

Local Government Inspectorate Annual Report 2021–22



Annual Report 2021–22

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Message from the Chief Municipal Inspector

It has been a busy and challenging year for the Inspectorate.

While the general election period ended in October 2020, we continued to receive complaints and enquiries and investigate election-related matters well into the 2021–22 financial year.

During 2021–22 our governance examination program took on the huge task of reviewing personal interest declarations for 650 councillors from 78 councils. This revealed a lower level of compliance than expected and resulted in a number of recommendations being communicated to the local government sector to raise the level of compliance. We prosecuted one former councillor for persistent breaches of the personal interests returns provisions.

Holding people to account for breaches of and offences against the *Local Government Act 2020* continues to be one of our greatest challenges. Prosecutions are expensive, time-consuming and will be pursued if it is in the public interest to do so. However, we are working with the Victorian Government to find alternative modes to address breaches and offences against the Act.

There have been some teething issues with the 2020 Act and we were required to seek guidance from the court about our powers. A Supreme Court ruling confirmed that we have the power to make orders to have a councillor stood down while criminal proceedings are continuing.

The restrictions on movement and the requirement to work from home as part of the CovidSafe settings challenged our staff again during 2021–22. Visits to councils and participation in events – previously a big part of our information gathering and guidance and education for the sector – was limited until the easing of restrictions enabled face-to-face interactions once again.

We presented to councillors and governance staff at councils including Shepparton, Nillumbik, Wodonga and Murrindindi, and to online audiences at sector representative bodies such as the Victorian Local Governance Association, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Western Australian Local Government Professionals.



Despite working from home restrictions (and for some – dealing with home schooling) our phone lines remained open and we handled an increased volume of online complaints.

I am proud of the resilience and professionalism shown by the LGI team during throughout this challenging period and am honoured to present to you the results of their efforts in the form of the Local Government Inspectorate's annual report for 2021–22.

Michael Stefanovic AM
February 2023

2020–21 at a glance

Statistics



Enquiries
158



Investigations completed
203

Outcomes



Prosecutions
0



Warnings
132



Governance examinations
0



Recommendations to councils
34

Public engagement



Reports
1



Newsletters
4



Presentations
17

Explanation of key categories and terms

Allegation: A claim of wrongdoing. A single complaint or enquiry may contain several separate allegations.

Complaints: A complaint is a matter lodged with or referred to the Inspectorate for assessment in its capacity as the dedicated integrity agency for local government in Victoria. Most of the complaints we receive relate to councils but not all complaints we receive fall within our remit.

Complaint assessment: When the Inspectorate receives a complaint, it undergoes an initial assessment to determine, among other factors, if the allegations fit within its legislative remit or the matter should be transferred to another agency. A matter is not considered under investigation at this stage.

Enquiries: An enquiry is any contact received by the Inspectorate that does not progress to an investigation. Enquiries are mainly questions from the public and complaints that fall outside our remit. Enquiries may involve multiple contacts with the public but only a single reference is included here.

Investigations: When the Inspectorate receives a complaint that falls within our jurisdiction, we conduct an investigation into it. Most of our investigations resolve allegations about improper conduct and contraventions of the conflict of interest provisions by councillors.

Prima facie: In the Inspectorate's work, this refers to the presence of sufficient evidence to establish a fact or raise a presumption unless disproved or rebutted. It can also refer

to matters that, on first appearance, may be a breach of offence under the Act but are subject to further evidence or information.

Prosecutions: The Chief Municipal Inspector is empowered by the Local Government Act to prosecute individuals in a court. This power is taken very seriously and prosecutions are only pursued under certain circumstances. The Inspectorate must consider whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction, whether or not it is in the public interest and whether or not there is an alternative to prosecution that may be more appropriate.

Public interest disclosure: In some circumstances, a complaint may be considered as a public interest disclosure (previously known as a protected disclosure or 'whistleblower' complaint). If a complaint appears to show that a councillor or member of council staff has engaged or proposes to engage in improper conduct, this could constitute a public interest disclosure. These matters must be sent to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) so they can determine whether or not the protections under the public interest disclosure regime apply.

Warnings: A warning is issued when a prima facie breach of the Act is substantiated, but circumstances show that a prosecution may not be warranted. Warnings given to a person are considered if any further substantiated complaints are made against the same person.

About us

The Local Government Inspectorate is the dedicated integrity agency for Victorian councils. We are responsible for investigating offences against and breaches of the *Local Government Act 2020* and examining any matter relating to a council or council operations, including electoral offences and activities.

As part of our role, we:

- assess and investigate complaints about some council operations, including councillors and council staff
- monitor governance and compliance with the Act
- provide guidance and education for councils
- encourage transparency and accountability across the sector.

The Chief Municipal Inspector heads the Inspectorate and reports to the Attorney-General (with respect to powers derived from the Local Government Act). This statutory position allows for the delegation of powers to Inspectors of Municipal Administration and has the remit to investigate offences and breaches under the Local Government Act or examine any matter relating to a council or council operations.

Our work can be categorised into three main areas.

Enquiries, complaints and investigations

The first part of our work responds to the community. We take enquiries from the community, councils and councillors. We provide advice and guidance on the Act and good governance principles. Sometimes we refer these enquiries to other agencies if they fall outside our jurisdiction.

We take complaints and conduct a thorough assessment to determine if they warrant further investigation. To start an investigation, we need to have sufficient information to suspect that a breach of the Act has occurred, which means conduct that would constitute a relevant offence. In serious cases, we will prosecute offences against Act.

By law, we are only able to investigate matters where we have jurisdiction, meaning we are not able to investigate all local government complaints.

The Inspectorate makes up one part of Victoria's integrity framework that provides confidence in the state's public sector. This framework is in place to mitigate the risk of poor behaviours, practices and even corruption in our councils, government departments and other agencies. Where required, the Inspectorate will refer complaints to other integrity agencies.

Governance examinations

The second part of our work is to measure compliance with the Act. To facilitate this, we conduct governance examinations of individual councils where a need has been identified, or of a particular topic across the entire sector. The results of these examinations are published on our website, along with best-practice examples, and other material that will help councils improve compliance. We conduct governance examinations and reviews of individual Victorian councils or look at topics that affect many or all councils. We often publish reports on our governance examinations, and provide examples of best practice governance directly to councils and on our website.

Guidance and education

The third part of our work is to provide guidance and education to the sector. This guidance is generated from ongoing or new themes and topics in complaints, investigations and governance examinations. While we do not have a specific legislative remit to provide guidance and education, it is a vital aspect of our work to make sure that councils and the community understand relevant laws and how the Inspectorate operates.

We provide presentations to councils and councillors, publish a newsletter and produce reports and other communications tools.

The Victorian integrity agencies that handle local government complaints

Local Government Inspectorate

The Inspectorate investigates matters related to council operations including criminal offences involving councillors, senior council officers or any person subject to the conflict of interest provisions of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

www.lgi.vic.gov.au

ombudsman VICTORIAN

The Ombudsman investigates the actions, decisions or conduct of public sector organisations and their staff. It also looks at whether a public sector organisation has acted in accordance with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

ibac independent broad-based anti-corruption commission Victoria

IBAC is responsible for exposing and preventing corrupt conduct in the public sector. It deals with serious corruption and misconduct in: state government departments and agencies, Victoria Police, members of parliament, judges and magistrates, and council employees and councillors.

www.ibac.vic.gov.au

Highlights and challenges of 2021–22

Case management system

Our Lotus Notes-based complaints management system has reached the end of its lifecycle and will soon no longer be supported by the Victorian Government IT provider, CenITex. Producing investigation reports and statistical analysis using the current system is also extremely labour intensive. Consequently, replacing the system is an urgent priority.

A project was established with technical experts from the Department of Justice and Community Safety to replace the old system with modern, fit-for-purpose that can enable improved tracking of cases, trend analysis and reduce data duplication across multiple software packages.

Supreme Court ruling

On 29 November 2021, the Supreme Court delivered a decision to confirm that the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) continues to have the power under the Local Government Act 2020 to make orders to have a councillor stand down whilst criminal proceedings are continuing.

Under the 1989 Act, we had certain powers but the retention of these powers under the 2020 Act was questioned in a VCAT hearing.

Justice Quigley delivered the judgment, settling an important question of law regarding section 229 of the Act. Her Honour ruled that decisions can be made without first having satisfied the elements set out in the preceding subsections in Division 6, Part 7.

Council visits

Speaking to councils and councillors is at the heart of what we do. It is vital for us to meet with councillors and remind them of their obligations under the Act and learn from their experiences. We also visit councils to make presentations, conduct interviews and do governance examinations.

These activities were restarted after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and when travel across Victoria returned to normal. We have since made trips to the southwest, northwest and northeast. We have also visited and presented to councils in metropolitan Melbourne.

Personal interests returns

In October 2021, we released a report into a wide-ranging governance examination of the personal interest declarations of 650 councillors. The Inspectorate conducted an examination of all councillors' returns for 78 councils between October 2016 and February 2020. An examination of Whittlesea councillors' personal interests returns was conducted as part of a separate investigation.

Along with other integrity agencies, we have identified that incomplete and inadequate personal interest disclosure is a historical and ongoing issue affecting the local government sector.

Personal interests returns: Encouraging disclosure and increasing transparency revealed details about how many councillors submitted accurate returns in this period, what they failed to disclose and some of the reasons they gave for failing to make the disclosures.

Councillors and key council staff must provide – and regularly update – accurate records of their personal interests under the Act.

We published the report to make public the issues attached to the submission of personal interests returns. The report also included recommendations to law makers and to those required to submit returns to improve both the process and the level of compliance.

Campaign donation returns

Following the 2020 council elections we conducted a review of campaign donation returns. The Act requires that all candidates must submit a declaration to the chief executive officer of the council where they are standing for election within 40 days after the election. They must make this declaration even if they received no donations of money or in-kind support worth \$500 or more.

Our investigation found that, of a total of 2,192 candidates, 144 failed to submit a campaign donation return within the required 40 days. However, 34 candidates subsequently submitted a late return.

The remaining 108 candidates who failed to comply were issued with an official warning.

However, the rate of non-compliance had halved compared to the 2016 council election when 290 candidates failed to comply.

It is pleasing to see an improvement in the number of candidates declaring their campaign donations in 2020 compared to 2016 and we will continue our guidance and education program with the aim of ensuring candidates understand their responsibilities to submit campaign donation returns for future elections.

Our work

Enquiries

The Inspectorate regularly receives enquiries from community members, councils and councillors seeking advice, information or raising issues that fall outside our jurisdiction.

We endeavour to help with enquiries where possible. Enquiries that do not fall within our remit are referred to other Victorian Government agencies or bodies representing the local government sector.

In addition to the 203 Investigations completed in 2021–22, we resolved 158 enquiries. A large number of enquiries are complaints about councillor code of conduct matters, which are to be dealt with by individual councils. Other enquiries include planning matters and complaints about council services.

Reporting period
2021–22



Enquiries **158**

Historical data

In previous annual reports, we have published the number of complaints and investigations we had handled in the financial year. However, historically, we have not had clear or consistent criteria for the way we categorise enquiries, complaints and investigations. Our case management system is outdated and the data it produces is limited. This meant we had to manually calculate the enquiries, complaints and investigations and the criteria we used to calculate them changed over time – making benchmarking difficult.

As the volume of our work has increased, it has been harder to compile this data manually. We are currently in the process of developing a new system to help us more accurately track our statistical information. Once this new case management system is operational, we will have consistent criteria and more accurate statistics.

Because of these issues, we have not included our historical data in this annual report. Our historic data does not accurately reflect the long-term trend of increasing volumes of complaints, enquiries and investigations.

We also have also decided to no longer report the number of complaints we receive as this is not an accurate reflection of the work we do. Once we receive a complaint, we assess it to see if it warrants further investigation.

Sometimes completing an investigation is straightforward to assess and determine an outcome and may take a short time. On other occasions an investigation can be very complex involving interviewing large numbers of people and reviewing a voluminous amount of evidence and can take many months to complete. The length and complexity of an investigation can impact the number of other investigations and enquiries that can be allocated to an investigator and completed during a twelve-month period.

Investigations

The Inspectorate investigates complaints regarding allegations of breaches of and offences against the Act. Some complaints consist of multiple allegations, for example, that a councillor has breached the conflict of interest and misuse of position provisions.

Investigations involve our inspectors gathering evidence to determine whether the allegations can be substantiated. This process determines whether the allegations:

- constitute a breach or offence under the Act
- should be referred to another responsible authority or
- do not breach or amount to an offence under the Act.

Allegations made



203
Investigations*

330
Allegations

** When we start an investigation, we may find that the complaint involves multiple allegations which are all part of the single investigation.*

There were 203 investigations, consisting of 330 allegations, conducted by the Inspectorate in the 2021–22 financial year. The Inspectorate may launch an own motion investigation into any matter that potentially breaches the Act. This usually happens when we hear about information from interviews, media reports or other intelligence we have gathered. Ten own motion investigations were completed in the 2021–22 financial year.

Of the investigations conducted, 34 per cent raised allegations of conflict of interest, 17 per cent raised allegations of misuse of position, 6 per cent included allegations of disclosure of confidential information, and 2 per cent raised allegations of directing council staff. Forty one percent raised allegations of other matters such as electoral offences, eligibility to be a councillor, and serious misconduct. As mentioned above, we are working on developing a new case management system which will give us more accurate data about our enquiries and investigations.

How investigations were received



50%
101 Online
complaints



43%
88 Emails



1%
2 Letters



5%
10 Own motion
investigations



1%
2 Telephone calls

Subject matter of investigations

| Investigation category | Number of allegations* | Percentage |
|--|------------------------|------------|
| Misuse of position** | 57 | 17 |
| Directing council staff^ | 6 | 2 |
| Disclosure of confidential information^^ | 20 | 6 |
| Conflict of interest# | 113 | 34 |
| Other | 134 | 41 |

Note:

* This table shows the number of allegations investigated. A single investigation may involve multiple allegations. The 203 investigations conducted during 2021–22 consisted of 330 allegations.

** Section 76D of the Local Government Act 1989 and section 123 of the Local Government Act 2020.

^ Section 76E of the Local Government Act 1989 and section 124 of the Local Government Act 2020.

^^ Section 77 of the Local Government Act 1989 and section 125 of the Local Government Act 2020.

Sections 77A-80C of the Local Government Act 1989 and sections 126-131 of the Local Government Act 2020.

Own motion investigation after newspaper article

The Inspectorate can start an own motion investigation if we receive information about a possible breach of the Act. We became aware of a possible conflict of interest after reading an article from a local newspaper and started an own motion investigation into the matter.

The article said that a regional councillor had failed to declare a conflict of interest in a sporting club before moving that the council should apply for funding to upgrade the club. The councillor is a member of the sporting club but did not declare the interest at the council meeting.

The councillor was not a committee member of the club and did not have any voting rights. The councillor claimed an exemption to the conflict of interest provisions.

In June 2022, the investigation found that the councillor had an interest in common with many other town residents and would receive no further benefit than that of the community.

We informed the councillor that while there had been a breach of the Act, there was an exemption and as a result there was no identifiable offence. The councillor was reminded of their obligations under the Act.

Reasonable Assistance Provisions

Under the Act, the Chief Municipal Inspector has powers to require the provision of reasonable assistance (also known as coercive powers). This may require a person to produce documents and evidence or appear for an interview under oath. In 2021–22, the use of the powers were approved on 5 occasions to obtain documents or information from people.

We interviewed 24 individuals in 2021–22 and all the interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis.

Official warnings

Warnings are issued for matters where a breach of the Act is substantiated but an alternative to a prosecution is considered to better serve the public interest.

Warnings are used as an educational tool in making recipients aware of their obligations under the Act and of the consequences for further transgressions.

During 2021–22, we issued 132 official warnings. A total of 108 warnings were for failures to submit an election campaign donation return, 20 were issued to real estate agents who inappropriately voted on behalf of persons for whom they manage properties, two were in relation to failures to declare a conflict of interest, and two were for personal interests returns failings.

Campaign donation return warnings

In March 2022, the Inspectorate officially warned 108 candidates after they failed to submit a campaign donation return after contesting the 2020 council elections.

A campaign donation return is a record of any gifts, donations or in-kind support worth \$500 or more received by election candidates for use in their campaigns. Candidates must submit a return to the chief executive officer of the council where they are standing for election within 40 days after election day.

Candidates must also submit a return even if they do not receive any donations or support. A summary of these declarations must then be published on the council's website.

The Inspectorate investigation found that, of a total of 2,192 candidates running during the council elections, 144 failed to submit a campaign donation return within the required 40 days. However, 34 candidates subsequently submitted a late return.

The remaining 108 candidates who failed to comply were issued with an official warning.

Real estate agents' post-election warning

The Inspectorate issued 20 real estate agents with an official warning in February 2022 after the alleged improper submission of ballot papers during the 2020 Melbourne City Council election.

It followed our investigation which looked at 216 ballot papers completed by representatives from 21 real estate agencies. Real estate agencies are authorised to manage properties for their owners; however, property owners cannot authorise agents to vote for them under Victorian electoral laws.

A total of 20 agents from 18 agencies admitted completing ballot papers on behalf of landlords whose properties they manage.

The agencies reported that the property owners generally lived overseas, usually permanently and had limited English. Some owners had authorised their agent verbally or in writing to vote on their behalf.

We could not determine who completed the ballot papers sent to two agencies and a further real estate agent could not be located.

While a prima facie breach of the electoral provisions of the Act was substantiated for 20 individuals, we opted not to pursue prosecution but issued formal warnings.

The ballot papers were detected by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) and excluded from the ballot count, meaning they did not affect the outcome of the election in which more than 91,000 votes were cast.

Recommendations

We provide recommendations following our investigations and governance reviews. The recommendations aim to improve compliance with the local government act and improve governance and transparency. Sometimes our recommendations are for the peak bodies for councils (the Municipal Association of Victoria, Local Governance Association of Victoria and Local Government Professionals) or Local Government Victoria, the team within the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions which supports Victorian councils.

The majority of our recommendations are for councils. During 2021–22, we issued 34 recommendations to councils. Of these, 20 were accepted and implemented, a further six were implemented after the end of the financial year and a further eight remain under consideration. Our recommendations may involve a decision of council or actions like additional training or policy development, which take time for a council to implement.

Governance examinations

We conduct governance examinations of Victorian local councils to measure compliance with the Act, identify process deficiencies and to make recommendations for future improvements.

Our governance program aims to give councils tools to improve compliance, transparency and develop better practice processes.

We typically conduct two types of governance examinations:

- we examine an individual council across a range of council practices
- we examine a particular topic or theme across all councils or a selected group of councils.

We will identify a council to visit or a topic or theme during investigations, feedback from the sector or information from the community.

Movement restrictions limited our ability to visit individual councils and so we focused on theme-based projects during 2021–22. We concluded a major investigation into personal interest declarations during 2021–22 and started another project to examine documents needed under the new Act.

Report on councillors' personal interests declarations

In October 2021, we published a report into a major review of the declaration of personal interests of 650 councillors from 78 councils.

In the report, *Personal interests returns: Encouraging disclosure and increasing transparency*, we detailed how 332 councillors (51 per cent) did not complete their returns strictly in compliance with the *Local Government Act 1989*.

During our review of 4,600 returns, we found five per cent of councillors failed to disclose a land interest in all their returns and 13 per cent failed to disclose a land interest in one or more returns. We also conducted a more in-depth review of the returns from 147 councillors and found even higher levels of non-compliance.

We also tested compliance with the requirement under the *Local Government Act 2020* for councils to publish a summary of interests returns. This revealed vastly different approaches on how the information was gathered and presented on websites.

We made 10 recommendations to improve compliance. Some of our recommendations were to improve guidance and education in relation to personal interests returns. We also recommended changes to oversight and legislative change to allow us to replace some prosecutions with infringements.

The review resulted in one prosecution, which was completed in the 2022-23 financial year.

Major review of council policies

In February 2022, we started a wide-ranging governance review of selected council policies which were required under the *Local Government Act 2020*.

It was the first time we reviewed policy documents which the new Act required councils to create or amend.

We requested a range of policies and governance documents from all 79 councils.

The main aim of the review is to test the level of strict compliance to the timely adoption of required policies by councils.

The review, which saw our governance team checking hundreds of policies, is expected to conclude in late 2022 when we will provide feedback to the local government sector.

Guidance and education

We use a range of communication tools to provide guidance to the local government sector and education to the general community. We publish reports, newsletters, presentations, social media posts, and fact sheets and use our website to provide this information.

We also engage with the Victorian Government, councils, council representative bodies, the community and other stakeholders through other channels, such as speaking engagements, presentations and meetings.



1
Reports



4
Newsletters



17
Presentations



89,800
Impressions of @CMI_Vic tweets



49,063
Website – unique views

General engagement

The travel restrictions which were in place in the state due to COVID-19 continued to impact on our face-to-face engagement in 2021–22. When our movement was restricted, we made use of online tools to present to councils across Melbourne and Victoria.

We presented to councillors and governance staff at councils including Nillumbik, Wodonga and Murrindindi, and to online audiences at sector representative bodies such as the Victorian Local Governance Association, Municipal Association of Victoria and the Western Australian Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

However, once travel restrictions were relaxed, we headed out to speak to councils to conduct in-person interviews and collect information for investigations. Once we were able to

travel, we also visited rural and regional councils including Warrnambool, Mildura, Gannawarra, Yarriambiack and West Wimmera. We also presented to councillors from Greater Shepparton in person.

Newsletter

The Inspectorate published four newsletters to provide information and updates about significant reports, investigations, events and other relevant information.

Newsletters were sent to more than 3,540 subscribers and published on the Inspectorate website. The content was a mix of information about our work and guidance to councils and councillors to improve the understanding of and compliance with the Act.

Resources for councils

The Inspectorate produced a wide range of fact sheets in 2021–22 to simply explain the complex processes and legislation. The fact sheets aim to help council staff, such as governance officers, with straight-forward information on topics, including:

- when personal interest disclosure need to be made
- which integrity agency handles specific types of complaints
- what comprises a conflict of interest under the Act.

We also produced short, easy-to-read summaries of our governance and investigation reports.

These publications were produced to answer questions we are often asked and to assist complainants, councils and the community to better understand our work and key aspects of legislation.

Social media

The Inspectorate uses its Twitter and LinkedIn accounts to provide updates on its work and highlight key issues for the sector.

We saw a modest increase in queries directed to our @CMI_Vic Twitter account about election campaigning practices, councillor or candidate behaviour or council activities.

Website

The Inspectorate [website](#) provides information about the Inspectorate, our powers and our work. We also publish guidance and education material to improve understanding of and compliance with the Local Government Act.

The website contains our reports, media releases, newsletters and the secure online complaint form.

Address at major councillor conference

In June 2022, the Inspectorate addressed the Victorian Branch of the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) conference. The annual conference, held in Shepparton, attracted about 150 people and is one of the largest gatherings of local government in Victoria.

Mr Stefanovic and Senior Investigator Laura Majewski spoke about our work in promoting integrity, including case studies about conflict of interest and how councils have managed the issue of councillor interference in operational matters.

The conference was an opportunity for councillors and staff to speak to us about issues they face and seek our advice. It was also a chance for us to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing the local government sector in 2022.

We also offered councillors and council staff copies of our new fact sheets, reports and report summaries.

Website changes to improve accessibility

In December 2021, we rolled out changes to our website to improve accessibility.

The project to refresh the web content started by analysing visitors to our website to better understand the reason they were visiting our site and the type of information they were after.

As a result, we developed more content to help users understand what complaints we can assess and to help them reach the appropriate bodies when complaints are outside our jurisdiction.

We also developed a section to provide councils and governance staff with guidance to improve compliance with the Local Government Act. This section of the website contains case studies of investigations and common governance issues. We published summaries of reports which are easier to access than the full document.

We also produced a number of fact sheets targeting councillors, which are aimed at improving understanding of and compliance with the Act.





Corporate

Our people

The Inspectorate had 12 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions filled as at 30 June 2021. We also employed two contractors for part of this period and had one full-time equivalent position vacant.

Challenges and opportunities

Recruiting qualified and experienced staff has continued to be challenging during 2021–22. However, we were successful in recruiting two new staff members with the right skills and experience for their roles.

Complaint volume has been increasing on the same gradual annual trend since our creation in 2009 but budgetary constraints continue to limit our ability to expand our team to meet increased demand.

We continued to explore avenues, such as issuing fines to candidates for not submitting campaign donation returns, and to councillors and senior staff for non-compliance with interest return requirements. This is a lengthy process that we are hopeful of completing in the next financial year.

Freedom of information

The Inspectorate received and responded to four Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in 2021–22. FOI requests are handled in accordance with guidelines and processes set down by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner.

Gifts and benefits

Our staff were not offered and did not accept any gift or donation during this financial year. We publish the gifts and benefits for this and previous years on our website under the [policies and registers section](#).

Witness welfare

We released our Witness Welfare Guidelines and Witness Welfare Policy in June 2022. The documents formalise many existing Inspectorate practices in relation to welfare.

The guidelines and policy will help our staff support the welfare of people they encounter while exercising their duties and powers. This includes witnesses who may appear voluntarily or be compelled to appear before us.

These documents set out how we will support the welfare, including physical health, mental health, wellbeing, and safety, of all people we deal with in the course of our work, including complainants, witnesses, subject persons, and stakeholders.

The guidelines set out how our staff should take welfare into account when communicating, conducting interviews, and using the reasonable assistance provisions.


Financials information


Under the *Public Administration Act 2004*, the Inspectorate is an administrative office hosted by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Inspectorate uses corporate services, including finance, from the department. Financial information is incorporated into the Department of Justice and Community Safety's [2021–22 Annual Report](#).


Local Government Inspectorate

Encouraging higher standards of integrity, accountability and transparency in local government

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