



REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION

Discussion Paper

May 2020

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Background

In accordance with Schedule 2.2(6) of the *Local Government Act 1995* the Shire of Dowerin has resolved to undertake a review of its system of representation (May 2020 CMRef 0198).

The purpose of the review is to assess whether eight councillors and a no wards structure is still an appropriate situation for the Shire.

Council last reviewed its representation in 2016 and resolved to dissolve all wards and retain eight councillors (December 2016 Item 10.1.3).

This Discussion Paper has been developed to assist the community in considering options and ideas as well as clarifying factors that will form part of the review. It is not intended to be prescriptive nor is it exhaustive. The community may consider these options and comment on them or may have alternative options that it feels should be considered by Council.

All submissions will be presented to Council to inform and assist it in its decision-making.

Current Situation

The electoral roll for the 2019 ordinary election shows the Shire of Dowerin has 8 Councillors and 495 Electors, being a Councillor/Elector ratio of 1 Councillor to each 62 Electors. The Shire does not currently have any wards.

Factors to be Considered

Several factors will be considered as part of the review and will include:

1. The advantages and disadvantages of reducing the number of councillors;
2. The advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a no ward structure;
3. The implications of any change to the councillor/elector ratio; and
4. The cost of councillors.

Options to Consider

Council will consider the following scenarios and members of the community may suggest others:

1. Maintain the current system of representation with 8 councillors and no wards.
2. Reduce the number of councillors to 7 and no wards.

The options of each scenario will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Community of interests;
2. Physical and topographic features;

3. Demographic;
4. Economic factors; and
5. Ratio of councillors to electors.

The Local Government Advisory Board offers the following interpretation of these factors.

1. Community of interests

The term “community of interests” has a number of elements. These include a sense of community identity and belonging, similarities in the characteristics of the residents of a community and similarities in the economic activities. It can also include dependence on shared facilities in an area as reflected in catchment areas of local schools and sporting teams or the circulation areas of the local newspaper.

Neighbourhoods are important units in the physical, historical and social infrastructure and often generate a feeling of community and belonging.

2. Physical and topographic features

These may be natural or man-made features that will vary from area to area. Water features, such as water courses and catchment boundaries, may be relevant considerations. The farmland, parks and reserves may be relevant, as may other man-made features, such as the rail line and other major and minor roads.

3. Demographic trends

Several measurements of the characteristics of human population size and its distribution by age, sex, occupation and location provide important demographic information. Current and projected characteristics will be relevant, as well as similarities and differences between areas within the Shire.

4. Economic factors

Economic factors can be broadly interpreted to include any factor that reflects the character of economic activities and resources in the area. This may include the industries that occur in an area (or the release of land for these) and the distribution of community assets and infrastructure such as road networks.

5. Ratio of elected members to electors in the various wards

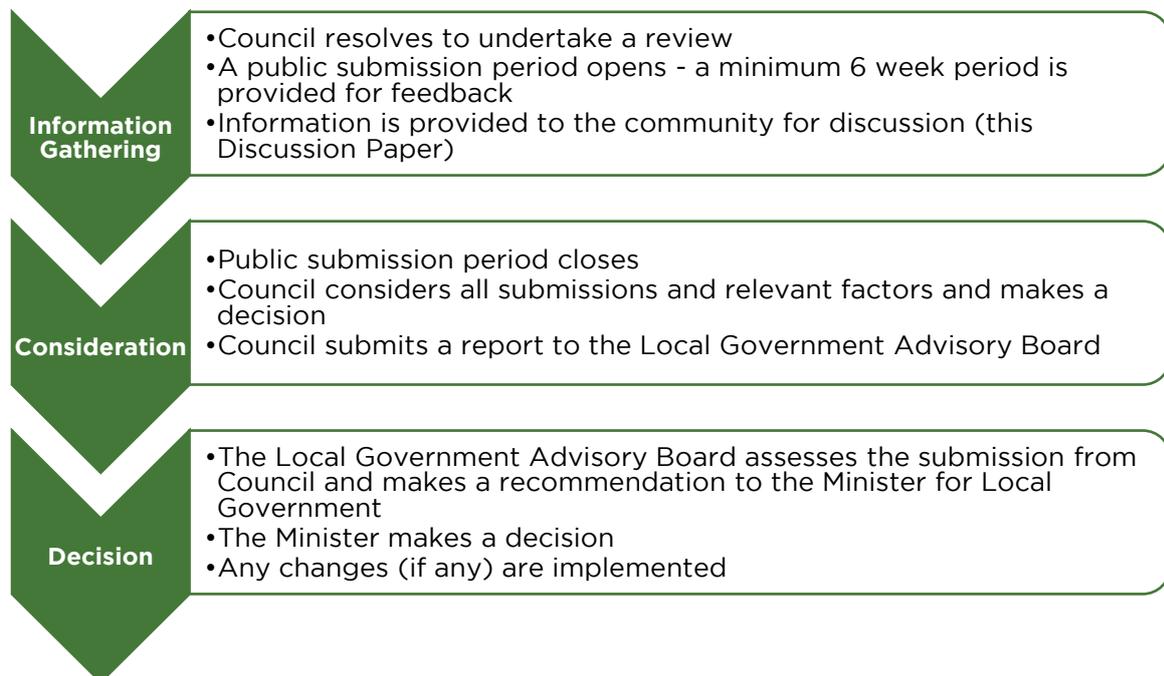
It is expected that each local government will have similar ratios of electors to elected members across its municipality. The Advisory Board stipulates the importance of keeping the councillor/elector ratio preferably within plus or minus 10%.

Finding the Best Option

The options above are only two possible options from a range of diverse alternatives which may be plausible. This Discussion Paper is intended only to stimulate thought and discussion. It is not intended to be prescriptive. In considering the best option, Council will consider submissions from the community about the options they feel will provide the best outcome for Dowerin and will assess those options against the factors listed above.

Review Process

The review process must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995*. This involves a number of steps:



Any changes, if approved by the Minister, are expected to be in place for the next ordinary election in October 2021.

More details about the Local Government Advisory Board, and its roles and processes is available [Via their Website](#).

Timeline

The following timeline is proposed in respect to the review:

Date	Action
19 May 2020	Council meeting - Council decision to undertake a review
29 May 2020	Public notice period commences inviting submissions - 6 week minimum statutory advertising

13 July 2020	Public notice period finishes - Officers assess public submissions and prepare report and recommendation for Council
21 July 2020	Council meeting - Council to resolve preferred representation option for forwarding to the Local Government Advisory Board

Reducing the Number of Councillors

The advantages of a reduction in the number of councillors may include:

1. The decision making process may be more effective and efficient if the number of councillors is reduced. It is more timely to ascertain the views of a fewer number of people and decision making may be easier. There is also more scope for team spirit and cooperation amongst a smaller number of people.
2. The cost of maintaining councillors is likely to be reduced.
3. The increase in the ratio of councillors to electors is unlikely to be significant.
4. Consultation with the community can be achieved through a variety of means in addition to individuals and groups contacting their local councillor.
5. A reduction in the number of councillors may result in an increased commitment from those elected reflected in greater interest and participation in Council's affairs.
6. Fewer councillors are more readily identifiable to the community.
7. Fewer positions on Council may lead to greater interest in elections with contested elections and those elected obtaining a greater level of support from the community.
8. There is a State-wide trend for reductions in the number of councillors and many local governments have found that fewer councillors works well.

The disadvantages of a reduction in the number of councillors may include:

1. A smaller number of councillors may result in an increased workload and may lessen effectiveness. A demanding role may discourage others from nominating for Council.
2. There is the potential for dominance in the Council by a particular interest group.
3. A reduction in the number of councillors may limit the diversity of interests around the Council table.
4. Opportunities for community participation in Council's affairs may be reduced if there are fewer councillors for the community to contact.
5. An increase in the ratio of councillors to electors may place too many demands on councillors.

Maintaining a No Ward Structure

The advantages of maintaining a no ward structure:

1. Councillors are elected by all electors of the district and not just one section of the district.
2. Members of the community are able to approach all councillors without the perceived barrier of having to approach a ward councillor.
3. Each councillor represents the whole district and not a specific ward.
4. Social networks and communities of interests are often spread across the district.

The disadvantages of maintaining a no ward structure

1. Some electors may feel that their locality is not appropriately represented.
2. May lead to a “us” (town) and “them” (rural) mentality, with decisions not made in the best interest of the whole Shire.
3. There is potential for an interest group to dominate Council.
4. Councillors may feel overwhelmed by having to represent all electors and may not have the time or opportunity to understand and represent all the issues.

Cost of Councillors

The financial costs can be assessed generally by reference to Council’s current Budget. Items which are considered to be variable on the number of councillors include (not including Allowance costs relating to the Shire President and Deputy Shire President):

Items	\$ per Councillor Annually
Meeting Allowance	3,125
Conferences and Training	1,125
Travel and Accommodation Expenses	250
Information Technology	213
Refreshments and Receptions	938
Corporate Apparel	100
Stationary and Badges	125
TOTAL	\$5,876

There are other expenses which cannot be accurately determined such as staff support, business papers etc.

Based on the above table, the estimated total annual cost for 8 councillors is \$47,000.

If the number of councillors was reduced to 7, using the above table as a guide, the total annual cost for 7 councillors would be approximately \$41,000.

Implications of any Change to the Councillor/Elector Ratio

The following tables presents statistics of both neighbouring local governments and local governments with a similar number of electors to the Shire of Dowerin.

Local Government	Number of Electors	Number of Councillors	Ratio	Wards
Dowerin	495	8	62:1	No
Cunderdin	848	8	106:1	No
Dumbleyung	467	8	58:1	Yes (3)
Goomalling	701	7	100:1	No
Koorda	267	7	38:1	No
Morawa	402	7	57:1	No
Mt Marshall	431	7	62:1	No
Narembeen	536	8	67:1	No
Tammin	244	6	40:1	No
Wongan-Ballidu	1,010	6	168:1	No
Wyalkatchem	352	6	59:1	No

Public Submissions

Members of the community are invited to make written submissions about any aspect of this Review of Representation. Submissions must be received by no later than 4.00pm on Monday 13 July 2020.

Submissions are to be in writing and can be made via the feedback form included in this Discussion Paper. Alternatively, submissions can be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and be:

Emailed (preferred) to: vgreen@dowerin.wa.gov.au
 Hand Delivered to: 13 Cottrell Street, Dowerin
 Posted to: PO Box 111, Dowerin WA 6461

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this review. Council welcomes your comments on any matters that may assist it to make informed and responsible decisions for the benefit of our community.

Darrel Hudson
Shire President

Rebecca McCall
Chief Executive Officer

Feedback Form

1. What do you think is the ideal number of councillors for the Shire of Dowerin?

Eight Other Please specify _____
 Seven

Comments:

2. Is your preference for the Shire of Dowerin to have no wards?

Yes
 No

Comments:

3. If you do have a preference for the Shire of Dowerin to have wards, do you have suggestions for the names of the wards, the numbers of wards and the area(s) they should represent?

Number

Names

Area(s)

Comments:

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