



Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry: Inquiry into Local Government funding and services

Hearing Date: 4 September 2024

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Mansfield Shire Council

Received Date: 14 October 2024

1. **Evan MULHOLLAND, Page 56**

Question asked:

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thank you. Thanks, Kirsten, for your presentation. There is a lot in it – really appreciate it. Can I just touch on the point you were making before regarding having to have mandatory embedded consultants. Was that in regard to a grant application? Do you just want to expand on that a bit?

Kirsten ALEXANDER: I am not across all the detail, as you can imagine, but my understanding from the officers that were involved was there is a scoping phase of the grant that they go through and there was a strong encouragement to use the embedded consultant to get through that scoping phase in order to develop the scopes that would then be funded by the department.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Was there a particular recommendation from the department on which consultant to use?

Kirsten ALEXANDER: I do not have that level of detail. I could find out.

Evan MULHOLLAND: You can take that on notice?

Kirsten ALEXANDER: Yes.

Response: The funding in question is the Safe Local Roads and Streets Program. Use of consultants from the Department’s panel was encouraged. Council was advised if they used different consultants, they would have to pay them directly. The Department directed in their attached email of 31 July 2024a “strong preference” for use of their preferred consultant.

2. **Evan MULHOLLAND, Pages 58 & 59**

Question asked:

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just following on from that, we have heard a lot in this inquiry from lots of councils in particular about grant programs where there is either matched funding and you have to apply to spend money on things you

might not have spent money on, or the process being the punishment in the sense that the amount of effort and resources in time and money spent putting together a grant application is quite laborious. What are the kinds of examples you have seen, and does the Victorian government's management of grants for capital works affect your council's ability to plan and deliver long-term projects?

Kirsten ALEXANDER: I think the short answer is definitely yes in that example that I just gave. Our engineers, including me, had to spend a significant amount of time answering questions from the department, and as I said, I found it quite circular, the whole process. There were multiple rounds of engagement. I do not think it added any value. That is one example I could definitely give you. That black spot process having to go through the state was a great disappointment. The first time around we were told we were out of time, and yet we had tried multiple times to meet their deadlines. So then we applied again in the following rounds and were reluctantly accepted, I would have to say. They still had reservations, and they were expressed in emails to us, despite our demonstrated ability to deliver road projects locally.

Evan MULHOLLAND: We would be happy for you to table any emails on notice that might assist with our inquiries.

Kirsten ALEXANDER: Yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thanks.

Response:

Council was requested to table a series of historical emails which demonstrates the back-and-forth between Council and the Department of Transport and Planning – Attached.

The source email regarding the 9% deduction to Blackspot funding amount due to stated internal department costs" from DTP – Attached.

3. Bev MCARTHUR, Page 64

Question asked:

Bev McARTHUR: Just on the farming community, can you tell us what percentage of your rates come from the farming community?

Kirsten ALEXANDER: I would have to do – actually, can you just grab the budget quickly?

Bev McARTHUR: We can take it on notice.

Kirsten ALEXANDER: Yes, we will get that number for you.

The CHAIR: Maybe take that one on notice. Just one more question, Bev, and then we will need to wrap up.

Response: The farming sector percentage as at FY2023-24 was 15.91%. Our 2024-25 budget expects this to decrease slightly to 15.67%.