



MAYORAL MEMO - 11 MAY 2022

It used to be a standard joke, with serious ramifications, when driving on country roads. Whilst driving along a corrugated, potholed, dusty dirt road you would suddenly be on a short section of beautiful bitumen. Typically there would be a driveway in the middle section of the bitumen. “An alderman must live there,” would be the standard statement from everyone in the car. The Local Government Act 1919 Section 87 stated, in part: “The mayor shall be the chief executive officer and may...control and direct the servants of council.” In other words, the mayor could legally direct an employee of council to lay bitumen along the road in front of the house of a fellow alderman or, for that matter, in front of the house of the mayor!

The next revision of the Local Government Act was passed by Parliament on 21 May 1993 when Dubbo's Gerry Peacocke was the Minister. After seventy-four years there were significant changes but the one I want to focus on is Section 335. “The general manager of a council has the function...to direct and dismiss staff.” The mayor was removed from the role of chief executive officer and could no longer direct staff.

It dramatically changed the role of an alderman, which was now

renamed to councillor, to a strategic role rather than an operational role. Councillors are now elected to represent the collective views of the community and, in so doing, councillors are expected to set strategic direction for the Council. It is then the responsibility of the general manager to undertake actions as a result of that strategic direction. Despite this clear separation of roles, there is no buck-passing with a poor performing Council. Section 232 states: "A councillor is accountable to the local community for the performance of the council."

This current councillor cohort was declared elected on 22 December 2021. Approximately four and a half months ago. With only one returning councillor from the last Council, it has seen the proverbial broom go through the group and the learning curve has been steep. I am incredibly impressed with how all of the councillors are performing and engaging with the community. Yes, there are lots of questions about roads. The roads didn't fall apart in the last 140 days. There are many challenges with bringing together two communities after an unpopular amalgamation. Finances are strained after the last Council left an operating deficit of \$20.3 million over the last three years. There are relationships to mend, leases to renew, consultation to complete and communication to improve but everything is travelling in the right direction. Councillors understand their strategic role and the operational part that our staff play. I ask the community to keep talking to your councillors and giving them feedback and, in time, councillors will turn this big ship around.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson
Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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