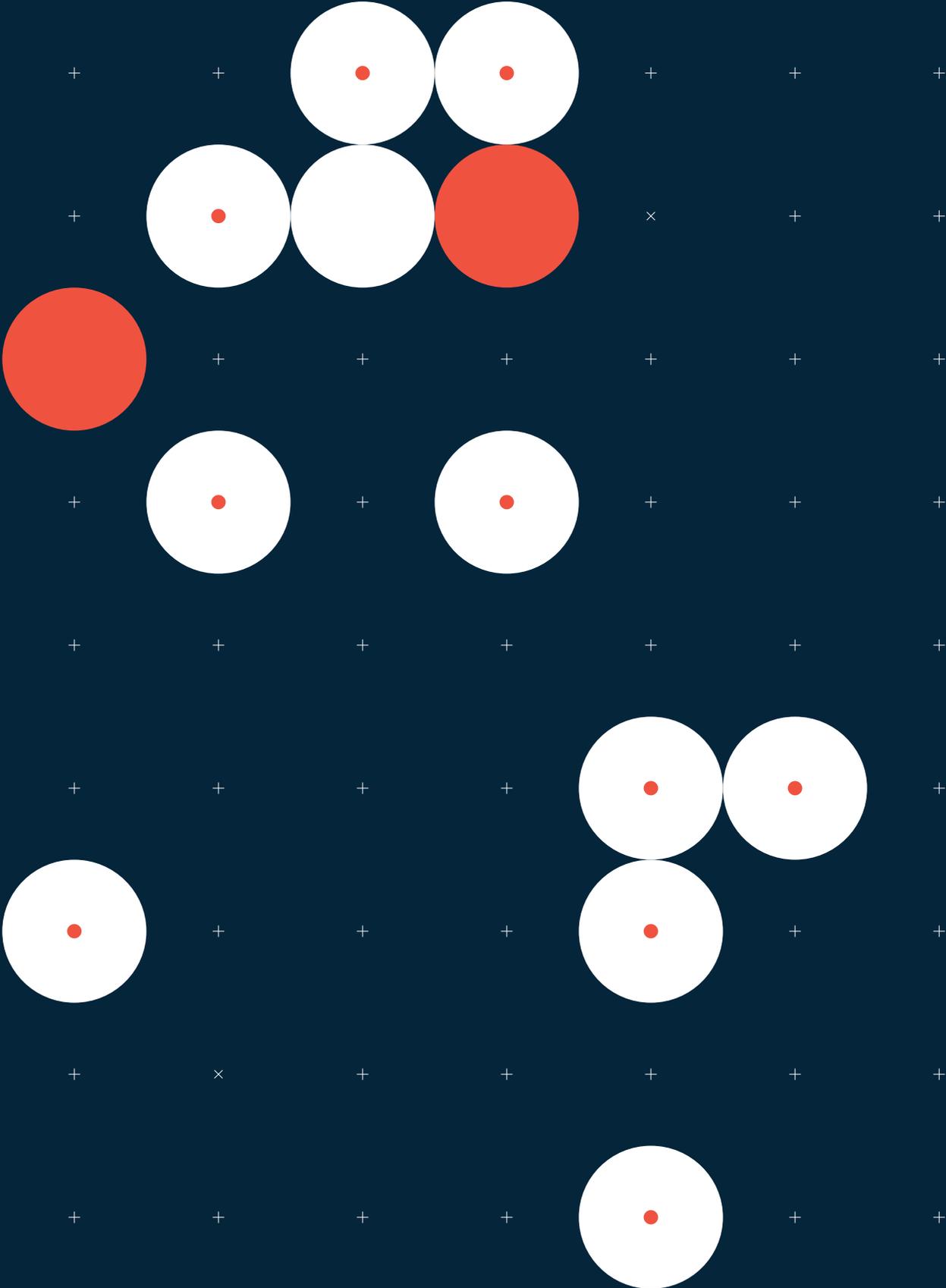


Draft Service Plan

2024 Local Government elections

September 2023



Front cover: Graphic representation of the key dates identified in the 2024 Local Government elections timeline. A secondary colour, red, signifies the overlapping and standalone 2024 Melbourne City Council elections dates.



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)
September 2023

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Draft Service Plan

2024 Local Government elections

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation, as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where we conduct our business.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Note

This election service plan is also available on the VEC's website at vec.vic.gov.au in Microsoft Word and PDF format.



Planning for the 2024 Local Government elections is well underway. Commencing almost two years before the event, we have focused our efforts on optimising well-established services and centralising a number of field operations for greater visibility and control.

Following the success of VoterAlert for both the Victorian 2020 Local Government elections and recent 2022 State election, this service will also be provided to send voting reminders and boost the participation of subscribers.

The VEC enjoys a positive working relationship with the local government sector, and this draft election service plan is an important opportunity to collect feedback from the sector on the VEC's planning for this significant event.

Once finalised, the Local Government Election Service Plan will become the foundation for the VEC's conduct of the 2024 elections. It will telegraph the conduct of the elections service delivery and the VEC's accountability. Importantly, it will also allow councils sufficient time and opportunity to plan and budget for the elections in an environment of significant scrutiny.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sven Bluemmel'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sven Bluemmel
Electoral Commissioner

Consultation on the draft plan

Feedback on the draft Local Government Election Service Plan closes at **5 pm on Friday 27 October 2023**. The final plan will be released to the local government sector in April 2024.

Submissions of feedback can be provided to:

Director, Elections
Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Email: LGProgram2024@vec.vic.gov.au

Copies of the draft election service plan are also available on the VEC's website at vec.vic.gov.au.

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Background and purpose

Introduction

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has a long history of working in partnership with the local government sector. This long-standing commitment to the sector to deliver high quality election services is reflected in the considerable planning, and extensive preparation and co-ordination that is undertaken for each cycle.

The VEC strives to deliver a great voter experience; by way of its efforts being largely invisible to the public. This Draft Service Plan (the plan) is a keystone document, informing all stakeholders of the planning and preparation for the 2024 Local Government elections.

The plan provides all election participants with early advice on how the 2024 Local Government elections will be delivered, allowing an opportunity for stakeholders to review the 'game plan' and provide feedback while developing their own plans accordingly.

This also extends to the many employees, appointees, contractors and service providers on which the VEC relies. Their understanding of the election and their place and importance in the event is critical to a successful outcome and a high quality of service for electors.

Guiding principles

The 2024 Local Government elections will be conducted on established and accepted principles.

Service excellence

The VEC will:

- › aim to deliver fair and equitable elections through high quality, value-for-money electoral products and services
- › perform all tasks in accordance with electoral law and approach all participants in the process fairly
- › work to provide electors with convenient, quality services through which they are able to exercise their democratic rights.

To effectively meet its legislative obligations, the VEC must respond to a changing electoral environment and align its approach with the expectations of voters, councils and other stakeholders.

Local focus for election services

An election manager will be appointed by the Electoral Commissioner for each council's election. Victorian law provides the election manager full responsibility for the conduct of each election.

Accordingly, the management of candidates, in-person enquiries from the public, and vote counting will take place locally within each council wherever possible.

Costs to be kept to a minimum

The plan aims to provide quality election services while keeping costs to a minimum for councils. The VEC's Local Government Election Program will meet all statutory requirements and ensure that customer service and accuracy are prioritised. Each aspect of the 2024 Local Government Election Program will be analysed in detail and transparently shared in relation to costs and benefits.

Legal framework

Victoria has 79 local councils. At the time of printing, only 78 will proceed to election, as Moira Shire Council was dismissed and administrators appointed until 2028. Victorian local government elections will be held on Saturday 26 October 2024.

The VEC is responsible for the conduct of all Victorian local government elections, by-elections and countbacks. The VEC's local government election operations are governed primarily by the following legislative instruments.

- › *Electoral Act 2002*: establishes the VEC as an independent statutory authority and sets out its functions and powers.
- › *Local Government Act 2020 (the Act)*: provides for the holding of elections and their timeframe and voting method, voters' roll entitlements, candidacy, electoral offences and disputing the validity of an election. It includes how councils are constituted and the electoral structural review process set to be completed in June 2024.
- › Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (**the Regulations**): prescribes the conduct of local government elections, mandatory training for candidates and the enforcement of compulsory voting.
- › *City of Melbourne Act 2001*: sets out the process for the election of councillors, Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor to the Melbourne City Council and voters' roll entitlements.
- › *Infringements Act 2006* and *Fines Reform Act 2014*: provide for the stages of compulsory voting enforcement.

All procedures and processes implemented by the VEC during the Local Government Election Program are prescribed or informed by the legislative framework.

The Minister for Local Government has determined that the voting system to be used for elections under the Act is postal voting. A change to the voting system must be determined at least 12 months prior to the election. Currently, the Regulations only provide a procedural basis for postal elections.

Privacy

The VEC is bound by the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, as well as other laws, that impose obligations on the handling of personal and health information. The VEC's privacy policy provides guidance to VEC officers on the management of personal information and supports the VEC's need to collect information and the right of the individual to privacy. All privacy enquiries and concerns should be directed to the VEC Privacy Officer.

Statement of Intent

Victorians who are eligible to vote will do so at an election that is:

- › fully compliant with State law
- › transparent
- › fair and accurate
- › delivered with efficiency, enthusiasm and to the highest standards.

This intent is aligned with the VEC's vision and purpose: 'All Victorians actively participating in their democracy'. This single intent is the premise for all election plans and projects. It assists decision-making, actions and the priorities associated with the allocation of resources.

To meet this intent, the following major operational objectives were identified:

- › complete all election preparation projects by 30 June 2024
- › ensure that as many eligible Victorians as possible are correctly enrolled by the close of roll at 4 pm on Friday 30 August 2024
- › support the sector transitioning to ratepayer enrolment by application
- › increase public awareness and knowledge of the election process and the various participation methods

› provide every eligible voter with a voting experience that is:

- safe, convenient and easy to access
- timely to their requirements
- easy to understand
- respectful and courteous
- confidential

› assist candidates to meet nomination requirements and participate compliantly and effectively in the election

› provide electoral information to all stakeholders in a format that is easy to understand, use and find, and is deliverable through a variety of media in a timely manner

› ensure all votes cast are reconciled, and counted accurately and efficiently, with results available in a timely manner

› maintain stakeholder confidence and trust in the VEC's capacity to deliver impartial, transparent, accurate and efficient election results.

Strategic initiatives

The VEC adopts a process of continuous improvement to refine the operational model and supporting frameworks, to ensure operational needs are legislatively compliant and align with the VEC's strategic outcomes.

Also taken into account is feedback from councils, voters and the VEC's advisory groups relating to the 2020 Local Government elections. This work includes consideration of the recommendations made by the VEC in the 2020 Victorian Local Government election report to parliament.

An update on the progress made in relation to the recommendations can be found in Appendix 9.

Several new or enhanced initiatives will be implemented for the 2024 Local Government elections. These are summarised as follows, further detail is provided later in the document:

- › centralisation of the public enquiry service
- › centralisation of the issuing of replacement votes
- › improved design, tracking and handling of ballot papers
- › improved candidate guidance and services
- › specific engagement campaigns for electors affected by the change in entitlements.

Electoral Integrity

The planning, delivery, and evaluation of the 2024 Local Government Election Program focusses on having robust integrity and decision-making measures at all levels of the organisation. These measures will zero in on election office and head office compliance, as well as specific activities vital for election result integrity.

Complaints management

Complaint management is an important component of election delivery. A dedicated team will manage feedback and complaints from the public received in writing via one of three channels: an online submission form; by email; or by post.

Complaints alleging a breach of the law should include any available evidence. Complaints lodged with election offices will be forwarded to the VEC head office for review and appropriate action, which may include referral to the relevant council or regulator.

The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) is the regulator for local government. The VEC will refer relevant complaints directly to the LGI and advise the customer of this action.

Customer confidentiality is protected. The VEC's customer feedback policy and customer service charter are available on its website.

Disputing election results

The validity of an election can only be disputed by an application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) within 14 days of the declaration of the result of an election.

Section 311 of the Act allows either a candidate, 10 persons entitled to vote at the election or the VEC, to dispute the validity of a local government election by an application to the VCAT.

Following the 2020 elections, nine applications were made to VCAT in relation to eight separate elections. Seven applications were made by individual candidates, one application was made by a group of at least 10 voters, and one application was made by the Electoral Commissioner.

The cost of the VEC's involvement in these reviews was shared between the VEC and the relevant council as a contingency cost under the election service agreement. For each election subject to an application, the VEC reported to the council on the proceedings and the recovery of costs.

In developing its cost recovery model for VCAT proceedings, the VEC notes that applications do not necessarily impugn the conduct of the VEC or the election manager, but the VEC expects it will be a party to any proceedings. The VEC will continue to recover costs associated with VCAT proceedings on a shared basis with the relevant council. The VEC will not seek to recover the cost if it is found by VCAT to be at fault and may choose to absorb a portion of costs where an application to VCAT provides an opportunity to build electoral knowledge or clarify electoral law.

In circumstances where the VEC is a party to legal proceedings, the VEC will be represented by the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office or an appropriate legal services panel firm, with legal counsel engaged as required.

Storage and disposal of ballot material

The VEC manages the security and storage of ballot material in accordance with section 79 of the Regulations. After the declaration of the result of election(s), election managers will package all ballot papers and other materials used at the election in sealed security boxes. The boxes will be clearly labelled to indicate contents, the council and ward (if applicable) and the date of the election. This material will be registered in the VEC's Electronic Document Records Management System (EDRMS) in a timely manner, before being returned to the VEC warehouse for secure storage.

The disposal of ballot material is governed by standards and disposal authorities issued by the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV) and standards issued by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC).

A certified copy of the electoral roll, as at the close of roll, is retained permanently, initially by the VEC but transferred to PROV as a State Archive at a point in time.

System security

The VEC has continued to strengthen its cyber security posture by implementing the Australian Signals Directorate's Essential Eight maturity model (ASD8) and deployed a range of other best-in-class security technology such as protection from Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDOS) attacks.

Significant work has been completed over several phases, with extensive in-house and external security testing and assurance. This work has placed the VEC's cyber security posture in a strong position to protect electoral information and systems.

Reporting on the conduct of the 2024 Local Government elections

Council reports

The VEC will provide each council with a report on the conduct of the election within six months of election day, as required by section 83 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020.

Report to Parliament

Under section 8(2)(b) of the *Electoral Act 2002*, the VEC must report to Parliament within 12 months of the conduct of each election on the administration of that election. For the 2024 Local Government elections, the VEC aims to table its report no later than October 2025. The report will include:

- › analysis and summary of results and trends
- › selected detailed statistics
- › acquittal or progress against recommendations from previous reports to Parliament
- › overview of the planning process
- › levels of key stakeholder satisfaction
- › details of the election budget
- › election administration, staffing and infrastructure
- › election services to voters and candidates
- › communication services
- › innovations and special projects
- › learnings from evaluation surveys and data analysis
- › summary of count processes and transparency measures.

The report may also include recommendations for legislative change or research topics, which will assist the conduct of future elections.

Electoral structure reviews

The Victorian Government has committed to electoral structure boundary reviews, which must be undertaken by the Electoral Representation Advisory Panels (ERAPs) in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*. The reviews undertaken by ERAPs include consideration of the total number of councillors for each municipality; and the ward structure, including the number of wards (if subdivided), number of councillors per ward, ward boundaries and names.

As at October 2022, 39 Victorian councils had electoral structures that were not compliant with the current requirements in the Act. The Victorian Government has committed to reviewing these structures prior to the October 2024 local government general elections. On 10 October 2022, the Minister for Local Government announced the establishment of two ERAPs to undertake reviews of the 39 non-compliant councils, and to provide the Minister with recommendations as to appropriate electoral structure for each council. As required by legislation, the VEC provides administrative and technical services to the ERAPs.

The electoral structure reviews commenced in early 2023 and must be completed by early 2024 when recommendations on all proposed new structures have been provided to the Minister for Local Government. Once final decisions are made and gazetted by the Minister, the VEC and the sector will then operationalise those new models and boundaries for LG2024.

Ward boundary reviews

Under Section 17(1) of the Act, on advice from the VEC, the Minister for Local Government has also requested that the VEC undertake ward boundary reviews for 10 councils. These wards are subject to review as the number of voters per councillor in one or more wards varies, or will vary, more than 10% from the average number of voters per councillor for all the wards for that council by the time the next general election is to be held in October 2024. The VEC will commence these ward boundary reviews in January 2024 and will be complete them prior to the October 2024 Local Government general elections.

A list of the councils requiring electoral structure and boundary reviews can be found in Appendix 7.

Election timeline

The Local Government general election timeline is defined in the Act and Regulations. Barring exceptional circumstances, Local Government general elections are held on the fourth Saturday in October every four years.

The election timeline for the 2024 Local Government elections is available in Appendix 1. The Melbourne City Council Councillors and Leadership election timelines are available in Appendix 2 and 3.

A detailed timeline of key interactions between Local councils and the VEC is available in Appendix 4.

Election service agreement and management

The Election Service Agreement establishes the costing arrangements for the preparation, conduct, and closure of each election. It also summarises contingency election services that may be required during the 2024-2028 council term.

The VEC's Election Service Agreement aims to ensure quality election services are delivered while keeping costs to a minimum for councils.

Although cost increases in some areas of the Local Government Election Program (LGEP) are unavoidable, the VEC will look for efficiency opportunities to minimise cost increases where possible.

The VEC will continue to apply a marginal cost recovery model where all direct costs are recovered. These costs include personnel and associated on-costs, stationery and material, equipment, mail processes, advertising and communications, printing, rent and utilities, insurances, IT infrastructure, and licences that are costed to the election. The VEC's cost recovery model only includes those head office/administrative costs associated with temporary casual staff that are specifically employed for the LGEP.

The VEC does not recover salaries for core staff working on the elections and overheads, such as head office and VEC warehouse accommodation. Some marginal costs are also not recovered because the VEC would be incurring the cost regardless of local government elections (i.e. depreciation of VEC equipment and materials).

There are a number of contingency costs that will also be included in the VEC's costing program on a fee-for-service arrangement. In some cases, it may not be possible to estimate the cost and provision for contingency services, which need to be factored into the election service agreement.

Examples of the contingency costs include being a party to a VCAT review (as discussed earlier in this draft election service plan) and the enforcement of non-voting (infringements and any matters proceeding to prosecution).

There are also a number of other unanticipated costs that may arise during the election timeline, where a council requires a variation to the established parameters for the election (i.e. access to suitable election office for extraction and counting due to number of candidates or change in counting method from manual count to computer count - see 'Counting the votes' for more information).

In all cases, the VEC's Client Liaison Team will discuss contingency costs with the contact officers at councils affected.

Client liaison officers will be appointed to supervise the election service agreement for each council. They will communicate with the council's representative and provide regular reports on the progress of the elections. Along with the election manager, the client liaison officer will be responsible for ensuring that the elections are conducted in accordance with the legislation.

Evaluation

Following the 2024 Local Government elections, an in-depth evaluation will be conducted to identify success against performance measures, capture lessons learned, and identify performance improvement opportunities through an established continuous improvement framework.

As part of the evaluation, the VEC will collect and analyse a range of data during and following the election, including feedback from internal and external stakeholders, election participants and the VEC's advisory groups.

The VEC will evaluate stakeholder satisfaction with the delivery of the 2024 Local Government elections. This activity will include a sample of candidates who nominated for the election.

Informal ballot paper analysis

Immediately post the election, for a period of roughly 3 weeks, the VEC will conduct a survey of informal ballot papers. The aim of the survey is to measure the incidence of various types of informal voting, and to contribute to Australia-wide literature on this subject.

External service providers

Many aspects of Local Government elections require the expertise of external service providers. Contracting these providers enables VEC staff to focus on election-specific areas of expertise, ensuring that Victorians are provided with the highest quality election services, built on modern technology and systems.

For the 2024 Local Government elections, the VEC will have service agreements and contracts in place for a range of specialist services, including:

- › Australia Post
- › ballot paper and ad-hoc printing services
- › cardboard furniture cartage and courier services
- › call centre services

- > election advertising
- > election staffing and labour hire
- > election staff on-line training
- > envelope production
- > information technology
- > mail-house services
- > network security testing and cyber-security augmentation.

on 1 July 2020 and expires on 30 June 2024, and a new MOU will be approved before the commencement of the 2024 Local Government elections.

Victoria Police

The VEC will engage with Victoria Police before and throughout the election timeline. Interactions with Victoria Police have been supported by more streamlined referral and response processes and reflect active engagement with police to build their understanding of electoral offences.

Resource management and sustainability

The VEC is committed to managing resources in a way that minimises environmental impact across its operations.

Examples include:

- > the provision of re-use and recycling facilities to all election venues
- > careful logistics planning to improve load efficiency and reduce carbon emissions associated with the transport of election materials across the State
- > paper reduction strategies such as reducing the amount of paper sent to election offices for election use, where possible moving instruction manuals to an online format, and the provision of electronic copies of reports where possible.

Arrangements with other agencies

The VEC will ensure that arrangements are in place to respond to any legal or regulatory issues arising during the election as set out below.

Victorian Government Solicitor's Office

The VEC will arrange with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO) to have legal counsel on stand-by throughout the election timeline, to ensure that any legal matters can be dealt with in a timely fashion.

Local Government Inspectorate

The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of alleged breaches of the LG Act. The VEC and the LGI are committed to maintaining a productive working relationship.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established to ensure robust and high-quality electoral practices at local government elections in Victoria. The LGI's responsibilities under the LG Act are to enforce and prosecute non-compliance. The MOU was established

Enrolment and close of rolls

Overview

Under a joint roll arrangement, the State and Commonwealth share responsibility for maintaining enrolment in Victoria. Both the VEC and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) have programs in place to assist people to enrol and update their enrolment details. Additionally, enrolment applications processed by the AEC are provided to the VEC at least weekly, to ensure currency of the Victorian register of electors.

The quality of the voters roll and the timelines that apply for roll preparation are very tight for this election. Changes to the way ratepayers enrol to vote will place increased pressure on councils and the VEC to review and process applications within the timeline. The VEC will work with the Local Government sector to maximise preparedness and develop a high-quality voters roll.

The VEC prepares the Electoral Commissioner's voters list (EC list) for council election purposes. This is the list of State electors that are enrolled within that municipality. Councils will prepare the Chief Executive Officer's voters list (CEO list). The EC list is merged with the CEO list to produce the voters roll for each council for certification by the Registrar.

The VEC will again work to a 3-stage process of roll production. Stage 1 will take place from January to April 2024 and will support verification of ratepayer records and identification of ratepayers with expiring entitlements. Stage 2 will commence in July 2024 and will create a draft voters roll with applications received by council to date. Stage 3 will commence immediately after the close of the roll and will reflect applications and changes of entitlement that have occurred since Stage 2. Key timeframes relating to the receipt of roll data from councils and the preparation of the voters roll are included in the timeline – see Election Timeline chapter. The VEC will make requests to councils to provide information to the VEC during these timeframes.

Entitlement to enrol

The 2024 Local Government elections will see a significant change in the enrolment of eligible ratepayers. This change completes the staged implementation of new entitlement arrangements, which were introduced in 2020. Owner ratepayers are no longer automatically enrolled for the election. There were over 350,000 voters enrolled in this category at the 2020 Local Government elections. Instead, all eligible owner ratepayers will need to apply to the council before the close of the roll to be included on the voters roll for the election.

This change will apply to all councils except:

- › the City of Casey and the City of Whittlesea. A 2022 amendment to the Act requires that voters rolls for these 2 councils will be prepared under the 2020 entitlement arrangements. People who were enrolled as non-resident owners at the 2016 election and whose circumstances have not changed will be automatically enrolled by council
- › the City of Melbourne, which has its own unique legislation and entitlements requirements
- › Moira Shire Council which is currently under administration and will not hold a general election until 2028.

Councils are required to write to all ratepayers whose enrolment is expiring and invite them to apply for enrolment for the upcoming election. The VEC will support this exercise by reviewing ratepayer lists in the first stage of roll production.

Local Government Victoria (LGV) has published a guidance document, developed in consultation with the VEC, detailing the entitlement changes and their impacts on enrolment. Councils need to ensure systems and resources to process applications from eligible ratepayers are available and in place. The VEC will provide ongoing advice to the sector and monitor readiness to provide accurate enrolment data within the timeframes required to produce voters rolls for the election.

An additional reference diagram outlining 'who can vote in the 2024 Local Government elections' is available in Appendix 5.

Ward structure and boundary changes

The register of electors will be updated with the new ward boundary changes after they are gazetted by the Minister for Local Government. New boundaries will be reflected against voter details in the VEC's 'Check My Enrolment' feature of its website after this date, as well as other online materials. Communication about the new boundaries will be available via the VEC website.

Roll production process

The VEC will again use DEX, an online secure file transfer service, to exchange roll data between councils and the VEC. DEX has been in use by the VEC since 2016 and most local council roll contacts are familiar with the service. The DEX server is hosted in Australia and complies with all relevant privacy and data protection legislation and guidelines, and greatly reduces the risk of privacy breaches during the exchange of highly sensitive roll data.

Producing a high-quality voters roll takes significant effort and resources from councils as well as the VEC, and relies on the VEC's sophisticated software and data matching tools. By participating in the preliminary process (January-April 2024) and by investigating and acting on the reports provided from this activity before the date for the primary enrolment extract, councils will be in a good position to ensure a high-quality voters roll.

The VEC's software will identify wherever a person can be matched who is identified as:

- > a person already enrolled on the Victorian register of electors within the municipality
- > a person who is listed twice in the CEO list
- > a person removed from the Victorian register of electors following medical evidence of unsound mind
- > people who have been approved to have their address not shown on the roll
- > people who are deceased.

VEC software tools can easily identify exact matches (i.e. identical name, date of birth and address) to provide councils with advice that an enrolment application should be reviewed or rejected.

However, a proportion of records will not be able to be definitively matched with the information available to the VEC and will have to be referred to the relevant council for further investigation. It is important that councils are able to respond to these referrals by clarifying the person's entitlement to be enrolled as promptly as possible.

The VEC has software that can, in most cases, create a valid address suitable for mailing. Addresses needing further manual clarification are also identified for council checking and correction as necessary.

In order for the final roll to be produced within the legislative timeframe, councils are required to:

- > ensure that at least 95% of CEO list records include the date of birth
- > nominate a council officer to resolve data issues promptly during each of the roll production processing periods
- > supply a Stage 1 preliminary CEO list in an agreed format (see Election Timeline) as early as possible in the cycle and, at the latest, by 15 January 2024
- > ensure notices are sent to voters whose entitlement is expiring, inviting them to renew their enrolment by Friday 31 May 2024

- > action the reports generated by Stage 1 preliminary roll processing before the date fixed for requiring council enrolment data – Monday 15 July 2024. This will involve investigating and deciding on duplicate records, removing deceased voters and correcting invalid data.
- > supply the council's Stage 2 CEO list in the agreed format by 5 pm on Monday 15 July 2024
- > supply a Stage 3 certification CEO list in a file in the same format as the Stage 2 primary enrolment data (this will be used to generate the update file), no later than 5 pm on Monday 2 September 2024
- > process enrolment applications as they are received to ensure there are no delays in creation of a Stage 3 certification CEO list
- > ensure that all records on the council's Stage 2 and Stage 3 CEO lists comply with the requirements of the Act.

The VEC values the collaboration with local councils to meet these deadlines and requirements and will work with each council to ensure a high-quality voters roll. However, due to the short timeframe, there are additional costs to the VEC if a council cannot meet these targets. Additional risk is unnecessarily introduced when slippages occur or roll feedback from the VEC is not actioned. As a result, and in consultation with the client liaison officer, the VEC may seek to recover these costs through the election service agreement.

A further factor that councils need to be aware of in planning for the 2024 Local Government elections is the timing of any proposed council software system upgrades or changes of software provider. These need to be *implemented and tested* before the Stage 1 CEO list is provided to minimise risk to the roll production process.

Queries from local councils regarding the changes to enrolment entitlements can be directed to the rollsupport@vec.vic.gov.au.

Close of roll

The roll for the election closes at 4 pm on Friday 30 August 2024.

The VEC works closely with the AEC to ensure that enrolment data received by the close of roll is processed by the AEC within 24 hours.

All electors updating their details in the weeks following the close of roll will be contacted and advised they are required to vote in the election for which they were enrolled as at the close of the roll.

The Act requires the VEC to certify the voters roll and make it available for public inspection. The roll will be certified on 19 September 2024 and will be available for inspection at the VEC's head office at Level 11, 530 Collins St, Melbourne from the day of certification until 30 days after election day.

Election roll products

Election rolls may be provided to candidates, council CEO, or other people or organisations if requested under the Act. All recipients of enrolment data will be reminded of their legislative obligations and the significant penalties for the misuse of roll data. They will be required to declare that the information will only be used for purposes authorised by the Act.

The VEC will release rolls to other people and organisations only if there is a public interest that outweighs the public interest in protecting the privacy of roll information, and in consultation with the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner.

The VEC will contact candidates directly to remind them of their obligations to dispose of roll data following the election.

Communication and engagement

Information services

Public enquiry service

For the 2024 Local Government elections a centralised contact centre will be established to respond to telephone public enquiries. This will ensure consistency in messaging, early identification of themes and trends along with the opportunity to enable election offices to focus on election administration.

The call centre will also be responsible for emails received during the local government election. It should be noted that any calls regarding CEO list applications will be referred back to the relevant councils.

Outside the call centre hours of operation, a recorded service will be available that provides information on enrolment and voting.

Note that election offices will continue to take phone queries from local candidates on issues directly related to their candidacy (as separate to general queries about running as a candidate).

Multi-language telephone interpreting service

An existing telephone multi-language information service will be available and have in-language pre-recorded election content upfront. Voters will be able to request an interpreter if they wish. The VEC provides 20 dedicated language lines for the most widely spoken languages in Victoria, but the service can support up to 100 different languages.

The telephone interpreting and multi-language information service will operate throughout the election period.

Enquiries specific to a particular council election will be costed back to that council. Incoming calls are directed to an interpreter, who then links to the VEC in a 3-way telephone conversation to relay information in the person's preferred language. Language Loop charges in time block increments.

info@vec.vic.gov.au

People who prefer to engage with the VEC online will be presented with a wide range of helpful information through the VEC website. If this does not successfully address their enquiry, people can email info@vec.vic.gov.au for a response. The VEC's public enquiry service will address and respond to emails sent to info@vec.vic.gov.au, but any emails relating to CEO list applications will be forwarded to the relevant councils.

Digital services

VoterAlert notification service

The VEC offers an electronic notification service - VoterAlert - by email and/or SMS. Electors subscribed for VoterAlert will receive enrolment and voting reminders.

Voters living in electorates with uncontested, failed or completed elections will not receive voting reminders. They will receive a separate VoterAlert to advise them that they are not required to vote in the election.

More than 50% of voters on the State register of electors are opted-in to this service.

Website

The VEC website will feature comprehensive Local Government election information, updated at each phase of the election. Information will include:

- > enrolment options
- > how to apply to work at the election
- > how to nominate
- > information on candidates
- > how to complete your postal ballot pack
- > how to vote by phone (for eligible voters)
- > voting options for electors who are away from their address
- > how the votes are counted
- > a misinformation register to collate and debunk any incorrect or misleading election information
- > election results
- > translated election content for language pages (specific languages to be confirmed).

Information regarding changes to council enrolment entitlements will be published on the VEC website leading up to the election - to ensure early awareness of the changed requirements and processes.

Election results will be published on the VEC website and will include first preference results, preference distribution results (including a downloadable preference distribution report, if required), and the names of elected candidates.

Links to translated electoral information, including telephone numbers for the multi-language interpreting service are accessible from the home page of the VEC website.

The VEC will position its website as the 'source of truth' for all election information.

Election venue locator

The VEC's election venue locator is searchable by address or locality. The map will show the election office locations including details such as address, opening dates and times. It will provide information about the facilities for candidates and electors seeking a replacement vote.

The election venue locator will be available via the VEC website from the opening of election offices on Wednesday 18 September 2024 for the 2024 Local Government elections.

Information for electors overseas

The VEC will provide information about the Local Government elections to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the SmartTraveller website. A link to the VEC's online information about voting options while overseas will also be included.

Advertising

Advertising campaign

An election advertising campaign will drive broad public awareness about participating in the 2024 Local Government elections. Each client liaison officer will work closely with the VEC's Communication Team, which will manage the advertising and communication campaign.

The Communication Team will coordinate the development and placement of advertising; write and distribute media releases and social media posts; develop communication kits for councils; deliver the VoterAlert notification service; and prepare election information for the VEC's website. The client liaison officers will forward copies of all voter information products to councils as they become available.

The VEC will deliver a state-wide voter information campaign. The campaign will be developed to:

- › meet statutory requirements
- › increase voters' awareness of their rights and obligations
- › maximise voter turnout
- › minimise informal voting.

Information in languages other than English and a telephone interpreter service will also be part of the VEC's standard package.

The VEC will publish statutory advertisements for each council that will comprise the following:

- › a 'close of roll' advertisement: covering enrolment entitlements, how to enrol, how to check enrolment, and the close of roll date
- › a 'notice of election' advertisement: including how to nominate, details of candidate information session/s (if applicable), and voting information including how to register for braille or large print ballot papers
- › a 'voting details' advertisement: including information on how to vote correctly, the voting deadline, and how to request replacement ballot material
- › a 'declaration of results' advertisement.

Mis- and disinformation

To combat election-related misinformation and disinformation campaigns, the VEC will promote digital literacy and the critical consumption of election-related information and advertising from third parties. This will involve:

- › maintaining the VEC's existing misinformation register and updating it as needed during the election period
- › addressing electoral mis- and disinformation on social media in accordance with social media protocols
- › promoting the VEC's [*Sorting fact from fiction*] page which has advice, tips and resources for critically consuming information.

These initiatives are intended to address mis- and disinformation about electoral processes only, not political discourse or claims made as part of campaigning.

Media

Media releases

A series of media releases will provide journalists and media outlets across Victoria with key election information for their publications such as enrolment, nomination and voting information, key dates, facts and figures, VEC initiatives, and results publication timelines.

Social media

The VEC will use social media platforms to convey key electoral information and continue to establish itself as an authoritative and trusted source of truth for all election-related enquiries. This will include proactively promoting key messages regarding the election using rich

media such as gifs, videos, and infographics – as well as responding in a timely and accurate manner to queries received from the public.

Similarly, the VEC will monitor and respond to as necessary to emerging issues that arise via social media.

Education and inclusion services

Education and inclusion services are provided year-round to support enrolment and voting across the broad diversity of eligible Victorians. The VEC's education and inclusion programs also form part of the VEC's priority community access and inclusion plans. These plans all include election-specific deliverables.

The VEC continues to work closely with a broad range of community stakeholders to ensure programs are relevant, appropriate and informed by community needs and expectations. The VEC regularly distributes its *Be Heard* newsletter to over 1,600 community stakeholders and liaises with members of the following advisory groups: Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG), which represents a number of disability support agencies and individuals with lived experience; Without a Home and Prison Advisory Group representing people experiencing homelessness or incarceration; Aboriginal Advisory Group; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Advisory Group; and a Young People Advisory Group. Each of these groups is involved in the design of the VEC's electoral education initiatives and each plan is published on the VEC's website for transparency.

A leaflet supplied in a minimum of 20 languages (plus English) that explains, step-by-step, how to vote formally will be provided for electors in metropolitan councils (mandatory, provided at cost) and is optional for regional and rural councils (at cost). It also includes telephone interpreter numbers for each language (plus the one general number for any other languages). See Appendix 10 for a list of languages.

Democracy Ambassador Program

The Democracy Ambassador Program will focus on reaching voters in traditionally under-represented communities. The program will include the training and support of a team of peer leaders to deliver electoral education and enrolment outreach. Areas across Victoria identified as having typically lower levels of electoral participation and higher informality will be prioritised for outreach promotion and delivery.

Youth enrolment and voting

A focus of the 2024 communication and engagement campaign will be the engagement of young people to enrol and vote.

Services for those without a home

The VEC will offer face-to-face outreach enrolment sessions prior to the close of roll to homelessness and accommodation support services.

Prisoner engagement

In partnership with Corrections Victoria, information and support will be offered to prisons via the VEC's Electoral Engagement for People in Prisons project.

Engaging Aboriginal communities

In partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations, the VEC will support the engagement of Aboriginal communities across Victoria and include the opportunity to provide information, education and enrolment sessions to groups in Aboriginal community locations.

Inclusion of people with disabilities

The VEC's services for people living with disability will include but are not limited to: braille and large print ballot papers and peer-to-peer electoral education sessions. This will aim to further enhance the support provided to people with disabilities to enrol and vote.

The VEC will liaise with Vision Australia (Vic) to produce material to be sent to all Victorian voters on their database. The communication will make these voters aware that elections are occurring, and provide basic information about the elections, contact details for further information, and a phone number for those who wish to register for braille or large print ballot material.

Election office management

Election offices

The VEC will establish an election office within each municipality. The VEC will endeavour to source an office that is conveniently positioned for candidates and members of the public and meets accessibility, safety, and security standards.

Where a council has a space available for an election office within its own premises, or other premises owned or operated by council, the VEC will work with council to determine its suitability, noting the security requirement that the VEC must be the sole occupant during the election period. Where no suitable council property exists, the VEC will secure a private lease for the election office.

Election offices will be clearly identified, with appropriate signage and security. The VEC will check all access points and, where necessary, arrange for new locks to be fitted.

For the 2024 Local Government elections, the VEC will require access to election offices by mid-August 2024 in order to deliver necessary furniture and materials and install/commission telephones and computers in time for the opening of the office.

The VEC will arrange the collection of materials and equipment from election offices commencing Friday 8 November, with final collections taking place no later than Friday 29 November 2024. Smaller election offices may be decommissioned earlier. The VEC will prioritise decommissioning of election offices located within council provided venues.

Public office hours

Election offices will be open to the public from Wednesday 18 September until Friday 25 October 2024. Election office opening hours will be standardised across the State and will operate from 9 am to 5 pm weekdays, except for the last two days before election day when election offices will close at 8 pm on Thursday 24 October and 6 pm on Friday 25 October. Standardised election office hours assist with providing consistent messages to voters through the advertising and communication campaign.

Election staff

Election management

The Electoral Commissioner will appoint 78 election managers to conduct elections for each of the 78 local government elections. Election managers are responsible for all activities undertaken within their election office and other venues to deliver the election for their council, including appointing and managing staff; processing nominations from candidates; overseeing the receipt and

processing of returned postal vote envelopes; overseeing counting activities conducted within their council; declaring results; and overseeing the decommission of the election office.

Each election manager will be assisted by either one or more assistant election managers, or a senior office assistant in smaller offices.

Recruitment of senior election officials

Election managers and assistant election managers are selected and appointed from a pool of Senior Election Officials (SEOs) who have been recruited to be available for these critical roles. While many members of the senior election official pool will have previous local government election experience, others will have only worked in a State Parliamentary election, and some may be experiencing their first election management position.

Due to the combination of skills required, ability to commit to full time work many months in advance, and the geographic location of roles, recruiting enough suitably skilled and available SEOs in required locations can be challenging. The VEC undertakes recruitment drives annually to ensure sufficient SEOs are available for appointment.

Where the VEC is not able to recruit SEOs in particular regions of the State, the VEC will pay accommodation and travel costs to relocate SEOs to ensure all positions are filled. The VEC also utilises a secondment program to engage staff from other electoral commissions and Victorian Public Sector agencies and departments if required.

In addition to appointing SEOs directly into election manager and assistant election manager roles, a pool of reserve SEOs will be appointed so they are ready to step into any late vacancies.

Election casual staff

The election manager will appoint and manage temporary election staff to work in the election office and affiliated count venues to ensure the efficient conduct of their election. Election managers are provided with instructions and tools to enable them to appoint a diverse workforce, in particular to appoint people from across the entire adult age range, people who speak a range of languages and people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. Election managers will be supported to appoint staff with disabilities and to make accommodations where possible, noting there are some limitations on accommodations that can be made due to the physical nature of much of the work.

The VEC will also appoint temporary staff to conduct centralised election activities at either head office or other centralised activity sites. This will include the use of personnel sourced via staffing agencies under contracts established by the VEC with these agencies.

The VEC expects to appoint over 6,000 staff to work in temporary election roles across election offices, count venues, head office and centralised activity sites to support delivery of the elections.

Election staff training

Election managers and assistant election manager training

Election managers and assistant election managers undertake a blended learning program comprised of online learning and face-to-face training.

The training program includes a comprehensive focus on the practical aspects of local government elections and the procedures that must be followed. Topics to be covered across the program include:

- > recruitment and training of staff
- > receipt and processing of nominations
- > processing returned postal vote envelopes
- > ballot paper management and accounting
- > conducting counts.

All reserve SEOs will undertake full election manager training.

Election staff support

Support for election managers

An election manager helpdesk, staffed by call centre operators will be established along with a specialist team of Election Support Officers (ESOs).

Helpdesk operators will provide support for issues relating to the operation of the VEC's Election Management System (EMS), the personnel system (Aurion), and other technical matters. Any support queries regarding procedural matters are referred to the ESO team.

ESOs will be appointed to act as line managers for election managers. ESOs perform a critical function during the delivery of an election. They are the point of contact between the election manager, the Electoral Commissioner and other VEC staff. ESOs support for election managers covers all aspects of their performance including:

- > direction regarding election procedures
- > support for operational issues concerning venues, election materials, staffing, candidates and the public
- > guidance and coaching regarding planning and preparation for each phase of the election.

While support for election managers will primarily be provided remotely, out of the VEC's head office, all ESOs will meet with their election managers face-to-face several times over the course of the election.

Employment support for election staff

The Personnel Helpline Team provides support to people wishing to register for election work, and appointed election staff who require support.

The Team provides a phone and email service assisting with:

- > completing online registrations for election work (potential new staff)
- > understanding political and criminal conviction disclosure requirements
- > completing online training
- > accessing and navigating the election staff self-service portal to update
- > contact details, enter banking, tax and superannuation details, access pay advice and accept any offers of appointment
- > completing timesheets and resolving pay-related queries.

The service will operate during standard office hours. The service does not provide staff with support for queries regarding technical aspects of the conduct of their roles, as this support will be provided by relevant supervisors.

Candidates

Candidate information session

The VEC will record information session videos on key topics for candidates and make these available to view at any time via the VEC website. The online videos will cover the election timeline, the nomination process and the procedures and rules relevant to candidates. The content will make clear that the VEC is responsible for the conduct of the election and that election enquiries from prospective candidates should be directed to the VEC, not council staff.

Upon request by council, the election manager may conduct an in-person information session for candidates prior to the opening of nominations.

The VEC's client liaison officer will consult with council in order to determine if an in-person candidate information session is required. This will be provided without charge. On a marginal cost recovery basis, councils may opt to conduct a 2nd in-person information session to cover an additional major town in the municipality. Councils should note that the content covered at the in-person session will be substantially similar to the information presented online.

Candidate enquiries and support

The VEC will operate a candidate helpdesk at head office in advance of the election so that prospective candidates can direct their enquiries and receive assistance with their nominations prior to the opening of the election office. This includes support with using the VEC's Candidate Helper, the digital tool for the pre-completion of nomination forms. From the opening of the election office, election managers will personally deal with all enquiries from candidates for their own council.

Candidate handbooks will be made available online and via the election office. Prospective candidates will be strongly advised to use the Candidate Helper and the VEC website for information on the election.

Nominations

Nominations open on Thursday 19 September 2024 and close at 12 noon on Tuesday 24 September. Election managers will receive and record nominations from candidates at the election office. This includes receiving the \$250 nomination fee.

In advance of the close of the roll, candidates are strongly encouraged to ensure that they have confirmed their eligibility to nominate. This is particularly relevant given the changing entitlement schemes in place at the 2024 Local Government elections. The VEC's nomination process will involve checking the candidate's enrolment against the certified roll.

Candidates will be able to create their nomination forms online via Candidate Helper, accessible via the VEC website, but must lodge their hard copy nomination form in person with the election manager.

The use of Candidate Helper is strongly encouraged as it enables candidates to step through the nomination process, including directly submitting their candidate statement and photograph. This expedites the nomination appointment process as election managers can retrieve this data to upload it into the VEC election management system via a unique identifier on the printed nomination forms.

The list of candidates who have nominated for each local government election will be regularly updated on the VEC's website. Candidates' names and public contact details, where provided, will appear soon after a full quality assurance process has been successfully completed for their nomination. The VEC anticipates updates to the lists of candidates on the VEC website to be made twice daily on each day during the nomination period.

Draw for position on ballot paper

Close of nominations for candidates is 12 noon on Tuesday 24 September. Election managers will hold a ballot draw to determine the order of candidates' names on the ballot paper as soon as practicable after the close of nominations (anticipated to be from 3 pm on Tuesday 24 September).

Ballot draws will be conducted electronically and the order of names on each ballot paper is determined by a single random draw.

The VEC's electronic application has been independently audited to ensure the result is random. Electronic ballot draws create significant efficiencies, reducing the risk and time involved with manual data entry of ballot draw results and thus the time between the draws and dispatching ballot paper files to the printer. The electronic draw also enables the publication of the final list of candidates, in ballot paper order, to be updated to the VEC's website by approximately 5 pm after the close of nominations.

Candidate statements and photographs

As part of the nomination process, election managers will receive candidates' personal statements and photographs. Candidates are strongly encouraged to create their candidate statements and upload their photographs into the VEC's online Candidate Helper and bring all documentation to their nomination appointment. This will streamline the process for loading information into the VEC's election management system and will enable candidates to complete all steps in the nomination process in a single appointment.

The candidate handbook will provide clear information on the requirements for preparing and submitting statements and photographs. Election managers will not assist candidates with the preparation of their statement content.

Supplying a candidate statement and photograph is voluntary. The completed statements will be accessible to voters on the VEC website, in election offices and will be included in the postal ballot pack.

Candidate questionnaires

As part of the nomination process, election managers will receive answers to candidate questionnaires completed by candidates.

Like candidate statements and questionnaires, candidates will be able to complete their candidate questionnaire forms using the VEC's online Candidate Helper prior to lodging it with the election manager. Candidates are strongly encouraged to bring this to their nomination appointment.

Supplying a candidate questionnaire is voluntary. The completed questionnaires will be accessible to voters on the VEC website and available in election offices. The VEC will publish advice showing which candidates did not lodge answers to the candidate questionnaire or did not answer any particular question.

Refund of nomination fees

Candidates who receive 4% or more of the formal first preference vote, or who are elected, will have their nomination fee refunded as soon as practicable after the declaration of the election.

Nomination fees will be refunded to eligible candidates by cheque or, where requested, by direct credit into a nominated bank account. Payments of fees forfeited by candidates who are ineligible to have their nomination fee returned will be sent to local councils at the same time.

Ballot material

The preparation and printing of ballot material for Local Government general elections is a large and complex task. The VEC's contracted direct mail provider and Australia Post have extensive experience in elections, having been engaged by the VEC for previous major electoral events.

VEC employees will supervise all stages of the preparation and printing of ballot material and roll products. Considerable time will be devoted to the recruitment and training of quality assurance staff to oversee the process to ensure integrity, compliance, and accuracy.

Postal ballot pack contents

Ballot packs sent to electors will contain the below items to enable the postal voting process:

Ballot paper

Ballot paper artwork is colour-coded for each ward to improve the efficiency of sorting processes.

For the City of Melbourne, voters receive two ballot papers, one for the Leadership election and one for the Councillor election.

Candidate statements

Each ballot pack will contain a printed document containing candidate statements from each of the candidates within the ward.

Multi-language voting instructions leaflet

The multi-language leaflet (see page 13) will be included in the postal ballot pack as standard for all metropolitan councils. The product is also encouraged for any other local councils using postal voting that have a high number of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Declaration envelope

The ballot paper declaration envelope has been designed for use at Local Government elections conducted by post and conform to the Regulations. The envelopes are designed so that their contents are not visible through the security lining and the declaration flap can be separated from the envelope by election officials before the ballot paper is extracted.

Reply-paid envelope

The VEC will establish a unique reply-paid number for each ward in the council and each unsubdivided council. The reply-paid envelope will be colour-coded to match the ballot paper. This facilitates pre-sorting of the envelopes to wards by Australia Post and maximises the accuracy of the sorting.

Outer envelope

The outer envelope is branded so that voters easily recognise that the envelope contains official election material. All outer envelope stock containing ballot material will show the Australia Post "PRIORITY" indicator for priority service delivery.

Ballot pack preparation and distribution

Artwork for ballot papers and candidate statements will be generated using the VEC's automation tool. This tool selects from a range of pre-defined artwork templates and populates them with the relevant candidate information directly from the election management system's database. Following an extensive quality assurance process, print-ready artwork files will be securely transmitted directly to the VEC's contracted ballot material printer ready for production.

The VEC's contracted mail house will directly print the voters' addresses (mailing and entitlement address) and barcodes on the ballot paper envelopes in preparation for assembly and delivery of ballot packs.

The mail house will assemble ballot packs for all postal elections. They will lodge the ballot packs with Australia Post over at least three days, with no more than 35% of any ward of a council or unsubdivided council lodged on any one day in accordance with the legislation. The mail house used by the VEC has allocated a secure area within its operations that will be used solely for the printing, insertion, and dispatch of ballot material to ensure the highest standards in security are met.

The VEC is confident Australia Post will continue to provide the service delivery levels required during an election campaign, following assurances given by Paul Graham, CEO & Group Managing Director, Australia Post.

Electors can apply to have their ballot material redirected to an address other than their entitlement address. Voters have until the certification day for the voters roll (also the day that nominations open) to apply for their ballot material to be redirected. The VEC will arrange for ballot material to be delivered to any elector applying for redirection to the address specified in their request.

Uncontested leaflets

Voters in uncontested wards will receive a leaflet informing them that their election was uncontested, and they were not required to vote. The leaflet will provide the name of the candidate who has nominated and would be declared elected. The uncontested leaflet is sent to reduce confusion among voters who were aware of the election but did not receive a ballot pack.

Where a subdivided council is entirely uncontested, a notice in the council's nominated local press will replace the uncontested election leaflet.

Voters enrolled in uncontested wards who are opted-in to VoterAlert will also be sent a VoterAlert message by SMS, email or both to advise them that the election is uncontested there will be no additional cost to councils for this service.

Ballot material security

Physical security and integrity are critical aspects of the VEC's election design and election materials are strictly controlled.

Interfering with ballot material is a serious offence managed under sections 294 and 296 of the Act. Those found guilty of committing such an offence are liable for a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years, or a fine of 600 penalty units.

Custody and control of returned ballot material

Ballot paper envelopes returned by the voter to the election office will be via the allocated Australia Post facility, pre-sorted by the reply- paid number corresponding to each ward or unsubdivided council.

Election managers will ensure daily reconciliation of mail received and supervise the scanning of ballot paper envelopes through the VEC's election management system to record their return.

Voting

Postal voting

The 2024 Local Government elections will be conducted almost entirely by post, with all electors automatically receiving their ballot packs to their registered postal address.

Electors complete their ballots and declarations and return these via post to the VEC for counting. Voters use the priority reply-paid envelope for the return of their ballot paper envelope containing their completed ballot paper(s). The return mail is delivered to each election office from local postal facilities or mail distribution centres. The VEC's service arrangement with Australia Post allows returned mail to be pre-sorted into wards where applicable, before being received by the election manager.

Voters can also hand-deliver their completed vote to any election office and place their ballot paper envelope into a ballot box in person. These must be returned to the election office in the council in which the voter has their entitlement.

As ballot paper envelopes are returned to the election office they are recorded in the VEC's election management system, then batched and stored in a secure location until after the close of voting.

Replacement votes

In some instances, electors may require a replacement vote to be sent to them. This can be due to:

- › not receiving a ballot pack
- › losing or spoiling the ballot pack
- › their ballot pack going to a post office box nominated, but which is no longer in use
- › being at a different address to where the ballot pack was sent.

Electors can request a replacement vote by completing an online application form or contacting the VEC by phone. A centralised team will process applications and mail replacement ballot packs to the postal address provided. Electors also have the option to attend the election office in the council for which they hold entitlement, to have a replacement vote issued over the counter.

The details of all replacement votes issued and returned are recorded in the VEC's election management system. This enables the election manager to ensure no voter has more than one ballot paper admitted to the count.

Voting at the election office

If an elector requires their ballot pack to be issued prior to the general mailout, they may request an early vote from the opening of election offices on Wednesday 18 September 2024. The elector must provide a reason for such request, for example being away from their address for the duration of the election. Electors requesting an early vote are encouraged to attend the election office in person to be issued their ballot pack and return it on the day.

In addition, electors who have not received their original or replacement ballot pack in the last few days before election day are encouraged to attend the election office in person to ensure they are able to cast a vote prior to the close of voting.

Election officials will undertake a process to issue a replacement vote in person in line with the procedures above for postal replacement votes.

Electors must cast their vote at the election office in the council for which they hold an entitlement, and cannot vote at any other location.

Counting the votes

In local government elections, two methods of counting are used to determine the result:

› Preferential counts

Preferential counts are used for single vacancy wards. Most preferential counts will be counted manually but some, such as the City of Melbourne leadership team election, that have high enrolment and a high number of candidates, may be a computer count. Preferential counts will be conducted only until an absolute majority has been reached

› Proportional representation (PR) counts

Proportional representation is used to determine the result in wards (or unsubdivided municipalities) involving multiple vacancies. The VEC anticipates conducting all PR counts using its computer count application.

Preparing for the count

Before any votes can be counted, they must first be deemed eligible for inclusion in the count. This includes checking that declaration envelopes have been signed by the voter, or in the case of a disadvantaged voter signed by an authorised person, and that they are dated on or before the close of voting. Further checks are undertaken to determine eligibility in cases where more than one vote appears to have been returned from the same voter, or where unenrolled votes have been issued.

Declaration envelopes deemed eligible after these scrutiny procedures can have their ballot papers extracted following the close of voting. Eligible envelopes are first run through a letter opening machine to separate the identifying declaration flap from the envelope. Envelopes are then run through the machine a second time to open them. Teams of election officials carefully remove ballot papers and batch them. The number of ballot papers and envelopes is reconciled before any empty or rejected envelopes are removed from the extraction area.

Postal votes can be received until 12 noon on Friday 1 November 2023. This extended postal vote receipt period means that extraction activities will take place in two stages. The first stage, referred to as Group A, will take place after the close of voting and comprises of returned votes from the general mail-out where the vote has been received before the close of voting and the original ballot pack is the only vote issued to, and returned by, the voter.

The second phase, known as Group B, will take place after the close of the extended period, when all votes that can be considered for inclusion in the count have been received. It will comprise of votes from the general

mailout received after the close of voting but signed and dated no later than the close of voting, as well as all eligible replacement votes. At this time, the election manager will also complete processing of all braille and large print ballot paper envelopes received in the election office. They will generate a report to identify any envelopes where more than one ballot pack appears to have been returned for the same voter and will action each return as prescribed.

At each phase, the relevant ballot paper envelopes proceeding to extraction are located and dealt with by election managers in accordance with the Regulations. No extraction can take place until these processes are complete.

A balance figure will also be established for each ward (or unsubdivided municipality) to confirm that all eligible envelopes have been processed and that the number of ballot papers proceeding to the count is correct

Unenrolled vote checking

Declarations completed by unenrolled voters will be checked progressively during the voting period and finalised as soon as practicable after election day. The VEC will support election managers with determining the entitlement of unenrolled declarations and will coordinate the checking process with councils as necessary.

Counting activities

The VEC will work with election managers to determine counting arrangements for each council. Given the two stages of extraction, counting activities may also occur in two phases following both the Group A and Group B extraction, or they may occur only after the Group B extraction (where Group A and B ballot papers will be counted together). Election managers will advise candidates of counting arrangements as soon as possible after the close of nominations, including the number of staff that will be involved.

Candidates are not entitled to attend the extraction and counting of votes, but they may appoint scrutineers to represent them at these activities and observe them on their behalf. The VEC will publish a comprehensive *Scrutineer handbook* that will outline the roles and responsibilities of scrutineers. It will be provided to candidates as well as published on the VEC website, with candidates strongly encouraged ensure that scrutineers are appropriately briefed before they undertake any scrutineer duties.

It should be noted that in some circumstances, extraction and/or counting activities may need to take place in a venue other than the election office. Councils will be contacted by their client liaison officer should this be required in their Council area, and candidates will be notified when the election manager advises them of counting arrangements after the close of nominations.

Manual counts

Where the count is to be conducted manually in a single-vacancy ward, ballot papers are sorted to first preference by candidate, or informal, based on what is marked on the ballot paper. The total number of informal and first preference votes per candidate are then tallied.

When all ballot papers from the Group A and Group B extractions have been counted, the election manager will establish if any candidate has received an absolute majority of first preference votes (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers). Where no candidate receives an absolute majority of first preference votes, a preference distribution will take place.

Preference distributions involve excluding the candidate with the least votes and transferring each of their ballot papers to the remaining candidates in the order of the preferences marked on the ballot papers. This process is repeated until one of the remaining candidates reaches an absolute majority of the vote.

After each distribution, ballot papers from the excluded candidate are checked that they have been sorted to the correct remaining candidates, and the total number of ballot papers is reconciled.

The election manager will appoint sufficient staff to form one or more counting teams to distribute preferences. A trained election official will be appointed as team leader for each counting team.

It is anticipated that all manual counts will be finalised by Friday 8 November.

Results for manual counts will be displayed on the VEC's website at the completion of preference distributions.

Computer counts

Where the count is to be conducted by computer, either in a multi-vacancy ward (or unsubdivided municipality) or where a preferential count by computer is required, ballot papers are sorted during extraction activities to remove those that are obviously informal. The remaining ballot papers are batched in preparation for data entry. Once batching has been completed, ballot paper batches, as well as the obvious informal votes, will be sealed and secured for transport to the computer count venue (if away from the election office).

At a computer count, the preferences shown on each ballot paper are entered into the VEC's Computer Count application by data entry operators. The application checks each ballot paper for formality.

Only formal ballot papers are saved to the database. Once all formal ballot papers have been entered into the system, and the number of informal votes totaled, the results can be calculated.

Ballot papers identified as obviously informal during extraction activities will be fully rechecked at the count centre while data entry takes place. Any informal votes deemed to be formal during this checking process will be added into the data entry process, and any informal ballot papers identified during data entry will also undergo a formality check and will be added back into the data entry process if deemed formal during this process.

The VEC will establish the computer infrastructure required for the conduct of all computer counts, which are expected to be completed in election offices in regional municipalities and at a centralised location where the council is based in or on the fringe of the Melbourne metropolitan area. An information session will also be published on the VEC website in the week before close of voting to explain the computer count process in detail. Candidates and their scrutineers will be encouraged to view this session to ensure they understand the process and the scrutineer's role within this.

It is anticipated data entry will commence for some computer counts from Monday 28 October, but some counts may start later. Results will be calculated for each council at the completion of data entry for all wards in that council (or when data entry is complete in an unsubdivided council). It is expected that all computer counts will be completed by Friday 8 November. Results will be displayed on the VEC website as soon as possible after the completion of calculations for all wards in a particular council, including the distribution reports.

The VEC will establish a centralised computer count venue at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre where metropolitan wards may be counted. Any ward that will be subject to a computer count will be notified.

Recounts

At any time before a candidate has been declared elected, the election manager may open any sealed parcel containing ballot papers and recount the ballot papers. This can be done at the election managers discretion, or a candidate may also request a recount in writing, specifying the reasons they believe a recount should be conducted.

In deciding to conduct a recount, the election manager will consider:

- › the occurrence of close margins at critical points during the distribution of preferences
- › any procedural or system error or failure that may have interrupted or interfered with the counting process
- › the accessibility of the counting process for scrutineers to properly perform their duties.

The VEC head office will support the election manager to ensure that all relevant checks and balances have taken place prior to the commencement of any recount.

Once the result is declared, the only option to challenge the result is through an application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Declaration of the result

Election managers are required to publicly declare the election and to announce the name/s of the candidate/s elected.

Elections will be declared as soon as possible once the result has been determined and the VEC has confirmed that no residual counting activity could possibly change the successful candidate(s). Candidates will be advised of the date, time and location of the declaration.

It is expected that election managers will complete all declarations by Friday 15 November. This is in line with the 2020 elections.

The VEC will advise election managers to allow a minimum of two hours for candidates to consider the provisional results prior to declaration to decide if they wish to request a recount. Election managers will advise candidates at the completion of the count if the proposed declaration time needs to be extended to allow for this requirement. Once the declaration takes place, the only avenue to request a recount is by application to the VCAT.

Compulsory voting enforcement

Under Section 266 of the Act, the VEC is required to carry out voting enforcement for all councils at Local Government elections. Regulation 86 determines that the VEC must, within six months after election day, send by post to those who appear not to have voted a notice asking why they did not vote. The VEC will commence the non-voter enforcement process in early February 2025.

The non-voter enforcement process will take place in 4 stages. The first 3 stages will be conducted by the VEC, with the final enforcement stage managed by Fines Victoria.

The Act also allows the prosecution of non-voters who do not satisfactorily respond during the enforcement process.

The VEC is equipped with the systems to manage non-voter follow through up to, and including, prosecution. It is compulsory for all electors enrolled under Division 1 to vote in their relevant election.

Melbourne City Council has its own legislation and has different entitlement and compulsory voting provisions.

The VEC's enforcement program will involve 3 stages. During each stage of the process, the VEC will update each council and provide statistical information regarding the number of apparent failure-to-vote notices issued, apparent non-voters who have replied, paid the fine, been excused, not been excused or who have not replied to the notice, and the number of infringements referred to Fines Victoria by the VEC.

The first step in the process is a requirement of the Act and the remaining steps are relevant to provisions of the *Infringements Act 2006*.

List of non-voters

The VEC will prepare the list of non-voters in accordance with the Regulations. This includes the exclusion of any non-voters who are automatically exempt from compulsory voting.

Apparent failure-to-vote notice

The VEC will prepare and send an apparent failure-to-vote notice to those who appear to have failed to vote in the election and are not automatically exempt. The VEC anticipates being able to dispatch these notices in early February 2025.

Infringement notice

The *Infringements Act 2006* sets out the steps to be followed at the infringement notice stage of enforcement.

The VEC will prepare and send an infringement notice to any apparent non-voter whose excuse is not considered valid and sufficient, and those who failed to respond to the apparent failure-to-vote notice. A penalty applies to this infringement notice. Non-voters must either pay the penalty in full by the due date or they may seek a payment plan. A penalty applies to this notice and will be collected on behalf of council.

During the infringement notice stage, non-voters may seek a review of the infringement. A request for a review may result in the infringement being withdrawn.

A 'Withdrawal of Infringement' letter must be mailed to each non-voter in this category where an internal review results in the withdrawal of the infringement. This will be an additional cost to councils.

During the infringement stage, non-voters may elect to have their matter heard directly in the Magistrates' Court.

Penalty reminder notice

The VEC will prepare and send a penalty reminder notice to those apparent non-voters who, at the conclusion of the infringement notice stage have not paid the penalty for failing to vote. The original penalty and a penalty reminder notice fee applies to this notice and will be collected on behalf of council. Non-voters continue to have the same review and hearing options available as at the infringement notice stage.

A 'Withdrawal of Infringement' letter must be mailed to each non-voter in this category where an internal review results in the withdrawal of the infringement. This will be an additional cost to councils.

During the penalty reminder stage non-voters may elect to have their matter heard directly in the Magistrates' Court.

Lodgement with Magistrates' Court and Fines Victoria

At the end of the enforcement program, the VEC will commence proceedings against any non-voter that elected to have their matter heard in the Magistrates' Court.

The VEC will also collate all outstanding infringements and prepare and lodge a final court file with Fines Victoria within the prescribed timeframe.

At the end of the infringement notice period, the VEC will commence proceedings against any non-voters who respond to the notice and requested the matter be heard in the Magistrates' Court. The VEC will repeat this process at the conclusion of the penalty reminder notice

period. Costs will be incurred to take such action, and will be passed on to council. Prior to lodging these matters with the Magistrates' Court, the VEC will take every step to ensure that only genuine requests proceed to court.

Prosecution of non-voters at the Magistrates' Court and through Fines Victoria involve significant time and resources. Matters referred to the Court and Fines Victoria can be expected to continue into subsequent financial years (i.e. beyond 2024-25).

Receipt of penalties

The VEC will receive and record all payments made in relation to compulsory voting enforcement. At the conclusion of the enforcement program, all penalty payments collected for the 2024 Local Government elections will be transferred to the relevant council. Council will be provided with the penalties received from non-voters at an agreed time.

Councils will continue to receive penalties collected by the VEC or through Fines Victoria on a quarterly basis once all necessary reconciliations have been completed.

Appendices

Appendix 1: 2024 Local Government elections timeline

		COUNTDOWN	
MON	15 JUL	103	Council primary enrolment data (date fixed by VEC)
SAT	10 AUG	77	Public notice of Close of Roll Date (published during this period)
FRI	16 AUG	71	
FRI	30 AUG	57	Close of roll at 4 pm
MON	2 SEP	54	Publication of Election Notice (published during this period)
SAT	7 SEP	49	
WED	18 SEP	38	Election offices open
THU	19 SEP	37	Certification of voters' roll Nominations open
TUE	24 SEP	32	Close of nominations at 12 noon (ballot draw to follow)
WED	25 SEP	31	Close of lodgement of candidate statements, photographs, and questionnaires at 12 noon
TUE	8 OCT	18	Mail-out of ballot packs / uncontested ward leaflets
WED	9 OCT	17	
THU	10 OCT	16	
FRI	25 OCT	1	CLOSE OF VOTING at 6 pm
SAT	26 OCT	0	Election Day
MON	28 OCT	2	Postal vote receipt period Close of postal vote receipt period at 12 noon on Friday 1 November
FRI	1 NOV	6	
TUE	5 NOV	10	PUBLIC HOLIDAY - MELBOURNE CUP
FRI	15 NOV	20	ALL ELECTIONS TO BE DECLARED BY FRIDAY 15 NOVEMBER

AFL Grand Final Public Holiday - TBD

Appendix 2: 2024 Melbourne City Council Councillor elections timeline

		COUNTDOWN	
WED	12 JUN	136	Council primary enrolment data (Date fixed by Registrar)
SAT	10 AUG	77	Public notice of Close of Roll Date (published during this period)
FRI	16 AUG	71	
FRI	30 AUG	57	Close of Roll at 4 pm
MON	2 SEP	54	Publication of Election Notice (published during this period)
SAT	7 SEP	49	
MON	9 SEP		Public telephone enquiry service commences
WED	18 SEP	38	Election office opens
THU	19 SEP	37	Certification of voters' roll Nominations open
TUE	24 SEP	32	Close of nominations at 12 noon
THU	26 SEP	30	Close of candidate groups and name registration at 12 noon (ballot draw to follow)
MON	30 SEP	26	Close of lodgement of statements, group voting tickets, ungrouped indications of preferences, and questionnaires at 12 noon
TUE	8 OCT	18	Mail-out of ballot packs
WED	9 OCT	17	
THU	10 OCT	16	
FRI	25 OCT	1	CLOSE OF VOTING at 6 pm
SAT	26 OCT	0	Election Day
MON	28 OCT	2	Postal vote receipt period Close of postal vote receipt period at 12 noon on Friday 1 November
FRI	1 NOV	6	
TUE	5 NOV	10	PUBLIC HOLIDAY - MELBOURNE CUP
FRI	15 NOV	20	ELECTION TO BE DECLARED BY FRIDAY 15 NOVEMBER

AFL Grand Final Public Holiday - TBD

Appendix 3: 2024 Melbourne City Council Leadership elections timeline

		COUNTDOWN	
WED	12 JUN	136	Council primary enrolment data (Date fixed by Registrar)
SAT	10 AUG	77	Public notice of Close of Roll Date (published during this period)
FRI	16 AUG	71	
FRI	30 AUG	57	Close of Roll at 4 pm
MON	2 SEP	54	Publication of Election Notice (published during this period)
SAT	7 SEP	49	
MON	9 SEP		Public telephone enquiry service commences
WED	18 SEP	38	Election office opens
THU	19 SEP	37	Certification of voters' roll Nominations open
TUE	24 SEP	32	Close of nominations at 12 noon
THU	26 SEP	30	Close of team name registration at 12 noon (ballot draw to follow)
MON	30 SEP	26	Close of lodgement of team statements, preferences, and candidate questionnaires at 12 noon
TUE	8 OCT	18	Mail-out of ballot packs / uncontested ward leaflets
WED	9 OCT	17	
THU	10 OCT	16	
FRI	25 OCT	1	CLOSE OF VOTING at 6 pm
SAT	26 OCT	0	Election Day
MON	28 OCT	2	Postal vote receipt period Close of postal vote receipt period at 12 noon on Friday 1 November
FRI	1 NOV	6	
TUE	5 NOV	10	PUBLIC HOLIDAY - MELBOURNE CUP
FRI	15 NOV	20	ELECTION TO BE DECLARED BY FRIDAY 15 NOVEMBER

AFL Grand Final Public Holiday - TBD

Appendix 4: Councils and VEC – Key Interactions Timeline

Date	Action	Responsible
26 September 2023 – 18 October 2023	Publish 2024 Local Government elections Draft Service Plan Provide Council Information sessions	VEC
October 2023	Provide Election Service Agreements to Councils	VEC
December 2023	Provide estimates to Councils	VEC
1 December 2023 – 15 January 2024	Period for council to prepare and send preliminary roll data CEO list to VEC	Council
15 January 2024	Final deadline for preliminary roll data CEO list to be shared with VEC	Council
1 February 2024	Recommended deadline for council to ensure enrolment application and resignation processes are operating	Council
1 February 2024 – 1 April 2024	Period for council to provide further information in response to VEC requests while analyzing the preliminary roll data CEO list	Council
April 2024	Provide quotes to Councils	VEC
30 April 2024	Deadline for VEC to send preliminary roll data feedback to councils	VEC
1 May 2024 – 31 May 2024	Recommended period for council to send notices inviting ratepayers to enrol or renew enrolment under section 240 (10) and 240 (12)	Council
1 May 2024 – 30 August 2024	Enrol completed council application and appointment forms as they are received 246(1)	Council
15 July 2024	Deadline for council to action all preliminary roll data reports generated by the VEC	Council
15 July 2024	Deadline for primary roll CEO list to be shared with the VEC	Council
31 July 2024*	Deadline for councils to send notices under section 240 (10) and 240 (12)	Council
15 July 2024 – 16 August 2024	Period for council to provide further information in response to VEC requests while preparing the primary voters' roll	Council
23 August 2024	Primary voters roll is created	VEC
30 August 2024 (4pm)*	Close of the rolls	VEC and Council
2 September 2024 (5pm)	Deadline for council to provide certified roll CEO list to the VEC	Council
3 September 2024 – 18 September 2024	Period for council (including weekends) to provide further information in response to VEC requests while preparing the certified voters' roll.	Council

3 September 2024 – 25 October 2024	Period for council to provide any new silent voter requests or other information to the VEC	Council
19 September 2024 (9am)*	Certification of the roll	VEC
19 September 2024 – 24 September 2024	Period for council to respond to VEC on enrolment queries from people nominating as candidates	Council
19 September 2024 – 1 November 2024	Period for council to respond to any requests for investigation into accuracy of the voters' roll, or requests for unenrolled votes	Council
May 2025	Forward Invoice 1 (Electoral Services) to Councils	VEC
July 2025	Forward Invoice 2 (Compulsory Voting - Part A) to Councils	VEC

Appendix 5: Diagram - 'Who can vote in the 2024 Local government elections?'



Who can vote in the 2024 Victorian local council elections?

You can only vote **once** in each municipality, no matter how many properties you own or occupy. You must enrol before **4 pm on Friday 30 August 2024**.



Voting is compulsory for everyone who is enrolled.

* ¹Whittlesea City Council and Casey City Council did not have a general election in 2020, and have different rules for the 2024 election. Some property owners will be automatically enrolled. For further information check our website.

*²Moira Shire Council's next general election will be in October 2028.

*³Melbourne City Council has different rules for enrolling and voting. For further information check our website.

Appendix 6: Councils participating in the 2024 Local Government elections

Alpine Shire Council	Hobsons Bay City Council
Ararat Rural City Council	Horsham Rural City Council
Ballarat City Council	Hume City Council
Banyule City Council	Indigo Shire Council
Bass Coast Shire Council	Kingston City Council
Baw Baw Shire Council	Knox City Council
Bayside City Council	Latrobe City Council
Benalla Rural City Council	Loddon Shire Council
Boroondara City Council	Macedon Ranges Shire Council
Borough of Queenscliffe Council	Manningham City Council
Brimbank City Council	Mansfield Shire Council
Buloke Shire Council	Maribyrnong City Council
Greater Bendigo City Council	Maroondah City Council
Campaspe Shire Council	Melbourne City Council
Cardinia Shire Council	Melton City Council
Casey City Council	Merri-bek City Council
Central Goldfields Shire Council	Mildura Rural Shire Council
Colac Otway Shire Council	Mitchell Shire Council
Corangamite Shire Council	Monash City Council
Darebin City Council	Moonee Valley City Council
Greater Dandenong City Council	Moorabool Shire Council
East Gippsland Shire Council	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Frankston City Council	Mount Alexander Shire Council
Gannawarra Shire Council	Moyne Shire Council
Glen Eira City Council	Murrindindi Shire Council
Glenelg Shire Council	Nillumbik Shire Council
Golden Plains Shire Council	Northern Grampians Shire Council
Greater Geelong City Council	Port Phillip City Council
Hepburn Shire Council	Pyrenees Shire Council
Hindmarsh Shire Council	Greater Shepparton City Council

South Gippsland Shire Council

Southern Grampians Shire Council

Stonnington City Council

Strathbogie Shire Council

Surf Coast Shire Council

Swan Hill Rural City Council

Towong Shire Council

Wangaratta Rural City Council

Warrnambool City Council

Wellington Shire Council

West Wimmera Shire Council

Whitehorse City Council

Whittlesea City Council

Wodonga City Council

Wyndham City Council

Yarra City Council

Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Yarriambiack Shire Council

**Moirá City Council currently under municipal monitoring
- therefore not participating.*

Appendix 7: Councils requiring an electoral structure or ward boundary review

Electoral structure review

Rural Shire Councils

Buloke Shire Council

Gannawarra Shire Council

Northern Grampians Shire Council

Yarriambiack Shire Council

Campaspe Shire Council

Corangamite Shire Council

Strathbogie Shire Council

Surf Coast Shire Council

Central Goldfields Shire Council

Hepburn Shire Council

Moorabool Shire Council

Mount Alexander Shire Council

Regional City and Metropolitan Councils

Ballarat City Council

Greater Bendigo City Council

Horsham Rural City Council

Mildura Rural City Council

Greater Geelong City Council

Greater Shepparton City Council

Warrnambool City Council

Wodonga City Council

Frankston City Council

Latrobe City Council

Yarra City Council

Wangaratta Rural City Council

Glen Eira City Council

Monash City Council

Port Phillip City Council

Stonnington City Council

Brimbank City Council

Hobsons Bay City Council

Merri-bek City Council (Moreland)

Moonee Valley City Council

Maribyrnong City Council

Melton City Council

Interface Councils

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Whittlesea City Council

Casey City Council

Hume City Council

Wyndham City Council

Ward boundary review

Bass Coast Shire Council

Baw Baw Shire Council

Boroondara City Council

Cardinia Shire Council

Greater Dandenong City Council

Loddon Shire Council

Murrindindi Shire Council

Pyrenees Shire Council

South Gippsland Shire Council

Wellington Shire Council

Appendix 8: Election preparation key milestones

Milestone	Start date	End date
Council information sessions	26 September 2023	18 October 2023
Election Service Agreements provided to Councils	1 October 2023	31 October 2023
Public Enquiry Service operational	16 September 2023	15 November 2023
Election managers/assistant EMs identified for appointment	8 January 2024	12 July 2024
Office lease period (6 months)	1 August 2024	31 January 2025
Resource delivery and election office set-up	14 August 2024	12 September 2024
Election managers in offices	9 September 2024	26 November 2024
Enrolment advertising	1 July 2024	31 August 2024

Appendix 9: VEC recommendations from the 2020 report to Parliament

Recommendation	Progress update
<p>1 That the Government introduces legislation that ensures enrolment entitlements and compulsory voting obligations for the next Casey City Council and Whittlesea City Council general elections in October 2024 are aligned with all other local councils going to election at the same time.</p>	<p>This was actioned by the <i>Local Government Legislation Amendment (Rating and Other Matters) Act 2022</i>.</p> <p>The requirements for the Casey City Council and Whittlesea City Council general elections in October 2024 will match those going to their second election under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>.</p>
<p>2 The Government notes the total possible number of scrutineers able to be appointed for an election under the ordinary operation of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (the LG Regulations) may be unsustainable if social distancing protocols extend beyond current regulatory relief arrangements.</p>	<p>The temporary regulatory relief inserted into the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 was extended and has since been replaced with an ongoing provision permitting for the maximum number of scrutineers for each candidate to be varied to ensure compliance with pandemic orders – see Regulation 64A of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020.</p>
<p>3 That the local government sector notes the VEC’s growing difficulty with sourcing suitable local counting venues.</p>	<p>This remains an ongoing challenge for the VEC and increasing centralisation of some processes will be required for the 2024 Local Government elections.</p>
<p>4 That the Government notes the increasing role of political parties in local government elections and the community’s desire for transparency in respect to candidate-party affiliations.</p>	<p>No action has been taken in respect to this recommendation and the VEC continues to engage with the State Government in respect to this matter.</p>
<p>5 That the Government notes voters have reported that the candidate questionnaire is not fit-for-purpose.</p>	<p>No action has been taken in respect to this recommendation and the VEC continues to engage with the State Government in respect to this matter.</p>
<p>6 That the Government notes that reach and readership of local newspaper continues to decline, and that news and information consumption is largely digital.</p>	<p>The VEC is permitted to publish statutory notices concerning local government elections via its website and will continue to consider print advertising, including local newspaper advertising, where suitable outlets are available.</p>
<p>7 That the Government amends the deadline for candidates to lodge their candidate statements, photographs and candidate questionnaires to align with the close of nominations.</p>	<p>No action has been taken in respect to this recommendation and the VEC continues to engage with the State Government in respect to this matter.</p>
<p>8 That the Government amends legislation to require councils to directly contact eligible council-enrolled voters and notify them in relation to their enrolment eligibility, application deadlines and obligation to vote (once enrolled).</p>	<p>No action has been taken in respect to this recommendation and the VEC continues to engage with the State Government in respect to this matter.</p>
<p>9 That the Government amends the prescribed list of excuses for failing to vote in the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 to include voters who were unable to vote at an election because they were experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>No action has been taken in respect to this recommendation and the VEC continues to engage with the State Government in respect to this matter.</p>

Appendix 10: Community languages

The VEC currently provides translated information and operates interpreter telephone lines in the community languages listed below (plus one for “all other languages”).

Language	Telephone
Amharic (African language)	9209 0190
Arabic	9209 0100
Bosnian	9209 0191
Chinese (Cantonese)	9209 0101
Chinese (Mandarin)	9209 0106
Croatian	9209 0102
Dari	9209 0193
Dinka	9209 0119
Greek	9209 0103
Italian	9209 0104
Khmer	9209 0192
Korean	9209 0194
Macedonian	9209 0105
Persian	9209 0195
Russian	9209 0196
Serbian	9209 0107
Somali (African language)	9209 0108
Spanish	9209 0109
Turkish	9209 0110
Vietnamese	9209 0111
All other non-English languages	9209 0112

