

OCAN Position Statement: Selection of Ward Councillors

A Municipal Council is the governing authority of a municipality, elected by the community to represent their interests, make policy decisions, and oversee the administration. In terms of the South African Constitution, a Council has both political and oversight authority over municipal affairs.

An effective Council provides clear strategic direction, builds a culture of integrity and accountability, ensures the efficient use of resources, promotes transparent decision-making, upholds meaningful public participation, and strengthens partnerships with business, civil society, and other spheres of government. It is not a rubber-stamping body.

A dysfunctional Council profoundly impacts institutional performance. Municipalities such as Knysna and Theewaterskloof, once well-functioning, illustrate how quickly decline can occur.

Councils fail because of weak leadership, unqualified or ineffective councillors, and political instability, factors that inevitably lead to governance and service delivery breakdowns. The consequences are immediate: investor flight, falling property values, and slowing local economic growth.

Effective councillors understand that oversight is not optional; it is their core duty. They are not merely politicians, but stewards of public trust, leaders of communities, and guardians of good governance. To fulfil this role, councillors must demonstrate competence, integrity, and leadership qualities that inspire confidence and accountability.

Key attributes include long-term thinking beyond political cycles, a working knowledge of municipal legislation and policy frameworks, the ability to get things done, and skill in building constructive relationships. Business acumen and financial literacy are essential.

The next local government elections are expected in late 2026. Political parties are already identifying potential candidates. Typically, candidates undergo a party-managed screening and selection process before being nominated for election.

However, voters often have limited information about who these individuals are, their qualifications, experience, community involvement, ethical standing, or leadership track record. As a result, unsuitable candidates frequently advance without proper scrutiny.

OCAN holds the view that the current Ward Councillor selection process is fundamentally flawed. Citizens are excluded from the final selection of their public representatives. The process rests entirely with political parties.

It is essential that communities play a meaningful role in the selection of councillors. Shortlisted candidates should be evaluated through a rigorous, transparent process that includes background checks, psychometric assessments, structured interviews, and city hall type question-and-answer sessions.

The Overstrand is not immune to governance or service delivery failures. To prevent it from following the path of once-prosperous municipalities now in decline, we must ensure that only the most capable and credible individuals are elected to lead.

After all, the foundation of good governance lies in the character of those who lead.