

BEING A

# COUNCILLOR

## IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

What is involved in being a Local Government Councillor

Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councillors

Who can nominate as a candidate in Local Government Council elections

The rules for candidates



Local Government Councillors are elected representatives of the people who live and do business in the local Council area. **Councillors play a very important community leadership role and influence the decisions that Councils make about what happens locally.** A Councillor gets involved in:

- deciding on Council plans and policies for the local area
- guiding Council affairs
- making sure Council resources are used fairly for the benefit of everyone in the community, and
- talking to local people about their views and ideas for the area, and
- letting others know on the Council, regionally and in State and Commonwealth Government agencies, about the local community issues.

Councillors are not paid wages but they are entitled to receive an annual allowance. The annual allowance paid to Councillors varies from Council to Council, but is between \$1500 and \$6000 for Councillors and up to four times the fee of a Councillor for a Mayor or Chairperson. Expenses related to doing Council business can also be reimbursed, for example, telephone and travelling costs, fees for child care or care of other relatives paid so that a Councillor can attend Council meetings.

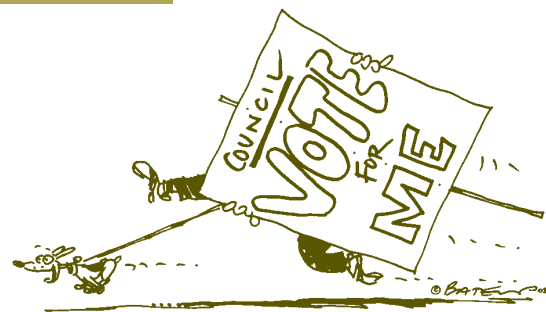
Taking on a community leadership role also means taking on extra work - there are Council agendas, papers and reports to read, meetings to attend, and community events to go to. The work of a Councillor also involves getting out and about in the community and talking to people who live and work in the area about their views and how they want to be represented. At the same time Councillors carry on with their other work, including looking after their families. But despite the extra work and time commitment required, there are many rewards.

### **WHAT DOES BEING A LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILLOR INVOLVE?**

Once successfully elected, your role as Councillor will involve

- participating in Council meetings, which are run using formal meeting rules
- reading and understanding reports and recommendations, including financial and social research reports
- being able to “read between the lines” for hidden agendas and vested interests
- dealing with issues that sometimes may not seem important to you or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally
- presenting your arguments, and debating with other Councillors
- public speaking at community events.

It is expected that all Councillors will conduct themselves in a manner that promotes a high standing of the Council within the community, and fairly and honestly to generate community trust and confidence in the Council. There are laws which set out specific rules for Councillors and you may want to find out more about these before nominating as a Councillor. Refer to “Where to go for more information” on the back of this brochure.



### **HERE ARE SOME OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COUNCILLORS**

- **Represent your people at the local level**, raising issues that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as the wider community. You will be taking a further step toward being involved in gaining greater control over what happens in your community.
- Find out what Council services and facilities are available and **encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access and use Council services and facilities.**
- **Help to raise awareness of Aboriginal cultural issues and concerns so Council decisions are better informed.** For example, things like looking after the land and waters, and promoting cultural events like NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week.
- **You can be a role model in your community, and encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to vote** in Local Government Council elections, and get involved in Local Government business generally. It is about their community, the sort of place they want it to be, now and in the future.

Training and support is provided to newly elected Councillors to help them find their way around Local Government business. You will find many people, including more experienced Councillors will want to help you learn about the work of the Council. Most Councillors have said that they had to learn new things very quickly. There are other things current and previous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councillors say potential candidates need to understand.

- Once elected, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councillors are in the minority and there may be high expectations from within the Council and the local community.
- It is the job of all Councillors to represent everyone in their community, not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This can be difficult, because sometimes the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people think you just represent them.
- Because of the high expectations placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councillors, you need to be realistic about what issues you can influence, and what is possible to achieve and act on in your role as a Councillor.

**ENROL BY**  
13/2/03  
City of Adelaide  
6/2/03

**CANDIDATES  
NOMINATE BY**  
12 noon 27/3/03

**RECEIVE BALLOT  
PACK IN MAIL BY**  
end April 2003

**POST BALLOT PAPER  
FOR DELIVERY BY**  
close of election  
12 noon 12/5/03

**ELECTION RESULTS  
PUBLISHED BY**  
12/6/03

You will need lots of energy and courage to try new things, and be prepared to keep in touch with and respond to your local community - you will be a "community voice".

Some of the skills that will be helpful are:

- good listening and communication skills
- good organisational and leadership skills
- making links with community - being part of the networks, and
- being able to manage your time well.

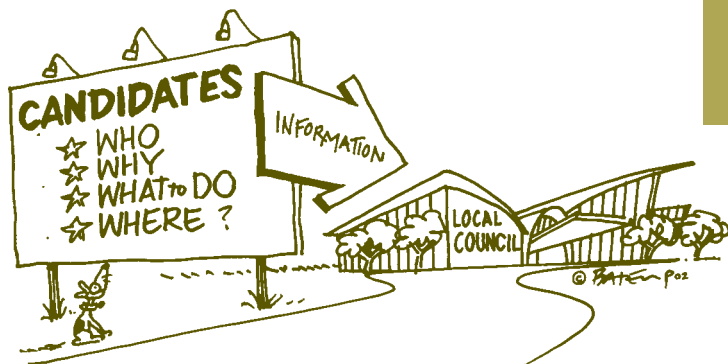
All Councils operate differently and expect different commitments from their Councillors. You can talk to an existing Councillor in your Council area or someone at your local Council office about what is required.

## WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR CANDIDATES?

The Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 sets out the rules for nomination and standing as a candidate. Some of the requirements and procedures are as follows.

- Candidates must **nominate by 12 noon on Thursday 27th March 2003** for the May 2003 Election.
- Nomination forms are available from the Council office or State Electoral Office or Deputy Returning Officer.
- Nomination involves completing and lodging nomination forms with an Electoral Officer appointed for the Council, including an accurate candidate profile of no more than 150 words and a photograph.
- A copy of the voters roll is available to candidates at the Council Office.
- All campaign material must be accurate, and include the name and address of the person authorising the publication and the name of the printer.
- Candidates must keep records of campaign donations and after the election, submit a return, which lists any donations or gifts received for their campaign.

It is illegal to do certain things, for example, there are rules about being honest, not interfering with voters or the secret ballot, and not assisting people to vote. Some practices can result in a fine or imprisonment.



## WHO CAN NOMINATE AS A CANDIDATE IN THE MAY 2003 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS?

Local Government Council elections are held every three years. Generally, anyone who is entitled to vote can stand as a candidate. Candidates must be

- over 18 years of age, and
- a resident or ratepayer in the Council area, and
- an Australian citizen (all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people born in Australia are Australian citizens), and
- on the Electoral Roll.

People who are not entitled to nominate as a candidate include Council employees, or candidates for election in other Local Government Council areas.

The State Electoral Commissioner runs the elections, which are conducted by voluntary postal voting. Country Councils may apply to the Returning Officer to conduct elections at polling booths.

The Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 sets out the rules for the elections. Another brochure in this series explains more about the rules of elections and **Voting in the May 2003 Local Government Elections.**

## WHAT IS INVOLVED IN BEING A CANDIDATE?

Running as a candidate will involve time, money and effort, so before you commit yourself you will need to do some research and find out some local information.

- Get to know the local issues and area really well so you are clear about what and who you will be representing. The local Council office can provide maps of the Council area and wards, and population information. It is also advisable to attend Council meetings to become familiar with what is discussed and the meeting procedures.
- Work out what issues you will campaign on and who you are up against. You will need to be able to let people know what you stand for so they can decide whether to vote for you.
- You will need to plan your campaign and how you will market and promote yourself. You could encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enrol and vote. Tell them why you think they should vote for you, and why their vote is important. You might want to consider door knocking, letterboxing brochures, or meeting people at local gathering places.
- Work out who can help promote you as a candidate. Are there high profile people who will speak up for you and encourage people to vote for you? Who can you ask to help you with your campaign tasks? Are there any opportunities for you to talk to the local media?
- If there are the same number of positions as candidates nominated, you will automatically be appointed as a Councillor. It is wise to find this out before you put too much energy and effort into your campaign.

# MORE

## INFORMATION

### WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call into your local Council office and ask for a package of information for potential candidates. You will also find the following publications very useful.

- *So you want to be on Council - A Guide for anyone considering nominating for election to their local Council* prepared by the Local Government Association of SA (LGA). You can telephone the LGA and request a copy on telephone 8224 2000, or visit the LGA web site at [www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au)
- *Candidate's Handbook for Postal Elections - Local Government Elections* prepared by the State Electoral Office, South Australia. You can telephone the State Electoral Office and ask for a copy on 8401 4300, or visit the web site at [www.seo.sa.gov.au](http://www.seo.sa.gov.au)
- *Making the decision to get involved in local government - ATSiC Local Government Handbook*. The handbook has useful information for potential candidates about making the decision to get involved, planning an election campaign, gaining political support, and marketing and media promotion. You can telephone ATSiC and ask for a copy on 8237 2153.



### Cover Artwork

The cover artwork by Tamara Watson depicts pathways to places and communities, and a hand grasping the crystal ball is a symbol of taking control of the future. Tamara's family is from the Coorong in South Australia - Tanganeakald people.