

Amalgamated councils performing ‘significantly lower than existing councils’, report reveals

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EXCLUSIVE, Ben Pike



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THE first report card by ratepayers on amalgamated councils is in, and the results are not pretty.

Stand-alone councils have outperformed amalgamated councils in eight out of 10 key criteria, a confidential survey, which the state government has tried to keep secret, has revealed.

The report of 10,000 residents' satisfaction levels reveals that simply amalgamating councils has not resolved people's anger with their local government.

The report was conducted on behalf of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and obtained under freedom of information laws.



A number of protests took place when councils were merged.

Amalgamated councils are also performing “significantly lower than existing councils” on two of 10 core performance measures, the \$76,000 report found.

Those two underperforming measures were “being a well-run and managed council” (55 out of 100 for amalgamated councils compared to 58 for existing councils) and “informing the community” (56/59).

Amalgamated councils are also being embarrassed by their more established counterparts in customer service, scoring 69 compared to the established council figure of 72.

The only measure where amalgamated councils finished ahead, by a margin of three, was in “condition of local streets and footpaths”.

“All the evidence shows that just making councils bigger doesn’t make them better,” opposition local government spokesman Peter Primrose said.

“It is common sense that just forcing together two councils with financial problems won’t fix things up,” he said.

The JWS Research survey was done in September last year, four months after the government announced it was cutting 41 Sydney councils to about 20.

The FOI documents also reveal the DPC's strenuous efforts to keep the survey results under wraps.

The department has gagged councils from releasing the findings, according to emails obtained by The Sunday Telegraph.



Tonya Boiko, 35, with daughter Jenny is part of the newly amalgamated Cumberland Council but said it needed to pick up its game. Picture: Sam Rutty

Tonya Boiko, 35, a mother of two, is a resident of newly amalgamated Cumberland Council area. She said the council "had been OK" but needed to pick up its game on park lighting and car spaces.

A DPC spokeswoman said the survey was about working out how councils could deliver better value for their ratepayers.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/amalgamated-councils-performing-significantly-lower-than-existing-councils-report-reveals/news-story/bd296743b24b8a612f425b9e6ae9d825>