# The Roles & Responsibilities of Chief Executive Officers and Councillors in Australian Local Government: A Corporate Governance Perspective

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**Abstract:** During the 1980s the respective functions of elected members and appointed officials became an increasingly problematic issue across the Australian local government sector. The expected roles and responsibilities attached to each group were vague in intent and often not adhered to. This situation had significant implications for the quality of local governance. Senior managers who exercised too much influence weakened the democratic legitimacy of the decision-making process, while councillors who interfered too readily in the details of administration undermined the overall efficiency of the organisation. Ongoing power struggles between councillors and management, and within the management arm itself, tended to exacerbate the problem. All six states sought to resolve this issue in the course of the 1990s by introducing revised local government legislation that was intended to clarify the roles and functions of councillors and senior management. A decade or so after this legislation was introduced, however, the definition of roles and responsibilities continues to be a contentious matter for a number of councils. Uncertainty and misunderstanding about duties, or a refusal to adhere to expectations, can lead to disagreement and conflict within authorities, and reduced operational effectiveness. In extreme forms they can result in corrupt behaviour and dysfunctional municipalities.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the roles and responsibilities of elected members and chief executives as they have emerged in the wake of states’ revised local government legislation. It does so in terms of a corporate governance perspective.

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