

6.2.10 Independent Local Government Review Panel Response

REPORT BY THE GENERAL MANAGER TO 2 APRIL 2014 COUNCIL MEETING

Local Government Independent Review Panel Response

GOV400038, A0170031

RECOMMENDATION

That:

1. **the report by the General Manager on the Independent Local Government Review Panel Response be received;**
2. **Council respond to the State Government on the 65 recommendations in the NSW Independent Local Government Independent Review Panel in accordance with the responses in this report (as amended if any).**

Detailed report

As Council will be aware the Minister of Local Government has now release the final report of the NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel. The panel's report is focused on wide ranging and concerted action that they consider essential to made NSW Local Government sustainable and fit for purpose into the mid 21st century. The panel has made 65 recommendations.

Set out below are the 65 recommendations that the Panel have made with the proposed Council response. This report should be read in conjunction with the review panels final report provided to Councillors under separate cover. Submissions on this report originally close on 7 March 2014 but the Minister has extended submissions to the 7th April

At the Council meeting on the 5th March additional comments were made by Council which added to or amended the recommendations. The changes are highlighted in yellow below.

RECOMMENDATIONS	COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
Fiscal Responsibility	
1 Establish an integrated Fiscal Responsibility Program, coordinated by DLG and also involving TCorp, IPART and LGNSW to address the key findings and recommendations of TCorp's financial sustainability review and DLG's infrastructure audit (5.1 and 5.3)	Agree. It's important that such a program be prepared that sets the minimum standard required of a local government unit. It is also important that local government is able to review and have input into the design of the program
2 As part of the program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt an agreed set of sustainability benchmarks (5.1) • Introduce more rigorous guidelines for Delivery Programs as proposed in Box 9 (5.2) • Commission TCorp to undertake regular follow-up sustainability assessments (5.3) • Provide additional training programs for councillors and staff (5.3) • Require all councils to employ an appropriately qualified Chief Financial Officer (5.3) 	Agree as per comments in answer to question 1 above. Agree Agree Agree Agree - but could be amended to require either employee or consultant hired to oversee financials
3 Place local government audits under the aegis of	Agree - as long as there is accountabilities in

RECOMMENDATIONS	COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
the Auditor General (5.4)	place and that costs are controlled as not become a further financial burden on local government
4 Ensure that the provisions of the State-Local Government Agreement are used effectively to address cost-shifting (5.5)	Agree. Such an agreement must have realistic and achievable outcomes that State Government is committed to genuinely addressing the cost shifting. A clause should be included that Government cannot pass legislation that affects local government until the cost shifting mechanisms have been addressed.
Strengthening Revenues	
5 Require councils to prepare and publish more rigorous Revenue Policies (6.1)	Disagree. The community has the ability to make submissions during the public consultation process on the Operational and Delivery Plans and seeking explanations on all policies and Council plans. This is an area that communities have not expressed an interest and thus why increase the bureaucracy.
6 Commission IPART to undertake a further review of the rating system focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options to reduce or remove excessive exemptions and concessions that are contrary to sound fiscal policy and jeopardise councils' long term sustainability (6.2) • More equitable rating of apartments and other multi-unit dwellings, including giving councils the option of rating residential properties on Capital Improved Values, with a view to raising additional revenues where affordable (6.3) 	<p>Such a review needs to cover a wider focus.</p> <p>A number of Councils are having difficulty with the rating of mines. Recent court decision have meant that land owned by coal mines that is currently used for mining purposes cannot be necessarily rated mining pursuant to Section 517 of the Local Government Act. Mining companies purchase land for noise and dust attenuation purposes as well as for environmental offsets. These lands are taken away from agricultural purposes and the mine cannot operate without this land. It is therefore appropriate that this land be rated mining.</p> <p>Also mining companies, as part of their environmental offset programs are gifting land to the State Government and declaring it national park or conservation land. This automatically makes the land non-rateable, even though they are often mining under the land, or require the land for a buffer between their operations and neighbours.</p> <p>There needs to be a complete and detailed review of the legislation relating to this matter so that local communities are not subsidising mining companies through their rates, because they have the resources to be able to work their way around the system.</p>
7 Either replace rate-pegging with a new system of 'rate benchmarking' or streamline current arrangements to remove unwarranted complexity, costs, and constraints to sound financial management (6.5)	<p>This Council supports the retention of rate pegging and that Government looks at other methods of funding that will assist Local Government in funding the infrastructure back log.</p> <p>However Council is requesting Government to amend the legislation that allows Councils to</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS	COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
	rate temporary state significant developments beyond the rate cap. When a new development is imposed on a Council area such as a coal mine the cost of maintaining infrastructure increases. The property that the mine owns and/or operates will have a changes in rate categorisation and thus a higher rate in the dollar. Any additional income from that recategorisation should be additional rate income to Council and not form part of the rate cap. And when the temporary development ceases then Councils can still maintain the original rate income without a sharp cost burden to the other ratepayers when the development ceases to operated
8 Subject to any legal constraints, seek to redistribute federal Financial Assistance Grants and some State grants in order to channel additional support to councils and communities with the greatest needs (6.6)	Agree. There needs to be more support of all communities and the infrastructure they require from the Federal Government. There will also need to be put in place an agreed, rigorous and fair methodology to achieve this.
9 Establish a State- borrowing facility to encourage local government to make increased use of debt where appropriate by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the level of interest rates paid by councils • Providing low-cost financial and treasury management advisory services (6.7) 	Agree. There also needs to be a review of the guidelines dictated by the State Government through the Division of Local Government that allows councils to better use its surplus funds for internal borrowings for infrastructural capital projects, as long as the long-term financial strategies competently address all issues into the future.
10 Encourage councils to make increased use of fees and charges and remove restrictions on fees for statutory approvals and inspections, subject to monitoring and benchmarking by IPART (6.8)	Agree. The fees need to reflect an appropriate level of cost recovery based on service level, user benefit and principles of equity.
Meeting Infrastructure Needs	
11 Factor the need to address infrastructure backlogs into any future rate-pegging or local government cost index (7.1)	Refer to comments to question 7 above. Local councils understand their infrastructural backlog needs, and some of this backlog could be addressed with more royalties from mining becoming available to communities that are most impacted by those mining operations
12 Maintain the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme (LIRS) for at least 5 years, with a focus on councils facing the most severe infrastructure problems (7.2)	Agree but requires broader scope in terms of eligible projects and a payback period that is more representative of the asset life.
13 Pool a proportion of funds from the roads component of federal Financial Assistance Grants and, if possible, the Roads to Recovery program in order to establish a Strategic Projects Fund for roads and bridges that would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide supplementary support for councils facing severe infrastructure backlogs that cannot reasonably be funded from other available sources • Fund regional projects of particular economic, social or environmental value (7.2) 	Agree, however such a pool of funds will need some very strict guidelines and input by Local Government. The last thing Local Government needs is to again be going 'cap in hand' to some form of Government committee to determine what the priority for roads needs is in the community. The politics will need to be taken out of the guidelines. The process will need to be rigorous and transparent.

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14 Require councils applying for supplementary support from the Strategic Projects Fund to undergo independent assessments of their asset and financial management performance (7.2)	Agree.
15 Carefully examine any changes to development (infrastructure) contributions to ensure there are no unwarranted impacts on council finances and ratepayers (7.3)	Agree.
16 Adopt a similar model to Queensland's Regional Roads and Transport Groups in order to improve strategic network planning and foster ongoing improvement of asset management expertise in councils (7.4)	Agree.
17 Establish Regional Water Alliances as part of new regional Joint Organisations proposed in section 11 (7.5).	Strongly disagree. This is only adding an additional layer of bureaucracy to Local Government which is unnecessary. Most councils are managing their financials and water supplies extremely competently and effectively. To suggest that an additional layer of bureaucracy be part of the management of our water and sewer schemes is only adding additional unnecessary costs to the community.
Improvement, Productivity and Accountability	
18 Adopt a uniform core set of performance indicators for councils, linked to IPR requirements, and ensure ongoing performance monitoring is adequately resourced (8.1)	Agree, but such performance indicators must be practical and easily developed. Local Government is all about delivering services to its community, not regularly focused on producing performance indicators that consume resources and add additional costs to the infrastructure with no sustainable benefit.
19 Commission IPART to undertake a whole-of-government review of the regulatory, compliance and reporting burden on councils (8.2)	Agree. Such a review should involve Local Government personnel to ensure the outcomes are pragmatic and achievable.
20 Establish a new sector-wide program to promote, capture and disseminate innovation and best practice (8.3)	Agree.
21 Amend IPR Guidelines to require councils to incorporate regular service reviews in their Delivery Programs (8.4)	Agree.
22 Strengthen requirements for internal and performance auditing as proposed in Box 17 (8.5)	Agree, but again, this needs to be pragmatic. Internal and performance auditing is essential to good outcomes of Local Government, however the auditing process needs to have practical and deliverable outcomes that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our service delivery to our community.
23 Introduce legislative provisions for councils to hold Annual General Meetings (8.6)	Disagree. This is an unnecessary additional bureaucratic burden upon Local Government with no deliverable outcome which will improve services to our community. If councils are of the

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	<p>opinion that this would be useful for their community, then they can do it on a voluntary basis. It should not be part of legislation to add yet another impost upon the organisation that will achieve very little outcome. The integrated planning and reporting process is more than sufficient for Local Government to effectively engage with its community. There are no tangible benefits to communities for an AGM.</p>
<p>24 Develop a NSW Local Government Workforce Strategy (8.7)</p>	<p>Agree in principle but the detail of the strategy will need to have extensive local government input.</p>
<p>25 Explore opportunities for the Local Government Award to continue to evolve to address future challenges facing the sector and changing operational needs.</p>	<p>Agree. Any review of the Local Government award should be delegated to individual councils. It is inappropriate for a state award that is generic to all councils in NSW. What is right for an industrial situation in a Sydney council is not necessarily appropriate for a regional council. Each council should be given the right to settle its own industrial award with its own staff and this role should be taken away from a state wide controlled and directed outcome.</p>
Political Leadership and Good Governance	
<p>26 Amend the Local Government Act to strengthen political leadership:</p>	<p>Agree.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require councils to undertake regular 'representation reviews' covering matters such as the number of councillors, method of election and use of wards (9.1) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before their nomination is accepted, require all potential candidates for election to local government to attend an information session covering the roles and responsibilities of councillors and mayors (9.1) 	<p>Agree.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend the legislated role of councillors and mayors as proposed in Boxes 19 and 21, and introduce mandatory professional development programs (9.2 and 9.3) 	<p>Agree - but restricted to core activities such as IP & R, Code of Conduct and Meeting procedure</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for full-time mayors, and in some cases deputy mayors, in larger councils and major regional centres (9.3) 	<p>Agree</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend the provisions for election of mayors as proposed in Box 22 (9.3) 	<p>Agree</p>
<p>27 Increase remuneration for councillors and mayors who successfully complete recognised professional development programs (9.2-9.4)</p>	<p>Agree. It is unreasonable that a city councillor is paid substantially more than regional councillors. The workload is in no way greater in the city than it is in a regional rural council. As a matter of fact, it could be argued that the workload in rural areas is greater because of distance and travel. It is unreasonable that councillors in regional areas managing an area the size of</p>

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	<p>Mid-Western Regional Council and its population is paid less than \$10,000, when its city counterparts are paid considerably more. Although being a councillor is a community service, there also needs to be compensation for the impost on their private lives. The current remuneration paid to councillors prohibits many in the community from being able to participate because it has such a financial strain upon their private affairs. The current payments are unreasonable and restrictive for full participation by community members and local democracy.</p>
<p>28 Amend the legislated role and standard contract provisions of General Managers as proposed in Boxes 23 and 24 (9.5)</p>	<p>Agree.</p>
<p>29 Amend the provisions for organisation reviews as proposed in section 9.6</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>30 Develop a Good Governance Guide as a basis for 'performance improvement orders' and to provide additional guidance on building effective working relationships between the governing body, councillors, mayors and General Managers (9.7)</p>	<p>Agree</p>
<p>Advance Structural Reform</p>	
<p>31 Introduce additional options for local government structures, including regional Joint Organisations, 'Rural Councils' and Community Boards, to facilitate a better response to the needs and circumstances of different regions (10.1)</p>	<p>This Council opposes the introduction of Community Boards. Community Boards are another layer of Local Government which adds further additional cost that communities cannot afford. To use the Community Board structure as experienced in New Zealand is expensive, cumbersome and delays effective decision making. It is recognised that Councils need to improve effective consultation with their communities and a lot of this is happening via the I P & R process.</p>
<p>32 Legislate a revised process for considering potential amalgamations and boundary changes through a re-constituted and more independent Boundaries Commission (10.3)</p>	<p>This Council was amalgamated in 2004 and the positive outcomes and results are very evident. This Council is of the opinion that an ultimate size of a council needs to be addressed so that outcomes are not based on simplistic criteria. For example this Council believes that the creation of the Mid Western in 2004 achieved a good outcome. The Council is 9,000 square kilometres with 24,000 population and is now financially sustainable. This Council is now able to meet the demands of a community by addressing environmental, cultural and social needs. It is the right size.</p> <p>However this Council's opinion is that further amalgamations in NSW's Local Government need to occur. Our communities are demanding more effective, efficient and modern governance, which a number of small councils cannot achieve because of lack of resources. In box 27 of the panel's report, a set of criteria for</p>

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	<p>determining Local Government boundaries has been highlighted. In consultation with Local Government we need to expand upon those criteria and establish minimum criteria. Councils need to meet that minimum criteria to retain their separate entities. If Local Government industry throughout NSW retains weak units of Local Government that don't meet the minimum criteria, then we are all opening ourselves up for criticism. This is an opportunity to become a strong industry that earns the respect and credibility of our communities.</p>
<p>33 Encourage voluntary mergers of councils through measures to lower barriers and provide professional and financial support (10.4)</p>	<p>Voluntary mergers of council will not improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Local Government that this reform is trying to achieve. Councils need to meet a certain minimum criteria as discussed in recommendation 32, otherwise they are not serving their community in a manner considered appropriate. The problem with voluntary mergers is that there are too many individuals protecting self interests as opposed to objectively creating a better and more modern Local Government for the communities they serve.</p>
<p>34 Provide and promote a range of options to maintain local identity and representation in local government areas with large populations and/or diverse localities (10.5)</p>	<p>It is inappropriate to suggest that an area will lose its local identity if they lose their local council situated within their township or regional area. Local communities are larger and more robust than just the Councils Local communities focus on many aspects of social and community life. Local Government needs to focus on the delivery of effective and quality services at an affordable cost rather than where the local Council headquarters are. Because a merger of two local communities form one council, this will never mean that one of those towns will disappear from existence, but it does mean that those towns maybe better served with better resources.</p>

Regional Joint Organisations

<p>35 Establish new Joint Organisations for each of the regions shown on Maps 2 by means of individual proclamations negotiated under new provisions of the Local Government Act that replace those for County Councils(11.5)</p>	<p>This Council supports the concept of regional joint organisations (whatever their final name) to deliver high level strategic direction, political advocacy and joint service deliveries as considered appropriate by the joint organisation. But this will only succeed if some of the current decision making is relinquished by State Government. An example of this would be the compilation of Land Use Strategies and Local Environment Plans. The joint organisation should have the delegated authority to approve all of these with the State Planning Department having submission power only.</p> <p>This Council opposes Mid-Western Region being included in the Central West joint</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defer establishment of JOs in the Sydney metropolitan region, except for sub-regional strategic planning, pending further consideration of options for council mergers (11.5) 	<p>organisation and requests that this Council belong to the Hunter joint organisation. This Council is currently a member of the Hunter Organisation of Councils (HROC). The Council joined HROC because it has a number of commonalities with the other member councils in that ROC such as, mining, agriculture and wine growing. It is important that this Council is put into the Hunter joint organisation and moved away from the Central West.</p> <p>It is also important that Joint Organisations determine the functions in which they are involve rather than that being determined by legislation. This is particularly relevant for service delivery function such as Library Services.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enter into discussions with 2-3 regions to establish 'pilot' JOs (11.5) 	<p>No comment as it does not affect this Council</p> <p>Agree</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-constitute existing County Councils as subsidiaries of new regional Joint Organisations, as indicated in Table 5 (11.2) 	<p>This Council is of the opinion that inefficient and ineffective county council should be abolished and become part of JO's. There are a number of these in the state and unless County Council are financially sustainable then they need to become part of the JO</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Regional Water Alliances in each JO along the lines proposed in the 2009 Armstrong-Gellatly report (11.3) 	<p>Strongly disagree. This may be appropriate for areas where there are common boundaries between existing water authorities, but in regional and rural NSW a number of our towns are separated by significant physical distance and to have a regional water alliance would only create additional cost burdens upon the community. The 2009 report stated that there would be strategic benefits in high level managerial direction by having water alliances, but this should be overcome by the minimum criteria determined for Local Government amalgamation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set the core functions of Joint Organisations by means of Ministerial Guidelines (11.6) 	<p>Agree.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek federal government agreement to make JOs eligible for general-purpose FAGs (11.6) 	<p>Agree</p>
<p>36 Identify one or more regional centres within each Joint Organisation and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a network of those centres to drive development across regional NSW (11.7) Consider potential mergers of councils to consolidate regional centres, as indicated in Table 6 (11.7) 	<p>Agree</p>

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<p>37 Develop close working partnerships between Joint Organisations and State agencies for strategic planning, infrastructure development and regional service delivery (11.8), and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add representatives of Joint Organisations to State agency Regional Leadership Groups (11.8) • Give particular attention to cross-border issues and relationships in the operations of Joint Organisations and in future regional strategies (11.9) 	Agree
'Rural Councils' and Community Boards	
<p>38 Establish a working party as part of the Ministerial Advisory Group proposed in section 18 to further develop the concept of 'Rural Councils' for inclusion in the re-written Local Government Act (12.1)</p>	Agree
<p>39 Include provisions for <i>optional</i> Community Boards in the re-written Act, based on the New Zealand model, but also enabling the setting of a supplementary 'community rate' with the approval of the 'parent' council (12.2)</p>	<p>This Council remains opposed to the introduction of Community Boards because of the reasons set out in the comments to recommendation 31. However if Community Boards are to be introduced they must remain optional and that the parent Council has the ability to say no to the establishment of Community Boards. This Council is concerned that Community Boards are simply another layer of governance which adds cost to the parent Council. A number of the New Zealand community boards often act as a ratepayer interest group rather than meaningfully contributing to the betterment of the Council and the community they serve</p>
Metropolitan Sydney	
<p>40 Strengthen arrangements within State government for coordinated metropolitan planning and governance, and to ensure more effective collaboration with local government (13.1)</p>	<p>This section (recommendations 40 to 46) does not affect this Council. However Council makes the comment that a more efficient local government in Sydney with forced amalgamations there could be additional Federal Money for Regional NSW Councils</p>
<p>41 Seek evidence-based responses from metropolitan councils to the Panel's proposals for mergers and major boundary changes, and refer both the proposals and responses to the proposed Ministerial Advisory Group (section 18.1) for review, with the possibility of subsequent referrals to the Boundaries Commission (13.3)</p>	No Comment
<p>42 Prioritise assessments of potential changes to the No Comment boundaries of the Cities of Sydney and Parramatta, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain a separate City of Sydney Act to recognise its Capital City role • Establish State-local City Partnership Committees for Sydney and Parramatta along the lines of Adelaide's Capital City Committee (13.4) 	No Comment
<p>43 Pending any future action on mergers, establish</p>	No Comment

RECOMMENDATIONS	COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
Joint organisations of councils for the purposes of strategic sub-regional planning (13.5)	
44 Maximise utilisation of the available local government revenue base in order to free-up State resources for support to councils in less advantaged areas (13.6)	No Comment
45 Continue to monitor the sustainability and appropriateness in their current form of the Hawkesbury, Blue Mountains and Wollondilly local government areas (13.7)	No Comment
46 Promote the establishment of a Metropolitan Council of Mayors (13.8)	No Comment
Hunter, Central Coast and Illawarra	
47 Seek evidence-based responses from Hunter and Central Coast councils to the Panel's proposals for mergers and boundary changes, and refer both the proposals and responses to the proposed Ministerial Advisory Group (section 18.1) for review, with the possibility of subsequent referrals to the Boundaries Commission (14.1 and 14.2)	As this section (recommendation s 47 to 49) does not affect this Council is offers no comment
48 Defer negotiations for the establishment of a Central Coast Joint Organisation pending investigation of a possible merger of Gosford and Wyong councils (14.2)	No Comment
49 Pursue the establishment of Joint Organisations for the Hunter and Illawarra in accordance with Recommendation 35 (14.1 and 14.3)	No Comment
Non-Metropolitan Regions	
50 Explore options for non-metropolitan councils in Group A as part of establishing the Western Region Authority proposed in section 16 (15.1)	As this recommendation not affect this Council is offers no comment
51 Refer councils in Groups B-F to the Boundaries Commission in accordance with Table 11 and the proposed timeline (15.1)	Please refer to recommendation 32 above where the State Government needs to address a minimum criteria for the existence of a Council. If that minimum criteria is not met then the future of the Council needs to be examined by an independent panel.
52 Complete updated sustainability assessments and revised long term asset and financial plans for the 38 councils identified in Table 11 by no later than mid-2015 (15.2)	Agree
Far West region	
53 Agree in principle to the establishment of a Far West Regional Authority with the functions proposed in Box 39 and membership as proposed in Figure 9 (16.3)	As this section (recommendation s 53 to 55) does not affect this Council is offers no comment
54 Adopt the preferred new arrangements for local	No Comment

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government set out in Box 40 as a basis for further consultation (16.4)	
55 Establish a project team and reference group of key stakeholders within the DPC Regional Coordination Program to finalise proposals (16.5)	No Comment
State-Local Government Relations	
56 Use the State-Local Agreement as the basis and framework for a range of actions to build a lasting partnership, and negotiate supplementary agreements as appropriate (17.2)	Agree
57 Introduce new arrangements for collaborative, whole-of-government strategic planning at a regional level (17.3)	Agree, but ensure that the State Government resources the collaborative needs that ensures the strategic approach is effective. This would be critical to the future sustainability of the process
58 Amend the State Constitution to strengthen recognition of elected local government (17.4)	Agree
59 Seek advice from LGNSW on the measures it proposes to take to meet its obligations under the State-Local Agreement (17.5)	Agree
60 Strengthen the focus of DLG on sector development and seek to reduce its workload in regulation and compliance (17.6)	Agree
Driving and Monitoring Reform	
61 Establish a Ministerial Advisory Group and Project Management Office (18.1 and 18.2)	Agree
62 Refer outstanding elements of the Destination 2036 Action Plan to the Ministerial Advisory Group (18.1)	Agree
63 Adopt in principle the proposed priority initial implementation package set out in Box 42, as a basis for discussions with LGNSW under the State-Local Government Agreement (18.3)	Agree
64 Further develop the proposals for legislative changes detailed in Boxes 43 and 44, and seek to introduce the amendments listed in Box 43 in early 2014 (18.5)	Agree
65 Adopt in principle the proposed implementation timeline (18.6)	Agree

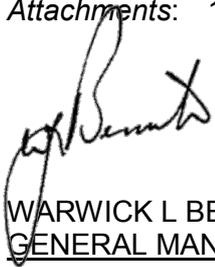
Financial and Operational Plan implications

Not applicable.

Community Plan implications

The response to the Panel report will set the direction of the Local Government direction for many years to come.

Attachments: 1. The NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel Report was sent to Councillors recently. If you require an additional copy please contact the writer.



WARWICK L BENNETT
GENERAL MANAGER

21 March 2014