



WEST WIMMERA SHIRE COUNCIL

3 September 2024

Sarah Connelly MP
Chair
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Parliament of Victoria
paec@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Sarah,

Parliamentary Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government

Thank you for the opportunity for West Wimmera Shire Council to provide insights and reflections on its response to VAGO Audit No. 316 on 28 July 2025.

Please see our responses to the additional questions below:

1. Would standardisation across councils be beneficial? What things would you like to have standardised (e.g. policies, processes, reporting, grant assessment criteria)?

We don't believe standardisation will work - Larger Councils may have larger value grants, more resources to review grants, more complex systems and different purpose they want to achieve with their grant guidelines and criteria. SmartyGrants, in combination with our own policies and guidelines are fit for purpose, user friendly, and suitable for smaller Councils, while still following best practice and good governance throughout the process. Our Council is made up of several communities which rely heavily on funding. Each community has different needs and what is relevant for one community will be different to the next so standardising would potentially favour some communities over others.

2. How does your council ensure that its Audit and Risk Committee is contributing to best practice controls? For example, how your ARC prioritises its work and meeting agendas and maintains transparency.

The Audit and Risk Committee meets quarterly and follows a Work Plan at each meeting which is adopted annually by the Committee. This Work Plan provides effective oversight to Council activities by the Audit & Risk Committee and includes the schedule of regular activities to be reviewed by the Committee and to ensure that all important aspects of the Council's activities are being overseen. An Audit & Risk Committee Work Plan provides the Committee with a set process to review and assess important documentation and reports



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and a chance to analyse key risks to Council in a structured manner to assess and analyse risk to Council.

Audit and Risk Committee minutes are presented to Council for information each quarter. A confidential section of the meeting allows for the Audit and Risk Committee to meet with the internal and external auditors to discuss and provide any feedback to the Committee.

3. How adequate do you believe the current consequences/penalties for breaches to the Local Government Act or instances of fraud and corruption are? What would you like to see changed?

We believe consequences and penalties are adequate but lack of resources to investigate matters and promptly issue consequences seems to be a problem.

4. How adequate do you believe current whistleblower protections in the local government sector and how could these protections be improved?

Whistleblower protections are adequate, we don't believe anything needs to be added.

The Committee also requests that the following two questions be reviewed and answered by all elected members of your Council:

1. How comfortable are you with the current use of confidentiality in meetings within your Councils? a. How could the need for confidentiality be better balanced with the requirement for Council decisions to be reported transparently?

WWSC follows the guidelines in the act to determine which matters should be handled as confidential – the act is very clear and sensible. Community education could be improved to ensure that the community understands why certain matters should be handled in confidence.

2. What have been the barriers and enablers to your council having a culture that makes councillors and council staff feel safe to 'speak up' when they identify fraud or corruption (both internally and formally through Public Interest Disclosures)?

We are not aware of any instance of fraud or corruption. Fraud and Corruption training is part of ongoing inductions and training for staff and Councillors. It is also incorporated into our Code of Conduct.



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Please feel free to contact myself if you would like any further information.

Yours faithfully



David Bezuidenhout
Chief Executive Officer