



PENRITH CITY COUNCIL CONDUCT OF THE 2021 ELECTION REPORT

Penrith City Council Report to
Minister for Local Government

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's obligations under Section 393A of the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 which requires the General Manager to Report on the Election.

Response to Clause 393A Requirements

Time Spent on the election by the general manager as a proportion of the general manager's remuneration

The General Manager, as in previous elections, was available to provide oversight to the Office of General Manager staff who were responsible for facilitating election arrangements with the Council's Election provider, the Australian Election Company. The General Manager however was not directly required to spend any time on the management of the election.

Time spent on the election by council staff as a proportion of council staff remuneration

Staff, as in previous elections, provided support services to Council's contractor, the Australian Election Company. This support however was less than previous elections as more tasks were left to the contractor to deliver. Any support provided was by the Governance Coordinator primarily, in addition to the Governance Manager and Chief Governance Officer. Most of this work is consistent with support that has been provided to the NSW Electoral Commission in the past. It is noted however that the Governance Coordinator worked closely in the lead up to the election with the Returning Officer, as a part of the partially outsourced model which was considered integral in achieving cost savings and a timely result. The estimated cost of the time staff spent on the election is \$10,000.

Total remuneration of council staff employed for the purpose of the election

No Council staff were employed specifically for the purpose of the election. Staff that provided support for the election did so within their existing duties and responsibilities.

Total remuneration, recruitment, and training costs of election officials

Council's contractor employed election officials, including polling officials, temporary assistance, and the Returning Officer. The total contract cost paid by Council to the contractor was \$1,127,041.60.

The cost of running any candidate information seminars

The Council's contractor, through the Returning Officer, provided a candidate information seminar prior to the election; this cost was included in the contract cost council paid to the Australian Election Company.

The cost of hiring venues and equipment for the election, including council venues and equipment and any associated costs

The cost of hiring most venues and equipment, including the Returning Officer's office, was included as a part of the contract cost paid to the Council's contractor. This cost totalled \$615,279. Other associated costs that were expended by Council are provided in the table below:

Activity	Cost (\$)
Additional Printing	787.74
Additional Advertising	8,836
Council owned polling places and returning office	6,926

The costs of any technological support, including the development of any counting software

The cost of technological support including count software was \$106,400.

The cost of preparing a written report under this clause

The report was prepared by the Governance Coordinator and overseen by the Governance Manager. The estimated cost of preparing this report is \$200.00.

Any electoral services provided to electors

Council had a comprehensive page of information on its website which provided all relevant details of the Council election. These included details of the accessible buildings which were provided for elections, the pre-poll locations, candidate information, a location-based map integrated with maps to show your closest polling place amongst other general information.

In addition to this, Council advertised heavily on social media and its website to generate awareness of the election and pre voting options available for residents. Council also, in collaborating with the contractor, established two additional pre-poll centres on top of the normal two, as a risk mitigation measure to the pandemic and to provide more access to our community.

Any electoral services provided to candidates

The Council's website was also available for candidates and provided significant resources and information. The Council's returning office was open for some time prior to the election to allow candidates suitable and timely access to the Returning Officer as required. In addition to this, a count website was provided for candidates and members of the public to keep track of data as it was input. A candidate information session was also run prior to the election at Council.

Operational details of the election and an overall evaluation of the conduct of the election, including feedback from stakeholders

Council staff believe the election was run efficiently, professionally and to an extremely high standard. Council is also confident that a significant cost saving was able to be achieved, however that is difficult to quantify. In addition to this, service to the community remained high.

The election count was completed by Saturday, 18 December 2021 with the result declared on Monday, 20 December 2021.

Scanning and Counting Centre used by the AEC

On balance, as it did in 2012, 2016 and 2018, the scanning software and processes used to scan ballot papers, was effective, efficient and in accordance with all required regulations.

Awareness of the Election

A common theme that has been maintained through recent times in respect of elections is community angst about the lack of awareness of local government elections.

It is pleasing that this year, less feedback was received with respect to awareness of the election. A number of factors may have contributed to this, however Council's efforts in promoting this through all avenues available, specifically social media, appear to have been successful.

Polling Places

Council Officers in conjunction with the Returning Officer kept in place most of the existing polling places that had been successful in the 2016 Election. While there were some minor queuing issues at a small number of polling places, caused by measures put in place to ensure social distancing, it is considered that the polling places again were very effective.

Pre-poll Voting

For the 2016 Council election, pre-poll voting was available at Penrith and St Marys at the following locations:

- Penrith City Council Library Theatre
- St Marys Memorial Hall

In 2021, Council made available two additional polling places to deal with the ongoing pandemic and to provide more choice for our community. This resulted in the following four pre-poll centres being available:

- Penrith City Council Library Theatre
- St Marys Memorial Hall
- Jordan Springs Community Hub
- Glenmore Park Youth Centre

The following table compares the pre-poll votes taken in 2016 compared to 2021:

	2016 Election	2021 Election
Penrith	12,607	10,870
St Marys	5,274	9,389
Jordan Springs	Not used	5,956
Glenmore Park	Not used	6,176
Total	17,881	32,391

The above table continues the trend from previous elections, with electors taking advantage of pre-poll voting and supports the Council's decision to double the number of centres available prior to the election.

The number of electors entitled to vote at the election and the number of electors who voted, specifying the number of electors who voted personally or by post

EAST WARD

Details	2008 Election	2012 Election	2016 Election	2021 Election
Number on Roll	39,115	41,530	45,076*	46,740*
Number who Voted	33,829	34,745	34,902	33,169
% of Voter Turnout	86.48%	83.66%	77.43%	70.9%

SOUTH WARD

Details	2008 Election	2012 Election	2016 Election	2021 Election
Number on Roll	38,936	40,954	44,821*	47,269*
Number who Voted	33,892	35,167	36,408	35,222
% of Voter Turnout	87.04%	85.87%	81.23%	74.5%

NORTH WARD

Details	2008 Election	2012 Election	2016 Election	2021 Election
Number on Roll	36,768	38,731	43,995*	50,504*
Number who Voted	32,081	32,808	35,879	36,805
% of Voter Turnout	87.25%	84.71%	81.55%	72.8%

*These numbers taken from the OLG elector numbers website

The total number of postal votes received was:

Postal Vote Details	No. of Votes
East Ward	2018
South Ward	2855
North Ward	2426
Total	7299

The number of electors increased across all three wards, however voter turnout was down noticeably, while complaints about awareness of the election were not as prevalent this year. It is likely that the ongoing pandemic situation resulted in many residents choosing not to vote in person or at all.

Additionally, despite Council promoting postal vote and pre-poll as an option, it is likely that the inability to provide our residents with an option to electronically vote heavily contributed to the lower than usual turnout figure. This is extremely disappointing as Council has made multiple representations to the Minister to allow the electronic voting system of the contractor to be used. This system is audited and proven, however legislation changes need to occur. Council also requested that iVote be provided on a licence basis so that our residents could also access it to make their votes but this was also denied.

Having provisions for councils to choose how to best run their election are welcome, but to do so in an environment where an electoral services provider and, in turn a community, are prohibited from being able to be provided with electronic voting options when others can, is a disappointing outcome. The biggest piece of feedback Council heard from residents at this election was their unhappiness about not being able to access electronic voting.

Warwick Winn
General Manager