2 September 2022

The Future of Local Government Review
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Dear Local Government Board

Submission to the Future of Local Government Review Interim Report

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Future of Local Government Review Stage 1 Interim Report* (the Interim Report).

TasCOSS advocates on behalf of low-income Tasmanians who often live in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. Our submissions and advocacy are strongly informed by the expertise of our members and the lived experiences of the Tasmanians we represent, who live across every council area in Tasmania.

Our members are actively engaged in the community sector and many deliver essential services to people in the local community experiencing disadvantage, vulnerability and with a high need for support. In delivering this support, they are engaged with local government on a daily basis as community members, social enterprises, not-for-profit or charitable organisations, land-owners and service providers.

Background

Local government is the closest level of government to the community. It plays a crucial role in the community providing governance, planning, service delivery, community development, asset management and local regulation.

Local government also provides a range of social services such as childcare, aged care and youth programs, as well as supporting community health programs, including GP services in some locations. It is vital in building local community infrastructure to create jobs and to improve the wellbeing of Tasmanians.

It is clear from TasCOSS' engagement with members that the community services industry believes local government plays a key role in our community. Local government is responsible for delivering a level of administration and range of services that underpin the social, economic, political and cultural systems that support our communities. As such, local government is a key player in addressing disadvantage by making decisions and taking actions that help to remove or reduce the barriers to inclusion and providing opportunities that increase participation and encourage greater community engagement.

Proposed Role Statement for Local Government

With the proposed role statement seeking to support and improve social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Tasmanian communities, there is alignment with the role statement and the community services industry's view on the role of local government.

TasCOSS encourages including in the role statement, a commitment to upholding human rights or human rights principles. This means local government developing a framework for putting people and their human rights at the centre of decision making, service delivery and local government activities.

A robust human rights framework will deliver better policy and social outcomes for local communities, in particular in the areas of governance, diversity, affordable housing, health and wellbeing, affordable and accessible transport, digital inclusion, food security, access to basic services, employment opportunities, climate change, reducing poverty and disadvantage.

PESRAC Report Findings

A key finding from the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) review is the importance of community and place-based responses to recovery. Communities are wanting to participate in and develop local solutions to local problems. The local government sector has a key role in leading and facilitating local priorities and presenting a whole-of-community view to other levels of government and supporting community connectedness.

TasCOSS endorses the PESRAC recommendation that the State Government and its agencies should actively seek out and fund community-led, place-based recovery activities. Community-led, place-based approaches will empower communities, strengthen community connection and build resilience.

Local Design and Delivery

The biggest challenge that governments and communities face is tackling the barriers to giving all Tasmanians the opportunity to live a good life. Tasmanians want to feel valued, included and have a voice in the decisions that affect them. Collaborative, cooperative and community-centred approaches to programs and service delivery will lead to greater effectiveness and improved social outcomes.

Across Tasmania many people are facing a range of barriers beyond their control, such as — a lack of access to reliable, affordable transport to get them to services, training and work; low levels of literacy; lack of access to digital technology; poor access to essential services such as health and dental care; and a decent income so they can afford the basics.

There are communities in Tasmania where individuals are feeling isolated, powerless and disregarded and are experiencing complex, multi-layered and entrenched disadvantage which is often intergenerational.

TasCOSS has heard, through our consultations on the development of the *Community Services Industry Plan 2021-31* (Industry Plan), that our industry wants connected, person-centred, place-based approaches to current and future needs.

Person-centred, place-based approaches in communities across Australia and other countries have delivered long-term outcomes including improved health and wellbeing for individuals, families and the community.

The Interim Report recognises local, place-based design and delivery remain crucial in some service areas, particularly when it comes to supporting improved community wellbeing. TasCOSS agrees that local government is in the best position to be a leader in this area and supports the next stage of the review developing options for better leveraging councils' ability to support community wellbeing through tailored, place-based approaches, and better joined-up effort across all levels of government.

Place-based approaches are a key driver of the Industry Plan, in particular, for taking action to develop local solutions for Tasmanians. This means building responsive and connected local services systems that ensure Tasmanians can get the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Place-based Approaches

The expansion of person-centred, community-led, place-based responses to local issues is an opportunity for local government.

It is important that place-based approaches are also community-led. Ideally, this means community co-design, or at least deep community engagement in design, delivery and evaluation. This supports the PESRAC finding that communities want to drive outcomes, rather than a one-size-fits-all, or top-down, approach to programs and service delivery being centrally designed by bureaucrats.

TasCOSS welcomes the Interim Report's greater focus on place-based services that support community wellbeing. This aligns with our Industry Plan and recent commitments by the Tasmanian Government, including the community-led, place-based COVID-19 recovery activities, as well as the 2020 *Review of the Tasmanian State Service* that identified an increased focus on the complex needs of people and places.

Significant benefits come from local knowledge and relationships with community members in a place-based approach. These include benefits to local government of:

- identifying and understanding local issues;
- developing solutions that meet the needs of local populations;
- better preparedness for disruption response and recovery;
- targeted, timely delivery of programs and services that are responsive to community need;

- reduction in duplication of services and programs;
- opportunities to consider new and innovative models of service delivery, particularly in rural and remote areas; and
- greater efficiencies in service delivery.

Through Stage 2 of the Review, there is an opportunity to position local government in a leadership role in place-based approaches that target the specific circumstances of a place and engage the community—and a broad range of local organisations from different sectors—as active participants in their development and implementation.

Conclusion

Local government will achieve better outcomes, including addressing the barriers to participation and causes of poverty and disadvantage, by putting people at the centre of decision making and empowering individuals to be full participants in their own lives, their community and the development of local solutions.

Place-based approaches create platforms for local people to work together to create and achieve goals for their communities. The benefits of this approach are broad and result in better outcomes for local communities.

Local government can take a leadership role by investing in people, social infrastructure, person-centred and place-based solutions, that build resilient communities with strong relationships and strong systems. Local government working together with local communities can deliver the place-based, community-driven solutions to address the barriers to participating in our economy and our community.

Yours faithfully

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