

Australia Post - Postal Services Modernisation discussion paper – submission for comment

Closing date for comment – 27 April 2023

At the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries we work closely with local government councils throughout Western Australia on a range of support services, this activity often involves use of a reliable postal service especially in regional areas.

Support for regional areas

In many regional areas there is already a reduction or loss of general services in comparison with metropolitan locations, so connectivity and communication is vital to the sustainability of regional communities for the general well-being of residents. Household mail delivery in regional areas is often non-existent so the reliance on retaining postal agents in these areas for a continuation of mail and other services is critical, with a trip to town vital in retaining valuable connectivity for community members in the country.

More equity between regional and metropolitan services is to be encouraged as residents in country areas should not be disadvantaged and disenfranchised simply because of their location.

Community Consultation and distribution of rates and licence notices to electors

Day to day operations of local councils involve maintaining contact with their residents and businesses, ensuring that they continue to meet the changing needs of their community through regular consultation which involves the use of local postal services. It is also important to maintain the reliable distribution of annual rates notices and local licences, and the ability for the members of the community to be able to make payments at Australia Post offices and local agents which adds to the overall convenience.

Election activity – democracy and increased participation

To strengthen democracy in local council elections and increase community engagement, there is a heavy reliance on a regular and reliable postal service to households and businesses throughout the state. There are currently no options to digitise local government election operations, so the reliance on a consistent mail service by Australia Post remains throughout all election periods. Purchase of regular and priority postal rates with bulk mail lodgement is also common throughout an election period, unfortunately delivery timelines in many areas currently differs very little between the two rates of lodgement and is therefore hard to justify the increased priority mail cost.

The election postal activity involves both outbound mail and the return of elector's votes. Election activity is also accompanied with increased marketing communication by candidates and interested community groups also utilising the postal service, so mail volumes increase generally around these times.

Unlike a state or federal election, voting in local government elections is currently not compulsory in WA, so there is an ongoing challenge to raise the level of voter participation and also to encourage nominations from prospective candidates that are more representative of the diverse community.

Postal voting is known statistically to increase overall participation rates in local government elections as this form of delivery is recognised as convenience voting. Any move to change the current delivery methods particularly during elections could have a detrimental effect.