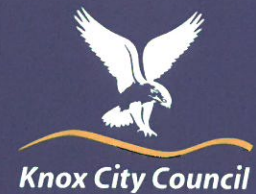


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17 December 2015

Enquiries to: Cr Karin Orpen

Att: Ms Ros Spence MLA
Chair – Local Government Act Review
Advisory Committee
Local Government Victoria
PO Box 500
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Spence

Submission - Review of the Local Government Act 1989

As a long serving Councillor of almost 20 years at the City of Knox, I welcome this opportunity to provide feedback regarding the review of the Local Government Act 1989.

At the outset, I advise that the views expressed in this submission are my own personal views and not necessarily those of Knox City Council.

The Role of Councillor

Local government is a vital element of Australia's federation. The responsibilities of local government are becoming increasingly more complex and continue to change and grow to meet the needs and expectations of the community. The traditional roles and responsibilities of local government have extended beyond rates, roads and rubbish to aspects of transport, business and economic development, health and community services, including aged, youth and disability services.

Councillors play an essential role in representing and planning for the future of their respective municipalities. They provide leadership in creating a shared vision for the community, developing plans and strategies to achieve collective goals and in delivering outcomes for the community.

The role of Councillor has changed considerably since the Local Government Act (the Act) came into effect in 1989. Amendments to the Act over the past 25 years have increased the level of regulation and accountability requiring a more considered and complex approach to decision making and Council governance. Other challenges include increased complexity and compliance in land-use planning, risk management, health and community wellbeing, economic growth and development, strategic planning and long-term financial planning.

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The rise in complexity and demands on the role of Councillor has been matched by a substantially increased workload demand on Councillors. 2015 sitting dates for State Members of Parliament show that they met 51 times during the past year. Comparatively, Knox Councillors attended a similar number of scheduled meetings during 2015 in addition to many advisory committee meetings commitments which also have a significant impact on workload.

Over recent times the role of Councillor has also been impacted by the increasing demands of community development and engagement models. The community has greater expectations of being able to interact with its elected representatives and actively contribute to and participate in decision making.

In acknowledging the above changes and increasing workload, I firmly believe that the review of the Act is an opportune time to consider the benefits associated with making the role of Councillor full time. Providing greater recognition of the role in this way would in turn promote greater diversity in candidates presenting themselves for election and align Victoria with some interstate colleagues as well as state and federal members of parliament.

Directly elected Mayors

There are many benefits associated with the notion of directly elected Mayors. A directly elected Mayor offers the possibility of greater visibility, accountability and leadership independent of party discipline through their direct mandate and four year term.

Whilst a directly elected Mayor may not enjoy specific additional powers by virtue of their role, and at times may find themselves in a minority, a personal mandate from the electorate can be seen to enable them to appeal directly to constituents, represent a diverse range of community interests, and to work more effectively with key stakeholders over the duration of the Council term. In England it has been asserted that directly elected mayors have provided more visible and accountable 'facilitative leadership', improved the performance of their councils, and established a platform for devolution of authority from central government (Kenny and Lodge 2008).

I fully support the notion of directly elected Mayors and request consideration of this matter as the Act is reviewed.

Should you have any questions regarding this submission, please contact me via email at karin.orpen@knox.vic.gov.au or by mobile: 0427 468 207.

Yours sincerely



Cr Karin Orpen
Dobson Ward – Knox City Council