
ITEM NO	:	2.1
SUBJECT	:	MEETING WITH PREMIER
CSP OUTCOME	:	COUNCIL IS RECOGNISED AND RESPECTED AS AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT ORGANISATION
DELIVERY PLAN STRATEGY	:	COUNCILLORS ARE WELL-INFORMED ABOUT ISSUES/PROJECTS
REPORTING OFFICER	:	CLR RICHARD QUINN

Ref.279863

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday afternoon, 1 December 2016, Clr Meredith Sheil and I met with the NSW Premier, the Hon Mike Baird MP, and senior staff to discuss the forced merger of Hunter's Hill Council. This meeting followed the Premier's commitment to Clr Sheil to meet with representatives of Hunter's Hill Council following Clr Sheil's question to the Premier at the Local Government NSW Conference in October 2016. Given the current legal proceedings related to this matter, it was agreed from the outset that the meeting and discussions proceed "without prejudice".

REPORT

At the meeting, Clr Sheil and I presented the current position of Hunter's Hill Council in relation to the NSW Government's forced merger with the City of Ryde and Lane Cove Council, namely that:

- Hunter's Hill Council supports to the spirit of reforms of local government in NSW;
- Our community expects a direct say, by way of poll or plebiscite, in how it is governed;
- The assumption that "bigger is better" is not widely supported by empirical analysis, and that expert opinion supported by empirical research strongly challenges this view;
- Independent surveys and presentations to the OLG's Delegate indicate that 80% of our community is opposed to a forced merger and supports the formation of a joint organisation with neighbouring councils for service delivery;
- Any forced merger will result in an adverse and major reduction of local representation, with the current Hunters Hill LGA likely to be represented by just one councillor on the proposed merged council;
- Hunters Hill LGA has unique character and sense of place that has been carefully nurtured by this community over the last 155 years since 1861;
- Given the significant reduction of local representation on the proposed council, our community will lose local control of its critical planning instruments, namely our Local Environment Plan and Development Control Plans, which to date have ensured appropriate stewardship of heritage and our built and natural environment, and our "sense of place";

- The current City of Ryde Council, which would comprise the majority area and population of the new proposed council, does not currently give appropriate priority, in the view of many in our community, to heritage and related preservation issues;
- Hunter's Hill Council fully supports the formation with the City of Ryde, Lane Cove Council and any other council, of a Joint Regional Authority (JRA) to achieve the necessary service delivery efficiencies and economies of scale, without sacrificing a significant reduction of local representation.

We presented the opinion that, in continuing to force the "big councils are better" vision on communities that do not share this vision, the Premier was reinforcing the perception that he is arrogant, dictatorial, not listening and "bulldozing" his way over community concerns. We proposed that this perception, which was reinforced by community reaction to other current issues, such as Anzac Parade Light Rail, Westconnex and greyhound racing, was at the heart of the Premier's significantly diminished popularity over the last year and the major loss of support for the NSW Government at the recent Orange by-election.

We talked further of better alternatives for improving the sustainability and cost efficiencies of councils without the need for mergers, including through better support and enabling of the Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) that already exist for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

We thanked and acknowledged the Premier for holding the meeting to listen to our points of view, and encouraged him to meet with other Mayors, Councillors and community groups that are opposing mergers to better understand the depth of community opposition to this process and the reasons for it, and to discuss and consider alternative ways forward.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There is no direct financial impact on Council's adopted budget as a result of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There is no direct environmental impact on Council arising from Council consideration of this matter.

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There is no direct social impact on Council arising from Council consideration of this matter.

RISK ASSESSMENT

There are no direct or indirect risks impacting on Council arising from consideration of this matter.

HUNTERS HILL 2030

The purpose of this report is to ensure Councillors are well informed about issues.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the report be received and noted.
2. That Mayor write to the Premier to thank him for agreeing to meet, and seeking further dialogue regarding the formation of a joint organisation

ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments to this report.