



The structure of local government

In Australia, there are three levels of government, and each level has different responsibilities. The three levels are:

- Federal Government - There is one federal government, made up of several parts. It looks after the whole country.
- State or Territory Governments - State or Territory Governments look after one state or territory. Our state government looks after the state of South Australia.
- Local Governments - Local government is the closest level of government to the community. There are over 500 local government bodies in Australia. Each one looks after a particular local government area. In South Australia we normally refer to these areas as council areas. There are 68 councils in South Australia. These areas are drawn on a map so you can see what council area you live in.

While each level of government works differently and has different powers, each has an important role. They work together to govern and provide services to the community. Councils have important knowledge about the needs of their local area and rely on state and federal government to also support local communities.

In South Australia, the Local Government Act 1999 is the law that guides how councils are established, their role and responsibilities.

Each council is made up of elected members and council staff. Elected members are also known as councillors. Council staff are also known as council employees.

The elected council is made of council members, including councillors and a mayor. The elected council are voted in by their local community in a council election. Elections typically occur every four years. The elected councillors and mayor must follow laws and rules about how they act and work with the local community.

The councillors serve the community by listening to diverse local voices and represent what is in the best interest for the whole community. This means they must make sure they are well informed on any issues affecting the local community. They need to understand the facts on important issues, listen and speak with people in the community, discuss and debate issues at council meetings. They also take part in many public activities and council events.

The mayor also takes part in these same activities. However, their main task is to lead and guide the council. They promote positive working relationships among councillors, ensure council debate is respectful, and make responsible decisions. The mayor works closely with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) between council meetings and is the main spokesperson for council.



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The elected council, which comprises mayor and councillors, is responsible for employing just one person - the CEO. The CEO is responsible for employing, leading and managing staff known as council employees. The CEO and council employees need to follow laws and act in the best interest of the community.

References:

'Three levels of government', Parliamentary Education Office, Jan 2024.

<https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/three-levels-of-government>

'How councils work', Local Government Association of South Australia, Jan 2024.

<https://www.councilelections.sa.gov.au/about/councils>

Local Government Association of SA