

Corruption trends and insights in local government

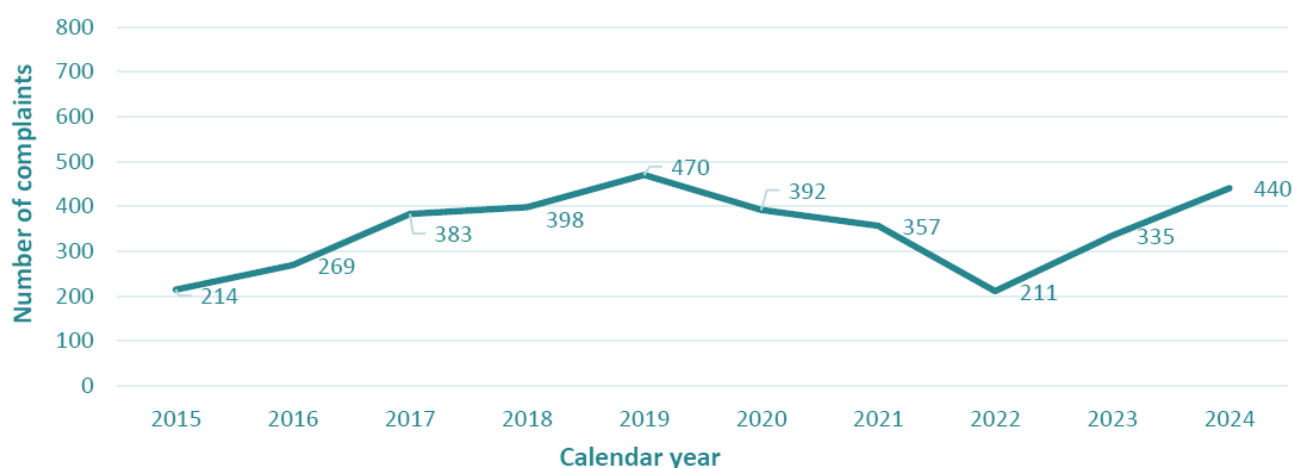
In 2025, the CCC examined current and emerging corruption risks and drivers impacting the local government sector. This included analysis of CCC complaint, investigation and intelligence holdings over a 10-year period, along with a review of publicly available reports, literature and data.

This fact sheet provides a summary of the trends and themes impacting the sector, with a focus on risks across council segments and cohorts.

Key insights

- Over the past 10 years, there has been an upward trend in the number of local government complaints received by the CCC (from 214 complaints in 2015 to 440 in 2024*).
- Information control, procurement, payroll, and recruitment feature prevalently in corruption complaints, which is consistent with local government risks identified by other integrity agencies.
- Changes to the sector's operating environment along with the impact of legislative change, local government elections and broader social and demographic trends have shaped local government corruption risks and the types of complaints received by the CCC.
- Increasing demands on the sector associated with population growth and infrastructure development, along with governance weaknesses will almost certainly heighten existing corruption risks and potentially expose new vulnerabilities, including risks associated with foreign interference and organised crime.

Complaints received , 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2024



*Complaints received in a calendar year.



Corruption risks by role

Council employees = 73% of total complaints about local government between 2015 and 2024*



Council employee

- Procurement, misuse of council assets and favouritism in recruitment were the most common complaints involving a council employee.
- Complaints typically relate to the mismanagement of people, resources, council funds or information.
- Heightened risk areas include timesheet and allowance fraud, and secondary and poly employment.
- Vulnerable work functions and activities include human resource management, information control and management, and management of public assets and resources.
- Senior executives and those with supervisory, decision-making, and financial delegations, as well as positions responsible for delivering engineering and civil works are more vulnerable to corruption.

Councillors = 33% of total complaints about local government between 2015 and 2024*



Councillor

- Poorly managed conflicts of interest, misuse of authority and electoral donations are the areas of greatest risk for councillors.
- Complaints involving councillors frequently relate to failing to declare and manage conflicts of interest, misusing confidential information, and decision-making relating to development or rezoning.
- Many councillors have other employment and private interests which can heighten conflict of interest risks, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Vulnerable work functions and activities include political and policy services, management of public assets and resources, and human resource management.

Common corruption risks by function or activity

1. **Procurement** including sourcing, tendering and contract management. Complaints often relate to infrastructure projects and the acquisition of equipment for civil works, as well as procuring ICT goods and services.
2. **Human resource management** including payroll processes, employees and councillors claiming allowances and entitlements they're not entitled to and misusing work time.
3. **Recruitment, selection and promotion processes** including favouritism, not following processes, and inadequate employee screening to verify suitability.
4. **Information and records management** including non-compliance with policies and procedures and misuse of confidential information.
5. Failing to declare and manage **conflicts of interest** feature across almost all complaint categories for both councillors and council employees, especially in rural and remote areas.
6. The period leading up to and following **local government elections** can be a high-risk period and have been associated with increased complaints, organisational turnover and change, and weaker governance.

*Percentage total of complaints exceeds 100% for total volume of complaints due to some complaints containing multiple allegations of corrupt conduct.



Council segment snapshot

Common enablers of corruption include workforce challenges, weak governance, and growing pressures and demands on council resources. However, corruption risks vary depending on the geographical location and size of councils. To enable comparison, we have grouped councils into the same segments used by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and Queensland Audit Office (QAO). These observations relate to high-level trends and risks based on complaints data across the six council segments from 2015 to 2024.

Coastal councils	Resources councils	Rural-Remote councils
<i>Coastal councils experience extreme weather conditions and therefore heightened risks associated with disaster recovery, grants administration and infrastructure development.</i>  Trend Increasing trend in complaints in recent years and volume assessed as being of a more serious or systemic nature.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Information misuse, procurement, and timesheet fraud. <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest, information misuse, and decision-making processes concerning development applications.  Prevention opportunities Implementing and enhancing processes for declaring and managing conflicts of interest as well as training in governance essentials (such as recordkeeping requirements and ethical responsibilities).	<i>Typically located in mining regions, Resources councils experience demands on infrastructure, and risks associated with the procurement of assets and services.</i>  Trend Fluctuating trend, with a recent increasing number of complaints which almost doubled in 2024.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Procurement, recruitment and compliance with employment obligations. <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest and managing the conduct of discipline matters (including investigations).  Prevention opportunities Developing policies, procedures and training in relation to conflicts of interest, procurement and tendering.	<i>Rural-Remote councils are particularly vulnerable to risks associated with procurement and conflicts of interest given the size of their electorates.</i>  Trend Slight decreasing trend in complaints over the 10-year period, with notable spikes attributable to individual councils. Slight decreasing trend in complaints assessed as being serious or systemic. The rate of procurement-related complaints in 2024 was notably higher than any other council segment.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Procurement and recruitment. <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest.  Prevention opportunities Improving recordkeeping practices and developing conflict of interest policies and procedures.

Rural-Regional councils	Indigenous councils	South East Queensland councils
<i>Due to their geographical location, Rural-Regional councils experience recruitment challenges as well as managing conflicts of interest inherent in small communities.</i>  Trend Fluctuating trend – 47 per cent increase between 2015 and 2017 with a 59 per cent increase in complaints observed between 2023 and 2024, attributable to a small number of councils.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Procurement processes and managing confidential information. <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest and managing confidential information.  Prevention opportunities Developing clear governance frameworks, and updating conflict of interest, procurement, and recruitment policies and procedures.	<i>Indigenous councils face unique complexities attracting and retaining staff and navigating legal, cultural and familial dynamics.</i>  Trend Variable trend, highly influenced by spikes in complaints relating to individual councils. A higher proportion of complaints are assessed as being more serious and systemic.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Recruitment, procurement and accounting (financial management). <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest and procurement processes.  Prevention opportunities Developing policies and training in relation to recruitment, procurement, conflicts of interest, use of corporate credit cards, implementing risk management procedures, and ensuring recordkeeping practices.	<i>These councils have significant infrastructure projects and are therefore vulnerable to procurement and contract management risks.</i>  Trend Relatively stable trend, with a recent increasing trend and more complaints being assessed as being serious or systemic.  Risk areas <i>Employees:</i> Timesheet fraud, compliance with employment conditions and managing confidential information. <i>Councillors:</i> Managing conflicts of interest and decision-making relating to development applications.  Prevention opportunities Training on governance, procurement, misuse of information and appropriate management of council resources, implementing timesheet controls, and guidance around the use of private email accounts.

Building resistance to corruption

Current and enduring corruption risks

A range of factors — including poor governance, weak fraud and corruption controls and workforce challenges — contribute to corruption risks in local government.

While a number of these vulnerabilities are apparent across all council segments, their extent and impact are influenced by characteristics unique to each council, such as their fraud and corruption control maturity, financial sustainability, organisational culture and leadership.

Key opportunities to build corruption resistance include focusing on:

- Roles and positions susceptible to corruption.
- High risk and impact work functions.
- Council segments that are more vulnerable or impacted by corruption.

Outlook for the sector

Local governments will almost certainly experience increased demand for services and amenities as the needs, size and diversity of their communities change.

- Councils are likely to face challenges associated with a growing population, housing shortages and pressure on community safety and health services, while managing an increasing volume of grants and infrastructure projects.
- Ongoing skills shortages and challenges attracting and retaining talent will continue to present challenges across the sector, particularly among small rural and Indigenous councils.
- New and rapidly developing technologies along with the increasing threat posed by foreign interference and organised crime infiltration expose novel risks for the sector to manage and mitigate.

Emerging and forecasted developments highly likely to impact corruption risks in local government:



Scope and demand of services



Population and social change



Legislative reform



Interference and infiltration



Emerging technologies



Climate change

Visit our website for [prevention guides and resources](#), or email corruption.engagement@ccc.qld.gov.au for further information.

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