Vote to have your say on local future

COUNCILLOR
LYNNE CRAIGIE
PRESIDENT
WALGA

Community members will have the power to shape the future direction of their Council by participating in Local Government Elections this month.

Nominations for Local Government Election candidates closed three weeks ago, following a joint campaign between WALGA and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries to build on the diversity of Elected Members across the State.

The campaign has seen more than the expected number of people completing the mandatory online induction process to run for elections. Despite this, the statistic may not have translated to an increased number of seats being contested.

There was a slight rise in incumbent Elected Members who were returned to Council unopposed, which could be due to a multitude of reasons.

In many cases it is likely that the community is happy with the way things are run in their Council and the representation provided by current Councillors. However, a more insidious factor being reported is the climate of aggression and hostility, which may be deterring potential candidates.

Along with Elected Members, we are seeing candidates being targeted by social media trolls. These keyboard warriors firing out disparaging comments and thinly-veiled acts of intimidation marks a new low in personal attacks, with some Elected Members suffering continuous abuse from candidates and the community.

The community shouldn’t tolerate bullying and intimidation in any form and with bullets being left on a candidate’s driveway, and decapitated rat carcasses placed on candidates doorsteps the worst examples of the behaviour people are being subjected to.

Understandably, it is harder to convince civic minded people to run, or to call for candidates who genuinely want to make a difference to put their hand up if they are confronted with the spectre of online and physical harassment.

I was pleased to see the Local Government Minister has stepped up to urge both community members and candidates to show respect during the election campaign while calling out the bullying and nastiness.

It may seem obvious, but all individuals are entitled to their own opinions – conversations and debate can occur in a mature and respectful way.

Community members in Councils with multiple candidates standing for election can make their vote count by taking time to learn about the nominees before casting their ballot slips.

Candidate profiles are available in the Local Government’s public notice board and postal packs from the WA Electoral Commission. They are also published on Council websites, community newspapers and social media.

Ask the nominees about the important issues and how they hope to achieve any proposed changes.

Ultimately, the community gets the representatives that the majority chooses, and the only way to impact local decisions is to participate by voting.

For more information on how you can vote in the Local Government Elections, visit your local Council website.