

**Western
Sydney
Leadership
Dialogue**

2024 Local Government Elections Brief

OCTOBER 2024

**The Dialogue's GWS local government
elections analysis**

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INTRODUCTION

NSW voters went to the polls on Saturday 14th September to decide what their local councils will look like for the next four years. Votes are now finalised, and councils have held their first meetings to swear in candidates and determine their mayors and deputy mayors. This means that more can be understood about what these results will mean for residents.

This 2024 Local Government Elections Brief is an update to our September 17th release, where the council election results were included, but many leadership roles had not yet been decided.

As previously noted, one of the strongest influences on these elections was the lack of Liberal Party candidates across many council areas; at least 14 NSW council wards had no nominations due to an administration error by the party executive. This shaped the outcomes of several council elections, notably Penrith, where an entire ward of Labor councillors was elected unopposed, shifting the council's majority. There were also councils where Liberals claimed significant seat numbers by returning to contest the election after skipping 2021, such as Blacktown and Cumberland.

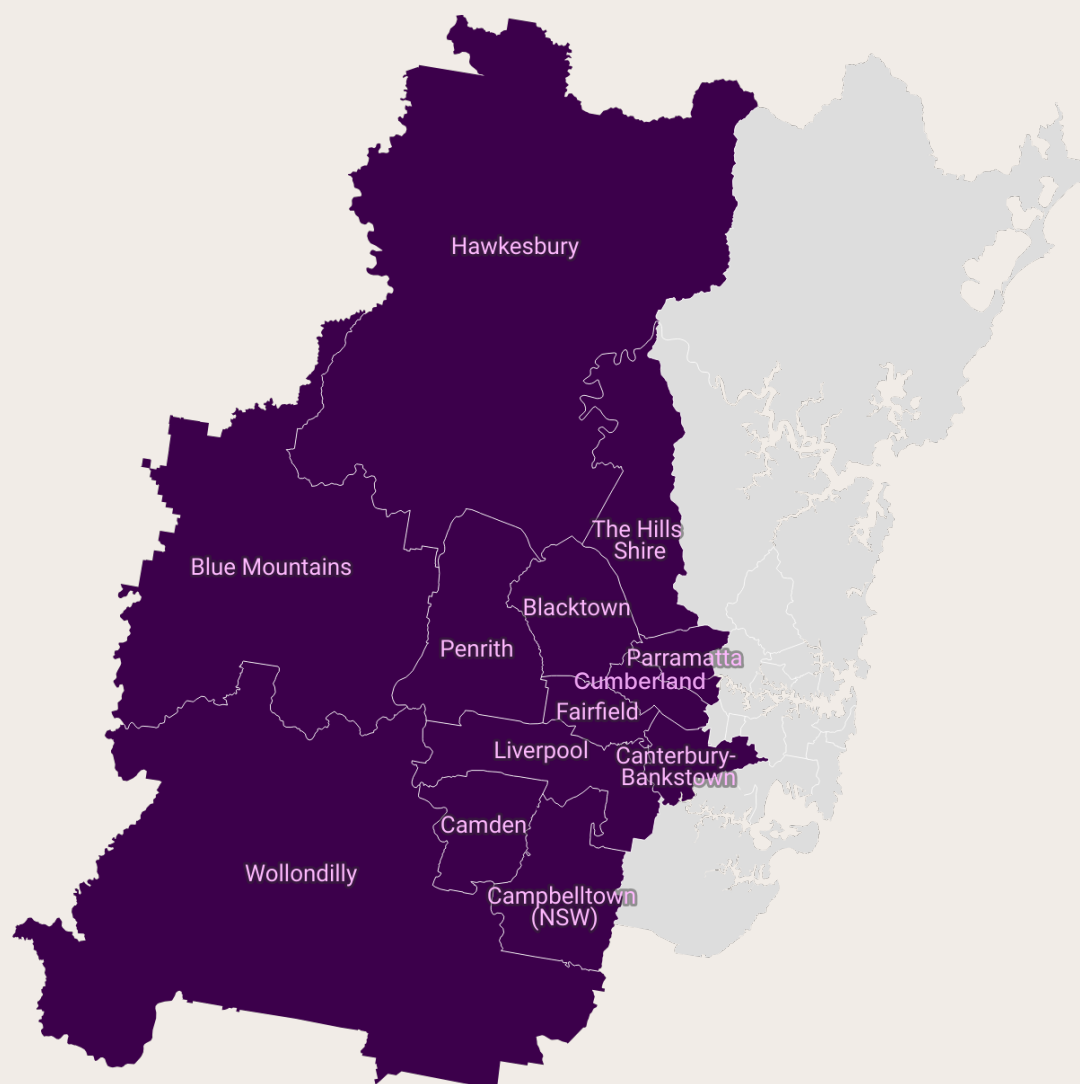
Greater Western Sydney (GWS) saw some atypical trends this election, indicating the changing preferences and issues impacting the region. The Greens Party saw stronger than usual results in the GWS region. The party claimed numerous seats, many on councils that had not previously had a Greens representative, including in Blacktown and Cumberland.

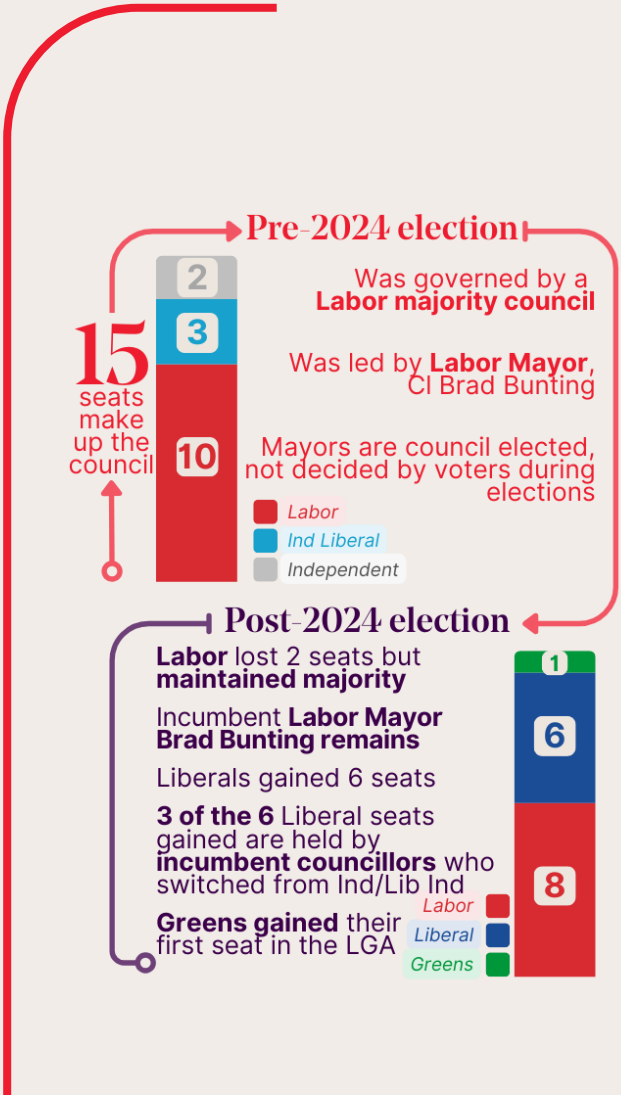
This election also saw gains for right-aligned minority parties benefiting from the lack of Liberal options. Libertarians have claimed seats in Camden and Penrith. Previously known as the Liberal Democrats, the Libertarians broad council election platform included "getting the woke B.S. out of council" and "smart cities? No way!". The Sustainable Australia party, running on an anti-immigration and anti-development platform, also picked up a seat in Campbelltown.

The success of smaller parties shows that the Labor Party did not benefit from the reduced Liberal ticket in the way that may have been expected. Results across the region were a mixed bag, and Labor held onto power with fewer seats in some councils and claimed or lost majority in others.

The left and the right shifts seen across the region may not indicate deepening liberalism or conservatism, but rather a return to localism. The independent and smaller party candidates that gained seats often ran on platforms highlighting some variation of prioritising community needs and/or the environment over ongoing greenfield residential development. Across the region, these smaller party candidates from both sides of the political spectrum gained votes that had previously gone to major parties. It is worth considering that in the face of ongoing global and economic headwinds, communities are increasingly identifying with candidates that hold a more hyperlocal position.

MAP: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY





BLACKTOWN CITY COUNCIL

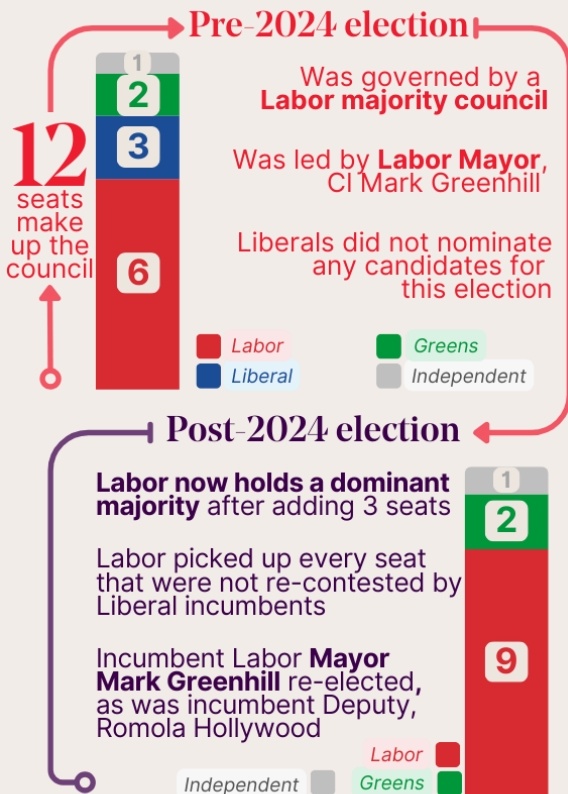
Blacktown will continue to be governed by a Labor majority, with a Labor mayor, which has been the ongoing trend since 2014. There has, however, been significant change to the party make-up of the chamber (as seen in the infographic).

Blacktown City Council now has a smaller Labor majority, a Greens councillor and a Liberal crossbench. Labor had held a two-thirds majority pre-election, with Independents accounting for the remaining seats.

The Liberals had a successful run in Blacktown, claiming six seats after returning to contest the LGA for the first time since 2016. While this is a tangible change, it is largely a return to past trends, after the party's absence from the previous election. One seat was picked up off Labor. The remaining five were regained Liberal-held seats that had been vacated coming into the 2021 election – three of which came from Independents switching to run as a Liberal.

Incumbent Labor mayor Brad Bunting maintained his position with nine out of 15 votes. Bob Fitzgerald (Labor) secured deputy by the same margin.

The council now has its first Pasifika councillor, Labor's Talia Amituanai. Additionally, the Greens saw success for the first time in Blacktown, claiming a seat off Labor in Ward 2. The Greens campaigned on local issues, such as pedestrian safety around Lalor Park shops, and sustainable development in the LGA.



BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL

The Blue Mountains Council has shifted from a Labor-Greens alliance to a strong Labor majority. Issues with Liberal party nominations were particularly impactful here. No Liberal candidates contested this election, as a result their three seats were picked up by Labor, increasing Labor's representation from six to nine (of 12).

The incumbent Labor mayor, Mark Greenhill and Labor deputy, Romola Hollywood have been re-elected to their positions, with this being Greenhill's 12th year as mayor. The council also has over 50% female representatives, with seven female councillors.

The Greens and Independents held onto seats in their respective wards, with the three candidates all incumbents.

CAMDEN COUNCIL

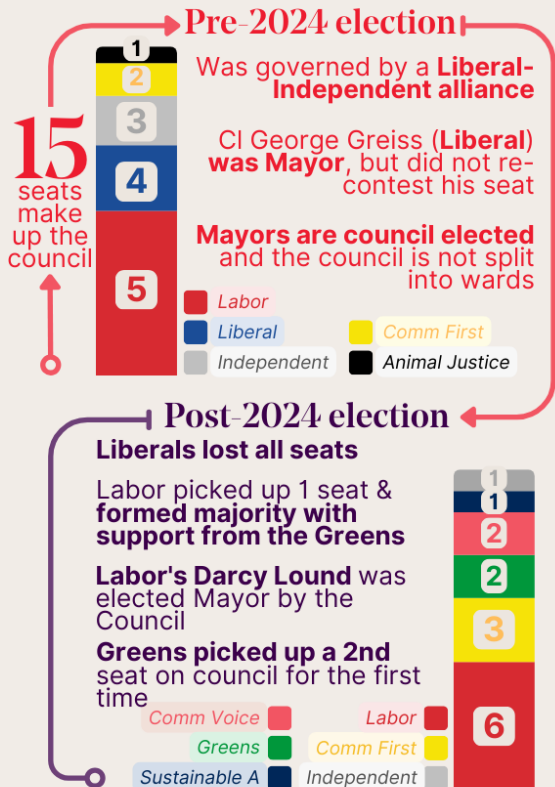
Camden Council also saw a shift in the power balance, largely due to the lack of Liberal Party nominations. Until now, the chambers consisted of Liberal, Labor and independent councillors, with leadership shared between the two major parties. Representation is now split.

Camden and Blue Mountains voters showed different responses to a similar situation, demonstrating how varied the council election trends were across the region. The Liberals contested just a single ward, only securing one out of four previously held seats. The remaining three Liberal seats on council were won by two Libertarians (first time representation) and an Independent.

With Labor holding onto their three seats in Camden, it is unclear what majority will most influence the council going forward. The previous Liberal/Labor leadership arrangement will continue, with Labor's Ashleigh Cagney and Liberal Therese Fedeli re-elected as mayor and deputy.



CAMPBELLTOWN CITY COUNCIL



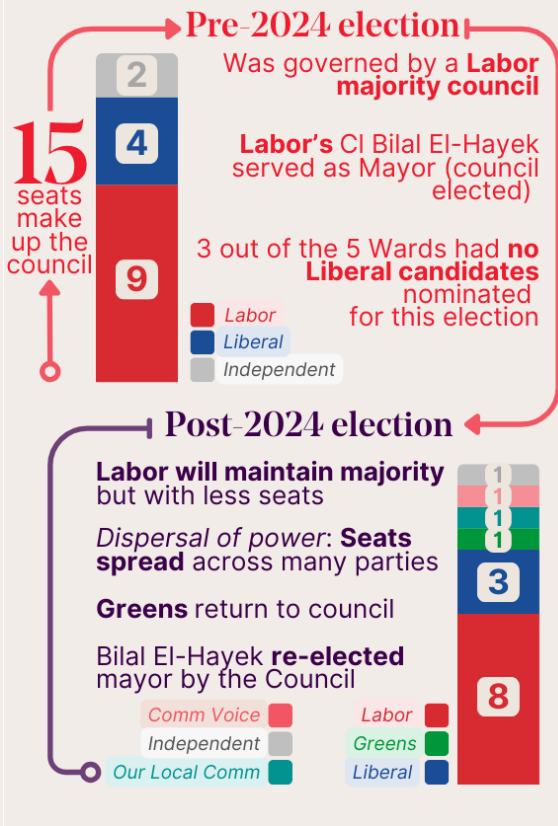
The makeup of Campbelltown City Council looks very different post-election. There were no Liberal candidates contesting seats, as such the loose Liberal-independent alliance that held majority no longer exists. Seats are now spread across a greater number of minor parties and a slightly larger Labor cohort.

Early signs are showing a Labor-Greens bloc forming, as seen in the mayor and deputy election. Labor's Darcy Lound was elected as mayor uncontested, and two Greens plus six Labor votes saw Karen Hunt (Labor) win the deputy position.

Campbelltown displayed a range of voter responses in the absence of Liberal options, in comparison to other LGAs. The Blue Mountains redirected to Labor, Camden turned to right-leaning candidates, and Campbelltown went in both directions.

Both Labor and the Community First party increased their share by one seat too, taking Labor to six and Community First to three. Community Voice and the Greens picked up two seats each. Sustainable Australia and right-wing independent Adam Zahra both picked up a seat for the first time.

CITY OF CANTERBURY-BANKSTOWN COUNCIL



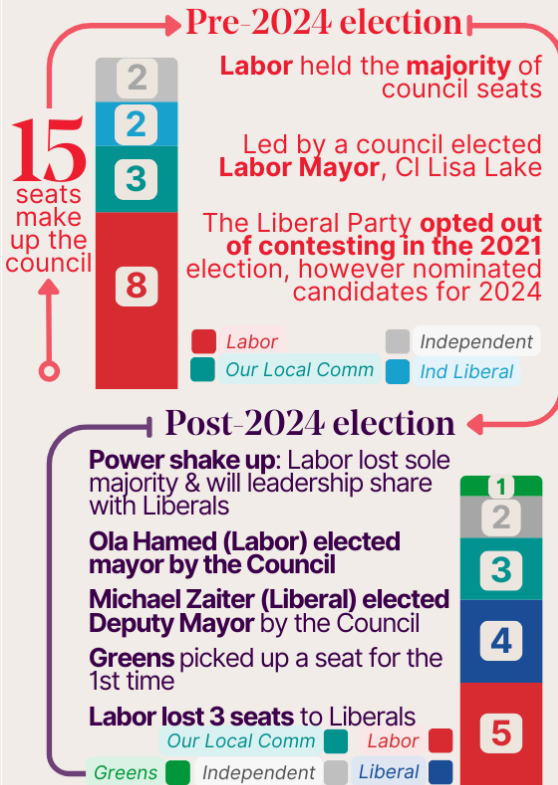
Labor has maintained the chamber majority and leadership roles that they carried into the Canterbury-Bankstown election. There is now, however, a greater dispersal of seats than was seen pre-election. Liberal, Labor and an Independent all lost a seat from their total count, with each being picked up by a small party. The result has been a doubling of the number of parties represented on Council.

Incumbent Labor mayor Bilal El-Hayed was re-elected to the mayoralty unopposed, with Karl Saleh OAM (Labor) elected to deputy.

The Liberals fared well considering that they only contested three out of Canterbury-Bankstown's five wards. They held two incumbent seats, lost two seats (one not contested, the other went to an Our Local Community (OLC) candidate) and gained one seat off Labor in the Revesby-Bunya ward.

The Greens, Community Voice and OLC all gained a seat on the Council. The Greens took a seat off an incumbent Independent, and Community Voice picked up the seat that the Liberals did not contest. OLC won their seat off the incumbent Liberal after running on a platform that included dropping Council rates and simplifying their remit to the "3 R's – Roads, Rates and Rubbish".

CUMBERLAND COUNCIL



The makeup of Cumberland Council looks quite different post-election. The Liberals returned to contest this election after skipping in 2021, like was seen in Blacktown. Labor no longer holds a standalone majority, and now look to have allied with the Liberal Party. This is a notable change as Cumberland has been a Labor majority council since its post-amalgamation election in 2017.

Former deputy, Ola Hamed (Labor) was elected as mayor by the council, with Liberal Michael Zaiter as the deputy mayor. All the Labor and Liberal councillors voted for Hamed and Zaiter, which suggests a potential new Labor-Liberal alliance forming. Hamed is Cumberland's first Muslim mayor and Zaiter is the brother of newly elected Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Martin Zaiter.

Labor remains the largest party in the chamber, but only by one seat. The Liberals, the Greens and an Independent each nabbed a seat off Labor. This meant that Labor lost three seats, across three different wards, to three different parties. The Greens gain also resulted in the incumbent mayor, Lisa Lake, losing her seat.

The Liberals gained four seats in this election. They claimed one Labor and one independent seat and gained another two through incumbent Liberal Independent Councillors running for this election under the Liberal banner.



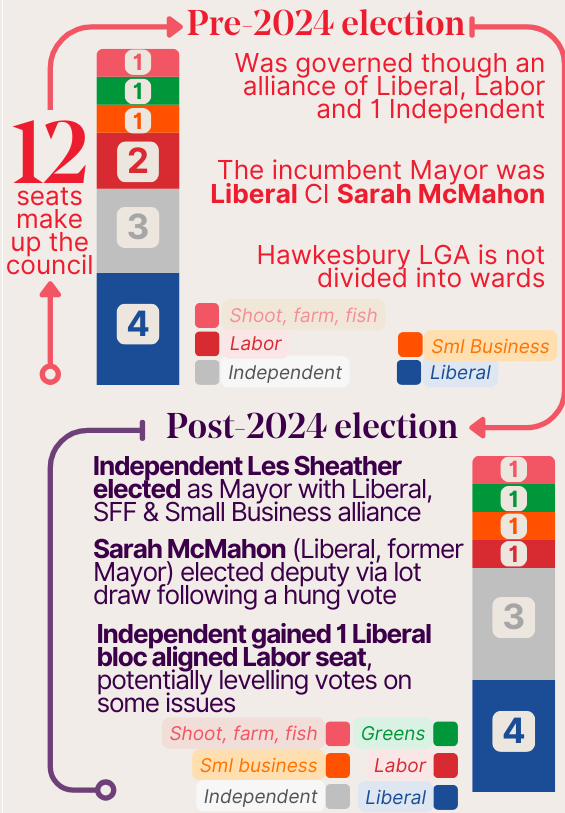
FAIRFIELD COUNCIL

The Carbone-Le alliance has continued to hold strongly in Fairfield. This has seen the council remain as one of the only GWS councils led by a coalition involving no major parties. Both parties have come out of the election holding the same seats that they went in with.

Frank Carbone, who was first popularly elected as mayor in 2021, was returned as mayor, receiving almost 80% of the direct vote. Dai Le was elected unopposed to serve as deputy mayor. This likely represents a strengthening in the Le-Carbone relationship, as the former deputy was a Carbone Party representative, and the party holds majority in its own right.

The only change in seats was Labor losing a seat in the Fairfield/Cabravale Ward to independent candidate Kate Hoang, reducing their number to a single seat.

HAWKESBURY CITY COUNCIL

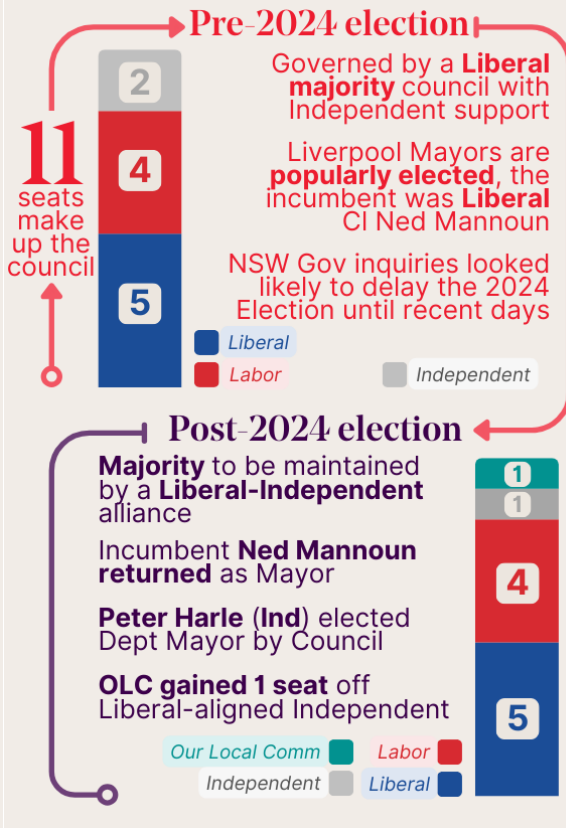


This election delivered a potentially influential, but not remarkable change to the council makeup, in comparison to the previous. The most notable change was a move away from the two major parties, with Labor losing one seat to Independents and the Liberal party claiming their fourth seat without reaching a full quota.

Previously the council was Liberal heavy, led by a Liberal mayor and Labor deputy. Majority was generally supported by Labor and an Independent, with minor party councillors divesting votes based on issue. This alliance has now lost one seat to the crossbench, which has the potential to evenly split the vote depending on issue. With all but one incumbent returning to council after the election, past alliances are likely to continue to influence votes.

This even split has already shown up in the first meeting of the year. The council elected Liberal aligned Independent Les Sheather as mayor, with seven out of 12 votes. When it came to the deputy, however, three councillors switched blocs, resulting in an even vote and Liberal Sarah McMahon (former Mayor) elected as deputy by random lot (that chose between her and an Independent).

LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL



Major party numbers remained stable in Liverpool coming out of this election. Both Labor and the Liberals have maintained the same number of seats they had coming in for each ward. The Liberal-Independent alliance that governed prior to the election is likely to be maintained.

Ned Mannoun secured the mayoralty for a third time this election, receiving over 40% of the popular vote. Independent Peter Harle will serve as deputy mayor and was appointed unopposed by the council into the role which was previously Liberal held.

This election saw Peter Ristevski (Our Local Community) pick up Independent Karress Rhodes' seat. While the Liberal-Independent alliance has enough seats (six out of 11) to maintain majority, the loss of this one seat reduces the buffer to its minimum.

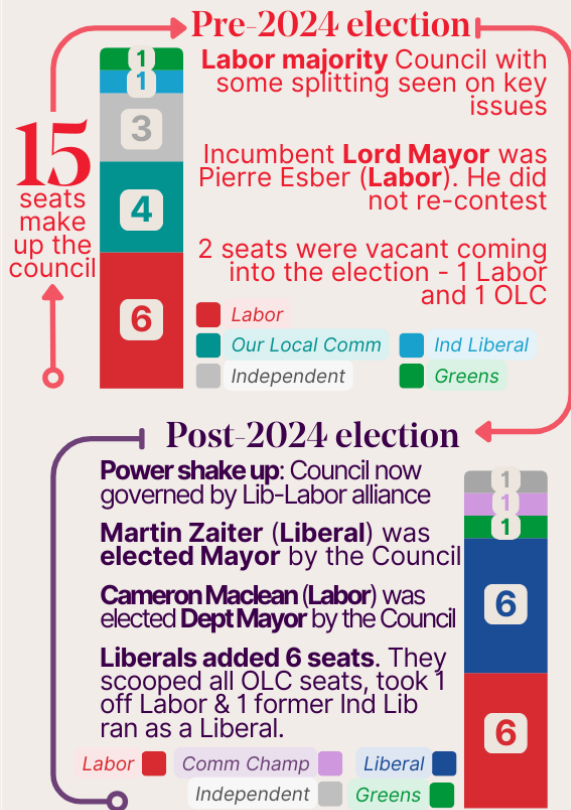
The NSW Government is yet to indicate when it will commence its public inquiry into the previous administration of Liverpool City Council, and it is unclear how this may impact the newly formed council.

CITY OF PARRAMATTA COUNCIL

This election brought significant change to the makeup of the City of Parramatta Council. With the Liberal and Labor Parties both holding six seats, and the remaining seats split across three different parties, these three Councillors will be certain to play a decisive hand on key decisions over the next four years.

The council elected Liberal Martin Zaiter to be Lord Mayor, with Labor's Cameron Maclean supporting as Deputy. Community Champions councillor Kellie Darley was the deciding vote for each. Despite having a Lord Mayor (the only other Sydney council with one is the City of Sydney), the City of Parramatta does not popularly elect its civic leader. The Dialogue has been advocating for this to change for several years.

OLC, which previously held four seats across two wards, has lost these to the Liberal party. The Greens have retained their seat in the Parramatta Ward, and both the Community Champions party and the Lorraine Wearne Independents picked up a seat each in the Dundas and Epping Wards respectively.

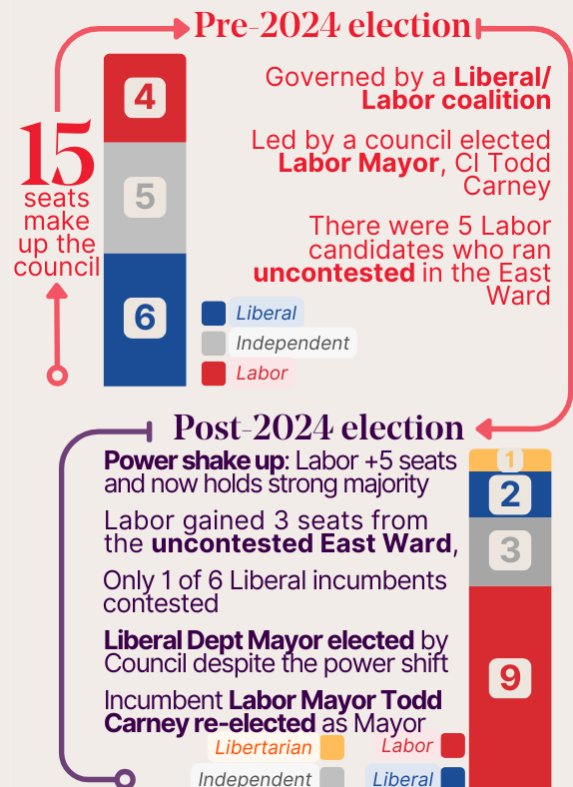


PENRITH CITY COUNCIL

A lack of Liberal nominations had a strong influence on the new make-up of the Penrith Council. As such, the balance of power has now shifted heavily in Labor's favour with nine out of 15 seats held post-election.

Incumbent Labor mayor Todd Carney was returned to the role by the council and will be supported by longtime Liberal councillor Ross Fowler OAM as deputy. Liberal and Labor ran an alliance and shared leadership roles for several years prior to the election, and this outcome appears to honour their previous alliance.

The Liberals dropped five seats due to lack of contest but picked up one in the only ward where Liberal nominees ran. Four of these were picked up by Labor, and one by a Libertarian. Additionally, Liberals and Labor picked up one seat each off Independents in the North ward.

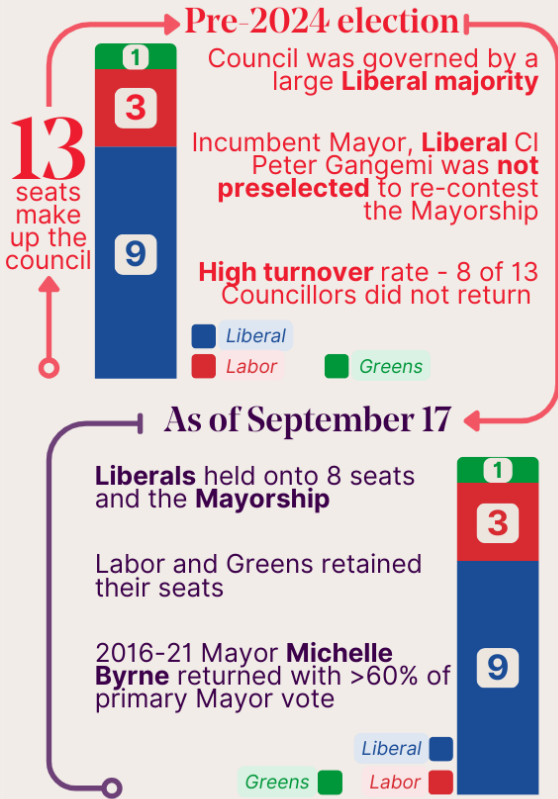


THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL

The Hills continues to be a Liberal stronghold at all three levels of government, despite seeing noticeable swings away from the party in recent elections. This result is no different and has seen the Liberals maintain their majority and popularly elected mayor.

The council saw unusually high attrition rates coming into this election, with eight of the 13 councillors not returning to contest their seat. This included former Mayor Peter Gangemi, after he lost preselection to former Mayor, Michelle Byrne, who has subsequently been popularly elected by the community to return to the role. The council voted for Liberal Frank De Masi to be deputy mayor.

The party representation on the new council is identical to the previous, with new candidates from each respective party taking over from those who decided not to re-run. This also meant that The Hills re-elected a Greens candidate in the North Ward.

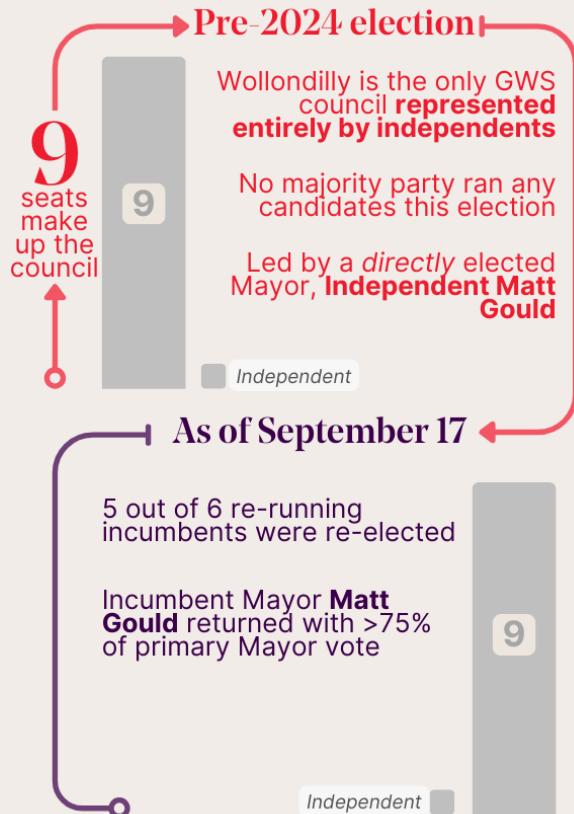


WOLLONDILLY SHIRE COUNCIL

Wollondilly Council has a long (and still unchanged) history of being run by independent councillors. The statewide issues around Liberal nominations had no impact on this council and the last time an established party ran a ticket was 2008, when the Greens ran in the now defunct Central Ward.

Overall, there was little change from this election to highlight. Incumbent Mayor Matt Gould was re-elected via popular votes on a margin almost 25% higher than in 2021, where he narrowly defeated opponent Judy Hannan by just 7% of votes.

Councillor turnover was also quiet, with more than half of the previous council returning to serve another term. Of the six incumbent candidates who chose to re-run in this election, five were re-elected to represent the community.



Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

The Dialogue is a not-for-profit, community initiative leading a national conversation about Greater Western Sydney.


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