Social media, more just making noise than making sense

Outstanding achievements of WA Local Governments in developing innovative and resourceful solutions for their communities was acknowledged at the recent National General Assembly of Local Governments in Canberra. I was delighted to see the City of Stirling receive the National Excellence Award for Local Government for its Kaleidoscope Initiative Mentoring Program. They joined the Cities of Belmont and Fremantle in also winning individual category awards.

These significant achievements should be celebrated but it concerns me that too often the focus on the Local Government sector is led by biased and ill-informed commentators which seems to be consistently informed by a small core of ratepayers using social media to pursue personal agendas.

The strength of Local Government is the personal opportunity provided to the community to make actual changes rather than just continuing to criticise at arm’s length on social media.

Unlike other services, Local Government gives its customers the option to take control – that is to take up a place on Council – and make a real contribution.

It may mean the recent discourse on social media about proposed changes to the Local Government Act will translate to greater interest in Council elections in October.

I would like to hope so and encourage those with strong views on their local communities to engage in the democratic process and make the commitment to serve on Council.

Indeed, what none of us should want is a repeat of the previous Local Government elections in 2017 with some candidates subject to relentless, often nasty and mostly inaccurate attacks via social media.

It is why it is important that the legislative changes proposed by the State Government to the existing Local Government Act can now proceed.

Among the first changes are the requirement for training for Elected Members to help them in their role on Council but also importantly an induction process for new candidates.

The second phase of the legislation will go to changes to make Councils even better placed to deliver value for their communities.

These proposed changes have not simply come from a detached government edict or worse, ill-informed bleating on social media, but rather through a wide-ranging consultation process.

Starting in mid-2017, the consultation with industry, Councils and the community has included dozens of workshops and taken more than 3000 submissions.

So it was a surprise in the midst of the recent Parliamentary process to start the long overdue changes to the Act, the Opposition decided it needed a wide-ranging select committee review of the sector.

The Local Government sector has made a clear commitment to engage with the McGowan Government’s legislative reform agenda, something that previous governments have failed to tackle.

Regardless of the political motivations behind the committee’s inception, I’m confident the Local Government sector will embrace the opportunity to demonstrate how committed the level of government closest to its community really is.