

# Local Government Culture Project Insights Report

May 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Disclaimer**

This report is not intended to be used by anyone other than the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (the “Department”).

We prepared this report solely for the Department’s use and benefit in accordance with and for the purpose set out in our Master Supply Agreement with the Department dated 20 August 2021. In doing so, we acted exclusively for the Department and considered no-one else’s interests.

We accept no responsibility, duty or liability:

- to anyone other than the Department in connection with this report
- to the Department for the consequences of using or relying on it for a purpose other than that referred to above.

We make no representation concerning the appropriateness of this report for anyone other than the Department. If anyone other than the Department chooses to use or rely on it, they do so at their own risk.

This disclaimer applies:

- to the maximum extent permitted by law and, without limitation, to liability arising in negligence or under statute; and
- even if we consent to anyone other than the Department receiving or using this report.

Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards legislation

# Executive summary

## Introduction

The Local Government Culture Project aims to better understand the factors that affect Councillor culture and conduct, to support creating a safer, more diverse, and representative local government (LG) sector. Previous to the development of this Insights Report, a discussion paper was produced based on research, academic expertise and preliminary input from key stakeholders from the LG sector and released on 17 December 2021. Its purpose was to identify some of the culture and conduct issues that the LG sector is currently experiencing and to test these preliminary findings with the sector and broader public. The discussion paper put forward three key themes:

- 1. Leadership experience and capability:** A lack of leadership experience and capability may be preventing some councils from effectively working together to achieve community-based goals.
- 2. Councillor journey:** Councillors need to be supported throughout their journey (from candidacy through to being elected and when performing their role) to ensure they understand and can perform their duties, especially in the social media age.
- 3. Early intervention and effective dispute resolution:** Early intervention and effective dispute resolution mechanisms are critical to resolving conflict and preventing the escalation of poor behaviour.

The discussion paper proposed these three key themes and 12 questions with the aim of inviting the sector and public to respond and provide further input on how culture and conduct issues could be addressed. The questions are outlined in **Appendix A**.

## Methodology

This project is being overseen by Local Government Victoria (LGV), a division of the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. Local Government Victoria provides policy advice, oversees legislation and works with Victoria's 79 councils to support responsive and accountable LG services. Local Government Victoria commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting (PwC) – in partnership with academics – to undertake the Local Government Culture Project. The academic partners are Professor Emeritus Anona Armstrong AM (Victoria University) and Dr. Yongqiang Li (Victoria University).

An initial discussion paper was developed by PwC with support and input from the academic partners, using broad research and preliminary insights from the sector. This discussion paper was released on the LGV website, and presented three key themes and 12 questions, inviting the LG sector and the general public to respond and provide further input on how culture and conduct issues in councils could be addressed.

The deadline to receive submissions from the LG sector and the broader public closed on 28th February 2022. These submissions were collected by LGV, de-identified and then provided to PwC for qualitative analysis.

PwC reviewed all submissions in response to the discussion paper. The findings outlined in this report reflect a summary of the key insights raised in the submissions.

The Insights Report provides a reflection of the submissions that have been received, as well as accompanying opportunities to consider to improve council culture. Any opportunities reflected in the Insights Report have not been developed, proposed or prioritised by PwC. Though we have not been able to reflect every issue highlighted in the submissions, all submissions that have been received are being considered in relation to sector-wide ownership of the next steps.



## Submission highlights



### Submission period

17 December 2021 to  
28 February 2022



### Number of submissions

149 responses registered\*

\* Note: a total of 149 responses were registered but 7 responses did not provide any information. Therefore data was only received from 142 submissions.



## Respondent characteristics

### Respondent type

### Approximate %

Council	11
Mayor	5
Current Councillor/s	27
CEO	5
Staff (current or former)	18
Former Councillor	5
Organisation - Peak body	3
Organisation - Other	4
Member of the public	21
Unspecified	1



## Theme characteristics



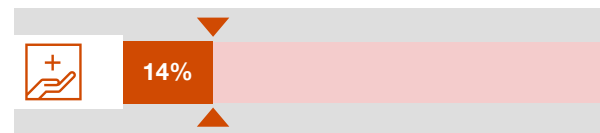
Approximately **96%** of submissions **confirmed** the themes in the discussion paper.



Approximately **4%** of submissions **contradicted** one or more of the themes in the discussion paper.

Where "**confirmed**" means the submission validated the findings from the discussion paper and "**contradicted**" means the submission did not entirely share the same view, or offered a different perspective.

Approximately **14%** of all submissions raised new themes that were not referenced in the discussion paper.



## Approximate geographical breakdown of submissions



### Metropolitan

26%

### Interface

9%

### Regional City

15%

### Large Shire

17%

### Small Shire

13%

### Unspecified




20%

# Executive summary

## What the sector is saying

We received 142\* submissions from the LG sector and broader public. These submissions provided further insights, case studies and opportunities for the sector to consider. All submissions received were reviewed and analysed when developing this Insights Report.

The majority of the responses to the discussion paper validated the key areas of focus in the discussion paper. This Insights Report reflects the nine key ideas that were identified from the submissions and have been aligned with the three themes identified in the discussion paper. These nine ideas provide insights into the major challenges facing culture and behaviour in the LG sector. The below table shows the key issues that were identified and the respective theme they were categorised into.

 <h3>Leadership experience and capability</h3> <p>Issues that relate to how roles could be better defined and how leadership skills could be built and maintained.</p>	 <h3>Councillor journey</h3> <p>Issues that relate to support for Councillors throughout their journey to ensure they understand and can execute their role, particularly in the social media age.</p>	 <h3>Early intervention and effective dispute resolution</h3> <p>Issues that relate to resolving conflict and preventing the escalation of poor behaviour and its impacts.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. There are opportunities to <b>address challenges</b> posed by the <b>Councillor-CEO employment relationship</b>.</li><li>2. Institutional factors could be addressed to allow councils to operate more like <b>representative boards of the community</b></li><li>3. <b>Leadership skills</b> need to be <b>taught</b> and upheld amongst <b>Councillors</b>.</li><li>4. The <b>support</b> and assistance provided to <b>Mayors</b> throughout their term could be significantly <b>strengthened</b>.</li><li>5. There is an opportunity to <b>improve diversity and representation</b> in local government.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. <b>Training</b> offered pre-candidacy, for induction, and during term could be <b>strengthened</b>.</li><li>7. <b>Social media</b> needs to be understood, used and managed in ways that promote positive engagement.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. The role of <b>Municipal Monitor</b> highlights opportunities for <b>independent and formal advice</b> to <b>resolve issues early</b>.</li><li>9. Consideration should be given to <b>strengthening resolution processes</b> and local powers to discipline.</li></ol>

This Insights Report also reflects ideas raised through consultations that could address these nine issues, at a high level. The feasibility of implementing the opportunities or suggestions arising from submissions discussed throughout this report has not been considered in this report.

## Where to from here

This Insights Report consolidates the feedback received from the submissions, and focuses on key and recurring insights. All submissions that have been received are being considered and incorporated into the next steps to be taken by the LG sector. Sector-wide ownership of the next steps will be crucial in ensuring that cultural challenges are addressed and long-term, systemic cultural change is achieved.

\* Note: a total of 149 responses were registered but 7 responses did not provide any information. Therefore data was only received from 142 submissions.

# Thank you

[pwc.com](https://pwc.com)

© 2022 PwC. All rights reserved. Not for further distribution without the permission of PwC. “PwC” refers to the network of member firms of PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (PwCIL), or, as the context requires, individual member firms of the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity and does not act as agent of PwCIL or any other member firm. PwCIL does not provide any services to clients. PwCIL is not responsible or liable for the acts or omissions of any of its member firms nor can it control the exercise of their professional judgment or bind them in any way. No member firm is responsible or liable for the acts or omissions of any other member firm nor can it control the exercise of another member firm’s professional judgment or bind another member firm or PwCIL in any way.

WLTP0185341