

Module 4 – Good Governance and Councillors

Narration script — one entry per slide

Slide 1 — Good Governance and Councillors

Welcome to Module 4 – Good Governance and Councillors. In earlier modules we looked at what local government is, and who does what inside a council. This module looks at something different: not the structure of local government, but the standard it should be held to. Good governance is what turns a technically lawful council into a genuinely trusted one — and it's built from a fairly small number of practical habits, not abstract theory. This module draws on Tasmania's own Good Governance Guide, developed by the Office of Local Government and the Local Government Association of Tasmania, so everything in it is specific to the environment you'll actually be operating in as a councillor here.

Slide 2 — Before You Begin

This module is for anyone considering election to Council, as well as current councillors and community members who want to understand what good governance actually looks like in practice. It draws directly on Tasmania's Good Governance Guide. You don't need to memorise every detail — the aim is to understand the handful of principles that, together, keep a council accountable, trusted, and effective. You can pause at any time.

Slide 3 — What Is Good Governance?

Governance is the processes and culture that guide an organisation's activities beyond its basic legal obligations — in other words, it's not just about following the law, it's about how decisions get made and how people behave along the way. Good governance in local government means councillors act with the highest ethical standards, understand their own role and the role of others, foster trusting and respectful relationships, commit to risk management and strategic planning, follow a transparent and accountable decision-making process, and genuinely understand and abide by the law. None of this happens automatically. It's a standard councillors choose to hold themselves to, and it's what allows a council to make decisions the community can actually trust.

Slide 4 — The Characteristics of Good Governance

Good governance has eight recognised characteristics. It's accountable — council can explain and answer for the decisions it makes. It's transparent — people can see how and why a decision was reached. It's law-abiding — consistent with legislation and within council's actual powers. It's responsive — timely and appropriate to community needs. It's equitable — every group, especially the most vulnerable, gets a fair hearing. It's participatory — people affected by a decision get a genuine chance to weigh in. It's effective and efficient — making the best use of the resources available. And it's consensus-oriented — working toward the position that best serves the whole community, not just the loudest voice in the room.

Slide 5 — Why Good Governance Matters

Good governance isn't just a compliance exercise — it delivers real, practical benefits. It promotes public trust: when decisions are made transparently, the community believes Council is acting in its overall interest, even when people disagree with the outcome. It gives councillors and employees genuine confidence — councillors trust the advice they're given, and council officers feel able to provide frank and fearless advice, knowing it will be

respected even when it's not what a councillor wanted to hear. It leads to better decisions, because decisions informed by good information and honest debate generally reflect the community's real interests. It supports ethical decision-making by encouraging everyone to ask 'what's the right thing to do?' And, done well, it actually improves efficiency — good governance and good results go hand in hand, not in competition.

Slide 6 — High Ethical Standards

Acting with high ethical standards is the component that, done properly, delivers all the others — an ethical councillor is naturally accountable, transparent, and law-abiding. In Tasmania, three things guide ethical behaviour: the Local Government Act and its regulations, your council's code of conduct, and your own personal ethics. One area worth taking seriously is confidentiality. Information discussed in closed meetings stays confidential unless Council authorises otherwise, and leaking it isn't just a breach of trust — it's a breach of the Act, and the penalties are real: fines, and in serious cases a court can bar someone from even nominating for election for up to seven years. Unethical behaviour doesn't just cost the individual — it costs the whole council's credibility, and public trust, once lost, is genuinely hard to win back.

Slide 7 — Understanding Your Role

We covered the core of this in Module 2 — Council governs, the CEO manages, employees implement — so this is a reminder rather than new ground. Understanding your role, and respecting the roles of others, is one of the eight components of good governance for a reason: the best intentions can be undermined when a councillor acts outside their role, and doing so isn't just a governance problem, it can be a breach of the Local Government Act itself. Staying inside your lane isn't about limiting your influence — it's what keeps the whole system accountable and protects your own reputation along with the council's.

Slide 8 — Building Positive Relationships

Good governance depends on trust and respect between councillors, and between councillors and employees — and that doesn't mean everyone has to be friends. It means everybody gets heard, disagreement gets handled robustly but fairly, and conflict gets resolved swiftly rather than left to fester. Good communication, built on that trust, is what turns a group of individually elected councillors into an effective team with a shared focus on the community's interests. It also shapes how the council is seen from outside: a council that visibly works well together builds a reputation as a cohesive, professional organisation — one the community is more willing to trust with difficult decisions.

Slide 9 — Effective Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is how Council sets a vision for the future and turns it into goals, objectives and actions — bringing council and community interests together into one coherent plan for the whole municipal area. It matters for governance because it creates accountability: the community can see what Council said it would do, and hold it to that. To do this well, councillors need to actively participate in setting that direction, not just endorse a plan handed to them. A strategic plan that councillors genuinely own is far more effective at guiding priorities than one they simply signed off on — ownership is what makes a plan stick.

Slide 10 — Robust Risk Management

Risk is built into everything a council does, so risk management is a core part of good governance — not a separate compliance task bolted on afterwards. It's worth being clear about what this isn't: risk management isn't about avoiding all risk. It's about taking the risks worth taking to achieve Council's strategic goals, while managing the ones that aren't. That means identifying risks, evaluating which ones genuinely need attention, deciding how to treat them, and then monitoring and reviewing regularly — because risk isn't static, and neither is a good risk management framework.

Slide 11 — Fair and Transparent Decision-Making

Sound decision-making is central to good governance, and it needs to withstand scrutiny — from regulators, the media, and the people directly affected. Three things matter here. First, acting in accordance with the law: your decisions need to be consistent with legislation and within Council's actual powers. Second, making unbiased decisions: giving all stakeholders a fair hearing before a decision is made, and not having predetermined the outcome before you've heard all sides — having a view isn't the same as having made up your mind. And third, acting in the interests of the whole community, which is genuinely different from simply advocating for your own constituents. You can advocate for a group's view at the table even while ultimately deciding, on the evidence, that the community's best interests point somewhere else. That distinction — advocating versus deciding — is one of the harder things about the role, and one of the most important.

Slide 12 — Legislative Compliance

Good governance is law-abiding, which means every decision and every action a councillor takes needs to be consistent with relevant legislation, and within the powers local government actually has. In Tasmania, that mainly means the Local Government Act and its regulations, but councillors will also regularly deal with legislation covering planning, public health, and environmental management, depending on what's in front of Council. You don't need to memorise every Act — but you do need to know when to ask, and know that 'no one told me' isn't a defence once you're in the role.

Slide 13 — Continuous Improvement

Good governance isn't a box that gets ticked once and left alone — it's something a council commits to improving continuously. That means being willing to review how decisions are made, how relationships are working, and how risks are managed, and being honest when something isn't working as well as it should. Continuous improvement is really accountability and transparency turned toward the council itself, not just outward toward the community — and it's what keeps good governance from quietly sliding into box-ticking over time.

Slide 14 — Five Things to Remember

Before we finish, five things worth carrying forward. First: good governance is a standard councillors choose to hold themselves to — it goes beyond the bare minimum the law requires. Second: it rests on eight practical components, from ethical standards through to continuous improvement, and they're all meant to work together, not in isolation. Third: good governance genuinely earns public trust — communities accept even difficult decisions when they can see the process was fair. Fourth: employees giving frank and fearless advice, and councillors respecting that advice even when it doesn't support their preferred outcome, is a sign governance is working, not a sign of conflict. And fifth: acting in the community's best

interests is not the same as advocating for your own supporters — sometimes the two will point in different directions, and knowing which one your role requires is what good governance actually asks of you.

Slide 15 — Next Module

In the next module, we'll move from principles to obligations, and look at Councillor Conduct and Integrity — the actual legal requirements behind good governance, including conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and the consequences when standards aren't met. Understanding good governance in theory is the foundation; Module 5 is where you'll see exactly what it requires of you in practice. Thank you for watching.