

LOCAL GOVERNMENT— REGULATIONS

Statement by Minister for Local Government

MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta — Minister for Local Government) [12.25 pm]: I am pleased to update the house on the Cook government's continued delivery of local government reforms. Today new regulations have been made to finalise many reforms that were the subject of the Local Government Amendment Act 2023, passed by this Parliament earlier this year. These new regulations specify the requirements for all larger local governments to live stream council meetings, while smaller councils will be required to publish audio recordings at a minimum. These regulations will further simplify financial reporting by clarifying that local governments will need to determine the accounting value of certain assets only every five years, rather than every year. This positive change builds upon the recent introduction of model financial statements for 2022–23. Together, these reforms are expected to streamline the annual reporting processes for local governments, ultimately reducing costs for ratepayers.

These regulations introduce a landmark positive change for council members. Local governments will now be able to reimburse the education expenses of council members for any course that is relevant to their role as a council member, provided that the council has established a policy to guide the reimbursement of such expenses. The regulations are flexible: costs for any courses on any topic areas relevant to a local government may be reimbursed by the local government, in line with its policy. For example, a councillor might seek reimbursement for study towards an accounting qualification to help them with their role on the local government's audit committee. This landmark reform is expected to support a broader range of people serving on councils. It will also ensure that council members can continue to develop their skills and knowledge while serving in public office. The new regulations also include measures to stamp out the use of sham leases, based on the recommendations of the City of Perth inquiry. These regulations introduce new minimum standards for the eligibility of occupiers of properties to enrol or nominate in local government elections.

Members will also know that many other reforms will be in effect at the local government elections this Saturday. More electors than ever before will have the opportunity to vote to directly elect the mayor or president of their council. Optional preferential voting will be in full effect, ensuring that electors will have the greatest degree of choice in who represents them. New backfilling provisions to fill extraordinary vacancies will also come into effect. Work on the delivery of further reforms, including the new local government inspector and monitors, is also continuing in close consultation with the local government sector.