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When would a council prefer to use a private provider, rather than the NSWEC, to conduct its elections?

The cost of running an election is significant. Where a private provider could provide a more cost effective solution to Council, this may be a better ratepayer outcome. That being said, as the Issues Papers highlights, the NSWEC has a sole competitor. Councils would need to be assured that any private provider has the necessary experience and capital to provide services equivalent to those currently provided by the NSWEC. They would also need to be subject to the same standards and regulation as the NSWEC. Internally, there would be an expectation that they have requisite systems in place to ensure public confidence in the transparency and fairness of the process.

Public confidence in administration by a government body can be higher than in often sceptical views of private providers. In particular, if in future online voting is adopted for local council elections, provision by a private provider may cause public scepticism in voting outcomes.

To what extent would the range of services offered by private providers vary by a council's geographic location (i.e., metropolitan, regional or rural) or size (i.e., small, medium or large)?

Councils in rural areas would find it difficult to source a local private provider for election services. As the Issues Paper highlights, there is a sole supplier alternative. There may be more opportunities for private providers if neighbouring regional/rural councils could use the same provider, with cost saving measures.

If a tender process is required under the Local Government Act to assess potential providers, in a private provider scenario, this would create greater impost to Councils.

How should we assess the efficient costs of providing election services to local councils?

From the building block approach to calculating costs of election services to local councils, it appears that in a competitive market scenario, the NSWEC would pass on costs as though it were a private sector provider. Is this a foreshadowed ACCC requirement? If not, then why would the NSWEC propose to pass on costs, for example, tax liability when no current obligations exists?

The cost build up approach could provide a more equitable outcome for Councils.

The number of election booths for a council election is not only costly for councils but near impossible for prospective candidates to man – this is a detriment to the democratic process.

Less physical voting booths are required. Minimum voters at booth should be 1,500 or the next closest booth should be more than 10km away.

Electronic voting whereby candidates can have a simple one page brief is more effective for candidates and council.

How should we allocate the efficient costs between the councils (as a whole) and the State Government?

In relation to indirect costs, we believe 100% of the cost should be borne by the State government in an effective competition scenario. Costs not currently borne by Council would be expected to be paid by the State Government or through compensation to Council, for example a Local Government Election Grant. We note that Council's ability to generate extra income to cover additional costs is

limited due to the State's position on rate pegging. Expenditure cutting on essential services may be required to fund the shortfall.

Some indirect costs are incurred by Council for elections, for example, policing non-compliance with election signage on road reserves, public footpaths, power poles and parks.

How should we allocate the council-share of costs between councils? For example, on a 'per elector', or some other basis?

As a rural Council we consider the fairest approach to be a 'per elector' basis. An alternate approach which does not see councils with a smaller elector base contribute to less of the overall state cost, would disadvantage those councils, particularly those that are unable to subsidise, which metropolitan councils may be positioned to do.