

Local Government Code of Conduct – Key Trends

August 2026

Introduction

Tasmania's Local Government Code of Conduct is the statutory framework that sets the behavioural standards for all Tasmanian councillors, including mayors and deputy mayors. By setting these standards, the Code of Conduct aims to maintain and strengthen community trust and confidence in council decision-making.

The Code is enforced by an independent Panel, which is empowered to investigate formal complaints and issue sanctions against elected members found to have breached these standards.

The Code of Conduct – both in terms of the framework overall, and individual determinations – is the subject of significant ongoing public interest. In that context, the Office of Local Government considers it is appropriate and timely as we approach the end of the current term of council to provide for increased public transparency in the recent and ongoing operation of the Code of Conduct framework.

This report provides a consolidated overview of the activity, determination outcomes, and associated costs generated by the framework during the current term.

While specific determination reports are already publicly accessible, broader, consolidated data such as sector-wide complaint volumes and trends has not previously been published. By bringing this information together, this report aims to highlight key trends within the recorded data, providing communities and the local government sector with clearer visibility into how the framework is operating, including changes that have occurred over time.

The Office of Local Government ultimately intends to transition this reporting into an online dashboard as part of its ongoing efforts to renew the public performance reporting arrangements for the local government sector. This report serves as an early, point-in-time snapshot to initiate that broader transparency effort.

This report highlights three primary trends currently evident within the Code of Conduct framework:

- A recent, general decline in complaints made, aligning with the introduction of mandatory dispute resolution requirements in 2025.

- A substantial increase in the proportion of complaints being generated internally by either other elected members or council staff, representing a shift in how the framework is accessed and utilised.
- The observation that the majority of upheld complaints and framework costs are concentrated within a small subset of highly active councils.

Report structure

This report is structured into three sections:

1. State-wide Trends – Macro-level data on total complaint volumes, overall costs, and broad shifts across the sector.
2. Council-level Activity – An examination of the municipalities experiencing the highest concentrations of Code of Conduct activity and cost.
3. Elected Member Data – Data regarding the outcomes and sanctions of individual elected members in relation to complaints upheld (in full or in part).

Data guidance

It is important to note a number of things when considering the data in the report. To accurately interpret the charts and figures, the following parameters apply:

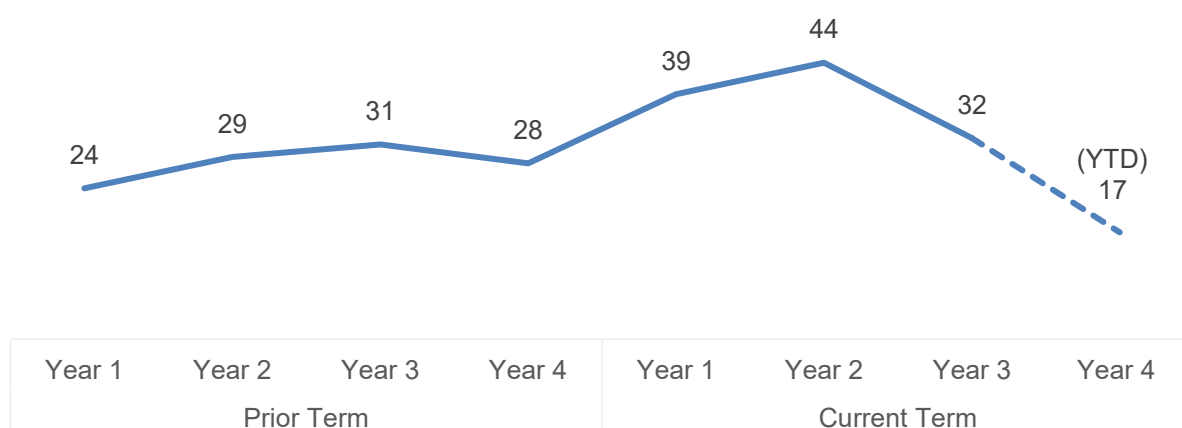
- Terms – Data is categorised by local government terms, which run for four years. The “Prior Term” captures the period from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2022. The “Current Term” captures the period from 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2026.
- Term Years – To ensure accurate comparisons, some data is grouped into 12-month “Term Years” (running from 1 November to 31 October) rather than standard calendar or financial years.
- Year to Date – Data for the current term period and current term year is as at 12 August 2026.
- Cross-term conduct – Complaints are dated based on when they are first received by the Framework’s Executive Officer from the relevant council’s general manager and therefore, in some limited circumstances, there may be “blurring” between terms or term years. This is because a complaint received early in a term could technically relate to conduct that occurred late in the previous term, where the respondent is a returning elected member.

Part 1 – State-wide Trends

Impact of mandatory dispute resolution on overall complaint volumes

Recent legislative reforms requiring mandatory council dispute resolution are correlating with a decrease in the volume of formal Code of Conduct complaints.

Figure 1: Code of Conduct complaints received by Term Year (2018–2026)



Key observations

- As of 10 September 2025, dispute resolution must be attempted in most instances before an individual may lodge a formal Code of Conduct complaint. While this was the statutory deadline for compliance, many councils were compliant up to six months earlier, aligning with the downward trajectory of formal complaints observed throughout Year 3 and Year 4 of the Current Term.
- Councils are now required to report on dispute resolution utilisation within their annual reports. While figures detailing the number of matters successfully resolved before reaching the formal complaint stage are not yet available, this data will provide further context when annual reports are released later in the year.

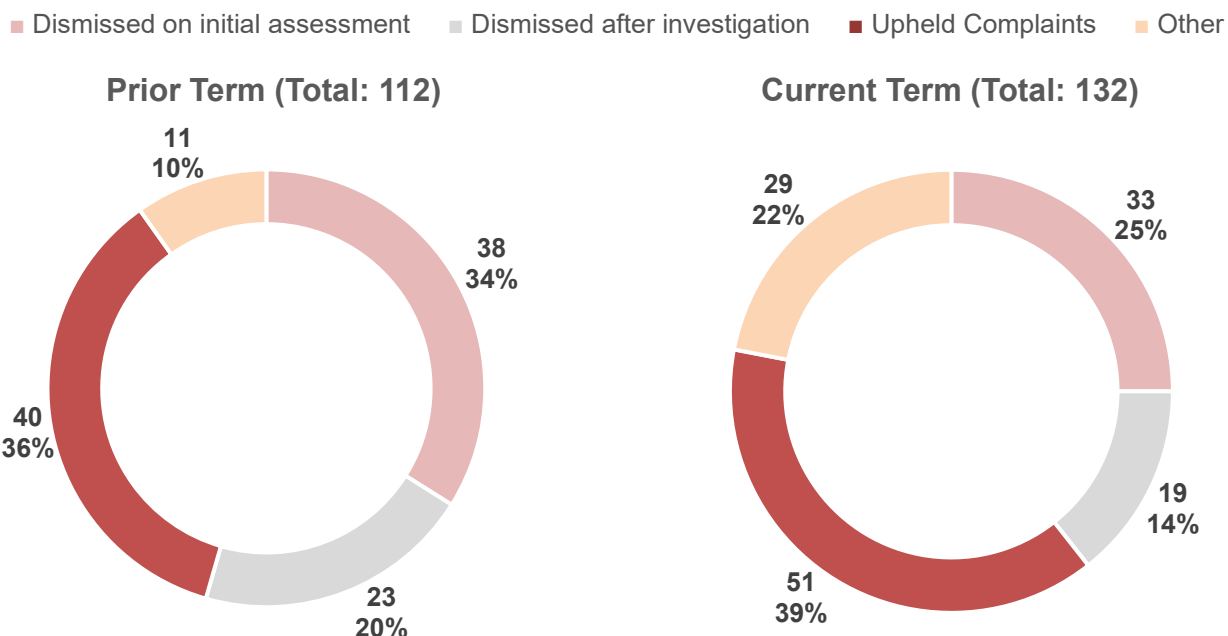
Guidance notes

- As the Current Term is still active, Year 4 figures represent Year-to-Date (YTD) volume, with 17 complaints received thus far. A 'straight-line' projection based on current intake rates estimates a final volume of approximately 22 complaints by the close of the term on 31 October 2026.

Upheld complaints increase

Alongside an increase in total complaints in the Current Term (132) compared to the Prior Term (112), the number of upheld Code of Conduct complaints has risen.

Figure 2: Code of Conduct determination outcomes by Term



Key observations

- The Current Term has already recorded a higher number of upheld breaches (51) compared to the Prior Term (40).
- A large proportion of the complaints in the 'Other' category remain unresolved. As active investigations and determinations are resolved, the final count of upheld breaches for the Current Term is likely to increase.

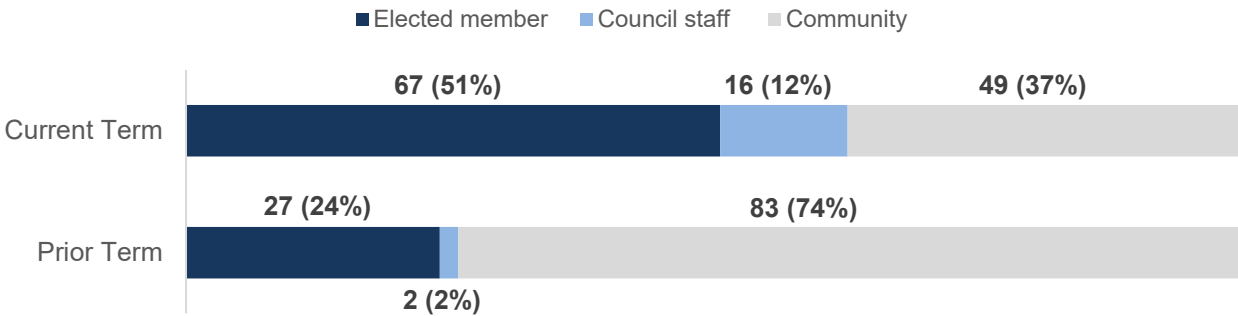
Guidance notes

- 'Upheld Complaints' captures all matters where a breach was substantiated by the Panel, including a relatively small number of determinations under appeal, provided a decision has not yet been made as to the outcome of the appeal.
- It is important to distinguish between an 'upheld complaint' and a 'breach.' The data tracks upheld complaints. However, within a single upheld complaint, a Panel may determine that a councillor breached multiple, distinct parts of the Code of Conduct. Therefore, the total tally of individual breaches will be higher than the number of upheld complaints shown but this data is not shown here.
- The 'Other' category acts as a catch-all for non-standard or unresolved outcomes. The high number of matters in 'Other' for the Current Term reflects complaints that are still active within the system (e.g. currently open, under active investigation) or that have been referred or withdrawn.

Complaints by elected members and council staff overtake complaints by community members

Despite a notable reduction in complaints originating from the broader community in this term, the overall volume of Code of Conduct matters has escalated. This growth has been driven by a surge in complaints originating from within councils – either from other elected members or council staff.

Figure 3: Proportion of total complaint volume by complainant type



Key observations

- Only 49 (37%) complaints have been lodged by community members in the Current Term, compared to 83 (74%) in the Prior Term. Complaints lodged in the Current Term by elected members and council staff together amount to 83, compared to 29 in the Prior Term.
- This means that the majority of complaints in the Current Term have been initiated by elected members and council staff (63%). These types of complaints represented only 26% of complaint volume in the Prior Term.
- This shift suggests that the administrative and financial resources of the Code of Conduct framework are increasingly being directed to internal council matters rather than concerns about conduct from community members.
- The introduction of mandatory council internal dispute resolution policies and processes in 2025 was driven by a desire to reduce the number of internal council matters that need to be escalated to the Code of Conduct framework. As we showed earlier in Figure 1, there has been an overall reduction in complaints since the new requirements have been brought in, and it will be interesting to observe ongoing trends in this regard in future reports.

Guidance notes

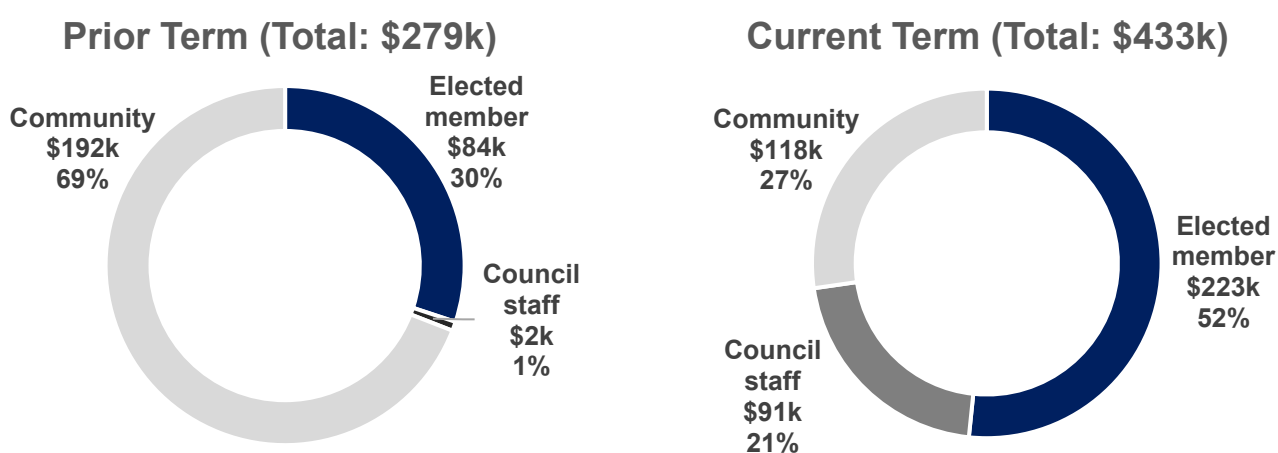
Nil

Invoiced Code of Conduct costs by complainant category

Councils bear the costs incurred by the Panel for processing, assessing and investigating complaints involving their elected members. Ultimately, then, these costs are passed through to the community.

Internal complaints have overtaken those made by the community as the primary financial driver of the Code of Conduct framework. Driven by this shift, total invoiced costs for the Current Term to date (\$433k) have already significantly exceeded the finalised total for the Prior Term (\$279k).

Figure 4 – Total invoiced Code of Conduct costs by complainant category for Prior Term and Current Term



Key observations

- In the Prior Term, community-initiated complaints accounted for the majority of invoiced costs (69% or \$192k). In the Current Term, complaints initiated by elected members and council staff have accounted for the majority of invoiced costs (73% or \$314k).
- The cost escalation aligns with the higher volume of complaints lodged internally. Conversely, the costs associated with community-lodged complaints have decreased (from \$192,000 down to \$118,000), which is consistent with the reduction in community complaint volumes.

Guidance notes

- These figures reflect the amounts invoiced to councils by the Code of Conduct Panel for the assessment, investigation, and related administrative handling of complaints. These figures do not represent the total net cost borne by councils.
- Current Term figures do not yet include the final costs of matters that currently remain open or subject to appeal. As these pending administrative categories are resolved, the total invoiced cost for the Current Term will increase.

Part 2 – Council-level Activity

In this part of the Report, we examine how Code of Conduct activity is distributed across individual councils.

Table 1 provides a complete baseline of all formal complaints and substantiated outcomes for the Current Term. Listed alphabetically, the data indicates that 18 of Tasmania's 29 councils have recorded at least one formal Code of Conduct complaint against an elected member. Eleven councils have not received any complaints.

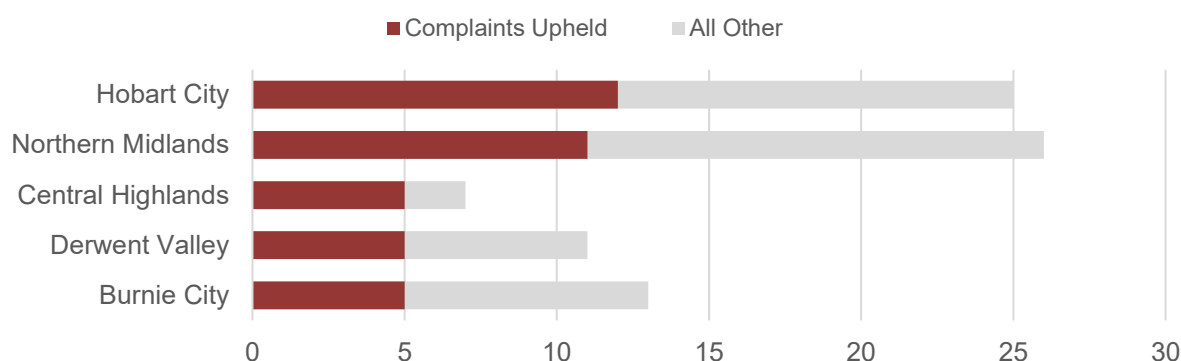
Table 1: Total complaints and complaints upheld by council for Current Term

Council	Received	Upheld	Upheld (%)
Burnie City	13	5	38
Central Highlands	7	5	71
Circular Head	1	–	–
Clarence City	7	2	29
Derwent Valley	11	5	45
Dorset	3	1	33
George Town	2	–	–
Glamorgan-Spring Bay	4	3	75
Glenorchy City	3	1	33
Hobart City	25	12	48
Huon Valley	5	1	20
Kingborough	1	–	–
Latrobe	4	–	–
Launceston City	6	2	33
Northern Midlands	26	11	42
Southern Midlands	2	1	50
West Coast	2	1	50
West Tamar	10	1	10
Total	132	51	–

Concentration of upheld complaints at certain councils

While Table 1 demonstrates that a majority of councils have recorded at least one Code of Conduct complaint in the term, the activity is not evenly distributed. A significant concentration of both framework utilisation and upheld complaints are occurring within five local government areas.

Figure 5: Councils with the highest number of upheld complaints as a proportion of total complaints received in Current Term



Key observations

- The five councils listed above account for 82 of the 132 (or 62%) total complaints received during the Current Term and 38 of the 51 (or 76%) total upheld complaints recorded State-wide.
- This concentration is particularly pronounced in Hobart City and Northern Midlands Councils, which together account for almost half (23 of 51) of all upheld complaints for the Current Term.

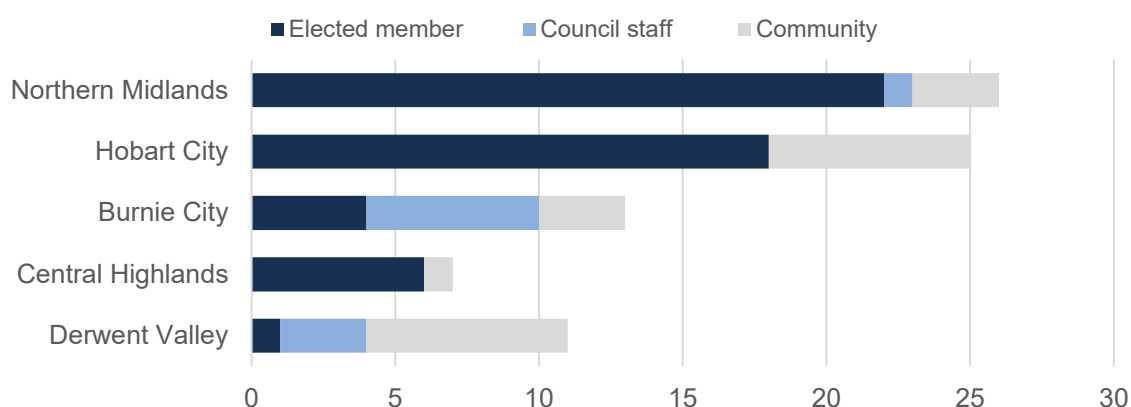
Guidance notes

- The Upheld Complaints category captures all matters where a breach was substantiated by the Panel. Consistent with earlier charts, this metric includes determinations that are currently under appeal.

Internal complaints disproportionately drive volume in the councils that have the most upheld complaints

Within the five councils with the most upheld complaints this term, elevated complaint volumes are overwhelmingly driven by internal complaints rather than those from community members, with the exception of Derwent Valley.

Figure 6: Complainant type across councils with most upheld complaints



Key observations

- Across these five councils, 61 complaints have been made by elected members or council staff. This represents a significant proportion (73%) of the State-wide Current Term total of internal complaints (83).
- The volume of internal complaints generated within these five councils alone (61) exceeds the State-wide Current Term total of all complaints made by the community across all councils (49).

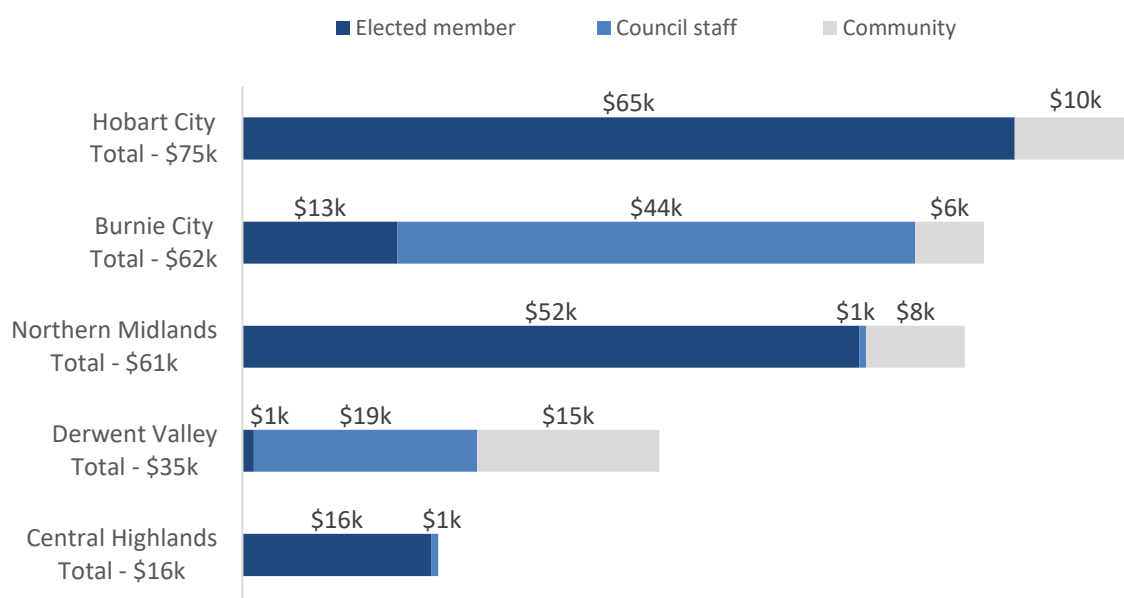
Guidance notes

Nil

Cost of internal complaints in key councils

The high volume of internal complaints within these five councils translates to a disproportionate cost for the overall framework.

Figure 7: Invoiced Code of Conduct costs by complainant category across councils with most upheld complaints



Key observations

- At \$212 000, the invoiced costs generated by elected member and council staff complaints in just these five municipalities account for nearly half of the entire \$429 000 State-wide total costs for the Current Term to date.
- Hobart City (\$75,000), Burnie City (\$62,000), and Northern Midlands (\$61,000) have incurred the highest overall costs. For those three councils, costs have been driven almost entirely by complaints made by elected members or council staff.

Guidance notes

- The cost figures presented reflect the direct amounts invoiced to councils by the Code of Conduct Panel for the assessment, investigation, and related administrative handling of complaints. These figures are drawn from internal data held by the Office of Local Government and do not represent the total net cost borne by councils, which councils report separately in their annual reports.
- These totals do not yet include the final costs of matters that currently remain open. As these pending administrative categories are resolved, the total invoiced cost for these councils may increase.
- Costs for complainant type are rounded to the nearest thousand. Therefore, the sum of costs for each complainant type may not be precisely equal to total costs.

Part 3 – Elected Member Data

This part of the report examines the distribution of upheld complaints and sanctions at the individual elected member level.

During the Current Term, a total of 24 individual councillors across the State have recorded at least one substantiated Code of Conduct breach. Please note that this figure – and the data in the following table – strictly excludes any determinations currently subject to an active appeal. Consequently, the number of upheld complaints in this section does not reconcile with earlier State-wide and council totals.

(Turn over for Table 2: Upheld complaints and sanctions by individual elected member).

To contextualise this figure, in the Current Term, there are 263 total councillors across Tasmania's 29 municipal areas. This indicates that upheld complaints (and associated costs) are concentrated among a very small proportion (24 or 9%) of the State's elected representatives, with an even smaller group (11 or 4%) accounting for multiple upheld complaints.

The data highlights how breaches are distributed and concentrated within individual chambers. While several councils record only a single elected member with at least one upheld complaint, the State's most active municipalities see these outcomes spread across multiple individuals – with the highest concentrations observed at Northern Midlands (five councillors) and Hobart City (four councillors).

The sanctions available to investigating Panels include suspending a councillor from office for a period not exceeding three months. A councillor that incurs three or more suspensions – whether in a single term or across two consecutive terms – can be removed from office under section 28ZL of the Act.

Guidance notes

- A single upheld complaint can result in a panel determining multiple distinct breaches, which may attract multiple and distinct sanctions. Conversely, multiple separate complaints relating to the same or similar conduct may be investigated jointly by a Panel. For example, the five upheld complaints recorded against the Central Highlands Mayor relate to similar matters and were investigated jointly.
- It is important to note that a number of councillors have determinations made against them, but which are currently subject to appeal. Details of these determinations cannot be included in the data in Table 2 due to legal confidentiality requirements. Recent legislative changes introduced via the *Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Act 2026* will adjust confidentiality arrangements so future determination reports will become public documents as soon as they are provided to all relevant parties to a complaint. Appeal rights will be retained, but matters will no longer need to be kept confidential while those proceedings are undertaken.

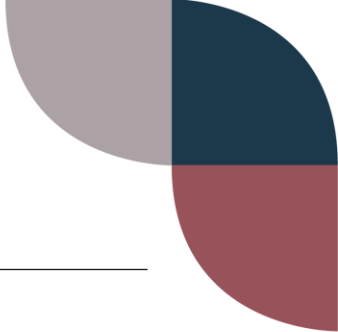
Table 2: Upheld complaints and sanctions by individual elected member

Councillor	Council	Upheld	Susp.	Caut.	Rep.	Apol.	C/T
Teeny Brumby	Burnie City	2	–	1	–	–	1
Trent Aitken	Burnie City	2	1	–	1	–	1
Ken Dorsey	Burnie City	1	–	1	–	–	–
Loueen Triffitt	Central Highlands	5*	–	–	5	–	–
Tony Mulder	Clarence City	1	–	–	1	–	–
Michelle Dracoulis	Derwent Valley	3	–	1	1	–	–
Peter Binny	Derwent Valley	1	–	–	–	–	–
Wayne Shoobridge	Derwent Valley	1	–	1	–	–	–
Greg Howard	Dorset	1	–	–	1	–	–
Cheryl Arnol	Glamorgan-Spring Bay	2	1	1	–	–	1
Michael Symons	Glamorgan-Spring Bay	1	1	–	1	–	1
Louise Elliot	Hobart City	5	2	1	2	1	3
Ryan Posselt	Hobart City	2	–	2	–	–	–
John Kelly	Hobart City	1	–	–	1	–	–
Marti Zucco	Hobart City	1	–	1	–	–	–
Jenny Cambers-Smith	Huon Valley	1	–	1	–	1	–
Joseph Pentridge	Launceston City	2	–	2	–	–	–
Mary Knowles	Northern Midlands	2	–	2	–	–	–
Alison Andrews	Northern Midlands	2	–	1	–	–	1
Andrew McCullagh	Northern Midlands	2	2	–	–	–	–
Janet Lambert	Northern Midlands	1	–	1	–	–	1
Paul Terrett	Northern Midlands	1	–	1	–	–	–
Liz Hamer	West Coast	1	–	–	1	–	1
Joshua Manticas	West Tamar	1	–	–	–	–	1

*See Guidance notes

Upheld – Upheld Complaints Susp. – Suspension from office Caut. – Formal Caution

Rep. – Formal Reprimand Apol. – Required Apology C/T – Required Counselling or Training



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