



22 November 2021

Ms Lucy Dalton
Director, Policy and Strategy
Local Government Victoria
Local Government & Suburban Development Group
Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

Email: lucy.dalton@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Dalton

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Draft Discussion Paper Lines of Inquiry*. Please find following the VLGA's feedback.

General Comment

Our submission is based on the premise that change in behaviour requires change in context, otherwise there is no impetus. This can be summed up in the words of Dragos Bratanu "Social context trumps reason and social context drives your behaviors with an influence akin to an invisible force. We naturally adapt our behaviors to the context."

Precipitation of Events

Whilst we understand that the brief requested comment on the 'Lines of Enquiry' as provided, there is another element that we consider should be addressed that relates to the context within which each council operates.

The *Local Government Act 2020* made some profound changes to the context within councils operate – for example – through the defining of 'good governance', enhanced definitions of roles and responsibilities, the application of the Governance Principles and the supporting principles, and the design of the Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework.

This context sets the scene for councillor interactions, and provides an environment where choices between organisational and personal values and behaviours become clearer.

It would, we believe therefore be helpful, in support of a 'proactive not reactive' approach, to include another yellow box on the left of the diagram on Page 7 with text along the lines of "Opportunity to set context and influence values and behaviours".

Lines of Enquiry

Generally the Lines of Enquiry and questions seem appropriate, save for the following comments.

1. Under ‘Roles, Responsibilities and Supporting Mechanisms’,

- Question 3 provides a powerful context to this project and would work well being posed first as Question 1.

This goes to the heart of the cultural review – how councillors, officers, political parties and, most importantly, the community, view the role of the Council. If it is seen as a political battleground (for example, the process of being elected in itself is a political process that is competitive), then dysfunctional, combative behaviour runs the risk of being rewarded or accommodated. As an alternative, a frame around community interest, diversity and collaborative & creative decision-making processes would either set a markedly different tone for the review or surface a more deep-seated structural and systemic problem which may require bold action to reform.

- Rather than the sub-heading of ‘**Leadership competencies and capabilities**’, the other two perhaps could be asked in a broader manner, with a sub-heading such as ‘**Supporting leadership**’ or similar.
- Two additional Questions under this sub-heading are also suggested:
‘The LG Act 2020 defines Good Governance in terms of sections 8, 9 and 28. How could ‘good governance’ be defined to best meet the needs of Councils? What other interventions and support are required to best achieve good governance.’
‘Under the LG Act 2020 councillors are required to attend to development, approval, oversight of implementation and review of the Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework (ISPARF). How can councillors be supported to overcome impediments and perform all elements of this important role.’

2. ‘Councillor Journey’:

- The current Questions 4 and 5 seem appropriate.
- Our experience is that many dysfunctional interactions between councillors are multi factorial. In addition to purpose and role clarity as touched on above, other factors also include shared respect (or lack thereof) and modes of communication that are not confined to social media. So perhaps a new subsection could be inserted ahead of ‘**The vindictive use of social media**’.
- The suggested additional section is along the following lines:
‘High Performing Teams’
‘What early interventions would assist councillors to interact with each other in a manner consistent with the Standards of Conduct, including the application of respectful, creative and sustainable early conflict resolution initiatives?’ and
‘How can a council (as a group) be supported to build underlying capability in its group interactions and problem solving skills?’



3. **'Dispute Resolution and Resolving Conflict'**

We have nothing to add in relation to this section, other than to note that this section is more transactional than the questions we have suggested in the previous section.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution to the discussion. I would be delighted to speak with you further in the event of any enquiries and can be contacted via Kathryn@vlga.org.au or 0417 990 270

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Arndt', is positioned above the printed name.

Kathryn Arndt
Chief Executive Officer