



CUSTOMER & CORPORATE DEPARTMENT

26 November 2019

Mr Peter Achterstraat
NSW Productivity Commission
Online submission

Dear Mr Achterstraat

RE: DISCUSSION PAPER – KICKSTARTING THE PRODUCTIVITY CONVERSATION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the work of your office related to productivity reforms within NSW.

Please find attached a submission from Willoughby City Council.

Yours sincerely



Productivity Commission

7.8 Enabling Councils to deliver better service

Should performance monitoring and benchmarking be adopted for local governments in New South Wales?

Willoughby City Council believes there are many positives that would flow from performance benchmarking and greater transparency.

Council participates in the Australian Local Government Performance Excellence Program. This provides a level of insight and benchmarking. This provides Council the mechanism to identify and explore improvement opportunities. The trend analysis also provides evidence of impact of interventions over time.

Any benchmarking program should:

- ✓ Be sufficiently transparent to allow the identification of councils to enable the cross-sharing of information between councils who are stronger performers in some areas with those whose results are not as strong.
- ✓ Consider the reporting and monitoring that currently exists. This includes:
 - Annual report
 - 6 monthly report
 - Quarterly budget reports
 - Monthly investment reports, and
 - A range of specific legislated reports as well as any council-mandated reporting and as such, should not be overly resource intensive.
- ✓ Be publicly accessible, to enhance community confidence in the sector. Consideration should be given to how materials are presented or made available to avoid the creation of a “league table.”

Would regular community satisfaction surveys make councils more responsive to their residents?

Willoughby City Council undertakes a biennial community perception survey. This is complimented by regular service-based customer satisfaction surveys.

This work is used to inform the development of the Council’s Delivery Program, Operational Plan, and the annual Budget by identifying actions or projects that address improvement opportunities.

In the design of the WCC survey, we considered the ability to benchmark and compare results as being important. To this end, a large proportion of questions were crafted to allow comparison with the Victorian Local Government survey. There was also a smaller sample of NSW Council results that we were able to use as a benchmark. These comparisons, were used to assist to identify and prioritise areas for improvement.

WCC believes that a state-wide local government community perception survey that provides the ability to benchmark and compare between councils would be valuable.

How could councils improve their funding arrangements to provide greater flexibility in meeting their residents' service demands?

The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework requires councils to engage the community in relation to strategic direction/vision (Community Strategic Plan), develop 4-year Delivery Program for each council term and an annual Operational Plan and Budget.

Councils are required to regularly report progress against these planning documents, budgets, projects and services.

As an example, Willoughby City Council has a sophisticated suite of planning documents, developed via thorough community engagement mechanisms, supported by a robust monitoring and reporting framework. This provides the opportunity for residents to inform the directions set by the Council, and to be assured of progress via regular transparent reporting.

Rate pegging is a blunt instrument that aims to enhance efficiency, but does not reflect the increased sophistication in council planning and reporting since its introduction. Councils have grown and evolved into significant and complex organisations, and should have the ability to manage and control all avenues of revenue (including rate revenue) to deliver on community expectations.

8.6 Making the most of public and green space

Are there other innovative ways of providing new public space, particular on underutilised land?

What other opportunities are there to improve the use of transport corridors in high density areas?

The Willoughby City Councils planning documents reflect the following:

- ✓ Activate local spaces in creative ways
 - Reclaim the low use streets as pocket parks; widen the verges where possible, do more street tree planting, install seating and create small community meeting hubs.
 - Provision of new public space can be addressed by increasing the quality of streetscapes and their connectivity to other reserves.
- ✓ A factor of increasing relevance is the value of protected bushland areas in relation to maintaining physical and mental wellbeing in increasingly “agglomerated urban areas”
- ✓ Facilitate the vibrancy of our village centres
 - Create a City of small villages with a mix of retail/ commercial uses incorporating open space/plazas with seating, meeting points and greenery
- ✓ Create family friendly neighbourhoods that connect people
 - To improve the use of transport corridors in high-density areas. Investigate opportunities for ‘blue sky’ project, for example, develop the Gore Hill Expressway airspace and create a linear roof top park connecting Naremburn, Artarmon, Cammeray and North Sydney.
 - Active transport links within RailCorp, RMS and golf course land that connect centres to allow safe off road links for bikes and pedestrians.
 - Active transport corridors can benefit from focusing on off road options whilst improving way finding and road crossings. These changes can be factored in to future crossings, pathway, traffic light upgrades and kerb and gutter design by the relevant agency.