

19/2/23

Future of Local Government Review  
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Firstly I would like to comment on the community meetings process conducted in Feb 2023. Mentioned in the Community Update document of Dec 2022, I was surprised that only 8 'town hall' style meetings and two online events were conducted.

### Effective Reforms

The Community Update '**Redesigning Local Government in Tasmania: Potential Reform Pathways**' Dec 2022 states:  
*"broad agreement that ... the current system is in need of some type of structural reform.  
'No change' is simply not an option."*

A clear statement of intent is followed by a rather loose one: *"Some form of consolidation is necessary to deliver greater economies of scale and scope, at least for some services. The Board is doing work to better understand (sic) which services and functions would benefit most from being delivered at a larger scale"*

It goes on to claim *"...better services will not occur on a purely voluntary basis within the current framework."*

Changes that are mandatory appear to be on the horizon of this local government review, made clear in the Dec 2022 Community Update, as well as within the Options and Appendix documents. Mandatory changes are the cheap and nasty way to push through reform and of this approach there are Australian examples where outcomes have not been good. Tasmania should not go down a mandatory path. Here I will especially mention boundary changes and the fundamental change of removal of planning authority from councils.

What is more I contend that councils are not in the position, at this time, to properly resource or promote the potential overhaul being flagged by the review documents. If councils don't get behind changes what chance is there for community support? Claims in the review of fostering community wellbeing will be meaningless.

### **So why are councils not in the position to effectively work on reforms?**

Current works on the table.

Only 19 councils have completed the process of SPP & LPS implementation, a process which seriously stretched (and stressed) council resources. Then there is:

- the current SPP review (a LOT of work to do there - many changes needed)
- the new Tas Planning Policies (What do we want and where)
- the update of Regional Land Use Strategies (Well overdue)
- the Tas Population Strategy (Who is within the current boundaries)
- the overdue State of the Environment report (What is within the current boundaries)
- and whatever happened to the review of the Tas Planning Commission?

### Recommendation:

**All these should be completed before any overhaul; it is highly inefficient to do otherwise.**

## Sharing of resources.

Back to the loose statements - *some form of consolidation ... some services ... to better understand.*

How thorough is the data on the current situation of all councils across all areas of their work? I feel strongly that until this baseline is created nothing of any use can be achieved. It's a huge job but a necessary one.

Here I refer to **UTAS Research paper # 4 Options for sharing services in Tasmanian Local Government**

*FoLGR-UTas-Paper-4-Options-for-sharing-services-in-Tasmanian-Local-Government.pdf*

### Recommendation:

**This extensive research is the starting point and should form the basis for Stage 3 of the Local Govt reform process.** Thorough resource analysis will bring to light micro through to macro changes that will benefit councils and their constituents and may even lead to some amalgamations/boundary changes. A lot of work, but I suggest that anything else is just wishful thinking, under-resourced motherhood stuff. The equally wishful thinking of mandatory impositions in this area will most likely fail.

### Recommendation:

**The collection and analysis of data, and action arising from this, would need to be coordinated by a new body, able to gather the information and be able to work on improvements within and between councils. Financial resourcing would need to be state based.**

### Quotes from UTAS Research paper # 4

#### ***"Lack of data or inadequacy of monitoring, reporting, and evaluation***

*Councils sometimes lack the resources to adequately establish and monitor baseline data and meet the reporting requirements necessary to ascertain whether or not shared services arrangements have been effective. The 2018 NSW Shared Services in Local Government audit, for example, found that "councils do not always have the capacity to identify which services to share, negotiate with partner councils, or plan and evaluate share service arrangements."* Pg 42

*"Interviewees emphasised that cultural and political factors are critical. Individual staff are part of a larger culture deeply influenced by key leaders. **Organisational cultures can support and foster change or resist it.** Leaders must want and own change, and must bring staff along for the journey. Consultation emphasised that local government support was critical: without council support, reform efforts would be unsuccessful. **Top-down reform has tended to generate resistance and can drive a retreat into adversarial role conceptions. While collaborative and consultative approaches are challenging and slower in the short term, they ultimately achieve more in the long term by building consensus.** Independent leadership of change management and reform transitions may assist with these issues."* Pg 42

*"Ultimately, however, both the effectiveness with which shared services can operate and the political feasibility of adopting them depends largely upon the support of councils and the communities they serve. This means, as our principles for effective shared services reform note, that **genuine, authentic community and stakeholder engagement are essential to success.**"* Pg 44

I also refer to the extensive, invaluable work presented in the document **UTAS Research paper # 3 Place Shaping and the future role of local government**

Yours sincerely, Victoria Wilkinson

