

# FROM THE LEADER'S CHAIR

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## TRACING THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS OF TODAY'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS



Local Government  
Professionals  
A U S T R A L I A



New Zealand Society of  
Local Government Managers



# GARY ARNOLD

## GENERAL MANAGER KINGBOROUGH COUNCIL TASMANIA, AUS

*“I’m tempted to say that endurance is the most important leadership trait, but there’s more to the full picture of a leader here.”*



**Gary Arnold is the State President of LG Professionals in Tasmania and General Manager of the island-state’s Kingborough Council following a career that traces much of the south-eastern corner of Australia.**

*I commenced local government life at the Shire of Melton, Victoria, in the engineering department. As Melton evolved from a small, sleepy town to a booming, outer-western suburb of Melbourne, I found myself increasingly involved in town planning matters. My final year at Melton as the one-and-only town planner involved the processing of over 600 planning permit applications. Moving to the role of City Planner at the City of Sunshine, completing a Masters in Town Planning and spending two years as Editor of Planning News, I was destined for a life in planning. Wrong! My mother-in-law insisted I complete my MBA, which I did (how could I refuse?).*

*Then along came the then-Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, and local government amalgamations happened swiftly. During that exciting and turbulent period, I was given my first taste of life as a Chief Executive Officer at the Shire of Newham & Woodend for a brief few months. That council was amalgamated with three other councils, but I was now on my way in my leadership journey in local government. After working at a number of Victorian and New South Welsh regional councils as CEO/ General Manager, I commenced my current role*

*in February 2014 as General Manager at the Kingborough Council, Tasmania.*

*Our Mayor, Cr Dean Winter, is the youngest Mayor in Tasmania and great to work with. We also have nine other genuinely committed Councillors, great staff, and a wonderful community. I am also now into my fourth term as State President of Local Government Professionals Tasmania, working with a great Board and enthusiastic CEO. It’s hard to single out challenges and they are always there, but when you are fortunate to find yourself surrounded with people prepared to have a go, like I am, life is good!*

### **What have the key challenges in your local government career been?**

*I often say that the top three challenges in local government are dogs, trees and... whatever. At least, that has generally been my experience. Those two issues seem to cause more derision in the community and the chamber than any others. That said, the greatest change I have observed is the challenge of dealing efficiently with social media. We now live in an instant society where everyone is time-poor yet local government is still expected to respond to social media 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Similarly, local government is increasingly being asked by our communities to take a leadership role in addressing a plethora of challenges including the challenge of climate change.*

## What have the key successes been?

*Anything at all that has improved the quality of life for members of our community has been a success.*

***“It’s the reason why I still jump out of bed every morning and look forward to going to the office even though I am in the twilight of my career.”***

*Long gone are the days when local government could lovingly or sarcastically be described as “roads, rates and rubbish.” Today, even the smallest of councils offer multiple services to their communities and most like ours offer well in excess of 100 services.*

Throughout these challenges and successes, what leadership traits have been most important, and do these translate between private and the public service?

*I’m tempted to say that endurance is the most important leadership trait, but there’s more to the full picture of a leader here. I’d add integrity, tact, courage, agility, initiative, judgement, justice, dependability, decisiveness, enthusiasm, knowledge, unselfishness and, finally, a good sense of humour. Unlike private enterprise though, local government operates in a political environment. From that perspective, leadership in local government is a beast unlike any other.*

From the viewpoint of a storied career in local government, Gary has words of advice for any up-and-comers looking to pursue their own leadership journey in the sector.

***“Give local government a try, grab a good mentor, and enjoy the most diverse, interesting, challenging - occasionally frustrating - but most rewarding career available.”***

*Gary Arnold during his tenure at Wodonga City Council.*

