Example Discussion Paper – LG Reform – Abolishing Wards and/or Reduction in Number of Members

The following example can be used as a guide for a discussion paper to inform the community and to stimulate discussion about ward boundaries and representation.

### Shire of Bottlebrush Review of Wards and Representation Discussion Paper

#### Background

The Shire of Bottlebrush has resolved to undertake a review of its ward system to comply with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act).

Schedule 2.2 of the Act requires local governments with wards to carry out reviews of the ward boundaries and the number of councillors for each ward from time to time so that no more than eight years elapse between successive reviews.

The last review of wards in the Shire of Bottlebrush was undertaken in [insert date] and it is now appropriate to carry out another review.

The Minister for Local Government has also announced a package of reforms to the *Local Government Act 1995*. As part of the reforms to strengthen democracy and increase community engagement, new requirements will be introduced to provide for:

* the introduction of optional preferential voting
* elector Mayors and Presidents for band 1 and 2 local governments
* councillor numbers based on population
* the removal of wards for band 3 and 4 local governments.

Legislation to give effect to the changes is expected to be introduced into Parliament in early 2023.

The Shire of Bottlebrush has been identified as needing to make changes to its ward structure to align with the new reforms. To implement these changes, the shire is undertaking a review. Feedback received through this consultation process will assist the shire to transition to the new requirements.

Further information on the reforms is available on the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries website at <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/local-government/strengthening-local-government/local-government-act-reform>.

#### Current situation

Currently the Shire of Bottlebrush has 12 councillors elected from four wards, with the shire president elected by the council as noted in the table below.

#### Table: Shire of Bottlebrush elector to councillor ratios - current situation

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ward | Number of  Electors | Number of  Councillors | Councillor to Elector Ratio | % Ratio  Deviation |
| West | 675 | 3 | 1:225 | +21.47% |
| Central | 513 | 3 | 1:171 | +40.31% |
| East | 450 | 3 | 1:150 | +47.64% |
| South | 1,800 | 3 | 1:600 | -109.80% |
| Total | 3,438 | 12 | 1:287 | Not applicable |

The % ratio deviation gives a clear indication of the % difference between the average councillor to elector ratio for the whole local government and the councillor to elector ratio for each ward.

It can be seen that there is a significant imbalance in representation across the Shire with the West, Central and East Wards being over-represented and the South Ward being under-represented. A balanced representation would be reflected in the % ratio deviation being within plus or minus 10%.

A map showing the ward boundaries is also attached.

#### Review process

The review process involves a number of steps:

* The council resolves to undertake the review
* Public submission period opens (minimum six weeks)
* Information provided to the community for discussion
* Public submission period closes
* The council considers all submissions and relevant factors and makes a decision
* The council submits a report to the Local Government Advisory Board (the Board) for its consideration
* If a change is proposed, the Board submits a recommendation to the Minister for Local Government (the Minister).

Any changes approved by the Minister will be in place for the next ordinary election where possible.

#### Factors to be considered

When considering changes to wards and representation, Schedule 2.2 of the Act specifies five factors that must be taken into account by a local government as part of the review process:

1. Community of interest
2. Physical and topographic features
3. Demographic trends
4. Economic factors
5. Ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards.

The Board offers the following interpretation of these factors.

#### Community of interest

The term community of interest has a number of elements. These include a sense of community identity and belonging, similarities in the characteristics of the residents of a community and similarities in the economic activities. It can also include dependence on the shared facilities in a district as reflected in the catchment areas of local schools and sporting teams, or the circulation areas of local newspapers.

Neighbourhoods, suburbs and towns are important units in the physical, historical and social infrastructure and often generate a feeling of community and belonging.

#### Physical and topographic features

These may be natural or man-made features that will vary from area to area. Water features such as rivers and catchment boundaries may be relevant considerations. Coastal plain and foothills regions, parks and reserves may be relevant as may other man-made features such as railway lines and freeways.

#### Demographic trends

Several measurements of the characteristics of human populations, such as population size, and its distribution by age, gender, occupation and location provide important demographic information. Current and projected population characteristics will be relevant as well as similarities and differences between areas within the local government.

#### Economic factors

Economic factors can be broadly interpreted to include any factor that reflects the character of economic activities and resources in the area. This may include the industries that occur in a local government area (or the release of land for these) and the distribution of community assets and infrastructure such as road networks.

#### Ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards

It is expected that each local government will have similar ratios of electors to councillors across the wards of its district. A balanced representation would be reflected in the ratio deviation being within plus or minus 10% for all wards.

#### Local government reforms

In addition to the legislative factors to be considered, the review also needs to consider the Minister for Local Government’s changes to ward structures and representation.

To comply with the Minister’s proposals, as the Shire of Bottlebrush is a band 3 local government, with a population of less than 5,000 people, the Shire’s existing wards need to be abolished and the number of councillors reduced to seven at maximum.

#### Options to consider

The council will consider the following options and members of the community may suggest others:

**Option 1:**

Abolish the shire’s wards and reduce the number of council members to nine at the next election and seven at the subsequent election.

**Option 2:**

Abolish the shire’s wards and reduce the number of council members to seven at the next election with all council positions to be declared vacant.

**Option 3:**

Abolish the shire’s wards and reduce the number of council members to five at the next election with all council positions to be declared vacant.

#### Public submissions

Members of the community are invited to make a written submission about any aspect of ward boundaries and representation and lodge it at:

Shire of Bottlebrush  
3 Read Road  
BOTTLEBRUSH WA

Email: [insert email address]

Submissions will also be accepted by email: Bottlebrush@ [insert email address]

All submissions must be received by 5pm on [insert day and date]

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this review. Council welcomes your comments on any matters that may assist it to make informed and responsible decisions for the benefit of the people of the Shire of Bottlebrush.

Councillor [insert name] [insert name]

PRESIDENT CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE