



MAYORAL MEMO - 16 FEBRUARY 2022

I have a deep philosophical question and I want your opinion. Despite the fact that Councils are normally associated with the letter R, most Councils do a lot more than Roads, Rates and Rubbish. Examine the 128 Councils across this State and you will find huge variety in the activities those Councils are associated with. Most Councils have administration functions and the duty of a consent authority when it comes to building applications. Often there are cultural services and community amenities that are run or maintained by Council. Finding Councils responsible for water supply and sewerage services is not that difficult.

But then you find more obscure functions. I am aware of Councils who run hairdressing businesses. Medical practices. Newspapers. Festivals. Business consultancy services. Function centres. Property development. Marketing services. Childcare facilities. Saleyards. The list goes on and each time I add one I think I have made a mistake. How does a Council justify owning some of these functions? Typically it is out of necessity but at first glance some of these seem somewhat outside core objectives.

One of the aspects of Local Government that has always impressed me is that Councillors and staff are prepared to deliver whatever a community might need to solve a problem. If residents are not moving to a certain community because there are no doctors available, a progressive Council may deem it necessary to start a medical practice. Is this allowed under the Local Government Act? Section 8A 1) c) and g) of the Act covers pretty much everything. "Councils should plan strategically...for the provision of effective and efficient services and regulation to meet the diverse needs of the local community" and "Councils should work with others to secure appropriate services for local community needs."

Those needs change over time but the problem often created for Councils is they start a new function to solve a particular issue but it seems very difficult to stop that activity when the pressing need is no longer present. This week saw the thirtieth anniversary of Rainbow Cottage Childcare Centre. This is an excellent childcare facility and my four children each spent several years there. I am sure when this was started there was a desperate need for childcare services but today there are 32 childcare services in Dubbo. Does Council really need to be competing with these other providers? Similarly with our Caravan Park which started over fifty years ago. Now there are five caravan parks. I tried to sell the Caravan Park in 2007 but the community told me loud and clear that they wanted Council to retain ownership. I am still not sure why Council needs to own this facility.

So my philosophical question is this. Should Council own businesses that compete with other businesses in a community? Send me your thoughts to mayor@dubbo.nsw.gov.au

Councillor Mathew Dickerson
Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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