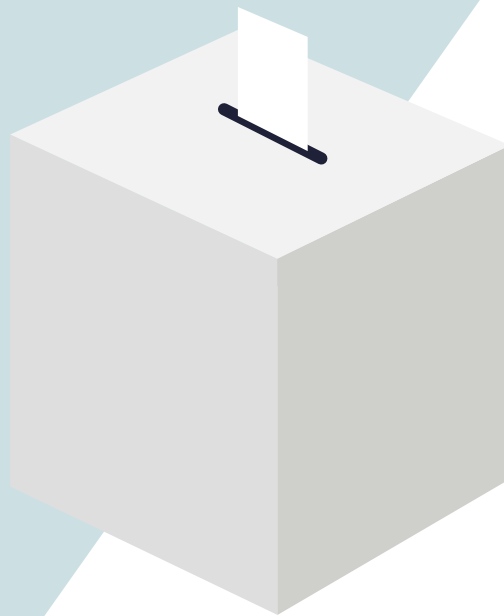




Electoral Commission
QUEENSLAND



2020
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS
Service Plan



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This report is available for downloading from the ECQ website www.ecq.qld.gov.au. Enquiries and requests for a paper copy of this document may be directed to:

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Foreword

On Saturday, 28 March 2020, the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) will conduct elections for all mayors and councillors of Queensland's 77 councils. Additionally, on the same day the ECQ will conduct by-elections for the state electoral districts of Bundamba and Currumbin.

Preparation and delivery of the 2020 local government elections is a significant logistical exercise, involving approximately 3.3 million voters, more than 1,100 election day polling booths, over 10,000 temporary election staff, and will culminate in the election of approximate 580 mayors and councillors. The elections will be contested on redistributed electoral boundaries in 17 divided councils, including the state's two largest local government areas of Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Changes to the electoral arrangements in Ipswich will see voters elect two councillors to represent each of its four multi-member divisions, while in Cloncurry, voters will elect an additional sixth councillor.

The ECQ is continually seeking to ensure its voter services are meeting the needs of electors, and keeping pace with public expectations around modern service delivery approaches. To this end, the ECQ will be implementing a range of new initiatives for the 2020 elections including a new Election Management System (EMS) and an upgraded Electronic Disclosure System (EDS), a new website with improved display of electoral information including election results, and a Voter Information Card that will be emailed, as well as posted, to electors.

The ECQ plans, prepares and will deliver the local government elections with explicit regard to the objectives in the ECQ Strategic Plan. These objectives are:

1. Deliver fair and transparent Queensland elections
2. Increase electoral awareness and participation
3. Continual improvement in electoral services, and
4. Queensland has balanced representation across electoral boundaries

Following the elections, the ECQ will also assess its performance in regard to how it achieved its objectives.

This Election Service Plan details how the ECQ intends to deliver the 2020 local government elections, including key election milestones, voter services and post-election activities, on behalf of all Queenslanders. A full report will be released following the elections, providing a transparent and public accounting of the outcomes of the 2020 local government elections.



Pat Vidgen PSM FGIA

Electoral Commissioner of Queensland

Overview

The ECQ is an independent statutory authority responsible for the impartial conduct of Queensland elections. In performing its functions, the ECQ seeks to be an evolving, trusted and respected Commission that continues to uphold the integrity of the state's electoral processes through the delivery of accessible, fair and transparent elections.

For the conduct of the 2020 local government elections, the ECQ will deliver services as prescribed by the *Electoral Act 1992*, the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the *Local Government Act 2009* and the *City of Brisbane Act 2010*.

The ECQ's main functions include:

- ▶ the preparation, planning and delivery of the elections in an efficient, transparent and accountable manner
- ▶ the regulation of electoral funding and disclosure requirements and promotion of compliance activities, and
- ▶ maintaining equitable representation through the periodic review of local government divisional boundaries by the Local Government Change Commission.

In Queensland, local government elections must occur for all mayors and councillors every four years on the last Saturday in March, unless changed by regulation. Voting in these elections is compulsory. Mayors in every council, and councillors in single-member divided councils are elected using the optional preferential voting system. Councillors in multi-member divided councils and undivided councils are elected using the first-past-the-post voting system.

To deliver fair and transparent local government elections, the ECQ provides a range of services to various stakeholders including Queensland voters, candidates, registered political parties and other political participants. The key election services and deliverables are discussed below.

The Bundamba and Currumbin by-elections will occur on the same day as the local government elections following the resignation of the sitting Members in each electoral district. The ECQ will deliver the by-elections according to writs issued by the Speaker and the Governor and many of the services provided for the local government elections will be available to voters in the Bundamba and Currumbin by-elections. Details of the timetable for the Bundamba and Currumbin by-elections are available on the ECQ website.



Election Timetable

In accordance with the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the key dates for the 2020 local government elections are as follows:

1. 22 February 2020 – Notice of Election

Publication of the Notice of Election on Saturday, 22 February 2020. The caretaker period for all councils will start upon publication of the notice on the ECQ's website.

2. 22 February 2020 to 3 March 2020 – Candidate nominations

Nominations for candidates for election as mayors and councillors will open from the publication of the Notice of Election on 22 February 2020, until midday on Tuesday, 3 March 2020. Details of candidates will be published on the ECQ's website.

3. 28 February 2020 – Close of electoral roll

Electors have until 5.00pm, 28th February 2020 to either update their enrolment to a new name or address or to enrol for the first time. This will ensure their eligibility to vote in this election.

4. 4 March 2020 – Ballot paper draw

The ECQ will conduct a random draw to determine the order in which candidates appear on ballot papers on Wednesday, 4 March 2020.

5. 4 March 2020 to 19 March 2020 – How-to-vote card review

The ECQ must accept all how-to-vote cards before they can be distributed to voters during local government elections. The ECQ will review candidates' how-to-vote cards from Wednesday, 4 March 2020 to Thursday, 19 March 2020. How-to-vote cards accepted by the ECQ will be available on the ECQ's website.

6. 16 March 2020 – Postal vote applications close

Postal vote applications will be open from 22 February 2020 until 7.00pm Monday, 16 March 2020. Voting must be completed by 6.00pm on election day. The ECQ must receive postal votes no later than 5.00pm Tuesday, 7 April 2020. Postal votes cannot be sent until after the ballot paper draw on Wednesday, 4 March 2020.

7. 16 March 2020 – Early voting commences

Early voting will be conducted between 16 March 2020 and Friday, 27 March 2020. The timeframes for early voting will vary in different locations, and detailed information about early voting times will be published on the ECQ's website prior to the election.

8. 28 March 2020 – Election day

Election day is on Saturday, 28 March 2020, and polling booths will be open from 8.00am to 6.00pm. The ECQ website provides functionality for voters to search for their closest polling booth.

9. From 29 March 2020 – Official count and declaration of results

After the close of polls, the ECQ will undertake an unofficial preliminary count on election night, before the official vote count commences. Results will be published on the ECQ website and election results for individual councils will be declared progressively. The official count process may take up to 10 days (until 7 April 2020) to allow returned postal votes to be counted.

10. 13 July 2020 – Election summary returns due

Candidates, groups of candidates, registered political parties and associated entities must give the ECQ an election summary return detailing gifts or loans received and electoral expenditure incurred during the election disclosure period. This return must be lodged within 15 weeks of election day which, for the 2020 local government elections, will be Monday, 13 July 2020.

1. Voter Services

The ECQ undertakes numerous activities to ensure all eligible Queenslanders can enrol to vote, cast a formal ballot and have confidence in the accuracy of the election results.

Enrolment

The Queensland electoral roll as at 31 December 2019 has 3,299,092 enrolled voters. New enrolments and change of detail updates will be accepted until 28 February 2020. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), in partnership with the ECQ, maintains the electoral roll and new enrolments and changes of details can be completed by contacting the AEC or updating enrolment details on the AEC website at www.aec.gov.au.

Election day voting

Across Queensland, there will be more than 1,100 polling booths operating on 28 March 2020 from Coolangatta in the south, to the Islands of the Torres Strait in the north. Polling booths will be open between 8.00am and 6.00pm on election day and locations will be available on the ECQ website. Additional interactive functionality is available on the ECQ website to assist electors in locating their nearest polling booths at www.ecq.qld.gov.au.

Early voting (pre-poll)

Early voting services will be available in most instances for two weeks prior to election day. Approximately 170 early voting centres will operate across Queensland. While times may vary, early voting centres will generally be open from 9.00am to 5.00pm in the first week, with hours extending from 9.00am to 6.00pm in the second week. Voters are encouraged to confirm the location and operating hours of all early voting centres on the ECQ website as variations may exist between councils.



Postal voting

Electors can apply for a postal vote and have their voting materials mailed to them. Postal voting applications open from the Notice of Election and close at 7.00pm Monday, 16 March 2020. Additionally, those registered as special postal voters or silent electors will have their voting materials mailed out automatically. These voters' completed ballots are then sent to the Returning Officer for processing and counting.

The Minister for Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs has approved 16 local governments to conduct a full postal ballot. A further three local government areas have been approved to have hybrid ballots, whereby part of the council will conduct the election as a postal ballot and part will have an attendance ballot. Those residing in locations where a postal ballot is being conducted will have their voting materials mailed out automatically, with completed ballots sent to Returning Officers for processing and counting.

Accessibility services

Many Queenslanders face barriers in accessibility when voting. The ECQ offers a range of voter services to ensure all Queensland voters have equitable opportunities to have their say at elections and participate in public life as enshrined by the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

Disability access is a key consideration in the selection of election day polling booths and early voting centre venues and their locations. Access information will be available on the ECQ website following the publication of details of election day polling booth and early voting centre locations. Other accessibility services are also available.

- ▶ Eligible voters, including those with a disability or a low level of literacy may be able to access telephone voting. Those eligible must register with the ECQ to utilise the service and cast a vote via telephone.
- ▶ Translation and interpreter services for people with English as a second language, as well as development and distribution of a *Multilingual Guide to Voting* to all polling booths.
- ▶ Voters can request a person join them in the polling booth should they need help with casting their ballot. This person can act as an interpreter, read and explain the ballot paper instructions, complete the ballot paper according to the voter's instructions and place the ballot paper in the ballot box.
- ▶ Remote area polling provides accessible voting services to electors in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with services designed in consultation with community stakeholders and tailored to local needs.
- ▶ Declared institution voting is a service where prior to election day, election staff will visit patients and residents of registered declared institutions, such as some hospitals or aged care facilities, to allow them to cast a ballot.
- ▶ Eligible voters can apply for electoral visitor voting, where election staff will come to the voter's address to allow them to cast a ballot.

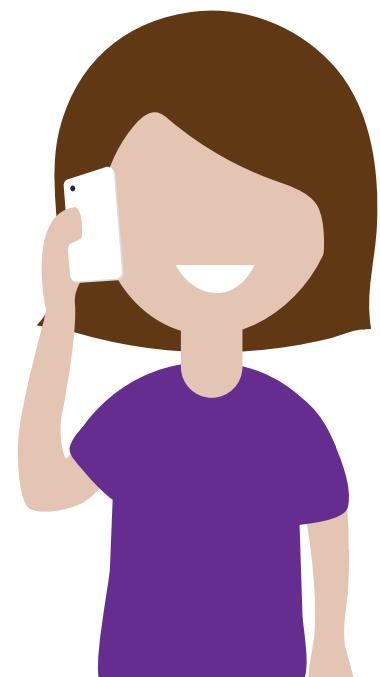
ECQ Service Centre

The ECQ Service Centre will be in operation throughout the election period to support voters access the services they need, and respond to enquiries, feedback and complaints received via telephone, email, post or in person.

Voters utilising this service can expect high quality assistance in a range of areas including:

- ▶ registration for telephone voting
- ▶ creating postal voting or electoral visitor applications
- ▶ providing information about the range of voting services available depending on the individual circumstances, and
- ▶ responding to general enquiries and complaints received both via email and telephone.

Enquiries can be directed to 1300 881 665 or ecq@ecq.qld.gov.au. The call centre is open 8.00am – 6.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am – 4.00pm Saturday.

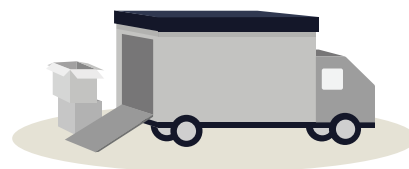


2. Election Resources and Technology

Logistics and Materials

Prior to election day on Saturday 28 March 2020, the ECQ will have packed and distributed approximately 13,000 voting screens and 1,300 polling booth packs to all local government areas in Queensland. These packs contain most of the necessary resources typically required to deliver the elections and include a range of materials such as signage, stationery, forms, envelopes and labels.

Approximately 9,000,000 ballot papers will be printed and distributed to ensure adequate numbers are available in every local government area. Printing and distributing the ballot papers requires significant planning and testing, especially to ensure they arrive on time in remote areas.



Information Communication Technology (ICT)

A significant amount of technology is deployed to returning offices, early voting centres and election day polling booths to increase the efficiency of election services and to improve the voting experience.

The ECQ configures and distributes an 'Office in a Box' to all Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, which contains all the necessary technology needed to complete their duties, including communications equipment, computers, screens, bar code readers and printers. Returning Officers and Assistant Returning officers also have access to a dedicated ICT help desk service to support the deployment of these technologies. Additionally, approximately 7,000 ePollbooks have been configured for use in early voting centres and election day polling booths. These devices will allow election staff to electronically find and mark-off voters from the electoral roll.

Election Management System

In the lead-up to the local government elections, the ECQ is deploying a new Election Management System (EMS). The EMS will provide an integrated and secure election administration and data management system for processes necessary to deliver an open and transparent election. It will also provide significant operational efficiencies by replacing several paper-based processes with an online system.

The EMS provides functionality including:

- ▶ online processes for receiving applications, recruiting, training and remunerating election staff
- ▶ dedicated portals for candidates to submit nominations, manage disclosures and access supporting information and election results, and
- ▶ access for electors to electoral information including enrolment details and polling booth locations.

3. Staff

The ECQ's ongoing establishment is made up of approximately 70 staff located at the ECQ head office in the Brisbane CBD and its warehouse facility. These staff plan, prepare and oversee the delivery of Queensland elections and are involved in a range of activities including:

- ▶ identifying and securing venues for early voting centres, election day polling booths and returning offices
- ▶ recruiting and training temporary election staff
- ▶ preparing and delivering training and education to candidates and political parties
- ▶ increasing elector awareness of enrolment, voting options and election information
- ▶ processing candidate nominations
- ▶ ensuring compliance with funding and disclosure requirements
- ▶ ensuring adequate resourcing of returning offices, early voting centres and election day polling booths
- ▶ acquiring, configuring, testing and deploying technology to deliver the election
- ▶ approving how-to-vote cards
- ▶ printing and distributing ballot papers
- ▶ planning and delivering postal voting and telephone voting services, and
- ▶ conducting post-event reviews to improve service delivery.

Recruitment of temporary election staff

The ECQ rapidly increases its staffing base for elections to include thousands of temporary staff that are dispersed across Queensland. To deliver the 2020 local government elections, the ECQ will recruit approximately 10,000 temporary election staff.

Recruitment of 150 Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, responsible for the conduct of elections within each local government area, was conducted through a merit-based selection process in the second half of 2019. At the end of 2019, appointees received five days of face-to-face training in both Brisbane and Cairns to enable them to deliver the following key duties:

- ▶ administering the returning office, early voting centres and election day polling booths in their respective regions
- ▶ recruiting election staff and distributing of election materials
- ▶ overseeing and managing the operation of voting across their area of responsibility
- ▶ engaging with candidates during the nomination process and over the election period
- ▶ ensuring the conduct of the election complies with the ECQ's legislation, policies and procedures
- ▶ overseeing the final vote count, and
- ▶ packing and returning election materials to the ECQ warehouse.



To recruit other temporary election staff required for the elections, the ECQ conducted an expression of interest process which commenced in September 2019, with over 10,000 applications received by January 2020. In areas with low application rates, the ECQ has actively promoted the employment opportunity through social media. These temporary election staff are vital to ensuring the smooth administration of election facilities and services, including the set-up and dismantling of booths, management of queues, issuing of ballot papers, marking voters' names off the electoral roll and then counting the millions of mayoral and councillor ballot papers to finalise the elections.

4. Candidates and Parties

The ECQ works closely with candidates and political parties to assist them to comply with their legislative obligations, and has published a range of resources, including handbooks, fact sheets and guides to explain the nomination and disclosure requirements. These resources are available on the ECQ website.

The ECQ has participated in several face-to-face presentations in partnership with the Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs delivered to prospective candidates. Individuals interested in nominating to be a candidate learn about the nomination process, new mandatory training requirements, disclosure obligations, rules around electoral advertising and new registration requirements for groups of candidates.

Briefings have also been provided to Queensland's registered political parties to provide an overview of each stage of the local government election such as nominations, the ballot draw, the available roll products, the different voting options available, as well as the requirements for campaign volunteers and scrutineers. Political party officials have also been provided the opportunity to meet with ECQ staff to discuss their obligations and the ECQ's expectations to assist in effective administration of the elections.

Candidate nominations and group registration

At the Notice of Election, candidate nominations will be open for any eligible person to run for election as a mayor or councillor. Any announced candidate, who had already made public their intention to run for election prior to the Notice of Election, must formally nominate to be placed on the ballot paper.

Under new legislative requirements, for a nomination to be accepted, candidates must complete mandatory training delivered by the Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs and provide details of their dedicated bank account to the ECQ. Additionally, if candidates have collected any gifts or incurred any electoral expenditure prior to nomination, these must be disclosed to the ECQ through the Electronic Disclosure System.

Any groups of candidates intending to conduct group campaigning activities must first register with the ECQ. Group campaign activities may include the sharing of donations, using the same branding, slogan, images, joint how-to-vote cards or a common policy platform. Groups of candidates must appoint an agent to be responsible for ensuring accurate disclosure of gifts and expenditure.

Electronic Disclosure System

The Electronic Disclosure System (EDS) enables the real-time reporting of political gifts, loans and expenditure, allowing for greater transparency and increased public awareness around political funding and financial activity in Queensland.

All candidates, groups of candidates, registered political parties, associated entities, groups, third party campaigners and donors are required to submit a return in the EDS, disclosing details on any loans, donation and gifts given and/or received.

Additionally, as of 20 January 2020, candidates, groups of candidates, political parties or third-party campaigners who incur electoral expenditure of \$500 or more are required to complete a return on the expenditure in real time. The EDS underwent significant upgrades to enable this functionality to be delivered to support political participants to meet their reporting obligations. The ECQ offers support to those using the EDS to assist them to use the system and explain reporting obligations.



How-to-vote cards

Material that shows how a candidate, a group of candidates or a political party wants electors to vote, or to rank preferences on the ballot paper, is known as a 'how-to-vote card'. The ECQ must approve all how-to-vote cards before they can be distributed to voters on a day that ballots may be cast. This approval is required for both the early voting period and on election day.

Under new rules, how-to-vote cards need to be submitted for approval and approved by the ECQ seven days prior to their intended distribution. To be approved for distribution they:

- ▶ must be authorised by the candidate, group of candidates, or registered political party
- ▶ must state the name and address of the person eligible to authorise the card
- ▶ must be in the correct format, and
- ▶ cannot be likely to deceive or mislead voters.

Information on submitting compliant how-to-vote cards is available on the ECQ website.

5. Communications

Elections are complex undertakings and all participants, including voters, candidates, and political parties need access to relevant information to effectively participate in the election and comply with their legislative obligations. The ECQ delivers a range of communication, awareness, engagement and education activities to ensure its stakeholders have the information they need to participate in the election.

Communication and engagement activities

Leading up to election day, the ECQ will deliver a broad awareness-raising campaign aimed at ensuring voters are informed about the date of the election, the voting options available, and the need to enrol to vote or update enrolment details. The campaign will be delivered through a range of channels including television, radio, print and digital media to ensure a broad reach across all voters in Queensland.

The ECQ will also utilise social media communications to engage with the community including providing election information and updates.

ECQ Website

On 1 July 2019, the ECQ launched a new website to improve access to information about the electoral system and voting in Queensland elections. The website was designed in a modern, user-friendly format which is easy to navigate and optimised for use on mobile devices. The website meets universally recognised accessibility guidelines to ensure that content is accessible to people with disabilities and easy to understand regardless of age, education or ability. Additional information will display on the ECQ's website during election time, and a re-designed election results website will interface with the EMS to deliver results to the public in real time. New functionality will allow voters to apply for postal votes online, candidates to nominate through a Self Service Portal, and voters to search for early voting centres and election day polling booths.

Multilingual Guide to Voting

For the local government elections, the ECQ has released the *Multilingual Guide to Voting* to assist voters with limited English to participate in the elections. The guide provides general information about the voting process, including step-by-step voting instructions, in a wide range of different languages including simplified English. The guide is available on the ECQ website and will be distributed to all election day polling booths and early voting centres.

Voter Information Card

As has been done previously, the ECQ will be mailing out a Voter Information Card to the postal addresses of enrolled Queensland voters unless they are receiving a postal vote. The card lists the voter's council area and division (where applicable) and features a barcode that enables election staff to quickly scan voters' names on ePollbooks, mark them off the electoral roll and issue ballot papers in an efficient manner.

For the first time, the ECQ will also email the card to electors who have opted to include an email address on the electoral roll. This initiative is aimed to provide an additional electronic option for voters, in line with evolving public expectations about the use of technology.

6. Local government reviews

The Local Government Change Commission (Change Commission) is an independent body established under the *Local Government Act 2009* to review council boundaries and other proposed changes to Queensland local government areas. The Change Commission has conducted numerous reviews since 2018 which will come into effect for the 2020 local government elections.

Divisional Boundary Reviews

Prior to local government elections, the Change Commission is responsible for assessing the boundaries and enrolment of divided councils. Queensland law requires most divided councils to have a relatively even number of enrolled voters within each of its divisions. This is designed to ensure that each person's vote has the same value.

In preparation for the 2020 local government elections, the Change Commission assessed the divisional boundaries of the following 17 local government areas:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Brisbane City Council | 10. Redland City Council |
| 2. Cassowary Coast Regional Council | 11. Rockhampton Regional Council |
| 3. Fraser Coast Regional Council | 12. Scenic Rim Regional Council |
| 4. Gold Coast City Council | 13. South Burnett Regional Council |
| 5. Gympie Regional Council | 14. Sunshine Coast Regional Council |
| 6. Ipswich City Council | 15. Tablelands Regional Council |
| 7. Isaac Regional Council | 16. Townsville City Council |
| 8. Logan City Council | 17. Whitsunday Regional Council |
| 9. Moreton Bay Regional Council | |

The review of the Ipswich City Council was a joint electoral arrangement and divisional boundary review. The Change Commission recommended at the conclusion of its review that the Ipswich local government area should move from 10 single-member divisions to four multi-member divisions with two councillors representing each division.

External Boundary and Electoral Arrangement Reviews

In addition to the divisional boundary reviews, the Change Commission also assessed:

- ▶ an external boundary review of the common boundaries between the Toowoomba and South Burnett Regional Councils, and
- ▶ an electoral arrangement review of the number of councillors in the Cloncurry Shire Council.

The new boundaries and electoral arrangements determined by the Change Commission have been available on the ECQ website pending their commencement at the 2020 local government elections.

7. Post-election activities

Following the close of polling booths on election day, a variety of post-election activities commence including the election count, declaration of results and finally election reporting and evaluation tasks. While many activities are undertaken in the immediate days and weeks following the election, others occur over a period of months. Post-election reporting and evaluation activities are a critical source of information that is used to inform innovation and develop improvements for future elections and service delivery.

Counting the votes

The ECQ must undertake the election counts according to the provisions set out in Part 4, Division 7 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*.

After the close of voting at 6.00pm on election day, a preliminary count will be conducted in polling booths and the results will be progressively published on the ECQ website. In accordance with the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, these preliminary results are not official and the ECQ is unable to declare the election based on the outcome of these counts.

The official count commences under the control of the Returning Officers as soon as is practicable after the close of voting and the preliminary count. The website will be continually updated as counting is conducted and results for local governments declared progressively as counting is finalised.

In some instances, it may not be possible for the ECQ to declare an election result until the final cut-off for the return of postal votes on 7 April 2020. If the result is too close to call and it is mathematically possible that the result may change due to outstanding postal votes, the ECQ must wait the legislated 10 days for postal votes to be returned to ensure that all votes are counted.

The ECQ will conduct the count according the requirements set out in the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*. For the mayoral and single-member divided council elections, conducted under the optional preferential voting system, all ballot papers must mark the box next to at least one candidate and voters have the option to number some or all other candidates in order of preference. All the first preferences are then counted and if no candidate receives more that 50 percent of the votes, the candidate with the least number of votes is excluded and any of their votes with a second preference is distributed to the remaining candidates. This process continues until a candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes and is elected to the council.

In multi-member divided and undivided councils, elections are conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system. This means that voters must mark the same number of boxes as there are councillor positions to be elected. The votes from all the ballot papers are counted and the candidates with the most votes, up to the number of councillor positions available, will be elected to the council.

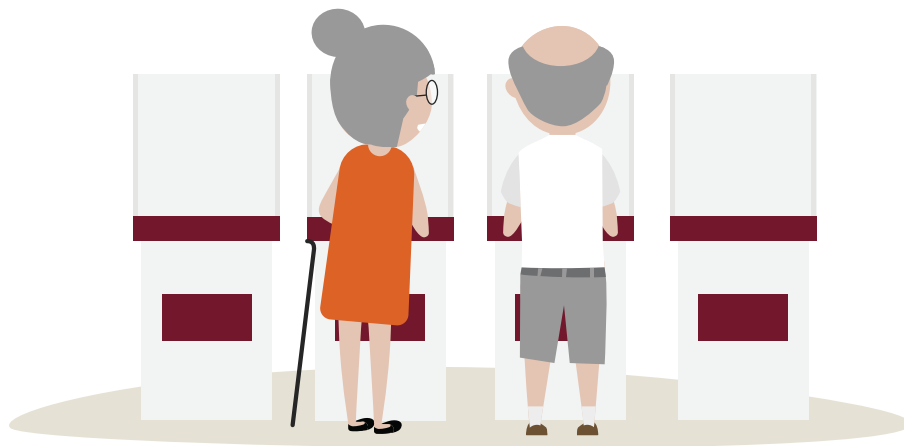


Review and reporting

The ECQ will be undertaking an evaluation of its conduct in the local government elections which will include identifying key improvements to be implemented prior to the State general election on 31 October 2020. This evaluation will provide a range of metrics and analysis that will inform future election service delivery.

Additionally, the ECQ will undertake a complementary survey that measures voter satisfaction with the ECQ's services. An informal ballot paper survey will also be conducted to gain a better understanding of informal voting at local government elections and the reasons ballot papers were deemed informal.

The outcomes of these activities will be outlined in a report released to the public in the months following the elections.





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