

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

**REVIEW OF COUNCILLOR REPRESENTATION**

**BACKGROUND:**

The Shire of Wagin last adjusted the number of Councillors in 2003 when a Council of 13 members was reduced to 11 members. The Shire has not operated a ward system for many years and there no intention to change this situation.

This Review Discussion Paper has been prepared having regard to the provisions of Schedule 2.2 of the *Local Government Act* which specify:

*7. Reviews*

***(1) Before carrying out a review a local government has to give local public notice advising —***

***(a) that the review is to be carried out; and***

***(b) that submissions may be made to the local government before a day fixed by the notice, being a day that is not less than 6 weeks after the notice is first given.***

***(2) In carrying out the review the local government is to consider submissions made to it before the day fixed by the notice.***

In accordance with the factors that might be considered when deciding upon a change in Councillor representation, because there are no wards, all Councillors represent all electors. Matters such as community of interests, physical and topographical features and economic factors are therefore not applicable in this discussion, Factors that are relevant include:

* Demographic trends
* Economic factors
* Ratio of councillors to electors

**CURRENT SITUATION:**

The Shire of Wagin comprises of 11 Councillors. The President is elected by the Councillors.

Elector numbers for the 2019 local government elections were 1277

**THE PROCESS:**

The review process is required to be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* and involves a number of steps as follows:

CONSULTATION

* Council resolves to undertake the review
* Public submission period opens – a minimum of six weeks is allowed for the lodgement of submissions

EVALUATION

* Public submission period closes
* Council considers all submissions and relevant factors and makes its decision
* Council submits a report to the Local Government Advisory Board for its consideration

DECISION

* Local Government Advisory Board makes a recommendation to the Minister for Local Government
* The Minister makes a decision and makes recommendation to the Governor
* Any changes approved by the Minister will be in place for the next election (October 2021) where possible.

**ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF ELECTED MEMBERS:**

The Department of Local Government and Communities has the following viewpoint on Council membership:

*The ideal number of elected members for a local government is for the local government to determine. There is a diverse range of Councillor/elector ratios across Western Australia reflecting the sparsely populated remote areas and the highly populated urban areas. The structure of the Council’s operations will provide some input into the number of elected members needed to service the local government.*

The **advantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

* 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.
* Consultation with the community can be achieved through a variety of means in addition to individuals and groups contacting their local elected member.
* The cost of maintaining elected members is likely to be reduced however a lesser number of elected members may result in increased commitment from those elected reflecting in greater interest and participation in Council’s affairs.
* Fewer elected members are more readily identifiable within the community.
* Fewer positions on Council may lead to greater interest in elections with contested elections and those elected receiving a greater level of support from the community.
* There is a State-wide trend for reductions in the number of elected members and some local governments have found that having fewer elected members has worked well.

The **disadvantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

* A smaller number of elected members may result in an increased workload and may lessen effectiveness. A demanding role may discourage others from nominating for Council.
* There is the potential for dominance in the Council by an interest group.
* A reduction in the number of elected members may limit the diversity of interests around the Council table.
* Opportunities for community participation in Council’s affairs may be reduced if there are fewer elected members to contact.

**COMPARISONS WITH SOME OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.**

Some examples of Councillor representation/ elector ratios in medium sized agriculturally based Shires are given hereunder:  *Note: Source for Shires other than Wagin – WA Local Government Directory 2019)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Local Authority | Councillors | Electors | Representative Ratio |
| Wagin | 11 | 1277 | 1/116 |
| Kojonup | 8 | 1345 | 1/168 |
| Moora | 9 | 1610 | 1/178 |
| Lake Grace | 9 | 918 | 1/102 |
| Dalwallinu | 9 | 857 | 1/95 |
| Wongan - Ballidu | 7 | 1010 | 1/144 |

*Note – The average representation ratio for the Shires listed = 132.39*

**SOME OPTIONS, COSTS AND IMPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER WITH RESPECT TO REPRESENTATION RATIOS ASSOCIATED WITH MAINTAINING**

**NUMBERS OF ELECTED MEMBERS IN WAGIN:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Councillors | Representation Ratio | Annual Estimated Cost |
| 7 | 1/182 | $125,806 |
| 9 | 1/142 | $151,669 |
| 11 (Current Situation) | 1/116 | $168,143 |
| 13 | 1/98 | $184,617 |

**OTHER FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED:**

Whilst the Councillor Representation Ratio has been addressed in the preceding sections, the following factors could also be considered:

**Demographic Trends:**

Census data over the last 3 census periods is shown in the following table.

Shire of Wagin – Census Statistics 2006 - 2016

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2006 | 2011 | 2016 |
| Total Population | 1846 | 1847 | 1852 |
| Median Age | 42 | 45 | 49 |
| Median Age Australia | 37 | 37 | 38 |
| 65 years and over | 16.9% | 19.7% | 24.7% |
| 15 to 64 | 61.4% | 59.6% | 57.4% |
| 0 to 14 | 21.7% | 20.7% | 17.9% |

This shows that the population of the Shire is very stable, however the median age is increasing as is the percentage of people aged 65 years and over. This could translate into a higher demand for the Shire to meet the needs of people in the higher aged groups. The Shire is however keen to grow the population and is currently focussed on improving sporting and recreational facilities and encouraging business activity to enhance employment opportunities and strengthenthe local economy.

**Economic Factors:**

The economy of the Shire is largely agriculturally based with wool, livestock and coarse grains being the economic mainstays. Wagin is however well supported with ancillary industries with some downstream processing of agricultural products, manufacturing, fabrication, vehicle, plant and machinery servicing and a strong general retail sector. In addition, the district is well served by builders, associated trades and accounting and legal, medical and allied health professions.

These businesses and services have been relatively stable over a long period and are not expected to change much in the foreseeable future.

Notwithstanding this relatively buoyant economic situation, the 2011 census showed that the average weekly household income of $970 was well below the State average of $1595, or Australia’s overall average of $1438.This accentuates the importance of all residents within the Shire of Wagin having adequate and diverse Councillor representation, to ensure that a reasonable level of equity to the provision of services that the Shire provides to the community.

**Effectiveness and Efficiency of Council Meetings:**

A fair degree of flexibility exists as to how a local government structures its business to deal with matters at Council meetings. Some Councils extensively utilise committees which make recommendations to Council, whilst others operate with very few committees and conduct most of their business though their ordinary Council meetings. There are also wide differences in how much of the decision-making processes are delegated to the Chief Executive Officer.

Councils with several committees and relatively few delegations to the CEO for example, would logically need to have more elected members than Councils which operate with few committees and which delegate a broad range of functions and decisions to the Chief Executive Officer. The key issues revolve around the capacity to make timely and effective decisions, compliance with legislation, the capacity to attract candidates for Council positions and the ability to attract high performing CEO’s and professional staff.

**IMPLEMENTATION:**

Advice has been given that in reducing Councillor numbers, it is not open to the Governor to order a full spill of positions. There is also no option to act on a Council recommendation to spill. The only way there can be a spill of positions is if more than half the Councillors resign.

Generally, a request, and consequently the order to reduce Councillor numbers is one that take effect from the next election.

**ELECTION CYCLES**

This table sets out the election process that would apply if the offices of Council were to be altered to implement Orders arising from a review into Councillor Representation.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Council Membership  Structure | **Election Process** | | |
| October 2021 | October 2023 | October 2025 |
| Seven Membership Council | 4 Offices abolished  2 Offices available to be filled in 2021 election | 5 Offices up for re-election  4 Candidates with most votes get four-year term  1 Candidate gets two-year term | Normal cycle returns with these Offices of Council up for election. |
| Nine Membership Council | 2 Offices abolished  4 Offices available to be filled in 2023 election | 4 Candidates with most votes get four-year term | Normal cycle returns with five offices of Council up for election |
| Eleven Membership Council | No change to current situation | No change to current situation | No change to current situation |
| Thirteen Membership  Council | 8 Offices available to be filled in 2023 election  7 Candidates with most votes get four-year term  1 Candidate gets two-year term | 6 Offices up for re-election for four-year term | Normal cycle returns with seven offices of Council up for re-election |

**SUBMISSIONS:**

Submissions will be received up to close of business on Tuesday the 18th August 2020. Submissions may be made by way of the attached form or may be submitted in any form in writing. Submissions should be lodged with:

The Chief Executive Officer

Shire of Wagin

PO Box 200

WAGIN WA 6315

Submissions may also be emailed to: shire@wagin.wa.gov.au