

Rethink mandatory IHAPS, says local government association

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Local Government NSW President Linda Scott has urged Planning Minister Anthony Roberts to rethink the mandatory imposition of new local planning panels known as Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels (IHAPs).



Recently elected LGNSW President Linda Scott

Planning Minister Anthony Roberts has claimed the IHAPs are all about probity, but the local government sector says they actually erode the community's democratic right to help determine what happens in their neighbourhood.

"IHAPs have the potential to actually reduce the accountability and transparency of planning decisions," Cr Scott said.

“Councillors are elected by and accountable to the community, while panels are not.

“And to make matters worse, ratepayers will have to foot the bill for this new layer of bureaucracy being introduced from next month for Sydney and Wollongong.

“The legislation requires councils to bear the full cost of these panels – about \$100,000 each, according to estimates by the Department of Planning and Environment.

“This means less funding for local parks, childcare centres and libraries in local communities.

“Councils will be keeping close track of the costs and will take the Government up on its commitment to recover net costs from the beneficiaries of development.”

Less than 3% of development applications (DAs) are currently referred to a council meeting for determination, with 97% being approved by professional planning staff under delegation.

LGNSW has consistently argued that councils and communities should not have an additional layer of bureaucracy imposed on them.

“Democratically-elected councils should be able to determine whether the panel option is the right choice for their area and whether there are real benefits to the community,” Cr Scott said.

“Ratepayers should be able to have confidence that they have a voice at the table via their elected representatives.

“A one-size-fits-all approach will never work in the many and varied neighbourhoods that make up Sydney and Wollongong.

“I’d urge the Planning Minister to rethink this move, and work in partnership with the local government sector to develop a better local planning system.”

<http://www.lgnsw.org.au/news/media-release/media-release-rethink-mandatory-ihaps-says-local-government>