

FROM THE COAST

What it means to be a Councillor

Critical letters and feedback on social media are part and parcel of being involved in local government. Our democratic society enables us to voice our opinions freely on anything that gets our goat.

Quite often these letters contain claims that call into question the ethics, morals and motivation of Councillors or staff in local government, or for that matter in any organisation. People should be encouraged to voice their ideas and opinions, but claims containing gross inaccuracies, unfounded allegations and, at times defamatory remarks, are not acceptable. Quite often comments made on social media are libellous.

Local government members are elected to make decisions and often the controversial tough decisions, inevitably stir up some members of the community who disagree with those decisions. However difficult these decisions are it is important to understand that decisions are made after many months and sometimes years of collating and reviewing the facts and feeding that information through the correct local government process.

Local governments have to make monthly financial reports, annual reports and annual budgets which are openly available to the public. These reports are presented to the Councils at Ordinary or Special Council Meetings which are open to the public, and whose agendas are available on the local governments' website. Juggling everything to provide for the wants and needs of our community is always a challenge. The Shire of Esperance has put in place a sustainable plan for the future to provide services and maintain assets whilst keeping forecast rate increases as low as possible, currently forecast at 4.5% per year. The Shire has also increased spending on maintaining and renewing the community's assets like roads, playgrounds and buildings by \$3.5m over the last 5 years to ensure that these are sustainable in the longer term.

It is difficult for any council to meet each need of every individual in the community, but decisions are often made that look at the bigger picture and its long term effects on the community. Decisions are made that not everyone will be happy with, but Councils look for the best possible outcome for the broad community.

If you have concerns about your council's ability, or why a decision was made, come in and ask your questions in person. Get the facts, and if you still are not satisfied, you can always take the next step and report your concerns to the relevant authorities.