

2020 Local government elections

Service plan

October 2020



The following updates have been made since publication:

Release	Corrections
January 2020	Change to election timelines to reflect public holiday dates.

Cover image: Democracy Ambassador Etimad leading an electoral education session in 2018. Etimad is a member of the VEC's Education & Inclusion Team, which is responsible for educating and engaging community members so that their voices can be fully heard in our democracy.



Victoria's 2020 local government elections will be our State's largest single election program. Over 4.2 million enrolled voters and upwards of 2,000 candidates will participate in nearly 300 individual elections.

I am proud to present this election service plan detailing how the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) intends to deliver such a significant program of elections.

This service plan outlines the VEC's work at each stage of the election timeline and sets targets to assess the success of the program following its completion. It also details the areas where local councils will be contributing to preparations for these elections and builds on the important partnership between the VEC and its local government clients.

The Local Government Bill 2019 has recently been introduced into the Victorian Parliament. The VEC will analyse and identify any new aspects or changes that will impact the conduct of the October 2020 local government general elections. Any adjustments to election services will be reflected in the VEC's Service Plan as appropriate and the VEC will provide updates to the local government sector. More so than ever, it is incumbent on the VEC to deliver these local government elections to the highest levels of integrity and in the interests of all Victorians.

I look forward to working alongside the local government sector as we deliver this election service plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Warwick Gately". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Warwick Gately AM
Electoral Commissioner

Acknowledgement of Country

The VEC pays respect to Victoria's traditional owners and their elders past and present who have been custodians of this country for many thousands of years. Their living culture and their role in the life of Victoria is acknowledged by the VEC.

History of the plan

This document has been prepared in consultation with Victoria's local government sector. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) released the draft election service plan in October 2019 and presented the plan at a series of consultation sessions held across the State during October.

The VEC appreciates the council officers who made themselves available to attend the session and contribute to planning for the 2020 local government elections.

For further information on the VEC's local government program and planning for the 2020 local government elections, contact:

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

Contents

1. Background and purpose	1	Appendix 1:	29
VEC's role in conducting local government elections	1	Summary of initiatives and key changes	29
Principles	1	Appendix 2: Election Timelines	30
Legal framework	2	Attendance election timeline	30
Purpose of this document	2	Postal election timeline	31
2. Performance targets	3	Appendix 3:	32
3. Proposed timeline	4	Key dates for voters' roll production in 2020	32
Critical elements to the proposed timeline	6	Appendix 4:	33
Voters' roll	6	Victoria's municipalities and electoral structures	33
4. Opportunities and challenges	7	Appendix 5:	37
5. Proposed election service package	8	Volumes in 2016	37
Election service management	8	Appendix 6:	39
Voters' roll production	8	Format for the supply of CEO voters list	39
Advertising and communication campaign	10	Appendix 7:	44
Election office and staff	13	Community languages	44
Telephone enquiry service	15	Appendix 8:	45
Candidates	15	Communication plan	45
Ballot material	17	Appendix 9:	46
Early voting	18	Community engagement and education	46
Voting centres (attendance elections only)	19		
Voter notice (EasyVote letter)	20		
Counting the votes	20		
Postal election timeline – close of voting to final result	21		
Attendance election timeline – close of voting to final result	22		
Recounts	23		
Declaration of the result	24		
Management of complaints	24		
Election report and storage of material	25		
Management of MET inquiries and VCAT reviews	25		
Insurances	25		
6. Compulsory voting enforcement	26		
List of non-voters	26		
Enforcement process	26		
Receipt of penalties	27		
7. Costs	28		
Contingency costs	28		

1. Background and purpose

VEC's role in conducting local government elections

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is the statutory election service provider to Victorian local councils. The VEC has been the sole provider of election services to Victorian local councils since 2004 and has a long history of working in partnership with the local government sector. The VEC became the legislated provider of election services in 2015 following changes to the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act).

The VEC conducted an extensive debriefing program following the 2016 local government elections and submitted a comprehensive report to the Parliament in 2017. The report, which is available on the VEC's website, contained several recommendations aimed to improve the administration for the next large-scale local government electoral event.

The VEC has a long-standing commitment to the local government sector to deliver high quality election services. Planning for the delivery of the 2020 local government elections commenced in early 2019 and has based all services on the current legislation. The VEC will continue to plan on the basis of conducting elections on behalf of 78 of Victoria's 79 local councils¹ and has prepared this election service plan to explain its anticipated Statewide roll out of the 2020 local government election program.

Principles

The VEC's local government election service program follows three major principles:

Service excellence

The VEC:

- aims to deliver fair and equitable elections and high quality, value for money products and services
- will perform all tasks in accordance with electoral law and approach all participants in the process fairly
- will provide a high-quality election service and will work to provide every voter with a quality and convenient service in which to exercise their democratic rights.

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

Local focus for election services

A Returning Officer will be appointed by the Electoral Commissioner for each local council's election. Victorian law gives the Returning Officer full responsibility for the conduct of each election. Accordingly, the management of candidates, enquiries from the public, and vote counting will take place locally within each council wherever possible.

Contingency plans will be put in place to cover overflow enquiries from voters, and where suitable, to take advantage of centralised counting venues.

Costs to be kept to a minimum

The VEC's election service plan aims to provide quality election services whilst keeping costs to councils to a minimum. The VEC's local government election program will meet all statutory requirements and ensure that customer service and accuracy are not compromised. Each aspect of the 2020 local government election program, but particularly any new initiatives or procedures that are being introduced to the

¹ The South Gippsland Shire Council was placed into administration in mid-2019. The Council's general election has been postponed until October 2021.

1. Background and purpose

program for the first time, will be analysed in detail for their cost and benefits.

Although cost increases in some areas of the local government election program are unavoidable, the VEC will look for opportunities for efficiencies to help minimise cost increases where possible.

Legal framework

The local government election program in Victoria is governed by the Act and other laws involved in local government election matters, including the *City of Greater Geelong Act 1993*, *City of Melbourne Act 2001* and, in relation to compulsory voting enforcement, *Infringements Act 2006* and the *Fines Reform Act 2014*. The VEC is guided in technical and procedural matters by the regulations established under these laws.

Importantly, the Act is the basis of all local government electoral events. The VEC has prepared timelines for attendance and postal elections based on current legislation. These timelines are shown in Appendix 2. Note that the VEC's timelines do not include decisions that must be made by councils to prepare for an election, such as the need for councils to resolve to change their method of voting at least eight months prior to the election (i.e. from attendance to postal voting or from postal to attendance voting).

As stated previously, the Local Government Bill 2019 has recently been introduced into the Victorian Parliament, and at the time of publishing this plan had not been passed by both Houses of Parliament. Therefore, this election service plan has been prepared based on the law as it currently stands and the VEC will adjust the program wherever necessary to accommodate legislative reform, including changes to regulations. The impact of any changes will be communicated with councils.

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to set out the VEC's plans for the delivery of the 2020 local government elections.

It should be noted that the election services outlined in this document apply for attendance and postal elections, as applicable. The election service plan does not include variations specific to Melbourne City Council elections, which will be

considered separately in discussions with the City of Melbourne.

In preparing this plan, the VEC has considered the volumes and timelines associated with the conduct of 78 concurrent general elections, as well as feedback from the 2016 local government elections, areas of potential risk, and initiatives that improve the efficiency and quality of the election services while minimising increases in overall cost.

The document outlines:

- the VEC's proposed timelines for election preparations, the preparation of estimates and quotes for election services, and the election and post-election periods
- the opportunities that concurrent local government elections provide, balanced with some challenges that need to be addressed by the VEC as an election service provider to local councils
- a description of the election services that the VEC proposes to deliver to councils using either the attendance or postal method of voting
- new areas and key changes to the VEC's election services from the 2016 local government elections, with reasons why the change is suggested.

By publishing the election service plan early in the planning timeline, the VEC is able to communicate the election services it proposes to deliver councils for the 2020 elections along with an indicative cost for these services. The VEC believes it is necessary to communicate this information to the local government sector as early as possible to maximise cost efficiency and quality, and to minimise risk. At the same time, this provides councils with visibility of the budgetary impact for the conduct of local government elections.

2. Performance targets

The VEC is committed to continuing to deliver high quality election services to the local government sector. In support of this commitment, the VEC has established and published performance targets for critical areas. These targets will assist in measuring the quality and effectiveness of the 2020 local government elections program, in addition to the more comprehensive internal and external debriefing activities following the elections. The VEC's proposed debriefing activities are discussed later in this election service plan.

The proposed targets include aspirational and operational measures and will allow the VEC to more accurately focus its reporting.

Election preparation

1. Establish all election service agreements with local councils by 29 May 2020.
2. Establish election offices, voting centres and early voting centres, where relevant, that are accessible and suitably located within the local council, and publish accurate information on their accessibility ratings.
3. Conduct a public awareness campaign to inform all Victorians of their opportunity to enrol and vote with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people experiencing homelessness, people living with a disability, and the Indigenous community.
4. Appropriately evaluate and respond to complaints and enquiries, including timely referral of compliance matters to the relevant investigating authority.

Election conduct

5. Municipal voters' roll, excluding processing errors outside of the VEC's control.

6. Ensure all communication products are produced in an accurate and timely manner, are compliant with the legislation, and are focused on enhancing electoral understanding and participation.
7. Provide information to assist prospective candidates and ensure systems provide efficient processing of nominations and candidate information.
8. Lodge all postal ballot material with Australia Post within the required timeframes.
9. Declare all elections before 5.00 pm on Friday 6 November 2020.
10. Continue to maximise opportunities to increase voter participation in local government elections, with a particular focus on those traditionally under-represented in the electoral process and in areas with predicted high unintentional informality and low turnout.

Election outcomes

11. Establish robust election procedures so that no election can be overturned as a result of the VEC's processes.
12. Evaluate its performance at each level of the local government election program and ensure its reporting obligations are met.
13. Implement reconciliation and integrity checks to ensure correct recording of results during counting activities and during the packaging, movement and storage of election material.
14. Maintain accountability for the cost of local government elections and continue to identify opportunities to minimise the cost impost on councils.

The anticipated changes to the Act may impact these performance targets. The impact of any legislation changes will be communicated to councils.

3. Proposed timeline

3. Proposed timeline

The lead-time for the management of 78 council elections is estimated to be around 18 months. This is equivalent to the lead-time required for the management of a State election. As such, the VEC has established the following timeline to ensure that services can be produced in a timely fashion and resources can be appropriately and efficiently allocated.

The more detailed timelines that apply for attendance and postal elections are included in Appendix 2.

Date	Activity
2019	
September	Roll data requirements communicated at the Revenue Management Association's AGM
October	Consultation sessions to present the proposed election program to the sector
Friday 8 November	The period for feedback on the draft election service plan ends
By Friday 13 December	Final election service plan is completed and dispatched to the sector Election cost estimates are prepared and dispatched to councils
2020	
January to end of March	Service level discussions with councils, including finalising key parameters, preparing quotes and election service agreements
February to end of June	Client liaison officer briefings with council contacts, including inspection of council-provided election office and/or early voting accommodation (if applicable)
Monday 24 February	Final day for councils to resolve to change their method of voting
March to 23 October	Deliver outreach electoral information and education sessions to priority communities
2 March to 30 April	Period for receiving preliminary voters' roll data from local councils
During April	Final period for finalising election service agreements
April to June	Period for councils to action the VEC's feedback on preliminary voters' roll data
Friday 24 April	Statutory deadline for the VEC to submit final reports for electoral representation and subdivision reviews to the Minister for Local Government
Friday 1 May	All election service agreements between VEC and councils fixed
Beginning of July	Access to election office accommodation is required for connections
Monday 13 July	Date for the provision of primary council enrolment data (fixed by the Registrar)
During August	Delivery and installation of election offices
Friday 28 August	Entitlement date, with the close of roll at 4.00 pm
Wednesday 16 September	Election offices open to the public
Thursday 17 September	Certification of the voters' roll by the Registrar Opening of the nomination period
Tuesday 22 September	Close of nominations at 12 noon Ballot draws to determine the ballot paper orders

Date	Activity
Wednesday 23 September	Opening of early voting and postal voting for attendance elections Opening of special circumstance voting for postal elections Period for lodging how-to-vote cards for registration by the Returning Officer opens for attendance elections Deadline for personal statements and photographs for postal elections at 12 noon Deadline for lodgement of candidate questionnaires at 12 noon
Friday 25 September	Mail out of the EasyVote letter to voters in attendance elections
Friday 16 October	Deadline for lodging how-to-vote cards for registration by the Returning Officer for attendance elections at 12 noon
Thursday 22 October	Deadline for applying to receive a postal vote for attendance elections at 12 noon
Friday 23 October	Close of voting for postal elections at 6.00 pm Close of early voting for attendance elections at 6.00 pm
Saturday 24 October	Election day voting centres for attendance elections are open between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm; close of voting for attendance elections at 6.00 pm Extraction and counting activities commence for postal elections
Friday 30 October	Postal vote receipt period closes at 12 noon
Sunday 25 October to Friday 6 November	Counting and declarations
2021	
Early January	Non-voter follow up commences

3. Proposed timeline

Critical elements to the proposed timeline

Election Service Agreement

The VEC will establish election service agreements with each local council to ensure transparency with the costing arrangement and administer any contingency services that may be required.

Election cost estimates will be prepared and provided to councils during December 2019 to assist councils with budgeting. However, the VEC will contact each council from the middle of January 2020 to finalise key parameters so that it can commence preparing final quotes and service agreements.

The VEC must have all agreements in place by 1 May 2020 to ensure that it is in the best negotiating position with suppliers by having fully established parameters.

Compulsory voting enforcement, including the prosecution of non-voters, is a mandatory requirement under the Act and will be costed separately under the service agreement. The timeline for compulsory voting enforcement will extend beyond the 2020-21 financial year as prosecutions progress through the court process.

The VEC's service agreements will include three service levels – (1) the preparation of the municipal voters' roll, (2) conduct of the election, and (3) compulsory voting enforcement. The same arrangement was implemented in 2016 to reflect the status of each service as separate pieces of the broader election timeline.

The VEC notes that some councils may still be undergoing electoral representation or subdivision reviews and may not have a finalised electoral structure by the end of April 2020. The VEC will provide election costs based on the current or recommended structure, depending on what stage the review is at. Alternative cost estimates can be prepared if required.

Voters' roll

The quality of each election is largely dependent on the quality of the voters' roll and the timelines that apply for roll preparation are very tight. The VEC is keen to work with councils as early as possible to maximise the quality of the voters' roll

and reduce the opportunity for errors. This will require preliminary roll data to be available from 2 March 2020. Key dates relating to the receipt of roll data from councils and the preparation of the voters' roll are included in the timeline – see Appendix 3. Since the authority to collect individual dates of birth on notices of acquisition has been in place since 2005, the VEC expects that councils will have dates of birth included with at least 90% of the Chief Executive Officer's voter lists (CEO list) records.

The VEC is again offering a service to provide councils with dates of birth where council records can be matched with a State roll record. This will commence in October 2019. To access this service, data should be provided to the VEC as soon as possible. Note that the VEC can manage entire database extracts, not just the CEO list.

Declaration timetable

At the 2016 local government elections, the VEC declared all elections by Friday 4 November 2016. A change to legislation prior to the 2016 local government elections allowed for a five day extended postal vote receipt period after election day, where votes were able to be admitted for postal and attendance elections if the Returning Officer was satisfied that the declaration was completed by the voter before the close of voting. The close of the extended postal vote receipt period for the 2020 elections will be 12 noon on Friday 30 October 2020.

For postal elections, the extraction of ballot papers will commence after the close of voting and will be finalised at the end of the extended period. Due to the extended postal vote receipt period, counting and results cannot be finalised until the extended period has expired.

For the 2020 local government elections, the VEC proposes to have all elections declared by Friday 6 November. More detail regarding the proposed conduct of counts is included from page 20 of this election service plan.

4. Opportunities and challenges

The concurrent conduct of 78 council elections provides a number of opportunities and challenges.

The main benefit of conducting concurrent elections is the ability to promote the elections on a Statewide basis through an advertising and communication campaign. This will ensure consistency where possible across elections and reduce possible confusion for voters. In addition to this, the VEC is able to provide cost efficient services.

There are two main challenges the VEC considers of most importance to the 2020 local government election program:

1. Low voter participation

The challenge of low voter participation must be addressed. Whilst the VEC is experiencing high enrolment this is not translating to participation. A reduction in participation was experienced at the 2016 local government elections, and further during the 2018 State election. In response to this, the VEC has expanded the Statewide advertising component in its proposed advertising and communication strategy. The proposed pilot of the VEC's VoterAlert messaging service to voters on the State roll with email or mobile telephone numbers will allow instant communication to remind voters of key milestones and their voting responsibilities. It is aimed that voter engagement through this service has a positive impact on voter participation.

The VEC is also delivering a pilot program to engage younger voters who are over-represented in low voter turnout figures.

2. The high volume of elections in set timeframes

There are also several challenges to be faced when conducting such a high number of elections in the required timeframes, especially as voter numbers increase. The estimated volumes, timelines, cost, quality, risk and experience from previous elections as well as the community's and local government sector's expectations must all

be considered in developing the election service package. A table showing the volumes involved in the conduct of the 78 concurrent local government elections in 2016 is included in Appendix 5. It is expected that the conduct of elections for 78 councils in 2020 will involve approximately 257 individual elections.

The activities taking place between the close of nominations and the dispatch of ballot packs for postal elections are especially time critical. In order to meet the required timelines for the high number of individual elections the VEC is looking at innovative ways to save as many hours as possible during this period. The timeline for the production of 78 voters' rolls is also extremely tight, and the strategy that the VEC is proposing in order to meet this target without compromising the quality of the roll is discussed later in this election service plan.

The VEC has attempted to balance these considerations in putting together this proposed election service package. In doing so, variations to the standard election service package have been minimised where quality services can be provided in a consistent Statewide manner. The following sections outline the VEC's service package. Initiatives in place for the 2020 local government elections are summarised in Appendix 1.

Any further changes to the program, including those prompted by any changes in legislation, will be communicated separately.

5. Proposed election service package

Election service management

A number of client liaison officers will be appointed to supervise the election service agreement for each council. The client liaison officer will communicate with the council's representative and provide regular reports on the progress of the elections. The client liaison officer will be responsible for ensuring that the elections are conducted in accordance with the legislation and within the terms of the service agreement. The Client Liaison Team is the local government sector's first point of contact for queries in relation to the VEC's election service. At the conclusion of the 2020 local government elections, the client liaison officers will prepare a report on each election, including any recommendations for future elections.

Each client liaison officer will work closely with the VEC's Communication Team, which will manage the advertising and communications campaign for each local council election. The Communication Team will coordinate the development and placement of advertising, write and distribute media releases, 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.

Voters' roll production

The VEC provides all councils with the Electoral Commissioner's voters list (EC list) for council election purposes. This is the list of State electors that are enrolled within that local government area and is designed to assist in the preparation of the CEO list. The EC list is merged with the CEO list to produce the voters' roll for each local council for certification by the Registrar.

The VEC has provided roll production services to local councils since 1995 and has developed sophisticated software tools and processing procedures for maximising the quality of the voters' roll. The process involves a preliminary file from each council for quality checking, a second CEO list at the date fixed by the Registrar, and a third certification CEO list at the entitlement date.

The latter two data files are compared using the VEC's software, resulting in a small 'update' file, which can be processed quickly in the two-week period allowed for production of the roll for certification. A range of roll products are then extracted from the certified roll, including electronic and hard copy rolls, ballot material mail-out files and EasyVote mail-out extracts.

Security of transferring roll data between local councils and the VEC

The VEC will again use DEx, an online secure file transfer service, to exchange roll data between local councils and the VEC. DEx has been in use 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. The transfer of roll data between the VEC and local government partners will also be more convenient and timely, particularly during the short periods to process roll information in the election timeline.

Roll data quality

Producing a high-quality voters' roll takes significant effort and resources from councils as well as the VEC. Much of this can be done well before the election timeline commences, when legislative deadlines for final roll production restrict the time available for quality assurance. By participating in the preliminary process (March -April 2020) 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.

VEC software tools can easily identify exact duplicates (i.e. identical name, date of birth and address) and the council record is removed in accordance with the Act.

However, it is considerably more difficult to identify possible and probable duplicates. The VEC's Roll Management System can identify potential duplicates between council data and the Victorian register of electors. A proportion of these matches will not be able to be definitively resolved with the information available to the VEC and will have to be referred to the relevant council

for a final decision. It is important that this process commences as early as possible so that there is time to contact voters to clarify their details, including date of birth and any property holdings.

Other checks are done to identify people who have been removed from the Victorian register of electors following medical evidence of unsound mind. In addition, the VEC makes every effort to identify CEO list voters who have been approved to have their address not shown on the State roll (i.e. silent electors) to ensure that their address is not shown on CEO lists for any other voting entitlements they have in other local councils.

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, as these are possible ward coding errors in council data.

Timelines

To make optimum use of the VEC's quality auditing tools, time is critical. Negotiating data compatibility, ensuring data validity, and identifying, confirming and removing duplicates all take time and effort from both VEC and council staff. The VEC aims for comprehensiveness and accuracy when creating the roll for an election so exchanging data and early quality checking of data improves the final product. See the key dates for roll production in Appendix 3.

Roll production

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

- ensure that at least 90% of CEO list records include dates of birth
- nominate a council officer to resolve data issues promptly during each of the roll production processing periods:
 - preliminary processing (early March – end of April)
 - primary council enrolment data (13 July – 21 August)
 - certification (28 August – 16 September)

- supply a preliminary CEO list in an agreed format (see Appendix 6) as early as possible in the cycle and, at the latest, by 1 May 2020
- supply the council's CEO list in the agreed format by 5.00 pm on Friday 10 July, extracting from the council database one record only across the whole local council for each voter who is eligible for the CEO list
- action the reports generated by preliminary roll processing before the date fixed for requiring council enrolment data—Monday 13 July. This will involve investigating and deciding on duplicate records, removing deceased voters and correcting invalid data
- perform as much quality checking of the council enrolment data as possible before the entitlement date
- supply a certification CEO list in a file in the same format as the primary enrolment data (this will be used to generate the update file), no later than 5.00 pm on Monday 31 August 2020.

In processing the primary enrolment data for each council, the VEC assumes that no more than 10% of the CEO list records will need to be removed because they are duplicates or deceased. This will be the case if all the preliminary reports to each council have been actioned.

The VEC values its partnership with local councils to meet these deadlines and requirements and will work with each council to ensure a high-quality voters' roll. Due to the short timeframe, however, 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. The level of training required for VEC officers to perform these tasks makes it impossible to employ additional staff at short notice. As a result, and in consultation with the client liaison officer, the VEC may seek to recover these costs through the election service agreement.

Council software

One further factor that local councils need to be aware of in planning for the 2020 local government elections is the timing of software system upgrades or changes of software

5. Proposed election service package

provider. These need to be implemented and integrated by February 2020 at the latest to minimise risk to the roll production process.

Certified voters' roll

The Act requires the Registrar to certify the voters' roll. The Registrar is also responsible for making the certified voters' roll available for inspection beginning on the day it is certified until 30 days after election day.

Provision of voters' rolls to candidates

On request, the VEC will provide each candidate with a copy of the voters' roll for the election in which the candidate has nominated. The roll is provided for election purposes only.

These rolls will be provided by the VEC electronically via DEx and will be in a user-friendly format to assist candidates with direct mail campaigning. Before providing the voters' roll to a candidate, they are required to declare that the information will only be used for campaign purposes. The voters' roll must be destroyed or returned to the Returning Officer following the election. The VEC will follow up with candidates directly to remind them of their obligations to dispose of roll data following the election.

Advertising and communication campaign

The VEC will deliver a voter information campaign on a local and State-wide basis. The historically low participation in, and awareness of, local government electoral events is a challenge. The campaign must address this issue and will necessarily involve additional cost. The campaign will be developed to:

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

The VEC will provide advertising services, media relations, election information on the VEC's website, and an SMS and email notification service (VoterAlert). Information and assistance

will be provided through an overflow service to respond to calls that have been directed to election offices (when all lines in a particular office are busy). Information in languages other than English and a telephone interpreter service will also be part of the VEC's standard package, where applicable.

Statutory advertising (all councils)

Statutory advertisements will appear in the general news section of local newspapers nominated by each council, and will comprise the following:

- a 'notice of entitlement' advertisement: covering enrolment entitlements and the entitlement date
- a 'notice of election' advertisement: including how to nominate, details of candidate information session/s, an electorate map and, where applicable, a summary of any variations resulting from a representation review
- a 'voting details' advertisement: including information on how to vote, formality, and how to contact the election office to request replacement ballot material or a postal vote (for attendance elections)
- a 'declaration of results' advertisement.

Local press advertising for all councils will include a telephone enquiry number for the election office, a National Relay Service enquiry number (for people who are deaf, hard of hearing and/or speech impaired) and the VEC's website address. Telephone numbers for the multi-language interpreting service will be included in press advertising for metropolitan councils and, on request, for rural or regional councils or where a non-metropolitan council selects the option of a multi-language leaflet.

The notice of entitlement and notice of election advertisements will also include messaging around the registration requirement for voters who wish to have their ballot material provided in Braille or large print format in line with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Statewide advertising (all councils)

Having all local government elections conducted concurrently allows the VEC to maximise promotion opportunities. The State-wide advertising campaign will promote enrolment and voting, including a final reminder to vote. The cost of the campaign will be separated into metropolitan and regional coverage and charged to all councils in their respective category on a cost per voter basis.

VoterAlert

At the 2018 State election, the VEC developed, piloted and implemented an email and SMS notification service called VoterAlert. This service was used to engage State-enrolled voters who had supplied a mobile phone number and/or email address. A rolling program of messages welcomed these voters and reminded them to check their enrolment details before the close of rolls. A further two messages were sent during the voting period with reminders to vote and links to the VEC website for further information.

Around 50% of voters on the State enrolment register with contact details are opted in to this service and 90% of people who received a VoterAlert message turned out to vote at the State election.

For the 2020 local government elections the VEC proposes to roll out a similar service, where State-enrolled voters will be reminded to check their enrolment details prior to the close of rolls, and to vote via two reminders sent during the voting period. VoterAlert gives voters the ability to select whether they receive an SMS, an email or both.

Voters Voice

Voters Voice is a free app designed to assist voters with complex communication difficulties to participate in Victorian elections; specifically voting in person at a voting centre. The application includes text-to-voice software customised for use with election terminology.

The application functions include the ability to 'speak' or 'show' pre-filled name and address information, as well as key voting phrases. It also provides a keyboard for those with a higher level of literacy skill. The app will also be appropriate for voters with English language or literacy issues

and those who speak Auslan. Questions and answers (which can be pre-prepared) can be 'asked' out loud or shown on a screen in interactions with election staff. A voting centre location feature will also be included for any attendance elections.

Multi-language advertising campaign (metropolitan councils only)

The State-wide advertising campaign will be extended for metropolitan councils to include ethnic media in high need languages. It will comprise advertisements focusing on enrolment and voting, to raise awareness among people from non-English speaking backgrounds and to encourage formal voting. This campaign will be costed across all metropolitan councils on a per voter basis.

Multi-language telephone interpreting service (all councils)

The telephone interpreting and multi-language information service will operate throughout the election period. Operated by Language Loop, interpreting services are available in more than 100 languages. A minimum of 20 dedicated telephone numbers will be provided for the most widely spoken languages in Victoria (plus a general number capturing all other languages).

Enquiries specific to a particular council election will be costed back to that council. Incoming calls are directed to a Victorian Interpreting and Translation Service (VITS) interpreter, who then links to the VEC in a three-way telephone conversation to relay information in the person's preferred language.

Mail-out to blind and vision-impaired voters

The VEC will liaise with Vision Australia (Vic) and Blind Citizens (Vic) to produce material to be sent to all Victorian voters on each of their databases. 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 special hotline number for those who wish to register for Braille or large print ballot material.

5. Proposed election service package

Voter notice (EasyVote letter – all attendance elections)

The voter notice is personally addressed to each voter in a contested election, with the intent that it will be kept by the recipient as a reminder to vote. The notice is a requirement of the legislation.

The notice provides ward-specific information regarding the time and venues that voters can cast their vote on election day, or at an early voting centre. The notice also includes information regarding postal voting and an electorate map showing ward boundaries and the location of voting centres.

Telephone numbers are provided for the telephone enquiry service, the National Relay Service for people who are deaf, hearing impaired and/or speech impaired, as well as the VEC's website address and telephone numbers for the multi-language interpreting service.

Uncontested election leaflet (subdivided councils only)

If, at the close of nominations, a ward election is uncontested, a leaflet will be mailed to affected voters, informing them that their election is uncontested and they are not required to vote for that election. The leaflet will provide the name of the candidate(s) who have nominated and will, in due course, be declared elected. The leaflet will substantially reduce the potential for confusion among voters who are aware of the election but do not receive a ballot pack or EasyVote letter in the mail.

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.

VEC website

The VEC website will feature comprehensive information about local government elections generally, as well as specific information for each local council's election. Content will be updated

at each phase of the election cycle including information about:

- enrolment
- nominating for election
- early and postal voting (attendance)
- redirection of ballot packs (postal)
- replacement ballot packs (postal)
- details of how and when to vote on election day (attendance)
- the close of voting
- election results.

Users will be able to search their address and be directed to election information for their local government area. For attendance elections, users will also have the option of searching for voting centres on an interactive map.

Results information 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 direct voters to the website in all advertisements and any printed material produced, as well as by providing content to each council to assist the council to link directly to that council's election page on the VEC's website.

Reminder advertisement

A final reminder for voters to cast their votes will be included. This advertisement will be listed in the council's nominated local press and it will:

- remind voters of the hours of voting on election day (attendance elections) or the close of voting for postal elections
- list voting centre locations (attendance) or where ballot material can be hand delivered

- list early voting centres (attendance) or provide instructions on how and where to apply for a replacement postal vote for postal elections
- advise who has to vote
- include contact details for further information.

Multi-language leaflet for postal elections

A leaflet supplied in a minimum of 20 high need languages (plus English) that explains, step-by-step, how to vote formally can be provided. It also includes telephone interpreter numbers for each language (plus the one general number for any other languages). See Appendix 7 for a list of proposed languages.

This product will be included as standard for all metropolitan council elections being held by postal voting and is strongly recommended for regional councils with high numbers of voters from non-English speaking backgrounds. Councils that are having attendance elections will have multi-language voting instructions printed in every voting compartment, so the leaflet is not required.

Election office and staff

Returning Officer, Deputy Returning Officer and staff

The VEC maintains a pool of trained senior election officials to ensure that enough suitable election staff are available for appointment as Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers for the 78 local council elections. Each Returning Officer may appoint up to three Deputy Returning Officers, as determined by the VEC, depending on the size and complexity of their particular elections. All Returning Officers and

Deputy Returning Officers appointed by the VEC will have satisfactorily completed a comprehensive online and face-to-face training program as well as a number of home study modules prior to their appointment.

A large number of the VEC's senior election officials will have previous local government election experience, State Parliamentary election experience, or both. Recruitment for new senior election officials looks for transferable skills, such as project and people management, which the VEC uses to complement its election training program. Further training, specifically in local government elections is compulsory for all senior election officials before they can be appointed to a Returning Officer or Deputy Returning Officer role. The training program includes a comprehensive focus on the practical aspects of local government elections and the procedures that must be followed.

The Returning Officer will be authorised to appoint an optimum number of staff to ensure the cost-effective and successful conduct of their election.

A team of election support officers will be appointed to support Returning Officers during the election period. Located at the VEC's head office, the election support officers will be the first point of contact for Returning Officers for assistance and advice on legislative, procedural, and technical matters. All election support officers are experienced electoral practitioners.

Election office

The VEC will establish an election office within each council area. The VEC will endeavour to source an office that is conveniently positioned for candidates and voters and meets the VEC's

Number of Voters	Recommended Office Space	Recommended size of secure storage within office space
Up to 10,000	200-300 sq. m	5 sq. m
10,001 to 50,000	300-400 sq. m	10 sq. m
50,001-70,000	400-500 sq. m	15 sq. m
70,001-130,000	500-750 sq. m	25 sq. m
>130,001	Minimum 750 sq. m	Minimum 25 sq. m

5. Proposed election service package

accessibility and security standards. Should council have suitable 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 keeping in mind that the VEC must be the sole occupant during the election period.

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.

The following table is provided as a guide of the floor space required when considering election office accommodation options, though it may be necessary to secure additional space for counting activities based on the council structure, contested elections and count type i.e. manual vs. computer. It is noted that more space is required for attendance elections, and the most suitable spaces for election offices have open floor plans without built in cubicles or multiple individual offices. All prospective election offices will be assessed by the VEC and must meet the strict standards for occupational health and safety, accessibility, security and storage.

For the 2020 local government elections, the VEC will require access to election offices by the end of July 2020 in order to deliver necessary furniture and materials and install and 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 Monday 9 November, with final collections taking place no later than Friday 27 November 2020. Smaller election offices may be decommissioned earlier and the VEC will prioritise decommissioning of election offices located within council provided accommodation.

Ballot paper security

An important focus of the VEC at the 2018 State election continued to be the secure storage and transport of used and unused ballot papers. The VEC implemented logistical and security procedures that ensured ballot papers were always stored in lockable storage areas, ballot paper accountability and reconciliation was increased, as was awareness of the safe and secure custody and transfer of ballot papers

during the election timeline. The VEC will implement similar procedures for the 2020 local government elections.

The VEC will assess each proposed election office venue for its compliance with the security standards. Training for Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers will reinforce the VEC's stringent security expectations. Where necessary, the VEC will provide temporary secure storage for ballot papers, such as secure cages. Should any physical modifications be required to election offices to meet secure storage requirements, they will be made in consultation with the council (for council provided election office accommodation), or the property manager/owner (for leased election office accommodation), pursuant to any lease arrangements.

Furniture and equipment

The VEC will provide the Returning Officer with a network of computers, photocopier/multi-function device, letter openers, ballot paper counting machines, cardboard furniture and other furniture and equipment. These items present a modern corporate image to the community and have proved cost-effective for use over a limited period.

Computerised election management system

The computerised election management system that is provided to the Returning Officer contains details of each individual election and the voters' rolls. Nominations, candidate statements (postal elections), candidate questionnaire answers, how-to-vote cards (attendance elections), early and postal votes and results are all entered by the Returning Officer directly into the computer application. This interfaces with systems at the VEC to produce the artwork for printing ballot papers, candidate statements and other products required for the election and to publish information directly onto the VEC's website.

Office hours

Election offices will be open to the public from Wednesday 16 September until Friday 23 October. Election office opening hours will be standardised across the State and will operate from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm weekdays, except for the last two days before election day when election offices will close at 8.00 pm on Thursday

22 October and 6.00 pm on Friday 23 October. Standardised election office hours assist with providing consistent messages to voters through the advertising and communication campaign.

Election offices for attendance elections will not be open to the public on election day—but the election office will post a sign showing the nearest voting centre(s) to the election office’s location.

Telephone enquiry service

Returning Officers will provide a local telephone enquiry service to handle election enquiries during the election period. The service will operate during office hours. Telephone enquiry staff will be located at the election office and will be provided with access to look-up tools containing key details for the election.

The telephone service at the election office will be linked to the VEC’s phone system and will allow for an overflow service when local telephone enquiry staff are fully occupied.

Based on call volumes during the 2016 local government elections, the VEC will establish necessary infrastructure at head office to respond to enquiries regarding the 2020 local government elections prior to election offices being open for business.

Candidates

Information session

Returning Officers will conduct at least one information session for candidates prior to the opening of nominations. The timing of the information session will be established in early 2020, as it is important that the session is not conducted too far in advance of the opening of nominations. The information session will cover the election timeline, the procedures and rules relevant to candidates (with particular emphasis on the rules regarding election advertising that are often the subject of complaints). Returning Officers will ensure that prospective candidates are aware that the VEC is responsible for the conduct of the election and that election enquiries should be directed to the election office, not council staff.

Returning Officers will be equipped with candidate kits for prospective candidates, which will contain a handbook and any forms relevant to candidature.

The VEC’s client liaison officer will consult with councils in order to determine if additional candidate information sessions are required, particularly where local council areas include multiple major towns.

Nominations

The Returning Officer will receive and record nominations from candidates, including the receipt of the \$250 nomination fee.

Prospective candidates will be encouraged to complete their nomination form using the VEC’s online Candidate Helper, which allows candidates to print a populated nomination form containing a unique identifier for easy lodgement with the Returning Officer. Nomination forms completed using the Candidate Helper must still be lodged in person, but the nomination process will be more efficient for candidates when they do visit the election office. The unique identifier printed on nomination forms prepared using the online Candidate Helper allows Returning Officers to retrieve the candidate’s data and load it directly into the VEC’s election management system.

In all cases, candidates will be required to quality assure their nomination information. Returning Officers will carefully run through the candidate declaration before the declaration is signed by the candidate and the nomination completed.

The list of candidates who have nominated for each local council 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 completed for their nomination. The VEC anticipates updates to the lists of candidates on the VEC website to be made at approximately 11.00 am and 5.00 pm on each day during the nomination period, and the final list of candidates as soon as possible after the close of nominations.

5. Proposed election service package

Draw for ballot paper position

Returning Officers will hold a ballot draw to determine the order that candidates' names will appear on the ballot paper as soon as practicable after the close of nominations.

Ballot draws will be conducted electronically with the order of names on the ballot paper determined by a computerised random draw. Electronic draws have been used for State elections since 1999 and for local government elections since 2008.

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 5.00 pm after the close of nominations.

Candidate statements and photographs (postal elections)

Returning Officers for postal elections will receive candidates' personal statements and photographs. Prospective candidates will also be able to complete the forms to lodge their personal statements using the VEC's online Candidate Helper. This will enable candidates to print their statement ready for lodgement with the Returning Officer. Again, this will streamline the process for candidates at the election office and allow Returning Officers to load the statement directly into the VEC's election management system. Candidates, or their authorised representative, will be required to quality assure the information entered into the election management system. Candidates will be encouraged to provide an electronic version of their photograph that will be directly loaded into the election management system. Hard copy photographs are also acceptable; however, these will take more time to format and load into the system.

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

Completion of the candidate statements 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

Returning Officers will receive answers to candidate questionnaires completed by candidates. Candidates will also be able to complete their questionnaire using the VEC's online Candidate Helper prior to lodging it with the Returning Officer. The completed questionnaires will be accessible to voters on the VEC website and available in election offices.

Completion of the candidate questionnaire is voluntary. However, the VEC will publish advice showing which candidates did not lodge answers to the candidate questionnaire or did not answer any particular question.

How-to-vote cards (attendance elections)

Returning Officers for attendance elections will process all how-to-vote cards (HTVC) submitted for registration. The VEC's head office Candidate Services Team will be available to Returning Officers to provide advice on how-to-vote card matters, as required.

Detailed information on the requirements for HTVC registration will be contained in the candidate handbook.

The names of the candidate, person or organisation on whose behalf the HTVCs were registered will be published on the VEC's website.

Refund of Nomination Fee

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 direct credit into a nominated bank account or, where requested, by cheque. 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

VEC employees will supervise all stages in the preparation, printing, assembly and dispatch of ballot material.

Considerable time will be devoted to the recruitment and training of quality assurance staff to oversee the preparation of ballot material for attendance and postal elections.

Postal elections

As stated previously, the timeline for the preparation of ballot packs is critical. The VEC has developed a strategy to manage the preparation of an estimated 4.5 million plus ballot packs. Some of the time saving elements of this strategy have already been discussed in the previous section. Further strategies are discussed below. The VEC will establish a service level agreement with Australia Post for the provision of postal facilities and services for the 2020 local government elections. Discussions will be held with the security printers and mail house to ensure that coordination between VEC, printer, mail house and Australia Post is as effective as possible. The VEC will also review the information contained in the ballot packs to ensure that it is as clear as possible to voters.

Ballot paper and candidate statements leaflet

The ballot papers will be printed with a background security screen using a different colour for each ward.

The ballot papers will be printed as a combined product attached to the candidates' statements to minimise the risk of any errors occurring when the products are mechanically inserted into ballot packs at the mail house. The ballot papers will have a perforation along the edge that joins the ballot paper to the candidates' statements. The voter will detach the ballot paper before marking their vote.

Reply-paid and outer envelopes

The VEC will establish a unique reply-paid number for each ward in the council and each unsubdivided council. The reply-paid envelope will feature a coloured block (matching the colour of the ballot paper) on the left-hand side of the envelope, which also contains brief instructions to

post the ballot paper on time. This facilitates pre-sorting of the envelopes to wards by Australia Post and maximises the accuracy of the sorting. The outer envelope is a window-faced envelope with a distinct marker to ensure 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 paper envelopes

The ballot paper envelopes have been specially designed for use at local government elections conducted by post and conform to the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2016.

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.

Multi-language leaflets

The multi-language leaflet (see page 12) will be included in the postal ballot pack as standard for all metropolitan councils using postal voting. 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.

Addressing, assembly and delivery of ballot packs

The VEC 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 and will lodge the ballot packs with Australia Post over 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.

5. Proposed election service package

As previously mentioned, ballot packs for postal elections will be lodged with Australia Post under the priority delivery timetable. Australia Post has undertaken to deliver each day's lodgement of ballot packs to voters in accordance with their priority mail guidelines.

Redirection of ballot material

Voters 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 voter applying for redirection to the address specified in their request.

Replacement ballot material

Any voters who contact Returning Officers claiming to have lost or spoilt their ballot material, or who claim not to have received a ballot pack, will be issued with replacement ballot material. Returning Officers can monitor the issue and return of replacement ballot material through the VEC's election management system to ensure that no voter is able to have more than one ballot paper admitted to the count.

Return of ballot paper envelopes

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.

Returning Officers 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.

Ballot paper envelopes will then be batched in totals of 50s (for balancing at scrutiny) and stored in a secure location until after the close of voting.

Security of ballot material

Interfering with ballot material is a serious offence managed under sections 58 and 58A of the Act and those found guilty of committing such an offence are liable for a term of imprisonment not

exceeding two years, or a fine not exceeding 240 penalty units.

As discussed early in this election service plan, the VEC will implement a number of measures for the security and storage of ballot material at election offices, voting centres and early voting centres (for attendance elections), and standalone extraction and counting venues. These measures are in addition to tightened accountability and reconciliation procedures governing the custody and transfer of ballot material.

Attendance elections

Ballot papers

Ballot papers for attendance elections will also be printed with a background security screen using a different colour for each ward.

Multi-language voting instructions

Voting instructions in 20 languages other than English will be pre-printed in voting compartments at voting centres. A list of the 20 languages is included in Appendix 7.

Early voting

Postal elections

Prior to the general mail-out of ballot packs, Returning Officers will issue ballot papers to voters to whom special circumstances apply. Voters in this category can apply to the Returning Officer by phone or in person during standard office hours.

Attendance elections

Postal voting

Any voters wishing to vote by post before election day may apply in writing to the Returning Officer. Applications will be available from the Returning Officer and via the online application on the VEC website. Applications submitted online will not require the signature of the voter, instead voters will be required to complete a verification question and answer with their application that will be used to authenticate the voter's returned ballot material. The Returning Officer will process each application through the election management system and post to each applicant

a ballot paper, voting instructions, a ballot paper envelope and a reply-paid return addressed envelope.

Returning Officers for attendance elections will arrange for ballot material to be posted to all voters who are registered as general postal voters for State elections as soon as ballot material is available (following the close of nominations).

Early voting (in person)

Returning Officers will provide early voting facilities at the election office from Wednesday 23 September to Friday 23 October. During this period, early voting will operate from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, except for Thursday 22 October (9.00 am to 8.00 pm) and Friday 23 October (9.00 am to 6.00 pm). This aims to avoid confusion for voters by ensuring consistency across all offices (postal and attendance) during the voting period and on the last day of early voting.

In consultation with local councils, the VEC may provide early voting facilities at additional venues during the early voting period. The VEC proposes that the hours of operation be consistent across all venues, and that the venues addresses be confirmed no later than Monday 20 July to assist with the production of advertising and communication products. Councils should consider the increase in early voting numbers over recent elections when considering additional early voting centres.

The VEC will provide all furniture and equipment necessary for the operation of early voting locations.

Voting centres (attendance elections only)

Accessibility

The accessibility standards of voting centres are a high priority for attendance elections. The VEC will look for voting centres that provide maximum access for voters and will attempt to ensure at least one fully accessible (Independent Wheelchair Accessible - IWA) voting centre is available in each ward. Where access limitations exist for voting centres, the VEC will provide an explanation of the limitations associated with each voting centre rated as having limited or no

wheelchair access (LNWA) or assisted wheelchair access (AWA).

Selection of voting centres

The VEC will prepare a proposed list of voting centres for each local council using the attendance method of voting in early 2020 so that venue bookings can be made.

In doing so, the VEC will consider voting centres that have been used at State, federal and previous local government elections, and will ensure that voting centres are suitably located within each ward or local government area.

Through the client liaison officer, the VEC will provide the list of recommended voting centres to each council for information purposes but Returning Officers will make the final decision regarding the appointment of voting centres. The VEC's head office team will work closely with Returning Officers as they formally appoint voting centres.

Voting centre locations will be finalised by the end of April 2020 to ensure the venue can be secured for use on election day, and to assist with resourcing and the preparation of communication products.

The VEC will cancel bookings for voting centres in wards that, after the close of nominations, are uncontested, unless there are satisfactory reasons for the voting centre to remain. Voting centres that are located near the border with a contested ward, or those that are conveniently located for the whole local council area, may be kept.

Voting centre equipment

The VEC will arrange for the delivery of voting centre furniture (where required) and equipment to each voting centre during the week before election day. This will include customised cardboard voting centre equipment (i.e. voting screens, directional signs, ballot boxes).

Operation of voting centres

Election day voting centres will operate between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm on Saturday 24 October 2020. Voters can attend any voting centre within their enrolled local council on election day.

5. Proposed election service package

Returning Officers for attendance elections will appoint and train voting centre managers. Training and reference material will explain the strict legal requirements that apply to voting at local government attendance elections.

The VEC will provide an electronic roll mark off facility at all voting centres that will allow voters to be marked off a council-wide roll at any voting centre for the local council. Hard copy rolls will only be used in the event of a connection failure at a voting centre.

Voting centre staff

Returning Officers for attendance elections will appoint the optimum number of staff for each voting centre to provide a smooth flow of voters on election day.

The Returning Officer will also appoint sufficient liaison officers to visit voting centres during the hours of voting and throughout the count on election day to support all voting centre managers. They will check procedures are being carried out correctly, provide advice where necessary and deliver any additional materials if shortages occur during the day.

Voter notice (EasyVote letter)

The EasyVote letter (see page 11) will be dispatched to voters enrolled for attendance elections by the VEC on behalf of the Returning Officer on Friday 25 September after the close of nominations.

Counting the votes

Counting of the votes after close of voting will be by one of two methods that includes:

- **Preferential counts**

Preferential counts are used for single vacancies at postal and attendance elections. All preferential counts, except for the City of Melbourne leadership team election, will be counted manually

- **Proportional representation (PR) counts**

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

The information below is provided as a guide as the timetable for each activity, and individual count plans for each council will be established once the final number of candidates and contested elections is known.

Computer counts

At the 2016 local government elections, the VEC established 47 sites for computerised counts for 69 local councils involving multiple vacancies.

The VEC's computer count application allows the VEC to easily establish computer count venues within any local council where the results will be determined by computer.

It is anticipated that a similar count model will be implemented in 2020 as was in 2016. The VEC will look to establish a mixture of centralised counting centres (to conduct computer counts for more than one local council) and individual counting centres - at either the election office or at a venue away from the election office. Where shared counting venues are established a timeline will be scheduled to optimise counting for all counts occurring at that venue. The VEC will consult with councils where centralised counting is being considered.

During a computer count, preferences on each ballot paper are entered into the VEC's computer count application by experienced data entry operators. Once all ballot papers have been entered, Returning Officers will apply a function within the application to calculate a result.

Manual counts

For elections involving single vacancies, the VEC's preference is that Returning Officers conduct a manual count at the election office. Where this is not possible, a venue within the local council area is to be provided by council or at cost to council. The area required for manual counting is approximately 40 square metres per 10,000 voters. This ratio also applies to the space

required for the extraction of ballot papers from ballot paper envelopes at postal elections.

Postal election timeline – close of voting to final result

Counting activities from close of voting

Due to the extended postal vote receipt period, counting for postal elections will be over two phases. The first phase is after the close of voting. Priority will be given to the extraction and counting of returned votes from the general mail-out where the original ballot pack is the only vote issued to, and returned by, the voter.

The second phase 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 (including any replacement votes). At this time the Returning Officer will complete processing of all replacement votes received in the election office.

They will generate a report to identify any envelopes where the original ballot pack and replacement pack(s) appear to have been returned for the same voter and will action each return as prescribed.

At each phase, the relevant ballot paper envelopes are located and dealt with by Returning Officers in accordance with procedures specified in Regulations. No extraction can take place until these processes are complete.

At each phase, a balance figure will be established for each ward in preparation for the extraction of ballot papers.

Checking unenrolled declarations

Declarations completed by unenrolled voters will be checked progressively during the voting period with final checking to be completed no later than Friday 30 October. The VEC will support Returning Officers with determining the entitlement of unenrolled declarations and coordinating the checking process with councils as necessary.

Counting activities from Saturday 24 October

From Saturday 24 October, teams of counting staff will commence processing of phase one

ballot papers and will remove the flaps containing the voter details from the ballot paper envelopes to be included in the count, open the ballot paper envelopes and extract the ballot papers in the presence of any scrutineers. The ballot papers will be tallied to ensure that all ballot papers have been extracted from the envelopes.

The same procedure will be followed for ballot material to be included in the count after the close of the extended postal vote receipt period.

It should be noted that additional accommodation may be required for the opening, extraction and counting of ballot papers.

Manual counts

Where the count is to be conducted manually, ballot papers are sorted to first preferences and informal, and counted to give first-preference results. At least two first preference counts will take place, the first once all phase one preliminary processing has been completed. The second once all phase two processing has been completed after the close of the extended postal vote receipt period.

Once all ballot papers to be included in the count have been counted to first preference and informal, the Returning Officer will establish if any candidate has received an absolute majority of first preference votes. Where no candidate receives an absolute majority of first preference votes, a preference distribution will take place.

The Returning Officer will appoint a team of experienced staff for each preference count. The number of teams required will depend on the number of preference counts to be conducted. A trained election official will be appointed as team leader for each counting team.

It is anticipated that all manual preference distributions for preferential counts will be finalised by Saturday 31 October.

Computer counts

Where the count is to be conducted by computer, extracted ballot papers are sorted to remove those that are obviously informal. Ballot papers identified as obviously informal are totalled and fully rechecked at the count centre. The remaining ballot papers are batched into totals of

5. Proposed election service package

50s in preparation for data entry. Once batching has been completed, ballot paper batches will then be sealed and secured for transport to the computer count venue (if away from the election office). It is anticipated that data entry of phase one ballot papers will commence during the week following election day with final data entry to occur after all phase two processing has been completed after the close of the extended postal vote receipt period.

The VEC will establish the computer infrastructure required for the conduct of the computer counts at each of the identified computer count venues. Some venues may have the space and facilities to conduct simultaneous counts across multiple rooms.

The number of data entry operators required for each computer count venue will be determined after nominations close. Data entry operators will be supervised by trained computer count team leaders and a number of trained computer count supervisors for each count team at each venue.

The timetable for data entry of ballot papers for each election will be determined after the close of nominations - when the number of candidates and uncontested elections is known.

It is anticipated that data entry will commence for some computer counts from Monday 26 October, but it is anticipated that larger counts will not commence data entry until Tuesday 27 October at the earliest. It is expected that all computer counts will be completed by Sunday 1 November, at the latest. Candidates and councils will be advised on the proposed counting timetable after the close of nominations.

Team leaders will establish an area within each computer count venue to allow the Returning Officer to recheck all informal ballot papers.

Ballot papers initially deemed to be informal, or those identified as informal during data entry that – are later confirmed as formal – will be returned to data entry.

Results will be calculated for each council at the completion of data entry for all wards in that council. Distribution reports that detail the count will be distributed as soon as possible after the completion of each result calculation. Results will be displayed on the VEC website as soon as

possible after the completion of all counts for a particular council.

Attendance election timeline – close of voting to final result

COUNTING ACTIVITIES SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

Count of ballot papers at voting centres

Voting centre staff will commence the count of first preferences and informal votes following the close of voting. The results will be communicated immediately to the Returning Officer after counting is completed. Ballot papers will be sealed in security boxes at the voting centres and returned to the election office on election night.

Count of postal and early votes

Preliminary scrutiny of postal votes (signature checks) for votes received up until the Friday before election day will take place in the election office. The count of postal and early votes will take place from 6.00 pm on election night.

COUNTING ACTIVITIES – POST ELECTION DAY

Checking unenrolled declarations

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 Returning Officers with determining the entitlement of unenrolled declarations and coordinating the checking process with councils as necessary.

Count of absent and unenrolled votes

Absent votes from each voting centre will be reconciled and amalgamated by ward in the election office from Monday 26 October, then counted. Unenrolled votes, where accepted will also be counted after the checking of entitlement has been completed.

Count of postal votes admitted during extended period

Postal votes received up until the close of the postal vote receipt period that are to be included in the count will be counted to first preference and informal after 12 noon on Friday 30 October.

Manual Preference Distributions (preferential counts)

Where no candidate receives an absolute majority of first preference votes, a preference distribution must be conducted.

Prior to commencing a preference count, all first preference ballot papers must be fully rechecked for formality, correct sorting and counting. Rechecks will take place during the week following election day. They will be completed once the extended period closes and all ballot papers to be included in the count have been reconciled. It is anticipated that some preference distributions will commence during the afternoon of the close of the extended period with the remainder to take place on the Saturday following election day (31 October).

Results for manual preferential counts will be displayed on the VEC's website at the completion of first preference counts for each ward, then again if a preference distribution is required, at the end of the distribution.

Computer Counts (proportional representation)

For the 2020 attendance elections to be counted by computer, the VEC will batch ballot papers by voting centre-or parcel of votes - to enable reconciliation throughout the count process. Ballot papers within each parcel of votes will be batched into totals of 50s in preparation for data entry (a short batch may be required where the number of ballot papers for a particular parcel is not divisible by 50). Any obvious informal ballot papers are removed during this process, other informal ballot papers will be identified during data entry. Once batching has been completed, ballot paper batches will then be sealed and secured for transport to the computer count venue.

The VEC will establish the computer infrastructure required for the conduct of the computer counts at each of the identified computer count venues. Some venues may have the space and facilities to conduct simultaneous counts across multiple rooms.

The number of data entry operators required for each computer count site will be determined after nominations close. Data entry operators will be

supervised by trained computer count team leaders and a number of trained computer count supervisors for each count team at each venue.

The timetable for data entry of ballot papers for each election will be determined after the close of nominations when the number of candidates and uncontested elections is known.

It is anticipated that data entry will commence from Monday 26 October, at the earliest. It is expected that all computer counts will be completed by Friday 6 November, at the latest. Candidates and councils will be advised on the proposed counting timetable after the close of nominations.

An area will be established within the computer count venue to allow their Returning Officer to recheck all informal ballot papers. Ballot papers initially deemed to be informal - that are later confirmed as formal - will be returned for data entry to the same voting centre or parcel of votes.

Results will be calculated for each council at the completion of data entry for all wards in that council. Distribution reports that detail the count will be distributed as soon as possible after the completion of each result calculation. Results will be displayed on the VEC website as soon as possible after the completion of all counts for a particular council.

Recounts

At any time before a candidate has been declared elected, the Returning Officer may open any sealed parcel containing ballot papers and recount the ballot papers:

- if they think fit
- at the written request of a candidate specifying reason.

In making a decision to conduct a recount, the Returning Officer 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

5. Proposed election service package

- the accessibility of the counting process for scrutineers to properly perform their duties.

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

The Returning Officer's interpretation of what constitutes a close margin is informed by the VEC's historical experience at previous recounts. This has shown that limited variation occurs when comparing the final or critical recounted margin to the original count. In particular, the greatest variation in recounts conducted by the VEC since 2008, where counting has been performed by computer data entry, has been seven.

Declaration of the result

It is expected that VEC Returning Officers will complete all declarations by Friday 6 November. This is in line with the 2016 elections.

Following the completion of the VEC's electoral representation review program in April 2020, the VEC will be in a better position to provide councils with a broad estimate of their proposed counting plan. A more accurate estimate will be provided after the close of nominations when the dimensions of each count are known.

The VEC advises Returning Officers to allow a minimum of two hours between the completion of a manual count and the conduct of the declaration. For computerised PR counts, a minimum of two hours should be allowed between the completion of the count and the declaration for small counts, and a minimum of four hours for larger counts. This allows reasonable time for candidates to consider distribution reports and decide if they wish to request a recount. Returning Officers 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 Municipal Electoral Tribunal (MET).

Management of complaints

Complaint management is an important component of conducting an election. Many complainants consider that proving a breach of

the Act will lead to an election result being overturned by a Court process.

Complaints generally fall into two categories:

If the complaint relates to:

1. **the administration of the election** – the Electoral Commissioner will respond on behalf of the Returning Officer
2. **a possible breach of the Act** – investigation and response to these complaints is the responsibility of the Local Government Inspectorate. The VEC will refer the complaint directly to the Inspectorate for a response and copy the complainant of this action.

The VEC will provide specific information regarding the management of complaints in the candidate handbook. This will include the different responsibilities of the Returning Officer and the Local Government Inspectorate.

A high proportion of the complaints received during local government elections allege the distribution of misleading or unauthorised electoral material. A number of these are often escalated by complainants to the MET. Previous decisions by the MET have been dismissed as the courts have been specifically concerned with material likely to mislead or deceive voters in relation to the casting of the vote. This is a very narrow definition in comparison to what many candidates generally consider to be misleading.

The VEC will include further information in its candidate handbook and candidate information sessions, to help candidates better understand what is considered to be misleading under the Act.

Based on previous experience, the VEC expects up to 500 complaints to be received for the 2020 elections. It would be expected that of 500 complaints, about 100 will relate to alleged offences against the Act and in the main relate to authorisation of election material, and material that is considered to be misleading.

Election report and storage of material

The VEC will provide council with a report on the conduct of the elections within three months of election day as required by legislation.

After the declaration of election(s), Returning Officers will package all ballot papers together with all other materials used at the election in sealed security boxes. The boxes will be clearly labelled to indicate contents, the ward and the date of the election and will be returned to the VEC warehouse for secure storage.

Where computer counts have been conducted, this will include an encrypted USB of the ballot paper data to be kept secure until such time as it may be required for the conduct of a countback.

Management of MET inquiries and VCAT reviews

Section 45 of the Act allows a candidate, 10 persons entitled to vote at the election, or the Returning Officer/VEC to dispute the validity of a local council election through an application to the MET.

MET decisions are subject to review through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Following the 2016 local government elections, seven applications were lodged with the MET. Additionally, there were two applications for review by the VCAT and one with the Supreme Court.

The cost of the VEC's involvement in these inquiries was shared between the VEC and the particular council as a contingency cost under the electoral service agreement. Comprehensive reporting during the MET inquiry and in relation to the recovery of cost was provided to each council.

In developing its cost recovery model for MET inquiries, the VEC notes that not all cases impugn the VEC or the Returning Officer. Nevertheless, the VEC is named as a party to respond to an application. Where the VEC is not directly impugned, the VEC may request to be removed as the respondent and/or be invited by the MET to remain as an interested party to assist the proceeding. However, in all inquiries following the 2016 local government elections, the MET required

the VEC to continue to be a party to the application, even when the VEC was not directly associated with the claims made by the applicant.

The VEC will continue to recover costs associated with responding to a MET inquiry on a shared basis with the council involved. The VEC will not recover the cost if it is found by the MET to be at fault and may absorb a portion of the costs associated with responding to a MET inquiry where there is an opportunity for building electoral knowledge.

In circumstances where the VEC is involved in a MET hearing or VCAT review, the VEC will generally be represented by the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO). The VEC may engage outside counsel through the VGSO, or in addition to or instead of working with the VGSO.

Insurances

The VEC maintains sufficient insurance coverage relevant to all of its activities, including its conduct of local government elections.

Where a re-election is required as a result of an error or action by the VEC or Returning Officer, the VEC will meet the cost of the new election. In all other re-election circumstances, the VEC will liaise with its insurers and/or the relevant council in relation to the cost of the new election.

6. Compulsory voting enforcement

The Act requires the VEC to carry out compulsory voting enforcement for all councils at local government elections. 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 that allow it to manage non-voter follow through to, and including, prosecution. For councils in Victoria (except Melbourne City Council), it is only compulsory for voters on the EC list for an election to vote at that election.

List of non-voters

Regulation 120 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2016 details the requirements for the 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.

Enforcement process

The VEC is obliged to enforce the compulsory voting provisions of the Act at the 2020 local government elections. The VEC's enforcement program will involve three 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 VEC will commence its compulsory voting enforcement program in early January 2021. 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*. process is as follows:

Apparent Failure-to-vote Notice

The VEC will prepare and send an apparent failure-to-vote notice to all voters who appear to

have failed to vote and are not automatically exempt. The VEC anticipates being in a position to dispatch these notices in early February 2021.

Infringement Notice

The VEC will prepare and send an infringement notice to any apparent non-voter whose excuse is not deemed sufficient or who failed to reply to the apparent failure-to-vote notice. A penalty applies to this notice and will be collected on behalf of council.

During the processing of responses non-voters may provide detailed evidence for not voting, or they may seek a review of the infringement. If the VEC determines that the evidence provided is sufficient the infringement will be withdrawn. This would also be the case where a request for an internal review results in the withdrawal of the infringement. A 'Withdrawal of Infringement' letter must be mailed to each of these non-voters. 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 non-voters who have not paid the infringement penalty. The original penalty plus a penalty reminder notice fee applies to this notice and will be collected on behalf of council.

'Withdrawal of Infringement' letters 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 the courts

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

Costs will be incurred to take such action. These costs 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 to go to court proceed to court.

The VEC will also collate any outstanding infringements at the conclusion of non-voter follow-up for each council into a final court file and lodge the file with Fines Victoria for prosecution within the legislated deadlines.

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 2020-21).

Receipt of penalties

The VEC will receive and record all payments made in relation to compulsory voting enforcement on behalf of council. Council will be provided with the penalties received from 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.

7. Costs

The VEC is conscious of providing a cost-efficient election service to the local government sector and will work to minimise costs wherever possible.

Since 2016, inflationary pressures have increased some of the VEC's costs and this is taken into account as the VEC begins to prepare cost estimates for the 2020 local government elections. Significant unit price cost increases have occurred with:

- communication and advertising costs, particularly in relation to major daily newspapers and the shift to magazine layout for some local publications
- Australia Post postage rates
- rates of pay for senior election officials, and election staff, which are linked to rates in the Victorian Public Service enterprise agreement
- market rent for election office and early voting centre accommodation
- paper for the production of ballot material
- transport and logistics in relation to the movement and delivery of equipment and ballot material, particularly courier costs and freight
- travel costs, particularly in relation to the cost of fuel (reflected in the per kilometre mileage allowance rate).

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 contractors that are specifically employed for the local government election program.

The VEC does not recover salaries for core staff working on local government 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).

Contingency costs

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 is not possible to estimate the cost and provision for contingency services, which need to be factored into the electoral service agreement.

Examples of the contingency costs include responding to a MET inquiry (as discussed earlier in this election service plan) and the prosecution of non-voters through the Victorian court system including the Infringements and Magistrates' Courts where applicable. 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, extraction, counting, voting centre and early voting accommodation, where applicable).

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

Appendix 1:

Summary of initiatives and key changes

The following table summarises initiatives and key changes to the election services offered by the VEC at previous elections.

1. Ballot paper security

At the 2018 Victorian State election, the VEC implemented a number of further measures for security and management of a ballot paper throughout its lifecycle. The VEC is committed to implementing these measures across its entire election program, including local government elections.

2. Online Postal Vote Applications

The VEC has enhanced its online application for a Postal Vote to more fully automate the process. Applications lodged online will automatically be available within the Election Management system at the relevant attendance election office. Once each application is processed the applicant will be emailed a tracking number so that they can track the progress of their application via the VEC website.

3. Online enrolment for State electors

Under a joint roll arrangement, the State and the 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 help update the Victorian register of electors.

At the 2016 local government elections the VEC offered an online enrolment facility to allow State electors to enrol to vote and update their enrolment details through the VEC website. The VEC discontinued its online enrolment function in August 2017. The current links on the VEC's website to update an elector's details or enrol redirect to the Australian Electoral Commission website.

4. VoterAlert

For the 2020 local government elections, the VEC proposes to roll out a similar service to that provided at the 2018 State election and subsequent local government by-elections where State-enrolled voters will be reminded to check their enrolment details prior to the close of rolls, and then sent two voting reminders during the voting period. VoterAlert gives voters the ability to select whether they receive an SMS, an email or both SMS and email.

5. Computer count venues

The VEC will further refine its centralised computer count model as venues continue to become increasingly hard to source for local government elections.

Where a local computer count venue is unavailable and no affordable alternatives can be identified, the VEC will prepare a comprehensive contingency plan to establish centralised or local computer count venues. Centralised venues will be able to process data entry for a number of local council elections without compromising the timeline for getting a result.

The VEC will look to provide computer count services within election offices for some councils therefore limiting ballot paper movement.

Appendix 2: Election Timelines

Attendance election timeline

Council primary enrolment data	JUL 13	MON	(Date fixed by Registrar)
Public Notice of Entitlement Date (Published during this period)	AUG 8	SAT	
	AUG 14	FRI	
Entitlement Date	AUG 28	FRI	4.00 pm; 57 days before Election Day
Publication of Election Notice (Published during this period)	AUG 31	MON	
	SEP 5	SAT	
Opening of election office	SEP 16	WED	
Certification of voters' roll Opening of nominations	SEP 17	THU	
Nomination Day	SEP 22	TUE	Nominations close at 12 noon Ballot draw to follow
Commence postal and early voting Registration period for how-to-vote cards opens Lodgement of candidate questionnaires	SEP 23	WED	Candidate questionnaires close at 12 noon
Mail-out for <i>EasyVote</i> letter and uncontested election leaflets	SEP 24	THU	
	SEP 25	FRI	(AFL Grand Final public holiday)
Last day for registering how-to-vote cards	OCT 16	FRI	How-to-vote card registration closes at 12 noon
Close of postal voting application	OCT 22	THU	Postal voting applications close at 12 noon
Close of early voting	OCT 23	FRI	Early voting closes at 6.00 pm
ELECTION DAY	OCT 24	SAT	Voting closes at 6.00 pm
Postal vote receipt period	OCT 26	MON	
	OCT 30	FRI	Postal vote receipt closes at 12 noon
	NOV 3	TUE	(Melbourne Cup Day public holiday for parts of Victoria)

All elections to be declared by Friday 6 November.

Postal election timeline

Council primary enrolment data	JUL 13	MON	(Date fixed by Registrar)
Public notice of Entitlement Date (Published during this period)	AUG 8	SAT	
	AUG 14	FRI	
Entitlement Date	AUG 28	FRI	4.00 pm; 57 days before Election Day
Publication of Election Notice (Published during this period)	AUG 31	MON	
	SEP 5	SAT	
Opening of election office	SEP 16	WED	
Certification of voters' roll Opening of nominations	SEP 17	THU	
Nomination Day	SEP 22	TUE	Nominations close at 12 noon Ballot draw to follow
Lodgement of candidate statements, photographs and questionnaires	SEP 23	WED	Candidate statements, photos and questionnaires close at 12 noon
	SEP 25	FRI	(AFL Grand Final public holiday)
Mail-out of ballot packs/ Uncontested ward leaflets	OCT 6	TUE	
	OCT 7	WED	
	OCT 8	THU	
CLOSE OF VOTING	OCT 23	FRI	Voting closes at 6.00 pm
Election Day	OCT 24	SAT	
Postal vote receipt period	OCT 26	MON	
	OCT 30	FRI	Postal vote receipt closes at 12 noon
	NOV 3	TUE	(Melbourne Cup Day public holiday for parts of Victoria)

All elections to be declared by Friday 6 November.

Appendix 3:

Key dates for voters' roll production in 2020

- Green shaded items are council actions.

Note that the VEC expects date of birth on at least 90% of council CEO list records.

Task	Key Dates
Any council software changes in place	Monday 3 February 2020
Preliminary EC lists to councils (except councils with boundary changes)	Late February 2020
■ Preliminary CEO list to VEC (except councils with boundary changes)	Tuesday 3 March – Friday 1 May 2020
■ Ward boundary changes implemented for councils with boundary changes. Followed by EC list to council and CEO list to VEC	Friday 24 April 2020
Preliminary feedback for council action	April – June 2020
■ Council uses feedback to correct database* (remove deceased and duplicate records, correct invalid data)	Before Monday 13 July 2020
■ Council mails renewal forms to all applicants on 2016 roll (Section 23A(1) of the Local Government Act 1989)	Before Monday 13 July 2020
■ Date for primary council enrolment data (CEO list) to VEC*	By 5pm, Monday 13 July 2020
Entitlement day	Friday 28 August (4pm) 2020
NOTE; Changes to the roll from the date for primary enrolment data (13 July) until entitlement date (28 August) must be applied before certification. These will be calculated by the VEC from two full roll extracts (primary enrolment and certification) provided by councils in identical format.	
■ Certification CEO list to VEC. CEO list as at 4pm Friday 28 August.	By 5pm Monday 31 August 2020
Roll certification and nominations open	Thursday 17 September 2020
Election day	Saturday 24 October 2020
■ *It is expected that council CEO list data at the primary enrolment data point will be accurate to the extent that no more than 10% of council records will need to be removed during roll processing.	

Appendix 4:

Victoria's municipalities and electoral structures

The estimate of voters for each council is based on anticipated voters as at January 2018.

- The VEC has recently completed an electoral representation review of this local council. If approved, the recommended number of councillors and electoral structure (shown) will take effect at the 2020 local government elections.
- An electoral representation review of this local council was underway or pending at the time of printing this plan. The electoral representation review program will be completed by 24 April 2020.

Local Council	Area (km2)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
Alpine	4,787	11,929	7	Unsubdivided
■ Ararat	4,230	9,311	7	Unsubdivided
Ballarat	740	84,783	9	3 x three-councillor wards
■ Bangule	63	99,158	9	9 x single-councillor wards
Bass Coast	864	46,280	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Baw Baw	4,031	42,184	9	3 x three-councillor wards
■ Bayside	36	78,937	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
■ Benalla	2,375	12,131	7	Unsubdivided
■ Boroondara	60	133,357	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
Brimbank	123	135,931	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
■ Buloke	8,004	5,807	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
■ Campaspe	4,519	31,345	9	2 x three-councillor wards 3 x single-councillor wards
■ Cardinia	1,281	82,303	9	1 x four-councillor ward 1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward
■ Casey	407	223,917	11	5 x two-councillor wards 1 x single-councillor ward
Central Goldfields	1,534	11,446	7	1 x four-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
■ Colac Otway	3,433	20,750	7	1 x single-councillor ward 2 x three-councillor wards

Local Council	Area (km ²)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
Corangamite	4,407	13,584	7	1 x three-councillor ward 4 x single-councillor wards
Darebin	54	117,261	9	3 x three-councillor wards
East Gippsland	20,931	43,123	9	1 x four-councillor ward 1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward
Frankston	131	109,662	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Gannawarra	3,732	9,044	7	1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward 2 x single-councillor wards
Glen Eira	38	106,440	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Glenelg	6,212	17,570	7	Unsubdivided
Golden Plains	2,704	18,567	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor ward
Greater Bendigo	3,048	91,665	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Greater Dandenong	130	101,846	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
Greater Geelong	1,247	200,616	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
Greater Shepparton	2,422	46,359	9	Unsubdivided
Hepburn	1,470	15,693	7	2 x two-councillor wards 3 x single-councillor wards
Hindmarsh	7,527	4,913	6	3 x two-councillor wards
Hobsons Bay	65	69,683	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
Horsham	4,249	16,454	7	Unsubdivided
Hume	503	144,959	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Indigo	2,044	13,725	7	Unsubdivided
Kingston	91	122,333	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Knox	114	118,678	9	9 x single-councillor wards
Latrobe	1,426	58,849	9	1 x four-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards 1 x single-councillor ward
Loddon	6,694	7,651	5	5 x single-councillor wards
Macedon Ranges	1,747	38,413	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Manningham	114	89,624	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Mansfield	3,843	10,971	5	1 x two-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards

Local Council	Area (km ²)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
Maribyrnong	31	65,202	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
Maroondah	61	87,817	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Melbourne	36	119,595	11	Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor directly elected as a leadership team by the voters at-large Unsubdivided
Melton	527	99,690	9	1 x four-councillor ward 1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward
Mildura	22,330	41,305	9	Unsubdivided
Mitchell	2,864	35,965	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Moira	4,045	25,086	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Monash	81	123,695	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
Moonee Valley	44	94,682	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Moorabool	2,110	27,856	7	1 x four-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
Moreland	51	132,790	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Mornington Peninsula	723	161,497	11	2 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
Mount Alexander	1,529	16,826	7	1 x three-councillor ward 4 x single-councillor wards
Moyne	5,478	14,424	7	Unsubdivided
Murrindindi	3,889	14,685	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
Nillumbik	435	48,969	7	7 x single-councillor wards
Northern Grampians	5,918	11,055	7	1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward 2 x single-councillor wards
Port Phillip	20	93,106	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Pyrenees	3,433	7,497	5	5 x single-councillor wards
Borough of Queenscliffe	11	4,400	5	Unsubdivided
South Gippsland ¹	3,305	29,505	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Southern Grampians	6,652	13,436	7	Unsubdivided
Stonnington	25	93,754	9	3 x three-councillor wards

¹ South Gippsland Shire Council general election has been postponed to October 2021.

Local Council	Area (km2)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
Strathbogie	3,302	10,182	7	2 x two-councillor wards 3 x single-councillor wards
Surf Coast	1,560	34,547	9	1 x four-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards 1 x single-councillor ward
Swan Hill	6,117	14,915	7	Unsubdivided
Towong	6,673	5,525	5	Unsubdivided
Wangaratta	3,639	23,168	7	1 x four-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
Warrnambool	120	27,497	7	Unsubdivided
Wellington	10,989	43,171	9	3 x three-councillor wards
West Wimmera	9,107	3,824	5	Unsubdivided
Whitehorse	64	117,705	11	4 x two-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Whittlesea	489	154,183	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Wodonga	433	32,230	7	Unsubdivided
Wyndham	541	151,786	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
Yarra	20	81,669	9	3 x three-councillor wards
Yarra Ranges	2,447	118,812	9	9 single-councillor wards
Yarriambiack	7,158	6,024	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards

Appendix 5:

Volumes in 2016

The following table provides the volume of voters, votes and resources required or produced for the 2016 local government elections based on 78 Councils.

	Postal	City of Melbourne	Attendance	Total
Elections	71	1	6	78
Total voters				4,428,810
Total EC voters	3,222,889	54,791	523,275	3,800,955
Total CEO voters	46,0826	79,010	88,019	627,855
Number of elections	195	2	25	222
Number of vacancies	570	10	56	636
Uncontested elections	33	-	5	38
Candidates	1,870	50	205	2,125
Online completion of nom form*				1,590
Candidate statements	525	27	N/A	552
Online completion of candidate statement	1,328	29	N/A	1,357
Candidate questionnaires	1,077	30	94	1,201
Online completion of candidate questionnaire	676	20	65	761
EasyVote letters (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	551,329	551,329
Uncontested leaflets	84,410	-	78,323	162,733
Fully uncontested Councils – newspaper notices	2	N/A	N/A	2
HTVCs registered (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	438	438
Voting centres (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	122	122
Early voting centres (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	13	13
Number of postal votes (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	49,785	49,785
Number of early votes (attendance only)	N/A	N/A	84,652	84,652
Ballot packs (standard)	3,683,908	134,337	N/A	3,818,245

Appendices

Ballot packs (Braille)	26	3	8	37
Ballot packs (large print)	96	2	10	108
PR counts	139	1	13	153
Preferential counts (computer)		1		1
Preferential counts (manual)	55		13	68
Apparent failure to vote notices*				598,913
Complaints	434	22	59	489
Stand-alone election offices	71	1	6	78
Phone enquiries – election office	6,8965	3,534	17,665	90,164
Phone enquiries – overflow service	16,636	1,083	5,073	22,792
Recounts	1			1

*Split across these categories is not available

Appendix 6:

Format for the supply of CEO voters list

Data you provide to the VEC must be clearly labelled and accompanied by a Council Data Information sheet, so that the VEC has the information needed to read and process the council data. If your system produces these details automatically, there is no need to transcribe the information, just include the output with your data file. Please supply the record layout for the data if different to the standard format.

Please do not send unidentified files as the resultant delays could jeopardise Municipal Voters Roll production.

The format on the next page is a guide to the required data. The VEC can cope with different data formats and would rather do this than lose any data. Standard formats have been established for each software supplier, to which councils are expected to adhere.

- The most important principle in extracting the CEO list is that no information is lost in the export process. Provide the fields as you store them in preference to truncating or concatenating fields to fit the following format. The VEC would rather deal with a different format than with missing data.
- Please do NOT open an extracted file in Excel or Access before sending it to us; both are liable to corrupt data in quite complex ways which can be very difficult to detect. Make a copy of the file if you want to do any checking but send us the untouched original file.
- No data should be truncated.
- A delimited file is preferred, using the pipe symbol | or TAB rather than comma (commas can appear in data fields). Records may also be fixed-length and fixed-format.
- Variations to this format may be negotiated, as long as all the necessary fields are provided in full.
- Separate ward files are not required; it is preferable that only one file is provided with the ward code on each record.
- A voter should not appear more than once, however many properties they own.
- All data provided to the VEC should be uploaded to DEx, the VEC's secure data server. This secure data server conforms to current security standards. The server is optimised for large data sets and will eliminate delays caused by email security filters and reduce the risk of a privacy breach. If you have any questions about DEx, please contact the VEC's Enrolment Capability Team.

FIELDS REQUIRED (mandatory fields are marked *, others may be blank)

Field	Comments	
Municipality ID *	Mandatory 3-character text field e.g. 522 allocated by the VEC.	
Ward ID *	Mandatory 2-character text field e.g. 03.	
Person ID *	From Council system. To facilitate feedback to council and allow efficient processing of "Update Files"	
Surname *	e.g. van der Walt	
Given Names *	e.g. Paul Andrew William	
Gender	M or F or leave blank	
Birth Date	Date format DD/MM/YYYY Councils should have DOB on at least 90% of records	
Property ID *	From Council system. To facilitate feedback to council and allow efficient processing of "Update Files"	
Capital Improved Value *	Numeric – whole \$ value (no commas). DO NOT include comma separators. 0 if not rated. To allow decisions on duplicates.	
Property Name	Where a property requires more than the street address to identify it, for example a caravan park, hospital name or a country property. E.g. Kadina Caravan Park, Bellbird Hospital, Killara, Westfield Retirement Village	
Address Number	Unit 4 or Flat 18 or RMB 7654 etc	
Street Number		237A
Street Name		Oxford or address string if separate fields are not available Unit 4/237A Oxford St
Street Type		Street
Place Name *		Mandatory – no parish names
Post Code	TEXT field, not numeric	
Contact Address Line1	Used for mailing ballot papers and voter cards as well as for duplicate matching Where 3 addresses are stored, Residential Address is more useful in these fields than Contact Address	
Contact Address Line2		
Contact Address Line3		
Contact Address Line4		
Contact Address Line5		
Nominated property	Y/N Flag - indicates owner wants voting entitlement based on this property	
Silent *	Y/N Flag - indicates council has accepted request for address not to be shown on roll. Addresses must still be provided for matching purposes.	
VICMAP identifier	Use Property_PFI from Land Victoria's Physical Data Model - Vicmap Property (Standard) or leave blank if not available	
Voter Status Code *	Indicates legislative basis for this voting entitlement (single character – see below)	
Change type *	L for CEO List.	

A more detailed explanation of these fields appears on the following two pages.

Municipality ID	The ID allocated by the Victorian Electoral Commission for this municipality/local council.
Ward ID	The ID allocated to the ward in which this voter is entitled to vote. (The Municipality ID and Ward ID together comprise the 5 digit 'LGA Id', which uniquely identifies the ward within the state.)
Person ID	From Council system. To facilitate feedback to council, duplicate identification and efficient processing of "Update" files.
Surname Given Names	Surname and Given Names should be provided separately, so names can be appropriately presented for mailouts and on the scannable roll.
Gender	M or F or blank if unknown. Do not use U for unknown.
Birth Date	Date format DD/MM/YYYY Leave blank if not available. Council should have date of birth on at least 80% of their records.

The following address fields make up the ENTITLEMENT ADDRESS, the basis on which the voter is included on the Roll.

Property ID	From Council system. To facilitate feedback to council, duplicate identification and efficient processing of "Update" files.	
Capital Improved Value	Numeric – whole \$ value only. DO NOT include comma separators. 0 if not rated. Facilitates decisions on duplicates.	
Property Name	Where a property requires more than the street address to identify it, for example a caravan park, hospital name or a country property.	
Address Number		Unit 4 or Flat 18 or RMB 7654 etc
Street Number		237 or address string, if separate fields are not available
Street Name		Oxford e.g. Unit 4/237 Oxford St or RMB 1419 Western Highway
Street Type		Street Include flat/lot/RMB details
Place Name	The name of the City/Suburb/Town/Locality. These should be gazetted place names; parish names are NOT acceptable.	
Post Code	The Postcode of the Entitlement Address. Postcodes should always be treated as text.	

The next set of address lines relate to the contact address. This must be different from the entitlement address or the record should be omitted as a resident owner (except applicants).

If you store the contact address as one free format field, please supply it in the same way regardless of size, do not split it into fields and do not truncate it.

This is the address used for mailing voter cards, information brochures and ballot papers. If your system stores Residential Address as well as Contact Address, extract the Residential Address for preference as this will give better matching in the duplicate identification process and is generally more satisfactory for mailing ballot papers. Real estate agent addresses are highly undesirable as ballot papers should not fall into the wrong hands.

Contact Address Line1

Contact Address Line2

Contact Address Line3

Contact Address Line4

Contact Address Line5 Postcodes should always be treated as text to prevent errors such as Northern Territory postcodes appearing as 827 instead of 0827

Nominated Property Y/N Flag - Y indicates that this multiple property owner wants their voting entitlement based on this property rather than others they own.

Silent Y/N Flag indicates council has accepted request for address not to be shown on roll. Addresses must still be provided for matching purposes.

VICMAP identifier Use Property_PFI from Land Victoria’s Physical Data Model - Vicmap Property (Standard) or leave blank if not available. This field will assist with Representation Reviews in the future.

Voter Status Code This field should contain the code used by the council to indicate the voter’s category of entitlement, i.e. Non-resident owner, company appointee etc. A list of the council codes used and their descriptions must be provided on the Council Data Information Sheet, otherwise we have to guess which of the following codes your voters belong to.

Council codes will be standardised by conversion to one of the following to be displayed on the printed roll:

- N** - Non Resident Owner - automatic entitlement
- A** - Resident Owner (not on EC list) application
- P** - Occupier ratepayer application
- O** - Corporation (owner) application (does not expire)
- T** - Corporation (occupier) application

Change Type L for CEO list.

The Council Data Information Sheet on the following page should be provided every time you send data to the Victorian Electoral Commission. Record counts and Voter Status Codes enable us to verify that we have correctly read the data. Ward numbers and names are needed to check the mapping we use.

2020 Council Data Information Sheet

Please upload all data to dex.vec.vic.gov.au and email this form to CEOList@vec.vic.gov.au

Name of the municipality

Contact **Phone No**

Software Used

What software is used to run the database that this data was extracted from? Please supply the record layout for the data if different to the standard format.

.....

Ward Names

We need to check that we are using the correct ward names for each ward identifier in your file.

Ward ID	Ward name

Voter Count

Number of voters in file	
--------------------------	--

Voter Status Code Information

This is the code you use to identify the different legislative categories of entitlement to be on your Roll

Standardised Voter Status Code	Your Council Voter Status Code (if different)
N Non Resident Owner - automatic entitlement	
A Resident Owner (not on EC list) application	
P Occupier ratepayer application	
O Corporation (owner) application	
T Corporation (occupier) application	

Appendix 7:

Community languages

The VEC currently provides translated information and operates dedicated interpreter telephone lines in the community languages listed below (plus one for 'all other languages'). This is to ensure that the VEC meets the community language requirements of councils that select the multi-language voting instructions leaflet for inclusion in the ballot pack, or for use at attendance voting centres.

Language	Telephone	Language description
Amharic	9209 0190	- African language
Arabic	9209 0100	
Bosnian	9209 0191	
Chinese	9209 0101	- Cantonese
Chinese	9209 0106	- Mandarin
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	9209 0108	- African language
Spanish	9209 0109	
Turkish	9209 0110	
Vietnamese	9209 0111	
All other non-English languages	9209 0112	

Appendix 8:

Communication plan

Communication and education services and products provided to council.

Advertising and publicity

Statutory advertising campaign

- Development of advertisements for all election phases – notice of entitlement, notice of election, voting details and declaration of results
- Placement and monitoring of all advertisements created.

Statewide advertising campaign

- Development of statewide advertising campaign
- Placement and monitoring of statewide advertising campaign in English and multi-language media
- VoterAlert
- Voting Reminder advertisement – creation and placement

Publicity

- Media releases developed to accompany each phase of the advertising campaign
- Handling all media enquiries regarding election activities
- Proofing of council's election-related information for newsletters, websites (created by council)

Public enquiries

- Handling all public enquiries
- Provision of an overflow call centre
- Provision of translated election material and interpreter service

- Responding to all email enquiries
- Website information

Accessibility

- Availability of Braille/large print ballot papers
- Mailout to Vision Australia/Blind Citizens Australia database re availability of above
- Provision of National Relay Service for hearing impaired electors
- Free ReadSpeaker software to read webpages via the VEC website
- Translated information published to the VEC website

Education

- School and community group education sessions (face-to-face)
- Enrolment sessions in homelessness agencies, prisons and Aboriginal community services.
- Distribution of tailored community sector election information kits
- Email blasts to community sector groups – particularly for traditionally underrepresented groups in the electoral process i.e. disability, homeless, young people, CALD, Aboriginal
- Special voting services within homelessness agencies

Products

- EasyVote letter
- Uncontested leaflet
- Multi-language voting instruction leaflet (for metro councils – postal, optional)
- Reference information and election office contact details for council staff
- Easy English Guide to Council Elections publication – no cost to council

Appendix 9:

Community engagement and education

Community engagement and education program

Education and information sessions

Face-to-face electoral education sessions provided to target groups traditionally under-represented in the electoral process. Participants will be encouraged to enrol and vote. The focus of education sessions will be the importance of voting in the local government elections, the election method (e.g. postal or attendance) with an emphasis on how to vote correctly. Particular emphasis will be placed on areas with higher unintentional informality and low voter turnout.

Enrolment and voting outreach

Special enrolment and voting support sessions will be conducted in homelessness agencies, prisons and within Aboriginal community services.

Information kit

Tailored Community Sector Information Kits to be distributed to community-based organisations who work with groups traditionally under-represented in the electoral process. The kit will contain resources and services tailored to particular communities to support their enrolment and voting in the local government elections. The kit will include an Easy-English version.

Passport to Democracy resources

As part of the Passport to Democracy program, resources will be produced that aim to increase students understanding of the local government, in particular how students can take action on local community issues. Election specific activities such as special information sessions and special voting services in homelessness agencies, an email newsletter for the community sector and briefing sessions will be offered to Statewide networks relating to target audiences.

Youth Engagement Pilot

A pilot youth engagement project to increase awareness of the value and importance of voting in local government elections in areas with higher proportion of young people. Project to utilise a co-design process so young people are engaged with piloting new strategies and solutions to the engagement of young people in local government elections.

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December 2019.

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