

# *Fit for the Future*

*Citizens' Panel Report*

*13<sup>th</sup> June 2015*



WILLOUGHBY CITY COUNCIL



# Fit for the Future

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## Citizens' Panel Report

### 1 Introduction

A group of 22 residents of Willoughby accepted the invitation by Council to participate in a Citizens Panel charged with making a recommendation to Council on the preferred Fit for the Future Scenario.

The group met for a total of 13 hours between Thursday 4 June and Saturday 13 June 2015.

**The following methodology was adopted:**

- Presentation by Council officers of information underpinning the Fit for the Future parameters.
- Team building activities to facilitate communications.
- Presentation of additional financial and other information.
- Access to Council's website to read relevant documents such as the Independent Panel's Report and contribute to on line forum.
- Discussion of benefits and disadvantages of each of the Fit for the Future scenarios.
- Deliberation on each and selection of the preferred Scenario.

### 2 Recommendation

The Panel's recommendation is Scenario 1; Willoughby Council – no amalgamation.

The reasons for this recommendation are as follows:

- Known entity - mostly comfortable with current operations.
- Level of representation ie. Councillor to Citizen ratio is appropriate.
- Good mix of commercial, residential and environmental elements.
- Financial prospects look sound.
- Alternate business model of other scenarios unknown.
- Benefits of amalgamation not clear and alternative regional organisation of some services not presented and explored.
- Enables Willoughby Council to focus on its own strategy ie. to grow as second CBD.

The Panel recognises that limitations of this recommendation may include the following:

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- Could limit long term purchasing power.
- Could limit negotiation power with the State Government.
- Affect synergy with adjoining councils.
- Inadequate sharing of resource costs.
- Amalgamation imposed with no opportunity to influence solution.

## 3 Panel Results

This is a consensus decision based on the following table:

| Option Considered                                                           | Whole Hearted Endorsement | Agreement with a minor point of contention | Do not like, but will support | Serious disagreement |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 (Willoughby alone)                                                        | 6                         | 7                                          | 4                             | 1                    |
| 2 (Willoughby and North Sydney)                                             | -                         | 1                                          | 16                            | 2                    |
| 3 (Willoughby and North Sydney, Lane Cove)                                  | 1                         | 1                                          | 16                            | 1                    |
| 4 (Willoughby, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Mosman, Hunters Hill, Part of Ryde) | 2                         | 3                                          | 1                             | 14                   |

\*Not all panellists participated in the voting



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## 4 Qualifications to recommendation

The recommendation of the panel was made with the following qualifications:

- Not enough information about pros and cons of each Scenario in the Fit for the Future analysis – in particular from other local government areas.
- Not clear that any of the scenarios meet the Fit for the Future criteria.
- No data on the operational model for amalgamations.
- State Government drivers or agenda not clearly explained.
- Wider governance/strategic issues between State and Local Government also need to be addressed.
- Local Government should have power to make local decisions.
- Options already exist for councils to co-operate and achieve savings.
- Amalgamation scenarios did not consider compatibility of merging councils.
- Recommendation of Scenario 1 does not preclude a need for change or improvement.
- Regional representation is important and should include State Government.
- Benefits of amalgamation can be achieved by councils working more closely.
- Regional body will address, influence and assist with funding of large projects.

## 5 Ideas to improve Willoughby City Council and local government under all scenarios

The Citizens' Panel recommendation does not mean maintaining status quo, and there are many issues that need to be dealt with under all scenarios.

### 5.1 Rights and Responsibilities

- Local councils need a clear Charter. This would set out both rights and responsibilities, clear areas of decisions, and accountabilities and key success areas.
- Strengthening skills and professionalism of the councillors.
- Local councils need to be made up of people sharing similar values, demographics, economic and social composition.
- Local councils should not be dominated by political parties, vested financial interests, such as developers – we need transparency and mechanisms to remove interests that are conflicted and agenda driven.



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- Having agreed a charter with citizens, NSW Government should not be permitted to override decisions that are made locally under the charter.

## 5.2 Revenue

- There are options in the Revitalising Local Government Report for restructuring revenue that should be addressed under all scenarios .
- These includes being able to raise rates more equitably.

## 5.3 Cross-Council Collaboration

- Some benefits of amalgamation can be achieved by councils working more closely together in a structured fashion.
- The Citizens' Panel recommends the creation of regional cross-council bodies to address and influence strategic issues including:
  - Facilitation of major projects and regional resource development.
  - Population planning and resourcing of community facilities such as schools and sporting facilities – shared use, optimisation of investment, adequacy of resourcing.
  - Traffic and parking – cooperation between councils to ensure optimal flows and avoid simply moving bottlenecks.
- There needs to be a mechanism to cover collaboration with State Government and State authorities, such as Transport, State Rail, RMS and Sydney Water.
- Councils can find opportunities to collaborate and share resources to save money and achieve better outcomes eg. IT and purchasing, without the need to amalgamate.
- Develop a mechanism for considering boundaries as circumstances change.
- Councils must consider the impact of their decisions beyond their immediate boundaries: cross border collaboration is essential.
- Issues affecting communities interfacing on boundaries should be dealt with holistically.

## 5.4 Democracy and representation

- We want to see a strong community representation under all scenarios: Local issues, local representation, local solutions.

