



# REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION

Discussion Paper  
October 2022

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## Background

Every local government is required to conduct a review of its representation every eight years in accordance with Schedule 2.2 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Council last reviewed its representation in 2020 and after consideration of public submissions resolved to retain eight councillors (August 2020 Item 11.7 CMRef 0198).

The previous review in 2016 Council resolved to dissolve all wards and retain eight councillors (December 2016 Item 10.1.3 CMRef 2721).

In July 2022, the Minister of Local Government announced the final package of proposed local government reforms. As part of the reforms to strengthen local democracy and increase community engagement, new requirements will be introduced to provide for:

- the introduction of optional preferential voting;
- directly elected mayors or presidents;
- councillor numbers based on population; and
- the removal of wards.

Many of the reform proposals related to council representation are based on recent trends and are intended to provide greater consistency between districts. Accordingly, for more than half of all local governments, the reforms will not require any specific change to the size or structure of the council.

However, the reform proposals do require some local governments to:

- reduce the number of elected members on council in accordance with population thresholds;
- change from a council elected mayor or president to a directly elected mayor or president (this reform only affects band 1 and 2 local governments); or
- abolish wards (for band 3 and 4 local governments with wards); or
- implement more than one of the above.

The Amendment Act will also provide the optional preferential voting will apply for all local government elections. Optional preferential voting means that all electors have the choice to number for as many or as few candidates as they wish.

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) has identified that the Shire of Dowerin may need to reduce the number of council members under the proposed reforms.

The Act already provides that local governments may initiate proposals to change the size or structure of the council. Accordingly, DLGSC has advised of two pathways the Shire of Dowerin (the Shire) may consider for making these election transition arrangements.

### **Voluntary Pathway**

The Shire may formulate a plan to implement these changes on a voluntary basis. This pathway will require the Shire to make the steps outlined below and could involve staging any larger changes in the number of councillors over two ordinary elections. This pathway provides the Shire with the greatest possible lead time to plan for next year's ordinary election.

If the Shire wish to undertake this process, the Shire should, by 28 October 2022:

- Advise the DLGSC of the Shire's intention to undertake a voluntary process. This advice should include a high-level plan outlining the potential changes to be implemented for the ordinary elections to be held on 2023 (and in 2025, if applicable); and
- Initiate a Representation Review to determine the specific changes to the structure of the council for the 2023 and 2025 ordinary elections, to be completed by 14 February 2023.

## Reform Election Pathway

Alternatively, it is intended that the Amendment Act will provide for all changes to be implemented through reform elections in 2023. This pathway would provide that all of the Shire's council offices can be declared vacant, and existing wards can be abolished, and the number of council offices would be set based on the reform proposals.

Elections would then be held to fill all council offices, with a split between two and four year terms as might be necessary to re-establish an ordinary election cycle.

The Shire may specifically decide to follow the Reform Election Pathway.

It is also intended that the Amendment Act will contain provisions for the Reform Election Pathway to apply if the Shire:

- does not advise of the intention to follow the Voluntary Pathway; or
- decides to follow the Voluntary Pathway but does not suitably complete a Representation Review by the dates outlined.

The following steps will need to occur to allow all required local governments to meet the 30 June 2023 timeframe of publication in the Government Gazette of any proposed ward or representation review changes, ahead of the October 2023 local government elections.

All local governments should aim to have their completed reviews submitted to the Local Government Advisory Board by no later than 14 February 2023.

The proposed Act Amendment proposes based on a population of up to 5,000 to reduce number of councillors representation to a maximum of 5,6 or 7.

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 2021 ordinary election shows the Shire of Dowerin has 8 Councillors and 466 Electors, being a Councillor/Elector ratio of 1 Councillor to each 58 Electors.

## 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 implications of any change to the councillor/elector ratio; and
3. The cost of councillors.

## Options to Consider

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

1. Reduce the number of councillors to 7.
2. Reduce the number of councillors to 6.

3. Reduce the number of councillors to 5.

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**

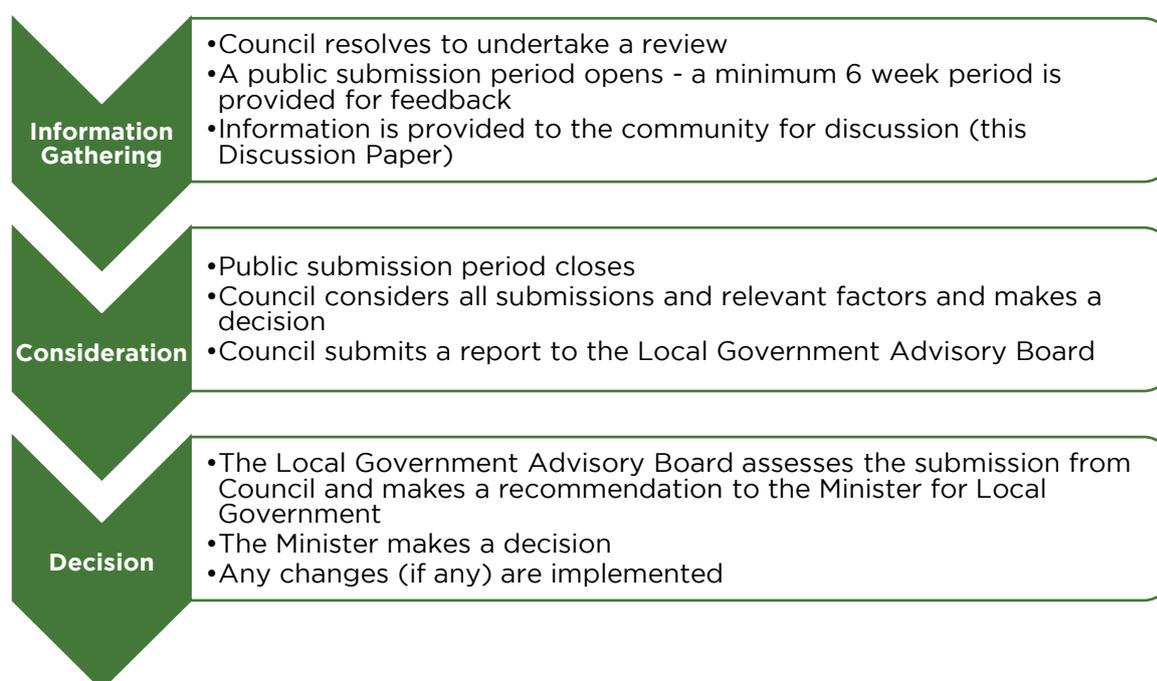
The Advisory Board stipulates the importance of keeping the councillor/elector ratio preferably within plus or minus 10%.

## 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 2023.

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
18 October 2022	Council meeting - Council decision to undertake a review
28 October 2022	Public notice period commences inviting submissions - 6 week minimum statutory advertising

9 December 2022	Public notice period finishes - Officers assess public submissions and prepare report and recommendation for Council
20 December 2022	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.

## 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):

Item	Cost Per Councillor Annually
Meeting Allowance	\$6,034 average
Conference and Training	\$875
Accommodation & Travel Expenses	\$250
Communication & Information Technology	\$300
Refreshments and Receptions	\$500
Corporate Apparel	\$140
Badges & Stationary	\$140
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,239</b>

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 the number of councillors:

Number of Councillors	Cost Per Annum
8	\$65,912
7	\$57,673
6	\$49,434
5	\$41,195

## 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
Dowerin	466	8	58:1
Cunderdin	848	7	121:1
Dumbleyung	467	8	58:1

Goomalling	681	7	97:1
Koorda	267	7	38:1
Morawa	402	7	57:1
Mt Marshall	373	7	53:1
Mukinbudin	363	9	40:1
Narembeen	536	8	67:1
Wongan-Ballidu	949	7	135:1
Wyalkatchem	352	6	58:1

## 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 Friday 9 December 2022**.

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: [ldreghorn@dowerin.wa.gov.au](mailto:ldreghorn@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.

**Cr Robert Trepp**  
**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?

Seven

Six

Five

Comments:

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