

People's Policy Review – a concept paper

Introduction

Greater Geelong faces two set of problems. One set is particular to Greater Geelong. It includes bullying of staff, inadequate accountability for Mayor and Councillors, a “my ward first” orientation in Council, conflict between Mayor and Council, and the use of discretionary ward money to create “fiefdoms.” These problems can be partially addressed by switching to electing councillors by proportional representation (either city-wide or from fewer, larger multi-seat wards), elimination of “slush funds” controlled by individual councillors, replacing the councillor departmental portfolio system with a more collaborative committee system, and establishing a clear delineation of Councillor and executive roles. These strategies are helpful, but are not sufficient.

The other set of problems – fundamental problems of modern democracies – should also be addressed, which will more completely resolve the particular problems of Greater Geelong. Most Australians would probably agree that governments should be more **representative** of the perspectives of residents, more **independent** of financial and political pressures, more **deliberative**, more **accountable**, and less **combative** . We believe that these problems are inevitable in governments where practically all the representative are chosen by election – and so do a growing number of academics, politicians, and advocates (see “for more information” at the end of this proposal).

These problems can be solved by adding randomly selected citizen bodies, similar to the well-known criminal juries and the increasingly popular Citizens' Juries and Citizens' Assemblies, such as the Citizens' Jury that is considering how to reform representation in Greater Geelong. Compared to elected bodies, the members of these citizen bodies are more representative of the whole population. They owe nothing to donors or special interests. They can engage in real deliberation with less incentive to attack opponents or play to the media. And they can be used to hold elected politicians more accountable.

Some people may worry about the competence of groups of randomly selected citizens. While individual members may be lacking in competence (which is also true of individual elected officials), what matters is the collective competence of the group. Research suggests that the fuller diversity of randomly selected groups actually improves their problem solving ability. Criminal juries have been trusted to make life-changing decisions for a long time, and Australia has recently seen many successful experiments with jury-like bodies – Citizens' Juries, a Citizens' Parliament, and citizen panels working on entire city budgets (more about this below).

There are many beneficial ways to incorporate bodies like Citizens' Juries into local government. We will propose three ways here, that we think will be useful in Greater Geelong: one dealing with accountability, one with agenda-setting, and one with budgeting.

Performance Oversight Trustees

There are two standard approaches to holding elected officials to standards of ethical conduct. One is to have the officials hold each other accountable. The other is to have voters hold officials accountable through elections. These strategies frequently fail. Once “bad behaviour” reaches a certain level, elected officials often accept the behaviour as normal. It can be difficult and time consuming for voters to constantly monitor the behaviour of their elected officials, and they may view competing candidates at election time to be worse. In addition, an elected official who is violating the code of

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conduct may "buy off" constituents through corrupt favours.

We propose that a randomly selected panel of citizens serve on a rotating basis as an ongoing body of Performance Oversight Trustees, to monitor the performance of councillors, the mayor and the CEO. The Trustees would follow strict guidelines and give officials accused of bad behaviour an opportunity to defend themselves. In order to be respected and effective, the body would have the authority to remove any of these officers from their position for cause. A decision to remove a public official would require a super-majority vote of the Panel – perhaps 2/3.

This body would need to be supported by a staff person who was fully independent from the rest of the government. The size of the body, the terms of members, whether they would receive a stipend and whether service would be semi-mandatory or voluntary would be subject to revision as experience teaches (see Agenda Panel below). As a starting point we recommend that the Performance Oversight Panel have 36 members, that they serve for one year terms (after an initial phase-in) with 1/12th of the members being replaced by new randomly selected residents each month.

Agenda Panel and Policy Juries

The Councillors, mayor or CEO may fail to tackle certain important tasks such as long term planning; or they may take actions that the residents do not support.

We propose that a randomly selected body of residents serve on a rotating basis as an ongoing Agenda Panel. Rather than monitoring the performance of individual officials, this body would be charged with identifying policy matters (such as local laws, infrastructure plans, etc.) where the Council has either failed to take appropriate action or has taken possibly undesirable actions, and calling short-duration randomly selected Policy Juries to make binding decisions. This citizen backstopping of the Council will likely improve the performance of the Council, since the Councillors will know they can no longer duck certain issues, nor get away with adopting corrupt or unfavourable items due to low levels of public awareness. In short, the citizenry will take turns giving careful attention to the actions and inactions of the Council as a way of overcoming the rational ignorance of average voters who can't be expected to constantly closely monitor their elected officials.

The Agenda Panel would also be responsible for the ongoing evaluation and improvement of this entire system of jury-like "mini-publics." They might propose changes in how the random selection should be carried out, or whether members should be paid for their time, or whether the entire system should be scrapped. Any proposal for reform of the system put forth by the Agenda Panel, like any policy matter, would be decided by a new short-duration Policy Jury called for that specific purpose. Thus it is proposed that this system be able to evolve through a system of self-improvement based on experience.

Since the Agenda Panel is only empowered to bring issues to Policy Juries, not to make final decisions, this body does not need to be as large as the Performance Oversight Trustees body or the Policy Juries. We suggest that the Agenda Panel start with twelve members, serving one year terms, with one member replaced each month. We propose that Policy Juries, like the Performance Oversight Trustees, should initially have 36 members.

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Like the Performance Overview Trustees, the Agenda Panel and Policy Juries need the support of ongoing professional staff that is completely independent of the rest of government.

Budget and Planning Jury

City budgeting is a politically contentious process. It is very difficult for elected officials to make good budget decisions together, because of the pressures from organised interest groups. That is why three Australian cities – [Canada Bay](#), [Greater Geraldton](#), and [Melbourne](#) – have conducted pioneering experiments in which representative samples of the public have been empowered to make recommendations about entire city budgets (in Melbourne, a \$5 billion financial plan) – and given the time, staff support, and attention from the local government to do a good job and to get most of their recommendations adopted.

We propose building on the experience of these three cities, and convening a one-time randomly selected citizen panel each budget cycle, with no other responsibility than making across the board recommendations on the city budget. A good initial size would probably be 36 members (as in Canada Bay), and the initial term of service might be 6 months.

Addressing Possible Objections

“Ordinary people selected by lot couldn’t possibly handle these tasks.”

Bodies like the ones we propose have already proven themselves competent to handle many tasks similar to these, in Australia and several other countries, including the [USA](#), [Belgium](#), [Ireland](#), and [Canada](#).

“These randomly selected people won’t be able to stay in their legislative jobs long enough to develop expertise.”

The tasks we describe don't require expertise so much as common sense civic judgement – the expertise will be supplied by professional staff as it is for the Mayor and Council.

“Most people won’t have time for this kind of commitment.”

Many people could spare a few days to a week to serve on a policy jury, just as they do with trial juries today. Fewer people would be willing to serve on the bodies with longer terms, but there should be enough of them to get a representative sample of the community. It may be desirable to use stratified sampling to assure a representative mix by age, sex, race and income.

“This would cost a lot of money – and government is too expensive already!”

There are a number of ways to reduce the cost of this proposal – for example, reducing the number of members in particular bodies. By taking on some tasks formerly the responsibility of the council and mayor (though inadequately performed) it may be appropriate to transfer some of their support funding to these new bodies. However, we think that these cost differences are much smaller than the benefits of better policy and budget decisions and improved oversight of elected officials.

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For more information

Papers about incorporating sortition into government

Bouricius, Terrill & Schecter, David (2013). [An Idealized Design for the Legislative Branch of Government](#). *Systems Thinking World Journal*. Vol. 2 No. 1.

Bouricius, Terrill & Schecter, David (2014). [An Idealized Design for Government, Part 2: Executive Branch Accountability](#). *Systems Thinking World Journal*, Vol. 3.

Popular books about sortition

Callenbach, Ernest, & Phillips, Michael (1985). *A Citizen Legislature*. Berkeley, California: Banyan Tree Books. A [text only version](#) is available on the Internet.

Fuller, Roslyn. *Beasts and Gods: How Democracy Changed its Name and Lost its Purpose* (2015). London: Zed Books.

Van Reybrouck, David (2016). *Against Elections: the Case for Democracy*. London: Bodley Head.

About Australian experiments with randomly selected citizen bodies

The best source is the [web site of the New Democracy Foundation](#) – specifically, the page titled [“Our Work,”](#)

About similar experiments outside Australia

Irish Constitutional Convention – a [short newspaper article](#), and [the web site of the Convention](#)

[Citizen Initiative Review](#) (USA)

[British Columbia Citizens' Assembly](#) (Canada)

G-1000 ([Belgium](#))

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1. The changing context of local government

In considering what structure are appropriate for local government, we need to start from the pattern of people's lives to establish just what needs to be done to provide for needs that neither commerce nor personal activity can provide, but are best provided as public goods, that is to say, goods that are accessible to anybody to use without them being required to pay for that use. Obvious examples are roads and parks, but also a lot of less tangible things, like information of various sorts.

The tendency in the development of our government institutions has been to centralise the provision of public goods, with states taking over from local government and the Federal government taking over from the states. There are many reasons for this: alleged economies of scale, from mass production; uniformity of provision in the name of equality; the centralisation of taxation at national level, and so on. These familiar actors are on the supply side, but there are also crucial factors on the consumer side.

In the fifty years from the 1860s to the Great War, local government flourished. Travel around thinner suburbs of Melbourne or Sydney and you will find in each suburb a handsome Town Hall, within walking distance of nearly everybody in the suburb, and designed to offer a focus for all sorts of community activities under the auspices of their local municipal council. Much of the lives of most people were bound up with the local community. People knew each other and shared many common interests and activities.

A lot of people have a nostalgia for that sort of community. They succeed sometimes in creating a limited local community, mainly among the growing cohorts of retired people and people who suffer from various disabilities. These communities are important in enriching the lives of very many people. Local government must be supportive of them. Most contemporary councils cover too wide an area. So they need to decentralise their provision for this sort of activity. I shall come back later to the question of how to do this in terms of organisational structures.

Most large councils maintain several local libraries. In the digital age they are increasingly evolving in the light of the needs and opportunities modern communications create. There is a long way to go before most people are in a position to access the whole range of things on the internet that might enlighten or entertain them. More importantly still, linking up with other people to cooperate in their mutual interests puts them in charge of aspects of their lives in which they may have felt powerless. But they have very little idea of where or how to start and how to handle the zillions of responses that overwhelm them. They need help that is locally accessible and largely free.

2. Representation: Locations and connections

In a modern metropolis central the big problem of democratic governance is that many of the services the council offers need to be directed at local needs and opportunities, in consultation with particular suburban communities. Centralised councils increasingly talk in terms of "a city of villages" and aspire to cultivate diversity. But geographical differences are not the only ones that are relevant. Different functions and the people they serve often form networks that have no particular location, often spilling beyond the limits of the municipality. A city, particularly a provincial city, flourishes to the extent that it build up a network of interconnections with its hinterland, offering its neighbours efficient, attractive facilities that connect them with the city. Those who, with their focus on the city, make the decisions that affect these relations to the hinterland need to be well informed about how those problems look from the outsider's point of view.

Many activities of importance to the life of the city, especially cultural, recreational interests and assistance to the handicapped, build up networks that have no particular central location within the city. It is typical of such interests that they involve directly only relatively small minorities. In sum they are of very great importance to the community as a whole, because in countless ways the creative people who stimulate the varied aspects of the life of the city are drawn to it by its reputation for enterprising investment of time, energy and money in all sorts of activities. With the best will in the world most citizens, including most councillors, are not likely to know much about a lot of these interests, and tend to dismiss them as minority interests.

In all such cases, present best practice by officials who are aware of their ignorance is to invoke consultants or opinion surveys. Both of these are very inadequate, fundamentally because opinion, even among those most closely involved in an activity is very often not well based. Nobody has the need or the opportunity to work out what the city can realistically do for them. They often feel neglected, but have only vague ideas of what they can sensibly ask for. It usually comes down to looking for funding.

What I believe is needed in such cases is a forum in which those who are interested in a particular activity can attempt to arrive at a realistic solution to their problem. If they can achieve that they are likely to get a lot of public support. Faced with a widely supported and sensible proposal, rather than a welter of uncoordinated demands, the central council is more likely to adopt it. The first step, I would suggest is to institute a well organised forum focussed on a specific problem or need, set up on a widely publicised website, inviting anybody who has anything to say on the matter to post a statement. That gives everybody the same opportunity to have their say, which is never the case in large meetings, where only very few get that opportunity. The hope is to ensure that all the relevant considerations are out there for all to see.

Of course, there will always be a lot of repetition, as well as irrelevancies and nonsense. I would suggest that a professional editor moderate the discussion, starring those posts that have something relevant and distinctive to say, enabling people to navigate their way through the discussion. People who objected to not

being starred could make their case on the site, perhaps in a special section. The forum would be a debate in which anybody could argue against anybody else's submission, but it would be futile simply to say "that's what I want".

If an argument is to have any relevance to a public good it must appeal to considerations that anybody can recognise as relevant, clear claims about public benefits and costs, not limited, of course, to those costs and benefits that have a monetary value.

The forum needs to be adjudicated to arrive at a practical proposal. My suggestion is that this task be given to a small committee chosen by lot from a panel of volunteers to constitute a reasonable sample of those most directly affected in one way or another by the questions at issue. It would be made clear to everybody that their task is to contribute to getting an outcome that can command support on the basis of the strength of the considerations advanced in the forum discussion. The point of choosing them from those most affected is that they are likely to have some experience of the practical issues that can be important in arriving at practical proposals. The decision is to rest on those relevant considerations, not on numbers of supporters of a decision either in the general forum or in the committee. Naturally all the debates on the committee will take place publicly on the website, so that anybody can see what reasons any participant offered for his or her view on any point.

As most people become computer literate, nearly everybody can take part in such a process if they want to. Of course those who are motivated to take part are likely to have irons in the fire. The result is going to be a compromise between particular minority interests, not necessarily what the public at large would have decided. I would argue that that is as it should be. The weakness of modern democracy is that, even when it recognises the need to consider minority needs, it often imposes uniformity in the name of equality or efficiency. But community flourishes on the breadth of the opportunities for diverse activities open to people, on open horizons rather than those restricted to established views. In any case, the final decision rests with the elected council.

If you want to explore more about his idea and the thinking behind it, you may find it in *The Demarchy Manifesto; for better public policy* by John Burnheim, Sydney University Press, 2016. (I get no royalties).

How to set up these citizen forums and their associated committees is a complex question that I cannot discuss in detail here. I would favour putting the initiative in the hands of such foundations as New Democracy, which has convinced many authorities to finance the enterprise in particular cases, but many variants are possible.

3. Guarding against corruption

There is no shortage of voluntary organisations that bombard legislative and executive officials at every level of modern government pressing particular interests, some by careful argument or legitimate threats to vote against those who do not support their interests, but often by shady deals or outright bribery.

The late Neville Wran, one of the best premiers NSW has had, once said he wished he could persuade the Labor party not to field candidates in local government elections. He thought it tended to corrupt both the party and the municipality. Because of the size of local councils you do not have to get many voters in your pay to win. So, particularly where party members vote as a group.

Politics as we know it at every level from the smallest municipality to the UN is very often a matter of doing deals. You support me on my pet project and I'll support you when you need it. It leads to a lot of poor decisions. Proposals get the required number of votes, not because politicians voted for them, not because they were the best decision on the merits of the case, but because of their strategies in the power game. In politics, no matter how much you may dislike it, if you want to be effective you have to win the power games. Astute politicians never loses an opportunity of doing a favour to a potential ally, putting others in their debt. You never know when you may need that person's support. The inevitable result is a lot of poor decisions, of opportunities lost, of money and other resources wasted.

The wheeling and dealing mentality sees nothing wrong with this. Life is a matter of competitive games. You winsome, lose some. Rulers in every form of government have always put their particular political interests before those of the people they are supposed to serve. Dealing in political favours very easily spells over into dealing in personal favours and favours to powerful commercial interests.

If the popular process I have outlined does result in a strong and well-informed public opinion on specific matters that should make it much harder to disguise what is behind poor decisions and put a brake on corruption. But it is not going to eliminate it. There is not a lot of public interest in local government few people know much about most of it. The turn out to vote is pathetically small. So it seems desirable to have something like a house of review to keep an eye on the day-to-day workings of a local authority. Such a body would not necessarily have any power to override the council, but it could draw matters to the attention of the media, the public and higher authority. It would be chosen by lot, like jury, but service would be voluntary and the composition would attempt to reflect the broad range of interests in the community.

To the reader

If you have read this far, you have probably got objections, questions and suggestions about my proposals. Please don't keep them to yourself. It's easy to post your criticisms and questions on this website for everybody to consider. If I can I'll try to answer them. You never know; we might get somewhere.

Two suggestions:

1. How to involve people constructively in local government.
2. How to audit local government's activities.

Most people are not active members of any organised group that affects local government. They often have interests that are not represented by the organised groups. Some of those interests are general interests in such matters as environmental protection or efficient auditing of government funds. Others may be quite local, such as preserving an old tree, even though it blocks the mayor's view..

There are three organised groups of participants in Local Government:

1. The elected councillors with their various allegiances to parties or groups of electors.
2. The permanent employees of the council, with their various professional bodies or trade unions.
3. The established interest groups, ranging from the Chamber of Commerce to various sporting bodies and environmental activists.

A lot of the decisions councils make are the result of interactions between these organised groups, in which private individuals often have some interest, but get little information about what is happening and little opportunity to intervene in it. On occasions when a particular decision affects them adversely, small groups of people may protest effectively. That is not always for the best. In a wider context, nimby (not in my back yard) groups stop projects that are of benefit to a wide range of other people, who are not so easily organised. General benefits do not stir us to action as readily as disadvantages that affect us personally.

In practice most of the operations local government are very much a matter of who gets what, of delivering particular facilities and services to their ultimate users. Funds are limited. Whose needs get priority is largely a matter of influence and power. There are many opportunities for swapping favours, laziness and petty corruption.

Suggestion one:

The council needs a comprehensive set of long term objectives that are generally endorsed by the citizens. The council's performance is to be assessed in terms of its progress towards these objectives.

This long term plan needs to begin with an open discussion among the citizens in which anybody can put forward their ideas or comment on what others have proposed. That discussion should aim to get all the considerations that are relevant to council's operations out in the open.

I would suggest that this is best done on a dedicated website that is carefully edited to exclude abusive and irrelevant posting and single out well-argued contributions. The atmosphere the editors should encourage is a constructive

one in which comments are directed to improving suggestions rather than dismissing them, exploring ways of enriching people's lives first of all. Apportioning expenditure can come later, when the council has to decide what we can afford.

Consolidating these suggestions into a long term program would need to be the work of a representative citizen's jury run by some well-established body as New Democracy.

Suggestion two:

In addition to the normal financial audit, a citizen's jury should conduct an annual review of the council's performance towards the goals in the long-term plan. Councils do try to keep their constituents informed about their achievements, but they naturally try to hide their failings. The jury should see itself primarily as giving a n adequate picture of the situation to the public. It is not empowered to instruct the council or its officers to do specific things.

My thinking has been greatly assisted by discussion with Dr Bronwyn Kelly, recently retired as a senior executive on Waverley Council in Sydney. I enclose pdf files of two of her papers outlining work in the field of community consultation. I also enclose an earlier draft submission of my own, which gives more background to these recommendations.

Introduction

This proposal describes a Council chosen entirely by random selection. As both the Constitution Act and the Local Government Act of Victoria expressly state that Councillors must be elected, the model of local government described here would require that these Acts be amended.

Government at any level ought above all to be equitable. For this, a Council should faithfully represent the community, not just in the obvious characteristics of gender, race, wealth and so on, but also *in the number of those in favour of or opposed to a policy or project that has not yet even been proposed*. The only way to ensure this is by using random selection from the whole community.

It is also important that decisions should be “wise”. For this to occur, research has shown that it is necessary to have the greatest possible diversity of backgrounds and points of view. Random selection ensures this.

Proposed Structure of the Council

A Council of not fewer than 48 members¹ will be chosen by lot from the whole community (residents and rate-payers) aged 18 and above. These members serve for four years, with staggered terms, six being replaced every six months in order to keep continuity. Those eligible are automatically included in the draw, but may opt out. The number of councillors is a compromise, more will give better representation, but ratepayers may be sensitive to the cost. As it is impossible for one or two persons, however well-intentioned, to represent a community, there is no Mayor or Deputy Mayor. Their functions are filled in part by the Liaison Officer (see below), in part by the Chairperson of Council meetings (see next section).

Agenda and Proposals Committee, and Council Chair

The 12 most senior members of the Council will choose eight of their number to sit on the Agenda and Proposals Committee, and to chair Council meetings. The office of Chairperson will be held in rotation, for one meeting only, by the members of the Agenda and Proposals Committee. The Chairperson does not vote and takes no part in debate.

Policy Committees

To ensure that debate and decisions are informed, the Council will set up a number of standing policy committees covering the major functions of local government. The names, number, and scope of these will be set by the Council, but a typical list might include:

- Town Planning and Buildings.
- Roads and Parking.
- Health Services.
- Community Services. (Child care, youth, aged, and disability services.)

and so on. Council itself should decide whether these committees are:

- a) chosen by lot from the council itself, so that each member serves on one committee.
- b) chosen by lot from the whole community.
- c) chosen in part from the Council and in part from the community.
- d)

In addition, Council should be able to set up temporary *ad hoc* committees, to debate and advise on important issues as they arise which are not covered by the standing committees. The members of these committees would be chosen by lot from the public.

Council Staff and Oversight Committee

Subject to the decisions of the Council, Council staff will remain essentially the same as at present, except that a new position of Liaison Officer will be created. The position of Chief Executive Officer will remain. At the discretion of the Council, an Oversight Committee may be formed, either from the members of Council or selected by lot from the public, for the purpose of verifying that purchases, contracts, permits and approvals by Council staff are made in an equitable and transparent manner.

Advisory Nature of Committees

All the committees mentioned above will research, debate, and advise Council on issues in their field of competence, but do not themselves make decisions. Policy committees are not be required to make unanimous recommendations, but are encouraged to submit minority views when opinions differ.

Remuneration Panel

The Remuneration Panel, of 50 members chosen by lot from the community, meets once per year for the sole purpose of fixing pay, allowances, and conditions for members of Council and committees. This it does in the manner described below for the Budget estimates. When finished, the Remuneration Panel is dissolved, and a new panel formed the following year. Those eligible are automatically included in the draw, but may opt out. Panel members are unpaid. The decisions of this panel are binding, and not subject to revision by the Council.

The Liaison Officer

The Liaison Officer acts as the Council's spokesperson and "figurehead" in dealing with the Minister for Local Government, other councils, the media and the public. He is a staff member acting on the Council's instructions, and would be liable to dismissal for not following those instructions.

Public Participation and Proposals

Any member of the public will be able to make a proposal for a project, a by-law, or a policy change. Council may require that proposals meet certain requirements, and show evidence of popular support (such as a certain number of signatures). These proposals should be addressed to the Agenda and Proposals Committee, which, after ensuring that they meet Council's standards, will place them on the Agenda. Council will usually send each proposal to the relevant policy committee for consideration, or, if necessary, set up a temporary policy committee for that proposal only. The policy committee then publishes the proposal, and calls for written submissions from the general public, and for the views of known experts in the field, whether residents of the community or not. After consideration and discussion of the information available, the policy committee makes its recommendation or recommendations to the council, which then votes after any necessary debate. In order to prevent corruption by bribes or threats, voting is by secret ballot.

The Budget

Establishing the budget expenditure and rates is of the first importance, as it sets the emphasis to be placed on each function of the local administration. Council will require each section of the administration to prepare a detailed estimate of its requirements for the following year. Using these and the information available from previous years, each member of Council will make his own assessment of the figure to be set, and the median (the "middle-most" figure) is taken for each item. Rates are fixed in the same way. For

this operation debate and a Chairperson are unnecessary, so all members participate. In effect, each estimate is both an opinion and a vote, and using the median gives equal weight to each vote and each opinion. Consequently, insofar as the randomly-selected Council accurately represents the community, this method is equitable, and voting without debate preserves the diversity of opinion necessary for good decisions.

Conclusion

From their own experience, members of the Citizen's Jury will be aware that choice by lot gives a body that is quite capable of making decisions in a responsible and thoughtful way. They will also be aware that members of elected bodies are often unresponsive to the wishes of the citizens that they are supposed to represent. It is hoped that the argument made above for equity in government will persuade them of the need for choice by lot. Other major advantages are that it limits corruption and cronyism. Any increase in the total remuneration of councillors will be offset by savings from not making wasteful decisions.

This proposal is a “scaled-down” version of a proposal for a national government which is presented in “Down with Elections!” (Campbell Wallace 2016), available in paperback from Amazon.com, and in e-book form from Amazon (for Kindle) and Smashwords for other devices. Some sources for further reading are given in the notes to this book.

TOPIC

ADMINISTRATION of Council Business Papers and reporting council decisions to the electorate

As part of the governance possibilities this is a good opportunity to rethink:

1. the way issues are reported to councilors and
2. the way decisions are reported to the community.

In my reading about local government reform I have not come across much discussion about innovation in ways of providing information to councilors and reporting council meeting outcomes.

Currently councilors are provided with reams of paper that is hard to get through and it is difficult to find the key points., particularly for new councilors. Depending on the relationship with council administration staff, and the General Manager /CEO, councilors may not be able to get the information they need to make an informed decision.

The decisions that are finally are then poorly communicated to those who matter. Some councilors would report back to their constituents. The feeling is that people are not interested. This needs to be tested to see if there are ways of communicating with residents that will engage them in the local political process.

SUGGESTION: informal facilitated discussion with staff on reports in the business papers; a summary report is then prepared that summarizes the key issues identified and provides any additional information requested by councilors. This summary could be read by the Mayor to start the formal meeting with a summary of the issues raised and the considerations they have highlighted to commence the consideration of reports. The information they have requested can also be highlighted

FOR

1. Allowing councilors to come together as a group before the meeting to ensure they have understood the content of the business paper will shorten meeting times. .
2. All councilor hear the same thing. If they miss this briefing, a summary is available so they can catch up.
3. Councilors can more easily ask for more information.
4. Reading a summary to start the meeting sets the strategic tone for the meeting to keep councilors thinking strategically.
5. This hopefully keeps councilors focused on the issues and not wasting time on attacking each other.
6. Builds relationship with council staff as they appreciate the ways individual councilors like to receive information.

7. Requires General Manager/CEO to work with councilors.

AGAINST

1. Council political dynamics may be able to hijack process
2. Maintaining impartiality of reports.
3. Second guessing councilors needs could be manipulated to influence decisions.

ASSUMPTIONS

That facilitated discussion and adequate information will lead to quicker appreciation of issues.

Discussion will make it easier to explain issues and to key points.

References:

Business paper

Currently exploring sources of information about this.

Reporting

Utilizing Forum Theatre in local government processes to engage with a broader section of the electorate would be an interesting exercise. Perhaps high school students could act out decisions at their schools to test this approach.

Boal, A. 2008. Theatre of the Oppressed. Pluto Press London

Boal, A. 2005 Legislative Theatre. Routledge NY

I am the coordinator of our postgraduate courses – Master of Local Government and Graduate Diploma in Local Government Management – at UTS, and the issues raised by the appointment of the citizen’s jury, and indeed the very use of this method of deliberative democratic practice, are included in our subjects and with our students on an ongoing basis. Having considered your request, and read the available documentation, the main contribution I believe I could make is to suggest that the jury spend an hour or so near the start of its deliberations focusing on the question: **What is local government?**

Having worked with and taught local government practitioners and councillors now for a number of years, I find that this foundation question is generally left unasked, to the detriment, I believe, of policy, strategy, implementation, and review in whatever area of local government practice one may choose to consider. The question of ‘what is local government’ is dealt with right at the start of our foundation subject, Local Government Principles and Practice, and it enables all further discussions, readings and debates to be brought back to the key phenomenon we are all talking about (i.e. local government), also when considering issues of governances, democracy, representation, participation, legislation, public value, you name it. In this spirit, I offer the following precis of an answer to the question.

What is local government?: Some ideas from the literature

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A melange of voices

As one delves into the literature, it soon becomes clear that, as Orr and Vince (2009: 655) write: ‘Local government is not a unified homogenous organizational entity, but rather a melange of voices, interests and assumptions about how to organize, prioritize and mobilize action.’ Figure 1 provides a summary of ways of understanding local government drawn from the literature.



Figure 1: Ways of understanding local government

Source: Ron Woods' synthesis of the literature

Copus, Sweeting and Wingfield (2013: 391) put forward the view that local government in the 21st century exists in 'two parallel universes': the first is focused on the quality, performance and management of public services; the second is the role that comes with the expectations of representative democracy and representative government. Colebatch and

Degeling (1986) have pointed out that each council is a service body, and that citizens are voters and ratepayers, as well as being customers of its services. Tensions may arise in adoption of these various roles vis-à-vis the local citizenry.

The democratic/governance aspect

In order for democracy to be seen as the process through which competing local interests are reconciled, Pratchett (2004: 359) argues for multi-purpose elected local government to remain as 'the primary locus of democracy at the sub-central government level'.

Justifications for local government include that the institutions of local democracy provide for a diffusion of power within society and that local democracy supports diversity and difference in the face of an otherwise constrictively uniform set of policies put forward by a central government. Arguments in favour of local responsiveness also come into play (Pratchett 2004: 359-360). In short, local government can be regarded as the 'institutional embodiment of local democracy' (Pratchett 2004: 359).

The service provision aspect

Watt (2006: 8) argues that 'the major advantage of local government is that it allows the local public goods and services it provides to be adjusted to suit the tastes and the preferences of local residents'.

An implication of this for the design of local government structures is that local government jurisdictions should be based on the benefit areas of local public goods, with adequate taxation powers to pay for the expenditure responsibilities allocated to them. Ideally, then, local governments should be established in such a way that local residents both pay for, and vote to decide on, the local public goods and services they receive (Watt, 2006: 9). There are potential disagreements over what constitutes a spatial community; over who pays; and over who benefits. The service delivery aspects of local government in Australia are characterised by great diversity in terms of 'the scope and scale of their functions, as well as their size, economic, geographic, environmental and social characteristics' (Productivity Commission 2008: 11).

Overcoming the tensions

Adopting an holistic view of (local) public services and representative government can possibly help to overcome the tensions. One way may be to operate from a conceptual framework that brings together the democratisation and service delivery functions of local government and links them to higher order goals (social cohesion and economic development) *via more effective and inclusive decision-making at the local level and infrastructure and service provision*. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

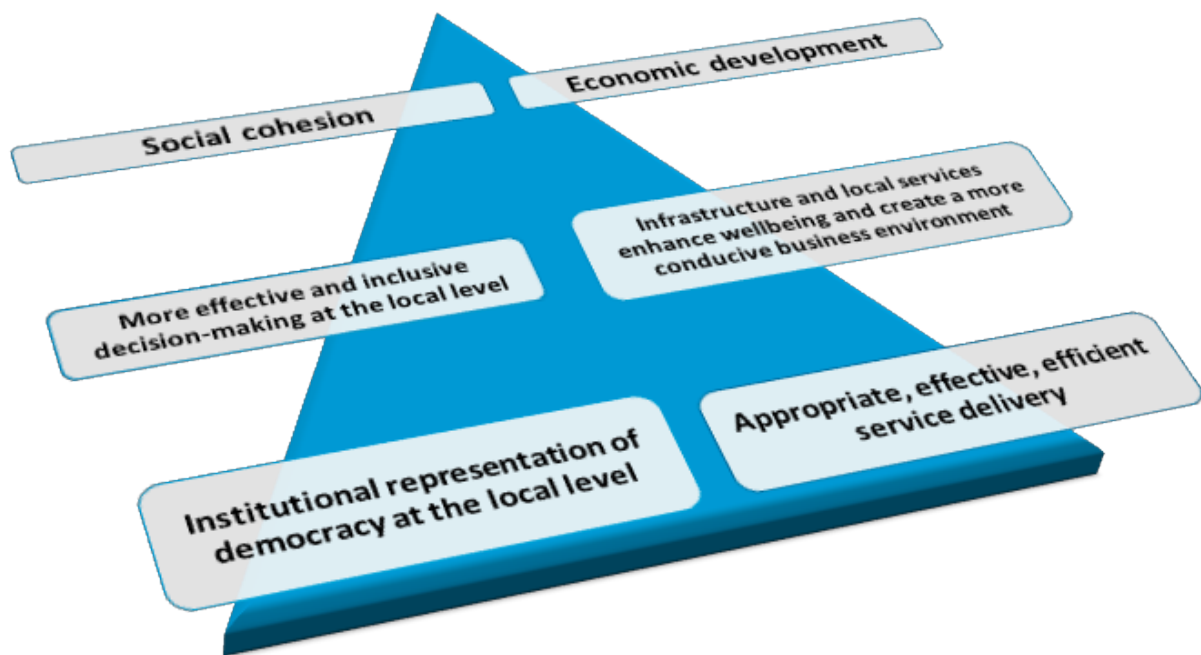


Figure 2: Adopting an holistic view of local government by focusing on higher order goals
Source: Ron Woods

Debates on local government's role in 'place-shaping' have also emerged in discussions about local government, particularly in the UK (see Lyons 2007) and this may be an additional concept for the members of the citizen's jury to explore further. I would argue that they link in quite well with the 'higher order goals' expressed above, namely the role of local government in promoting social cohesion and economic development for the benefit of local communities.

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