Future Roles of Mayors and Councillors: Issues and Ideas

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Core propositions

- If local government is to become more valued, respected and ‘community-led’ we need to re-think some of our current ideas about elected representation.
- Australia has a damaging obsession with being over-governed ...
- ... and in the case of local government, with separating the roles of managers and councillors – the Board of Directors model.
Australia as an international ‘outlier’

- An unusual *combination* of features:
  - Large average population per local government
  - Very few councillors per person
  - Very few directly elected and/or ‘strong’ mayors (except Qld)
  - No formal ‘upper tier’ and limited regional cooperation
  - No statutory local boards or community councils
- A democratic deficit?
## Different approaches to representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Australia</th>
<th>Wales</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.76 m people</td>
<td>3.06m people</td>
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<tr>
<td>139 LGAs</td>
<td>22 LGAs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,222 Councillors</td>
<td>1,271 Councillors</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Cllrs per LGA</td>
<td>58 Cllrs per LGA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Cllr per 2,190 people</td>
<td>1 Cllr per 1,240 people</td>
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<td>PLUS &gt;700 elected community councils AND emerging regions</td>
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Expectations of local government

‘Good’ democratic governance (representative, ethical)

Community support, empowerment

Broad wellbeing (social, economic, environmental, cultural)

Integrated place management

Agent (‘partner’) of central governments

Local regulation (up to a point)

Selected services and infrastructure

Efficient and effective provider/producer

Complex political challenges
‘Strategic capacity’

**Relevance**
- Keeping up-to-date on local and ‘big picture’ agendas
- Expertise replaces and communities
- Innovation and creativity

**Resources**
- Revenue policies
- Finance/asset management
- Staff and Cllr skills (inc policy, strategy, IGR)
- New ways to deliver services

**Respect**
- Re-building trust
- Sound political governance
- Openness and accountability
- Local leadership and partnerships
- New roles for councillors
Place-based governance

- Multiple players and decision-makers:
  “a collaborative approach to determining a community's preferred futures and ... implementing the means of realising them”
- Leadership/facilitating role for local government, but NOT ‘in charge’
- Appropriate mechanisms AND SKILLS are crucial
“The role of mayors is not properly understood by the community. Many councillors argue that mayors are 'first among equals' and that the role is merely ceremonial … as well as chairing meetings.

Out in the community, people often have a completely different view: that the mayor has an important leadership role in council … and that they also have broader responsibilities for how the council, including its administration, fulfils its role.

... a mayor does hold the key leadership position in their council. This means more than taking the lead in meetings and speaking for the council.”
NSW Review Panel: on Mayors

- Concept of mayor as civic leader – formulating a vision; leading community engagement and strategic planning; forging partnerships; ensuring good governance; guiding the CEO/GM

- “... enhancing the role of mayors could make a major contribution to focusing councils on strategic issues, improving governance and strengthening inter-government relations and partnerships with key stakeholders.”
Leadership roles re-defined in NSW Act
Councillors and Mayors Toolkit

- CEO and Management Relations
- LG Act: Purposes and Principles
- LG Act: Role Definition
- Audit and Annual Report
- Community Engagement
- Performance Monitoring (Scrutiny)
- Stakeholder Relations, Partnerships
- Strategic Plans and Budget
Critical roles and skills for the future

- “Re-thinking the role of councillors as community connectors, brokers and leaders” (CCIN)
- ‘Stewardship’ (Toronto)
  - More than making decisions: “keeping in touch with citizens and their concerns... understanding how the community is doing.”
- Community engagement and strategic planning
  - Political tasks – resources and priorities; leadership and partnerships
  - Danger of excessive ‘professionalisation’
- Dispassionate scrutiny of council performance (audit)
- Regional cooperation and IGR
  - Projecting local interests on a bigger stage
  - Enhancing local government as a sector