

Council Ref: 19/113138
Your Ref:



19 July 2019

Local Government Election Cost Review
Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box K35
HAYMARKET POST SHOP NSW 1240

Via electronic submission

Dear Tribunal Members,

***Re: Submission to IPART's
Draft Report Review of Local Government Election Costs***

I refer to Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunals (IPART's) Draft Report on the Review of Local Government Election Costs dated June 2019 and thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Council understands that a number of submissions have already been made to IPART on this matter. In preparing our submission it is important to note that Woollahra Council has historically engaged the services the NSW Electoral Commission, having conducted the elections in 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2017.

We can appreciate that there are increases to the operating expenditure for the NSW Electoral Commission (including election staffing, venue procurement and logistics, cost of executives, joint roll agreement, capital costs) and acknowledge the identified cost-efficiency savings. Our concern lies with the proportion of cost payable by local government.

We strongly recommend that IPART revisits the contribution payable by the State and reiterate the sentiments of Shaun McBride from Local Government NSW who addressed the public forum on 2 July 2019, specifically:

1. Proposed increased are not acceptable to local government and are very large increases.
2. Councils are required to hold Local Government elections as the State Government mandates these as part of the democratic process. Councils are unable to change their terms to lower the election costs. The increases proposed are substantial we recommend that IPART revisits the NSW Government costs.

The impactor-pays model results in yet another example of cost shifting and the late in the electoral cycle provides no opportunity to adjust budgets. Woollahra would not be alone in setting aside an annual budget allocation to build toward the cost of an election. If change is to be made it should be timed to coincide with the commencement of an electoral cycle, not the end. If adopted, the recommendations in the review should not be implemented until the 2024 local government elections.

Councils are expected to be fiscally responsible and to place a focus on managing and renewing their assets and infrastructure. To achieve these goals, Councils have been working hard to improve productivity, save costs and generate revenue to manage the impact of these reforms on services and programs. Prudent financial management requires Council's to budget effectively and we call on IPART to reconsider the cost shifting to Council's and delay implementation of any new proposed model to allow Council's to plan our budgets effectively. The existing allocation of costs should remain for the 2020 election.

IPART's statement in the draft report that the impact on ratepayers will be relatively modest can be considered to be taking a blinkered view. It is true that the financial impact to ratepayers of an increase in election costs will be minimised by the rate peg, however, considered together with other costs shifted from the State, the impact on ratepayers is inevitably a reduction in services and programs which councils are able to provide.

We are supportive of IPART's draft recommendations that the State Government implements regulatory reforms aimed at facilitating future competition for local government elections, unbundling of the NSW Electoral Commissions prices and services and reducing the notification period for Council's to engage the services of NSW Electoral Commission.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] or Helen Tola, Manager Governance & Council Support on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Don Johnston
Director Corporate Services