

From: rosie walsh [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 3 January 2022 4:15 PM
To: DLGSC Act Review
Subject: Local Government Reforms submission

Categories: Jen

SUBMISSION - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS - in regard to the COTTESLOE COUNCIL

Regarding transparency and accountability

- During recent years council decisions have been dominated by bloc-voting.
- The impression that decisions are made before council meetings with no regard or importance given to residents' questions and statements if they don't align with the ruling faction.
- Officer reports often lack background, history and accuracy. They recommend the officer's opinion and/or that of the voting faction.
- Minutes are not true records.
- During the last two council elections, aligned candidates collaborated with local sporting groups and the two public primary schools and consequently many hundreds of electors were contacted for votes. Opposing candidates' names were published as being unsupportive of club and school proposals requiring council support. Confidential volunteer member databases were accessed, which were not available to other candidates or their supporters.
- Concerns emailed to mayor and councillors very rarely receive replies. The CEO occasionally replies despite not being an addressee.
- Questions at public question time are too often 'taken on notice' and not responded to until a month later at the next public meeting, when they can be irrelevant.
- There are too many confidential Council meetings that do not fit the local government requirements.

Democracy and community engagement

- During recent years the council has:-
- (a) first made major decisions, (b) then employed consultants, (c) then finally consulted the community on the result. Proper governance would seek community aspirations first.
- Community consultations have been inequitable, including active council lobbying for submissions from outside of Cottesloe to support their plans (e.g. the council invited 9 schools with thousands of students outside the electorate to comment on a proposed skate park). Despite the responsibility to represent their district, the council has a habit of inviting submissions from the "wider community" as they go about 'making changes' in the suburb.
- Predetermined outcomes. Consultants are given the Council's position before giving a professional analysis. In at least one case, an expensive consultant advised against a particular site and was told to write another report favouring the council decision. The result was an inaccurate report citing incorrect figures discovered by concerned residents.
- Community surveys are biased towards predictable results.

- Surveys have omitted costings, fundings, specifications and future growth for council plans in public space.
-

Financial Management and reporting

- The cavalier spending on consultants to support council decisions is of most concern. Many jobs that were previously handled by qualified staff have been given at the community's expense, to consultants. In my opinion, they use consultants to add weight to their preconceived decisions.
- Residents are asked to comment on proposals without any breakdown of costs, funding or future expansion.
- Recent Council finances demonstrate expenditures have been exorbitant and funding of large-scale decisions will be a problem for the community.

Caretaker Periods

- Blatant important decisions were made in favour of the clubs mentioned above at the Council meeting during the 2021 election period, despite several residents present, pointing out the lack of democracy in even considering them. This would definitely have had an effect on the election outcome. Caretaker periods are essential to democracy.

I have already emailed the Dept. Local Government as to the behaviour of the presiding member (subsequently elected mayor) at that meeting who shocked the large number of residents present, with her unforgettable, overbearing conduct.

Recording of meetings

- Meetings are recorded in Cottesloe but are unavailable to residents who have been told they are confidential.
- Transparent recording of meetings is much-needed in Cottesloe.
- (a) It would maybe lessen the antipathy and disrespect shown to residents who bother to turn up with concerns.
- (b) For those who can't turn up, community business should be available as it happens and it would put an end to inaccurate transcribing of public statements in the minutes and would maybe get answers to residents' questions.

In Cottesloe the 'entitlement' of some of the elected members - those who vote together on almost every item, is palpable at meetings and reform is needed. They seem to have wish-lists and are prepared to disregard, or are ignorant, of proper process.

Reform is definitely needed.

R D Walsh

