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From: Ben Lawver [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 24 January 2022 11:40 AM
To: DLGSC Act Review
Subject: Local Government Reform - Submission

Categories: Jen

To whom it may concern,

I spoke with one of the Advisors in Minister Carey's office the other week and shared these common sense proposals for inclusion into the Local Government Reforms, but I also wanted to make certain they were communicated in writing as well.

It would be appreciated if receipt of this email could be acknowledged.

BACKGROUND - I am a newly elected councillor for the city of Fremantle (2021) and noticed some strange irregularities with the Owner/Occupier roll which could be easily eliminated by including a few additional changes to the current legislation being proposed.

The vast majority of people I believe do the right thing, but we saw an attempt by a group of candidates to push the boundaries in Fremantle by attempting to register hundreds of voters via the Owners/Occupiers roll with a large number of these applications filed at the last minute.

I personally was disadvantaged by this because I intentionally filed by candidacy at the start of the filing period, intending to receive the entire voter roll so I could have the most time possible to communicate with voters directly. Because CoF staff were swamped by these last minute Owner and Occupier applications I was not able to receive this list of voters until well after the filing period had passed.

It appeared very little due diligence was taken by those submitting these applications, because nearly half of all applications received were ultimately rejected.

None-the-less, several hundred "new" Owners & Occupiers made it onto the roll and I identified several areas of concern. I am happy to provide you with evidence of the specific instances I mention below, but the advisor I spoke with said to just include descriptions of what occurred and not specific proof.

Please see below for my proposed suggestions:

SOLUTION #1 - Require all ballots requested through Owner/Occupier roll sent to the address on WAEC roll.

This simple change would:

1. Eliminate confusion with ballots for same person being mailed ballots to separate addresses
2. Ensure Owner/Occupier receiving ballot is indeed on the electoral roll at a valid address
3. Provide for greater certainty that ballots cast are done so by those who are registered

Personally, I don't understand why this isn't already a requirement, but by requiring ballots to be mailed to the registered WAEC address would fix the following issues identified in the most recent Fremantle Council election:

- 22 ballots from 12 different people (almost all of these were registered at multiple addresses as an owner nominee) were mailed to the **SAME** PO Box in South Fremantle. It is highly questionable each of these individuals have access to that PO Box and mailing their ballots to a registered home address would ensure they received them.
- Many people registered as an Owner/Occupier and also are on the Fremantle roll at a different address. Often these second, or even third, ballots were sent to a different address than what was on the electoral roll which just creates the potential for extra mayoral ballots to be sent by error.

Solution #2 - Have an earlier cut-off on the enrolment period for owners and occupiers who wish to vote in a council election.

Suggest a 6-month window for Owner/Occupiers to register 1st Jan - 30th June each year when there is an election. Having this earlier cut-off would eliminate the following concerns:

1. Last minute flurry of applications leads to overburdened council staff and higher likelihood of mistakes
2. More lead time will allow for applicants to correct any errors
3. More time for WAEC to ensure no duplicate names are registered (multiple addresses for same person)

Having more time to investigate Owners/Occupiers would have led to greater scrutiny and most likely the following instances not occurring:

- Multiple people successfully registering to vote as an "Owner" of the same address where they live and are on the WAEC roll. Receiving multiple ballots.
- One person being successfully registered twice (once as an owner at same address) but the same address being listed in two separate wards.
- People registering to vote as an Owner/Occupier at questionable places (such as yacht club) where they also have a vote via WAEC roll.

Solution #3 - Require Owners and Occupiers to re-register for each election, reduce from TWO votes to ONE for each category, and eliminate Owner nominees.

Receiving extra votes as an owner/occupier is a privilege and requiring folks to register prior to each election ensures only those who are active and engaged participate. Once a person is "on the roll" they can stay on there for several elections even if their lease has expired or they have sold the property - this would be an easy way to ensure all of these voters are current owners or have current valid leases.

Again, receiving extra votes as an owner/occupier is a privilege and why should someone get TWO votes (sometimes four if they also have a lease) when a single mum or Dad who owns their home only gets ONE vote? BY reducing these "extra" votes for owners/occupiers we can retain the privilege, but reduce the incentive to game the system as well as level the voting so it's on par with single adult occupiers.

In my scrutiny of the voter roll for Fremantle, Owner nominees is probably the single largest category of questionable ballots. The majority of the 22 ballots sent to the single PO Box were Nominees of an Owner. If an owner can't be bothered to vote themselves, why should they be allowed a nominee? Also, this seems to be a way for people who own multiple properties to get around the restriction of multiple ballots in a single election - eliminate this option all together and the temptation to game the system would go away.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my suggestions and I would be more than happy to provide additional information if you require.

Councillor Ben Lawver
Hilton Ward - Fremantle

