

Item No: MM09/20-40

MAYORAL MINUTE - RESPONSE TO COUNCIL'S PUBLIC ECONOMIC STATEMENT

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SUMMARY

Our financial situation at Cumberland City Council is well known. The situation that we're facing now is serious, and the decisions we now have to make will ensure the future sustainability of Council.

We don't have endless cash reserves and like many businesses and organisations, our Council has been hit hard by the financial impacts of COVID-19. The amalgamation process hasn't delivered the savings that we were promised, at least not yet.

We have considered options to address our financial situation including the increasing of rates beyond the State Government imposed rates cap through a special rate variation, and borrowing. However, we don't believe these options are in the best interests of the broader community.

As you all know, Council has released an Economic Statement, detailing to our community the measures Council is investigating in order to address our budget situation. Releasing such a statement showed that as a Council we are open and transparent with our community. It was actually a move that Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee applauded.

We're not taking an ostrich approach to this situation. We're not burying our heads in the sand. We know we have a responsibility to every ratepayer in Cumberland City to ensure our services are delivered in the most cost effective way possible. We owe that to our ratepayers. We owe it to our ratepayers to be honest and accountable and to sometimes make decisions that aren't popular but we know are about equity.

These are challenging times for this Council. Since becoming Mayor, I've made it a priority that this Council needs to get back to basics. I often ask myself, what do ratepayers expect from us at the end of the day?

They expect their footpaths to be repaired; they expect their bins to be collected; they expect their streets to be clean; and they expect Council assets and infrastructure to be maintained and ideally upgraded. If we can't do the basics well and if we can't afford to deliver these services, we don't deserve to operate as a Council.

The reality we're facing now – is if we don't make difficult decisions and find savings, we will struggle to fund essential works. So what cost savings measures is Council investigating? We're looking at areas like Council run child care centres and swimming pools - areas that are not considered to be our core business.

Why are we looking at these services? Council's 17 early education centres are running at a loss of \$6.4 million dollars annually. We cannot continue to sustain these kind of losses.

We are realistic, and we know that sometimes the private and not for profit sector can be better equipped to deliver certain services than local government, and we have examples of this model already working in our local government area. Look at the Auburn Ruth Everess Aquatic Centre. This is one partnership with a commercial provider that has proven to be very effective.

Why does Council need to be involved in the day to day operations of these services? Why can't we own the assets, own the buildings – and let an external provider run an efficient, cost effective service.

Naturally, not everyone agrees with this position and I respect that. This is a democracy and everyone is allowed to express their own views and opinions.

What is not acceptable, however, are the inappropriate, cowardly and personal social media posts that have followed since our Council released our Economic Statement.

It's no secret that the United Services Union, is working with certain members of this Chamber, to derail the process of Council identifying savings in these areas, and ultimately giving this Council, a sustainable future.

This includes key members in the United Services Union and several Australian Labor party members on this Council engaging with a privately operated 'Care for Cumberland' Facebook page by publicly liking and commenting on social media posts.

About a week ago, this page posted a photo of myself holding my baby nephew, who had previously appeared in a media article after I restored Council's nappy allowance for our childcare centre workers with an inappropriate caption.

I can tolerate personal attacks such as this on myself. What I won't tolerate is the people who run this page, violating this child's privacy. They didn't seek permission from the baby's parents to use his image. They also referred to the baby boy as a 'she.'

In a second post, they posted his photo, again without parental permission. In this post, they made light of his gender and included his name. It wasn't until the baby's father complained that the two photos and the baby's name were subsequently removed.

As all Councillors are aware, Council has an adopted *Child Protection Policy*, and we take our child protection obligations very seriously in this Council.

Posting the photos shows a lack of regard for privacy and child safety. I find it disappointing that at least one United Services Union official and the State Member for Granville, Julia Finn 'liked' this content.

It's not funny, it's not effective lobbying – it's below the belt in my opinion. Again, this is a page that certain members of this Chamber follow and engage with.

The parents of the baby used in the photo are very distressed by this. The matter is serious and options to rectify the issue are being pursued.

For residents of Cumberland City Council, I'd like to assure you that Council will do everything possible to ensure this is an effectively run and sustainable Council, which is accountable to our entire local community.

We will not shy away from tough decisions. We will represent all ratepayers.

I encourage all residents to read Council's economic statement, which is available on Council's website.

Council will continue to update our community on plans to deliver savings. We are here for the entire Cumberland City Council community, and we will make this a financially sustainable Council long term, one decision at a time.

Therefore Councillors, I am recommending the following:

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Endorse the Mayoral Minute.**
- 2. Express its extreme disappointment and condemn the Care for Cumberland Facebook Page and its use of derogatory child images which were posted without parent consent.**
- 3. Continue to take child safety and privacy with the upmost seriousness, do everything in its power to combat such behaviour.**

ATTACHMENTS

Nil