

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (the ECQ) accepts the findings and will implement all recommendations of the Nous Group's report *Review of Election Day Issues at the 2024 Queensland Local Government Elections*.

The report will inform preparations and planned service delivery and governance improvements for the October 2024 State general election and for subsequent by-elections and state-wide elections.

Context

The delivery of state-wide elections for Queensland's 3.7 million enrolled electors is a vast logistical exercise. Local government elections are particularly complex, involving the election of 578 mayors and councillors through 343 separate electoral contests, delivery of elections on a service provision and cost recovery basis to 77 local governments, the application of different voting systems for mayoral, undivided councillor and divided councillor positions, and the issuing and counting of two separate ballot papers for mayors and councillors for each elector.

The ECQ's preparations for the 2024 elections 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. This modelling had evidenced a trend towards early voting, which had accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and was sustained, albeit at slightly decreased levels, at subsequent elections.

However, the 2024 local government elections showed a reversion to election day voting as a preference for electors, with around 45 per cent of all votes at the election cast on election day, a significant increase on the anticipated election day voting rate of 35 per cent. Notably, this was the first state-wide Queensland election since 2017 where more electors chose to vote on election day than by any other means.

As a result, the resourcing model for election day polling booths was placed under pressure, particularly in large population centres. The ECQ acknowledges that these issues, such as queuing and ballot paper shortages, resulted in a sub-standard voting experience for some Queensland electors.

In recognition of the impact on some electors, the ECQ has taken those circumstances into consideration for its compliance approach in relation to apparent non-voters at the 2024 local government elections.

The ECQ has exercised its discretion under the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011* to issue 'apparent failure to vote' notices to electors who have demonstrated repeated non-voting behaviour over five Queensland elections. This means that any electors who experienced issues on election day in March 2024 but had previously voted as required in Queensland elections, will not be subject to any non-voter action.

Report on election day issues

In response to the experience of election day in March and as part of the commitment to continual improvement of its election service model and operational delivery arrangements, the ECQ commissioned Nous Group to undertake a targeted independent review of election day for the 2024 local government elections. This included any relevant issues that arose at the concurrent by-elections for the State electoral districts of Inala and Ipswich West.

The ECQ provided a range of input, information and data to Nous Group to assist with its review. The ECQ provided over 120 documents including project plans, strategic frameworks, policies, forecast data and voting figures, and participated in or facilitated stakeholder consultations, including with Returning Officers and other temporary election staff, candidates and local government stakeholders.

The resultant report recognised a wide range of strengths and successes in the ECQ's approach to election planning and delivery but identified issues with forecasting data, resourcing models and risk management, and made eight recommendations for short and longer-term improvements to strengthen the ECQ's planning, forecasting, risk management and resource allocation approaches.

The ECQ welcomes the improvements identified by Nous Group and, in keeping with its long-standing support for continual improvement, is committed to implementing the recommendations with a view to strengthening its election delivery governance, planning and monitoring arrangements.

Election delivery improvements

The ECQ is committed to ensuring that all Queensland electors voting in the upcoming State general election are provided with high quality electoral services, regardless of their location or preferred voting channel.

Key improvements being implemented by the ECQ for the State general election aimed at enhancing the voter experience at the election include:

- Revising expected voting forecasts across in-person voting channels and increasing planned capacity at early voting centres and election day polling booths to service a range of potential demand.
- Expanding early voting opening hours, with polling to be conducted from 8.00am to 6.00pm at all early voting centres operating during the two-week early voting period.
- Increasing the total election workforce, with an expansion of the total number of temporary election staff from approximately 7,300 staff at the local government elections to around 15,000 positions for the State general election.
- Raising the minimum staffing requirements for polling places, with additional issuing officers and queue controllers to be employed at early voting centres and election day polling booths.
- Expanding training provided to all frontline election staff to enhance consistency of service provision at voting channels and locations across Queensland.
- Reviewing early voting centre and polling booth locations to address issues identified and feedback received on specific polling places used at the local government elections.
- Updating the resource allocation (table weighting) methodology, including revising formulas used to predict demand and workload for frontline officers working in polling places.
- Promoting the availability of early voting options and their expanded operating hours, including through advertising and direct elector communications, to better distribute electoral service demand across the voting period.
- Enhancing real-time data monitoring and associated resource allocation processes, to facilitate ongoing monitoring and review of voting trends against forecasts to inform any required changes to the service model during the early voting period.

These measures will be in place for the October 2024 State general election, with further long-term improvements and further engagement on issues specific to local government election delivery to occur following the State election, and in advance of the delivery of the next local government quadrennial election, due in March 2028.

Response to recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Response	Timeframe
1	<p>Establish clear, shared principles for the delivery of high-quality elections.</p> <p>Develop a clear and succinct resource that communicates the markers of a successful election.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The ECQ has a range of guiding principles, frameworks and operating procedures in place which provide the strategic direction for the planning and delivery of all elections. For major state-wide elections, the ECQ releases a service plan in advance of the election period that establishes the key elements of the service model and associated elector services.</p> <p>The ECQ will expand the scope of its service plan for the 2024 State general election to more clearly articulate the key indicators of a successful election. The service plan will be published prior to the commencement of the State general election in October 2024.</p> <p>The ECQ will also work with the local government sector and other key stakeholders as part of its long-term planning and engagement strategy for the next local government quadrennial elections in 2028 to establish a shared understanding and agreement of the key principles that will guide local government election delivery in the longer-term.</p>	September 2024 and ongoing
2	<p>Review cost recovery arrangements.</p> <p>Further explore opportunities to increase the budget for future LGEs.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The ECQ will continue to work with local governments and the Queensland Government on the funding required to deliver local government elections, noting the complexity of local government election service delivery and the cost recovery arrangements with councils.</p> <p>This will be guided by the principles guiding local government election delivery and the service delivery model to be implemented for future state-wide elections.</p>	June 2026

3	<p>Ensure costs that are communicated to councils are compiled with input from all relevant areas of ECQ.</p> <p>Use the shared vision of election success (recommendation 1) to communicate the minimum-viable and non-negotiable elements of the election delivery model.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The process for preparing and communicating cost estimates to local governments in the year prior to local government quadrennial elections will be revised prior to the 2028 elections.</p> <p>This will be informed by further consultation with the local government sector to establish a shared understanding and agreement of the key principles to guide local government election delivery as outlined in recommendation 1.</p>	February 2027
4	<p>Continue to invest in ECQ's risk culture and capability.</p> <p>Curate a risk culture that emphasises shared ownership of issues and their resolution, collaboration across services, and feedback loops to proactively identify and monitor risks across the organisation.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The ECQ has reviewed its election governance model and implemented new processes for management, reporting and oversight of delivery of the approximately 40 individual projects that comprise the overall portfolio of election delivery.</p> <p>As part of the new oversight model, there will be further emphasis on risk assessment, mitigation and management through regular scrutiny, monitoring and reporting to the Election Delivery Board on the delivery of all projects.</p>	May 2024 and ongoing
5	<p>Review and update core assumptions within the voter forecast model to take on lessons about voter behaviour.</p> <p>Build quality assurance and feedback loops into data modelling and reporting processes to promote consideration and incorporation of new information.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The voter forecast model for the October 2024 State general election has been revised and updated to incorporate the experiences in voter behaviour at the March 2024 local government elections. This model has increased the anticipated forecast for election day voting to 45 per cent, consistent with the election day turnout at the March elections, while maintaining forecasts for early voting at 45 per cent.</p> <p>The revised forecast model will provide additional capacity across voting channels to ensure elector services can respond to a range of potential demand.</p>	Complete – May 2024

6	<p>Further invest in ECQ's data and analytics capability to enable data-driven and real-time decision-making.</p> <p>Continue to iterate forecasting models to accurately reflect shifting voter behaviour preferences and place-based population changes.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The ECQ has increased resourcing of its internal data capability and will review, enhance and refine real-time reporting, monitoring and analysis of election data for the October 2024 State general election.</p> <p>This will emphasise monitoring and analysis of voting rates against forecasts during the early voting period, to allow any necessary changes to the elector service and resourcing model to be implemented prior to election day if required.</p>	June 2024 and ongoing
7	<p>Revise the assumptions that underpin the polling place resourcing model.</p> <p>Specifically, consider restoring table weighting to historic estimates and planning capacity to undertake queue control functions.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The polling place resourcing model has been reviewed and updated, with increases to the expected vote issuing capacity (table weighting) implemented to guide resourcing decisions for the 2024 State general election and all subsequent elections.</p> <p>The resourcing model will also include the addition of queue controllers at all polling places forecast to take more than 500 votes per day. While this position had been created as a temporary role in response to conditions created through the COVID-19 pandemic, the role will be embedded as an ongoing feature of the election staffing establishment at all future elections.</p>	Complete – May 2024
8	<p>Seek opportunities to influence voters toward early voting as a means of 'de-risking' election day.</p> <p>Build a deeper understanding of voter behaviour and how ECQ can influence this.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>The ECQ's advertising campaign and awareness-raising program to support participation in the State general election will emphasise the availability of early voting options and the expansion of operating hours at early voting centres.</p> <p>Messages will be promoted across a range of channels, including paid advertising campaigns, social and proactive media and direct communications to electors including Voter Information Cards and SMS alerts.</p> <p>Election communication strategies will continue to be informed by stakeholder engagement and market research insights, with further in-depth voter sentiment research to be undertaken in 2025 to inform future election delivery.</p>	October 2024 and ongoing