

GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL **MAYORAL MINUTE**

MM01

SUBJECT: FIT FOR THE FUTURE - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM AGENDA
FROM: John Dal Broi, Mayor

SUMMARY

This report refers to the State Government's reform agenda for the Local Government, "Fit For the Future" and seeks Council's support for Griffith City Council to participate in a facilitation process, led by an independent facilitator, to explore options for a merger of the two (2) Councils.

RECOMMENDATION

(a) Griffith City Council support the engagement of an independent facilitator to conduct discussions between Councillors of Griffith City Council and Murrumbidgee Shire Council with a view to exploring opportunities/options for a merger of the two Councils in accordance with the NSW Government "Fit for the Future" reform process.

(b) Should Murrumbidgee Shire Council adopt a resolution with similar intent to (a) above, that the General Manager be authorised to make necessary arrangements in consultation with the General Manager of Murrumbidgee Shire Council for the facilitation process to take place.

BACKGROUND

The Independent Local Government Review Panel Report released during 2014 includes a schedule of "Preferred Options for all Councils in NSW". Griffith City Council, as the regional centre is listed as a possible merger with Murrumbidgee Shire Council. The report also lists Carrathool Shire Council as a possible merger with Griffith City Council.

Griffith has consistently expressed its view to neighbouring councils that it is prepared to engage in constructive discussions. Murrumbidgee Shire Council has approached Griffith in this regard.

Councillors are aware that all councils in NSW are required to prepare and submit to the Office of Local Government a proposal or template which documents the respective Council's intended model for their local government area into the future. These templates must be submitted by 30 June 2015.

There are three options/templates available:

- Template 1: Council Merger Proposal
- Template 2: Council Improvement Proposal (Existing Structure)
- Rural Council Proposal (Stand alone but with reduced functions yet to be determined). This option is intended for smaller councils only.

In preparing its submission/template each council is required to take due regard of the "Options" as documented in the Independent Panel Report referred to above. Secondly, each council is required to address 7 criteria determined by the Office of Local Government, which assesses the Council's financial sustainability.

Griffith City Council staff are in the process of preparing draft Template 2. Council Improvement Proposal (Existing Structure) in that it meets all 7 financial sustainability criteria.

Notwithstanding the above, Griffith City Council received a letter from Murrumbidgee Shire Council on 24 February 2014, inviting Griffith to participate in discussions regarding the Fit for the Future process. Council (Griffith), subsequently resolved at its Ordinary Meeting that evening as follows:

15/040

RESOLVED on the motion of Councillors Stead and Napoli that the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and General Manager meet with representatives from Murrumbidgee Shire Council to explore all avenues that relate to Fit for the Future in relation to Griffith City Council and Murrumbidgee Shire Council.

As a consequence of the above resolution a meeting of representatives of the respective Councils was held at Murrumbidgee Shire Council today, 10 March 2015.

The discussions were quite productive with open and frank dialogue as to the State Government's Fit for the Future reform process and what implications/opportunities there may be for our respective communities.

An agreement was reached at the meeting that a recommendation would be taken back to our respective Councils seeking endorsement to engage an independent facilitator, through the Office of Local Government, to examine all issues/options in relation to a possible merger of the two Councils. The facilitator is fully funded by the Office of Local Government.

Following the facilitation process, should the two Councils wish to prepare a detailed merger business case, this will be 50% funded by the Office of Local Government with remaining cost shared by the two Councils.

It should be noted that the available time to formalise a proposal and to seek community feedback is limited with submissions required to be lodged by 30 June 2015.

OPTIONS

- (a) As per the recommendation in this Mayoral Minute.
- (b) Council note the Mayoral Minute and decline to participate in a facilitation process.

STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

a) Policy Implications

Not Applicable

b) Financial Implications

There will be no cost to Council to engage the facilitator. The Office of Local Government will fully fund this process.

Should the facilitation process result in a decision by the two Councils to prepare a detailed business plan for a merger, the Office of Local Government will meet 50% of that cost. No budget provision has been made for Griffith City Council's share of the remaining cost.

c) Legal/Statutory Implications

The engagement of a facilitator places no obligations on either party to proceed with a merger.

CONSULTATION

Councillors
Senior Management Team
Murrumbidgee Shire Council

STRATEGIC LINKS

a) Growth Strategy Plan

Not Applicable

b) Corporate/Business Plan

Not Applicable