The Annual Report and the Community Forum

Narration Script

Slide	Title
1	Title — The Annual Report and the Community Forum
2	Before You Begin
3	Reporting Closes the Loop
4	What Must Be In It
5	Councillors in the Annual Report
6	Audit and Assurance
7	Publishing the Report
8	The Community Forum
9	Councillor Role at the Forum
10	Five Things to Remember
	Total

Slide 1 — Title — The Annual Report and the Community Forum

Welcome to The Annual Report and the Community Forum, part of the Huon Valley Council Candidate and Councillor Knowledge Series.

Council spends the year planning, budgeting and delivering. The annual report is where it turns around and accounts for all of it. This module covers what has to be in that report, what it says about Councillors, and how the community engages with it before the Annual General Meeting.

Slide 2 — Before You Begin

A quick word on what this module is.

The annual report sits at the end of Council's planning cycle. The strategic plan sets the direction, the annual plan and budget set the year, and the annual report is where Council accounts for what it actually did.

This is the first of two modules. This one covers the annual report and the Community Forum. The companion module covers the Annual General Meeting — submissions, motions and the formal process.

The statutory requirements apply to every Tasmanian council. The Community Forum is how we do it here.

One thing for Councillors to be ready for: Councillors are in this document. A Councillor's attendance, allowances and completed training are all published, by name, every year.

And every slide cites its source. Where a requirement comes from the Act, we say so. Where it comes from Council's own Framework, we say that too — because the two are not the same thing.

Slide 3 — Reporting Closes the Loop

An annual report is not paperwork. It is the mechanism by which Council answers for the year to the people who paid for it.

Think of the cycle. The strategic plan sets the long-term direction. The annual plan and budget set what will be done this year and what it will cost. The annual report closes the loop by reporting back against them.

It is a statutory obligation. Section 72 requires Council to prepare an annual report and prescribes what has to be in it. Council does not get to decide the contents.

It is also a Councillor's primary tool. Section 28 gives Councillors the function of monitoring the implementation of strategies, plans and the budget, and the annual report is the main evidence available to do that. A good reason to read it properly rather than skimming the pictures.

And it is public. The annual report is available for public inspection on Council's website and from the Customer Service Centre, and a copying charge may apply for a hard copy. Copies also go to the Director of Local Government and the Director of Public Health.

Slide 4 — What Must Be In It

Section 72 prescribes what has to be in the report. It falls into four groups.

Performance. A summary of the annual plan for the year just gone, and a statement of Council's activities and how it performed against the goals and objectives set for that year.

Finance. The financial statements, a copy of the audit opinion, and for each significant business activity its operating, capital and competitive neutrality costs and revenue. That last requirement is why questions about Council's childcare centres and medical services come up at the forum every year — the numbers are right there.

Public health. Council's goals and objectives in relation to public health — how far it carried out its functions under the Public Health Act and the Food Act, what resources were allocated, how well local needs were met, and whether any strategies were completed.

And integrity and people. Code of conduct complaints and what they cost, councillor allowances and attendance, senior employee remuneration in bands, any land donated under section 177, and the matters prescribed by regulation 37.

Slide 5 — Councillors in the Annual Report

Four of the prescribed contents are about Councillors personally, and they are published with the Councillor's name attached.

Attendance at meetings of the Council and of any Council committee during the year.

Allowances and expenses — the total paid to the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and Councillors.

Training. Regulation 37 requires a statement of the core learning and development activities, as determined by the Director of Local Government, that each Councillor has completed during the year. Not offered — completed.

And conduct. The number of code of conduct complaints received, the number upheld wholly or in part, and what dealing with them cost Council.

None of this is a gotcha. It is the accountability side of the role. But it is a good reason for Councillors to take attendance and training seriously from the first month rather than the last, because the record is published and permanent.

Slide 6 — Audit and Assurance

The financial statements are independently audited before they reach the report, and that independence is what gives the document its weight.

Under the Audit Act 2008, Tasmanian councils are audited annually through submission of their financial statements to the Auditor-General, who then reports to Parliament each year assessing councils' financial performance and sustainability.

The audit opinion itself is published. Section 72 requires a copy of the audit opinion to be included in the annual report — the actual opinion, not a summary written by Council.

Alongside that, every Tasmanian council must establish and maintain an audit panel, which reviews financial systems and management and, more broadly, whether Council has the risk settings, culture, policies, systems and controls it needs.

The Auditor-General may also conduct performance audits into local government activities and report those to Parliament.

Slide 7 — Publishing the Report

Once the report is prepared, section 72(2) sets out what has to happen to it.

One copy goes to the Director of Local Government, and one to the Director of Public Health.

Copies must be available for public inspection, and provided free of charge or on payment of a prescribed fee.

Council must advertise the availability of the report in a daily newspaper circulating in the municipal area.

And critically, that advertisement must carry an invitation to electors to lodge submissions on the report, for discussion at the Annual General Meeting. The statutory route for the community to have its say on the report is a written submission.

Hold onto one distinction, because people conflate these constantly. A submission is a written comment on the report and it comes from the Act. A motion at the Annual General Meeting is a different thing.

Slide 8 — The Community Forum

Before the Annual General Meeting, Huon Valley Council holds a Community Forum on the annual report. Nothing in the Act requires this. It is how we choose to do it here.

It is a public session. Council presents the highlights of the year and walks through the annual report and the budget, and the community asks questions and raises issues directly with councillors and employees in the room.

It sits before the Annual General Meeting and before the closing date for motions. That sequence is deliberate — it means something raised at the forum can still become a motion in time.

The 2025 forum gives a fair sense of the range: operating losses on medical services and the shift to bulk billing, competitive neutrality in Council's childcare centres, the land use strategy as the biggest lever Council has, reaching people who do not engage digitally, grant dependency, and financial sustainability.

And it is deliberately informal. No motions are moved and nothing is decided. The point is a real conversation before the formal meeting, not a rehearsal of it.

Slide 9 — Councillor Role at the Forum

The forum is the one point in the year where Councillors hear directly from the community about the report, before anything is formalised.

First, turn up and listen. This is not a Council meeting. Councillors are not there to defend positions or decide anything, but to hear what people actually think — which is harder to do in a chamber with a camera running.

Second, help people frame a workable motion. Part of why the forum exists is so residents have time to think a motion through before the closing date. A clear, achievable motion has a far better chance of leading somewhere than a vague one.

Third, be honest about spheres of influence. Some of what gets raised is squarely Council's. Some sits with the State, the Commonwealth or another body. Saying so at the forum is more useful than letting a motion be framed against the wrong target and explaining afterwards why nothing happened.

And fourth, encourage participation. A motion at the Annual General Meeting is one of the very few formal routes a resident has to put something directly in front of Council, and many people do not know it exists.

Slide 10 — Five Things to Remember

Five things to take away.

One. The annual report closes the accountability loop. Strategic plan, annual plan and budget, then the report back against them.

Two. Its contents are prescribed, not chosen. Performance, finance, public health, integrity and people — all set by section 72 and regulation 37.

Three. Councillors are in it, by name. Councillor attendance, allowances and completed training are published every year.

Four. The audit opinion is published in full, and the Auditor-General reports separately to Parliament on councils' financial performance and sustainability.

Five. The Community Forum is Council's own initiative, not a requirement of the Act. It sits before the motions deadline precisely so the community has time to frame something workable.

The companion module picks up from there — the Annual General Meeting itself, submissions, motions and the formal process.