



Late Agenda Item

Ordinary Meeting of Council

Wednesday 25 March 2026 6:00 pm



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Late items

C2603-27 RESPONSE TO WALGAS DISCUSSION PAPER ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL REFORMS

Meeting date: 25 March 2026
Responsible officer: Manager Governance
Voting requirements: Simple Majority Required
Attachments: 1. Discussion Paper

SUMMARY

This report is presented to Council in response to the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) Electoral Reform Discussion Paper (February 2026), inviting Council to endorse and forward a position on the anticipated State Government electoral reform changes, being:

- **Full spill elections every four years (replacing the current half spill elections every two years); and**
- **Compulsory voting at Local Government elections (replacing the current voluntary voting model).**

Local Governments are invited to provide Council-endorsed feedback so that WALGA can form its position to form its advocacy with the State Government ahead of anticipated formal legislative proposals.

BACKGROUND

The Western Australian State Government, through the Minister for Local Government, Hon Hannah Beazley MLA, has signalled its intention to propose electoral reforms for Local Government in WA. While no formal consultation proposals have been released, WALGA is conducting early engagement with the sector to ensure its advocacy position reflects current sector views.

Western Australia currently differs in electoral arrangements among Australian jurisdictions in two ways:

- It holds biennial half spill elections, where half of Council positions are up for election every two years (with four-year terms). All other Australian jurisdictions hold full spill elections every four years.



- It is one of two Australian jurisdictions where voting in Local Government elections is voluntary (South Australia being the only other); all other states have compulsory voting.

WALGA has an existing advocacy position to support half spill elections (Advocacy Position 2.5.16) and voluntary voting (Advocacy Position 2.5.15), both of which were confirmed following sector consultation in late 2024. However, a continuing sector led investigation into compulsory versus voluntary voting was continuing when the Minister signalled these reforms.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as a result of this item. However, it is noted that the anticipated electoral reforms will result in future financial implications on the City.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

This item is in keeping with the City of Fremantle's Strategic Community Plan 2024 – 2034:

Corporate - Lead and empower the organisation to deliver the vision of 'strong reputation, stronger future'

- The matters contained in this report align to the intent of this theme's outcome.

CONSULTATION

This issue was raised with Elected Members at an informal meeting on Monday, 23 March 2026.

OFFICER COMMENT

As provided in WALGA's Electoral Reform Discussion Paper (shown in Attachment 1), WALGA has posed the following questions for Local Government feedback:

1. *Does your Local Government support half spill elections every two years or full spill elections every four years?*



2. *What are the key considerations informing this view?*
3. *If full spill elections every four years were introduced, what transitional arrangements and consequential amendments may be required?*
4. *Any other comments?*
5. *Does your Local Government support compulsory voting or voluntary voting in Local Government elections?*
6. *If the frequency of Local Government elections were changed to every 4 years, would your Local Government support compulsory or voluntary voting?*
7. *What are the key considerations informing this view?*
8. *Any other comments?*

In responding to these questions, the following analysis is provided for council consideration.

1. Election Frequency

Western Australia is the only jurisdiction in Australia that currently holds elections every two years, with half of Council positions up for election at each cycle. Under the proposed changes to election frequency, all positions on Council would be contested at a single election and held every four years thereafter.

The table below summarises how other jurisdictions in Australia manage election frequency:

Jurisdiction	Election Frequency
Western Australia	Half spill / 2 years
South Australia	Full spill / 4 years
Queensland	Full spill / 4 years
New South Wales	Full spill / 4 years
Victoria	Full spill / 4 years
Tasmania	Full spill / 4 years
Northern Territory	Full spill / 4 years

WALGA’s current advocacy position on election frequency is as follows:

2.5.16 Elections	The Local Government sector supports:
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	1. Councillors serve four-year terms with elections every two years and half of the Council positions spilled at each election.
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Recommended position:

Whilst there are some administrative benefits to the proposed election frequency changes, it is recommended that Council support to retain the current election frequency of half spill elections every two years.

Recommended key consideration for this position:

It is noted that the current election frequency helps retain a balance of experience and knowledge on current/ongoing matters being considered by Council, which can support consistency in decision making and provide a smooth transition through election cycles.

2. Compulsory or Voluntary Voting

As noted in the discussion paper by WALGA, Western Australia and South Australia are the only Australian jurisdictions that retain voluntary voting at the Local Government level, with all other Australian jurisdictions require compulsory voting.

Further investigation into participation rates for voluntary and compulsory voting was undertaken was WALGA. This investigation found participation rates differ noticeably between voluntary and compulsory voting across each jurisdiction, as summarised in the table below:

Jurisdiction	2022-24 Participation	Previous Rate	Voting Type
Western Australia	31.2% (2023)	30.2% (2021)	Voluntary
South Australia	32.9% (2022)	31.6% (2018)	Voluntary
Tasmania	84.79% (2022*)	58.72% (2018)	Compulsory from 2022
New South Wales	84.54% (2024)	83.56% (2021)	Compulsory
Queensland	82.31% (2024)	77.71% (2020)	Compulsory
Victoria	81.46% (2024)	81.47% (2020)	Compulsory

WALGA’s current advocacy position is as follows:



<p>2.5.15 Participation in Local Government Elections</p>	<p>The Local Government sector supports voluntary participation in Local Government elections.</p> <p><i>Noting that State Council at its 6 December 2024 State Council meeting resolved that the WALGA Secretariat further investigate implications of compulsory and voluntary participation in Local Government elections and report back to State Council.</i></p>
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Recommended position:

It is recommended that Council support retaining voluntary participation in Local Government election.

Recommended key consideration for this position:

Whilst participation rates would improve as a result of compulsory voting, this approach is not recommended. It may not necessarily reflect community sentiment, where we currently see participation by those actively engaged in the election process. This may also result in an increase in “donkey” voting. Additionally, this approach may cause additional administrative burden such as an increase in resourcing, enforcement, and processing requirements.

Recommendation in relation to transitional arrangements:

Should the proposed electoral reform changes be imposed on Local Governments in WA, it is recommended that the following transitional clause be considered by State Government.

1. That an option be available to Local Governments, to adopt a transitional arrangement with State Government that enables:
 - i. Council Members elected in 2025, to complete their remaining term of officer (ending in 2029);
 - ii. Full spill elections every four years to commence at the Local Government election in either 2029 or 2031; providing a maximum two-year term for council members elected at the 2027 or 2029 Local Government election.

Whilst it is acknowledged that State Government have not formally announced the proposed electoral reform changes discussed in this report and in the WALGA discussion paper, there is strong support to provide an endorsed position of



Council to WALGA for the purpose of future advocacy in relation to electoral changes on behalf of all WA Local Governments.

VOTING AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Simple Majority Required

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

Council:

- 1. Adopt the following position in response to the questions posed by WALGA in the Electoral Reform Discussion Paper:**
 - a. The City of Fremantle supports retaining the current election frequency of half spill elections every two years; noting that:**
 - i. The current election frequency helps retain a balance of experience and knowledge on current/ongoing matters being considered by Council, which supports newly elected members with their induction and transition into their role, and assists with effective and consistent decision making.**
 - b. The City of Fremantle supports an option be available for Local Governments to adopt transitional arrangement that enables:**
 - iii. Council Members elected in 2025, to complete their remaining term of officer (ending in 2029);**
 - iv. Full spill elections every four years, to commence at the Local Government election in either 2029 or 2031; providing a maximum two-year term for council members elected at the 2027 or 2029 Local Government election.**
 - c. The City of Fremantle supports retaining voluntary voting.**
 - d. Should the frequency of Local Government elections change to every 4 years, the City of Fremantle supports retaining voluntary voting.**
- 2. Request the Chief Executive Officer to submit Council's endorsed position (in part 1) to WALGA in response to the Electoral Reform Discussion Paper.**