

*Heart of the Stirling*



**SHIRE OF GNOWANGERUP**

**STEP FORWARD FOR YOUR COMMUNITY  
BECOME AN ELECTED MEMBER**



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## **PREAMBLE**

Democracy is something that no one should take for granted. Every day, all over the world, people are struggling for the right to participate in determining the destiny of their community and country.

Australia certainly is one of the 'lucky countries'. We have the opportunity to actively participate and have influence in all spheres of government. Increasingly, people are taking more interest in public affairs, particularly those at the local level, and many people are actively seeking to get involved with their Council to address issues that concern them and/or their communities.

Nominating to become an Elected Member is an important decision as you will put your name and credibility on the line with voters in a Council election. Being an Elected Member is certainly not a 'bed of roses'. The role is time consuming and can be demanding and complicated. Although you can be sure that other Elected Members and the staff will help you, you will have to be prepared to learn a lot very quickly.

However, you will gain satisfaction from playing an important part in developing a better local community for the future. It is a rewarding role and well worth considering.

This information has been prepared to assist you in making the decision about whether to nominate. It highlights some of the important issues relevant to nomination, describes the election process and gives you hints on campaigning.

## INTRODUCTION

The three spheres of government in Australia - Local, State and Commonwealth - work together in various ways to govern and provide services to the community. Although each level operates differently and has very different powers and functions, each has an important role to play in Australia.

In Western Australia, there are approximately 1,220 Elected Members representing 139 local government authorities throughout the State. The differing cultural backgrounds, age groups, qualifications, occupations and life experiences of Elected Members are important in ensuring that decisions taken by local governments reflect the diverse views of their communities.

Your Shire needs dedicated, community-minded people who are passionate about the Shire and want to help see it improve.

As a Councillor or as a President, the range of desirable attributes include flexibility, patience, willingness to learn, leadership, accountability to the community and the ability to help plan for the current and future needs of the Gnowangerup Shire.

Becoming an Elected Member is not something to take on lightly, but the satisfaction of being part of an organisation that is progressive, innovative and passionate about the community is an outstanding reward.

The Shire of Gnowangerup's elected members are community leaders who represent the entire Shire and during the next term of office will shape the direction of the Shire and lay the foundations for its ongoing sustainability.

No specific prior knowledge is needed to be an elected member. However, candidates are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Shire's local government structure and the role of Councillors, and should be aware of the important community issues across the Shire.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government in Western Australia is established under the *Local Government Act 1995* and has legislative responsibility for many functions and activities that are relevant to a local community. Local governments are well placed to understand the needs and priorities of their residents.

As this level of government is often seen as the 'closest' to the community, local government activities relate to matters that are fundamental to people's lives and impact strongly on their quality of life. Local governments have the ability to take account of and respond to, local views and ideas.

A local government consists of a Council - comprising Elected Members, and an Administration – comprising the CEO and employees. The Shire of Gnowangerup Council consists of 9 Elected Members (the President and 8 Councillors), and the Administration consists of approximately 30 employees.

A local government's responsibilities include:

- representing people in the community, preparing strategic and financial plans, and making decisions which will determine the future of the area.
- providing services and facilities for the well-being of people who live, work and do business in the area, striking a balance between social, environmental and economic priorities.
- consulting with communities and other tiers of government on local needs.

Each Council decides what services it will provide in its local area. The *Local Government Act 1995* sets out the role and functions of a Council.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A COUNCIL?

A Council is elected to provide leadership for the good governance of its local government and the local community, and operates primarily at the strategic level. Council does not involve itself in the operations of the organisation which is the responsibility of the Chief executive Officer.

The role of a Council includes:

- acting as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making.
- providing leadership by establishing strategic objectives and monitoring their achievement.
- maintaining the viability of the Shire by ensuring that resources are managed in a responsible and accountable manner.
- advocating the interests of the local community to other communities and governments.
- acting as a responsible partner in government by taking into account the needs of other communities.
- fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life.

For more information on the role and function of Council, see the *Local Government Act 1995* – available on the Shire of Gnowangerup's website.

## **SHIRE OF GNOWANGERUP - OUR VISION**

In the Shire we are proud to protect and enjoy our unique natural environment and work together to enhance the health, wellbeing and sustainability of our community.

Our civic leaders are innovative and receptive to the community's vision for our future. As a connected and inclusive community, we enjoy quality lifestyles and opportunities to live, work, play and do business locally.

We strive to:

- Serve the people in all three communities within the Shire of Gnowangerup with sensitivity to their needs.
- Provide for the convenience, comfort and safety of all persons of the Shire of Gnowangerup.
- Ensure appropriate development and maintenance of the amenities of every part of the Shire.
- Build a Shire of opportunities and one in which people will be proud to live, work and recreate.
- Promote the economic development and sustainable growth of the Shire.
- Provide an open and fair government for all residents and ratepayers.
- Safeguard the health and welfare of those who reside or work in the Shire.

## **CORE VALUES**

Our Values, chosen by the staff, are the fundamental guiding principles of how we work and interact with each other and with our customers. By aligning our behaviour to our values, we will create a happy, healthy and rewarding workplace.

**Our Values are:**

***Honesty*** – through integrity, ethical behaviour and trustworthiness

***Excellence*** – through consistency and the pursuit of continual improvement

***Responsibility*** – through accountability, transparency and ownership

***Respect*** – of diversity and opinion through politeness and inclusiveness of all community groups

***Fairness*** – through justice and equality

***Teamwork*** – through collaboration, partnerships and a willingness to work together

## **WHAT IS REQUIRED TO BECOME AN ELECTED MEMBER?**

The Gnowangerup local government area is made up of a diverse range of people including people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; people with disability; families; and young people.

It is accepted that people from diverse cultural backgrounds and age groups can bring a fresh outlook and new ideas to local government, which helps inform a more responsive approach to decision-making.

If you are passionate about your local community, then you are well-placed to become an Elected Member.

There are no special qualifications to become an Elected Member other than a desire to serve your community. Training and support are provided to new and existing Elected Members to assist in becoming familiar with the new role.

The skills, knowledge and attributes which are helpful for Elected Members include:

- communication skills, including listening and interpersonal skills, public speaking, respecting different opinions, negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution skills.
- problem-solving and analytical skills, in order to get to the core of a problem and come up with good solutions.
- teamwork skills, as Elected Members and the Shire's Administration need to work together for the benefit of the community.
- organisational skills, including time management and prioritising.
- understanding financial and reporting processes including budgets and financial reports.
- ability to engage with the community.
- understanding the principles of natural justice.
- understanding the role and services of local government.
- ability to understand legislation.
- leadership qualities such as energy, optimism, motivation, resilience, confidence, assertiveness, strategic thinking, advocacy and networking.
- ethical and accountable behaviour – and a commitment to acting in the best interests of the community as a whole.

At the end of this guide, a checklist has been prepared to assist you in making the decision about whether becoming an Elected Member is for you.

## WHAT ARE ELECTED MEMBERS REQUIRED TO DO?

The formal role of an Elected Member is detailed in the *Local Government Act 1995* and includes:

- representing the interests of electors, ratepayers and residents of the district.
- providing leadership and guidance to the community in the district.
- facilitating communication between the community and the Council.
- participating in the local government's decision-making processes at Council and Committee meetings.
- performing such other functions as are given to an Elected Member by the *Local Government Act 1995* or any other written law.

The President is required to perform all of the above as well as:

- preside at meetings.
- provide leadership and guidance to the community in the district.
- carry out civic and ceremonial duties on behalf of the Shire.
- speak on behalf of the Shire.
- liaise with the CEO on the Shire's affairs and the performance of its functions.
- perform such other functions as are given to the President by the *Local Government Act 1995* or any other written law.

Once successfully elected, your role as an Elected Member will involve:

- attending and participating in Council meetings, that are run using formal meeting rules and procedures.
- reading and understanding reports, including financial, environmental and social issues reports.
- presenting your arguments and debating with other Elected Members.
- keeping in touch with people in your area and speaking at community events.

As an Elected Member, you will be contributing your thoughts and ideas within a decision-making body that:

- decides on strategic and development plans for the local area.
- ensures Shire resources are used fairly for the benefit of all in the community.
- talks to local people about their views and ideas for the area.
- lets others on Council, regionally and in State and Commonwealth Government agencies, know about the local community issues.

One of the most important roles you will have as an Elected Member is to participate in making policy and decisions on behalf of your community. As a 'policy maker' you have responsibility for establishing and reviewing the rules, regulations and guidelines by which your community will be governed in the future.

An essential element of policy making is identifying community needs, setting objectives to meet those needs, establishing priorities between competing demands and allocating resources. In practice, this requires Councils to establish effective working relationships with various government agencies to explore opportunities for collaborative effort.

The policy framework, together with the Council's strategic management plans, provides the direction for the ongoing management and operation of the Council.

The working relationship between Elected Members and Council staff is very important. There are separate but complementary roles for Council Members and staff as set out below:

- Elected Members decide the overall strategic direction of the Council and set the policies and plans.
- Staff, through the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), undertake the administrative actions required to achieve the Council's strategic directions, policies and plans.

Every Council must appoint a CEO, who is the most senior member of the staff. The CEO is responsible to the Council:

- for the implementation of Council decisions and the general administration of Council functions and affairs.
- for employing and managing all the other staff of the Shire.
- to act as an adviser to Elected Members and to ensure that the Council acts within the law.

Note: Elected Members have no direct involvement in administration or managing Council staff.

The Shire President, as well as being a Councillor, has additional responsibilities and duties that include:

- Promoting the vision for the Shire.
- Providing leadership to achieve the vision.
- Leading the development of Council plans, strategies, policies and budgets.
- Ensuring effective engagement between the Council and the Management Team.
- Ensuring effective engagement between the Local Government and the people of the Shire of Gnowangerup.

The Shire President is also responsible for presiding over Council meetings and providing effective governance of the Council.

The Shire President is elected by the Councillors at the first meeting held after the election.

## ATTENDING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

One of the major commitments of an Elected Member is their time to attend various meetings, functions and events. This may mean having to put aside other family or personal commitments and responsibilities from time to time. The Shire of Gnowangerup holds one Council Meeting each month and one Council & Executive Workshop. These generally run on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month.

The Council & Executive Workshop is a more casual type of meeting that allows Elected Members to attend a meeting where discussions can be held on matters to be raised at the Ordinary Council meeting in a fortnight's time. This is a fantastic opportunity for Elected Members to hear from the Shire staff.

The official Council meeting where decisions are made is open to the public and is held on the fourth Wednesday of the month.

There are other functions held from time to time such as Committee meetings, working group meetings and workshops which you may be required to attend on other days during the month. As an Elected Member there is also an opportunity for you to become a member, or the Shire's representative, on boards and committees of various external agencies, government bodies or groups. This will also increase the time commitment required of you.

The Shire, as part of its annual civic calendar of events, conducts several functions for community groups, volunteers and the Shire's stakeholders, as well as regular citizenship ceremonies to swear in Australia's newest citizens. As an Elected Member you will be invited to attend these events and you may even be required to participate in making speeches or presentations.

While meetings and events add to the time commitment needed to be an Elected Member, they provide a valuable opportunity for Elected Members to engage with members of the community as well as networking with key stakeholders, business leaders and important dignitaries.

You will need to be in touch with the community by:

- keeping aware of the needs and wishes of the community as a whole.
- being prepared to initiate change and bring to the Council ideas and activities as the community needs change and evolve.
- keeping abreast of matters affecting the whole Council area because you will have to vote on all issues before Council.

To keep in touch with electors you will also have to do all or some of the following:

- attend meetings of local organisations.
- participate in a range of local activities.
- be available to discuss individual concerns.
- respond to issues raised with you and refer any enquiries or complaints that you may receive to the CEO.
- read, watch or listen to the local media to keep abreast of local news and issues.

- communicate with your community.
- keep informed about state and national current affairs which will give you a broader view of issues that may affect the Council.

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR**

Elected Members are holders of public office, exercising powers, functions and duties on behalf of the community and the public at large. Elected Members are required to put public interest before self-interest and to respect and uphold the principles and laws designed to protect the public interest and to preserve the public trust and confidence in the integrity of government.

The *Local Government Act 1995* requires that every local government prepare or adopt a Code of Conduct which set out the standards of behaviour expected to be observed by Elected Members, committee members and employees. The Shire's Code of Conduct is not intended to control or prohibit the actions of Elected Members, committee members or employees, but simply to document the standards of conduct expected of all who serve the community. It can be found on the Shire's website under Corporate Documents and Plans.

The community is entitled to expect that the following general principles be used to guide Elected Members in their behaviours:

- Act with reasonable care and diligence.
- Act with honesty and integrity.
- Act lawfully.
- Avoid damage to the reputation of the Shire.
- Be open and accountable to the public.
- Base decisions on relevant and factually correct information.
- Treat others with respect and fairness.
- Not be impaired by mind-affecting substances.

The *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 2007 (Rules of Conduct)* also provides a framework to deal with individual conduct by Elected Members. (A copy can be found on the Shire of Gnowangerup's website).

The Rules of Conduct prescribe uniform rules of conduct for Elected Members about:

- standards of general behaviour.
- use of confidential information.
- securing personal advantage or advantaging/disadvantaging others.
- misuse of local government resources.
- involvement with the Administration (relations with employees).
- disclosing interests that may affect impartiality.
- receipt and disclosure of gifts of a prescribed value.

As an Elected Member, a person becomes a key public official throughout the community and their behaviour and actions will be seen, and reflected on, by others.

## REMUNERATION

The current annual allowances paid for elected members are reproduced in the table below.

<b>Allowance</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Shire President</b>	\$16,000 (+ the Councillors Allowance)
<b>Deputy Shire President</b>	\$ 3,000 (+ the Councillors Allowance)
<b>Councillors</b>	\$ 8,000
<b>Telecommunications Allowance</b>	\$ 660
<b>Travel Allowance</b>	0.80 cents per Km

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

It is highly recommended that candidates read the following documents and plans.

- The Strategic Community Plan 2017-2027
- The Shire Budget 2019/2020
- Fees and Charges Schedule 2019/2020
- Rates Information 2019/2020

These documents are available on the Shire's website at [www.gnowangerup.wa.gov.au](http://www.gnowangerup.wa.gov.au) or you can contact the Shire for a printed copy.

In addition, the Department of Local Government & Communities has a large selection of information available on its website [www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au](http://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au) ranging from "Standing for Council – Information for Candidates" to Frequently Asked Questions information on a range of topics involving local government issues. It is worth having a look at the Department's website

## Checklist: Becoming an Elected Member

✓	I am prepared to .....
<input type="checkbox"/>	promote a positive image profile of Council and the Shire
<input type="checkbox"/>	inform myself about community needs and concerns and advocate at Council meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	present a broad range of electors' views
<input type="checkbox"/>	network with clubs, community business and service groups to seek feedback when needed
<input type="checkbox"/>	participate effectively in strategic plan and policy development
<input type="checkbox"/>	engage with all members of the community in a non-discriminatory way

✓	I have the skills to ....
<input type="checkbox"/>	Read and understand agendas and reports, so I can prepare for meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use computers to download, print, save and edit documents, use email and access internet sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate effectively, negotiate, explain and discuss issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research and evaluate community issues and concerns

✓	I Understand ....
<input type="checkbox"/>	The demographic profile of the Shire and relevant issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Social, environmental and economic issues facing my community in the long and short term
<input type="checkbox"/>	The statutory responsibilities I will have to observe
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elected members have no individual authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decisions cannot be made at informal gatherings, only at a formal council meeting
<input type="checkbox"/>	That there are conflicts of interest provisions and a code of conduct to observe
<input type="checkbox"/>	That elected members must conduct themselves with integrity, honesty and fairness and treat people with respect
<input type="checkbox"/>	How to read and interpret budget and financial statements - and seek training if required

✓	Eligibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT serving a prison sentence for a crime
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am 18 years of age or older
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am an elector of the district
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT a member of State or Federal Parliament
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT an insolvent under administration
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT on the local electoral roll as the nominee of a body corporate
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have NOT been convicted of a serious local government offence within the last five years
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have NOT been convicted on indictment of an offence for which the penalty was or included imprisonment for life, or imprisonment for more than five years
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT a member of another council
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT subject to a court order disqualifying me from being a council member because I have misapplied local government funds or property
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am NOT currently disqualified by the State Administrative Tribunal from holding office as a member of a council