

# 2020 Local government elections

## Media handbook



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# The Victorian Electoral Commission

## Our vision

All Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

## Our purpose

To deliver high quality, accessible electoral services with innovation, integrity, and independence.

## Our values

- Independence: acting with impartiality and integrity
- Accountability: transparent reporting and effective stewardship of resources
- Innovation: shaping our future through creativity and leadership
- Respect: consideration of self, others, and the environment
- Collaboration: working as a team with partners and communities.



Victoria's 2020 local council elections will be our State's largest single election program. Over 4.5 million enrolled voters and upwards of 2,000 candidates will participate in nearly 300 individual elections across 76 of Victoria's 79 councils. Casey City Council, Gippsland Shire Council and Whittlesea City Council will not be having elections this October and remain under administration.

As the responsible agency, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) will manage every element of the local council elections which, under a strict statutory regime, requires forward planning and strong project management.

The elections will consume considerable financial, logistical, human and administrative resources.

This handbook provides answers to the VEC's more frequently asked questions, including key changes to elections following the implementation of the *Local Government Act 2020* in April.

The handbook also covers the adjustments to our service delivery model to ensure we deliver a safe election during the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic.

I hope you find this information kit useful and look forward to working with you as we deliver this large program of elections on behalf of all Victorians.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Warwick Gately'.

**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.

# 1. Latest news

Keep up to date with the latest council elections information via:

- [vec.vic.gov.au/Media](https://vec.vic.gov.au/Media)
- [twitter.com/electionsvic](https://twitter.com/electionsvic)
- [facebook.com/electionsvic](https://facebook.com/electionsvic)

## Media centre

The VEC [Media Centre](#) provides a hub of useful resources, links and media releases for journalists for the 2020 local council elections.

## Election information

### Individual elections

All 76 local councils undergoing elections during October will have a dedicated page on the VEC website, with information about enrolment, voting, nominations and results as they become available. Visit:

[vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2020-local-council-election](https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/2020-local-council-election)

For summary profile information on each council, see Appendix 3. For electoral maps of each council, visit [vec.vic.gov.au](https://vec.vic.gov.au). Please note that the electoral structure for a number of councils has changed following the implementation of the *Local Government Act 2020* (LG Act 2020).

### Results

Official results declarations are expected to be finalised by Friday 13 November. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, additional measures have been put in place to protect the health and wellbeing of our staff and the public. The final date for declaring all results has been extended to Friday 13 November to accommodate social distancing measures and safe work practices in election offices and count centres.

The proposed counting and results timelines for individual councils will be made available before the close of voting.

## Media enquiries

### General enquiries

For general media enquiries, contact the VEC's Communication Team:

[communication@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:communication@vec.vic.gov.au)

Contact details for individual Communication Team staff are available on the [Media Centre](#).

### Individual elections

From the opening of election offices on Wednesday 16 September, media enquiries relating to a specific election should be directed to the relevant Election Manager on the election office number available via the VEC website in late August.

### Melbourne City Council elections

For all Melbourne City Council election enquiries before 7 September, please contact Ruth Murphy, Senior Media and Communication Advisor:

- [ruth.murphy@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:ruth.murphy@vec.vic.gov.au)
- (03) 8620 1189

From 7 September, contact: Bill Lang, Election Manager on (03) 8619 1444

### Contacting candidates

The names and contact information (where provided) of candidates will be progressively available on the VEC website, in nomination order, during the nomination period, Thursday 17 September to 12 noon Tuesday 22 September.

The final list of candidates, in ballot paper order, will be available online on the afternoon of Tuesday 22 September (Monday 28 September for Melbourne City Council elections).

Candidates can submit a photograph and a statement of up to 300 words to be included in the ballot pack. Leadership Team and Councillor groups for Melbourne City Council elections are permitted a statement of up to 350 words in length; ungrouped candidates have up to 300 words. Other information specific to Melbourne City Council elections, including indications of preferences and group voting tickets, will also be made available.

Note: Regulations changing the permitted word limit for councillor group statements for Melbourne City Council have not yet been finalised.

This information will also be available on the VEC website from Thursday 1 October, after ballot packs have been printed.

All candidates have the option of completing a questionnaire for publication on the VEC website, which will allow voters to make a comparison of each candidate's experience. The questions are prescribed by legislation.

Answers to the candidate questionnaire will be published on the VEC website from Monday 28 September (Tuesday 29 September for Melbourne City Council elections).

The VEC does not gather or provide demographic information on candidates.

## 2. Key changes

Recent legislative changes have resulted in several changes since the 2016 local council elections.

The LG Act 2020 came into effect in April 2020 and new Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (LG Regs 2020) were made shortly thereafter.

### Mandatory candidate training

As part of their nomination, all candidates must declare they have completed the mandatory local government candidate training and provide details relevant to their training.

All candidates must complete the mandatory training, even if they have previously been or are currently sitting councillors.

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the mandatory candidate training is being offered online. Candidates can access the training through their local council website or Local Government Victoria [localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/candidate-training](https://localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/candidate-training)

### Candidate information session

Prospective candidates are strongly encouraged to watch the online information session offered by the VEC from Thursday 3 September.

The online information session will be complemented by three State-wide interactive seminars on the following dates:

- 7 pm Wednesday 9 September
- 1 pm Sunday 13 September
- 5 pm Tuesday 15 September

The candidate information session and the interactive seminars will be available online at [vec.vic.gov.au](https://vec.vic.gov.au)

Melbourne City Council will conduct two live streamed sessions for Melbourne City Council elections. Visit the Melbourne City Council website for further information [melbourne.vic.gov.au](https://melbourne.vic.gov.au).

### Compulsory voting

The VEC's planned advertising, community information and media campaigns for the elections will reinforce the message that voting is compulsory for all Victorians on the State roll.

### Council electoral structures

The Victorian Electoral Commission's 2019-20 electoral representation and subdivision review program commenced in January 2019. The program involved the review of 38 local councils - 31 representation reviews and seven subdivision reviews.

The following council electoral structures will change to single-councillor wards for the October 2020 local council elections:

- Bayside City Council
- Manningham City Council
- Cardinia Shire Council
- Darebin City Council
- Greater Dandenong City Council
- Kingston City Council
- Maroondah City Council
- Whitehorse City Council
- Boroondara City Council



- Murrindindi Shire Council

The following councils will change to an unsubdivided structure for the October 2020 local council elections:

- Mansfield Shire Council – 5 councillors in an unsubdivided structure
- Swan Hill Rural City Council – 7 councillors in an unsubdivided structure

The following councils will not change from their current structures for the October 2020 local council elections, although there may be changes to the ward boundaries, number of councillors or single-councillor wards:

- Banyule City Council
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Casey City Council (no election until October 2024)
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Buloke Shire Council
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Benalla Rural City Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Moira Shire Council
- Borough of Queenscliffe
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Colac Otway Shire Council
- Golden Plains Shire Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Mitchell Shire Council

- Whittlesea City Council (no election until October 2024)
- Surf Coast Shire Council
- Wyndham City Council
- Stonnington City Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council
- Hume City Council
- Monash City Council
- Moorabool Shire Council

The LG Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 26 March 2020 and the electoral provisions came into operation on 6 April 2020.

The immediate impact was the cancellation of the representation reviews of Whittlesea City Council and Mitchell Shire Council. The proclamation of the new LG Act 2020 did not have a direct impact on the subdivision reviews, which were completed according to the schedule of reviews.

The LG Act 2020 stipulates a uniform system of single-councillor wards for all Victorian local councils. The Minister for Local Government may decide, however, that in some cases a local council can be unsubdivided or consist of multi-councillor wards with an equal number of councillors per ward.

Details of council electoral structures for the 2020 elections are listed in Appendix 3.

## Council-enrolled voters

It is not compulsory for council-enrolled voters to vote, except in Melbourne City Council.

People can apply to enrol with their council if they:

- are not an Australian citizen, but live and pay rates in a council

- pay rates on a property they occupy and have no other entitlement to vote in the council
- are a director or company secretary of a corporation that pays rates and have no other entitlement to vote in the council
- are a ratepayer, who was not on the council roll at the last election and are not on the State roll for that council area.

Non-resident owners who were enrolled with council at the last elections (or at the last by-election) will be automatically enrolled

## Results timeline

Official results declarations are expected to be finalised by Friday 13 November, noting additional social distancing requirements in election offices and count centres and possible recount requests.

Counting and results timelines for individual council elections will be made available before the close of voting.

### 3. Key dates

Time and Date	Activity
From Saturday 8 August	<b>Close of roll notice</b> Voter information campaign commences with advertisements and releases containing enrolment information.
4 pm Friday 28 August	<b>Close of roll</b> Voters must be on the roll by this date to be eligible to vote or stand as a candidate, 57 days before election day.
Wednesday 16 September	<b>Election offices open</b>
9 am Thursday 17 September to 12 noon Tuesday 22 September	<b>Nomination period</b> Anyone wishing to stand as a candidate must lodge their nomination with the Election Manager during this period. Ballot draws to determine the order of candidate names on ballot papers are held following the close of nominations.
Tuesday 6 October to Thursday 8 October	<b>Ballot packs distributed</b> Ballot packs are mailed to all enrolled voters in a random order over three days.
6 pm Friday 23 October	<b>Close of voting</b> Completed ballot material must be in the mail or hand-delivered to the relevant Election Office by 6 pm.
12 noon Friday 30 October	<b>Deadline for inclusion of postal votes</b> The Election Manager will include ballot material if satisfied it was signed by voters before 6 pm Friday 23 October (close of voting).
Monday 2 November to Friday 13 November	<b>Results declarations (anticipated)</b> Results for all elections will be officially declared and published in relevant newspapers and to the VEC website during this period.

Variations to this timeline apply for Melbourne City Council elections (see Appendix 2).

## 4. Postal elections

The 2020 local council elections will be held entirely by postal voting for all councils in Victoria as a result of the direction of the Minister for Local Government under the *LG Act 2020*.

The average voter turnout rate in the 2016 council elections conducted by post was 73.75%, with an average informality rate of 6.02%.

To vote in a postal election, enrolled voters:

- receive a ballot pack in the mail with voting instructions, candidate information, a ballot paper (or two ballot papers for Melbourne City Council), ballot paper envelope (with flap) and a reply-paid envelope for returning the completed ballot paper
- complete the ballot paper by following the instructions on the ballot paper
- insert the completed ballot paper into the ballot paper envelope, complete their details on the flap, sign and date it, then insert it into the reply-paid envelope
- mail or hand-deliver the completed ballot material by 6 pm Friday 23 October.

In previous elections councils were able to choose their method of voting between attendance voting or postal voting.

At the 2016 local council elections, six councils held their elections by attendance voting – Banyule, Greater Dandenong, Knox, Moreland, Port Phillip and Yarra City Councils.

Casey City Council, Gippsland Shire Council and Whittlesea City Council will not have elections this October and remain under administration.

# 5. Roles and responsibilities

## Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC is the statutory provider for Victorian council elections. The VEC has conducted all local council elections in Victoria since 2004 and has a long history of working in partnership with the local government sector.

The VEC:

- prepares and certifies the voters' roll for the election (but not for Melbourne City Council elections), compiled through council-enrolled (CEO list) voters and State-enrolled voters
- appoints, trains and oversees the Election Managers
- provides infrastructure and support for the Election Managers and their offices
- provides compulsory voting enforcement services.

Media enquiries about the arrangements for and administration of the elections should be directed to the VEC.

## Election Manager

An Election Manager is appointed by the VEC to conduct each election

The Election Manager is responsible for the management of nominations, public enquiries, vote counting and results declarations for their election.

Media and public enquiries for a specific election should be directed to the relevant Election Office from Wednesday 16 September.

## Local Government Inspectorate

The Local Government Inspectorate is responsible for investigating any alleged breaches of the *LG Act 2020*. Complaints received by the Election Manager or the VEC that allege a breach of the Act will be referred to the Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate works closely with the VEC as well as other integrity and law enforcement agencies, including the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

## Councils

Individual councils provide council-enrolled voter data to the VEC for inclusion on the voters' roll.

Councils are responsible for enforcing local laws in relation to candidate signage and other publicly displayed election matter.

Following the declaration of an election, the Chief Executive Officer of a council will arrange the swearing in of the incoming council and schedule the first council meeting. Elected councillors formally leave office at 6 am on election day.

## 6. Enrolment

There are several entitlement categories and thus more people entitled to vote in Victorian council elections, compared to the relatively straightforward residential and citizenship requirements for State and Federal elections.

Most enrolled voters will be Australian citizens, aged 18 or over, residing in a council area going to an election. People enrolled in this way are referred to as 'State-enrolled voters' or being on the State electoral roll. These voters accounted for 84.97% of total enrolments in the 2016 council elections.

The bulk of remaining enrolments will be non-resident property owners who are automatically enrolled by council if they were enrolled at the last election (including the last by-election for their council or ward).

The minority of remaining enrolments will be voters who apply directly to council to enrol under a council-administered entitlement category. People enrolled in either of these ways are referred to as 'council-enrolled voters'.

Enrolment in all categories closes at 4 pm on Friday 28 August 2020.

### Who is automatically enrolled?

People are automatically enrolled if they will be 18 years of age or over on 24 October and:

- live in a council area and are on the State electoral roll for their current address
- own property in a council area but don't live there and were enrolled at the last election (including the last by-election for their council or ward).

### Who must enrol?

Australian citizens aged 18 or over on 24 October 2020, living in Victoria, must enrol if they:

- have never enrolled
- have lived at their present residential address for at least a month and have not updated their enrolment details.

Australian citizens can enrol, check or update their State enrolment details at [vec.vic.gov.au](https://vec.vic.gov.au).

### Who can apply to council to enrol?

People can apply directly to council if they will be 18 years of age or over on 24 October 2020 and:

- own property in a council area but don't live in the council area, and were not enrolled at the last council election or by-election
- are non-Australian citizens who live and pay rates in the council area
- pay rates on a property they occupy in the council area (typically business tenants)
- are a director or company secretary of a corporation that pays rates to the council.

To apply to enrol in one of these categories, people need to contact their council directly.

### One vote per council

A person is entitled to only one vote per council, regardless of how many entitlements they may have. Entitlements are hierarchical, with a person's State enrolment taking precedence.

People can enrol and vote in more than one council election if they have the necessary entitlements, for example, voting as a resident in one council, and as a non-resident property owner for a holiday home or investment property in another council.

## **Provision 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 campaign purposes only. This information contains an elector's name and address, but not their contact details. It also excludes silent electors.

Candidates who receive a copy of the voters' roll must securely destroy or return it to the VEC within 30 days of the election day.

There are significant penalties for any candidate who misuses voters' roll information.

# 7. Nominations and candidates

## Nominations

To nominate, a person must be:

- an Australian citizen and enrolled on the voters' roll for the council they are nominating for
- eligible to become a councillor should they be elected, and
- have completed the mandatory local government candidate training before lodging their nomination with the Election Manager.

Certain conditions disqualify a person from nominating, for example if they are:

- a member of any Australian Parliament
- a councillor for another local council in Australia
- a member of council staff for the council they are nominating for
- convicted of certain criminal offences
- an undischarged bankrupt.

This list is not exhaustive; further details are outlined in the LG Act 2020. Depending on the type of disqualification, candidates may resolve the disqualification if they take leave from the conflicting position (and must resign if elected) or seek relief from the disqualification through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Candidates in subdivided councils can stand for election for any ward, even if their enrolled address is in a different ward within the council.

## Mandatory candidate training

All potential candidates must complete mandatory local government candidate training before lodging their nomination with the Election Manager.

Candidates can access the mandatory training online through their local council websites or on the Local Government Victoria website [localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/candidate-training](https://localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/candidate-training)

All candidates must complete the training, even if they are or have previously been a councillor.

## Candidate information session

Prospective candidates are strongly encouraged to watch the online information session offered by the VEC from Thursday 3 September.

The online information session will also be complemented by three state-wide interactive seminars on the following dates:

- 7 pm Wednesday 9 September
- 1 pm Sunday 13 September
- 5 pm Tuesday 15 September

Melbourne City Council will conduct two live streamed sessions for Melbourne City Council elections. Visit the Melbourne City Council website for further information [melbourne.vic.gov.au](https://melbourne.vic.gov.au).

## Nominating

Candidates must make an appointment during business hours with the Election Manager to



lodge their nomination and pay their \$250 nomination fee.

The nomination period begins on Thursday 17 September and nominations close at 12 noon Tuesday 22 September. Late nominations cannot be accepted.

A list of nominations (including candidate contact information, where supplied) for each election will be updated regularly during the nomination period on the VEC website.

## **Candidate questionnaire**

All candidates have the option of completing a questionnaire for publication on the VEC website, which will allow voters to make a comparison of each candidate's experience. The questions are prescribed by legislation.

Answers to the candidate questionnaire will be published on the VEC website from Monday 28 September (Tuesday 29 September for Melbourne City Council elections).

## **Ballot paper order**

The order of names on the ballot paper is determined by a computerised single random draw. The Election Manager will conduct the draw at the election office following the close of nominations.

The final list of candidates in ballot paper order will be available on the VEC website on the afternoon of Tuesday 22 September (Monday 28 September for Melbourne City Council elections – after the ballot draw).

## **Candidate information**

Candidates can submit a photograph and a statement of up to 300 words to be included in the ballot pack.

Leadership Team and Councillor groups for the Melbourne City Council elections can submit a statement of up to 350 words.

This information will also be available on the VEC website on Monday 28 September (Tuesday 29 September for Melbourne City Council elections).

Note: Regulations changing the permitted word limit for councillor group statements for Melbourne City Council have not yet been finalised.

## Endorsements

Candidate statements and questionnaire answers where a candidate claims endorsement or support from a person, organisation or party, must be lodged alongside written evidence of consent to the claim by the person, organisation or party.

The *LG Act 2020* does not recognise the formal participation of political parties in council elections, and no party affiliations are included on ballot material. Candidates are, however, free to seek endorsement from any party, group or organisation. Evidence is required if this endorsement is included in formal election material.

## Uncontested elections

If, at the close of nominations, the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of vacancies for any election, this results in an uncontested election.

The Election Manager will declare these candidates elected on or after election day and provide public notice of their election.

Voters in an uncontested ward will be mailed an uncontested election leaflet informing them of the outcome. If the election for an unsubdivided council is uncontested or all wards within a subdivided council are uncontested, the outcome will be advised via advertisement.

If there are no candidates for an election or where an uncontested election leaves further vacancies to be filled on the council, a by-election will be required to fill the vacancies.

# 8. Voting and the election process

## Compulsory voting

Voting is compulsory in Victorian council elections for all State-enrolled voters, regardless of age. This includes all voters enrolled for the elections because they were on the State electoral roll as at the close of roll (4 pm Friday 28 August).

It's compulsory for all voters enrolled in the Melbourne City Council elections to vote, including non-Australian citizens and corporation voting representatives.

If a person is required to vote at an election and doesn't vote, they may be fined unless they have a sufficient excuse for failing to vote.

## Filling in the ballot paper

In all council elections except the election of councillors for Melbourne City Council (see Appendix 2), voters receive the same kind of ballot paper, with candidates listed in the order determined by the ballot draw for the election. Full preferential voting is used, where voters complete their ballot paper by numbering all the boxes in order of their preference.

## Voting in postal elections

Ballot packs are mailed (priority paid) to enrolled voters between Tuesday 6 and Thursday 8 October. Voters in the same household may receive their ballot packs on different days.

## Redirection and replacement

Voters who will not be at their enrolled or mailing address during the voting period can arrange for their ballot material to be sent to another address by making a redirection request in writing by Thursday 17 September.

Election Managers can also issue voters with a replacement ballot pack if they claim to have lost, spoilt or not received their ballot pack. The VEC's election management system ensures only one declaration envelope proceeds to the count.

## Voting deadline

Completed ballot material must be in the mail by 6 pm Friday 23 October. Alternatively, ballot material can be hand-delivered to the election office by the same deadline.

## Failure to vote

Compulsory voting enforcement, including the prosecution of non-voters, is a mandatory requirement under the LG Act 2020.

The VEC will commence a compulsory voting enforcement program in early 2021, with the mail-out of an 'Apparent Failure to Vote Notice' to all voters who were required to vote and appear to have failed to vote. Any voters who are automatically excused from failing to vote will not be sent a notice. This notice is not a fine, but an opportunity to provide an explanation for having failed to vote or provide details if they did indeed vote.

A person who receives an 'Apparent Failure to Vote Notice' and does not respond with a sufficient excuse for failing to vote, or those who do not respond at all, will be issued an Infringement Notice. For the October council elections, the fine for not voting is \$83.00 (half a penalty unit).

# Counting the votes

## Preferential counting

Preferential vote counting is used in single councillor ward elections and for the Melbourne City Council Leadership Team election:

- to be elected, a candidate (or Team) must gain an absolute majority of the first preference votes (more than 50%) to be elected
- if no candidate (or Team) receives an absolute majority of first preference votes, a preference distribution is required. The candidate or team with the fewest first preference votes is excluded and their votes are distributed to the other candidates according to the voter's preferences. This process continues until one candidate (or Team) has an absolute majority and is elected
- the process continues until one candidate (or Team) gains an absolute majority.

## Proportional counting

Proportional representation vote counting is used to elect councillors where there is more than one vacancy to be filled

- to be elected, candidates have to obtain a 'quota', determined by dividing the number of formal votes by one more than the number of vacancies to be filled, and then rounding up to the nearest whole number or adding '1' to the result (for example, if there are 10,000 formal votes for three vacancies, the quota is 10,000 divided by four plus '1', equalling a quota of 2,501)
- each candidate who achieves the quota is elected, and then any surplus votes (votes above the quota) are transferred to the remaining candidates at a reduced value
- if there are still vacancies to be filled once the surpluses for each elected candidate have been transferred, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes are transferred to the remaining candidates at the value received

- this process continues until all vacancies are filled
- In some instances, one or more candidates may be elected without receiving a quota.

More information, explaining preferential and proportional counting, is available on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works/counting-votes](https://vec.vic.gov.au/voting/how-voting-works/counting-votes)

## Obtaining the result

In most circumstances, preferential vote counts will be conducted manually (the count for the Melbourne City Council Leadership Team will be conducted by computer) and proportional vote counts will be conducted using computer data entry.

Candidates can appoint scrutineers to observe the counting process.

## Counting and results timeline

Results can only be calculated once all votes admissible to the count have been received.

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic the official results declaration period has been extended to allow for adequate social distancing in election offices and during the counting activities. Official declarations are anticipated to take place between Monday 2 November and Friday 13 November, varying according to the electoral structure of each council, the Melbourne Cup Day public holiday for parts of Victoria, and requirements for any recounts.

Detailed counting and results timelines for individual councils will be made available before the close of voting on the VEC website.

# 9. Advertising and campaign material

Anyone may publish electoral material during a council election campaign. All published electoral material—such as advertisements, flyers, billboards and social media posts—must be authorised and comply with the *LG Act 2020*, to ensure voters are informed about the source of political advertising and not misled about how to cast their vote.

## Authorisation

Advertising and campaign material must be authorised, ensuring the producers of election material are accountable and contactable.

The authorisation statement must be at the end of the electoral material, as follows:

- ‘Authorised by [authoriser’s name], [authoriser’s address]’.

This requirement applies to the person who has printed, published or distributed the material, or the person who has caused, permitted or authorised the material to be printed, published or distributed. The address included must be a physical address or a PO box address (email addresses are not acceptable).

Authorisation requirements always apply—not just in the election period. The authorisation requirements include material published online and through social media. If it is not possible to include an authorisation statement in a social media comment (e.g. Twitter), the post must include or directly link to an authorisation statement.

## Newspapers

Paid election advertisements in newspapers must be properly authorised and additionally be printed with the word ‘advertisement’ as a headline (in at least 10 point font).

During the election period, from close of nominations to election day (Tuesday 22

September to Saturday 24 October), all published articles or letters in a newspaper that contain electoral matter must include the author’s name and address at the end. This does not apply to leading articles that only contain a report of a meeting. Letters to the editor only require the author’s name and a suburb or locality where the author’s address is located.

## Misleading or deceptive matter

During an election period, it is illegal to print, publish, distribute, permit or authorise to be printed, published or distributed:

- anything that is likely to mislead or deceive a voter in relation to the casting of their vote
- an electoral advertisement containing a representation of a ballot paper that is likely to induce a voter to vote otherwise than in accordance with the directions on the ballot paper.

The definition of ‘misleading’ advertising in the *LG Act 2020* has been interpreted narrowly by the courts. The Act does not regulate the content or truthfulness of political messages contained in electoral matter, as these messages can be freely debated and opposing views can be put forward during ordinary political discourse. Instead, the Act is principally concerned with ensuring that electoral material does not mislead or deceive electors about the way in which the voter understands their vote must be cast and the effect of their vote.

For example, material that suggests that someone should number the candidates on a ballot paper in a particular order to vote for candidate X, when in fact voting in that order would see candidate X getting voters’ last preferences, would be likely to be considered misleading or deceptive by the courts.

In contrast, to suggest that a candidate has ‘been in the area all their life’ when they have lived somewhere else and just worked in the area, is not likely to be considered misleading or deceptive within the interpretation of the LG Act 2020.

## **Electoral matter**

Electoral matter means matter which is intended or likely to affect voting in an election.

### **Heading to electoral advertisements**

Newspaper proprietors must print the word ‘advertisement’ as a headline (in at least 10 point font) to each article or paragraph printed in the newspaper containing electoral matter which is paid for, or for which compensation is to be made.

### **Identification of author(s)**

During an election period, all articles or letters containing electoral matter, which are printed, published or distributed in a newspaper, circular or pamphlet must include the name and address (not an email address) of the author at the end. However, letters to a newspaper simply have to include the author’s name and the suburb or locality in which the author’s address is located.

The identification requirement does not apply to a newspaper leading article or an article that is solely a report of a meeting.

## **Social and online media**

The use of online platforms (including social media) by candidates and others for campaigning purposes must conform with electoral law and terms and conditions of the platforms concerned.

Social media, websites, blogs and email containing electoral matter or content must be authorised. Advertisements, including sponsored links, published online must also carry or directly link to an authorisation statement.

Candidates and other producers of such material should seek their own legal advice in this area.

### **Posters and billboards**

Posters and billboards must be properly authorised.

Candidates and other producers of such material should check with the council about any local laws that may apply to the display of advertising material and/or with the Department of Transport for provisions governing the display of material alongside major roadways or at public transport facilities.

### **Letters and direct mail**

Leaflets, flyers and other forms of unaddressed direct mail delivered to households must be properly authorised.

Producers and distributors should be aware of the rules relating to such material. It would be advisable to contact Australia Post.

Letters addressed to individual voters by name do not have to include an authorisation statement but must include the author’s name and address at the end of the letter.

A candidate or other campaigner who intends to distribute campaign material in public should check with the council for any local laws about the distribution of advertising material, as well as any other relevant authorities or property owners (e.g. shopping malls).

# 10. Customer feedback and complaints

The VEC has a robust process for handling customer feedback and complaints. If a complaint relates to:

- a possible breach of the *LG Act 2020*—it will be referred to the Local Government Inspectorate
- the administration of the election, including the actions and behaviours of Election Managers and election staff—the VEC will manage it
- a possible breach of local laws—it will be referred to the CEO of the relevant local council
- alleges a criminal offence—it will be referred to Victoria Police.

A complaint that alleges wrongdoing by a public officeholder (including a councillor) may be protected by Victoria's public interest disclosure laws. The VEC is not empowered to receive public interest disclosures under the relevant laws, so these statutory protections will only apply for complaints made directly to the relevant authorities, including the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

If a complaint alleges corrupt conduct by a public officeholder, the VEC is required to provide a mandatory notification to IBAC in addition to referring the matter to the relevant authority.

## Candidate conduct and advertising complaints

Complaints about candidate conduct and advertising material will most likely relate to the *LG Act 2020*, with some of the most common complaints including:

- Unauthorised material —all election campaign material must have appropriate authorisation, as described in Section 9 above
- Misleading or deceptive material —strictly relates to material that misleads or deceives a voter in relation to how they cast their vote (that is, if it causes a voter to misunderstand the effect of their vote).

## Confidentiality of customer feedback

The VEC and Election Managers may comment on the customer feedback and complaints process, but will not comment on any specific complaints, or confirm whether a complaint or feedback has been received—to do so would infringe on the confidentiality of the customer.

Parties to the complaint are free to discuss the complaint with the media.

Reporting on the number and category of complaints will be provided in the VEC's post-election reporting.

# 11. Council communication schedule

The VEC will deliver a voter information campaign on a local and State-wide basis, with advertising services, media relations, and election information on the VEC website.

Although the elections are ‘local government’ elections, from a communication perspective the VEC refers to ‘local council’ elections – a term more familiar to voters.

The campaign comprises two main phases: enrolment and voting.

The aim of the campaign is to increase public awareness of, and participation in, local council

elections. Traditionally, participation in council elections is markedly lower than State elections (72% vs 91% respectively), even though voting in both election types is generally compulsory. This is particularly the case for young voters between the ages of 18 and 29.

State-wide media releases will be available on the VEC [Media Centre](#). Some state-wide media releases will also be translated into 20 different languages and distributed to ethnic language media outlets across the state. Individual council releases will be distributed to local publications according to the council communication schedule below.

Timing	Communication
From Saturday 8 August	Close of roll advertisements and media release <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ how to enrol and eligibility</li> <li>▪ council contact number for council enrolments</li> </ul>
From Monday 24 August	Notice of election advertisements and “call for candidates” media release <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ how to nominate as a candidate</li> <li>▪ candidate information session details</li> <li>▪ requesting redirection or large print/braille ballots</li> </ul>
Monday 5 October	“Ballots mailed” media release
From Wednesday 12 October	Voting reminder advertisements
Monday 17 October	“Voting deadline” media release
From Friday 13 November	Results advertisements (media advisories will be issued as results are declared from Monday 2 November)



# 12. Education and inclusion

The VEC's Education and Inclusion Team is conducting a range of activities to increase engagement and participation in the democratic process. Engagement and outreach will be delivered online and through other contactless methods to protect the health and safety of our staff and the community during the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic. School and community-based outreach and education programs include:

- *Be Heard* Democracy Ambassador Program online education sessions and social media video content aimed at raising electoral awareness within communities traditionally under-represented in voting, including diverse cultural and language communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people with a disability, and people experiencing homelessness.
- *Passport to Democracy* ([passport.vec.vic.gov.au](https://passport.vec.vic.gov.au)), delivered online to schools and tertiary institutions aimed at increasing the political literacy of students
- *Talking Democracy*, an online civic education kit for people studying English as an additional language
- *Myth Busting* outdoor advertising campaign to dispel enrolment and voting myths, for Victorians experiencing unstable housing.
- *Voting is for Everyone*, electoral education audio visual resources and facilitator guide aimed at people with disabilities.
- *Indigenous Video Project*, collaboration with Reconciliation Victoria to produce a video series on electoral engagement for Aboriginal Victorians.
- *Youth Co-design Project*, online workshops with young people to identify barriers and solutions to engaging in the electoral process.

The Education and Inclusion Team also distributes the [Be Heard newsletter](#) to community sector audiences with useful electoral information.

Electoral information, including translated enrolment forms is available in 20 languages on the VEC website along with contact details for interpreter assistance.

Read more online at [vec.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-stand-for](https://vec.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-stand-for)

# Appendix 1: Detailed election timeline

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2020 ELECTION TIMELINE

Council primary enrolment data	JUL 13	MON	(Date fixed by VEC)
Public notice of Close of Roll Date (Published during this period)	AUG 8	SAT	
	AUG 14	FRI	
Close of Roll	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	
Mail-out of ballot packs/ Uncontested ward leaflets	OCT 6	TUE	
	OCT 7	WED	
	OCT 8	THU	
<b>CLOSE OF VOTING</b>	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 13 November.**

\*AFL Grand Final public holiday - TBD

# Appendix 2: Melbourne City Council elections

Melbourne City Council elections are distinct to other Victorian council elections. Key differences include:

## Two simultaneous elections are held

Two simultaneous elections are held for Melbourne City Council—one to elect the Leadership Team (Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor) and the other to elect nine councillors.

Voters will receive two ballot papers in their ballot pack, one for each election.

## Non-ratepayer occupiers can enrol

Once they have lived at an address for a month, occupiers of rateable properties in the City of Melbourne can apply directly to the Council to enrol, even if they are not ratepayers. Applications must be made to Melbourne City Council before the close of roll at 4 pm on Friday 28 August 2020.

## Corporations are entitled to two votes and must be enrolled

A corporation that solely or jointly owns or occupies rateable property in the City of Melbourne may appoint two representatives to vote on its behalf. Representatives must be a director or company secretary of a corporation or hold an equivalent position.

If a corporation that solely owns or occupies rateable property in the City of Melbourne does not validly appoint two voting representatives by the close of roll at 4 pm on Friday 28 August 2020, the Council is required by law to enrol the first two of the following (to be taken in alphabetical order):

- the company secretary of the corporation
- the directors of the corporation.

## Two voting methods are used

Separate voting methods apply for each election:

### Leadership Team

Full preferential voting is used to elect the Leadership Team, where voters number all the boxes in order of their preference. Each Leadership Team can have a team name.

### Nine councillors

The councillor ballot paper is similar to Victorian Legislative Council ballot papers, allowing voters to vote for a group above the line or for individual candidates below the line. Voters only need to mark one box above the line for a valid vote at Melbourne City Council elections.

Candidates can form into groups and lodge group voting tickets, which determine the order of voting preferences for where a voter votes for that group above the line.

Unlike State elections, voting below the line requires voters to number every box below the line.

## Voting is compulsory for all enrolled voters

Voting in the Melbourne City Council elections is compulsory for **everyone** on the voters' roll, regardless of age—including non-Australian citizens and corporation voting representatives.

This is different to all other council elections, where council-enrolled voters are not obliged to vote. The voters' roll for Melbourne City Council elections is made up of:

- residents of the City of Melbourne
- owners of rateable property in the City of Melbourne

- occupiers of rateable property in the City of Melbourne
- representatives of corporations that own or occupy rateable property in the City of Melbourne.

# Melbourne City Council elections timelines

## LEADERSHIP TEAM ELECTION TIMELINE

Council primary enrolment data	JUN 10	WED	(Date fixed by Registrar)
Public notice of Close of Roll date	AUG 8	SAT	
(Published during this period)	AUG 14	FRI	
Close of Roll	AUG 28	FRI	4.00 pm; 57 days before Election Day
Publication of Election Notice	AUG 31	MON	
(Published during this period)	SEP 5	SAT	
Public telephone enquiry service commences	SEP 7	MON	
<b>Opening of election office</b>	SEP 16	WED	
Certification of voters' roll Opening of nominations	SEP 17	THU	
Nomination Day	SEP 22	TUE	Nominations close at 12 noon
Team name registration	SEP 24	THU	Closes at 12 noon Ballot draw to follow
	SEP 25	FRI	
Lodgement of team statements, preferences and candidate questionnaires	SEP 28	MON	Close at 12 noon
Mail-out of ballot packs	OCT 6	TUE	
	OCT 7	WED	
	OCT 8	THU	
<b>CLOSE OF VOTING</b>	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)

**Election to be declared by Friday 13 November.**

\*AFL Grand Final public holiday – TBD

# Councillor election timeline

Council primary enrolment data	JUN 10	WED	(Date fixed by Registrar)
Public notice of Close of Roll Date (Published during this period)	AUG 8	SAT	
	AUG 14	FRI	
Close of Roll	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	
Public telephone enquiry service commences	SEP 7	MON	
<b>Opening of election office</b>	SEP 16	WED	
Certification of voters' roll Opening of nominations	SEP 17	THU	
Nomination Day	SEP 22	TUE	Nominations close at 12 noon
Candidate groups and name registration	SEP 24	THU	Close at 12 noon Ballot draw to follow
	SEP 25	FRI	
Lodgement of statements, group voting tickets, ungrouped indications of preferences, and questionnaires	SEP 28	MON	Close at 12 noon
Mail-out of ballot packs	OCT 6	TUE	
	OCT 7	WED	
	OCT 8	THU	
<b>CLOSE OF VOTING</b>	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)

**Election to be declared by Friday 13 November.**

\* AFL Grand Final public holiday – TBD

# Appendix 3: Profile summary of councils holding elections in October











## Victoria's municipalities and electoral structures

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





- The VEC completed an electoral representation review of this local council. The VEC's recommended structure was accepted and the recommended number of councillors and electoral structure (shown) will take effect at the 2020 local government elections.
- The electoral structure of this local council was determined by the Minister for Local Government in accordance with the provisions of the LG Act 2020.
- The VEC completed an electoral representation review of this local council; the number of councillors and electoral structure (shown) will remain unchanged for the 2020 local government elections.

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




<sup>1</sup> Casey City Council's general election has been postponed to October 2024

Local Council	Area (km2)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
 <b>Colac Otway</b>	3,433	20,750	7	Unsubdivided
<b>Corangamite</b>	4,407	13,584	7	1 x three-councillor ward 4 x single-councillor wards
 <b>Darebin</b>	54	117,261	9	9 x single-councillor wards
 <b>East Gippsland</b>	20,931	43,123	9	Unsubdivided
<b>Frankston</b>	131	109,662	9	3 x three-councillor wards
<b>Gannawarra</b>	3,732	9,044	7	1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward 2 x single-councillor wards
<b>Glen Eira</b>	38	106,440	9	3 x three-councillor wards
 <b>Glenelg</b>	6,212	17,570	7	Unsubdivided
 <b>Golden Plains</b>	2,704	18,567	7	Unsubdivided
<b>Greater Bendigo</b>	3,048	91,665	9	3 x three-councillor wards
 <b>Greater Dandenong</b>	130	101,846	11	11 x single-councillor wards
<b>Greater Geelong</b>	1,247	200,616	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
<b>Greater Shepparton</b>	2,422	46,359	9	Unsubdivided
<b>Hepburn</b>	1,470	15,693	7	2 x two-councillor wards 3 x single-councillor wards
<b>Hindmarsh</b>	7,527	4,913	6	3 x two-councillor wards
<b>Hobsons Bay</b>	65	69,683	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
<b>Horsham</b>	4,249	16,454	7	Unsubdivided
<b>Hume</b>	503	144,959	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
<b>Indigo</b>	2,044	13,725	7	Unsubdivided
 <b>Kingston</b>	91	122,333	11	11 x single-councillor wards
<b>Knox</b>	114	118,678	9	9 x single-councillor wards
<b>Latrobe</b>	1,426	58,849	9	1 x four-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards 1 x single-councillor ward
<b>Loddon</b>	6,694	7,651	5	5 x single-councillor wards
<b>Macedon Ranges</b>	1,747	38,413	9	3 x three-councillor wards
 <b>Manningham</b>	114	89,624	9	9 x single-councillor wards
 <b>Mansfield</b>	3,843	10,971	5	Unsubdivided
<b>Maribyrnong</b>	31	65,202	7	1 x three-councillor ward 2 x two-councillor wards
 <b>Maroondah</b>	61	87,817	9	9 x single-councillor wards



Local Council	Area (km2)	Estimate of voters	Number of Councillors	Electoral structure
<b>Melbourne</b>	36	119,595	11	Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor directly elected as a leadership team by the voters at-large Unsubdivided
<b>Melton</b>	527	99,690	9	1 x four-councillor ward 1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward
<b>Mildura</b>	22,330	41,305	9	Unsubdivided
 <b>Mitchell</b>	2,864	35,965	9	3 x three-councillor wards
 <b>Moira</b>	4,045	25,086	9	Unsubdivided
<b>Monash</b>	81	123,695	11	3 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward
<b>Moonee Valley</b>	44	94,682	9	3 x three-councillor wards
<b>Moorabool</b>	2,110	27,856	7	1 x four-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
<b>Moreland</b>	51	132,790	11	2 x four-councillor wards 1 x three-councillor ward
<b>Mornington Peninsula</b>	723	161,497	11	2 x three-councillor wards 1 x two-councillor ward 3 x single-councillor wards
<b>Mount Alexander</b>	1,529	16,826	7	1 x three-councillor ward 4 x single-councillor wards
 <b>Moyne</b>	5,478	14,424	7	Unsubdivided
 <b>Murrindindi</b>	3,889	14,685	7	7 x single-councillor wards
 <b>Nillumbik</b>	435	48,969	7	7 x single-councillor wards
<b>Northern Grampians</b>	5,918	11,055	7	1 x three-councillor ward 1 x two-councillor ward 2 x single-councillor wards
<b>Port Phillip</b>	20	93,106	9	3 x three-councillor wards
<b>Pyrenees</b>	3,433	7,497	5	5 x single-councillor wards
 <b>Borough of Queenscliffe</b>	11	4,400	5	Unsubdivided
<b>South Gippsland<sup>2</sup></b>	3,305	29,505	9	3 x three-councillor wards
 <b>Southern Grampians</b>	6,652	13,436	7	Unsubdivided
<b>Stonnington</b>	25	93,754	9	3 x three-councillor wards
<b>Strathbogie</b>	3,302	10,182	7	2 x two-councillor wards 3 x single-councillor wards

<sup>2</sup> South Gippsland Shire Council's general election has been postponed to October 2021.

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

<sup>3</sup> Whittlesea City Council's general election has been postponed to October 2024

