

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT — ELECTIONS**

*Statement by Minister for Local Government*

**MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta — Minister for Local Government)** [9.18 am]: Local government ordinary elections are being held across Western Australia this Saturday. Around 500 council members will be elected to fill vacancies on the council of every local government. Voters across our great state will notice the Cook government’s landmark reforms coming into place at these elections. Electors across all 44 of the state’s largest local governments now have the opportunity to directly elect their mayor or shire president, with a record 35 such elections held. This reform provides voters with a clear line of sight for who will lead their council.

Councils directly electing mayors and shire presidents for the first time include Armadale, Ashburton, Augusta–Margaret River, Bayswater, Belmont, Broome, Busselton, East Pilbara, Esperance, Exmouth, Gosnells, Harvey, Karratha, Kwinana, Manjimup, Mundaring, Northam, Serpentine Jarrahdale, Swan and Wyndham–East Kimberley.

Optional preferential voting has also been implemented to give ratepayers the greatest possible say on who represents them on their local council. These changes have brought council elections more in line with state and federal elections and local government elections in all other states.

New backfilling rules are also now in effect. If a council member resigns within one year of being elected, the resulting vacancy can be backfilled if there is an eligible next highest polling candidate from the recent election.

We have also been working to encourage voters to take part in these elections. The state government worked in conjunction with the Western Australian Local Government Association to deliver a community engagement campaign, “Vote for Them”. This campaign emphasised the importance of local government in the day-to-day lives of Western Australians and the value of voting for council representatives. Apart from targeting the wider community, this campaign also focused on reaching sections of the community in which voter turnout has been historically low, such as Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, younger people, the LGBTIQ+ community and people living with disability.

As part of the Cook government’s reforms, the election period has been increased by one week to account for variability in postal delivery times. Ballots must be returned by 6.00 pm this Saturday for them to count in the local government election. Any voter who has not returned their postal ballot can lodge it in person at their local polling place. Any voter who has not already voted can attend in person to request a new ballot, even if they had previously discarded a postal ballot. Voters in councils that are yet to initiate postal voting in their area should check with their council to see where they can vote on Saturday. I am sure that all members will join me in encouraging every voter to have their say in these elections. Good luck to all those candidates who have put their hands up to serve their local communities.