

2024 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS **SERVICE PLAN**



Electoral Commission
QUEENSLAND

Acknowledgment of Country

The Electoral Commission of Queensland acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country and their connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

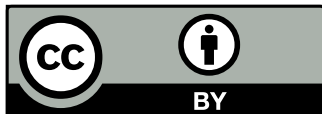
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Content from this document should be attributed as the Electoral Commission of Queensland 2024 Local Government Elections Service Plan. This report is available to download from the ECQ website www.ecq.qld.gov.au.

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01

FOREWORD

On Saturday, 16 March 2024, elections will be held to elect the mayors and councillors that constitute the 77 local governments in Queensland.

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) is Queensland's trusted provider of fair and transparent elections in which all eligible Queenslanders are able to participate. State-wide elections, such as the 2024 local government elections, are significant logistical exercises. In 2024, approximately 3.7 million electors will head to the polls across around 170 early voting centres and over 1,000 election day polling booths and assisted by over 10,000 temporary election staff.

A total of 77 mayors and 501 councillors will be elected, each representing one of Queensland's diverse local communities. In 2024, divided councils in Isaac, Bundaberg, and Fraser Coast will each be contested on redistributed divisional boundaries.

The ECQ is committed to providing electoral services that meet the needs of electors and which keep pace with expectations about modern service delivery. Our approach to continual improvement has seen us continue to refine and enhance our services, building on the learnings of the major elections held during 2020 and the many subsequent by-elections.

In 2024, electors will see this work reflected in our elector engagement services. Additional information and resources will make it easier for electors to apply for and complete a postal vote, an Election Facts register will provide an authoritative source of information to counter misinformation and disinformation, and a new-look Voter Information Card that is more accessible for Queenslanders will help electors cast their vote more efficiently through quicker roll mark-off.

The ECQ is committed to ensuring every Queenslanders can have confidence in the quality and integrity of their elections. To this end, our planning, preparation and delivery of the local government elections will align with our Strategic Plan objectives which are:

1. Trusted to deliver Queensland elections.
2. Increase electoral awareness and participation.
3. Maintain election readiness.
4. Ensure compliance with electoral laws.

As occurs after every election, the ECQ will assess its performance in delivering the election and achieving these objectives.

01 FOREWORD

This Service Plan sets out how the ECQ will deliver the 2024 local government elections on behalf of all Queenslanders. It details the key election milestones, voter services and post-election activities that will be undertaken.

Following the elections, a full report will be released, providing a transparent public account of election outcomes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Vidgen', is positioned above the name and title of the signatory.

Pat Vidgen PSM FGIA

Electoral Commissioner of Queensland

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OVERVIEW

The ECQ is an independent statutory authority responsible for the impartial conduct of Queensland State, local government and industrial elections, as well as the support of periodic redistributions of electoral boundaries.

The ECQ's main functions include:

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

For the 2024 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*.

Under Queensland electoral legislation, local government elections are held for all mayors and councillors every four years on the last Saturday in March, unless changed by regulation. The date of the 2024 local government elections has been changed by regulation to Saturday, 16 March 2024. This ensured the elections would not be held during the Easter and school holiday period, and would not create additional challenges for candidate and elector participation.

Voting in all local government and State elections is compulsory. To ensure electors are aware of their obligation to vote and how to access electoral services most suited to their needs, the ECQ will deliver a range of communication and engagement activities, including an advertising campaign delivered through various channels, direct communications to electors through distribution of Voter Information Cards and engagement with key stakeholder cohorts.

Electors in the majority of local government areas will have access to a variety of electoral services including attendance voting at polling places over the early voting period and on election day, mobile polling services, telephone voting for eligible electors and the option to apply for a postal vote. Some councils have chosen to apply to the Minister responsible for Local Government to hold their elections as postal ballots in all or part of their local government areas. For those applications approved by the Minister, all eligible electors will have to cast their ballot papers by post only.

Mayors in every council, and councillors in single-member divided councils are elected using the optional preferential voting system. Councillors in undivided councils and multi-member divided councils are elected using the first-past-the-post voting system.

Local government electoral landscape

2024 elections

Number of local governments	77 councils
Types of councils	23 divided councils, including one multi-member divided council 54 undivided councils
Voting systems	Optional preferential voting – all mayors and councillors in all single-member divided councils First-past-the-post voting – councillors in all undivided councils and the multi-member divided council
Number of elected positions	77 mayors 501 councillors
Number of electoral contests*	343 contests
Postal ballot councils	15 full postal ballots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Balonne Shire Council · Banana Shire Council · Barcaldine Regional Council · Barcoo Shire Council · Blackall-Tambo Regional Council · Bulloo Shire Council · Diamantina Shire Council · Etheridge Shire Council · Goondiwindi Regional Council · Longreach Regional Council · North Burnett Regional Council · Paroo Shire Council · Quilpie Shire Council · Richmond Shire Council · Western Downs Regional Council Two hybrid ballots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Isaac Regional Council · Maranoa Regional Council

*In undivided and multi-member divided councils, multiple councillors are elected in a single electoral contest under the first-past-the-post voting system.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

Local government elections are complex undertakings, with different local governments having varying geographies, sizes, voting systems and election delivery models. To respond to the diverse needs of local governments in Queensland, the ECQ has undertaken planning for these elections under the guidance of its Local Government Engagement Strategy.

This strategy focuses on establishing productive relationships with the local government sector and providing further transparency and context around the conduct of local government elections, including cost drivers and logistical and legislative constraints. The strategy has enabled the ECQ to better understand local contexts and the challenges of providing appropriate electoral services to the diverse range of local communities across Queensland.

Since 2021, the ECQ has been implementing a comprehensive program of local government engagement, to ensure local perspectives are incorporated into voter service design. The ECQ has liaised with Queensland's 77 councils to seek their input and insights into planning for elections in their local government area and to allow the ECQ to tailor election service design to the needs of each community.

To facilitate strategic engagement and opportunities for collaboration, the ECQ has also established the Local Government Election Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from the local government sector, to provide advice and input into the ECQ's election service design. This committee has provided valuable input to the ECQ's election preparation activities over the final year of planning for the elections. Communiques from these meetings have been made available on the ECQ website after each meeting.

Consultation undertaken by the ECQ with individual local governments on electoral service design has guided planning for the delivery of the 2024 local government elections in accordance with the services and deliverables outlined in this Service Plan.

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ENROLMENT

As at December 2023, the Queensland electoral roll has **3,646,613** enrolled electors, and by the March 2024 elections, it is anticipated that **almost 3.7 million** electors will be enrolled to vote.

Eligible Queenslanders will be able to enrol or update their enrolment until **5 February 2024**. The information on the Queensland electoral roll at that time will be the electoral roll for the election.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), in partnership with the ECQ, maintains Queensland's electoral roll, including processing updated and new enrolments. New enrolments or updates to enrolment details can be made on the AEC website at www.aec.gov.au.

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ELECTION MILESTONES

Local government elections must be held in accordance with set milestones specified in accordance with the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*. While election day is set under legislation, other election dates are determined by the ECQ in accordance with provisions of the Act.

During preparations for the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ released an indicative timetable to local governments in August 2023 and publicly released the proposed election dates in November 2023.

The indicative timetable for the election is outlined below and will be officially confirmed upon publication of the notice of election.

Indicative timetable

Monday, 29 January 2024

Notice of election

Under section 25 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the ECQ must publish notice of an election, calling for nominations for offices of mayor or councillor and setting a day for candidate nominations.

The publication of this notice will officially commence the 2024 local government elections and open the nomination period.

Monday, 29 January 2024

Candidate nominations open

Nominations for candidates for election as mayors or councillors will open from the publication of the notice of election on 29 January 2024, until noon 13 February 2024.

Details of candidates will be published on the ECQ website.

Monday, 5 February 2024

Close of the electoral roll

The ECQ must compile a roll of eligible electors to be used during voting at an election.

Eligible persons should update their enrolment details or enrol for the first time by the date specified for the close of the electoral roll to ensure their eligibility to vote in the elections. Eligible persons who update their details or enrol for the first time after the date specified for the close of the electoral roll, may need to cast a declaration vote at a polling place.

Under section 18 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the close of the electoral roll must be between five and seven days after the publication of the notice of election.

Tuesday, 13 February 2024, 12.00pm

Candidate nominations close

Nominations to contest the election for Queensland's 77 mayoral and 501 councillor offices open when the ECQ publishes the notice of election and must be provided to the relevant Returning Officer by the deadline specified on the notice of election. Late and incomplete nominations cannot be accepted.

Details of nominated candidates will be published progressively on the ECQ website after being received and certified by relevant Returning Officers.

Under section 25 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the date set for close of nominations must be between eight and 18 days after the publication of the notice of election and between 18 and 42 days before election day.

Wednesday, 14 February 2024

Ballot paper order draw

After the close of candidate nominations, Returning Officers must conduct random draws to determine the order in which candidates' names will appear on the ballot papers for each election. Following the ballot order draw, printing of ballot papers can commence, including distributing postal voting materials to relevant electors.

Under section 57 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, the ballot order draw must be conducted as soon as practicable after the close of nominations. For the 2024 local government elections, the ballot order draw will be undertaken on the day following the close of nominations.

Monday, 4 March 2024, 7.00pm

Postal vote applications close

Postal vote applications will open from the publication of the notice of election and can be submitted online through the ECQ website, by telephone or on the approved application form until 7.00pm on Monday, 4 March 2024.

Electors in local government areas, or parts of local government areas where a postal ballot is being conducted, as well as those electors registered as 'special postal voters', do not need to apply for a postal vote.

Postal voting materials will be printed and distributed after the close of nominations and completion of the ballot order draw.

Under section 79 of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, postal vote applications must be received no later than 7.00pm on the day that is 12 days before election day. Applications submitted after this date cannot be accepted.

<p>Monday, 4 March to Friday, 15 March 2024</p>	<p>Early voting</p> <p>Early voting will be conducted over the period from Monday, 4 March 2024 until 6.00pm on Friday, 15 March 2024 (excluding the weekend). The early voting schedule will vary by local government area and early voting centre addresses and opening times will be published on the ECQ website progressively, once the notice of election has been issued.</p>
<p>Saturday, 16 March 2024, 8.00am-6.00pm</p>	<p>Election day</p> <p>Election day will be on Saturday, 16 March 2024 and all polling booths will be open from 8.00am to 6.00pm. Details of polling booth locations will be published on the ECQ website progressively, once the notice of election has been issued.</p> <p>After the close of polls on election night, the ECQ will undertake a preliminary count and results will be progressively published on the ECQ website.</p> <p>Election outcomes will not be declared by the ECQ on election night.</p>
<p>Sunday, 17 March 2024 onwards</p>	<p>Official count and declaration of results</p> <p>On the day after election day, the official count will commence under the supervision of the relevant Returning Officer. All votes will be counted again, and postal votes included in the count as they are received.</p> <p>The ECQ will declare the successful candidates only when the outcome is certain. It may be necessary to await the deadline for the return of postal votes for declarations to be made.</p>
<p>Tuesday, 26 March 2024</p>	<p>Deadline for return of postal votes</p> <p>All postal votes must be received by the ECQ by Tuesday, 26 March 2024 in order to be included in the count. Any postal votes received after this date cannot be included in the count.</p> <p>The deadline for return of postal votes is set at 10 days after election day under sections 86(4) and 87(4) of the <i>Local Government Electoral Act 2011</i>.</p>
<p>Monday, 1 July 2024</p>	<p>Election summary returns</p> <p>All candidates, groups of candidates, registered political parties which endorsed a candidate and other electoral participants must give the ECQ an election summary return for the election period, which must include all gifts, donations and electoral expenditure.</p> <p>Any successful candidate who fails to lodge an election summary return will automatically have their office vacated.</p> <p>Under the <i>Local Government Electoral Act 2011</i>, the required period for the lodgement of returns is 15 weeks after election day.</p>

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VOTER SERVICES

For the March 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will deliver a suite of voter services that are responsive to local community needs and that maximise opportunities for electoral participation by all Queenslanders.

The ECQ has monitored changes in voter behaviour at recent elections in Queensland and in other jurisdictions to inform its service delivery model for the upcoming local government elections. As a result, the ECQ's planned services have accounted for increased rates of early voting and stabilised levels of postal voting following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Service planning has been based on estimates of approximately 45 per cent of votes being cast during the early voting period, 35 per cent on election day, 15 per cent by postal vote, and five per cent through other channels. While these estimates have been used to guide resource allocation, the service delivery model has flexibility to cater to variations in these figures.

VOTING CHANNELS

The key voting options that will be provided at the elections are early voting, election day voting, postal voting, electronically assisted (telephone) voting and mobile polling.

EARLY VOTING

Early voting will be held over the two-week period prior to election day, from **4 March until 15 March 2024** (excluding the weekend). Early voting services will vary across local government areas, and locations and operating hours of all early voting centres will be published on the ECQ website.

Approximately **170** early voting centres will operate across Queensland during the elections. While operating hours may vary, early voting centres will generally be open from 9.00am to 5.00pm with hours extending from 9.00am to 6.00pm on the last Friday of the early voting period.

The ECQ takes several matters into consideration when selecting venues to be used as early voting centres, including accessibility, security, workplace health and safety, parking facilities and venue availability. Where practicable, the ECQ seeks to use council facilities to reduce the costs of election delivery and, wherever possible, suitable venues are used concurrently for subsequent elections, including Federal and State electoral events to provide continuity for electors, where anticipated turnout supports the need. The ECQ is planning for a 45 per cent turnout during early voting, equating to over 1.6 million electors.

ELECTION DAY VOTING

Voting on election day, **Saturday, 16 March 2024**, will be available between 8.00am and 6.00pm at polling booths across Queensland.

There will be over **1,000** polling booths established for the elections, with locations published on the ECQ website and searchable using the 'find my polling booth' functionality which assists electors to locate their nearest polling place.

While the number of people casting votes on election day has declined in recent elections, election day is expected to remain the single busiest day of the voting period in terms of the number of votes cast. The ECQ is planning for a 35 per cent turnout on election day, which equates to almost 1.3 million electors.

POSTAL VOTING

Any elector is able to apply for a postal vote and have their voting materials mailed to them. Postal vote applications open from publication of the notice of election and will close at **7.00pm on 14 March 2024**. Applications for a postal vote may be made via the ECQ website or by calling 1300 881 665.

Those electors registered as special postal voters, as well as silent electors, or electors in postal ballot areas, will have their voting materials mailed out automatically.

A total of **15** local governments have been approved to conduct a full postal ballot and a further **two** local government areas will have hybrid ballots, whereby part of the council will conduct the election as a postal ballot and part will have an attendance ballot.

Once electors receive their postal voting materials, they are required to complete the ballot papers before **6.00pm on election day**. Electors must follow the instructions provided with their postal ballot material to ensure their postal vote is accepted into the count.

Postal votes must be received by the ECQ prior to **5.00pm on Tuesday, 26 March 2024**, 10 days following election day.

These measures ensure the integrity of the elections and that only eligible electors participate in the elections. If the instructions have not been followed, or the postal ballot is not received by the ECQ within 10 days following election day, it will not be included in the count.

To address issues with an increasing number of postal votes being rejected for not meeting legislated requirements as set out above, the ECQ conducted research to redesign the postal vote declaration envelope. The redesigned postal voting materials simplify instructions and more clearly explain the steps to be undertaken to complete a valid postal vote.

In addition, an instructional animated video has been published on the ECQ website to assist electors to understand the postal voting process.

The ECQ is planning for 15 per cent of the votes to be cast by postal ballot, equating to over 555,000 electors.

TELEPHONE VOTING

Electronically assisted (telephone) voting is a service available to members of the community who have limited voting options available to them. This includes people who cannot vote without assistance due to an impairment, people with an insufficient level of literacy, people whose enrolled address is more than 20 kilometres from a polling place, special postal voters or electors who will be out of Queensland, including overseas, for the entirety of the voting period.

The telephone voting process is subject to a range of controls to preserve the secrecy of the ballot, with registration and vote-taking undertaken in separate processes and across separate locations. Eligible electors must make two phone calls to complete the voting process.

Firstly, electors make a call to apply to use the service and, if eligible, will receive a registration number and PIN. Secondly, the elector must call a second call centre and use the registration number and PIN to mark their name off the electoral roll, which preserves the secrecy of the elector's identity. During the second phone call, once marked-off, an ECQ officer completes the ballot paper as dictated by the elector, while another ECQ officer listens and observes to ensure the vote is recorded as per the elector's direction.

Due to the labour-intensive nature of telephone voting, this service is not available to all electors and there will be strict checks to confirm eligibility to access the service. Electors should not attempt to register for the service if they do not meet eligibility criteria. Doing so may cause phone lines to become congested and inhibit eligible electors, some of Queensland's most vulnerable citizens, from being able to access this vital service.

Eligible electors who are interstate or overseas at the time of the election will be able to access telephone voting, as well as having the option to apply for a postal vote.

The ECQ is planning for approximately 20,000 votes to be cast using telephone voting.

DECLARED INSTITUTION VOTING

For the 2024 elections, the ECQ will deliver mobile polling to high-care residents of aged care facilities. This service allows residents at these locations to cast a ballot when ordinarily they would have difficulties attending a polling place. It should be noted only residents are eligible to vote at these mobile polling places and voting will not be made available for staff or visitors.

In 2020, this service was not provided as this class of elector was at significantly higher risk from COVID-19. To protect their health and safety, affected individuals were directed to contactless forms of voting such as postal voting and telephone voting.

In the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will again be offering this service. The ECQ is planning to visit approximately 420 declared institutions.

REMOTE EVENT MANAGEMENT

As part of its commitment to delivering culturally appropriate electoral services for First Nations communities, the ECQ will provide mobile polling to 14 remote Indigenous local government areas.

A dedicated hub in Cairns will operate during the election and offer oversight and support to the election staff providing services in communities. These staff will be supported with additional training and information on delivering culturally appropriate electoral services in First Nations communities.

06 VOTER SERVICES

This project will deliver services to the following communities:

- Aurukun Shire Council
- Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council
- Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
- Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council
- Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council
- Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council
- Mornington Shire Council
- Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council
- Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council
- Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council
- Torres Shire Council
- Torres Strait Island Regional Council
- Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

The early voting period for these councils will vary depending on the needs of individual communities and details will be published on the ECQ website. The ECQ has engaged with each of these local governments to design and develop services to meet the needs of the local community, including the location and number of in-person voting services or mobile polling in very remote areas.

SERVICE CENTRE

The ECQ's service centre will be in operation throughout the election period to provide advice and support to electors. The service centre will be delivered in partnership with Smart Service Queensland allowing service capacity to be scaled up in periods of high demand.

Services provided through the service centre, by both telephone and email, will include:

- telephone voting registration
- postal voting and electoral visitor applications
- information and advice about available voting services based on the individual's circumstances, and
- responses to general enquiries and complaints.

Enquiries can be directed to 1300 881 665 or ecq@ecq.qld.gov.au.

The service centre will be in operation from **29 January 2024** and open from 8.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday and 8.00am to 6.00pm election day.

07

STAFF

The ECQ centrally plans, coordinates and oversees election delivery through its workforce based in Brisbane. However, during elections the ECQ recruits over 10,000 thousand of temporary election staff across Queensland to deliver election services at a local level.

ECQ HEAD OFFICE

The ECQ's ongoing establishment consists of approximately 80 full-time equivalent staff located at the ECQ head office and its warehouse facility in Brisbane, which expands to approximately 100 staff members during the election period. These staff coordinate the delivery of elections through a structured planning process and program of work involving the development and execution of over 40 individual project plans under the oversight of the ECQ's Election Delivery Board.

These plans cover a range of critical election activities including:

- identifying and securing venues for early voting centres, election day polling booths and Returning Officers' offices
- recruiting and training Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers and temporary election staff
- preparing and delivering information and educational resources to candidates, political parties and other electoral participants
- monitoring and enforcing compliance with funding and disclosure requirements
- developing and delivering advertising and awareness campaigns to increase elector awareness of enrolment, election delivery and voting options
- acquiring, configuring, testing and deploying ICT equipment required to deliver the elections
- approving how-to-vote cards
- printing and distributing ballot papers and purchasing and distributing other materials required for election delivery
- planning and delivering voter services including postal voting, telephone voting services, mobile polling and other voting services
- conducting post-election reviews and surveys to analyse and inform improvements to service delivery.

Elections are delivered under a decentralised model, with temporary election staff responsible for delivering electoral services in their respective local government areas. The ECQ maintains oversight of election delivery activities and works closely with Returning Officers and other temporary election staff.

To support staff in the field, the ECQ has established a central support centre of contact officers that are available to provide advice and assistance to Returning Officers and facilitate consistent delivery of electoral services across the State.

RETURNING OFFICERS AND ASSISTANT RETURNING OFFICERS

At a local level, Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers are employed to deliver the elections for each of the 77 local governments, with additional temporary election staff employed to undertake various functions to support election delivery.

For the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will recruit, train and support over **150** Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers. Their responsibilities include:

- managing election venues for their local government area, including the Returning Officer's office, early voting centres and election day polling booths
- recruiting and managing temporary election staff and training polling booth supervisors
- distributing election materials to polling places
- accepting candidate nominations and ensuring compliance with legislative requirements
- overseeing and managing the conduct of voting across their electorate, including maintaining the security of ballot papers
- engaging with local governments, candidates and appointed scrutineers during the election period to keep them updated about local election delivery
- ensuring the conduct of the election complies with legislative requirements and the ECQ's policies and procedures
- managing the counting of votes and declaration of results
- packing and returning election materials to the ECQ's warehouse.

TEMPORARY ELECTION STAFF

For the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will recruit approximately **10,000** temporary election staff. These staff will fill roles including polling booth supervisors, issuing officers and count assistants.

Temporary election staff deliver election services to electors including through setting up and dismantling polling places, marking electors off the electoral roll, issuing ballot papers, and counting votes following the close of polling.

Expressions of interest for temporary employment opportunities at the 2024 local government elections opened in November 2023 and will remain open during the election period. The ECQ encourages all members of the public, especially those who are culturally or linguistically diverse or identify as a First Nations person, to apply.

CRITICAL ELECTION SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS

Successful election delivery is reliant upon contracts and relationship management with suppliers, who become critical partners in event planning. Australia Post is a key partner and will deliver millions of Voter Information Cards and postal ballots to Queensland citizens and then expeditiously return completed postal ballots to Returning Officers.

Other partners include major print houses to produce ballot papers and postal ballots in secure environments and within immutable timeframes, transport providers contracted to ensure the on-time delivery of all election materials to every part of Queensland, and others who support the digital environment and provide the resources and materials required to deliver a State-wide event to around 3.7 million Queenslanders.

These partnerships are critical, and the ECQ enjoys positive contractual relationships with suppliers, working together to plan and execute the details of election delivery.

08

ELECTION RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Significant procurement activities are required to support election delivery, to resource election staff with the materials, equipment and technology required to provide election services to electors across Queensland. Resources required include office materials, polling place resources, ballot papers and ICT equipment. These resources are distributed to various locations across the State by the ECQ.

ELECTION MATERIALS

Prior to election day on Saturday, 16 March 2024, the ECQ will have packed and distributed approximately 700 pallets containing materials to supply every Returning Officer's office, early voting centre and polling booth.

In preparation for the election, the ECQ warehouse will distribute material to each local government area in Queensland. This includes:

- around **7,800 voting screens**
- around **16,000 pencils**
- over **5,000 ballot boxes**.

The ECQ will also oversee the printing and distribution of approximately **11.2 million** ballot papers in the short period of time between the close of nominations and the commencement of early voting.

A significant amount of planning and testing will go into this process to ensure materials arrive in time for the voting period, especially in remote areas of Queensland.

ICT EQUIPMENT

All ICT equipment needed to support election delivery is centrally purchased and deployed to Returning Officers to equip early voting centres and election day polling booths with the technology required to deliver election services.

The ECQ configures and distributes an 'Office in a Box' to all Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, including communications equipment, computers, ePollbooks, screens, bar code readers and printers.

Approximately **4,400** laptops will also be configured for use in polling booths and early voting centres across Queensland. These devices are used by election staff to electronically search and mark-off electors from the electoral roll when voting.

Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers also have access to a dedicated ICT help desk service to support the deployment of these technologies.

ELECTION SYSTEMS

The ECQ's Election Management System is the primary system used to support the administrative processes necessary for election delivery. It provides the ECQ functionality to manage:

- polling booths and early voting centres
- temporary election staff recruitment
- candidate nominations
- electoral roll information, including elector look-up and mark-off
- telephone voting
- online voter services including a 'Find my polling booth' service and online postal vote applications.

The ECQ also manages other election systems that support election delivery, including the Electronic Disclosure System (used for real-time disclosure of gifts, donations, loans and electoral expenditure) and the election results website.

The ECQ is undertaking various assurance activities to ensure the security, stability and readiness of its election systems prior to the elections in 2024. Activities being undertaken include:

- Business Continuity Planning workshops
- incident response readiness and tabletop scenarios
- system performance and load capacity testing
- source code reviews and website application penetration testing
- end-to-end system testing
- user testing of systems and their alignment to business processes through detailed election rehearsals.

Monitoring of the election systems and their underlying technology platforms provides additional assurances and coverage for performance and security. The ECQ is supported by the Queensland Government Cyber Security Unit, in particular its Security Operations Centre service, providing security monitoring of the ECQ's environment. An additional subscription and relationship with the Australian Signals Directorate's Australian Cyber Security Centre keeps the ECQ informed of cyber security threats and vulnerabilities.

CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

During the delivery of elections, the ECQ works closely with candidates and political parties to facilitate the nomination process and support compliance with legislative obligations. The ECQ produces a range of resources, including handbooks, fact sheets and guides to explain the endorsement, nomination and disclosure requirements, which are available on the ECQ website.

CANDIDATE NOMINATIONS AND GROUP REGISTRATION

After the notice of election is published, candidate nominations will open for any eligible person to nominate to stand for election to 578 mayor or councillor positions across Queensland's 77 local governments.

The ECQ is engaging proactively with all announced candidates to ensure they have the information required to facilitate their formal nomination. The candidate nomination process will open upon the publication of the notice of election, and the nomination process must be completed in line with statutory requirements in order for a candidate's name to be placed on the ballot paper.

Under the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, for a nomination to be accepted, candidates must complete mandatory training delivered by the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works, known as 'So you want to be a councillor' training.

Additionally, any gifts/loans or electoral expenditure received or incurred prior to nomination must be disclosed to the ECQ through the Electronic Disclosure System. Candidates must also open a dedicated bank account for the deposit of gifts and donations and expensing all electoral expenditure and provide details of this account to the ECQ.

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.

EXPENDITURE CAPS

In April 2023, the Queensland Parliament passed the *Local Government Electoral (Expenditure Caps) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2023*. This Act introduced an electoral expenditure cap framework for local government elections in Queensland, which will be in place for the first time at the 2024 local government elections. These caps place limitations on the amount of electoral expenditure a candidate, group of candidates, political party or third party can incur for the elections.

09 CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Caps vary for each local government depending on:

- the number of electors in the local government area
- whether the candidate is running for mayor or councillor, or
- if the expenditure is incurred by a registered third party.

In July 2023, the ECQ published [notice of the electoral expenditure caps for the 2024 local government elections](#). The notice declares the capped expenditure period for the elections, from **14 August 2023 until 6.00pm on election day, 16 March 2024**. The notice also lists the different expenditure cap amounts for the mayoral and councillor candidates (and any third parties) for each local government area.

The ECQ has provided significant support and educational materials to candidates, registered political parties, third parties and other affected stakeholders to understand the new requirements and assist them to comply.

Upon commencement of the expenditure cap legislation on 28 June 2023, the ECQ published 38 fact sheets covering all aspects of the funding and disclosure framework for local government elections, including the new expenditure cap requirements and refreshed and accessible web content. The education materials provide targeted and relevant information for electoral participants according to their individual requirements.

DISCLOSURE

To allow for greater transparency and increased public awareness around political funding and financial activities of election candidates, the ECQ maintains the Electronic Disclosure System where gifts and expenditure are declared and published.

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

COMPLIANCE

In April 2023, the ECQ published its [Compliance Approach](#) to the 2024 local government elections and a statement of the ECQ's [Commitments and Expectations](#) on the ECQ website.

These documents provide electoral participants (particularly candidates) and other stakeholders with a clear understanding of the types of matters which the ECQ will be actively monitoring during the election, including group campaign activity, expenditure cap compliance and proper authorisation of election material.

The ECQ has also finalised its proactive compliance plan for implementation immediately following the 2024 local government elections. Candidates and other electoral participants may be contacted by the ECQ to address discrepancies or other issues at any time in the years following an election event.

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COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The ECQ is committed to ensuring all eligible Queenslanders have the information they need to participate in elections. For the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will deliver a broad range of advertising, information and engagement activities to raise awareness, promote participation and maintain accessibility of election services.

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

In the lead-up to, and during, the elections, a state-wide advertising campaign will be delivered using a mix of channels such as television, radio, digital and print media. This campaign will be guided by an engagement strategy that targets a range of audience groups, to ensure as many Queenslanders as possible are reached.

The ECQ will also deliver a proactive social media program promoting key information and election updates to support Queenslanders' participation.

VOTER INFORMATION CARD

In February 2024, the ECQ will mail a Voter Information Card directly to the postal address of all eligible Queensland electors (excluding special postal voters or electors who are participating in postal elections). The card is aimed at helping electors to vote quickly and efficiently and provides key information such as links to polling booth locations and details of the elector's local government area (and division if relevant).

By scanning the barcode on the front of the card, election officials will be able to quickly and efficiently mark electors off the roll and issue them with their ballot papers when they arrive at a polling booth.

The card has been significantly enhanced for 2024. This work was informed by market research insights and is designed to improve accessibility for Queenslanders with low literacy or limited English.

In 2020, the ECQ also issued an electronic version of the Voter Information Card to electors who have opted to include an email address on the electoral roll. This will continue in 2024 along with an SMS alert to be sent on election day to electors who have opted to include their mobile number on the electoral roll. Providing digital alternatives to the hard-copy Voter Information Card helps ensure the ECQ's awareness program is continuing to evolve with public expectations.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND DISINFORMATION

As Queensland's trusted elections provider, the ECQ takes electoral integrity extremely seriously. To counter misinformation and disinformation, the ECQ has taken a proactive approach to ensuring factual information about electoral processes is accessible to Queenslanders via the ECQ website and the ECQ's social media channels.

A new [Election Facts](#) web page has been published on the ECQ website for the 2024 local government elections, offering a central point of truth. It includes an Election Facts register which will be updated progressively during election delivery to mitigate any misinformation or disinformation that may be circulating in the community.

The ECQ also liaises with the Australian Government's Counter Foreign Interference Coordination Centre on a regular basis to understand and adapt to the current threat environment.

ECQ WEBSITE

The ECQ website is a user-centred and accessible platform that provides information about the electoral system and voting in Queensland.

The website will provide a range of information for Queensland electors about the conduct of the elections, including key dates, available voting options and election services, online candidate nominations, a polling booth search service and online postal vote application functionality. Following the close of polling, the election results website will display real-time election results.

MULTILINGUAL GUIDE TO VOTING

The ECQ produces the Multilingual Guide to Voting to support electors with limited English to participate in elections. The guide is distributed to all election day polling booths and early voting centres and is also available on the ECQ website. It provides general guidance about the voting process, including step-by-step voting instructions in a wide range of languages – including simplified English.

In the lead-up to the election, the ECQ will proactively engage with key stakeholders to promote the availability of the guide to electors in target groups and support their participation in the elections.

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The ECQ is focused on delivering culturally inclusive elections that encourage electoral participation. The ECQ has developed a [First Nations Engagement Strategy](#) released on 7 July 2023 during NAIDOC week, to guide enhanced engagement with First Nations communities, improvements to the delivery of culturally appropriate electoral services and increased cultural awareness for ECQ staff.

The ECQ has recruited a First Nations Engagement Officer, who is supporting the ECQ to respond to the needs of First Nations Queenslanders leading up to, and during, the 2024 local government elections.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEWS

The Local Government Change Commission (Change Commission) is an independent body established under the *Local Government Act 2009* responsible for reviewing local government divisional boundaries to ensure balanced enrolment across the relevant local government area.

Prior to the 2024 local government elections, the Change Commission assessed the boundaries and enrolment of divided councils to ensure they have a relatively even number of enrolled electors within each of its divisions. This process ensures that each person's vote has the same value.

DIVISIONAL BOUNDARY REVIEWS

In early 2023, all divided councils reviewed their divisional enrolment to ensure they had approximately the same number of enrolled electors in each division. Following this process, the Minister responsible for Local Government referred four local government areas to the Change Commission for divisional boundary reviews:

- Bundaberg Regional Council
- Fraser Coast Regional Council
- Isaac Regional Council
- Tablelands Regional Council.

The Change Commission completed the divisional boundary reviews for these local government areas in October 2023, following the assessment of a broad range of information and data, including population projections and written submission from members of the public. The Change Commission recommended changes to the divisional boundaries of Bundaberg, Fraser Coast and Isaac Regional Councils.

Reports and maps of the new divisional boundaries recommended by the Change Commission have been published on the ECQ website and recommended changes have been implemented by regulation. The new divisional boundaries for these local government areas will be in place for the 2024 local government elections.

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POST ELECTION ACTIVITIES

Following the close of polling at 6.00pm on Saturday, 16 March 2024, a range of post-election activities will commence including the election count, declaration of results and final election reporting and evaluation projects. While many activities are undertaken in the immediate days and weeks following the election, others occur over a period of months.

COUNTING THE VOTES

There are two voting systems in use in Queensland's local government elections: optional preferential voting (for mayors and councillors in single-member divided councils) and first-past-the-post voting (for councillors in undivided and multi-member divided councils).

For mayoral and single-member divided council elections conducted under the optional preferential voting system, electors must mark the box next to at least one candidate with the option to number some or all other candidates in order of preference.

When these votes are counted, all first preferences are tallied and if no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes, a distribution of preferences is required to be undertaken. For this process, 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 one candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes and is elected to the council.

In undivided and multi-member divided councillor elections conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system, electors must mark the same number of boxes as there are councillor positions to be elected. When these votes are counted, 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.

The ECQ has produced animated videos regarding the voting systems in use in Queensland and the process of counting votes to assist in explaining these processes to candidates, stakeholders and the broader community.

WHEN THE VOTES ARE COUNTED

The ECQ must undertake the election counts according to provisions of the *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*. Only formal ballot papers can be included in the count and all votes are counted more than once.

After the close of polls at 6.00pm on election day, **Saturday, 16 March 2024**, a preliminary count will be conducted in polling booths and the results progressively published on the ECQ website. In accordance with the Act, 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 will commence under the control of the Returning Officers from the Sunday after election day. The results website will be continually updated as counting progresses with the completion of official counts and addition of returned postal votes.

Results for the 343 individual electoral contests across the 77 local governments will be declared progressively as counting is finalised. The ECQ cannot declare any results until the outcome is mathematically certain and cannot be changed with the addition of any outstanding votes.

In many instances, it may not be possible for the ECQ to declare an election result until after the final cut-off for the return of postal votes on **Tuesday, 26 March 2024**. 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 included in the count. This might mean counting continues for some days after the 10-day cut-off for the return of postal votes, depending on the number of postal votes received at that time and the size of the preference count that might be required.

NON-VOTER ACTIVITIES

In Queensland it is compulsory to vote at all State and local government elections and by-elections. If an enrolled elector fails to vote despite the options available, the ECQ is obliged to consider enforcement action, which may include apparent failure to vote notices which includes a half penalty unit fine, whole penalty unit fine and referral to the State Penalties Enforcement Registry.

Following the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will commence a non-voter program to contact enrolled electors who, according to election mark-off records, have not voted in the election.

These electors will, in the first instance, be sent an 'apparent failure to vote' notice. This notice provides the opportunity for the elector to either provide a valid excuse for not voting, advise that they did vote, or pay a half penalty unit. If the elector does not respond to the notice, a fine of a full penalty unit (currently valued at **\$154.80** as of 1 July 2023) may be sent.

At any time during this process, electors are encouraged to contact the ECQ for advice or information to help them navigate the process. If the ECQ is unable to resolve the matter with electors, including where it cannot make contact with enrolled electors in this process, they may be referred to the State Penalties Enforcement Registry.

EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Post-election evaluation and reporting activities provide a range of metrics that help inform and improve future delivery of electoral services.

Following the 2024 local government elections, the ECQ will complete a number of evaluation projects including a review of informal ballot papers, a post-election survey and an in-depth review of the election.

An overview of the delivery of the elections, including relevant findings from these evaluation projects, will be outlined in a report on the elections that will publicly be released to aid in transparent reporting and public understanding of the conduct of the 2024 local government elections.

STATE GENERAL ELECTION

The 2024 State general election is due to be held on **Saturday, 26 October 2024**. The ECQ has commenced initial planning for the 2024 State general election in parallel with preparation for the 2024 local government elections.

The ECQ will provide further information regarding the planning for the conduct of this election in the coming year to assist in public awareness and preparations for the second State-wide electoral event to be held in 2024.



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