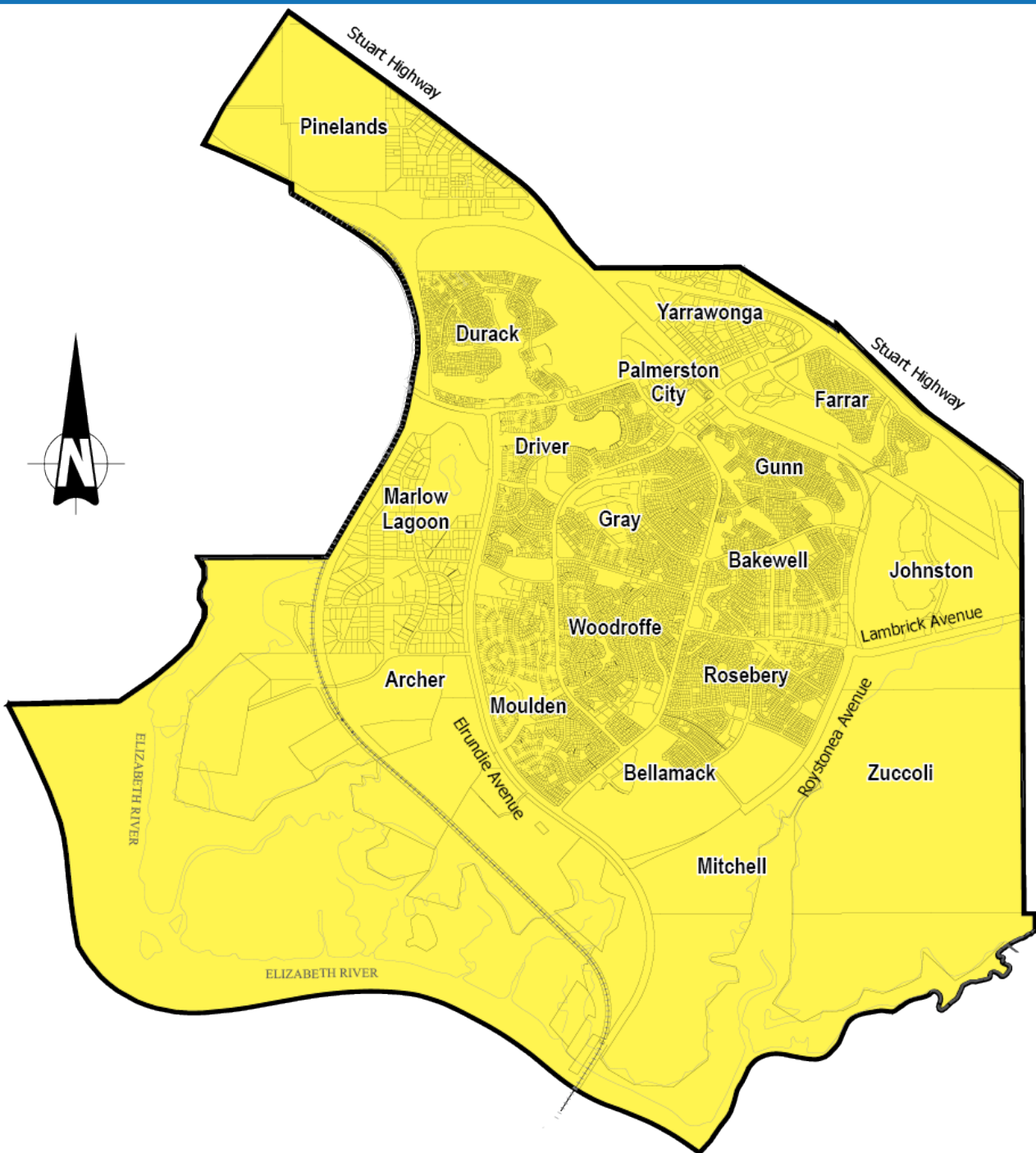




NORTHERN TERRITORY ELECTORAL COMMISSION

CITY OF PALMERSTON ELECTION REPORT



Election timetable

2018 City of Palmerston election

24 March 2018

Date	Time	
Friday 2 February		Gazettal of date by Minister Nominations open
Tuesday 13 February	5:00 pm	Electoral roll closes
Thursday 22 February	12:00 noon	Nominations close
Friday 23 February	12:00 noon	Declaration of nominations, draw for position on ballot papers
Monday 26 February		Postal vote mail-out commences
Monday 5 March	8:00 am	Early voting commences
	9:00 am	Mobile voting commences
Tuesday 20 March	6:00 pm	Overseas postal voting despatches cease
Thursday 22 March	6:00 pm	All postal voting despatches cease
Friday 23 March	6:00 pm	Early voting ceases
Saturday 24 March		Election day
	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
		Primary counts of postal, mobile and early votes commence
Monday 26 March	9:00 am	Declaration vote verification checks, commence recheck of all counts
Thursday 29 March	9:00 am	Primary counts of accepted declaration votes, further postal counts
Tuesday 3 April	12:00 noon	Deadline for receipt of postal votes
		Final counts of postal votes commence
		Distribution of preferences
	3:00 pm	Declaration of the election result

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BACKGROUND

Election

- This is the second Local Government (LG) general election under section 85 of the *Local Government Act* (LGA). Amendments to the LGA deferred the election from March 2016 to August 2017. LG general elections are now held 12 months after the Legislative Assembly (LA) election.
- On the 13 July 2017, the Minister for Housing and Community Development under section 96 of the LGA, and with reference to regulation 57 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, extended the time for holding the next periodic general election of the City of Palmerston to 17 March 2018.
- On the 16 March 2018, under section 42 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, the City of Palmerston election was adjourned to 24 March 2018 due to the cyclone warning issued for Cyclone Marcus, which was predicated to hit the greater Darwin region on 17 March 2018.
- The Commissioner of the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) is the returning officer for local government general elections.
- Susan Whyte was appointed deputy returning officer for the 2018 City of Palmerston election.
- An electronic mark-off system (eLAPPS) was used at all voting centres.
- City of Palmerston were sent a breakdown of the estimated cost of the election in December 2016. The NTEC developed a costing model for all councils for the 2017 NT Council elections which included either direct costs associated to a particular council or an apportioned cost across the NT; this is percentage based on the number of voters in each council area. For Palmerston, this apportioned percentage was 15.7 per cent. The total apportioned cost was \$91,705. The total cost of the election was \$241,462.
- A revised estimate, due to the extension of the election to March 2018, was provided to the council in January 2018. Additional costs associated with the adjournment due to Cyclone Marcus was \$16,329.
- An election charter, detailing the NTEC's service commitments, was finalised on 4 May 2017 and sent to the council.
- An updated Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the City of Palmerston and the NTEC was entered into on 8 January 2018. This outlined both organisations' roles, responsibilities, election services and costs.

Council

The City of Palmerston consists of one elected mayor and seven elected aldermen.

As per the SLA, City of Palmerston undertook the following for the election:

- The promotion of the election via social media and communication outlets.
- The provision of space on the Pinelands council roadside banner site at no cost.

Boundary changes

The City of Palmerston requested an increase in the number of aldermen from six to eight. The Minister approved an increase to seven. This change was made and took effect for the election in March 2018. The City of Palmerston also requested an extension of their boundaries to include land in the Berrimah Farm, Elrundie, Holtze, Howard Springs and Pinelands areas. This request was declined.

ENROLMENT

At the close of the electoral roll on Tuesday 13 February 2018 at 5:00 pm, there were a total of 21,261 electors enrolled for the City of Palmerston. This was a 28 percent increase from the enrolment of 15,329 at the 2012 general elections.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Campaign

The public awareness campaign for the City of Palmerston election included enrolment and voting information (early and election day) disseminated across social media, television, radio, print and digital platforms. The public awareness campaign began in February across television and radio stations, as well as social media, and continued up until election day on Saturday 24 March.

Website

The 2018 City of Palmerston website was launched in December 2017 and provided comprehensive information for candidates and voters. It also hosted dedicated election results pages, included details on vote counting, and showed all early and election day voting centre information. The website remains live for a number of months following the election.

Newsletter

Seven election newsletters were emailed to stakeholders including City of Palmerston, candidates and the media from 27 February with the final newsletter emailed on 27 March. The newsletters were also available on the NTEC website with links shared on Facebook and Twitter.

Advertising – print, radio, television

Advertisements used in the 2017 NT Council elections were re-developed for airing on television and radio: enrolment and close of roll (15 secs); early and formal voting (15 secs); election day (30 secs). These advertisements were also available on the NTEC website, NTEC's YouTube channel and were promoted through social media.

There was also an extensive digital marketing campaign using NEWS Xtend that ran for six weeks from 2 February until 17 March. The marketing campaign used the 15 second television video ads and appeared on both desktops (PC) and mobile phones.

Statutory print advertising, providing specific voting information, was published in the NT News.

The Electoral Commissioner also promoted enrolment and voting through several interviews with Northern Territory media including ABC radio and television, Channel 9, MIX104.9 and Territory FM.

Street banners and A-frames

Large eight metre canvas banners advertising the relevant phases of the election were placed at the Pinelands roadside banner site as well as at voting centres including Bakewell Primary School, Driver Pre-school, Durack Primary School, MacKillop Catholic College and Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School. A-frames displaying various enrolment and voting messages throughout the election were used at the Oasis and Palmerston shopping centres.

Candidate information sessions

Candidate information sessions were conducted on Tuesday, 12 December 2017 and Wednesday, 31 January 2018. The sessions were hosted at the council chambers with representatives from the NTEC, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the City of Palmerston.

Email and SMS

A total of 27,856 emails and 18,475 SMS were used to contact City of Palmerston electors throughout the election period.

Message	Date sent	Email	SMS
Close of electoral roll	05 Feb 2018	8,765	2,907
Early voting available	06 Mar 2018	8,637	2,908
Election day 17 Mar	15 Mar 2018	5,227	Not sent
Election adjourned	16 Mar 2018	5,227	6,948
Election day 24 Mar	24 Mar 2018	Not sent	5,712
TOTAL		27,856	18,475

Other promotional activities

The NTEC promoted the City of Palmerston election at the Defence Expo held in Darwin on 10 February; the focus of the promotion was on enrolment as the expo was three days out from the close of the electoral roll. The election was also promoted during 'O' Week at Charles Darwin University on 19 February.

VOTING SERVICES

Nominations

Nominations opened Friday, 2 February and closed on Thursday, 22 February at 12:00 noon. There were a total of 17 accepted nominations for alderman and eight accepted nominations for mayor. There were no rejected nominations.

The declaration of nominations took place at the City of Palmerston Civic Centre on Friday, 23 February. This event was attended by the general public, nominees, council representatives and the media. A random number generator selected the ballot paper position for each candidate. Results of the draw were uploaded to the NTEC website as soon as the draw had concluded.

Summary of accepted nominations/candidates for the City of Palmerston

Position	Candidates in ballot paper order
Mayor (1 position)	Mick SPICK
	Athina PASCOE-BELL
	Graeme CHIN
	Robert MACLEOD
	Raj Samson RAJWIN
	Trevor JENKINS
	Margy KERLE
	Tom LEWIS
Alderman (7 positions)	Adrian BURKENHAGEN
	Sarah HENDERSON
	Benjamin GIESECKE
	Tom LEWIS
	Damian HALE
	Matt STRIPLING
	Mick SPICK
	Jeff STEWART
	Trevor JENKINS
	Raj Samson RAJWIN
	Martin BLAKEMORE
	Anita NEWMAN
	Lucy BUHR
	Athina PASCOE-BELL
	Amber GARDEN
Margy KERLE	
Ian ABBOTT	

Electronic voter mark-off

An electronic voter mark-off system is now used in all voting centres. The system records when someone has voted at any voting centre in real time. The mark-off system alleviates the necessity to have paper certified lists, therefore improving efficiencies in voting centres.

Early voting centres (EVCs)

Legislative changes in 2015 allows all electors the option to vote early without the need to meet any eligibility criteria. Overall there is a trend towards voting early across the Northern Territory.

Early voting services were provided at the Palmerston Shopping Centre and the NTEC offices in Darwin and Alice Springs from 5 to 16 March 2018 (including Saturday 10 March). As a result of the adjournment of the election due to cyclone Marcus, early voting services were extended and the early voting centres opened from Wednesday 21 March through to Friday 23 March 2018, taking a further 855 votes during this period.

Votes issued at EVCs (compared with other events)

2018 General election	2012 General election	2013 By-election	2015 By-election
7,467	1,100	1,161	2,519

These figures show a 679 per cent increase in early voting from the 2012 General election, where electors were required to meet eligibility criteria. More votes were cast at early voting centres than on election day for this election.

Postal voting

Legislative changes in 2015 allows all electors the option to apply for a postal vote without meeting any eligibility criteria.

Postal votes admitted to the count are contained in a declaration envelope. There is a slight difference in the numbers admitted to the count and the actual counted figure as there is no guarantee that the returned declaration envelope contains all ballot papers.

In order to be counted, a postal vote had to be completed before 6:00 pm on election day, Saturday, 24 March 2018 and received by the Commission before 12:00 noon on Tuesday, 3 April 2018. The deadline to receive postal votes was extended until the Tuesday due to the Easter public holidays.

Postal votes issued/counted (compared with other events)

2018 General election		2012 General election		2013 By-election		2015 By-election	
Issued	Admitted to count	Issued	Admitted to count	Issued	Admitted to count	Issued	Admitted to count
1,117	803	474	320	384	248	720	431

There was a 251 per cent increase in the number of postal votes counted compared to the 2012 General elections.

Urban institution voting

The urban institution voting team visited the Darwin Private and Royal Darwin Hospitals where 21 electors voted. City of Palmerston electors in the Darwin Correctional centre, at the request of the Department of Correctional Services, voted by post.

Election day voting centres (EDVCs)

Election day was Saturday, 24 March 2018 with voting centres open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Bakewell: Primary School, 8 Hutchison Tce
Driver: Primary School, 37 Driver Ave
Durack: Pre School, 50 Woodlake Blvd
Johnston: MacKillop Catholic College, 285 Farrar Blvd
Rosebery: Palmerston College, 7-9 Middle Campus, 185 Forrest Pde
Woodroffe: Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, 34 Emery Ave

The number of EDVCs equalled the number used in the 2012 General elections; however, further reviews will need to be considered, in consultation with council, in respect to the possibility of reducing EDVCs due to the increasing trend of electors choosing to early vote.

Votes issued for the City of Palmerston at EDVCs (compared with other events)

Voting centre	2018 General election		2012 General election		2013 By-election	2015 By-election
	Mayor	Alderman	Mayor	Alderman	Alderman	Alderman
Bakewell	1,244	1,244	2,439	2,437	2,411	1,855
Driver	625	625	2,304	2,303	1,815	1,035
Durack	815	815	1,406	1,410	1,449	1,139
Johnston	706	705	514	515	556	531
Rosebery	1,041	1,041	935	936	1,211	1,283
Woodroffe	925	925	1,934	1,937	1,641	1,711
TOTALS	5,356	5,355	9,532	9,538	9,083	7,554

Declaration and urban institution votes issued

Location	Votes counted
Declaration votes	7
Urban institution	21
Total	28

Of the total number of votes for the election, 55 per cent were cast before election day. The location of the voting centre at Palmerston Shopping Centre made it convenient for electors to vote early. As more voters choose to vote before election day, a reduction in election day voting centres needs to be considered at future elections.

ELECTION

Voting

The voting system for local government elections 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: $(\text{total number of formal votes} / (\text{number of candidates to be elected} + 1)) + 1$
- 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.

Vote counting – election night

Counting began immediately after the close of voting at 6:00 pm on Saturday, 24 March. A count of first preference votes for mayor and alderman was undertaken at each voting centre. First preference votes cast at early voting centres were counted at the NTEC scrutiny centre in Darwin city.

Post-election night scrutinies

Post-election, all votes received for the City of Palmerston were entered into an electronic count system (Easy Count) and then re-entered for verification purposes.

Easy Count was used for the election as there were multiple alderman vacancies and a large number of candidates for both mayor and alderman positions. By using this system it alleviates the need to undertake a manual recheck of ballot papers from voting centres as each paper is entered and verified by two different data operators. Manual counts of declaration and postal votes were undertaken in the week following election day and then entered into Easy Count.

The deadline for the receipt of postal votes was 12:00 noon on Tuesday, 3 April. After the deadline, remaining postal votes were counted, the quota determined and the distribution of preferences conducted. Final results were available on the website mid-afternoon on Tuesday, 3 April 2018.

Election outcomes for the City of Palmerston

There were eight candidates contesting the mayor vacancy and 17 candidates contesting seven aldermen vacancies. The successful candidates and first preference votes received are detailed in tables below.

Election of one mayor

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

Candidate	First preferences
Mick SPICK	1,530
Athina PASCOE-BELL	2,808
Graeme CHIN	1,863
Robert MACLEOD	2,970
Raj Samson RAJWIN	694
Trevor JENKINS	615
Margy KERLE	690
Tom LEWIS	1,426
TOTAL	12,596

The quota of votes required under the proportional representation voting system was 6,299.

Following the distribution of preferences and in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, the results were as follows:

- Athina Pascoe-Bell received the quota at count number seven.

Athina Pascoe-Bell was duly elected.

Election of seven aldermen

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 preferences
Adrian BURKENHAGEN	545
Sarah HENDERSON	899
Benjamin GIESECKE	341
Tom LEWIS	945
Damian HALE	2,047
Matt STRIPLING	464
Mick SPICK	721
Jeff STEWART	160
Trevor JENKINS	479
Raj Samson RAJWIN	509
Martin BLAKEMORE	273
Anita NEWMAN	152
Lucy BUHR	1,354
Athina PASCOE-BELL	1,827
Amber GARDEN	295
Margy KERLE	310
Ian ABBOTT	574
TOTAL	11,895

As Pascoe-Bell stood for both positions and was elected mayor, in accordance with section 54(2) of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, Pascoe-Bell's ballots were distributed according to preferences, i.e. all first preference votes for Pascoe-Bell were allocated to their second preferences with subsequent preferences altered accordingly.

The quota required under the proportional representation voting system is 1,487.

Following the distribution of preferences and in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, the results were as follows:

- Damien Hale and Lucy Buhr received the quota at count number one
- Sarah Henderson received the quota at count 61
- Tom Lewis received the quota at count number 84
- Benjamin Giesecke received the quota at count number 108
- Mick Spick received the quota at count number 124
- Amber Garden received the quota at count number 138.

Damien Hale, Lucy Buhr, Sarah Henderson, Tom Lewis, Benjamin Giesecke, Mick Spick, and Amber Garden were duly elected as City of Palmerston Aldermen.

Declaration of the election results

The declaration of election results took place at the City of Palmerston Civic Centre at 4:00pm on Tuesday, 3 April 2018.

Declared election results for City of Palmerston

Mayor (one vacancy)	Alderman (seven vacancies)
Athina Pascoe-Bell	Damien Hale Lucy Buhr Sarah Henderson Tom Lewis Benjamin Giesecke Mick Spick Amber Garden

A copy of the full distribution of preferences is available on the 2018 City of Palmerston election [results page](#) of the NTEC website.

Election costs

The initial estimated cost for the conduct of the City of Palmerston election, as part of the 2017 NT Council elections, was \$213,003. Adjourning the election to March 2018 meant this estimate was revised to \$255,133. Additional costs incurred due to the one week adjournment as a result of Cyclone Marcus, were \$16,329. The total cost, including the apportioned costs attributed in 2017 of \$91,705, was **\$241,462**.

A breakdown of the election costs can be found in the tables below:

Summary of apportioned costs

Election area	Costs
Easy Count Software licence	\$ 3,920
Election Management System development	\$11,760
Website development	\$2,352
Election report	\$3,136
Public awareness activities	\$37,122
Secondment staff accommodation and fares	\$3,300
Casual staff costs	\$28,315
Stationery costs	\$1,800
TOTAL	\$91,705

Summary of operational election costs

Election area	Costs
Public awareness	\$ 4,670
Staffing	\$62,608
Premises	\$13,600
Operational costs	\$40,421
10% GST	\$12,129
TOTAL	\$133,428

Summary of adjourned election costs

Election area	Costs
Public awareness	\$2,000
Staffing	\$8,905
Premises	\$2,000
Operational costs	\$1,940
10% GST	\$1,484
TOTAL	\$16,329

ISSUES OF NOTE

Informality

Mayor

- In the post-election phase, the NTEC conducted a survey of informal ballot papers. A total of 1,072 informal votes for mayor were received. During the informality survey it was identified that 65 per cent of the informal votes (702) for mayor were considered intentionally informal, with 51 per cent left blank.

The remaining 35 per cent (370) were considered unintentionally informal, with approximately 20 per cent either containing duplicated numbers or were only partially completed.

Alderman

- A total of 1,776 informal votes for alderman were received. During the informality survey it was identified that 56 per cent of the informal votes (994) were considered unintentionally informal, with 42 per cent either containing duplicated numbers or only partially completed.

The remaining 44 per cent were considered intentionally informal, with 35 per cent left blank.

- The high number of unintentional informal ballot papers could be attributed to the large number of candidates for alderman.

Election day voting centres

- In the 2017 NT Council elections, it was observed that voters were taking longer to complete their ballot papers in Darwin and Alice Springs voting centres due to the large number of candidates. As a result of this observation, additional voting screens were used at all voting centres for the Palmerston election.
- Thresholds were established to allow the NTEC to reassess the size of the ballot paper depending of the number of candidates. For this election a larger alderman ballot paper was created.
- It was identified that the majority of election day voting centres did not meet the expected voter turnout. This can be attributed to a number of things including the location of the early voting centre at Palmerston Shopping Centre, the use of electronic mark-off and the additional voting times for early and postal voting after the adjournment of the election and subsequent change to the timetable. The voting centre located in Johnston exceeded numbers due to the development of the new suburb Zuccoli.
- Due to the increasing trend of electors choosing to early vote, the number of election day voting centres, their location and staffing numbers will be reviewed. A further recommendation is to consider extending the use of the early voting premises to incorporate an election day voting centre. Survey evidence has demonstrated that during this election voters preferred this facility based on the convenience of the location.

Early voting centres

Campaigning

- Due to strict stipulations from the owners of the Palmerston Shopping Centre and the TCG Centre in Darwin, attendance campaigning at early voting centres was not permitted. Candidates were given the option to display their campaign material at each EVC with specific areas set up to accommodate posters and pamphlets.
- As the local government legislation currently allows campaign workers to canvass outside the 10-metre boundary at early voting centres and there is no legislative base to prohibit canvassing; the current practice is to prohibit canvassing only at the direction of the landlord of the centres used for early voting.

Urban institution voting

- The Palmerston Hospital is due to open in August 2018. Urban institution voting services will need to be reviewed to include the hospital in future City of Palmerston elections.

Complaints

- Three formal complaints were received for the election:
 1. A citizen, not enrolled in the City of Palmerston, alleged that one candidate was unfairly criticised through Facebook posts and via a third party website (i.e. not a candidate's website), which he felt was in breach of section 99(2) of the LGA.

It was determined that there was no breach of section 99(2). However, if the complainant was of the view that the Facebook and website posts were defamatory, the proper course of action would be to take appropriate civil action.
 2. A candidate sought clarification as to the functions and responsibilities of scrutineers within a voting centre and some election administrative procedures. A response was provided to the candidate who accepted the explanation.
 3. A voter sought clarification as to the legitimacy of a how-to-vote (HTV) card. Based on the information the candidate provided to the Commission, it was considered that the HTV card was not in breach of section 99 of the LGA.

Non-voters

- Approximately 6,457 electors (30 percent) were identified as failing to vote in the 2018 City of Palmerston election. A further 630 electors (3 percent) provided valid and sufficient reasons prior to and during the election.
- The NTEC's role is to extend their service to undertake non-voting follow up action upon instruction from the council. For the NTEC to pursue non-voters it is estimated to cost \$23,124.

The Commission would like to extend its thanks to Luccio Cercarelli, Mark Blackburn and council staff for the support provided.