

Local Government Inspectorate Annual Report 2019–20



Local Government Inspectorate Annual Report 2019–20

Design by Rick Rigoni

Accessibility

If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, please contact the Inspectorate on by email: media.comms@lgi.vic.gov.au.

This document can be found in HTML and PDF formats at www.lgi.vic.gov.au.

ISSN 2208-8342 - Online (pdf/word)

Authorised by the Victorian Government
1 Spring St, Melbourne, 3002

© 2020 State of Victoria (Local Government Inspectorate)



You are free to re-use this work under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence provided you credit the State of Victoria (Local Government Inspectorate) as author, indicate if changes were made and comply with the other licence terms. The licence does not apply to any images, photographs or branding, including the Victorian Coat of Arms and government logos.

Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

2019–20 at a glance

COVID-19 challenged all Victorians during 2019–20. Our movements were limited, and we were asked to work remotely, if we still had a job. The pandemic also changed the way Victorian local government was forced to operate. Suddenly, council staff were asked to work from home and council meetings were moved online.

In these unprecedented times, coronavirus has shown us that transparency in local government is vital. It has also shown us the value in having a robust integrity system which can oversee the decisions made on our behalf—even if they are taking place behind closed doors.

During the first half of 2019–20, the Inspectorate published one major report into Yarriambiack Shire Council, in Victoria's north west. The report made a number of findings and recommendations to improve the council's procurement and purchasing systems and policies.

The Inspectorate also recommended to the Minister for Local Government that a Monitor be appointed to Whittlesea City Council pursuant to section 223CA of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

The second half of the financial year saw the enactment of the *Local Government Act 2020* and the commencement of the Act's first two tranches in April and May. The new Act was the largest reform to the local government sector for 30 years. It aims to improve local government democracy, accountability and service delivery.

Inspectorate staff were able to seamlessly incorporate the new legislative regime into their day-to-day operations. The second two tranches of the Act commence in October 2020 and July 2021.

Administratively, in April 2020 the Inspectorate was transferred from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the Department of Justice and Community Safety as part of machinery of government changes following the resignation of the Special Minister of State, the Hon. Gavin Jennings MLC, from Parliament. I would like to express my sincere thanks to both departments for their assistance in achieving a smooth transition.

The new *Local Government Act 2020* contains numerous offences directed at councillor behaviour. The Inspectorate typically launched 5–10 prosecutions a year under the *Local Government Act 1989*. In some areas, such as campaign donation return submission, prosecution has proved problematic in achieving effective compliance.

The Inspectorate has requested that the Department of Justice and Community Safety support amendments to the new Act to convert 'low-impact' offences to infringements. This would enhance the Inspectorate's effectiveness and efficiency and ensure consistency in the application of the Act's penalty provisions.

In April, the *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020* inserted temporary measures into the 2020 Act to deal with impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on council operations and the Inspectorate's work.

As with the majority of the Victorian public service, Inspectorate staff started working from home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in late March 2020. Working from home presented some challenges for the Inspectorate, most notably stopping us from attending councils and delaying some interviews.

The coronavirus restrictions also affected the Inspectorate's education and prevention functions in the second half of the year. I commend the professionalism and dedication of all Inspectorate staff in meeting these challenges.

At the time of publication, we are past the 2020 council election period. The Inspectorate received a record number of election complaints for the October 2020 elections, which absorbed almost all of the Inspectorate's resources and will be the subject of a dedicated report, initially to the Attorney-General and the Minister for Local Government, and then released to the general public.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge David Wolf, the inaugural and long-serving Chief Municipal Inspector, and his contribution to ensuring the integrity of the local government sector. David served from 2009 to 2013 and again from 2016 until January 2020. The Inspectorate was fortunate to have a person of David's dedication and drive at its helm over those years.



Dr John Lynch PSM
Acting Chief Municipal Inspector

2019–20 at a glance

Statistics

Complaints

272



Enquiries

336



Investigations
completed

56



Outcomes

Prosecutions

2



Warnings

4



Examinations/
compliance reviews

3



Public engagements

Reports

1



Newsletters

4



Presentations/
online forums

12



Explanation of key categories and terms

Complaints: A complaint is a matter lodged with or referred to the Inspectorate for assessment in its capacity as the dedicated integrity agency for local government in Victoria. Most of the complaints we receive relate to councils but not all complaints we receive fall within our remit.

Enquiries: These include relevant contacts with the Inspectorate other than recorded formal complaints. Enquiries may involve multiple contacts with the public but only a single reference is included here.

Investigations completed: When the Inspectorate receives a complaint, an assessment is conducted to determine the best course of action. Formal investigations are resource intensive, so we are only able to dedicate resources to a limited number of investigations at any given time. Considerations for allocating resources include the prospect of matters proceeding to prosecution or being the subject of a public report.

Prosecutions: The Chief Municipal Inspector is empowered by the *Local Government Act* to prosecute individuals in a court. This power is taken very seriously and prosecutions are only pursued under certain circumstances. The Inspectorate must consider whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction, whether or not it is in the public interest and whether or not there is an alternative to prosecution that may be more appropriate.

Warnings: A warning is issued when a prima facie breach of the Act is substantiated, but circumstances show that a prosecution may not be warranted. Warnings given to a person are taken into account if any further substantiated complaints are made against the same person.

Complaint assessment: When the Inspectorate receives a complaint, it undergoes an initial assessment to determine, among other factors, if the allegations fit within its legislative remit or the matter should be transferred to another agency. A matter is not considered under investigation at this stage.

Prima facie: Refers to a criminal prosecution in which the evidence before a court is sufficient to prove the case unless there is substantial contradictory evidence presented during hearings.

Public interest disclosure: In some circumstances, a complaint may be considered as a public interest disclosure (previously known as a protected disclosure or 'whistleblower' complaint). If a complaint appears to show that a councillor or member of council staff has engaged or proposes to engage in improper conduct, this could constitute a public interest disclosure. These matters must be sent to IBAC so they can determine whether or not the protections under the public interest disclosure regime apply.

What we do

The Local Government Inspectorate is the dedicated integrity agency for local government in Victoria, responsible for investigating offences and breaches under the *Local Government Act 1989* and *Local Government Act 2020* or examining any matter relating to a council or council operations. During council elections, the Inspectorate is the agency responsible for receiving, assessing and, where appropriate, investigating matters and offences provided for under the electoral provisions of the Act.

The Inspectorate's work can be categorised under three main themes: responding to community need, ensuring compliance, and providing a guidance and education function. Reactive work includes responding to requests for information and enquiries, assessing complaints, conducting investigations and, in some cases, prosecutions. Proactive work includes council-specific governance examinations and reviews of systemic or thematic issues across the sector. Our guidance and education to the sector is generated by both reactive and proactive work outcomes and includes newsletters, presentations, reports and other communications.

The integrity system gives Victorians confidence in the state's public sector because misconduct and corruption in councils and the Victorian public sector hurts us all. The Victorian integrity system consists of the Inspectorate, Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), Victorian Ombudsman, Victorian Auditor-General's Office, the Victorian Information Commissioner, and Commissions for the Victorian Public Sector, Judiciary and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity.

Who are the Victorian integrity agencies, what do they do and what complaints can't they deal with?

Local Government Inspectorate

The Inspectorate investigates matters related to council operations including criminal offences involving councillors, senior council officers or any person subject to the conflict of interest provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

www.lgi.vic.gov.au

ombudsman VICTORIAN

The Ombudsman investigates the actions, decisions or conduct of public sector organisations and their staff. It also looks at whether a public sector organisation has acted in accordance with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

ibac independent broad-based anti-corruption commission Victoria

IBAC is responsible for exposing and preventing corrupt conduct in the public sector. It deals with serious corruption and misconduct in: State government departments and agencies, Victoria Police, members of parliament, judges and magistrates, and Council employees and councillors.

www.ibac.vic.gov.au

Highlights and challenges of 2019–20

Change of Chief Municipal Inspector

Chief Municipal Inspector David Wolf departed the Inspectorate on 28 January 2020 after being appointed as a Deputy Commissioner of IBAC.

David led the Inspectorate from its beginning in 2009, until 2013. He returned to the role in 2016 and guided the Inspectorate through the general council elections of that year and then continued to lead the Inspectorate in improving integrity and accountability of local government in Victoria.

Dr John Lynch was appointed to act as the Chief Municipal Inspector while recruitment was underway for Mr Wolf's replacement.

Dr Lynch has extensive public sector experience in legal and integrity roles and was previously Special Counsel at IBAC. Prior to working at IBAC, Dr Lynch was Crown Counsel to the Victorian Government.

New legislation

The *Local Government Act 2020* received Royal Assent on 24 March 2020, with the first and second tranches of legislation coming into operation on 6 April 2020 and 1 May 2020. The third and fourth tranches commence on 24 October 2020 and 1 July 2021. In this transition period, the Inspectorate operates under both acts.

The legislation delivers reforms to improve accountability, including:

- mandatory training for council election candidates and councillors
- standards of conduct to guide councillor behaviour and allow for disqualification of councillors subject to two or more findings of serious misconduct
- recognition of the need for collaboration between councils to deliver better services
- mandatory transparency rules for handling complaints
- deliberative engagement with communities to set each council's Community Vision and Council Plan.

The *Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment (Public Interest Disclosures, Oversight and Independence) Act 2019* passed both houses of Parliament and received Royal Assent on 5 March 2019. Cross-agency collaboration was undertaken to prepare for changes to Victoria's *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* that came into effect on 1 January 2020. The Act, which was renamed as the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012*, introduced a range of enhanced protections for those who disclose in the public interest. The changes required the Inspectorate to review and modify its assessment and other processes.

Machinery of government changes

Following the resignation of Special Minister of State, the Hon Gavin Jennings MLC, from Parliament, machinery of government changes came into effect on 23 March 2020. Under these changes, LGI's responsible Minister is now the Attorney-General supported by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The impact of COVID-19 on operations

A State of Emergency was declared in Victoria on 16 March 2020, which gave the Chief Health Officer extra powers in an effort to limit the spread of coronavirus and keep Victorians safe. The State of Emergency was extended on 31 May until 21 June 2020. Throughout this period, Victorians were directed to work from home where possible, avoid gathering in groups and limit travel.

In line with this direction, the Inspectorate closed its office on 23 March and staff worked from home for the remainder of the financial year. The transition to remote working required Inspectorate staff to find new ways to continue ongoing investigations and preparations for the 2020 local council elections. This situation is expected to continue for part of the 2020–21 financial year.

As operations were adapted for remote working, some investigations were delayed where in-person interviews were required and not possible due to travel restrictions, but the majority of investigations were unaffected. At the same time, the Inspectorate's ability to produce and process mail was limited and several outreach activities to engage candidates and councils ahead of the 2020 local council election period were cancelled in the interests of public safety. The pandemic is expected to have impacted on quantity and type of complaints received, as councils and potential complainants focused on other concerns.

Responding to community need

Enquiries

Members of the community, councils and councillors regularly contact the Inspectorate seeking advice or information. Some enquiries raise issues that fall outside the Inspectorate's jurisdiction and the Inspectorate refers these enquiries to other agencies where appropriate. Many contacts from the general public are referrals from other state government agencies and sector representative bodies.

Complaints

The Inspectorate receives allegations about offences and breaches under the Act and has a responsibility to assess all complaints as part of its role. Complaints staff initially assess whether the allegation is within the Inspectorate's jurisdiction

or if it should be referred to another responsible authority. Complaints are then subject to an initial action assessment to substantiate the allegation(s) forming the basis of the complaint and investigated to determine whether it is a breach or offence under the Act.

The Inspectorate works to a timeliness measure for the complaints function, with the target of receiving and acknowledging all complaints within five working days.

There were 272 complaints accepted for assessment by the Inspectorate in 2019–20. This was lower than the previous year's complaint volume and as discussed earlier, may be attributed to the impact of the pandemic on potential complainants and usual council complaints processes.

Trends in councillor conduct

Complaints data gained over three years (2016–2019) provided some insights into the conduct of elected councillors.

The Inspectorate identified that conduct-related issues peaked in the third year of their term at about 20 per cent, excluding the anomaly of election year complaints in 2016–17.

During the first year in office, data shows many complaints related to councillor conduct during elections and issues such as use of mobile phones or emails for electioneering purposes. In the latter half of the first year, councillors have undergone initial induction training or refresher courses and are dealing with decisions and information related to the council plan, strategic resource plan and budget.

Complaints increase in the second year for various reasons including:

- personality clashes
- matters before council
- political affiliation
- capability or capacity of elected representatives
- perceived or actual power imbalance
- information or actions of administration.

During the third year, complaints are at a peak, but intervention mechanisms such as the councillor code of conduct, informal discussions, and mediation or arbitration, may start to have an impact on councillor behaviour.

These are key timings in the cycle that council staff can be aware of and support the addition of periodic training to the calendar and reminders to councillors about the role and their responsibilities to the community.

Investigations

While complaints are a main driver of investigations, the Inspectorate may launch an own motion investigation into any potential breaches of the Act, or related to a council or council operations. An 'own motion' investigation is where the Inspectorate investigates a matter without receiving a

formal complaint and may be due to information received by other methods, such as media reporting. During 2019–20, 56 investigations were completed—a reflection of the significant amount of smaller or less time-consuming investigations and testament to the effort of staff involved.

Reporting period	2015–16	2016–17 (election year)	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
Complaints	397	576	417	421	272
Investigations completed	49	56	39	29	56

Note: The 2019–20 period does not include election complaints for the 2020 council elections.

Whittlesea Council sacked

Following complaints related to the behaviour of councillors and other matters over an extended period, Chief Municipal Inspector David Wolf recommended the Minister for Local Government appoint a Monitor pursuant to section 223CA of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The appointment was made to ensure good governance around processes and statutory decision making within the council.

Municipal monitor Yehudi Blacher's report found clear evidence that governance had collapsed in Whittlesea City Council and recommended the council's dismissal.

In addition, the report found that:

- the council's deep divides and personality conflicts had rendered it dysfunctional
- councillors failed to provide stability of senior leadership, employing five CEOs in five years and spending more than \$500,000 on internal legal disputes
- councillor behaviour had not been consistent with the Councillor Code of Conduct, causing significant harm to the council's administration and reputation.

Whittlesea Council was dismissed on 21 March 2020, one day after the *Local Government (Whittlesea City Council) Act 2020* received Royal Assent. This legislation provided for the dismissal of the council and appointment of administrators until the October 2024 general council elections.

Among the events that led to the appointment of a Monitor, and ultimately the dismissal of the council, was an allegation of serious misconduct against councillor Ricky Kirkham. The Chief Municipal Inspector applied for a councillor conduct panel to make a finding under section 81B(1B)(c) of the *Local Government Act 1989* in February 2020. The application was withdrawn after Cr Kirkham resigned his position shortly afterwards.

Coercive powers

Under the Act, the Chief Municipal Inspector has powers to require the production of documents, provision of reasonable assistance, or require a person to appear for examination on oath. In 2019–20, the use of the powers was approved on 22 occasions either to obtain documents, require assistance or examine individuals with information relevant to an investigation.

The powers were used to examine 46 individuals during this period. This included examinations at Yarriambiack Shire Council of 32 depot staff—arising from one request to use reasonable assistance provisions—and 13 staff and councillors, also arising from a single request for reasonable assistance.

Yarriambiack Council investigation

Council depots are repositories of a considerable amount of plant, equipment and consumables which are used by employees to undertake civil works, parks and recreation works and other duties. Poor management of physical resources held by councils presents a risk of fraud and corruption.

At Yarriambiack Shire, a number of allegations were raised with the Inspectorate and were subsequently proven. These included works undertaken by staff on private properties, inappropriate use of council equipment, unauthorised sale of plant and equipment, and leasing arrangements between the council and depot staff members without formal contracts being executed.

In the report published in November 2019, then Chief Municipal Inspector David Wolf said: “Our work focused on specific allegations where community assets and resources had either not been properly managed or were used to the benefit of individuals, not the community as a whole.”

While the investigation presented challenges for the council, the Inspectorate was “encouraged by the willingness to improve and the assistance [of] administrative and operational staff.”

The Inspectorate found:

- a council that had not kept pace with the requirements and expectations of councils as a contemporary organisation and management at the time was complacent
- policies and rigour around community assets and resources were insufficient
- many of the issues found in this investigation had the potential for a negative financial impact on ratepayers and residents of the shire.

In response to the investigation, Mayor, Cr Graeme Massey and Chief Executive Officer, Ms Jessie Holmes stated: “Yarriambiack Shire Council is committed to rectifying the deficiencies identified and demonstrating a stronger commitment to the management of critical areas of Council that the community expects.”

The council commenced making improvements as the investigation progressed and put together an action plan in response to the final report. There were many facets in the [resulting report](#) that provide recommendations for improving accountability and transparency of contracts, employment practices and general processes at other regional and metro councils.



Prosecutions and other proceedings

The Chief Municipal Inspector has powers to prosecute offences under the Act which are initiated in the Magistrates' Court. The decision to prosecute requires consideration of whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction and having determined that there is such a prospect, it is in the public interest to proceed. The Chief Municipal Inspector may also certify the failure of a person to comply with a requirement of the Chief Municipal Inspector to the Supreme Court.

The decision to prosecute requires consideration of whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction and, having determined that there is such a prospect, it is in the public interest.

While most prosecutions relating to campaign donation return disclosures were completed in 2017–18, two additional candidates were brought before the courts in 2018–19 and 2019–20.

There were two prosecution cases in 2019–20, including:

- The County Court upheld [four charges of misuse of position](#) following an appeal by former Murrindindi Shire councillor Chris Healy in late October. The outcome reinforced the importance of the role of councillor and the serious consequences—for council, the community and the councillor themselves—of improper use of information by councillors.
- Wyndham City Council candidate Joh Bauch was charged with making and using false documents during the 2016 elections. The four-day hearing was due to begin on Monday 11 May 2020. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on court processes, the matter was adjourned to 7 December 2020 at Sunshine Magistrates' Court. At the time of writing, this had been further adjourned to 6 July 2021 at the same court.

Warnings

Warnings can be issued for matters where a prima facie breach of the Act is substantiated but an alternative to a prosecution is considered to better serve the public interest. Four warnings were issued in 2019–20. This included two warnings given to councillors at Gannawarra Shire for breaches of interest return provisions.

Hearing rescheduled for 2016 Wyndham Council election candidate

New hearing date for Tarneit resident charged with making and using false documents during an election.

Hearings in 2019–20 were subject to adjournments prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Compliance actions

Governance examinations

The Inspectorate conducts both council-specific governance examinations and broad reviews of systemic or thematic issues identified during council visits, investigations, feedback from the sector or the general community.

Examinations of council governance arrangements are a key proactive function of the Inspectorate in assessing the effectiveness of councils' risk management and governance processes. The objective of this function is to review council process and procedures against the requisite legislation, identify deficiencies and provide suitable recommendations.

The governance arrangements and operations of Yarriambiack Shire Council (see case study above) was examined during the financial year resulting in a specific report to that council, setting out the scope and findings of the work.

Recommendations

Reports on examinations provide councils with a broad range of improvement opportunities and recommendations to improve compliance with the Act and meet community expectations. Inspectors of Municipal Administration also make recommendations to councils and elected councillors as part of their investigative work. A total of 56 recommendations were made in 2019–20. This included 45 recommendations made to Yarriambiack Shire Council in the November 2019 report and six made to Whittlesea City Council on policy and process improvements.

Election period policy

Under the *Local Government Act 1989*, Victorian councils were required to review and, if necessary, amend an election period policy no later than 12 months before the commencement of each general election period, that is by September 2019. This had to be conducted in accordance with section 93B of the *Local Government Act 1989*. New rules regarding election policies commenced on 1 May 2020 (*Local Government Act 2020* ss 60(1)(e), 69).

In October 2019, the Inspectorate sent a brief survey to all councils on the adoption of their election period policy. By December, 66 councils had reviewed and amended their election period policy (also known as a caretaker period policy). While 32 councils adopted a policy outside of the required timeframe (in breach of statutory requirements), this does not invalidate the policy.

Common reasons given by councils for not adopting a policy in the required timeframe included:

- councils were not aware of the requirement
- legislation was not clear
- impending introduction of the Local Government Bill
- insufficient staff to carry out requirements.

It was also found that 11 councils had not provided the policy to the community, through posting on their public website or other means, despite this also being a requirement under the Act.



Guidance and education

Reports, newsletters, presentations and social media posts are key aspects of the Inspectorate's guidance and education program. Engagement occurs across various channels to ensure the Inspectorate's reactive and proactive work is

communicated effectively to state government, councils, council representative bodies, the community and other stakeholders.

Reports – public	1
Newsletters	4
Presentations/online forums	12
Impressions of @CMI_Vic tweets	117,500
Website – unique views	43,763

Newsletter

The Inspectorate published four newsletters to provide information and updates about significant reports, prosecutions, events and other relevant information. Newsletters were sent to more than 3300 subscribers and published on the Inspectorate website. This increased the reach of information beyond traditional mailing lists and assisted in meeting Victorian Government accessibility requirements.

General engagement

Before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on in-person gatherings and conferences, the Inspectorate delivered presentations to councils, sector representative bodies and at partner agency events.

David Wolf presented on the [CEO employment management report](#) at the Local Government Professionals' conference, LGPro Australia National Congress, in Darwin on 1 August and was part of a Future Leader panel discussing issues faced by council leaders nationally and potential future challenges.

Visiting and presenting to regional councils was a specific focus during the second half of 2019. David was invited to speak to senior management at Central Goldfields Shire in late July and a gathering of Corangamite Shire Council representatives at a Municipal Association of Victoria event.

IBAC hosted the [Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference](#) (APSACC) at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre on 30–31 October. The Inspectorate curated the conference's local government stream, which featured presentations from leading academic and sector figures. More than 500 delegates from across the country and overseas attended the conference and workshops.

Inspectorate representatives gave presentations at events including the LGPro CEOs forum, Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) Mayors and FastTrack forums and regional Corruption Prevention and Integrity Insights forums in Geelong. More than 50 public sector chief executive officers, managers, and senior staff working in integrity roles attended the Geelong forum.

Following the cancellation or switch to virtual seminars for many events in 2020, the Inspectorate took part in panel sessions and podcasts for the VLGA Connect series and other key stakeholder events.



David Wolf, Kathryn Arndt, Chris Eddy and Bo Li at a Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) event



David Wolf speaking at a Corruption Prevention forum in Geelong

Social media

The Inspectorate continues to use its Twitter account [@CMI_Vic](#) to supply updates on its work and highlight key issues for the sector. The former Chief Municipal Inspector also shared relevant news on his LinkedIn profile. The Inspectorate

explored alternative social media channels for engaging with the sector but resource constraints limited its ability to manage further channels effectively.

Website

The Inspectorate website provides easy access to information about the Inspectorate's work publications, news, media releases and the secure online complaint form. After user feedback and input from staff and external stakeholders,

the Inspectorate implemented a [new online form](#) that was aimed at simplifying the complaints process and improving information security and accessibility in line with Victorian government standards.



Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Page views	40,306	50,902	43,763
Top downloads	1359 downloads of Central Goldfields Shire Council investigation	1204 downloads of Protecting integrity: leading the way – Managing the employment cycle of a council CEO	1252 downloads of Protecting integrity: Yarriambiack Shire Council investigation
Complaint form (clicks)	342	282	262

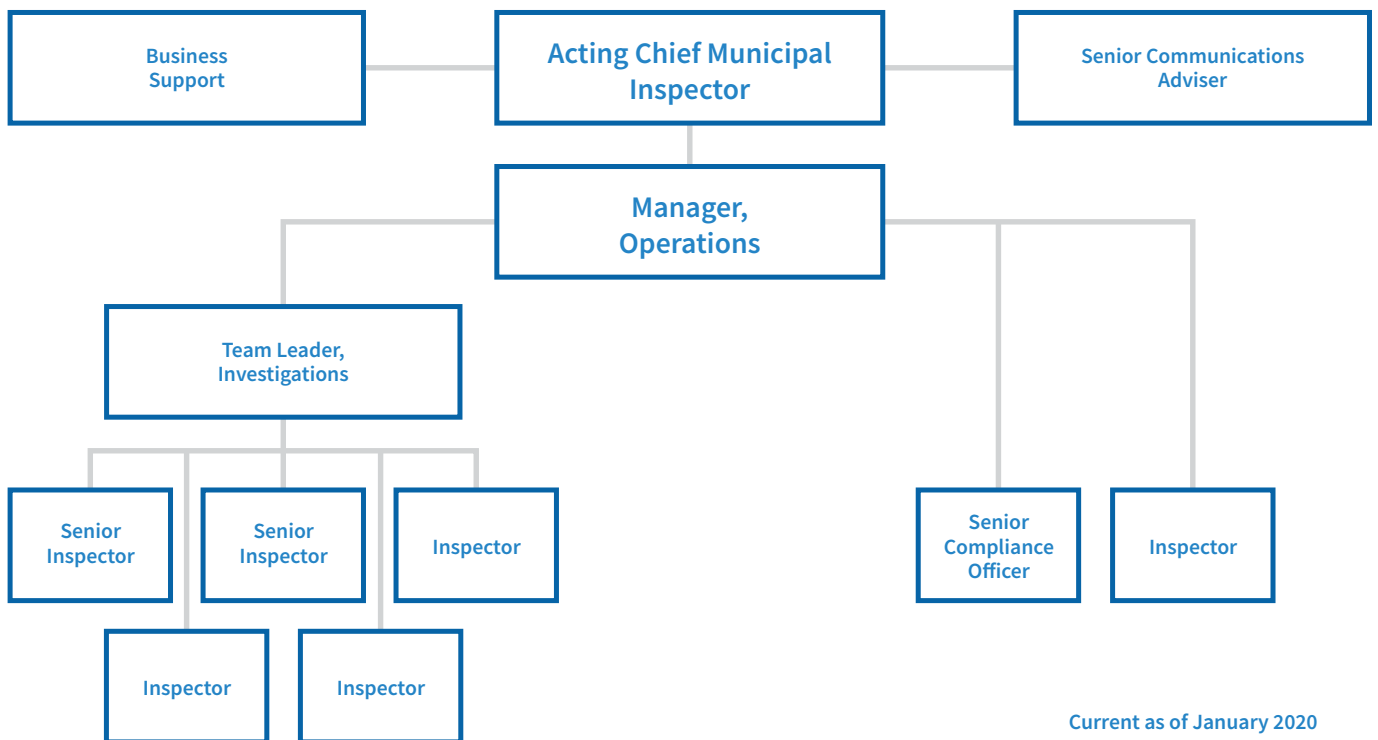
Source: Google Analytics/Google Datastudio

Corporate

Our people

The Inspectorate employed 12 full-time equivalent staff in 2019–20, an increase from 10 staff at the start of 2018–19.

Organisational structure



Challenges and opportunities

The 2019–20 period proved challenging with resource constraints and COVID-19 pandemic impacts, however, the additional funding investment by the government aided in supplying added capacity towards the end of the financial year.

In addition, since the commencement of amendments to the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* on 1 January 2020, the Inspectorate has been able to receive referrals of public information complaints involving councillors and local government matters for investigation from the IBAC. This reform further cemented the Inspectorate’s role in local government integrity.

FOI

The Inspectorate did not receive any Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in 2019–20. FOI requests are handled in accordance with guidelines and processes set down by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC).

Gifts and donations

Inspectorate staff were not offered, nor did they accept, any gifts during this financial year.


Financials


Under the *Public Administration Act 2004*, the Inspectorate is an administrative office, and was hosted by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) during 2019–20. The Inspectorate utilised corporate services including finance from DPC. Financial information is incorporated into the Department of Premier and Cabinet 2019–20 [Annual Report](#).

Local Government Inspectorate

Encouraging higher standards of integrity, accountability and transparency in local government

Level 27, 1 Spring Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000

 inspectorate@lgi.vic.gov.au

 1800 469 359

 www.lgi.vic.gov.au