

Senior NSW Liberal Don Harwin behind push to shrink City of Sydney: claim

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The President of the NSW Legislative Council, Don Harwin, was behind a recent push to shrink the City of Sydney council area for the benefit of the Liberal Party, according to the party's former candidate for mayor.



NSW upper house president Don Harwin. Photo: Dallas Kilponen

A former senior inner-city Liberal, Edward Mandla, has split with the party and is running on an independent ticket in next month's council elections.

Since splitting, Cr Mandla has sought to attack the role and influence of the party's factional chieftains.

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His latest attack centres on the role of Mr Harwin, an influential player in the party's moderate faction and the head of the state's upper house.

According to Cr Mandla, Mr Harwin called him to his office in 2014 to push a plan that would help the Liberals gain control of the City of Sydney council.

"Don Harwin is a factional chief. He's been organising preselections for the past 20 years. I got summoned. I got the phone call, I got called in," said Cr Mandla, the Liberal candidate for lord mayor at the 2012 council election.

"He said what I want you to do is prepare a plan to shrink the boundaries of Sydney."



Liberal city councillor Christine Forster campaigning to be Sydney's lord mayor. Cr Forster had previously proposed shrinking the council boundaries. Photo: Daniel Munoz

Mr Harwin disputes Cr Mandla's account. Asked if he instructed Cr Mandla to prepare a plan to re-size the City of Sydney council boundaries, Mr Harwin said: "That story is false."

Asked if he ever discussed splitting the council's boundaries with Cr Mandla, Mr Harwin said: "I have no further comment."

Cr Mandla said his diary listed meetings with Mr Harwin in May and September 2014. But he could not recall at which meeting the conversation about the City of Sydney took place.

Cr Mandla said the intention of re-drawing the council boundaries around the central business would be to "hand control of the City of Sydney to the Liberal Party". Under the proposed boundaries, residential areas that have tended to vote for the incumbent lord mayor, Clover Moore, would be excised from the City of Sydney.

Although Cr Mandla said he wrote a report making such recommendations, he ultimately did not like the idea and never handed in the report.

In mid-2015, however, fellow City of Sydney Liberal councillor Christine Forster, the current Liberal candidate for mayor, proposed shrinking the council boundaries. In a submission to a review of local government, Cr Forster proposed redrawing the boundaries of the council area to exclude areas like Redfern, Alexandria, Glebe, and Pyrmont.

Cr Forster said on Wednesday it was "completely untrue" that she had made the proposal on the suggestion of anyone else. "It was a proposal that I thought had merit for consideration as part of the review of boundaries then underway."

At the time the Baird government's council amalgamation plans potentially included a larger City of Sydney. Cr Forster said she proposed the smaller council in that context and was currently "agnostic" on the idea.

Fairfax Media revealed this week that Cr Forster's campaign manager, Mitchell Price, had to repay about \$14,000 to the Mardi Gras after it emerged he had charged personal expenses to the organisation.

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