

2012 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council
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Date Received: 6/02/2013



29 January 2013

Mr Jai Rowell MP
Chair
Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Rowell

Subject: Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the 2012 Local Government Elections

Please find below a submission to the Electoral Matter Inquiry into the 2012 Local Government election.

(a) The cost of the election

Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) achieved an estimated saving of around \$200,000 by using a private contractor to manage the election. This is calculated using an estimate of costs provided by the NSW Election Commission (NSWEC) to manage the election for LMCC.

In future elections the NSWEC should be required to submit a formal and firm quotation to all Councils considering the use of their services.

(b) The experience of Councils that conducted their own elections

Whilst LMCC allocated additional internal resources to manage the election compared to the previous election managed by the NSWEC, this additional cost was minor compared to the overall saving. It is anticipated that the internal skills gained during the election will add further benefits for the next election period.

There were some minor teething problems with the private contractor working in a totally new environment but a successful outcome was achieved and again, the knowledge gained will ensure processes are refined and improved for the next election period.

LMCC's experience in dealing with the NSWEC was frustrating and it appeared that some actions undertaken by the NSWEC were deliberately obstructive. Examples of this include:

- Access to authorised rolls – all candidates had access to soft copies of the electoral roll whilst Council as the election provider was denied the same access. Councils were also not able to obtain a combined electoral roll.

Our Ref: F2011/01833

Your Ref: LAC12/569

Submission to Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry in the 2012 Local Government Elections.DOC

"Quality Lifestyle"

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- Additionally, the contractor was prevented from accessing the rolls from any computer operated by them, despite the fact that they were engaged to undertake the election on behalf of Council. Similarly the NSWEC would only send emails to electoral staff using a Council email address. This resulted in the Returning Officer maintaining two email accounts.
- Enrolment forms were initially not available until pressure exerted by the contractor lead to additional forms being 'found' and provided.
- NSWEC continued to contact electoral staff within areas not being managed by them and after they had been engaged by the contractor causing confusion amongst the staff and resulting in staff being 'poached' out of area. There were allegations from staff of threats that they would never work for the NSWEC again if they worked for the private contractor.

(c) Possible legislative changes to improve the efficiency of and participation in Local Government elections

Consideration should be given to alternate voting options including full postal voting and on-line voting. This could potentially lead to significant costs reductions and be more convenient for electors.

(d) Non-residential voting in Local Government elections

No comment

(e) The impact of requirements under the election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981 on participation by candidates in Local Government elections and possible legislative changes to remove any barriers to participation

No comment

(f) Any other related matter

The NSWEC should consider offering individual services to councils conducting their own elections. There are a number of services that they could offer to Councils or contractors that may result in further reductions in the cost of undertaking elections. For example, the NSWEC could check declaration vote eligibility for Councils.

The NSWEC should have a dual role – 1. to undertake elections and 2. to advise Council's undertaking their own election. As described previously the NSWEC was uncooperative with Council's managing their own elections despite holding knowledge that should be available to all Councils.

There were some late regulatory amendments (Postal Vote applications were changed on 22 June) which resulted in forms having to be reprinted and additional costs. All regulatory changes should be completed well before the election process commences.

Should you require further information please contact Mr John Ferguson, Manager
Community Planning on 4921 0381.

Yours faithfully



Brian Bell
General Manager