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Since much of the administrative and clerical work of councils is now processed through computer based systems, it is purely revenue raising for some charges still to be levied on the basis of substantial time and effort on the part of staff. One simple example is the need to provide councils for a fire protection report for buildings used by the public. The owner of the premises is required to pay an appropriate organisation to carry out the regular inspection and then provide a certificate. This certificate must then be forwarded to the council but it must be accompanied by a fee. The council updates the record (a one minute task) but charges a fee more representative of one hour's work. It is anomalous that you provide the council with information which they merely place on the record but you are charged a fee for giving it to them.

I paid the council the entire cost for my double driveway to be constructed but I am not allowed to leave my vehicle on the driveway. Since there was and is no footpath yet there, my driveway does serve as a portion of footpath for which I have paid the full cost. I also paid the council half the cost of the kerb and guttering and half the cost of the footpath outside my property. Now the councils have this work carried out by the developers at their cost but they still levy the developers (ultimately those who buy the properties) allegedly for providing facilities. Councils have confirmed that even the traffic signs are now required to be put in by the developers at their cost. Obviously, this is freeing up their funds yet they still cry poor. They have successfully opted out of many of their tasks but still cannot make ends meet and then ask for rates to be increased by triple the Consumer Price Index.

Another ruse is to charge payment from a rate payer in advance for council to carry out a task and then not commence the task still quite some time later. An attractive way of using the short term money market at the ratepayer's expense.

It has been noticeable that there is a significant discrepancy between council's cost to carry out a task and the cost from alternative sources. Their level of profit is therefore considerable.

Progressively, councils have entered more and more areas requiring expenditure which are not compatible with the interests of the bulk of ratepayers. Examples include paying artists in residence, subsidising premises for special groups, providing free meals, subsidising all types of festivals, establishing relationships with overseas cities and regular visits to them.

Another clever way to raise money is to determine that even a trivial change to a development application requires a new application together with the fee to be paid again. I am aware of this happening when one word "there" was spelt without the "e" and when the applicant leaned over the desk with the council planner and inserted the letter, he was told it was now necessary to lodge a new application because the one now on the table was no longer the approved one. Similarly, a landing and awning over a door was approved but it was then stipulated that the whole of the house guttering must then be altered and redirected because of the awning. Since this was a major and expensive undertaking the pensioner could not go ahead so said that she would just have the landing outside the door. No, even though the whole project had been approved, including the landing, to build just the landing required a new application and the payment of fees again.

Every opportunity is sought to obtain fees. To put a cement block in the ground to support a post is an excavation and therefore requires an inspection and a fee.

We have seen many instances where councils have approved of five houses being demolished and replaced with at least fifteen new residences so they significantly increase their rate revenue from the site with only a marginal increase in their required expenditure. Again, the revenue rolls in but the fees, rates and fines increase.

Now the councils have not only additional revenue from parking meters but also revenue from the fines which run into million of dollars. This is double dipping since they have always received and continue to request and receive money from the State Treasury yet they now receive the fines which previously went into State Treasury Consolidated Revenue.

Another classic money maker is occurring as follows. A block of villas had the usual recycle, garbage and green bins. Some person put incorrect material in the green bin so the council removed all green bins from the premises but for years has still been charging a fee on all the rate notices for green recycling.

The council has a designated parking area for staff right in the centre of the business district. The excuse given when this was queried was the staff used their cars for their work. However, this was not the case since the area was usually three quarters full throughout the day. The cars are not council vehicles, they are private vehicles. Because the area is a CBD declared by the State Government, a substantial fee must be paid to the Government for every parking space provided. Because there are parking stations within the required distance, a fringe benefit tax is also applicable, who pays this? Meanwhile, the other workers in this CBD are obliged to used time limited paid parking meters.

I have extended my home four times so I have some experience of fees and conditions. Some builders have openly stated that they will not undertake work in certain council areas.

It is fortunate that Mr Sartor is addressing some critical issues in local government and it is encouraging to see that IPART is now involved.

Michael Sobb