

Councils should be free of Party politics

LOCAL GOVERNMENT should be about local democracy with communities determining what works best in their area not some faceless political party headquarters in Macquarie or Sussex Streets Sydney.

The Liberal Party for the first time in Hunters Hill Council's history, at the last election, ran endorsed candidates.

It is reasonable to assume they were financed and supported by their Party and are expected to follow party policy.

The Liberal Party still has a policy seeking to drastically reduce the number of councils in Sydney and a policy of denying councillors any real role in strategic planning and decision-making concerning developments.

It has shown by its words and actions that it does not believe in local democracy.

NOT SATISFIED with their Party's flawed and failed bid to forcibly merge Hunters Hill Council, two Liberal endorsed councillors are now in my view attempting to discredit Council and its councillors. It is unfair for Liberal Deputy Mayor Clr Collins to assert at a recent council meeting that councillors have "failed the community" when he and his Liberal colleague Clr Miles provide no credible

To The POINT with CLR ROSS WILLIAMS



evidence or explanation to justify such a statement.

Council is making significant steps to ensure that it is sustainable and efficient and is in the process of improving its connectivity, transparency, services and financial outcome.

Council has a bright and sound future, with a new General Manager who is bringing an enthusiastic and fresh approach to our governance, leadership and service delivery.

THE STATE Government including our local member and Minister for Planning the Hon Anthony Roberts MP have been financially strangling local government by cost shifting and rate pegging.

This is not unique to Hunters Hill with most Sydney councils affected no matter how small or large.

The impact of cost shifting was a significant issue at this year's Local Government Conference and documented in a report prepared by Local Government NSW.

One might also ask, why won't this Government pay Hunter's Hill Council's legal costs for the amalgamation cases as awarded by the NSW Court of Appeal about 17 months ago?

* * *
THERE ARE some who see Council as a "Board", but I feel they do not appreciate that a council is a representative democracy which is beholden to its community and not shareholders that have a single focus of profit.

Councils must be transparent, independent and follow community concerns and needs, which is a broad and diverse agenda. A Board is an entity shrouded in confidentiality.

Over the last eight years the current Government has seriously diminished our local democracy by removing control of planning and handing it to the development industry via Local Planning Panels, complying development and private certification. Government policy supports the development industry over the rights of residents.

This has negatively impacted our council's resources and finances.

Most of the Hunters Hill community hold views on these issues opposing those of the current Government.

ROSS WILLIAMS is a current Councillor and Emeritus Mayor on Hunters Hill Council.