

Answers to Questions on Notice
Inquiry into integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs
Hearing 21 September 2020
Michael Edgar and Chandi Saba, The Hills Shire Council

1. “Given the funding opportunities available, the NSW Government may wish to consider that, where grants are similar in their intent, objectives and outcomes and opportunities it might be possible to **consolidate these into fewer programs and increase maximum funding amounts** available. This could reduce administration needs for both applicants and agencies in assessment and, also, enable Councils to target applications appropriately without tying up co-funding that may be required while awaiting decisions.”

Agree in principle.

2. “As populations in Western Sydney continue to increase, Council welcomes any **investment in arts and cultural facilities** in the region to both redress the legacy of funding shortfalls and provide a higher level of equity in the future. Funding for arts and cultural facilities in Western Sydney is largely drawn from local Councils including facilities of a regional standard that draw audiences and provide opportunities for large catchments beyond their geographic boundaries. Council would welcome the reintroduction of specialist funding cultural development and cultural facility funding for Western Sydney.”

Along with Capital Grants funding, Investing in a mechanism to fund on going costs in operating and maintaining these facilities needs to be considered as the Rates income that is capped will not be sufficient to fund increased level of service in these areas. The catchment of some of these facilities extends beyond that of the rate base so a sustainable regional funding model needs to be considered.

3. “In terms of the **Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund**, it was identified as a three-year program with \$100m made available. Two rounds have now been completed. Given the value of projects submitted to each round being considerably more than the grant funding available it would be appropriate for consideration of funding levels to be increased should there be future programs. Strategic alignment of the program and funding with prioritised facility infrastructure plans of the sport sector, based demonstrated needs analyses, will strengthen the program and ensure connection between grassroots to elite sport infrastructure provision. The NSW Office of Sport has collected Future Needs of Sport data and has been developing District Plans. Publication of this documentation would provide a framework to guide Greater Sydney Sport Fund Programs. Finally, given there is one more round of the Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund currently programmed an early determination on the extension of this program and funding levels to be made available would be valuable to potential applicants in developing projects and funding strategies for future sport infrastructure provision.”

Agree.

4. “Potential grant applicants could be assisted through the publication of a **consolidated ‘calendar’ of NSW Government** grant program opening and closing dates as well as grant determination/announcement dates and, in the case of multi-year grant programs, for these to be advertised in the first year of the grant program. Critically, established and advertised dates should be adhered to.”

Agree – this will assist Councils to plan for grant submissions.

5. “When grants are made available to the **community to apply** and there are implications for Council resources such as financial support, impacts on assets, support for service delivery and the like, before determination, Council could be provided with the opportunity to provide commentary. This would confirm the alignment of the applications with Council’s priority needs which have been established through consultative and planning processes.”

Agree – this is very important as Council needs to consider whole of lifecycle costing and the resulting maintenance burden put onto ratepayers. It also gives the community expectations that Councils can deliver on projects quickly especially for a growth Council like ours.

6. “In order to strengthen the existing range of measures already in place the following could be considered.
 - Guidelines, assessment tools and priorities should always be available for review during a grant round. This would be desirable
 - Grant assessment should be well resourced with appropriately trained grant administrators. An independent body should be involved in decision making. Neither agree nor disagree however any conflicts of interest should be declared.
 - Assessment should not solely rely on the quality of the application but rather the merit of the application. Projects should be prioritised in line with:
 - The greatest identified need, evidence-based outcomes, alignment with relevant statistical data. *Desirable*
 - Those projects which are linked or identified with a strategic planning context and are endorsed by the relevant peak sports or arts organisations. *Agree*
 - Generating participation and, improving the liveability of an area. *Agree*
 - Partnerships that ‘value-add’ and generate social and economic return on investment. *Agree*
 - Decision making should be documented, transparent and published. *Agree and ideally the decision should be made available for public as well.*
 - There should always be a meaningful feedback mechanism. *Agree and it would also be beneficial to know why the approval was granted or why an*

application was rejected. This will make the process much more transparent and give Councils feedback especially if grant funding is unsuccessful

- Advisory task forces, constituting independent and industry experts, could be established to review grant programs and advise Government of recommendations for continuous improvements.” Neither agree nor disagree it needs to be accepted that the Government can determine its expenditure priorities, they just need to be understood.

Council remains committed to the substance of its original submission and the answers provided to the questions without notice should be viewed having regard to the context and substance of that submission. Council recognises that Governments from time to time are able to determine priorities and the allocation of resources to those priorities with the ultimate accountability being to the Parliament and the electorate.