Submission to Banyule City Council Electoral Representation Review

I have served as the Grimshaw Ward Councillor on the Banyule City Council for almost seven years since my election in October 2012. I make this submission to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to provide my own views on the optimal Ward structure and number of Councillors for the City. This submission is made in my own personal capacity as a Councillor and does not reflect the official views of Council.

Ward Structure

I believe that the single member Ward structure is optimal. In time on Council I have found that the current single member Ward structure:

- Enables Councillors to develop a good understanding of the unique priorities in their Ward and to be a strong advocate on local issues.
- Provides enhanced accountability to residents for the responsiveness, timeliness and quality of Councillor advice and support in to inquiries.
- Reduces the risk of residents “advice shopping” Councillors in the same Ward.
- Reduces the risk of competitive behavior between Councillors in the same Ward for community recognition of the achievements of Council. The structure helps to foster strong and supportive working relationships among Councillors.
- Best represents the numerous local communities of interest across the City of Banyule including Eaglemont and Ivanhoe in the Griffin Ward, Montmorency in the Hawdon Ward and Heidelberg West in the Olympia Ward, home to one of the largest Somali Australian communities in Victoria. In the case of the Grimshaw Ward there is a community of interest based in Watsonia with a strong fabric of local community and trader organisations including the Watsonia RSL, the Watsonia Trader’s Association, Watsonia Neighbourhood House and Sustainable Watsonia.

One of the largest criticisms of a single member Ward structure is that Councillors can become too focused on the issues of their local area and unable to adopt a broader strategic perspective on City wide priorities. I have not observed this in my time on Council. Over the last seven years Council has delivered on a range of city wide priorities that are well outside the purview of local Ward interests.
Key City wide achievements of the Council include:

- The establishment of municipal offices in Greensborough at cost of $30m and the associated consolidation of three local offices. This did raise significant concerns among residents in number of local Wards.
- The redevelopment of the Ivanhoe Library at a cost of $32m based in the Griffin Ward.
- A partnership with La Trobe University to invest $5m in basketball courts based at the university in the City of Darebin but will be utilised extensively by clubs in Banyule.
- Delivery of major environmental and social economic policies. These include a Climate Change Action Package of $5m to achieve carbon neutrality by 2028 and a recurrent $1m investment in local jobs and social enterprise to provide job opportunities for young residents in Banyule with disabilities and from disadvantaged communities.

It is evident that within the current single member structure Councillors are able to balance the provision of strong local representation to local communities of interest while adopting a broad, long-term perspective on key City wide priorities.

**Number of Councillors**

I believe that the current number of Councillors of seven is optimal. Residents receive timely, quality and responsive advice from Councillors as evidenced by high community satisfaction ratings while Councillors are sustainably managing their workloads.

I have found that my workload as a Councillor is not driven by the number of residents in the Ward but rather governed by the complexity of issues at particular times. In this respect the Chief Executive and Council officers have been crucial in establishing customer service processes to adequately support Councillors in managing complex issues.

If the VEC were to determine that an increase in the number of Councillors is warranted I encourage the VEC to be cognisant of the unique communities of interest in the City in the design of the Ward boundaries.

**Closing**

I believe the community’s needs are being well addressed by the current electoral structure of seven single member Wards in the City of Banyule. Under the current structure Council continues to receive high community satisfaction ratings for its services and has experienced few issues regarding the governance of Councillors. I encourage the VEC to maintain the current electoral arrangements. If I can be of any further assistance I can be contacted on

Yours sincerely,

Cr Rick Garotti
Grimshaw Ward
Banyule City Council

cc: Cr Wayne Phillips, Mayor Banyule City Council
cc: Mr Simon McMillan, Chief Executive Banyule City Council