The Role of Local Government for a Contemporary Victorian Community

Catherine Dale
Bachelor of Music, Melbourne University
Bachelor of Education, Melbourne University
Master of Education, Melbourne University
Master of Business Administration, Monash University

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Victoria University

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Abstract

In this thesis the role of Victorian local government has been explored from a community perspective.

Often referred to as the sphere of government closest to the people, this dissertation has explored the potential for local government to positively impact on residents' quality of life and provide opportunities for citizen engagement and participation in key issues and within a diversity of fields.

As a level of government it is contended that Victorian local government has six roles: democratic; governance; service provision; community building; advocacy and community planning.

These roles have been reviewed from the following perspectives: the context within which Victorian local government undertakes these roles; the limitations or barriers that impede achievement of these roles; how these roles benefit the community and what proposals could be introduced to enhance their implementation. The examination of Victorian local government's role has also been examined within its historical, political and financial context.

A qualitative research method was utilized in this thesis. The relevant literature has been examined and discussed within the context of the four perspectives as listed above. Thirty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews with opinion leaders were undertaken and analyzed.

As a result of the research for this thesis a number of key recommendations have been identified that would progress the effectiveness of Victorian local government's role. These recommendations focus on the enhancement of local government's image, increased facilitation of citizen engagement, a review of the legal and political framework within which local government operates and in particular local government's relationship with the state government, enhancement of local government's financial capacity,

changes to the electoral structure, additional training for elected representatives and senior officers, the development of a range of performance indicators, the need for local government to operate on a more regional basis and a review of organizational structures.

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Catherine Dale declare that the PhD thesis entitled The Role of Local Government for a Contemporary Victorian Community is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature   Date

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents Olive Ashley and John Dale.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1   Background to the Research

In 1762, Rousseau presented the view that it was vital that citizens maintained their involvement in public affairs. Rousseau argued that if money and laziness took the place of personal involvement, it would spell the ruination of the State (Pateman 1970).

In the late 1700s, as Jefferson was leading the United States of America into its future, he professed a firm belief in the value of a system of governance that was built on small local government, with the state and federal governments only performing the functions that were not feasible at the local level (Box 1998).

Within a contemporary Australian context and some centuries later, Reverend Tim Costello wrote about the need for community, and about his own personal journey in connecting communities through the integration of the family, the Church, the law and local government (Costello 1998).

These three prominent citizens, while being significantly diverse in terms of their nationality, social context, period in history and personal background, illustrate an enduring belief in the need for citizen participation and for civic legitimacy at the local level.

From the early beginnings of society through to today's sophisticated urban communities, the notion of citizen participation in Western cultures most commonly finds its tangible expression through some form of local, democratic government (Pateman 1970; Bowman and Hampton 1983; Bailey 1999). In the developed world, this has been a common theme in the writings and speeches of politicians, academics, social commentators and individual citizens throughout the decades.

In contemporary Australia, the Victorian community will continue to experience significant changes in social fabric, economic imperatives and environmental

sustainability. It is a time when developments in communications and global economics seem to threaten at least some aspects of the traditional community (Eckersley 1998; Mackay 1999; Purple Sage Project 2000; Brackertz et al 2005).

As the level of government closest to the community, Victorian local government needs to ensure that it has the individual and collective capacity to competently respond to current challenges and proactively plan for the issues that may present themselves in the future (Johnstone 1996b; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Kiss 2003). The challenge for Victorian local government is to clearly define and delineate its role and functions (Dollery 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

In *The Role of Local Government for a Contemporary Victorian Community*, the role of Victorian local government and the specific roles that comprise this overall role are explored and delineated. This perspective has been selected because of the closeness of Victorian local government to its citizens and because local government decisions can directly impact on people's quality of life (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Brackertz et al 2005).

In this thesis a review of an extensive range of literature and material from thirty-one in-depth interviews with opinion leaders is drawn upon to define the role of Victorian local government. In addition to exploring this role the literature has been reviewed to provide an historical, political and financial perspective of Victorian local government.

As a level of government it is contended that Victorian local government has six roles: democratic; governance; service provision; community building; advocacy and community planning.

The discussion on Victorian local government's role is reviewed from four perspectives and seeks to answer a series of questions that flow from these perspectives. These four perspectives are: the context within which Victorian local government undertakes these roles; the limitations or barriers that impede achievement of these roles; how these roles

benefit the community; and what proposals or recommendations could be introduced to enhance their implementation.

1.2   Research Problem

Victorian local government can be defined as:

> *subnational in scope; has a measure of autonomy and a capacity to provide its own resources through taxation; and is democratic (Bowman and Hampton 1983 p.3).*

Victorian local government has an extensive history that can be traced back to the 1840s (Russell and Bishop 1973). During the mid 1900s Victorian local government underwent significant development and expansion of its role from that of predominantly roads boards (Russell and Bishop 1973; Jones 1993).

With the 21st century in sight, the 1990s was a period of rapid change for Victorian local government, which until that time had been characterized by stability and traditional management systems (Bains 1979; Jones 1989, 1993; Wensing 1997a; Dunstan 1998). In 1992 the Kennett Government was elected in the state of Victoria. The Kennett Government made sweeping changes to Victorian local government in terms of its structure, role and reporting obligations. These changes would have ramifications throughout the following decades (Galligan 1996; Kiss 1997; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998a; Hill 1999).

During the period from when Victorian local government came into existence until the current day, local government's role has developed and expanded to respond to community needs and legislative requirements (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993).

At first glance Victorian local government's current role is multi-layered and includes the provision of basic services through to the more esoteric ideals of advocacy and building a

sense of community. However clearly delineating Victorian local government's role from a community perspective is a complex question that this thesis explores.

It is argued that there has been limited discussion about Victorian local government's role (Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006). It is further argued that Victorian local government has reached a pivotal threshold in its development and that there is a need for a serious debate about the role of Victorian local government within the broader Australian polity and the theoretical principles upon which local government should be founded (Dollery 2005).

The view that there has been a lack of clarity regarding local government's role is not limited to Australia and has also been identified in the United Kingdom. Leach and Davis (1996) state that there are a *number of different 'visions' of local government (p.2)* and that one of the problems has been that local government has *lacked a clear statement of its role and purpose... as a starting point (p.2).*

In clarifying the topic of this dissertation, it was acknowledged that the role of local government is diverse and broad in nature. Dollery, Marshall and Worthington (2003b) state:

> *The complexities of Australian local governance and its multi-faceted nature mean that no single academic discipline is capable of providing an adequate conceptual basis for a thorough coverage of all its dimensions (p.2).*

In discussing the generation of a research problem more broadly, Silverman (2001) states that a common problem with research projects is that *researchers take on an impossibly large research problem (p.5).* Rudestam and Newton (1992) further state that researchers should avoid *a topic that is overly ambitious (p.10).*

In order to define clearly the parameters of this thesis, two key decisions were taken at the commencement of the research.

Firstly, this thesis examines the role of local government within the state of Victoria. The decision to focus on Victorian local government was based on four key factors.

Firstly, in 2005 there were 703 local governing bodies throughout Australia, of which 79 were within the state of Victoria (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Each state and territory local government in Australia operates under its own state or territory legislation and serves a diversity of communities (Chapman 1997b; Worthington and Dollery 2001; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). It was considered that the sheer number of Australian local governments and the resultant complexities would make a study of Australian local government too broad for the scope of this study. Consequently, the decision was taken to focus on local government within the state of Victoria.

Notwithstanding the differences between local governments throughout Australia, the second reason that Victorian local government was selected for this thesis is that a study of the role of Victorian local government does have relevance to local government in other states. There are a number of reasons for this view.

Firstly, the structural and political frameworks within which local governments in Australia operate share common features (Bowman 1983; Jones 1993; Chapman 1997a; Marshall 1997; Jones 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Jones (2002) states that while the development of local government throughout Australia has been shaped by individual state governments *the overall result has been a broadly similar approach (p.38)* (also refer Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Wensing 1997a; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

A review of local government legislation from each state in Australia reveals that these Acts are similar in terms of their objectives, role, functions and powers (Local Government Act (Vic) 1989; Local Government Act (NSW) 1993; Local Government Act (Tas) 1993; Local Government Act (Qld) 1993; Local Government Act (WA) 1995; Local Government Act (SA) 1999). During the 1990s, legislative reforms in all states

empowered local government with greater flexibility in regard to its operations (Aulich 1999; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

A review of expenditure by state and purpose further reveals that while percentages between the categories vary, all local governments within Australia expend resources within eight major categories (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

The third reason for the focus on Victoria local government is that in the 1990s Victorian local government underwent a significant period of reform as a result of the Kennett Government's election at the state level. The reforms introduced by the Kennett Government and the subsequent period of renewal resulted in a significant amount of literature being written on Victorian local government when compared to local government in other Australian states and territories.

The interest that the Kennett reforms of local government created is demonstrated by texts such as *Local Government Reform in Victoria* (Galligan 1998a); *Governing Local Communities - the Future Begins* (Johnstone and Kiss 1996); *Rooting Democracy: Growing the society we want* (Rayner 1997); *The Kennett Revolution: Victorian politics in the 1990s* (Costar and Economou 1999); and *What Price Citizenship?* (Williamson 2002).

The final reason for selecting Victorian local government for this thesis was the practicalities of conducting the research component. As the author of this dissertation is a senior manager in Victorian local government, there were minimal barriers to accessing opinion leaders to be interviewed for this thesis. The author's local knowledge of appropriate opinion leaders to interview also assisted in securing interview data that was relevant, informed and authoritative.

The second key decision that was taken prior to the commencement of the thesis was that the role of Victorian local government would be researched from the point of view of the

community. This selection further defined the parameters of the research. The thought process behind this decision is as follows.

The role of Victorian local government can be viewed from a number of different points of view, including a management or leadership perspective, an elected member's perspective or the perspective of other levels of governments.

The decision was taken to focus this research on the role of Victorian local government from the community's point of view. This choice was based on the fact that Victorian local government has the potential to enhance the quality of life of the people within its municipality through, but not limited to, its democratic structures, services, facilities, community engagement processes, planning and advocacy. The decisions that Victorian local government makes can also have a direct impact on the local community (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Brackertz et al 2005; Warburton and Baker 2005). Warburton and Baker (2005) state that local government is *intimately linked to communities (p.62).*

A review of all local government Acts within the states of Australia further indicated that the community was referred to in the context of local government's role, functions and powers (Local Government Act (Vic) 1989; Local Government Act (NSW) 1993; Local Government Act (Tas) 1993; Local Government Act (Qld) 1993; Local Government Act (WA) 1995; Local Government Act (SA) 1999).

Having decided that the thesis would focus on local government in the state of Victoria and that the study would be undertaken from the perspective of the community, the next decision related to how the research question would be defined and explored.

Literature on designing a successful research framework commonly begins with a discussion on the importance of clearly defining the primary question that is the subject of the research (Marsden 1983; Blaikie 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a; May 2001; Silverman 2001).

Blaikie (1993) states that*:*

> *a critical element in the design of any social research is the specification of the questions which the research is intended to answer (p.4).*

The first component of the research task for this thesis was to clearly identify the role of Victorian local government. This task can be defined as delineating the primary research question (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a).

Once the primary research question is delineated, the subsequent research task is to then determine subsidiary or contributory areas for investigation. The purpose of the subsidiary questions is to deconstruct the primary question into manageable components and identify contributory areas for investigation (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a). The framing of the subsidiary questions should cover the topic but not introduce issues that are outside the scope of the research topic (Williamson 2000a).

There was no clear guidance for this component of the research task. Consequently, a number of general texts on local government were examined (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989, 1993; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003a). This review revealed that local government's role was generally, but not exclusively, discussed within a framework of its historical, political and contextual setting. The literature review also identified that topics such as current organizational trends, the principles that underpinned local government's role, the benefits for the community from undertaking this role, the challenges that local government faced, and what proposals could be introduced to enhance community outcomes were discussed.

As the focus of the research was from the perspective of the community, the author adopted this broad framework based on a review of selected literature on local government.

Consequently, the primary question that this thesis seeks to explore is:

What is the current role of Victorian local government from a community perspective?

The subsidiary questions that this thesis seeks to explore are:

(i)   How has the role of Victorian local government evolved historically and what implications does this past impose on current roles and structures?

(ii)   Why from a community perspective does Victorian local government undertake its role?

(iii)   How is Victorian local government generally performing its role?

(iv)   In terms of a future vision for Victorian local government what factors inhibit achieving better outcomes for the community?

(v)   How does the community benefit from Victorian local government undertaking its role?

(vi)   What are the recommendations for Victorian local government for achieving enhanced outcomes for its citizens?

The above questions illustrate that a clear and precise statement of the primary research question and the subsidiary questions that underpin the research topic under investigation has been developed.

There is one further issue that arises from exploring how the research questions will be investigated and the findings documented in this thesis. This relates to where these questions will be explored within the structure of the research project.

The primary research question is explored throughout this dissertation. The role of Victorian local government is explicitly discussed in the literature review, through the conduct and analysis of the interviews, and in the final chapter on key themes and recommendations.

The first subsidiary research question (i), is outlined predominantly in Chapter 1, where an overview of Victorian local government's historic, political and legal context and financial environment will be explored. Aspects of this question are also discussed in the literature review and throughout the interviews, particularly regarding Victorian local government's role.

Subsidiary questions (ii), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi) are explored in the literature review and throughout the interview process. The final chapter specifically investigates the key recommendations for Victorian local government and brings together the main themes that emerge from the literature review and the analysis of the interview material.

The thought processes and the initial investigations that were undertaken prior to the commencement of this thesis have been outlined in this section. As a result of those processes, the primary and subsidiary research questions for this thesis were defined and the scope of those questions delineated.

1.3   Justification for the Research

The next step in the initial research process is to justify the significance of the research project (Rudestram and Newton 1992; Marshall and Rossman 1995).

There are two premises that demonstrate the significance of the research being undertaken for this thesis.

The first premise is that Victorian local government fulfils an important role in terms of Victorian communities. If this premise is valid then it follows that it is vital that Victorian local government understands its role in the community, what barriers exist in

implementing that role, how the undertaking of its role benefits the community and what local government could change to achieve better outcomes for that community.

It is considered that there are two key, interconnected reasons that substantiate the premise that Victorian local government fulfils an important role.

The first reason relates to Victorian local government's democratic structure and the number of initiatives and programs it undertakes that underpin and facilitate community well-being.

As Victorian local government is the most accessible level of government to the community, it provides an opportunity for citizens to become involved in planning processes and to influence decisions that directly impact on their community (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). The community engagement processes that are implemented by local government provide an avenue for citizens to present a local perspective, develop solutions to deal with complex social and environmental issues and develop a shared understanding of the future vision for that local government municipality (Jones 1993; Hill 1996; Kiss 1996; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005).

Victorian local government through its community building initiatives assists communities to deal with the rate of change in the external environment and the economic uncertainties that impact on society in a local, Australian and global context (Galligan 1996; Hill 1999; Raysmith 2001; Broad 2003; Cuthill and Fien 2005). The development of strong community networks and partnerships between local government, State/Territory governments, community groups and citizens also results in healthier communities (Raysmith 2001, 2002; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

Victorian local government provides of a range of services and community infrastructure such as libraries, leisure facilities, parks, pre-schools, childcare centers and aged care facilities. These services and facilities make a positive difference to the

lives of citizens (Jones 1993; Galligan 1996, 1998b; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

Victorian local government can be an effective advocate for the community on issues of importance or where other levels of government threaten the removal of services and facilities (Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Hill 1999; Brackertz et al 2005).

The second reason why local government fulfils an important role is because of the external issues that are facing Australian and therefore Victorian communities. A survey undertaken in 2005 revealed that 56% of those Australians that were interviewed said that in the next five years local government would be more important to them, 23% said it would be less important, 13% said it would remain the same and 8% could not say (Levine 2006). While it is not possible to understand the reasons why people that responded to this survey answered as they did, it is possible to put forward a view as to why a majority of respondents considered that local government would increase in importance in the future.

There is a renewed interest in local issues as citizens face the impacts of constant change, globalization and the need for a greater sense of community connectedness (Galligan 1996, 1998b). Social commentators throughout the globe are reflecting on the pace of change and the consequential uncertainties (Handy 1995, 1998; Mackay 1999; Coghill 2004). Victorian local government has a key role in addressing these issues in partnership with the community by facilitating a greater sense of community empowerment and advocating on behalf of those citizens who are unable to effectively influence outcomes (Haag 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hunt 1998b; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005).

There is also a related view that the current environment in which local government operates is becoming more complex (Jones 1993; Tucker 1997; Wensing 1997a; Newnham and Winston 1997; Stoker 2003).

In light of the important role that Victorian local government fulfils and the challenging external environment in which Victorian local government operates, it is vital that Victorian local government has a clear understanding of its role. It must also understand how it can continue to enhance the implementation of this role to respond to current and future challenges.

A second premise for the significance of this research is that the findings and recommendations will have a number of applications. While acknowledging the diversity of communities, local government operates throughout Australia and fulfils substantially similar roles in an overarching context (Local Government Act (Vic) 1989; Local Government Act (NSW) 1993; Local Government Act (Tas) 1993; Local Government Act (Qld) 1993; Local Government Act (WA) 1995; Local Government Act (SA) 1999). In 2005 there were an estimated 165,100 employees working in Australian local government and 6,566 elected members (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

It is hoped that the research will be useful to the local government sector throughout Australia and to the people that operate within it. The research will provide a clear delineation of local government's role and provide a series of recommendations that will facilitate a discussion about local government's future direction and the initiatives it can pursue.

1.4   Research Methods

In this section an overview of the research methods used to explore the primary and subsidiary research questions is provided. Prior to discussing the specific aspects of the research approach, an overview will be provided about what sources will be identified and referenced in examining these research questions.

There are a number of factors that have historically defined and are currently defining Victorian local government's role in both a political and community context. It is

considered that there are three primary sources for this influence (Chapman 1997a). The first is Victorian local government's role within the Australian political structure, where local government is created and defined by state government legislation and impacted by federal government administration and financial arrangements (Worthington and Dollery 2001). The evidence of the power and influence of state and federal governments can be found in legislation, policy documents and other reference material.

The second influence has been Victorian local government itself where, within the framework as established by state government legislation, local government has implemented changes to its role and pursued various strategic initiatives. Policy documents, service and infrastructure programs and material from local government peak bodies articulate Victorian local government's role.

The third factor that has influenced the role of Victorian local government has been the literature that has emerged from academics and writers on local government more broadly. Material from this source can be found in books, documents and other articles and reflects the views of academics, opinion leaders and community groups.

These three key influences directed from where the research material for this thesis would be sourced.

The overarching methodology that will be employed to undertake the research for this thesis is an interpretative approach, leading to the implementation of a qualitative research method. There are two principal processes that will be undertaken to fulfill the research task.

The first step is a review of the literature that relates to local government and Victorian local government more specifically. The review will primarily be restricted to the period from the 1990s until the present day, although, a small number of references prior to this period are relevant and will therefore be cited. The rationale for the selected time period is because Victorian local government underwent significant reform in the 1990s and literature prior to this period is generally less relevant.

The literature review is focused on literature from Australia and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The reason for this selection is because there are similarities between these countries in terms of their democratic framework and management trends. There is a greater similarity between local government in Australia and the United Kingdom, than with the United States of America.

The literature review provides a basis for the primary and subsidiary research questions as they are explored and discussed in later chapters.

The second key research task is the undertaking of thirty-one in-depth interviews with opinion leaders. In these interviews the role of Victorian local government and the subsidiary research questions as previously defined will be explored.

The opinion leaders will be selected from four categories as previously identified. These categories are Victorian local government; Victorian state government; federal government; and community leaders, business leaders, representatives from related non-government organizations and academics. The thirty-one interviews will be recorded and transcribed. This process will enable the interview data to be systematically coded and analyzed utilizing the principles of content analysis.

Approval from the University Ethics Committee has been obtained for the conduct of the interviews for this thesis (Registration Number BHREC 99/4).

Based on the literature review and the analysis of the interview material the primary and subsidiary research questions will be comprehensively explored.

1.5   Definitions

In this thesis the terminology that is utilized throughout this work as it arises will be defined, as this places the language within the context that it is being used.

The primary and subsidiary research questions will be examined within a framework that is comprehensible to a reader regardless of their knowledge of local government generally or the system of local government that operates specifically within an Australian or state of Victoria context. There are four general terms that require a clear definition at this point.

The *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) broadly delineates the definition of Victorian local government. Within this context the term local government municipality will be used to describe the geographical area of a local government's jurisdiction. A local government council consists of the democratically elected members who operate within its legal boundaries as defined in the 1989 Act. Any reference to a *council* should be interpreted to mean a council within a local government context.

The term *elected member* has been predominantly used to refer to the citizens who have been elected to a local government municipality. In a minority of cases direct quotes and other references may use the term *councillor*. This is to be interpreted as an elected member in local government. The term *management* has also been used throughout this thesis and refers to the staff appointed by the chief executive officer to manage the operations, services and programs provided by the council.

The third term that requires discussion is the use of the word *community*. In discussing the vagueness of this word, Kiss (2003) cites a survey where the term *community* was used in ninety-four different ways.

The *New Collins Concise English Dictionary* (1983) defines community as *the people living in one locality (p.225)*. This definition is useful for this thesis as it refers to a defined geographical area. The term *community* will consequently be used to refer to the citizens who live within a local government municipal area, including residents who are either rate-payers or rent-payers.

The fourth term that requires definition is *role*. Like the terms local government and community, *role* appears in the title of this thesis and is referred to throughout this dissertation.

The *New Collins Concise English Dictionary* (1983) defines *role* as *usual function (p.999)* (also refer Newnham and Winston 1997). An examination of the literature on the role of Victorian local government reveals that in some circumstances, the words *role* and *functions* are used interchangeably. For example in the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) advocating the interests of the community is listed both as a *role* and a *function* of Victorian local government (Section 3D and Section 3E). In other contexts *role* and *functions* are referred to separately with *function* regarded as being an activity level that sits below the term *role*.

A further example of the different use of the terms *role* and *function* is illustrated in the *Local Government National Report* that is produced on an annual basis by the federal government. In the 2001 edition *Advocacy* is listed as a *function* of Australian local government, whereas in the 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 editions *Advocacy* is listed as a *role* of Australian local government (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006).

Another term that is used when referring to local government's *role* is *responsibilities*. A review of the literature reveals that in some cases these terms are used interchangeably and in other circumstances as complementary terms. When used as complementary, the *role* of local government may be to provide services and it is a *responsibility* of local government that these services are provided in an efficient manner. Therefore the term *responsibility* is 'how' a role is delivered as opposed to 'what' is delivered.

An example of the treatment of the term *responsibility* as a complement to the *role* of local government is in the *Declaration on Role of Australian Local Government* (Australian Local Government Association 1997) which states that two of the *roles and responsibilities* of local government are that local government *must exercise local*

autonomy and *adapt to change*. These statements clearly refer to the method of how local government will best achieve its role as opposed to what local government's *role* is.

Having regard to the use of interchangeable and complementary terms, where an author discusses the *functions* or the *responsibilities* of Victorian local government, this material will be utilized where relevant, and where it further adds to the discussion on the role of Victorian local government.

1.6   Limitations and Key Assumptions

The first limitation that requires discussion is that the primary and subsidiary research questions that this thesis is investigating will cover a broad range of information and theoretical concepts. An investigation into the role of Victorian local government and related issues will include a number of research components. It is recognized there would be enough material to prepare a dissertation on any one of the individual components of this research. Consequently, it will not be feasible to discuss each component in the same depth that would be possible if the research project were only investigating one component of the total project. Some themes have therefore, been summarized or discussed at a broad conceptual level.

A second issue that requires discussion is the examination of Victorian local government's role and how that exploration is structured.

While the six specific roles of Victorian local government that will be explored in this thesis are discussed separately, it is acknowledged that they are interlinked. The reason each role has been discussed separately is to assist in the development of a comprehensive analysis of the subject area and to facilitate a clearer and manageable examination of the literature.

However, there are close links between Victorian local government's democratic and governance roles (Rowe 2002). It is further noted that the principles of good governance underpin the provision of services, strategic planning and community building processes

(Raysmith 2001), while advocacy strategies are closely linked with the provision of services and community building programs (Hill 1999). These connections between the specific roles will be further discussed in the relevant sections.

The third issue that requires discussion relates to how the exploration of the research topic is structured. The analysis of each specific role of Victorian local government will examine why local government undertakes this role and how the community benefits from local government undertaking this role. In some instances the answers to these questions are the same or very similar. Every effort will be made not to duplicate these responses, and this may result in one or other of these sections appearing not to cover all the issues that were identified.

The final consideration is the underpinning assumption of this research. In section 1.2 the similarities between local governments throughout Australia were outlined and it was asserted that a study of Victorian local government has relevance to Australian local government. It is acknowledged, however, that the needs and the socio-demographic composition of the communities that Australian local government serves are diverse (Worthington and Dollery 2001). The conclusions and recommendations that emerge from the research undertaken for this thesis may not address every challenge that local government faces or be equally relevant to every local government municipality. It has been stated that in relation to local government, a one-size-fits-all approach for finance solutions and organizational problems is not always appropriate (Dollery 2003a; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). The outcomes of this research should be read within this context.

There are a number of other limitations that relate to specific aspects of the research that was undertaken for this thesis and these limitations are addressed in the relevant chapters.

1.7   Victorian Local Government's Historical Context

1.7.1 Overview

Local government in Victoria operates within a legal, political and societal framework (Jones 1989, 1993; Chapman 1997a; Marshall 1997; Rayner 1997; Rentschler 1997; Galligan 1998b; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Williamson 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Baker 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). In understanding Victorian local government's roles within this framework, it is necessary to explore its evolution as a political entity in its own right, as one of the three levels of Australian government and its role from a community perspective. An understanding of Victorian local government's historical role assists the reader to place the current role and the recommendations for the future that emerge from this thesis within a framework.

Rayner (1997) supports the relevance of Victorian local government's evolution and states that *to a large extent it (local government) has been a prisoner of its history (p.161).* Dollery and Wallis (2001) further state:

> *Historical circumstances have been a decisive factor in determining the functions of local government and their evolution over time (p.10).*

One of the underpinning aspects that influenced local government's role from an historical perspective was the implications of the Australian federal structure. Federalism was created to ensure that the respective roles of central and other levels of government in the provision of goods and services, policy directions and national imperatives could be optimized.

There was a range of literature that discussed the roles of different levels of government from a federalism perspective and in particular in relation to fiscal federalism and the decentralization theorem (Oates 1972; Gerken 1995; Kincaid 1995; Bailey 1999). It was considered that federalism in economic terms provided the optimal form of government and was a compromise between unitary government and extreme decentralization (Oates 1972; Gerken 1995; Kincaid 1995; Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999; Bailey 1999).

It was identified that in determining roles and responsibilities between levels of government that a central government was in an optimal position to, amongst matters, implement monetary and fiscal policy and maintain a stable economy. In contrast local government was considered to be more successful in delivering certain classes of goods and services because services that were centrally supplied could not take in consideration different needs, preferences and levels of consumption. Where there was not a uniform demand or need for that particular service it was considered that in economic terms, it was more efficient for local government to provide those goods and services. This was known as the decentralization theorem. A system of local government also resulted in the most efficient production of public goods because there was clear recognition of the cost of such goods at the local level (Oates 1972; Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999; Boyne 1998; Bailey 1999).

It was noted that there was a movement towards co-operative federalism where different levels of government jointly assumed responsibility for certain aspects of service delivery (Oates 1972; Kincaid 1995). The provision of joint service delivery was described as the shift from a *layer cake to a marble cake (Oates 1972, p.238).* Frey and Eichenberger (1995, 1999) have further developed the theory of co-operative federalism in their discussions on what they defined as Functional, Overlapping and Competing Jurisdictions (FOCJ). This new federal network allows for the emergence of political bodies to undertake the tasks that reflect their relative size. FOCJ were considered to strengthen federalism by adding a layer of competition between political jurisdictions while also increasing public choice (Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999).

In contrast to co-operative federalism, Kincaid (1995) discusses the concept of coercive federalism where federal government increasingly overrides state and local government jurisdictions by imposing federal policies. It was considered that this trend was aimed at protecting individual rights and resulted in a loss of intergovernmental competition and fewer incentives for co-operation between levels of government (Kincaid 1995).

While federalism has played a significant role in the distribution of goods and services and consequently the role of local government in an Australian context, it is outside the scope of this thesis to further explore other models for local government responsibilities in light of the fact that the current system of federalism is unlikely to significantly alter in the near future.

There are a number of commentators on Australian local government and its development (Russell and Bishop 1973; Bains 1978, 1979; Advisory Council for Intergovernmental Relations 1980a, 1980b, 1980c; Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Floyd and Palmer 1985; Jones 1989, 1993; Dollery and Marshall 1997; Rayner 1997; Dunstan 1998; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). As there is a significant amount of literature on the history of Victorian local government, this material will be summarized within key periods so that significant points and emerging trends are addressed.

1.7.2 The Development of Local Government: 1830 – 1960

Australia's pattern of settlement, its large geographic area and sparse population characteristics influenced the political system that developed, including local government (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989, 1993; Dunstan 1998). Australian local government evolved in the various colonies before Australia developed as a united nation in terms of population, its sense of identity and economic independence (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989; Rayner 1997).

Established by predominantly middle-class free settlers, Victorian settlement was distinguished by its culture of local entities that became an integral component of its political fabric (Russell and Bishop 1973; Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989). The Town of Melbourne, incorporated in 1842, was initially given a wide range of powers (Russell and Bishop 1973; Dunstan 1998). The breadth of functions, however, was to be short lived when the responsibility for power, water supply, sewerage, police and education was moved to the colonial government (Russell and Bishop 1973; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

The *Municipal Institutions Act 1854* (Vic) resulted in the creation of 45 municipal districts in Victoria by the 1860s (Russell and Bishop 1973; Jones 1989; Dunstan 1998; Kloot 2001). During the same period over 100 road districts, which were the precursor to local government bodies both institutionally and functionally, were created (Russell and Bishop 1973).

Despite the difficulties of small populations and a resultant lack of financial resources, by 1910 there were 206 units consisting of municipalities, shires and boroughs, which covered the entire state of Victoria (Dunstan 1998).

The creation of the federal government in 1901 was significant for local government throughout Australia for two reasons.

Firstly, an increased role for the federal government resulted in the diminution of local government's role over time (Jones 1989). In terms of total government outlay in Australia, local government in the 1980s contributed approximately half of what it contributed in 1909, illustrating the expanding role of federal and state governments, with limited growth at the local level (Chapman and Wood 1984).

Secondly, there was no mention of local government in the federal constitution, which still remains as a contentious issue (Jones 1993; Chapman 1997a, 1997b; Rayner 1997; Ellison 2000; Soul 2000 cited May 2003; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Kiss 2004; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Kane 2006). All Australian local government authorities are created by state legislation, have limited financial independence and cannot make laws that contravene state or federal legislation (Bowman 1983; Jones 1989, 1993; Wensing 1997a; McNeill 1997; Dunstan 1998; Worthington and Dollery 2001, 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

There are five key observations about the evolution of Victorian local government from the period 1830 to 1960 that assist in understanding the debates that would subsequently follow and the development of Victorian local government into its present day context.

Firstly, it was considered that as the twentieth century progressed the status of local government throughout Australia was not enhanced (Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989; Rayner 1997). Jones (1989) wrote that Australian local government *handicapped by its limited nineteenth-century role, has survived rather than prospered (p.48).* Throughout the 1900s local government in Victoria grew in numbers but not equally in terms of financial capacity or political influence (Jones 1989; Dunstan 1998).

Secondly, Australian local government had limited responsibilities in comparison to models of local government in the United Kingdom or the United States of America (Bowman 1983; Jones 1989; McNeill 1997; Dunstan 1998; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; May 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Functions that may have otherwise been the province of Victorian local government were vested in state bodies (Dunstan 1998). During the post war period, Victorian local government dealt mainly with what was colloquially described as the 'three Rs', namely roads, rates and rubbish with a limited to non-existent role in community services, health, housing, education, police or broad-based land use planning (Bowman 1983; Jones 1989; Dunstan 1998).

In commenting on the limited service role of Victorian local government Bowman (1983) stated:

> *Victoria can stand as an extreme example of structural rigidity, with a concomitant removal of responsibilities from municipal hands (p.168).*

Thirdly it was clear from the earliest development of Victorian local government that the state government considered local government to predominantly be a means to deliver services at a local level. In commenting on the division of responsibilities between state and local government, Jones (1989) stated that jealousy and competition between state and local government was one of the main themes in the history of Australian local government. Jones (1989) considered that this conflict played a vital role in the early

frustration of any strong local government system, demonstrated by the failure of local government to gain responsibility for education, health and other critical services.

Fourthly, the settlement patterns for Victorian local government resulted in most people settling in the larger cities (Beed 1981; Jones 1989). This population distribution resulted in relatively weaker rural local government areas when compared to metropolitan local government councils.

Finally, the early development of Victorian local government indicated that there was a tradition of democratically elected bodies (Russell and Bishop 1973). Due to this tradition, when the institution of local democracy was challenged in the 1990s, it evoked a strong reaction by many sectors of the community.

1.7.3 Reform Attempts of the 1970s and 1980s

In the 1970s and 1980s there were two state government initiated attempts to reform Victorian local government.

In 1978, the State Government appointed Malcolm Bains to chair a review of Victorian local government (Jones 1989; Vince 1997; Dunstan 1998). The *Bains Report* (1979) concluded that Victorian local government had failed to adjust to social change and had become *ossified (Bains 1979 p.xix).* It was further argued that significant changes were required if Victorian local government was to adequately respond to future demands and that the structure and size of Victorian local government was a critical weakness that prevented it from playing a much broader and stronger role (Bains 1979).

The *Bains Report* (1979) recommended the introduction of a corporate management approach and the clear distinction between the roles of elected members and senior officers. It further recommended the creation of the chief executive officer position that would replace the dual management structure of town clerk and the city/shire engineer (Jones 1989, 1993; Hallam 1994).

Despite the view that the *Bains Report* (1979) was for its time the *most sophisticated attempt to review Australian local government's structure and performance (Jones 1989 p.177),* the then Victorian State Government did not pursue the recommended restructure of local government (Jones 1989). Other internal organizational recommendations such as the corporate management approach, however, were implemented.

Victorian local government encountered further a reform attempt by the state government during the 1980s. In 1985 the Cain Labor Government decided to pursue a number of the recommendations from the *Bains Report* (1979) and appointed the Local Government Commission to undertake a review (Vince 1997; Morris 1998).

The Local Government Commission's Report (1986) stated that Victorian local government was financially weak, its boundaries divided communities with similar needs, it failed to meet the challenges of the community and that the existing structure had become *obsolete (Local Government Commission 1986 p.1).* The Report (1986) recommended that Victorian local government review its structure and operations so that it could fulfill a greater role in the governance of Victoria (Local Government Commission 1986; Jones 1990; Local Government Department 1990; Municipal Association of Victoria 1991; Vince 1997; Morris 1998).

Opposition from local government grew and as a result, the reform process for Victorian local government did not proceed (Vince 1997; Morris 1998; Worthington and Dollery 2002). The failed reform attempt illustrated a number of issues that were relevant for future reforms.

Firstly, it was apparent that Victorian local government and a number of their communities caused considerable political pressure to stop the change process (Jones 1993; Vince 1997; Morris 1998; Worthington and Dollery 2002). Secondly, the restrictive provisions of the 1958 *Local Government Act* (Vic) required the Local Government Commission to follow a complexity of procedural requirements, which provided both the legal avenues and the time for opposition groups to challenge the reform process (Morris 1998). Thirdly, the state government did not have a majority in

both Houses of Parliament or have the support of the opposition to implement the restructure program (Morris 1998).

Another significant event that occurred in Victoria during the 1980s was the passing of a new *Local Government Act* in 1989 (Jones 1993; Hunt 1998a; Kloot 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2002). The 1989 Act provided a fundamental change to the role of Victorian local government because it set out the wide-ranging functions of a local government council, but importantly, did not limit it to those functions. This empowered local government councils with what is referred to as 'general competence' to do anything which the state government itself could do, subject to state laws (Local Government Department 1990; Wensing 1997b; Hunt 1998a; Aulich 1999). Furthermore, many of the restrictive provisions of the superseded 1958 Act that the Local Government Commission found had frustrated the previous reform process in 1986 were now removed (Jones 1993; Hunt 1998a).

There were three developments in relation to the federal government during the 1970s and 1980s that were to impact on Victorian local government.

The first was the election of the Whitlam Federal Government that implemented a new model for federal/local government co-operation, including the direct funding of local government (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Chapman 1997a; Marshall 1997; McNeill 1997; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Local government was also represented at the 1973 and 1974 constitutional conventions, which provided an avenue for local government to put forward its views in an inter-governmental forum (Chapman and Wood 1984).

The philosophy of the importance of local government was extended in 1976 at the Australian Constitutional Convention where a resolution was unanimously carried that recognized local government as a partner in the Australian system of democratic government. It invited the states to consider local government's formal recognition in their constitutions (Jones 1993). Victoria was the first state to implement this option.

The second development for local government was the creation of the Advisory Council on Inter-governmental Relations that was established to review the relationships between federal, state and local governments. The Council released three reports that specifically related to the place of local government within these inter-governmental relationships (Advisory Council on Inter-governmental Relations 1980a, 1980b, 1980c; Chapman 1997a, 1997b), which raised the profile of local government (Chapman and Wood 1984; Marshall 1997; Chapman 1997a, 1997b; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Dollery 2005).

The third development for local government were the propositions in 1974 and 1988 to amend the Commonwealth Constitution via a constitutional referendum to provide for the establishment and continuance of a system of local government. This proposition was defeated on both occasions (Jones 1989, 1993; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). The impact of this defeat on local government is discussed in more detail in section 1.8.1 of this chapter.

The final point to be noted about this period was that in the 1980s, Victorian local government expanded its range of service responsibilities particularly in the areas of community services and land use planning (Jones 1989, 1993). Victorian local government employment increased throughout the 1980s while other levels of governments stabilized or declined (Municipal Association of Victoria 1991).

1.7.4 Kennett's Revolution – Local Government in the 1990s

During the 1986 debate regarding the restructure of Victorian local government under the Labor State Government, the then Shadow Minister for Local Government was recorded as having stated:

> *Under no circumstances should any municipality be put in the hands of persons who have not been democratically elected (Morris 1998 p.50).*

In 1994, this statement was to become a dim memory for the Kennett Victorian State Government.

In 1992 the Kennett Coalition Government was elected in the state of Victoria in both Houses of Parliament and made sweeping changes to Victorian local government (Galligan 1996; Kiss 1997; Rayner 1997; Vince 1997; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998a; Hill 1999; Kiss 1999).

The Kennett Government reforms of Victorian local government will be outlined in some detail in this section due to their significance and relevance to this research project. Some aspects of the Kennett reforms will be related to topics in other sections of this thesis, but the material covered in this section will not be repeated. It should also be noted that the discussion of the Kennett reforms will predominantly focus on how these reforms impacted on the role and structure of Victorian local government. It is not intended to provide a critique on the actions of the Kennett Government itself, although some inferences in the reference material on this topic are inherent.

The Kennett Government reforms that were implemented throughout the state of Victoria evoked a significant amount of comment as illustrated by the range of articles and books on this topic (Johnstone and Kiss 1996; Ernst, Glanville and Murfitt 1997; Munro 1997; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a, 1997b; Kiss 1997; Vince 1997; People Together Project 1997, 1998; Costello 1998; Rance 1998a; Davidson 1998; Dore 1998; Galligan 1998a; Hunt 1998a; Costar and Economou 1999; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; O'Neill 2000; Purple Sage Project 2000; Gross 2001; Kloot 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Allan 2003). The range of writings revealed a diversity of opinion on the success or otherwise of the Kennett reforms in terms of local democracy, community and economic outcomes, service delivery and local government structure.

The Kennett State Government, influenced by the ultra conservative views of the Institute of Public Affairs, made a number of significant changes to a range of institutions, including local government. The state government amended the Victorian Constitution thirty-four times in its first two years of office (Rayner 1997; Kiss 1999; Mowbray 1999; Purple Sage Project 2000), including a change that ensured that the reform of local government could not be stopped through legal avenues (Kiss 1997; Mowbray 1999).

In 1993 the Victorian Local Government Board of Review was established and was empowered to develop a new framework for Victorian local government (Vince 1997; Wensing 1997b; Burke and Walsh 1998; Kiss 1999; Worthington and Dollery 2002). The reforms that were implemented can be summarized as including the reduction of local government municipalities from 210 to 78, the dismissal of all elected councillors, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering to the value of 50% of expenditure, a 20% cut in rates, rate capping, the appointment of interim chief executive officers, changes to the electoral structure and a range of performance reporting requirements (Proust 1995, 1997; Ernst, Glanville and Murfitt 1997; Rayner 1997; Vince 1997; Wensing 1997b; Kiss 1997, 1999; Digby 1999; Mowbray 1999; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Burdess and O'Toole 2004).

There are four significant impacts of the Victorian local government reforms that were to impact on its role and structure.

The first significant issue that arose from the Kennett reforms was the vulnerability of Victorian local government's democratic role (Kiss 1997; Rayner 1997; Vince 1997; Chapman 1997a; People Together Project 1997, 1998; Costello 1998; Galligan 1998b; Kiss 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000). The dismissal of democratically elected local government councillors was described as an attack on democracy (Brumby 1996; Rayner 1997; Vince 1997). Galligan (1998b) stated that *the reform process dealt brutally with established local democracy in the short-term (p.205).* Rayner (1997) further maintained that *the protests were less against amalgamation as such than against the loss of local democracy (p.172).*

In section 1.7.2 it was noted that the presence of elected boards was a tradition of local democracy in Victoria. The concept that all elected councillors could be dismissed challenged this tradition. Russell (1997) stated:

> *The (State) Government's initial action of removing all elected councillors in the guise of facilitating boundary amalgamations was a profoundly undemocratic act for which it should not be pardoned (p.11).*

Costello (1998) supported Russell's (1997) opinion and maintained that it was usual practice for elected members to stay in power and oversee the transition to the new structures, not to be dismissed. This point of view was supported by a number of commentators (Brumby 1996; Chapman 1997a; Kiss 1997; Rayner 1997; Vince 1997; Hunt 1998b; Kiss 1999; Mowbray 1999; Gross 2001; Kiss 2003; Miller and Dowling 2004). Some writers on this subject, however, welcomed the appointment of commissioners by the state government from an administrative perspective (Proust 1995).

Elections for most local government municipalities occurred during the years of 1996-1997, with a small number held some years later (Johnstone 1996a; Kiss 1999). However, the introduction of postal voting for these elections that benefited non-property owners and the increased cost of election campaigns for potential candidates, further impacted on the democratic system of Victorian local government (Kiss 1997).

The second impact of the Kennett Government's reform process was a reinforcement of a philosophy that Victorian local government's prime role, as an agent for state government, was to run a series of businesses that delivered services to its customers (Hallam 1994; Local Government Board 1995; Hallam 1998), rather than being a legitimate level of government in its own right (Munro 1997; Rayner 1997; People Together Project 1997, 1998; Costello 1998; Kiss 1999). The view that Victorian local government was considered to be an agent for state government was demonstrated by the fact that local government was used to collect the deficit tax that was imposed on all property owners by the state government (Mowbray 1999).

The third impact of the Kennett reforms was the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for services. Rayner (1997) stated that this reform removed the *welfare orientation of many community services (p.172)*, and resulted in citizens becoming customers (also refer Munro 1997; People Together Project 1997). It was stated that residents on lower incomes could not afford the privatized services and that compulsory competitive tendering resulted in increased unemployment (People Together Project 1997, 1998; Costello 1998; Miller and Dowling 2004).

There is a body of literature that questioned the cost savings of compulsory competitive tendering and whether the objectives of this initiative were achieved more broadly (Hodge 1996; Kiss 1997; Pope and Harrowfield 1997; Worthington and Dollery 2002). It was considered that the initial savings that resulted from compulsory competitive tendering were not sustainable and came at the cost of management issues, difficulties in the integration of systems, community dissatisfaction, a decline in capital expenditure, service quality and advocacy capacity (Vince 1997; Munro 1997; Kiss 1997; Rance 1998a; Kiss 1999; Worthington and Dollery 2002).

It was acknowledged, however, that the Victorian model of compulsory competitive tendering legislation did leave flexibility for local government to determine which services were tested, which was unlike the United Kingdom model of tendering where specific services were prescribed (Hallam 1994; Local Government Board 1995; Moore 1996; Digby and Kennedy 1998; Blacher 1998; Burke and Walsh 1998; Digby 1999).

Finally there were a number of direct impacts from the amalgamation of local government councils.

The amalgamations impacted on local government's services role particularly in rural areas where the closure of offices resulted in residents having to travel further to receive services (Munro 1997; People Together Project 1997; Rance 1998a; Purple Sage Project 2000; May 2003; Miller and Dowling 2004).

The restructure of Victorian local government also resulted in a significant reduction in the average number of elected members as a ratio of the population (Rayner 1997; Kiss 2003). The increased size of local government boundaries impacted on the way that citizens and local government representatives interacted and *eliminated the sense of intimacy (Rayner 1997 p.176)* between the two parties.

As an overview of the Kennett Government reforms, it was considered that the reforms generally diminished and limited the role of Victorian local government (Hill 1999; May

2003). Kiss (1999) maintained that during this period, local government was turned into *local administration (p.110).*

There were also a number of outcomes of the Kennett reforms that positively impacted on Victorian local government's capacity to undertake its role. These benefits were considered, however, to be an unintended outcome of the Victorian local government reforms (Kiss 1997).

The first benefit of the amalgamations was the creation of larger and more powerful local government units which enabled more efficient service delivery and responsive community engagement programs (Local Government Board 1995; Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997; Burke and Walsh 1998; Hill 1999; Miller and Dowling 2004). The larger local government entities provided greater strategic capacity, expanded information technology systems, front of house citizen services and the development of corporate and long-term financial planning (Aulich 1999; Digby 1999; Miller and Dowling 2004).

The new amalgamated councils also had the benefit of providing a stronger voice on behalf of their communities, especially in terms of Victorian local government's advocacy role (Hill 1999). Hill (1999) stated that restructured local government:

> *has shown itself capable of delivering quite a powerful punch when an appropriate occasion arises (p.15).*

There was a view that in the post Kennett Government reform period and when local democracy was restored, Victorian local government needed to take up the challenge of re-establishing its place within the political system (Johnstone 1996a; Kiss 1996, 1997; Salvaris 1997; Rayner 1998).

1.7.5 1999 and Beyond – Embracing the 21st Century

In 1999, the Bracks Labor Government was elected to state parliament and replaced the Kennett Coalition Government. Victorian local government generally welcomed the election of the Bracks Government (Phillips 1999).

The Bracks Government followed the example of the Blair Government in the United Kingdom (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998; Boyne 1998; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions 2001; Aulich 2003) and moved away from compulsory competitive tendering for local government. The Bracks Government introduced its version of Best Value (Local Government (Best Value Principles) Act 1999 (Victoria); Jones 2002; Broad 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) and embarked on a community building agenda, which was also in line with the trends in the United Kingdom (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions 2001; Broad 2003).

The Labor Government is currently in office in Victoria. With one exception, the geographical structure of Victorian local government has remained intact as created by the Kennett Government reforms. A range of reporting requirements are also still in place (Department for Victorian Communities 2005).

1.8   Victorian Local Government's Legal, Political and Financial Environment

In section 1.7 the history of Victorian local government has been outlined and has demonstrated that Victorian local government as it exists within a federal structure, operates within a political and legal environment that has delineated its role (Bowman 1983; Jones 1989, 1993; Maclellan 1996; Saunders 1996; Kiss 1996; Chapman 1997a; Rentschler 1997; Rayner 1997; McNeill 1997; Marshall 1997; Hallam 1998; Galligan

1998b; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Williamson 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Baker 2003; Kiss 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

This section complements that discussion and outlines Victorian local government's legal and political status, and financial position within a broader context. Kiss (2004) stated that the constitutional, legislative and financial arrangements have shaped Australian local government.

Discussions in the literature on Australian local government identify a range of legal, political and financial influences that are key factors in terms of the current and future role of local government (Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989, 1993; Saunders 1996; Chapman 1997a; Rayner 1997; Rentschler 1997; McNeill 1997; Galligan 1998b; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Williamson 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Kiss 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). These external factors as they are examined throughout this section will assist in providing a framework for the discussion on the primary and subsidiary research questions that form the basis of the following chapters of this thesis.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of external factors that impact on Victorian local government in terms of global and Australian-wide factors (Wensing 1997b; Martin 1997; Galligan 1998b; Martin 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a), however, it is outside the scope of this thesis to explore these factors.

1.8.1 Legal and Political Context

Chapman and Wood (1984) state that local government *should not be studied apart from its political context (p.10)*. In this section the political context in which Australian and therefore Victorian local government operates is examined.

The lack of autonomy of Australian local government and the fact that its power is conferred (and limited) by statute has shaped the political environment and has

underpinned discussions on its past and future role. Control of local government by the state is absolute and varies from time to time and from state to state (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989, 1993; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a; McNeill 1997; Dunstan 1998; Galligan 1998b; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2001, 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Kiss 2003; Dollery 2005; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Murray and Dollery 2006). The power of the state government over local government was demonstrated in Victoria during the period of the Kennett Government as outlined in section 1.7.4.

The federal government also exercises significant influence over local government through the federal-state cooperative arrangements and funding programs such as Roads to Recovery and AusLink (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman 1997a; McNeill 1997; Caulfield 2003; Municipal Association of Victoria 2003; Powell 2005).

Victoria is the only Australian state that requires approval by the electors at a state–wide referendum to change the process of amending those provisions of the Constitution Act dealing with the system of local government (Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Bill 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

The relatively recent recognition afforded to local government in a Victorian context was demonstrated in the Second Reading Speech on the *Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Bill 2003* when it was stated:

> *The Constitution Act will also be amended to formalize the place of local government as a distinct and essential level of government and that councils are democratically elected and accountable to their constituents (p.9).*

However, as outlined in section 1.7.3 the two proposals to amend the Commonwealth Constitution to provide for the establishment and continuance of a system of local

government were both defeated (Jones 1993; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Kane 2006).

In 2006 an amendment moved in Federal Parliament to conduct a referendum to extend constitutional recognition to local government was also defeated (Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates 17 October 2006).

There is a range of views regarding the lack of constitutional recognition for local government and the impact that this has on its role.

Ellison (2000) considered that Australian local government is vulnerable in the absence of constitutional recognition and has had to rely on cooperation at the inter-government level for survival (also refer Jones 1993).

Aulich and Pietsch (2002) further stated that the lack of constitutional recognition of Australian local government has resulted in a questioning of its fundamental role (also refer Jones 1989, 1993). They stated:

> *If being 'left on the shelf' becomes a position of permanence for local government in Australia, it does raise questions about whether it can claim to be part of the national polity or, rather, exists primarily as an agent for delivering public services on behalf of other spheres of government (p.22).*

As a consequence of the failed attempts to gain constitutional recognition, Australian local government is constrained by both an imposed political and legal structure, in that the policies of the controlling level of government directly delineate the legal boundaries for local government (Saunders 1996; Wensing 1997a; McNeill 1997; Dunstan 1998; Ellison 2000; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Dollery 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Kane 2006). In this way the political and the legal environment is inter-related, as one is established by the other.

In terms of Victorian local government specifically, the Municipal Association of Victoria (2002) stated:

> *Lacking in adequate constitutional recognition, local government is placed in a subservient position...(and) is subject to a range of discretional controls (and interference) that are exercised by State Government. While its roles and responsibilities are as important as the other two levels of government, local government is not treated as an equal partner in the federal system (p.5).*

Discussing the relationships between federal, state and local governments, Saunders (1996) further stated:

> *The Commonwealth lords it over the states. The states lord it over local government. Local government reciprocates by teaming up with the Commonwealth and in turn is often used by the Commonwealth. Local government tends to come off worst (p.57).*

The political context of Australian local government was not unlike the United Kingdom environment, where the relationship between local government and the central governments of Thatcher and Blair resulted in a number of commentators on this topic (Hodge and Thompson 1994; King and Stoker 1996; Leach, Davis and associates 1996; Pratchett and Wilson 1996; Stoker 1996b; Hodge, Leach and Stoker 1997; Boyne 1998; Hughes 1998; Local Government Association (UK) 1998; Rallings and Thrasher 1999; Nicholls 1999; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Giddens 2002; Mulgan 2002; Stoker et al 2003; Geddes 2004; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2004c, 2005c).

Local government in the United Kingdom underwent dramatic change during the period of the Thatcher Government (Hodge and Thompson 1994; Jones and Travers 1996; Stoker 1996a, 1996b; Davis 1996; Leach 1996; Pratchett and Wilson 1996; Rallings, Temple and Thrasher 1996; Hodge, Leach and Stoker 1997; Boyne 1998; Bailey 1999; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000). The impact of these changes on local government attracted strong criticism, as illustrated by Hodge, Leach and Stoker (1997) who stated that *we have gone through eighteen years of persistent attack on local government (p.2).*

The local government experience in the United Kingdom during the Thatcher period of government is significant for Victorian local government, as the Thatcher period has been likened to the Kennett period in Victoria during the 1990s. Baker (2003) stated that the Kennett Government's approach to local government was based on the *policies implemented by the Thatcher Government in the United Kingdom (p.130).*

The Thatcher era introduced what was described as the enabling council model (Jones 1993; Leach 1996; Pratchett and Wilson 1996; Walsh 1996; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000). The concept of the enabling authority meant that local government became an enabler rather than a direct provider of services with the key role for local government being a service purchaser (Jones 1993; Leach 1996; Pratchett and Wilson 1996; Walsh 1996; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000). The enabling concept of local government as it was developed in the United Kingdom decreased the role of local democracy and allowed the market to determine the levels of service (Newnham and Winston 1997).

The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering by the Kennett Government in Victoria was based on the enabling council model (Jones 1993; Marshall 1997; Rayner 1997; Gerritesen 1998; Jones 2002; Baker 2003) as demonstrated by the fact that the Local Government Board (1995) stated that local government councils may see themselves as a *bare enabling authority (p.5).*

In summary it is clear that the limited autonomy of Victorian local government as delineated by state government has shaped, and will continue to impact on the overall context in which Victorian local government operates. The Kennett era demonstrated the ultimate power of the Victorian state government over local government in a political and legal context and exposed the inherent historical weakness of Victorian local government (Kiss 1997).

The material presented in this section and section 1.7 has explored the historical, political and legal context of Victorian local government and has discussed how these factors have shaped its past and its present role. The final contextual aspect is Victorian local government's financial environment, which is discussed in the following section.

1.8.2 Financial Context

There is a considerable amount of literature on the financing of Australian local government (Jones 1989, 1993; Bishop 1997; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Municipal Association of Victoria 2001; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). In terms of this thesis, the discussion on Australian local government's financial environment will particularly focus on local government's ability to fulfill its present and future role.

Australian local government has four main sources of revenue, which include rates, user charges and fees, interest and dividends, and grants from the state and federal governments (Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Johnson (2003) stated that Australian local government had *limited and restrictive revenue raising options (p.38).*

In 2003/04 Australian local government had revenue of over $17 billion, which represented approximately 4% of public sector revenue (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). It was stated that Australian local government at a national level had a *strong credit quality* and had shown *good control of expenditure (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005 p.71).* It was further stated that on average, local government appeared to be *in a strong financial position (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005 p.32).*

In 2004/05, Australian local government collected only 3% of all taxes raised in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006), which demonstrates a continued trend of local government receiving a declining share of total taxation revenue for the past three decades (Jones 1993; Municipal Association of

Victoria 2001; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005). In 1975 the tax collected by local government was 4.2% (Jones 1993).

The value of the Federal Assistance Grants provided to local government as a proportion of total federal tax revenue have also fallen from 1.8% in 1993-94 to an estimated 0.77% in 2007-08 (Spokes 2005 cited Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005). In addition to declining federal grants, fiscal equalization which is a feature of a federally based financial system also resulted in differing resources being distributed on a per-capita basis (Oates 1972; Kincaid 1995; Boyne 1998). The principle of fiscal equalization is based on the premise that wealthier communities would be able to raise more local taxes and therefore required less assistance federally.

Property rates comprise 45% of total revenue for Victorian local government, which is higher than the Australian average of 37% (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Despite the significance of rates for local government from a financial perspective, state governments and the community generally scrutinized local government rates closely (Nahan 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Hancock 2003; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006a; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Murray and Dollery 2006). It was noted that the same level of scrutiny was generally not applied to state and federal governments' taxation processes (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a).

Despite the expansion of Australian local government's services in the past three decades, this had not been matched by a commensurate increase in revenue, particularly when compared with federal and state governments (Jones 1993; Johnson 2003; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). As a result of ongoing pressure for additional and enhanced services and due to limited opportunities for diversification in revenue streams, Australian local government since the 1970s had on an average annual basis increased user charges by 13%, other revenue by 11% and municipal rates by 9.4% (Crase and Dollery 2005 cited Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005).

In contrast to the view presented by the Department of Transport and Regional Services (2005) that Australian local government was on average, in a strong financial position (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005), this view was not held by other writers on this topic. It was considered that Australian local government's financial position impacted on its role and autonomy (Jones 1993; Self 1997; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Pritchard 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006). Self (1997) stated that *finance is...the Achilles heel of local government (p.304).*

The three key reasons that were identified as the cause of local government's financial stress were cost shifting from other levels of government to local government, community expectations and a constrained ability to raise revenue as outlined above (Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006; McShane 2006).

Johnson (2003) stated:

> *In essence, local government is currently facing strong financial pressures in which it is unable to meet the increasing needs of the community it serves... Thus the gap between what the community and other levels of government demand from councils, together with councils' assets renewal requirements when compared to the funds local government has to met these demands, is growing at an alarming rate (p.38).*

The cost shifting debate revolved around the increase in the range of services provided by Australian local government, whereby while local government itself had initiated some of those increases, state and federal governments had shifted a significant proportion of the costs onto local government (Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Pritchard 2002; Sansom 2002; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Carnegie and Baxter 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). The cost shifting debate also focused on the discrepancy between expenditure responsibilities and revenue raising capacity between

the three spheres of government (Manningham City Council 2004; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

In 2002 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration conducted an inquiry into Australian local government and cost shifting and released a discussion paper in 2003 (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a). In relation to local government finances, the discussion paper stated:

> *Unless local government finances are improved it cannot make the contribution to Australia's system of government that might otherwise be desirable – its role may even have to be curtailed (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a p.18).*

A final report published later in 2003 included 18 recommendations (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b). This report is commonly referred to as the *Hawker Report* (Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

Key features of the *Hawker Report* (2003) were that Australian local government's responsibilities had dramatically increased, cost shifting was wide spread, some states had imposed unwarranted revenue limitations on local government, local government did not always receive its fair share of Commonwealth special purpose payments, some state and federal government agencies did not pay rates, some local governments were poor financial managers and intergovernmental relationships were deficient, with roles and responsibilities unclear (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b).

The issues raised in the *Hawker Report* (2003) in regard to the challenges that Australian local government faced coincided with a range of views previously expressed on these topics (Municipal Association of Victoria 1990; Jones 1993; McNeill 1997; Johnson 2003).

The cost shifting debate that was initiated by the *Hawker Report* (2003) resulted in a significant degree of discussion on the topic of cost shifting (Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Douez 2002; Kearney 2002; Pritchard 2002; Sansom 2002; Tuckey 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; Garcia 2003; Spokes and Sides 2003; Manningham City Council 2004; Sansom 2004; Sheperd 2004; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Powell 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Kane 2006). The Municipal Association of Victoria (2002) estimated that the total magnitude of cost shifting over recent years in Victoria was approximately $60 million per year.

In 2006 the three levels of government signed a national agreement that purportedly addressed the problem of cost shifting (Inter-governmental Agreement Establishing Principles to Guide Inter-Governmental Relations on Local Government Matters 2006; Municipal Association of Victoria 2006; Hutchison 2006). However while the agreement was considered to be an historic win for local government, the view that cost shifting had effectively been addressed was not universally accepted (Hutchison 2006).

Community expectations and the changing nature of communities were identified as the second reason for the financial pressure that was placed on Australian local government. Local communities generally expected more services from their local government (Worthington and Dollery 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a; Hancock 2003; Johnson 2003; Manningham City Council 2004; Shepard 2004; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Vince (1997) stated:

> *The rapidly changing nature of Australian society...have increased community demands and expectations of local government to provide a wider range of community facilities and human-related services (p.154).*

The provision of community services and infrastructure maintenance and renewal were potentially significantly impacted by the financial constraints that faced Australian local government (Jones 1993; Tod 2001; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; McShane 2006). The ability of local government to maintain infrastructure and roads in particular, received particular attention in the literature on this

issue (Jones 1993; Pemble 2002; Sansom 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b; Montgomery 2003; Rotherham 2003; Spokes and Sides 2003; Lee 2004b; Manningham City Council 2004; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Gittins 2006).

In discussing the concerns about local government finances and infrastructure, Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006) stated:

> *Local government resources can be stretched only so far before a crisis point is reached. We are already seeing evidence of this with the deterioration in local infrastructure, particularly roads (p.40).*

Rural local government councils, often with declining populations, in particular were considered to be struggling to fulfill their basic service functions and infrastructure renewals (Jones 1993; Isaac 2001; Tod 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2001; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

A lack of alternate revenue sources was the third predominant reason for Australian local government's financial pressures (Jones 1993; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). The key reasons why a rate on a property was unsatisfactory was that it did not reflect a household's use of local government services and was not linked with the capacity to pay (Oates 1972; Jones 1993; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

The collection of a growth tax by local government, which would provide a revenue source that automatically grew as the economy grew, was presented as a possible option to address Australian local government's lack of financial independence and capability (Sansom 2002; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b; Australian Local Government Association 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Another option that was presented was for Australian local government to receive a greater proportion of the national taxation base (Jones 1993; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

The Local Government Association in the United Kingdom presented similar arguments in regard to taxation options and the long-term sustainability of local government in the United Kingdom context (Local Government Association 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b). Similarly to the comments on the disadvantages of Australian local government property taxes, the literature prepared by the Local Government Association (2005b) in the United Kingdom stated that property tax *does not necessarily reflect ability to pay and unfairly burdens those on low/fixed income (p.3).* It was further stated that property taxes did not grow with the economy (Local Government Association 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b).

Australian Local government's current ability and capacity to adequately provide for its communities was dependent on a number of external and structural factors as outlined in this section. As demonstrated in later chapters that discuss the outcomes of the interview research, the respondents raised the issue of Victorian local government finance on a number of occasions.

1.9　　Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 1 an outline of this thesis as a complete research project has been provided. This outline included the background and context of the research questions that are to be investigated, how the research questions were delineated, a justification for the research, a synopsis of the methodology that will be utilized and key assumptions and limitations of the research. In this chapter an historical summary of the research topic, in this case Victorian local government, and an examination of the political, legal and financial environment in which Victorian local government operates has also been provided. The prime purpose of this chapter has been to provide the reader with the principal elements of the research process that will be expanded in later chapters.

In the second chapter the outcomes of the literature review and the key themes that emerge from the literature will be documented. An extensive review of relevant literature will be undertaken which will assist in defining and exploring the primary and subsidiary

research questions. The prime purpose of the literature review is to build a theoretical foundation that provides a contextual framework for undertaking the interview research.

The research methods that will be undertaken for this thesis will be examined in Chapter 3. The principal components of this chapter include the research approach that will be adopted, the design of the research, the data collection and the data analysis process. The central purpose of this chapter is to explain the research approach so that the reader has a high level of confidence in the approach that has been implemented and that the research process could be replicated.

In Chapter 4 the key themes that emerge from the thirty-one interviews that were undertaken will be outlined. The analysis of the interviews will be based on the primary and the subsidiary research questions and builds upon the themes that emerged from the literature review. The prime purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the original research that was undertaken as a factual account within an analytical framework.

In the final chapter, the key findings from the interview research and the literature review will be summarized. The author will draw on the general conclusions of the research to examine principal points of similarities and differences between the original research and the previous material that has been written on the research topic. In this chapter a number of recommendations will be documented to facilitate further discussion and debate.

Based on the foundations as outlined in this chapter, the thesis will now proceed with a detailed description of the research. The following chapter explores the literature that has been written on the role of Victorian local government within the context of the community and builds on the theoretical foundation upon which the research is based.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1   Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1 the historical, legal and political context in which Victorian local government operated and its challenges from a financial sustainability perspective were examined.

In this chapter the literature that has been written on the role of Victorian local government and the key elements that emerge from the literature are identified and analyzed. The review of the literature will progress the conceptual and factual material outlined in the previous chapter. An extensive examination of the relevant materials will be undertaken which will assist in exploring the primary and subsidiary questions of this research project. The literature review will also provide a contextual framework for the analysis of the interview data.

A literature review serves many purposes and has a critical role in the research process (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Williamson 2000a; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Goulding 2002). Such a review is also considered to be a component of the *Exploratory* research model outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1995) and as one of the four major research methods as identified by Silverman (2001). These models, and their relevance to the research questions under review are examined in the following chapter on research methods.

The principles of grounded theory also provide a useful reference point when reviewing the role of the literature review. Within a grounded theory approach the literature review can provide theoretical constructs, categories and their properties that can assist in organizing the research data (Marshall and Rossman 1995). This principle is particularly relevant for this thesis as the literature provided a conceptual framework in which to further explore the research questions during the interview phase. The principles of

grounded theory are also explored in more detail in the following chapter on research methods.

The literature review undertaken for this thesis demonstrated that there was a significant amount of relevant literature on the role of Victorian local government. This expansive range of material, which included books, publications, articles and conference papers is identified and comprehensively analyzed in this chapter.

A literature review provides two avenues in which to examine the research topic (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Williamson 2000a; Goulding 2002). One outcome is that the research builds on the current literature so that it contributes to the existing knowledge base in a way that is different or creative. Alternatively the researcher may identify a gap in the literature that the research outcomes will address (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Williamson 2000a; Goulding 2002).

It is considered that the literature related to the research questions being investigated for this thesis, predominantly builds on the knowledge of Victorian local government's role and the subsidiary research questions. The literature review will provide an analysis of the range of views on the role of Victorian local government from a community perspective, the barriers to achieving that role, the benefits for the community by local government undertaking that role and proposals to enhance the implementation of that role.

There is a second element of the literature review that requires discussion. While there is a significant amount of material on the specific aspects of Victorian local government's role, the research undertaken for this thesis will provide a comprehensive framework for a discussion on the overall role of Victorian local government. Therefore, this thesis will also address a number of perceived gaps that have been identified in the literature.

An analysis of the literature reveals that the specific roles of Victorian local government's role are documented in some detail, but this material can only be found by researching a number of different sources. In searching for an answer to the primary research question

of this thesis, there are few contemporary documents that discuss the role of Victorian local government in a holistic context. There is also limited reference material that explores the role of local government from the perspective of the community.

Finally this thesis will examine the views of a number of opinion leaders who have extensive experience or a background in the field of local government. This will provide a practical perspective that is not clearly present in the current range of literature. Taken from these perspectives, the research for this thesis achieves the second objective as articulated by Marshall and Rossman (1995); Williamson (2000a); and Goulding (2002) by addressing a gap in the current literature.

The literature review will also provide the structure for the analysis of the interview data. As this Chapter and Chapter 4 will demonstrate, there was a close synergy between the key themes that emerged from the literature review and the interviews.

2.2   Victorian Local Government's Role

2.2.1 Defining Victorian Local Government's Role

There was a significant body of literature that directly or indirectly referred to the role of Victorian local government and related themes. Consequently, it was important to delineate a number of boundaries in terms of the selection of the available literature.

The literature search revealed that there was an extensive amount of literature that discussed what might be termed 'old local government'. In the United Kingdom during the mid 1900s a number of authors explored the role of local government and related issues (Langrod 1953; Redcliff-Maud 1969; Jones 1969; Bains 1972; Stewart 1971, 1980). This was also the case in an Australian context where commentators provided their views on the role of Australian local government (Bland 1944; Bains 1978, 1979; Advisory Council for Inter-Government Relations 1980a, 1980b, 1980c; Chapman and Wood 1984; Floyd and Palmer 1985).

While these writings provided an historical context, the extent of change since this material was written and the current local government environment limited their relevance. In Australia and the United Kingdom, major changes such as council amalgamations, methods of service delivery and a number of other political and social factors as outlined in Chapter 1 have altered the way Australian local government operates (Jones 1993; Johnstone and Kiss 1996; Chapman, Haward and Ryan 1997; Dollery and Marshall 1997; Galligan 1998a; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Consequently, the analysis of the literature review has predominantly focused on material from the 1990s, or slightly earlier if the author was focusing on topics that are still relevant in the present context.

The literature review has also been confined to within Australia and where relevant, to the United Kingdom and to a lesser extent, the United States of America. The reason for this decision was that such countries shared a similar societal environment and had a comparable institutional and political structure for local government (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1989; Tucker 1997; Self 1997; May 2003; Caulfield 2003).

A further reason why there was a focus on the literature from these particular countries was the tendency for management and governance paradigms to flow amongst them. Initiatives that were implemented in one country were often implemented in another, or at least discussed as possible options for serious consideration (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Tucker 1997; Burke and Walsh 1998; Baker 2003; May 2003; Caulfield 2003).

This was particularly the case between Australia and the United Kingdom, as illustrated by the introduction in Victoria of compulsory competitive tendering, council amalgamations and best value which were initiatives based on the United Kingdom precedent (Jones 1993; Tucker 1997; Burke and Walsh 1998; Caulfield 2003).

Citation of the literature from the United Kingdom and the United States of America requires clarification. It should be noted that there was an extensive range of literature on

local government in the United Kingdom in particular, and the United States of America to a lesser extent. Ideas from the literature from these countries have only been cited where there was a direct relevance to local government in a Victorian context. Consequently where an author from the United Kingdom or the United States of America provided material that was relevant to Victorian local government but was within the context of that particular country, then this was cited as such. Where the material was generically applicable to local government then the author was included with other authors on the topic.

Clarification also needs to be made regarding the analysis of the literature on Victorian local government as a component of Australian local government. Victorian local government shared a significant number of similarities with local government in other states in Australia as outlined in Chapter 1 (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Local Government Act 1993 (NSW); Local Government Act 1993 (Tas); Local Government Act 1993 (Qld); Local Government Act 1995 (WA); Local Government Act 1999 (SA); May 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Consequently, while there were a number of specific references that related to Victorian local government, literature that focused on Australian local government has been cited where appropriate. Discussions that refer to Australian local government should be read as being inclusive of Victorian local government.

Clarification is also required in relation to the nature of the literature that was reviewed for this thesis. While it is often common practice in the analysis of social science fields to distinguish between theoretical and empirical material, it was not a relevant consideration in relation to this study. While a number of the authors cited in the literature review asserted certain views or advocated a particular position, the nature of the literature was predominantly theoretical as opposed to empirical.

A final comment needs to be made on the analysis of the literature that addressed the role of Victorian local government. With very few exceptions (Dollery 2003a; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005) there was minimal critical examination of the literature of local government between the commentators themselves. It was noted in the literature that

there was a general lack of academic attention to local government within the social and political sciences area (Ellison 2000).

The literature on the topic under review has been presented as an analysis of the literature as opposed to a description of the literature. In order to achieve this outcome it was necessary in some circumstances to draw conclusions about the major themes that emerged from the literature, including the similarities and the differences of opinion. Care has been taken not to misrepresent the views of any writer.

The structure of this chapter comprises three main sections.

In section 2.2.1 an analysis of how Victorian local government's role is defined in the literature by the federal government, the Victorian state government, Victorian local government and academic writers is examined. These four main sources were selected because they have a direct influence on the role of Victorian local government, as is the case with the three levels of government or have provided significant commentary about Victorian local government's role, as is the case with academic writers. The common themes from the key sources of literature that describe the role of Victorian local government have been summarized into six specific roles that comprise Victorian local government's overall role. This section does not examine each of the specific roles in detail, but rather provides a framework for further discussion.

In section 2.3 of this chapter, the key themes that emerged from the literature about each of the six specific roles of Victorian local government are explored. Each specific role is discussed in a consistent format that includes a definition and context of the role, limitations that Victorian local government experiences in fulfilling that role, how the community benefits from the provision of that role and recommendations to assist Victorian local government to more effectively implement that role in the future. This format is consistent with the analysis of the interview data on the role of Victorian local government that is examined in Chapter 4.

In sections 2.4 and 2.5, limitations and proposals that apply to Victorian local government's role more broadly, or themes that are relevant across more than one specific role are documented.

2.2.1.1 How the Federal Government Defines the Role of Victorian Local Government

As it is the views of the federal government that are reviewed in this section, all comments that are listed relate to Australian local government. The comments that have been selected are also relevant to Victorian local government.

Local government's role as defined in the *2006 Local Government National Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services) includes *governance, advocacy, service delivery, planning and community development, and regulation (p.3)* (also refer Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates 2006). While the Report (2006) did not specify that local government had a democratic role it was clear that local government was considered to be a level of government because it represented the community through the elected members and participated in forums such as the Council of Australian Governments (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

In the commentary on the services aspect of local government's role, it was stated in the Report (2006) that the standard definition of core services being roads, rates and rubbish no longer applied and that local government delivered a broad range of social services (also refer Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002). Local government had moved away from being predominantly a property-based service provider to a human services provider (Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a, 2003b).

In the *2006 Local Government National Report* a number of functions that local government undertook were listed and included engineering, recreation, health, community services, building, planning and development administration, cultural/education and water and sewerage. It was clear that these functions as documented in this Report (2006) were considered to be components of a broader local government services role.

An examination of the *Local Government National Reports* from 2001-2006 indicated that the federal government had not changed its view about the fundamental role of Australian local government during this period (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration conducted an inquiry into local government and cost shifting in 2002 (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a). This review was to also examine the role of local government and reflected a view of the then federal government that the role of local government could be expanded to include local policing and the management of local hospitals and schools (Hassan 2002; Kearney 2002; Tuckey 2002; Garcia 2003). The Federal Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government during the time of the inquiry was quoted in the *Sunday Telegraph* (Kearney 2002) as saying that he wanted *local governments to seriously consider running most services currently provided by the States (p.40).* In the same article, the then New South Wales Premier was quoted as saying that the idea *was ridiculous (p.40).*

The notion that local government should undertake an expanded role was flagged a year earlier by the then Federal Minister for Local Government, who was reported as stating:

> *Perhaps it is time for local government to develop a long-term strategy for the future governance of Australia. It well may be that the strategy should look at having a two-tier system of government in Australia (West 2001 p.6).*

While the initial terms of reference of the review undertaken by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration included an examination of the role of local government, an examination of the literature indicated that the cost shifting debate became the main issue for discussion and not the role of local government (Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Pritchard 2002; Sansom 2002; Tuckey 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; Garcia 2003; Spokes and Sides 2003; Manningham City Council 2004; Sansom 2004; Sheperd 2004; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Powell 2005). The *Hawker Report* (2003) did not contain any recommendations that addressed the issue of local government taking on responsibility for local policing or management of local hospitals and schools.

In summary, an analysis of the literature on the role of local government from the federal government's perspective was that local government's role centered on the areas of governance, advocacy, service delivery, planning and community development, and regulation. There were a number of functions that ranked below this prime role. It was noted that the federal government did not specifically refer to local government's democratic role although it was clear that it was recognized as a level of government that represented its communities through the elected members. In the literature it was also evident that the federal government had a view that the current role of local government could be expanded.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, through its reports also discussed the role of local government. It should be acknowledged that while this committee was established by the then federal government, its members were from different federal political parties. Its finding, therefore, reflect the views of the federal parliamentarians on the committee and not those necessarily of the federal government.

The federal government through its *Local Government National Report* (2006) acknowledged that the legal framework for local government roles was provided for by state legislation, which provides the next examination of Victorian local government's role.

2.2.1.2 How the Victorian State Government Defines the Role of Victorian Local Government

In a *Guide to Local Government* (Department for Victorian Communities 2006a) produced by the Victorian state government, local government is defined as a:

> *democratically elected body that provides for a specific geographical area within a State. Local councils comprise a third tier of government, in addition to Federal and State governments and are generally regarded as closest to the people (p.1).*

In the Guide (2006a) it was further stated that *(local government) is established and operates under various State Government laws (p.2).* This legislation consequently provided the focus for a discussion on how the Victorian state government defined the role of Victorian local government.

Until 2003 the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) did not specifically denote a role for Victorian local government. It delineated a purpose and functions (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Office of Local Government 1994, 1996; Hunt 1998a).

The purpose of a local government council under the *Act* (1989) included but was not limited to, the provision of peace, order and good governance; facilitation and encouragement of appropriate development; provision of equitable and appropriate services and facilities for its community and the management, improvement and development of resources in an effective and efficient manner (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Office of Local Government 1994, 1996; Hunt 1998a). The functions of Victorian local government as documented in the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) mirrored the list of functions identified by the federal government in the *2006 Local Government National Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006), the only difference being that the list of functions in the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) was slightly more extensive.

In 2003 the *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003* (Vic) added a Local Government Charter to the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic). This included a section

on the role of a Victorian local government council and modified the functions section. The overarching role of a Victorian local government council was as follows:

> *A Council is elected to provide leadership for the good governance of their municipal district and the local community (Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act Section 3D).*

The *Act* (2003) further stated that the role of a local government council included acting as a representative government; providing leadership; effectively managing resources; advocating the interests of the local community; acting as a responsible partner in government; fostering community cohesion; and encouraging active participation in civic life (Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 Section 3D).

The functions of a Victorian local government council as modified in section 3E of the *Act* (2003), included advocating; planning for and providing services and facilities; providing and maintaining community infrastructure; undertaking strategic land use planning; raising revenue; and making and enforcing local laws (Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 Section 3E).

It should be noted that Victorian local government's services role was listed as a function in the *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003* (Vic) whereas in the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) it was listed as a purpose of Victorian local government. This indicated that since the 1989 *Act*, state government's perspective was that the role of Victorian local government had broadened from its role of predominantly being a provider of services.

While the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) provided the clearest legal statement of how the Victorian state government defined the role of Victorian local government, in 2004 the Victorian state government released a discussion paper titled: *Community strengthening and the role of local government*: *A discussion paper* (Local Government Victoria 2004a). The Paper (2004a) maintained that local government was *pivotal to clarifying and driving the community strengthening agenda (p.1).*

This Paper (2004a) and other related documents produced by the Victorian state government indicated that it considered that Victorian local government had an emerging role for community strengthening (Broad 2003, 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004b, 2005; State Government Victoria 2005; Broad 2005, 2006).

In summary, it was evident from an analysis of the documents prepared by the Victorian state government that it defined the role of Victorian local government as including a democratic and representative role, good governance, advocacy and a role centered around community building and community cohesion. Local government also had a role in the provision of services. These roles would be achieved through the effective management of resources, leadership, the fostering of community participation and by being a responsible partner within the political framework. The Victorian state government further considered that Victorian local government fulfilled a number of functions that ranked below its overall role.

2.2.1.3 How Victorian Local Government Defines its Role

In order to provide a holistic view of the how the Victorian local government sector defined its role, the research outlined in this section has focused on material that was prepared by local government peak bodies or collectively prepared by Victorian local government. The analysis has focused on four prime sources and includes documents prepared by the Australian Local Government Association, Municipal Association of Victoria, Victorian Local Governance Association and academic research undertaken on the corporate plans produced by Victorian local government.

At the 1997 National General Assembly, the *Declaration on the Role of Australian Local Government* was developed (Australian Local Government Association 1997). The *Declaration* (1997) delineated both the roles and responsibilities of Australian local government and stated that its aim was to achieve:

> *more effective democratic processes and secure the environmental, social and economic well-being of their constituents (p.1).*

The *Declaration* (1997) delineated the role of Australian local government to include the provision of good governance; leadership and advocacy; active citizenship at the local level; local identity and civic pride; community cohesion and community development; and local service delivery (Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997a; Hunt 1998a; Kiss 2003). The *Declaration* (1997) also reinforced the view that the Australian citizen had a right to democratically elected local government representatives and that the Australian Constitution should protect this right (Australian Local Government Association 1997; Hunt 1998a).

Other aspects of the *Declaration* (1997) such as being responsive and accountable highlighted how local government should undertake its role.

The role of local government as documented in the *Declaration* (1997) demonstrated a strong similarity to the views that were articulated in the federal and state governments' documents about the role of local government.

Victorian local government is legally required to produce a council plan (formerly called corporate plan) (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)), which outlines what each individual local government council believes to be its priorities within its role. Kloot (2001) examined the content of all Victorian local government corporate plans. This research provided a clear delineation of what Victorian local government considered its role to be from a community perspective.

Kloot (2001) concluded that over half of the corporate plans produced by Victorian local government included the following key areas:

> *Economic Development; Accountability and Civic Leadership; Financial Management; Environment; Leisure, Arts, Culture, Community Services and Health; Infrastructure and Asset Management; and Town Planning, Building Control and Land Use (pp.22-24).*

It was noted by Kloot (2001) that *Accountability and Civic Leadership* was related to the concepts of advocacy and good governance. Other Victorian local government activities

that were identified by Kloot (2001) that appeared in less than half of the corporate plans included:

> *Employees, Human Resource Management, Organization Development, Organizational Culture; Corporate Planning; Tourism; Image Marketing; Human Services: Children and Family Services, Ageing, Youth and Community Development; Transport and Roads, Customer and Local Government Service (and) Contract Management (pp.25-26).*

The areas that were listed in this analysis of Victorian corporate plans were primarily, but not exclusively, focused at the functional and service level and reflected the fact that council plans are action-oriented documents (Kloot 2001). There was a clear similarity between the functional areas listed in local government corporate plans and those listed by the federal and Victorian state governments.

Victorian local government has two associations: the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association. A review of documents published by these bodies provided an insight into what they believed was the role of Victorian local government.

The Good Governance Advisory Group, which comprised the two Victorian local government associations and representatives from the sector, defined local government's role as having an overarching democratic and governance role (Good Governance Advisory Group 2004).

It was evident in other jointly produced local government documents such as the *Code of Good Governance* (Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association 1997) and *Doing it ourselves* (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998) that Victorian local government had a clear and significant governance role.

The democratic and governance role was underpinned by a number of specific roles that included planning, law making, representation, advocacy, service delivery and infrastructure, and community development and community building (Good Governance

Advisory Group 2004; Municipal Association of Victoria 2005a, 2005b). These roles would be achieved through a number of strategies such as the development of policy.

While not commenting on the role of Victorian local government specifically, the Victorian Local Governance Association (2001a) identified that there were four key issues for Victorian local government. These issues were:

> *governance; participation and engagement; community building; and sustainability (Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a p.3).*

The Review (2001a) further stated that *they (local governments) have frequently shown their effectiveness as influential advocates (p.3).*

This statement further illustrated that the Victorian Local Governance Association believed that local government had a role as an advocate, a view that was reinforced in other Victorian Local Governance Association publications (Victorian Local Governance Association 2001b, 2003).

In summary, an analysis of the literature prepared by the Victorian local government sector indicated that there was a consensus on a number of specific roles. This included its democratic role, and its role in the areas of governance, community development/building, advocacy, services and infrastructure provision, and planning. There was a stronger focus on Victorian local government's role in the areas of the environment and sustainability than in the literature produced by the federal and Victorian state governments.

The analysis of Victorian local government's corporate plans revealed that there was a high level of consistency on what services were delivered by Victorian local government at the functional level. In this regard there was a similarity between the literature produced by the Victorian local government sector and federal and state governments. The processes on how Victorian local government would achieve its role included the facilitation of active citizenship, participation and engagement and by being responsive

and accountable leaders. These processes were similar to what was outlined in the documents produced by the federal and state governments.

2.2.1.4 How Academics Define the Role of Victorian Local Government

There was an extensive range of academic literature on the role of Victorian local government. In this section a number of key sources are cited and in particular, those references that explicitly discussed the role of Australian local government in a holistic context. A more detailed examination of the academic literature on the specific components of Victorian local government's role is explored in section 2.3 of this chapter.

While the analysis of the role of Victorian local government as delineated by the three levels of government focused on a small number of specific references, the amount of academic literature required this analysis to be undertaken in themes as opposed to individual references.

Chapman and Wood (1984) stated that local government was part of the governing system and that one of the fundamental aspects of Victorian local government's role was its democratic or representative role (also refer Wensing 1997b). Bowman and Hampton (1983) supported this view and maintained that democracy underpinned the theoretical argument for the existence of local government (also refer Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; Dunstan 1998; Kiss 1999; May 2003; Brackertz et al 2005). While speaking from a United Kingdom perspective Davis (1996) also supported this view and maintained that the legitimacy for local government stemmed from its democratic base, which was its fundamental rationale for existence.

Galligan (1996, 1998b) and Aulich (1999) supported the view that local government had a democratic role and further stated that local government was usually perceived as having two basic roles: one fulfilling the role as a democratic system of local governance and the second as a provider of local services. The democratic governance role, however, was of a higher order than achieving efficient service delivery. Galligan (1996, 1998b)

further stated that each role informed the other because the democratic governance role determined what services were provided.

An analysis of the literature revealed that while it was clear that Victorian local government had a role in the provision of services, there was a range of views expressed about the character of this services role.

Jones (1993) stated that federal and state governments had a *service function view of local government* that he described as *problematic (p.34)*. Hunt (1998a) supported the view that local government was considered by the state government in particular to be *simply a service provider (p.65)* and stated that the *role of local government is not merely that of a business or deliverer of services (p.65)* (also refer Stoker 1996a, 1996c; Johnstone 1996b; Chapman 1997a; Kiss 1997; Wensing 1997b; Gerritsen 1998; Mowbray 1999; Reddel and Woolcock 2003).

While speaking from a United Kingdom perspective Stoker (1996a, 1996c) also argued that local government should not be defined as a service provider, but rather for the value of its political activities (also refer Bailey 1999).

While the fundamental framework of local government service provision had not altered, Worthington and Dollery (2002) stated that:

> *there have been modifications in the way in which local communities, and local government itself, think about the role and functions of local government (p.3).*

In citing a former Minister for Local Government, Wensing (1997a) also identified that in recent years:

> *there is a growing expectation everywhere that councils should play a much greater role in the social, economic and environmental well-being of their communities (p.93).*

In discussing the changing role of local government from predominantly being a service provider in a narrow field, Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006) further stated:

> *The traditional emphasis of 'roads, rates and rubbish' that has been the cornerstone of municipal bodies in Australia from their inception has been broadened to encompass new responsibilities, ranging from environmental management to economic and social development (p.285).*

Martin (undated) and Kloot (2001) also supported the view expressed by Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006).

It was clear from the extracts listed above that in the academic literature on Victorian local government there was a consensus that local government had a democratic and a services role. In regard to the services role there was a consistent view that Victorian local government's services role was historically constrained but that it had expanded past its traditional focus on roads, rates and rubbish (Bowman 1983; Jones 1993; McNeill 1997; Wensing 1997a; Dore 1998; Gerritsen 1998; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006). These expanded roles that were identified in the academic literature will now be identified.

Brackertz et al (2005) stated that in addition to Victorian local government's fundamental democratic and services role, there were three other specific roles. These included advocacy and the fostering a civil society; governance and setting the direction for the municipality; and community building.

There was a range of literature that supported the view expressed by Brackertz et al (2005) that Victorian local government had an advocacy role. This was evidenced by the writings of Jones (1993); Rayner (1997); Wensing (1997a); Dore (1998); Hill (1999); and Mowbray (1999).

The view expressed by Brackertz et al that Victorian local government had a governance role was further supported by the writings of Johnstone (1996b); Rayner (1997); Wensing (1997a); Hunt (1998a); Hill (1999); Dollery (2003b); Marshall (2003); and Dollery (2005). It was also identified that Victorian local government's democratic governance role underpinned its democratic role (Galligan 1998b).

Brackertz et al (2005) identified that the third additional role for Victorian local government was community building. This role, or similarly described roles such as community strengthening was also supported in the literature. This was evidenced by the writings of Hill (1999); Mowbray (1999); Raysmith (2001, 2002); Butler (2005); Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006); and Wiseman (2006).

Finally, inherent in the view expressed by Brackertz et al (2005) was that Victorian local government had a role in setting the direction for the municipality. This view can be interpreted as Victorian local government's planning role. While some aspects of planning can be viewed as a component of effective service delivery (Boyd and Thomas 1995) there was also a broader role in terms of council or community planning. The writings of Dore (1998); Kloot (2001); and Salvaris (2002); supported the view that Victorian local government had a role in council or community planning.

In summary, the analysis of the academic literature indicated that there was agreement that Victorian local government had a democratic role and a view was also expressed that this democratic role was of a higher order than other roles. There was also evidence that there was agreement that Victorian local government had a services role. While this role was relatively limited in scope, Victorian local government's services role had expanded in recent years from being predominantly focused on roads, rates and rubbish to a broader range of service areas.

In the academic literature it was alleged that the state government considered Victorian local government to primarily be a deliverer of services. It was interesting to note that the current *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) as amended, did not totally support the contention that the current Victorian state government viewed Victorian local government in this light. It was noted that the majority of these comments about the services view of Victorian local government were stated during the period of the Kennett Government that did, as outlined in Chapter 1, take the view that Victorian local government was primarily an enabler of service provision.

An analysis of the academic literature also demonstrated that there was agreement that Victorian local government had an advocacy, governance, community planning role and a role that centered on the theme of community building and fostering a civil society.

2.2.1.5 Common Themes that Define the Role of Victorian Local Government

An examination of the literature on the role of Victorian local government as outlined in the previous sections, demonstrated that there were a number of common themes identified by the three levels of government and academic writers.

The first clear role was that Victorian local government as a level of government had a role in terms of democratic processes and governance. This was demonstrated in the views that were expressed by all levels of government and academics. It was highlighted in the literature that effective democracy and governance would be achieved through the processes of leadership, civic participation, accountability and transparency.

It should be noted that Victorian local government's democratic role was at times assumed as evident in the literature developed by the federal government. It was considered that this was because Victorian local government was a level of government, and Australia's system of government was based on a democratic model. As demonstrated in the literature developed by the state government, local government and academics it was apparent that local government had a democratic role by the very definition of what it is. There was a view that Victorian local government's democratic role was of a higher order than other roles but this was not an opinion that was universally expressed.

While Victorian local government's democratic role was at times assumed, Victorian local government's governance role was clearly articulated by all the four sources that were reviewed. The democratic and governance roles of Victorian local government were interlinked.

The third clear role that emerged from an analysis of the literature produced by all four sources was that Victorian local government fulfilled a services role. This role also included the provision and maintenance of community infrastructure and facilities. The discussion on the provision of services was framed in terms of a broader range of services than property-based services, which traditionally was Victorian local government's focus.

It was evident in the literature that there was a range of services that were referred to as functions. These functions included community services, recreation, health, land use planning and building regulation, economic development and tourism, environmental management, regulations, cultural and engineering services.

The fourth agreed role of Victorian local government that was articulated by the three levels of government and academics was advocacy. Advocacy was defined as representing the issues that were important for the local community or local area.

The fifth role that was identified by all parties was a role that centered on community building or community strengthening. This role was also referred to as promoting community cohesion or community development. Other themes that underpinned community building were the achievement of social equity, social justice and the development of a local identity. Community strengthening was considered to be of a higher order than the provision of community services, which was defined as a function.

Planning in a broad context was identified as the sixth role of Victorian local government. There was agreement from the four sources that Victorian local government had a role in setting the direction for their community either through a council or community planning process. This view was either expressed directly or indirectly by the fact that there was a legislative requirement set by state government for local government to develop a council plan.

A distinction was made, however, between holistic planning that was considered to be a role of Victorian local government and land use planning that was considered by the three levels of government to be a function. Consequently land use planning activities has been

treated as a function of Victorian local government and will be discussed under the services section role of Victorian local government.

An analysis of the literature produced by the four sources raised the issue of resource management for Victorian local government. This was seen as an enabler to achieve the roles and functions of local government, as opposed to being defined as a role in its own right. The financial context of Victorian local government was discussed in Chapter 1.

In reviewing the material produced by the four identified sources it was also apparent that there were some differences in how each source defined the role of local government. The federal government discussed the role of local government predominantly in service and functional terms. While the range of services local government provided had expanded in recent years, it was discussed as a service provider. In contrast, the Victorian state government viewed the role of local government in broader terms and included additional roles such as its democratic role and the provision of good governance and community strengthening.

The range of services provided by local government was also more broadly defined than those defined by the federal government. Local government, similar to the Victorian state government also defined its role broadly. The analysis of corporate plans further revealed that the range of services identified by local government was diverse. Community focused roles such as participation and engagement were identified by local and state governments but were not as clearly identified in the literature produced by the federal government. Academic literature on the role of local government varied in its discussions on this topic and was dependent on the views and background of the particular author.

As a general comment it was observed that the closer the source was to local government the broader its role tended to be defined by that source.

In researching the primary and subsidiary questions that this thesis is exploring, the literature will now be examined in order to progress the discussion on these six specific roles of Victorian local government. The structure of the following sections follows a

consistent format. Specific sections on various aspects of Victorian local government's role have been included where the literature revealed a particular focus that was relevant to the topic.

2.3   Roles of Victorian Local Government

2.3.1 Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

> *A Democracy is not an abstract idea: it is a living organism. Like an ancient tree, it shelters us from the elements and allows us to lead a good life (Rayner 1997 p.245).*

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that it was recognized that Victorian local government had a democratic role (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Jones 1993; Davis 1996; Galligan 1996; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a; Dunstan 1998; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; Aulich 1999; Kiss 1999; May 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006a) (also refer Beetham 1996; Kiss 1996; Brumby 1996; Phillips 1996; Salvaris 1997; Mowbray 1999; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Marshall 2003; Burdess and O'Toole 2004). An examination of the literature revealed that there was a significant amount of discussion on the topic of Victorian local government's democratic role.

2.3.1.1 The Context of Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

Democracy was the most commonly used term to describe Victorian local government's democratic role (Bowman 1983; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Rayner 1997; Salvaris 1997; Kiss 1999; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004). Related terms included acting as a representative government (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Wensing 1997a; Hunt 1998a; Dunstan 1998; Brackertz et al 2005). In some cases the

term representative democracy was cited (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Blacher 1998; Dollery 2003b; May 2003).

In the literature it was revealed that there was a strong link between the terms democracy and governance (Mowbray 1999; Hill 1999; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Marshall 2003). This view was illustrated by Marshall (2003) who stated that:

> *sound corporate governance at the local level should embrace and promote participatory democracy (p.155).*

In some instances the democratic and governance roles were discussed individually and in other examples they were discussed as the one concept (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Johnstone 1996a; Galligan 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Aulich 1999; Marshall 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; King 2006).

In this thesis, the democratic and the governance roles of Victorian local government will be discussed separately. To clarify the distinction between these two roles, the democratic role will be examined within the framework of political representation and will incorporate models of democracy, structures and relevant issues related to community representation (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; May 2003).

Victorian local government's governance role will be examined in section 2.3.2. That discussion will incorporate how democracy is advanced through good governance practices and will examine, amongst other matters, corporate processes and the notions of community participation and engagement (Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; May 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

2.3.1.1.1 Models of Democracy for Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

The first major theme that emerged from an examination of the literature was the theory of democracy, both broadly and in relation to Victorian local government (Pateman 1970; Bowman 1983; Jones 1993; Saunders 1996; Galligan 1996, 1998b; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; Williamson 2002; Reddel 2002; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Dollery 2005).

It was noted that the theory of democracy as political science was examined extensively in the literature (Pateman 1970; Bowman and Hampton 1983; Mayer 1991; Putnam 1993; Beetham 1996; Hindess 1997; Rayner 1997; Uhr 1998; Saward 2003; King 2006). It was stated that democracies were underpinned by the four dynamitic principles of political equality, inclusion, expressive freedom and transparency (Saward 2003). Such principles were constantly reviewed and were embodied according to how these principles were articulated and enacted by the institutions that underpinned democracies.

In focusing this thesis, however, it was essential to narrow the literature review relating to democracy to how it related directly to Victorian local government's democratic role.

There were two predominant models of democracy delineated in the literature; that being representative democracy and participatory or direct democracy (Pateman 1970; Bowman and Hampton 1983; Munro-Clark 1992; Painter 1992; Jones 1993; Leach 1996; Phillips 1996; Saunders 1996; Stoker 1996c; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Frey and Eichenberger 1999; Bailey 1999; Hudson and Kane 2000; Hindess 2002; Rowe 2002; Williamson 2002; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Marshall 2003; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Reddel 2005; King 2006).

Saunders (1996) defined representative democracy as a system of government that *is presided over by elected representatives and (which) derives its legitimacy from that fact*

(p.56). In discussing the fundamental weakness of representative democracy, Saunders (1996) asserted that it encouraged *a winner-take-all mentality* and had *insufficient regard for people, except as voters (p.56).*

Galligan (1998b) supported the view that representative democracy had limitations and stated that:

> *in a system of representative democracy, participation in political decision making is possible only for political elites who represent the people (p.208).*

Rayner (1997) further stated that there was *no such thing as a perfect system of representative government (p.45)* (also refer Stoker 1996c; Uhr 1998; Latham 2000; Hindess 2002; King 2006).

It was considered that representative democracy could have had more meaning in smaller communities where citizens could elect one of their own to represent them. This option was not a reality in the current Australian political framework (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

One positive aspect of representative democracy that was identified was it excluded influential groups from political power except at elections where there was a range of views from all voters (Hudson and Kane 2000).

While writing some years earlier than the writers quoted above, Pateman (1970) also explored the critical views of representative democracy. Pateman (1970) investigated the role of participation as a practical component of democracy and maintained that representative government did not necessarily equate to democratic government. Pateman (1970) advocated participatory democracy partly as a way of ensuring a redistribution of political power through the participation of ordinary citizens in the process of public decision making (also refer Munro-Clark 1992; Painter 1992; Bailey 1999; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Hindess 2002; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

An analysis of the literature revealed that the theory of participatory democracy was relevant for Victorian local government, which had the strongest links with local

communities of the three levels of government (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998a; Bailey 1999; Mowbray 1999; Williamson 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). Participatory democracy included genuine consultation systems, transparency through open meetings, access to information and communication with the community and other related initiatives (Jones 1993; Saunders 1996; Hudson and Kane 2000).

Pateman (1970) also agreed that participatory democracy must be fostered at the local level as this was where individuals had the potential to impact on every day life and where there was also a possibility of being elected (also refer Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Stoker 1996c; Box 1998; Williamson 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). It was considered that there was a growing demand for participatory democracy where citizens were actively engaged in local issues (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

Galligan (1998b) supported the view that local government had a significant role in participatory democracy and stated:

> *Because of its (local government) relative smallness it can more closely approximate the participatory conditions of democracy. Despite the genius of representation, participation in democratic governance remains a powerful aspiration of citizens (p.209).*

(also refer Galligan 1996; Williamson 2002).

In discussing the relative benefits of representative and participatory democracy, Dollery (2005) stated:

> *The whole question of representative and participatory democracy, and the linkage between the two concepts, needs to be properly explored. Dynamic communities require sophisticated political structures that involve elements of both representative and participatory democracy (p.6).*

It was considered that the balance between representative and participatory democracy was dependent on individual localities and that diverse communities required elements of

both representative and participatory democracy (Dollery and Marshall 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Dollery 2005).

In discussing local government in the United Kingdom context, Stoker (1996c) also took a middle ground in terms of the participatory and representative democracy debate. While acknowledging that traditional thinking about local government was based on the virtues of representative democracy, Stoker (1996c) argued this model could result in inappropriately granting legitimacy to decision-makers, without governmental accountability.

Conversely, Stoker (1996c) did not wholly support the view that participatory democracy necessarily provided the optimum outcome. Stoker (1996c) concluded that the representative democracy model should be enhanced in terms of good governance systems that underpinned representative democracy. Such good governance principles incorporated systems whereby processes were open, encouraged debate and assisted those who were poorly resourced.

In this context participatory democracy was linked with the processes that underpinned democratic governance. This concept is explored in further detail in section 2.3.2 on Victorian local government's governance role.

Deliberative democracy was a third model of democracy that was discussed in the literature (Uhr 1998; Hartz-Karp 2004; Reddel 2005). Deliberative democracy was linked to forms of political representation (Uhr 1998; Reddel 2005) and was seen to be a new version of participatory democracy (Uhr 1998).

In the literature from the United Kingdom, the term deliberative innovations was also used and meant new methods that encouraged citizens to consider relevant issues through some deliberative process (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001). Deliberative methods included focus groups, community planning, visioning exercises and citizens' juries (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001). It appeared that the term deliberative innovation

was the current term for what was generally categorized as participatory methods in an Australian context.

Democracy was also discussed in terms of being a particular approach as opposed to being a defined model as prescribed in legislation (Saward 2003). It was considered that democracy could be interpreted in many ways depending on the time and the place and included a range of approaches including deliberative, direct, participatory, ecological and representative models. The 'meta' approach to democratic principles as defined by Saward (2003) linked models of democracy to the practical application of democracy and formal decision making mechanisms. Saward (2003) maintained that the enactment of democratic principles required multiple devices.

2.3.1.1.2   Victorian Local Government's Democratic Structures

The second main theme that emerged from an examination of the literature on Victorian local government's democratic role was the discussion on the structure within which it operated and the role of elected representatives.

An analysis of the literature identified that Victorian local government fulfilled a representative democratic role, confirmed by the fact that a general election was undertaken where local representatives were elected and collectively empowered to make decisions within the legal framework as established by the state government (Jones 1993; Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). While property qualifications dominated voting rights until the 1980s, in a present day context local government fulfilled a representative democratic function in terms of adult suffrage (Rayner 1997).

The range of responsibilities for elected representatives and the size of the municipalities varied between Australian states. Victorian local government had the largest municipalities in Australia in terms of population with an average size of 42,586 residents as against an Australian average of 27,813 (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). The average resident population per councillor

was also the largest for Victoria, with an average of 8,053 compared to an Australian average of 3,028 (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

These statistics for Victorian local government reflected the Kennett Government reforms of local government during the 1990s. It was noted in the literature that when local government elected representatives were reintroduced in Victoria there was a totally different geographical and representative electoral structure in place (Galligan 1998b).

It was stated in the literature that local government councillors had three roles, which were to represent the interests of residents, provide leadership and strategic policy formation, and monitor performance (Newnham and Winston 1997*; Marshall 2003). Within this framework local government councillors had a legal and ethical obligation to govern in a way that achieved balanced and beneficial outcomes for the community (Jones 1993).

Newnham and Winston (1997) stated that the role of a local government councillor was more complex than that of an office holder in a corporate context. The role of elected members in local government was defined by the expectations and obligations placed on them by the community and the fact that *the theory of democracy assigns a specific role to elected representatives (Newnham and Winston 1997 p.107).*

Victorian local government voting was based on the principle of property ownership and place of residency (Kiss 2003). This meant that residents who did not live in the local government municipality but owned a property were entitled to vote (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Kiss 2003).

The City of Melbourne had a different electoral system to the other seventy-eight Victorian local governments (Gardner and Clark 1998) and currently has a separately elected mayor and deputy mayor.

2.3.1.1.3 Rationale for Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

The literature revealed that the fundamental reason why Victorian local government had a democratic role was due to its role within the broader democratic and electoral structures within the Australian political framework (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Galligan 1996; Kiss 1996; Johnstone 1996b; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997b; Dunstan 1998; Hunt 1998a; Galligan 1998b; May 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

While commenting about local government in the United Kingdom, Davis (1996) stated:

> *The legitimate role for the local authority stems from its democratic base. Indeed the democratic process is the fundamental rationale for the existence of local government (p.23).*

The view that democracy underpinned local government equally applied in a Victorian context (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Kiss 1996; Wensing 1997a, 1997b; Dunstan 1998; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; May 2003; Brackertz et al 2005). In discussing the concept of democratic governance, Galligan (1996, 1998b) argued that local government played a significant role in Australia's political structure and stated that *the basis of local government must be a democratic one (Galligan 1996 p.55).*

Bowman and Hampton (1983) further stated that while there was often discussion about the need for local government to be efficient, there was a greater need for local government representatives to be democratically elected. This was because the tradition of representative local government was sustained by the democratic values of:

> *freedom, equality, community (fraternity), political responsibility and participation (Bowman and Hampton 1983 p.6).*

Local government in turn contributed to the stability of democratic institutions and a civil society (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Rayner 1997; Latham 2000; Coghill 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

2.3.1.2 Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

There were two categories of limitations identified in the literature that related to Victorian local government achieving its democratic role. In the first category the barriers that arose from the external environment that either directly or indirectly impacted on Victorian local government's democratic role will be discussed. In the second category limitations identified in the literature that were relevant to the structural or internal aspects of Victorian local government's democratic role will be explored.

There were three external limitations identified in the literature that related to Victorian local government's democratic role. The first issue was Victorian local government's legal status within the Australian political framework.

The fact that the state government determined the legal framework within which Victorian local government operated also meant that its democratic role was fundamentally under the control of the state. Rayner (1997) stated that when state governments *attenuate the powers of local government…they hack at the roots of our democracy (p.255)* (also refer Kiss 1997).

The actions by the Kennett Government, when all existing Victorian local government elected representatives were dismissed, illustrated the potential impact of the Victorian state government on Victorian local government's democratic role and the impact on the communities local government represented (Brumby 1996; Chapman 1997a; Kiss 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Munro 1997; People Together Project 1997; Wensing 1997a, 1997b; Hill 1997; Rayner 1997, 1998; Costello 1998; Dore 1998; Gerritsen 1998; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000).

Gerritsen (1998) stated that the Victorian experience illustrated that there was little concern by the state government about local government's *role as the primary level of democratic governance (p.232).* Hill (1996) supported this view and stated that the Kennett Government:

> *left a strong impression in the state that local democracy is a tradable, or even dispensable, commodity under the current Government (p.97).*

The view was expressed that the Victorian state government needed to pay greater respect to Victorian local government's democratic role (Kiss 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Costello 1998; Dore 1998; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; Williamson 2002).

Connected to the issue of democratic status, Kiss (2003) maintained that local government's legitimacy as a local representative democracy was weakened due to the fact that local government had been *locked into the nebulous phenomenon of community (p.104).* Kiss alleged that the term *community* was both vague and problematic and could be claimed by any sphere of government as its representative base (also refer Frazer 1996).

The view expressed by Kiss (2003) regarding the term *community* was illustrated by the following quote by a former Victorian Minister for Local Government, who stated that:

> *when it comes to 'legitimacy' to represent the community, there is no doubt that the State Parliament reflects more accurately the will of the Victorian community than do any number of councillors or councils (Maclellan 1996, p.11).*

This quote also demonstrated the vulnerability of Victorian local government's democratic role when viewed from a state government perspective.

The second external factor that was identified in the literature that limited Victorian local government's democratic role related to what was generally described as a democratic deficit in Australian politics (Frey and Eichenberger 1999; Bishop and Davis 2002; Hindess 2002; Curtain 2003; Edwards 2003; Brackertz et al 2005). The democratic deficit

was also referred to as a civic deficit (Putman 1993, 2000; Balnaves, Walsh and Shoesmith 2004).

In a broader Australian context Bishop and Davis (2002) maintained that the democratic deficit resulted from the struggle of democratic institutions to connect with, and satisfy the aspirations of citizens. The issues of corruption, increased privatization of public services and a philosophy that promoted less government interference in public life heightened the democratic deficit (Hindess 2002).

It was further asserted that the democratic deficit was an outcome of representative government. Hindess (2002) argued that while representative democracy was an enduring system it was viewed negatively because for the majority of the population *direct participation in politics is limited to elections (p.34).*

Bentley (2001) supported this view and maintained that with the exception of voting, residents had little direct power to ensure that local government or other levels of government fulfilled its purpose. The limitations of representative democracy as relevant to Victorian local government were outlined in section 2.3.1.1.1.

The democratic deficit and related limitations impacted on Victorian local government's democratic role in a number of interconnected ways (Gifford 1999; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002).

The first outcome was the general mistrust of government in Australia. A number of writers have raised awareness about this issue (Walker 1992; Jones 1993; Cox 1995; Kiss 1996; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Latham 2000; Isaac 2001; Goot 2002; Bishop and Davis 2002; Reddell 2002; Broad 2003; Hughes 2004; Singh and Sahu 2004; Blacher 2005b; Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005; Levine 2006; Wiseman 2006).

This mistrust of government and general lack of engagement was also discussed in relation to the United Kingdom (Bentley 2001; Stoker 2003b; Milburn 2004; Local

Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2004c, 2005c). It was stated that more people voted in the Big Brother television polls than in the Scottish, Welsh or European elections (Bentley 2001).

King (2006) supported the view that there was a growing apathy amongst citizens in regard to civic involvement and maintained that the active role of individuals in the democratic process had been de-emphasized (also refer Pateman 1970; Walker 1992; Cox 1995; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Putnam 2000; Goot 2002; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005). It was estimated that 14% of Australians would not vote in elections if it was not compulsory to do so and 28% of the community did not care about the outcomes of elections (Wiltshire 2006).

Dollery (2003a, 2003b) identified voter apathy as a general limitation to democracy, which he maintained was more acute in local government than in other levels of government (also refer Byrnes and Dollery 2002; Brackertz et al 2005; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006). Dollery (2003a, 2003b) suggested there were five key reasons why apathy was more pronounced in local government.

The first issue was that voters did not generally consider municipal elections to be politically significant due to the constraints on local government that were established by state and federal governments. Secondly, elections in Victorian local government were not contested along party political lines which meant that voters did not have the benefit of information usually associated with party platforms to assist citizens to make more informed choices. Thirdly, media reporting of local government elections was generally less comprehensive than for federal or state government elections. The generally lower profile of Victorian local government that often resulted in confusion between the roles of elected members and senior managers was identified as the fourth reason for voter apathy. Fifthly, the nature of local government functions made it difficult to assess performance and resulted in a greater level of uninformed or informal voting at local government elections (Byrnes and Dollery 2002; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005).

A further impact on Victorian local government's democratic role that resulted from voter and media apathy was that elected members in an election period were more likely to pursue eye-catching projects to seek the attention of the media and the community. Potential candidates could also be inclined to initiate policy changes for the sake of change regardless of whether the current system was efficient (Byrnes and Dollery 2002).

A final outcome related to the generally low interest in local government elections was that there was often difficulty in attracting candidates to stand for local government, especially in rural municipalities (Bowman 1983).

As a result of the inadequate number of candidates for Victorian local government elections there were limitations to the extent that local government consequently reflected the communities that they served. The literature revealed that women, particular age groups, citizens from lower socio-economic groups and a diversity of races were under-represented in local government (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Phillips 1996; Mowbray 1999; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Kiss 2004). This was despite some advances that had been made in relation to gender balance (Kiss 2004).

The lack of diversity was also identified as an issue for local government elected members in the United Kingdom (Stoker 1996b; Stoker et al 2003; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c).

The third and final external factor identified in the literature that was considered to be a limitation to Victorian local government's democratic role related to the issue of globalization.

There was a view that globalization closed options for local democracy and for communities to have an influence on the future of their municipality. It was considered that global markets had undermined the capacity of local government to regulate or predict the local impact that resulted from actions and decisions that were taken on the other side of the world (Haag 1997; Salvaris 1997; Hunt 1998b; Wiseman 1998 cited Mowbray 1999; Hill 1999; Isaac 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a,

2005; Geddes 2005). The issue of globalization is further discussed in the section relating to Victorian local government's governance role.

The second category of factors identified in the literature as limitations to Victorian local government's democratic role related to internal and structural aspects of Victorian local government's environment. There were five issues in this category.

The first issue related to the increased focus on the management philosophy of efficiency and the economic performance of Victorian local government (Jones 1993; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery 2005). This philosophy, which was particularly relevant during the Kennett reforms in the 1990s (Jones 1993; Office of Local Government 1996, 1997; Marshall 1997; Rayner 1997; Gerritesen 1998; Baker 2003), was considered to have overshadowed the civic values and democratic dimension of Victorian local government (Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Kiss 2003; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery 2005).

Jones (1993) stated that the increased focus on efficiency had:

> *replaced the language of democracy: citizenship, community, voluntarism...participation and representatives (p.265).*

An outcome of Victorian local government's increased business focus was the trend to refer to citizens as customers (Office of Local Government 1996, 1997), which was considered to be a limitation to Victorian local government's democracy role (Salvaris 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). The prime concern expressed in the literature about the use of the term customer was that the relationship with a customer was based on what a person agreed to pay for, which was in contrast to the notion of citizen where there was a public interest test to direct priorities (Salvaris 1997). It was considered important for Victorian local government to *reestablish democratic relationships with your... citizens not your customers (Salvaris 1997 p.53).*

A second issue identified in the literature that related to the democratic role of Victorian local government was the high expectations placed on elected members in terms of workload and commitment (Stoker 1996b; Reynolds 1999; Marshall 2003). It was further stated that local government councillors struggled to cope with the breadth and complexities of the functions that were required of them (Marshall 2003; Cuthill and Fien 2005). This challenge was exacerbated by the part-time status of the elected position (Chapman and Wood 1984; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Marshall 2003; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

The third issue that limited Victorian local government's democratic role related to elected members who potentially sought to use local government as a stepping stone to higher levels of government (Bailey 1999; Byrnes and Dollery 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006). It was considered that at times local government was used to advance the political careers of elected members as opposed to being committed to local democracy (Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

The annual rotation of the mayor was identified as the fourth limitation to Victorian local government's democratic role as this practice resulted in a loss of continuity and reduced the ability to provide leadership and pursue broader issues (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 2003). It was also seen to impact on the ability for the mayor to form a positive working relationship with the chief executive officer (Martin and Simons 2002; Hill 2003).

The fifth issue in the category of internal and structural aspects of Victorian local government's environment that limited its democratic role, related to the voting system under which local government operated. Kiss (2003) maintained that Victorian local government could not claim to be democratically legitimate while its constituency included non-resident property voters. The central criteria for the right to vote must be the locality, so Victorian local government could legitimately represent and reflect the will of the people who lived in the local area.

Kiss (2003) stated that *each person should only vote in her or his place of residence. This is the essence of democracy (p.113).*

The use of postal voting, as used by 70 out of 79 councils in Victoria (Qvortrup 2005), also favored people who did not live, but owned property in the area. Research indicated that postal voting did not increase the generally lower participation of marginal groups in the democratic process (Kiss 2003; Qvortrup 2005).

2.3.1.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role

In the literature it was identified that the community benefited from Victorian local government's role as a result of number of interconnected factors that centered on Victorian local government's closeness to the community and the contribution of local government elected members.

Rayner (1997) stated that democracy was about *debate, consultation and differences of opinion (p.8).* Salvaris (1997) in a similar line of argument stated that effective democracy was about asking the question *what is the kind of a society that should we create? (p.64).* Democracy was also considered to empower the individual as the relationship between government and the individual was inextricably linked (King 2006).

In discussions on Victorian local government's democratic role, local government was considered to be the most appropriate level of government to fulfill the democratic objectives listed by Rayner (1997); Salvaris (1997); and King (2006) because it was the closest level of government to the community and therefore the most accessible (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1989, 1993; Brumby 1996; Kiss 1996; Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Galligan 1998b; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Williamson 2002). Local government was also referred to as the first level of government (Johnstone 1996a; Marshall 1997). Rayner (1997) stated that local government is *our most accessible democratic institution (p.160).*

In discussing the democratic principles of British local government that were transferred to form the basis of Australian local government, Byrne (1992 cited Kiss 1996) stated:

> *Local government is a system which defuses power; it provides local opportunities for choice; and it provides alternate solutions...to local problems (p.116).*

While the issue of community engagement and its relevance to Victorian local government's governance role is discussed in more detail in section 2.3.2, the positives for the community to participate in local issues were also relevant to the discussion on local democracy.

Victorian local government had real potential for formal and informal participation (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Rayner 1997; Milburn 2004; Cuthill and Fien 2005). In discussing local government and democracy, Rayner (1997) stated that *local participation is a building block for democracy (p.256)* (also refer Bailey 1999; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Local government also operated within a decentralized system of power that assisted to facilitate community input (Stoker 1996a).

Victorian local government was considered to be directly accountable and have strong links with its local communities, particularly in rural areas (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1996b; Phillips 1996; Hunt 1998a; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). The role of the citizen in a local government context was not one of merely exercising a vote to determine who would govern, but also influencing decisions on locally significant issues in-between the election cycle (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Rayner 1997; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Brackertz et al 2005).

As a result of its direct access to the community Victorian local government was also considered to be able to respond to communities more quickly than state and federal governments. Its more manageable size made it more innovative and adaptable (Stoker 1996a; Williams 1997; Latham 2000).

The benefits for the community that resulted from Victorian local government's democratic role as identified in the literature, included discussions on the broader societal impacts of constant change, globalization and the need for a greater sense of connectedness. It was argued that Victorian local government through the engagement of its citizens fulfilled a role as a legitimate level of government in terms of creating an increased sense of community well-being (Jones 1993; Stoker 1996a; Galligan 1996; Haag 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hill 1997; Rayner 1997; Costello 1998; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998b; Rance 1998b; Williams 1998; People Together Project 1998; Mowbray 1999; Hill 1999, 2000; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Martin and Simons 2002; Williamson 2002; Milburn 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005).

Galligan (1998b) stated that:

> *people are looking increasingly to local politics where they can have easier political access and where their quality of life is immediately affected (p.214).*

Finally it was further stated that the community benefited from the role that was undertaken by local government councillors. Elected members contributed to the achievement of democratic government through their leadership to the community, commitment and passion (Johnstone 1996b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Reynolds 1999).

Victorian local government was also the only level of government where the elected members were predominantly independent of the main political parties. Councillors did not have to vote along party lines and were more likely to respond to the views of citizens and local needs (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Rayner 1997). Local government councillors were also flexible, accessible, honest, financially conservative and had an in-depth knowledge of local needs (Jones 1993).

2.3.1.4 Proposals for Victorian Local Government's Democratic Role Identified in the Literature

An analysis of the literature revealed that there were a number of proposals that were considered would enhance Victorian local government's democratic role. These proposals addressed a number of the limitations that were identified in section 2.3.1.2.

The first proposal related to the need for Victorian local government to achieve constitutional recognition in the federal context. It was considered that gaining formal status would reinforce Victorian local government's democratic role and would add a greater level of protection to balance the absolute power of the state government over local government (Chapman 1997a, 1997b; Ellison 2000; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Kiss 2004; Kane 2006). It was further stated that constitutional recognition would strengthen local government's position and relevance within the political framework, increase its economic significance and provide greater protection for local community assets (Ellison 2000; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Kane 2006).

Kiss (2004) maintained that constitutional recognition would address the current situation where local government was *little more than an agent of state government (p.2)* (also refer Ellison 2000; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Kane 2006).

It was noted that there was not a consensus view, however, that constitutional recognition would address the broader issues of local government's representation within the federal system (Galligan 1996).

Connected to the issue of constitutional recognition for Victorian local government was the discussion on whether there should be broader constitutional change. Research indicated that there was some support in Australia for a future federation with a two tiered structure based on the collapsing of state and local government into a regional

structure (Brown 2002). While this research was undertaken in Queensland it had relevance to all states as the current federal structure applied uniformly.

The second proposal related to Victorian local government's voting system. Kiss (2003) maintained that the electoral provisions should be altered so that the right to vote was limited to those that lived within the municipality and did not include ratepayers who owned property in the local area but did not live there. Related to the property based voting system was the questioning of the practice to use postal voting, which made it easier for property based voters to vote (Kiss 2003).

The third proposal that was identified in the literature was that Victorian local government needed to move towards more participatory forms of democracy and address the negative elements of representative democracy. This was considered to be an important objective for Victorian local government due to the reduction in representative democracy that resulted from the amalgamation of Victorian local government in the 1990s (Hunt 1998a; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Brackertz et al 2005).

It was stated that a greater focus on participatory democratic processes would address the democratic deficit as identified in section 2.3.1.2 and result in citizens being more engaged in the political issues that directly impacted on them (Pateman 1970; Saunders 1996; Galligan 1998b; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Wettenhall and Alexander 2005). It was also considered that engagement with the community between the formal election processes was fundamental to a democratic system and that government should not only respond to the best-resourced groups but also govern for all citizens (Rayner 1997; Frey and Eichenberger 1999; Brackertz et al 2005).

A greater engagement in local democratic processes would also address the distrust of government and the general apathy of the community in terms of civic involvement (Putnam 1993; Putnam 2000; Bentley 2001; Milburn 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Wettenhall and Alexander 2005; King 2006).

There were a number of strategies identified in the literature that addressed the translation from representative democracy to a participatory democratic environment. Saunders (1996) stated that there were four remedies to assist local government to address the negative aspects of representative democracy, which included attitude, consultation, transparency and communication. These principles underpinned a number of strategies that are discussed in this section.

The first proposal to assist Victorian local government's participatory democratic processes was the development of a holistic democracy plan. This plan would articulate for all parties how the local government organization would work together to nurture and enhance democracy in-between elections (Williams 1998).

The second proposal to facilitate participatory democratic processes included the utilization of e-democracy and other community engagement techniques. These aspects are discussed in more detail in the following section on Victorian local government's governance role.

The third proposal focused on two aspects related to local government elected representatives that were raised in the previous section on limitations to local government's democratic role.

It was considered that there was a trend to reduce the powers of local government councillors, whereas a strong elected member role was an important element in a successful local government system (Newnham and Winston 1997). Elected representatives were important because they potentially provided a different perspective to the professional influence of management (Jones 1993; Newnham and Winston 1997; Reynolds 1999). Input from local government councillors was considered to be an increasingly important issue as the Victorian local government environment became more complex.

It was also proposed that the mayor not be rotated on an annual basis so that there was continuity in the representation of the local government council. A change to this process would bring the tenure of the mayor in line with other political leaders (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 2003). Changing the annual rotation of the mayor would also address what was considered to be a perpetual weakness in local political leadership and in the establishment of effective relationships (Martin and Simons 2002; Hill 2003).

A final proposal was the issue of measuring progress on establishing a healthy democracy. It was stated that a healthy democracy underpinned community well-being on a national level and that indicators should be developed to assess the health of the formal and informal institutions, the effectiveness of democratic rights and the culture of democracy (Salvaris 1998).

In section 2.3.1.2 there were a number of other limitations to Victorian local government's democratic role that will be addressed in later sections. Limitations such as the impacts of globalization, apathy towards Victorian local government and its image more broadly will be discussed in the final section of this chapter that addresses issues that spanned more than one specific role. The treatment of citizens as customers will also be discussed further in the section on the services role of Victorian local government.

An analysis of the literature revealed that solutions to limitations such as the workload of local government councillors, the lack of candidates to stand for local government elections and using local government as a way to advance political careers in other tiers of government were not apparent.

2.3.2 Victorian Local Government's Governance Role

> *When local governments practice good governance, their communities are more connected and engaged, better services are provided, and more effective use is made of resources. In meeting the highest standards of public accountability, good governance produces better outcomes (Good Governance Advisory Group 2004 p.3)*

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that it was recognized that Victorian local government had a governance role (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Johnstone 1996b; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997a; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hunt 1998a; Galligan 1998b; Hill 1999; Kloot 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Dollery 2003b; Kiss 2003; Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic); Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Dollery 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) (also refer Howell 1997; Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Martin and Simons 2002; Rowe 2002; Coghill 2002; Cameron 2003; Caulfield 2003; Stoker 2003a, 2003b; CPA Australia 2005). An examination of the literature revealed that there was a significant amount of discussion on the topic of Victorian local government's governance role.

2.3.2.1 The Context of Victorian Local Government's Governance Role

Governance in a broad context was defined as how an organization steered itself, the processes that were employed by the elected members and the administration to achieve its goals and how it measured its accountability to its citizens (Howell 1997; Quiggin 1999; Marsh 2002; Edwards 2002, 2003; CPA Australia 2005). Edwards (2003) stated that governance was *not so much about what organizations do, but how they do it (p.1)* (also refer Francis 2000). The implementation of good governance focused on the issues of accountability, responsiveness, transparency, consultation and balance (Coghill 2002;

Rowe 2002; Coghill 2004). Good governance improved the quality of government (Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Seth-Purdie 2004).

In discussing Victorian local government's governance role, Hunt (1998a) stated that while the functions between local government may differ, the governance role remained constant.

The term governance was the most frequently used phrase in the literature to describe this role of Victorian local government (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Australian Local Government Association 1997; Howell 1997; Hunt 1998a; Galligan 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 1999; Kloot 2001; Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Martin and Simons 2002; Rowe 2002; Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic); Caulfield 2003; Neilson 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

There were three key references that provided an overall context and a conceptual framework for Victorian local government's governance role. These were the *Code of Good Governance* (Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association 1997) that set out the governance standards for Victorian local government; *Doing it Ourselves: Good Governance* (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998); and the *Good Governance Guide* (Good Governance Advisory Group 2004).

In accordance with these three references and for Victorian local government more broadly, there were two components of governance that local government was accountable for, those being corporate governance and democratic governance (Johnstone 1996b; Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Mowbray 1999; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Dollery 2005; Brackertz et al

2005). In some references the term participatory governance was used and had a similar meaning to the phrase democratic governance (Edwards 2002, 2003; Stewart 2003).

In the literature the concept of governance was discussed in a number of different contexts that were broader than the concept of governance as defined in the references that were directly relevant to Victorian local government's role.

One phrase that was used was integrated governance. This term referred to the formal and informal relations between government agencies, other levels of government and the non-government sector (Institute of Public Administration Australia 2002). Multi-level governance was another phrase that was evident in the literature and reflected the view that governance occurred at different institutional levels and was based on negotiation, networks and a joined up government approach (Stoker 2003a).

Local governance or community governance were two phrases that were used in the literature on governance. The concept of local governance or community governance arose from the fact that local government, which was previously the prime supplier of services, now operated within an environment that had a complex variety of local overlapping networks that involved a range of organizations (Stoker 1998; Bailey 1999; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000). Local government's role in this environment was seen as a lead player in a system of local governance where there was an increased focus on the participation of community, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Geddes 2005).

The term local governance or community governance had relevance for Victorian local government due to the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in the 1990s, which increased the delivery of services by the private sector. The term local governance or community governance was also likened to the phrase multi-level governance and was discussed within a similar context (Geddes 2005).

The various concepts of governance as listed above, generally reflected the notion of governance across levels of government and agencies, in contrast to the governance of

one level of government, in this case Victorian local government. The material from the sources that discussed governance in this broader context has therefore been used to the extent that it is relevant to Victorian local government.

Edwards (2002) stated that it was important to define the meaning of the term governance because it was commonly used but often not well understood (also refer Stoker 1998; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Shadwick 2006). Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg (2000) described governance as a *somewhat slippery concept (p.53).*

An examination of the literature revealed that corporate governance was commonly defined as the principles, operational structures, codes of conduct and management practices that underpinned an effective and transparent organization (Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Dunlop 1999; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Marshall 2003). Corporate governance underpinned the processes of democratic governance (Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association 1997).

In a practical context corporate governance incorporated a number of critical components. This included a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of key players, the nature of the relationships between the key players, channels of communication with stakeholders, ethical behaviors, effective decision making, control mechanisms, appropriate resource allocation, strategic planning and reporting procedures (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Dunlop 1999; Reynolds 1999; Francis 2000; Cameron 2003; Marshall 2003).

Due to the fact that more contracting out had been introduced in the public sector environment since the 1990s, corporate governance had become an increasingly important concept (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Dunlop 1999; Gifford 1999; Francis 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Wallis and Dollery 2002; Marsh 2002; Marshall 2003). It was further considered that achieving good governance was more complex in the public sector as opposed to the private sector due to

the political, environmental and social objectives that needed to be taken into account (Wallis and Dollery 2002; Cameron 2003; Edwards 2003).

It was noted in the literature that Victorian local government had a legal requirement to adhere to corporate governance processes through legislation as established by the *Information Privacy Act 2000* (Vic), *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001*(Vic) and *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003* (Vic) (CPA Australia 2005).

Democratic governance was defined as *when governments govern as a result of being elected by an informed and engaged electorate (Brackertz et al 2005 p.10).* It was also described as a process of continuous exchange between the governors and the governed (Stoker 2003a). Democratic governance was underpinned by the mechanisms that were available for the community to make government accountable and accessible in-between elections (Johnstone 1996a; Kiss 1996; Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Rayner 1997; Galligan 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Gifford 1999; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c; CPA Australia 2005).

An analysis of the literature revealed that democratic governance was considered to be particularly relevant to Victorian local government as it was frequently referred to as the government that was closest to the people, grass roots government and the first level of government (Jones 1989, 1993; Johnstone 1996a; Stoker 1996c; Rayner 1997; Rentschler 1997; Dunstan 1998; Williams 1998; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005). Local government had been given these titles because it played a key role in community life in terms of its decisions and the services it provided (Pettersson 2000).

The view that local government was the level of government that was closest to the people was underpinned by the principle of subsidiarity. This principle argued that the purpose of government was to serve the people and that they were best served by institutions closest to them; in this case local government (Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997;

Hunt 1998b; Galligan 1998b; Bailey 1999; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Brown 2002; Dollery 2005; Blacher 2005b).

Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006) stated that implementation of the subsidiarity principle ensured the:

> *optimum allocation of functions between the various tiers of government, the most effective coordination of decisions between those tiers, and the most appropriate forms of accountability and participation in decision making (p.43).*

While the concept of subsidiarity was relevant for Victorian local government's governance role and decision making, this concept will be explored further in the discussion on local government's services role.

Democratic governance also had a high degree of relevance to local government because of its democratic nature and its accountability to its community (Johnstone 1996a; Kiss 1996; Phillips 1996; Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Gifford 1999; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). An examination of the literature revealed that there was a strong relationship between democracy and participatory democracy in particular, and democratic governance. Effective democratic governance principles and practices underpinned strong democracy (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Galligan 1996, 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Stoker 2003a, 2003b; Brackertz et al 2005).

Putnam (1993, 2000) also argued that democracy functioned best when civic engagement was at its highest and that strong civic engagement equated with stronger aspirations for democracy (also refer Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

The relationship between democratic governance, democracy and the role of local government was illustrated by the following comments by Bowman and Hampton (1983) who stated:

> *Democracy implies political participation by citizens...In democratic theory, a high level of citizen involvement in politics is held to be desirable, as it is likely to produce better citizens and better societies...One of local government's strongest claims to contribution to democracy rests on the additional opportunities it provides for participation (pp.9-10).*

As the above quote indicated, the principles of democratic governance in a local government context espoused a number of concepts including engagement, consultation and participation by the community (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Galligan 1996; Phillips 1996; Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Gifford 1999; Bishop and Davis 2002; Edwards 2002, 2003; Kiss 2003; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; King 2006; Shadwick 2006; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

The concepts of engagement, participation and consultation that underpinned democratic governance were defined in a number of different ways (Munro-Clark 1992; Rentschler 1997; Curtain 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). In some extracts engagement was considered to be a broad category that encompassed ways of involving the community in governance, and consultation and participation were elements of this engagement process (Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). Other authors used the term participation and consultation as an encompassing term (Munro-Clark 1992; Rentschler 1997) and some authors used all three terms interchangeably (Rayner 1997; Brackertz et al 2005).

In regard to this thesis the terms of engagement, participation and consultation will be utilized as appropriate, with a preference by the author for the term engagement as an encompassing concept.

Regardless of whether the term engagement, participation or consultation was used, the outcomes of these processes were commonly defined as creating an environment that allowed differences of opinion and inequalities to be better dealt with by having a more informed community and governing body (Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

An analysis of the literature revealed that citizen engagement was a central aspiration of Victorian local government's democratic governance role (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Brackertz et al 2005; Shadwick 2006; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). Engagement resulted from the many processes and interactions that occurred between a local government and its community (Edwards 2002; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004).

Victorian local government gained credibility through the achievement of effective democratic governance practices (Johnstone 1996b; Gifford 1999; CPA Australia 2005). An informed and involved community had the knowledge to question and challenge processes and to influence local government decisions that impacted on them (Munro-Clark 1992; Beetham 1996; Phillips 1996; Rentschler 1997; Rayner 1997; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Digby 2002; Brackertz et al 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

It was acknowledged that Victorian local government had a legal requirement to engage with its community as established by the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic), *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003* and Best Value legislation (Brackertz et al 2005). Compliance with the legislative requirements enhanced the credibility of Victorian local government in the eyes of the community (Gifford 1999; Johnstone 1996b; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005).

2.3.2.2   Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Governance Role

A number of limitations to Victorian local government achieving its corporate governance and democratic governance role were identified in the literature.

2.3.2.2.1   Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Corporate Governance Role

There were three key limitations identified in the literature that applied to Victorian local government's corporate governance role.

The first limitation focused on the role and behaviors of elected representatives and senior officers, and the relationship between the two parties. It was stated that the achievement of corporate governance was mostly about behaviors as opposed to processes (Cameron 2003).

A lack of understanding between the role of a local government councillor and senior management was considered to be a potential limitation to achieving effective corporate governance and led to a lack of respect and trust between the parties (Chapman and Wood 1984; Howell 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Gifford 1999; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Martin and Simons 2002; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; CPA Australia 2005).

Samuels (1990 cited Newnham and Winston 1997) state that the roles of officers and local government councillors and their relationship was:

> *unclear, misunderstood and unsatisfactory. Councillors spend too much time on politics, operational management, and trivia. Officers spend too much time accommodating councillors (p.118).*

Jones (1993) further stated that local government could become *paralyzed by conflicts (p.7)* between senior staff and councillors and between the councillors themselves

because each party could hold very different views from each other (also refer Chapman and Wood 1984; Newnham and Winston 1997; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Marshall 2003).

A lack of understating of the role of the mayor was considered to be a particular issue in regard to corporate governance in Victorian local government. This was expressed as mayors who saw themselves as chief executive officers (Marshall 2003).

The behavior of an individual local government councillor was also identified as a limitation to the achievement of effective corporate governance. Competing and conflicting issues that required consideration by elected members included managing conflicts of interest, lobbying and the application of undue influence by elected members on local government officers (Gifford 1999; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Pettersson 2000; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Warburton and Baker 2005).

The behavior and relative skill level of a Victorian local government councillor when compared to elected members from other levels of government were considered to be a challenge in some instances (Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Byrnes and Dollery 2002). State and federal elected members had usually worked their way through the party ranks and had a background in politics. This was not often the case in a local government context (Byrnes and Dollery 2002). Victorian local government councillors were also elected on individual platforms and did not have the conventions of a party system that tended to make corporate governance more manageable (CPA Australia 2005).

It was acknowledged in the literature that there were a range of pressures on local government councillors to make certain decisions that may at times impact on good governance principles (Gifford 1999; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Pettersson 2000). Elected members had the competing challenges of fulfilling both the roles of advocating for their constituents and also being a member of the governing body that makes the decision (Pettersson 2000; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Warburton and Baker 2005).

The dominance and behavior of local government managers were also considered to potentially impact on the achievement of effective corporate governance. Galligan (1998b) maintained that local government was dominated by managerialism. Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry (2002) further stated that there was a lack of understanding by senior managers of corporate governance principles and the different roles between the elected members and officers as previously discussed. The dominance of management was exacerbated by the fact that the local government environment was complex and elected members were predominantly part time (Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Marshall 2003; Dollery 2003b; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

Dollery (2003b) stated that:

> *well-informed bureaucrats hold a comparative advantage over their relatively ill-informed political masters and can thus out-maneuver them (p.220).*

The second key issue identified in the literature that was a limitation to Victorian local government's corporate governance role was the decline in trust by the community in government. This issue was discussed in detail in section 2.3.1.2 on limitations to Victorian local government's democratic role and was also considered to be relevant to the achievement of corporate governance.

It was alleged that standards of governance in Australia had generally declined as governments had become more business like and secretive due to services being contracted out (Gifford 1999; Quiggin 1999; Marsh 2002). This view was also relevant to standards of corporate governance in Victorian local government (Gifford 1999; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002).

Discussions in the literature identified that there was potential for inappropriate behavior by either councillors or staff through misappropriation, poor policy, inappropriate decision making and inadequate systems (Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Gifford 1999; Pettersson 2000; Stoker 2003a; Seth-Purdie 2004). This had led to a loss of trust in elected members and officers

as they were seen to make decisions or undertake actions to suit their own interests (Gifford 1999; Stoker 2003a).

The decline of trust in local governance was also considered to be a result of a more complex and demanding governance environment and broader issues such as globalization and information technology (Marsh 2002; Pettersson 2000; Stoker 2003a).

A third limitation that impacted on the achievement of good corporate governance was that people seldom volunteered to be accountable especially when the political environment was complex and constantly changing (Seth-Purdie 2004). In a Victorian local government context the fact that blame could be deflected between elected representatives and senior management, resulted in a diminution of accountability for decisions and actions.

2.3.2.2.2 Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Democratic Governance Role

There were two categories of limitations identified in the literature that applied to Victorian local government's democratic governance role.

The first category focused on the barriers to facilitating engagement with the community that were generally external to Victorian local government's control. The second category examined the principles and practices of community engagement that were largely influenced by the actions of Victorian local government. There were a number of components in both of these categories.

It was firstly alleged that there was tension between the concepts of democratic governance and community engagement (Brackertz et al 2005). This tension was due to a lack of clarity between the objectives of Victorian local government's role in terms of community engagement and the relationship of this process to effective local decision making (Bishop and Davis 2002; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthall and Fien 2005).

It was considered that there was pressure on Victorian local government to embrace more participatory forms of decision making, without sufficient thought being given to the purpose and desired outcomes of community engagement in local processes (Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Bishop and Davis 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). It was generally concluded that Victorian local government should examine the context and aims of the engagement process prior to embarking on a particular method (Bishop and Davis 2002; Edwards 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). Bishop and Davis (2002) stated that participation models should be shaped to match the specific problems being investigated and that *participation is not a single trend (p.26).*

It was stated in the literature that the need to consider the objectives of community engagement processes was also because of resource limitations. Engagement processes required both time and financial resources and the lack of resources of both Victorian local government and the community was considered to be a limitation to effectively achieving good democratic governance (Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2002; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002; Curtain 2003; Stoker 2003b).

A further barrier to democratic governance was that regardless of the extent of good governance practices utilized by Victorian local government, true representation could not be achieved in all circumstances (Beetham 1996; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). This was because some sections of the community declined to become involved in engagement processes for a diversity of reasons.

The first reason for the lack of community participation was because of what was termed *consultation overload (Brackertz et al 2005 p.28)*, which meant that citizens become annoyed at being frequently asked to be involved in consultation exercises (also refer Beilharz 2000; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001). This situation was exacerbated by the intensification of lifestyles and pluralization of roles and obligations experienced by some communities (Beilharz 2000; Brackertz et al 2005).

A lack of community involvement in local government engagement processes also reflected limited interest in government issues, a preference to spend time on non-political activities and a lack of time more generally (Jones 1993; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002; Stoker 2003b; Brackertz et al 2005).

A further difficulty in achieving true representation was because engagement processes may elicit views from a particular group that was atypical and therefore unrepresentative of the majority (Munro-Clark 1992; Painter 1992; Beetham 1996; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Brackertz et al 2005). Engagement practices provided avenues of influence for sections of the community who had political knowledge and were well resourced, while excluding other groups who were less influential (Munro-Clark 1992; Painter 1992; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

A barrier to achieving effective governance practices was because there were also sections of the community who were *hard to reach (Brackertz et al 2005 p.25).* Typically hard to reach groups included the elderly, youth, indigenous communities, people who spoke languages other than English and people with disabilities (Stoker 2003b; Brackertz et al 2005). Lower socio-economic groups might also not articulate their views because they believed that the political process achieved little for them and was controlled by others (Painter 1992; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Stoker 2003b).

Wider use of technology was considered to exacerbate the difficulties in engaging some citizens in governance processes. Recently introduced concepts such as e-democracy, e-petitions and 'have your say' web based programs were considered to limit the access of certain sections of the community to put forward their views (Salvaris 1997; Curtain 2003; Joseph 2004; Singh and Sahu 2004; Cooper 2005; King 2006). Other authors suggested the messages from the community via electronic communication processes were unreliable and misleading (Putnam 2000; King 2006).

There were a number of limitations to democratic governance in regard to community engagement that resulted from the practices undertaken by Victorian local government.

It was identified that some local government professionals regarded community engagement as a nuisance and a process that delayed decisions (Munro-Clark 1992; Jones 1993; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2002; Curtain 2003). Citizens consequently became disengaged with government and its processes (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997).

Community engagement was also considered to be a potential threat to elected members and to diminish the legitimacy of government. The engagement of the community meant a sharing of power and the loss of control to determine outcomes (Williams 1998; Latham 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Edwards 2002, 2003; Curtain 2003; Cuthill and Fien 2005). The concern about the potential loss of power reflected a lack of trust between the community and government more broadly (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

A lack of commitment to community engagement by Victorian local government limited community access to information. This lack of information meant that citizens were not able to fully participate in engagement processes or adequately articulate their views (Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

A further disincentive for Victorian local government to undertake engagement programs was that such initiatives could raise unrealistic community expectations, especially where resources were limited (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001). Broad engagement with the community could also result in conflict and disagreement between the parties, rather than a consensus based outcome (Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Edwards 2002).

2.3.2.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Governance Role

An analysis of the literature revealed that the community benefited from Victorian local government's corporate and democratic governance role in a variety of ways.

The main benefit for the community in terms of corporate governance focused on the ethical outcomes in decision making and behaviors.

Effective corporate governance ensured that elected members and officers acted in the best interests of the community and that the governance systems produced consistent outcomes (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Dunlop 1999; Gifford 1999; Pettersson 2000; Seth-Purdie 2004; Shadwick 2006). Such behaviors and systems added a degree of protection for the community against fraud and inappropriate financial decisions (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Gifford 1999; Seth-Purdie 2004).

Effective corporate governance also improved management practices and reinforced local government's democratic values (Marshall 2003). This environment resulted in transparent decision making and program delivery processes (Gifford 1999; Francis 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002).

The prime benefit for the community in regard to Victorian local government's democratic governance role centered on the engagement of people in issues that impacted on them and the increased community capacity that resulted from that engagement (Phillips 1996; Rayner 1997; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Jones (1993) stated that *participation has been, historically, a key local government objective (p.277).*

Citizen involvement in engagement processes provided a sense of fulfillment as concrete results were achieved from these efforts. Such involvement also provided the opportunity to reach a consensus and resulted in transparent decision making and responsive policies that reflected community views (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Kiss 1996; Stoker 1996a; Rayner 1997; Box 1998; Briand 1998; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Lando 1999; Maksem 1999; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Putnam 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Latham 2000; Pettersson 2000; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2001, 2002; Marsh 2002; Bishop and Davis 2002; Curtain 2003; Edwards 2003;

Stoker 2003a, 2003b; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Blacher 2005b; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Moran 2005).

The objectives of transparency and responsiveness were seen to be particularly important because local government had responsibility for a significant number of decisions that impacted on people's amenity and assets (Pettersson 2000). Brackertz et al (2005) stated that *more participation leads to better-informed policy and decision making (p.15).*

Bishop and Davis (2002) maintained that there was renewed interest in public participation and experiments in direct democratic governance processes (also refer Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Latham 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Marsh 2002; Reddell 2002; Curtain 2003; Stoker 2003b; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Blacher 2005b). This renewed interest reflected an increased awareness in the values of localism and citizen engagement and resulted from a growing disenchantment with political processes at the state and federal level and global institutions (Pateman 1970; Galligan 1996; Putnam 2000; Goot 2002; Reddel 2002; Milburn 2004).

Democratic governance processes also enabled citizens to have a voice in the direction and governance of their local community (Box 1998). This was termed as having the *civic conversation (Latham 2000 p.8).* Community input was considered to be particularly important as communities grappled with unprecedented economic, environmental, technological and social change (Jones 1993; Hill 1996; Rentschler 1997; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Latham 2000; Rogers 2001; Milburn 2004; Butler 2005).

It was noted that local citizens often brought a point of view or local knowledge that had not been taken into account by elected members or officers (Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Curtain 2003; Butler 2005). Engagement processes therefore delivered a way of involving citizens to identify and achieve solutions to local problems they confronted (Perry 1995; Stoker 1996c; Box 1998; Briand 1998; Lando 1999; Stoker 2003a, 2003b; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Locally developed solutions also resulted in greater community ownership (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

It was noted that local government municipalities encompassed a diversity of communities that displayed differences in aspirations, structures of power and influence, and physical, economic, social and cultural environments (Jones 1989, 1993; Brackertz et al 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Democratic governance processes that were underpinned by community engagement principles meant that 'ordinary people' from different backgrounds were involved in influencing local government processes and not only the 'usual suspects' (Edwards 2002; Brackertz et al 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

An examination of the literature revealed that a number of Victorian local government councils had developed community engagement and consultation policies (City of Maribyrnong 2000; City of Moreland 2000; City of Darebin 2002; City of Port Phillip 2003; Shire of Nillumbik 2004; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). These documents illustrated the initiatives undertaken by Victorian local government that assisted Victorian communities to be engaged and participate in local government decisions, policy development and programs.

2.3.2.4 Proposals for Governance Identifed in the Literature

A number of proposals to enhance Victorian local government's corporate governance and democratic governance role were identified in the literature. These proposals addressed a number of the limitations of the role as identified in section 2.3.2.2.

There were three interconnected proposals that related to Victorian local government's corporate governance role.

The first proposal identified in the literature was the provision of training for elected members and officers on their respective roles and responsibilities (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Howell 1997; Gifford 1999; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Francis 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Hill 2003;

Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; CPA Australia 2005). Role clarity built positive relationships and created an environment where senior officers were able to work with elected members to achieve the organization's goals (Marton 2003). An effective working relationship between the mayor and the chief executive officer was seen as particularly significant in achieving good corporate governance (Martin and Simons 2002).

A comprehensive training program developed the leadership skills of elected representatives and senior officers, which was considered to be a key element in the achievement of effective corporate governance. Ethical behavior by senior management and the communication of good governance messages throughout the organization were critical factors in establishing a positive governance culture (Francis 2000; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Edwards 2002).

It was stated that the training program should be underpinned by corporate governance protocols (Howell 1997; Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Gifford 1999; Francis 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Seth-Purdie 2004; CPA Australia 2005). These protocols should be based on a clear mission statement for the organization and incorporate relevant values such as mutual respect, effective partnerships, accountability, honesty, professionalism and transparency (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Reynolds 1999; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Seth-Purdie 2004; CPA Australia 2005).

In addition to the development of corporate governance protocols it was proposed that there should be ongoing communication processes between elected members and senior officers about roles, responsibilities, processes and policy development (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Francis 2000; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; CPA Australia 2005).

Other aspects that should underpin the principles of corporate governance were dispute resolution processes, effective internal reporting systems, transparent practices and effective management structures (Independent Commission Against Corruption 1997; Dunlop 1999; Gifford 1999; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Francis 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; CPA Australia 2005).

It was considered that these proposals would assist in addressing a number of the barriers that faced local government in achieving its corporate governance role. These barriers as previously outlined included the relationship between, and behaviors of elected members and officers, the skill level of elected representatives and the complexities of their role, and the decline of trust by the community in government. Such proposals would also partially address the fact that councillors fulfilled a part time role and the managerial dominance of the senior officers.

The proposals as outlined in the literature regarding democratic governance focused on Victorian local government's capacity to engage with the community and the need for governing systems to have a strong local dimension. It was considered that citizens had an increased desire for local knowledge and connectedness (Galligan 1996; Isaac 2001; Milburn 2004; Wiseman 2006). Stoker (2003a) referred to this concept as the need for a *new localism (p.16)*.

The proposals that related to community engagement and participation were discussed on a number of levels.

At the highest level, it was considered that a clear understanding of different engagement and participation models would assist Victorian local government to more effectively communicate with its community (Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). A number of participation models were identified in the literature (Arnstein 1969; Shand and Arnberg 1996; Box 1998; Edwards 2001, 2002; Bishop and Davis 2002; Reddel 2002; Curtain 2003; Marshall 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

While it was not within the scope of this thesis to examine in detail the diversity of participation models, it was considered that the model developed by Bishop and Davis (2002) was useful for Victorian local government (Brackertz et al 2005). Bishop and Davis (2002) argued that participation was not a single approach and that government officers should analyze the context of the participation project in terms of which approach would most effectively involve citizens and then decide on the best type of participation (Bishop and Davis 2002; Brackertz et al 2005). Bishop and Davis (2002) identified five participation types which were consultation, partnership, standing, consumer choice and control. All types of participation had both positive aspects and limitations to citizen involvement in decisions and policy development (Bishop and Davis 2002; Brackertz et al 2005).

Another useful model for consideration by Victorian local government was the community governance model developed by Box (1998). In discussing community engagement in the United States of America, Box (1998) maintained that traditional participation programs should be extended to involve citizens in both policy development and implementation. The community governance model required a change for the elected body from a central decision making role to one which focused on a citizen's coordinating role, a change in the role of officers who would become community assistants, and the establishment of citizen boards that would make recommendations back to the elected body (Box 1998).

Regardless of what participation model local government chose to implement, such a model required an organizational culture that was supported by appropriate policies and inclusive practices (Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Cuthall and Fien 2005; Reddel 2005). These initiatives were required because effective community engagement was not sustainable by the use of networks alone (Edwards 2002; Reddel 2005).

The implementation of open and transparent processes for all members of the community was considered to be a fundamental aspect of an organizational culture that facilitated effective democratic governance (Gifford 1999; Edwards 2001; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Marsh 2002; Stoker 2003a; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005;

Shadwick 2006). This was not to suggest that the participation of every citizen was required, but rather that all citizens had the opportunity for participation and no particular group was excluded (Stoker 1996c, 2003a; Curtain 2003; Brackertz et al 2005). For open processes to be achieved, the power relations needed to be structured so that all members of the community participated as equal citizens (Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Adams and Hess 2001).

Transparent engagement and participation processes built a level of trust between the community and local government and assisted in facilitating effective decision making processes that reflected community priorities (Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Stoker 2003a, 2003b; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). Transparent processes also facilitated open lines of communication that brought forward differing perspectives and provided feedback to citizens on reasons for the decisions that were taken (Rayner 1997; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

A number of engagement initiatives were outlined in the literature as potential strategies for consideration by Victorian local government.

It was evident that recent experiments in the United Kingdom on community engagement were relevant to the facilitation of democratic governance (Adams and Hess 2001; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions 2001; Edwards 2001, 2002; Institute of Public Administration Australia 2002; Aulich 2003; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Stoker 2003b). These innovations included citizen juries, citizen panels, focus groups, referendums, visioning exercises and the quick response survey panel. These initiatives resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the issues and community ownership of the outcomes (Cochrane 1996; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998; Williams 1998; Edwards 2002; Saward 2003; Stoker 2003b; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c; Brackertz et al 2005).

A range of engagement and participation innovations had also been trialed by a number of Victorian local governments with significant progress having been achieved (Jones 1989; Kiss 1996; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Williams 1998; Maksem 1999; Latham 2000; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)). These participation techniques included consultative meetings, special committees of council, advisory committees, councillor ward meetings, community forums, focus groups, user surveys, citizen panels, community visioning exercises, consensus conferences, search conferences, internet voting and partnerships with resident associations (Jones 1989; Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

It was proposed that electronic participation techniques be considered as options to assist citizens to provide their feedback on emerging issues, particularly those citizens who were 'time poor' (Williams 1997; Davidson 2000; Latham 2000; Marsh 2002; Balnaves, Walsh and Shoesmith 2004; Joseph 2004; Horey 2004; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b; King 2006). The introduction of electronically based governance processes balanced and complemented the more traditional quantitative research methods (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

In its narrowest sense, e-participation or e-democracy was viewed as the process by which the electorate connected to the elected (King 2006). In its broader context it was viewed as an answer to true democratic governance, as e-democracy incorporated the principles of community engagement in the governing process (Davidson 2000; King 2006).

The potential for direct legislation was also discussed as a potential way to revitalize democratic governance processes (Walker 1992). Direct legislation or direct democracy provided the power for citizens to determine the laws under which the community lived, although it was noted that this technique needed to be carefully managed in a local government context because of the limited geographical area (Walker 1992).

Finally, there was a need for government leaders to implement a range of practical proposals in order to achieve effective democratic governance (Edwards 2001, 2002; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Stoker 2003a; Cuthall and Fien 2005).

These proposals included the reconfiguration of traditional organizational structures from functional lines to one that facilitated more effective democratic governance outcomes (Edwards 2001; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Stoker 2003a). There was also a need to define new career paths so that professional networks could move across governance processes (Stoker 2003a). It was further proposed that training be implemented for officers and elected members specifically in the areas of facilitation and engagement techniques (Box 1998; Isaac 2001; Edwards 2001, 2002; Stewart 2003). Reddel (2002) stated that participatory governance models were based on management by negotiation rather than by hierarchical control.

It was considered that the proposals as identified in the literature and outlined in this section would assist in addressing a number of the barriers that faced local government in achieving its democratic governance role. These barriers as previously outlined included the overall lack of clarity about the objectives and processes of engagement programs and concerns about the relinquishment of control from local government to citizens. The proposals as outlined in this section would also partially address the issues of successfully engaging the harder to reach citizens and disengaged citizens and the concern about achieving a balanced outcome in terms of consultation processes.

There was no clear resolution about barriers such as consultation overload and the increased conflict and community expectations that resulted from some engagement programs. While the development of e-technology was discussed as a potential strategy to increase community participation in democratic governance initiatives, there were differing views on whether or not it would further exclude disengaged and disadvantaged groups in the community.

2.3.3 Victorian Local Government's Community Building Role

> *Community building in this era will be about ordinary people reclaiming some control over their lives and reconnecting with others they regard as part of their community. In part this is about rebuilding trust and connectedness, but it is also a move from passive consumer to active citizen, from victim to initiator (Raysmith 2001 p.15).*

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that it was recognized that Victorian local government had a community building role (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997a; Hunt 1998a; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Kloot 2001; Raysmith 2001, 2002; Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Broad 2003; Kiss 2003; Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic); House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a, 2003b; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b; Broad 2004, 2005; Local Government Victoria 2005; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; Municipal Association of Victorian 2005a, 2005b; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Broad 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Wiseman 2006) (also refer Latham 2000; Isaac 2001; Edgar 2002; Digby 2002; Coghill 2003; Municipal Association of Victorian 2004; Levine 2006).

An examination of the literature revealed that there was a significant amount of discussion on the topic of Victorian local government's community building role. There were also a number of references that discussed the role of other levels of government in this field and the Victorian state government in particular. Relevant information contained in these sources has been applied to Victorian local government where applicable.

It should be noted that the following discussion on Victorian local government's role in community building does not relate to local government's role as a provider of

community services, although it is acknowledged that these services may result in community building outcomes.

2.3.3.1 The Context of Victorian Local Government's Community Building Role

An examination of the literature revealed that the language that described Victorian local government's community building role was diverse and included a number of phrases that were used as a synonym for this role. Examples included community development (Mowbray 1999; Municipal Association of Victoria 2005a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006); community strengthening (Raysmith 2002; Broad 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005; Wiseman 2006); community cohesion (Local Government Act 1989 Part 1A section 3D); social and well-being (Australian Local Government Association 1997); cohesion and community development (Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997a; Hunt 1998a) and social development (Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

In some cases a number of phrases were used interchangeably, in particular community building and community strengthening (Raysmith 2001; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Butler 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005).

It was noted that the discussion paper *Community strengthening and the role of local government* (Local Government Victoria 2004a), utilized the terms community strengthening, community building, social inclusion and creating social and community capital interchangeably (Interface Councils 2004; Victorian Local Governance Association 2004).

The term community building was the most consistently used phrase in the literature (Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Raysmith 2001, 2002; Edgar 2002; Digby 2002; Kiss 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; Mowbray 2005; Wiseman 2005; McShane 2006) and was therefore used in this

thesis. References that were relevant to Victorian local government's community building role have been utilized, even if the specific term 'community building' was not used.

An analysis of the literature revealed that Victorian local government's role in terms of community building was framed within a number of contexts.

In a federal, Victorian state and Victorian local government policy context, community building initiatives were based on the philosophies as espoused by social capital (Raysmith 2001; Edgar 2002; Broad 2003; Coghill 2003; Productivity Commission 2003; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; McShane 2006; Wiseman 2006). While social capital was not a straightforward concept (Productivity Commission 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Adams and Hess 2006), it was defined as *the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively (Woolcock and Narayan 2000 cited Brackertz et al 2005 p.21)* (also refer Cox 1995; Putnam 2003; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005).

Community building was defined as a way of exploring more engaged and networked approaches to policy development which was underpinned by linking residents, community organizations, and public and private sector organizations (Edgar 2002; Raysmith 2002; Broad 2003, 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b; Wiseman 2006). Within this framework Raysmith (2001) maintained that community building was about the way government's governed, engaging those for whom they governed, maximizing resources and harnessing the benefits from collective decision making, local action and joined up approaches.

Community building was especially relevant as a way to build the capacity of communities to actively engage in a diverse range of social, economic, cultural, recreational, learning and civic activities, through the involvement of the three levels of government (Broad 2003; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b). The aim of community building was to assist communities to become stronger through local initiatives so that specific issues and priorities were systematically

addressed (Local Government Victoria 2004b). An important aspect of community building was the establishment of respectful partnerships between all relevant parties (Hill and Wiseman 2004).

Community building was viewed as an extension of Victorian local government's democratic and democratic governance roles and was strongly linked with the principles of participatory democracy through the outcomes of community engagement, partnerships and connecting people to decision making structures (Raysmith 2001; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; McShane 2006). Stronger communities were created through community building initiatives due to an enhanced relationship with government and vice versa (Raysmith 2001; Brackertz et al 2005).

While it was acknowledged in the literature that Victorian local government had been involved in community building for a number of years, this role had been given a higher profile due to the Victorian State Government's agenda (Raysmith 2001; Broad 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Blacher 2005a). Raysmith (2001) stated that *community building is rife across Victoria (p.2).*

In 2004 Local Government Victoria produced a discussion paper that defined a context for Victorian local government's role in community building from a state government's perspective and outlined three potential pathways for local government to consider in terms of delivering its community building role (Local Government Victoria 2004a).

In response to the 2004 discussion paper a number of views were submitted from Victorian local government and local government organizations (Local Government Victoria 2004b). There was not a consensus on the preferred model for community building as presented by the Victorian state government, but there was a preference for a devolved governance pathway (Local Government Victoria 2004b). The Municipal Association of Victoria (2004), Victorian Local Governance Association (2004) and the Interface Councils (2004) expressed a number of concerns about the directions of the 2004 discussion paper.

In addition to the community building objectives of the state government, there were a number of reasons identified in the literature that outlined the rationale as to why Victorian local government had a role in community building. Victorian local government was seen as pivotal in actively progressing community building and had a strong record of achievement in this field (Raysmith 2001, 2002; Broad 2003; Coghill 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b, 2005).

As a level of government in its own right, Victorian local government's community building role was viewed to be fundamental due to its proximity to the community and its interactions with other levels of government and the private sector (Galligan 1996; Newnham and Winston 1997; Rentschler 1997; Self 1997; Williams 1998; Latham 2000; Tod 2001; Coghill 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005).

It was stated that Victorian local government had a particular role to play in community building due to its democratic base that was both accountable and provided a strong framework to build partnerships (Raysmith 2001). Evidence of this democratic base was Victorian local government's involvement in community building programs in partnership with the community, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector (Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Brackertz et al 2005).

It was further considered that Victorian local government was well placed to assist in community building through its facilitation of civic pride and the development of a community identity (Latham 2000; West 2002). It was stated that there was a renewed interest from communities in social connectedness and cooperation through joint local government and community programs (Hill and Wiseman 2004).

While speaking about the United States of America, Etzioni (1993) presented the view that the local community was the critical basis for the development of a social fabric where shared values could be nurtured (also refer Plein, Green and Williams 1998). This view was relevant to the implementation of community building in a Victorian context. Local government as one of society's key institutions that understood the needs and

interests of the local community, was best placed to assist in the rebuilding of civic engagement through community building (Etzioni 1993; Russell 1996).

Community building was also viewed within the context of local leadership that was present through Victorian local government's elected representatives and the services and social infrastructure that local government provided (Latham 2000; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

2.3.3.2 Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Community Building Role

There were three key issues identified in the literature that were considered as barriers to Victorian local government's community building role.

The first issue focused on the community building programs that were initiated by other levels of government and the Victorian state government in particular. Kiss (2003) maintained that both the federal and state governments predominantly excluded Victorian local government in community building programs and instead focused on partnerships with volunteer organizations, private-public partnerships, non-government agencies, churches and philanthropic organizations.

The general lack of involvement from Victorian local government resulted in community building activities that reflected state government agendas and objectives. This restricted the resolution of local issues because Victorian local government priorities that had been determined through community consultation were not necessarily addressed (Raysmith 2001; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Mowbray 2005). It was also stated that the state government sought to find the most expedient solution that may not involve a shared commitment from the community or local government (Raysmith 2001; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

A related limitation identified in the literature was that community building philosophies that promoted self-help, volunteering and social entrepreneurship often masked deeper

social inequalities and inhibited the development of more progressive policies by state and federal governments (Wiseman 2006). Community building programs were therefore seen to be an excuse by other levels of government to withdraw resources at the local level.

Wiseman (2006) stated:

> *No amount of local community capacity building can substitute for long-term investment in the core public infrastructure…that provide the real foundations for resilient and healthy communities (p.104).*

The lack of resources for some communities was further exacerbated by state and federal government processes that often directed resources towards those communities that were already well organized (Mowbray 2005).

It was also noted that the funding of community building initiatives by the Victorian state government was usually for a three-year period which did not provide sufficient time to produce wide-spread economic, social or environmental community change (Mowbray 2005). A short-term funding approach also created unrealistic expectations, especially in relation to the achievement of short-term objectives. As a result, community building programs that did not directly solve problems or lead to predictable outcomes may be discontinued (Raysmith 2001). Raysmith (2001) stated that *it is easy to set community building up to fail (p.9).*

Victorian local government's limited resources for community building initiatives was exacerbated by the funding processes adopted by the state government as outlined above. Local government was therefore, partially dependent on state and federal governments to assist in the implementation of community building initiatives at the local level (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

The second key issue that was identified in the literature on community building that limited Victorian local government's role in this area, was the reluctance or inability of people to become involved in community activities (Putnam 2000; West 2002;

Department for Victorian Communities 2006b). This lack of community involvement was previously discussed in relation to democratic governance as outlined in section 2.3.2.2.2 and was also relevant in this context.

The reluctance or inability of people to become involved in community activities limited effective community building programs because such programs required the local knowledge that was gained through community networks and organizations (Adams and Hess 2006). A lack of involvement by economically disadvantaged groups was particularly seen to be an issue in this regard (Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

In the context of the United States of America, Putnam (2000) identified that since the mid 1960s there had been a sharp decline in the number of citizens who were involved in community-based organizations. Reasons for this trend included urban sprawl, two-career families, technology and the rising costs of liability insurance that impacted on community events (Putnam 2000; West 2002). As a result of these social trends there was a general loss of community well-being; people belonged to fewer groups, knew fewer neighbors and socialized with their families less often (Putnam 2000; West 2002).

The significance of Putnam's research for this thesis was that there was a strong relationship between the effectiveness of government and community well-being through the development and implementation of effective community building initiatives (also refer Latham 2000; Costello 2003; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005).

In an Australian context, research indicated that there was also a trend towards less participation in community organizations (West 2002). This trend was exacerbated by the community's lack of trust, especially in rural areas, in Victorian local government and government generally (Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

The third limitation regarding Victorian local government's community building role focused on local government itself.

It was noted that local government in Victoria varied in its ability and preparedness to engage and work with their communities and other public and private institutions (Raysmith 2001). Establishing a constructive relationship with external organizations required a degree of power sharing with those organizations. This was considered to be a hindrance to community building (Raysmith 2001) and was previously raised as a limitation to Victorian local government's democratic governance role. Research from the United Kingdom supported the view that a lack of willingness to share power was a limitation to community building and that local government was a major inhibitor to empowering local communities and their leaders (Raysmith 2001).

2.3.3.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Community Building Role

There were two interconnected community benefits identified in the literature that resulted from Victorian local government's community building role. The first perspective was related to the maintenance and strengthening of healthy communities.

There was a range of positive outcomes that resulted from Victorian local government's role in community building in terms of sustaining healthier communities. A healthy community included the achievement of positive social, educational and health outcomes, the creation of opportunities and increased participation in the economy (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; West 2002; Broad 2003, 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Blacher 2005a, 2005b; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Wiseman 2006).

Healthy communities were a resource that Victorian local government could utilize to deliver better outcomes for both the citizen and the overall community (Coghill 2003). These outcomes included a sense of pride and identity, consensus based outcomes, increased volunteerism, a heightened feeling of safety and lower levels of crime (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Edgar 2002; West 2002; Broad 2003; Costello 2003; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government

Victoria 2004, 2005; Blacher 2005a, 2005b; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

Community building activities also had the potential to establish more effective community networks, which was another measure of a healthy community. Strong community networks facilitated an environment that provided people with skills, facilitated collaboration between community groups and government, and provided opportunities to pool resources and share information (Putnam 1993, 2000; Latham 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; West 2002; Edgar 2002; Coghill 2003; Costello 2003; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Blacher 2005a, 2005b; Butler 2005; Local Government Victoria 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Moran 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b).

Community building also created the opportunity for community leadership and to develop a shared vision (Stoker 2003a).

The second perspective of Victorian local government's community building role focused on how communities would be supported to deal with a range of broader societal trends.

It was identified that Australian communities were increasingly apprehensive about a range of issues including the widening income gap, the rate of change, unemployment, reduced standards of community services, the failure of traditional services to deal with social issues, loss of public assets, racial tension and the erosion of democratic rights (Hill 1999; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Purple Sage Report 2000; Raysmith 2001, 2002; Hill and Wiseman 2004). This decline in community well-being, as a world-wide trend was extensively documented in the literature (Putnam 1993; Handy 1995, 1998; Hill 1999; Latham 2000; Putnam 2000; Isaac 2001; Tod 2001; Raysmith 2002; West 2002; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003; Broad 2003; Costello 2003; Stoker 2003a; Hughes 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005; Moran 2005). The need to address community well-being had resulted in the formation of a number of community-initiated programs (People Together Project 1997, 1998, 2000; Purple Sage Project 2000).

A decline in community well-being was also a result of the rapidly changing economy and social environment where established norms were being challenged (Latham 2000; Rogers 2001; Broad 2003; Hughes 2004; Blacher 2005b; Moran 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005). This rapid change was described as a *poverty in human relationships (Latham 2000 p.2)* (also refer West 2002).

It was considered that Victorian local government through its community building role assisted to rebuild community well-being through increased civic engagement and other initiatives. Community building activities provided a process to restore shared values, increase trust in society and for citizens to reconnect with other community members (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Broad 2003).

Community building programs sought new ways to tackle social disadvantage and resolve of a range of community issues such as youth problems, isolation, family breakdown and crime through the joint involvement of government and an active, knowledgeable and empowered community (Jones 1993; Latham 2000; Tod 2001; Raysmith 2001; West 2002; Broad 2003; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b; Blacher 2005b; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Wiseman 2005).

Community building was identified as a way to deal with the failure of government services, which was particularly relevant for rural communities where economic growth had not compensated for the withdrawal of services and the declining population (Raysmith 2001; Tod 2001).

Victorian local government itself was considered to be a balance to the rate of change in the external environment because it was a stable and enduring institution (Jones 1993; Self 1997; Rentschler 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005; Wiseman 2006). Jones (1993) maintained that local government fulfilled an important role as

communities grappled with economic and social change (also refer Brumby 1996; Galligan 1996; Russell 1996; Stoker 2003a; Milburn 2004; Wiseman 2006).

2.3.3.4 Proposals for Community Building Identified in the Literature

There was a range of proposals that explored how Victorian local government could better respond to changing community needs through the adoption of strategies to achieve more effective community building (Johnstone 1996b; Kiss 1996; Russell 1996; Howell 1997; Pope and Harrowfield 1997; Rayner 1997; Self 1997; Davidson 1998; Hunt 1998a; Somlyay 1998; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Williamson 2002; Local Government Victoria 2004a). The proposals concerning Victorian local government's community building role have been categorized into two groups.

The first group of proposals focused on the development of partnerships, which was discussed from three perspectives.

A commitment to partnerships between community groups and local government was considered to be an effective way to facilitate community building (Latham 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; West 2002; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Blacher 2005a). It was noted that community groups were often a complex interaction of individuals who had different priorities and perspectives (Raysmith 2001; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Victorian local government had a significant role in bringing disparate groups within the community together through engagement and persuasion (Latham 2000; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Blacher 2005a, 2005b).

In working with the community, Victorian local government needed to achieve a balance between top-down and bottom-up community approaches in order to facilitate the effective implementation of community building initiatives (Latham 2000; West 2002; Cuthill and Fien 2005). There should be a focus on community-led solutions that assisted communities to develop skills and tangible outcomes, including the possibility of financial incentives and operational support for community groups (Latham 2000;

Raysmith 2001; West 2002; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Moran 2005). Local leaders needed to be identified and their skills harnessed (Blacher 2005a).

Victorian local government needed to ensure that community leaders had access to all relevant information that was held by the organization, as this assisted in the successful design of appropriate community building programs (Latham 2000; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Cuthall and Fien 2005). Access to social, environmental and economic information by the community also balanced the power within the collaboration and laid the foundation for effective decision making and planning (Latham 2000; Cuthall and Fien 2005).

The second partnership that was discussed in the literature on community building was between the Victorian state government and Victorian local government. It was stated that the partnership between state and local government needed to be clearly defined and address the ongoing concerns about cost shifting and lines of accountability (Blacher 2005a; Local Government Victoria 2005).

It was also proposed that local government connect with the programs and services provided by other levels of government so that resources were not dissipated (Raysmith 2001, 2002; Broad 2004; Blacher 2005a).

The relationship between the three levels of government and local communities was the third partnership that required development. It was considered that a fundamental change in approach by all governments was needed to ensure that the diversity of views within the community was embraced (Broad 2004; Blacher 2005a; Local Government Victoria 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Such an approach should be underpinned by participation and empowerment; inclusion and access; tolerance and diversity; and sustainability (Raysmith 2001). The formation of new local structures that could establish priorities and had decision making capabilities was also proposed (Raysmith 2001, 2002).

It was stated that the partnership between government and the community would not be effective if community building programs were utilized as a way for governments to

reduce its responsibilities to the community instead of being a means to assist service delivery to be more targeted and accessible (Raysmith 2001; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Mowbray 2005). Community building would only take place where resources were invested to assist the community in their efforts (Hill and Wiseman 2004; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Governments should also encourage the private sector to be a contributor of resources to community building initiatives (Stoker 2003a).

It was proposed that all levels of government should take a long-term view of community building so that a strategic approach was provided (Raysmith 2001; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Mowbray 2005). A locally based collaborative planning model that involved all parties would assist in developing this long-term view and would also build the relationship between the levels of government and the community (Blacher 2005a).

The second category of proposals that was discussed in the literature focused on specific areas that Victorian local government needed to address.

The effective implementation of community building programs required Victorian local government to review its structures and organizational processes (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Coghill 2003; Blacher 2005a; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Adams and Hess 2006). Local government was traditionally viewed as bureaucratic and hierarchal (Latham 2000). New structures and a supportive organizational culture that facilitated collaborative approaches with the diversity of external organizations involved in community building activities needed to be developed (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Such a change required a shift from a government control model to one of an enabler and facilitator (Blacher 2005a, 2005b). Political leadership at the local government level was a critical component to facilitating this change of approach.

An analysis of the literature identified that Victorian local government also had a responsibility to enhance its organizational skills and to review its processes so that community building programs could effectively be designed, implemented and integrated (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; West 2002; Coghill 2003; Blacher 2005a; Cuthill and

Fien 2005; Adams and Hess 2006). This proposal included a commitment to building a shared vision, appropriate processes to resolve potential conflicts and the allocation of resources (Latham 2000; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

Victorian local government had a responsibility in the rebuilding of civic engagement through community building programs. Such initiatives assisted in the building of social capital and sustainable communities (Etzioni 1993; Putnam 1993, 2000; Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Butler 2005).

It was proposed that Victorian local government maintain its commitment to the development and maintenance of community infrastructure that had a significant role in the facilitation of community building activities (Hill and Wiseman 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b). It was stated that local government's role in this area should not be underestimated (Latham 2000; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

Finally it was stated that indicators should be established to measure the effectiveness of community building programs (Rogers 2001; Adams 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Hughes 2004; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005). Indicators monitored changes over time, informed policy decisions and provided information that explored causal connections in the longer-term (Adams 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Trewin 2004).

In summary it was considered that the proposals identified in the literature and outlined in this section would assist in addressing a number of the barriers that faced Victorian local government in achieving its community building role. The lack of community involvement and negative social trends would be assisted by more effective partnerships with the community. Open and transparent processes, community-based groups and access to all relevant information would alleviate the lack of trust and interest in local government and community activities. There were a number of proposals that would assist the successful implementation of community building programs that were in the control of local government itself. It was considered that more research needed to be

undertaken to ensure that a collaborative partnership between the Victorian state government and local government was achieved.

2.3.4 Victorian Local Government's Advocacy Role

Communities have been calling on their local governments to play a more powerful advocacy role. The manifestations of local government advocacy over the past four years have been quite impressive (Hill 1999 p.17).

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that is was recognized that Victorian local government had a role as an advocate (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Jones 1993; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997a; Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a; Dore 1998; Hunt 1998a; Mowbray 1999; Kloot 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a, 2001b; Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; Kiss 2003; Victorian Local Governance Association 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Municipal Association of Victoria 2005a, 2005b; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) (also refer Local Government Board 1995; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Rance 1998b; Hill 1999; Isaac 2001; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; CPA Australia 2005; Levine 2006).

An examination of the literature revealed that there was less discussion on Victorian local government's advocacy role than other role areas. As a consequence, some sections that appeared in the discussion of other local government roles have been combined.

2.3.4.1 The Context and Limitations of Victorian Local Government's Advocacy Role

The term advocacy became commonly used in the mid 1990s and replaced the concept of lobbying (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Haag 1997; Wensing 1997a; Kloot 2001). It was stated in the literature that advocacy strategies initiated by Victorian local government not only focused on increased service provision but also covered a wide

range of social, economic, environmental and political issues (Jones 1993; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a). Such strategies were predominantly directed at state and federal governments (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Hunt 1998a; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005).

The role of individual councillors as advocates representing constituencies on specific programs within the local government decision framework was also recognized (Local Government Board 1995; Rayner 1997; Gifford 1999; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Local Government Association (UK) 2005c). It was considered that in recent years there had been an increased number of lobby groups who sought specific outcomes (Rayner 1997).

An examination of the literature revealed that the rationale for Victorian local government's advocacy role was discussed in two ways. The most predominant view was that local government was an advocate for its community (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Hill 1999; Isaac 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a, 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Levine 2006). The importance of this role was increasing because of the need to secure enhanced services and facilities from other levels of government and authorities (Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a).

The second reason for Victorian local government's advocacy role was because of its own position as a level of government within the overall political framework. It was important that Victorian local government was at the *centre of debate on emerging issues and not always reactive and defensive (Jones 1993 p.60).*

Being at the center of policy development provided Victorian local government with the opportunity to advocate to state and federal governments on local amenity, services, infrastructure and environmental issues (Jones 1989, 1993; Kiss 1996; Saunders 1996; Wensing 1997a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). The view that Victorian local government should be involved in policy

issues also extended to global issues where world-based decisions impacted on the local environment (Haag 1997; Hill 1999).

A related theme to the importance of Victorian local government's participation in policy development was the successful partnerships it formed with state and federal governments as a result of its advocacy (Kiss 1996; Dollery and Marshall 2003). The partnership between local government and state government was previously discussed in the context of Victorian local government's community building role.

It was identified in the literature that advocacy fulfilled a local leadership role in terms of being an information broker for the community (Jones 1989, 1993; Wensing 1997a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). In some instances, federal and state government policy positions were not widely known by the community until such positions were communicated to the community by local government.

Saunders (1996) stated that a limitation to Victorian local government's role as an advocate was that state and federal governments did not take sufficient notice of local government's views (also refer Kiss 1996). Saunders (1996) stated:

> *The capacity for local government to make a contribution towards policy-making at the other levels is also important. Local government needs more than an opportunity to have a say (p.60).*

2.3.4.2 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Advocacy Role and Proposals

A number of community benefits that resulted from Victorian local government's advocacy role were identified in the literature (Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997, 1999; Mowbray 1999; Hill 1999; Isaac 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a, 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

Victorian local government's advocacy role benefited the community by being a voice for those who were disadvantaged by policy failures and decisions of other levels of government that did not adequately take into account local issues and impacts (Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Rance 1998b; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999; Isaac 2001; Brackertz et al 2005). Hill (1999) stated that people expected their local government to *stand up for them (p.17).*

The amalgamation of local councils in the 1990s assisted Victorian local government to be a stronger advocate for its community (Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999, 2001a). This increased capacity resulted in more effective advocacy initiatives particularly where services were under threat from funding reductions (Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999).

The benefits for the community in terms of advocacy also occurred because local government had in-depth knowledge of community priorities and local issues, which enabled effective advocacy strategies to be implemented (Rance 1998b; Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999, 2003; Brackertz et al 2005).

There were a number of successful advocacy campaigns identified in the literature that discussed Victorian local government's advocacy role. These campaigns included gambling, environmental initiatives, economic tariffs and the withdrawal of banking services from small communities (Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997, 1999; Isaac 2001).

It was considered that there were limited discussions in the literature about strategies to progress and enhance Victorian local government's advocacy role. While it was identified that advocacy was a specific local government role, particularly in regard to policy failures of other levels of government, the exploration of limitations and proposals was narrow.

2.3.5 Victorian Local Government's Services Role

> *It (local government) is the level of government closest to the people and delivers services that greatly affect the immediate living environments of its citizens (Newnham and Winston 1997 p.115).*

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that it was clearly recognized that Victorian local government had a services role (Bowman 1983; Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Jones 1989, 1993; Office of Local Government 1994, 1996; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1996b; McNeill 1997; Australian Local Government Association 1997; Chapman 1997b; Wensing 1997b; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998a; Aulich 1999; Kloot 2001; Department of Transport and Regional Affairs 2002; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a, 2003b; Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic); Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Municipal Association of Victoria 2005a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006) (also refer Chapman and Wood 1984; Reynolds 1988; Newnham and Winston 1997; Tucker 1997; Digby and Kennedy 1998; Haig 1998; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Bailey 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999; Mowbray 1999; Martin 2001; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; May 2003; Johnson 2003; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; CPA Australia 2005; Dollery 2005). An examination of the literature revealed that there was a significant amount of discussion on this role.

2.3.5.1 The Context of Victorian Local Government's Services Role

In the literature it was revealed that the term 'services' was an umbrella phrase and included all the programs and activities that Victorian local government provided for its community either directly or through external service providers (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989, 1993; Galligan 1996; Wensing 1997b; Haig 1998;

Digby and Kennedy 1998; Worthington and Dollery 2002; May 2003; Johnson 2003; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Dollery 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). Victorian local government provided services in the areas of engineering, waste management, health, land use planning and development, environmental management, community leisure and recreation, and a number of regulatory functions (Bowman 1983; Kloot 2001; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

The phrase 'services' was also linked to the provision of infrastructure (Bowman 1983; Russell and Macmillan 1992; Tucker 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Worthington and Dollery 2002; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b). In some cases infrastructure provision was directly classified as a local government service (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2003). Unless specifically notated, throughout this thesis the use of the term 'service' should be read as also incorporating infrastructure provision.

Local government's role as a significant provider, planner and steward of community-based infrastructure was well documented (Bowman 1983; Russell and Macmillan 1992; CPA Australia 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

An examination of the literature revealed that the provision of local services and infrastructure for residents and service users was a traditional aspect of Victorian local government's role and was a primary reason for its original formation (Russell and Bishop 1973; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989; Russell and Macmillan 1992; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1997; Rayner 1997; Bailey 1999; Martin 2001; Wallis and Dollery 2002).

Local government's role in service delivery was defined by its municipal boundary and based on a property regime, although a number of services were provided for citizens who visited a local government municipality, but did not live there (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Wallis and Dollery 2002; Commonwealth of Australia,

Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Department for Victorian Communities 2006a). Victorian local government also provided a range of services on behalf of state and federal governments (Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

Dollery, Marshall and Worthington (2003b) stated that there was an expectation that Victorian local government would shift from a *services to property (p.4)* function to a *services to people (p.4)* model (also refer Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; McShane 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

As previously outlined, while Victorian local government had a limited span of service delivery responsibilities compared to the United Kingdom and United States of America, the range of services provided by local government had expanded in recent decades particularly in the areas of community services, leisure and recreation and emergency management (Chapman and Wood 1984; Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Johnstone 1997; Mowbray 1999; Kloot 2001; Martin 2001; Rotherham 2002; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Rotherham 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; McShane 2006).

The literature revealed that local government's role in economic development had also expanded (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Garlick 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Hill 1997, 1999; Martin 2001; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). The view expressed in the 1980s that Victorian local government had considerable potential for economic management (Bowman and Hampton 1983) was reinforced in the 1990s with the amalgamations of Victorian local government (Johnstone 1996b; Maclellan 1996).

Local government's responsibilities in land use planning as an individual service were also recognized in the literature (Beed 1981; Johnstone 1996b; Maclellan 1998; Troy 1999; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Carr 2005). There was a range of literature on the technical aspects of land use planning and the history of Victorian local

government's role in this area (Beed 1981; Government of Victoria 1994, 1995; Maclellan 1998; Kiss 1999; Savage 1999; Landy 2002; Carr 2005).

Victorian local government's increased role in environmental management was also acknowledged (Christoff 1999; Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Garcia 2002a; McKenzie 2003; Dean and Garcia 2004).

The provision of services by Victorian local government was frequently discussed in the literature within the context of efficiency and economies of scale principles (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Municipal Association of Victoria 1991; Proust 1995; Maclellan 1996; Galligan 1998b; Cetinic-Dorol 1999; Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999; Boyne 1998; Bailey 1999; Worthington and Dollery 2002; May 2003; Dollery 2005; Carnegie and Baxter 2006). Local government was under constant pressure to improve performance and to implement the most recent management paradigm (Proust 1995; Davis 1996; Johnstone 1997; Cetinic-Dorol 1999; Worthington and Dollery 2002). There was a view that the main focus of Victorian local government should be the provision of services for the least possible cost (Moore 1996; Maclellan 1996; Proust 1996).

A number of management trends that focused on efficiency service models emerged in the 1980s. The models that influenced Victorian local government included Management by Objectives, Zero Based Budgeting and Planning Programming Budgeting Systems (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Jones 1993; Proust 1995; Tucker 1997; Cetinic-Dorol 1999). Management theories that focused on efficient service delivery also emerged from the United States of America through the writings of Kotter (1982); Schein (1983); and Drucker (1988).

The efficiency focus for government service delivery further gained interest through the writings of Osborne and Gaebler (1993) who explored an economic and effectiveness model for local government. Hunt (1998a) maintained that these authors strongly influenced the Victorian government ministers in the Kennett Government during the 1990s.

The trend for an efficiency focus on service delivery continued with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, national competition policy and best value (Proust 1995, 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Pope and Harrowfield 1997; Johnstone 1997; Cetinic-Dorol 1999; Vincent-Jones 1999; Brackertz et al 2005; Russell 2006). The efficiency theories as outlined above influenced Victorian local government's services role throughout these two decades (Municipal Association of Victorian 1993; Hunt 1998a) and continued into the next century.

One service delivery model that was developed in the 2000s was the virtual council approach (Allan 2001). This model suggested that smaller local government councils should amalgamate or contract-out administrative functions in order to achieve the economies of scale and service delivery efficiencies of larger municipalities (Allan 2001; May 2003; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). In this model the shared service centre would be owned and controlled by participating councils (Allan 2001; May 2003; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). The virtual council model was based on the premise that a community's satisfaction with local government services can be measured by whether the service delivery met the resident's needs and what they cost the resident (Dollery 2003a).

It was considered however, that the virtual council approach required further examination and discussion prior to its uniform adoption throughout local government (Dollery 2003a, 2003b).

The primary reason identified in the literature as to why Victorian local government undertook a services role focused on the fact that local government was close to the community and understood local needs (Oates 1972; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1997; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2005c; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

Underpinning the view that Victorian local government was the level of government that was closest to the people was the principle of subsidiarity. This principle was defined in the discussion on Victorian local government's governance role in section 2.3.2.1. The

subsidiarity principle was considered to be particularly relevant for Victorian local government because it was best qualified to respond to the service needs of local communities and was consequently more accountable to that local community (Galligan 1996, 1998b; Hunt 1998a, 1998b; Frey and Eichenberger 1995, 1999; Bailey 1999; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Brown 2002; Local Government Association (UK) 2005a, 2005c; Dollery 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

While speaking about the United States of America, Etzioni (1993) supported the subsidiarity principle when he wrote:

> *What can be done at the local level should not be passed on to the state or federal level (p.260).*

Another term that was used in a similar context to subsidiarity was localism (Stoker 2003a; Geddes 2005). This term described the means by which power was devolved to those best placed to make decisions and deliver goals (Geddes 2005). Excessive centralization limited the effectiveness and innovation associated with subsidiarity or localism (Milburn 2004; Geddes 2005).

2.3.5.2 Limitations to Victorian Local Government's Services Role

There were three key limitations to Victorian local government's services role identified in the literature. The first limitation highlighted local government's capacity to deliver services to the local community as a result of community factors or controls imposed by other levels of government.

Local government faced increasing demands from citizens for a number of services from a wide range of areas (Worthington and Dollery 2002; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 2003; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003a; Hancock 2003; Johnson 2003; Sheperd 2004; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Russell 2006).

Local government's financial and organizational capacity to respond to these community needs in terms of services and infrastructure provision varied considerably and was identified as an issue of concern (Chapman and Wood 1984; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999; Municipal Association of Victoria 2001; Pemble 2002; Wallis and Dollery 2002; Lee 2004b; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Carnegie and Baxter 2006; Gittins 2006; McShane 2006; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). This was especially relevant for rural councils (Jones 1993; Tod 2001; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006; McShane 2006). The financial challenges faced by Victorian local government and the concerns about cost shifting from other levels of government to local government were previously outlined in section 1.8.2 of Chapter 1.

It was also noted that state and federal governments would often commence a service agreement with local government and then reduce or cease funding, which left local government responsible for the service (Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). These capacity challenges meant that Victorian local government had to make unrealistic decisions about the relative importance of certain services versus others (Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

Victorian local government was considered to be a *junior partner (Bowman 1983 p.172)* in the provision of services from an influence and expenditure perspective when compared to state and federal governments (also refer Oates 1972).

In terms of services related to land use planning specifically, both Victorian local and state governments were considered by the community to be failing in the protection of neighborhood character and local heritage (Rayner 1997; Wensing 1997a). The Victorian state government's ultimate control of land use planning was considered to limit Victorian local government's ability to manage local amenity and development parameters (Rayner 1997).

The second category of limitations to Victorian local government's services role related to its relationship to the community and the socio-demographic characteristics of some populations.

Bailey (1999 cited Dollery 2003a, 2003b) stated that there was a lack of community input or 'voice' about preferences for the mix or standard of services. Socio-demographic issues where communities were poorer and less educated often exacerbated this lack of voice when compared to groups that were educated, affluent and articulate. This resulted in one particular group influencing the quality outcomes of service delivery to the exclusion of others (Bailey 1999 cited Dollery 2003a, 2003b). The relative importance of some services for particular segments of the population was also a factor in uneven service provision.

It was further considered that there were barriers between citizens and local government decision makers due to organizational limitations and inadequate information about the cost and nature of service delivery (Bailey 1999 cited Dollery 2003a, 2003b). Dollery, Wallis and Allan (2006) identified that it was difficult for voters to determine if they received value for money for their services from local government due to the fiscal complexities involved in the delivery structure (also refer Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005).

The third category of issues relevant to Victorian local government's services role related to the operations of local government itself.

An examination of the literature identified that the focus on efficient service delivery had reduced the quality of the services provided by Victorian local government (Aulich 1997). A focus on efficiency and the potential for contracting of services was apparent in the early 1990s (Municipal Association of Victoria 1991) and was reinforced with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering under the Kennett Government where a number of services were subsequently contracted (Aulich 1997).

Research supported the relatively poor view of local government services. A 2004 survey found that only 34% of those surveyed rated local government services as good or excellent (Lee 2004a). It was stated, however, in response to this result that many residents were not aware of which services were provided by local government, other levels of government or external service providers (Lee 2004a).

The lack of adequate performance measurement was identified as a limitation to the assessment of effective service delivery by Victorian local government (Municipal Association of Victoria 1991; Johnstone 1997; Department of Infrastructure 1998). However, it was also stated that each local government should be able to develop meaningful benchmarks that reflected local priorities and that qualitative measurements were more meaningful than simplistic quantifiable outcomes (Johnstone 1997).

2.3.5.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Services Role

An examination of the literature identified that the delivery of relevant and effective services by Victorian local government made a positive difference to people's lives in a number of areas (Bowman 1983; Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Galligan 1998b; Stoker 2003b; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). Services that were targeted and successfully delivered to the community assisted to build stronger communities, strengthened prevention strategies and were central to the long-term success of a community (Martin 2001; Raysmith 2001).

The effective delivery of services and the range of locally provided services were important factors in light of the social changes that resulted from the urbanization of cities, higher densities, changing work patterns and the development of transportation (Troy 1999). As a result of local knowledge, Victorian local government also had the ability to detect emerging needs and respond to those needs more effectively than other levels of government or the private sector (Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Lowndes 1996; Stoker 2003a). This included addressing issues of inequality and isolation (Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Lowndes 1996).

In the broader context Victorian local government was a significant contributor in developing initiatives that assisted the community to respond to the global challenges of environmental management (Christoff 1999; Garcia 2002a; McKenzie 2003; Dean and Garcia 2004).

It was stated that service delivery under best value had benefited local communities. The requirement for Victorian local government to review all services had resulted in more responsive services, increased participation between local government and their communities, transparency of decision making and a basis for continuous improvement (Russell 2006).

2.3.5.4   Proposals for Services Identified in the Literature

The first overarching proposal was for Victorian local government to determine what service model it would adopt.

Dollery, Wallis and Allan (2006) discussed three possible service delivery models for local government. Firstly there was the maximalist local government that delivered a wide range of services that was only constrained by the financial capacity of the local government itself. Secondly there was the minimalist local government that provided services on the residuality principle where local government did not provide services for people and only focused on services to property. Thirdly there was the optimalist local government that assumed a leadership role in harnessing the community, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector to jointly fund local initiatives. The optimalist model was based on a partnership approach (Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006).

In analyzing the three models, Dollery, Wallis and Allan (2006) did not conclusively propose a particular model, but rather suggested that the conversation needed to be had by local government about the appropriateness of each option.

There were a number of additional proposals identified in the literature, the first of which focused on local government's limited financial capacity.

It was suggested that local government should seek to secure external funding from all available sources and particularly from other levels of government (Jones 1993; Johnson

2003). Available funding sources could be achieved by a number of strategies including the development of a partnership approach to service delivery (Johnson 2003).

It was considered that the achievement of additional resources through extended partnerships with other levels of government largely depended on the degree that Victorian local government was considered to act responsibly and its capacity to deliver local services (Wallis and Dollery 2002). Conversely local government in the development of new partnerships needed to have the confidence that there was a shared understanding about what funds were available for the provision of ongoing service costs, to limit potential cost shifting (Wallis and Dollery 2002).

The development of stronger partnerships with other services providers, including state and federal governments, would achieve what was termed a 'joining up' of community services and social assets. Such an approach would achieve more enhanced service outcomes for the community (McShane 2006).

The management of service costs due to local government's financial constraints required communication and consultation with the community so that voter expectations were managed and pricing policies were understood (Johnson 2003; Carnegie and Baxter 2006). A community participation program should be initiated to determine what services and levels of service should be provided within the available funding (Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Latham 2000; Johnson 2003). A two-way understanding of community expectations would also assist in determining the most appropriate service delivery model as previously outlined by Dollery, Wallis and Allan (2006).

Utilization of the annual reporting process could clearly articulate what services Victorian local government provided, service management plans and the restrictions imposed on local government as a result of cost shifting by other levels of government (Johnstone 1997; Johnson 2003).

It was proposed that Victorian local government deliver services in the most cost effective way in order to create savings and increase the opportunity to deliver additional

services (Johnson 2003). Effective service planning and implementation needed to be complemented by appropriate organizational structures (Cetinic-Dorol 1999). It was recognized, however, that too much emphasis on a drive for efficiency at the cost of an effective organizational structure resulted in the failure of an organization (Cetinic-Dorol 1999).

The treatment of citizens as customers was discussed in the context of Victorian local government's democratic role and was also relevant to local service delivery (Salvaris 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

During the Kennett Government reform period in the 1990s, the term customer was extensively used in related literature (Proust 1995; Office of Local Government 1996, 1997; Department of Infrastructure 1998). It was acknowledged that there had been a move away from this trend in recent times and it was proposed that Victorian local government should acknowledge service users as citizens, because citizens were active participants in the process of service provision (Jones 1993; Salvaris 1997; Kiss 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Garcia 2002b).

It was stated that service delivery strategies should be evidence based so that the services delivered by Victorian local government addressed community needs and achieved measurable outcomes (Municipal Association of Victoria 1993; Aulich 1997; Johnstone 1997; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Galligan 1998b; Raysmith 2001; Garcia 2002b; Dollery 2005). Such measures needed to be meaningful and reflect local priorities (Johnstone 1997) and not result for an imposed set of uniform standards (Worthington and Dollery 2001).

Dollery (2005) stated that:

> *it is simply not acceptable that inefficient councils are permitted to disguise the fact that they lag behind their counterparts in service delivery (p.18).*

The proposals outlined in this section provided a number of interconnected resolutions to the limitations that were identified in section 2.3.5.2. The proposals addressed the need for Victorian local government to determine a service model that best responded to community requirements based on partnership approaches, community engagement and communication strategies, the delivery of cost effective and effective services and service outcome measurements. The financial constraints regarding the implementation of a preferred service model was partially addressed but did not entirely resolve the issue of resource constraints and cost shifting from other levels of government.

2.3.6 Victorian Local Government's Planning Role

> *Local government provides many of the opportunities for facilitating the integration of planning not only within the council, but with other spheres of government, the voluntary sectors and the many regional agencies that impact on the local community (Boyd and Thomas 1995 p.6).*

The analysis of the literature from the three levels of government and the academic literature as documented in section 2.2, revealed that is was recognized that Victorian local government had a planning role (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Boyd and Thomas 1995; Dore 1998; Kloot 2001; Salvaris 2002; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; Municipal Association of Victorian 2005a; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) (also refer Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Local Government Board 1995; Johnston 1997; Self 1997; Wensing 1997a; Reynolds 1999; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Carr 2005).

An examination of the literature revealed that there was a limited amount of discussion on the topic of Victorian local government's planning role. As a consequence, some sections that appeared in the discussion of other Victorian local government roles have been combined.

2.3.6.1 The Context and Limitations of Victorian Local Government's Planning Role

An analysis of the literature revealed that Victorian local government had a significant role in planning for its current and future communities. It was best placed to understand local needs, aspirations and potential trends. Responsibilities included corporate or community planning to provide a vision and key goals for both the council and citizens; and general planning in the areas of strategic land use; environment and open space; infrastructure, community services and recreation (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Wensing 1997a; Reynolds 1999; Kloot 2001; Salvaris 2002; Dollery, Marshall and Worthington 2003b; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Carr 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

There were three predominant terms that were used to describe Victorian local government's broad planning role. Corporate planning was the most commonly used phrase prior to 2003 (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Dore 1998; Kloot 2001). In 2003 the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) was amended to refer to corporate plans as council plans (Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 Victoria). Council plans were also referred to as community plans where there was a clear intention to comprehensively involve the community in the planning process for the local government municipality (Salvaris 2002).

In this thesis the term council plan will be utilized so that there is consistency with the legislation, but in using this term it is inferred that this planning process includes the principles of community engagement that underpin a community planning model.

A number of reasons why local government should pursue a council planning approach were discussed in the literature. These reasons included the need to establish a clear vision and direction for the organization with the community, the long-term benefits of addressing significant community issues and creating an organizational culture that was

accountable (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Local Government Board 1995). Planning was also seen as a powerful tool to engage citizens in discussions on key decisions (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Salvaris 2002).

From an internal perspective it was noted that Victorian local government produced a proliferation of planning reports and ad hoc studies. A council plan brought this research together so that priorities were established and duplication of effort was avoided (Floyd and Palmer 1985). It was noted that Victorian local government had a legislative requirement to complete and publish a council plan (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Kloot 2001).

A number of limitations to Victorian local government's planning role were identified in the literature.

Jones (1993) stated that there was an over emphasis in local government on financial systems at the cost of more creative and innovative planning strategies and that local government's strategic planning function was *in a mess...All councils should take a very critical look at their formal planning systems (p.272).*

Johnston (1997) supported the need for a review of local government planning due to the turbulence and complexity of the Victorian local government environment where formal planning processes quickly becoming redundant (also refer Neilson 2003). This turbulence was due to local elections, changes of local government councillors or mayors and political imperatives (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Jones 1993; Johnston 1997; Reynolds 1999; Salvaris 2002). The instability of the external environment was also due to the scale of demographics changes and the impact of those changes on cities and regions (Troy 1999; Neilson 2003).

A further difficulty that occurred in developing a council plan was the diversity of views that existed within a community and the conflicting motivations that were present throughout a planning process (Cuthall and Fien 2005). It was considered that a balance

needed to be achieved between the common good and the self-interest of individuals or groups (Cuthall and Fien 2005).

2.3.6.2 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's Planning Role

It was identified that the development of a comprehensive council plan had a number of community benefits (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Kloot 2001; Salvaris 2002). It was firstly a tool that re-engaged citizens in key decisions about the community in which they lived and brought together the ideas and aspirations of all interested parties (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Salvaris 2002). This engagement assisted community groups to understand complex issues and deal with potential conflicts and problems (Salvaris 2002).

Local government planning processes involved citizens from a diverse range of backgrounds and interests and was a vehicle for articulating different perspectives and socio-economic issues (Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2004b, 2005c). It was a process that developed community leadership (Salvaris 2002; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2004b, 2005c).

Council planning assisted communities to deal with internal conflict. As council planning focused on the future, issues could be framed within an agreed context rather than having a focus on self-interest and the practicalities of the present. Council planning therefore had a greater possibility of achieving a collaborative and cooperative approach (Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Salvaris 2002; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

The longer-term focus of council planning broke the cycle of short-term policy making that only responded to immediate demands and assisted the community to respond to issues such as globalization and the pace of change (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Salvaris 2002; Neilson 2003; Cuthill and Fien 2005). Planning provided a more pro-active approach for both

local government and the community to critically examine future options and actions (Salvaris 2002; Cuthill and Fien 2005).

Council planning that engaged the community facilitated a whole of government approach and addressed the current fragmentation of services between different levels of government (Salvaris 2002). The development of partnerships between levels of government and a rationalization of services tended to be an outcome of council planning (Salvaris 2002).

Finally, council planning ensured that local government was accountable to the community in terms of the allocation of resources (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993). The annual report ensured that the council plan was measured and reported to the community (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Johnstone 1997; Kloot 2001).

2.3.6.3 Proposals for Planning Identified in the Literature

There were three key proposals outlined in the literature that would assist Victorian local government to achieve more effective council planning. These proposals addressed the limitations outlined in section 2.3.6.1 with the exception of local government's turbulent internal and external environment.

The first proposal was that successful planning needed to involve the community in a participatory process in order to develop an agreed vision and goals (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Cuthall and Fien 2005). This collaborative approach built a relationship between government and the community that was based on mutual trust and respect (Cuthall and Fien 2005).

The planning process should also be supported by a decision framework that was transparent, accountable and provided for the integration of community perspectives (Cuthall and Fien 2005). Processes that should be considered by Victorian local government to engage the community included community forums, search conferences,

community visioning and consensus conferences (Cuthall and Fien 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)).

The second proposal was the need to ensure that the organization's culture reflected a shared set of values that facilitated community engagement and a commitment to forward planning. This focus needed to take into account internal and external issues (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Cuthall and Fien 2005).

The third proposal was that the council planning process needed to clearly identify relevant stakeholders, who should have the opportunity to have input through the implementation of effective communication systems (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Cuthall and Fien 2005).

2.4   General   Factors   That   Limited   Victorian   Local Government Achieving its Role

An examination of the literature on Victorian local government identified that there were three categories of limitations to local government effectively implementing its role that crossed a number of specify role areas. The first category related to issues that were external to Victorian local government's control.

The financing of local government and its challenges and limitations was comprehensively discussed in Chapter 1. It is not intended to cite the literature on this topic again but it is acknowledged that Victorian local government's financial capacity was a limiting factor in terms of implementing its role.

A related issue to the financial sustainability of Victorian local government was local government's ongoing capacity to achieve its role in the broader context. This issue was discussed in relation to local government's expanded responsibilities that had grown to meet the increasing expectations of the community. The *Hawker Report* (2003) questioned whether:

they (local government) are trying to be all things to all people at a price they cannot pay (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b p.10).

The *Hawker Report* (2003) concluded that the role of local government could not continue to expand without additional funding and resources (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 2003b).

The second external factor that inhibited Victorian local government's achievement of its role was its external and resultant internal image and the lack of community support that resulted as a consequence of that image (Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Chapman 1997a; Rayner 1997; Dunstan 1998; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 1999; Ellison 2000).

Chapman and Wood (1984) stated that:

its (local government's) own self-image suffered because it saw itself, and was seen by others, not as part of the governing system, but rather as a limited, functional, managerial system (p.14).

Rayner (1997) stated that because local government made decisions in areas that had an immediate impact on personal and neighborhood life, local government was *the government we love to hate (p.160).*

The negative portrayal of local government by the media contributed to Victorian local government's poor image (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 1999). Attempts to gain positive media coverage on good news stories were not taken up by the media (Hill 1999). Hill 1999 stated that:

every opportunity is taken by Mitchell (radio compere) to savage and ridicule local government and turn them into objects of contempt (p.16).

The poor image of Victorian local government that was exacerbated by the media portrayal of local government resulted in a number of community outcomes.

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Kiss (2004) stated that the community did not believe in the necessity of local democracy but tolerated it as long as it cost as little as possible and no additional powers were devolved. The community was also generally apathetic towards local government as demonstrated by the lack of response to the local government reforms instituted by the Kennett Government in the 1990s (Kiss 1997, 2004).

It was further stated that there was a degree of community resentment of local government because it was insulated from the dramatic economic changes that the private sector had endured (Jones 1993). Local government could increase its rates to a predominantly captive audience (Jones 1993).

Another impact of Victorian local government's poor image was the lack of general debate about the role and status of local government. In discussing this issue Dollery and Marshall (2003) maintained that:

> *one of the most problematic issues facing local government today (is) the low profile of the sector in the public consciousness. Unlike its state and federal counterparts there is very little informed dialogue about the functions, structures and purposes of Australian local government (p.248).*

Bowman (1983); Chapman and Wood (1984); and Dollery and Wallis (2001) supported this view.

Victorian local government also had to counteract the blame that was sometimes directed at it due to policies that were imposed by other levels of governments (Jones 1993). This situation resulted in Victorian local government generally becoming defensive (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998). Local government councillors and officers were generally considered to have a lower capacity compared to their federal and state counterparts (Chapman 1997a).

The third external barrier to Victorian local government's implementation of its role was the capacity to develop policy. This was limited due to the principle of *ultra vires*, which

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meant that local government could not make policy that conflicted with state or federal government policy. This resulted in both a complex legal environment for local government and a constrained framework in which policies could be developed (Bowman 1983; Beetham 1996; Bailey 1999). Bowman (1983) stated that as a consequence of the *ultra vires* principle it was *extraordinarily difficult to engage in rational policy processes at the local level (p.180).*

The second category of barriers to the effective implementation of Victorian local government's role was its partnership and relationship with other levels of government. These issues as they specifically related to local government's democratic, community building and services roles have been previously identified. It was considered that in general terms local government's lack of achievement of effective partnerships was due to the high degree of mutual suspicion between the three levels of government (Saunders 1996; Chapman 1997; Dollery and Marshall 2003).

It was further considered that a significant shift of power and recognition needed to be directed to local government by state and federal governments if effective partnerships were to be achieved (Chapman 1997a; Geddes 2005). This was especially relevant for decision making and resource allocation (Wiseman 2006). Chapman (1997b) maintained that *neither of the other spheres (of government) is willing to share its power very readily (p.43).*

A related barrier to effective partnerships between local government and other levels of government was the difficulty in determining the structural arrangements for partnerships, due to the large number of local governments (Chapman 1997b; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Dollery 2005). It was stated that the nature of intergovernmental relations was complex (Chapman 1997b).

The lack of representation at the federal level was considered to be a further limitation for local government as evidenced by the fact there was one seat on the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for all local governments throughout Australia (Galligan 1996).

The third category of barriers to Victorian local government's effective implementation of its role related to a number of internal issues.

Smith (1998) maintained that while the localness of local government had underpinned its existence it had become a limitation. This limitation was because local government had become too inwardly focused and maintained the status quo, even though external developments paved the way for change (Smith 1998). Bowman (1983) and Jones (1993) supported this view.

A further limitation was the difficulty for elected members to balance the needs of all the community when developing policy. This was particularly difficult if that community was socially, culturally or ethnically diverse (Marshall 2003). It was stated that local government councillors could be confronted with a policy environment that was complex and volatile, leading to what was described as a *policy milieu (Marshall 2003 p.145).*

2.5 General Proposals for Enhancing Victorian Local Government's Role

An examination of the literature identified that there was a range of proposals that would assist Victorian local government to effectively implement its role in a number of role areas.

The first set of proposals focused on the need for Victorian local government to establish stronger partnerships with other levels of government and external organizations such as academic institutions, including schools (Galligan 1996; Kiss 1996; Self 1997; Galligan 1998b; Reynolds 1999; Wallis and Dollery 2002; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Dollery 2005; Geddes 2005). Stronger partnerships would assist local government to address a number of external factors such as the need for local governance, the degree of technological change and the growing complexities of institutional decision making (Galligan 1996, 1998b).

To effectively tackle the issues of significance, Victorian local government needed to seek the involvement of organizations from outside its boundaries and be more outward looking than in the past (Kiss 1996; Stoker 1998; Geddes 2005). Some of these issues of significance included a rapidly changing economic and social system, an ageing and culturally diverse population, a greater focus on the environment, the impacts of globalization and a competitive global market, and fiscal restraints on infrastructure (Haag 1997; Rentschler 1997). Addressing global issues in particular required local government to advocate for locally based but globally connected economic, social and political relationships (Haag 1997).

It was proposed that local government also establish collaborative partnerships with business and community groups to enable the pooling of resources and the joining up of program delivery (Wallis and Dollery 2002; Geddes 2005). It was considered that these multi-organizational partnerships had become more important where financial and human resources were limited (Wallis and Dollery 2002).

Dollery and Marshall (2003) stated that there was a greater potential for partnerships between local and state governments (also refer Dollery 2005; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006). It was considered that there was an increased willingness between the two levels of government to collaborate and consult. While the state of Tasmania was cited as the leading state in this regard, the Victorian context was considered to contain some elements of this collaborative approach (Dollery and Marshall 2003; Dollery 2005).

Partnerships within local government to enable the voluntary groupings of neighboring councils were also proposed (Hunt 1998a; Martin 2001; Dollery and Marshall 2003). Such networking would provide the opportunity to exchange ideas, plan on a regional basis, develop common policies on broader issues, benchmark activities, coordinate programs across boundaries, facilitate joint purchasing arrangements and act as a strong advocate for the region (Self 1997; Martin 2001; Dollery and Marshall 2003).

The second set of proposals focused on addressing the poor public image of Victorian local government and raising its profile more generally (Kiss 1996; Hill 1999; Kiss 2004; Carnegie and Baxter 2006). Addressing the image of Victorian local government would increase its capacity to be sustainable, regain its confidence as a significant contributor to community well-being and ensure that it contributed to the debate about the future of the country (Hill 1999; Kiss 2004). Kiss (1996) stated that *if local government can win the confidence of the community, it cannot fail (p.122).*

It was firstly proposed that a comprehensive communication strategy be implemented that would provide the community with a greater understanding of local government's role and raise its profile generally (Hill 1999; Carnegie and Baxter 2006). Local government sector associations and state bodies should also continue to be active in presenting a positive image of what local government provided to its communities (Ellison 2000; Dollery and Marshall 2003). Dollery and Marshall (2003) noted that a number of sector associations have *worked hard to project local government more firmly into the community's consciousness (p.249).*

It was considered that there was a role for universities to be more involved in building Victorian local government's profile (Bowman 1983; Kiss 1996; Ellison 2000; Dollery and Marshall 2003). An increased profile would be achieved by offering courses that catered for the distinctiveness of the local government sector and additional research into local government would generate more academic interest (Kiss 1996; Dollery and Marshall 2003).

Universities and additional research would provide the basis for the implementation of a local government think-tank that could undertake research and develop strategies to counteract the present limitations of local government's political environment (Kiss 2004). A think-tank could also support the arguments developed by local government as to why it needed additional powers and how such powers benefited the broader community (Kiss 2004).

The third set of general proposals focused on the internal operations of Victorian local government.

The literature revealed that Victorian local government needed to think and act in a more sophisticated and imaginative manner. Kiss (1996) maintained that a change in the way Victorian local government operated increased *local government's capacity to determine its own future (p.121).* A more outwardly focused local government environment would also connect with communities more effectively and build local government's image more broadly (Kiss 1996; Martin 2001).

Chapman and Wood (1984) maintained that local government needed to be comprehensively involved in the political and policy development processes of federal and state governments to be effective in its role. Chapman and Wood (1984) stated that the *fulfillment of any dream for local government depends above all on (its) political action (p.188).* Dollery, Crase and Johnson (2006) also maintained that local government needed to exert more political pressure and hold the other levels of government accountable in a number of areas, including cost shifting.

It was proposed that increased training in a broad range of areas be implemented for both elected members and officers. A greater connection between local government and universities as previously outlined would assist in fulfilling the need for ongoing training requirements (Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Hill 2003; Dollery 2005).

Connected to the issue of training was the need for local government to focus less on service delivery and more on developing community pride and local identity (Jones 1993; Reynolds 1999; Stoker 2003a). This change of focus by local government would minimize the community anxiety and disruption from an unstable external environment (Rentschler 1997; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Stoker 2003a; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c).

The change of focus for local government could be underpinned by a set of principles for local government as proposed by Galligan (1996, 1998b). These principles could include the recognition of the social, political and economic imperative of nationhood; the subsidiarity principle; the structural efficiency principle; and the accountability principle (Galligan 1996, 1998b).

As a final proposal it was stated that any redefinition of the role of local government required that it be determined by local government itself (Chapman 1997a).

Chapter 3 – Research Methods

3.1   Chapter Outline

In this chapter the methodology used to undertake the empirical research that examines the research questions as they relate to the role of Victorian local government is described. The material presented in this chapter builds on the introduction provided in section 1.4 of Chapter 1 and provides validations that appropriate research procedures were implemented. A research framework that delineates an overview of the links between the primary and subsidiary research questions, the research strategy, the data collection and recording processes, and how the analysis of the data will be undertaken is outlined.

The methodology as discussed in this chapter also provides a framework that enables the key themes to be drawn from the literature review that was explored in the previous chapter and will assist in the development of explanations during the data collection and analysis phase of the research process. These explanations seek to clarify, evaluate and suggest linkages among the diversity of ideas that emerge from the entire research quest (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Goulding 2002).

The primary and subsidiary questions this thesis is exploring require a logical and orderly research approach. Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish (2000a) state that in complex information environments the process of conducting research needs to be systematic, authentic and lead to a legitimate conclusion. As a basic principle research should make a fundamental contribution to knowledge, problem solving or the enhancement of systems. These overarching principles are relevant to this thesis.

As illustrated in this chapter, it is considered that a systematic research approach has been undertaken and that an exploration of the role of Victorian local government will provide a valuable contribution to this field of knowledge.

The subject matter being investigated in this thesis was critical in determining which research approach would be adopted. Silverman (2001) stated that in undertaking research the components that comprise that research are not true or false, only *more or less useful (p.4)*. Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish (2000a) support this view. The primary and subsidiary research questions of this thesis have been carefully considered and have consequently determined the dominant research processes that have been implemented.

Consideration of the research questions has led to the utilization of an interpretive approach underpinned by qualitative research. The research for this thesis will be undertaken in the field, with the data being collected from interviews with thirty-one opinion leaders. The researcher has utilized an in-depth, semi-structured interview approach. The key aspects that guided the thinking that underpinned this research approach are outlined in the following sections of this chapter.

Other complementary research techniques that have been utilized for this thesis, in particular grounded theory and content analysis, are also detailed in this chapter. The discussion of these techniques explores their theoretical value, how such techniques were relevant to the research questions under investigation and how they have been utilized within that context.

The research model as depicted in ***Figure 3.1*** summarizes the research methodology that was adopted for this thesis. In this chapter the aspects that are listed under the heading: **Development of Research Strategy** are explored.

IDENTIFICATION OF PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

↓

Identification of Subsidiary Research Questions

↓

LITERATURE REVIEW

↓

DEVELOPMENT of RESEARCH STRATEGY

↓

Data Collection

↓

Data Recording

↓

Analysis Process

↓

ANALYSIS of the RESEARCH

↓

KEY THEMES and RECOMMENDATIONS
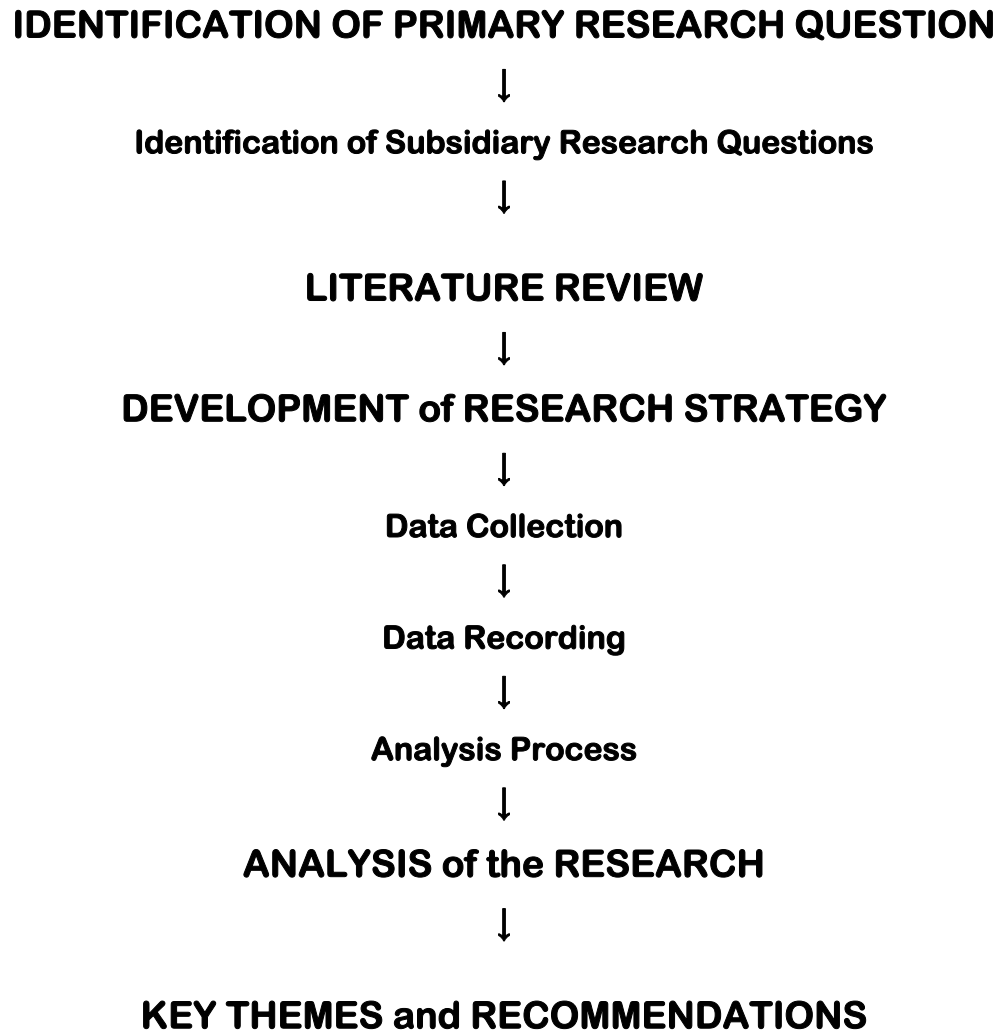
Figure 3.1 (Adapted Research Model: Marshall and Rossman 1995)

In the first section of this chapter a brief review of the dominant principles of research from a theoretical perspective, and their relevance to this dissertation is provided. The practical application of those research principles and how they were applied to the research task of this thesis is examined in the second section of this chapter.

3.2   Principles of Research

While there are numerous definitions of research (Zikumund 1988; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Sekeran 1992; Blaikie 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; May 2001; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Babbie 2004) a useful definition is provided by Hernon (1991 cited Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000a) who stated:

> *Research is an inquiry process that has clearly defined parameters and has as its aim the discovery or creation of knowledge, or theory building; (and) testing, confirmation, revision, refutation of knowledge and theory (p.6).*

This definition is relevant to this thesis because it is exploring the knowledge base of Victorian local government within a delineated boundary, through an exploration of the primary and subsidiary research questions. The answers to these questions will be investigated through an examination of the literature and from the conclusions that can be drawn from the empirical research.

As noted in section 3.1 there are not always definitive explanations to a problem and whatever research method is adopted, the findings will reflect one viewpoint (Goulding 2002). It is therefore imperative that the researcher clearly articulates the research strategy, data collection processes and analysis methods so that the research goals are clearly delineated (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002).

The predominant research choices that were considered in determining the overarching research strategy for this thesis will now be explored.

3.2.1 The Positivist and Interpretivist Approach to Research

There are two major traditions of academic research, those being positivist and interpretivist (Blaikie 1993; Dey 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Myers 1997; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; Silverman 2001; Holstein and Gubrium 2003). In this thesis an interpretive approach has been utilized. To place that decision in context, a brief description of each approach will be outlined, with a focus on the interpretivist approach because it is relevant to this dissertation.

A positivist approach adopts the position that the world is external and objective to the researcher. This approach to research is usually linked with quantitative research and as a consequence, researchers that utilize this approach focus on description, explanation and uncovering facts (Blaikie 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; May 2001; Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

In contrast and relevant to this thesis, an interpretive approach to research adopts the view that the world is socially constructed. Within this paradigm, researchers seek to uncover meanings and understandings of the broad interrelationships in the situation under investigation (Ticehurst and Veal 2000).

Interpretivist research commonly involves a literature search to gain an initial understanding of the topic, the development of research questions, and the formation of a plan to outline how the data will be collected and analyzed (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b). These processes have been undertaken for this thesis.

There have been significant debates about the superiority of positivist and interpretivist research paradigms (Dey 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Myers 1997; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; May 2001; Silverman 2001). Some authors have criticized the positivist model because it can fail to identify or explore complexities in the real world by reducing them to summary measures (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Conversely, some authors have viewed the interpretive research approach as lacking rigor unless it is carefully and systematically planned (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; Silverman 2001). This challenge results from the fact that interpretivist researchers are generally more flexible in their approach to the research task than positivist researchers (Ticehurst and Veal 2000). In interpretivist research, if the initial data reveals an unexpected perspective the researcher may decide to adjust the research question and collection plan to take into account these new concepts. Interpretive research is less linear and more iterative when compared to positivist research (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b).

In addition to the debates regarding interpretative and positivist research techniques, there are also extensive discussions on other approaches to research. This included theorists such as Kuhn (1970) who explored sociological explanations of how dramatic changes in science methods occurred and explored what he termed as 'paradigm'shifts and Popper (1959) who claimed that the proper role of research was to falsify scientific conjectures. Debates on other approaches such as relativism, instrumentalism, constructivism and logical positivism are just a few of the topics that have caused researchers to explore and debate theories on research methods over time (Stove1998). The conclusion that can be drawn from these discussions is that numerous research perspectives can be adopted and that the research method that is ultimately implemented should reflect the nature and objectives of the research project in question (Stove 1998).

As explored in more detail in section 3.3.1.2, a reflective and flexible research approach was utilized for this thesis. This is illustrated by the fact that the interview procedure was modified because the initial interviews did not produce what was considered to be the optimum results from the opinion leaders being interviewed.

Interpretivist researchers are concerned with exploring multiple realities with meaning and interpretation (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b). The interpretive approach is usually, but not exclusively, linked with qualitative methods of research and an inductive approach (Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b).

There has been a long history of producing qualitative research from an interpretive framework (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b) and this approach was considered to be more appropriate to apply to this thesis than a positivist approach. This is because this thesis is exploring in-depth understandings and is focused on the *why and how* as opposed to the *what, when or how much type of information (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b p.34).*

The key features of interpretivist research having been briefly outlined, the strategic decisions that flowed from utilizing an interpretive research approach will now be discussed.

3.2.2   Utilizing a Qualitative Approach to Research

It is considered appropriate to briefly discuss at a theoretical level, the conceptual framework and the principles of utilizing an interpretive approach underpinned by qualitative research, as they relate to this research project. As grounded theory has also influenced the directions of the research for this dissertation, this paradigm is also briefly addressed. The elements of the conceptual framework are then linked to the practical application of these approaches in the following sections of this chapter.

A useful description of a qualitative approach to research is provided by Van Maanen (1983 cited Ticehurst and Veal 2000) who stated that qualitative methods:

> *comprise an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (p.94).*

Marshall and Rossman (1995) further state that the utilization of qualitative research methods allows the researcher to *delve in-depth into complexities and processes (p.43)* (also refer Silverman 2001).

These quotes are applicable to the research questions being reviewed for this thesis, because these questions are exploring a complex, contextual framework of related issues and understandings as described in the literature, and the perceptions and views as expressed by opinion leaders through the interview process.

Research based on a qualitative paradigm requires a rigorous approach because the rules and procedures for establishing knowledge adopted by interpretivist researchers are more diverse than within a positivist framework (Dey 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Myers 1997; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; Goulding 2002). Consequentially, qualitative research and its processes, procedures and aims require clarification and justification (Goulding 2002).

The *Exploratory* model, as one of four main categories of qualitative research identified by Marshall and Rossman (1995), was a useful tool in developing the thought processes that underpinned the research approach for this thesis. This model, which is referred to throughout this chapter, provided guidance on developing a logical relationship between the research questions being explored and the components of the research strategy.

The pertinent features of the *Exploratory* model as defined by Marshall and Rossman (1995) were as follows:

> *EXPLORATORY (MODEL)*
> *Purpose of the Study:*
>   *To identify/discover important variables*
>   *To generate hypotheses for further research*
>
> *Research Question:*
>   *What are the salient themes, patterns, categories in the participants'*
>   *meaning structures?*
>   *How are these patterns linked with one another?*
>
> *Research Strategy:*
>   *Field study*
>
> *Examples of Data Collection Techniques:*
>   *In-depth interviewing*
>   *Elite interviewing (p.41).*

The *Exploratory* model (Marshall and Rossman 1995) as outlined above is relevant to the objectives of this thesis, which are to explore the diversity of opinions, the common themes and alternate views that emerge from the research and how these themes combine to present a holistic picture of Victorian local government's role. The empirical research will be undertaken in the field. Marshall and Rossman (1995) also identify in-depth interviews with elites or opinion leaders as a common approach to gathering information when using a qualitative approach to research (also refer Silverman 2001) and this research technique has been utilized for this thesis.

Implementation of the *Exploratory* model (Marshall and Rossman 1995) and qualitative research more generally involves gathering in-depth information from or about, a small number of people or organizations (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000a). It is based on the belief that gaining a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation, however unrepresentative this may be, is of greater value than a limited understanding of a large, representative group (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b).

The benefits that were gained from undertaking a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a research topic (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Blaikie 1993; Dey 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Myers 1997; Bauer, Gaskell and Allum 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003) were relevant to this thesis due to the nature of the research questions being investigated. In order to answer questions about the role of Victorian local government, respondents needed to understand the context, challenges and options surrounding the issues under investigation.

A further consideration in designing the research processes that underpinned the *Exploratory* model (Marshall and Rossman 1995) and was also relevant to a qualitative research approach more broadly, was that researchers should attempt to explore their topic without imposing pre-existing expectations (Kvale 1996; Bauer, Gaskell and Allum

2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003). In this way once the data was collected and analyzed, the researcher could develop concepts, insights and an understanding of the emerging patterns. Qualitative research methods were considered to be more appropriate for theory building as opposed to quantitative methods that were more useful for theory testing (Glaser 1992; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a). Again, these concepts were relevant to the questions being explored for this thesis due to the nature and context of Victorian local government.

The process of theory building from the ground upwards can be linked to the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory generates theory from the research, as opposed to research that tests existing theory (Ticehurst and Veal 2000). Ticehurst and Veal (2000) considered that grounded theory was an *important philosophical perspective in the analysis of qualitative data (p.104).*

Grounded theory provided a general methodology of analysis that is linked with data collection and a set of methods that generate an inductive theory about a particular topic (Glaser 1992). When utilizing the principles of grounded theory, data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously and are linked throughout the research project (Glaser 1992). The theoretical framework develops as the researcher collects more specific data due to the narrowing of the potential range of topics (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Myers 1997; Charmaz 2003). A grounded theory approach to research further involves assigning themes to a selected topic, combining these themes into related categories and identifying and verifying links between these categories. The process of integrating these categories then begins to form a theory to explain the phenomenon under investigation (Darke and Shanks 2000).

A useful outcome of grounded theory is that it conceptualizes the data that consequently raises the level of thought about that data to a higher level (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Darke and Shanks 2000; Goulding 2002).

Glaser and Strauss (1967 cited Goulding 2002) stated that grounded theory:

> *moves through various levels of theory building, from description through abstraction to conceptual categorization, in order to probe underlying conditions, consequences and actions (p.36).*

While the research methods used in this thesis have not strictly followed a grounded theory approach, the principles that underpin grounded theory have provided valuable tools in developing the thought processes that have assisted the development of the research design for this thesis. In the context of the research questions concerning the role of Victorian local government, its limitations, community benefits and recommendations, grounded theory provided a useful framework in which to explore theoretical concepts and propositions as they emerged from the interview data. The principle of utilizing an approach that seeks to build theory as opposed to testing theory was considered to be particularly relevant for this thesis due to the nature of the research questions being investigated.

3.3   Research Strategy

In this next section the overall research strategy will be outlined and the practicalities of applying qualitative research principles to the implementation of the data collection and analysis phases of the research will be discussed in greater detail. The previous section has established the framework for this subsequent discussion.

The development of the research strategy can be defined as the overall plan for undertaking the exploration of the particular topic under investigation, while the methods for data collection are the tools for conducting that exploration (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Williamson 2000a; Silverman 2001). The development of this strategy involves making a number of key decisions about the practical aspects of the research process and includes information-gathering methods and data analysis techniques (Blaikie 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Myers 1997; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000a). Silverman (2001) described the research strategy as *how we go about studying any phenomenon (p.4)*.

It is essential that there is connectivity between the exploration of the primary and subsidiary questions and the research strategy. Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that the challenge of the research strategy was to *build logical connections between the problem, the questions, and the design and methods (p.37).*

In this thesis the primary and subsidiary research questions have directed the development of the research strategy that includes the scope of the data collection and analysis techniques. The choices and challenges that underpin this research strategy will now be discussed.

3.3.1   Data Collection Methods

In accordance with the *Exploratory* model as developed by Marshall and Rossman (1995), the data collection procedure is a significant step in the research process (also refer Berg 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

There are a significant number of considerations in determining the details of the data collection process. These considerations include the type of interview to be utilized, interview techniques, interview format and questions, target group and the capturing of the data (Berg 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005). These issues are addressed in the following sections.

3.3.1.1 Interviewing Options

As the analysis of the role of Victorian local government is complex and not always clearly defined, the data collection techniques adopted for this thesis needed to produce quality information from a select number of respondents. The principles that underpin qualitative approaches to research as described in the *Exploratory* model developed by

Marshall and Rossman (1995) and grounded theory, identify the use of in-depth interviews as a useful research technique (Kvale 1996; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003). Charmaz (2003) stated that *in-depth qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well (p.312).*

However, the decision to utilize in-depth interviews for this dissertation requires some justification in the context of the range of interview techniques that are available.

Interviews in the broadest context are considered to be a useful research technique if the information that is sought requires consideration and discussion (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005). In supporting the use of interviews as a frequently used and valuable method for research investigation, Kvale (1996) stated that the *constructive nature of the knowledge created through the interaction of the partners in the interview conversation (p.11)* should be acknowledged.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003) provided a useful description of the overall aim of interviews when they wrote:

> *(the aim) is to derive, as objectively as possible, the respondent's own opinions of the subject matter in question, information that the respondent will readily offer and elaborate when the circumstances are conductive to his or her doing so and the proper methods are applied (p.10).*

Holstein and Gubrium (2003) further stated that this aim would only be achieved if the interviewer provided a well-planned and encouraging format.

Goulding (2002) stated that interviews *may be structured, unstructured, group, face to face or conducted over the telephone (p.59).* Shuy (2003) maintained that there were certain advantages and disadvantages associated with each type of interviewing option. While it was acknowledged that telephone interviewing had become a dominant approach

in research in recent years (Shuy 2003), it was considered that in-person interviews best matched the research goals of this thesis.

Yin (1989) outlined three types of in-person interviews which can be summarized as (i) open-ended in nature where the respondent was one of an informant and provided insights into the matter under investigation; (ii) focused format where the respondent was interviewed for a short period and assumed a role of a corroborator of established facts; and (iii) a structured interview that was similar to a formal survey, which involved sampling procedures and other similar research instruments.

Yin's (1989) open-ended interview format was similar in approach to what was referred to as a semi-structured interview format (Berg 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Gaskell 2000). A semi-structured interview format involved a number of predetermined questions that were typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order. In accordance with the principles of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer however, was allowed the flexibility to digress and probe beyond the standard questions (Berg 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Gaskell 2000).

The decision was made to utilize an open-ended or semi-structured interview format for this thesis. This decision was based on two key reasons.

Firstly, Marshall and Rossman (1995) identified that structured interviews are of little value when the researcher is examining complex social relations or issues (also refer Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005). An examination of the role of Victorian local government involves a number of factors including its legal, financial, political and social context. The data collection strategy also needed to address Victorian local government's current role including recommendations to assist local government in the future. As the research questions involved an exploration within a particular frame of reference it was considered that the intrinsic nature of these questions required in-depth exploration and analysis. Consequently the research questions did not lend themselves to

a highly structured research process, as this would not have produced the depth of information that the research questions demanded.

Secondly, as the interviews were to be conducted with elites or opinion leaders, the researcher needed to be able to adapt the prepared set questions without losing the point of the interview (Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995). It was recommended that semi-structured and open-ended questions allowed the interviewee a certain amount of freedom that would produce the best result in that circumstance (Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995).

In summary, it was considered that in-depth, semi-structured interviews were a useful way to collect meaningful information in an effective manner and to provide a contextual understanding of the material that was collected (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Shuy 2003). It was considered that utilizing this research method would achieve what Gaskell (2000) described as *thick descriptions (p.39)* of the concepts being investigated.

It was worth noting that Williamson (2000b) identified a number of disadvantages in undertaking in-depth interviews, which included the cost in time and money, interview and interviewer variability, and the difficulty in recording and analyzing unstructured interviews.

Threats to the validity and reliability of the interview process due to interviewer bias were also identified as a potential disadvantage (Williamson 2000b). The principles of validity and reliability are fundamental research principles that needed to be taken into consideration during the research phase (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Tanner 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b). Validity is defined as the extent to which the data collected truly reflected the phenomenon being investigated, while reliability is the extent that the research findings would be the same if the research was repeated with a different sample of subjects or at a different time (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Tanner 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b).

The difficulties and challenges of utilizing in-depth interviews as a research method were also discussed by Blaikie (1993); Marshall and Rossman (1995); Rubin and Rubin (1995); Kvale (1996); Gaskell (2000); Ticehurst and Veal (2000); Silverman (2001); Goulding (2002); and Holstein and Gubrium (2003).

While the issues associated with in-depth interviews are acknowledged it was considered that these concerns could be addressed though the implementation of relevant processes. The strategies that were utilized to address the challenges of conducting in-depth interviews are outlined in sections 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3 of this chapter.

A final issue that requires clarification is the fact that grounded theory has been associated with the use of repeat interviews with the same respondent so that the researcher can clarify interview questions as an outcome of the ongoing interview analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Myers 1997; Charmaz 2003).

Charmaz (2003) stated however, that grounded theory studies have come to be identified with what she referred to as a *one-shot interviewing approach (p.318),* which did not provide the opportunity to correct earlier omissions or construct more complex analysis. Charmaz (2003) further stated that if researchers did undertake only one interview with each respondent that probing questions in later interviews should be introduced so that the theoretical issues could be explicitly addressed.

Due to the fact that the interviews for this research project were conducted with opinion leaders, it was not considered appropriate or feasible to seek multiple interviews. However, an ongoing analysis of the interview material was undertaken throughout the interview schedule. While the general interview format remained constant, interviews became more focused to reflect the knowledge that was obtained from earlier interviews.

Overall and despite the disadvantages of conducting in-depth interviews as identified by Williamson (2000b); and other writers on this topic (Blaikie 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Gaskell 2000; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005), it

was considered that the use of in-depth interviews was the most appropriate option in the context of the research questions being explored in this thesis.

3.3.1.2 Challenges of Conducting Interviewing

While section 3.3.1.1 outlined the appropriateness of employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews for this dissertation, its practical application however, required the interviewer to be both skilled in interviewing techniques and cognizant of many factors that could impact on the quality of the interviews (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

Key decisions in the design of the research strategy if in-depth interviews were to be employed included the ability to gain entry into the setting, the appropriateness of the specific interactions and their relevance to the research questions, the ability to establish trusting relationships, and the credibility and quality of the data that was being collected (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Kvale 1996; Williamson 2000b). The researcher's response to these and other specific issues is addressed in this section.

As an overall comment in discussing the issues regarding access into the setting, in this case access to opinion leaders, establishing credibility and interview techniques, it can be noted that the researcher undertaking this investigation is a senior manager working in the Victorian local government sector. This provided a number of advantages in this circumstance. Being a senior officer in the field under investigation firstly resulted in access to often-restricted personnel or potentially reluctant respondents. Secondly, a rapport was quickly established during the interview in the majority of cases.

Further issues that required consideration were that qualitative interviews necessitated highly developed listening skills, a knowledge of interview techniques to achieve the framing of appropriate questions and probing, interpretation and an understanding of the context in which the respondent was framing their discussion, and skillful personal interactions (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996;

Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Shuy 2003). These practical issues associated with achieving successful interview outcomes will now be explored in greater detail.

In response to the challenges regarding interview techniques, all interviews followed the same broad format based on the primary and subsidiary research questions as outlined in section 1.2 in Chapter 1.

There was only one change to the interview framework and this related to the attribution of the interview material. When the initial contact was made with the potential respondents, they were informed that their views might be attributed to them in the writing of this thesis. Early in the interview schedule it became apparent that some senior government officers were reluctant to address certain issues openly, especially in terms of the question relating to the performance of Victorian local government. This was evident by some respondents thinking carefully prior to answering certain questions and being slow to respond. One interviewee queried the rationale of attributing comments because it would, in their opinion result in less candid responses.

As openness and discussion were considered to be more important for this research project than attribution, subsequent respondents were informed that their comments would be anonymous. This change in the process produced more useful results and reflected the interpretive approach to research that was adopted for this thesis. Within this framework the research process was iterative, flexible and took into account unexpected results in the beginning of the data collection process (Williamson, Burstein and McKemmish 2000b).

A further challenge was to ensure that the responses of the interviewees were not influenced through body language or other verbal signals from the interviewer (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001). Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that:

> *an assumption fundamental to qualitative research (is that) the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it (p.80).*

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It was recognized that achieving a non-biased approach could be a challenge for an interviewer to achieve (Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Shuy 2003). Defined as *conversational traps (Williamson 2000b p.227)*, the interviewer should avoid the temptation to illustrate their knowledge on a particular topic or to interrupt. Other verbal and physical cues should be utilized to indicate that the interviewer was interested but was not commenting or judging the respondent's answers (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001; Shuy 2003). In-depth interviews, while being personable, significantly differed from an ordinary *conversation (Ticehurst and Veal 2000 p.100)*.

In response to these issues, care was taken by the author not to respond or agree or disagree with comments made by the respondents during the discussions. The respondents were probed in order to seek further information or to clarify a particular statement but the interviewer was careful not to reflect any internal thought processes with the respondents.

To assist in the consistency of the interview process it was also important to minimize *inter-interviewer variability (Williamson 2000b p.227)*. Consequently the same interview format, environmental conditions and approach should be replicated for all interviews to the extent that this was possible. The higher the level of interviewer and question neutrality, the higher the score on validity would result (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Fontana and Frey 2005).

To address this challenge, the interviewees were asked if they had any questions regarding the interview prior to the recording commencing. All interviews were conducted in an office or home environment so that a focused, quiet and private environment was created. This assisted to create a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

An awareness and understanding of the issues that are listed above assisted the researcher for this thesis to undertake the interviews in a consistent and systematic manner.

Prior to the thirty-one interviews being conducted, two trial interviews were undertaken to test a number of questions and views in an informal environment. One interview was undertaken with a prominent academic who was also a former Victorian state government minister and one interview was conducted with a Lord Mayor from a New South Wales local government council. The material from these interviews was not formally incorporated into the data analysis phase, but they were useful to experiment with different interview techniques and question options.

The trial interviews also assisted the researcher to be aware of the challenges of interviewing and some of the potential traps as previously outlined (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson 2000b; Silverman 2001; Goulding 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Poland 2003). The material from these two initial interviews further provided the early development of key themes and issues relating to the research questions.

After the two trial interviews were undertaken and a number of interview processes were thought through, a final list of interview questions was developed. The interview questions were then discussed with a professional researcher who indicated that in their view the questions were clear and followed a logical sequence.

The thirty-one interviews that were undertaken for this thesis occurred over an eighteen-month time frame. While this was a lengthy period, it allowed for the interviews to be transcribed, summarized and an initial analysis to be undertaken after each interview took place. The time frame also allowed for the researcher's interview skills to be continually developed and for a time of reflection on what worked effectively and what approaches were less valuable. The literature on interview techniques as previously outlined provided valuable guidelines about the conduct of successful interviews.

The interview schedule was also developed so that less challenging interviews were conducted at the beginning of the interview program. This process assisted the researcher to gain experience in keeping the interview on track and not allowing the opinion leader

to take charge of the interview (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Poland 2003).

A further consideration for the interviewer was the use of language, specialized vocabulary and an understanding of the respondent's cultural framework (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Williamson 2000b; Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

The issue of language needed to be carefully considered in the context of this thesis because the Victorian local government sector and government more broadly does not have a shared and clearly defined vocabulary in the same context that other professional and technical fields may have. For example, words such as governance, community building and advocacy, while commonly referred in local government literature and conversations may have very different connotations for each individual being interviewed. The context and diversity of language was discussed in Chapter 2 when each specific role of Victorian local government as defined in the literature was examined. This definition of roles and concepts was also adopted throughout the undertaking of the interviews, so that the researcher had a shared understanding of the language used by the respondents.

It was considered that the interviewer's familiarity with the local government sector assisted to promptly establish a common understanding of language and related concepts with the interviewees. This broad knowledge of local government also assisted the researcher to probe when a respondent was unclear or provided information that was not consistent with previous comments they had made.

The tape-recording of in-depth interviews is a common method of data capture and was utilized for this thesis. One of the issues associated with the use of tape-recording is that this procedure can inhibit some respondents to openly respond (Yin 1989; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Poland 2003).

In conducting the interviews for this thesis, while a tape-recorder was used, the respondents appeared to have a greater level of comfort in view of the fact that a private and friendly interview environment was created. A copy of the transcript of the interview was also sent to each respondent after the session and an opportunity was provided to correct any typographical errors.

It was worth noting that in general, the politicians and local government councillors that were interviewed for this thesis stated that they were frequently on the public record in terms of their views and did not appear in any way to be impacted by the use of the tape recorder. In some cases, although not uniformly, senior officers from local and state government were somewhat more guarded about their comments during the interview sessions. This issue has been previously mentioned and as a result, the comments from respondents were not attributed.

In regard to the community representatives, their openness and response to the taping of the interview varied depending on the person's current position and background. Respondents who were in the public realm as a result of their position were generally unconcerned about their views being recorded. If an interviewee had an ongoing relationship with the Victorian local government sector, this sometimes resulted in a more guarded response to some questions.

In most circumstances, however, once the interview was underway, interviewees disregarded the tape recorder and openly answered the questions that were put to them.

3.3.1.3 Interviewing Opinion Leaders and Peers

In the previous section the general issues associated with the conduct of in-depth interviews was examined. The research approach for this thesis however, involved the interviewing of thirty-one opinion leaders, which dictated that a range of additional issues needed to be taken into account. In this section the utilization of opinion leaders for the interviews, their selection and the interview techniques that were specifically adopted in interviewing those opinion leaders is outlined.

The *Exploratory* model as defined Marshall and Rossman (1995) identified elite interviewing as a potential data collection option (also refer Rubin and Rubin 1995) and this option has been selected for this thesis. Marshall and Rossman (1995) described the benefits of utilizing elite interviewing and stated that:

> *valuable information can be gained from these (elite) participants because of the positions they hold in social, political, financial, or administration realms (p.83).*

The rationale for the use of in-depth interviews with elite or opinion leaders was linked to the nature of Victorian local government itself and the primary and subsidiary research questions. As previously indicated, discussions about the role of Victorian local government required respondents to have an in-depth knowledge about this role. It was also considered that the data that would be collected from interviews with opinion leaders would include a diversity of views about the primary and subsidiary research questions, which was an important research goal to achieve.

In progressing the research strategy, there was a need to determine which group of potential classes of respondents, in this case opinion leaders, should be targeted for these interviews. Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that *one cannot study intensely and in-depth all instances, events or persons. One selects samples (p.50).*

An appropriate selection of opinion leaders would enable the debate about Victorian local government to be progressed because opinion leaders would be able to provide an opinion from an informed perspective. The selection of the target group of opinion leaders needed to include people who were influential, well informed and who had expertise in the relevant field (Becker and Meyers 1974; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995), in this case Victorian local government.

In addressing the selection of the interview sample and in accordance with the identification of the classes of people who influenced the direction and role of Victorian local government as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, interviews were undertaken with federal and state government political representatives and senior bureaucrats; local

government councillors and senior officers; representatives from local government peak bodies; and community leaders, business leaders, representatives from related non-government organizations and academics. It was considered that approximately thirty interviews was an appropriate sample to gain sufficient qualitative data on the issues being investigated. At the conclusion of the data collection phase, thirty-one interviews had been undertaken.

The interview categories for this study were as follows:

Victorian Local Government Professionals - five interviewees with representatives from the Victorian local government categories as defined by the Department for Victorian Communities (2006c). This comprised local government councils located in Inner Central and Outer Inner Metropolitan, Outer Metropolitan, Regional Cities, Large Shires and Small Shires.

Victorian Councillors/Mayors - five interviewees with councillors from the above categories as defined by the Department for Victorian Communities (2006c). The councillors/mayors were chosen from different councils than those selected for the interviews with local government professionals, in order to broaden the diversity of views obtained.

Victorian State Politicians - four interviewees: three drawn from the Liberal and Labor Parties and one Independent Member of Parliament.

Federal Politicians - two interviewees drawn from the Liberal and Labor parties.

Victorian State Government Professionals - two interviewees drawn from the Senior Executive level who were associated with Victorian local government.

Victorian Local Government Associations - two interviewees, one drawn from the Municipal Association of Victoria and one representative from the Victorian Local Governance Association.

Community, Business Leaders/Related non-government organizations/Academics - eleven interviewees drawn from business, academia, service industries, advocacy organizations, and social and political commentators.

The broad categorization as listed above, allowed for a diversity of views to be explored, which was a key objective of the research strategy. It resulted in a range of participants, some of whom were directly involved in Victorian local government and a number of participants who provided an external perspective. Representatives from the Community, Business leaders/Related non-government organizations/Academics category were also selected from different backgrounds and for their potentially varying views and philosophies.

In all cases, an overall aim was to secure interviews with people who had a clear interest in the role of Victorian local government, and who had publicly or professionally expressed views on this subject. The selection criteria for the elite interviewees were based on their experience in, and knowledge of Victorian local government. A brief statement about the thirty-one respondents is included in Appendix A.

It was noteworthy that of the thirty-one respondents, twelve respondents qualified for two or more of the interview categories. For example, two respondents in the Councillors/Mayors category had also been presidents of Victorian local government associations, while another respondent in the Councillors/Mayors category had been appointed as a senior executive officer in State Government. Three opinion leaders/advocates had previously operated in local or state government as elected representatives and four of the representatives from state or federal government had previously worked in or had been elected to local government. The diversity of the respondent's experience further reinforced the breadth of understanding and knowledge of Victorian local government.

Interviews were conducted with the following personnel based on the categories as previously outlined. The listing reflects that person's position at the time of interview.

Local Government Professionals –

Chief Executive Officer – City of Boroondara

Chief Executive Officer – City of Greater Geelong

Chief Executive Officer – City of Whitehorse

Chief Executive Officer – Shire of Mornington Peninsula

Chief Executive Officer – Shire of Glenelg

Councillors/Mayors –

Councillor – City of Melbourne

Mayor – City of Greater Bendigo

Mayor – City of Monash

Mayor – City of Port Phillip

Mayor – Shire of Surf Coast

State Politicians –

Member for Gippsland West

Member for Prahran

Member for Monbulk

Member for Western/ Shadow Spokesperson for Local Government and Victorian Communities

Federal Politicians –

Member for Chisholm

Member for Dunkley/ Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs

State Government Professionals –

Secretary – Department for Victorian Communities

Executive Director - Local Government Victoria and Community Information

Local Government Associations –

Chief Executive – Municipal Association of Victoria

Chief Executive – Victorian Local Governance Association

Community/Business Leaders/Related non-government organizations/Academic -

Chair – EcoRecycle Victoria

Chairman – SOCOM Public Relations

Chairperson - Good Governance Advisory Group

Chief Executive – Institute of Public Administration Australia

Chief Executive – Victorian Council of Social Services

Chief Executive Officer – State Library Victoria

Former Premier of Victoria

Manager Planning and Research – Gandell Retail Management

President – Save Our Suburbs

Senior Policy Analyst – Royal Automobile Club Victoria

Senior Research Fellow – Swinburne University

It should be noted that due to the small number of respondents in each category it was not possible to contrast the views or draw conclusions between the categories of respondents.

It was identified in the literature on research methods that there were a number of challenges and issues when undertaking interviews with opinion leaders, which were in addition to conducting interviews within a conventional framework (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Platt 1981; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

The first challenge was gaining access to the interviewees (Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Thomas (1993) stated that *visibility is not the same as accessibility (p.81).* In undertaking this thesis accessibility to opinion leaders for the interviews was not a significant problem, due to the fact that as previously stated, the researcher is a senior officer in the Victorian local government sector.

Only two potential interviewees did not agree to be interviewed. In one case this was because that person considered that another individual would be more appropriate to be interviewed. In the second case of refusal, the person stated that they never gave interviews due to their position. In this instance, however, there was sufficient printed material to ascertain that person's views on a number of relevant issues.

Once access was achieved there were a number of additional issues in relation to interview techniques that needed to be considered (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Platt 1981; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Firstly, elite interviewees, because of their broad experience, may be inclined to pursue a particular line of thinking that may not entirely relate to the questions being posed (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995). There was also the potential that an elite participant, who was typically experienced in such situations, may turn the interview around and take the lead (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Thomas (1993) pointed out that:

> *it is easy (for the researcher) to be drawn by the articulateness and, in some cases, by the charm of top executives, without realizing it (p.85).*

The interview preparation and implementation therefore required an advanced degree of competence in the interview process itself and a clear focus on achieving the desired outcomes from the interaction process (Zuckerman 1972; Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995). In conducting the interviews for this thesis it was important that interview times and venues were confirmed with the interviewees and that a professional attitude to the interview was adopted. This also required a focused approach in the interview so that the questions were addressed in a comprehensive manner. In some cases it was clear that the interviewees had limited time available and it was necessary to utilize the time effectively.

Connected to the issue of interview preparation was the need for careful research about the topic and the interviewee to be undertaken prior to the interview (Becker and Meyers 1974; Thomas 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995). It was useful that background material was sourced from other more accessible means in addition to the interview itself (Thomas 1993). It was relevant that 26% of interviewees were also published authors on aspects of local government and are cited in Chapter 2 of this thesis. This meant that research on the views of these respondents could be undertaken prior to the interview and this assisted in drawing out particular perspectives from these interviewees.

The questions utilized for this thesis and the brief description of the research topic were sent to the participants prior to the interview, so that they had the opportunity to reflect on their responses. This assisted the interview to be focused on the questions and the issues that flowed from the interviews. Circulation of the pre-reading material also assisted the interviewer to keep the respondent on track. The letter regarding the interview and the description of the research that was sent to the interviewees is attached as Appendix B.

In establishing the interview framework with an opinion leader, Thomas (1993) stated that it was useful to clarify for the interviewee in which context you were interviewing. For example if the person being interviewed was a chief executive officer, it was useful to clarify whether the interviewer was seeking the views of that person as an individual, as a chief executive officer generally or as chief executive officer as a representative of the organization (Thomas 1993). In response to this issue it was made clear to the respondents that represented or worked for a particular organization that their views were being sought as an individual.

The selection of the interview group for this thesis also included a number of respondents who were peers (colleague chief executive officers) of the interviewer. This factor was also taken into consideration in designing the data collection method.

Platt (1981) stated that interviews usually created situations where there was a degree of anonymity and in a practical sense there was no past or future relationship between the

interviewer and the interviewee. This created a scenario where the consequences of an interview were relatively limited. This was not always the case where there was an ongoing relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Platt 1981).

While Platt (1981) highlighted a number of benefits in interviewing one's peers, such as a shared set of understandings of the topic and the use of a common language, she also stated that care needed to be taken to differentiate the interview process from other interactions so that the *rules (of the interview process) are known to both parties (Platt 1981 p.84).*

The issues raised by Platt (1981) were taken into consideration during the conduct of the interviews and it was not considered that any detrimental outcomes resulted from the interviewer knowing the interviewees. It was important to articulate the purpose of the interview and in what context the material would be cited. Once these issues were clarified the interviewees responded openly to the interview questions.

This section has outlined the processes that the researcher undertook in conducting the in-depth interviews for this thesis. It has articulated the rationale for the interview format, the practical application of the interview techniques that were implemented in order to achieve quality material from the interviews and the selection of the respondents.

Having defined these issues, the next topic is the discussion on how the material that was collected from the interviews was systematically analyzed into useable and logical categories of information.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected material obtained during the research collection phase (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Williamson and Bow 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001). Qualitative research generally, and grounded theory specifically, can be described as a search for general statements about relationships

among categories of data (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Charmaz 2003).

Considerable thought needs to be directed to the analysis of the data (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Williamson and Bow 2000; Silverman 2001).

Qualitative data analysis provides a process that facilitates a search for a range of general themes and relationships between categories of data. In terms of analysis, and in accordance with the principles of qualitative analysis and grounded theory, a critical factor is the researcher's ability to sort ideas into congruent themes and to uncover patterns and contradictions within that data (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that the analysis process involved *organizing the data (and) generating categories, themes and patterns (p.113).* These processes as referred to by Marshall and Rossman (1995) and other research techniques that were employed for this thesis will now be explored.

3.3.2.1 Content Analysis and the Coding Process

In citing an example of a longitudinal study that resulted in 20,000 pages of transcripts, Mayring (2000) stated that the challenge for the researcher of this project was to analyze this data in *a qualitative oriented way (p.1).* The analysis of such data required a systematic methodology that would provide outcomes that were both reliable and valid (Mayring 2000).

To achieve the objectives of reliability and validity, content analysis was utilized to analyze the thirty-one interviews that were undertaken for this thesis. This was considered to be the most appropriate approach as it enabled researchers to sort through large volumes of data in a systematic way (Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Bauer 2000; Mayring 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001; Stemler 2001;

Babbie 2004). In the context of this thesis, it should be noted that content analysis was utilized as an analysis tool rather than a complete research strategy.

The in-depth interviews that were undertaken for this thesis resulted in 428 typed pages (double spaced). While this was significantly smaller than the study cited by Mayring (2000), the same principles applied in terms of adopting a systematic approach to the analysis of the data that was collected for this thesis.

The key attributes of content analysis, and their relevance to the research undertaken for this dissertation will be outlined in this section. This will address how content analysis is defined and its predominant uses, types of content analysis, processes that are utilized, and its benefits and limitations as they related to this research topic. Utilizing content analysis principles, an overview of the analysis of the interviews conducted for this research in a practical context will be discussed in section 3.3.2.2 of this chapter.

There are a number of definitions of content analysis (Krippendorff 1969; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Bauer 2000; Mayring 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Stemler 2001; Babbie 2004). A useful definition for the research of this thesis was developed by Kerlinger (1986 cited Wimmer and Dominick 1994) who stated that content analysis was:

> *a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (pp.163-164).*

Wimmer and Dominick (1994) stated that Kerlinger's (1986) definition of content analysis as cited above was *fairly typical (p.163).*

Simply stated, the utilization of content analysis reduced the complexity of a collection of texts and enabled the distillation of large amounts of material into a short narrative of its key features (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Bauer 2000; Mayring 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001; Babbie 2004). Due to the nature of the research undertaken for this thesis, content analysis was a useful tool to utilize.

Wimmer and Dominick (1994) maintained that content analysis incorporated three key concepts. The first was that it was *systematic (p.164)*, in that a consistent set of rules was applied to the analysis. The second concept was that it was *objective (p.164)*, which meant that the personal views of the researcher should not influence the findings. The analysis should yield the same results and be able to be replicated if another researcher were to undertake the research. The third concept as defined by Wimmer and Dominick (1994), was that content analysis should be *quantitative (p.164)* (also refer Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001).

The view that content analysis should be confined to quantitative analysis, however, was not universally accepted. Berg (1995) considered that *content analysis may focus on either qualitative or quantitative aspects (p.175)* and that it was useful to strive for a blend of these two approaches. This position was also supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985); Bauer (2000); Mayring (2000); and Babbie (2004).

The content analysis approach employed for this thesis has utilized both quantitative and qualitative techniques with a greater focus on qualitative processes. This approach was considered to be the most appropriate course in regard to the specific objectives of this research project and was previously explored in section 3.2 of this chapter.

While to some extent the focus on qualitative analysis techniques resulted in limited reliability, Bauer (2000) stated that *no content analysis expects perfect reliability where human judgment is involved (p.144).* Bauer (2000) further stated that it was important to achieve an acceptable level of reliability and validity and that there were *tradeoffs between the two (concepts) (p.145).*

Content analysis was most commonly associated with written documents or transcripts of recorded verbal communications (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Berg 1995; Mayring 2000; Stemler 2001; Fontana and Frey 2005) although it was not confined to the domain of textual analysis (Bauer 2000; Stemler 2001; Babbie 2004).

Bauer (2000) stated that:

> *content analysis is the only method of text analysis that has been developed within the empirical social sciences (p.132).*

As transcripts of recorded interviews is the subject of the analysis for this thesis, content analysis was considered to be a useful and relevant research tool to utilize.

A fundamental aspect of content analysis was coding the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Bauer 2000; Mayring 2000; Silverman 2001; Stemler 2001; Babbie 2004). Babbie (2004) defined the coding process as the *logical conceptualization and operationalization (p.318)* of the information under review within a conceptual framework. A coding frame which should be derived theoretically and reflect the purpose of the research, provided a systematic way of comparing data (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Bauer 2000; Mayring 2000; Silverman 2001; Stemler 2001; Babbie 2004).

Babbie (2004) stated that there were two categories of coding; those being the manifest and latent content (also refer Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995). Coding the manifest content was defined as the *visible surface content (Babbie 2004 p.319)*, and was akin to using a standardized questionnaire. Berg (1995) similarly described the manifest content as those elements that are *physically present and countable (p.178).*

An example of coding manifest content was to count the number of times a word or list of words appeared (Babbie 2004). Coding the manifest content produced a quantitative analysis outcome (Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Babbie 2004). The advantage of coding manifest content was that it was simple and reliable, however it was considered by some authors to have limited validity (Berg 1995; Babbie 2004).

In coding the latent content the researcher focused on the underlying meaning of the text and consequently relied on a more subjective analysis (Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Babbie 2004). Berg (1995) defined latent content as the *deep structural*

meaning conveyed by the message (p.178). The disadvantage of coding the latent content was that it had limited reliability and specificity (Berg 1995; Babbie 2004).

In a similar context to Babbie's (2000) discussion of manifest and latent content analysis, Bauer (2000) cited two dimensions to content analysis; those being *syntactical and semantic (p.134).* Syntactical procedures focused on aspects such as the *frequency of words and their ordering (p.134).* A semantic approach focused on the relationship of the words and was described as *what is said in the text, the themes and valuations (p.134).* Semantic units of analysis were a matter of *judgment (Bauer 2000 p.143).*

Babbie (2004) stated in his discussions on content analysis that there was a *fundamental choice between depth and specificity of understanding (p.319).* Babbie (2004) further stated that typically researchers preferred to base their judgments on a broad range of observations and information, even though this may mean that another researcher may reach a different conclusion from the same situation.

Both Berg (1995) and Babbie (2004) concluded that the best approach was to utilize both manifest and latent coding techniques, as this would accomplish reasonable levels of both validity and reliability (Berg 1995; Babbie 2004). This approach has been used in the analysis of the interview data for this thesis.

Stemler (2001) raised a related theme to the manifest and latent coding discussion and stated that it was commonly thought that content analysis simply meant doing a word frequency count and that this was not the case. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) supported this view and identified that one of the problems in content analysis was the *counting for the sake of counting syndrome (p.168).*

A more sophisticated process to only focusing on single words was to code concepts as units. Concepts involved words grouped together in conceptual clusters or ideas (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Bauer 2000; Stemler 2001; Babbie 2004). An example provided by Babbie (1983 cited Berg 1995) illustrated that a

cluster of words such as *crime, delinquency and fraud could form a cluster around the conceptual idea of deviance (p.182).*

In providing further debate on the issue of content analysis, Marshall (1981 cited Lincoln and Guba 1985) stated that:

> *It always amuses me when I read books on how to do content analysis that you have to decide on looking at a word, a sentence or a section. But the units are really fairly obvious - you get chunks of meaning which comes out of the data itself...There are chunks of meaning and you do not have to look at individual sentences (p.345).*

Bauer (2000) stated that content analysis was a *social construction* that should *take into account some reality (p.141).* Bauer (2000) further stated that the coding method should *embody the theory that underlies the analysis (p.145).*

As outlined in the next section of this chapter, that discusses the practical application of content analysis, the coding approach that was undertaken for this thesis aimed to achieve this social construction based on the research questions being investigated. This thesis has taken the approach of both analyzing individual words where they were significant to the research topic and coding conceptual clusters where clearly defined themes emerged.

Stemler (2001) also made the point that researchers in applying content analysis principles needed to be aware that synonyms may be used throughout the material under review, that some words may have multiple meanings and that the context in which a word was used could be significant (also refer Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Bauer 2000; Babbie 2004; Perakyla 2005). In Stemler's (2001) view, word frequency counts should be viewed as a potential area of interest for further contextual analysis.

Stemler's (2001) point regarding synonyms was particularly relevant for this dissertation and has consequently been taken into consideration in the coding process. As discussed in section 3.3.1.2 of this chapter, Victorian local government language was at times imprecise or utilized terminology that was specific to the local government sector (Frazer 1996; Kiss 1996). It was therefore useful to consider synonyms in this context.

A final concept related to content analysis that was relevant to the analysis undertaken for this thesis was the background and experience of the researcher, which provided a broader perspective to the coding of the latent content.

Strauss (1987 cited Berg 1995) stated that the analysis outcomes could be influenced by the *researcher's scholarly knowledge (p.179)* who could *add breadth and depth to (the) observations (p.179).* Berg (1995) further stated that it was reasonable to suggest that insights about the research could be derived from previous experience, which could represent the personal experience of the researcher.

For the research undertaken for this thesis, the author utilized her experience as a senior officer in Victorian local government to assist with the analysis. However, it is considered that a significant degree of objectivity was achieved, and that the analysis process that was utilized was systematic and in accordance with the principles of content analysis.

3.3.2.2 Interview Analysis Process

The analytical process undertaken for this thesis is considered to have achieved what Bauer (2000) described as *reflective of the purpose of the research (p.140).* To achieve this objective a structured and systematic analysis process was required, which in turn necessitated time and effort (Berg 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Gaskell 2000; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Silverman 2001; Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Babbie 2004).

Berg (1995) described the data analysis process as a *complicated jigsaw puzzle* and that as the *pieces come together to form a more complete picture, the process can be thrilling (p.180).* This section outlines the process that was utilized to assemble that jigsaw based on the research strategy and research techniques as outlined throughout this chapter.

On the completion of each interview undertaken for this thesis, file notes or memos were compiled to note what local government roles were identified and how those roles were

defined, which of those roles the respondent elected to talk about in more detail, key contextual themes and any other observations about the interview itself. This included, for example if the interview had flowed well, if there were any difficulties and any other technical issues that may have arisen.

It was considered that memo writing assisted the researcher to begin analyzing and writing draft findings about the research outcomes (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003). It began the processes of raising ideas into conceptual categories and encouraged the researcher to discover gaps in the early interviews and make explicit comparisons. It was recommended that the writing of memos should continue during each phase so that connections between ideas could be articulated (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003). This process was adopted for this thesis.

The writing of memos or file notes after each of the thirty-one interviews undertaken for this thesis assisted the interview program as initial patterns and key themes could be identified. The writing of a memo after each interview further assisted in the initial coding as the memos could be used to refer back to during the analysis phase.

As documented in Chapter 2 there was a significant body of literature related to the role of Victorian local government. The analysis of the literature further provided a theoretical basis that assisted with the sorting and coding processes of the thirty-one interviews.

In organizing the data, which was a key component of the analysis process (Marshall and Rossman 1995) each interview was transcribed by the author at its conclusion.

It was noted by Gill (2000) that while the production of transcripts was *hugely time consuming (p.177)*, the generation of transcripts facilitated a methodical analysis of the data that was collected (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Ticehurst and Veal 2000; Poland 2003). The initial transcription of the thirty-one interviews for this thesis as full texts took in excess of 250 hours. The tapes of the interviews were

transcribed as a detailed discourse and were not summarized, or as Gill (2000) stated *cleaned up (p.177).*

Gill (2000) stated that the time commitment involved in transcription should not be considered to be *dead time (p.178)* (also refer Lincoln and Guba 1985; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Kvale 1996; Gaskell 2000; Poland 2003). Transcribing the interviews provided an opportunity to commence the process of what Gaskell (2000) described as *immersing oneself in the text corpus (p.53).*

The interviews undertaken for this thesis were listened to a second time and transcripts were reread and checked for typographical errors. The second listening of the interviews and reading of the transcripts also provided an opportunity to format the text into clearly defined sections so that key concepts and categories were easily identified in the longer-term.

A close examination of the texts occurred at this stage of the analysis process and transcripts were marked-up on a line-by-line basis in terms of what local government role the respondent was identifying, the context of that role and what interview question the respondent was answering. Undertaking this process provided the researcher with a visual classification of the key sections of the interview material and identified the main contextual themes, and contradictions and similarities of views between the respondents. The initial analysis processes followed Berg's (1995) advice that initially the researcher should *analyze the data minutely…(and) that in the beginning of the analysis, more is better (p.187).*

Marshall and Rossman (1995) further stated that:

> *reading, reading and reading once more through the data forces the researcher to become familiar with those data in intimate ways (p.113).*

Perakyla (2005) also reinforced the importance of qualitative researchers intently reading the research data and stated that *by reading and rereading their empirical materials, they try to pin down their key themes (p.870).*

The initial marking-up and review of the transcripts commenced what is referred to as the coding process. This process was discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The process of coding and analyzing of data simultaneously was a feature of research designed to build theory (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Blaikie 1993; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003).

Grounded theory principles suggested that the data should be initially coded using an open coding technique that then allowed for a more focused coding. This enabled the researcher to identify the most frequently occurring themes, which can then be sorted into categories (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003). The development of categories from the coding process enabled the researcher to then test emergent hypotheses and evaluate the adequacy, credibility and usefulness of the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Bauer 2000; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2003).

A multi-staged approach to coding was undertaken for this thesis. Utilizing the initial review and coding process as previously outlined, as common themes from the interviews emerged key concepts and categories were mapped within a matrix format. For example, if a respondent nominated *Advocacy* as a role of Victorian local government, the definition, context and attributes given to this role by the interviewee was delineated and listed within the matrix. As the coding process continued for each interview a more comprehensive view for each specific role developed, however at this stage the analysis was still at a broad conceptual stage.

To assist in the development of a more refined coding frame two groups of five interviews were further analyzed. This process aimed to clarify for the researcher the complexity or simplicity in developing a more sophisticated coding system.

The first step was that five interviews were reviewed again and a more detailed outline of the key themes in terms of the role of Victorian local government was developed. The interviews that were selected for this process focused on five different roles as articulated

by the respondents. The interviews were also chosen from five different categories of interviewees so that a range of views could be reviewed. In this way one particular view would not dominate or skew the researcher's thinking.

This more detailed analysis identified that concepts such as *Advocacy* and *Service* provision were relatively straightforward in terms of how the participants conceptualized their underlying definition. However it was noted that even though the concept of *Advocacy*, for example, appeared to be clearly defined, a close examination of the data from just one transcript revealed that this role was discussed within a number of contexts, and that a range of issues related to the barriers of its implementation, community benefits and recommendations were identified. A number of synonyms for *Advocacy* were used which reinforced the views of Stemler (2001) about the need to identify synonyms in content analysis.

The analysis of the other transcripts identified that some roles were going to be considerably problematic to code in a systematic manner. Roles and related activities that were discussed by the participants such as *Governance, Community Building, Community Engagement* and *Representation* were vague concepts, sometimes used interchangeably, and referred to in a number of different contexts. It became apparent that in order to classify these concepts accurately, the author was required to carefully read the context of how these roles and their attributes were described a number of times and to then make an informed judgment about which concept was relevant to which category.

The file notes or memos that were compiled at the completion of each interview were re-examined and cross-checked in relation to the key themes that were identified by the respondents. The matrix diagrams that were produced after the initial coding process were also reviewed to check the outcomes of this analysis phase. The analysis of the role of Victorian local government and related themes as identified in the literature review also assisted to provide an initial theoretical framework.

In the coding of the more complex concepts, the use of both manifest and latent content analysis (Wimmer and Dominick 1994; Berg 1995; Babbie 2004) was considered to be relevant, with a high degree of focus on latent content analysis.

The second process that was undertaken during this phase of the data analysis was to explore preliminary challenges with computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages that may have been useful in assisting the researcher to sort and code the data into logical categories.

After preliminary research it was considered that NVivo had the most potential in terms of providing a useful CAQDAS for this thesis. NVivo was a software program that enabled the detailed analysis and interpretation of processes and data to be undertaken (QRS Newsletter 2(3) 2001; Jemmott 2002; Welsh 2002).

A second set of five interviews was coded using the NVivo package. The author sought the assistance of a CAQDAS expert to assist with the process of using the NVivo package. As with the first set of five interviews, these interviews were selected from different interviewee categories and focused on different local government roles.

After entering five interviews on NVivo it was found by the author that it provided a useful tool in highlighting the complexities of the various concepts. A benefit of using the NVivo program was that it forced the researcher to categorize every line of the interview, which provided a useful discipline in terms of making distinctions between key concepts. Another benefit of using NVivo was that it assisted in clarifying the phrases that best linked with the various concepts.

In broad terms the fundamental challenges and findings that emerged from the in-depth manual coding of the first set of five interviews were also evident after undertaking the analysis of the second set of five interviews when using NVivo. In terms of the detailed analysis of the interview data that was required, especially the thought process behind the more complicated concepts, on balance, the author considered that a paper-based system was more adaptive. This was primarily because a paper-based system was more visible

and could be laid out on tables and subsequently on walls, so that all concepts could be viewed at the one time.

The decision by the author not to use NVivo was in line with the view expressed by Gaskell (2000) who stated that:

> *the analysis is not a purely mechanical process. It hinges on creative insights, which may well occur when the researcher is talking to a friend...or in moments of contemplation such as driving, walking or taking a bath (p.54).*

In the context of the research analysis for this thesis, it was considered by the author that the use of NVivo was not going to facilitate that 'creative insight'.

Further research was undertaken in regard to developing an appropriate coding frame in order to progress the analysis phase. One further interview transcript was sorted into an adapted version of a *Coding Agenda Table (p.6)* developed by Mayring (2000).

While this exercise was useful, a coding frame with an expanded number of categories was subsequently utilized, based on the model developed by Spradley (1979 cited Lincoln and Guba 1985). These coding headings were adapted to reflect the nature and objectives of this particular research topic. Consequently the following key headings provided the coding frame used for this thesis:

CONCEPT/KEY WORD

RELATED WORDS

RATIONALE

CONTEXT

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

OUTCOMES

STAGES

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Utilizing the initial review of the interview data, the matrix exercise and the analytical processes with the two sets of five interviews that were undertaken, a coding process

based on the above framework for all interviews was conducted. This involved re-reading each transcript and on a line-by-line basis labeling sections of the interviews and sorting the concepts under the headings as outlined above.

The coding process assisted in the extraction of relevant verbatim sections from the transcripts as utilized in the following chapter. This coding process also allowed an audit trail to be maintained through the data analysis processes so that concepts could be cross-referenced back to the initial memo that was written after each interview was undertaken and the other preliminary analysis processes that had been undertaken.

While these coding headings as developed by Spradley (1979 cited Lincoln and Guba 1985) and adapted for this thesis are perhaps self-explanatory, further details of the sequence of the thought process that underpinned these categories are outlined in Appendix C.

Following the development of the coding frame, each interview transcript was marked up in two ways. Key words were highlighted throughout the text in different colors and sorted into categories. This process was double checked by using a word search function. The left side margin was used to highlight the themes that the respondents were saying about the roles of Victorian local government. Different colored markers were used to delineate the different themes. As a result of the earlier preliminary analysis, the author by this stage in the analysis process had a high level of insight into what concepts those roles were going to include.

The right side margin was re-marked to indicate the broad sections of the interview as the interviewee responded to the various questions and any sub-themes that emerged. As the interview followed a fairly open format, a respondent might have spoken about a particular aspect of Victorian local government's role in different stages of the interview. In one example the interviewee requested to commence the interview with the last question.

For example, if a respondent spoke about *Advocacy* in terms of Victorian local government's performance, key words were highlighted on a line-by-line basis. If the respondent discussed the role of *Advocacy* in the context of the influence of local government councillors and the success or otherwise of *Advocacy* outcomes, that text was marked as follows. The right-hand margin was marked in a pink highlighter (role). The left-hand margin was marked in an orange pencil (the performance section of the interview) and the comments about councillors were marked in the left margin with a yellow colored pencil (the context). This process was applied to the whole interview transcript.

In accordance with the views of both Berg (1995) and Babbie (2004), and based on the coding frame as outlined above, coding of both the manifest and latent content of the interviews was undertaken. As previously stated, a greater focus was placed on coding the latent content (Berg 1995; Babbie 2004) or semantic procedures (Bauer 2000) due to the fact that it was necessary to understand the underlying links between the concepts. The coding process was assisted by the fact that the researcher had read each transcript by this stage five or six times and was consequently very familiar with the content.

A further aspect of the coding process that was undertaken for this research was that the data was predominantly analyzed in terms of concepts as units rather than only focusing on single words. This process was in accordance with the views of Lincoln and Guba (1985); Wimmer and Dominick (1994); Berg (1995); Bauer (2000); Stemler (2001); and Babbie (2004). Some single word analysis was initially undertaken to provide a context for the concepts being explored.

Based on the coding frame and the research analysis principles as outlined above, the interview material was further sorted and the key issues refined. This material was transferred onto a series of formatted A3 sheets that were categorized into each identified Victorian local government role. Each A3 sheet included a number of sub-headings for the different questions that were being addressed. The sorting process summarized the key issues that were raised by the interviewees and provided a system that was able to be cross-referenced back to the interview transcript.

The constant comparative method that was used enabled the researcher to group common phrases into categories that identified similarities and differences in the concepts. The questioning of the data was also an ongoing strategy that was utilized during the analysis process. While different techniques were trialed by the author, some of which were subsequently found to be of limited use, these exercises still assisted to gain an understanding and an appreciation of the complexities of the analysis process and of the data itself.

3.4   Limitations and Conclusion

Prior to concluding this chapter it is important to recognize that, as with any research project there are a number of research options to be chosen which result in limitations and boundaries around the research outcomes. Marshall and Rossman (1995) state that *real research is often confusing, messy, intensely frustrating and fundamentally nonlinear (p.15).* It is accepted that research does not always provide a definitive explanation to a problem and the findings will be one perspective that is drawn from a range of possibilities (Goulding 2002).

It is therefore acknowledged that the research tools that were used for this thesis had some broad limitations, a number of which have been outlined in this chapter. In regard to the data collection methods these included the challenges of undertaking in-depth interviews with opinion leaders specifically, the selection of the opinion leaders and justification of the categories that were chosen. A number of challenges were also evident in designing the research strategy in terms of the analysis of the interview data. These choices included how to best utilize the principles of content analysis as a research tool. This challenge was linked to the decision not to utilize computer-aided analysis that resulted in the need to develop a systematic process of manually sorting the interview material.

One factor that was difficult for the researcher to control was that at times external factors might have influenced the comments of the interviewees. An example of this factor was

that one respondent identified disaster recovery as a key role for Victorian local government. This particular interview was conducted in the peak of a summer fire season where a number of rural towns had been destroyed by fire and other towns were under threat. It is possible that if the same interview had been undertaken in the winter months, the respondent may not have chosen that aspect as a role of Victorian local government. The disaster recovery role was only mentioned by one respondent and did not appear to be a consistent theme with other interviewees. In such circumstances, the interview material was treated as valid comments, but was recognized as being only one respondent's view.

A second factor that impacted on the results of the interview process was that despite probing of the respondents by the researcher, some topics provoked more interest than other areas. Consequently the responses to the interview questions reflect some slight unevenness in terms of connections between the data and depth of the interview material.

Finally it should be noted that the outcomes of the empirical research through the use of in-depth interviews reflected the perceptions of those being interviewed. The historical and external context for Victorian local government as outlined in Chapter 1 and the analysis of the literature review as documented in Chapter 2 provided a range of material that was founded in factual evidence and relevant legislation. This was not the case in regard to the interview material as it was largely based on insights and perception.

While this outcome could be considered to be a limitation it should be recognized that as outlined in section 3.2.2, qualitative research deals with investigating and subsequently forming an understanding of complex issues and processes (Dey 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Silverman 2001). In this context the research outcomes of this thesis are not based on quantitative, measurable data or conclusions.

In this chapter the steps that were implemented to address these limitations so that the empirical research could build on the concepts as explored in the literature review and the interview data in a systematic manner have been outlined.

The research options and the reasons for these choices have also been examined, and the processes of sorting and analyzing the interview material on a number of levels and through a range of processes have been discussed. The research approach for this thesis has been based on an interpretivist model that has utilized qualitative research methods. The implementation of this approach has also utilized the principles of grounded theory and content analysis to complement the research framework. Utilizing these techniques and research approaches, the research *jigsaw (Berg 1995 p.180)* began to take shape.

The insights gained from the review of research methods have enabled the conceptual categories for this thesis to be sorted into a theoretical framework that is defined and examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – Analysis of the Research

4.1   Chapter Outline

In Chapter 3 the research processes that were employed for the conduct and analysis of the interviews that were undertaken for this thesis were outlined. As discussed in that chapter and summarized in section 1.4 of Chapter 1, the empirical research that was undertaken to examine the role of Victorian local government and related research questions, comprised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with thirty-one opinion leaders.

The material presented in this chapter documents the outcomes of the research analysis processes that were applied to the interview data, as outlined in Chapter 3. The analysis of the interview data reflects the context of the primary and subsidiary questions and builds on the themes that emerged from the literature review presented in Chapter 2. The material presented in this chapter is a contextual interpretive analysis of the interview material, whereas the conclusions that can be drawn from this material will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

The format of this chapter has followed a similar structure to the literature review so that there is a logical flow between the material that emerged from the literature on the role of Victorian local government and the data from the interviews.

Throughout this chapter the interviewees are referenced by their transcript number (Tx) and the corresponding page number of the transcript where a direct quote is being cited. Where it is relevant to cite the number of times a topic or issue was raised by the respondents, this procedure has been undertaken.

4.2   Overview of Interview Outcomes

The opening interview question asked of each respondent was what in their view *were the key phrases that described or defined the role of Victorian local government from a community perspective.* The responses to this question as defined by the thirty-one

respondents were initially categorized into 13 role areas. Most participants identified that Victorian local government fulfilled three to four different roles.

Table 4.1 indicates the roles that were identified by the interviewees and the number of respondents that listed these roles. At this stage of the analysis limited interpretation of the data had been undertaken. Consequently the list in **Table 4.1** reflects what the majority of respondents stated verbatim. In a small number of cases where respondents stated closely aligned synonyms or descriptive words for particular roles, these have been grouped together with the predominant phrase that was used. For example, respondents who identified *Governance* may have said *good Governance* or *good Corporate Governance*.

Table 4.1 Initial Role Categories

ROLE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFYING ROLE
Provide *Services*	28
Provide *Democratic Representation* (within a democratic system of government)	14
Facilitate *Community Building*/*Community Development*/*Community Strengthening*	11
Provide *Infrastructure*	11
Provide *Governance*	10
Advocate	10
Plan for the Community	9
Undertake *Land Use Planning*	6
Facilitate *Sustainable Communities*	2
Facilitate *Economic Development*	2
Facilitate *Nation Building*	1
Undertake *Disaster Recovery*	1
Develop *Policies*	1
Provide *Whole of Government Systems*	1

The initial outcomes that emerged from the question on Victorian local government's role demonstrated a high degree of similarity when compared to the key findings of the literature review as outlined in Chapter 2. The highest seven roles as identified by the respondents:

Services (28 respondents - all respondents except T1, T20, T30);

Democratic Representation (14 respondents - T6, T9, T12, T15, T16, T18, T19, T21, T24, T26, T27, T28, T29, T30);

Infrastructure (11 respondents - T3, T4, T7, T11, T17, T18, T21, T23, T27, T29, T31);

Community Strengthening/Development /Building (11 respondents - T5, T7, T8, T9, T12, T15, T17, T18, T24, T25, T26);

Advocacy (10 respondents - T1, T2, T3, T4, T9, T10, T12, T14, T21, T24);

Governance (10 respondents - T4, T7, T13, T15, T17, T20, T21, T22, T25, T30); and

Planning for the Community (9 respondents - T2, T5, T6, T7, T9, T17, T18, T23, T27); were the key roles that emerged from the literature as documented in section 2.2.1 of Chapter 2.

Six respondents (T2, T8, T11, T17, T27, T29) raised Victorian local government's *Land Use Planning* role. This role was discussed in the literature review and it was considered that *Land Use Planning* as distinct from *Corporate* or *Community Planning* was one of the *Services* provided by local government. For this reason *Land Use Planning* will be discussed in the section of this chapter that discusses *Services*.

A role that was identified by two respondents (T20, T24) was the facilitation of *Sustainable Communities*. This role was also identified in the literature review and it was categorized as one of the service areas that Victorian local government had provided in more recent times. Victorian local government's *Sustainability* role was discussed in section 2.3.5.1 of Chapter 2. In documenting the analysis of the interviews, facilitating *Sustainable Communities* will be discussed in the context of Victorian local government's *Services* role.

The identification of *Economic Development* as a *Service* was also discussed in section 2.3.5.1 of Chapter 2. In that section it was noted that *Economic Development*

was considered to be a component of Victorian local government's expanded range of *Services*. Two respondents (T5, T25) listed *Economic Development*. Within this context, local government's role in *Economic Development* will be discussed in the section that addresses *Services* so that there is consistency between the literature and the analysis of the interview data.

One respondent (T23) used the term *Nation Builder* to refer to a role of Victorian local government. A review of the context in which this role was discussed revealed that it focused on *Economic Development*. Consequently the role of *Nation Building* will be discussed in the section that deals with *Economic Development*.

One interviewee (T5) stated that *Disaster Recovery* was a role of Victorian local government. In the literature review it was noted that Victorian local government had an extended role in fire prevention and emergency management. This is documented in section 2.3.5.1 of Chapter 2 that addressed the context of local government's *Services* role. Relevant comments from the interview that nominated *Disaster Recovery* as a role will therefore be addressed in the *Services* section.

It was considered that the development of *Policies*, as raised by one respondent (T6), was a process that underpinned a number of roles but was not a specific role in its own right. In the literature review the development of *Policies* was discussed as a recommendation in regard to *Governance*, *Advocacy* and *Service* delivery. In this particular interview the development of *Policies* was referred to within the context of community services, which is a component of Victorian local government's *Services* role. The relevant material from this interview will be explored within that context.

In discussions on *Service* delivery, one respondent (T5) raised the facilitation of *Whole of Government Systems* between the three levels of government and the not-for-profit sector. In the literature review the issue of partnerships between local government and state and federal governments was raised as a recommendation to enhance *Service* delivery. This was outlined in section 2.3.5.4 of Chapter 2. It was considered that the issue that was raised by the respondent on *Whole of Government Systems* was not a role as such but rather a process to achieve effective *Service*

delivery. The relevant sections of the interview material have been analyzed and discussed within that context.

Following a review of the initial comments from the respondents to ascertain the context in which the roles of Victorian local government were framed, and reviewing the material from the literature review, there were consequently seven key roles that were identified by the respondents. As discussed in section 2.3.5.1 of Chapter 2, the provision of *Services* and *Infrastructure* was considered in the literature to be linked and reflected the traditional roles of Victorian local government. In order to provide a consistent approach between the literature review and the analysis of the interview material, *Infrastructure* provision will be discussed in the section of this chapter that addresses *Services*.

An analysis of the interview data revealed that a number of respondents mentioned specific Victorian local government roles in parts of the interview, other than those that they identified in response to the first interview question. For example a respondent may not have identified *Democratic Representation* as a role in answer to the first question but raised this role in discussions on local government's performance. Where it was clear that the respondent identified other roles throughout the interview, even though they had not stated this in response to the first interview question, these responses have been included in the analysis.

Based on the seven roles as outlined above and noting the identification of roles throughout the interview discussion, the total number of respondents that identified each role is listed in *Table 4.2*.

Table 4.2 Total Role Categories

ROLE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFYING ROLE	
	Question 1 Response	Throughout Interview
Provide *Services* *	29	1
Provide *Democratic Representation* (within a democratic system of government)	14	10
Community Building/*Community Development*/*Community Strengthening*	11	8
Provide *Infrastructure*	11	0
Provide *Governance*	10	7
Advocate	10	6
Plan for the Community	9	3

(* Includes *land use planning*, *economic development*, s*ustainability* and *disaster recovery*)

The analysis process as outlined in section 3.3.2.2 of Chapter 3, detailed that the interviews would be analyzed in accordance with the coding headings developed by Spradley (1979 cited Lincoln and Guba 1985) and as adapted by the author to reflect the objectives of this particular research topic. Using these coding headings the analysis of the thirty-one interviews as they relate to each Victorian local government role is structured into four sections throughout this chapter. The first section covers the **CONCEPT/KEY WORD, RELATED WORDS, CONTEXT** and **RATIONALE** for each role. The second section identifies **LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES** for each role. The third section discusses the **OUTCOMES** in the context of community benefits from implementing each role. The fourth section explores the **STAGES** that contribute to successful outcomes, which is linked to **POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS (RECOMMENDATIONS)**.

It should be noted that some participants spoke about more than one role in detail in response to the second question of the interview.

4.3   Victorian Local Government's *Democratic* Role

> *The Democratic role (of local government) is an extraordinarily important link between citizens and government. Local government is the only real thing that makes most citizens happy with government. Because I think the others (levels of government) are just so far away (T16, p.1).*

In response to the first interview question, fourteen respondents (T6, T9, T12, T15, T16, T18, T19, T21, T24, T26, T27, T28, T29, T30) discussed the *Democratic* role of Victorian local government. A further ten participants (T1, T2, T3, T5, T10, T11, T13, T17, T22, T23) spoke about the *Democratic* role at a later period during their interview.

During the interviews a total of twenty-four respondents or 77% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. Of the fourteen participants who discussed Victorian local government's *Democratic* role in response to the first question of the interview, six participants (T9, T12, T16, T18, T19, T28) chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth.

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

4.3.1   Victorian   Local   Government's   *Democratic*   Role Defined

An analysis of both the manifest and latent coding process was utilized to determine how the respondents defined the concept of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. This analysis was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the term *Democratic* (**CONCEPT)** was mentioned in the interviews, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the word *Democratic* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was discussed (**CONTEXT).**

Using these three headings, the definition of *Democratic* is outlined as follows.

CONCEPT

Democracy (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 39 times)

Democratic (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 17 times)

Representative Democracy (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 6 times)

Total number of instances *Democratic* (or derivations) mentioned 62 times

RELATED WORDS (To *Democratic*)

Representation (including Represent, Political Representation and Community Representation) (mentioned 34 times)

Government (mentioned 6 times)

Governing the community (mentioned 4 times)

CONTEXT (Within what context does Victorian local government's *Democratic* role operate?)

Elected Councillors and their role as decision makers (mentioned 30 times)

As the level of government closest to the people (mentioned 27 times)

Elections and the right of citizens to vote (mentioned 14 times)

As a creature of state government (mentioned 6 times)

As a level of government (mentioned 3 times)

As an implementer of policy (mentioned once)

The above analysis indicated that respondents considered that Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (mentioned 62 times) was closely associated with the concept of representation (mentioned 34 times). During the interviews four participants (T9, T15, T18, T30) used the two concepts of *Democratic* and representation interchangeably.

The close association between the terms *Democratic* and representation is illustrated in the following three extracts:

> *With local government you have a Democratically representative method of establishing priorities for the local government area (T9, p.2);*
>
> *Representative Democracy…you elect representatives and they represent you (T15, p.7);* and
>
> *In local government you have achieved the ultimate in representative Democracy (T22, p.9).*

The use of terminology for Victorian local government's *Democratic* role indicated that this role was not as clearly defined as other roles such as *Governance* (refer section 4.4.1) or *Services* (refer section 4.7.1.1), where the language used by the participants was generally consistent.

An analysis of the interview transcripts also revealed that respondents considered there were links between Victorian local government as a level of government (mentioned 6 times) or to govern (mentioned 4 times), the concept of representation (mentioned 34 times) and local government elections (mentioned 14 times). The frequency that these terms were cited and their association with Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was further demonstrated by the fact that elected members (mentioned 30 times) was the most frequent context in which Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was discussed.

Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was further associated with the view that local government was considered to be the government that was closest to the people (mentioned 27 times).

In discussing Victorian local government's *Democratic* role it was mentioned on six occasions that local government was a creature of state government. Five participants (T3, T15, T24, T28, T29) discussed the political context of Australian local government.

In examining Victorian local government's *Democratic* role, the rationale for this role was explored during the interviews with the respondents. An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the following reasons for Victorian local government's

Democratic role. The key issues have been summarized by the author and are as follows.

RATIONALE (Reasons for Local Government's *Democratic* Role)

To make responsible decisions that take into account community input (mentioned 31 times)

To assist communities to participate (mentioned 6 times)

To articulate *Democratic* and community aspirations through local leadership (mentioned 6 times)

To establish directions and priorities for the local area (mentioned 6 times)

To assist communities to act positively (mentioned 6 times)

To represent local needs at state and federal levels of government (mentioned 4 times)

To represent local needs (mentioned 3 times)

Because local government is best placed to represent local communities (mentioned 3 times)

Because there is a greater level of confidence in local government (mentioned 3 times)

Because local government is the link between citizens and government (mentioned 3 times)

To achieve high levels of community consultation (mentioned twice)

Because local government is more able to achieve change even if it is less powerful than other levels of government (mentioned once)

To assist communities to gain skills (mentioned once)

The issues as outlined in the above list can be grouped into five key themes.

The first category that was extrapolated from the **RATIONALE LIST** was based around the *Democratic* role of Victorian local government as a decision maker. Mentioned on thirty-one occasions in total and discussed by seven respondents (T3, T12, T19, T21, T22, T27, T28), it was the most frequently raised topic in terms of this aspect of Victorian local government's role.

The notion that a fundamental aspect of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was to make responsible decisions that took into account community input (mentioned 31 times), to assist communities to participate (mentioned 6 times) and to achieve high levels of community consultation (mentioned twice) illustrated the view that Victorian local government was considered to be the level of government closest to the people (mentioned 27 times) as documented in the **CONTEXT LIST**.

The connection between Victorian local government's *Democratic* role, decisions and community input was demonstrated by the following comments from interviewees:

> *(Local government) has got the capacity to give citizens confidence that they can be a part of the decisions of a government and effect change…Decisions have to be voted on and discussed, but there is a Democratic process and the community have had their say (T12, p.2, p.16);*
>
> *Lots of councils can point to decisions they have made, where it comes from – community consultation (T19, p.5);*
>
> *(Local government) does get a cross section of people sitting at the table making the decisions and when you are looking at a key role that describes the role of local government it is Democracy (T21, p.3);* and
>
> *In local government it is very important that the community sees its elected councillors as taking decisions in the best interests of the community itself (T30, p.5).*

The second category that was identified related to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role in establishing a vision for the community through the leadership of elected officials and management. Comments from the interviewees that referred to Victorian local government's role in articulating *Democratic* and community aspirations through local leadership (mentioned 6 times) and the establishment of directions and priorities for the local area (mentioned 6 times) further linked the notion of community input and engagement. As will be noted in section 4.3.3 of this chapter, when discussing the components of effective *Democratic* processes, engagement and consultation was mentioned by five respondents (T9, T12, T17, T18, T19) a total of 24 times.

The following comments from the interviewees illustrated the associated themes of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and the establishment of priorities based on community aspirations:

> *Democratic principles must be applied to local government because you are dealing with communities with their elected representatives looking after their future (T30, p.1); and*

> *(Local government) is about helping to actually articulate the Democratic and community aspirations of individuals and community groups in a collective sense…Having local government there enables communities to make decisions about where to from here, because otherwise it would be too ad hoc (T21, pp.1-2).*

While the focus of the discussions about Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was frequently defined in the context of the elected members (mentioned 30 times, **CONTEXT LIST**), the role of management was also discussed by one respondent who stated that:

> *the council must have the confidence that the administration will work loyally in fulfilling the work of the elected council (T30, p.3).*

The third category that can be extrapolated from the **RATIONALE LIST** regarding Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was its responsibility to assist communities to be *more secure and to have a lessening level of anxiety (T9, p.8).* Comments from participants (T9, T16, T19) that included assisting communities to act positively (mentioned 6 times), assisting communities to participate (mentioned 6 times) and assisting communities to gain skills (mentioned once), underpinned the view that Victorian local government's *Democratic* role *assisted communities to be positive (T9, p.5).*

The opinion that Victorian local government had a role in assisting communities through its *Democratic* role and engagement was captured in the following statement:

> *There is a growing sense that local government has a role in community engagement linked to Democracy and that it is important for communities to be engaged (T18, p.5).*

In discussing the 'absence' of *Democracy* during the local government amalgamations period in the 1990s, one participant commented:

> *When we did not have Democracy, I watched communities fracture into lobby groups and they were unable to act in their own interests. There was a period of incredible stress that communities went through (T9, p.4).*

The respondent went on to say that in terms of community well-being:

> *the Democratic part of local government is the most important. Democracy is our greatest safeguard (T9, p.4).*

The fourth category in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role related to local government's representative function. As the level of government closest to the people (mentioned 27 times), local government was considered to be in the best position to represent local needs (mentioned 3 times), represent the views of local communities (mentioned 3 times) and also represent local priorities to other levels of government (mentioned 4 times).

In discussing Victorian local government's representation function in a rural context, one respondent stated that:

> *there is an expectation in the community that you (local government) will represent them on every issue and that council will fix it (T21, p.1).*

The final category of topics that the respondents raised during the interviews related to how communities regarded Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. The view was expressed that there was a greater level of confidence in local government than other levels of government (mentioned 3 times) and that local government was the link between citizens and government (mentioned 3 times). These comments were also connected with the view that local government was the level of government closest to the people (mentioned 27 times **CONTEXT LIST**).

One respondent stated that while Victorian local government was less powerful than other levels of government, it was more able to achieve change (T28).

Victorian local government's role as seen by the community was summarized by the following comment:

> *There is plenty of evidence to show people in the community that of the three levels of government, there is a greater level of confidence in local government. That has always been the case historically (T18, p.6).*

4.3.2 Victorian Local Government's *Democratic* Performance and Limitations

In response to the interview question regarding Victorian local government's *Democratic* performance, three participants (T12, T28, T29) provided a direct response to this enquiry. A further sixteen respondents (T2, T3, T5, T9, T10, T11, T13, T15, T16, T17, T18, T19, T22, T23, T27, T30) provided comments regarding Victorian local government's performance and the obstacles that local government faced in achieving positive outcomes when undertaking its *Democratic* role.

Two respondents (T12, T9) commented positively in regard to Victorian local government's performance of its *Democratic* role. This is evidenced by the following comment:

> *Local governments are not perfect but they tackle areas where no other sphere of government can (T12, p.2).*

Other comments revealed a more mixed view of Victorian local government's *Democratic* performance with statements such as *it is eclectic with its capacity as a sphere of government (T28, p.2)* and *some councils are performing brilliantly and some councils are performing disastrously (T19, p.4).*

A number of factors that inhibited Victorian local government's ability to perform its *Democratic* role were identified. As there were a significant number of single comments made by the respondents, these comments have been grouped and summarized under nine key headings by the author. The details of these issues are explored in the subsequent discussion.

LIMITATIONS TO VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S *DEMOCRATIC* ROLE

Role of local government councillors (mentioned a total of 26 times with 12 underpinning issues)

Image of local government (mentioned a total of 20 times with 9 underpinning issues)

Political framework (mentioned a total of 18 times with 3 underpinning issues)

Community views on *Representative Democracy* (mentioned a total of 15 times with 6 underpinning issues)

Federal and state governments' political context (mentioned a total of 11 times with 5 underpinning issues)

Local government electoral processes (mentioned a total of 11 times with 3 underpinning issues)

Decision making and *Democratic* processes (mentioned a total of 9 times with 4 underpinning issues)

Council amalgamations (mentioned a total of 9 times with 3 underpinning issues)

Local government's geographical context (mentioned a total of 4 times with 2 underpinning issues)

The role of elected councillors (mentioned a total of 26 times with 12 underpinning issues) was the most frequently raised limitation in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. Seven respondents (T2, T3, T12, T18, T19, T23, T30) were critical of councillors and associated issues such as their behavior and skill level.

The following comments provided an overview of the issues that were raised by respondents about the role of councillors in the context of local government's *Democratic* role:

> *The level of genuine commitment to Democracy amongst politicians is minimal (T18, p.17);*

> *There is more interest in being called councillors and having a funny robe, than actually doing anything (T2, p.3);*

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> *Often you can have an elected council that might comprise of people that have very little understanding of the business of management or of the business of the various services that local government provides (T30, p.3);* and

> *As a sector we have to remind ourselves that our (councillors') behavior affects everyone else and to think about the broader implications regardless of the personal axe they might have to grind (T12, p.17).*

Three respondents (T10, T12, T23) expressed the view that sometimes councillors did not demonstrate effective leadership. This opinion was demonstrated by the following extract:

> *Nothing grows without leadership and vision. It is often forgotten or overrun with egos and past trivial disagreements, and then opportunities are lost (T23, p.5).*

In contrast to the negative comments regarding Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and local government councillors, a number of respondents (T2, T5, T28) stated that most people did not realize how difficult it was being a councillor and that the expectations by the community of effective councillors were too high. The observation regarding councillor fatigue was illustrated by the comment that *you end up with good progressive councillors totally worn out (T5, p.5).*

One respondent (T19) raised the skill level of local government councillors in rural areas, where opportunities for professional development and connections with other councillors were limited. In contrast, the practical application of *Democratic* principles and representation by councillors was considered to be more tangible in a rural setting when compared to a metropolitan environment (T10, T17).

The image of Victorian local government (mentioned a total of 20 times with 9 underpinning issues) was a topic that was raised in a number of discussions concerning local government's role. This image was considered to limit local government's capacity to achieve its *Democratic* role for a number of reasons, as illustrated by the following comments:

> *Australia is the world record holder in terms of low trust in government (T18, p.18);*

> *(Local government was) poorly regarded by the community because there was a lack of understanding about its role...The community was generally apathetic about local government (T16, p.8);*

> *The community think that state and federal governments were much more important than local government (T28, p.2);* and

> *Communities relate to other community-based boards, such as school councils, rather than their local councillors (T15, p.6)* (also raised in T22).

Two participants (T12, T16) considered that the media played a part in Victorian local government's poor image in regard to its *Democratic* role. This is demonstrated by the following comment:

> *Either it is a state politician having a crack, or there is some major planning issue or a mayor's misbehaving, so you have these idiots on the radio who see nothing positive about local government (T16, p.3).*

One respondent (T19) stated that Victorian local government deserved greater recognition, which in turn would enhance its overall image with the community and with other levels of government.

Victorian local government's image was to a certain extent connected to local government's electoral processes (mentioned a total of 11 times with 3 underpinning issues). Due to Victorian local government's poor image it was considered by five respondents (T5, T10, T12, T19, T28) that this image impacted on attracting quality candidates to stand for local government.

It was the view of two respondents (T5, T19) that there was a lack of turnover of elected councillors and that some people were voted in year after year. One participant summarized this opinion and stated that:

> *once you are in (the council) it is easy to stay on and it gets easier to stay on because you can get away without doing very much (T5, p.6).*

Three respondents (T11, T13, T22) expressed concerns about the election process for Victorian local government including the postal voting process and the overall lack of

information about councillors and what they stood for. These concerns were expressed in the following comments:

> *The last council election happened and this postal voting thing, where you need a spunky photo and a few glib paragraphs and you get elected. Now that makes me nervous (T13, p.10);* and

> *They get elected because of the words they have had scripted by journalists (T22, p.6).*

Four respondents (T10, T15, T17, T18) commented on how they thought the community viewed *Representative Democracy* as it related to Victorian local government's role (mentioned a total of 15 times with 6 issues).

Three participants (T15, T17, T18) spoke at some length about the concepts of *Participatory Democracy* and *Representative Democracy,* which while being applicable to all levels of government, were seen to be particularly relevant to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role.

The application of these *Democratic* concepts to Victorian local government was evident in the following extract, which highlighted the limitations of local government's *Democratic* role:

> *We have an initial problem in Australia and many other Western countries with Representative Democracy in that Representative Democracy has become something of a cipher in terms of the original promise of Democracy. Modern governments say well we have elections what more do you want? So people are more cut off and have a greater sense of frustration with government than ever before... In our system we have elections and then we go to sleep (T18, p.7, p.16).*

Participants also spoke about the degree of cynicism about *Representative Democracy* (T17), the rigidity of institutional systems that underpinned *Representative Democracy* (T15) and the apathy of voters generally (T10).

Federal and state governments' views about Victorian local government (mentioned a total of 11 times with 5 underpinning issues) were considered to limit local government's *Democratic* role. Described as *thinly veiled contempt (T18, p.25)* by

one respondent, it was stated by the same respondent that state government's perception of local government was *a real barrier (T18, p.26).*

It was considered that Victorian local government's image in the community was impacted by the political framework within which local government operated. It was alleged by one respondent that:

> *state and federal government make the rules and poor old local government has got to carry them out, so they get the blame for everything that goes wrong…they (local government) are in a no win position (T27, p.1).*

One respondent stated that state and federal governments were too interventionist and that these levels of government should foster a political process with Victorian local government that was *collaborative not competitive (T11, p.16).*

The broader political framework within which Victorian local government operated was mentioned a total of 18 times. There were three underpinning issues.

The first issue, raised by two interviewees (T12, T22) related to elected representatives or candidates viewing local government as a stepping-stone for other levels of government. This raised the question by one respondent who queried:

> *why does local government always have to be seen as the first step up the rung instead of the pinnacle ? (T22, p.7)*

Two respondents (T19, T29) discussed the issue of constitutional recognition for Victorian local government and expressed their opinion that such recognition would not assist local government to achieve its *Democratic* role.

One respondent spoke about the issue of constitutional recognition for Victorian local government at some length and expressed the view that:

> *the plea for constitutional recognition is just hot air. It is just rubbish. The (Australian) Constitution did not attempt to set up a framework for the conduct of governance right across the nation (T29, p.4).*

Another respondent expressed a similar view about the value of constitutional recognition and said:

> *You cannot say if local government gets constitutional recognition that we will be fine. I think that is nuts (T19, p.11).*

The final issue raised under the political framework category was that the difference between the two major parties in the state government context was *increasingly blurred (T12, p.8).* It was considered that this blurring resulted in communities basing their votes in a Victorian local government context on *different administrations as opposed to voting on the values of the candidates (T12, p.8).*

It was stated that council's decision making and related *Democratic* processes (mentioned a total of 9 times with 4 underpinning issues) was a limitation to Victorian local government achieving its *Democratic* role. One respondent (T22) expressed the view that there needed to be a clear connection between the decisions councillors made and the people they represented. It was alleged that this goal would be difficult to achieve if the councillor did not live in the ward that he or she was representing.

Another issue that was raised by one respondent (T12) related to councillor decision making where there was significant community opposition to a particular outcome that the councillor believed should proceed. It was alleged that the values a councillor brings to the table are a fundamental aspect of *Democracy* and that *managing community pressure gives people confidence in our (local government) system (T12, p.17).*

The third issue associated with the category of *Democratic* processes focused on community engagement and transparency of decision making. Two interviewees (T12, T18) raised this issue. It was considered that a significant aspect of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was to counter the current *disengagement of local communities (T12, p.13; T18, p.5).* The view about the importance of community engagement was expressed in the following comment:

> *Local government has a legitimate role in terms of promoting Democratic self-governance and trying to reach out to people and involve them (T18, p.5).*

It was considered that the lack of community engagement was exacerbated by community perceptions that many decisions made by Victorian local government were *made in secret (T12, p.13)*.

The eighth category of issues raised by two respondents (T3, T9) focused on the Victorian local government amalgamations that occurred in the 1990s (mentioned a total of 9 times with 3 underpinning issues).

It was stated by one respondent (T9) that the loss of democratically elected councillors during this period had resulted in fractured communities and that many areas were *still suffering reverberations of those forced amalgamations and loss of Democracy (T9, p.3)*. This participant further stated that the forced amalgamations had resulted in a period of:

> *incredible stress (for communities) and high levels of anxiety as people felt that their interests were not being looked after (T9, p.4)*.

In discussing the amalgamations from a different perspective, one respondent (T5) believed that while she did not personally support the amalgamations, they had the effect of:

> *rejuvenating a sense of Democracy in terms of the community wanting elected councillors (T5, p.7)*.

One respondent (T3) stated that the post amalgamated councils, while having the capacity to be more strategic due to their size, may not have given *some very local issues the attention that perhaps they might have when wards were smaller (T3, p.1)*.

The final category of issues raised by respondents in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role related to local government's geographical context (mentioned a total of 4 times with 2 underpinning issues). Commenting on this topic, one respondent (T19) stated that the vastness of Australia's geography meant that one councillor had driven several hours to have a meeting with her and that isolation was a significant factor in local government achieving *effective representation or other models of government (T19, p.10)*.

4.3.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Democratic* Role

Respondents were asked to state what community benefits would be realized if Victorian local government effectively achieved its *Democratic* role. As there were a significant number of single comments made by the respondents, these comments have been grouped and summarized under four key headings by the author. These responses are as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Facilitates community engagement in political processes (mentioned a total of 24 times with 4 underpinning issues)

Results in community confidence in government (mentioned a total of 23 times with 4 underpinning issues)

Builds social capital and community capacity (mentioned a total of 15 times with 6 underpinning issues)

Delivers community outcomes (mentioned a total of 9 times with 3 underpinning issues)

The most frequently cited outcome that would be achieved for the community if Victorian local government effectively fulfilled its *Democratic* role, focused on community engagement in political processes (mentioned a total of 24 times with 4 underpinning issues).

Two respondents (T12, T24) discussed at length the importance of community engagement in the context of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. These views are summarized in the following comment:

> *Good Democracy engages people and people are engaged in political life, public life and social life (T12, p.2).*

It was considered that engagement resulted in communities being more able to challenge political processes and not agreeing to be *treated simply as consumers in a political environment (T12, p.2).*

Closely associated with the engagement concept was the opinion that strong *Democratic* processes encouraged individuals to feel that they could have a say about community priorities and be *represented further up the scale (T9, p.3).*

It was stated by two respondents (T9, T21) that community engagement as a result of strong *Democratic* processes was achievable at an individual level, or on a group or community level. Models of representation through structures such as town committees were seen to assist individuals on a group level to provide input into local government priorities.

Community engagement, which was seen by four respondents (T9, T12, T18, T21) to give people a voice into the *Democratic* process, was considered to assist communities to have more control over their future and to achieve agreed priorities. The view about community input was demonstrated by the following comment:

> *If they can have control over their immediate environment there is a sense that well, I belong to this community and to a Democratic process and I have been asked to have my say (T19, p.3).*

The second most prominent theme was that strong *Democratic* processes resulted in community confidence in government (mentioned a total of 23 times with 4 underpinning issues).

Four respondents (T10, T12, T15, T30) expressed the view that strong *Democratic* processes developed or restored confidence in government. One respondent (T12) expressed the view that this confidence related to all levels of government while three participants (T10, T15, T30) only addressed the role of Victorian local government in this context.

It was stated that there were a number of benefits that were derived from stronger confidence in government. The first benefit was that an increased degree of confidence resulted in a greater ability for communities to challenge all levels of government. Increased confidence was also considered to establish open processes so that people could express their views in a political framework (T12).

It was stated by two respondents (T10, T30) that greater confidence in Victorian local government gave people a belief that the council could take the municipality forward and steer it in a direction that reflected community priorities. It was further mentioned by three participants (T9, T10, T18) that the community was more likely to accept and support decisions made by the local government council if there was confidence in the elected representatives and the council itself.

The final issue that was raised by two respondents (T1, T28) under the heading of community confidence in local government was that effective *Democratic* processes would result in a positive role model and a greater respect for local government leaders. The importance of providing a positive role model was expressed by the following comment:

> *Leadership is vital as you (as a councillor) are a public person and how you operate in a council meeting is a vital aspect of community leadership (T1, p.7).*

Seven respondents (T9, T10, T12, T15, T16, T19, T28) addressed the issue of the relationship between Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and building social capital and community capacity (mentioned a total of 15 times with 6 underpinning issues).

Genuine *Democratic* processes were considered to pave ways for communities to build strength (T12), empower communities (T12), allow people to reach their potential (T28), create community cohesion (T15) and create a sense of local ownership of local communities (T10).

While the above comments by the respondents were expressed in a positive manner, three participants (T9, T16, T19) spoke about the community's negative response if

there were not strong *Democratic* processes in place. This outcome was described as *increasing community anxiety (T9, p.4)* and *a high level of community static with citizens making a lot of noise (T16, p.5).*

Victorian local government's *Democratic* processes were also considered to be important in terms of providing an avenue for people to turn to when *there is nowhere else to go and (people) do not know what to do (T19, p.9).*

The final group of outcomes was based around delivering particular community results (mentioned a total of 9 times with 3 underpinning issues). These outcomes included delivering projects on behalf of the community (T12), developing strategies and policies (T12, T19) and achieving greater effectiveness and efficiencies (T18).

4.3.4 Recommendations for Enhancing Victorian Local Government's *Democratic* role

During the interviews the respondents outlined what they considered to be the critical steps in achieving effective *Democratic* processes. These steps have been summarized by the author and are outlined as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Engagement of, and consultation with the community (mentioned 24 times)

Openly debating values and what councillors stand for (mentioned 7 times)

Establishment of workable *Democratic* structures (mentioned 5 times)

(Ward meetings, Citizen Panels, Town Committees)

Establishment and communication of the strategic direction (mentioned 4 times)

Councillors being open, transparent and accountable (mentioned 3 times)

Measurements of *Democracy* (mentioned twice)

Respondents were asked to identify recommendations that would assist Victorian local government to achieve its *Democratic* role. As these recommendations did not lend themselves to be listed in a similar format to previous sections, they are discussed directly.

The recommendations were grouped into four categories. The most frequently raised suggestion in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role related to challenging and modifying the overall political framework within which local government operated (mentioned a total of 23 times with 6 underpinning issues).

One respondent (T11) expressed two solutions in response to Victorian local government's *Democratic* framework that were contrary to other respondents. These suggestions focused on Victorian local government moving away from its *Democratic* role. As the perspective expressed by this respondent (T11) was the only example of this view, the opinions of this participant are explored in some detail.

The first suggestion by this respondent (T11) was to abolish local government councillors and have the bureaucracy deliver the services. Under this model Victorian local government would be regional arms of state government delivering services at the local level. The services would be under the control of career public servants who were considered to have a commitment to independent public service.

The benefits of this model as outlined by the respondent (T11) was that this structure would result in *service delivery being less influenced by lobbyists (p.6)*; *better resources (pp.6,8)*; and *service delivery being more policy driven as opposed to politically driven (T11, p.8).* This respondent expressed the view that Victorian local government outcomes were too dependent *on politicians promulgating personal views that are rarely evidence based (T11, p.6).*

The same respondent (T11) further stated that if local government had to be retained there should be fewer local governments and the restructured municipalities should operate on a regional basis and move resources to address needs as they arose.

The second recommended change to the electoral structure of Victorian local government that was suggested by one respondent (T22) was to alter the current legislation that allowed candidates to be elected onto two or more different councils at the one time. The reason for this view was expressed as follows:

If you are going to reinforce the concept of local government, meaning the community managing its own affairs then one of the fundamentals is that community representatives ought to live in their community (T22, p.3).

The same respondent (T22) further expressed the view that the current legislation that allowed candidates to stand in a ward in which they did not live should also be reviewed. It was considered that this provision undermined the concept of representation that was fundamental to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. The outcome of the current system was outlined in the following statement:

I remember when I was retiring from …(municipality) that two prospective councillors called me who were intending to run in my ward, but they did not live in that ward and asking me what were the issues that they should be aware of. Now if they have to ask that question of someone else they are not the people who should be representing your community. And that is the ultimate test I think (T22, p.10).

Four participants (T10, T11, T22, T28) commented on the fact that councillors in Victorian local government received a minimal allowance for the role that they undertook. One respondent (T22) argued that if this allowance was considerably increased it would have a detrimental impact on the *Democratic* effectiveness of Victorian local government because such an increase would encourage people to stand due to the monetary reward. Another respondent (T28) believed that the minimal amount hindered the attraction of quality candidates to stand for local government.

An issue that was raised in discussions on a number of local government roles was the annual rotation of the mayor. In regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role it was considered by one respondent that the rotation system limited the mayor's competence to represent their community because:

at a practical level you spend your first year learning the job, both meeting the community and gaining a degree of understanding over organizational issues. The annual rotation really impeded your ability to be effective in the organization for your community from a democratic point of view (T2, p.6).

The final structural recommendation that was raised by one respondent (T13) was to remove the current option of postal voting so that all Victorian local government elections were based on attendance voting. It was considered that attendance voting would provide a candidate with a set of credentials within the community and would demonstrate commitment to community engagement by having people *turn out on polling day (T13, p.10).* It was considered that postal voting was an exercise in the *dumbing down of local government (T13, p.10).*

The second group of solutions that were discussed by four respondents (T2, T10, T12, T16) focused on the image of Victorian local government and in particular media representation (mentioned a total of 15 times with 2 issues). Victorian local government's image was also raised during discussions on other roles (*Advocacy, Governance, Community Building*).

The poor image that was alleged by the respondents (T12, T16) to be portrayed by the media, was considered to impact on the community's understanding that Victorian local government had a *job to do (T16, p.5)* in terms of its *Democratic* role. It was stated by one respondent (T16) that a public relations campaign would assist the community to understand what local government delivered and also assist in improving relationships between local government and federal and state governments. A concerted campaign was considered to be *a job worth doing (T16, pp.4,9)* because it would enhance community trust in Victorian local government's decision making.

An enhanced image of Victorian local government would also assist in attracting high caliber people to stand and be elected to local government (T2, T10). One respondent stated that *it is the whole sort of image of a pretty ordinary operating outfit that keeps people out (T10, p.7).*

Associated with the perceived caliber of elected members was the voluntary nature of being a councillor, balancing full time employment and family commitments, and the view that local government was a stepping stone to other levels of government (T10). An improved image was considered to assist in addressing these issues.

The third group of recommendations regarding Victorian local government's *Democratic* role focused on the electoral system and councillors (mentioned a total of 15 times with 5 underpinning issues). Ten respondents raised this issue (T2, T3, T5, T11, T16, T18, T19, T22, T27, T28).

The first solution that was citied centered on attracting high caliber candidates to stand for Victorian local government through the electoral process (T3, T5, T11, T19, T28). Two respondents (T2, T10) previously raised the issue of attracting candidates in the context of local government's image.

Attracting competent candidates who may subsequently be elected to local government would enhance decision making from a *Democratic* perspective (T3, T19), would achieve improved outcomes for the community (T28), result in a greater diversity of people being elected to council (T5), generally increase the skill level in the local government sector (T19) and provide a focus on the big picture (T11).

Once councillors were elected it was considered by four participants (T2, T11, T18, T22) that appropriate professional development was imperative. Being able to take a broader view was one of the key requirements of being an effective councillor as indicated by the following comment:

> *Councillors need to be educated about the big wide world out there and be dragged out of their municipalities (T2, p.13).*

The Municipal Association of Victoria was considered to play an important role in achieving this outcome through training and support for local government councillors (T2).

Financial management was also cited as an area for councillor training by one respondent who stated:

> *We expect councillors to act, perform and deliver in a way that big business would but without the training, experience or accountability arrangements (T11, p.12).*

The final area of training that was considered by two respondents (T12, T22) would enhance Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was professional development in participation and engagement principles. As indicated in the list of **SUCCESS FACTORS**, community engagement was ranked highly (mentioned 24 times). Training in the areas of participation and engagement would provide greater confidence in the decisions made by Victorian local government and result in communities being more actively involved in planning the future of their municipality.

One participant (T27) expressed the view that Victorian local government's *Democratic* role would be strengthened if organizational processes facilitated more input from councillors. It was stated that *no one knows their own communities better than their own councillors (T27, p.9).*

The final recommendation in relation to enhancing Victorian local government's *Democratic* role in this category was to implement systems whereby local government councillors were provided with independent feedback about how they were performing their duties (T22).

The fourth group of recommendations in regard to how local government's *Democratic* role could be enhanced focused on processes (mentioned a total of 8 times with 2 underpinning issues). Five respondents (T9, T12, T17, T18, T22) spoke about this issue.

The first recommendation regarding processes was for Victorian local government to develop greater opportunities for councillors and officers to be exposed to different techniques through the local government sector, which would enable greater learning about *Democratic* practices (T12). This was seen to be particularly important in the rural sector where resources were limited when compared to metropolitan local governments (T12).

The second recommendation suggested by three respondents (T9, T18, T22) regarding *Democratic* processes was the implementation of specific structures or programs that facilitated *Democratic opportunities (T18, p.30)*. This issue was identified in the list

of **_SUCCESS FACTORS_** (mentioned 5 times). The development of neighborhood committees, ward committees, citizen panels and town committees were considered to provide direct feedback from the community to their local government representatives. The movement of council meetings throughout the municipality was also considered to provide greater access to Victorian local government's _Democratic_ processes (T17).

4.4   Victorian Local Government's _Governance_ Role

> _Many of the passionate believers of local government like me talk about local Governance…shaping opportunities, vision, the character of the community, bringing the best out of what is available, both the human and the physical in an environmental sense (T13, p.1)._

In response to the first interview question, ten respondents (T4, T7, T13, T15, T17, T20, T21, T22, T25, T30) discussed Victorian local government's _Governance_ role. A further seven participants (T1, T10, T12, T18, T19 T26, T28) spoke about the _Governance_ role at a later period during their interview.

During the interviews a total of seventeen respondents or 55% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's _Governance_ role. Of the ten participants who discussed Victorian local government's _Governance_ role in response to the first question of the interview, five participants (T13, T17, T20, T22, T30) chose _Governance_ as their preferred topic to discuss in detail.

The analysis of Victorian local government's _Governance_ role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

4.4.1 Victorian Local Government's *Governance* Role Defined

An analysis of both the manifest and latent coding process was utilized to determine how the respondents defined the concept of Victorian local government's *Governance* role. This analysis was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the term *Governance* (**CONCEPT**) was mentioned, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the word *Governance* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context Victorian local government's *Governance* role was discussed (**CONTEXT**). Using these three headings, the analysis of the definition of *Governance* as summarized by the author is as follows.

CONCEPT

Governance (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 72 times)

Corporate Governance (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 25 times)

Total number of instances *Governance* (or derivations) mentioned 97 times

RELATED WORDS (to *Governance*)

Bureaucracy (mentioned once)

Good municipal government (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does Victorian local government's *Governance* role operate?)

The relationship between councillors and the administration (mentioned 20 times)

Processes of public administration (mentioned 15 times)

As a level of government (mentioned 5 times)

Within a compliance framework (mentioned 4 times)

Within the municipality (mentioned 3 times)

At council meetings (mentioned twice)

As an information portal (mentioned once)

A structure that sits on top of *Services*, *Infrastructure* and *Community Planning* (mentioned once)

A number of observations can be derived from the above content analysis.

Other Victorian local government roles (*Advocacy, Democratic*) that were identified by the respondents had a significant number of **RELATED WORDS**. In contrast, interviewees almost exclusively used the term *Governance* indicating that this term was the most commonly utilized phrase when describing this aspect of Victorian local government's role.

In discussing the concept of *Governance*, participants did not generally distinguish between *Democratic Governance* and *Corporate Governance* as defined and discussed in section 2.3.2.1 of Chapter 2. This lack of distinction between the two forms of *Governance* is illustrated by the following extracts from the interviews:

> *Governance is about making better decisions, collating resources, making sound choices and selecting pathways (T13, p.2);*
>
> *Good Governance can be applied to any organization that has Democratic overtones (T30, p.1);* and
>
> *Good governance is a package of effective and good decision making for the diverse interests of the community (T4, p.1).*

Only one respondent specifically identified *Corporate Governance* which he defined as the:

> *relationship of a governing body to its administration and the inter-relationship between those two (T30, p.2).*

As *Corporate Governance* centered on relationships between councillors and the administration (mentioned 20 times) it was stated that the *structures between the elected government and the administration were critical (T30, p.2).* It was further stated that *Democratic Governance* was supported by *Corporate Governance* practices, which were dependent on relationship protocols.

As evidenced in the **CONTEXT LIST**, the respondents generally placed the *Governance* role within a process framework (public administration mentioned 15 times) or in the context of how Victorian local government operated (as a level of government mentioned 5 times), within a compliance framework (mentioned 4 times),

within the municipality (mentioned 3 times), at council meetings (mentioned twice) and as an information portal (mentioned once).

In examining Victorian local government's *Governance* role, the rationale for this activity was explored with the respondents. An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the following reasons why *Governance* was considered to be a role for Victorian local government. The key issues have been summarized by the author and are as follows.

RATIONALE (Reasons for Victorian Local Government's *Governance* Role)

To develop systems and processes that assist local government to make decisions that reflect community input (mentioned 24 times)

To develop structures that assist the relationship between councillors and the administration (mentioned 16 times)

To shape opportunities, vision and the future character of the community (mentioned 6 times)

To develop systems to deliver information between the community and the council (mentioned 6 times)

To model good *Governance* standards in order to encourage the community to keep faith in government and its systems (mentioned 4 times)

To generate discussions with the community about local government's role (mentioned 4 times)

To engage with the community (mentioned 4 times)

To ensure that councillors and senior officers are accessible to the community (mentioned 3 times)

To provide community leadership (mentioned 3 times)

To provide good municipal government (mentioned once)

To ensure that there is meaningful input from the community (mentioned once)

The reasons that underpinned Victorian local government's *Governance* role as identified in the **RATIONALE LIST** were grouped into three key themes.

The first category focused on Victorian local government's internal processes that facilitated communication and positive relationships between the community and local government. This was evidenced by statements such as to develop systems and processes that assisted local government to make decisions that reflect community input (mentioned 24 times), to implement systems that delivered information between community and the council (mentioned 6 times), to generate discussions with the community about local government's role (mentioned 4 times), to engage the community (mentioned 4 times), to ensure that councillors and senior officers were accessible to the community (mentioned 3 times) and to ensure that there was meaningful input from the community (mentioned once).

Responsible decision making was considered by four respondents (T12, T13, T21, T22) to be one of the underpinning aspects of good *Governance*. The importance of transparent and considered decisions by Victorian local government was illustrated by the following comments:

> *The process (of decision making) has to have the confidence of the community that everything is going right. I used to like to hear people say...well I did not necessarily agree with the decision but I felt that we had a good hearing (T22, p.2);*

> *Governance is a process about shaping pathways and about making decisions that take you along those pathways as a conscious choice (T13, p.2);* and

> *There is a high level of expectation that they (local government) will engage with the community before they make decisions and that they consult with the community about the decisions that they have made (T21, p.1).*

Governance processes that facilitated broader communication between the community and Victorian local government was also considered by participants (T13, T20, T22) to be a significant goal of good *Governance*. Referred to by one respondent (T13) as an integral aspect of Victorian local government's 'tool kit', having the 'conversation' with the community about the role of local government, service delivery options and expectations of local government by the community were considered to be important *Governance* discussions.

Two respondents (T7, T17) expressed the view that accessibility was an important aspect of effective *Governance* processes and that accessibility was the interface between community and the organization. Another respondent described the importance of accessibility as follows:

> *There is an expectation on local government that it will be in fact local. The fact that the ward councillor and the chief executive officer will be at that local festival and that there can be a conversation is very positive. People do not want the council to behave like a government, but like a local organization with a face (T17, p.8).*

The second key theme that emanated from the **RATIONALE LIST** related to the discussion on *Corporate Governance* and the need to develop structures to assist the relationship between councillors and the administration (mentioned 16 times). *Corporate Governance* was described by one respondent as the:

> *biggest issue facing local government in Victoria and I think it is being addressed but we have a long way to go (T30, p.2).*

It was further stated by that respondent that good *Corporate Governance* would also achieve:

> *informed views, informed directions, informed planning and good methods of community engagement (T30, p.4).*

The third category of issues identified by the respondents (T1, T4, T10, T13, T17, T20, T25) focused on the strategic aspects of *Governance*. This aspect of *Governance* was reflected by comments such as to shape opportunities, vision and the future character of the community (mentioned 6 times), to model good *Governance* standards in order to encourage the community to keep faith in government and its systems (mentioned 4 times), to provide community leadership (mentioned 3 times) and to provide good municipal government (mentioned once).

The strategic aspects of Victorian local government's *Governance* role was reflected in the following comments by the respondents:

> *Looking at the aspirations of communities and their hopes for the future and answering that strategic question, what do you hope will be different or better about the place that you live in?…that is the Governance side of it (T13, p.2);*

> *Most importantly what we have done is to develop a vision which seeks to address the social, environmental and economic needs in a way that brings those three things together (T17, p.6);*
>
> *Governance is about local community leadership and it is about setting standards for the conduct of local affairs (T10, p.2);* and
>
> *The way that you govern is so important because it can restore and keep people's faith in Governance systems (T1, p.7).*

Victorian local government's *Governance* role and its relevance to community confidence in government more broadly, were contrasted to the image of both state and federal governments. One respondent (T20) expressed the view that federal and state governments were struggling to be relevant to people and that the federal government in particular was *captured by international markets (T20, p.1)*. The respondent went on to say that:

> *if you want to get interactive Governance happening and Governance where people can have some really meaningful input, it needs to happen at the local level (T20, p.1).*

4.4.2 Victorian Local Government's *Governance* Performance and Limitations

In response to the interview question regarding Victorian local government's *Governance* performance, six participants (T13, T17, T20, T21, T22, T30) chose to provide a direct response. A further two respondents (T15, T26) provided comments regarding Victorian local government's performance and the obstacles that local government faced in achieving positive outcomes when undertaking its *Governance* role.

Two respondents (T13, T30) expressed mixed opinions about Victorian local government's *Governance* performance and stated that more development needed to be undertaken.

Two respondents (T20, T30) spoke about Victorian local government's performance in its *Governance* role since the local government amalgamations in the 1990s. One respondent (T30) stated that Victorian local government's performance in this area had substantially improved but there was still *much, much further to go (T30, p.2)*. A second respondent expressed a similar view and stated:

> *I would give it a score of three out of ten for the whole sector and that may sound like a harsh and cruel judgement, but if you had asked me that question pre-amalgamations I think I would have said a one (T20, p.4).*

Another participant stated that:

> *local government aspires to have that Governance role and value add but at times falls short by being pressured into dealing with the here and now (T13, p.4).*

Two respondents (T17, T21) believed that Victorian local government performed its *Governance* role in rural areas more effectively than in metropolitan areas, because local government had a closer relationship with its community and was considered to be *a lot, lot easier to engage (T21, p.12).*

The respondents outlined a number of factors that they considered inhibited Victorian local government's ability to perform its *Governance* role. These limitations have been summarized by the author and are as follows.

LIMITATIONS TO VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S *GOVERNANCE* ROLE

Local government councillor and management relationships (mentioned 15 times)

Constrained by legislative mandate (mentioned 8 times)

Negative image of Victorian local government (mentioned 7 times)

Local government has a personality disorder (mentioned 7 times)

Minimal support from peak bodies (mentioned 3 times)

Community groups have limited confidence in local government's ability to achieve outcomes (mentioned 3 times)

Victorian local government's toolbox is limited (mentioned 3 times)

Victorian local government does not take *Governance* seriously (mentioned 3 times)

There is too much pressure to deal with short-term issues (mentioned 3 times)

Community concern about professional development for councillors limits genuine training opportunities on governance issues (mentioned 3 times)

There is too much emphasis on compliance requirements (mentioned twice)

There is a lack of leadership (mentioned twice)

Corporate Governance is a sensitive and difficult issue (mentioned twice)

The community usually reacts only when an issue impacts on them (mentioned once)

The issues that are outlined in the **LIMITATIONS LIST** can be grouped into five categories. The first group of comments specifically related to *Corporate Governance*.

The relationship between councillors and management was mentioned a total of 15 times. A number of the issues that were raised revolved around the power relationship between elected representatives and management, as demonstrated by the following comments:

> *The administration effectively blocked projects (T28, p.7);*
>
> *There was a lack of trust between councillors and management (T12, p.14);*
>
> *Some councils appointed less technically competent chief executive officers so that they would not challenge councillors (T12, p.10);*
>
> *In order for councils to be successful management needed to have some political push (T19, p.11);* and
>
> *Councillors had to rectify the imbalance between technically determined goals and Democratically determined outcomes (T18, p.16).*

One respondent (T30) stated that there were three main barriers to achieving effective *Corporate Governance*. The first limitation that was identified was that *Corporate Governance* related to relationships between the councillors and the administration, and that there were *sensitivities* and a reluctance to *get these issues out on the table (T30, p.2).*

This participant alleged that if either party (councillors or the administration) raised the issue of relationships it could be seen as:

> *some sort of competition or attempt to exert power or influence or authority in some way over each other (T30, p.2).*

The second limitation to *Corporate Governance* that was articulated by this participant (T30) was that there was an undue focus placed on compliance issues (mentioned twice), in terms of legislation and the roles of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman in particular. It was stated that compliance was not the main issue of *Corporate Governance* and that for Victorian local government, *relationships and role clarification was of far more importance (T30, p.2).* The importance of the relationship between local government councillors and the administration was because *relationships are things that cannot be legislated (T30, p.5).*

The third limitation that contributed to poor *Corporate Governance* was the lack of focus by local government peak bodies on good *Corporate Governance* models and education. These initiatives were considered to be a fundamental responsibility of the peak bodies that was not being addressed. It was stated that:

> *they (the peak bodies) have got to do a lot more in hopping on the good Governance bandwagon and realizing that this is the name of the business they are in (T30, p.5).*

The second category of limitations relating to Victorian local government's *Governance* role was the political context within which local government operated. Comments in this category included that Victorian local government was constrained by its legislative mandate (mentioned eight times), that local government had a personality disorder (mentioned seven times) and that local government's toolbox was limited (mentioned three times). All comments relating to this category emanated from the one respondent (T13).

During the interview this participant (T13) focused on what he referred to as local government's *personality disorder* and the *Governance tool kit (T13, p.3).* The *personality disorder (T13, pp.3,5,7,15)* as described by the participant (T13) was that on one hand Victorian local government aspired to fulfill its *Governance* role, which

was defined as creating a vision, improving opportunities for the community, shaping pathways and making choices (T13). The interviewee (T13) further stated however, that the legislative framework that was imposed on Victorian local government by state government meant that the *tool kit was a bit bare at the municipal level (T13, p.4)* and that *Governance* activities were pursued with *one arm tied behind your back (T13, p.4)*. Victorian local government was left to do the *grudge business (T13, p.5)* such as traffic, planning applications, building permits and the day to day administrative activities that leave the community *under-whelmed (T13, p.5)*.

The argument that was articulated by this respondent was summarized in the following statement:

> *So the issue is that state policy has said no, this is Governance, direction, shaping communities, it is serious stuff for councils to mess with so therefore we will limit the space you can work within. Mind you we will beat you up if you do not get your permits out on time (T13, p.4).*

The third group of limitations that was raised by two respondents (T13, T20) related to Victorian local government's negative image and the impact that it had on its *Governance* role (mentioned seven times). The issue of local government's image was raised during discussions about other roles (*Democratic, Community Building, Advocacy*).

It was considered by one respondent (T13) that people had pre-judgments about politicians generally, including local government councillors and all that was needed was the *slightest bit of evidence to back up that pre-judgment (T13, pp.3-4)*. In describing some local governments across Australia it was stated that *you would not trust them with your coffee money (T13, p.12)*.

Victorian local government's poor image was also seen to be a result of the portrayal of local government by the media and the fact that there was not a strong voice speaking positively about local government. It was stated that:

> *to lift your council to a level of respect is a job in front of us because it is a bit of a traditional Australian thing to view local governments in a disparaging way…There is a view that bashing the local government is a popular pastime in the media (T20, p.10).*

The fourth category of issues that was raised by the participants that limited Victorian local government's *Governance* role, related to the community's views of local government processes. Statements made by two participants (T13, T20) identified that community groups had limited confidence in local government's ability to achieve outcomes (mentioned three times), the community was often concerned about professional development for councillors (mentioned three times) and that the community usually reacted only when an issue impacted on them (mentioned once).

In referring to the *personality disorder* as previously described by one respondent (T13), it was considered that due to the confused perception of Victorian local government's *Governance* roles, community activists became *frustrated (T13, p.5)*. It was stated that:

> *when they (community activists) express their views and look for their municipal representative to give effect to that view they get frustrated because the councils can only do so much and then they wonder who to talk to about the things that matter (T13, p.5).*

It was further stated that if the community considered that local government had more influence, the community would be more *excited by the prospect of contributing to the development of local strategies and policies (T13, p.9).*

One respondent (T20) identified that Victorian local government's ability to fulfill its *Governance* role effectively was hindered by the fact that the community was often concerned about professional development for councillors (mentioned three times), as demonstrated by the following comment:

> *Communities expect Governance, expect representation, expect some leadership, and expect some Advocacy from their elected representatives but they will turn around and be horrified if they spend a weekend away in a planning session. If we started to introduce the notion of coaching for our councillors or our mayors a lot of communities would be horrified because they would see it like mayors having their own private psychiatrist (T20, p.5).*

The final category of limitations to Victorian local government's *Governance* role raised by the respondents (T13, T20) focused on a number of internal issues to local government. Concerns about Victorian local government not taking *Governance*

seriously (mentioned three times), there being too much pressure to deal with short-term issues (mentioned three times) and an overall lack of leadership (mentioned twice) were raised in this context.

Other reasons provided for inadequate *Governance* processes included a lack of leadership in local government (T20) and a lack of opportunity to deal with:

> *the proactive stuff and to look at the decisions that have been taken over a period of time and see what trends are happening (T13, p.6).*

4.4.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Governance* Role

Respondents were asked to state what community benefits would be realized if Victorian local government effectively fulfilled its *Governance* role. These responses have been summarized by the author and are outlined as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

The future direction reflects community aspirations (mentioned 11 times)

Facilitates more engaged and healthier communities (mentioned 8 times)

Encourages community development (mentioned 3 times)

Achieves appropriate service levels based on community input (mentioned twice)

Community would take local government more seriously (mentioned once)

Everyone has a chance to have their say (mentioned once)

Joins people together (mentioned once)

Balances the scales for disadvantaged groups (mentioned once)

Decisions can be made that reflect the diverse interests of the community (mentioned once)

Leads to active citizenship (mentioned once)

The ten *Governance* outcomes as identified by the respondents (T1, T4, T10, T13, T17, T20, T22, T30) all focused on benefits that the community would gain in some manner.

The creation of a community driven future (mentioned 11 times) was considered by one respondent (T13) to be the most significant achievement of good *Governance*. The search for a community vision was expressed *as looking at the aspirations of the community and their hopes for the future (T13, p.2)*. Another respondent also supported the concept of communities' determining their future as evidenced by the following comment:

> *I am a believer as a community activist in communities actually determining where they want to go (T1, p.8).*

The creation of a vision that reflected the community's vision was considered by one respondent (T17) to have the benefit of engaging people in a way that was positive and not adversarial (mentioned once). This view was expressed as follows:

> *They (the community) want a sense of we know where we are going and we are going there in a way that is inclusive and engages people (T17, p.7).*

Related to the theme of community, *Governance* objectives such as more engaged and healthier communities (mentioned 8 times), community development (mentioned 3 times) and active citizenship (mentioned once) were raised by five respondents (T1, T10, T13, T20, T30).

The connection between good *Governance* and community well-being was articulated by the following comments:

> *Community development and the way community and social interaction work...you have to work with that so that they complement each other in a Governance sense (T13, p.3);*

> *More engaged communities are healthier communities, are wealthier communities, are more liveable communities and it is only going to happen if our quality of Governance is good at the local level (T20, pp.8-9);* and

> *The building of active citizenship is a very important aspect of a vital community (T1, p.8).*

Developing the theme of community engagement and good *Governance*, one respondent (T20) spoke about the potential alienation of communities, which that participant considered to be the *biggest threat to our western democratic societies (T20, p.8)*. The participant further stated that:

> *if there are forums for people locally, if there are activities for people to take part in and avenues for opinions to be heard you can reduce alienation. But it can only happen locally. The state government has not got a hope and the federal government is way off (T20, p.8).*

Good *Governance* practices were considered by one respondent (T17) to assist in achieving appropriate service levels based on community input (mentioned twice) and in balancing the scales for disadvantaged groups (mentioned once).

It was considered that *Governance* principles underpinned by effective communication would provide the opportunity for everyone to have their say (mentioned once). In describing the development of a significant city strategy, one respondent stated that:

> *you could not have finished the process with any other conclusion than that they (the community) had every opportunity to have their say and I think what they said was taken account of and structured accordingly (T22, p.8).*

Associated with the theme of community input, one participant (T4) expressed the view that effective communication processes resulted in decisions that reflected the diverse interests of the community (mentioned once).

The final benefit that was raised by one respondent (T20) in regard to the implementation of good *Governance* practices, was that the community would take local government more seriously if they saw good models of *Governance* being adhered to (mentioned once).

4.4.4 Recommendations for Enhancing Victorian Local Government's *Governance* Role

During the interviews the respondents outlined what they considered to be the critical steps in achieving effective *Governance* processes. These steps have been summarized by the author and are as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Providing forums for engagement (mentioned 7 times)

Public accountability (mentioned 5 times)

Transparent processes (mentioned 3 times)

Good *Corporate Governance* models (mentioned 3 times)

Leadership (mentioned once)

Respect for local government (mentioned once)

Shaping paths (mentioned once)

Respondents were also asked to outline what recommendations they considered would assist Victorian local government in achieving its *Governance* role. As these recommendations did not lend themselves to be listed in a similar format to previous sections, they are discussed directly. The solutions were grouped into four categories.

The first group of recommendations that were discussed by two respondents (T13, T20) focused on the external image of Victorian local government and in particular media representation (mentioned a total of 7 times).

One respondent (T20) considered that Victorian local government's image in terms of its *Governance* role would only be enhanced if there were leaders who were able to work with the media and *take the debate head on (T20, p.7)*. It was considered by this participant that a pro-active strategy would result in more enlightened media and would also *lift the level of respect of councils (T20, p.10)*. Respect for local government was also noted in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST** (mentioned once).

Two participants (T13, T20) made two further suggestions in regard to enhancing the image of Victorian local government. The first recommendation was to work more closely with academic institutions to raise the understanding and awareness about the importance of Victorian local government to *citizens and the impact on the world around them (T20, p.7).* The second recommendation was for the Municipal Association of Victoria to take a leadership role in regard to the *quality control (T13, p.12)* of councillor behavior.

The second category of recommendations to enhance Victorian local government's *Governance* role focused on the role of councillors (mentioned 9 times). One respondent (T20) spoke about the need to train and support elected members to assist them to be more reflective and strategic about their role. This participant (T20) recommended that a percentage of the council budget be allocated for councillor training in the same way that was implemented for council staff. This recommendation would also assist to foster leadership, which was identified in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST** (mentioned once).

Connected to the leadership issue was the view raised by one respondent (20) that councillors should become more active in speaking to the community and fulfilling a community leadership role.

The third category of recommendations raised by two respondents (T22, T26) related to the internal processes that could be employed by Victorian local government to enhance its *Governance* role (mentioned 4 times). The issues of community engagement (mentioned 7 times) and transparent processes (mentioned 3 times) were identified in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST**.

The first recommendation related to the community's perception of Victorian local government and how improved *Governance* systems could enhance that perception. It was suggested that Victorian local government should review its decision making processes to ensure that it was perceived to be a genuine process rather than *simply getting the task done (T22, p.3).* It was further suggested by one respondent (T22) that different community engagement processes should be employed if the issue was complex rather than using the same process regardless of the issue concerned. A more

tailored approach to community engagement resulted in the community having more confidence in the decision making of local government and therefore of local government as an entity.

Two respondents (T17, T26) further discussed methods of engagement with communities in the context of people's busy lives. The challenges associated with communicating with the community were described in the following way:

> *In a world where people measure their life in minutes and seconds the challenge is for councils to engage with their communities and part of that is done through finding creative ways to get people's attention and to come along and be engaged (T17, p.4);* and

> *Working people simply do not have the time to partake in a more Democratic approach to local Governance, so we need to find avenues that are acceptable and channel them into the interest areas they have (T26, p.7).*

Three respondents (T17, T22, T26) identified that methods of communication with the community were also fundamental to achieving good *Governance* processes. Structured attempts to have a dialogue with the community, like councillor ward meetings, often only attracted the *usual suspects (T22, p.4)* who were described as:

> *the ones that have got nothing to do, or have a gripe that they are never going to let go of or those that simply want a free cup of coffee (T22, p.4).*

It was stated that structures that allowed the community to have regular input were essential to ensure that *the processes that the council is following are correct (T22, p.5).*

The final group of recommendations centered on internal and external contextual matters (mentioned 19 times).

It was recommended by one respondent (T13) that state and federal governments should provide Victorian local government with a greater spread of influence. If local government was given *more tools to work with (T13, p.9)* this would allow it to be more innovative and be able to respond more appropriately to local needs.

The other recommendations in this category specifically focused on ways to enhance local government's *Corporate Governance* role. Good *Corporate Governance* models (mentioned 3 times) was identified in the *SUCCESS FACTORS LIST*.

One respondent (T30) stated that it was essential that *Corporate Governance* became a legitimate issue for discussion despite the fact that it was sensitive and hard to deal with. A number of recommendations were suggested to overcome these obstacles of achieving effective *Corporate Governance*.

The first suggestion was that there needed to be a recognition of the importance of *Corporate Governance* and that as this was the *main game it was vital to get it (Corporate Governance) up in lights (T30, p.4)*. Education of both councillors and officers was also considered to be an important strategy and it was identified that the peak bodies should purse this responsibility.

Other strategies to enhance *Corporate Governance* were considered to be a commitment to better relationships, building a culture that promoted the sharing of goals and trust, clear statements about the role of the mayor and the councillors, a recognition that the chief executive officer as an employee of the council should support the council in their decisions and that informal briefings should be held so that information could be presented and discussions held to ensure that councillors were informed of all the issues.

4.5   Victorian Local Government's *Community Building* Role

> *Local government has the capacity to be the best Community Builder in the business because it is close, because it is doing the things that people recognize. It is involved in sporting clubs, the community organizations and the service clubs and all that sort of stuff (T29, p.12).*

> *This increasing role of Community Building, that is being more responsible for the whole area – integrating economic, social and environmental well-being. To think about the community as a whole place in a holistic way and for the long-term. And why should local government do that? The short answer is because no one else does or can. It has become a legitimate and important part of local government (T18, p.5).*

In response to the first interview question, eleven respondents (T5, T7, T8, T9, T12, T15, T17, T18, T24, T25, T26) discussed Victorian local government's *Community Building* role. A further eight participants (T1, T2, T4, T11, T19, T20, T29, T31) spoke about the *Community Building* role at a later stage during their interview.

During the interviews a total of nineteen respondents or 61% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Community Building* role. Of the eleven participants who discussed local government's *Community Building* role in response to the first question of the interview, seven participants (T8, T15, T17, T18, T24, T25, T26) chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth.

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Community Building* role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

4.5.1 Victorian Local Government's *Community Building* Role Defined

An analysis of both the manifest and latent coding process was utilized to determine how the respondents defined the concept of Victorian local government's *Community Building* role. This analysis was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the term *Community Building* (**CONCEPT**) was mentioned, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the word *Community Building* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context Victorian local government's *Community Building* role was discussed (**CONTEXT**).

Using these three headings, the analysis of the definition of *Community Building* as summarized by the author is as follows.

CONCEPT

Community Building (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 67 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Community Building*)

Community connectedness (mentioned 10 times)

Developing social capital (mentioned 9 times)

Community strengthening (mentioned 7 times)

Community development (mentioned 6 times)

Building a sense of community (mentioned 3 times)

Building citizenship (mentioned twice)

Maintaining community (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does Victorian local government's *Community Building* role operate?)

As the level of government best placed to work with communities (mentioned 18 times)

Within and across *Service* provision and delivery (mentioned 8 times)

Within the local area and centered within the local community (mentioned 7 times)

As a part of the councillor's role (mentioned 5 times)

In partnership with other levels of government and within a framework set by other levels of government (mentioned 5 times)

In partnership with voluntary organizations and community groups (mentioned 3 times)

As an outcome of developing a community vision (mentioned 3 times)

As a component of local government's *Democratic* role (mentioned once)

As a component of local government's *Advocacy* role (mentioned once)

A number of observations can be derived from the above content analysis.

The term *Community Building* (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 67 times) was clearly the most common word utilized by the respondents (T1, T2, T4, T7, T9,

T15, T18, T24, T25, T26, T29, T31) to describe this aspect of Victorian local government's role.

Other terminology that was commonly utilized to describe Victorian local government's *Community Building* role is outlined in the following commentary.

A number of respondents used the terms *Community Building*, community strengthening and community development interchangeably (T4, T15, T24, T25, T26). In discussing the range of terminology used to describe this aspect of Victorian local government's role, one respondent stated:

> *I think the terms Community Building, community strengthening and community development are quite similar. If you are building a community you are strengthening and developing it (T24, p.12).*

Another participant also interchanged the three terms *Community Building*, community strengthening and community development as evidenced by the statement:

> *The biggest untapped area for local government is community development or Community Building (T15, p.1).*

The same respondent utilized the term community strengthening later in the interview within the same context as community development and *Community Building*.

Another respondent spoke about the term community development and community connectedness and stated:

> *It (local government) has very, very strong responsibilities for what I call community connectedness. Some people call it community development. I hate that term because it really is about taking on concepts like volunteerism and who is going to look after the poor and we will not do it from the public purse. So it is a small government notion (T8, pp.1-2).*

The above analysis indicated that there was a strong association with the **CONCEPT, RELATED TERMS** and **CONTEXT** lists and the concept of community. Of the eight **RELATED TERMS** to the **CONCEPT** of *Community Building,* six terms included the

word community and the two most prominent contexts in which Victorian local government's *Community Building* role operated, also related to communities (As the level of government best placed to work with communities, mentioned 18 times; and Within the local area and centered within the local community, mentioned 7 times).

The respondents (T1, T2, T4, T15) recognized that the state government's policy position on *Community Building* influenced how Victorian local government fulfilled its *Community Building* role. As outlined in the **CONTEXT LIST**, the phrase: In partnership with other levels of government and within a framework set by other levels of government, was mentioned on five occasions.

Victorian local government's role as a *Community Builder* was seen to underpin a number of other local government roles or components of other roles. This was evidenced by the identification of a number of phrases in the **CONTEXT LIST**. *Service* provision and delivery was mentioned 8 times *(Service role)*, as a part of the councillor's role was mentioned 5 times *(Democratic role)*, as an outcome of developing a community vision was mentioned 3 times *(Governance role)*, as a component of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was mentioned once and as a component of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role was mentioned once.

In discussions on *Community Building* and *Service* delivery, one participant considered that *Community Building* should underpin the range of *Services* that Victorian local government was involved in and is not:

> *one person's job function. It is a way of doing business as much as anything else and I think that is important (T8, p.3).*

Another participant described this cross-departmental focus of *Community Building* as the need for it to be *impregnated throughout the whole council organization (T4, p.8).*

In examining Victorian local government's *Community Building* role the rationale for this activity was explored with the interviewees. An analysis of the interviews as summarized by the author revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to fulfill its *Community Building* role.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Community Building*)

To cultivate community well-being and develop community capacity (mentioned 16 times)

To draw together communities that are fragmented and under stress (mentioned 12 times)

To counter the economic rationalism philosophies of state and federal governments (mentioned 8 times)

To engage with the community to develop outcomes, its future vision and directions (mentioned 8 times)

To involve people in decision making (mentioned 4 times)

To develop citizenship (mentioned 3 times)

To provide the tools to the community to challenge all spheres of government (mentioned 3 times)

To map out *Service* needs and priorities (mentioned twice)

To bring together all levels of government in *Service* delivery that local government is not responsible for (mentioned once)

To improve local government's performance in meeting the needs and challenges of the community (mentioned once)

The reasons that underpinned Victorian local government's *Community Building* role as identified in the **RATIONALE LIST** were grouped into four key themes.

The first theme identified by ten respondents (T8, T9, T12, T15, T17, T18, T24, T26, T29, T31) related to the overall well-being of communities. Comments such as to cultivate community well-being and develop community capacity (mentioned 16 times), to draw together communities that are fragmented and under stress (mentioned 12 times) and to develop citizenship (mentioned 3 times) demonstrated this point. Five participants (T9, T12, T17, T18, T26) considered that Victorian local government's role in *Community Building* brought fragmented communities together.

It was suggested by one interviewee (T18) that communities were under stress, breaking down, experiencing problems, unhappy and that there was increased inequality. These societal trends were considered to be impacting on Victorian local

government's overall role and it was alleged that local government had expanded to become more:

> *community centered rather than being a somewhat impersonal agency that collected the rubbish. It (local government) is far more aware of its role in the community in overall community well-being and Community Building (T18, p.2).*

It was stated by two respondents (T12, T26) that there were sections of the community who were disadvantaged and were at the margins of society. This included older groups, pensioners and youth. It was considered that Victorian local government had a significant role in working with these groups to enable them to resource networks and organize themselves in whichever way those groups thought it appropriate. It was stated that *this is what Community Building and capacity building is all about (T26, p.2).*

Two respondents (T9, T17) stated that Victorian local government's role as a *Community Builder* was particularly significant in areas that did not have long standing neighborhood traditions or that were changing because of new urban development. One participant expressed Victorian local government's role in this context as follows:

> *What we find is that new communities have limited connectedness because the roots have to be put down over time. Just as the trees grow above the horizon, the roots the families put down take some time (T17, p.8).*

An extension to the argument that Victorian local government had a role to assist fragmented communities was the view that local government had a role to assist community well-being and community capacity more broadly. Eight participants (T8, T12, T15, T18, T19, T24, T29, T31) discussed this aspect of Victorian local government's *Community Building* role.

Relevant comments regarding local government's role in promoting and facilitating community well-being included:

> *Local government has the capacity to build communities that reflect the wishes and aspirations of the local people better than anyone else (T29, p.14);*
>
> *Local government gives them (the community) something to identify with and then they realize that things can happen (T31, p.9);*
>
> *If the local government is working well, the community is working well and then you get a much healthier happier community (T19, p.9);* and
>
> *It gives them (the community) the confidence that they can make a plan and that what they see as priorities will be supported (T24, p.9).*

The final issue that was raised in regard to Victorian local government's *Community Building* role and the well-being of communities was its relationship to citizenship. One respondent (T12) considered that there was a connection between *Community Building* and developing community capacity so that the community was confident to participate and be active citizens. This included community roles such as being a volunteer, membership of a political group or being on a childcare committee of management (T12).

The second category of reasons for Victorian local government's *Community Building* role focused on the approach of the Victorian state and federal governments. This point of view included two different aspects.

It was considered by two respondents (T8, T18) that both the federal and state governments had an economic rationalist approach to communities, as indicated by the following comment:

> *They (state and federal governments) have been abandoning communities, pulling out some aspects of community support and infrastructure that are clearly necessary to build and maintain communities. Small government. (T18, pp.2-3).*

As a result of this economic rationalist focus by state and federal governments, it was believed by one respondent (T18) that the *Community Building imperative (T18, p.3)* was a defensive reaction to the fact that communities were experiencing stress. Enhancing the role of Victorian local government in *Community Building* was therefore considered to be the solution to *state and federal governments getting out of*

government (T18, p.12) because it was stated that *you cannot mandate Community Building from Spring Street (T18, p.3).*

Federal and state governments' adoption of a 'small government' approach related to earlier comments by a respondent (T8) regarding their reluctance to use the term community development. This respondent also considered that Victorian local government's role in *Community Building* was necessary to counter the federal and state governments' economic rationalist approach, as evidenced by the following comment:

> *Local government is playing a fantastic role of helping people move from the individual is good, economic rationalism is the hero to a position of actually connecting people into community, which is an absolutely key role (T8, p.2).*

The second aspect related to the state and federal governments' role that was identified by two respondents (T5, T12) focused on the notion that *Community Building* enhanced the community's capacity to challenge all levels of government. Local government's role in *Community Building* was considered to have the follow-on benefit that communities could take the learnings from *Community Building* experiences and engage with state and federal governments. This view was expressed in the following comment:

> *Local government can rebuild that confidence and faith in the body politic to get involved in questioning and challenging all levels of government (T12, p.7).*

Stronger *Community Building* from Victorian local government was also considered by one respondent (T5) to enable communities to pressure other levels of government to review the delivery of services that were not controlled by Victorian local government.

The third area identified by seven respondents (T8, T9, T17, T18, T24, T25, T26) related to the need to assist communities to plan for the future and identify *Service* needs. Comments such as to engage with the community to develop outcomes and its future vision and directions (mentioned 8 times), to engage with the community to

develop outcomes and its future vision and directions (mentioned 8 times) and to map out *Service* needs and priorities (mentioned twice) demonstrated these objectives.

Victorian local government's *Community Building* role was considered to add to the social fabric and to assist a community to determine what areas needed to be focused on. By Victorian local government *connecting with the community (T17, p.2)* it was suggested that this would result in an:

> *understanding of what those big picture needs were, those human needs and engage with all other players in developing outcomes (T17, p.2).*

An associated aspect of *Community Building* raised by four respondents (T8, T17, T18, T26) was to involve communities in the decision making process about their future. It was considered that such decision making could also include budgeting and resource initiatives (T18, T26).

The final aspect of why Victorian local government should be involved in *Community Building* was to improve its own performance in meeting the needs and challenges of the community (mentioned once).

4.5.2 Victorian Local Government's Performance and Limitations as a *Community Builder*

Nine respondents (T7, T8, T12, T15, T17, T20, T24, T25, T26) addressed how they viewed Victorian local government's performance in *Community Building*. These views identified that overall performance was mixed.

Comments included *some are doing it exceptionally well (T8, p.4); generally pretty well, but it is an area that has to be constantly evolving (T26, p.3); it is highly variable, some councils do it very, very well and some do not (T15, p.2); it is a mixed bag (T24, p.8); patchy (T25, p.3)*; and *we have just to learn to do it (Community Building) more effectively (T7, p.7).*

Four participants (T8, T12, T17, T20) commented on the relative ease of implementing *Community Building* initiatives between rural/outer municipalities and metropolitan municipalities. One respondent (T17) stated that it was more difficult to achieve *Community Building* outcomes in metropolitan areas because of the lack of connectedness between communities (T17). Three participants (T8, T12, T20) conversely stated that Victorian local government's performance in rural areas was impacted by a lack of resources.

Two participants (T8, T20) further alleged that Victorian local government's performance in rural areas was poor due to other external factors. This view was demonstrated by the following comments:

> *They (rural areas) have been smashed by a whole bunch of factors such as the withdrawal of banks, schools, government and transport (T20, p.15);* and

> *Since amalgamations there has been a problem of a lack of identity of a country town, because it has lost its town hall and it has lost its mayor and councillors to some bigger entity that is 50 kilometers up the road. And it has lost its bank and its government services and a lot of other things (T8, p.5).*

In commenting on Victorian local government's performance in the area of *Community Building*, one participant (T15) indicated that it was difficult to generalize about performance across the whole of the local government sector.

Fifteen participants (T1, T4, T7, T8, T9, T11, T12, T15, T17, T18, T20, T24, T25, T26, T31) identified limitations to local government achieving its *Community Building* role. These limitations as summarized by the author are as follows.

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE *COMMUNITY BUILDING*

Local government has limited resources (mentioned 14 times)

People have less time and are less willing to be engaged in *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 9 times)

Success is dependent on the caliber and motivation of the councillors (mentioned 7 times)

Responsibilities for inter-governmental relationships and funding are not clear (mentioned 6 times)

People move neighborhoods more frequently and have less loyalty to the local area (mentioned 5 times)

Success is dependent on the caliber of the officers (mentioned 4 times)

Local government is defined by boundaries and *Community Building* initiatives therefore become compartmentalized (mentioned 4 times)

Media treatment of local government is not balanced and this influences people's views (mentioned 4 times)

Success depends on the community leadership (mentioned 4 times)

Local government has limited powers (mentioned 3 times)

Community Building initiatives could be controversial (mentioned twice)

Local government is seen as a bit of a joke (mentioned twice)

Local government wants to dominate activities (mentioned twice)

Overloading of volunteers (mentioned twice)

Notions of community do not mean anything these days (mentioned once)

Local government has limited access to relevant community data (mentioned once)

The community may not be ready (mentioned once)

Community members may have other agendas (mentioned once)

The issues raised by the respondents as outlined in the list of **LIMITATIONS** can be grouped into five categories, the first of which related to the internal operations and characteristics of Victorian local government itself. Eleven participants (T1, T4, T8, T12, T15, T17, T18, T20, T24, T26, T31) raised issues in regard to this category.

The most frequently raised barrier was Victorian local government's limited capacity to resource *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 14 times). Two respondents (T18, T26) considered that local government resources were more likely to be spent in traditional areas such as roads, rubbish and other physical services.

Five participants (T8, T12, T17, T20, T31) raised the issue of resources for rural municipalities in particular, which was a matter that was previously identified in discussions on Victorian local government's performance in this role area.

The caliber and motivation of some councillors (mentioned 7 times) was seen by four respondents (T4, T8, T24, T26) to be a potential limitation to Victorian local government's *Community Building* outcomes. One respondent spoke about the negative impacts on community connectedness when a local government councillor is *running their own agenda for purposes completely other than local government (T8, p.11).*

Additional views regarding elected members and their impact on *Community Building* were demonstrated by the following comments:

> *A shortcoming in this area (Community Building) is sometimes the role of the elected people. There is almost a sort of inherent laziness amongst the governing body (T26, p.7);*

> *I think there is a barrier with councillors about sharing their boundaries (T4, p.6);* and

> *It depends on the caliber of the councillors and their interests (T24, p.9).*

Three participants (T4, T8, T15) also identified the caliber of the officers (mentioned 4 times) as a potential limitation to Victorian local government fulfilling its *Community Building* role. It was considered that:

> *some officers actually hate going out into the community which creates a sense of suspicion with the community (T8, p.11);* and

> *the major impediment is at the officer level. Most bureaucrats are not in a risk environment (T15, p.11).*

Other internal Victorian local government characteristics that could hinder achieving *Community Building* initiatives was that such initiatives could be controversial (mentioned twice) and consequently be *placed in the too hard basket because of the division that it (Community Building) might engender (T26, p.8).*

Two respondents (T1, T24) also identified that the implementation of *Community Building* programs was sometimes dominated by local government which limited their success (mentioned twice) and one respondent (T18) further raised that local government had limited access to relevant community data (mentioned once).

The second category of issues that inhibited Victorian local government's *Community Building* role, focused on societal and broader community factors.

It was stated by four respondents (T7, T9, T17, T18) that due to time constraints, people were less willing to be engaged in *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 9 times). The challenge in terms of involving people was summarized by one participant who stated:

> *Engaging in Community Building initiatives to some extent depends on people's willingness to participate and time and good will and people that do not have any of those three qualities, it is pretty hard to get them engaged. I think the general trend is that people find less time for community pursuits and are likely to spend their time on the internet or watching television or finding their own circle of friends (T18, p.28).*

The lack of time for the community to become engaged in Victorian local government initiatives was also raised by participants in discussions on other role areas (*Democratic* and *Governance* roles).

The view that people moved neighborhoods more frequently and consequently had less loyalty to the local area (mentioned 5 times) was also considered by one respondent (T18) to be a factor that inhibited Victorian local government's performance as a *Community Builder*. It was suggested that:

> *If you are dealing with people who do not care about the place where they live and do not have any attachment to it, basically it is a dormitory for them and they are going to move on in two years. And increasingly people are more mobile (T18, pp.27-28).*

Another participant (T11) stated that the idea of 'community' in modern society was unclear (mentioned once). This respondent stated:

> *We laugh about the constant use of the word community – Are you in our community? No, you are standing on the wrong street corner so you must belong to another community (T11, p.7).*

The third category of limitations regarding this role that was raised by four participants (T1, T15, T18, T25) related to the political context within which local government operated.

It was considered by one respondent that there was confusion about effective inter-governmental relations (mentioned 6 times) and *who should be responsible for what (T15, p.2)*. It was suggested that from a citizen's perspective who was responsible for what aspects of *Community Building* was irrelevant and debates about funding, roles and responsibilities were *vacuous (T15, p.2)*. It was further suggested by this participant that *Community Building* was in their opinion the *biggest untapped area for local government (T15, p.1)*.

One respondent (T25) commented that the rigid boundaries that defined Victorian local government was a limitation to effective *Community Building* (mentioned 4 times) and that *Community Building* needed to be implemented across jurisdictions. It was alleged that this *compartmentalization (T25, p.3)* was especially difficult for residents who lived on the fringes of a municipality.

The final issue in this category that was raised by two participants (T1, T18) was that Victorian local government had limited powers to implement *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 3 times). One participant suggested that this limited power meant that *Community Building* projects were imposed *from above and may not reflect local knowledge and input (T1, p.6)*.

The fourth category of limitations as identified by four respondents (T8, T12, T24, T31) related to the community. It was considered that the success of *Community Building* initiatives depended on the strength of community leadership (mentioned 4 times). It was stated that the caliber of the people outside of the council was an important factor in achieving community outcomes, but that it was always going to be a *bit of hit and miss in that people's abilities are different (T24, p.10)*. Another respondent stated that:

> *very often there are natural leaders and we have to encourage them and give them major resources (T31, p.6).*

It was suggested that unsuccessful *Community Building* projects, despite good intentions might mean that the community was *not ready for change* or that *not enough work had been done on identifying local leaders and supporters (T24, p.8).*

Other factors involving the community included that volunteers were often overloaded (mentioned twice) by the responsibilities that were being *shifted on to them (T12, p.6)* and that community members may have other agendas (mentioned once) and use council as a *platform* in which to *capture the community (T8, p.11).*

The fifth category of issues relating to Victorian local government's *Community Building* role focused on local government's image (mentioned twice) and its representation in the media (mentioned 4 times). Two respondents (T26, T31) raised these two issues during their interview.

It was stated by one respondent that *local government was a bit of a joke (T26, p.6).* It was alleged that this was partly due to the criticism of Victorian local government as portrayed in the tabloid press. It was further stated:

> *They (the tabloid press) will pick on the .0001% of what on the surface appears to be a fairly ludicrous decision one of the 79 councils has made and it will get a lot of air play that will influence people's view of local government (T26, p.6).*

In discussing the influence of the media, the closure of services on small towns and its consequential impact on *Community Building* initiatives, one respondent commented:

> *Given the media hype which is all doom and gloom and you look at small townships that have gone and everyone says 'we are going to be next. We are going to get out because the bank's gone, the doctor's gone, the hospital just up the road at the next town has just closed and now we have to drive 100kms to get medical services' (T31, p.6).*

The respondents in discussions on other roles raised the media's negative portrayal of Victorian local government.

4.5.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Community Building* Role

Respondents were asked to state what community benefits would be realized if Victorian local government effectively fulfilled its *Community Building* role. A summary of these responses as compiled by the author is as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Citizens are engaged in their community (mentioned 11 times)

Creates a sense of a community vision and shared values (mentioned 11 times)

Creates healthy communities (mentioned 6 times)

Increases participation in council activities and community groups (mentioned 5 times)

Provides information into communications, priorities and strategies (mentioned 5 times)

Provides additional resources (mentioned 5 times)

People feel satisfied with their community and have an affinity with it (mentioned 4 times)

People do not feel they are on their own and that they have a powerful partner in local government (mentioned 4 times)

Communities work together (mentioned 4 times)

People have a sense of pride (mentioned 3 times)

Develops community capacity (mentioned twice)

Creates an investment in early intervention and prevention (mentioned twice)

Develops communities that learn (mentioned twice)

Improves social fabric and well-being (mentioned twice)

Develops empowered communities (mentioned once)

Reduces inequality (mentioned once)

Develops respect, tolerance and inclusiveness (mentioned once)

Achieves good *Governance* (mentioned once)

Rebuilds confidence in local government (mentioned once)

The community outcomes as articulated by the respondents can be grouped into three categories.

The first group can be classified as the benefits of *Community Building* initiatives that would specifically assist communities. Seven participants (T1, T4, T7, T12, T15, T18, T24) spoke about this topic.

Three respondents (T4, T12, T18) considered that Victorian local government's role as a *Community Builder* resulted in citizens being more engaged in their community (mentioned 11 times). In discussing the benefits of *Community Building* one respondent stated:

> *Community engagement is really important and that re-engaging of citizens in their communities is best done through meaningful tasks and proper partnerships and co-operation. There is a huge amount of evidence that local government has been able to establish greater legitimacy and engagement and rapport and this is going to lead to the best Community Building (T18, p.14).*

The second related theme in this category was that *Community Building* creates a sense of a community vision and shared values (mentioned 11 times). Four respondents (T1, T12, T15, T18) spoke about this community benefit. The significance of creating a sense of vision was illustrated by the following comments:

> *I am a believer in communities actually determining where they want to go (T1, p.8);* and

> *One of the success factors (of Community Building) is that the community have a sense of vision which is not just the council's vision but is also the community's vision (T15, p.4).*

The links between *Community Building*, engagement and creating a sense of vision was further evidenced by the following comment:

> *The most meaningful task of Community Building itself is that ongoing dialogue in the community. Community engagement does link to decisions about priorities and broad goals. So I would like to think of local government moving down that track towards having a stronger Community Building role based on better community engagement (T18, pp.14-15).*

Three respondents (T7, T12, T24) raised the development of healthier communities (mentioned 6 times) as a result of *Community Building* initiatives. It was alleged that if people were more active in the community that this positively impacted on health indicators, issues of general health and life expectancy.

Closely associated with the concept of healthier communities was that *Community Building* resulted in people feeling more satisfied with their community and having an affinity with it (mentioned 4 times). Two participants (T7, T18) further considered that if people felt more satisfied with their community they would similarly have more confidence in their local government. The following comment summarized this view:

> *It is about a positive feeing about where they live and how secure they feel and having an organization you can depend on if you need support or advice (T7, p.6).*

Other community benefits that were derived from *Community Building* initiatives included the facilitation of communities working together (T1, T4) (mentioned 4 times), the development of community capacity (T24) (mentioned twice), community learning (T12) (mentioned twice) and empowered communities (T12) (mentioned once).

Six of the benefits identified in the **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES LIST** related to the positive impact on the social fabric of society. Seven respondents (T4, T8, T12, T15, T18, T24, T25) spoke about this issue.

It was considered by two respondents (T4, T8) that effective *Community Building* resulted in people not feeling that they were on their own and that Victorian local government was a powerful partner (mentioned 4 times). One participant stated that the benefits of *Community Building* were *huge (T8, p.8)* and that:

> *the single most important thing was that when they (people) wanted to do something they were not on their own (T8, p.8).*

Another respondent stated that *Community Building* initiatives created an environment where people had *someone to turn to (T4, p.6).*

Four respondents (T12, T18, T24, T25) identified positive community outcomes that were reflected in statements such as people having a sense of pride (mentioned 3 times), improving the social fabric and well-being (mentioned twice), reducing inequality (mentioned once) and developing respect, tolerance and inclusiveness (mentioned once).

The final issue that was raised by one respondent (T15) about the societal benefits was that *Community Building* equated to an investment in early intervention and prevention (mentioned twice). This participant considered that *Community Building* at the local government level saved resources that would otherwise be expended by the state government at the *statutory end of the service level (T15, p.10).*

The third category of community benefits that was raised by the respondents focused on general outcomes, including the achievement of good *Governance* (mentioned once).

Three respondents (T1, T9, T24) spoke about the benefits of *Community Building* in terms of facilitating community input into priorities and strategies (mentioned 5 times). In discussing a *Community Building* initiative that one respondent had been involved in, that participant stated:

> *Often we do not know what services are out there and what services are missing. So we identified family violence as a major issue and if we had not done that exercise we would not have known that we needed to focus on this (T24, p.11).*

Three respondents (T4, T18, T24) addressed the issue of additional resources (mentioned 5 times), one participant stating that:

> *Community Building gives them (the community) feedback and provides resources and recognizes and celebrates their achievements (T18, p.13).*

Another respondent (T4) believed that additional resources would be achieved through *Community Building* initiatives because such programs would result in higher volunteerism.

4.5.4 Recommendations for Enhancing Victorian Local Government's *Community Building* role

During the interviews the critical steps in achieving effective *Community Building* processes were outlined. These steps have been summarized by the author and are as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Citizen engagement (mentioned 18 times)

Proper partnerships and co-operation (mentioned 12 times)

Communication with community groups (mentioned 8 times)

Identification of community leadership (mentioned 7 times)

Establishing the vision and priorities (mentioned 5 times)

Linking with other players (mentioned 5 times)

Community *Infrastructure* (mentioned 4 times)

Development of a plan (mentioned 3 times)

Councils to support *Community Building* but not drive it (mentioned 3 times)

Formation of supporting structures (mentioned twice)

Local government needs to devolve power (mentioned twice)

Council leadership (mentioned twice)

Open and genuine processes (mentioned twice)

Allocation of resources (mentioned twice)

Community action (mentioned once)

Enabling the community (mentioned once)

Nine respondents (T7, T8, T12, T15, T17, T18, T20, T24, T26) identified potential solutions that they considered would assist Victorian local government in achieving

its *Community Building* role. These solutions focused predominantly on internal organizational and structural issues.

Four participants (T7, T20, T24, 26) stated that Victorian local government should work together and share ideas about *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 5 times). Proper partnerships and co-operation (mentioned 12 times), linking with other players (mentioned 5 times) and the formation of supporting structures (mentioned twice) were related themes that were identified in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST**.

One respondent stated that:

> *I think the problem is that councils tend to sometimes try and reinvent the wheel rather than talk together and outline what has worked (T24, p.13).*

When asked the question about what would achieve more effective *Community Building* another respondent indicated that *sharing was the key thing (T26, p.4).*

Effective teamwork between senior management and elected representatives was also listed as a recommendation to enhance *Community Building* (mentioned 5 times). One respondent (T7) considered that the skills of the chief executive officer were a key success factor in implementing effective *Community Building* initiatives.

The second staffing issue (mentioned twice) related to *Community Building* was ensuring that staff who felt *comfortable working with communities were in the front line* and *the others just keep out of it (T8, p.12).*

On an organizational level, one respondent identified that integrating *Community Building* into the core functions of Victorian local government would be a *shift (T26, p.5)* that would enhance this role for local government. This was expressed as:

> *seeing the Community Building side of what local government does in the same way that people would accord waste collection or the planning department and those key things that you associate local government with (T26, p.5).*

It was further considered by one interviewee that it was important for Victorian local government to move away from the *physical planner model (T18, p.14)* because such a model did not achieve effective *Community Building* (mentioned 3 times). This respondent stated that physical planners *have their place but my view is that experts do not lead, they follow (T18, p.14).*

One respondent (T15) considered that *Governance* arrangements needed to be rethought if *Community Building* was to be effective (mentioned 5 times). It was stated that Victorian local government needed to create:

> *different Governance arrangements to counterbalance the rigidities of the system of public administration (T15, p.8).*

Effective engagement and communication with the community was another organizational recommendation that would assist the implementation of *Community Building* initiatives (mentioned 5 times). Citizen engagement (mentioned 18 times) and communication with community groups (mentioned 8 times) were related themes that were identified in the ***SUCCESS FACTORS LIST***. One participant defined effective community engagement as *thinking of creative ways in which to communicate and getting people's attention (T17, p.11).*

Effective communication through *Community Building* initiatives would also mean that Victorian local government would became a focal point in providing information and advice to the community (mentioned 4 times). Two respondents (T7, T12) considered that this outcome would enhance community respect and rebuilt confidence in Victorian local government.

Successful *Community Building* was also considered by one respondent (T26) to counteract some of the negative images of Victorian local government as portrayed by the media. The respondent further stated, however, that this view may be *slightly naïve and overly optimistic (T26, p.6).*

The final recommendation that was raised by two respondents (T17, T26) was the importance of research. One respondent (T17) identified the need to understand the

community through valid research (mentioned 3 times) and stated that such research should:

> *include the minority, including the home care clients that never come out to a meeting at night (T17, p.4).*

The second mention of research related to academic research. One respondent raised this issue and stated that Victorian local government needed to encourage:

> *academic clout or interest in it from the tertiary sector. This is an area where there is a real opportunity for Community Building from the local perspective to be given some research attention (T26, p.4).*

4.6   Victorian Local Government's *Advocacy* Role

> ***The fundamental role of local government I see is Advocacy, and Advocacy on issues of great importance to the community (T1, p.1).***

In response to the first interview question, ten respondents (T1, T2, T3, T4, T9, T10, T12, T14, T21, T24) indicated that *Advocacy* was a role of Victorian local government. A further six participants (T13, T17, T18, T19, T28, T29) spoke about the *Advocacy* role at a later period during their interview.

During the interviews a total of sixteen respondents or 52% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role. Of the ten participants who identified *Advocacy* as a Victorian local government role, five participants (T1, T2, T4, T10, T14) chose *Advocacy* as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth.

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

4.6.1 Victorian Local Government's *Advocacy* Role Defined

An analysis of both the manifest and latent coding process was utilized to determine how the respondents defined the concept of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role. This analysis was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the term *Advocacy* (**CONCEPT**) was mentioned, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the word *Advocacy* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role was discussed (**CONTEXT**).

Using these three headings, the analysis of the definition of *Advocacy* as summarized by the author is as follows.

CONCEPT

Advocacy (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 63 times)

RELATED WORDS

Influencing decisions (mentioned 12 times)

Facilitates (mentioned 10 times)

Represent (mentioned 7 times)

Developing solutions (mentioned 7 times)

Partnering (mentioned 4 times)

Collaboration (mentioned 3 times)

Promoting the interests of the community (mentioned twice)

Achieving change (mentioned twice)

Developing strategic alliances (mentioned once)

Lobby (mentioned once)

Voice for the people (mentioned once)

Take up the gauntlet (mentioned once)

Collective action (mentioned once)

Mediate (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does local government *Advocate*?)

To other levels of government (mentioned 35 times)

To the private sector/ businesses (mentioned 10 times)

To represent local issues for constituents (mentioned 5 times)

Within a political context (mentioned 4 times)

On *Land Use Planning* issues (mentioned once)

The content analysis from the interview data as listed above, illustrated a number of key points that influenced the participant's discussion on *Advocacy*.

Firstly the term *Advocacy* was the most commonly used word in relation to Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role (listed a total of 63 times) compared to the number of times related terms were mentioned as substitutes.

In terms of the context of Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate*, it was identified that *Advocacy* occurred externally and was particularly directed towards state and federal governments (listed a total of 35 times).

In examining Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* the rationale for this activity was explored. An analysis of the interviews as summarized by the author revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to be an *Advocate*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Advocacy*)

To achieve additional *Services*, resources or facilities (mentioned 25 times)

To achieve important social outcomes (mentioned 10 times)

To help control global or external factors (mentioned 7 times)

Because local government is best placed to understand local needs (mentioned 7 times)

Because local government does not control the provision of all *Services* (mentioned 4 times)

To influence state government policy decisions (mentioned 4 times)

To manage *Land Use Planning* outcomes (mentioned 4 times)

To provide a voice of honesty (mentioned twice)

Because local government is a creator of spaces (mentioned once)

To help shape possible community responses (mentioned once)

A number of observations can be derived from the above content analysis.

The breadth of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role ranged from global issues, to national issues, to very localized *Service* provision. It was also considered that *Advocacy* operated on a number of different levels. This included views on *Advocacy* on a regional basis (two or more local governments), single municipality and individual local government councillor level. How *Advocacy* was defined by the respondent and in what context it was placed, influenced the participant's perceptions and views about how Victorian local government consequently performed this role.

The data as documented above illustrated that there was a connection between Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* in the context of other levels of government (mentioned a total of 35 times) and the views expressed that local government's *Advocacy* role was to increase *Services*, resources and facilities (mentioned 25 times), achieve important social outcomes (mentioned 10 times) and influence state government policy decisions (mentioned 4 times). The link between other levels of government and community outcomes was further reflected in the interview data analysis that indicated that Victorian local government did not control the provision of all *Services* (mentioned 4 times).

Five respondents (T1, T2, T3, T4, T12) expressed the view that Victorian local government was the level of government that was best placed to understand local needs and priorities as articulated and determined by those communities (mentioned 7 times). Local government was consequently in a position to *Advocate* on behalf of their communities because of that understanding.

Victorian local government's success as an *Advocate* was therefore, defined by the way that it could act as:

> *an influencer to achieve outcomes for its community, where it does not have the direct levers or resources in its Service provision role (T4, p.2).*

The opinion that Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* revolved around its ability to influence other levels of government and to achieve greater levels of resources provided an insight into how the respondents (T4, T21, T24) viewed Victorian local government's position, how it operated within the political framework and its relative power.

One respondent noted that local government only received 3% of all taxes collected within Australia and was consequently a relatively *small player (T5, p.8)* when compared to state and federal governments.

While nine respondents (T1, T2, T3, T4, T10, T14, T17, T21, T24) saw *Advocacy* as an integral part of Victorian local government's role in terms of being able to provide adequate or responsive S*ervices* for its community, there was a range of definitions about what *Services* actually meant. One interviewee (T17) discussed *Services* as limited to social or community *Services*, while other participants (T1, T2, T3, T4, T10, T14, T21, T24) viewed *Services* as including economic, transport, environmental, physical and social aspects.

In contrast to the view that Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role was predominantly limited to *Service* provision, globalization and the lack of control over external influences were identified as reasons why Victorian local government should be effective *Advocates* (mentioned 7 times). Raised by four respondents (T1, T10, T13, T28), it was stated that communities felt they were powerless to influence global agendas such as world trade agreements and economic trends. Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* in terms of a global context provided the broadest definition of local government *Advocacy*, when compared to other explanations.

It was further considered by one respondent (T1) that world trade agreements had a significant impact on people's daily lives and their overall level of well-being.

Two respondents (T1, T28) expressed the view that the federal government was captured by global agendas and this exacerbated the impact of globalization on Australian communities. It was judged by one respondent (T1) that decisions made by the federal government were being made with little to no thought given to their impact on local communities. The implication for Victorian local government was that it was important to *Advocate* on behalf of the community to the federal government on issues of local importance.

The final point to be made in this section of the analysis was that six respondents (T2, T10, T12, T14, T19, T29) considered that Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* also related to the role of elected members. In this context it was considered that there was an expectation by residents that local government councillors would *Advocate* for them on specific local issues. One respondent (T29) expressed the view that Victorian local government was only an *Advocate* in a *very parochial (T29, p.3)* context and was not considered to be an *Advocate* from *a community perspective or in the same sense as non-government organizations (T29, p.3).*

4.6.2 Victorian Local Government's Performance and Limitations as an *Advocate*

The five respondents (T1, T2, T4, T10, T14) who chose *Advocacy* as their topic for in-depth discussion commented specifically on how they considered that Victorian local government was performing in its role as an *Advocate*. During the interviews a further four participants (T3, T12, T17, T29) commented on Victorian local government's performance and what factors inhibited it from achieving successful outcomes.

Three respondents (T1, T4, T10) considered that Victorian local government's performance as an *Advocate* was average to poor, while another interviewee (T14) believed that performance varied, depending on the political pressures that local

government councils were experiencing. One respondent stated that local government's performance in this area was at best *mixed (T2, p.1)*.

Other respondents provided a range of views on Victorian local government's performance as an *Advocate*. One participant stated that local government was *good on local issues but more strategic and regional issues were not handled as well (T3, p.7)*. Another participant stated that generally local government's performance was less successful in inner-city municipalities because it was more difficult to differentiate local issues and to therefore *make a case that was clear to the state or federal governments about specific needs (T17, p.14)*.

One participant expressed the view that of all Victorian local government's roles, an improved performance in *Advocacy* would *potentially have the most scope to deliver improved outcomes for the community (T4, p.2)*.

Despite the predominantly negative views of Victorian local government's performance as an *Advocate*, it was considered by two respondents (T1, T2) that the amalgamations in the 1990s had significantly enhanced performance in this area. The main reason given for this achievement was that local government councils generally had greater strategic capacity as a result of having greater resources to employ more professional staff.

One of the examples of effective *Advocacy* by Victorian local government cited by two respondents (T1, T12) was the work undertaken in relation to gambling. It was stated that the gambling program had involved lobbying state government to gain greater support for problem gamblers and had brought the broader community impacts of this issue into the public arena. The gambling campaign had involved community groups, churches and academic institutions, with local governments taking the lead role. One respondent stated that *ten years ago this (gambling reform) would never have happened in my wildest dreams (T1, p.3)*.

The respondents identified a number of factors that inhibited local government's ability to be a successful *Advocate*. The author has summarized these limitations as follows.

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE *ADVOCACY*

Local government does not have sufficient political power or a positive image (mentioned 11 times)

There is a lack of leadership by councillors (mentioned 8 times)

Local government does not relate to state government as a legitimate sphere of government (mentioned 7 times)

Local government does not have sufficient strategic capacity (mentioned 5 times)

Local government's inability as an entity to share power (mentioned 5 times)

Inability of councillors and management to share power (mentioned 5 times)

The media portrays a poor image of local government (mentioned 4 times)

The workload of councillors is too great (mentioned 4 times)

Local government does not understand collaboration and partnerships (mentioned 3 times)

Local government does not understand its role (mentioned twice)

Local government is too political (mentioned twice)

Local government is too parochial (mentioned twice)

The relationship between local government and other levels of government is not positive (mentioned twice)

Some councils do not see the need to *Advocate* (mentioned twice)

The above list indicates that limitations to the performance of Victorian local government as an *Advocate* predominantly focused on three key themes.

The first category of limitations identified in the list of **LIMITATIONS** related to Victorian local government's poor image generally (mentioned 11 times) and its poor image as portrayed by the media (mentioned 4 times). As previously mentioned the issue of Victorian local government's image was raised in a number of other role areas.

In terms of Victorian local government's performance as an *Advocate,* four respondents (T1, T2, T4, T10) raised the poor image of local government both internally and externally. The following statement captures the view that Victorian local government's image impacted on its ability to *Advocate* effectively:

> *Sometimes you think it doesn't matter how professional you are or what sort of a case you are putting. It is just local government. You know, they always whinge (T2, p.3).*

One respondent summarized Victorian local government's image in an *Advocacy* context and stated:

> *We have a collective problem of the role and image of councils. How they see themselves; what vision they have or do not have for their local community…their behavior. All those sorts of things pan out at the micro level (T10, p.9).*

It was stated by three respondents (T2, T4, T10) that Victorian local government either individually, regionally or as a sector was not highly regarded or understood by the general public or key decision makers. One interviewee (T2) stated that the perception of the community in particular was that local government was predominantly limited to property-based *Services* such as roads, rates, rubbish and roundabouts. When discussing the image of Victorian local government and its relationship to *Advocacy* one respondent further stated *I think that perception is actually a big block to our Advocacy (T2, p.5).*

An associated theme to the image of Victorian local government was the view by one respondent (T10) that the communication channels between councils and their communities were relatively poor. It was stated that:

> *you can be doing a lot of terrific things but you have got to match your actions with telling people about it. Then you will have some real champions out there (T10, p.5).*

Two respondents (T2, T12) criticized the media for creating and perpetuating a negative view of Victorian local government.

The second theme that related to limitations to Victorian local government's ability to effectively *Advocate,* was the relative political power relationship between Victorian local government and the state government (mentioned 7 times) and local government's poor relationship with other levels of government generally (mentioned

twice). One respondent commented that Victorian local government was a *very political place and the political role was like a subset of Advocacy (T10, p.2).*

There was a connection between the focus on the relationship between local and state government as mentioned in the preceding paragraph and the focus on the provision of *Services*, facilities and resources (mentioned 25 times), as state and federal governments provided additional funds and grants above what Victorian local government collected from rates and charges.

Three respondents (T1, T2, T4) cited the political framework between federal, state and local government and the consequential power relationships as an inhibitor to effective *Advocacy*. This power relationship was considered to be partly due to issues of perception, however it was also seen to be in some instances, a clear reality (T1, T4).

The difficulties for Victorian local governments in providing effective *Advocacy* was seen by one respondent (T4) to be due to the actions of the state government, due to the actions of local government and at times, a result of the actions of both levels of government. The view that state government treated local government as subservient and did not always give it due respect in terms of a partner was a common theme raised by the respondents (T4, T10).

As a result of this lack of respect, it was alleged that Victorian local government was perceived to be a:

> *pretty poor player particularly at a higher political level as Advocates for their local community (T10, p.4).*

It was further stated that Victorian local government was *the poor cousin politicians with not much power to wield (T10, p.4).*

Related comments were made in regard to the power relationship between Victorian local government and other levels of government. One respondent stated that

Victorian local government needed to negotiate on equal terms as a legitimate sphere of government and *not go as victims (T1, p.4).*

It was also considered that Victorian local government had not developed clear outcomes and did not effectively know how to partner or take advantage of the different roles it could play. This was expressed as a *victim attitude (T1, p.4; T4, p.3).*

The third group of issues considered to inhibit Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role focused on the elected members and a number of internal factors relating to local government. A lack of leadership by local government councillors (mentioned 8 times), the inability of councillors and management to share power (mentioned 5 times), sufficient strategic capacity (mentioned 5 times) and the significant workload of councillors (mentioned 4 times) were identified as barriers to Victorian local government effectively fulfilling its *Advocacy* role.

As indicated in the list of **LIMITATIONS**, other internal issues related to Victorian local government's limited understanding of collaboration and partnerships (mentioned 3 times) and its role (mentioned twice). The views that local government was too political (mentioned twice) and too parochial (mentioned twice) were also listed as factors that limited Victorian local government's effectiveness as an *Advocate.*

The limitations relating to internal Victorian local government issues was also linked by four respondents (T1, T2, T4, T10) to local government's political capacity to influence other levels of government effectively. One explanation that was provided for this limited influence was the capability of councillors *to achieve a more action orientated political role with other levels of government (T10, p.2).*

It was stated that in the eyes of the local community and other observers of the political process, such as state and federal governments, local government councillors were often unable to focus on *the higher order issues* and instead were intent on *fighting amongst themselves (T10, p.4).* It was considered that such political *games played at the local level were often confused, redundant and a waste of time (T10, p.2).*

A further limitation to effective *Advocacy* that was raised by one respondent (T10) was the lack of importance councillors placed on influencing issues that were going to impact on their local community.

An associated reason for Victorian local government's poor performance in relation to *Advocacy*, which related to councillors and mayors in particular, was the view expressed by two respondents (T2, T10) that effective lobbying was about strong relationships and networks. The fact that most local governments changed their mayor every year meant that networks were continually fragmented. It was stated that very few organizations that placed a high value on leadership, such as boards and most religious denominations, had an annual election or rotation system of their leader or chairperson.

Linked to the mayoral rotation was the view that *Advocacy* required leadership and often leadership was assisted by professional development and experience. The yearly rotation of the mayor further weakened the ability for one-term mayors to effectively *Advocate*.

The perceived ineffectiveness of individual councillors as *Advocates* on local issues was considered to reflect the community's lack of understanding of the role of elected members. One participant expressed this view as follows:

> *The perception of the resident is very much, 'well I did not get what I wanted and the councillor did not help me so they are not sort of Advocating for what I want' (T10, p.3).*

A related factor that was seen by one respondent (T2) to hinder effective *Advocacy* was the workload on individual councillors, particularly as a result of the Victorian local government amalgamations in the 1990s.

Two interviewees (T2, T10) stated that some councillors who were not prepared to work with their colleagues and constantly voted against proposals to prove they were different, were not effective *Advocates*. One respondent articulated this view as follows:

> *They (councillors) were happier to go down on a 5-2 or 4-3 vote all the time and fight the good fight. They didn't actually deliver anything for the community. They didn't achieve anything (T2, p.10).*

The notion of councillors working together to achieve results in the area of *Advocacy* was further expressed by the following comments from another respondent who stated:

> *It is the way that councillors work with each other…the power of acting collectively (T10, p.6).*

Two interviewees (T4, T10) identified that the skill level of local government councillors was an inhibitor to effective *Advocacy*. Councillors were seen as having short-term views and focusing on 'quick fix' solutions like fixing a pothole. One respondent stated that *Advocacy is that sort of role that is a long-term investment (T4, p.6).*

It was considered by two respondents (T3, T10) that the limitations of councillors, resulted in the responsibility of *Advocacy* resting with officers. It was stated that examples of effective *Advocacy* were often the result of officers' guidance and strategy development.

The political framework that Victorian local government operated within was also considered to be a hindrance to effective *Advocacy*. Local government was seen to be reluctant to *share power (T4, p.7)* or *give up some stuff (T2, p.13).*

Victorian local government's reluctance to share power was also discussed in relation to the involvement and support of the community. In describing a successful *Advocacy* campaign that achieved its outcomes but did not engage the community, one respondent stated:

> *We ended up doing such a strong and sophisticated campaign the community was left behind and it was because it was a professional campaign. It looked like we had all these people behind us but we did not. We lost the plot completely (T12, p.4).*

Two respondents (T2, T4) also considered that Victorian local government's effectiveness as an *Advocate* was hindered due to its inability to act cohesively or strategically. One participant said that local government *has not learnt the power of collaboration and to use that power to its full extent (T4, p.2)*.

To illustrate what in their view was a lack of strategic thinking by local government, one respondent (T3) cited an example of a state government project to which some local governments were objecting. In outlining this example it was stated that a council wanted to *shame the state government by erecting billboards (T3, p.7)*, which in the respondent's opinion *was a naïve approach (T3, p.7)*.

A further reason articulated by four participants (T1, T2, T3, T4) that inhibited the effectiveness of Victorian local government's *Advocacy*, was a lack of focus on regional issues. It was considered that if a regional perspective was taken on broader issues, then local government would be in a more powerful position to lobby for local outcomes.

4.6.3   How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Advocacy* Role

Respondents were asked to state what benefits they saw for the community, if Victorian local government achieved a more effective level of *Advocacy*. A summary of responses as collated by the author is as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Achieves better outcomes for the community (mentioned 14 times)

Assists *Economic Development* (mentioned 9 times)

Builds community capacity (mentioned 9 times)

Builds a sense of community (mentioned 4 times)

Overcomes local government's weakness as a political force (mentioned twice)

Achieves better decisions (mentioned once)

Puts a city on the map (mentioned once)

Achieves outcomes for own ward (mentioned once)

Builds *Democracy* (mentioned once)

As evident from the **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES LIST** there was a dominant theme related to community outcomes, and in particular *Service* provision and *Economic Development*.

Four respondents (T1, T4, T13, T14) considered that more effective *Advocacy* would result in further streamlining and less fragmentation of *Services* for the community. It was also identified by five interviewees (T1, T4, T10, T12, T17) that in the context of *Advocacy,* Victorian local government was in the best position to achieve equitable *Service* delivery outcomes. This would particularly be the case for at risk segments of the community such as the elderly or young people.

Eight respondents (T1, T2, T3, T4, T10, T14, T17, T21) considered that effective *Advocacy* would result in additional *Services* or social *Infrastructure* for that particular community. Additional resources would in turn improve the quality of life for residents, provide increased options and also reduce costs.

It was further stated by four residents (T1, T2, T4, T17) that Victorian local government was best placed to understand the needs of the community and was, therefore, best placed to deal with local issues. One respondent commented:

> *Local government has the ability to be the most responsive level of government because it operates within that community environment…by virtue that you are a councillor and you go down the street (T1, p.5).*

The closeness of Victorian local government to local issues is further reinforced by the following comment:

> *Local government is close to local communities because it hopefully understands local communities (T17, p.16).*

Two respondents (T3, T14) considered that effective *Advocacy* was particularly significant for growth municipalities where the provision of additional community

facilities either through the public or private sector was essential. The importance of *Economic Development* as an outcome of *Advocacy* reflected the **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES LIST** where this *Service* was mentioned on eight occasions.

It was also identified that effective *Advocacy* assisted in building community capacity (mentioned 9 times), building a sense of community (mentioned 4 times) and building *Democracy* (mentioned once). It was considered by six participants (T1, T3, T10, T12, T14, T28) that these community outcomes were achieved through community leadership. It was stated that people *yearn for the concept of leadership at the local level (T10, p.9).* Another respondent stated that:

> *the benefits (of Advocacy) would be to have better pride in the local area, because there is a more integrated effort and you end up with a better connected community (T14, p.5).*

In commenting on *Advocacy* and community outcomes, one respondent stated, *Advocacy…that's the road to Democracy. I think it is just fantastic (T28, p.10).*

Three respondents (T1, T3, T10) considered that leadership could achieve community outcomes on state, national or global issues. Examples included the upgrading and provision of national and arterial roads, changes to gambling controls, opposition to overhead cables, establishing friendship groups with East Timor and educational planning.

4.6.4   Recommendations for Enhanced *Advocacy*

During the interviews the respondents outlined what they considered to be the critical steps in achieving effective *Advocacy*. These steps have been summarized by the author and are outlined as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Engagement of the community (mentioned 3 times)

Participation by the community (mentioned twice)

The ability to draw on resources (mentioned once)

The identification of local needs (mentioned once)

Respondents were also asked to outline any solutions they considered would assist Victorian local government to achieve more effective *Advocacy.*

Three participants (T2, T10, T12) considered that the enhancement of Victorian local government's overall image would achieve more effective *Advocacy*. Greater credibility and a repositioning of Victorian local government would have a flow-on impact in terms of achieving community outcomes. One respondent stated that greater credibility would mean that *more effective people would take us (local government) seriously (T2, p.3).*

It was stated by two participants (T2, T12) that an improved image for Victorian local government would require a sustained campaign, potentially coordinated by the Municipal Association of Victoria, to inform the community and decision makers about what local government does and what it stands for.

A view was also expressed by one participant (T4) that a more positive view of Victorian local government by local government itself would assist with what one participant (T4) described as a lack of *maturity* and an attitude by local government that it is *being done to us (T4, p.3).*

A second recommendation identified by two respondents (T2, T10) was the need for ongoing professional development for local government councillors to assist them to be more effective *Advocates*. It was further recommended that mayors should be elected for the full council term. One participant stated that:

> *it (Advocacy) is about leadership amongst the councillors and the concept of the changing mayor every year does not help (T10, p.6).*

A third recommendation articulated by two respondents (T1, T2) was that Victorian local government needed to plan, lobby and act within a more regional perspective. Developing self-sustaining regions was seen as a way to develop prosperous and more successful nations. Developing a regional perspective was also seen as a way to be a more effective *Advocate* due to increased capacity and political influence.

Four respondents (T4, T12, T17, T21) considered that a more consistent approach to community engagement to underpin *Advocacy* campaigns needed to be developed. Engagement of the community (mentioned 3 times) and participation by the community (mentioned twice) were identified in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST**. The importance of community engagement and participation in *Advocacy* was summarized in the following comment:

> *So the Advocacy role…you need to strengthen the community, build capacity, provide some learning for people. So there's a lot we can do in helping communities be part of that whole thing about political and public life and challenging other levels of government (T12, p.5).*

The achievement of positive negotiations on local and state *Service* arrangements was seen by one respondent (T1) as a solution to achieving better outcomes for the community. A transparent agreement between state and local governments was considered to lessen the need to *Advocate* for resources from the state and also allowed for a mechanism where community issues could be presented and resolved in a facilitated forum.

A final recommendation focused on the achievement of enhanced economic outcomes for the community. It was considered that this outcome required local government to commit time and resources. In describing the context for effective *Advocacy,* the following comments articulated the important factors in this area:

> *They (local government) tend to put a fair bit of time or resources into the economic portfolio, they have a profile that says we are going to facilitate investment, we're going to be seen in Victoria, Australia. They are interested in working with the Infrastructure and working with state government and the federal government so that the city works better (T14, p.3).*

4.7   Victorian Local Government's *Services* Role

> *The provision of services is not only core local government but one of our key roles (T21, p.1).*

4.7.1   Victorian Local Government's *Services* Role Defined

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Services* role has been treated slightly differently from other role areas discussed in this chapter, as there were a number of components within this role. As defined by the respondents and consistent with the literature review as documented in Chapter 2, the overall *Services* role incorporated *Services* (not individually identified)*, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Environment/Sustainability* and *Land Use Planning*. These areas were classified as functions that belonged within a *Services* framework.

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Services* role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

An analysis of both the manifest and latent coding process was utilized to determine how the respondents defined the concept of Victorian local government's *Services* role. This analysis was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the terms for each component of *Services* (**CONCEPT**) was mentioned, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the words of each component of *Services* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context Victorian local government's *Services* role was discussed (**CONTEXT**).

Each of the areas of *Services, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Environment/Sustainability* and *Land Use Planning* will initially be outlined individually. Due to the relatively limited discussion on these areas, the analysis of Performance and Limitations, Benefits to the Community and Recommendations will be discussed as a total group.

4.7.1.1 *Services*

In response to the first interview question all participants with three exceptions (T1, T20, T30) indicated that *Services* was a Victorian local government role. One respondent (T1) provided some comments about local government's *Services* role during their interview.

During the interviews a total of twenty-nine respondents or 94% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Services* role. Of the twenty-nine participants who identified *Services* as a Victorian local government role, three participants (T5, T11, T21) chose *Services* as their preferred topic to discuss during the interview. Unlike other Victorian local government role areas, comments from the participants on this role were comparatively limited in their breadth and depth.

The analysis of the definition of *Services* as summarized by the author was as follows.

CONCEPT

Services (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 103 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Services*)

Roads, rates and rubbish (mentioned 11 times)
Functions (mentioned 3 times)

CONTEXT (Within what context does Victorian local government provide *Services*?)

Within a local community setting (mentioned 16 times)
As local government's traditional role (mentioned 11 times)
As a provider/deliverer for other levels of government (mentioned 6 times)
Community *Services* (mentioned 6 times)
Joined up *Services* (mentioned 3 times)

Within the context of *Advocacy* (mentioned 3 times)

Place based *Service* delivery (mentioned 3 times)

Libraries (mentioned 3 times)

Civic and statutory controls, local laws and regulations (mentioned twice)

Garbage collection (mentioned once)

As a builder of cities (mentioned once)

Disaster recovery (mentioned once)

As a region or an individual local government (mentioned once)

The above analysis indicated that Victorian local government's role as a *Service* provider was clearly defined and was the most commonly used word for this role (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 103 times). The participants considered that there was a strong link between Victorian local government's role as a *Service* provider and its traditional role (mentioned 11 times). The traditional role perspective raised by respondents was further corroborated by the frequency that the phrase roads, rates and rubbish (mentioned 11 times) was identified in the **CONTEXT LIST**. It was also clearly indicated that the setting for the provision for *Services* provided by Victorian local government was within a local community setting (mentioned 16 times).

A number of specific *Services* areas that were delivered by Victorian local government were identified in the **CONTEXT LIST**.   This included community *Services* (mentioned 6 times), libraries (mentioned 3 times), civic and statutory controls, local laws and regulations (mentioned twice), garbage collection (mentioned once) and disaster recovery (mentioned once).

In examining Victorian local government's role as a *Service* provider the rationale for this activity was explored. An analysis of the interviews as summarized by the author, revealed the following reasons why the respondents considered it was important for Victorian local government to provide *Services*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Services*)

To deliver *Services* that reflects local needs and culture (mentioned 10 times)

To facilitate whole of government and whole of community responses (mentioned 4 times)

Because local government is closest to the people who are receiving *Services* (mentioned twice)

To provide *Services* that underpin local communities (mentioned once)

To do things that are vitally important for society (mentioned once)

To ensure a hygienic, quality and safe environment (mentioned once)

To fulfill the needs where state and federal governments are retracting (mentioned once)

The issues listed above were grouped into three categories.

The first category related to Victorian local government's role in providing *Services* for the benefit of the community. Six participants (T4, T17, T18, T19, T29, T31) identified the positive aspects of Victorian local government delivering *Services* that reflected local needs and culture (mentioned 10 times). The positive outcomes of linking *Services* to community needs are illustrated by the following comments:

> *So when the basic level of Services are done then you are actually addressing community need or desire, and you are responsive to that (T19, p.7);*

> *It (local government) is providing much needed Services that people rely on to ensure that our community has a hygienic quality and safe environment to operate in (T19, p.6); and*

> *There is no question that our Services are much better targeted now and more responsive because we have asked the community (T17, p.16).*

One participant (T7) stated that the *Services* provided by Victorian local government underpinned local communities (mentioned once). This was expressed as follows:

> *I was standing there this morning, the people came and swept the road and they picked up the street bin. Tomorrow they will pick up the garbage bins. We are traveling over roads and standing on a footpath the council has constructed. The council will create the gutters. Everything basically. I mean it is the underpinning of local communities (T7, p.1).*

The rationale for Victorian local government providing *Services* was also described as *doing things that are vitally important for society (T28, p.1).*

The second category of reasons why Victorian local government provided *Services* was due to local government's place within the overall governmental framework.

One respondent (T5) considered that Victorian local government's *Service* role was to facilitate a whole of government and whole of community response (mentioned 4 times). This respondent stated that:

> *local government anywhere in the state is best placed for actually organizing the delivery (of Services) (T5, p. 8).*

Two respondents (T11, T14) further stated that Victorian local government should be a deliverer of *Services* because it was closest to the people who were receiving those *Services* (mentioned twice). One participant stated:

> *It tends to work back to the whole structure of government Services in Australia, where we have the federal government, a state government which to some extent has an artificial boundary and local government which has a much closer touch to people (T14, p.4).*

The final point made by one interviewee in regard to Victorian local government's *Services* role was that it was required to fulfill the needs of the community where state and federal governments were retracting (mentioned once) as a result of the *new right agenda (T28, p.3).* This respondent stated that:

> *Local government has been picking up some of those functions because they have been hearing those injustices on the ground (T28, p.3).*

4.7.1.2 *Infrastructure*

In response to the first question in the interview eleven respondents (T3, T4, T7, T11, T17, T18, T21, T23, T27, T29, T31) or 35% of all respondents interviewed indicated that the provision of *Infrastructure* was a Victorian local government role. No further participants spoke about the *Infrastructure* role during their interview.

Of the eleven participants who discussed Victorian local government's *Infrastructure* role in response to the first interview question, one participant (T3) chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss during the interview. Unlike other role areas, comments from the participants on this role were comparatively limited in their breadth and depth.

The analysis of the definition of *Infrastructure* as summarized by the author was as follows.

CONCEPT

Infrastructure (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 20 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Infrastructure*)

Roads (mentioned 12 times)

Community assets (mentioned 7 times)

Local assets (mentioned 3 times)

Physical *Services* (mentioned twice)

Capital works (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does local government provide *Infrastructure*?)

Roads, garbage, drains and footpaths (mentioned twice)

Traditional role (mentioned twice)

Transport networks (mentioned once)

Within the structure of state and federal governments (mentioned once)

Planning for *Infrastructure* (mentioned once)

Custodians (mentioned once)

Core Service (mentioned once)

Building cities (mentioned once)

It was evident from the above analysis that there was a synergy between the term *Infrastructure* and the **RELATED WORDS** that were used as a substitute for the term *Infrastructure*, such as assets (mentioned a total of 10 times) or capital works (mentioned once) or as a subset of *Infrastructure* such as roads (mentioned 12 times).

The context in which Victorian local government's *Infrastructure* role operated illustrated a common definitional framework. Comments such as roads, garbage, drains and footpaths (mentioned twice), transport networks (mentioned once) and building cities (mentioned once) illustrated that this role was considered to be the physical development and maintenance of the assets which Victorian local government was responsible for.

The **CONTEXT LIST** also illustrated that Victorian local government's *Infrastructure* role was a traditional role (mentioned twice) and a core *Service* (mentioned once).

An analysis of the interviews, as summarized by the author, revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to provide *Infrastructure*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Infrastructure*)

To manage traffic and parking (mentioned 19 times)

To manage basic *Infrastructure* (mentioned 4 times)

To influence what VicRoads* is responsible for (mentioned 3 times)

(*VicRoads refers to Victoria's state statutory body for arterial and main roads)

To manage scarce resources (mentioned 3 times)

To effectively manage local roads (mentioned once)

To manage the physical *Infrastructure* that underpins a local community (mentioned once)

Because local government is best placed to understand what is needed (mentioned once)

In accordance with the framework as identified in the **CONCEPT, RELATED WORDS** and **CONTEXT LISTS**, the rationale for Victorian local government's

Infrastructure role focused on roads and related issues including traffic and parking (mentioned 19 times), to influence what VicRoads is responsible for (mentioned 3 times), local roads (mentioned once) and *Infrastructure* itself (mentioned 4 times).

It was identified that Victorian local government had scarce resources for the provision of *Infrastructure* (mentioned 3 times).

4.7.1.3 *Economic Development*

In response to the first question in the interview, three respondents (T5, T23, T25) identified *Economic Development* as a Victorian local government role. Two participants (T27, T31) spoke about this role at a later stage in their interview.

During the interviews a total of five respondents or 16% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Economic Development* role. Of the three participants who discussed this role in response to the first interview question, no participant chose this role to discuss in-depth. Due to the small number of respondents who addressed this role and unlike other areas, comments from the participants were comparatively limited in their breadth and depth.

The analysis of the definition of *Economic Development* as summarized by the author was as follows.

CONCEPT

Economic Development (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 8 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Economic Development*)

Nation builder (mentioned 5 times)
Economic sustainability (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does local government provide *Economic Development*?)

Tourism (mentioned 4 times)

In rural Victoria (mentioned twice)

When developing a city (mentioned once)

International trade (mentioned once)

The above analysis indicated that Victorian local government's role in *Economic Development* was linked to city development (Nation builder, mentioned 5 times and developing a city, mentioned once). There was a further link to tourism (mentioned 4 times) and international trade (mentioned once).

In examining Victorian local government's role in *Economic Development* the rationale for this activity was explored. An analysis of the interviews revealed the following reasons why it was important for local government to facilitate *Economic Development*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Economic Development*)

Local government is best placed because it is respected, non-political and does not waste money (mentioned 3 times)

To assist with job creation especially in rural areas (mentioned twice)

Local government is best placed to understand what is needed and the sorts of businesses that are best suited to the local area (mentioned once)

To develop a flourishing city (mentioned once)

One respondent (T23) considered that Victorian local government was in the best position to facilitate *Economic Development* because *it has the capacity to communicate with anybody anywhere in the world and be respected (T23, p.5).*

Two respondents (T27, T31) identified the importance of Victorian local government's role in *Economic Development* for rural areas. One interviewee stated:

> *Economic Development is a huge issue for local councils especially in rural Victoria and especially in job creation, which is a difficult issue (T27, p.6).*

4.7.1.4 *Sustainability*

In response to the first interview question, two respondents (T20, T24) indicated that *Sustainability* was a Victorian local government role. Two participants (T28, T31) spoke about this role at a later stage during their interview.

During the interviews a total of four respondents or 13% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Sustainability* role. Of the two participants who discussed local government's *Sustainability* role in response to the first interview question, no participant chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth. Due to the small number of respondents who addressed this role, comments from the participants were comparatively limited in their breadth and depth.

CONCEPT

Sustainability (Word mentioned by respondents 6 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Sustainability*)

Environmental protection and enhancement (mentioned 5 times)
Environmental sphere (mentioned once)

CONTEXT (Within what context does local government provide a focus on *Sustainability*?)

Environmental (mentioned 5 times)
Cultural (mentioned 3 times)
Economic (mentioned twice)
Social justice (mentioned once)
Ecological (mentioned once)

It was evident that local government's *Sustainability* role was spread across a number of fields. This was particularly the view of one respondent who stated:

> *Local government can genuinely engage in a very practical way in Sustainability in the areas of economic, cultural, environment and social. They rise up in front of you and you deal with them all the time directly as a Service provider and in terms of the impact they have on your community (T20, p.3).*

An analysis of the interviews revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to be involved in *Sustainability*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Sustainability*)

To ensure development is *Sustainable* (mentioned twice)

To protect the environment for future generations (mentioned once)

Because local government can work at the community level (mentioned once)

To deliver reductions in greenhouse gases and water conservation on the ground (mentioned once)

In terms of the importance of Victorian local government's *Sustainability* role one respondent stated:

> *With the environment we have a living world with us and we do need to ensure that it is protected as much as it can be so that it is passed on to our children and our grandchildren in a better state than we received it and how we find it now. So we (local government) need to do that because we can facilitate sustainable communities and indeed our whole civilization (T31, p.4).*

4.7.1.5 *Land Use Planning*

In response to the first interview question, six respondents (T2, T8, T11, T17, T27, T29) indicated that *Land Use Planning* was a Victorian local government role. Two participants (T14, T16) spoke about this role at a later stage during their interview.

A total of eight respondents or 26% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Land Use Planning* role. One respondent (T29) chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth. Unlike

other role areas, comments from the participants on this role were comparatively limited in their breadth and depth.

CONCEPT

Land Use Planning or *Land Use* (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 30 times)

RELATED WORDS *(to Land Use Planning)*

No other words mentioned

CONTEXT (Within what context does local government undertake *Land Use Planning*?)

Urban Consolidation (mentioned 3 times)
Development control (mentioned 3 times)
Future housing needs (mentioned twice)
Planning schemes (mentioned once)

An analysis of the interviews revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to be involved in *Land Use Planning*.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Land Use Planning*)

To stop inappropriate development (mentioned 4 times)
To educate and inform communities (mentioned twice)
To manage population and environmental change (mentioned once)

Two respondents (T2, T14) discussed the rationale for *Land Use Planning* by Victorian local government. The first reason was to stop inappropriate development (mentioned 4 times).

The second reason identified by one respondent (T2) was that it educated and informed communities (mentioned twice). It was stated that Victorian local

government's *Land Use Planning* processes informed communities about population and environmental challenges, which led to understanding the need for land use changes. It was stated that:

> *to get to that level of understanding and leadership, you have to educate the community and give them the space to own that information (T2, p.14).*

In addition to educating and informing the community about *Land Use Planning*, one respondent (T2) considered that Victorian local government's role in this area was to manage population and environmental change (mentioned once), so that housing growth in particular was staged.

4.7.2 Victorian Local Government's Performance and Limitations in *Services*

Sixteen respondents (T2, T4, T5, T6, T10, T11, T16, T17, T19, T20, T21, T23, T25, T28, T29, T31) provided comments about Victorian local government's performance in the area of *Services*. The overwhelming majority of comments in regard to this role were positive. Eleven participants (T2, T4, T6, T16, T17, T19, T20, T21, T23, T28, T29) expressed the view that *Services* were well delivered by Victorian local government.

Related comments to support this assessment included*:*

> *Victorian local government is light years in front of other states (T20, p.2)*;
>
> *I think we've got better because twenty years ago our ratepayers were a bit of a nuisance, now we call them community, citizens (T6, p.2);*
>
> *Services are all improved and more targeted (T17, p.16)*;
>
> *They (local government) are fantastic and are fulfilling a need (T19, p.2);*
>
> *Local government does them (Services) very well and in a responsible and caring way (T16, p.2);* and
>
> *Local government is kicking goals out there and it is perceived as doing a very good job (T29, p.3).*

Positive comments were also directed to Victorian local government in the context that:

> *they (local government) are doing well and coping well with the retraction of support from state and federal governments (T28, p.3).*

The five interviewees (T5, T10, T11, T25, T31) who did not express positive comments in regard to Victorian local government's role in the *Services* area were mixed in their views. One participant stated that performance was *satisfactory (T31, p.2)* while another participant stated that:

> *we (local government) need to think smarter and better about Service provision or we will be put out of the game (T10, p.12).*

Another respondent was reserved in their comments and stated that *I find it hard to work out how anything is measured in local government (T11, p.3)*. One respondent (T25) said that *Services* were *patchy (T25, p.3)* and another participant indicated that:

> *some local governments are impossible to deal with especially in the rural areas where local politics and personalities come into play much more (T5, p.9).*

Comments by participants (T14, T29) on *Land Use Planning* were predominantly negative as reflected by the following statements:

> *Until we can find ways of taking councillors away from the immediate local political issue day by day, we are going to struggle to get a sensible approach (T14, p.6);* and

> *They (local government) are not to be relied on to deliver good planning for the long-term (T29, p.7).*

One participant acknowledged that Victorian local government's performance in *Land Use Planning* was impacted by the fact that this area was so *difficult (T16, p.2).*

A number of factors were considered to inhibit local government's ability to successfully provide *Services*. The majority of comments related to *Services* in general. There were five comments regarding *Infrastructure*, three comments related

to *Economic Development* and *Land Use Planning* and no participant identified any limitations to local government achieving its role in terms of *Sustainability*.

These limitations have been summarized by the author and are listed as follows.

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING THE EFFECTIVE PROVISION OF *SERVICES*

Lack of sufficient resources (mentioned 25 times)

The lack of tax distribution to local government (mentioned 8 times)

State government has too much control over funding (mentioned 7 times)

State and federal governments will not delegate to local government (mentioned 6 times)

Greater recognition is needed of local government's role from federal and state governments (mentioned 6 times)

Cost shifting from federal and state governments (mentioned 6 times)

Arguments between levels of government impact on *Services* for the community (mentioned 5 times)

Local government does not understand its capacity to change things (mentioned 4 times)

State government's *Land Use Planning* policies force development that the community does not want (mentioned 4 times)

Local government is defined by boundaries (mentioned 3 times)

Federal government has no idea about how much *Infrastructure* costs (mentioned 3 times)

Local government is unable to direct resources appropriately (mentioned 3 times)

Other levels of government blame local government when things go wrong (mentioned twice)

Local government is unable to deliver the same level of *Services* across municipalities (mentioned twice)

Land Use Planning is too political (mentioned twice)

Local government does not think regionally (mentioned twice)

Appropriate levels of *Infrastructure* are not provided by state government (mentioned twice)

State and federal governments are not aware that *Services* need to be different for different communities (mentioned twice)

Local government does not speak with a unified voice (mentioned twice)

The residents do not understand what *Services* are available from local government (mentioned once)

Some *Services* may not be economic to provide in the future (mentioned once)

Businesses will not help themselves (mentioned once)

Developers, speculators and farmers dictate *Planning* outcomes (mentioned once)

The above list indicated that discussions on the performance of local government's *Services* and *Infrastructure* roles predominantly focused on three key themes within which there was some overlap. The limitations as identified by the respondents also addressed Victorian local government's role in regard to *Economic Development* and *Land Use Planning* specifically.

The first category related to the issue of resources and referred to both *Services* generally and *Infrastructure* specifically.

The lack of sufficient resources (mentioned 25 times) was considered by ten respondents (T3, T5, T13, T16, T18, T21, T23, T25, T27, T31) to be a significant limitation for Victorian local government in effectively fulfilling its *Services* and *Infrastructure* role. The issue of lack of resources was evidenced by the following comments:

> *We do not have the resources to carry out our basic tasks (T18, p.20);*

> *I think an issue facing local government is that whole funding issue, being dependent on substantial federal government grants in the roads area and you still have to run your other Services (T3, p.9); and*

> *The biggest problem is the lack of funds (for Infrastructure). The capacity to raise revenue is minor compared to the state and the commonwealth (T23, p.3).*

The lack of resources was considered by four participants (T16, T21, T27, T31) to be a particular issue for local government in rural Victoria. This was demonstrated by the following comments.

> *The provision of Services is always difficult because we are struggling just to do what we should be doing within our limited resources and in the rural areas we have got a large area. The main difference between the metros and the rurals is that you constantly have this battle of the need for Services and Infrastructure and very limited resources and funding (T21, p.5).*

The lack of resources was considered by five respondents (T5, T11, T18, T23, T27) to be exacerbated as a result of cost shifting to local government from federal and state governments (mentioned 6 times). It was alleged that Victorian local government *keep on delivering Services because they are closer and because they are there (T5, p.15).* It was also stated that cost shifting by state and federal governments meant that Victorian local government:

> *delivers a Service for a while and the other side takes out their funding and then if you (local government) pull out from the Service everyone blames you (T27, p.1).*

One respondent (T23) stated that other levels of government had limited understanding of how much *Infrastructure* costs (mentioned 3 times). This was expressed as follows:

> *As a councillor when you sit around the table at a budget meeting and you look at all the items you can actually see the cost of everything. They do not see that level of detail at state and federal level. They have no concept or understand how easy cost shifting could occur (T23, p.3).*

In further discussing the issue of cost shifting two respondents (T5, T11) maintained that arguments between levels of government impacted on *Services* for the community (mentioned 5 times). One participant described their experience of *Service* delivery as follows:

> *I had a long talk to our mayor because 5,000 hours of aged care had been taken out of the budget. And I thought this must be a misprint, this cannot be right. So the mayor gave me this long diatribe about cost shifting by the commonwealth. This is a wrangle between the three levels of government. But what is happening to the people on the street whose service was going to be cut? It is appalling (T11, pp.9-10).*

The lack of an appropriate tax base was considered by three participants (T8, T18, T27) to be a reason why Victorian local government was unable to adequately deliver *Services* (mentioned 8 times). This concern was evidenced by the following comments from participants:

> *The question of the finance of local government is something that requires some serious rethinking. I support some system of local financing that has occurred in a number of European countries. The simple equation is that if you have got Services and you want to have good quality Services and proper facilities then there must be funds for them (T18, p.11);* and

> *Why should ratepayers be paying for a lot of these Services when they should come out of general revenue? A lot of people do not own property and they do not pay rates and use all the Services in your community so they do not actually contribute. So I think we need some other sort of funding and the fairest way of doing it would be a percentage of GST (Goods and Services Tax) (T27, p.5).*

It was further alleged that the state government did not provide appropriate levels of *Infrastructure*, which consequently impacted on Victorian local government (mentioned twice). This was expressed as follows:

> *Public transport for example. It is becoming more congested, harder to get to work and it is not local government's fault but you get the blame (T27, p.12).*

The second category of limitations focused on the political context of Victorian local government and the impact of this context on local government's ability to deliver *Services*.

Comments such as the state government has too much control over funding (mentioned 7 times), state and federal governments will not delegate to local government (mentioned 6 times) and that greater recognition of local government's role was needed from federal and state governments (mentioned 6 times) demonstrated some of the tensions that were identified between Victorian local government and the state and federal governments.

It was further asserted by one respondent (T19) that state and federal governments were not aware of the need for *Services* to be different for different communities (mentioned twice). It was stated that:

> *it is important to maintain the differences (of Services) because it reflects the community and other levels of government do not really perceive that (T19, p.10).*

Too much control of funding by state government was considered by one respondent (T27) to stifle community driven projects where the greatest need had been identified. This respondent stated:

> *At the moment it (funding) is a Spring Street approach. There is a bucket of money and if you fit that bucket you can apply for it but if you do not fit into it you do not get any of it (T27, p.3).*

Another participant (T8) stated that state and federal governments were *very restrictive (T8, p.3)* with their funding which impacted on Victorian local government's ability to deliver *Services* that had a *local flavor (T8, p.3).*

One respondent (T5) expressed a contrary view to more discretion being provided to local government and discussed the problems that they considered would be apparent if federal and state governments were to further delegate to Victorian local government. This was expressed as follows:

> *If you are talking about a federal or state government minister's authority being delegated down to the local level and implemented through the local council that is very challenging for the way we do government. Extremely challenging and this seems to me to be a major constraint (T5, p.14).*

This respondent further stated that in their opinion there would be *concern and fear from local government (T5, p.14)* about taking on more responsibilities. This was expressed in more detail as follows:

> *Local government would not be sure if their federal or state colleagues are going to have a similar sense of accountability to that community to deliver to that community. If you had local government in the front line and all others are faceless bureaucrats back in the office in Canberra or Spring Street their sense of accountability and urgency about delivering on things really leaves local government so that they can be blamed by the other levels of government if things do not work (T5, pp.14-15).*

Two participants (T19, T21) spoke about the lack of recognition of Victorian local government's role by federal and state governments (mentioned 6 times). One respondent (T21) considered that local government's role, as a provider of *Services* and *Infrastructure* would be assisted if local government was *better recognized and empowered (T21, p.5).* This respondent further stated that Victorian local government was:

> *often seen as a vehicle to be used to implement the strategies of other levels of government and that impacted on local government's capacity to deliver its own strategic objectives (T21, p.5).*

Another participant alleged that:

> *you go to COAG (Council of Australian Governments) and local government is seen as a blimp at the end of it (T19, p.11).*

The lack of recognition of Victorian local government by other levels of government was considered by one respondent (T19) to be due to the fact that local government did not speak with a unified voice (mentioned twice). This respondent stated that:

> *one of the greatest limitations is that local government has not been a big enough voice or a proponent for itself. The various councils have relied on their peak bodies and there has been a split in the peak bodies and differences. So I think there has been a lack of voice (T19, p.11).*

The third category of issues focused on Victorian local government's ability to effectively deliver *Services*.

Comments in this category included the statements that local government was defined by boundaries (mentioned 3 times), was unable to deliver the same level of *Services* across municipalities (mentioned twice), did not think regionally (mentioned twice) and was unable to direct resources appropriately (mentioned twice). Four respondents (T4, T19, T22, T25) raised these issues during their interview.

One respondent (T25) believed that Victorian local government was unwilling to deliver *Services* from a collective perspective rather than from a particular municipal boundary. Consequently it was considered that it was difficult to change systems and

Infrastructure provisions that were *imbedded (T25, p.5)*. Another participant raised the consistency of *Services* across municipalities and stated that:

> *it may be argued that the delivery of Services should be the same quality if you live in Noble Park or live in Kew (T22, p.5).*

Two respondents (T4, T19) believed that Victorian local government's inability to think regionally (mentioned twice) limited its ability to effectively deliver *Services*. This was considered to be particularly relevant in rural areas where it was stated that:

> *not every (rural) council needs to own its own grader because they are expensive capital items. There are just stupid duplications (T19, p.7).*

One respondent (T10) stated that the future of some *Services*, such as waste and aged care may not be economic for Victorian local government to provide in the future (mentioned once). This interviewee predicated that Victorian local government would not provide such *Services* because of the economies of scale and that it would be more likely that these *Services* would be delivered as *an arm of a regional function (T10, p.13).*

It was further considered by one participant (T19) that at times Victorian local government inappropriately directed resources to *Services* (mentioned 3 times). It was stated that:

> *it was imperative upon councils to make the right decisions about where they are spending the money and not on little pet projects of a ward councillor (T19, p.12).*

One respondent (T16) believed that residents did not understand what *Services* were available from Victorian local government (mentioned once) or if they did, *they did not really use them (T16, p.2).*

There were two specific limitations regarding Victorian local government's role in *Economic Development* identified by two respondents (T23, T31). The first issue related to the belief that local government did not understand its capacity to change things (mentioned 4 times). It was stated that:

local government is proud in its own way. But it's on the surface. They don't really get down deep and understand that they actually have enormous capacity to change things and create meaningful environments. They need to have a greater belief in what they can do (T23, p.9).

Another respondent (T31) had a difference perspective and stated that the problem with *Economic Development* was the lack of initiative from businesses. This view was expressed as follows:

I've seen it repeatedly in our city where traders will virtually do nothing themselves until the council says it will do something. We'll provide this amount if you find matching funding and they found that worked. But it was like pulling teeth trying to get them to cooperate (T31, p.7).

Five participants (T11, T14, T16, T27, T29) identified limitations regarding Victorian local government's role in *Land Use Planning*.

The first issue that was raised by two participants (T16, T27) was that state government's *Land Use Planning* policies forced development that the community did not want (mentioned 4 times). The participants expressed this limitation as follows:

Communities do not want six blocks of units next to them, overlooking and everything, but that is government policy (T27, p.9); and

In my opinion in my entire businesses career, I have not come across an area that is more difficult to get a win, win (T16, p.2).

A related limitation that was cited by two interviewees (T11, T14) was that *Land Use Planning* was too political (mentioned twice). It was considered that local government councillors made *Land Use Planning* decisions that were good politically but wrong fundamentally and that *we were suffering from that all the time (T14, p.6).*

The final limitation to *Land Use Planning* as identified by one interviewee (T29) was that developers, speculators and farmers were dictating planning outcomes (mentioned once). This statement was in the context that when compared to Sydney, Melbourne had a *speculative character (T29, p.9)* and that Melbournians were always *looking for a higher and better (land) use (T29, p.9).*

4.7.3 How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Services* Role

Respondents were asked to state what community benefits would be realised if Victorian local government effectively fulfilled its *Services* role. A summary of responses as collated by the author is as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Delivers reliable and predictable *Services* that meet and reflect the needs of the community (mentioned 11 times)

Creates a one-stop-shop (mentioned 4 times)

Assists people to accept change (mentioned 4 times)

Assists community well-being (mentioned 3 times)

Lowers community angst about urban consolidation philosophies (mentioned twice)

Benefits the community (mentioned twice)

Creates more livable cities and towns (mentioned twice)

Achieves value for money (mentioned twice)

Reduces speeds and crashes (mentioned twice)

Provides *Services* that only local government would provide (mentioned once)

Puts resources back into the community (mentioned once)

Achieves intergenerational outcomes (mentioned once)

Achieves what communities think is appropriate for their environment (mentioned once)

Fifteen respondents (T2, T3, T4, T5, T8, T11, T14, T16, T19, T21, T23, T25, T27, T29, T31) identified a range of community benefits that would be achieved if local government effectively fulfilled its *Services* and *Infrastructure* role. These issues included comments regarding *Land Use Planning* and *Economic Development* specifically.

The focus on community was evidenced by the comments in the **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES LIST** such as delivers reliable and predictable *Services* that meet and

reflect the needs of the community (mentioned 11 times), assists community well-being (mentioned 3 times), benefits the community (mentioned twice) and puts resources back into the community (mentioned once).

The delivery of *Services* and *Infrastructure* that reflected local needs was seen by four respondents (T3, T4, T19, T25) to be an important community benefit as demonstrated by the follow comments:

> *Most councils do reflect the needs of their residents pretty well and those needs differ (T3, p.6);*
>
> *It (local government) is best placed to understand the needs of that community and when it does that there is an equitable distribution of resources which deal with the diversity in terms of place (T4, p.4);* and
>
> *If you were able to limit the fragmentation of Services, that would assist you as a citizen and as a community member to better understand the link between the various layers of government and institutions of government and the Services that you may need. So there would be a better predictability by our Services to meet the needs of people (T25, p.4).*

Victorian local government's effective delivery of *Services* and *Infrastructure* was considered by three participants (T16, T23, T31) to create a greater sense of community well-being or quality of life. Comments that reflected this view included:

> *Local governments are extremely reliable deliverers of Services that citizens can feel and touch everyday (T16, p.1);*
>
> *Local government exists to help people achieve their goals and the outcomes they want in life. I think far too often we've lost sight of that in local government (T31, p.1);* and
>
> *Their (community) quality of life is so much better. When someone goes to a park and it looks beautiful, how much better they feel when they leave? It is simple stuff. It is basic community (T23, p.6).*

Seven respondents (T3, T4, T5, T11, T14, T21, T27) commented on the community benefits that would be achieved as a result of specific *Services* and *Infrastructure* delivery outcomes.

A benefit that was considered by one respondent (T5) was that the creation of a one-stop-shop (mentioned 4 times) would achieve *joined up services (T5, p.12)* which would then in turn result in *more common outcomes and better Services for people and continuity of care (T5, p.12).* Related to the theme of enhanced *Service* delivery, one participant (T11) stated that a benefit of effective *Service* delivery by local government would be the value for money that would be achieved for the community (mentioned twice).

The creation of more livable cities and towns (mentioned twice) was nominated by one respondent (T27) to be an outcome of appropriate *Services* and *Infrastructure* provision. Associated with the more livable cities concept was the view by one respondent (T3) that appropriately designed road *Infrastructure,* as managed by Victorian local government, would make cities safer places through the reduction of speed and transport crashes (mentioned twice).

A further comment by one respondent (T4) on the provision of *Infrastructure* was that Victorian local government was the custodian of community *Infrastructure.* Making the correct decisions about the provision of this *Infrastructure* provided an intergenerational perspective and meant that the cost of significant aspects of *Infrastructure* provision was not borne by one generation but was spread across a number of generations.

Two respondents (T11, T21) raised specific comments that related to *Services.* One participant (T21) reflected that in rural Victorian, local government was the only provider of some *Services* (mentioned once) *because there are no commercial alternatives (T21, p.4).*

Three respondents (T2, T8, T29) identified a number of community benefits in regard to *Land Use Planning.* It was considered by one respondent (T2) that this role helped people to accept change (mentioned 4 times) particularly in regard to future democratic changes that confronted Victoria in the next 50 years.

Connected to the issue of change, one participant (T29) considered that *Land Use Planning* lowered community angst about urban consolidation philosophies

(mentioned twice). The community angst that this participant referred to was expressed as follows:

> *Urban consolidation and the growing densities are being inflicted and this undermines people's satisfaction or contentment with their suburban environment (T29, p.2).*

Another respondent (T8) stated that *Land Use Planning* achieved what communities' thought was appropriate for their environment (mentioned once). It was considered that:

> *communities have a much stronger view about what they think is appropriate or not appropriate (T8, p.1).*

In discussions regarding *Economic Development*, one respondent (T23) stated that Victorian local government's promotion and facilitation of tourism and local businesses assisted to *put resources back into the community (T23, p.8).*

4.7.4   Recommendations for the Provision of *Services*

During the interviews the critical steps in achieving the effective provision of *Services* were identified. These steps have been summarized by the author and are outlined as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Understanding local needs (mentioned 7 times)

Policy development (mentioned 3 times)

Advocate for change in *Land Use Planning* (mentioned 3 times)

Allocation of resources (mentioned twice)

Engagement with the community and stakeholders (mentioned twice)

Innovation (mentioned twice)

Prioritization of *Services* (mentioned twice)

Lobbying other levels of government for additional resources (mentioned twice)

Accountability to the community (mentioned once)

Confirmation of the boundary between urban and green wedge areas (mentioned once)

Respondents were also asked to outline any solutions they considered would assist Victorian local government to achieve more effective *Service* provision.

A commonly cited recommendation to enhance the delivery of *Services* was to address the issue of Victorian local government funding and the degree of partnerships and cooperation between the three levels of government. Five participants (T3, T5, T23, T27, T31) discussed the issue of funding from state and federal governments specifically. Allocation of resources (mentioned twice) and lobbying other levels of government for additional resources (mentioned twice) was identified in the **SUCCESS FACTORS LIST**.

One participant (T27) alleged that the state government should provide an *Infrastructure* fund that enabled Victorian local government to apply for financial support for projects that were endorsed by a community planning process (T27). It was suggested that:

> *state government could work with local government and be funded on a ten year plan of where communities would like to be in that time frame (T27, p.8).*

In discussing the issue of cost shifting, one respondent (T23) stated that the *Hawker Report* (2003) was local government's opportunity to *grab the agenda (T23, p.10)*. In discussing this report it was stated that:

> *you can never treat a report out of a major senate committee as just nothing. You actually have local government on a formal agenda. Now get in there and make sure that something happens (T23, p.10).*

It was considered by this respondent that the *Hawker Report* (2003) provided the opportunity to gain additional resources that would enable Victorian local government to *look after the people in your community (T23, p.10).*

In discussing the issue of roads specifically, one respondent (T3) stated that the accountabilities and responsibilities between the three levels of government needed to be addressed. This respondent considered that:

> *local government faces a dilemma. I think it is unfair to expect local government to take on the responsibility for roads that are really regional and conversely I do not think that local government has got the right to impede the broader community interest for roads that serve regional or even national needs. So there is a structural issue and lines of responsibility that need to be sorted (T3, p.8).*

One respondent (T5) considered that greater cooperation between the three levels of government would achieve a *joined up Service delivery model where people can have one government outlet that they can go to (T5, p.11).* It was further stated that Victorian local government was *best placed to be the lead agency in developing joined up Services (T5, p.17)* and that this would *encourage the state and federal government in implementing this at the next level up (T5, p.17).*

A further way to achieve a coordinated approach to *Services* was by Victorian local government working together to create a joined up service model. Implementation of this model would mean that:

> *you can do your business from any service point whether it be a physical service point or an electronic service point (T25, p.4).*

Two participants (T10, T22) made two further recommendations regarding *Service* delivery. The first was that Victorian local government should progress to providing the same level of *Service* regardless of the municipality. One participant expressed this view as follows:

> *People are going to have the same expectation around a set of Services such as garbage, green waste, aged care criteria and childcare access. We (local government) are going to have to think smarter and better about how we are going to provide some of that (T10, p.13).*

The second recommendation focused on planning for the future and was expressed as follows:

> *What is the future of local government? Would we be better off trying to preserve what we control at the local level by taking charge of what we know is going to happen and do the scenario planning into the future and say, well we are not going to be in the game of waste. It is going to be a different world in another twenty years so let us take charge of it now (T10, p.13).*

One respondent (T19) recommended that Victorian local government needed to raise its profile by demonstrating its worth and success to other levels of government. The need to develop a higher profile was expressed as follows:

> *You (local government) are not heard as a vital voice who actually understands, so therefore you are not funded appropriately and resourced appropriately (T19, p.12).*

In relation to recommendations that related to *Land Use Planning*, one respondent (T29) stated that this role should be taken out of the hands of Victorian local government. It was alleged that the view of most people was local government should only have a *very minor role* and that *this would be the kindest thing (T29, p.7).*

Taking a slightly different but similar view, one respondent further stated that local government councillors should be:

> *taken out of the decision making on development applications but should rather be focused on the strategic and policy questions (T14, p.6).*

While not supporting the opinion that Victorian local government should not be responsible for *Land Use Planning*, one participant (T27) suggested that this might be an outcome. It was stated that:

> *I think you will find that Planning is taken away from local government. You will have a Planning committee for Melbourne with some people who do not get elected but are appointed, and they will make the decisions. And it is a pity that the councils will not have much say (T27, p.9).*

One respondent (T27) stated that *Land Use Planning* should be for the long-term and not change every time the state government changed.

4.8   Victorian Local Government's *Planning* Role

> *Councils have a pivotal role in the Planning and design of their communities for the future (T7, p.3).*

In response to the first interview question, nine respondents (T2, T5, T6, T7, T9, T17, T18, T23, T27) discussed Victorian local government's *Planning* role. Three participants (T1, T21, T30) spoke about the *Planning* role at a later stage of their interview.

During the interviews a total of twelve respondents or 39% of all respondents interviewed, provided comments about Victorian local government's *Planning* role. Of the twelve participants who discussed local government's *Planning* role in response to the first interview question, one participant (T7) chose this role as their preferred topic to discuss in-depth.

4.8.1   Victorian Local Government's *Planning* Role Defined

The analysis of Victorian local government's *Planning* role and the relevant comments provided by the respondents on this topic, were listed under the eight coding headings as previously identified in section 4.2.

In utilizing both manifest and latent coding, how the concept of local government's role was defined was assisted by an examination of the total number of times the term *Planning* (**CONCEPT**) was mentioned, what related terms the participants used as a substitute for the word *Planning* (**RELATED WORDS**) and in what context local government's *Planning* role was discussed (**CONTEXT**).

Unlike the discussion on other local government roles, the term *Planning* was used exclusively by the respondents. However the term *Planning* was discussed in three difference contexts.

CONCEPT

Planning (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 19 times)

Community Planning (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 14 times)

Corporate Planning (Word mentioned by respondents a total of 8 times)

RELATED WORDS (to *Planning*)

No other words mentioned

CONTEXT (Within what context does Victorian local government's *Planning* role operate?)

Within a community context (mentioned 10 times)

Within a corporate context (mentioned 9 times)

To plan for community *Services* (mentioned 7 times)

To plan for *Infrastructure* (mentioned once)

To plan for physical *Services* (mentioned once)

Discussions with the respondents explored in what context Victorian local government undertook its *Planning* role.

In terms of defining *Community Planning*, one respondent (T7) stated that it was an:

> *orderly development of an area, but with a view to what the community is going to need over time, with both new and old communities. Actually thinking about what that community is going to look like in the future (T7, pp.2-3).*

Another respondent (T5) similarly stated that *Community Planning* meant:

> *how the council facilities needed to be designed around the social needs of a community, the demographic change and those sorts of things (T5, p.2).*

One participant (T18) took a broader view of *Community Planning* and stated that it was:

thinking about the underlying attributes of community and thinking about community as having economic, environmental, social, cultural and democratic connections (T18, p.22).

Reference to *Corporate Planning* by two respondents (T21, T30) was defined within a context of strategic *Planning*, financial plans and benchmarking.

An analysis of the interviews, as summarized by the author revealed the following reasons why it was important for Victorian local government to undertake its *Planning* role.

RATIONALE (Reasons for *Planning*)

To provide an ordered development of an area with a view to what the community is going to need (mentioned 10 times)

To marshal resources to deliver what the community needs (mentioned 7 times)

Because local government is best placed to understand community needs (mentioned 7 times)

To inform councillor decisions (mentioned 3 times)

To strengthen *Democratic Governance* (mentioned 3 times)

To educate and inform communities (mentioned twice)

To develop a corporate plan that councillors own (mentioned twice)

To provide an integrated *Planning* framework (mentioned twice)

To plan for the longer-term (mentioned twice)

To manage population and environmental change (mentioned once)

To encourage benchmarking and mutual learning (mentioned once)

To inform *Advocacy* programs (mentioned once)

The above analysis indicated that the three *Planning* roles for Victorian local government as in *Planning, Community Planning* and *Corporate Planning* as identified in the **CONTEXT LIST** can be linked to the analysis as shown in the **RATIONALE LIST**.

In terms of *Community Planning*, three participants (T5, T7, T27) addressed the issue of providing an orderly development of an area with a view to what the community

was going to need (mentioned 10 times). One respondent (T7) stated that in their view:

> *Community Planning was a critical issue and it was about meeting the expectations and the potential stresses on the community over time (T7, p.2).*

This respondent further stated that part of Victorian local government's role in *Community Planning* was to:

> *think in advance of the pressures that are on the community and thinking about getting the structures right (T7, p.5).*

One respondent (T1) stated that the *Community Planning* model strengthened *Democratic Governance* (mentioned 3 times). It was considered that:

> *as a councillor no individual has a mandate, but if you can work with the community and determine your vision and the aspirations of the community through the development of a Community Plan, then you have strengthened the principles of Democratic Governance (T1, p.10).*

This respondent (T1) also considered that a clear understanding of the community's aspirations through the *Community Planning* model would inform *Advocacy* programs (mentioned once).

In discussing the rationale for Victorian local government's *Corporate Planning* role, it was stated that a systematic planning process would facilitate councillor ownership of the corporate plan (mentioned twice), which in turn would *contribute to good Corporate Governance (T30, p.3)*. It was further considered by this respondent (T30) that *Corporate Planning* encouraged benchmarking and mutual learning (mentioned once).

In terms of *Planning* more generally, three participants (T7, T18, T21) considered that Victorian local government's *Planning* role assisted in the appropriate allocation of resources (mentioned 7 times).

One participant (T21) stated:

> *We go out and we talk to our community about what they think they would*
> *want and when it comes to Planning, the councillors are very good at*
> *engaging the community and making decisions about where to from here, with*
> *utilizing their limited resources (T21, p.7).*

A further respondent (T6) discussed the importance of long-term *Planning* and stated:

> *What is really important is trying to do this long-term Planning and the big*
> *picture projects and where they are going. Everything keeps coming back to*
> *that and that consolidates for me how important local government is (T6, p.5).*

In furthering the discussion on resource allocations, two respondents (T1, T21)
believed that *Planning* assisted to inform council decisions (mentioned 3 times). It
was considered that:

> *understanding community aspirations feeds into council's Planning which*
> *then informs the budget processes. You then have an informed process (T1,*
> *p.10).*

Planning was also considered by two respondents (T2, T18) to provide an integrated
approach to solving issues and *Service* questions. This was described as developing a
view about *how the different things fit together (T2, p.15).*

Two respondents (T2, T23) stated that Victorian local government should undertake a
Planning role because it was best placed to understand community needs (mentioned
7 times). One respondent (T23) maintained that:

> *they (local government) will be the first to register any changing trends*
> *because it is clearly recognized in statistics and data at the local government*
> *level (T23, p.1).*

Another respondent (T2) stated that *social and resource Planning is actually only*
going to happen through local government (T2, p.16).

4.8.2 Victorian Local Government's Performance and Limitations in *Planning*

Four respondents (T1, T5, T7, T21) provided comments on Victorian local government's performance in the area of *Planning*. The respondents expressed a diversity of views, which was dependent on which aspect of Victorian local government's *Planning* role was being discussed.

In terms of *Community Planning*, it was considered by two respondents (T1, T7) that Victorian local government generally performed this role relatively effectively. One respondent (T7) commented that local government's role in *Community Planning* was:

> *done better in rural areas than in the metropolitan areas, because in the rural areas the council is the real hub of community activity (T7, p.5).*

It was further acknowledged by that respondent (T7) that the:

> *pressures in the rural and metropolitan areas were different and that it was a lot harder to form a relationship with communities in metropolitan areas (T7, p.5).*

Another participant (T1) stated that while Victorian local government needed to *get a lot more sophisticated in terms of the processes of Community Planning (T1, p.11)* it was a *continuous improvement journey (T1, p.11).*

One participant (T5) described local government's performance in *Community Planning* as uneven, stating that:

> *some local governments were absolutely at the cutting edge and there are some who do not see that they have a major role in this area (T5, p.2).*

It was stated by one respondent (T21) that Victorian local government's performance in *Corporate Planning* was *very good (T21, p.7).*

The respondents provided a number of factors that they considered inhibited Victorian local government's ability to effectively *Plan*. These limitations as summarized by the author are outlined as follows.

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE *PLANNING*

Lack of resources to analyze and work with the community (mentioned 7 times)

Limited access to best data (mentioned twice)

Lack of skills in *Community Planning* (mentioned once)

Community Planning still not regarded as core business (mentioned once)

Resources from state and federal governments are spent in marginal seats (mentioned once)

The limitations addressed both *Planning* generally and *Community Planning* specifically.

Four respondents (T5, T7, T18, T27) spoke about the lack of resources available to Victorian local government to analyze and work with the community (mentioned 7 times). The need for resources was evidenced by the following comments:

> *Anything is possible with Community Planning but what is the point of having a great Community Plan, great ideas and then say it is all good stuff but there is no funding available (T27, p.10);* and

> *Local government needs to marshal the resources to deliver the Community Plan because the state government is certainly not looking at that (T7, p.3).*

In discussing one aspect of the resources issue one participant stated that:

> *the state government would not supply resources because they did not look at Planning in a holistic way (T7, p.3).*

Another participant (T18) alleged it was important that Victorian local government allocated resources and that this was going to be a *hard decision in light of other priorities (T18, p.8).*

Connected to the issue of resources, one respondent (T5) stated that resources from state and federal governments were spent in marginal seats (mentioned once), which meant there were less resources available for the communities that were in most need, despite what *Community Planning* had been undertaken.

One respondent (T5) maintained that *Community Planning* was not regarded as core business (mentioned once) and commented that:

> *Community Planning still seems a bit vague and on the edge as far as local government sees it (T5, p.3).*

Two final limitations were identified. Two respondents (T6, T18) stated there was the lack of access to the best data (mentioned twice) and one respondent (T5) maintained that there was a lack of skills in *Community Planning* (mentioned once).

4.8.3　How the Community Benefits from Victorian Local Government's *Planning* Role

Respondents were asked to state the community benefits that would be realized if Victorian local government effectively fulfilled its *Planning* role. A summary of these responses as summarized by the author is listed as follows.

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Provides a focus on outcomes and solutions (mentioned 5 times)

Results in better planned communities with increased participation (mentioned 4 times)

Provides an integrated approach (mentioned twice)

Decisions reflect community priorities (mentioned twice)

Creates facilities that are accessible and connected (mentioned once)

Contributes to good *Corporate Governance* (mentioned once)

Eight respondents (T1, T2, T6, T7, T18, T21, T27, T30) identified a number of community benefits in regard to *Community Planning*.

It was considered that *Community Planning* provided a focus on outcomes and solutions (mentioned 5 times) and a more integrated approach (mentioned twice). This opinion was expresses as follows:

> *Having an integrated view (as a result of Community Planning) enables you to focus on what the problem is and what the solutions are and then you have a subsequent discussion about whose problem it is (T2, p.16);* and

> *Community Planning results in more holistic thinking, because there is a dearth of that sort of integrated thinking about communities (T18, p.21).*

Community Planning was also seen by one participant (T27) to assist communities to determine priorities and those facilities that were no longer essential for that community or ones that could be amalgamated to provide upgraded facilities. It was stated that:

> *you can get some excellent Community Plans and you can actually close things. So anything is possible with Community Planning especially if there are outcomes (T27, p.10).*

Community Planning was further considered by two participants (T6, T18) to result in better planned communities with increased participation (mentioned 4 times). This view was expressed as follows:

> *It (Community Planning) results in more participants in the longer-term and by making sure that communities are kept in there all the way, that has got to be a huge benefit for communities (T18, p.22).*

Two respondents (T1, T21) alleged that a community benefit of *Planning* was that decisions would reflect community priorities (mentioned twice). One participant (T1) discussed this outcome in relation to *Community Planning* and stated:

> *I think that Community Planning is a key understanding of moving forward in terms of enhancing local government's capacity to work for its community and the decisions that it takes (T1, p.10).*

One participant (T30) considered that *Corporate Planning* contributed to *Corporate Governance* (mentioned once) because the reporting of the outcomes of the corporate plan to the community added a level of accountability back to the community.

One respondent (T7) stated that a benefit for the community as an outcome of *Planning* in general was that all community assets and facilities would be easily accessible.

4.8.4   Recommendations for Local Government's *Planning* Role

During the interviews the critical steps in achieving the effective delivery of *Planning* were identified. These steps as summarized by the author are outlined as follows.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Create productive partnerships with the non-government sector (mentioned 3 times)

Identify resources (mentioned twice)

Focus on the long-term (mentioned twice)

Keep the community informed (mentioned twice)

Involve the community (mentioned twice)

Identify community leaders (mentioned once)

Respondents were also asked to outline solutions they considered would assist Victorian local government to achieve more effective delivery of its *Planning* role.

In relation to *Community Planning*, one participant stated that this role should be legislated so that the Victorian local governments who currently do not undertake *Community Planning cannot get off the hook (T5, p.2).*

One respondent (T6) discussed the need to modify the *Planning* methodology depending on the demographic composition of community. It was stated that with an articulate community, consultation for the *Community Planning* process was straightforward because *you just call a meeting and people come (T6, p.6).* In other communities that were classified as *unassertive (T6, p.7)* a range of methodologies was required.

A further recommendation identified by one respondent (T5) in regard to *Community Planning* was that in order for Victorian local government to enhance its *Community Planning* role it needed to attract a greater diversity of elected representatives. This would result in a better understanding of local issues that would in turn improve the *Community Planning* processes undertaken by Victorian local government (T5).

4.9   Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the original research that was undertaken for this thesis have been presented as a factual account within an analytical framework. The key themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews have been outlined and systematically categorized. The process of analysis of the interviews reflected the research methodology that was discussed in Chapter 3.

The exploration of the interview data commenced with a discussion on the overall response of the participants in answering the primary research question regarding the role of Victorian local government. The initial outcomes that emerged from this question demonstrated a high degree of congruence when compared to the key findings of the literature review as outlined in Chapter 2.

The analysis of the interview data based on the subsidiary research questions subsequently followed. Under each Victorian local government role, the context of that role was delineated. The limitations to achieving that role, the benefits for the community in Victorian local government achieving enhanced outcomes and specific recommendations for each role have been comprehensively documented.

The format of this analysis followed a similar structure to the literature review. As a consequence there was a logical flow between the material that emerged from the literature on Victorian local government and the data from the interviews.

This format has established the framework for the final chapter of this thesis. The following chapter will draw out the key findings and themes that have emerged from the earlier chapters of this thesis. It will examine principal points of similarities and differences between the original research and the literature that has been written on the research topic, provide general conclusions and outline key recommendations that could be introduced to enhance the implementation of the role of Victorian local government.

Chapter 5 – Key Themes and Recommendations

5.1   Chapter Outline

In Chapter 5, as the concluding chapter of this thesis, the key themes of the literature review and the empirical research are drawn together. Consequently the findings for each research question are summarized and examined based on the research outcomes from the interviews and the prior research as outlined in the relevant literature.

In section 1.2 of Chapter 1, the research problem was defined and the primary and subsidiary research questions were delineated. The answers to these research questions were explored in the context of how the relevant literature on this topic provided commentary and responses. The literature review was discussed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, the analysis of the interview data was outlined and this analysis also sought to answer the primary and subsidiary research questions as defined in section 1.2 of Chapter 1. The analysis of the interview material was in accordance with the research methodology that was discussed in Chapter 3. In this final chapter, the key themes, proposals and recommendations that arose from the findings of the components of the research project are discussed.

It should be noted that only the main points of interest that arise from the research will be discussed in this chapter. It is not intended to repeat large sections from previous chapters and therefore not all aspects of the research findings will be discussed in detail.

In this chapter the observations and opinions of the researcher are more evident than in previous chapters. This chapter provides the opportunity to present informed views about the outcomes of the research and the proposals and recommendations that arose from this research. This chapter therefore reflects the opinion of the author and responds to the findings as examined in previous chapters.

There are two format issues that need to be discussed prior to the analysis of the research questions commencing.

It should be noted that as outlined in Chapter 4, in some cases references to the interview data indicates the number of times a topic or issue has been raised by the respondents (mentioned by respondents *x* times) and in other cases where a reference has been a sub-set of a broader issue, the particular respondent (T*x*) has been cited. In this chapter a preference will be directed towards citing the number of times a topic or issue has been collectively raised by the respondents, unless it is a specific comment by a respondent that is one aspect of a general topic.

One final comment that also needs to be made is that, as outlined in section 1.6 of Chapter 1, in some cases the reasons why local government undertook its role were also relevant to how the community benefited from local government undertaking its role. A flexible approach has been adopted in answering these two subsidiary questions in terms of the material from the interviews and the literature, to ensure that there was minimal duplication and logical connections between each section.

5.2   General Findings from the Research Questions

A number of general observations can be made regarding the discussions on the primary and subsidiary research questions. The primary research question was defining the role of Victorian local government from a community perspective.

In examining the role of Victorian local government, the first observation is that in both the literature and the interview material there was a significant degree of consensus on what that role comprised. The highest seven roles as identified by the respondents – *Services*, *Democratic Representation*, *Infrastructure*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy, Governance* and *Planning* for the community, were the key roles that emerged from the literature as documented in section 2.2.1.5 of Chapter 2.

The reason for this general agreement was considered by the author to be two-fold. Firstly, as the interviews were based on the views of opinion leaders from the sector there was a high degree of knowledge on the role and issues related to Victorian local government. As stated in Chapter 3, 26% of interviewees were also published authors on aspects of local government and were cited in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The second reason for the degree of similarity of views, in the opinion of the author was the fact that as outlined in section 1.7 of Chapter 1, local government in Victoria has been part of the political landscape since the 1840s primarily in its present day form. It therefore has established a long-standing tradition of providing for communities. While the role of Victorian local government has expanded in recent decades, the knowledge and experience of the opinion leaders would result in an awareness of current trends.

The second general observation was that there was minimal discussion on any significant changes to the role of Victorian local government in the future. This observation by the author reflected the responses to two specific subsidiary questions. Those questions were (i) *in terms of a future vision for Victorian local government what factors inhibit achieving better outcomes for the community?* and (ii) *what are the recommendations for Victorian local government for achieving enhanced outcomes for its citizens?*

Only one respondent (T11) suggested a far-reaching response to either of those two subsidiary questions. As outlined in section 4.3.4 of Chapter 4, this response was abolishing the *Democratic* role of Victorian local government and establishing regional arms of state government. Under this model local government would not be a government and would be run by bureaucrats. Such a change to the political structure of what is currently constituted as local government would also result in a substantially reduced role in *Governance*, *Advocacy* and *Planning*. This or similar views were not expressed by other respondents or discussed in any extended manner in the literature.

It was considered by the author that the lack of what could be classified as radical options for the role of Victorian local government was attributable to two factors.

The first factor reflected the selection of opinion leaders for the interview process. As outlined in section 3.3.1.3 of Chapter 3, an overall aim of the interview selection was to secure interviews with people who had a clear interest in the role of Victorian local government, and who had publicly or professionally expressed views on this subject.

The selection criteria for the interviewees were based on their experience in, and knowledge of Victorian local government. A particular focus in regard to the selection of the respondents from the Community, Business Leaders / Related non-government organizations/Academic category, which comprised 35% of the interview sample, was to select interviewees who would bring a diversity of opinions to the research process.

However, due to the fact that by necessity the opinion leaders that were interviewed for this thesis were predominantly involved in local government in some context, it could be construed that such a group would be likely to support the continuance and strengthening of Victorian local government as opposed to limiting its role.

In the opinion of the author the second reason for the general lack of discussion on significant changes to the future role of Victorian local government was the fact that the Australian political framework has not dramatically altered in terms of its fundamental structure or legal environment since its inception. This stability impacted on the overall role of Victorian local government. In this context, it is likely that Victorian local government's role into the future may not look very different from the structure that was outlined in section 1.8 of Chapter 1.

Kiss (2004) stated that it is commonplace in political science that policy proceeds incrementally. Kiss (2004) further stated that:

> *this (incremental change) is likely to mean that local government will go on, at least during our lifetimes, moving along its present path (p.1).*

A third general observation that can be drawn from the analysis of the literature and the interview material was that the interviewees were generally more critical of the performance, skill level and motivation of local government councillors when compared to the literature on this topic. The role of elected members in terms of limiting Victorian local government's achievement of its role was identified by respondents in discussions on local government's *Democratic* role and in the areas of *Governance*, *Community Building* and *Advocacy*. In contrast, the performance of elected members was only discussed in the literature in relation to Victorian local government's *Governance* role.

There are possibly a number of reasons for this difference of views between the respondents and the literature on this topic. In the opinion of the author, the most likely reason for this difference was the fact that 61% of the respondents who were interviewed for the research were either currently or had previously been a senior officer working in Victorian local government or an elected member.

The closeness of the daily operations, personal and political differences and the issues of conflict and frustration that would be experienced by those within the local government sector would potentially explain the consequential criticism of local government councillors. Academics, other general writers and observers of Victorian local government who had not experienced the regular cut and thrust that is prevalent within the local political environment could potentially form a different view on the role and performance of elected members.

A further general observation regarding the limitations or barriers that were identified in relation to Victorian local government achieving its role, was that while there were a significant number of common themes between the respondents and the literature on this topic, this was not consistent throughout the discussions on all role areas.

This inconsistency was evident in the discussions on Victorian local government's *Governance* role. In the literature there were extensive discussions on the decline of trust in government, inadequate systems, management issues and tensions regarding community engagement and representation more generally. The respondents did not specifically identify these issues.

Conversely in the analysis of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role, there was significantly more discussion on the limitations that were identified by the respondents than was evident in the literature. The limitations included a range of factors that focused on the political environment within which local government operated and its position within that framework, a range of internal management issues and community expectations. The literature review did not identify these issues within the context of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role.

A further general observation was that in the subsidiary questions examined for this thesis, there was a close alignment of views between the material in the literature review and the views expressed by the respondents in regard to the benefits that the community gained as a result of Victorian local government undertaking its role. An analysis of the material from both sources revealed that there were very few issues that were not duplicated in either a similar or identical form.

A final observation was that there was also a close alignment between the predominant limitations that hindered Victorian local government achieving its role and the recommendations to address these limitations. Proposals and suggestions to respond to most major barriers in the literature and from the analysis of the interview data were evident.

Further and more specific observations will be explored in the following two sections of this chapter.

5.3   Subsidiary Questions Key Findings

In the following section the key findings of the research will be examined with reference to each subsidiary question. These key findings reflect the opinion of the author and are based on the conclusions that were drawn by the author from the literature and the views of the respondents.

Prior to commencing this discussion it is worth stating that the aim of the research undertaken for this thesis was to provide a clear delineation of Victorian local government's role in terms of the community and provide a series of proposals and recommendations that would facilitate a dialogue about local government's future direction and the initiatives it could pursue. As a consequence, the subsidiary questions that focused on the recommendations for Victorian local government and the limitations that could impede the achievement of such recommendations required a greater focus than other subsidiary questions that were more contextual in nature. This focus on the recommendations and limitations that confronted Victorian local

government is reflected in the format and the emphasis of the discussions that emerge in this chapter.

Key themes from the primary and subsidiary questions that formed the foundation of this thesis from the author's perspective, will now be explored.

As outlined in section 1.2 of Chapter 1, the primary research question that this thesis investigated was:

What is the current role of Victorian local government from a community perspective?

As outlined in section 1.2 of Chapter 1, the subsidiary research questions that this thesis investigated were as follows:

(i)   How has the role of Victorian local government evolved historically and what implications does this past impose on current roles and structures?

(ii)   Why from a community perspective does Victorian local government undertake its role?

(iii)   How is Victorian local government generally performing its role?

(iv)   In terms of a future vision for Victorian local government what factors inhibit achieving better outcomes for the community?

(v)   How does the community benefit from Victorian local government undertaking its role?

(vi)   What are the recommendations for Victorian local government in terms of the implementation of its role that would achieve enhanced outcomes for its citizens?

In providing a response to the primary research question, this has been discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 4, and section 5.2 of this chapter has outlined the similarities between the literature review and the responses from the interviewees. The author has concluded that there is general agreement about the role of Victorian local government as previously outlined.

The key findings from the subsidiary research questions will now be explored.

5.3.1 Subsidiary Question – Historical Context

The first subsidiary question, regarding the evolution and historical context of Victorian local government and its subsequent implications was explored in sections 1.7 and 1.8 of Chapter 1. In the opinion of the author there were four overriding themes that arose from that discussion.

The first theme was that Victorian local government having been established in some form since the 1840s was underpinned by a long-standing democratic tradition and a history of *Service* provision for the local community. For many years the fundamental structure and operations of Victorian local government expanded in accordance with the population of Victoria and the subsequent needs of that population.

The second and related issue was that the political and legal standing of Australian local government, thereby including Victorian local government, was controlled and delineated by state government legislation. As outlined in section 1.8.1 of Chapter 1, local government is not recognized in the Australian constitution (Jones 1993; Ellison 2000; Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006). The legal standing of local government resulted in a limited status and autonomy for Victorian local government due to its dependence on, and the consequential influences of the state government. In a Victorian context the reforms of local government by the state government in the 1990s significantly impacted on the then present and future structure and operations of local government in that state.

The third key issue was that historically the role of Victorian local government was limited in its range of responsibilities. As outlined in section 1.7.2 of Chapter 1, many functions performed by local government in the United Kingdom, such as housing and education, were the responsibilities of state or federal governments in Australia (Bowman 1983; Jones 1989; McNeill 1997; Dunstan 1998; May 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

The impacts of the second and third key issues as listed above and other related factors resulted in Victorian local government having limited financial capacity to implement the various components of its role. The constraints of this financial environment were discussed in detail in section 1.8.2 of Chapter 1. As outlined in that section, local government's limited financial position had been exacerbated through cost shifting from other levels of government, community expectations and the constrained ability of local government to raise revenue (Johnson 2003; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006; McShane 2006).

The recommendations that relate to this subsidiary question will be addressed in section 5.4 of this chapter.

5.3.2 Subsidiary Question – Context of, and Rationale for Victorian Local Government's Role

In the opinion of the author there were a number of similarities between the interview data and the literature review about how Victorian local government's role was defined and how it operated. This was particularly evident in terms of local government's *Democratic*, *Governance*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy* and *Services* roles. A number of key themes that emerged from this contextual analysis will now be examined.

As outlined in section 2.3.1.1.1 of Chapter 2, it was identified that the representative and participatory models of *Democracy* were relevant to Victorian local government and both models were discussed in the literature (Pateman 1970; Bowman and Hampton 1983; Munro-Clark 1992; Painter 1992; Jones 1993; Leach 1996; Saunders

1996; Stoker 1996a; Galligan 1998b; Hunt 1998b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hudson and Kane 2000; Hindess 2002; Rowe 2002; Williamson 2002; Dollery and Marshall 2003; Marshall 2003; Reddel and Woolcock 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Reddel 2005; King 2006).

The respondents also clearly identified that Victorian local government had a representative role as indicated in section 4.3.1 of Chapter 4. The respondents mentioned the term *Democratic* (or derivations) a total of 62 times and representation was mentioned 34 times. While only three respondents (T15, T17, T18) discussed participatory *Democracy* specifically, the principles of participatory *Democracy* were highlighted by other respondents in section 4.3.1 of Chapter 4 through the use of terms such as community engagement, the input of community consultation in local government decision making, local government described as the level of government closest to the people, the leadership of elected representatives and local government's role in assisting communities to become more secure.

The principles of participatory *Democracy* as identified by the respondents also reflected the close connection between Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and its *Governance* role as discussed in section 2.3.1.1 of Chapter 2. The view that Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was underpinned by the role of the elected members was evident in both the literature (Jones 1993; Newnham and Winston 1997; Marshall 2003) and as discussed by the respondents (role of the elected members mentioned 30 times).

Similarly to the discussion on Victorian local government's *Democratic* role, there were close similarities between the issues raised by the respondents on *Governance* and in the literature on this topic. The term *Governance* was predominantly used for this aspect of local government's role as outlined in section 2.3.2.1 of Chapter 2 and as identified by the respondents (term mentioned by respondents 97 times). The distinction of *Democratic Governance* and *Corporate Governance* was evident in the literature and was identified by the respondents. It was noted that in the literature *Governance* was more clearly and consistently delineated as either *Corporate* or

Democratic Governance, whereas the respondents tended to refer to *Governance* more generally.

Both *Democratic* and *Corporate Governance* were discussed in terms of implementing appropriate processes (Howell 1997; Quiggin 1999; Francis 2000; Marsh 2002; Edwards 2002, 2003; CPA Australia 2005) (public administration mentioned by respondents 15 times, operations mentioned by respondents 5 times and compliance mentioned by respondents 3 times). Discussions on *Corporate Governance* focused on relationships and the need for processes to assist with this aspect of Victorian local government's role (Newnham and Winston 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Cameron 2003) (relationships mentioned by respondents 20 times).

In the opinion of the author the literature and the respondents identified that, while there was a range of terms that were used for Victorian local government's *Community Building* role, *Community Building* was the most commonly used phrase to describe that role (Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Raysmith 2001, 2002; Edgar 2002; Digby 2002; Kiss 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; Mowbray 2005; Wiseman 2005; McShane 2006) (mentioned by respondents 67 times).

It was apparent in the literature that *Community Building* was strongly linked with the principles of representative *Democracy*, participatory *Democracy* and *Democratic Governance*, through the outcomes of community engagement, partnerships and connecting people to decision making structures (Raysmith 2001; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; McShane 2006). As outlined in section 4.5.1 of Chapter 4, the respondents similarly considered that *Community Building* underpinned a number of other Victorian local government roles including *Services* (mentioned by respondents 8 times), *Democratic* (councillor role mentioned by respondents 5 times, and *Democratic* role mentioned once), *Governance* (developing a community vision mentioned by respondents 3 times) and *Advocacy* (mentioned by respondents once).

Victorian local government's *Community Building* role was discussed within the context of partnerships by both the respondents (mentioned 5 times) and in the literature (Raysmith 2001; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Brackertz et al 2005).

The view that Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* was predominantly focused on *Advocating* to other levels of government was reflected in both the literature (Jones 1993; Rayner 1997; Hunt 1998a; Mowbray 1999; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Brackertz et al 2005) and in the interview data (mentioned by respondents 35 times). The role of an individual local government councillor as an *Advocate* representing constituencies on particular matters was also identified in discussions on this topic (Local Government Board 1995; Gifford 1999; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2005c; Brackertz et al 2005) (mentioned by respondents 5 times).

A final point regarding the definition and context of Victorian local government's role, was that the *Services* role was discussed in the literature and by respondents as being a traditional aspect of its role (Russell and Bishop 1973; Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1989; Russell and Macmillan 1992; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1997; Rayner 1997; Martin 2001; Wallis and Dollery 2002) (mentioned by respondents 11 times), within a distinct geographical boundary that serviced a particular community (Wallis and Dollery 2002; Department for Victorian Communities 2006a) (mentioned by respondents 16 times) and as a provider of *Services* for other levels of government (Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006) (mentioned by respondents 6 times).

In the opinion of the author there was a significant degree of consensus between the interview data and the literature about why Victorian local government undertook its role. The key points of that analysis and the common themes that applied to a number of role areas will now be explored.

The first reason that was considered to underpin many aspects of Victorian local government's role was its closeness to the community. This theme was also discussed in relation to the community benefits from local government undertaking its role.

In relation to its *Democratic*, *Governance*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy*, *Services* and *Planning* roles as outlined in sections 4.3.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.6.1, 4.7.1 and 4.8.1 of Chapter 4, the view that Victorian local government was the level of government that was most closely connected to the community was mentioned by the respondents 27 times in regard to the *Democratic* role, 18 times in regard to the *Community Building* role, 7 times in regard to the *Advocacy* role, 3 times in regard to the *Services* role, 7 times in relation to *Planning* and *Infrastructure* and by two respondents (T7, T17) in regard to *Governance*.

The view that local government was the level of government closest to the people was also evident in the literature on Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1989, 1993; Brumby 1996; Phillips 1996; Kiss 1996; Galligan 1996; Stoker 1996c; Rayner 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Galligan 1998b; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Williamson 2002), its *Governance* role (Jones 1989, 1993; Johnstone 1996a; Rayner 1997; Rentschler 1997; Dunstan 1998; Williams 1998; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Milburn 2004; Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005) and its *Services* role (Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1997; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2005c; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006).

Underpinning Victorian local government's closeness to the community was the principle of subsidiarity that was raised in the literature in regard to local government's *Governance* and *Services* roles (Galligan 1996; Rayner 1997; Hunt 1998b; Galligan 1998b; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Brown 2002; Local Government Association (UK) 2004a, 2005c; Blacher 2005b; Dollery 2005).

While the principle of subsidiarity was not specifically discussed by the respondents, comments in relation to Victorian local government's *Governance* role such as the need to develop systems so that decisions reflected community input (mentioned by respondents 24 times), the need to ensure accessibility (mentioned by respondents 3 times) and the need to ensure meaningful input from the community (mentioned by respondents once) were related aspects that underpinned the principle of subsidiarity. The need for decision making to reflect community input (mentioned by respondents

31 times) was also identified in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role.

In the opinion of the author, the closeness of Victorian local government to the community also determined that the engagement of, and consultation with the community on issues of significance was a reason for local government undertaking its role. As the topic of community engagement was also identified in discussions on the benefits for the community research question, this area will be discussed in section 5.3.5 so that duplication is avoided. The reference material has consequently been combined to present a holistic picture.

A second issue that was raised in both the rationale section and the community benefits section was the securing of additional resources. In order to avoid duplication this issue will also be discussed in section 5.3.5.

As outlined in sections 4.3.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1 and 4.8.1 of Chapter 4, and throughout the literature, another reason for Victorian local government undertaking its role that applied to a number of areas was the need for strategic *Planning* and working with the community to establish priorities and a vision for the future.

The need to establish a vision and determine priorities was evident in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (mentioned by respondents 6 times), its *Governance* role (mentioned by respondents 6 times), its *Community Building* role (mentioned by respondents 8 times) and its *Planning* role (mentioned by respondents 10 times). The need to establish a vision was also identified in the literature in regard to *Planning* (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Boyd and Thomas 1995; Local Government Board 1995). The comments regarding the determination of a vision for the community included the importance of local government working with the community to shape opportunities, establish its preferred character and agree on *Service* needs.

A final theme as to why Victorian local government undertook its role was the need for local government to become involved in wider policy debates in the state, federal and global arenas. This was specifically discussed in relation to *Advocacy* (Jones

1989, 1993; Kiss 1996; Saunders 1996; Haag 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hill 1999; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) (global issues mentioned by respondents 7 times and influencing state government policies mentioned by respondents 4 times).

The legal requirement for Victorian local government undertaking its role in regard to *Corporate Governance* processes, *Democratic Governance* and council *Planning* was raised in the literature (Local Government Act 1989 (Vic); Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic), Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001 (Vic); Kloot 2001; Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic); Brackertz et al 2005; CPA Australia 2005) but not by the respondents.

5.3.3 Subsidiary Question – Victorian Local Government's Performance of its Role

The discussion on elements of Victorian local government's performance was more directly addressed in the interviews with opinion leaders than in the literature review. The author's comments in this section are therefore primarily based on this material.

The overarching theme that emerged in relation to this subsidiary question was that Victorian local government's performance was generally mixed. This was evident in regard to its *Democratic* role, and the areas of *Governance*, *Community Building* and *Advocacy*. The issue of Victorian local government's performance was discussed in sections 4.3.2, 4.4.2, 4.5.2 and 4.6.2 of Chapter 4.

Victorian local government's performance in *Service* provision resulted in predominantly positive comments from the respondents (T2, T4, T6, T16, T17, T19, T20, T21, T23, T28, T29). In this case, 69% of those respondents who spoke about local government's performance stated that *Services* provided by Victorian local government were well delivered. Positive comments were also evident in regard to local government's *Planning* role (T1, T7).

A number of respondents identified improvements in Victorian local government's performance since the amalgamations in the 1990s. This view was expressed in relation to *Governance* (T20, T30) and *Advocacy* (T1, T2).

The opinion that the amalgamations resulted in benefits to local government's performance was also expressed in the literature. This view related to Victorian local government's overall strength as a level of government (Local Government Board 1995; Burke and Walsh 1998; Miller and Dowling 2004), although as outlined in section 1.7.4 of Chapter 1, there was not a consensus on this point of view (Kiss 1997; May 2003). A positive view of Victorian local government's performance since the amalgamations was also expressed in regard to *Advocacy* (Hill 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 1999, 2001a).

Two respondents (T8, T20) considered that the amalgamations had negatively impacted on local government's *Community Building* role because of the withdrawal of services and the lack of identity within the local community. This view was also expressed in the literature (Butler 2005).

It was considered that local government in rural areas undertook its role more effectively than local government councils in the metropolitan area. This opinion was expressed in regard to Victorian local government's performance in the areas of *Governance* (T17, T21), *Community Building* (T17), *Advocacy* (T17) and *Planning* (T7). As outlined in sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.2 of Chapter 4, this opinion was based on the fact that local government's relationship with the community in rural areas was closer and it was consequently easier to communicate and engage. It was acknowledged in the literature and by the respondents that local government's performance in rural areas was, however, limited by its lack of financial and resource capacity (Jones 1993; Tod 2001; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006; McShane 2006) (*Community Building* role: T8, T12, T20).

5.3.4 Subsidiary Question – Limitations/Barriers to Victorian Local Government Achieving its Role

In analyzing the limitations or barriers to Victorian local government's achieving its role it is considered by the author, based on the literature and the views of the respondents that there were five interconnected themes.

The first significant barrier to Victorian local government achieving its role was its lack of autonomy that resulted from its legal status and its consequential relationship with other levels of government and the state government in particular. There were a number of secondary impacts that resulted from this limitation. The issue of local government's lack of autonomy was raised in the context of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role and to a lesser extent in its *Governance*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy* and *Services* roles.

The state government's attitude to, and control of, Victorian local government in regard to local government's *Democratic* role was raised by the respondents on eleven occasions and discussed in some detail in the literature on this topic (Rayner 1997; Hill 1997; Kiss 1997; Wensing 1997b; Costello 1998; Dore 1998; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Ellison 2000; Williamson 2002). The lack of respect for local government by state government, its interventionist approach and the consequential impact on local democracy due to the dismissal of elected representatives and amalgamations were common themes. The generally high degree of mutual suspicion between the three levels of government also impacted on Victorian local government's achievement of its role (Jones 1989; Chapman 1997; Dollery and Marshall 2003).

It was further identified in the literature that Victorian local government's legal status impacted on its ability to develop policy, which consequently hindered its ability to implement its role (Bowman 1983; Beetham 1996).

The issue of Victorian local government's legal status was also raised by the respondents in regard to *Governance* (mentioned by respondents 8 times) and the constraints that the legislative framework as imposed by the state government had on local government fulfilling its role. It was further stated that the state government set the agenda in regard to *Community Building* priorities (Kiss 2003) (mentioned by respondents 3 times) and had too much control over funding for *Services* (mentioned by respondents 7 times).

Related to the theme of local government's relationship with other levels of government was the view that Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role was limited because state and federal governments did not take sufficient notice of local government's opinions and priorities (Saunders 1996). The respondents expressed their concerns about this lack of respect in a number of contexts. This included that local government did not have sufficient political power (mentioned by respondents 11 times), that state government did not relate to local government as a legitimate sphere of government (mentioned by respondents 7 times) and that the relationship between local government and other levels of government was not positive (mentioned by respondents twice).

Similar concerns regarding the lack of recognition for Victorian local government (mentioned by respondents 6 times) and a lack of delegation to local government (mentioned by respondents 6 times) by both state and federal governments were also raised in relation to local government's *Services* role.

The status of Victorian local government resulted in a lack of resources and financial control. The issue of limited resources (mentioned by respondents 25 times) and the lack of an appropriate tax base (mentioned by respondents 8 times) was considered to directly impact on the delivery of appropriate *Services* by local government (Chapman and Wood 1984; Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Municipal Association of Victoria 2001; Pemble 2002; Wallis and Dollery 2002; Lee 2004b; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006; Carnegie and Baxter 2006; Gittins 2006; McShane 2006). A lack of resources was also discussed in the context of Victorian

local government's *Planning* role (mentioned by respondents 7 times) and *Community Building* role (mentioned by respondents 14 times) (Cuthill and Fein 2005).

Cost shifting from other levels of government exacerbated the lack of available resources that Victorian local government had to undertake its role (Victorian Local Governance Association 1997; Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006) (mentioned by respondents 6 times).

The second significant barrier to Victorian local government achieving its role that was linked in some respects to its legal status was its overall image. The issue of local government's image was raised in the literature as a broad limitation (Chapman and Wood 1984; Jones 1993; Chapman 1997a; Rayner 1997; Dunstan 1998; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 1999; Ellison 2000). The respondents also raised the issue of Victorian local government's poor image in the context of its *Democratic* role (mentioned by respondents 20 times), *Governance* role (mentioned by respondents 7 times), *Community Building* role (mentioned by respondents twice) and *Advocacy* role (mentioned by respondents 4 times).

In the opinion of the author, Victorian local government's image was discussed within a diversity of contexts and resulted in a number of consequences. An overarching outcome of its negative image was the lack of general debate about the role and status of local government more broadly (Bowman 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Dollery and Wallis 2001; Dollery and Marshall 2003).

The media's role in portraying and perpetuating a negative role of Victorian local government was raised as a limitation by both the respondents and in the literature (Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Hill 1999). The respondents outlined their views on this limitation in discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic* (T12, T16), *Governance* (T13, T20), *Community Building* (T26, T31) and *Advocacy* (T2, T12) roles.

The third limitation, which was one outcome of Victorian local government's image and media representation, was the overall lack of trust by the community in government more broadly. This lack of trust was raised in the literature regarding

Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (Walker 1992; Jones 1993; Cox 1995; Kiss 1996; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Latham 2000; Isaac 2001; Goot 2002; Reddell 2002; Broad 2003; Hughes 2004; Singh and Sahu 2004; Blacher 2005b; Brackertz et al 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005; Wiseman 2006), *Governance* role (Gifford 1999; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002) and *Community Building* role (Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005). The issue of mistrust of government was considered to be particularly relevant for local government councils located in rural areas (Butler 2005).

The respondents also identified that elected members were pre-judged in regard to the amount of trust that was afforded to them in a *Democratic* (T18), *Governance* (T13) and *Community Building* context (T26).

In the literature the theoretical aspects of what was termed as the *Democratic* deficit (Bishop and Davis 2002; Curtain 2003; Edwards 2003; Brackertz et al 2005) or civic deficit (Putman 1993, 2000; Balnaves, Walsh and Shoesmith 2004) were discussed. The issue of community indifference or reluctance to become involved in local activities was raised in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (Byrnes and Dollery 2002; Dollery 2003a, 2003b; Brackertz et al 2005; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006) and *Community Building* role (Putnam 2000; West 2002; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b) (mentioned by respondents 9 times).

With the exception of two respondents (T15, T18) the interviewees did not address issues that were directly related to the *Democratic* or civic deficit. There was, however significant discussion outlined in section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4 on the degree of cynicism about *Democratic* processes (T10, T15, T17), the apathy of voters (T10), the general lack of understanding and respect for local government (T15, T16, T28) and the disengagement of the community in political processes (T12).

A related issue to the indifference and mistrust of Victorian local government by the community that was also a barrier to local government achieving its role was its limited ability to engage with the community. In the opinion of the author this was due to a number of factors.

The first reason was the lack of local government resources. This issue has previously been discussed as a limitation more broadly and was specifically raised regarding local government's *Governance* role (Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2002; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002; Curtain 2003; Stoker 2003b) and *Community Building* role (Cuthill and Fien 2005) (mentioned by respondents 14 times).

Other factors that limited the ability of Victorian local government to engage with its community were due to a number of societal influences. The first cause was the demanding lifestyle for modern-day communities. This impacted on the achievement of local government's *Governance* role (Beilharz 2000; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Brackertz et al 2005) and *Community Building* role (Putnam 2000; West 2002) (mentioned by respondents 9 times). The difficulty of engaging with particular groups within the community due to demographic and cultural reasons also impacted on local government's *Governance* role (Brackertz et al 2005) and *Community Building* role (Department for Victorian Communities 2006b). The final factor was the overload experienced by volunteers (mentioned by respondents twice).

The fourth group of issues that was identified as limiting Victorian local government's ability to perform its role, was a number of general electoral issues and structural barriers.

Victorian local government's poor image, as previously identified, resulted in a limited number of potential candidates for local government elections. The need to attract high calibre and a diversity of candidates to stand for local government was raised in the literature as a broad limitation (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Chapman and Wood 1984; Mowbray 1999; Wettenhall and Alexander 2000; Kiss 2004) and by respondents (T2, T3, T5, T10, T11, T12, T19, T28).

A related theme in relation to Victorian local government's *Democratic* role was that local government was considered by some people to be a stepping-stone to other political careers (Byrnes and Dollery 2002; Dollery, Crase and Byrnes 2005; Dollery, Wallis and Allan 2006) (T12, T22).

The system of postal voting was also identified as a barrier to Victorian local government achieving its *Democratic* role. In section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4 three respondents (T11, T13, T22) expressed concerns about postal voting including the lack of information about potential candidates and the overall process. Concerns about postal voting were also raised in the literature (Kiss 2003; Qvortrup 2005).

The skill level and motivation of elected members and the limited understanding of their role were cited as barriers to Victorian local government achieving its role. This was evident in discussions by the respondents on local government's *Democratic* role (mentioned by respondents 26 times), *Governance* role (mentioned by respondents twice), *Community Building* role (mentioned by respondents 7 times) and its *Advocacy* role (mentioned by respondents 8 times).

As outlined in section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4, seven respondents (T2, T3, T12, T18, T19, T23, T30) were critical of councillors and associated issues such as their behavior and skill level. As further identified in sections 4.4.2 and 4.6.2 additional comments included concerns about there being too great a focus on short-term issues (mentioned by respondents 3 times), a lack of leadership (mentioned by respondents 8 times), an inability of elected members and management to share power (mentioned by respondents 5 times) and a lack of strategic capacity (mentioned by respondents 5 times). The limited skill level of elected members was also evident in the literature on local government's *Governance* role (Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Byrnes and Dollery 2002).

The demanding workload of local government councillors was discussed by the respondents (T2, T5, T28) and identified in the literature (Stoker 1996b; Reynolds 1999; Marshall 2003) as a limitation to Victorian local government achieving its role. It was also acknowledged in the literature on *Governance* that there were a number of competing demands that local government councillors needed to balance (Pettersson 2000; Burdess and O'Toole 2004; Warburton and Baker 2005).

The political turbulence and uncertainty of local government elections was also identified in the literature as a barrier to effective council *Planning* (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Jones 1993; Johnston 1997; Reynolds 1999; Salvaris 2002; Neilson 2003).

The fifth and final group of issues that was a hindrance to Victorian local government achieving its role was the role of management.

In discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic* role it was stated that the management philosophy of efficiency and economic performance had overshadowed the *Democratic* dimension of local government (Jones 1993; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Dollery 2005). In discussions on *Governance* the dominance of management to the detriment of good *Governance* was also raised (Galligan 1998b; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002). A related theme to the role of management that was raised by the respondents (T4, T8, T15) was the limitations that could result from a lack of commitment from officers to *Community Building*.

In the opinion of the author both the literature and the respondents identified that the relationship between elected members and management was also a barrier to effective *Corporate Governance*. This limitation was due to a lack of understanding about the roles of elected members and management (Newnham and Winston 1997; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002) (T12, T18, T19, T28, T30). This lack of role clarity led to an environment of mistrust between the parties (Chapman and Wood 1984; Howell 1997; Newnham and Winston 1997; Gifford 1999; Cetinic-Dorol 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Martin and Simons 2002; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; CPA Australia 2005), conflict (Jones 1983) and a reluctance to openly discuss relationship issues (mentioned by respondents twice).

5.3.5 Subsidiary Question – Community Benefits from Local Government Undertaking its Role

In the opinion of the author, there was a range of common themes that were identified in the literature and by the respondents that resulted from Victorian local government's implementation of its role. These community benefits have been grouped into five categories.

The first key theme was Victorian local government's role in providing benefits to the community in terms of community engagement. These benefits were raised regarding local government's *Democratic*, *Governance*, *Community Building* and *Planning* roles. As previously mentioned, to avoid duplication this discussion will address both the rationale and the community benefits that arise from community engagement.

The close links between the community engagement principles that underpinned the *Democratic* processes of Victorian local government and the benefits for the community was a key theme in both the literature (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Galligan 1996; Johnstone 1996b; Rayner 1997; Hunt 1998a; Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000; Coghill 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005) and as articulated by the interviewees (mentioned by respondents 6 times in **RATIONALE** section and 24 times in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section). The community benefits from the involvement in local issues as a result of local government's community engagement processes were also evident in discussions on G*overnance* (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Jones 1993; Phillips 1996; Rayner 1997; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Gifford 1999; Bishop and Davis 2002; Edwards 2002, 2003; Kiss 2003; Marshall 2003; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Local Government Association (UK) 2004c, 2005c; Brackertz et al 2005; Butler 2005; CPA Australia 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; King 2006; Shadwick 2006; Victorian Local Governance Association and Local Government Division 2006 (last update)), (mentioned by respondents 4 times in **RATIONALE** section and 8 times in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section).

Community benefits were also derived from local government's role in *Community Building* (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; West 2002; Broad 2003, 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Blacher 2005a, 2005b; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Wiseman 2006) (mentioned by respondents 11 times in Community Benefits section) and *Planning* (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Salvaris 2002) (mentioned by respondents 4 times in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section).

Related and specific outcomes of community engagement also benefited the community from a number of additional perspectives.

Local *Democracy* and the implementation of *Democratic Governance* principles were considered to provide a voice for citizens and an avenue for them to determine the future direction of their local community (Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005) (mentioned by respondents in **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES** section 11 times), influence policies, programs and services (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Perry 1995; Kiss 1996; Stoker 1996a; Rayner 1997; Box 1998; Briand 1998, Plein, Green and Williams 1998; Lando 1999; Victorian Council of Social Service 1999; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2001; Edwards 2002, 2003; Curtain 2003; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005) (mentioned by respondents in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section twice) and assisted communities to be positive, gain skills and be secure (mentioned by respondents in **RATIONALE** section 13 times).

Local government's *Democratic* and *Democratic Governance* role also enabled communities to influence decisions that impacted on them and for local government decisions to consequently reflect community views (Perry 1995; Phillips 1996; Box 1998; Briand 1998; Lando 1999; Maksem 1999; Latham 2000; Pettersson 2000; Edwards 2002; Brackertz et al 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; CPA Australia 2005) (mentioned in **RATIONALE** section (*Democratic* role) by respondents 31 times and 24 times in **RATIONALE** section (*Governance* role)).

Additional community benefits from a *Governance* perspective included the development of community leadership (Gifford 1999; Francis 2000; Pettersson 2000; Chimonyo, Gallagher and Henry 2002; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Brackertz et al 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b) (mentioned by respondents in **RATIONALE** section 3 times), outcomes that reflected the diversity of communities (Jones 1989, 1993; Brackertz et al 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) and the achievement of consensus on matters of local importance (Marsh 2002). The benefits of ensuring that all citizens who wished to have input had that opportunity, was also identified (Brackertz et al 2005; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b) (mentioned in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section by respondents once).

There were related benefits to community engagement as a result of Victorian local government's *Community Building* role in terms of developing community capacity. This was mentioned by the respondents on 16 occasions (**RATIONALE** section) and was also discussed in the literature on this issue (Broad 2003; Hill and Wiseman 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2004b). Additional community benefits were gained through providing input into priorities and strategies (mentioned in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section by respondents 5 times) and the creation of a vision for the local community (mentioned in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section by respondents 11 times) (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Stoker 2003a). The issue of creating a community vision and identifying needs was also raised in section 5.3.2 on the rationale for Victorian local government's role.

The second key theme that also had some connections with the benefits from community engagement, was the benefits that were achieved through sustaining healthier and stronger communities. In the opinion of the author this notion was evident in discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic*, *Democratic Governance*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy* and *Services* roles.

Both in the interviews and throughout the literature it was considered that Victorian local government assisted communities to achieve an increased sense of well-being and connectedness. This was identified in the literature in discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic*, *Governance* and *Community Building* roles (Haag 1997; Wensing 1997a; Hill 1997; Box 1998; Costello 1998; Hunt 1998b; Rance 1998; Williams 1998; People Together Project 1998; Hill 1999, 2000; Latham 2000; Putnam 2000; Raysmith 2001; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a; Martin and Simons 2002; West 2002; Broad 2003, 2004; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Milburn 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a, 2005; Blacher 2005a, 2005b; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005; Wiseman 2006).

The benefits for the community in regard to an increased sense of well-being and connectedness were also identified by the respondents in discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic* role (T10, T12, T15, T28) and in the areas of

Governance (T1, T10, T13, T20, T30), *Community Building* (mentioned by respondents 6 times), *Advocacy* (mentioned by respondents 9 times) and *Services* (mentioned by respondents 3 times). The respondents also identified the benefits of building a sense of community in terms of Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role (mentioned by respondents 4 times).

The provision of *Services* by Victorian local government that responded to existing and emerging community needs (Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Lowndes 1996) and that made a positive difference to people's lives (Bowman 1983; Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Galligan 1998b; Stoker 2003a; Good Governance Advisory Group 2004; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Services 2006) (mentioned by respondents 11 times) was also identified in the literature on this topic and by the respondents. Aspects of a healthier community included addressing issues of disadvantage (Latham 2000; Raysmith 2001; Broad 2003; Department for Victorian Communities 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Blacher 2005b; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Johnson, Headley and Jensen 2005; Moran 2005; Wiseman 2005) (mentioned by respondents once), addressing issues of isolation (Reynolds 1988; Jones 1993; Lowndes 1996), connecting both new and established communities (mentioned by respondents once), promoting citizenship (mentioned by respondents once), active involvement in neighbourhood networks (T17) and creating more liveable cities (mentioned by respondents twice).

Connected to the issue of community well-being was the view that Victorian local government had the potential to address the overall lack of confidence and interest in government and civic issues more broadly. This lack of interest in government issues was outlined as a limitation in 5.3.4 of this chapter.

In the author's view, the ability to restore confidence and interest in government was expressed by the respondents during discussions on Victorian local government's *Democratic* role, (mentioned by respondents 24 times), *Governance* role (mentioned by respondents once) and *Community Building* role (mentioned by respondents 5 times). The restoration of confidence in government was also supported in the literature in regard to local government's *Community Building* role (Putnam 1993; Handy 1995, 1998; Hill 1999; Latham 2000; Putnam 2000; Isaac 2001; Rogers 2001;

Raysmith 2002; West 2002; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003; Broad 2003; Costello 2003; Stoker 2003a; Hughes 2004; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005; Moran 2005).

A third common theme was the assistance provided to communities through the implementation of local government's role as fulfilled by the elected members. This view was evident in terms of Victorian local government's *Democratic* role. Local government councillors were considered to be independent, responsive to community needs (Bowman and Hampton 1983; Rayner 1997) accessible, honest, having an in-depth knowledge of local issues (Jones 1993) and providing local leadership (Johnstone 1996b; Victorian Local Government Good Governance Panel 1998; Reynolds 1999) (T1, T21, T27, T28).

The fourth community benefit that resulted from Victorian local government undertaking its role was that local government assisted communities to cope with, and understand the broader societal impacts of change including the consequences of globalization. This view was evident in terms of local government's *Democratic*, *Governance*, *Community Building*, *Advocacy*, *Services* and *Planning* roles and was evident in the literature (Jones 1993; Brumby 1996; Galligan 1996; Russell 1996; Self 1997; Rentschler 1997; Edgar 2002; Salvaris 2002; Stoker 2003a; Neilson 2003; Local Government Victoria 2004a; Butler 2005; Cuthill and Fien 2005; Moran 2005; Victorian Local Governance Association 2005; Wiseman 2006) and expressed by the respondents (T1, T2, T4, T8, T10, T12, T13, T15, T18, T24, T25, T28). Assisting the community to better cope with change also related to Victorian local government's role in specific *Services* such as *Environmental Management* (Christoff 1999; Garcia 2002a; McKenzie 2003; Dean and Garcia 2004) and *Land Use Planning* (mentioned by respondents 4 times).

Finally it was considered that the community benefited from the achievement of Victorian local government's role because it gained additional resources for the community. As previously mentioned, to avoid duplication the discussion on resources will address both the rationale and the community benefits that arise from this outcome.

The securing of additional resources, *Services* and facilities was considered to benefit the community in relation to Victorian local government's *Community Building* role (Putnam 1993, 2000; Latham 2000; West 2002; Blacher 2005a; Department for Victorian Communities 2006b) (mentioned by respondents 5 times) and *Advocacy* role (mentioned by respondents in **RATIONALE** section 25 times and by the following respondents: T1, T2, T3, T4, T10, T14, T17, T21 in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section) (Jones 1993; Hill 1999; Mowbray 1999; Victorian Local Governance Association 2001a).

Connected to the theme of resources was the view that Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate* assisted in addressing the withdrawal of resources and *Services* by other levels of government (Hill 1999) and the consequential policy failures (Rayner 1997; Rance 1998b; Isaac 2001; Brackertz et al 2005). Victorian local government's *Planning* role also determined that appropriate resources were sought and employed (Floyd and Palmer 1985; Municipal Association of Victoria 1992; Jones 1993; Johnstone 1997; Kloot 2001) (mentioned by respondents in **RATIONALE** section 7 times and by the following respondents: T7, T18, T21 in **COMMUNITY BENEFITS** section).

5.4 Key Recommendations For Victorian Local Government

In discussing the role of local government the Australian Prime Minister was quoted in *Government News* (Powell 2005) as having said:

> *The role of local government, far from a diminishing role, is a role of growing relevance and growing interest and growing importance to the Australian people (p.10).*

This section examines the general recommendations that, in the opinion of the author would assist in enhancing the role of Victorian local government as identified by the then Prime Minister.

In drawing together the key themes from the literature and the interview data, a number of recommendations were identified that would assist Victorian local

government to more effectively achieve its role. These recommendations have been grouped into two categories by the author and address issues that are relevant to the external and internal environment. Both categories have a number of recommendations within each group. The key recommendations as identified by the author will now be explored, commencing with the recommendations that relate to the external environment

The first and most prominent recommendation is the need for Victorian local government to address its image. This issue was discussed in section 2.5 of Chapter 2 and in sections 4.3.4, 4.4.4 and 4.6.4 of Chapter 4. The issue of Victorian local government's image was identified as a limitation in section 5.3.4 of this chapter.

An enhanced image for Victorian local government would result in improved relationships with other levels of government, the attraction of an increased number of high calibre candidates to stand for local government, the view that local government was only a stepping stone to other levels of government being addressed, a greater diversity of people being elected to local government that reflected the diversity of the community and improved community outcomes due to more effective *Advocacy* programs. These issues were identified as limitations in section 5.3.4 of this chapter.

There are a number of strategies that would address the image of Victorian local government.

The first strategy is the implementation of a comprehensive public relations or communications campaign. Such a campaign could communicate the achievements of local government, the *Services*, facilities and programs that it provided to the community and the significance of its overall role from a community perspective.

Local government's public profile could also be enhanced through building stronger relationships with academic institutions such as universities. Academic institutions could raise the profile of local government by offering specifically targeted courses for local government elected members and officers, and by undertaking additional research on local government issues specifically. This proposal would assist Victorian local government's *Governance* and *Community Building* roles.

There is a need to address the way that the media predominantly portrays Victorian local government in a negative light. The media has a significant role in creating and perpetuating Victorian local government's poor image. It is recommended that local government leaders who are high performers in a media environment need to promote and argue local government's perspective more effectively.

The second recommendation is for Victorian local government to more successfully engage and consult with the community. The achievement of this objective requires the lack of trust and interest in government to be addressed as discussed in sections 2.3.1.2, 2.3.2.2 and 2.3.3.2 of Chapter 2, section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4 and in section 5.3.4 of this chapter.

Effective community engagement would achieve more community involvement and control of issues that impacted on them, address the general mistrust and apathy in relation to government issues and respond to the political alienation and disenchantment of the community with the political system. More effective community engagement would also enhance the achievement of *Advocacy* campaigns, achieve more effective *Planning* outcomes, assist to manage the expectations of residents in terms of the provision of *Services* and *Infrastructure* and determine what programs should be provided.

There are a number of interrelated strategies that could be implemented by management to enhance Victorian local government's role in community engagement and *Democratic* processes.

The first category focus on local government's internal processes and include the development of specific structures and programs to engage the community, the implementation of a range of initiatives to encourage participation, the implementation of transparent processes that incorporate appropriate consultation models, a review of organizational structures to facilitate effective community engagement outcomes and the development of a *Democracy* plan.

Local government should also develop processes and consultation models that facilitate input from a broad range of citizens and take account of people's time-committed lifestyles.

A number of additional recommendations regarding community engagement and consultation are also relevant to associated areas. These include appropriate training in the areas of *Democratic Governance*, the development of leadership skills, the incorporation of participatory principles throughout the organization and the facilitation of effective decision making processes.

The third group of recommendations that relate to the external environment are concerned with the political and legal framework within which Victorian local government operates. This issue was identified as a limitation in section 5.3.4 of this chapter.

The political and legal framework and consequential relationship between state government and local government result in the need for the control that is exerted by the state over local government to be reconsidered. The issue of relationships with the state government, and the federal government to a lesser extent, was discussed in regard to Victorian local government's *Democratic Governance*, *Advocacy*, *Community Building* and *Services* roles.

As outlined in Chapters 1, 2 and 4, there are tensions between local and state governments and the political framework within which local government operates.

It is recommended that Victorian local government needs to establish stronger partnerships with state and federal governments.. This strategy is specifically relevant to *Service* provision and the need to secure additional resources and funding. The need for greater partnerships is also relevant to *Community Building*. The achievement of this recommendation would result in local government more effectively connecting with programs and *Services* from other levels of government so that resources are not dissipated. State government should also provide local government with more flexibility and a greater spread of influence so that it could be more innovative.

The author is supportive of the arguments that highlight the benefits of Victorian local government achieving recognition in the Australian Constitution. This recommendation is a way to strengthen the status of local government and its relevance within the political framework..

The fourth group of recommendations relate to the issue of local government's financial capacity and the requirement for this limitation to be addressed. This issue needs to be tackled from a number of perspectives and relates to a range of both internal and external factors including Victorian local government's status within the political and legal framework. A detailed discussion of Victorian local government's financial capacity was outlined in section 1.8.2 of Chapter 1 and was identified as a limitation in section 5.3.4 of this chapter. The financial capacity of local government was also discussed in relation to *Community Building*, *Planning* and *Services* in Chapter 4.

The first proposal to tackle local government's financial capacity is that cost shifting and the unclear lines of accountabilities should be addressed.. Related to cost shifting is the requirement for a transparent agreement between state and local governments to be established so that the need to *Advocate* for resources from the state would be lessened.

The second recommendation relates to local government's tax base. The introduction of a growth tax would provide a revenue source that automatically grew as the economy grew and would address Victorian local government's lack of financial independence and capability. Another option related to financial capacity is for local government to receive a greater proportion of the national taxation base, especially to assist in the provision of *Infrastructure*.

Victorian local government also needs to examine its role in the broader context and not continue to expand *Services* and programs without additional funding sources. This strategy could be achieved through the development of appropriate *Service* models.

In relation to the external environment, discussions on the electoral structure of Victorian local government provide the fourth group of recommendations.. This limitation was identified in section 2.3.1.2 of Chapter 2, section 4.3.2 in Chapter 4 and in section 5.3.4 of this chapter.

It is recommended that the legislation relating to the electoral structure be amended so that any citizen is only able to be elected to one local government municipality at the one time and only within the ward within which they lived, voting is limited to those residents who live in the municipality and a review of postal voting for local government elections be undertaken.

The internal Victorian local government environment also results in a number of suggestions and proposals.. The first set of recommendations focus on the role of local government councillors and the mayor.

It is recommended that the mayor should not rotate on an annual basis. This would enhance Victorian local government's *Democratic* and *Advocacy* roles. It is further recommended that the roles of elected members and management be clarified and the role of elected members strengthened so that their views are given proper weight by senior management. The development of clear protocols about the roles of elected representatives and the administration would also address the behaviour of some local government councillors.

There is a need for professional development for elected members specifically regarding local government's *Democratic*, *Democratic Governance*, *Corporate Governance* and *Advocacy* roles and financial responsibilities. The development of leadership skills for elected members is also recommended.

Connected to the issue of training for local government councillors is the need for a greater awareness of the benefits of *Corporate Governance* discussions between elected members and senior management. These discussions should focus on communication processes, roles and responsibilities and policy development.

The second set of recommendations that focus on the internal environment relate to the management of Victorian local government. Limitations in this area were identified in section 5.3.4 of this chapter and previous chapters.

The first recommendation is the development of a range of performance indicators. Such indicators could relate to measurements of *Democracy*, *Governance, Community Building* and *Services..*

The ongoing review and implementation of appropriate organizational structures and internal processes has previously been raised in the context of community engagement and consultation. The issue of structures and processes was also discussed in relation to Victorian local government's role in *Community Building*. Appropriate structures and processes would result in the principles of *Community Building* being integrated throughout the organization and into the practices that underpin core *Service* programs, program design and implementation.

A further recommendation is that local government management and officers should undertake additional training in the areas of *Community Building* and relationship management. This is particularly relevant in regard to the leadership skills of the chief executive officer.

A final recommendation is that Victorian local government needs to operate on a more regional basis with *Advocacy* strategies, networking and the sharing of ideas between local government councils.

5.5   Reflections

Prior to concluding the discussion on the role of Victorian local government, the author would like to make the following observations.

Firstly, at the conclusion of the research component of this thesis and in preparing to write this chapter, it became apparent to the author that the research process of interviewing opinion leaders in comparison to reviewing the literature resulted in

slightly different research outcomes. The written material on Victorian local government as explored in the relevant literature was systematically reasoned and composed as would be expected in a written document. While the questions were provided to the respondents prior to the interview and despite the fact that the respondents were all opinion leaders in the field, the same logical progression of thought was not always apparent compared to a situation where the respondents had the opportunity to contemplate and redraft their responses. Interviews by their very nature are iterative and not as ordered as the material that was sourced from the literature.

The slightly different analysis outcomes between the various topics of the interview material were noted in section 3.4 of Chapter 3.

On the other hand, it was possible for the author to probe and follow a particular line of discussion with the respondent in a way that was clearly not possible through the literature review process. An example of this research outcome was the question on local government's performance. In the interview situation this question could be directly asked of the respondents, whereas in the literature it was not an issue that was explicitly apparent.

The issue of the different research outcomes was addressed in two ways in the analysis of both the literature and the interview material. Firstly, Chapters 2 and 4 followed a similar format so that direct comparisons of all the research material would be possible where that material was comparable. Secondly in Chapter 3 the conduct and analysis of the interview material and strategies that were implemented to ensure that the research processes were systematically undertaken were outlined.

The differences in the research process of reviewing static documents versus live interviews had implications for this chapter that was highlighting the key themes that emerged from the explorations of the primary and subsidiary research questions. In some cases there was an equally comprehensive answer to the questions under review from both the interview material and the literature review. However in other circumstances the answers to the research questions originated predominantly from one source as opposed to the other source of information. It was also apparent that in

some areas of the research, direct or extensive comparisons between the interview data and the literature were not always possible, if the material was limited.

A second observation was that, as outlined in section 1.2 of Chapter 1, the primary and subsidiary research questions that were developed focused on an analysis of Victorian local government's role from the perspective of the community. However as also outlined in section 1.3 of Chapter 1, a justification for this thesis was that the research would be useful to the local government sector throughout Australia and to the people that operated within it.

A number of practitioners within the Victorian local government sector may not be surprised by the findings of this thesis. The defining of Victorian local government's role, the benefits for the community in local government undertaking this role, the limitations and recommendations raised are issues that are grappled with on a daily basis within one context or another. It is hoped, however, that this thesis provides a comprehensive and logical discussion of those issues and that the role of Victorian local government and the limitations that impact on this role can be better understood and therefore more appropriately addressed.

It was interesting to note that the Municipal Association of Victoria recently distributed a discussion paper to all Victorian local government chief executive officers titled *Local Government Education and Awareness Program* (2007). This paper proposes a plan to raise community awareness and expand the understanding of Victorian local government's role in the areas of leadership, *Infrastructure*, *Services*, *Advocacy* and the role of elected members. It is suggested in the paper that the awareness program could be achieved through research, mass advertising, proactive media initiatives, the development of a website, branding initiatives and the implementation of a model communication strategy (Municipal Association of Victoria 2007). These types of strategies if implemented would significantly address some of the limitations that were identified in this thesis.

More research, however, and consideration needs to be now given to resolving the limitations that impact on the level of government that is closest to the people and implementing the recommendations that can address these limitations.

Finally in undertaking this research it is clear to the author that there are a number of additional areas of potential research that could be undertaken in regard to the role of Victorian local government from varying perspectives. One of these perspectives would be to examine the role of management and the different models of organizational structures. Other areas of potential research include a comparative study of Victorian local government compared to other states and a closer examination of the role of elected representatives. It is hoped that future research students and academic institutions will consider these other aspects of Victorian local government.

5.6   Conclusion

In this thesis the role of Victorian local government has been explored and delineated from a community perspective. As a level of government it has been identified that Victorian local government has six roles: *Democratic*; *Governance*; *Service* provision; *Community Building*; *Advocacy* and *Community Planning*.

The research method that underpinned this dissertation was a qualitative approach. The relevant literature that had been written on this topic was examined and discussed in relation to the primary and subsidiary research questions. Thirty-one in-depth interviews with opinion leaders were undertaken and analyzed. The format of this analysis was structured to reflect the format of the literature review. In this way connectivity between the two primary research sources was achieved.

It was identified that in both the literature and the interview material there was a significant degree of consensus on what the role of Victorian local government comprised.

The discussion on Victorian local government's role was reviewed from four perspectives. These perspectives were: the context within which Victorian local government undertook its roles; the limitations or barriers that impeded achievement of those roles; how these roles benefited the community and what recommendations

could be introduced that would enhance their implementation. The examination of Victorian local government's role was also examined within the context of its historical, political and financial context, as these factors impacted on the current and future role of local government.

An analysis of the literature and the material from the interviews revealed that there were a number of similarities between the two sources in regard to the context within which Victorian local government undertook these roles; the limitations or barriers that impeded achievement of these roles and how these roles benefited the community. There were also instances where the analysis of the literature revealed a different focus on aspects of the research questions under investigation when compared to the interview material.

In this thesis a number of recommendations have been identified that would enhance the effectiveness of Victorian local government's role. These recommendations have been developed following an analysis of the literature and the outcomes of the interview data. The recommendations relate to Victorian local government's external and internal environment and cover a range of areas.

These recommendations included the enhancement of local government's image, increased facilitation of community engagement, a review of the legal and political framework within which local government operates and in particular local government's relationship with the state government, enhancement of local government's financial capacity, changes to the electoral structure, an increase to the tenure of the mayor, additional training for elected representatives and senior officers, the development of a range of performance indicators, the need for local government to operate on a more regional basis and a review of organizational structures.

It is suggested that further research be undertaken to develop strategies and action plans so that these key recommendations, where they are appropriate, can be implemented.

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Appendix A

Biography of Respondents

(Listed in Alphabetical Order)

Bruce Billson is the Member for Dunkley (House of Representatives) and Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defense. Bruce was formerly a senior manager in local government and is actively involved in a number of community organizations.

Yehudi Blacher is the Secretary of the Department for Victorian Communities and was the previous Deputy Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Yehudi has held a number of senior management positions in the state government including youth and family services and local government.

Anna Burke is the Member of Chisholm (House of Representatives). Anna is a member of a number of Parliamentary Committees and was the Deputy Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. She is an active member of a number of community organizations.

Leonie Burke is currently the Chief of Staff for the Federal Minister for Community Services. Leonie was formerly the MLA for Prahran and Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government. She was a councillor and mayor for the City of Prahran and Chair of the Victorian Local Government Board of Review.

John Cain was the Premier of Victoria from 1982-90 and MLA for Bundoora from 1976-92. John is currently on an extensive number of not-for–profit boards including State Library Victoria, Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust, Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust and the Graduate Board, Melbourne University.

Susan Davies served as the MLA for Gippsland West as an independent for five years. Susan has held a number of positions with state government and is currently on a number of community based boards.

Prue Digby is the Executive Director Local Government, Employment and Adult Education. Prue was the former Chief Executive Officer of the City of Yarra and has held a number of senior management positions in both local and state government.

Noelene Duff is the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Whitehorse and has held a number of senior management positions in local and state government. Noelene is the past president of Local Government Professionals and national president of the Local Government Managers Association.

Rod Fyffe is a councillor for the City of Greater Bendigo and has served as mayor on two occasions. Rod is involved in a range of community and statewide activities and is a board member of the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Julie Hansen is the former President of the Victorian Local Governance Association and former Mayor and Councillor of Surf Coast Shire. Julie is involved in a number of community based organizations and professional associations.

Julian Hill is a former councillor and mayor of the City of Port Phillip and is involved in a number of community based organizations. Julian is currently Executive Director in the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Mike Hill is the former Chief Executive Officer for the Victorian Local Governance Association and was a councillor and mayor of the City of Moreland. Mike is Chair of the Victorian Local Sustainability Advisory Committee and a board member of Sustainability Victoria.

Peter Johnstone is the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Boroondara and was the CEO of the City of Moreland. Peter has held senior positions in all levels of government and is currently chair of Jesuit Social Services.

Michael Kennedy is the Chief Executive Officer of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and was the CEO of the City of Boroondara and the Shire of Hastings. Michael is a member of a number of community based boards and associations.

Nigel Kirby is the former President of Save Our Suburbs (SOS) and is a spokesperson on land use planning issues. Nigel was a councillor for the City of Boroondara and Mayor of the City of Hawthorn.

Geoff Lake is a councillor and former mayor of the City of Monash. Geoff was the President of the Municipal Association of Victoria and Vice President of the Australian Local Government Association. He is currently a board member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

James Merlino is the MLA for Monbulk and Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. James was formerly a councillor at the Shire of Yarra Ranges. He is involved in a number of community organizations.

Bernard McNamara is the Manager Planning and Research for Gandell Retail Management and has previously worked in the areas of local government, architecture and planning. Bernard is a member of a number of professional associations and advisory bodies.

Ken Ogden is General Manager, Public Policy with the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. Ken has held previous positions with Monash University and is the author and editor of several books.

Sheila O'Sullivan is the Chair of Socom Public Relations and works with all levels of government on a diverse range of issues and campaigns. Sheila's work has been recognized both nationally and internationally and she holds a number board positions.

David Risstrom is a former Melbourne City Councillor and Australian Greens candidate for the Australian Senate. David is a spokesperson on a range of issues including environmental sustainability, transport and human rights.

Andrew Rowe is the former Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Local Governance Association and was a councillor and mayor of the City of Moreland. Andrew currently holds a senior role at the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Kay Rundle is the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Greater Geelong and was the former CEO of the City of Maribyrnong. Kay has held a number of senior management positions in both local and state government and is the past president of Local Government Professionals.

Mike Salvaris is Adjunct Professor, Applied Human Rights and Community Wellbeing at RMIT and has held previous positions at Victoria University and Swinburne University. Mike is a community activist and specializes in the links between well-being measurement, democracy and human rights.

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich is the Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian for the State Library of Victoria and was previously the Acting Director-General of the National Archives of Australia. Anne-Marie is a member of a number of Australian and international professional associations.

Zana Smith is the former Executive Director for the Institute of Public Administration Australia. Prior to this position Zana held a number of senior management positions in state government. She is actively involved in a number of professional associations and trusts.

Cath Smith is the Chief Executive Officer for the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and was previously a director at Oxfam Community Aid Abroad. Kath has held a number of senior management positions in the not-for-profit sector.

Rob Spence is the Chief Executive Officer of the Municipal Association of Victoria and was the CEO of the City of Brimbank. Rob has held a number of senior positions with local and state government and the private sector.

Jennifer Tod is the former Chief Executive Officer for Glenelg Shire Council and for Yarriambiack Shire Council. Jennifer currently holds a senior management position in the ANZ Bank.

John Vogels is the MLA for Western and the Shadow Minister for Agriculture. John was previously the Liberal Spokesperson for Local Government and Victorian Communities and was a councillor and mayor of the Shire of Corangamite. He holds a number of positions on local associations and trusts.

John Warburton is the Chair of Civic Mutual Plus and the audit committee of the City of Melbourne. John's former roles include Chair of the Good Governance Advisory Group and Chief Commissioner for the City of Moreland. He currently holds a number of directorships in both public and private companies.

Appendix B

Information sent to Respondents Prior to Interview

Confirmation Letter Sent to Respondents

Dear *X*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project which is examining the role of Victorian local government from the perspective of the community. An overview of the research topic is attached for your information.

The interview will take approximately half an hour and will be recoded. A transcript will be forwarded to you. Approximately thirty interviews will be conducted with opinion leaders, including representatives from the three levels of government, peak bodies, related non-government organizations, academic institutions and business and community spokespeople.

As this research project is seeking the views of opinion leaders, you will be identified in the thesis and a few lines about your background, particularly in relation to Victorian local government will appear in one of the appendices. I shall contact you prior to the publication of the thesis to confirm that I have drafted current information.

An outline of the interview questions is as follows:

1.   Could you please outline the key phrases or headings that you believe define or describe the current role of Victorian local government in the context of the community?
2.   Can you select one (or more) of those key phrases that define or describe the role of Victorian local government and discuss:
     2.1   How you would describe or define this role?
     2.2   Why and within what context does Victorian local government undertake this role?

3. How is Victorian local government generally performing this role?

4. In thinking about a future vision for Victorian local government what factors inhibit achieving better outcomes for the community in terms of the implementation of this role?

5. How does the community benefit from Victorian local government undertaking this role?

6. What recommendations would you suggest for Victorian local government in terms of the implementation of this role that would achieve enhanced outcomes for its citizens?

Once again thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this project. I confirm our meeting time will be at (*venue*) on (*time*). Please call me on (*phone*) if you have any queries.

Regards

Catherine Dale

The Role of Local Government for a Contemporary Victorian Community

In this thesis the role of Victorian local government is examined in the context of the community. A series of research questions will be explored including:

- the role of Victorian Local Government;
- the context in which that role is undertaken
- the limitations or barriers that impede achievement of that role;
- how the achievement of Victorian local government's role benefits the community; and
- recommendations to enhance that role.

The research methodology is based on an examination of the relevant literature and interviews with approximately thirty opinion leaders.

Appendix C

Coding headings as developed by Spradley (1979 cited Lincoln and Guba 1985) as adapted for this thesis

The coding frame used for this thesis was based on the following key headings:

CONCEPT/KEY WORD
RELATED WORDS
RATIONALE
CONTEXT
LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES
OUTCOMES
STAGES
POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Local government's role in *Advocacy* has been used to illustrate the purpose of each category.

In the **CONCEPT/KEY WORD** column, the role or the key word either as identified by the participants or else as sorted into that category by the researcher was listed. The role of Victorian local government in this process can be labeled as *concept Y (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.340)*. For example Transcript 19 (T19) discussed Victorian local government's role as a *voice for the people*, but did not explicitly use the term *Advocacy*. In the context that this phrase was used, it was clear to the author of this thesis that it was Victorian local government's *Advocacy* role that was being referred to.

In the **RELATED WORDS** column, synonyms as referred to by Stemler (2001) are listed. This can be thought of as *X and X is interchangeable with the concept Y (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.340)*. Related words provide a context and a greater clarity about the concept that the respondent is describing. Synonyms, therefore, assist to refine the definition of concept Y.

Under the **RATIONALE** column the reasons for *doing concept Y (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.340)* are explained. For example a reason given by one participant (T2) as to why Victorian local government should be an *Advocate*, was to increase the level and opportunities for services and facilities for their communities.

In the **CONTEXT** column the framework or the environment in which concept Y is *relevant or is a location for action (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.340)* is described. For example in relation to Victorian local government's role as an *Advocate*, in what situations does that occur? In this column to whom or what does Victorian local government *Advocate* to is listed.

In the **LIMITATIONS** column any barriers identified by the respondents in achieving concept Y are detailed. To illustrate ideas listed in this category, in T4 it was stated that Victorian local government exhibited limited strategic capacity to achieve *Advocacy* outcomes.

In the sixth column a description of the **OUTCOMES** of the concept Y in action is provided. It answers the question: what outcomes are achieved if this role is effectively achieved. To use the example of *Advocacy*, in T1 it was stated that an outcome of *Advocacy* was to build a sense of community when the agreed goals were achieved.

Under the **STAGES** heading any *related steps or a sequence to achieving concept Y (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.340)* are outlined. For example, it was identified in T12 that engagement of the community was a critical step or a success factor in achieving effective *Advocacy*, otherwise a local government council could not be sure of what the significant issues were for that community.

Under the **POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS** heading, the antitheses of the limitation factors are listed and ways to overcome the barriers to achieving concept Y are identified.