



Fit for the Future?

The State government has told Palerang and Queanbeyan councils that it would prefer an amalgamation.

Palerang mayor Pete Harrison explains to BWD how the process is going thus far ...

What is the NSW government's 'Fit for the Future' plan and what does it require of councils?

The 'Fit for the Future' plan is the NSW government's blueprint for the future of local government. It is their response to the findings of the Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP).

The FfTF blueprint is based on ILGRP's 65 recommendations for the reform of local government. These recommendations cover issues ranging from financing and governance, including asset management, audit processes and rate models, to structural reform, including mergers. It suggests the establishment of rural councils, community boards, and joint organisations.

The NSW government has set councils a target of June 2015 to prepare what amounts to a business plan that is consistent with this FfTF blueprint. Each council is being asked to look at its current situation and consider the future needs of its community.

How will becoming FfTF benefit Palerang's financial long-term future?

Councils, that present a proposal adjudged 'FfTF compliant' by an independent panel, will be considered to have planned for a financially sustainable future. To achieve this end, councils will need to address the parameters defined in the government's FfTF blueprint.

This may present a serious challenge in some cases, but the ILGRP identified a range of options that would be available to councils to fix the problems it identified in its research. The expectation is that by embracing the necessary recommendations, be they modifying rating, charging or other internal financial structures, or merging to create a more capable entity, all councils could become financially viable.

Is it a forgone conclusion that Palerang and Queanbeyan must merge?

This is certainly not the view being taken by Palerang Council. The directive from the State is, however, that both Palerang and Queanbeyan start by defining the parameters that would underpin a suitable merged structure.

The State has offered to provide a fully funded facilitator to assist in this process. The facilitator would assist a Transition Committee, comprising representatives of each council, in developing an appropriate model for a merged entity.

The two councils may then choose to develop alternative structural models, using the merged structure as a reference point. If the councils decide not to proceed with the merger plan, however, they will need to demonstrate that their alternative structural model does not disadvantage their respective communities, and can still satisfy the strategic goals embraced by these communities.

Is it likely that the government will provide information on how local representation, wards or whatever, would provide for the far-flung Palerang communities in the event of a merger?

It would appear that these sorts of issues would be managed within the proposed Transition Committees. This would be part of the structure of a merged entity that would require consideration. Any related proposal would have to be presented when canvassing community sentiment during the required consultation process.

Do you think merging will solve the funding crisis that most local governments find themselves in with infrastructure backlogs etc. and if not what is the likely solution?

It is a fairly widely held view that merging two weak councils, by whatever measure, will not produce a stronger council. At that level, therefore, merging is unlikely to alleviate any funding crisis.

The broader funding problem facing local government is tied up with the so-called infrastructure backlog, ageing infrastructure that financially weaker LGAs cannot afford to replace. This problem tends to be directly related to population density, with sparsely populated rural communities, with large transport infrastructure networks, most heavily impacted. Once again, merging two such entities is not likely to improve the position of either.

The alternative, in each case, might be to merge a weaker council with a stronger neighbour, with the view that the stronger council's position will carry through to the merged entity.

An alternative approach being considered is to retain independent LGAs within some new structure that would strengthen the individual positions of the contributing entities. There are

two models under consideration in this context: a new structure for [small] rural councils, and Joint Organisations of councils.

The more relevant in our case is the function of Joint Organisations (JOs), which we believe will operate much like the current Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs). Like ROCs, JOs should enable neighbouring councils to develop collaborative agreements, taking advantage of both individual strengths and the power of a larger organisation.

Do you think the NSW government has taken account of Palerang's relationship with the ACT?

This appears to be a major issue with the reform package as proposed, because dealing with an external jurisdiction in the way necessary to formally recognise the existing relationship between the ACT and adjacent NSW LGAs may be beyond the scope of the present reform process. Nonetheless, to ignore the role of the ACT in the economic viability of LGAs in our region would be to ignore the reality of the economy of SE NSW.

Being proactive on this matter, Palerang has been lobbying for recognition of the importance of the ACT within the region from the outset of the review process. It is one of a number of councils that have volunteered to form a pilot Joint Organisation that would embrace the goal of ensuring that the legislative structure that underpins the new JOs supports the necessary relationship with an external jurisdiction such as the ACT.

Vanishing representation

THE FINAL REPORT FROM the Independent Local Government Review Panel put the 2011 population of Queanbeyan as 39,826 and Palerang as 14,835.

That's close enough to a 70:30 split. In a 9 member council quota it's 6.3:2.7. But not everyone in Palerang will vote for a local candidate.

Voting for party tickets, Liberal, Labor and Green, will send votes to the first and second positions on party tickets. Their number crunchers will insist on Queanbeyan candidates in those top winnable spots.

It's more than likely that Palerang will struggle to get two out of nine councillors and very likely just one. Those one or two councillors will, looking at the population numbers, most likely come from Wamboin.

What your local pharmacists can do for you.

We thought it may be of interest to tell you about the services available from Braidwood Pharmacy.

Dose administration aids – this is a fancy name for the weekly packs that we make up for our customers – often called **Websterpaks**. To help manage your daily tablets and capsules we make up packs on a weekly basis. This is particularly helpful when you have lots of tablets or find it difficult to remember if you have taken your medication.



We also provide devices for some glaucoma eye drops to help with use of the bottles and getting the drop into the eye.

NDSS: National Diabetes Supply Scheme. We are an agent for the NDSS and via the scheme supply strips for blood sugar meters and needles for diabetic patients.

Blood pressure: You can have your blood pressure checked at the pharmacy if needed.

Certificate of Leave: We provide certificates for work places if you are unwell – we can give you a certificate to cover one day only.

Home Medicine Reviews: As the name states this is a review by a pharmacist of your medicines in your home. To have such a review you need a referral from your doctor and need to fulfil some criteria in regard to the medication you are taking.

Services we are looking to introduce:

MedsCheck: This is a service where we will go through your medication in the pharmacy and help you make a list over your medications and look for potential problems.

MedAdvisor App: This is an app for your smart phone where the pharmacy helps you keep check on your prescriptions and when they are due. This requires you to keep your prescriptions in the pharmacy.

