influence the future direction of the local community and help those who require support. It can be daunting and time consuming, but also rewarding. Councils are complex and vibrant organisations that require talented and dedicated individuals to participate in making the decisions that count.

One of the most challenging aspects of this work is that councillors are required to make decisions on a regular basis that affect peoples' lives to varying degrees. Some of these decisions will not be popular with all constituents. It is important that councillors can successfully communicate to their constituents the council's need to pursue the long-term objectives and vision of council.

This guide has been prepared to assist those considering standing as candidates to understand the purpose of Local Government, what is expected of a councillor, and the process for getting elected to council.

As well as using this guide, another way to find out about life as a councillor is to attend council meetings to get a feel for the issues, the values and the level of debate. Talking to local councillors will also provide an insight into their experiences.

# Section 1: About Local Government

**Local Government In Tasmania**  
**Legislative Framework**  
**Council Functions and Powers**  
**Local Government Funding Sources**

## Local Government in Tasmania

Councils have a significant impact on the lives of all Tasmanians, enabling the economic, social and cultural development of the community, supporting individuals and groups, and providing a wide range of services for the wellbeing of the community. Councils are complex businesses that provide and maintain a wide diversity of public buildings, amenities and services.

As well as implementing legislative responsibilities, policies and programs set by the Commonwealth and State Governments, councils can provide a range of discretionary services in response to local community needs. Each municipal area is distinct, so while there will be some common services across Local Government, there is also a degree of diversity. The range of services includes:

- road construction and maintenance
- street lighting
- rubbish collection
- stormwater drainage
- some traffic or parking regulations
- planning and building services
- public health such as inspecting cafes, shops and manufacturing premises to check for hygienic conditions
- sporting ovals, parks and public reserves
- public swimming pools
- community halls
- community arts facilities
- some community services such as child care, immunisation services, services for young people and seniors and health promotion
- community festivals and events
- economic development and tourism.

In order to provide such a diverse range of services, councils in Tasmania employ over 4,000 people with a wide range of skills.

## Legislative Framework

[The Local Government Act 1993](#) (the Act) is the principal piece of legislation that establishes the powers and functions of Tasmanian councils. Originally passed by the Tasmanian Parliament in 1993, it has been regularly reviewed and amended, most recently in 2013.

There are also two key sets of regulations relating to the Act:

- [Local Government \(General\) Regulations 2005](#)
- [Local Government \(Meeting Procedures\) Regulations 2005](#)

The Minister has the power to make Orders under Act in relation to long-term financial and asset management of councils and in early 2014 three Orders came into being:

- [The Local Government \(Content of Plans and Strategies\) Order 2014](#)
- [The Local Government \(Audit Panels \)Order 2014](#)
- [The Local Government \(Management Indicators\) Order 2014](#)

Under the Act, councils can make by-laws in relation to their functions and powers under any legislation. More information about by-laws can be obtained from the Local Government Division website at [www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd).

As well as the *Local Government Act 1993*, there are many other pieces of Tasmanian legislation that affect the operation and activities of councils, including:

- [Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993](#)
- [Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994](#)
- [Resource Management and Planning and Appeal Tribunal Act 1993](#)
- [Public Health Act 1997](#)
- [Building Act 2000](#)
- [Right to Information Act 2009](#)

Tasmanian legislation can be accessed online at [www.thelaw.tas.gov.au](http://www.thelaw.tas.gov.au).

## Council Functions and Powers

A council is a body corporate, created under the Act, and is responsible for its municipal area. Section 20 of the Act sets out the following broad functions of councils:

- to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community
- to represent and promote the interests of the community
- to provide for the peace, order and good government of the municipal area.

Councils are given the power to do anything necessary or convenient to perform their functions, either within or outside the municipal area.

Councils are elected to provide leadership for, and the good governance of, the municipal area. In performing their functions, councils are required to consult, involve and be accountable to the community. They must take into account the diverse needs of the local community in their decision-making, setting and monitoring strategic objectives and in ensuring resources are managed in a responsible manner.

The responsibilities of councils include:

- planning for and providing services, facilities and infrastructure for the community;
- undertaking strategic land-use planning for the municipal area;
- making and enforcing by-laws;
- raising revenue to enable council to perform its functions; and
- advocating proposals that are in the best interests of the community, now and in the future.

## Local Government Funding Sources

Local Government in Tasmania raises its revenue from a range of sources.

From within the Municipality:

- rates and charges on property;
- fees, fines and charges (e.g. swimming pool entry fees, waste depot fees, planning permit fees, parking fees and fines); and
- borrowings (e.g. to pay for large infrastructure projects), asset sales, donations, contributions, reimbursements and interest earned.

The Australian Government provides two main types of grants to Local Government:

- untied Financial Assistance Grants (FAGS), which may be spent on any purpose. These are provided annually to local councils through the State Grants Commission, which is responsible for making annual recommendations to the State Treasurer about the distribution of FAGS to councils;
- specific purpose grants, which are restricted to particular types of expenditure eg. road funding.

The State Government may make one-off grants to councils for specific projects and programs.

The proportion from each funding source varies from council to council.

## **Section 2: The role of a Councillor**

**Legislative Functions of Councillors**  
**Role of the Mayor**  
**Councillor Activities**  
**Financial Entitlements**  
**Rewards and Benefits**  
**Ceasing to be a Councillor**

A councillor's role is exciting, diverse and demanding. Councillors play a vital leadership role, working together to create and implement their community's vision, strategic direction and the values within which they operate.

## Legislative Functions of Councillors

Section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1993* sets out the functions of councillors as individuals and in their collective role as the council. It is important to understand that individual councillors have no decision-making power. This lies with the collective group, which is the Council. When performing his or her functions, a councillor is to accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council.

The functions of individual councillors are to:

- represent the community;
- act in the best interests of the community;
- facilitate communications with the community;
- participate in the activities of council; and
- undertake duties and responsibilities as authorised by council.

The functions of councillors acting collectively as the council are to:

- develop and monitor the implementation of strategic plans and budgets;
- determine and monitor the application of policies, plans and programs for:
  - the efficient and effective provision of services and facilities
  - the efficient and effective management of assets
  - the fair and equitable treatment of council employees ;
- facilitate and encourage the planning and development of the municipal area in the best interests of the community;
- appoint and monitor the performance of the General Manager;
- determine and review the council's resource allocation and expenditure activities; and
- monitor the manner in which services are provided by the council.

The implementation of council decisions and the day to day running of the council is the responsibility of the General Manager, whose responsibilities are set out in the Act.

## Role of the Mayor

The Mayor is popularly elected for a four-year term at each election and is tasked with:

- acting as community leader;
- chairing council meetings;
- acting as spokesperson for the council, responding to the media and undertaking ceremonial duties;
- liaising with the General Manager on council activities; and
- overseeing and advising councillors in the performance of their responsibilities.

The Deputy Mayor acts in the position of the Mayor in the Mayor's absence or if authorised in writing to do so by the Mayor.

## Councillor Activities

When performing their functions, both as individuals and in their collective role as the Council, councillors are required to participate in a wide variety of activities. Some of these key activities are described in detail below.

### Council Meetings

Councils' key decisions are made at council meetings which councillors are required to attend. Ordinary meetings are held at least monthly. If a councillor is absent from three consecutive meetings without leave the office becomes vacant. Special meetings may be called to address business that cannot be postponed. Some councils also have a committee structure - if a councillor is appointed to a council committee (e.g. planning, works, finance) they must expect to attend additional meetings above the ordinary council meetings.

Prior to full council and committee meetings councillors receive the agenda and relevant reports to read and consider. The reports provide background information and advice on the issue from senior specialist council officers. Agendas and officers' reports are essential reading for effective council debate and constructive in decision-making.

These papers can be lengthy and sufficient preparation time is needed prior to each meeting.

At the meetings councillors debate the issues and make considered decisions in the best interests of the community. Elected members have an equal voice in council decisions, each councillor having one vote.

The decision-making processes of the council must be open, accessible and transparent except in limited circumstances when confidentiality is required. *The Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations* govern the conduct of council meetings. Any meeting of a council must be open to members of the public, unless discussion relates to certain matters specified in the Regulations.

Councils may hold workshops for the purpose of conducting in-depth discussion of certain topics. Formal decisions are not made at workshops but these sessions provide the time needed to explore important matters in detail.

### **Council Plans and Annual Reporting**

Councils must produce several important planning and reporting documents as prescribed in the Act, including the Strategic Plan, an Annual Plan, an Annual Report, a Long-Term Financial Plan and Long-Term Strategic Asset Management Plan as well as Financial Management Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Asset Management Policy. Developing and adopting these is the responsibility of councillors and enables them to influence the strategic direction of the council.

The Strategic Plan sets out the council's strategic objectives for a ten year period and is supported by the Long Term Financial and Strategic Asset Management Plans. These documents must be reviewed every four years in line with the election cycle. In preparing or updating the Strategic Plans, councils are required to consult with their communities.

The Annual Plan includes a statement about how the council is to meet the goals and objectives of the strategic plan and a summary of revenue and expenditure estimates for that financial year.

Once adopted by council, these documents are available for inspection by the public and are submitted to the Director of Local Government.

Each year the council must publish an annual report, which provides feedback on the achievements and activities of the council. The Act specifies certain matters that must be covered in the report. There is also a requirement for councils to report on specified financial and asset management sustainability indicators in their financial statements.

### **Financial Management**

Financial management is the decision-making process and control procedures associated with acquiring and sustainably using funds necessary for council operations.

Councillors will be involved in:

- budgeting (including setting of rates and charges);
- long-term financial planning (including strategic asset management planning);  
and
- financial reporting.

The council is responsible for adopting estimates of revenue and expenditure prepared by the General Manager. Councils seek to make the most out of the revenue available. The budget process involves setting priorities and allocating funds to achieve the strategic objectives of the Council.

Councillors are also involved in monitoring spending against budget allocations and the achievement of council objectives. This is achieved by ensuring the financial activities of council are underpinned by appropriate plans and strategies which are linked to its strategic, asset management and annual plans.

## **Land Use Planning and Development Approvals**

Under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993 (LUPAA)* a council is defined as a 'planning authority', with responsibility to:

- prepare and administer planning schemes;
- certify amendments to planning schemes;
- assess and approve applications for planning permits for the use and development of land; and
- enforce planning scheme provisions and permit conditions.

A councillor's role in forming planning schemes and deciding planning applications can be challenging and time consuming. Councillors are often faced with having to decide contentious development proposals after considering opposing viewpoints from ratepayers, developers and other parties.

Issues requiring council's consideration when deciding applications include objections and submissions received by the council as well as environmental issues, visual amenity considerations, impact of a development on neighbourhood character, economic and social considerations.

Councillors don't have to be professional planners to respond to planning challenges and community concerns. However, a basic understanding of the planning system is essential. As members of planning authorities, councillors must act with procedural fairness and should not make public declarations of their views on particular developments until all the information and reports have been assessed. Often the best approach is to refer technical questions to the council planner.

There are likely to be occasions when there is no option but to approve developments that are consistent with the planning scheme even though there is considerable dissatisfaction in the community. In such situations it is important to remember that councillors are fulfilling a role and a responsibility under *LUPAA* which is distinct from their role as elected members under the *Local Government Act 1993*. Councillors must make planning decisions impartially and consistent with the planning scheme and not be swayed by the urgings of community members to vote a certain way.

Council's decisions can be appealed to the Resource Management Planning and Appeals Tribunal (RMPAT).

As councils may have to make large numbers of planning decisions each year, some of their decision-making responsibilities may be delegated to council officers.

A Guide to the Resource Management and Planning System, which outlines the processes and instruments that make up Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System including *LUPAA*, can be found at [www.planning.tas.gov.au](http://www.planning.tas.gov.au).

### **General Manager Appointment and Performance Review**

Councils are responsible for the appointment, negotiation of contractual obligations and reviewing the performance, of the General Manager. Contracts of employment<sup>1</sup> are for a maximum five years duration.

The General Manager has the following functions under the Act:

- to implement the policies, plans and programs of the council;
- to implement the decisions of the council;
- to be responsible for the day-to-day operations and affairs of the council;
- to provide advice and reports to the council on the exercise and performance of its powers and functions and any other matter requested by the council;
- to assist the council in the preparation of the strategic plan, annual plan, annual report and assessment of the council's performance against the plans;
- to coordinate proposals for the development of objectives, policies and programs for the consideration of the council;
- to liaise with the Mayor on the affairs of the council and the performance of its functions;
- to manage the resources and assets of the council; and
- to perform any other function the council decides.

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<sup>1</sup> LGAT with Local Government Managers Australia (Tasmania) have developed a template contract for General Managers for use by member councils.

When a council has decided its direction, strategy and policies it delegates authority to the General Manager for implementing these decisions and managing day-to-day operations. This involves responsibility for the management of the council's resources and assets.

In order to assess the performance of the General Manager council determines systems for monitoring performance, including specifying performance goals, key performance indicators and evaluation methods in the General Manager's contract of employment.

### **Community Involvement and Accountability**

As individuals, councillors are accountable to their community and must respond to the needs of voters and advocate on their behalf. Many citizens who become councillors have already had a high level of involvement in community organisations and events. Attending community meetings, gauging community values and needs, as well as being available and approachable are part of being a councillor.

Councillors, both individually and collectively, are accountable to their community. They have a responsibility to respond to requests for information, be prepared to explain the reasons for their own or the council's actions, and defend council proposals.

### **Advocacy**

Councils often represent and advocate on behalf of residents and community agencies on key issues that affect the wellbeing of their local area. This includes meeting with other levels of governments, statutory bodies, businesses and regional interest groups.

Councillors play an important role in the decision-making processes that guide and govern the strategic vision and directions for the municipal area.

Councillors need to balance their obligation to represent the interests of their constituents and to make decisions that will benefit ALL the community.

## Financial Entitlements

Councillors are not employees of their council and do not receive employment benefits such as a salary and leave entitlements. Councillors are entitled to an annual allowance. Allowances are reviewed every four years through an independent process and subject to annual indexation, in accordance with Regulation 42 of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2005*.

Issues such as municipal population and council revenue are taken into account in establishing the level of councillor allowances.

Allowances to a Mayor or Deputy Mayor are paid in addition to councillor allowances.

Councils are required to develop a policy in relation to the payment of expenses incurred by councillors in carrying out their functions. A councillor is also entitled to be reimbursed for reasonable expenses in relation to –

- telephone rental and telephone calls;
- travelling;
- care of any child of the councillor; and
- any other expenses the council determines appropriate.

Councils may also decide to provide support services, facilities and equipment on loan to a councillor.

Income equivalent to a councillor's allowance will need to be included in their taxation return. Councillors can decline to receive an allowance, in which case no tax would arise. Superannuation contributions to a complying fund do not represent assessable income. Councillors are also entitled to deduct expenses relevant to their election costs and activities as a councillor. The Australian Taxation Office sets limits for election expenses that can be deducted from a candidate's income tax.

Councillors should seek information on taxation of councillor allowances and candidate expenses from an accountant or the ATO on 13 28 61.

## Rewards and Benefits

There are many rewards for serving your local community. It is an important and challenging role and provides one of the most direct means an individual can influence the decisions that affect their local area.

### **Satisfaction in Serving the Community**

Councillors, by virtue of their elected role, have influence and involvement in the planning and development of their local environment. They like getting a better deal for their community. They value being in or close to the places where decisions are made. Councillors have differing interests, motivations and skills. They will make different contributions to the council and will draw their own levels of satisfaction from the outcomes.

### **Personal Enrichment**

Citizens elected as councillors bring with them a wide range of employment, educational, community and general life experiences. Through full participation in Local Government, councillors learn about democratic processes, consultation processes at a formal and informal level, and to be responsible and accountable for what they do. To see the development and implementation of programs they have initiated or been involved with is rewarding.

### **Professional Development**

Councils are expected to support new councillors by offering professional development programs. Councillors, through a combination of on-the-job experience and professional development programs, will gain knowledge and skills in areas which help them perform effectively – for example, in budgeting, corporate planning, meeting procedures, advocacy, negotiation and media. Professional development is voluntary but strongly encouraged and accessible.

## Ceasing to be a Councillor

The office of a councillor becomes vacant if a councillor –

- dies;
- resigns in writing to the General Manager;
- is absent without leave from 3 consecutive ordinary meetings of the council;
- is removed or dismissed from office under the Act;
- becomes a paid employee of the council; or
- is no longer eligible to nominate as a candidate under the Act.

# **Section 3: Fulfilling the Role of a Councillor**

**Declaration of Office**  
**Disclosures of Interest**  
**Codes of Conduct**  
**Access to Information**  
**Time Commitment**  
**Working with the General Manager and Staff**  
**Working with other Councillors**  
**Working with the Community**  
**Helpful Skills**

## Declaration of Office

Once elected, a councillor is required to make a declaration of office to carry out the functions and exercise the powers of the office to the best of their ability and in accordance with the law.

The declaration is to be acknowledged by the council and noted in the minutes.

## Disclosures of Interest

### **Pecuniary Interests**

If a councillor, or a close associate of a councillor, has a pecuniary interest in a matter before a council or committee, a number of requirements must be complied with under the Act.

A pecuniary interest arises when, if a matter was decided in a particular way, a councillor (or close associate) would have an expectation of receiving or be likely to receive a financial advantage or disadvantage. In these situations, a councillor must declare the interest and leave the room while the matter is being discussed. The details of the interest are recorded in a register.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

Councils also have requirements about how councillors must deal with other conflicts of interest in their Codes of Conduct.

## Codes of Conduct

The community is entitled to expect that:

- the business of the council is conducted with efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality;
- the councillor will attend all meetings of council (except where leave of absence has been obtained) and vote on all matters except when prohibited from doing so;
- councillors and staff obey the spirit and letter of the law and, in particular, the provisions of relevant statutes, regulations and by-laws; and
- that councillors are honest and ethical, reliable, motivated to perform and knowledgeable about their community.

The Act requires councils to adopt a code relating to the conduct of councillors. As well as complying with legal obligations under the Act, Councillors must comply with the provisions of the Code of Conduct in performing their functions and exercising their powers.

The adoption of a Code of Conduct is an important means of ensuring councils are responsible for their own behaviour and accountable to their communities. It also assists councillors and staff in their roles and makes a statement to the community as to what can be expected from councillors and staff in terms of their behaviour<sup>2</sup>.

Matters that must be addressed in each council's Code of Conduct are laid out in Regulation 22A of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2005*. They are:

- conflicts of interest;
- the use of the office of councillor, Mayor or Deputy Mayor;
- the use of council resources;
- the use of council information;
- the giving and receiving of gifts and benefits;
- relationships with the community, other councillors and council employees; and
- the representation of the council.

The Local Government Association of Tasmania has developed a model Code of Conduct which can be used by councils. The Association is also involved in a review of Code of Conduct provisions in legislation with the Local Government Division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

## Access to Information

Councillors are entitled to information and documents required to perform any councillor functions and documents relating to council and committee meeting agendas.

However, councillors must be careful not to disclose any information that it is received at a closed meeting or that is given to them on the basis that it is kept confidential.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it should be noted that the Code of Conduct provisions in the legislation are currently under review.

Councillors also must not make improper use of council information either to gain advantage for themselves, a family member or close associate or to cause any damage or loss to council. A councillor who breaches these provisions could be fined, disqualified from nominating as a councillor for a period of seven years or dismissed.

## **Time Commitment**

The role of councillor involves several hours each week for formal duties and many more hours for informal duties such as meeting with constituents and attending community functions.

The time commitment varies from councillor to councillor and council to council, but it could require a core commitment of 15-25 hours a week. Some councillors may be able to devote more hours.

Formal council meetings are held at least once a month, however council may have committee meetings or other activities, which form a regular schedule. Councillors often nominate for a particular committee responsibility, which holds separate committee meetings.

Councillors will also receive phone calls and correspondence from constituents raising issues of concern which require responses. There may also be involvement in external organisations, for example with neighbourhood house committees, school and recreational committees. These committees meet at the discretion of their membership.

Many councillors retain their employment and undertake the role of councillor in their own time. Partners of councillors are not expected to attend all civic events and receptions; however an invitation is often extended to them.

## **Working with the General Manager and Council Staff**

The importance of trust and mutual respect within the council team and between Council and senior management cannot be underestimated. There needs to be a shared commitment to the goals of the council by both councillors and senior management.

To achieve maximum results for the community, councils need a strong team of councillors and management. While councillors determine policy directions for the municipality, they also need to rely on advice from the organisation.

As mentioned previously, the everyday running of councils is the General Manager's responsibility. This includes the employment of staff with the necessary expertise to undertake the administrative and operational functions of a council.

The General Manager and council officers are there to provide advice and support to council and assist it in implementing its policies, plans and programs. Councillors evaluate alternative options and assess the impact of decisions before deciding what it considers to be in the community's best interest. The organisation then implements the policy directions decided on by Council.

The process and relationship are interactive, with each having distinct roles and functions. Understanding these differences will influence the degree to which a trusting and professional working relationship can be established between council and its management team.

A key challenge for councillors is not becoming involved in the day-to-day operations of a council by directing staff. The role of a councillor is to work with other elected members on overall council strategy and policy and, as an individual councillor, to represent the interests of the community.

Individual councillors have no authority to act or make decisions on behalf of the Council unless the Council specifically authorised this at properly constituted council meeting.

While the separation of policy making and day-to-day management is important, it should be managed sensitively, so a high level of trust is cultivated between the councillors and the General Manager and a sound and effective working relationship is achieved.

## Working with Other Councillors

Councillors are often elected having promised to achieve – or oppose – particular issues or projects. It is important to understand that councillors do not make decisions on their own.

The major challenge for councillors, therefore, is to convince a sufficient number of their councillor colleagues to support their particular positions and have their issues adopted as part of the council's plans, policies or programs.

This is a complex and fluid process and councillors need to be very focused on working with one another. There will be times when councillors will have differing points of view which should be debated in the council chamber in an open and transparent way.

## Working with the Community

Individual councillors provide an invaluable link between the communities and councils. Councillors will also often be approached by individual and groups in the community who need assistance or support.

Consultation and engagement with the community is essential to identify community aspirations, issues and priorities. Consultation gives citizens another opportunity to express their opinions and provide information to inform the decision makers, prior to a decision being taken. Some examples of consultation processes are:

- workshops and focus groups;
- surveys;
- public meetings;
- community liaison groups; and
- precinct committees

Consultation does not mean that councils are bound to follow the majority position on an issue. Local Government is not government by referendum. Rather, good consultation means that the council knows and understands the range of community opinions about a particular issue, and can use this information to inform its decision.

There are occasions when a council needs to demonstrate community leadership. This may arise because of information that is available to a council, or stem from a council's perception of its role as a government elected to govern or from its understanding of the community built upon by considered consultation and engagement processes.

## Helpful Skills

### **Good Communication and Listening Skills**

Some people seem to be naturally gifted but, to be able to communicate is a skill that can be learned. Outside of formal training, a councillor needs to be willing to talk to and listen to people from all walks of life. Being able to develop networks within the community provides councillors with a 'sounding board' against which to assess the impact of council policies.

### **Time Management**

One of the major constraints on councillors is the ability to devote adequate time to attend council and council committee meetings, community and residents' groups or prepare for meetings by study of agenda papers and financial reports. Time management is, therefore, a skill that councillors need to acquire if they are to be effective in their role.

### **Negotiation and Being Assertive**

Negotiation and lobbying skills may need to be honed in order to become a councillor of influence. Councillors need to effectively present potential solutions or alternative viewpoints to fellow councillors and to communicate council decisions to residents or other sectors of government.

### **Conflict Resolution Skills and a Thick Skin**

As decision making in councils is often related to the allocation of resources, councillors can be confronted with conflict both within the council and in the community. Being able to focus on issues and not personalities associated with decisions is an important skill in what can be at times an emotionally charged atmosphere.

## Section 4: The Election Process

**Terms & Voting**  
**Tasmanian Electoral Commission**

## Eligibility to Nominate

Under Section 270 of *The Local Government Act (1993)*, a person is eligible to nominate as a candidate for councillor if they are:

- An elector in the municipal area; and
- Not a councillor in another council; and
- Have not been barred by a court from nominating; and
- Are not an employee of the council in that municipal area; and
- Have not been removed from the office of councillor because of inadequacy or incompetency; and
- Is not bankrupt; and
- Is not undergoing a term of imprisonment or has been sentenced for a crime; and
- Is not subject to a care order.

## Terms and Voting

Under the recently amended legislation, council elections are held every four years, when all councillors, from each council in Tasmania vacate their positions and nominations are called for these vacancies.

Mayors and Deputy Mayors are popularly elected and currently must have served as a Tasmanian councillor previously for at least 12 months. The Tasmanian Government has recently introduced legislation into Parliament seeking to remove the eligibility criteria for Mayors and Deputy Mayors. If passed this means candidates will not have to have previously served on a Tasmanian council.

Voting in Local Government elections is conducted through a postal ballot. Under this system there is a 14-day polling period rather than a single polling day.

## Tasmanian Electoral Commission

The Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) conducts Local Government elections on behalf of Tasmanian councils. TEC publishes a detailed 'Information for candidates' booklet which looks at the full election process, from the notice of election through to counting of votes.

Of particular interest to potential candidates are the sections dealing with:

- eligibility to nominate as a councillor;
- how to nominate as a councillor;
- advertising (including the requirements in each municipal area relating to signs);  
and
- offences relating to elections.

The booklet and more information about council elections can be found on the TEC website at [www.electoral.tas.gov.au](http://www.electoral.tas.gov.au).

## **Section 5: Getting Elected**

**Introduction to Campaigning**  
**Advertising**  
**Door Knocking**  
**Photographs**  
**Using the Media**

## Introduction to Campaigning

This section provides an overview of various approaches to campaigning, and includes information on campaign brochures, door-knocking, advertising and using the media.

Local Government is locally based and personalised so your campaign should reflect this.

To campaign effectively you need to plan and be prepared. It is important that candidates know:

- information about the municipal area in which they are standing and
- information about the procedure of the election and voting processes.

Starting a campaign early will increase its effectiveness.

There needs to be consideration of the message to be communicated to voters and how the messages can best be delivered. This might include:

- phoning, writing or emailing known people;
- distributing a brochure;
- door knocking;
- seeking endorsements through local organisations;
- attending shopping centres and recreational activities to 'meet the people';
- obtaining coverage in local press articles;
- placing advertisements;
- submitting information for local paper 'profiles' of candidates;
- going to public meetings; and
- creating a website.

The approach taken will depend on the likely strengths of the opposition, what methods are most effective in reaching voters in the local area, the time available to candidates and the number of helpers they can organise, and the size of the area.

**There are a number offences relating to election campaigning that candidates should be aware of. A summary of these offences is contained in the Tasmanian Electoral Commission 'Information for candidates' booklet.**

## Advertising

### Campaign brochures

Many candidates use brochures as a vehicle for providing information to voters. They can be used when door knocking, handed out at community events or distributed in letterboxes.

Brochures may include:

- a candidate slogan;
- information about the candidate;
- a photo of the candidate, including action shots;
- the candidates hopes and aspirations if elected;
- third party positive endorsements from prominent people or community leaders such as past and present local politicians, church leaders, service club leaders, sporting association leaders, migrant associations, progress associations, chambers of commerce, etc;
- surveys to obtain important feedback from voters on issues important to them, and which may lead to the production of a second brochure publishing the results of the initial survey;
- an open letter to voters; and
- information about the voting process.

### Some important detail

Candidates should note that:

- the official council logo cannot be used;
- photos of other people cannot be printed without permission;
- there is a need to check the authorisation requirements for written documents;
- election material should not contain anything that is likely to mislead or deceive an elector in relation to their vote. There is a penalty for printing, publishing or distributing any election material that is misleading or deceptive; and
- the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2005* Division 4 prescribes spending and advertising limits for candidates for Council.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Currently the total expenditure for the purchase of advertising time or space by or on behalf of a candidate must not exceed \$5,000 in a single election (or \$8,000 for a Mayor or Deputy Mayor). Posters must not exceed 3m<sup>2</sup> or be more than 50 in quantity. They must be authorised by the candidate. A maximum of 10 minutes on television or 50 minutes on radio is allowed during the election period.

Further, candidates should:

- always proofread their pamphlets before production (as spelling mistakes look unprofessional and have the potential to cost votes) and
- ensure information is accurate and does not contain offensive material or language.

### **Posters**

Posters are a great way of building a profile in the municipal area.

The TEC 'Information for candidates' booklet explains the regulations covering the authorisation, size and placement of posters.

### **Advertising in the Media**

The extent of advertising in newspapers, television or radio depends on the amount of money a candidate can dedicate to this form of promotion.

Again, the TEC 'Information for candidates' booklet explains the regulations covering advertising time and space.

## **Door Knocking**

Door knocking is one of the most effective and important ways of campaigning. It brings candidates face-to-face with the community and provides an opportunity to hear about their concerns and issues, as well as a chance to inform citizens of a candidates approach and values.

### **But what do I say?**

A suggested good opening line is:

*"Good morning/afternoon my name is John Smith and I am doing some door knocking in your neighbourhood today as I have decided to stand for council at the coming elections on... Are you aware there are council elections happening?"*

## **Important Points When Door Knocking**

Doorknocking may be the only opportunity for voters to meet a candidate in person, first impressions are important and candidates should:

- understand this is a very important time, providing the opportunity to learn and understand issues and concerns important to residents. It is an opportunity to harness these concerns that could provide detail for future campaign platforms and brochures;
- know the timetable for voting detail, know when to expect ballot papers to arrive in the mail and when they need to be returned;
- look presentable as this may be the only time voters meet you;
- consider safety issues, it may be preferable to be accompanied when door knocking;
- avoid inconvenient times of the day, such as meal times;
- visit a block of houses in one area then, time permitting, travel to another area in order to obtain a cross section of views across the entire municipal area;
- consider knocking on every second or third door in a street if time is restricted;
- try not to be held up for too long at each house;
- try to follow up on concerns if asked, either in writing or over the phone, even if the response is not to the voter's liking;
- leave the voter a calling card as a memory aid;
- leave a calling card in the letterbox if residents are not at home but not under the front door, as this tells everyone that no one is home; and
- always close the gate.

## **Photographs**

Good photos are a valuable investment for any campaign. They can ensure that printed material is both interesting and informative. Poor quality or boring photos just turn the reader away.

Many people prefer to scan printed material, taking in parts that appear interesting.

Photos act as entry points, a voter gets more information in a shorter space of time from a photo or several photos than from the written word.

A professional photographer is a must when relying on photos to get a message across to voters. The photographer must be able to work as a photojournalist. If you don't know anyone, check advertisements in local papers, or the yellow pages and start interviewing.

Although nothing can replace a professional photographer, candidates cannot always afford to hire a full-time photographer and it is worthwhile carrying a camera and taking photos if the opportunity arises. Take several photos from different angles to ensure the right image and quality are captured.

### **Steps To Planning Good Photos**

#### **Understand the purpose of the photo**

- is it arresting and does it lure the reader into reading the copy?
- does it deliver the candidate's message?

#### **Decide what you need:**

- types of shots required i.e. head and shoulders, full length.
- the variety of pamphlets/cards and the issues that may be covered.
- whether the photos will be black and white or colour.

#### **Hire a professional photographer:**

- be aware of the budget available for photography.
- know the turn around time for producing proof sheets and final prints.
- understand the time required to complete the shoot.
- request proof sheets showing an entire roll of film, allowing ease of selection.

#### **Types of photos:**

- no campaign can do without head and shoulders shots.
- photos should always look facing into the text, left facing photos should be position on the right hand side of the text and vice versa.
- for best results in pamphlets or newsletters photos should be turned into bromides, generally printers can do this.
- photos can be scanned for general use but consideration needs to be given to the quality of the scan and the end result to the material being produced.



### Points to remember when planning your photo shoot

- Get your photos done as soon as possible, don't wait until just before the election.
  - Plan your photo shoot in detail – where will you take the photos?, what will you be doing in the photos?, what messages do you want to convey?, do you need to involve other people?
  - You can never have too many photographs. It is better to have more to select from.
  - Plan what you will wear and what props you may need. Completing the photo shoot in one block of time will save costs but a change of clothes is advisable to ensure the photos look more natural and props such as a clipboard may be useful in depicting door knocking for example.
  - When taking photos of people try to be spontaneous. Let people carry on a conversation about whatever the subject matter of the photo is. This will help get real emotions and facial expressions and suitable body language.
  - Keep in mind that the light in the middle of the day is hard for outdoor shots. Early morning or late afternoon gives the best lighting.
  - Always remember to get the permission of the people you are using in your photos.
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## Using the Media

Candidates are thrust into a competitive environment. There may be sitting councillors who are well known to the media and the local community.

### Handy tips for dealing with the Media

- Personally introduce yourself as a candidate for the relevant municipal area. Make sure you leave them with the correct spelling of your name, your telephone number and your mobile telephone number, and a photo of yourself.
- Take any written information with you such as your campaign brochure and articulate your main platform. Ensure that there are only three to four key issues and be certain of your facts.
- Highlight your number one issue if you are with the journalist/editor.
- Issue media releases relating to your issues on a regular basis BUT do not become a serial media release issuer. Pick the issues on which you most want to be heard to avoid journalists regarding your media releases as junk mail.
- Utilise the 'Letters to the Editors' column, BUT do not become a serial letter writer, again pick your issues.
- Local radio may contact you as a result of articles published in the newspaper. When they telephone you, DO NOT provide answers immediately. Ask them what they want to speak to you about and what their deadline is. If their deadline is within the next 30 minutes, tell them you will ring them back in 10 minutes. This gives you breathing space to think about what you are going to say.
- In all cases remember it is your interview and PLAN what you want to say!
- Don't forget you have spending limits for advertising.

### Handy Tips with Press Releases

- Always introduce yourself as the person putting out the media release - never assume that the journalist will know who you are e.g. “Candidate in the upcoming council elections for ..... today said that .....”
- Once you have introduced yourself, then refer back to yourself by name; e.g. “The prospect of massive rate increases is dire” Mr Smith said.
- The opening sentence should always contain what the media release is about e.g. “Crime in ..... is still very high, despite the visible increase in police presence”, John Smith said today.
- Try to answer the following questions in the first sentence of the release; Who? What? Where? When? How and Why?
- Once you have established what the media release is about, the rest of the release should be one-paragraph sentences, spoken or attributed to the person.
- Try to keep the media release to one page, journalists will rarely read two whole pages of a release
- Try to answer all the questions any reasonable and inquiring person might ask and try to pre-empt any claims or questions that may arise
- Try to present a positive alternative in a competitive environment such as a campaign, it is easy to fall into the trap of criticising everything.
- Always provide your name, the name of the municipal area, an address, and contact details.
- Avoid using photographs on press releases, as they don’t fax well.

## Social Media

Increasingly, social media is being used to support election campaigns. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few.

Among the advantages of social media are that it:

- is fast/can be immediate;
- allows for easy content creation/development/dissemination;
- can establish large, powerful networks;
- is always on;
- potentially can reach a large audience; and
- can build reputation through attracting attention.

However care must be taken to ensure the use of social media complies with the electoral provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993* (see for example, s311 of the Local Government Act: Electoral articles to be signed and the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2005* (see Division 4 – Electoral Advertising)).

## Section 6: Additional Information

**Useful Contacts**  
**Other Resources**  
**About LGAT**

## Useful Contacts

### **Local Government Association of Tasmania**

326 Macquarie St, Hobart

**Tel:** (03) 6233 5966

**Website:** [www.lgat.tas.gov.au](http://www.lgat.tas.gov.au)

### **Local Government Division**

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Level 14, 39 Murray St, Hobart

**Tel:** (03) 6232 7022

**Website:** [www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd)

### **Tasmanian Electoral Commission**

Level 2, 70 Collins St, Hobart

**Tel:** (03) 6233 3749

**Website:** [www.electoral.tas.gov.au](http://www.electoral.tas.gov.au)

### **Tasmanian Planning Commission**

144 Macquarie St, Hobart

**Tel:** (03) 6233 2795

**Website:** [www.planning.tas.gov.au](http://www.planning.tas.gov.au)

### **Australian Local Government Association**

8 Geils Court, Deakin, ACT

**Tel:** (02) 6122 9400

**Website:** [www.alga.asn.au](http://www.alga.asn.au)

### **Australian Local Government Women's Association**

**Website:** [www.algwatas.asn.au](http://www.algwatas.asn.au)

**Council websites**

Break O'Day [www.bodc.tas.gov.au](http://www.bodc.tas.gov.au)

Brighton [www.brighton.tas.gov.au](http://www.brighton.tas.gov.au)

Burnie [www.burnie.net](http://www.burnie.net)

Central Coast [www.centcoast.tas.gov.au](http://www.centcoast.tas.gov.au)

Central Highlands [www.centralhighlands.tas.gov.au](http://www.centralhighlands.tas.gov.au)

Circular Head [www.circularhead.tas.gov.au](http://www.circularhead.tas.gov.au)

Clarence City [www.ccc.tas.gov.au](http://www.ccc.tas.gov.au)

Derwent Valley [www.derwentvalley.tas.gov.au](http://www.derwentvalley.tas.gov.au)

Devonport City [www.devonport.tas.gov.au](http://www.devonport.tas.gov.au)

Dorset [www.dorset.tas.gov.au](http://www.dorset.tas.gov.au)

Flinders [www.flinders.tas.gov.au](http://www.flinders.tas.gov.au)

George Town [www.georgetown.tas.gov.au](http://www.georgetown.tas.gov.au)

Glamorgan Spring Bay [www.gsbc.tas.gov.au](http://www.gsbc.tas.gov.au)

Glenorchy City [www.gcc.tas.gov.au](http://www.gcc.tas.gov.au)

Hobart City [www.hobartcity.com.au](http://www.hobartcity.com.au)

Huon Valley [www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au](http://www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au)

Kentish [www.kentish.tas.gov.au](http://www.kentish.tas.gov.au)

Kingborough [www.kingborough.tas.gov.au](http://www.kingborough.tas.gov.au)

King Island [www.kingisland.tas.gov.au](http://www.kingisland.tas.gov.au)

Latrobe [www.latrobe.tas.gov.au](http://www.latrobe.tas.gov.au)

Launceston [www.launceston.tas.gov.au](http://www.launceston.tas.gov.au)

Meander Valley [www.meander.tas.gov.au](http://www.meander.tas.gov.au)

Northern Midlands [www.northernmidlands.tas.gov.au](http://www.northernmidlands.tas.gov.au)

Sorell [www.sorell.tas.gov.au](http://www.sorell.tas.gov.au)

Southern Midlands [www.southernmidlands.tas.gov.au](http://www.southernmidlands.tas.gov.au)

Tasman [www.tasman.tas.gov.au](http://www.tasman.tas.gov.au)

Waratah Wynyard [www.warwyn.tas.gov.au](http://www.warwyn.tas.gov.au)

West Coast [www.westcoast.tas.gov.au](http://www.westcoast.tas.gov.au)

West Tamar [www.wtc.tas.gov.au](http://www.wtc.tas.gov.au)

## Other Resources

### **LGAT Councillor Resource Kit**

This kit provides practical information to assist councillors understand and perform their role.

### **Guide to the Resource Management and Planning System**

The Guide to the Resource Management and Planning System outlines the processes and instruments that make up Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS).

The Guide is designed for use by planning authorities, any person having an interest in planning administration and any person interested in understanding planning matters and processes generally.

<http://www.planning.tas.gov.au/?a=152289>

More detail on the planning system in Tasmania, including Local Government planning can be found on the Tasmanian Planning Commission's website.

[http://www.planning.tas.gov.au/the\\_planning\\_system](http://www.planning.tas.gov.au/the_planning_system)

### **Local Government Division – Information sheets**

Access to information for councillors

Compliance - Pecuniary interest; Misuse of office; Misuse of information

Council meeting procedures

Councillor allowances

Director of Local Government and Local Government Division

General manager

Pecuniary interest

Representation to councillors

Role of elected members

[http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd/resources\\_for\\_councillors](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/lgd/resources_for_councillors)

## About LGAT

The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) is the voice of Local Government to other governments, interested stakeholders and the wider community. LGAT works to protect the interests and rights of councils, to promote the efficient operation of Local Government and to foster strategic and beneficial relationships.

LGAT has been the peak body for Local Government in Tasmania for 100 years and is part of a national network of associations. It is funded by councils and other income earned through projects sponsored on behalf of Local Government, and a range of services and sponsorships.

A General Management Committee (GMC) of eight members provides oversight to LGAT operations. The GMC is elected by LGAT member council representatives every two years. It comprises the popularly elected president, the Lord Mayor and six other members elected by regional groupings of councils. The vice president is elected by the GMC.

LGAT provides specialist services to its member councils including policy and strategic support, information and learning for Local Government elected members and officers and procurement of employee relations and insurance services. LGAT also coordinates the Tasmanian Local Government Awards for Excellence, the annual Tasmanian Local Government conference and LGAT*Assist* (a financial assistance product for Local Government employees).

For more about what we do, please see the website [www.lgat.tas.gov.au](http://www.lgat.tas.gov.au).

The Local Government Association of Tasmania supports local councils so that they, in turn, are well placed to serve their communities.