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This is version 1.0 of the Local Government Association of Tasmania’s (LGAT) Strategic Plan December 2012-2017.

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Introduction

The aim of this Strategic Plan is to outline the broad priorities for the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) over the next three to five years.

Seven priority areas (PA’s) have been identified and the plan is structured around these. They are:

1. Strengthening strategic relationships
2. Leading recognition and reform
3. Ensuring financial sustainability
4. Building sector capacity
5. Improving land use planning
6. Ensuring environmental sustainability
7. Continuing water and sewerage reform.

In reviewing this plan it is important to note that:

1) It has been informed by past activity, current pressures and desired outcomes.
2) It is not intended to comprehensively describe all the work that LGAT undertakes or reflect all the activity within councils.
3) It is a living document that will be reviewed regularly in order to appropriately reflect the social, economic and political environments within which councils are working.
4) It will provide the basis for resourcing decisions and work planning by staff for LGAT.

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 earns other income through projects sponsored on behalf of Local Government, services to members and sponsorships.

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 Assist¹.

We work collaboratively with our members to support council staff and elected members. The communities our member councils serve are represented by 268 elected members and supported by over 4000 staff.

¹ For more information about what we do, please see the website www/lgat.tas.gov.au
About GMC
The General Management Committee (GMC) is elected by member council representatives of the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) every two years. The GMC 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. The GMC oversees the administration of Local Government policy, provides strategic direction to the LGAT in accordance with policies resolved by member councils, appoints Local Government representatives to boards, committees and working groups and oversees the financial management of the Association.

At the time of developing this plan, the GMC comprised:

- Mayor Barry Easther President
- Mayor Deidre Flint (Vice President)
- Lord Mayor Damon Thomas
- Deputy Mayor Jock Campbell
- Mayor Barry Jarvis
- Councillor Lynn Laycock
- Mayor Don Thwaites
- Mayor Albert van Zetten

Context
During the twelve months preceding development of this plan, there was an increasing focus on reform and restructure of Local Government with a significant and concerted campaign for amalgamation of councils on top of a flurry of reform activity already underway with or within councils.

LGAT has a key role in correcting misinformation, improving informed discussion and decision making and selling the positives of Local Government and so this will become more of a strategic focus in the years ahead.

We have had considerable success in working with our Members to continue to build the capacity of Local Government and some important initiatives will continue to dominate over the next period. These include the development, implementation and improvement long term financial and strategic asset management planning to assist councils in ensuring their financial sustainability, implementing the outcomes of the rating and valuation review, supporting water and sewerage reforms and the Think Big, Work Local Careers Project. We will also continue to ensure Local Government has a voice in planning reform and work with the State Government to deliver land use planning outcomes which balance the full range of interests and issues.

LGAT will persist in looking for opportunities for improving the sector. ‘Big’ reforms or ‘little’ reforms need to be supported by thorough research and sound analysis and assistance to consider options and implement changes. LGAT sees that as a critical ongoing role.

Local Government in Tasmania is fortunate as its size allows it to have close access to and a relatively strong working relationship the State Government. While not without the occasional challenge, the closeness of the relationship allows effort to be put to problems encountered by local communities and provides opportunity for fast tracking many issues.

LGAT is a relatively small organisation, currently only 11 staff (with a number of those working part-time or on fixed-term contracts). This influences how LGAT can and does work. We must address the same range of issues as the larger, better resourced Associations. Often small organisations have little opportunity to move from reactive to proactive roles but LGAT has played a pivotal role in raising awareness within the sector of the challenges ahead and in forging advantageous relationships with other spheres of government and other Associations. Outlined below are a number of key achievements made over the period of the last strategic plan:
• Think Big, Work Local Project including television advertisements, website, workforce analysis and securing funding for training of councils staff.
• Establishment of the Metropolitan Councils Group
• Funding for a range of climate change focussed projects and delivery of benchmark data, a conference, workshops, toolkits and case studies on climate change.
• Funding to implement common frameworks for long term financial and strategic asset management planning
• Delivery of the Household Hazardous Waste Project
• Development of a Model Code of Conduct
• Our 100th Annual Local Government Conference
• Development of a Planning Course for elected members in conjunction with the University of Tasmania.
• Significant support for councils in relation to Water and Sewerage Reform.
**Vision**

For Local Government to be an independent, representative, sustainable sphere of government, participating fully in governance, for the benefit of Tasmanian communities.

**Mission**

Through the efficient and effective utilisation of resources, LGAT will deliver to member councils strong leadership, support, representation and direction, to help secure Local Government’s social, environmental and economic future.

**Aims**

The Local Government Association aims to:

- act as a facilitator (of best practice, change, reform);
- be a powerful representative and advocate;
- provide an environment for leadership and catalyst for reform
- assist elected members to understand their roles and responsibilities;
- identify issues, analyse data and develop possible responses; and
- collaborate with the State and Federal Governments for improvements for the community and for the sector.
Priority Areas (PA)

**PA 1: STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS**

The Local Government Association of Tasmania has the opportunity to influence policy and legislation, through presenting a strong, united voice on behalf of the sector and to build understanding of the role and importance of Local Government.

Local government is facing a number of challenges including future economic sustainability, managing increased community expectations and maintaining existing and new assets. Local Government, through LGAT, must develop strategic relationships with key organisations, particularly State Government, in order to influence decision making, pool expertise, achieve efficiency and realise opportunities. Within the sector, Local Government must also work collaboratively to share knowledge, experience and develop solutions.

It is important that LGAT provides an influential voice that accurately represents the views and policy of Local Government within Tasmania. Underpinning this is active management of member relationships with the goals of gaining/maintaining all Tasmanian councils as members and ensuring Local Government policy is equitable across all council types.

**STRATEGIES:**

1. **Build a strong association**
   - Continue to work collaboratively with members to provide a strong relevant association with maximum membership of Tasmanian councils.

2. **Provide a strong united voice for Local Government**
   - Ensure Local Government’s voice is represented in relevant public debates, legislative reviews and intergovernmental forums.

3. **Develop and maintain strategic alliances**
   - Identify opportunities for collaboration, resource sharing and attracting funding for Local Government.

4. **Foster collaboration and cooperation within the Local Government sector**
   - Proactively provide opportunities for councils with like issues to meet and share experiences and solutions.
PA2: LEADING RECOGNITION AND REFORM

The Local Government sector is incredibly diverse, delivering an increasing array of services to communities. Unfortunately, there is limited awareness about just how much we do.

There is increasing political and community pressure to reform Local Government, without really understanding the type of reform necessary or even what outcomes are really desired.

Slick campaigns disparaging of Local Government need to be countered with positive messages designed to improve the understanding and image of Local Government. We also need to consider the impact of negative perceptions on the long standing national Constitutional Recognition campaign.

Through a strategic and collective approach to marketing Local Government (services and successes), LGAT can not only ensure a well considered dialogue about the future of Local Government but also contribute to ensuring we are recognised as a legitimate level of Government.

STRATEGIES:

- **Improve the image of Local Government**
  - Develop and deliver a strategic marketing campaign designed to improve understanding and positive perceptions of the sector.
  - Provide tools for members to promote Local Government and improve community understanding of functions and services.

- **Drive the Local Government reform agenda.**
  - Undertake research and analysis to aid the development of reform options and allow for strategic advice.
  - Support members to respond to proposed reform agendas.
PA3: ENSURING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Association will build upon previous achievements in improving our understanding of councils’ financial sustainability and ability to deliver sound long-term financial and strategic asset management plans.

This is core business for councils and therefore requires continuous improvement. There is ongoing scrutiny at the national and state level on councils’ financial management and much guidance as to best practice.

The Association will actively pursue opportunities for efficiency gains and continue to ensure the capacity of councils to undertake long-term planning is well developed.

**STRATEGIES:**

- **Drive improvements in financial and strategic asset management across the Sector.**
  - Continue to deliver training and tools to build councils’ capacity to understand and plan for the long-term.
  - Implement the outcomes of the rating and valuation review.
- **Develop opportunities for improvement and efficiencies.**
  - Investigate and develop opportunities for joint procurement and resource sharing.
PA 4: BUILDING SECTOR CAPACITY

The Association has always played an active role in building sector capacity. We will continue to deliver programs such as the Think Big, Work Local Project, elected member training, specialist workshops and our Annual Conference which support the skills development of staff and elected members.

As a sector, Local Government faces a number of workforce challenges including skills shortages, an ageing workforce and competition for staff.

LGAT ensures that Tasmanian issues are captured in national policy and planning processes with strong engagement with the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, Government Skills Australia and the National Local Government Workforce Development Group.

An additional benefit of a skilled sector is enhanced reputation and credibility which in turn support Strategic Priority 2.

STRATEGIES:

- **Continue to deliver programs which improve recruitment and retention.**
  - Deliver programs as appropriate, for example Think Big, Work Local.
  - Attract funding for training across the Sector in response to identified gaps.

- **Build the capacity of elected members and staff to deliver quality outcomes.**
  - Provide training and networking opportunities in response to identified needs.
  - Deliver an annual Local Government conference.
  - Conduct regular meetings of member councils to update, discuss and give/seek direction on areas of need.
## PA5: IMPROVING LAND USE PLANNING

LGAT is well placed to directly influence land use planning policy decisions having built good relationships and consultation protocols with the State Government and the Tasmanian Planning Commission, as well as a strong Local Government advisory network. In fulfilling the role on the planning authority, elected members must be fully informed of changes to policy and practice in order to make sound decisions.

Planning reform is likely to remain a consistent focus of the State Government, the Opposition and the Development Sector for the foreseeable future. There is a need to address unrealistic or ill informed expectations with solid, practical and strategic advice which recognises that there is always room for improvement. There is a lack of recognition that in Tasmania in general, planning is being done relatively well.

There are inherent risks related to the current structure with the Planning Commission now making policy independent of Government and with an increasing regional focus. The Association is well placed to have an eagle eye view to ensure consistency and sustainability of new approaches.

### STRATEGIES:

- **Respond to planning policy reform on behalf of the Local Government sector.**
  - Maintain relationships with key stakeholders in order to influence and inform policy and practice.
  - Advocate for improvements to the State Planning System.

- **Build the capacity of elected members to function as members of a Planning Authority.**
  - Provide access to training for members of planning authorities to support their legislative functions and understand emerging land use planning issues (eg hazards, climate change).

- **As part of the strategic marketing campaign, build recognition of good planning outcomes being delivered by Tasmanian councils.**
PA6: ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

LGAT has been at the forefront of a number of innovative projects aiming to address aspects of climate change and waste management, garnering support and funding, allowing councils to move beyond their traditional roles and take a leading position.

Dealing with issues such as waste management and climate change are becoming an increasing burden for councils with increased community expectations and regulatory compliance regimes. The uncertainties around climate change and the implications of the related carbon tax, create challenges for councils in forward planning.

The Association can build on the successes to date to:
- ensure councils can identify and respond to risks;
- meet growing community expectations; and
- overcome barriers to delivering the best outcomes for the community – these can be funding, policy or legislative barriers.

STRATEGIES:
- Continue to support councils in identifying and responding to climate change related risks.
  - Undertake research and disseminate information to members.
  - Attract funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation activities.
  - Continue to advocate for resolution of liability issues.
- Work to secure better waste management outcomes across the sector.
  - Develop a position on future funding and waste management priorities.
  - Advocate for improvements to the management of waste in Tasmania.
LGAT had a pivotal role in the initial phase of water and sewerage reform, coordinating Local Government input, developing policy positions and negotiating the form of legislation and regulatory instruments associated with the operations of the water and sewerage corporations.

The Association’s position and capability in the area of intergovernmental relations and the coordination of member interests and inputs provide the appropriate platforms to address and implement the next phase of the water and sewerage reform agenda.

**STRATEGIES:**

- **Ensure that the structural and governance requirements of owner councils are addressed and implemented.**
  - Undertake discussions/negotiations with State Government to establish the appropriate frameworks and instruments to deliver the reform requirements.
  - Liaise and consult with owner councils and water and sewerage corporations to ensure that the various elements of the reform are understood and accepted.
  - Provide constant feedback and reports on progress and issues arising from the reform process to owner councils.
Glenorchy City Council is currently the only Tasmanian council not a member of LGAT. They are currently reviewing this decision.
Methodology/process.

LGAT Policy staff undertook a review which included examination of the previous strategic plan and activity against that, consideration of the plans developed by other Local Government Associations and the current local government context. A possible structure, priority areas and key strategic areas were identified for the consideration of the General Management Committee (GMC) in March 2012. At the March 2012 meeting the GMC agreed the structure and priorities and that their preference was for a more succinct and flexible strategic plan supported by an annual activity plan.

A first draft was completed by the Policy Director in May 2012, circulated for staff comment and finalised for the consideration of GMC in June 2012. Following GMC deliberation a final version was prepared and agreed out of session for endorsement at the July 2012 Annual General Meeting.