

Understanding the Role of Councils

So what does a council do?

In Victoria, 79 local governments represent about 4.6 million people. Each council varies in size, population, rate base and resources but all must operate in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Each Victorian municipality is different – its community may be young or old, established or still developing, rural or urban, and its population may vary from less than 4000 people to more than 200,000.

The City of Melbourne also has its own additional laws in the form of the *City of Melbourne Act 2001*. This Act includes extra objectives to recognise the unique role of the Melbourne as Victoria's capital city, and the special relationship that exists between it and the state and federal governments because of this position. It also provides a different electoral system.

All local governments consist of an elected arm, which are democratically elected councillors, and an operational arm through council employees. The elected councillors appoint the chief executive officer, decide on the council policies, appoint the Mayor and monitor council operations. The operational arm is responsible for implementing council decisions and providing advice to the elected arm.

A council is elected to provide leadership for the good governance of the municipal district and the local community. 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 council by ensuring 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.

Local governments have powers to set their own regulations and by-laws and provide a range of discretionary services.

Local laws developed by local governments deal with issues such as community safety, peace and order issues such as public health, management of council property, environment and amenity.

Local laws also apply to noise, fire hazards, abandoned vehicles, parking permits, disabled parking, furniture on footpaths, graffiti, burning off, animals in public space and nuisance pets.