

**Submission
No 30**

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Campbelltown City Council
Name: Mr Steven Kelly
Position: Manager Corporate Support
Date Received: 13/05/2009

Submission by
Campbelltown City
Council

Parliamentary Inquiry into
2008 Local Government
Elections

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY - 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Introduction

Campbelltown City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a formal submission to the Parliamentary inquiry conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the conduct of the 2008 Local Government elections.

Since 1995 the State Electoral Commission has had the responsibility for running Local Government Elections in New South Wales with councils being invoiced by the Commission for staff and administrative costs incurred in the running of the election.

In July 2007 the Electoral Commission advised Council that the cost of the 2008 Local Government Elections across New South Wales would be in the vicinity of \$31M. In the case of Campbelltown, the Commission estimated the cost to be incurred by Council would be \$649,400. This figure represented a 230% increase on the cost of the 2004 election in Campbelltown.

To meet the estimated costs proposed by the Electoral Commission Council was required to reduce planned expenditure on services and facilities to the community by \$450,000 in the 2008/09 Budget. Council is extremely disappointed in such a large increase in costs being passed onto local councils at the expense of services to their residents.

Cost Shifting

It seems clear that NSW State agencies will continue to respond to pressures on their own resources, and to community demands for action on issues of concern, by devolving responsibilities to Local Government. The key issue for Councils is whether this trend will proceed ad hoc or through a coordinated, consultative process. In particular, there is a pressing need to address the cost implications for Councils when functions are transferred without corresponding financial support or revenue mechanisms.

Local Government finances are under increasing stress. Local Governments capacity to deliver services and to develop and maintain infrastructure are under genuine threat. This is the combined result of restricted revenue raising capacity, increasing responsibilities and rising community expectations.

Local Government is increasingly required to pay substantial charges to State agencies to meet cost of services provided to communities or for other purposes. These have been increasing at rates well above inflation and the rate-pegging limit imposed on Councils. In some cases the charges clearly subsidise agencies basic operating costs, which ought to be a State responsibility.

The cost of the 2008 Local Government elections would appear to be another instance of cost shifting by the State Government to Local Government. In the past few years Council has faced large increases in other statutory contributions including the Board of Fire Commissioners, Rural Fire Services, State emergency Services and Integral Energy. During this period Council's rate income has been capped by the State Government at a level no greater than CPI and in some years less than CPI.

Detailed Cost Items

Council would also like to raise with the Committee certain cost items that in Council's view appear to be somewhat unreasonable.

Office Space

Council is concerned at the need for a large area of commercial office space for a period of up to 3months. Campbelltown was required to provide 400 square metres of office space from mid July through to early October.

Office Furniture

The Electoral Commission required Council to hire office furniture for a period of 3 months. Council was requested to provide ten office desks and chairs for use by the Returning Officer

and electoral staff. Although Council could provide the necessary furniture it did not conform to the Commission's standard of identical and as new furniture.

Polling Screens

Council advised the Commission that they had in storage a large number of well maintained voting screens. The Commission advised that they would provide all voting screens and the cost of the new screens would be met by Council

Ballot Papers

The Commission advised that they would manage all arrangements for the printing of ballot papers including the engagement of printers.

Council had 90,000 enrolled electors and took approximately 75,000 votes. However we received from the Commission 130,000 ballot papers at a cost to Council of \$46,590. Council also has an in-house print room facility which has in the past printed ballot papers required for elections.

Management Fees

Council is also concerned with a number of Management, Administrative and Information Technology costs that the Commission has passed on to Local Government. For example Campbelltown incurred the following management fees:

- \$49,550 - Administration Fees
- \$32,430 - Election Information Services
- \$45,970 - Information Technology

Administration fees based on an hourly rate of \$195 per staff member appears to be a direct charge on Councils to meet the day to day operational costs of the New South Wales Electoral Commission.

Electoral Funding Authority

In accordance with the Electoral Funding Authority Guidelines candidates before accepting \$1,000 or more in political donations or incurring \$1,000 or more in electoral expenditure must open a campaign account. All political donations must be paid into the account by the candidate's official agent and all payments for electoral expenditure must be paid from the account by the official agent.

Council wishes to highlight to the Committee and the Electoral Funding Authority the need to ensure that all candidates discharge electoral expenditure from electoral funding they have received. Council would request that a declaration be made by all candidates that all electoral costs have been discharged

Summary

The 2008 Local Government elections have seriously impacted on NSW councils with the cost of the elections increasing by as much as 286% on individual councils. Councils are being forced to pay up to three times more for the running of the 2008 elections compared to 2004 and they have a right to know exactly how their money was spent.

With many NSW councils experiencing financial difficulty and the State Government's policy of cost shifting creating economic barriers to councils servicing their communities, the cost of the 2008 Local Government elections only adds further pressure to councils capacity to deliver services.

Campbelltown City Council would prefer to use its limited funds in providing services and facilities to our community. Assistance by the State government in running elections in accordance with their requirements is not considered an unreasonable request.

I trust that this submission has provided the Inquiry with an insight into the issues facing Local Government generally and Campbelltown City Council in particular in regard to the cost of conducting the 2008 Local Government elections.