

# Local government engagement

## STATEMENT OF INTENT



**Electoral  
Commission**  
QUEENSLAND

### Overview

The delivery of accessible, fair and transparent local government elections is one of the Electoral Commission of Queensland's (ECQ) core functions, and central to its mandate to ensure the integrity of Queensland's electoral processes. Local government quadrennial elections are complex, involving the election of 578 mayors and councillors through 343 separate electoral contests across 77 local government areas. There are different voting systems for mayoral, undivided councillor and divided councillor positions, and requires the issuing and counting of two separate ballot papers for mayors and councillors to each voter.

The ECQ is committed to developing strong relationships with all councils to inform, support and ensure continuous improvement in local government election delivery.

### 2024 local government elections

The delivery of the 2024 local government elections for Queensland's 3.7 million enrolled electors was a vast logistical exercise. The ECQ's preparations emphasised engagement with individual local governments to ensure the delivery of co-designed, cost-effective and locally appropriate electoral services based on modelling of voter behaviour at recent Queensland and other Australian elections.

The 2024 local government elections were overall considered to be successful, with electoral participation returning to pre-COVID levels at 82.31 per cent. However, the ECQ is committed to continuous improvement and ensuring its election services meet community needs. Following the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ evaluated all aspects of service delivery and identified key business improvements, which are now being implemented in advance of elections in 2028.

### Purpose

The purpose of the ECQ's local government engagement is to build on the relationships developed with the local government sector since 2020. This document reaffirms the ECQ's commitment to ongoing and constructive engagement, demonstrating lessons learnt from the 2024 local government elections and incorporating local government views and perspectives into planning for the 2028 local government elections.

### Objectives

The ECQ will engage directly with local governments and stakeholders focusing on four key objectives:

- **Cost** – The ECQ will ensure greater accountability and transparency in how election delivery costs are determined and provide local governments opportunities to have input.
- **Voter experience and compliance** – While the ECQ is seeking to put downward pressure on costs, this can have implications for service levels and voter experience, which can impact confidence in elections. The ECQ must work with local governments to improve voter experience and manage any subsequent cost increases. Improving voter experience also has flow-on effects for increasing electoral participation and reducing voter compliance actions.
- **Speed and integrity of declarations** – The ECQ needs to support awareness and understanding of the counting process with key stakeholders and explore improvements to achieve more efficient vote counts.
- **Role of technology** – The ECQ deploys significant technologies to improve effectiveness and efficiency of electoral services and will work with key stakeholders to set expectations and determine what can be feasibly delivered.

## Key issues

The ECQ recognises some key issues applying to both local governments and the ECQ in local government election delivery. The engagement program will support shared understanding and expectations on these issues.

**Scale of delivery:** The ECQ is legislated to deliver elections and by-elections for all 77 local governments, which involves large numbers of candidates and contests, multiple voting systems and a diverse range of communities. It may not be possible to tailor all aspects of election delivery to the specific contexts and challenges of each community. However, local engagement is critical to informing service design within these constraints.

**Diverse contexts:** The ECQ acknowledges the considerable diversity represented across the 77 local governments in Queensland in terms of population numbers and density, geographical diversity and cultures. Similarly, rural, remote, metropolitan and regional centres have different community expectations, facilities and infrastructure. This has tangible implications for election delivery. Local knowledge supports the ECQ to provide election services that meet community needs and maximises voter experience. Acknowledging this, a priority for the ECQ includes developing culturally appropriate services to increase the turnout of First Nations peoples at local government elections.

**Financial constraints:** Local governments are responsible for the cost of elections, while the ECQ is responsible for service delivery. These costs include staff, polling place leases, materials and logistics, utilities and technology, call centre operations, and staff training costs. The ECQ understands local governments are under considerable financial pressure and will seek partnerships to deliver elections that demonstrate value for money.

**Time constraints:** Engagement and communication must be tailored to meet the needs and competing priorities of local governments, acknowledging that election planning is likely to be less of a priority for councils earlier in the electoral cycle.

## Actions

The ECQ will commit to undertaking the following actions to improve engagement with local governments.

**Review cost recovery methodology:** The ECQ is reviewing its cost recovery methodology to improve the transparency and accountability of the costs it charges to local governments. This review will assist in improving budgeting and planning for local government elections and also provide local governments greater insight into how council funds are spent.

**Meetings:** Senior ECQ staff will commence meetings with local governments, to seek their input and advice and start a process of consultation in election planning. This will be supported by ongoing, officer-level consultation between the ECQ and local governments.

**Reporting:** The ECQ will provide each council information on elections delivered in their respective local government allowing greater insight into the election planning processes and the services they are paying for.

**Ongoing sector engagement:** The ECQ will undertake regular consultation and ongoing engagement with peak bodies and stakeholder organisations and where possible will utilise existing forums to facilitate consultation. A particular focus of the ECQ will be on developing an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.

**Advisory committee:** The ECQ will establish an advisory committee, comprising representatives of the local government sector, which will support the ECQ to deliver elections, inform the ECQ's service design and facilitate further engagement with the local government sector.

**Direct communication:** Closer to the 2028 local government elections, the ECQ will reintroduce the popular 'Countdown' newsletter to communicate with all 77 local governments, and provide updates on election planning, by-elections and other ECQ initiatives.

**Engaging with Queensland Government:** The Queensland Government is a key stakeholder, setting the legislative and policy framework for local government. The ECQ will provide advice and information to the Queensland Government to support any potential change that may improve local government election delivery.