



# Council elections

## Local Government - Councils at Work

Local Government Councils are one of the three spheres of government in Australia, the others being State and Commonwealth governments. Councils are often referred to as being at the “grass roots” and are well placed to know about the needs and priorities in the local community and to enhance the local environment and quality of life.

Council Members are elected at Council elections every four years by voluntary secret postal ballot, conducted by the Electoral Commissioner of South Australia. Anyone who is over 18 years old and living in, owning or leasing property in a Council area is eligible to be on the Council voters roll and to vote.

Generally, anyone who is an Australian citizen and enrolled to vote can nominate as a candidate. The head of the elected Council is either the Mayor, if elected “at large” by all voters in the area, or Chairperson, if chosen by Councillors after the election.

Councils primarily operate within the **legal framework** of the *Local Government Act 1999* and the *Local Government (Elections) Act 1999*. Councils also deal with other laws, for example, laws regulating building and development, keeping pets and animals, parking and traffic, and public health and safety. They are also accountable with State laws against fraud and corruption applying and subject to oversight by police, the Ombudsman and the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption.

There are 68 Councils in South Australia, varying in geographic size, location (metropolitan and country areas) physical character and population. However, no matter what size or where a Council is, its **responsibilities** include:

- representing people in the community, preparing strategic and financial plans, and making decisions about what sort of place the area will be into the future;
- providing services and facilities for the well-being of people who live, work and do business in the area, striking a balance between social, environmental and economic priorities; and
- consulting with communities and other spheres of government on local needs.

Councils' revenue comes primarily from rates, although they also receive some of their funding through State and Commonwealth grant programs. Councils engage with their communities to help inform their decisions about plans for the area. Services vary from one area to another depending on the priority needs of the area and the resources/funding available.

The people who get elected to the Council will help decide what happens locally now and into the future.

Candidates standing for election to the Council have a variety of views about what should happen in the local community. Anyone can contact the candidates and talk to them about what they want for the area and why they want to be elected. Information about candidates will be made available at [www.lga.sa.gov.au/lgcandidates](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/lgcandidates) and in booklets provided with voting papers. Voters may decide that some candidates will be better at representing them than others and choose to vote for the person with similar views.

## **Nominating to become a member of a Local Government Council is an important decision.**

If elected, you will take up a community leadership role. This will involve influencing decisions about planning and setting priorities for local services such as:

- **Libraries**
- **Environment and land management**
- **Sport and recreation**
- **Community and aged care services**
- **Community Transport**
- **Economic Development**
- **Youth activities**
- **Tourism**
- **Community services**

## **Here is how a Council works**

- At Council meetings, Council Members decide on Council plans and policies and what local services will be provided.
- Individual Council Members do not have authority to make decisions on behalf of the Council – it is the elected Council as a whole that has this decision-making power.
- The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for all staffing issues, implementing Council policies and decisions and the daily operations of a Council.
- Councils may form committees of their Council Members and Council staff to deal with some tasks, such as work related to development, finance and recreation.
- Councils may also invite members of the community to be involved in Council committees.
- When major planning decisions or changes in the community are being considered Councils will consult with the community before they make decisions.
- Minutes of meetings are prepared, as well as reports about the management of Council affairs such as Annual Reports. These records are available to the public.
- Anyone can attend Council meetings to listen to what is talked about and the decisions that are made.

**If you are interested in nominating as a candidate you are encouraged to go along to your local Council meetings to hear what issues are being considered and to check out how your Council works.**

### **Interested in finding out more about Nominating as a Candidate?**

The **Local Government 2010 Elections Information Sheet Series** comprises four Info Sheets which are available for download at [www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au)

- **Info Sheet 1: Local Government – Councils at Work**
- **Info Sheet 2: Interested in taking up a role as Council Member?**
- **Info Sheet 3: On the campaign trail**
- **Info Sheet 4: Where to go for more information**

For further information about Council elections in your area, contact your local Council.