

ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA ITEM

Ordinary Meeting

19 May 2015

Agenda Item 5.3	Submission on the Preliminary Report - 2015 Electoral Representation Review	
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Submission to Preliminary Report 2015 Electoral Representation Review

Greater Shepparton City Council

Greater Shepparton City Council

Gavin Cator

Chief Executive Officer

Locked Bag 1000

SHEPPARTON VIC 3632

Council Contact

Sharlene Still

Acting Manager Corporate Performance

Ph: 03 5832 9869

Email: sharlene.still@shepparton.vic.gov.au

Greater Shepparton City Council is currently represented by 7 Councillors in an unsubdivided municipality. This structure was a result of an extensive community consultation process in 1996 where there was a consistent view that Councillors need to have a municipality wide focus and be responsible for representing the municipality as a whole.

In preparation of a preliminary submission to the 2015 review, Council discussed the merits of both an unsubdivided and subdivided municipality in addition to the number of Councillors, and decided that the current structure of the municipality has proven to provide the most effective representation for the Greater Shepparton community, and has the capacity to continue to do so.

An unsubdivided municipality allows for equal representation of all residents, by all Councillors and provides more opportunities for the community to access their elected representatives. Residents and ratepayers can contact any Councillor when wishing to discuss concerns or raise issues of interest and it allows individual Councillors to be accessed based on policy interest or expertise.

It also allows Councillors to freely share workloads and commitments and promotes a strategic approach to decision making, as opposed to individual ward interests.

While the number of voters in the municipality provides reasonable justification to increase the number of Councillors to nine, the Council is confident that seven Councillors can still fairly represent the diverse and complex needs of our community in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

Since the restructure of local government in Victoria in 1997, Greater Shepparton has been represented by 7 Councillors and it is the Council's view that this is appropriate and workable for this municipality. It allows for effective, streamlined decision-making, and optimal representation and accessibility for the various communities of interest.

To increase the number of Councillors to nine would cause an increased financial burden on the Council and its ratepayers, many of which are already experiencing financial hardship. At present, 2.2% of ratepayers in Greater Shepparton are on payment arrangement plans (22.9% of which have fallen behind in payments) and 3.8% of ratepayers have been referred to a debt collection agency due to non-payment of rates. The total amount of debt outstanding on accounts which has been referred to our debt collection agency is currently 22.3%, highlighting that a large number of residents and businesses, not just ratepayers, are experiencing financial difficulty.

It is estimated that an additional two Councillors would come at an approximate cost of \$67,500 annually; adding to the already increasing pressure Council is facing with the introduction of rate capping. In addition to these ongoing operational costs, two additional Councillors would also have a significant impact to the workload of support staff and result in the need to undertake building renovations and office refurbishments, also at a significant cost to Council.

Greater Shepparton City Council has carefully considered all three options outlined in the preliminary report presented by the Victorian Electoral Commission on the electoral structure

of the municipality and agrees with the Victorian Electoral Commission in their observation that there is no evidence that the current number of Councillors is unworkable.

Therefore, the Greater Shepparton City Council recommends that the current unsubdivided electoral structure, with 7 Councillors, be maintained as the model that would provide the electors of the municipality with the most effective and equitable representation for the future.