

**Submission  
No 96**

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR  
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

**Organisation:** Waverley Council

**Date Received:** 8 September 2020

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## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs – Stronger Communities Fund**

At its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020 Council considered a Notice of Motion relating to the Inquiry into the Integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government grant programs and specifically the Stronger Communities Fund and resolved, *“that Council:*

- 1. Notes that analysis of the \$250 million Stronger Communities Grants Scheme operated by the NSW Liberal Government from 2017 to 2019 shows that 80% of the funds were sent to councils wholly in Coalition-held state electorates and only 2% to those wholly in non-government-held state electorates. The balance was to councils that straddled government and non-government electorates.*
- 2. Notes that there was no public call for submissions from councils to the Stronger Communities Fund after guidelines were secretly changed by the government in June 2018. That change greatly expanded eligibility for the scheme from councils that were newly created as a result of the government’s merger proposals to all councils that were either newly created or had ever been the subject of a merger proposal regardless of whether it had proceeded or been withdrawn.*
- 3. Notes that public money should be allocated where it is needed and not for producing a political advantage and what money is available as grants to local councils should be provided on a needs based, non-partisan manner.*
- 4. Notes that the Premier Gladys Berejiklian ‘directly approved more than \$100 million in council grants in Coalition-held electorates before last year’s state election’ (SMH, 3 July 2020).”*

Council also resolved to make a submission to the Inquiry in relation to the grants process for the Stronger Communities Fund.

In this regard I wish to advise that Council supports the existence of Government grant programs for local government and is grateful for the funding it received in grants from the Stronger Communities Fund program. The Council followed the process outlined by the Office of Local Government (OLG), applied for grants for projects that had been pre-identified, and duly entered into funding agreements and received funds.

However, the Council’s view is that the process for grants could be more transparent and less susceptible to criticism. The Council considers that the process could have been improved had there been an open call for grants with councils able to select which projects they wished to apply for. The Council also notes that the eligibility for the grants program was changed from only being for newly established councils to being for both new councils and councils previously subject to merger proposals. While Council was made aware of this through OLG, it did not seem to be a widely publicised change.

Council recognises the administration of the Stronger Communities Fund program was carried out by OLG officials. However, the Council also notes that the involvement of Government Ministers and Local Members in the process has led to allegations of use of grants programs for political advantage. Having a

process with an open call for applications, publicised criteria and eligibility, and a known approval process would likely help safeguard future grant programs from such allegations.

Council supports the reporting and acquittal processes in place with respect to the grant program. Council also supports steps to build public confidence in the integrity and efficacy of Government grant programs.

In determining its view on this matter Council further resolved to call upon the NSW Government to cooperate fully with the Inquiry.

Ross McLeod

General Manager

On behalf of Waverley Council