

State Budget Priority Statement 2021-22

This year's State Budget will be one unlike any other. As a State our priorities must be informed by managing the impacts of and our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

To date, all levels of government have invested to ensure the recovery of our society and economy. And, while the investment from Federal and State Governments has been significant, Local Government's contribution cannot be underestimated. For example, Tasmanian councils have committed in excess of \$40 million to support their communities through the crisis and into recovery.

The ongoing recovery effort will, of course, require a variety of strategies. That is why Local Government, through LGAT, has provided the following suite of initiatives for consideration as part of the State Budget process to contribute to our State's recovery. At the core of each of our initiatives is the fact that *we must focus locally to effect positive social and economic change*.

It is Local Government that delivers the services and infrastructure that shape the daily experiences of every Tasmanian and which are a major determinant of our communities' wellbeing. Local Government is the closest level of government to the community and as such, it is best placed to partner with the State Government on building prosperity and enabling improved community outcomes at the local level.

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on both the economic and social wellbeing of

Tasmanians. This is why the Local Government sector is seeking the following targeted investments to support business and communities to drive recovery.

SUPPORTING BUSINESS

Councils' ability to support economic development at the local level is essential to revitalising local economies and building more resilient and economically diverse regions. The following three initiatives are designed to leverage this existing support.

BUY LOCAL INITIATIVE

Councils have significant purchasing power, exceeding \$684 million in 2018/2019. To support businesses to rebuild and thrive post COVID-19, it is critical now more than ever to invest in our local economy and 'buy local'. While there is already a sizeable contribution made by councils in supporting local business, we believe this can be enhanced with some targeted support for councils and local businesses.

LGAT already manages a highly successful procurement support program that helps Tasmanian councils undertake best practice procurement and deliver value for money through the establishment of pre-qualified supplier panels, streamlining the procurement process for councils and suppliers alike.

To extend the impact of the State Government's Buy Local Policy and Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) recommendations for recovery, we propose to establish a Buy Local Program as part of LGAT Procurement. The initiative will involve working directly with Tasmanian councils and businesses to expand local purchasing and maximise the

opportunities for Tasmanian businesses to rebuild in a post COVID-19 environment.

Proposed activities would include the preparation and implementation of a Local Government Buy Local Policy, tools and training linked to the State Government legislative context and contemporary probity and procurement practice. LGAT will also work with councils to develop and implement tailored local procurement approaches, with a focus on expanding local supplier panels to support Tasmanian businesses.

Our work with councils will be supported with direct business engagement in the form of training for suppliers across the key areas of council expenditure to assist them in understanding and accessing Local Government procurement.

Budget request: LGAT is seeking support for a 3-year program. This will include dedicated resources to support councils and local business in capitalising on buy local opportunities.

PLANNING

Local Governments make decisions daily that influence how local communities are planned and developed.

For the past few years, the State Government and councils have been implementing a significant planning reform agenda in the form of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. The next stages of the Government's agenda include the development of the missing strategic foundations for our planning system, the Tasmanian Planning Policies and Regional Land Use Strategies.

Councils are responsible for the implementation of the State Government's planning reform 'on the ground'. However, the Local Government sector's ability to do

this is constrained by a national shortage of planners.

Our proposal is to establish a single Local Government owned authority to deliver high order planning services to councils. The model would involve regional hubs to allow proximity to council premises and cost-effective site visits, community access and an ability to work alongside and build the capacity of locally based council officers who are at an early professional or paraprofessional stage.

Having a repository of senior planners available for use by councils could enhance the capabilities of smaller councils through assistance with advice on controversial or significant development proposals and with longer term land use issues and plans. Importantly, the resources could assist councils process permit applications in peak periods and be a valuable resource with the introduction of the single statewide Tasmanian Planning Scheme.

Local Government can provide real value to the next stages of the State Government's planning agenda and our state's recovery from COVID - 19, but only if we are supported in securing qualified people with specific training and skills to efficiently deliver and maintain economic outcomes.

Budget request: State Government support for establishment of the "Planning Hub" for an initial two years, with intent to build to an ongoing cost neutral model during this period. Once successfully self-sufficient for planners, then the model could be expanded to other disciplines where skills shortages exist, such as Development Engineers and Environmental Health Officers.

STORMWATER

Council stormwater infrastructure networks operate continually to protect people and property across Tasmania from the impact of storm events by directing flows to safer pathways. These networks also filter and clean overland flows to maintain water quality and contribute to Tasmania's environment and our clean and green image.

However, increasingly sophisticated stormwater engineering modelling and planning reveals that many of these networks have points of vulnerability. This is either due to establishment before today's standard of stormwater modelling was available or, from the increasing frequency and intensity of storms that we are experiencing from our changing climate. In addition, stormwater quality management has been maturing in Tasmania and many of our networks across the state could deliver improved environmental and amenity outcomes with key interventions in infrastructure.

With a targeted stormwater infrastructure funding program, Tasmania's councils could deliver better stormwater containment and management, protecting people, property and the world-class environment that is at the foundation of the Tasmanian quality of life. Importantly, improving these networks will support community resilience to storm events intensified by climate change. Furthermore, as stormwater operates across the state in both urban and regional areas, a stormwater funding program would be able to deliver multiple regional projects of varying size and scope, supporting local construction businesses and regional economies and delivering on Recommendations 52 and 53 of the PESRAC Interim Report.

Such a stormwater funding program would

deliver regional jobs and productivity, better climate resilience and protection of people and property from storm impacts and improved water quality across the state, improving lifestyle outcomes and tourist experience by lifting infrastructure service standards.

Budget request: That the State Government co-invest \$6 million over 3 years to support the construction and upgrade of Local Government stormwater networks.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY

Sustainable improvements in health outcomes require local community ownership of, and accountability for, health focused programs. As the enduring local authority, councils can deliver continuity of support and adaption in order to respond to community needs. As the closest level of government to the community, councils are essential partners to work cooperatively with the State Government in supporting community recovery. There are two areas in particular where Local Government could enhance its community support role with additional investment.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family and sexual violence is a social issue that affects all Tasmanian communities. Its impacts are felt by families, in workplaces, the community and economy, with a range of significant consequences.

The statistics on family and sexual violence in Australia are confronting. Every week, on average, one woman is murdered by a current or former partner. One in three women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years and one in five women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 years. This is unacceptable.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its hardships has exacerbated some of the contributors that increase family and sexual violence, such as distress and anxiety, other mental health issues and increased drug and alcohol consumption.

Preventing violence from happening in the first place is the single most effective way to eliminate family and sexual violence. Councils with their direct, ongoing relationships with individuals and organisations across their community, are uniquely placed to influence and drive social change to reduce family violence by leading critical primary prevention work.

In 2019, in a national first, the Tasmanian Government formed a partnership with Our Watch to build capacity at a local level for primary prevention. The National Plan to *Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*; the Tasmanian Government's *Safe Homes, Families and Communities Action Plan* and the ongoing Local Government Health and Wellbeing Project provide evidence, direction and context for the next steps.

The PESRAC Interim Report observes that "in many ways, women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19". It further notes the anecdotal evidence of increased levels of emotional and financial coercion and emotional and physical abuse. Councils' local knowledge supports both observations.

Councils have expressed strong support, through LGAT and Our Watch for a LGAT led project that takes a collaborative approach to develop family and sexual violence prevention strategies tailored for individual communities.

LGAT will leverage the Our Watch Local Government Toolkit, which will provide

support and resources for the project. This project will contribute to improving important health and wellbeing outcomes for Tasmanian women, children and families.

Budget Request: Funding for a two-year LGAT facilitated project to build capacity for the prevention of family and sexual violence in Tasmanian communities through direct work with Local Government.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Local Government's essential role in sustaining community health and wellbeing was highlighted during the COVID-19 lockdown. The local knowledge and networks of council officers continues to be invaluable as government agencies and other organisations partner with councils to support recovery and build sustainable responses to local needs.

Local Government officers have ensured high standards of environmental health and local compliance with COVID-safe practices. This visible work continues to be supported by the informal guidance provided by trusted officers to business owners and community members in suburbs and towns across the state. Community development, health and wellbeing and sport and recreation officers have demonstrated that they are a vital part of Tasmania's preventative health workforce.

Throughout and since the pandemic, LGAT has provided qualitative data to a range of government agencies on issues including mental health, food security, gaps in services and particular local needs.

This collective Local Government perspective has informed a range of government agency plans and other organisations seeking to build sustainable programs and resilient communities.

They include collaboration with the Public Health Service, Department of Communities, Volunteering Tasmania, The Mental Health Council of Tasmania and Relationships Tasmania.

LGAT has continued building understanding about the nature of, and conditions for, sustainable partnerships across councils, government agencies and other stakeholders.

Sustainable improvement requires effective community adaption of large-scale programs. Through the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Project we have an important and ongoing role in facilitating that understanding and supporting best practice.

Budget Request: Ongoing funding for the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Project.

drive social and economic growth and enhance community wellbeing.

For the 2021 – 22 State Budget, our suggested collaborative activities will serve the State well in increasing productivity and securing the wellbeing and viability of all Tasmanians post COVID–19 and into a vibrant future.

CONCLUSION

Local Government's enduring central role in recovery, combined with its networks and local area knowledge make it a crucial partner in any attempts to drive economic and social recovery and in promoting healthy, viable and sustainable communities.

No other level of government can provide the combined understanding of the real community impact of COVID–19 and appreciation of what needs to be done at the local level, particularly in regional Tasmania.

Local Government is not only a key stakeholder, it is already actively leading or supporting a broad range of community and economic recovery measures. Investing in Local Government offers an effective and efficient way to work with communities to