Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Submission to the *Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework*

March 2019

TasCOSS

INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS is the peak body for the community services sector in Tasmania. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their clients to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the *Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework.*

TasCOSS advocates on behalf of low-income Tasmanians who often live in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. Our submissions and advocacy are strongly informed by the expertise of our members and the lived experiences of the Tasmanians we represent, who live across every council area in Tasmania.

TasCOSS endorses the key assumptions presented in the Discussion Paper[1], in particular:

- Councils have an important role in serving the community and expectations for their responsibilities change as our social, economic and technological environment continues to evolve.

- Elections are an important part of ensuring the democratic representation of local government and should be accessible and equitable for all members of the community.

- The community expects councils to operate in an efficient, effective way and make sound, ethical decisions that reflect the best interests of the community.

- Good governance is the foundation that supports good decision-making and decisions should be made through open debate and consultation.

- There should be mechanisms to enhance accountability and performance.

Our submission is informed by research into best-practice models of government engagement with communities, as well by the consultations we held with our members and other stakeholders. For this submission, we asked our members for input on increasing community engagement and participation; minimising red tape and administrative burdens; and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of council services.

We received responses from over 35 members and organisations around the state, providing valuable feedback on the role and aspirations for local government in Tasmania. These members and organisations are actively engaged in the community sector and deliver essential services to people experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability with a high need for support and essential services in their local community. In delivering this support, they are engaged with local government on a daily basis as

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[1] Department of Premier and Cabinet (2018), Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework Discussion Paper, Tasmanian Government, Hobart.

community members, social enterprises, not-for-profit or charitable organisations, land-owners and service providers.

It is clear from our consultations that the community sector believes local government plays a key role in our community. Local government is responsible for delivering a level of administration and range of services that underpin the social, economic, political and cultural systems that support our communities. As such, local government has a key role to play in addressing disadvantage by making decisions and taking actions that help to remove or reduce the barriers to inclusion and providing opportunities that increase participation and encourage greater community engagement.

In that context, TasCOSS believes a contemporary Local Government Act should include a commitment to reducing social disadvantage and provide a framework for local government to deliver:

- high-quality services for all in the community;

- land at an affordable cost to all people; and

- broad public participation with genuine consultation.

The focus of our submission is on three broad principles we believe will help deliver these: governance and community engagement; minimising red tape and administrative burden; and improving overall services and delivery.

List of Recommendations

A contemporary Local Government Framework will:

<u>Governance and Community Engagement</u>

- Enshrine principles of good governance to support councils to make decisions and to act in the best interests of the community.

- Ensure that all residents, organisations and businesses have a full and equal say in decision-making processes of local government by adopting best-practice early engagement, consultation, assessment, monitoring, evaluation and review processes.

- Focus on broadening and deepening democratic participation by residents living in disadvantaged and vulnerable circumstances.

- Incorporate building staff capacity for engagement, to ensure effective consultation is undertaken by skilful and knowledgeable staff who have good lines of communication with and the support of their councils and of elected representatives.

<u>Minimising Red Tape and Administrative Burden</u>

- Ensure a rates exemption for organisations providing charitable services is retained in the Act and a consistent interpretation of this exemption is applied across all councils to provide clarity for organisations undertaking charitable purposes.

- Maintain existing legislative provisions for councils to publish plans, strategies and policies on its websites.

- Provide mechanisms for councils to develop, in conjunction with their communities, public access to information requested that is not commercially-sensitive or private information of individuals in the community or employees.

- Ensure public information is accessible and clearly identifiable on council websites.

Improving Overall Services and Delivery

- Recognise reducing social disadvantage as a core objective in local government and support service delivery focused on social, economic, environmental and cultural needs.

- Develop and promote a range of affordable housing options; affordable and accessible transport; access to employment; community service organisations; and good health and well-being.

- Encourage the activities of community service organisations and assist them to meet the needs of Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage by ensuring that community service organisations are supported in their activities and facilitating the provision of space for community service organisation premises and services.

- Support collaborative thinking and action, and ensure all levels of government are working effectively with each other and with relevant community service organisations, to help combat social disadvantage.

1. Governance and Community Engagement

Governance is spoken of in many contexts and while the use of the term is prevalent, there is often little understanding of what it really means. Simply put, governance is the process of making and implementing decisions, or as referenced in the Discussion Paper: *"Governance is the processes and culture that guide the activities of an organisation."* (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2018, p11).

The *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) states the role of mayors is *"… to promote good governance by, and within, the council"*. The Local Government Division has produced its own resource for the Tasmanian local government sector, primarily elected members, that aims to *"build better understanding of, promote and enhance good governance in local government in Tasmania"*. With the Division acknowledging "good governance" is critical to local government's success, TasCOSS supports the principles of good governance being enshrined in a contemporary Local Government Framework, to support councils to make decisions and to act in the best interests of the community.

Good governance in local government is more than just councils having a process for making decisions. Good governance will involve input from all the community - individual residents or groups - about how those decisions are made and implemented. In that context, community engagement is an essential component of good governance.

A contemporary Local Governance Framework will provide for deeper democratic engagement at the local government level, especially in terms of disadvantaged groups. TasCOSS believes any reform to the Act must:

- Establish mechanisms that ensure an increased say in administrative, local planning and social welfare decisions.

- Be focused on improving councils' capacity for community engagement - including information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment - which should be viewed as core business, not confined to individual projects. The Discussion Paper acknowledges that typical engagement efforts receive little community feedback[2], therefore new strategies for reaching disadvantaged groups are required.

- Include a commitment to building staff capacity for engagement and evaluation as an integral part of progressive engagement policies for councils.

What is Good Governance?

The *Good Governance Guide[3]* lays out seven characteristics of good governance. The attractive feature of this model is that it highlights that governance is about both process and results. In other words, good governance uses good processes to get good results according to the objectives set forward by all members of the community.

TasCOSS endorses the seven characteristics of good governance as described in the *Good Governance Guide* and as referred to in the Local Government Division handbook, *Good Governance Guide for Local Government in Tasmania*:

- ***Good governance is accountable***
  Accountability is a fundamental requirement of good governance. Local government has an obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the consequences of decisions they have made on behalf of the community it represents.

- ***Good governance is transparent***
  People should be able to follow and understand the decision-making process. This means that they will be able to clearly see how and why a decision was made – what information, advice and consultation council considered, and which legislative requirements (when relevant) were followed.

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[2] Department of Premier and Cabinet (2018), Review of Tasmania's Local Government Legislation Framework Discussion Paper, Tasmanian Government, Hobart, p13.
[3] The Good Governance Guide © MAV, VLGA, LGV & LGPro 2012

- *Good governance follows the rule of law*
  This means that decisions are consistent with relevant legislation or common law and are within the powers of local government.

- *Good governance is responsive*
  Local government should always try to serve the needs of the entire community while balancing competing interests in a timely, appropriate and responsive manner.

- *Good governance is equitable and inclusive*
  A community's wellbeing results from all its members feeling their interests have been considered by their council in the decision-making process. This means that all groups, particularly the most vulnerable, should have opportunities to participate in the process.

- *Good governance is effective and efficient*
  Local government should implement decisions and follow processes that make the best use of the available people, resources and time to ensure the best possible results for their community.

- *Good governance is participatory*
  Anyone affected by or interested in a decision should have the opportunity to participate in the process for making that decision. This can happen in several ways – community members may be provided with information, asked for their opinion, given the opportunity to make recommendations or, in some cases, be part of the actual decision-making process.[4]

Why is Good Governance Important?
Good governance is important for several reasons.

- *It promotes community confidence -* People are more likely to have confidence in local government if decisions are made in a transparent and accountable way. This helps people feel that local government will act in the community's overall interest, regardless of differing opinions. It also encourages local governments to remember that they are acting on behalf of their community and helps them to understand the importance of having open and ethical processes which adhere to the law and stand up to scrutiny.

- *It encourages elected members and council officers to be confident -* Elected members and council employees will feel better about their involvement in local government when good governance is practised. Elected members will be more confident that they are across key issues, that they can trust the advice they are given, that their views will be respected even if everyone doesn't agree with them, and that local government is a safe place for debate and decision making. Officers will feel more confident in providing frank and fearless advice which is acknowledged and respected by elected members.

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[4] http://www.goodgovernance.org.au/about-good-governance/what-is-good-governance/

- ***It leads to better decisions -*** Decisions that are informed by good information and data, by stakeholder views, and by open and honest debate, will generally reflect the broad interests of the community. Of course, not everyone will think each decision is the right one. But members of the community are more likely to accept the outcomes if the process has been robust, even if they don't agree with the decision.

- ***It helps government meet legislative responsibilities -*** If decision-making is open and able to be followed by observers, it is more likely that it will comply with the relevant legal requirements.

- ***It supports ethical decision making -*** Good governance creates an environment where elected members and government employees ask themselves 'what is the right thing to do?' when making decisions. Making choices and having to account for them in an open and transparent way encourages honest consideration of the choices facing those in the governance process.

Consultation and Engagement
The main ways that local government consults with the community is through elections (where voting is voluntary), public notices and council meetings. As noted in the Discussion Paper, these methods receive very little community feedback and input[5].

A contemporary Local Government Framework will ensure that all residents, organisations and businesses have a full and equal say in decision-making by prioritising best-practice early engagement, consultation, assessment, monitoring, evaluation and review processes designed to:

- Transparently communicate policy and planning processes, including negotiations with other groups (developers, for instance) over major projects.

- Capture and engage with the ideas and views of all residents, including disadvantaged individuals and groups.

- Equitably consider the needs and desires of all residents.

- Ensure that outcomes are clearly explained and open to appeal.

- Ensure that outcomes are monitored, evaluated and reviewed for effectiveness for all residents.

Some people in the community are disengaged from local government because of lack of interest, while others in the community experience barriers to participation in public policy processes and political disengagement driven by socio-demographic disadvantage. For example:

- Low-income and disadvantaged residents can feel as though "the system" is biased against them, or lack the literacy or numeracy skills necessary to engage.

- Older people can feel as though "progress" is running away from them and be intimidated by new technologies.

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[5] Department of Premier and Cabinet 2018, p13.

- Young people who cannot yet vote can feel that their views are of no interest.

With typical local government engagement efforts ineffective, new strategies for reaching the disadvantaged and hardest-to-engage groups are required.

There are a number of key principles to consider when considering community engagement. Whether using traditional methods or new technology as a result of the digital age, there are many innovative and creative ways to connect with people meaningfully. Regardless of the method, best-practice community engagement should include the following:

- Timely – engagement happens early, making sure people have enough time to contribute meaningfully. If there is little time to contribute, the consultation will feel tokenistic and respondents may be put into a reactive, negative mode.

- Inclusive – involve the community in the consultation so it becomes community-owned and ensure that engagement is accessible for the whole of the community to participate by:
  - making it as easy as possible for people to participate including multiple ways to contribute, such as online, in-person, taking the consultation to them and encouraging different demographics to participate;
  - using plain language that is understandable to everyone and making available advocates to help communities on highly technical issues;
  - offering convenient, safe, neutral spaces that community members will feel comfortable in, particularly people with caring responsibilities, mobility problems, or who lack access to transport.

- Transparent – be clear in what you're asking for and why, by providing enough detail for residents to understand why they're participating, what the outcome will be and when. Offer access to the completed result, as people often want to see their voices and contributions were heard and listened too.

- Flexibility – understand the audience and how they might be best engaged. Try different initiatives to get different people involved and access new thinking. Consider the best methods for engaging with different demographics and be able to adapt. Use mechanisms and tools - for instance, 3D visualisation tools - specifically designed to obtain the views of less educated and socially excluded residents.

- Meaningful – engage in genuine consultation, not consultation for the sake of it. The community will get consultation fatigue and become disinterested if their contribution is not valued or useful. Take both qualitative and quantitative data seriously, to give community concerns and expert assessments equal weight.

- Responsive – as well as opportunities for public input, inform respondents of actions that have emerged from their engagement so that they can see the end results and that their input is valued.

TasCOSS Survey Results

The feedback received from local community members suggests that residents don't feel like their voices are heard, or their contributions are valued. The methods used to engage with the community are not easily accessible and intimidating for many people.

There was a sense that local councils hold an authoritarian relationship with community – this is felt in the methods of engagement and language used when communicating with residents.

When the community does contribute, they feel as though their opinions and ideas aren't taken on board, resulting in people being hesitant to engage. As the responses to the questions below show, this feedback suggests there is a disconnect between communities and local councils.

1. *On what matters should councils engage with local communities?*

Recognising that local government makes important decisions for our communities, we asked our members on what matters should councils engage with them. The responses were quite broad, reflecting the diversity of views on local government and the range of services they deliver:

> *"Councils taking the time to find out what the community values most and having their input."*

> *"In particular, the voices of community members who are not often included in planning, policy and initiative delivery should be engaged and included where possible. This may include children, for example, on planning around parks and public use areas."*

> *"Pathways should be open for community to engage on all matters that affect their communities, in saying this individuals only engage when the issue is of high importance and a pathway is open that works with home, work, family etc. commitments."*

The survey responses regarding the matters councils should engage with local communities are summarised and grouped in the table below:

Social	Economic	Political	Cultural
Housing	Traffic / roads	Strategic plans and policies	Public spaces / recreation
Council services	Planning / land use	Legislation and regulations	Inclusion / Community development
Animal control	Investment / development	Democratic representation	Community infrastructure
Youth	Small business	Discretionary powers	
Safety	Environment		
Welfare issues – drugs, family violence, unemployment	Waste/recycling		
Public transport	Water resources		

2. *What is the best way for councils and councillors to engage with and represent communities in the digital age?*

Given the traditional ways councils engage, we asked our members what better ways they could be consulted and how could this be improved:

> *"More communication over social media. However, meaningful interaction still happens in person, so engaging with the community in more casual environments, not just council meetings or major events."*

> *"Whilst this sometimes means social media is a good platform, face-to-face and social group engagement is also important."*

While a large proportion of responses endorsed the use of social media and digital platforms as new methods for engagement, an equal number of responses acknowledged that face-to-face meetings are just as important. This is especially important in Tasmania where around half of the population is functionally illiterate[6] and the state experiences higher levels of digital exclusion than other states[7], especially in relation to disadvantaged socio-demographic cohorts. In order of preference, the most popular ways for councils to engage were:
i.   Social media / Face-to-face
ii.   Surveys
iii. Websites
iv.   Traditional media / other.

Q3. *How can community engagement be strengthened and measured?*

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[6] 26TEN 2018, Tasmanian Government, accessed 22 February 2019, <https://26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>
[7] Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, CK, Cook, K, Louie, YM & Holcombe-James, I, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, 2018, Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2018, RMIT University, Melbourne, for Telstra.

A common theme in most responses was a recognition that community engagement needs to be broader and more inclusive in order to be stronger. All socio-demographic groups in the community should be able to participate in community engagement and multiple methods of engagement need to be used to reach these groups:

> *"It needs to value all participants equally and provide a platform and voice which truly represents all perspectives and needs. Measurement of engagement could consider feedback from key stakeholder groups who are used to engaging their own communities. Over time, outputs and outcomes derived from community engagement activity will be the best measure."*

Other survey responses for strengthening and measuring engagement suggested:
- Community consultation audits;
- Utilising community heroes (as influencers);
- Ensuring transparency;
- Looking at contemporary research on community participation;
- Setting realistic goals and council outcomes being independently reviewed; and
- Media outreach.

Recommendations

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will enshrine principles of good governance to support councils to make decisions and to act in the best interests of the community.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will ensure that all residents, organisations and businesses have a full and equal say in decision-making processes of local government by adopting best-practice early engagement, consultation, assessment, monitoring, evaluation and review processes.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will focus on broadening and deepening democratic participation by residents living in disadvantaged and vulnerable circumstances.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will incorporate building staff capacity for engagement, to ensure effective consultation is undertaken by skilful and knowledgeable staff who have good lines of communication with and the support of their councils and of elected representatives.

2. Minimising Red Tape and Administrative Burden

Tasmania's 29 councils have diverse needs, challenges, opportunities and expectations of their residents. Councils make decisions on the services they deliver and programs they provide based on their strategic priorities and revenue-raising capacity. Consequently, this results in different councils providing different services across Tasmania.

The effects of this are inefficiencies resulting from a lack of economies of scale, inconsistencies across local government in approaches to decision-making (such as planning approvals) and different services and social welfare programs provided by councils. A further complication is the way the Act is interpreted and applied by 29 different authorities.

With the Tasmanian Government choosing not to include amalgamations in the terms of reference for this review, it must accept responsibility for ensuring the Act is applied consistently across all 29 municipalities in Tasmania.

TasCOSS Survey Results

Discussions with a sample group of our members in relation to the application of section 87(1)(d) of the Act (relating to rates exemptions for charitable purposes), showed there is confusion in relation to eligibility for exemption and clear inconsistencies in the way this section is interpreted and applied across councils. There are examples of the same organisation providing the same charitable services in two municipalities and being eligible for a rates exemption in one but not another.

TasCOSS believes that section 87(1)(d) of the Act is not being applied by a large number of Tasmanian councils as it is intended – to provide rates relief to organisations providing charitable services. From discussions with TasCOSS member organisations and reviewing the rates policies declared by each council (in accordance with section 86B of the Act), it is clear councils determine their own interpretation of s87(1)(d) and apply exemptions differently across the state.

It is irrational that organisations undertaking charitable purposes must request a rates exemption under the Act and each council assesses that request in 29 different ways across Tasmania, when the clear intention of the Act is to provide for an exemption.

In the community sector, most Tasmanian charitable organisations are very small in size and deliver essential services to children, families and those most vulnerable and with the greatest need in our community. In delivering this support, Tasmanian charities contribute significant funds into essential services in Tasmania through both fundraising and volunteer workforces. Many of the buildings owned by charities in Tasmania have been acquired through grass-roots fundraising efforts, bequests and donations of the local community, as recognition of the key contribution community service organisations are making. The intent of this section of the Act is to recognise this important contribution from charities and local communities by providing some relief to their overhead costs.

TasCOSS seeks clarity and consistency regarding the interpretation of section 87(1)(d) of the Act on behalf of our members. A clear definition of "charitable purposes" and consistent application of this definition across all municipalities is necessary.

We also asked our members that have commercial dealings with councils what additional red tape and administrative issues they would like to raise.

1. What mechanisms are necessary to make councils accountable and transparent?

With Councils accountable to their communities, appropriate mechanisms need to be in place to measure their performance and ensure transparency:

> *"Community having access to council and councillors to ask questions and see the process…
> Think outside printed materials and expecting everyone to access online information - go to the
> people more often and in their spaces."*

Good record-keeping, access to information and access to councillors were commonly referred to as key mechanisms to making councils more accountable and transparent. Other mechanisms suggested by respondents were:

- Community consultation audits
- Regular communication that uses plain language
- Confidential process for residents to contribute views
- Significant restructure and reform of the local government sector that results in more efficient and accountable personnel.

Q2. What information should councils make available to the public and how should it be accessed?

The information councils make available can create an administrative burden if it is not being used by the public and can create red tape for the community if the information they require is not accessible. We asked our members what information is of interest to them and how should it be made available:

> *"All except confidential records really. Online perhaps? Libraries or council office."*

Most respondents indicated councils should make available any information that is not protected by confidentiality or privacy. In particular, respondents were interested to access – financial reports; meeting minutes; decisions; budgets; strategic plans/policies/procedures; and community consultation documentation, with one respondent interested in reporting against targets for the proportion of social and affordable housing in each municipality.

Most respondents considered accessing such information online and in a central physical location, such as council offices or local library, was appropriate, or provided by e/mail as requested.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Ensure a rates exemption for organisations providing charitable services is retained in the Act and a consistent interpretation of this exemption is applied across all councils to provide clarity for organisations undertaking charitable purposes.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will:

- maintain existing legislative provisions for councils to publish plans, strategies and policies on its websites;

- provide mechanisms for councils to develop, in conjunction with their communities, public access to additional information requested that is not commercially-sensitive or private information of individuals in the community or employees;

- ensure this information is accessible and clearly identifiable on council websites.

3. Improving Overall Services and Delivery

Council service delivery has transformed from the once narrow focus on "roads, rates and rubbish", into successfully delivering broader social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. As identified in the Discussion Paper, councils are now delivering transport, infrastructure, social welfare programs, sport and recreation, health, education and environmental services.

However, many socially excluded Tasmanians face problems related to past planning decisions of local government, including:

- Tasmania's supply of public and social housing, as well as affordable private housing, is far short of demand, and will fall shorter still as housing affordability continues to decline.

- Tasmania has a history of planning decisions that have led to pockets of disadvantage - broad-acre public housing projects outside of Hobart and Launceston, for example, which are isolated from services and employment.

- Tasmanian public and community transport networks are not extensive, a situation that disadvantages the state's high (and growing) number of older people who may not be able to drive their own car, as well as the higher than average number of residents who cannot afford to own or run a car.

TasCOSS believes local government has an important role in planning and delivering services in the community sector and to residents experiencing disadvantage. The work of many Tasmanian community service organisations is focused on helping Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage secure the resources, opportunities and capabilities that they need to learn, work, and engage socially, economically, politically and culturally.

While acknowledging councils are constantly faced with competing priorities, a contemporary Local Government Framework will ensure that all local services and council activities balance and support the community's social, economic, environmental and cultural needs.

TasCOSS would like to see a contemporary Local Government Framework that supports the following objectives:

➤ *Remove barriers to and, where possible, promote affordable housing.* Provide mechanisms in land use planning regulatory frameworks to encourage the development of affordable housing. It's important that Tasmanian planning processes facilitate the provision of a range of affordable housing types for all ages, as well as of social housing stock for special needs groups, in convenient, sustainable locations.

➤ *Promote good health and wellbeing for all.* Local government should be focussed on work to:

- Create opportunities for healthy activities for all people, regardless of age, gender, physical abilities or levels of socio-economic advantage;

- Create places for recreation that people of all ages, physical abilities, genders and levels of socio-economic advantage can access and enjoy; and

- Create inclusive public spaces where people and communities can connect.

➤ *Create the infrastructure for affordable and accessible transport.* Local government can help facilitate the creation of infrastructure required to encourage the growth of public and community transport options, as well as healthy options such as walking and cycling. The location of future housing and business developments should be linked to transport availability.

➤ *Bring basic services closer to people.* It is important that local government is focussed on removing barriers to the establishment of basic services in proximity to residential areas and ensuring that basic services are provided for in the establishment of new residential areas.

➤ *Help Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage access employment.* Local government can play an active role in efforts to promote sustainable employment for Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability.

➤ *Encourage the activities of community service organisations.* Local government should acknowledge and value the role of community sector and charitable organisations and ensure they are aided and supported in their activities, and councils can facilitate the provision of space for community service organisation premises and services.

To help combat social disadvantage, it is crucial that all parties involved work together, including at the local government level. A contemporary Local Government Framework will work towards collaborative thinking and action:

- *Within councils* - to break down organisational barriers between, for example, planning and community development staff.

- *Between councils* - to maximise opportunities for sharing expertise and resources.

- *Between councils and the state government* - to advocate for all residents, in particular, disadvantaged members of the community.

Local government can help to reduce disadvantage by working in partnership with community service organisations not only in service delivery, but in the policy planning process. As already noted, socially excluded individuals and groups are among the least likely to engage with public consultation processes, making it hard for local governments to hear their points of view.

Community service organisations have the potential to serve a unique function as a bridge between our community planners and some of the most marginalised individuals, families and communities across the state. With their detailed knowledge, community service organisations have the potential to help local governments:

- Understand specific local issues contributing to disadvantage and social exclusion.

- Avoid potential problems in approaches existing and proposed council planning.

- Develop innovative approaches towards overcoming existing and potential barriers to social inclusion and community well-being.

TasCOSS Survey Results
1. *What services, programs or community development do you think councils should be responsible for delivering into the future?*

Given the range of functions local government performs and the diverse services it provides, we asked our members what services councils should provide into the future and what they would change about local government:

> *"Council should continue to have an important role in community development, planning and asset management and partnering with others to ensure community needs are met."*

The survey provided an extensive range of responses regarding council services, suggesting the community has broad and diverse views about the role of councils and service delivery. The most common responses were:
- better public transport and cycling/walking tracks;
- more youth programs and activities;
- more public amenities such as BBQs, playgrounds, community spaces; and
- increased recycling and improved rubbish collection.

Other suggestions for desired council services into the future included:
- Better roads and repairs;
- Environmental programs, green and food waste collection;
- Supporting community houses, community gardens and men's sheds;
- Arts projects;
- Community programs supporting health, lifestyle, well-being, elderly, disability, ethnic diversity, early-years learning;
- Free entry days at community facilities;

- Solar-powered council buildings;
- Public safety;
- Local business promotion; and
- Work experience.

Two responses touted an alternative position, advocating a less involved role for councils. One response suggested councils should not be involved in service delivery, but rather partner with not-for-profits to deliver services on their behalf. The other suggested councils should not be involved with providing services that the market or state government can, such as childcare, aged care and health care.

Q2. What is one thing you would change about how local government currently operates and why?

Similarly, there was a broad range of responses to this question, suggesting again, a diverse range of views in the community about local government. General themes that emerged from the survey were that councils need to be better engaged with local communities to understand what their needs are and be more efficient in delivering services to them:

> *"Listen to the community better and have more representation of diversity on council, people who do not have personal agendas and are really there to represent all the community."*

The main issues that respondents identified they would like to change about local government include:
- Improve the use and social return of infrastructure.
- Assist not-for-profits with purchase/lease of premises.
- The removal of community services by councils becoming more profit-oriented.
- More sharing of information and services across councils.
- More resources into infrastructure that community service providers and groups can use.
- Increased access to information to support decision-making.
- Better access to local government to see how it works and how to engage.
- More input into state and federal government grants and funding.
- Not enough listening and communicating with local residents.
- Encourage councils to look at trauma-sensitive practice and understand the complexity of people's lives.
- Dissolve all councils and rewrite the Local Government Act establishing 9 councils with harmonised rates and charges.

Recommendations
Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will recognise reducing social disadvantage as a core objective in local government and support service delivery focused on social, economic, environmental and cultural needs.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will develop and promote a range of affordable housing options; affordable and accessible transport; access to employment; community service organisations; and good health and well-being.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will encourage the activities of community service organisations and assist them to meet the needs of Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage by ensuring that community service organisations are supported in their activities and facilitating the provision of space for community service organisation premises and services.

Recommendation: A contemporary Local Government Framework will support collaborative thinking and action, and ensure all levels of government are working effectively with each other and with relevant community service organisations, to help combat social disadvantage.

Conclusion

A contemporary Local Government Framework will have a focus on broadening and deepening democratic participation by residents experiencing disadvantage, creating efficiencies with a goal of reducing rates and regulation, as well as improving the social services that local governments provide to disadvantaged people and the community.

A contemporary Local Government Framework will incorporate principles for community engagement by:

- Enshrining a process of good governance.

- Encouraging participation in decision making by disadvantaged and vulnerable Tasmanians and community service organisations.

- Ensuring that local government planning works to protect the interests of all Tasmanians, regardless of socio-economic status, age, gender, or levels of ability.

- Ensuring that the social inclusion impact of development proposals is understood, and that development does not negatively affect, but rather benefits, socially excluded Tasmanians.

- Ensuring that all levels of government work effectively with each other and across all relevant agencies.

A contemporary Local Government Framework will also provide mechanisms for councils to share information more efficiently, support consistency in interpretation and application of the Act across municipalities and retain a rates exemption for organisations providing charitable services.

Good planning and service delivery by local government is vital to addressing many key areas of social disadvantage. The issues relating to disadvantage can be better addressed by improved engagement, efficiency and service delivery from local government, particularly in relation to land use, housing, transport, employment, infrastructure, health and well-being and supporting community organisations.