

The future
of local
government
review

Community Update

Review Stage 1 – July 2022



Let's All Shape the Future
of Local Government.



Almost 1400 Tasmanians shared their thoughts on the future of our local councils.

Local government has played a big role in supporting Tasmanian communities for over 100 years. Even though we live in a globalised world, we still need local knowledge and solutions to deal with many of the challenges we face as a community. Councils need to be set up to succeed in the long run so they can deliver the things that matter most to their communities. We have spoken with many people about this over the last six months. They have helped us to identify the parts of our system of local government that need to change so councils can succeed.

“The Tasmanians we spoke to value local government and want councils to succeed.”

– The Hon Sue Smith AM



The Review – what we want to achieve

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ‘re-set’ the role of local government in Tasmania so that it is ready for the future.

The Tasmanian Government asked the Local Government Board to review the role, function, and design of local government in Tasmania so that our councils are ready for the future. Our job is to look closely at how local councils are working now and make recommendations to the Government about what we think needs to change. Our focus is on making sure councils are set up as well as possible to make people’s lives better.



What we heard and learned – Stage 1

During Stage 1 of our Review, we gave Tasmanians the chance to share their thoughts and ideas about the future of councils.

By talking to people and doing our own research, the Board came up with a list of what we think are the main challenges and opportunities for local government:

- **The role of councils has changed a lot over time – this means it is not always clear to the community when something is a job for councils or should be handled by other levels of government.**

The community expects all levels of government to work together in their interests, with each performing the role that best lines up with their strengths and capabilities. We need to work out the functions and services councils should be responsible for. Then we can decide how to best organise and fund our councils in a way which is fair and sustainable.

- **Councils are in the best position to understand what local communities need most and develop the solutions that will fix local problems.** We know that local design and delivery of some services is really important, particularly when it comes to the things that can have the biggest impact on improving community wellbeing, like mental health services and access to jobs. Now we need to understand how much effort councils are spending on things that might be done better in a different way. We think councils should be freed up to focus on using their local knowledge to make the most difference to communities.
- **Council staff and elected members work hard for their communities, but we heard that the way councils are set up makes it hard to attract and keep the people with the skills councils need.** This is especially the case in more rural areas. Rather than having every single council trying to manage on their own, we want to explore ways to pool councils' funding, people, and systems to get better overall results for communities. Having fewer, bigger councils is not the only option here. More sharing of council resources across regions is also possible.
- **Tasmanians – especially those who live outside the cities – really value having local representatives they can trust to respond to their issues and concerns.** Councils provide this local voice, but for it to work well, communities need to trust and respect their elected members. When individual councillors behave badly, it can weaken trust in the overall system of local government and undermine the good behaviour of the majority. We think there is room to improve the overall standard of councillor professionalism and get a broader range of people involved in local decision-making.



What we will do next

We have identified the problems, and now it's time to develop solutions.

Based on what we learned in Stage 1, we have come up with six 'priority reform areas'. These are the areas we want to look at in more detail in Stage 2 of the Review. We will be coming up with ideas and options under each of these areas, but to do that we will need your input.

1. Defining councils' role in the 21st century

Getting the role of local government right is critical. We need to establish exactly what functions and services councils should be delivering, and the administrative, financial, and legislative methods to deliver them. In Stage 2, we want to lead a community conversation about the role councils should play in the future, and then identify the reform options that will best support that vision. We have developed a draft role statement to support this discussion.

2. Local representation and good governance

Communities need to trust and have confidence in their local council. There is significant room for improvement in the overall standard of local governance in Tasmania. This includes in community engagement, the representativeness, skills and professionalism of elected members, workplace culture, and performance. The Board's focus in Stage 2 will be to identify a range of reform options that target these aspects.

3. Strategic and regional capability

Tasmania's current system of 29 councils makes it hard to coordinate effort and resources around common regional and state-wide policy goals. This includes settlement planning, infrastructure and land use planning, tourism, and branding. In Stage 2, we will be looking at how councils work together and coming up with options for improvement.

4. Efficient and effective infrastructure and service delivery

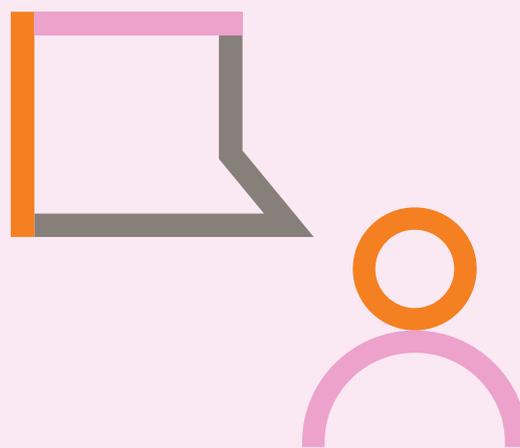
We believe that consolidation in some service areas may keep costs down and deliver better value for the Tasmanian community. More importantly though, we believe it would also result in a higher quality of services because overall council capability may be improved. In Stage 2 we will work out which services would benefit from delivery at larger scales (and those which would not), so we can develop potential alternative delivery models.

5. Sound and consistent planning and regulatory services

We need to resolve the role that councils play in land use planning, particularly development approvals. Our current view is that we may not have the balance right between local concerns and broader regional and state-wide costs and benefits. There is also some evidence that the quality of some other regulatory services – like building and plumbing permits or health inspections – is mixed.

6. Operational sustainability

Some smaller councils will struggle in the medium to longer term to raise enough revenue to be able to deliver all their current functions and services to a good standard. Increasing subsidies to fund the survival of unsustainable councils is not the answer. In Stage 2, we want to get a clear and detailed picture of the current and projected financial position of all councils, so that we can develop appropriate funding options.



Your voice

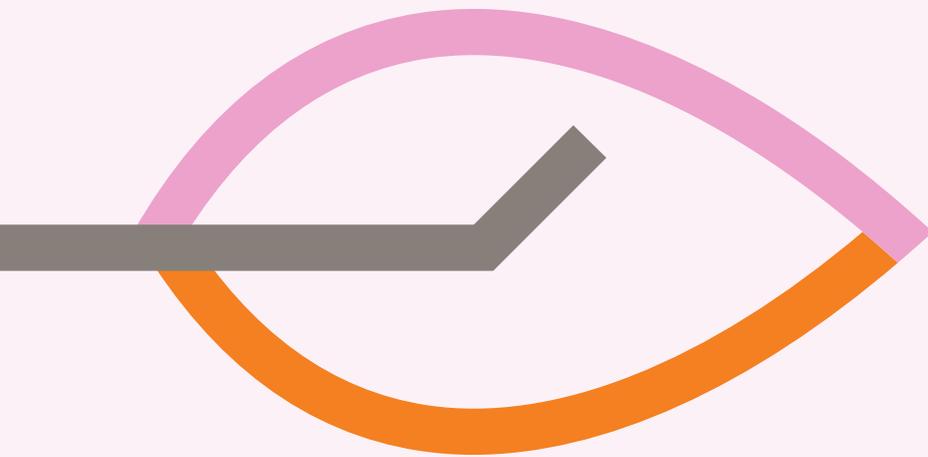
This is a shared reform journey. We need you to have your say.

We want to hear your thoughts and ideas. Head to engage.futurelocal.tas.gov.au to participate in our dedicated community engagement portal. This page will be active for five weeks from 21 July 2022. You can also read the full Interim Report and complete the survey.

Once we hear your views, the Board will be exploring these reform areas to develop specific options for improvement.

To stay up to date with what is happening with the Review and to find out about any future engagement opportunities, visit www.futurelocal.tas.gov.au

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Tasmanian
Government

Department of
Premier and Cabinet

More information?

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