




Speech By
Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Local Government Elections

 **Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.06 am): Continuity of government is paramount at a time such as this. Local government has an essential role in delivering services and supporting communities. To that end, briefings to me and the government from the Chief Health Officer have emphasised the importance of having mayors and councillors in place to lead their communities at this time. That is why the local government elections on 28 March are going ahead.

Several measures have been put in place to smooth this event and address the concerns of all voters. These measures have been informed by public health advice. A key measure is extending the hours for pre-polling if and where possible. This includes extending hours into the evening and this Saturday. I urge people to take advantage of this opportunity.

Voters in declared institutions, including nursing homes and hospitals, will be given alternative voting options, including telephone voting. Applications for postal votes through the Electoral Commission of Queensland closed at seven o'clock last night. Close to 540,000 Queenslanders have applied for a postal vote. I would like to thank all the ECQ staff working under Commissioner Pat Vidgen.

Yesterday was truly an historic day for the ECQ. Of the 540,000 postal vote applications, 160,000 were registered in the final 24-hour period. Almost 74,000 voters cast their ballot at polling stations after early polling started at 9 am yesterday. By 5 pm yesterday, 162 people had registered for telephone voting and 68 people had lodged their vote over the phone. At the weekend, staff took thousands of phone calls and emails. I know that the ECQ website over the weekend and yesterday was pushed to the limit. I know that there were some delays with phone lines. When I reflect on the figures just mentioned, I convey my deepest appreciation to the ECQ teams working right across the state.

However, as a government, we have to be nimble in an evolving situation. We are looking at legislation that will give the government all the options we need in relation to local government elections if things change. Early voting stations have opened at about 130 sites across Queensland, as I have mentioned, and that information is available on the ECQ website.

I encourage everyone voting to take your own pen or pencil, but there will be more than enough pencils available at booths and stations as an added precaution.

Yesterday the Attorney-General and I had a phone hook-up with mayors and CEOs from across the state, along with the Electoral Commissioner. That was an important opportunity to share this information and the measures that have been put in place by the ECQ with support of the government to make sure that this election period runs smoothly.

Equally, conversations are being held about volunteer staffing at polling booths, how-to-vote cards, postal vote supplies and how best to address the needs of vulnerable people, including people living with disabilities and the elderly. Indeed, the government calls on all candidates, groups and parties

to, at the very least, limit their volunteers at polling places and to not hand out how-to-vote cards physically. There are further measures that we can put into place. We are working with the Electoral Commission to make sure that appropriate how-to-vote information is available to people attending polling places. These are truly extraordinary times, but times that need continuity in local government.