



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

26 March 2020



Regulation changes – Council meetings and 2020 Election

The local government elections and start of the new Council term during the COVID-19 pandemic brings challenges for our whole community, and unique challenges for candidates and Councillors.

On Thursday 26 March 2020 the Governor in Council approved the [Local Government Electoral \(2020 Quadrennial Election\) Regulation 2020](#). The Regulation introduces several measures to help minimise COVID-19 health risks to candidates, voters, Councillors and the broader community during and after the 2020 election.

You can read up-to-date information from the Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs about the elections, caretaker period and COVID-19 matters on the [Department's website](#).

2020 election

The Regulation will allow returning officers and polling officials to give directions to candidates and scrutineers on polling day in order to facilitate appropriate social distancing measures.

The Regulation also includes amendments about candidate setup and the placement of signs at polling booths.

For more information on these issues, please visit the [Electoral Commission of Queensland website](#) or contact your returning officer.

Phone and teleconference for Council and committee meetings

The following temporary changes have been made to provisions of both the *Local Government Regulation 2012* and the *City of Brisbane Regulation 2012* to allow council meetings to occur via phone or teleconference.

Attendance via phone or teleconference

- Council meetings may take place by phone or teleconferencing, with the chairperson of the meeting allowing individual Councillors or other people to participate by phone or teleconferencing.
- Arrangements for Councillors to participate in meetings by phone or teleconferencing must allow Councillors and other participants to take part in discussions as they happen (for example, not occur by providing a recording of the meeting).

Public accessibility

- If any person taking part in the meeting is doing so by phone or teleconference, where possible Councils must use streaming or other facilities so that the public can observe or hear the meeting at one of the Council's public offices or on the Council's website. This requirement will help keep the community informed of Council decisions as they are made, consistent with the requirement for Council meetings to be open to the public.

Closing a meeting due to COVID-19

- During the current COVID-19 pandemic it may not be practical for health reasons for the public to come into a Council's public offices or for Council to listen or observe council meetings.
- Where this is the case, the chairperson will be allowed to close a meeting (either being held in person or via teleconference) if they are satisfied it is not practicable to provide public access. Council must then publish a notice on its website at a reasonable period before the meeting, to advise of this decision. In that instance, Councils are encouraged to live stream their council meetings. However, it is acknowledged that not all Councils, notably smaller Councils, may not be able to provide live video footage.

Transition to new council term

Under the *Local Government Act 2009* and *City of Brisbane Act 2010*, the current Council remains in place until the conclusion of the election (i.e. when the ECQ publishes the final declaration of poll for your Council).

However after the election is declared, Councillors are unable to act in their roles until they make their declaration of office to the CEO of Council. This includes both new and re-elected Councillors and Mayors. The CEO will make appropriate arrangements for Councillors to make their declarations of office as soon as possible.

Note that, particularly during COVID-19, it is possible for the CEO to witness the declaration of office over the phone or by teleconference.

Disaster management training

I am aware that all District Disaster Management Groups and Local Disaster Management Groups are at stand up throughout the state. The Local Government Association of Queensland has been working closely with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) to establish COVID-19 [training arrangements](#) for Councillors and Mayors. This training will be rolled out after the elections to all Councils

For further information about disaster management training, please contact your QFES Emergency Management Coordinator or contact the Emergency Management Training Command via DMTraining.Feedback@qfes.qld.gov.au.

Camping grounds & other non-essential Local Government Services

In addition, as part of Stage 2 of the COVID-19 National restrictions, local government's attention is drawn, in particular, to the following inclusions:

- local government non-essential community services such as libraries and swimming pools, and
- all camping grounds are to close with the exception of those that provide services and facilities to permanent residents.

Those local governments operating these facilities should take all appropriate steps to comply with this restriction.

More information

The Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs is available to provide advice and will continue to work with councils to help with meeting their legislative and other responsibilities at this important time.

For more information about local government matters, send an email to lgregforms@dlgrma.qld.gov.au or contact your nearest [regional office](#) of the Department.

Warwick Agnew
Director-General
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If you're concerned, **visit your GP** or **call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)**

