



**Southern Downs**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

**ATTACHMENTS TO MINUTES  
GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

**23 NOVEMBER 2016**



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**Calendar for Council Meetings, Briefing Sessions and  
 Professional Development Workshops  
 January to December 2017**

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>BRIEFING SESSION 1</b>	<b>BRIEFING SESSION 2</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSION</b>	<b>GENERAL MEETING</b>
January	No Session	16/1/2017 Warwick	23/1/2017 Warwick	25/1/2017 Stanthorpe
February	6/2/2017 Stanthorpe	13/2/2017 Warwick	20/2/2017 Stanthorpe	22/2/2017 Warwick
March	6/3/2017 Warwick	13/3/2017 Warwick	20/3/2017 Stanthorpe	22/3/2017 Stanthorpe
April	3/4/2017 Stanthorpe	10/4/2017 Warwick	24/4/2017 Stanthorpe	26/4/2017 Warwick
May	1/5/2017 Warwick	8/5/2017 Warwick	22/5/2017 Stanthorpe	24/5/2017 Stanthorpe
June	5/6/2017 Stanthorpe	13/6/2017 Warwick	26/6/2017 Stanthorpe	28/6/2017 Warwick
July	3/7/2017 Warwick	10/7/2017 Warwick	24/7/2017 Stanthorpe	26/7/2017 Stanthorpe
August	7/8/2017 Stanthorpe	14/8/2017 Warwick	21/8/2017 Stanthorpe	23/8/2017 Warwick
September	4/9/2017 Warwick	11/9/2017 Warwick	25/9/2017 Stanthorpe	27/9/2017 Stanthorpe
October	3/10/2017 Stanthorpe	9/10/2017 Warwick	23/10/2017 Stanthorpe	25/10/2017 Warwick
November	6/11/2017 Warwick	13/7/2017 Warwick	20/11/2017 Stanthorpe	22/11/2017 Stanthorpe
December	4/12/2017 Stanthorpe	11/12/2017 Warwick	18/12/2017 Stanthorpe	20/12/2017 Warwick





## **Electoral Commission of Queensland Review Panel Submission**

### **Introduction**

Southern Downs Regional Council's 2016 Local Government election was conducted by the Electoral Commission of Queensland using postal voting only. The Minister for Local Government approved the postal ballot in August 2015.

### **Feedback from 2016 Election**

For the 2016 local government elections, 25,254 registered voters were forwarded ballot papers and associated documents for completion and return to the Returning Officer. Due to reasons unknown, 5,424 voters failed to return documentation.

Informal votes for the election of the eight Councillors totalled 6,304; which is in reality 31.7% of returned ballot papers.

Feedback from the Returning Officer indicates that confusion amongst registered voters with the process of completing the documentation associated with postal voting was a major reason in votes being declared informal. This, combined with the large number of voters who requested replacement ballot papers, has the Returning Officer recommending that postal voting be discontinued for any future local government election.

### **Future Options**

#### **ACT model**

It is noted the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has successfully used an electronic voting system for the past five elections from 2001 to 2016. Features of this system include:

- use of standard personal computers as voting terminals;
- voters using a barcode to authenticate their votes;
- voting terminals are linked to a server in each polling location using a secure local area network, noting that no votes are taken or transmitted over a public network like the Internet;
- continued use of manual marking of the electoral roll; and
- all paper votes are scanned and the preference numbers on each image are read by Intelligent Character Recognition software.

The ACT electronic voting system is used in the pre-poll voting centres as well as on election day at ordinary polling places. In polling places that do not have electronic voting, voters still use traditional paper ballots. In electronic polling places, voters are given a choice of voting electronically or on paper. The ACT Electoral Commission asserts that the election software used is open and transparent and can be made available to scrutineers, candidates and other participants in the electoral process.

### Web-based voting

This option involves giving the elector the opportunity to vote electronically from any location on a web-based secure site, somewhat similar to the recent ABS 2016 Census electronic data collection process. Undoubtedly, harsh lessons have been learnt from this process, however the concept for Local Government elections could be implemented with these lessons in mind. Unlike the Census, the data required to conduct a Local Government election electronically would be significantly smaller and far less complicated to complete for the user.

For those electors who do not have access to the internet, Council Libraries/community centres could be made available for electronic voting. These centres are ideal for electronic voting due to the fact that Libraries are located in most communities and already have multiple computer facilities available. Electors without internet access would regularly frequent the free internet at Council libraries and community centres, therefore providing familiarity to these voters.

### **Advantages**

The advantages of the ACT model and web-based voting include:

- paperless voting resulting in reduced stationery, printing and postage costs;
- reduced risk of misplaced ballot papers;
- less resources required compared to manual counting of ballot papers;
- election result determined in a shorter timeframe;
- reduced ECQ costs passed to Council due to the use of Council library facilities; and
- reduced inconvenience, travel time and costs for web-based voting.

The disadvantages of the ACT model and web-based voting include:

- potential failures of IT systems;
- insufficient firewalls to prevent security breaches; and
- community mistrust of the process.

Southern Downs Regional Council believes an opportunity exists to offer a unique service to residents as part of the on-line voting process. It is proposed that residents could undertake their voting at Library facilities owned and operated by Council. This would allow for people unaccustomed to utilising computers to be allowed access to computers to undertake their voting in a familiar and recognised environment. It is recommended that voting should take place over an extended period of time, perhaps two weeks, thereby allowing residents to make their way to a polling station or voting centre. Council believes that appropriate levels of connectivity already exist in the information technology infrastructure at each of the Library facilities. Council also believes that the Libraries offer a safe and secure environment in which people may cast their votes. Whilst it is envisaged that not all people will wish to access Libraries, these facilities will exist for people that do not have access to the internet readily available.

Council also believes that local government authorities have the capacity, experience and capability to successfully run local government elections. In future local government elections it is suggested that local government become the responsible authority. Should this occur, Council recommends that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) be the Returning Officer for the elections. Council believes that having the CEO as the Returning Officer also offers the benefit of potentially reducing the voter confusion which was evident in 2016. Voters generally took their complaints to the Council but had to then be referred to the ECQ, which created delays and caused voter frustration. It also created the impression that Council was 'blame-shifting'.



If the management of the elections is continued to be outsourced by a local government, the organisation taking on the role should provide a fixed cost estimate, rather than what recently occurred where the local governments had to make a "guessimate" on the cost of the election, which included a potential refund or subsidy for the inclusion of the question on four-year terms. Local government needs to know the cost of elections so this can be accurately included in budgets and forecasting.

#### **Conclusion**

With the constant advancement in technology, it is inevitable that future Federal, State and Local Government elections will be conducted utilising this technology, particularly as generations of Australians are now tech savvy. Therefore, Council considers that a detailed assessment of the potential for electronic voting is essential, using the ACT model as a guide.

#### **Recommendation**

Southern Downs Regional Council propose that:

1. The Electoral Commission of Queensland Review Panel recommend to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Training and Skills that the Queensland Electoral Commission undertakes a feasibility assessment of electronic voting for future Local Government elections in Queensland.
2. Queensland Local Governments become the responsible authority for all future elections and that the CEO be appointed as the Returning Officer.