

# Local government councillor – snapshot of the role

## 1. Context – the general function of local government

Why local governments exist.

- The *Local Government Act 1995* (section 3.1) establishes that the general function of a local government is to provide for the good government of persons in its district.
- In performing its functions, a local government must have regard to the need:
  - to promote the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the district
  - to plan for, and to plan for mitigating, risks associated with climate change
  - in making decisions, to consider potential long-term consequences and impacts on future generations
  - to recognise the particular interests of Aboriginal people and involve Aboriginal people in decision making processes
  - to consider collaboration with other local governments.
- The scope of what a local government can do is broadly what its community requires and can reasonably be provided with available resources and within the constraints of the Act or any other written law.
- A liberal approach is to be taken to the construction of the scope of the general function of a local government.
- The notion of “good government” is illustrated by the provisions of section 1.3(2) of the Act which summarises the outcomes intended:
  - “This Act is intended to result in –
    - a. better decision making by local governments
    - b. greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments

- c. greater accountability of local governments to their communities
- d. more efficient and effective local government.”

## 2. Role of councillors, as prescribed by the Local Government Act 1995

The role of a local government councillor as per section 2.10 of the Act is to:

- represent the interests of the electors, ratepayers and residents of the district and take account of the interests of other persons who work in, or visit, the district
- participate in the deliberation and decision-making of the local government at council and committee meetings
- facilitate communication with the community about council decisions
- facilitate and maintain good working relationships with other councillors, the mayor or president and the CEO
- act consistently with section 2.7(3) to (5) [role of council]
- maintain and develop the requisite skills to effectively perform their role.

### **Skills, abilities and knowledge**

- An understanding of the role and structure of local government as prescribed by the *Local Government Act 1995* and Regulations:
  - an understanding of the quasi-judicial town planning role of local government, as prescribed by the *Planning and Development Act 2005*.
- An understanding of Integrated Planning and Reporting which comprise the strategic plans for the future of the local government, the processes involved and the strategic role of a councillor.
- An understanding of the process of managing the CEO’s performance.
- Ability to read and understand financial statements and reports.
- A basic understanding of legal processes.

## 3. Governance and ethical standards

A local government councillor is expected to:

- promote and support good governance of the council and its affairs

- promote and support open and transparent government
- support, and adhere to respectful, appropriate and effective relationships with employees of the local government
- adhere to the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and the Code of Conduct adopted by Council under those regulations.

### **Skills, abilities and knowledge**

- An understanding of the ‘separation of powers’ between councillors and the administration (the difference between governing and managing).
- An understanding of meeting process, including Standing Orders or Meeting Procedures Local Laws (the local law containing rules used to manage a meeting).
- An understanding of policy development processes.
- An awareness of risk management strategies.
- An understanding of the accountability framework prescribed by the *Local Government Act 1995*, the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*, and other legislation.

### **Values, characteristics and commitment to role**

These are the values, characteristics and commitments that are expected of a councillor:

- openness and transparency with making decisions
- honesty and integrity in dealing with issues being considered
- tolerance and respect in relationships at all levels
- equality and fairness in promoting community issues
- a commitment to attend meetings and be fully prepared to participate in the decision-making process
- a collegiate approach to serving the community
- a commitment to networking and community consultation
- willingness to listen to and consider other peoples’ views and accept challenge from others
- awareness and management of conflicts of interest
- preparedness to share the workload with other councillors.

**Skills, abilities and knowledge**

- The ability to communicate, debate and actively participate in meetings.
- Ability to enhance discussion and assist discussions to reach closure.
- Ability to disagree, without being disagreeable.
- The ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships and to manage interpersonal conflicts.
- Ability to exercise independent judgement.