



DISCUSSION PAPER:

REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to identify the perceived advantages and disadvantages of reducing the number of councillors for the Shire of Mundaring to allow for informed feedback and comment from the community. This feedback will assist the council in determining the most appropriate representative structure for the Shire of Mundaring.

Background and Context

As part of the Minister for Local Government's announcement in February 2009 regarding local government reform strategies, the Shire has been encouraged to consider a review of its representative structure, with a view to reducing the number of elected members (councillors) to between 6 and 9.

The Shire of Mundaring council currently comprises 12 councillors.

There is nothing within current local government legislation which specifies the number of councillors required to represent a local government.

A Department of Local Government publication entitled "Review of Wards and Representation" (published in November 2008) relevantly notes:

"The ideal number of elected members for a local government is for the local government to determine. There is a diverse range of councillor/elector ratios across WA reflecting the sparsely populated remote areas and the highly populated urban areas. The structure of council's operations will provide some input into the number of elected members needed to service the local government."

Within this context there is also the issue of two of the other aspects of the Minister's reform strategy: consideration of whole of council amalgamations or boundary reform. Should there be a decision to amalgamate or undertake significant boundary reform, then the consideration of representation is different. For example, two or more amalgamated councils would need to consider reducing their combined aggregate number of councillors to between 6 and 9; or the size of the local government area may change significantly, resulting in a substantially changed elector : councillor ratio.

NOTE: this paper has been prepared as though an amalgamation or significant boundary review has not occurred. However, council is conducting community feedback and undertaking further discussion and research prior to forming a view in relation to either amalgamation or boundary change.



Current Structure - Wards

There are 24,427 electors in the Shire of Mundaring. These electors are currently separated into four wards: East, Central, West and South.

Three councillors are elected from each ward.

In 2003 Council resolved to retain the Ward system of representation. At this stage, there is no proposal to amend the ward structure.

Advantages of Reducing the Number of Councillors¹

The **advantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

- The decision making process may be more effective and efficient if the number of elected members is reduced. It is more timely to ascertain the views of a fewer number of people and decision making may be easier. There is also more scope for team spirit and cooperation amongst a smaller number of people;
- The cost of maintaining elected members is likely to be reduced. An estimate of the cost of reduction per elected member, based on the allowances one elected member may receive, is \$10, 400 per year per councillor;
- The increase in the ratio of councillors to electors is unlikely to be significant;
- Consultation with the community can be achieved through a variety of means in addition to individuals and groups contacting their local elected member;
- A reduction in the number of elected members may result in an increased commitment from those elected reflected in greater interest and participation in Council's affairs;
- Fewer elected members are more readily identifiable to the community;
- Fewer positions on Council may lead to greater interest in elections with contested elections and those elected obtaining a greater level of support from the community;
- There is a State wide trend for reductions in the number of elected members and many local governments have found that fewer elected members works well.

¹ "Review of Wards and Representation: for local governments with a ward system and local governments without a ward system"; Department of Local Government and Regional Development, Government of Western Australia; November 2008; p30.



Disadvantages of Reducing the Number of Councillors²

The **disadvantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

- A smaller number of elected members may result in an increased workload and may lessen effectiveness. A demanding role may discourage others from nominating for Council;
- There is the potential for dominance in the Council by a particular interest group;
- A reduction in the number of elected members may limit the diversity of interests around the Council table;
- Opportunities for community participation in Council's affairs may be reduced if there are fewer elected members for the community to contact;
- An increase in the ratio of councillors to electors may place too many demands on elected members.

Examples

Two examples are provided for the purpose of illustrating the change in ratio of representation should there be a reduction in the number of councillors.

12 Councillors; 4 Wards

No change to current number of wards or elected members.

Councillor to elector ration is 1:2035.

8 Councillors; 4 Wards

No change to current number of wards; reduction in number of elected representatives from 12 to 8.

Councillor to elector ration is 1:3053.

The above examples do not cover all potential options or variations, but represent a sample of the types of options that are available.

² "Review of Wards and Representation: for local governments with a ward system and local governments without a ward system"; Department of Local Government and Regional Development, Government of Western Australia; November 2008; pp 30-31.