COUNTING
ARRANGEMENTS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ELECTIONS

Victorian Electoral Commission

VEC

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Contents

Introduction

Elections for 78 of the 79 Victorian local councils will be conducted in October 2016. A total of 72 councils, including Melbourne City Council, have chosen to have their election conducted by postal voting. The remaining six councils (Banyule, Greater Dandenong, Knox, Moreland, Port Phillip, and Yarra City Councils) will have attendance elections.

The way votes are counted for local government elections is dependent on the number of vacancies to be filled.

Proportional representation is the counting method used for unsubdivided councils and multi-councillor wards. All proportional representation counts are conducted by computer.

Preferential counting applies for single councillor wards. Preferential counts, with the exception of the Melbourne City Council Leadership Team, are conducted manually.

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) will conduct computer counts for multi-member contested elections and the Melbourne City Council Leadership Team election, and will establish a number of computer count venues across the State to support these counts.

Attachment at the end of this document lists Victoria's 78 local councils with elections this year, the Council structure, whether the election is being conducted by postal or attendance voting and the proposed counting method.

Counting processes

The VEC will establish a counting timeline for each election to ensure that essential reconciliations can be completed before the commencement of each stage in the counting process. In establishing the timeline, the VEC will allow for events that cannot be predicted prior to the close of voting and the close of the postal vote receipt period. The need to manage staff wellbeing during long working hours across the election timeline will also be considered.

Every effort will be made to complete counting as quickly as possible. However, preference distributions or data entry cannot be completed until the processing of all votes received by the close of the postal vote receipt period at 12 noon on the fifth working day after the close of voting. The VEC will ensure that all elections are declared by Friday 4 November 2016.

Details of each council's counting timeline will be prepared once nominations have closed and the number of candidates and contested elections is known. The counting timeline is still subject to change as close elections and recounts cannot be anticipated.

The Returning Officer will publicly declare the result of the election at a suitable time following the completion of counting. Candidates will be advised of the declaration time and venue. The VEC will also publish a notice of results in local newspapers and advise the Minister for Local Government.

All results will be made available on the VEC's website at vec.vic.gov.au as they become available.

The activities following the close of voting for postal, attendance and Melbourne City Council elections are detailed in Attachments 1 – 3 on the following pages.

Attachment 1 – Counting Process – Postal Elections

Processing of votes

The Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2016 provide an extended period for postal votes to be received by the Returning Officer (up to 12 noon on the fifth working day after the close of voting).

Any postal or declaration votes received by the Returning Officer will be sorted and bundled. Processing of postal and declaration votes will occur progressively, the declaration on each ballot paper envelope will be checked and its bona fides confirmed.

Extraction of ballot papers

The extraction of ballot papers involves removing the identification flaps from the ballot paper envelopes. Once the flaps have been removed, the ballot paper envelopes are opened and the ballot paper is removed.

Extraction may only commence after the close of voting and will continue until final reconciliations have been completed after the close of the postal vote receipt period. Extraction will be carefully scheduled to ensure appropriate volumes are provided to the extraction team or teams during the period.

Batching for computer counts

Ballot papers will be batched in preparation for computer counting, with any ballot papers that are obviously informal isolated into a separate batch. Batching can only commence after ballot papers have been extracted from the ballot paper envelopes.

The total ballot papers after batching will be reconciled against the balance figure for that batch. Once reconciled, ballot paper batches will be secured and transported to the computer count venue.

Data entry for computer counts

Data entry operators will enter the preferences from formal ballot papers into the VEC's computer count application. The application will identify any informal ballot papers. All informal ballot papers will be rechecked by the Returning Officer and where considered formal will be returned to data entry.

Results for each election (i.e. a ward or an unsubdivided council) may only be calculated once all informal ballot papers have been rechecked, all formal ballot papers data entered, and all reconciliations completed for that election. Where possible, the calculation of results will always occur locally, even if the computer count venue is outside of the local council area.

First preference sorting for manual counts

Extracted ballot papers will be sorted according to the first preferences for each candidate and informal ballot papers will be set aside. Tallies will be taken during each sort to maintain a balance figure.

First preference sorts and final reconciliations may only be finalised following the close of the postal vote receipt period. Once all first preference sorting has been completed, the total number of ballot papers will be reconciled against the balance figure for the ward.

If a candidate has achieved an absolute majority of first preference votes (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers), the candidate will be provisionally successful. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority, a preference distribution is required.

Preference distributions for manual counts

A preference distribution involves excluding the candidate with the lowest number of votes and transferring each of their ballot papers to the remaining candidates in the order of the preferences marked on the ballot papers. This process is repeated until one of the remaining candidates reaches an absolute majority (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers).

Recounts

At any time after the provisional results have been calculated (computer count) or a preference distribution has been completed (manual count) but before the declaration of the result, a recount may be conducted.

Candidates may request a recount or it may be initiated by the Returning Officer. A recount will be required if the Returning Officer is satisfied that the reasons provided by the candidate may have affected the election result.

In some cases, the Returning Officer may require a partial recount, where only part of the total number of ballot papers are recounted. A partial recount usually involves reviewing the informal ballot papers and considering whether they may be counted as formal. Any previously informal ballot papers that are found to be formal can be returned to the count.

The result of the recount (or partial recount) supersedes the original count.

A computer recount will be conducted where the initial count was counted by computer.

Declaration of results

The Returning Officer will publicly declare the result of the election at a designated time and place after the completion of all counting. A minimum period of two hours will be provided between the provisional results and the final declaration.

Candidates will be notified of the declaration date, time and venue.

Attachment 2 – Counting Process – Attendance Elections

Processing of votes

The Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2016 provide an extended period for postal votes to be received by the Returning Officer (up to 12 noon on the fifth working day after election day).

Any postal or declaration votes received by the Returning Officer will be sorted and bundled. Processing of postal and declaration votes will occur progressively, the declaration on each ballot paper envelope will be checked, its bona fides confirmed, and then the declaration flap will be separated from the envelope before extracting the ballot paper.

First preference sorting

After the close of voting and post-election day, election officials will sort the ballot papers based on first preferences and set aside any ballot papers that appear to be informal. Election officials will carefully batch the sorted ballot papers into bundles of 50, tally the number of votes against each candidate, and the total number of ballot papers counted will be reconciled with the number of ballot papers issued.

Batching for computer counts

Ballot papers will be batched in preparation for computer counting, with any ballot papers that are obviously informal isolated into a separate batch.

The total ballot papers after batching will be reconciled against the balance figure for that batch. Once reconciled, ballot paper batches will be secured and transported to the computer count venue.

Data entry for computer counts

Multiple-councillor wards will be counted by computer.

Data entry operators will enter the preferences from formal ballot papers into the VEC's computer count application. The application will identify any informal ballot papers, all informal ballot papers will be rechecked by the Returning Officer and where considered formal will be returned to data entry. Ballot papers will remain in ward or vote type order during data entry, no amalgamation across parcel will take place.

Results for each ward may only be calculated once all informal ballot papers have been rechecked, all formal ballot papers data entered and reconciliations completed for that election. Where possible, the calculation of results will always occur locally, even if the computer count venue is outside of the local council area.

Recheck for manual counts

All single-councillor vacancy counts will be manually rechecked.

As ballot papers have already been sorted to first preferences, teams of election officials will conduct a recheck of all sorted bundles. Once all rechecks have been completed, the total number of ballot papers will be reconciled against the balance figure for the ward.

If a candidate has achieved an absolute majority of first preference votes (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers), the candidate will be provisionally successful. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority, a preference distribution is required.

Preference distributions for manual counts

A preference distribution is required in a single-councillor ward when no candidate has achieved an absolute majority of first preference votes (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers).

The preference distribution involves excluding the candidate with the lowest number of votes and transferring each of their ballot papers to the remaining candidates in the order of the preferences marked on the ballot papers. This process is repeated until one of the remaining candidates reaches an absolute majority (i.e. more than 50% of the total formal ballot papers).

Recounts

At any time after the provisional results have been calculated (computer count) or the preference distribution has been completed (manual count) but before the declaration of the result, a recount may be conducted.

Candidates may request a recount or it may be initiated by the Returning Officer. A recount will be required if the Returning Officer is satisfied that the reasons provided by the candidate may have affected the election result.

In some cases, the Returning Officer may require a partial recount, where only part of the total number of ballot papers are recounted. A partial recount usually involves reviewing the informal ballot papers and considering whether they may be counted as formal. Any previously informal ballot papers that are found to be formal can be returned to the count.

The result of the recount (or partial recount) supersedes the original count.

A computer recount will be conducted where the initial count was conducted by computer.

Declaration of results

The Returning Officer will publicly declare the result of the election at a designated time and place after the completion of all counting. A minimum period of two hours will be provided between the provisional results and the final declaration. Candidates will be notified of the declaration date, time and venue.

Attachment 3 – Counting Process – Melbourne City Council elections

Processing of Postal Votes

The Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2016 provide an extended period for postal votes to be received by the Returning Officer (up to 12 noon on the fifth working day after the close of voting).

Any postal or declaration votes received by the Returning Officer will be sorted and bundled. Processing of postal and declaration votes will occur progressively, the declaration on each ballot paper envelope will be checked and its bona fides confirmed.

Extraction of ballot papers

The extraction of ballot papers involves removing the identification flaps from the ballot paper envelopes. Once the flaps have been removed, the ballot paper envelopes are opened and the ballot papers removed.

Extraction may only commence after the close of voting and will continue until final reconciliations have been completed after the close of the postal vote receipt period. Extraction will be carefully scheduled to ensure appropriate volumes are provided to the extraction team or teams during the period.

As ballot papers are extracted they will be sorted to those for the Leadership Team election and those for the councillor election.

Leadership Team: ballot paper batching

Ballot papers for the Leadership Team will be batched in preparation for data entry with informal ballot papers being isolated into one batch.

The total Leadership Team ballot papers after batching will be reconciled against the balance figure for that election.

Councillor election: initial sorting and batching

Councillor election ballot papers will be sorted to those marked above-the-line, below-the-line and informal:

- ballot papers marked below-the-line will be batched in preparation for data entry

- ballot papers marked above-the-line will be sorted and counted to the respective groups

- informal ballot papers will remain in one batch.

The total councillor election ballot papers after these tasks will be reconciled against the balance figure for that election.

Data entry

Data entry will commence as soon as practicable after batching is complete. Data entry operators will enter the preferences from formal ballot papers into the VEC's computer count application. The application will identify any informal ballot papers. All informal ballot papers will be rechecked by the Returning Officer.

During data entry for the councillor election ballot papers identified as informal may, after checking be deemed as formal either above-the-line or below-the-line. Once all data entry of below-the-line ballot papers has been completed the total number of ballot papers for each group will be entered into the computer application, and the tickets registered for each group applied.

The total number of informal ballot papers will be entered as the last step.

The election result for election will be calculated once data entry and all reconciliations are complete for that election.

Recounts

At any time after the provisional results have been calculated but before the declaration of the results, a recount may be conducted. Where the initial count was conducted by computer, any recount will also be conducted by computer.

Candidates may request a recount or it may be initiated by the Returning Officer. A recount will be required if the Returning Officer is satisfied that the reasons provided by the candidate may have affected the election result.

In some cases, the Returning Officer may require a partial recount, where only part of the total number of ballot papers are recounted. A partial recount usually involves reviewing the informal ballot papers and considering whether they may be counted as formal. Any previously informal ballot papers that are found to be formal can be returned to the count.

The result of the recount (or partial recount) supersedes the original count.

Declaration of results

The Returning Officer will publicly declare the result of the elections at a designated time and place after the completion of all counting. A minimum period of two hours will be provided between the provisional results and the final declaration. Candidates will be notified of the declaration date, time and venue.

Attachment 4 – Victoria's local council structures – Effective from October 2016

Local council	No. of Crs	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Alpine	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Ararat	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Ballarat	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Banyule	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Attendance
Bass Coast	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Baw Baw	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Bayside	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Benalla	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Boroondara	10	10 Single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Brimbank	11	3 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Buloke	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Campaspe	9	2 three-Cr wards, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Cardinia	9	1 two-Cr ward, 1 three-Cr ward, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Casey	11	1 single-Cr ward, 5 two-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Central Goldfields	7	3 single-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Colac Otway	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Corangamite	7	4 single-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Darebin	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
East Gippsland	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Frankston	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Gannawarra	7	2 single-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Glen Eira	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Glenelg	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Golden Plains	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal

Greater Bendigo	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Greater Dandenong	11	3 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Attendance
Greater Geelong	No election—next election scheduled for October 2017			
Greater Shepparton	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Hepburn	7	2 two-Cr wards, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Hindmarsh	6	3 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Hobsons Bay	7	2 two-Cr wards, 1 three Cr ward,	Computer PR	Postal
Horsham	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Hume	11	1 three-Cr ward, 2 four-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Indigo	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Kingston	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Knox	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Attendance
Latrobe	9	1 single-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Loddon	5	5 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Macedon Ranges	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Manningham	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Mansfield	5	3 single-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Maribyrnong	7	2 two-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Maroondah	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Melbourne	2 + 9	1 vacancy (for Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor) and nine-Cr (unsubdivided)	Computer PD and Computer PR	Postal
Melton	9	1 four-Cr ward, 1 three-Cr ward, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Mildura	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Mitchell	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Moira	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Monash	11	1 two-Cr ward, 3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Moonee Valley	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal

Moorabool	7	3 single-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Moreland	11	1 three-Cr ward, 2 four-Cr wards	Computer PR	Attendance
Mornington Peninsula	11	3 single-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward, 2 three-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Mount Alexander	7	4 single-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Moyne	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Murrindindi	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Nillumbik	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Northern Grampians	7	2 single-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Port Phillip	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Attendance
Pyrenees	5	5 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Queenscliffe	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
South Gippsland	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Southern Grampians	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Stonnington	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Strathbogie	7	3 single-Cr wards, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Surf Coast	9	1 single-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Swan Hill	7	3 single-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Towong	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Wangaratta	7	3 single-Cr wards, 1 four-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Warrnambool	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Wellington	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
West Wimmera	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Whitehorse	10	5 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Whittlesea	11	1 three-Cr ward, 2 four-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Wodonga	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal

Wyndham	11	1 three-Cr ward, 2 four-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Yarra	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Attendance
Yarra Ranges	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Yarriambiack	7	2 two-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal

PD = Preference Distribution

PR = Proportional Representation

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES

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