

# Local Government Culture Project: Discussion Paper Snapshot

The Local Government Culture Project aims to better understand the factors influencing councillor culture and conduct. A Discussion Paper has been released for public consultation on how the local government sector can work towards creating a safer, more diverse and representative local government sector.

## What is the problem?

Local communities rely on Councillors to strategically drive the vision of the municipality, and sustainably and responsibly deliver community services.

In the previous Council term (2016-2020) poor Councillor behaviour led to significant state intervention, including four anti-corruption investigations and the dismissal of five Councils.

Unacceptable Councillor behaviour (towards the Mayor, other Councillors, Council staff and community members) can:

- seriously affect health and wellbeing
- limit the diversity and representativeness of Councillors
- make it difficult for a Council to attract and retain talented staff
- have a financial cost to Councils
- damage a Council's reputation
- impair a Council's ability to perform its role effectively.

It is necessary to understand what enables Councillors to behave in unacceptable ways. This will empower the sector to proactively deal with poor behaviour to minimise its harmful impact and prevent escalation.

## What have we heard?

The current system has a range of mechanisms in place to address unacceptable behaviour, but these mechanisms are not sufficient.

Drawing on recent integrity reports, targeted stakeholder consultation, and academic expertise, three themes which underpin Council culture have emerged:

1. Although the roles and responsibilities of Councillors, Mayors and CEOs are clear in legislation, a lack of leadership experience and capability may be preventing some Councils from effectively working together as a diverse board of the community to achieve community-based objectives.
2. Councillors need to be supported throughout their journey (e.g. from candidacy to appointment) to ensure they understand and can execute their role, particularly in the social media age.
3. Early intervention and effective dispute resolution mechanisms are critical to resolving conflict and preventing the escalation of poor behaviour and its impacts.

## Have your say

The Discussion Paper will guide a discussion about practical things that can be done to improve Council culture.



The Discussion Paper can be read in full on the Local Government Victoria website: [www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/local-government-culture-project](http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/local-government-culture-project)

Twelve questions have been posed to help frame the input to this conversation. Local Government Victoria is seeking written submissions addressing one or more of the 12 lines of inquiry. Details regarding the public submission period are available on the website above.

**The Project is seeking your feedback on the following lines of inquiry:**

Leadership experience and capability – these questions relate to how roles could be better defined and how leadership skills could be built and maintained	
Supporting leadership competencies and capabilities	<b>Question 1:</b> The Local Government Act 2020 defines leadership roles and responsibilities. Does this require further role clarity? If so, which aspects require clarification and how may this be achieved (including legislative and non-legislative mechanisms)?
	<b>Question 2:</b> Given the diversity and experience of candidates’ backgrounds, how can the local government sector improve leadership capability and better cultivate an environment of transparency, honesty, integrity and trust?
	<b>Question 3:</b> How successful have any existing initiatives been to promote strong leadership and build trust? Please provide case studies or examples of good practice that have worked well and could be considered for broader implementation.
Operation of local government	<b>Question 4:</b> Mention is made through consultation of local government being a <i>‘parliament of opposition as opposed to a diverse board of the community’</i> . What needs to change to better align Councillors and Mayors to effectively achieve community-based objectives and better operate as a diverse board of the community?
Councillor journey – these questions relate to the support and training that could be offered to Councillors	
Training and professional development	<b>Question 5:</b> How could the candidate and induction training support be improved to ensure genuine engagement and sustained understanding of the role and responsibilities of Councillors?
	<b>Question 6:</b> How can the local government sector work to formalise a structured professional development pathway for Councillors and Mayors?
Social media	<b>Question 7:</b> How can awareness be raised on the best ways to harness social media to ensure a consistent management approach – covering monitoring, appropriate usage, and the consequences of negative usage?
	<b>Question 8:</b> Do you think that any amendments to the Local Government Act 2020 are required to deal with the usage of social media? How should social media harassment be defined and what mechanisms could be introduced into the Act?
Early intervention and effective dispute resolution – these questions relate to how poor behaviour can be dealt with when it arises	
Early intervention	<b>Question 9:</b> In the context of leadership, what needs to change to empower elected representatives, CEOs, and Council staff, to call out poor Councillor behaviour and misconduct without fear of retribution?
	<b>Question 10:</b> What can be done to better support dispute resolution at Councils?
Dispute resolution	<b>Question 11:</b> What types of early intervention mechanisms can be formulated and when? What do you think is an acceptable duration or timeframe for this intervention to fairly resolve a matter?
	<b>Question 12:</b> How can the process for misconduct and/or poor behaviour claims be improved, or more adequate penalties for misconduct and poor behaviour be incorporated in a more effective way?

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