



## LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR THE FUTURE >>>

### INFORMATION SHEET

# Universal training policy position

The consultation paper for phase one of the Western Australian Local Government Act Review addressed a number of key areas required for reform, including universal training for council members. The consultation process included a four month public submission period and workshops in 15 locations across the State.

This information sheet outlines what we heard during the consultation period about universal training from local governments and others including individuals, community sector organisations and peak bodies. It also outlines the new policy direction the Government intends to take based on this information.

## Why we consulted

Council members have a unique and challenging role. They oversee multi-million dollar budgets and make difficult decisions that impact the wellbeing of communities. Council members hold their position through elections where fewer than one-third of eligible voters cast a ballot. More than a fifth of elections across the State are not contested.

Council members have a unique and challenging role yet **fewer than one-third of eligible voters cast a vote.**

For some aspects of their role, council members are required to receive training. Under the Planning and Development (*Development Assessment Panels*) Regulations 2011, council members appointed as a Development Assessment Panel (DAP) member are required to complete training.

Greater training for council members has been recommended by successive inquiries and reports.

These reports have concluded that dysfunction at council, poor relationships between council and administration, and a failure to adhere to due diligence in decision-making can be improved by council members better understanding the framework in which they are required to perform their duties.

At recent elections the standard of behaviour and conduct of candidates has led to calls for candidates to receive an induction that would inform them about election rules and the role of a council member.

## What we consulted on

The consultation paper canvassed ideas about how to better prepare council members for their challenging role. It discussed the following topics:

- competencies required to be a council member
- funding training
- mandatory training
- continuing professional development

## What we heard












Strong community support exists for council member training and candidate induction. Some local governments supported training providing that only new councillors were to receive training and that a process to recognise prior learning was introduced.

Both community and local government submissions noted that the availability of training in regional and remote Western Australia was a key implementation concern. These submissions often also noted that online delivery of training provided a means to reduce the impact of distance.

Submissions identified knowledge of the Act, meeting procedures, community engagement and financial management as critical competencies and that while basic knowledge of matters such as financial management and planning was required, it was not essential for council members to be experts in these fields.





A few submissions argued that the only criteria for being a council member was possessing an appropriate level of community spirit.

### Summary of feedback from local governments and others:

-  Very strong community support for training, particularly in metropolitan areas
-  Many stated that training should be optional not compulsory
-  Some considered requiring training to be undemocratic
-  Access, expense and time is a major impediment to training in regional areas
-  Universal training in regional areas could result in more uncontested elections and unfillable vacancies
-  Councillors often thought 'others' need training
-  Almost 9 in 10 community members supported universal training of council members
-  Almost 4 in 10 local governments provided conditional support for universal training
-  Less support exists in both groups for universal candidate training
-  Local governments tended to support the WALGA competencies
-  Some community submissions were suspicious about the content of WALGA's training

### Summary of feedback from peak local government bodies:

#### WALGA

-  Supports and encourages all council members to carry out the council member skillset
-  Requests funding from State Government
-  Supports local governments being required to establish a council member training policy
-  Supports candidates being required to attend an information session as an eligibility criterion for nomination

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-  Mandatory training be introduced for all newly council members
-  Recognise prior learning

## New direction

The aim is to build council member capacity and restore public confidence in local government by providing council members with the skills and knowledge they need to do their job well.

### A universal training program will be introduced with three components:



universal  
candidate  
induction



universal  
council  
member  
training



continuing  
professional  
development

### Universal candidate induction



Candidates need to understand both the role they will potentially be taking on and what laws affect the way they conduct their campaign. Every person nominating for council would be required to declare that they have participated in a candidate induction session at the time of nomination.

### What would this look like?

- 1 A free two-hour induction session addressing what to expect as a council member and the rules for campaigning
- 2 Online induction to ensure accessibility in regional and remote Western Australia
- 3 It could also be delivered face-to-face, including at the local government's offices.

### Universal council member training

The second component is designed to provide council members with the basic skills and knowledge to perform their role well through completing five foundational units within 12 months of being elected, set out in regulations.

### What would this look like?



1. Five foundational competencies would be completed within 12 months of being elected.



2. Units would be available online to ensure maximum accessibility.



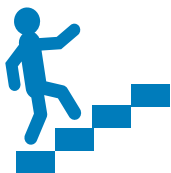
3. Local governments would record completion on their website and in their annual report.



4. Topics would include: meeting procedures and conflicts of interest, understanding local government, serving on council, debating and understanding financial reports and budgets. A unit on social media may also be included.

Once the legislation is passed, this requirement will take effect from the next time a council member is elected.

## Continuing professional development



As in all professions, it is important that council members continue to develop their skills and keep up-to-date with new developments.

The third component is for each local government to adopt a policy providing for council member professional development.

### The professional development policy would:



emphasise the important role of training and embed professional development in local government practice.



be determined by the individual local governments within broad parameters set out in regulations.



be tailored to the needs of the district, the council and the individual council member.



be published on the local governments' website.



outline reporting requirements for training undertaken by each council member.

## Vision for the future

The reforms will build council member capacity and strengthen local governance. They will form the first tranche of reforms that will deliver on governance and accountability.

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