



PENRITH CITY COUNCIL CONDUCT OF THE 2016 ELECTION REPORT

Penrith City Council Report to
Minister for Local Government

The 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 provided oversight for the entire election process. The General Manager met on a number of occasions with staff from the Governance Department and with the head of our election contractor once. It is estimated that the time spent on the election would have been approximately \$2,700. It should be noted that the time spent on the election would have been the same had the NSWEC been engaged.

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 was primarily provided by the Governance Coordinator, in addition to the Governance Manager and Chief Governance Officer. Some incidental administrative tasks were undertaken by Council's administration staff. The majority of this work is considered to be consistent with support that has been provided to the NSW Electoral Commission in the past. It is noted however that the Governance Coordinator worked very directly 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 \$21,500.

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 the majority of election officials, including polling officials, temporary assistance and the Returning Officer. The total contract cost paid by Council to the contractor was \$615,279.

In addition to this Council had 3 staff working on election day as liaison officers. The total cost of their time spent is estimated at \$2800. These costs were included in the figure provided earlier regarding time spent on election by Council staff.

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. It is estimated that the catering, printing and staff time to run this seminar would have been \$250.

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

The cost of hiring the majority of 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 (\$)
Printer, Printing, phones and Internet	3,090
Additional Advertising Signage	4,185
Council owned polling places and returning office	3,941

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

Nearly all technological support including the count and scanning software and the count website for candidate and members of the public was provide by the Council's contractor. The technological support provided by council was in relation to the provision of internet, printers and mobile phones which was provided above at a cost of \$3,090.

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 \$400.00.

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. This 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 and working with the Council's contractor Council put on two additional polling places to deal with population increases at Jordan Springs and Caddens.

Council also arranged for 3 staff to be available (1 for each ward) on election day as Liaison Officers to ensure the smooth operation of all polling places and also to ensure that any voting material was available should the need arise.

Council also kept open its returning officers for longer hours than required including late on 2 Thursday evenings prior to the election to coincide with Thursday night shopping.

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 in the region of \$150,000 was able to be achieved.

The election count was completed by the Friday following the election and declared the following Monday, which was 1 day less than in 2012. Council staff observed that the communication and cooperation with the NSWEC was at a high level although believe there is still room for improvement in enabling the efficient transfer of information with respect to rolls and access to information in the format required.

As a general comment for all elections, Council again as it has done in previous years received significant feedback relating to the lack of awareness about the election, which appears to be an ongoing challenge. This is despite the fact that council employed additional advertising of the election including the use of VMS signs, billboards around the city and significant subscriber and social media campaigns.

Below are details surrounding a number of operational elements of the election:

Scanning and Counting Centre used by the AEC

The AEC conducted the scanning, audit and counting of ballot papers at an office that they rented at Warners Bay, Lake Macquarie. Between Monday 12 and Wednesday 14 September 2016 the majority of the Council's ballot papers were delivered to the Count Centre securely by Council officers. The remaining ballot papers (postal ballot papers, and declared institution ballot papers etc.) were delivered over the following days. The Council's Governance Coordinator remained at Warners Bay for the week to oversee the processing of the Council's ballot papers. This oversight allowed the General Manager and the Returning Officer to have a direct line of communication to the Count Centre which played an integral part in the timely processing of the Council's votes.

The results for the Council were finalised on Friday night, 16 September 2016. The Returning Officer subsequently declared the Poll for the Council's election on Monday 19 September 2016, which was 9 days after the election was held (one day quicker than in 2012).

In the 2016 Election, above the line votes were not scanned as these were counted manually. This meant that a significant less number of ballot papers required scanning than did in 2012.

On balance, as it did in 2012 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 would appear that this year, it was again a significant issue for local residents. This may have been impacted by the proximity of the local government elections to the Federal Election and the confusion coinciding with not all council's conducting an election due to proposed amalgamations.

A number of additional measures were organised by Council staff to communicate the elections in addition to the radio and print advertisements arranged by the NSWEC. These included VMS signs, making use of large billboards the Council owns in the Local Government Area, sending text/email messages to existing council subscriber groups, the council website, social media and information provided in email signatures. Despite all this it is acknowledged that Council staff and councillors, both prior, on the day and after the election still received considerable feedback about a lack of awareness of the election.

Council at the most recent Local Government Conference put forward a motion for the State Government to consider a television campaign for local government elections to generate more awareness more broadly across the State.

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 2012 Election. Council when considering polling places attempts to make available as many accessible polling places or partly accessible polling places as possible. In 2016 Council Officers had regard to emerging suburbs and areas which have experienced population increases since 2012. This resulted in two additional polling places, 1 at Jordan Springs and 1 at Caddens. The polling place at Jordan Springs was an overwhelming success and contributed significantly to the management of the election by reducing pressure on polling places in nearby suburbs.

Pre Poll Voting

For the 2012 Council election, Pre Poll voting was available at Penrith and St Marys at the following locations:

- Penrith City Council Returning Officer's Office, 114-116 Henry Street, Penrith; and
- St Mary Memorial Hall, Mamre Road, St Marys

For the 2016 Council election, Pre Poll voting was available at Penrith and St Marys at the following locations:

- Penrith City Council Returning Officer's Office, 205 High Street, Penrith; and
- St Mary Memorial Hall, Mamre Road, St Marys

The following table compares the Pre Poll votes taken in 2012 compared to 2016:

	2012 Election	2016 Election
Penrith	8,749	12,607
St Marys	3,101	5,274
Total	11,850	17,881

As can be seen from the above Table, there was a significant increase in the amount of Pre-Poll votes taken at both the Penrith (3858; 44.10% increase) and St Marys (2173; 70.10%), Pre Poll locations, with an overall increase of 6,031 or a 50.09% increase. The spike in the turnout of electors occurred in the last few days of the Pre-Poll availability and follows similar increases that were experienced in 2012. These statistics indicate an increasing preference from electors to vote prior to election and it will be important that Council continues to be prepared for high pre-poll and postal voter turn outs in the future.

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
Number on Roll	39,115	41,530	45,076*
Number who Voted	33,829	34,745	34,902
% of Voter Turnout	86.48%	83.66%	77.43%
Number of Formal Votes	31,327	30,334	32,597
Informal	2,502	4,411	2,305

% of Informal Votes	7.39%	12.69%	6.60%
Quota	5,222	5,056	5,437

SOUTH WARD

Details	2008 Election	2012 Election	2016 Election
Number on Roll	38,936	40,954	44,821*
Number who Voted	33,892	35,167	36,408
% of Voter Turnout	87.04%	85.87%	81.23%
Number of Formal Votes	31,545	31,602	34,190
Informal	2347	3,565	2,218
% of Informal Votes	6.92%	10.14%	6.09%
Quota	5,258	5,268	5,679

NORTH WARD

Details	2008 Election	2012 Election	2016 Election
Number on Roll	36,768	38,731	43,995*
Number who Voted	32,081	32,808	35,879
% of Voter Turnout	87.25%	84.71%	81.55%
Number of Formal Votes	29,527	29,075	33,461
Informal	2,554	3,733	2,418
% of Informal Votes	7.96%	11.38%	6.74%
Quota	4,922	4,846	5,579

*These numbers taken from the OLG elector numbers website from June 2016.

The number of electors in the Council's area increased between 2012 and 2016 by 12,677 (10.46%). The total being 133,892. The total number of votes taken was 107,189. Voter turnout was down over all three wards anywhere from 3-6%, this was possibly due to a number of factors surrounding awareness of the election, anecdotal evidence suggests this may have been related to the proximity of the elections to the Federal Election and some confusion surrounding the status of Council's and the amalgamation proposals. The reduction in voter turnout appears to have affected most of the council elections held in 2016.

The total number of postal votes taken was 2,384 in comparison to votes taken in person which totalled 104,805.

Alan Stoneham