



MAYORAL MEMO - 8 JUNE 2022

This week Councillors completed the last of our compulsory induction training sessions. The Office of Local Government has a range of inductions that are now required for Councillors within a certain timeframe after an election. There are 128 Councils across this State with more than 1,300 Councillors but the occasional poor behaviour by a limited number of Councillors over the years has required further training regimes to be implemented by the Minister. More training and Councillors with better skills can only lead to better outcomes for a community.

This week the last training session was on social media use by Councillors. This is a space that is changing rapidly. It was 2003 when I decided I should stand for the upcoming Council election which was held on 27 March 2004. To say that social media was not a part of my campaign is to state the obvious. The term "Social Media" was more likely to refer to a group of journalists at a pub on a Friday night than anything involving a computer. Think about the date. Facebook launched in February 2004. April 2005 witnessed the first YouTube video upload. The first Tweet was published in March 2006. You needed to wait years for Instagram

with the first photo posted there in July 2010 with Snapchat not available until September the following year and in 2003, the founder of TikTok was still studying at the Nankai University in Tianjin and wouldn't launch that app until September 2017. Even if social media sites had existed, connecting to them would have been problematic. 3G data services for mobiles only launched in 2003 but you paid by the kilobyte to use the data and it wasn't until April 2009 that NBN Co. was announced.

Meanwhile, Councillors in NSW are still operating under the Local Government Act 1993.

A new policy document for social media use has just been adopted by the State Government and it is this document which was used for the training of Councillors this week. With the mere mention of social media in a Local Government scenario, there are varied opinions. With many pitfalls possible, there are some who stay as far away from its use as possible. With defamation actions and reputations damaged seemingly on a daily basis, it does seem safer to stay as far away as possible. On the flip side, doing so would rob many parts of the community of their main communication tool. On the flip flip side, after the 2016 US Presidential election, Facebook revealed that 126 million Americans were exposed to Russian agents during the election and social media was used by both candidates to spread disinformation. Furthermore, conspiracy theories are lurking around every corner.

Despite some possible drawbacks, social media is a necessary tool for a modern Councillor but training is essential.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson

Last Edited: 14 Jun 2022