

Local Government Act Review

Submission - Local Government Advisory Board

March 2019

The Local Government Advisory Board would like to present a submission to the Local Government Act review.

The Board's functions are set out in the provisions contained in section 2.45 of the Act. The Board's primary role is the provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister for Local Government on local government constitutional matters such as the establishment of districts, and boundary, ward and representation changes. It does this by assessing proposals and making recommendations to the Minister, who may either accept or reject these recommendations. The Board can also inquire into any matter as directed by the Minister.

Comment on potential merger of Local Government Advisory Board and Local Government Grants Commission

The Board does not support the proposal to combine its role together with that of the Local Government Grants Commission. Rather, the Board is committed to further developing its capacity in supporting and enhancing local government in WA.

Expanded role of Local Government Advisory Board

The Advisory Board submits that the Act could be amended to expand its role to include three main areas of importance:

1. Support for local government (new function)
2. Future directions (new function)
3. Constitutional/regulatory/compliance activity (current function)

1. Support for local government

- Overall, the Board would like to help to enable local governments via the provision of high level and targeted leadership, coaching and mentoring.
- The Board maintains that its effectiveness will come from providing informed guidance – with the goal of achieving excellent governance practices within the sector, via the prudent sharing and delivery of information and resources.
- For example, board members could attend Ordinary Council Meetings of local governments and could also be available via electronic forms of communication to provide assistance.
- The Board generally supports the issues and opportunities for reform that were raised in the Local Government Act review's 'Interventions' discussion paper, as they aim to provide positive and constructive outcomes for local governments.

- In this regard, the Board could potentially provide support and advice to the department in relation to interventions. These are the program elements or strategies designed to produce behaviour or cultural changes among individual elected members, staff or an entire local government. Interventions may include educational programs and matters such as new or improved policies.
- The Board can provide specific advice to the Minister when requested, on issues raised with him by the community, local governments, individual elected members, and State and/or local government employees.
- The Board could have an important role in supporting elected members and staff requiring guidance and support. The Board has identified that there is a gap in assistance available to individuals.

2. Future directions of local governments

- Creating a “learning forum” - where elected members and staff from across the State present their work innovations in aspects of continual improvement in local government. A forum could be convened biannually or quarterly to allow individuals to get together to share ideas and learn from colleagues. This could include education programs on various local government regulatory functions such as sessions on how to review local laws or how to conduct compliance audits with custom templates which have been specifically developed for that purpose.
- Considering options to help improve local government sustainability eg provision of targeted grants.
- Overseeing and undertaking research for better practice in local government.
- Developing a forward looking improvement program to continually grow local government to become more contemporary and fit for purpose.

3. Constitutional/regulatory/compliance activity

- Encouraging and assisting with the development of a new statewide public governance framework to be adopted by local governments (defining roles and responsibilities) that also enables sustainability and growth within local governments.
- Providing assistance in governance training, focusing on regulatory compliance and enabling local governments.
- Assisting and guiding local governments that are considering voluntary amalgamations, to act as a facilitator and to provide assistance with the process.

MARCH 2019