

Media Release

The Hon Melissa Horne MP

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Minister for Local Government

Minister for Ports and Freight

Minister for Roads and Road Safety



Friday, 17 November 2023

REFORMS TO BOOST CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Allan Labor Government will introduce legislation to improve the performance and accountability of councillors across the state, so Victorians can have confidence in their local government representatives.

Minister for Local Government Melissa Horne announced legislation to be introduced early next year will elevate governance and integrity standards in the state's 79 councils, encouraging quality candidates to put themselves forward at local government elections to be held statewide in October 2024.

Local government leaders and members of the community have called for action after confidence in local government in some areas has suffered due to poor councillor behaviour and ineffective performance.

Almost 30 councillors have resigned since January, while municipal monitors have been appointed as an urgent intervention to protect local communities eight times in 18 months – at Glenelg, Strathbogie (twice), Horsham, Darebin, Wodonga, Geelong and Yarra. Moira Shire Council was dismissed and replaced with administrators.

The Local Government Culture Project has been a key driver in the reform process, drawing more than 140 submissions from residents, mayors, councillors, council staff and peak bodies.

Reforms will introduce mandatory training for elected representatives, a uniform councillor code of conduct and strengthened powers for the Minister to address councillor conduct.

The Local Government Act 2020 mandates induction training for new councillors and the changes will take this focus on education and training further with a requirement for ongoing training for councillors.

Good governance is critical to ensure councils make sound decisions and deliver the services their communities need. Expanded powers to address councillor misconduct will discourage poor behaviour.

Reforms will give the Minister the ability to suspend or disqualify individual councillors found to have created a risk to health and safety or prevented the council from performing its function. The Chief Municipal Inspector will also have enhanced powers, including the ability to issue infringement notices.

A model code of conduct for councillors with tougher sanctions for misconduct will provide a uniform set of standards and reduce the regulatory burden on councils which will no longer need to establish their own codes.

The Government will consult with the sector in coming months about the legislation and throughout next year on developing regulations for the councillor model code of conduct and mandatory training. Legislation is planned to be introduced in the first quarter of 2024.

The amendments to the Local Government Act 2020 will address recommendations made by integrity bodies such as the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) and the Chief Municipal Inspector.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Local Government Melissa Horne

"Victorians rightly have high expectations of their local councillors and these changes will ensure residents can have confidence their best interests are being served."

"Having a model code of conduct and mandatory training makes sense and extend reforms we introduced before the last council elections. They will help encourage quality candidates to come forward for the 2024 polls."

Media contact: Silvia Ferretti 0408 363 545 | silvia.ferretti@minstaff.vic.gov.au