

FAQs: Municipal Monitor Peter Stephenson

Municipal Monitor Peter Stephenson has been appointed at Strathbogie Shire Council.

Mr Stephenson's appointment is the second monitor to work with Council this term.

The first, Janet Dore, finished her appointment in July 2022 and her report was provided to Council in January 2023, and noted at its February meeting.

Ms Dore provided Council with invaluable learnings and support. She provided an extra layer of education for Council in its pursuit of good governance.

Ms Dore's report can be found on our [website](#).

In appointing Mr Stephenson, the Minister is responding to serious concerns about governance and conduct raised with her by Councillors, Council staff and independent members of Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

She is concerned there are serious risks impacting the functioning of the Council and the health and wellbeing of its members.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) to Mr Stephenson's appointment make it clear he has been appointed to assess the Council's ability to function properly.

The TOR in full can be found below:

Without limiting the Municipal Monitors' functions and powers under sections 180 and 181, respectively, of the Act, the Municipal Monitor is:

1. *To monitor the Strathbogie Shire Council's (Council) governance functioning, with specific regard to key areas of concern identified in correspondence from the Mayor and other members of the Council dated February and March 2023, including the following matters:*
 - (a) *The actions taken in response to, and the Council's ability to give effect to, the advice from the former municipal monitor appointed to the Council in 2022;*
 - (b) *Councillor understanding and performance of their statutory roles and responsibilities;*
 - (c) *The relationships between councillors and between councillors and Council staff, including councillor behaviour with respect to the Councillor Code of Conduct and processes for resolving disputes between councillors;*
 - (d) *Council's meeting procedures and decision-making processes, including Council briefings and meetings;*
 - (e) *the Council's processes and practices in relation to health and safety including any matters that may be creating a serious risk to the health and safety of Councillors, Council staff or other persons; and*

(f) any other matters that may be affecting the Council's ability to effectively perform its statutory role, including behaviour that may be preventing the Council from performing its functions.

2. *To identify the underlying causes of any issues affecting the ability of the Council and / or individual councillors to properly perform their statutory roles, with specific regard to the matters raised in clause 1.*

3. *To report to the Minister for Local Government, with respect to the matters in clause 1 and 2, on:*

(a) any steps or actions taken by the Council to improve its governance and the effectiveness of those steps or actions;

(b) any recommendations for the Council to ensure the proper performance of its statutory role, including in relation to the conduct of councillors and responding to the advice of the former municipal monitor appointed to the Council; and

(c) any recommendations for the Minister, including in relation to the exercise of any Ministerial power under the Act.

FAQs

Why has a Municipal Monitor been appointed?

The Minister for Local Government has expressed serious concerns with ongoing conduct and governance issues at the Council.

She said governance and conduct concerns had been raised with her by councillors, Council staff and independent members of the Council's Audit and Risk Committee and she is concerned there are serious risks impacting the functioning of the Council and the health and wellbeing of its members.

How is this appointment different to Council's first Municipal Monitor?

The first Municipal Monitor, Janet Dore, finished her nine-month appointment in July 2022 and her report was provided to Council in January 2023, and noted by Council at its February meeting.

Ms Dore provided Council with invaluable learnings and support. She provided an extra layer of education for Council which, all but one, were first time Councillors.

This Minister is clear Mr Stephenson's ToR are very different, and he will be reporting to her on the relationships between councillors and between councillors and Council staff, including councillor behaviour with respect to the Councillor Code of Conduct and processes for resolving disputes between councillors.

Who is the Municipal Monitor?

Mr Peter Stephenson has held senior roles in a range of organisations including government, community services, higher education and health sectors.

He is a former Councillor and Mayor of Darebin City Council. As a Municipal Monitor he was worked with South Gippsland Shire Council and the Rural City of Wangaratta.

How long will the monitor be in place?

The appointment is for three months, for two to three days a week, from May 15 to August 15, 2023.

How much will it cost and how is it being funded?

The position will be funded by Council and is expected to be between \$32,000 and \$50,000 depending on the number of days required over the three-month period.

Were all councillors aware and were they supportive?

Councillors and Council staff were not aware until the Minister's announcement.

Did Councillors receive adequate training during their induction program?

The Councillor induction program ran for five months, with several hours of each Tuesday dedicated to the induction. This was the most extensive induction program ever delivered at Strathbogie Shire Council and was tailored to cater for the needs of six new incoming councillors with no previous experience on Council or Committees of Council.

This training was delivered by our Executive Team and other officers, external experts in the governance, planning and gender equity fields, along with meetings with groups such as the Taungurung Land and Waters Council and the Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance.

An induction manual, Councillor portal and copies of the presentations delivered to the Councillors all form a resource for the Councillors on an ongoing basis. This induction has been followed up by Municipal Monitor Janet Dore's appointment in 2022. Ms Dore provided invaluable learnings and support. She provided an extra layer of education for Council in its pursuit of good governance.

Has there been examples of poor governance raised to have a municipal monitor appointed?

The Minister for Local Government has expressed serious concerns with ongoing conduct and governance issues at the Council.

She said concerns had been raised by councillors, Council staff and independent members of the Council's Audit and Risk Committee and she is concerned there are serious risks impacting the functioning of the Council and the health and wellbeing of its members.