

# Tasmanian Local Government Survey

Findings Snapshot

April 2023



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA

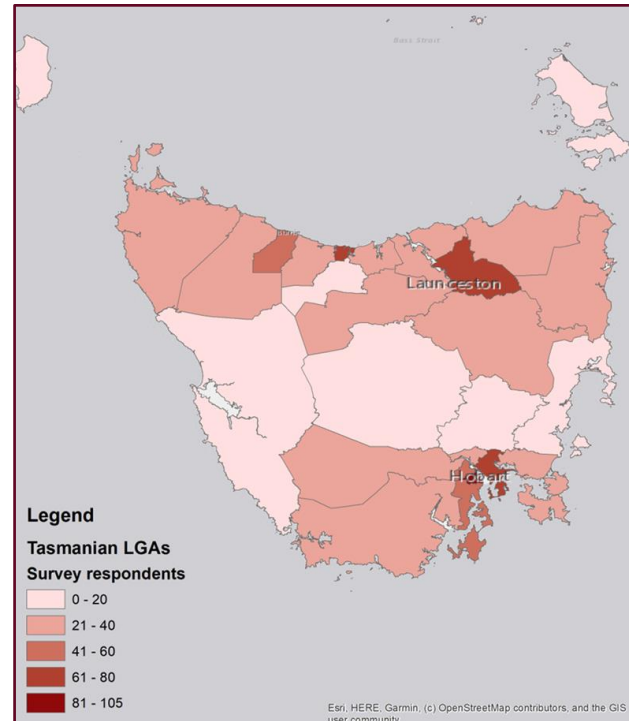
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## Overview

In February 2023, we conducted a phone survey of **1,000 Tasmanians from all 29 council areas** to better understand what people think about the future of councils. This is the largest survey ever conducted in Tasmania on this topic.

The people we spoke to were as diverse as the population of the state itself: from all genders, ages, backgrounds, stages of life, and people living in the cities, the towns and in the country.

We are confident that the people surveyed are representative of the population. We have a **high level of confidence** that these results accurately reflect the views of people from across the state.



This survey forms a part of the **Future of Local Government Review**, which was commissioned by the Tasmanian Government to ensure the current system of local government is robust, capable, and ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The Review is led by the Local Government Board. They have used this survey to gather feedback to better understand how people feel about their local community, their local council, and the future role of local councils in Tasmania.

# How are Tasmania's councils performing?

**We asked, “how well does your local council serve your local area?” Overall, the responses were generally split 30-50-20, with 30% having a positive perception, 50% neutral and 20% negative.**

This was a generally consistent split right across the state and with all age groups, although the major urban cities were less negative (14%) than the rural and remote councils (24%) when it came to judging their councils.<sup>1</sup>

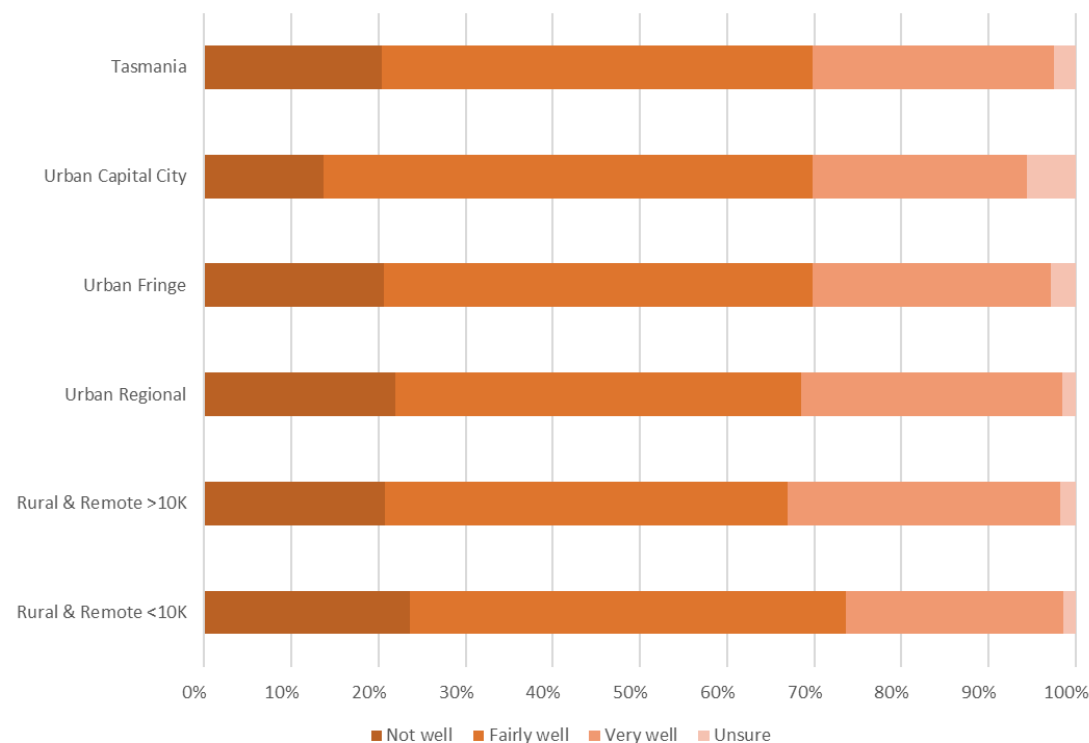
Councils were seen to perform best at providing adequate and quality services and facilities (37% rated very well) and being well governed and professional (30% rated very well).

On the other hand, councils were rated poorly on financial management (23% rated very well) and how well their decisions represented the whole of the community (19% rated very well).

When discussing how well councils were maintaining infrastructure, including roads and bridges, it depended where people lived.

People in small councils in rural and remote areas were much more likely to reflect poorly on the ability of their local council to adequately maintain infrastructure (44% rated not well). Small remote councils were also rated significantly below the average on financial management.

Overall, how well does your local council serve your local area?



# How do people engage with their councils?

**Just under half of the respondents (45%) had direct contact with their local council in the last 12 months.**

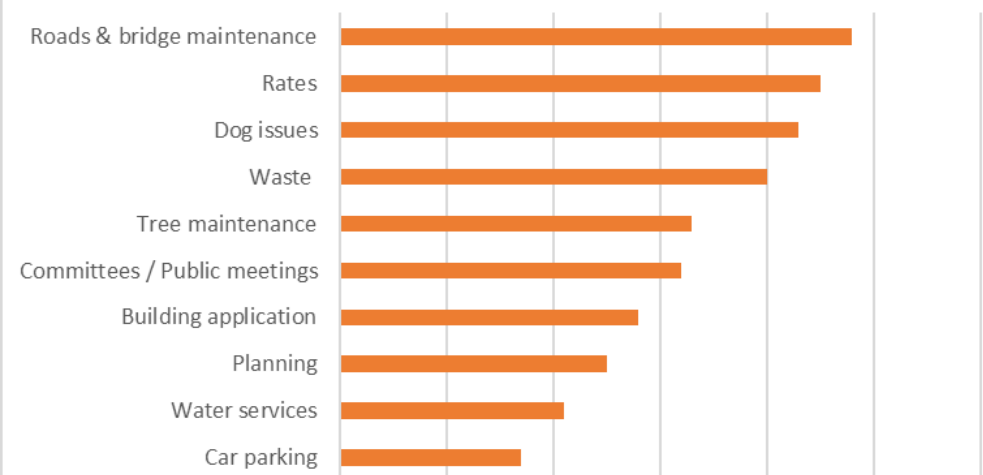
Younger people (18 to 24 years) were much less likely to have had contact with their local council – 83% had not engaged with their council.

Respondents aged 55 to 69 years were more likely to reply yes, they had had contact with their local council in the last 12 months (57%).

Respondents who resided in rural and remote areas with a small population (less than 10,000 people) were more likely to reply yes, they had had contact with their local council in the last 12 months 54%, whereas it was down to 36% for the major cities.

There are notable differences in levels of understanding about council operations. **When asked whether their council was financially well-managed, 18.5% of respondents were 'unsure'.**

"What was the nature of your engagement with Council?"



Of those who had direct contact with their local council in the last 12 months, one in ten in each case stated that the nature of their contact with council was regarding roads and bridge maintenance, dog issues or rates (10% in each case).



# Are there too many, too few, or the right number of councils?

We asked if 29 councils was too many, too few, or about right.

**More than half of the respondents felt that Tasmania had too many councils (57%).**

14% of respondents felt that either the population or the size of the state was too small to sustain that many councils.

Greater resource sharing, more cost savings and reducing duplication were also among the most common reasons cited for having too many.

31% felt that we have the right amount, and only 2% felt there were too few.

In both sets of responses, the issues were around the concern that fewer councils would not provide adequate representation or meet distinct, local needs.

<b>Too Many Councils</b>	<b>57%</b>
Tasmania's population or size is too small	14%
Support for amalgamation or greater resource sharing	12%
Too costly or fewer councils more efficient	12%
Too much duplication of processes or services	5%
<b>About the Right Amount</b>	<b>31%</b>
Each council has specific or local needs	5%
Current system works	4%
Numerous and/or diverse communities	3%
Constituents get better representation	3%
<b>Too Few Councils</b>	<b>2%</b>
Council area already too large to meet needs	1%

# Does the level of government matter?

We asked whether people agreed with the statement “I don’t mind which level of government provides services locally, as long as they are delivered well.”

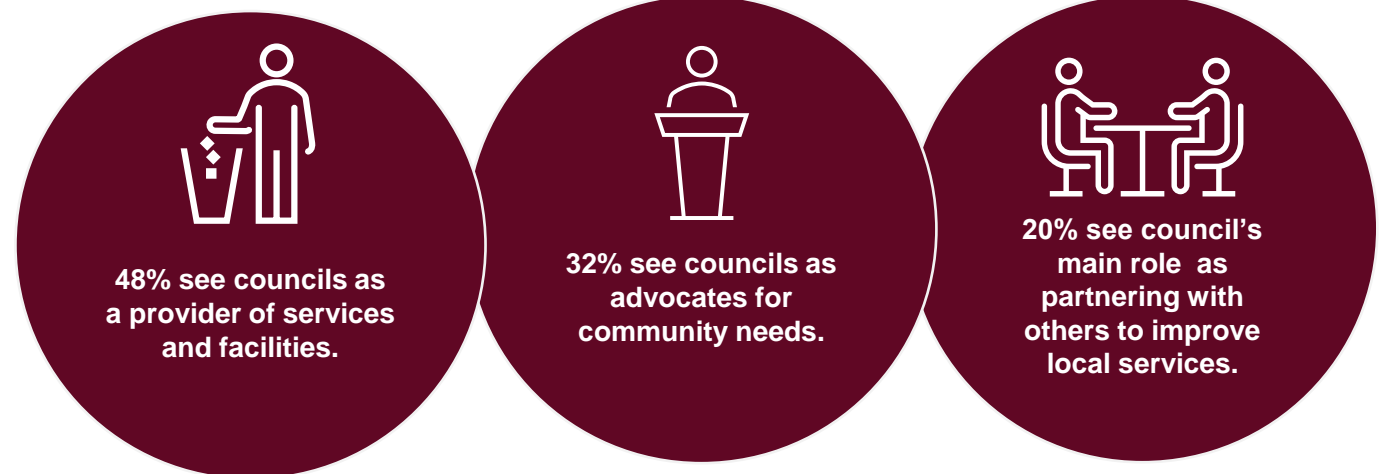
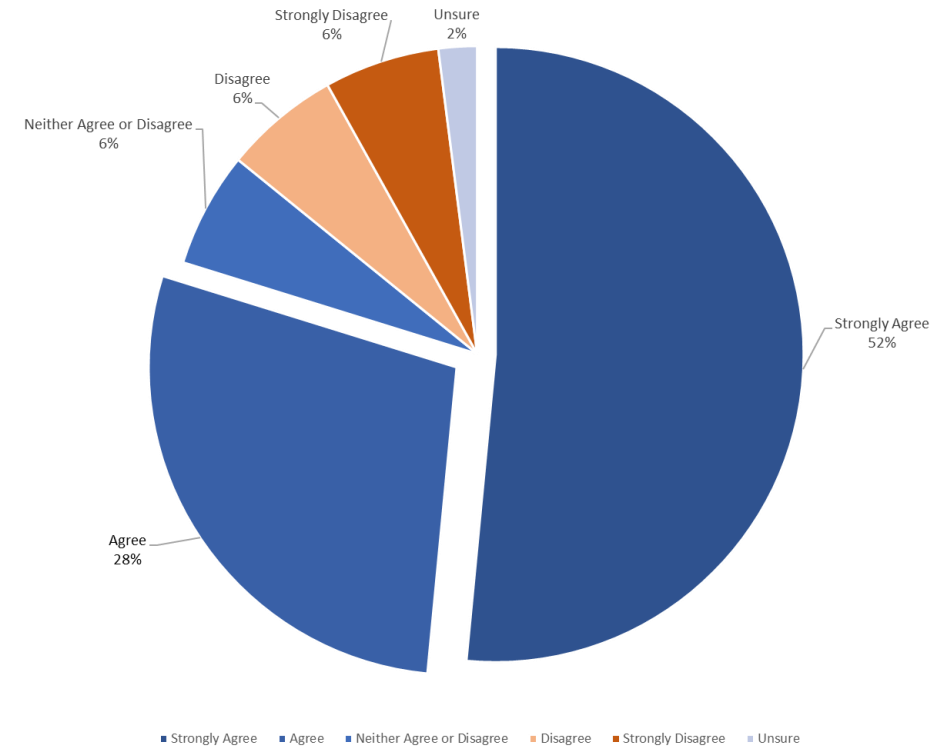
**80% agreed that they don’t mind which level of government provides services locally, as long as they are delivered well. 52% of these strongly agreed.**

**48% of people felt that the main role of council was as the provider of services and facilities.**

32% felt that council’s main role was advocating for community needs.

People aged 25-34 years and people who live in regional urban centres, are more likely to see their local council primarily as advocating for the needs of the community.

“I don’t mind which level of government provides services locally, as long as they are delivered well”



# Should councils share more services across regions?

More than four out of five (82%) of people surveyed agreed that local councils in Tasmania should share more services across regions and statewide, particularly when thinking about the needs of their family and community over the next 20 to 30 years. 9% disagreed, and 9% were unsure.

## Reasons for shared services

Cost sharing and/or cost reduction	17%
Improved unity / cohesiveness / working together	10%
Better management of resources	9%
Efficiency and consistency of services	9%
Less duplication of services	5%
Better access to facilities or equipment	5%

## Reasons against shared services

Services will be distributed too thinly	11%
Local community reliance is preferred	7%
Shared services won't be well managed	7%
Wider distribution will increase travel and costs	7%
People want their rates to be spent in their own area	7%
Small and remote areas will be denied services	6%

# What is most important for the future of your local area?

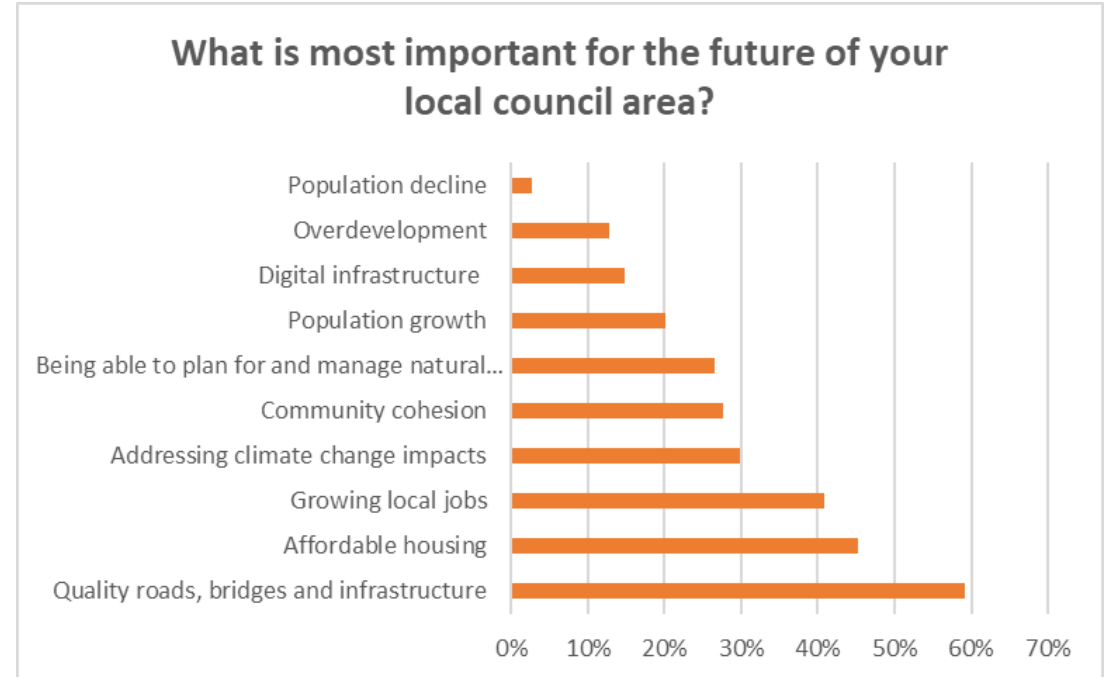
Infrastructure, including quality roads, was significantly prioritised by respondents state-wide. Almost 60% of those surveyed listed infrastructure as one of their three top priorities.

Affordable housing significantly prioritised in cities, urban centres and towns, although less so for the smaller rural and remote councils (38%).

Affordable housing was the major issue for Tasmanians from 18-24 years old (72%) and from 25 to 34 years (68%).

Local jobs were also significantly prioritised in the age groups from 18 through to 44 years old. That same age group expressed less concern about overdevelopment and population growth compared with the older population.

Population decline was a low priority issue, regardless of council, location or age-group.



Housing affordability was an issue in all council areas, but especially in the major urban cities. This has not historically been an area of council responsibility in Tasmania, and highlights the challenges of community expectations for councils.



# How do the smaller remote councils compare?

Tasmania has six councils with a total population under 5,000 residents: Central Highlands, Flinders, Glamorgan–Spring Bay, King Island, Tasman and West Coast.

Compared with other councils:

- Residents in smaller councils are **significantly more likely to have direct contact** with their council (59.7%) than the state-wide average (45%).
- They are marginally more likely to believe that we have too many councils (59% think too many, compared with 57% state-wide).
- There is more support for shared services, with 85% agreeing with more shared services, compared with 82% state-wide.
- Residents in smaller councils are more likely to see their council as efficient and well managed financially than the state-wide average, but they are **also significantly less satisfied with the adequacy and quality of services, facilities and infrastructure maintenance**. For example, 48% rated the ability of their local council to adequately maintain infrastructure as 'not well' compared with 30% statewide.

How well does your Council do the following:  
(relative score)



In terms of local government reform, residents in smaller councils are more likely to believe things will improve without reform (18% compared with 14% statewide) but are also more inclined to believe things will stay the same regardless (40% compared to 35% statewide).



# How do younger people engage with councils?

The Review is future-focused, and keenly interested in the views of young adults when it comes to how they see the future role of local councils in Tasmania. The survey found that:

- When asked about what makes a local council area a desirable place to live, the respondents aged 18 to 24 years were more likely to value the sense of community (49% compared with 25% importance overall). For people from 25 to 34 years, the main consideration was housing affordability and availability (24% for that age group, compared with 10% across the whole population).
- Tasmanians aged 18 to 24 years were much less likely to have had direct engagement with their council. 83% of respondents had not engaged with council in the last 12 months.
- The assessment of council performance was generally positive: 9% indicated that they felt their council was not serving their local area well.
- Younger people prioritised significantly different council priorities from other age groups, with 72% of respondents prioritising affordable housing. Providing local jobs and addressing climate change were a higher priority for this age group.

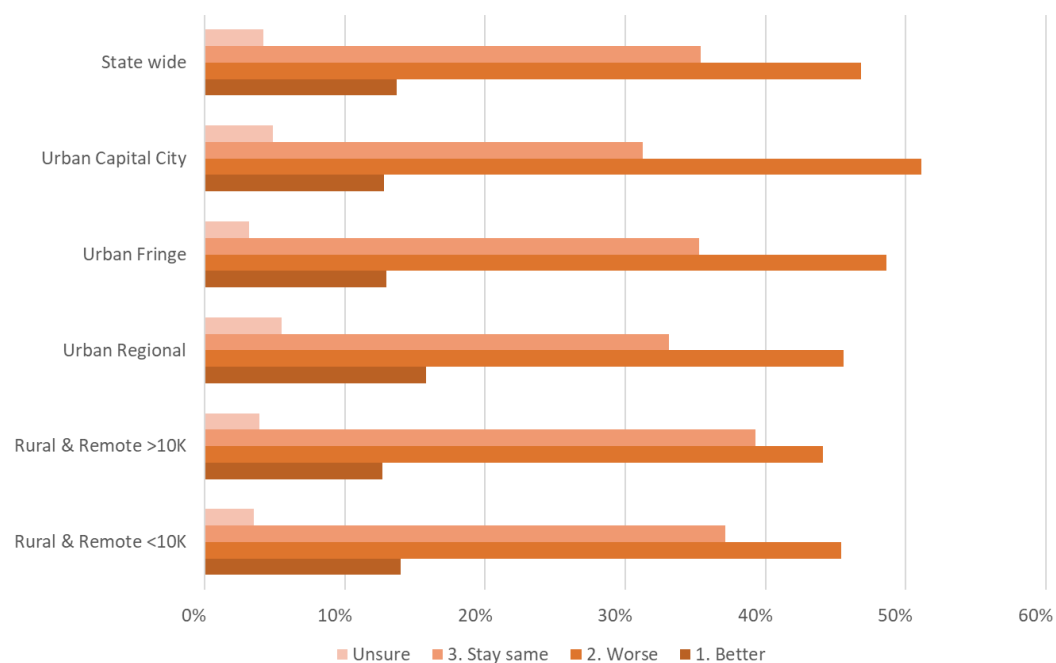
## Highest council priorities for 18-24 year olds

Affordable housing	72%
Growing local jobs	47%
Addressing climate change impacts	45%
Roads, bridges and infrastructure	40%
Planning for and managing natural disasters	26%
Community cohesion	23%

18-24 year olds were more likely to state that the number of councils were about right (49%) than the state wider population (31%). However, they were more likely to be uncertain (12%) when it came to thinking about whether things would improve without local government reform (4% state average).

# Does local government in Tasmania need reform?

Thinking forward 20 to 30 years, if there was no change to how councils work, do you think that things would get better, worse, or stay about the same?



There is a general pessimism that if there is no change in the local government sector, things will get worse as councils grapple with future issues. State-wide, people were more likely to think things will get worse (47%). 14% will imagine things will get better.

The main reasons for the general pessimism were:

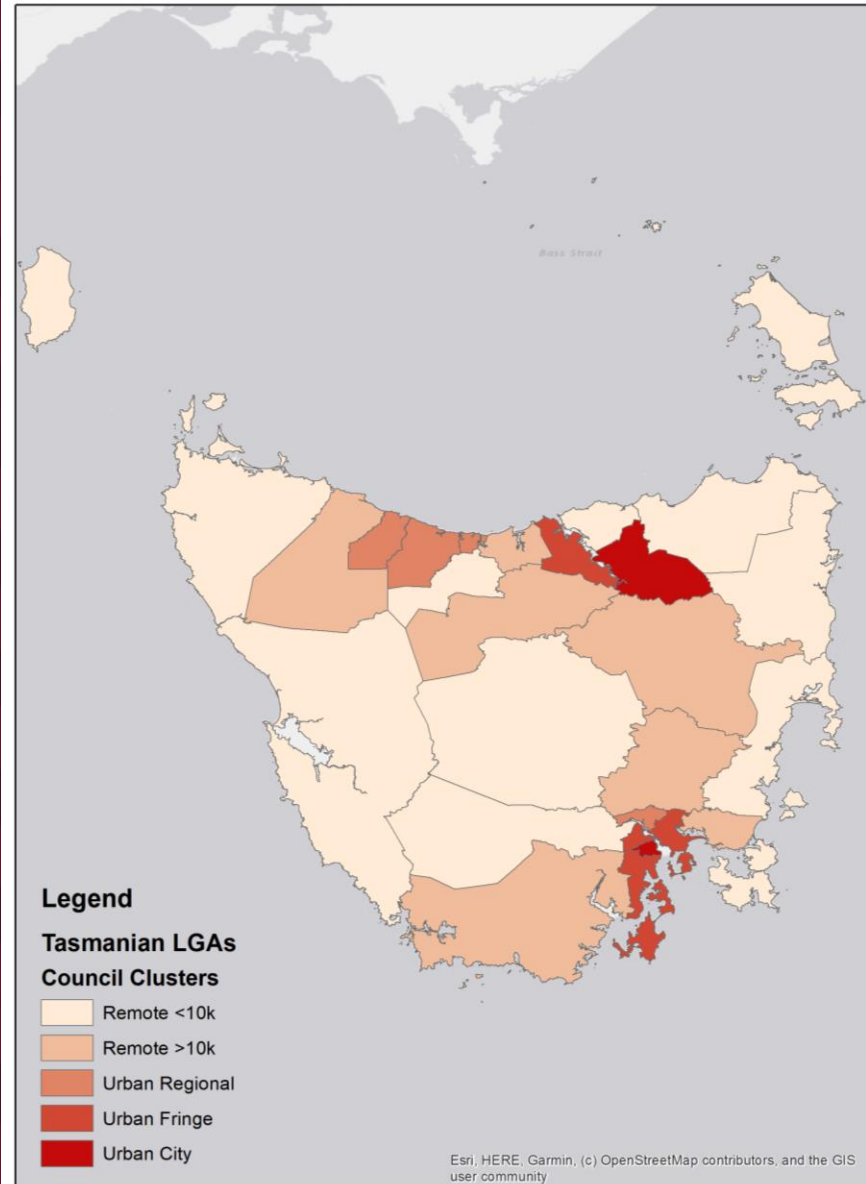
- Inefficiency of council facilities and/or services to manage change.
- Council's capacity to be forward thinking or 'evolve with the times'.
- Changes in the population in terms of growth and ageing.
- Councils are not appropriately structured to manage future issues.
- Elected councillors lack the capacity or qualities to manage future changes.

Areas of potential future inefficiency that were identified included: roads, traffic and transport infrastructure, environment and climate change issues, housing, development, crime management, healthcare access, waste management, communication and engagement with the community.

# Appendix A: Council Categories

To ensure robust results, the project developed a unique geographic classification to enable meaningful clustering of results across councils. Councils were categorised based on their population and location, as:

- Rural Remote (<10k population)
- Rural Remote (>10k population)
- Urban Regional
- Urban Fringe
- Urban City Capital



Classification	Council Groups (population)
<b>Rural and Remote (R&amp;R) &lt;10,000 population</b>	Break O'day (5,778) Circular Head (6,295) Dorset (5,478) George Town (5,657) Kentish (5,383) West Coast (3,495) Central Highlands (2,008) Glamorgan Spring Bay (4,398) Tasman (2,252) Flinders (769) King Island (1,294) Derwent Valley (8,534)
<b>Rural and Remote (R&amp;R) &gt;10,000 population</b>	Latrobe (10,046) Southern Midlands (10,977) Huon Valley (14,500) Meander Valley (16,586) Northern Midlands (10,977) Sorell (13,278) Waratah-Wynyard (11,417)
<b>Urban Regional (UR)</b>	Brighton (14,004) Burnie (15,531) Central Coast (18,355) Devonport (20,774)
<b>Urban Fringe (UF)</b>	Clarence (49,031) Glenorchy (40,476) Kingborough (31,377) West Tamar (20,002)
<b>Urban Capital City (UCC)</b>	Launceston (55,858) Hobart (46,110)



