

Neighbours look at getting hitched

Matt Taylor

TALKS are under way for a Claytons-style merger between two of Sydney's smallest councils which mounted the biggest fight to remain independent during the forced amalgamation process in 2016.

Lane Cove councillors last week unanimously voted for general manager Craig Wrightson to explore the prospect of a broad "shared-service arrangement" with Hunters Hill Council.

And then Hunters Hill followed suit at a meeting on Monday night, paving the way for greater ties between the councils.

The partnership would see a rolling together of both councils' key functions, including information tech-

nology, library services, a works depot and senior staff.

Lane Cove Deputy Mayor Scott Bennison said his council was in a strong financial position and could help lift Hunters Hill out of the financial doldrums.

"Under this arrangement, both councils would retain their autonomy, but we'd be sharing more costs across the board," he said. "We already have a great relationship with Hunters Hill Council, and we see this as not only a win for both councils, but also for ratepayers, who will save money."

Hunters Hill Council, the state's smallest council with an estimated population of 14,747 in 2017, was last month given approval to increase rates from above the 2.7 per cent peg next month to im-

prove its bottom line. Hunters Hill Deputy Mayor Ben Collins lifted the lid on how his cash-strapped council's general manager, Lisa Miscamble, had been in private talks for weeks with Lane Cove's management over the possible cost-cutting measures.

He praised Ms Miscamble for "driving" a "synergy of services" with Lane Cove.

"Lisa has shown great leadership with this initiative," Cr Collins said. "Our big problem is that we don't have the economies of scale and we need to improve efficiencies to reduce costs."

"It's not a merger as such that we're looking at with Lane Cove, but rather giving both councils the benefits of a merger as we each maintain our independence."

