



**2017 NT COUNCIL ELECTIONS**  
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# **Service Charter**

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## FOREWORD

I am pleased to present this election service charter for the Local Government (Council) general elections detailing how the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) intends to deliver a significant program of elections across the Territory.

Over 132,000 enrolled voters will participate in 60 elections to fill approximately 150 positions.

The election service charter outlines the NTEC's work at each stage of the election timetable and sets targets to assess the success of each component of the election. It also details the areas where councils will be contributing to the preparations for elections and builds on the important partnership between the NTEC and its local government clients.

I look forward to working in partnership with the local government sector in conducting the 2017 Northern Territory Council elections.



Iain Loganathan  
Electoral Commissioner

Date: 29 May 2017

## **1. Introduction**

The service charter document outlines the NTEC's broad goals and aims for the conduct of all 17 local government council elections. It defines the Commission's service level commitments to stakeholders, as well as the key performance indicators the Commission will use to evaluate election outcomes, and allow a benchmark to determine future proposed amendments to the [Local Government Act](#) and the [Local Government \(electoral\) Regulations](#) and measure the Commission's performance.

The aim of the document is to enhance electoral transparency and to demonstrate the Commission's accountability in all aspects of election planning. It should also assist stakeholders, including voters, candidates and the media, with their election preparations and set their expectations of, and interactions with, the Commission.

## **2. Background and purpose**

The NTEC is the statutory election service provider to Northern Territory local council general elections. The NTEC has been the sole provider of general election services to the Northern Territory local councils for many years and has a long history of working in partnership with the local government sector.

The NTEC conducts extensive debriefing after each local government electoral event. In 2013 following the 2012 Local Government elections, the NTEC submitted a [report](#) to Parliament. The report, which is available on the NTEC website, contained a number of recommendations to improve and modernise local government elections.

The NTEC has a long established standing commitment to the local government sector to deliver high quality election services. Preparation for the 2017 NT Council elections commenced late 2015. The NTEC has prepared this service charter on the basis of conducting elections on behalf of all 17 local councils.

The NTEC's election service charter aims to provide quality election services with transparency about costs. The NTEC's local government election program will meet all statutory requirements and ensure customer service and accuracy are not compromised.

Although cost increases in some areas of the local government election program are unavoidable, the NTEC will look for efficiencies to help absorb cost increases wherever possible.

The local government election program in the Northern Territory is governed by the [Local Government Act](#). The NTEC is guided in technical and procedural matter by the Regulations established under these laws.

The purpose of this document is to involve councils in the early phase of the NTEC's planning for the 2017 NT Council elections. The NTEC will document election services through individual Election Service Level Agreements with each of the 17 councils.

### **3. Performance targets**

In order to evaluate the overall success of the 2017 NT Council election program, the NTEC has prepared a series of performance targets to report on after the completion of the program. These targets include both aspirational and operational measures.

#### **3.1 Election preparation**

1. Finalise electoral service agreements with local councils by 31 May 2017.
2. Establish early voting, election day and remote mobile voting centres, where relevant, that are suitably located within the council area, and publish accurate information on their accessibility level.
3. Conduct a public awareness campaign to inform all Northern Territorians living in local government areas of their opportunity to vote with a focus on culturally diverse communities, people living with disability, and the Indigenous communities.
4. Develop various suites of advertising targeting enrol to vote, preferential voting method and voting services. This to include television, radio, print media, social media and other agreed practices with local government councils.
5. Increase the average territory-wide enrolment participation rate (percentage of eligible Northern Territorians on the roll) to 85 per cent.
6. Bring the 18 to 25 year old enrolment participation rate closer to the national average of 80 per cent.
7. Ensure the electoral roll is closed in accordance with the Act and 100 per cent of enrolment forms received by the NTEC are transferred to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) in a timely manner for processing before the 5:00 pm deadline on 25 July 2017.

#### **3.2 Voter services**

1. Electronic certified lists are provided in 100 per cent of voting centres (including remote voting) which quickens the voting process and improves accuracy.
2. Implement and test the necessary redundancy provisions for the electronic mark-off and election website.
3. All postal vote applications received by 4 August 2017, are processed and despatched in the first available mail.
4. All identified early voting centres are open and fully equipped to operate at 8:00am on Monday 14 August 2017.
5. All election day voting centres are open and equipped for voting from 8.00 am until 6:00 pm on 26 August 2017.
6. Forty per cent of voters who vote in the 2017 NT Council elections are utilising early voting centres across the Territory.
7. Eighty per cent of first preference count results for Mayors / Presidents are received by 8:00 pm from election day voting centres, and are published on the NTEC website. Counts for Alderman/ Councillors are published on the website by 10:00 pm.
8. An increase in voter participation, in all council areas, compared to the 2012 election.
9. Improvement on the lowest local government council area turnout rate of 29 per cent in 2012 to at least 40 per cent.
10. Decrease informal voting rates compared to the 2012 Local Government election (6.6 per cent).

#### 4. Proposed timelines

The lead-time for the management of 17 council elections is 12 to 18 months. This is equivalent to the lead-time required for the management of a Northern Territory general election. As such, the NTEC has established the following timeline to ensure services can be produced in a timely manner and resources are appropriately and efficiently allocated.

DATE	ACTIVITY
<b>2015</b>	
December 2015	All council CEOs notified of estimated election costs
<b>2016</b>	
December 2016	Draft Election Service Agreements despatched to councils
<b>2017</b>	
February to end of March	Service level negotiations commence with councils
May	Service level agreements finalised
Friday 14 July	Gazettal of date by Minister/ Nominations Open
Tuesday 25 July	Close of electoral roll
Thursday 3 August	Close of nominations
Friday 4 August	Declaration of nominations, draw for position on ballot papers
Monday 7 August	Postal vote mail-out commences
Monday 14 August	Early voting commences
	Remote Mobile voting commences
Tuesday 22 August	Overseas postal voting despatches cease
Thursday 24 August	All postal voting despatches cease
Friday 25 August	Early voting ceases
<b>Saturday 26 August</b>	<b>Election day</b>
	Election day voting commences
	Election day voting ceases
	Mobile voting ceases
	Primary counts of ordinary, postal and early votes commence
	Primary counts of postal, mobile and early votes commence
Monday 28 August	Declaration vote verification checks, commence recheck of all counts
Thursday 31 August	Primary counts of accepted declaration votes, further postal counts
Friday 1 September	Deadline for receipt of postal votes
	Final counts of postal votes commence
	Distribution of preferences
Monday 4 September	Declaration of the election result

#### 5. Vision for the NT Council elections

The Northern Territory Electoral Commission's vision for the next Northern Territory Local Government general election is aligned with the organisation's broader purpose, as defined in the [2015 - 2019 Corporate Plan](#).

The Commission's vision for the 2017 NT Council elections states:

*We are committed to providing quality electoral services to Territorians, ensuring that our electoral system, especially the right to vote and to vote in secret, is fully accessible to all voters.*

## **6. Opportunities and challenges**

The concurrent conduct of 17 council elections provides a number of opportunities including the promoting the elections on a territory-wide basis through the advertising and communication campaign. Further opportunities include the ability to engage Regional Councils in undertaking activities associated with updating the electoral roll and promoting election awareness at remote community levels.

In planning to conduct 17 local government elections, the NTEC has considered a number of challenges: the estimated volumes; participation rates and timelines; the experience of existing staff; and the need to second additional electoral experience to meet the community's and local governments expectations.

An election co-ordinator will be appointed to supervise the electoral service agreement for each council. The co-ordinator will liaise with the council's representative and provide regular reports on the progress of the election. The co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring the elections are conducted in accordance with the legislation and within the terms of the electoral service agreement. The designated co-ordinator is the council's first point of contact for queries in relation to the NTEC's election service. At the conclusion of the 2017 NT Council elections an election report will be prepared for each council. In addition, the NTEC will prepare a report with recommendations for legislative and procedural changes for future local government elections.

## **7. Election service package**

In order to measure the Commission's success in meeting its election objectives and its own performance, the following election service packages have been adopted.

### **7.1 Advertising and communication campaign**

The NTEC will deliver a voter information campaign on a local and territory-wide basis to:

- meet statutory requirements
- increase voters' awareness of their rights and obligations
- maximise voter turnout
- minimise the informal vote.

The NTEC will also provide advertising services, media relations, election information and assistance on the NTEC's website, and will provide an overflow service to respond to calls in the designated call centre. Voter information will be translated into Indigenous languages.

### **Statutory advertising**

Statutory advertising will appear in the general news sections of local newspapers nominated by each council, and will comprise the following:

- the date in which the election is to be held
- the nomination day for the election, and the time by which nominations must be lodged
- the date and time of the closing of the electoral roll.

Local press advertising for all councils will include a telephone enquiry number and the NTEC's website address.

### **Territory-wide advertising**

Having all local government elections conducted concurrently allows the NTEC to maximise promotion opportunities. The territory-wide advertising campaign will promote enrolment and voting and include an emphasis on the particular voting system used in local government elections. The cost of the campaign has been apportioned to all councils based on a percentage of enrolled voters. To minimise costs and maximize advertising reach, the NTEC will be utilising social media as a key marketing platform.



## **NTEC website**

The NTEC website will feature comprehensive information about local government elections generally, as well as specific information for each local council's election. Content will be updated at each phase of the election cycle including information about:

- enrolment
- nominations
- early and postal voting
- details on how and when to vote on mobile voting teams and where to vote on election day
- the close of voting
- election results.

Results from election day will be published on the NTEC website and will include first preference results only. No further updates for elected member positions will be published until after the final receipt of postal votes at 12:00 noon, Friday 1 September 2017. Elected mayoral results will be updated during the days following election day as new votes are admitted into the counts. However, final results will not be known for mayoral positions until the final receipt and counting of postal votes at 12:00 noon, Friday 1 September 2017.

## **7.2 Election office and staff**

The NTEC maintains a pool of trained electoral staff ensuring suitable persons are available for appointment as electoral officials for the 17 local government councils. Under the Electoral Service Agreements, some councils are making their staff available to undertake various election functions to reduce election costs.

## **7.3 Service commitments to casual and contract staff**

Staff engaged by the Commission can expect:

- efficient and timely recruitment processes, including electronic advice regarding the outcome of their application
- accurate advice and information concerning their conditions of employment, location, remuneration and position responsibilities
- appropriate and sufficient training for the role to be performed (typically a combination of online, face-to-face, and on-the-job training), as well as the provision of suitable training materials, manuals and/or guides
- accurate and timely payment.

## **7.4 Targeted service standards for casual and contract staff**

- Staff will receive training on their role and responsibilities.
- Payments to voting centre staff are made within four weeks of the election.
- Post-election survey responses indicate strong satisfaction with recruitment, training, payment and operational support.

## 7.5 Call centre service

The NTEC will provide a telephone service to manage election enquiries during the election period. This service will operate during office hours enabling consistent territory-wide messaging. The call centre staff will be located in the NTEC Darwin office and will be provided with access to look-up tools containing key details for the election.

### Performance indicators

1. The service targets measuring the performance of the call centre are based on a number of factors including:
  - the number of calls referred to the call centre team leader, or escalated
  - feedback on quality from both staff and stakeholders.
  
2. Key performance indicators include:
  - customer service complaints < 1 per cent
  - consistency with average talk times (call times under or over a reasonable variance can indicate under or over servicing of stakeholders and requires intervention)
  - adherence to schedule >95 per cent (arriving on time as per roster, scheduled breaks as per roster, etc.).

## 8. Candidates

In conjunction with representatives from the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) and the Department of Housing and Community Development, information sessions will be conducted for prospective candidates prior to the close of nominations on Thursday 3 August. The sessions will cover the election timeline, the procedures and rules relevant to candidates, and include particular emphasis on the rules regarding election advertising, which are often subject of complaints.

### 8.1 Nominations for the 2017 NT Council elections

The NTEC will receive and record nominations from candidates, including the receipt of the candidates' photographs.

All regional councils have agreed to act as receiving agents for all prospective candidates in remote areas of the Northern Territory. This agreement has also been extended to councils taking candidate photographs if required, and forwarding both the nomination form along with the photo to the NTEC.

All nominations must be in the hands of the NTEC no later than 12:00 noon, Thursday 3 August. Late nominations will not be accepted. The public declaration of nominations will occur in the NTEC offices located in either Alice Springs or Darwin.

NTEC ALICE SPRINGS	NTEC DARWIN
Alice Springs Town Council	Coomalie Community Government Council
Barkly Regional Council	City of Darwin
Central Desert Regional Council	City of Palmerston
MacDonnell Regional Council	East Arnhem Regional Council
	Katherine Town Council
	Litchfield Council
	Roper Gulf Regional Council
	Tiwi Islands Regional Council
	Victoria Daly Regional Council
	Wagait Shire Council
	West Arnhem Regional Council
	West Daly Regional Council

## **8.2 Draw for ballot paper position**

The NTEC will hold a ballot draw to determine the order that candidates' names will appear on the ballot papers. This is undertaken at an appropriate time determined by the Returning Officer. In 2017, this will occur at 12:00 noon, 4 August 2017 in both locations as outlined in section 8.1.

Ballot draws will be conducted with the order of names on the ballot paper determined by a computerised random draw. Electronic draws were recently used in the 2016 Territory election.

## **8.3 Service commitments to candidates**

Candidates nominating for election to local government councils can expect:

- clear, accurate and timely information about their rights and responsibilities as a candidate, including access to candidate information sessions run by the Commission
- efficient and timely nomination processes, with relevant and accessible information available to enable lodgement within the statutory timeframe
- helpful and courteous services and advice provided by electoral staff
- regular distribution of election information using electronic newsletters published on the NTEC website
- a clear point of contact for all enquiries
- access to accurate and timely election results, as well as other related information
- a dedicated point of contact within the Commission to address nomination queries.

## **8.4 Targeted service standards for candidates**

- All nominating candidates receive a candidate pack upon request that contains information required to lodge a successful nomination. This information will also be available on the NTEC website and relevant council sites.
- All complaints or enquiries are responded to, or acknowledged, within 24 hours.

## **9. Early voting**

### **9.1 Postal voting**

An elector will be able to apply for a postal vote from 29 May 2017. To enable this, the NTEC has developed an online postal vote application system where voters can go online and request postal ballot material.

Once an application is registered, the NTEC will process it when ballot papers are available and endeavour to ensure that the postal material is despatched in the first available mail.

The NTEC will arrange for ballot material to be posted to all voters who are registered as general postal voters (registered to receive a postal vote at every election) as soon as ballot material is available in order to meet the first available mail.

### **9.2 Early voting (in person)**

The NTEC will provide early voting facilities in all major centres across the Northern Territory from Monday 14 August 2017 to Friday 25 August 2017. During this period, early voting will operate from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, except for Friday 25 August 2017 (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and Saturday 19 August 2017 (9:00 am to 5:00 pm).

In consultation with local councils, the NTEC proposes that the hours of operation be consistent across all venues, and that all venues be included in communication products.

## **10. Voting centres**

### **10.1 Accessibility**

The accessibility standards of voting centres are a high priority for attendance (in person) ballots. The NTEC will look for voting centres that provide maximum access for voters and will attempt to ensure at least one fully accessible voting centre is available in each ward. Where access limitations exist for voting centres, the NTEC will provide an explanation of the institutions associated, with each voting centre rated as having no wheelchair, or assisted wheelchair access.

The NTEC will consider voting centres that have been used at Northern Territory, Federal and previous local government elections, and will ensure voting centres are suitable located within each ward or local government area.

### **10.2 Operation of voting centres**

Election day voting centres will operate between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm on Saturday 26 August 2017.

Election co-ordinators will appoint and train voting centre managers. Training and reference material will explain the electoral laws that apply to voting in local government elections.

The NTEC will provide an electronic mark-off facility at all voting centres that will allow voters to be marked off a council roll at any voting centre for the local council.

Election co-ordinators will appoint sufficient staff for each voting centre to provide a smooth flow of voters on election day. In addition, voting area managers will visit voting centres during the hours of voting and throughout the count on election day to support all voting centre managers. They will check that procedures are being carried out correctly, provide advice, and deliver any additional materials required should shortages occur during the day.

### **10.3 Northern Territory voters can expect:**

- a range of public awareness activities aimed to assist them with ensuring they are correctly enrolled - voters will be directed to enrol online
- a range of voting options to make it as easy as possible for every voter to cast their vote and exercise their democratic right and obligation
- an effort to provide appropriate services for voters with particular requirements due to their location, cultural or linguistic background, or disability
- accurate, user-friendly and timely information about when, where and how to vote
- well located, accessible, advertised voting and early voting centres
- helpful and responsive call centre, enquiry and complaints management services
- courteous, informed and helpful voting staff
- ballot papers, advertising, a website and other election materials that are accurate, easy to read and understand
- accurate, timely reporting of election results and statistics utilising an accessible, user-friendly website.

### **10.4 Targeted service standards for voters**

- Provision of an accurate and complete electoral roll for each council area.
- All complaints or enquiries are responded to, or acknowledged, within 24 hours.

## **11. Counting method**

On election night, all election day voting centres will sort and count all ordinary votes taken at their voting centre. They will provide the NTEC with the first preference count for each candidate contesting that council seat.

The data will be vetted before posting it to the election website. The progressive updated results are available to candidates, media and the community on election night. Early voting centres and mobile voting team results will also be made available on the website on election night.

### **11.1 Computer counts**

Proportional representation counts are used to calculate the results in wards involving multiple vacancies. Post-election day, the NTEC will conduct all proportional representation counts using its computer count system (Easy Count).

The NTEC will batch ballot papers by voting centre to enable reconciliation throughout the count process. Ballot papers within in each batch will be batched into 50s in preparation for data entry (a short batch may be required where the number of ballot papers for a voting centre is not divisible by 50). It is expected that batching would be completed on the afternoon of Sunday 27 August 2017.

During a computer count, preferences on each ballot paper are entered into the NTEC's Easy Count by experienced data entry operators. Once all ballot papers have been entered and separately verified by another data entry operator, the Returning Officer will apply a function within the application to calculate a result.

It is expected that all computer counts will be completed by 12.00 noon Friday 1 September 2017. This then allows for the inclusion of any late excepted postal votes to be processed by the cut-off period.

### **11.2 Manual counts**

For elections involving single vacancies (Mayor), post-election day, returning officers will conduct a fresh manual count of all ballot papers to ensure that:

- ballot papers have been sorted correctly
- first preference totals are correct
- identified informal votes are confirmed as informal
- the statistical return completed by each voting centre manager is in order.

It is expected that all manual counts will be completed by 12:00 noon Friday 1 September 2017. This then allows for the inclusion of any late excepted postal votes to be processed by the cut-off period.

### **11.3 Scrutineers and formality**

Appropriately appointed scrutineers are entitled to be present during the scrutiny and counting of all votes, but no other persons are permitted except for electoral officers. In voting centres and at the central count centre, candidates are restricted to one scrutineer per count table.

A decision by electoral officials on the formality of a ballot paper will be final. Voting centre managers, during the scrutiny on election night, are able to make a decision on formality that will apply to their count. The Commission will then review the informal ballot papers during the fresh scrutiny or computer input.

## **12. Declaration of results**

It is expected that NTEC returning officers will complete all declarations by Monday 4 September 2017. This will be consistent with the 2012 elections.

The NTEC, through the various Electoral Service Agreements, has agreed where possible, to provide the formal declaration of results at the various council chambers.

## **13. Management of complaints**

Complaint management is an important component of conducting an election. The NTEC commits to a service standard that all complaints or enquiries are responded to or acknowledged within 24 hours.

## **14. Election report**

The NTEC will provide council with a report on the conduct of the elections within two months of election day.

All individual council reports will feed into the NTEC's 2017 NT Council election report.

Date	Time	
Friday 14 July		Gazettal of date by Minister
		Nominations open
Tuesday 25 July	5:00 pm	Close of electoral roll
Thursday 3 August	12:00 noon	Close of nominations
Friday 4 August	12:00 noon	Declaration of nominations, draw for position on ballot papers
Monday 7 August		Postal vote mail-out commences
Monday 14 August	8:00 am	Early voting commences
	9:00 am	Remote Mobile voting commences
Tuesday 22 August	6:00 pm	Overseas postal voting despatches cease
Thursday 24 August	6:00 pm	All postal voting despatches cease
Friday 25 August	6:00 pm	Early voting ceases
<b>Saturday 26 August</b>		<b>Election day</b>
	8:00 am	Election day voting commences
	6:00 pm	Election day voting ceases
		Mobile voting ceases
		Primary counts of ordinary and early votes commence
	Primary counts of mobile votes commence	
Monday 28 August	9:00 am	Declaration vote verification checks, commence recheck of all counts
Thursday 31 August	9:00 am	Primary counts of accepted declaration votes, further postal counts
Friday 1 September	12:00 noon	Deadline for receipt of postal votes
		Final counts of postal votes commence
		Distribution of preferences
Monday 4 September	TBA	Declaration of the election result