

5.4 Serving in Local Government

Recommendation

That the information be noted.

Firstly, I would like to start by thanking my fellow Councillors for re-electing me on Tuesday, 5 September, as the Mayor of Campbelltown. I am honoured and humbled to have been elected by my fellow Councillors and to have increased my majority from 8-7 in 2022 to 10-5, which is a testimony to the power of local democracy.

As I mentioned in my first Mayoral Minute, across our Council's 74 years of history, we have had 27 individual Mayors with tenures ranging from a single year to 8 unbroken years, with me now continuing to serve as the 28th Mayor of the community of this great city of Campbelltown.

I have enjoyed the journey and have developed a better understanding of our community's needs and aspirations. I also have learned a lot about the workings of the Council and the complexity of government machinery. While I cannot tell from experience or historical account whether this is a norm in the ever-changing political environment, I can say that we are currently facing increasing challenges to deliver significantly more with a lot less resources.

We will continue our commitment to the residents of Campbelltown and our work to deliver the best we can with the resources we have, within the legal limitations.

Local Government

It is undeniable that Local Governments have to deal with a vertical fiscal imbalance, relying on grants from the State and Federal Governments to fulfil crucial functions within their community. What is perhaps less apparent, is that local governments also confront a vertical democratic imbalance, requiring approval from the State and, at times, the Federal Government for some of their actions.

These imbalances delineate the two traditionally recognised models of Local Government in Australia. It has long been acknowledged that local government operates both as a local service provider and as an instrument of democratic self-governance.

In its capacity as a service provider, Local Government is often narrowly viewed as a supplier of services, operating under the purview of public management theories. Here, fiscal and economic considerations tend to override social and political concerns. This model hinges on the efficient allocation of resources, with more substantial state government intervention to maintain control and ensure mechanisms are in place to enhance this efficiency.

Conversely, when Local Government functions as a form of democratic self-governance, a premium is placed on local distinctions and diversity, rooted in the belief that local government possesses the legitimacy and capability to collaborate with and comprehend local choices. In this model, the focus shifts towards traditional democratic principles such as representation, accountability, and accessibility.

Additionally, a third role for Local Government known as Place-Shaping has frequently been discussed. Although the validity of this model is subject to debate; I align with the local government scholars who firmly place it within the purview of the NSW local government system, especially when considering the role of local government in urban planning.

The tension between efficiency and democracy has been a pivotal aspect of the history of Local Government in NSW, and it remains central to all contemporary Local Government reforms. It is important to emphasise that these models are not mutually exclusive. Local Government can function as an efficient service provider while maintaining local political representation and fostering collaboration with communities to shape the local physical and social landscape, if it's allowed to do so.

I am conscious that exploring these intricate and complex issues cannot be adequately covered within a single Minute, and I intend to dedicate significantly more time and explore them in greater detail in the next few months. As I fear, based on the limited rhetoric we encounter in the media and the proposals for the management of WestInvest funding, we may be on the cusp of another significant push towards prioritising efficiency of service-provision and state government intervention over local democracy and choices.

WestInvest

Last year, the NSW Government announced WestInvest, a landmark \$5 billion program to enhance families' quality of life and make communities in West and South-West Sydney even better places to live. Originally, it was announced that Campbelltown Local Government Area would benefit from approximately \$410 million in committed funding from the NSW Government.

The committed funding includes \$171 million for Council-delivered projects to our community, such as the expansion of Campbelltown Arts Centre, park and facility enhancements, traffic and connectivity improvements, and the creation of several new recreation facilities and play spaces, as I have highlighted numerous times previously. We have received confirmation from the WestInvest Program Office and, more importantly, the Premier of NSW, the Hon. Chris Minns MP, committing to continuing our funds under the Local Government Allocation Round and Community Competitive Round of WestInvest. The letter was tabled at the July 2023 Council meeting.

Also, there was the WestInvest NSW Government Allocation of \$200 million for the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan (considered as \$100 million to Campbelltown LGA as the Gardens are shared between Campbelltown and Camden Local Government Areas) and \$243 million for Health Hubs at Glenfield and Liverpool (assumed \$121.5 million shared equally between the Hubs). The WestInvest NSW Government Allocation is under review by the new Government, and further announcements are expected as part of the NSW Government Budget due on 19 September 2023. I look forward to the budget and hope our community receives its fair share of investments and projects.

However, what is very concerning is the funding model for the \$171 million that has been committed to our community's project delivery. The funding deeds remain unsigned, and have been subject to several significant amendments over the recent months. This changing legal landscape creates additional risk and exposure for Council, which creates significant uncertainty for our delivery program.

In conjunction with a number of the other recipient Councils, we are actively engaged in negotiations and seeking advice to navigate the complexities and legality of these proposed changes. I will update the Council and the community on the progress of the issues as soon as we have a clear understanding of the WestInvest Program Management Office and the government's final position.

I want to thank Mr Greg Warren MP, Member for Campbelltown, for his ongoing support for the projects and his work ensuring that the funding continues to be available to our community. I look forward to briefing him on the issues the Council faces due to the changes and appreciate his ongoing offer to advocate for our community to ensure these projects are delivered.

Community Forums

On Tuesday 29 September, I hosted the first of a series of community forums, to acknowledge some of our recent achievements, share some upcoming projects and seek ideas for the future. The forum was held in the Campbelltown Civic Hall and attended by approximately 50 members of the community. The topics raised covered a range of areas from Planning, transport and open space, to employment, sporting facilities, opportunities for seniors and active transport. As part of the format of the event, I have the opportunity to meet one on one with a number of community members to hear their concerns and ideas. A team member from our Customer Service team was also available to take any service requests and provide assistance to customers who attended on the night.

I look forward to the next two forums which will be held on 25 September in Campbelltown and 25 October in Ingleburn.

Attachments

Nil