



Our Ref: 18/1098

7 February 2018

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Ms Alex Johnston
Secretariat
Tasmanian Industrial Commission
GPO Box 1108
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Submission – Councillor Allowances Review Issues Paper

I am writing in relation to the Councillor Allowances Review Issues Paper circulated to Councils for comment.

Please find attached Dorset Councils submission.

If you have any further questions on the submission, please don't hesitate to contact me on 0409 546 247 or via email mayorhoward@dorset.tas.gov.au

Yours sincerely

GREG HOWARD
Mayor



Dorset Council Submission - Councillor Allowance Enquiry

Councillor/Aldermen (councillor) allowances are currently determined by a formula based on the number of voters in the municipality and the total revenue. This formula gives rise to huge discrepancies in the amount of the allowances, which appear to far exceed the variances in responsibilities and the amount of time it takes to fulfil those responsibilities.

There appears to be a very reasonable argument that the gap between the small councils and the city councils is too great with the difference between the fourteen smaller councils and the two largest councils varying by a ratio of approximately 287% - 389% for councillors and mayors.

While there is no argument that councillors, deputy mayors and mayors in larger councils are responsible for more residents and would undoubtedly be required to spend more time servicing those residents, the ratio difference cannot be substantiated, especially for mayors because there are simply not that many hours in a day.

Under the current formula there is no recognition of the size of the municipality in area and the smaller councils by population, usually rural councils, are often larger by area, which obviously takes more time to service.

While it is accepted that councillors can claim travelling allowances on a kilometre basis there is no consideration for the amount of time it takes to traverse the municipality to perform the functions of a councillor. For most of the city councils it is possible to drive from one side to the other in 30 to 40 minutes or less whereas in rural councils, to do the same can often take in excess of 2 hours. This often means a short meeting with a resident or community group can take in excess of half a day.

My suggestion is that councillors, deputy mayors and mayors should be paid a pro rata allowance, on top of normal allowances to reimburse them for their time taken up during travelling. The pro rata allowance would be calculated on the size of the municipalities, in thousands of square kilometres with no additional allowance under one thousand square kilometres.

Additionally councillors in the smaller councils are undoubtedly closer to the community than larger councils with phone numbers and addresses usually on council websites and even without this information, residents in small communities tend to know where councillors live. This results in lots of personal visits to councillors homes by residents.

One of the major impediments to attracting quality candidates for council elections is that allowances in general are too low and need to be increased substantially across the board. Currently the workload of councillors, results in elected members coming from limited demographics within community and therefore not truly representative of community. These demographics tend to be retired or semi-retired, self-employed, unemployed or in receipt of some sort of pension. It is difficult for fully employed residents to stand for election and perform all of the functions required unless they have an extremely understanding employer or flexible working arrangements. While having a part time job and serving as a councillor is an option, the low level of allowances in smaller councils would still make it difficult to earn enough for a reasonable standard of living.

The role of mayor and deputy mayor was redefined in the latest review of the Local Government Act. These changes have added responsibilities to both roles, plus the general nature of council business has changed since 2008 adding further roles to mayors, deputy mayors and councillors. Councils have moved far beyond the old days of roads, rates and rubbish and have taken on new roles in community development, social responsibilities (once the roles of the Federal and State governments), health care, attraction and promotion of new business and managing the impact of major business closures. Recent examples of this in Dorset are

1. The Aminya aged care facility bought by Council to prevent closure,
2. Council buying into the Scottsdale Irrigation scheme to ensure construction went ahead.
3. Council's role in the North East Destination Action Plan.
4. Council's incentive scheme for new business.
5. Advocacy on behalf of a number of prospective businesses with Government and the bureaucracy.
6. Council involvement in the fallout from the closure of Gunns.
7. Council involvement in the fallout from the closure of two major sawmills in Dorset

In recent times councillors have been required to undertake additional roles in areas such as audit panels and health and safety committees, have been subjected to constant changes to accounting standards, which have a significant effect on how budgets are presented and therefore have been required to attend additional training to keep up with those changes.

Since 2010 Councils have been forced to implement Codes of Conduct which places additional responsibilities on councillors and more recently with a single Code of Conduct which on its own is not necessarily a bad thing. However the new Code far exceeds any level of conduct required by well remunerated State or Federal politicians especially when it comes to interaction with community. This code is so unworkable that it allows residents to unfairly target councillors, often with issues not of their making, while almost banning councillors of any opportunity to respond. It is

fully understood that this Code is under review, however unless significant changes are made, no person in their right mind would submit themselves to this type of abuse for what, in all intent and purpose is a paltry sum of money.

Dorset Council believes that the review of allowances should be conducted in conjunction with a review of councillor numbers at all councils. It is suggested that most councils have too many councillors and a reduction could be achieved without affecting the responsible management of councils or the interest of residents.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Howard', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

GREG HOWARD
Mayor