



YOUR COUNCIL – A LOCAL GOVERNMENT FACT SHEET

A snapshot of local government in New South Wales

- New South Wales is currently divided into 152 council areas.
- The smallest council in terms of area is Hunters Hill at 5.8 km².
- The largest council in area is Central Darling at 53,510.8 km².
- The council with the smallest population is Urana with approximately 1,400 residents.
- The council with the largest population is Blacktown with approximately 279,000 residents.
- Council elections are held every four years as set out under the *Local Government Act 1993*.
- There are currently 1,523 elected councillors in New South Wales.
- 400 councillors are women (26%) and 18 current mayors are women (12%).
- There are currently 29 Aboriginal councillors (1.9% of councillors).
- The most common age group of councillors is 50-59 years (34.5% of all councillors).
- 161 councillors in NSW have a first language other than English (11% of all councillors).
- NSW councils employ more than 51,000 people.

What do councils do?

Councils provide a range of day-to-day services for their local communities and are responsible for issues that affect our daily lives.

These services may include:

- libraries, community centres and halls
- recreation facilities such as public swimming pools and sporting fields
- infrastructure such as local roads, buildings, sewerage and drainage, bridges, boat ramps, skate parks, caravan parks, public toilets and picnic areas
- environmental and public health services
- waste management, including recycling services and landfill disposal facilities
- controlling companion animals
- planning and development services
- services for specific groups in the community such as children, young people, older people, people with disabilities, Indigenous people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- water supply for communities outside areas serviced by Sydney and Hunter Water Corporations or authorities specified under the *Water Management Act 2000*.

How can you find out about your local council?

If you are not sure which council area you live in you can:

- Check the local government section in your local telephone directory.

- Look in a street directory.
- Go to the department's website at www.dlg.nsw.gov.au. Enter your suburb or town in the search box. The results will include a map of the council area, some statistical information, and contact details for your council.

If you don't have internet access, you can call us on (02) 4428 4100.

How do councils operate?

Councils operate within laws set by the NSW government. Their powers and responsibilities mainly come from the *Local Government Act 1993* and associated regulations.

NSW is divided into approximately 150 council areas. These areas may be divided into wards. The creation of wards can only be done through a constitutional referendum of the local community. Each ward must have about the same number of voters – a variation of not more than 10% – and elect the same number of councillors.

Council elections are held every four years. Each council must have a minimum of five and a maximum of fifteen councillors, one of whom is the mayor. Mayors are either elected by the other councillors (123 mayors) or elected directly by the local community (29 mayors). An individual council's decision to change the number of councillors or change the way the mayor is elected must be approved by a referendum.

All councillors must complete training in topics such as meeting procedures, planning legislation, financial issues, codes of conduct and conflicts of interest.

The role of the councillors is to set the council's strategic direction and make final policy decisions. Council meetings are held at least ten times a year to discuss issues and make decisions on behalf of the local community. Each meeting must be held in a different month.

Councils employ a wide range of administrative, outdoor, technical and professional staff. The general manager is responsible for implementing the strategic direction and policies set by the councillors and managing the work of council staff.

How are councils financed?

Councils receive income from rates and annual charges, user charges and fees, interest, contributions and donations, and grants from the state and federal government. They also receive government funding for specific projects.

What can you do if you have a problem with your council?

Many problems can be resolved at an early stage by speaking to the appropriate person at the council. As locally elected, autonomous bodies it is important that councils are given every opportunity to resolve concerns directly with the parties involved. If you are not satisfied with the response from council staff, you should contact your local councillors. If you are still not satisfied, you could contact your State Member of Parliament.

All local councils in NSW are independent corporate bodies, so the Minister for Local Government and the Department of Local Government do not have the authority to direct local councils in their day-to-day decision making or review the planning, resource allocation or enforcement decisions they make.

The following table lists some key council responsibilities, the relevant laws, and the government agency responsible for administering those laws.

Key council responsibilities and relevant contact agencies

Issue	Relevant legislation	Relevant agency	Contact details
Abandoned shopping trolleys	<i>Impounding Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Aboriginal heritage	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and Heritage Act 1977</i>	Dept of Planning NSW Heritage Office	(02) 9228 6333 (Planning) (02) 9873 8500 (Heritage)
Alcohol free zones	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Asbestos	<i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 Contaminated Land Management Act 1997</i>	Dept of Environment and Conservation (Environment Protection Agency)	(02) 9995 5000
Billboards/signage/advertising	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Brothels (amenity)	<i>Restricted Premises Act 1943</i>	Attorney General's Dept	(02) 9228 7777
Brothels (private land use)	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Caravan Parks	<i>Local Government (Manufactured Home Estates, Caravan Parks, Camping Grounds and Moveable Dwellings) Regulation 2005</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Car parking	<i>Road Traffic (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999</i>	Roads and Traffic Authority	131 782
Car parking - free parking areas (eg public car parks)	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Community and operational land under council control	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Companion animals (cats and dogs)	<i>Companion Animals Act 1998</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Competitive neutrality	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Compulsory acquisition of land	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100

Issue	Relevant legislation	Relevant agency	Contact details
Council annual reports	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Council audited financial reports	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Council corruption allegations	<i>Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988</i>	ICAC	1800 463 909
Council maladministration allegations	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government NSW Ombudsman	(02) 4428 4100 1800 451 524
Council management plans	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Council social/community plans	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Council State of the Environment reports	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Councillor misconduct / misbehaviour allegations	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Crown land	<i>Crown Lands Act 1975</i>	Dept of Lands	(02) 9228 6666
Development - affecting waterways	<i>Rivers & Foreshores Improvement Act 1948</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Development - applications and consents	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Development - staged	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning NSW Ombudsman ICAC	(02) 9228 6333 1800 451 524 1800 463 909
Development (unauthorised) - enforcement	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	NSW Ombudsman Building Professionals Board (private certification matters)	1800 451 524 (02) 9895 5950
Developer contributions (s94)	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Fencing - dividing	<i>Dividing Fences Act 1991</i>	Dept of Lands	(02) 9228 6666
Fencing - consent to construct	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Flouridation	<i>Flouridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957</i>	NSW Health	(02) 9391 9000
Graffiti	<i>Summary Offences Act 1988</i> <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Attorney General's Dept Dept of Local Government	(02) 9228 7777 (02) 4428 4100
Greywater reuse	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government NSW Health	(02) 4428 4100 (02) 9391 9000
Heritage	<i>Heritage Act 1977</i>	NSW Heritage Office	(02) 9873 8500
Impounding	<i>Impounding Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100

Issue	Relevant legislation	Relevant agency	Contact details
Land use/environmental planning	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Land values	<i>Valuation of Land Act 1916</i>	Dept of Lands	(02) 8258 7400
Libraries (funding)	<i>Library Regulation 2005</i>	State Library (Arts NSW)	(02) 9273 1414
Local government elections (conduct of)	<i>Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act 1912 and the Election Funding Act 1981</i>	State Electoral Office	1300 135 736
Noise complaints	<i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997</i>	Dept of Environment and Conservation	131 555
Noxious weeds	<i>Noxious Weeds Act 1993</i>	Dept of Primary Industries (Agriculture)	(02) 6391 3100
Pecuniary interest	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Places of public entertainment (POPEs)	<i>Local Government Act 1993 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Pollution	<i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997</i>	Dept of Environment and Conservation (Environment Protection Agency)	(02) 9995 5000
Private land use (eg brothels, holiday lettings)	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Protected disclosures - corruption	<i>Protected Disclosures Act 1994</i>	ICAC	1800 463 909
Protected disclosures - maladministration	<i>Protected Disclosures Act 1994</i>	NSW Ombudsman	1800 451 524
Protected disclosures - waste in local government	<i>Protected Disclosures Act 1994</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Public-private partnerships	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Rates and charges	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Rainwater tanks	<i>Code of Practice for Plumbing and Drainage Regulation</i>	Dept of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability	(02) 8281 7777
Retaining walls - consent to construct	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Retaining walls - disputes	Common law	Independent legal advice or a Community Justice Centre	(02) 9228 7455
Rezoning of land	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333

Issue	Relevant legislation	Relevant agency	Contact details
Roads	<i>Roads Act 1993</i>	Roads and Traffic Authority Dept of Lands Dept of Local Government	131 782 (highways) (02) 8258 7400 (other roads) (02) 4428 4100 (local roads)
Sewage management	<i>Local Government Act 1993 and Local Government (General) Regulation 2005</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Stormwater (general)	<i>Various</i>	Dept of Environment and Conservation	131 555
Stormwater (charges)	<i>Local Government Act 1993 and Local Government (General) Regulation 2005</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Stormwater drainage (development consent for private land)	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Strata property management	<i>Strata Schemes Management Act 1996</i>	Office of Fair Trading	133 220
Subdivision of land	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Swimming pools - consent to construct	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Swimming pools - fencing standards	<i>Swimming Pools Act 1992</i>	Dept of Local Government	(02) 4428 4100
Trees	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Planning	(02) 9228 6333
Unsatisfactory service or dissatisfaction with council response	<i>Ombudsman Act 1974 Local Government Act 1993</i>	NSW Ombudsman Dept of Local Government	1800 451 524 (02) 4428 4100
Waste management	<i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i>	Dept of Environment and Conservation	131 555
Water supply	<i>Water Supply Authorities Act 1987</i>	Dept of Planning Dept of Environment and Conservation Dept of Lands Dept of Local Government	(02) 9228 6333 131 555 (02) 9228 6666 (02) 4428 4100

Need more information?

The department has produced a range of other fact sheets and brochures on topics such as:

- How to have your say in council.
- How to access council information.
- Why do you pay rates?

You can access these documents on our website or by contacting us at our offices.

Our contact details



New South Wales Department of Local Government

5 O'Keefe Avenue
Nowra NSW 2541

Locked Bag 3015
Nowra NSW 2541

General enquiries	(02) 4428 4100
Facsimile	(02) 4428 4199
Telephone typewriter	(02) 4428 4209

Level 9, 323 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Locked Bag A5045
Sydney South NSW 1235

Telephone	(02) 9289 4000
Facsimile	(02) 9289 4099

Email	dlg@dlg.nsw.gov.au
Website	www.dlg.nsw.gov.au