

# Alice Springs Town Council Election Report



## NTEC version control

### 2021 Local Government Elections - Alice Springs Town Council report

Version Number	Purpose/change	Author	Date
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1.1	Addition of version control Removal of blank page	M. O'Brien	12/04/2022

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## Election timetable

### 2021 Local Government Elections

**28 August 2021**

Date	Time	
Friday 16 July		Nominations open
Tuesday 27 July	5:00 pm	Electoral roll closes
Thursday 5 August	12:00 noon	Nominations close
Friday 6 August	12:00 noon	Declaration of nominations, draw for position on ballot papers
Monday 9 August		Postal vote mail-out commences
Monday 16 August	8:00 am	Early voting commences Mobile voting commences
Tuesday 24 August	6:00 pm	Overseas postal voting despatches cease
Thursday 26 August	6:00 pm	All postal voting despatches cease
Friday 27 August	6:00 pm	Early voting ceases
Saturday 28 August	6:00 pm	Primary counts of postal, mobile and early votes commence <b>Election day</b>
	8:00 am	Election day voting commences
	6:00 pm	Election day voting ceases Mobile voting ceases Primary counts of ordinary, postal and early votes commence
Monday 30 August	9:00 am	Declaration vote verification checks, commence recheck of all counts
Thursday 2 September	9:00 am	Primary counts of accepted declaration votes, further postal counts
Friday 10 September	12:00 noon	Deadline for receipt of postal votes Final counts of postal votes commence
	6:00 pm	Distribution of preferences
Monday 13 September	10:00 am	Declaration of the election result

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## **BACKGROUND**

### **Elections**

Election day for the 2021 Local Government Elections was Saturday 28 August. Local government general elections in the Northern Territory cover 17 local government areas and include 60 separate elections for 159 positions. For Alice Springs Town Council, there were two elections: one mayoral and one to elect 8 councillor positions.

### **Legislation**

This was the first general election under the new *Local Government Act 2019* (which commenced 1 July 2021), with further electoral legislative and regulations changes included in amendments passed in July 2021.

The key changes relating to local government elections resulting from these amendments are:

- Changes to declaration voting that allows electors who turn up at a voting centre, but are not enrolled (or are enrolled for an interstate address) to still cast a vote that can be admitted to the count. The declaration envelope acts as an enrolment form which is forwarded to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) for processing. If the person is able to be enrolled, their vote is added to the count. Previously, declaration votes would result in updated enrolments, but their ballot papers would not be included in the count.
- Financial disclosure requirements were simplified so that only candidates who receive reportable donations and loans are required to complete a return, and disclosure timeframes were generally aligned to those in the *Electoral Act 2004*. (The financial disclosure requirements do not come into effect until 1 July 2022, so were not relevant to the 2021 Local Government Elections.)
- Other amendments included changes to the election timetable and nomination requirements.

### **Service Charter**

The service charter (one document for all councils) provided an overview of service commitments and associated standards that councils could expect from the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC). The charter also described how councils could assist in the delivery of the elections and thereby offset some of their costs. These are detailed in individual service level agreements that the NTEC had with each council.

### **Service Level Agreement**

As part of its service level agreement signed 2 March 2021, Alice Springs Town Council opted to provide or facilitate the following for its 2 elections:

- candidate information sessions
- promotion of the election via its social media outlets
- banner space on council signage locations at no cost
- the Andy McNeil Room as both an early voting centre and election day voting centre at no cost.

All electoral services were provided by the NT Electoral Commission.

## **BOUNDARY CHANGES**

There were no boundary or representative structure changes as a result of the representation review of Alice Springs Town Council conducted prior to the election.

## ENROLMENT

At the close of the electoral roll on Tuesday 27 July at 5:00pm there was a total of 15,756 electors enrolled in the Alice Springs Town Council area. This is a 9 per cent increase in enrolment from the previous local government general elections held in 2017.

## PUBLIC AWARENESS

### Campaign overview

The public awareness campaign for the 2021 Local Government Elections was implemented in two broad phases. The first phase focused on awareness and enrolment. The second was a call to action for all eligible Territorians to vote.

The roll out of the public awareness campaign for the 2021 Local Government Elections commenced on 21 June and continued through until the declaration of the results on 13 September 2021. Social media was the primary channel used to promote the election Territory wide. Television, radio, digital and print media were also integral parts of the media mix.

In-language radio, TV and social media content was also created to promote the election throughout remote areas and communities in the Territory. Based on recommendations from the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and Aboriginal Broadcasting Australia, content was developed in 9 Aboriginal languages which were geo-targeted to the regions where the languages are spoken.

Broadly understood Aboriginal languages such as Kriol and Arrernte were used right across the northern and southern parts to the Territory respectively to ensure that content developed in at least one relevant language other than English was available Territory wide.

### Website

The website for the 2021 Local Government Elections was launched early June and provided comprehensive information for candidates and electors. The site was designed to be the primary source of information for voters about enrolment and voting options, times and locations and results.

For candidates, the site provided information about nominating, campaigning, voting and scrutineering processes.

The following table shows website engagement for the election period (21 June through to 13 September) as well as specific Alice Springs Town Council results and information page engagement, prior to and post election day.

### Website engagement

<b>Total website page views</b>	<b>865,814</b>
Alice Springs mayor results page views	36,640
Alice Springs councillor results page views	17,737
Alice Springs list of mayoral candidates	4,577
Alice Springs list of councillor candidates	3,621
All other Alice Springs related pages views	15,469
<b>Total Alice Springs content related page views</b>	<b>78,071</b>

## Newsletters



A total of 10 election specific newsletters were emailed to stakeholders including councils and candidates, from 28 May through to 9 September. The newsletters kept stakeholders up to date with topics ranging from nomination information through to details of vote counting. The newsletters were also available on the NTEC website and links were shared on the NTEC's Facebook page.

## Advertising – radio, television, social media

NTEC branded advertisements of 15 seconds were developed for radio, television and social media. The advertisements carried simple, concise messages such as: 'check your enrolment', 'are you correctly enrolled?', 'early voting has started', and 'vote now'.

All advertisements promoted the NTEC website as the prime source of information for electors to 'find out more'.

These advertisements were also translated into 9 Aboriginal languages and broadcast on the CAAMA, Aboriginal Broadcasting Australia, Yolngu Radio and TEABBA radio networks throughout the Territory.

In-language versions were also broadcast on Aboriginal Broadcasting Australia TV and ICTV channels and were geo-targeted to their respective language areas on social media.

The stock advertisements were run on social media in conjunction with a series of video logs (vlogs) featuring well-known Territorians such as Charlie King, who promoted key election messages on behalf of the NTEC.

A number of social media advertisements were developed in collaboration with Bellette Media featuring Territorians raising awareness about the elections.

Facebook engagement statistics show that the vlog format advertisements proved highly successful. In total, 8 of the 42 social media advertisements were produced in either a vlog or light-hearted format. Those 8 advertisements accounted for 152,988 video views from the campaign total of 377,810 views.

English language radio advertisements were broadcast on Hot 100 and Mix-FM stations in the Top End and Sun FM and 8HA in Central Australia.

English language television advertisements were broadcast on Channel 7, Channel 9 and Imparja networks. Placement of these was focused on 'event' TV, or high-rating programs and popular sports such as AFL and NRL matches.

## Direct digital and print advertising

With a large decline in print media options since the 2017 general elections, newspaper advertising for the 2021 Local Government Elections was largely restricted to statutory advertising requirements as prescribed under the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021. These advertisements ran in the NT News as the Territory's primary, widely-circulated newspaper.

However, further publications with a digital presence such as Alice Springs News Online, Tennant Creek and District Times and Katherine Times were also engaged for location targeted aspects of the campaign.

Direct digital advertising placements on millennial, tech-savvy platforms such as EA Games and NewsXtend, proved highly successful in terms of campaign awareness.

From 92,893 video impressions served on EA Games, a view through rate of 89.9 per cent was achieved, or put another way, there were 83,486 complete views of the two 15 second advertisements run across the campaign.

The NewsExtend platform also served 298,501 impressions Territory-wide and achieved 30,805 complete views of awareness video advertisements.

The following tables outline relevant statistics for different advertising channels and platforms.

### Television

Network	Dates aired	Number of advertisements
Channel 7 Darwin	04/07/2021 – 28/08/2021	202
<b>Channel 7 Central</b>		<b>228</b>
Channel 9		78
<b>Imparja</b>		<b>127</b>
<b>ICTV</b>		<b>120</b>
<b>ABA</b>		<b>124</b>
<b>Bold:</b> Channels aired throughout Alice Springs Town Council region		<b>Total 879</b>

### Radio

Network	Dates aired	Number of advertisements
Hot 100	04/07/2021 – 28/08/2021	158
Mix FM		157
<b>CAAMA</b>		<b>168</b>
TEABBA		109
<b>ABA</b>		<b>141</b>
Yolngu Radio		104
<b>Sun FM</b>		<b>104</b>
<b>8HA</b>		<b>104</b>
<b>Bold:</b> Channels aired throughout Alice Springs Town Council region		<b>Total 1,045</b>

### Social Media

Campaign	Reach	Impressions	Click through rate
<b>2021 Local Government Elections – overall</b>	168,472	2,825,293	1.07%*
<b>Alice Springs geo-targeted ads#</b>	33,875	143,820	1.8%

\*Industry standard is 0.89%

#Includes only advertisements targeted to run in Central Australia, which included the Alice Springs Town Council area



### Call centre

A call centre was established on Monday 2 August and ran until 6pm on 28 August, election day. Staff assisted electors with a variety of enquiries related to the election during this period.

Enquiry mode	Number of enquiries
Total phone calls	1,522
Emails to ntec@nt.gov.au	261
Front counter	88
Formal complaints received	43

### Street banners

The NTEC placed large banners ranging in size from 4 metres x one metre up to 8 metres x one metre in high traffic locations around Alice Springs to promote awareness of the 2021 Local Government Elections.

The following table details where and when those banners were located and what message they carried.

Banner location	Message	Display dates
Larapinta Drive	ENROL TO VOTE	12/07 – 26/07
	VOTE EARLY NOW	16/08 – 23/08
	VOTE SATURDAY	23/08 – 28/08
Todd Mall	ENROL TO VOTE	12/07 – 26/07
	VOTE SATURDAY	23/08 – 28/08
Gap Road	ENROL TO VOTE	12/07 – 26/07
	VOTE SATURDAY	23/08 – 28/08

### Candidate information sessions

There were 4 candidate information sessions organised by the Local Government Association of the NT in partnership with the council, which the NTEC presented at. The table below provides details about these sessions.

Date	Location/sessions	Number of attendees
6 July 2021	Alice Springs Council x 2	21
7 July 2021	Alice Springs Council x 2	9

### Stakeholder meetings

Wayne Harlock, returning officer for the southern region attended various face-to-face stakeholder meetings with the council throughout the election period. These meetings provided opportunities to confirm arrangements and/or address issues as they arose throughout the election.

## Email and SMS

Electors who have provided either their mobile phone number or email address or both are able to be contacted directly by the NTEC. Those electors in the Alice Springs Town Council area received 4 messages before election day, 28 August. Details of those messages are provided in the table below.

Message	No. of emails sent	Date sent	No. of SMS sent	Date sent
Enrolment	6,176	19-07-2021	7,902	22-07-2021
Voting suspended (COVID-19)	320*	16-08-2021	7,336	16-08-2021
Vote now, early voting open (post lockdown)	5,616	19-08-2021	7,336	19-08-2021
Last day/s to vote#	3,621	26-08-2021	4,177	28-08-2021
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15,733</b>		<b>26,751</b>	

\*Sent only if no SMS contact and if elector had not already voted

#Sent only to electors who had not voted

## Other promotional activities

The NTEC hosted stalls on the show circuit promoting the upcoming 2021 Local Government Elections in Katherine and Darwin only. Stalls were ready to be run in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek but these shows were cancelled due to a COVID-19 lockdown.

## VOTING SERVICES

### Nominations

Nominations opened Friday 16 July and closed on Thursday 5 August at 12:00 noon. For Alice Springs Town Council there were a total of 17 accepted nominations for councillor and 10 accepted nominations for mayor. No nominations were rejected.

The declaration of nominations was held at the NTEC's Central Australia election office at the Arid Zone Research Institute, 519 Stuart Hwy, Kilgariff. The event was attended by candidates, the general public and council representatives. A random number generator selected the ballot paper position for each candidate and results were uploaded onto the NTEC website and Facebook page as soon as the draw was completed.

### Alice Springs Town Council – summary of accepted nominations/candidates

Position	Candidates in ballot paper order
<b>Mayor (1 vacancy)</b>	Blair McFARLAND
	Angus McIVOR
	Aaron BLACKER
	Patrick BEDFORD
	Jimmy COCKING
	Wayne WRIGHT
	Steve BROWN
	Marli BANKS
	Eli MELKY
	Matt PATERSON

Position	Candidates in ballot paper order
<b>Councillor (8 vacancies)</b>	Jimmy COCKING
	James DASH
	Patrick BEDFORD
	Emily WEBSTER
	Sean HEENAN
	Allison BITAR
	Marli BANKS
	Angus McIVOR
	Catherine SATOUR
	Aaron BLACKER
	Wayne WRIGHT
	Michael LIDDLE
	Eli MELKY
	Mark COFFEY
	Kim HOPPER
Darren BURTON	
Steve BROWN	

### Electronic mark-off

An electronic voter mark-off system is now used in all voting centres across the Northern Territory. The system records when someone has voted anywhere in the NT in real time. Where there is no internet coverage, each netbook stores the voter mark off information until such time as there is internet coverage which allows the netbooks to synchronise and send the information to NTEC offices.

Voting centres are issued paper copies of the certified lists as an emergency backup option in case of complete failure of the electronic mark off system.

The system also prevents multiple voting, as a voter who is marked off electronically in one voting centre or who has completed a postal vote will appear in all voting centres as already voted.

## ELECTIONS

### Early voting

Within the Alice Springs Town Council area, early voting services were offered for two weeks (from Monday 16 August to Friday 27 August) at the Andy McNeill Room at the town council office building. However, from 12 noon, Monday 16 August to 12 noon, Thursday 19 August, early voting was suspended Territory wide due to a COVID lockdown. To offset the loss of service to electors, early voting times were extended.

When open, early voting for Alice Springs Town Council electors was also available all other early voting centres located throughout the Territory. The table below shows the number of votes issued at each early voting centre (EVC) for this election, the comparison statistics from the 2017 NT Council Elections. Note: Votes 'issued' differs from votes counted, the latter being used for results and voter turnout figures and other election reporting.

**Early voting statistics compared – Alice Springs Town Council**

<b>Voting Centre</b>	<b>2021 Local Government Elections Votes issued</b>	<b>2017 NT Council elections Votes issued</b>
Alice Springs EVC	5,087	4,846
Casuarina EVC	23	8
Coolalinga EVC	7	6
Darwin EVC	18	19
Katherine EVC	7	6
Palmerston EVC	10	N/A*
Tennant Creek EVC	22	22
Yarrowonga EVC	18	N/A*
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,192</b>	<b>4,907</b>

\*The previous City of Palmerston election was held separately from the 2017 NT Council elections (in March 2018) due to the council being suspended.

**Mobile voting – urban institutions**

For the Alice Springs Town Council area, an urban mobile voting team visited the Alice Springs Hospital and the Alice Springs Correctional Centre over 2 days. This team issued a total of 187 votes. Similar urban mobile voting teams also visited institutions in Darwin and Tennant Creek which issued votes to Alice Springs Town Council electors. These are captured as absent votes in the results.

**Postal voting**

All electors have the option to postal vote. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, postal voting services were provided to all residents of urban aged care facilities (rather than in-house mobile voting as provided previously) throughout the Territory. As Australia Post could not guarantee the delivery and return of postal votes to overseas addresses within the legislated timeframes, due to the impact of COVID-19 on international flights, no postal votes were sent overseas. The table below provides further details about postal votes for Alice Springs Town Council electors.

**Postal voting statistics – Alice Springs Town Council**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Number</b>
Number of postal vote applications received	1,003
Number of postal votes issued	885
Number of postal vote applications rejected	118
Number of postal votes returned	768
Number of postal votes added to the count - mayor	577
Number of postal votes added to the count - councillor	583
Number of postal votes rejected	186

The reasons for rejecting postal vote applications were:

- multiple applications received from same elector (90)
- postal address overseas (17)
- application received too late (9)
- cancelled by elector (2)

The main reasons for rejecting returned postal votes were:

- vote received too late (60)
- ordinary vote issued (i.e. elector marked off as having voted in person) (59)
- postal vote not signed (45)
- returned to sender (13)
- vote dated too late (8)
- signatures did not match (1)

### Declaration voting

A person who cannot be found on the electoral roll, but is entitled to vote, can be issued with a declaration vote after completing and signing a declaration envelope. Their ballot paper is placed in the envelope and a scrutiny of all declaration envelopes commences the day after election day.

Legislative amendments passed in May 2021 created a savings provision that allows eligible electors who are unenrolled at the close of roll date, a chance for their vote to be admitted to the count. During the declaration scrutiny process, all declaration envelopes are forwarded to the AEC and eligible electors are added to the roll using the envelope as an enrolment form. Where voters are unable to be enrolled, their declaration vote is rejected.

For Alice Springs Town Council, the table below shows the declaration votes admitted to the count and those rejected.

### Declaration vote statistics – Alice Springs Town Council

Accepted	Rejected	Total
216	13	229

The main reasons for rejecting declaration votes were:

- insufficient evidence of identity to enrol the person or update their enrolment (5)
- elector enrolled for a different local government area to the one they completed the ballot paper for (4). Electors must vote for the area they are enrolled in at the close of electoral roll, even if they have since moved to another NT address.
- declaration envelope/enrolment form not signed (4)

### Election day voting centres

Election day was Saturday 28 August 2021. For the Alice Springs Town Council area, there were 6 election day voting centres (detailed in the table below) all open from 8:00am to 6:00pm. Following discussions with the council, the number of election day voting centres remained the same from the 2017 election. If voting on election day, electors had to vote at a voting centre located within their council area.

### Election day voting statistics – Alice Springs Town Council (based on councillor votes)

Election day voting centre	Location	Votes counted
Alice Springs	Alice Springs Town Council 93 Todd St, Alice Springs	1,187
Braitling	Braitling Primary School 80 Head St, Braitling	671

Election day voting centre	Location	Votes counted
Gillen	Gillen Primary School 55 Milner Rd, Gillen	963
Kilgariff	Desert Knowledge Australia 475 South Stuart Hwy, Kilgariff	169
Larapinta	Living Waters Lutheran Primary Albrecht Drive, Larapinta	424
Sadadeen	Centralian Senior College Grevillea Drive, Sadadeen	609

### Participation

Turnout for the Alice Springs Town Council election was 65.1% with 10,261 electors (based on councillor votes) voting out of a total enrolment figure of 15,756. The turnout was down compared with the previous election in 2017, with 71%. The following table details the total number of vote types for those votes admitted to the count.

### Number of votes by voting centre – Alice Springs Town Council (based on councillor votes)

Voting centre	Number of votes counted	% of total votes
Election day voting centre	4,023	39.2%
Early voting	5,085	49.6%
Mobile team (Alice Springs)	187	1.8%
Postal voting	583	5.7%
Declaration voting	216	2.1%
Absent voting*	167	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,261</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Absent votes were issued via early voting centres, urban mobile voting teams and election day voting centres located outside the Alice Springs Town Council area.

### Non-voters

There 5,713 identified non-voters across the Alice Springs Town Council area. The table below shows the age and gender demographics of these non-voters.

### Non-voter statistics – Alice Springs Town Council

Gender	18-29 years	30-49 years	50-69 years	70+ years	Total
Female	748	1,139	660	186	<b>2,733</b>
Male	807	1,289	720	161	<b>2,977</b>
Gender undisclosed	1	2			<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,556</b>	<b>2,430</b>	<b>1,380</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>5,713</b>

### Informality

Of the 10,240 mayoral ballot papers counted, 454 (or 4.4%) were considered informal and therefore not counted. For the 10,261 councillor ballot papers, there were 1,015 informal votes (or 9.9%). The high number of candidates on both ballot papers would have contributed to the unintentional informal votes.

**Informal vote statistics – Alice Springs Town Council**

<b>Ballot paper</b>	<b>Intentional</b>	<b>Unintentional</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Mayor</b>	270	184	454
<b>Councillor</b>	342	673	1,015
<b>Total</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>1,469</b>

**Voting system**

The voting system for local government elections where there are multiple vacancies to fill is proportional representation (PR):

- Electors must number all the boxes on their ballot paper sequentially starting with the number one for their first choice.
- First preference votes for each candidate on formal ballot papers are counted, then a quota is calculated.
- The quota is calculated using the following formula: (total number of formal votes / (number of vacancies + 1)) +1.
- The candidates with votes equal to or greater than the quota are elected. If all vacancies are filled, the election is complete.
- If not, preferences are distributed to the other candidates until all vacancies have been filled.

To learn more about the PR system, go to the vote counting page on the NTEC website. For single vacancy positions (like a mayor) a preferential count is conducted.

**Vote counting – election night**

Vote counting began immediately after the close of voting at 6:00 pm on election day. A count of first preference votes for mayor and councillor was undertaken at each voting centre. First preference votes cast at the Alice Springs early voting centre and with the mobile team were counted at the Alice Springs scrutiny centre.

**Post-election night scrutinies**

- A count of postal votes returned by election day were counted followed by a re-check of first preferences for the mayor vacancy was conducted during the week following election day. Counts of declaration and postal votes returned during the counting period were undertaken over the 13 days following election day.
- As the mayoral position was a single-vacancy election, all counts were done manually.
- Votes received for the councillor vacancies were entered into an electronic count system that the NTEC uses to count votes using proportional representation (Easy count). All votes are then re-entered for verification purposes.
- Using this system alleviates the need to undertake a fresh re-check of ballot papers as each paper is entered and verified by two different data operators.
- Following the deadline for the receipt of postal votes at 12 noon on Friday 10 September, a distribution of preferences for the Alice Springs mayor was required as the leading candidate did not secure more than 50 per cent of the first preference votes. This count was done manually. The distribution of preferences for the councillor positions was conducted electronically using the Easy Count software.
- On Tuesday, 14 September a manual recount of the distributed votes and the informal votes for the mayor position was conducted in Alice Springs, in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021. This was scrutinised by teams of scrutineers for the 2 leading candidates. The recount resulted in a narrower margin (from 17 votes down to 2 votes) but did not change the elected candidate.

## ELECTION OUTCOMES

There were 10 candidates for the mayor vacancy and 17 candidates contesting 8 councillor vacancies. The successful candidates and first preference votes received are detailed in the tables below:

### Election of mayor

At the close of nominations there were 10 candidates. An election was duly held and the first preference votes were recorded as follows:

Candidate	First preference vote
Blair MCFARLAND	356
Angus MCIVOR	49
Aaron BLACKER	346
Patrick BEDFORD	240
Jimmy COCKING	3,101
Wayne WRIGHT	63
Steve BROWN	559
Marli BANKS	695
Eli MELKY	1,959
Matt PATERSON	2,418
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,786</b>

The number of votes required to win as per the preferential voting system (more than half) was 4,894, which no candidate received.

Following the distribution of preferences, and the recount of the distributed votes, **Matt PATERSON** was duly elected as mayor. The winning margin of just two votes was the closest ever result for a mayoral vote in the NT.

An application was made to Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NTCAT) following the declaration of results, seeking an order that a scrutinised recount of the first preferences (or primary votes) be conducted.

### Election of 8 councillors

At the close of nominations there were 17 candidates. An election was duly held and the first preference votes were recorded as follows:

Candidate	First preference votes
Jimmy COCKING	2,595
James DASH	48
Patrick BEDFORD	229
Emily WEBSTER	436
Sean HEENAN	347
Allison BITAR	385
Marli BANKS	487
Angus MCIVOR	44
Catherine SATOUR	326



Candidate	First preference votes
Aaron BLACKER	336
Wayne WRIGHT	48
Michael LIDDLE	425
Eli MELKY	1,366
Mark COFFEY	1,089
Kim HOPPER	372
Darren BURTON	240
Steve BROWN	473
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,246</b>

The quota required under the proportional representation voting system was 1,028. Following the distribution of preferences and in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Local Government (*Electoral*) Regulations the following candidates were elected:

- **Jimmy COCKING**
- **Eli MELKY**
- **Mark COFFEY**
- **Marli BANKS**
- **Steve BROWN**
- **Kim HOPPER**
- **Allison BITAR**
- **Michael LIDDLE**

### Declaration of the election results

The declaration of election results took place at the Alice Springs Town Council at 1:15pm on Wednesday 15 September 2021.

A copy of the full distribution of preferences is available on the 2021 Local Government Elections [results page](#) of the website.

### ELECTION COSTS

#### Estimate of costs

Election area	Estimated cost
Public awareness	\$33,900
Staffing	\$110,782
Operational	\$59,489
Sub total	\$204,171
10% GST	\$20,417
<b>Total estimated cost</b>	<b>\$224,588</b>

**Actual costs**

<b>Election area</b>	<b>Actual cost</b>
Public awareness	\$22,245
Staffing	\$148,163
Operational	\$53,926
Sub total	\$224,334
10% GST	\$22,433
<b>Total actual cost</b>	<b>\$246,768</b>

The main reasons for the difference between the estimated costs and the actual costs for the Alice Springs Town Council elections were the costs associated with the recount, as well as COVID-19 related costs, in particular the lock down that occurred 16 – 19 August. The final cost includes a \$10,000 'COVID contribution.'

**ISSUES TO NOTE**

- Early voting commenced at 8.00am on Monday 16 August 2021. Later that day a COVID lockdown involving greater Darwin and Katherine was announced and a suspension of early voting was applied for three days across the Territory from 12.00 noon. Stakeholders were informed verbally at voting centres, and by a variety of digital communications. Early voting in Alice Springs resumed at 12.00 noon, Thursday 19 August 2021. To ensure voters still had ample opportunities to vote early, the NTEC extended opening hours from 5.00pm to 6.00pm weekdays and provided further voting on Sunday 22 August.
- In their SLA, Alice Springs Town Council banned campaigning at the Alice Springs early voting centre located in their premise at the council office building. However they changed this position at the commencement of early voting.
- The placement of campaign signage caused many complaints and confusion for the public, candidates and council staff. Candidates were encouraged at information sessions and in the candidate handbook to check signage policies and by-laws of their local council, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, and Power and Water Corporation when determining where to place campaign material. It became evident during the election that this was not occurring, and there was confusion about the council's signage policy. The NTEC received many signage complaints which had to be referred to the relevant authority as election signage is not under the jurisdiction of the NTEC.
- As there is no two candidate preferred count for local government elections, the closeness of the mayoral count was not known until the distribution of preferences on the final day of the count (almost 2 weeks after election day).
- A total of 1,015 informal votes were received for the councillor position and 454 for the mayor position. The high number of informal ballot papers could be attributed to the large number of candidates for councillor (17) where voters either duplicated numbers or missed the sequence. The NTEC attempted to assist voters in casting a formal vote by making the ballot paper larger and advising electors at the point of issue that all boxes must be numbered sequentially.
- The continuation of high numbers of voters opting to vote early at NT elections should see councils review the number of election day voting centres. Alice Springs has a unique geographical diverse layout across its jurisdiction; however, the costs associated in delivering voting services across 6 voting centres should support a review as there are now voting centres taking as little as 169 votes on election day.
- The notable decrease in voter participation is concerning and partially attributable to the AEC's Federal Direct Enrolment Program that uses external data to automatically put electors on the roll and update address details of existing electors. The voter participation of electors automatically added to the electoral roll is usually lower than those electors who enrol themselves.

- Following the recount on Tuesday, 14 September, and the declaration of the winning mayoral candidate, an application was made to the NTCAT seeking an order that the Electoral Commissioner conduct a scrutinised recount of the first preference (or primary votes) of the 2 leading candidates. On 21 October, the NTCAT denied this application and on 17 November published (via the NTCAT website) the reasons for the decision, being that NTCAT has no legislative power to order a recount and were not satisfied there had been a material error affecting the result of the election.
- On 8 October 2021, a freedom of information (FOI) request was submitted seeking copies of the mayoral ballot papers, specifically access to the first preference votes. At the time of writing this report this matter remains ongoing.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Alice Springs Town Council to annually review its election signage policy prior to the 2025 local government elections with any changes to be publicised.
- NTEC to consider conducting a two candidate preferred count of the 2 leading mayoral candidates, on the Monday following election day to identify likely close counts.
- Alice Springs Town Council to consider reviewing the number of election day voting centres in their jurisdiction.
- Joint research between the Alice Springs Town Council and NTEC to analyse non-voter demographics to determine strategies to promote voter participation.
- As part of its standard post-election review, the NTEC to consider changes to, and/or development of, policy, procedures and education of candidates and scrutineers in relation to recounts.