




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR CONDUCT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (11.37 am): I rise to speak in support of the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Listening to the contributions of the committee members last night, there certainly seemed to be a lot of love in the room, which was great to see, between the member for Bancroft, the esteemed chair of the committee; the member for Ipswich West, my longstanding colleague and former committee member; the member for Bundaberg; the member for Lockyer; the member for Traeger; and the member for Burleigh.

In the spirit of this bill, I congratulate the committee on their tripartite approach—that is a word we do not often use in this House but has been used many times already in this legislation—to working together across all of the different political parties that make up that committee. They have done a significant amount of strong work and it is clear to see that the committee are quite pleased with where they have eventually landed. I also note that the bill has good support from the Local Government Association of Queensland and many mayors and councillors throughout Queensland.

It is worth noting at the outset that Queensland local governments are unique. Brisbane is home to the largest local government in the country. I believe that it is larger in budget than the state of Tasmania. When we talk about local governments, we are not just talking about small rural and regional councils. The Brisbane City Council has a huge local government area that is governed by its own legislation, the City of Brisbane Act. In my own electorate I have three local councillors. I call it my French flag, because I have one Labor, one Liberal and one Independent.

Mr Dametto: French?

Ms PUGH: The Independent; I see her colours as white. I am sure that they all agree on the importance of the bill in line with the broad support that the legislation has received from local government generally. The work on this report and the subsequent bill, which is now before the House, took over a year to produce. The committee tabled its report in October 2022. The committee made 40 recommendations to improve the councillor conduct complaints system. The bill before the House today enables 19 recommendations from the report to be enacted. Those recommendations require legislative amendment in order to be enacted.

I acknowledge one of the members of the department staff who worked on the bill and some of the notes surrounding it. I see her down the back, shaking her head. Jess Burgess worked in my electorate office when I was first elected. From my very first day as the member for Mount Ommaney—

Mr Saunders: What a great day.

Ms PUGH: What a great day. I very fondly remember my first day in the office. Jess has always had a passion for planning, which she studied at university. I am so proud not only to see her career blossoming but also to speak on a bill that she had a hand in. I echo the sentiments of the member for Pine Rivers about the hard work of the department staff who worked with the members of the committee, the ministers and, of course, all of the relevant organisations to bring this bill before the House. They have done a fantastic job. In addition to Jess, I acknowledge them for all of their hard work.

Deputy Speaker, I note that you also know young Jess. I call her 'young Jess' because that was the name that she gave herself. I think I was 'old Jess' in the office.

Mr Sullivan: Grandma Jess.

Ms PUGH: 'Grandma Jess'; I do not take that interjection, member for Stafford. The councillor conduct report noted that councillors can struggle to identify what can constitute a conflict of interest, that in the past training on this issue has been irregular and that it has not been given the appropriate importance that it deserves. Let us be clear: this kind of training should be compulsory because it needs to underline the fact that it is nonnegotiable. It is vitally important, in performing their role, that councillors clearly understand all of their obligations. It is very fair that new councillors will get guidance. This training constitutes a key part of that.

I think back to all of our onboarding here at Parliament House. Each and every member of parliament is required to undertake a training course, which is not done by political parties. All newbie members come together, here at parliament, to learn about our responsibilities, our roles and, of course, all of the reporting measures that are required. I do believe I sat next to the members for Noosa and Maiwar when we did that training. It was fantastic to see the 'no dumb questions in this space' approach that the panel took so that we could walk away with a much better understanding of the role that we were to carry out. Importantly, we now know where to go if questions come up over the course of our tenure.

The councillor conduct report recommendation 27 is that the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning make training and professional development on the councillor conduct system, including conflicts of interest, compulsory for all local government councillors, mayors and senior council managers. The government's response supports recommendation 27 in principle, of course subject to further consideration and stakeholder consultation. Clauses 7 and 97 insert new section 169A into the City of Brisbane Act, which I have referred to, and the Local Government Act to require councillors to complete approved councillor training about the responsibilities of councillors under the CoBA or the LGA.

Very many moons ago, I worked for the then minister for local government. I recall attending a very early iteration of this councillor training. It has obviously come a long way since then. We have long been aware of the importance of this training. It is great to see this legislation underpinning it and making it compulsory.

The training must be completed by a councillor within the period prescribed by the regulation or, if the department's chief executive extends the period for that particular councillor, the councillor needs to complete it within the extended period. The department's chief executive may extend the period for completion of training only if the department's chief executive is satisfied that it would be appropriate in those particular circumstances, for example, a councillor is unable to complete the training due to an unavoidable absence. Of course, there is a little bit of flexibility there but, once again, it underlines and underscores the critical importance of this training, the top priority that needs to be placed on ensuring that this training is undertaken and that it is very difficult for a councillor to commence their work without having undertaken it.

The department's chief executive must publish a notice about approved councillor training on the department's website within the period prescribed by the regulation. The department's chief executive must also give a notice about approved councillor training to each local government and each councillor of the local government within the period prescribed by regulation. Furthermore—and this is a particular issue I notice in the City of Brisbane right now—if a councillor is appointed or elected to fill a vacancy in the office left by another councillor then a notice must be given to the local government and the councillor within 20 business days after the councillor is appointed or elected. That is particularly important right now as we come within the one-year window of the elections. We are seeing a number of new appointees into councils, particularly in the City of Brisbane area. It is important that, as those new councillors are appointed, they are able to get training as soon as they are appointed to the role rather than wait for the election period for that to take place. They need to know straight up what their responsibilities are.

I know all members of this House respect the role of local government, which is part of the reason this legislation is so important. I commend the bill to the House.