

Chapter 12

The Evolving Role of Mayors: An Australian Perspective

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This final chapter¹ revisits some of the principal themes of this book through the lens of the role of mayors. In so doing it reflects Quirk's (2011: 137) view that:

Elected politicians set the tone for public institutions. The style and substance of their leadership is central to how public institutions are viewed by their staff, their service users and their stakeholders. Their conduct and their behaviour set the atmosphere, the microclimate in which the institution functions. Their role in governing the institution is vital – they lead, they speak for the public, and they choose direction and strategy. They set the intent of policy and they also choose the instrument of policy. They decide what is to be done and often how it is to be done.

The early years of the twenty-first century have seen significant developments in the role of mayors in several Commonwealth countries. For example, legislation has provided for mayors with substantial executive powers in both England and South Africa; in New Zealand, the mayor of the new Auckland 'super city' has been handed considerably greater responsibilities and authority than his counterparts across the rest of the country; while in Australia recent or proposed legislative amendments in three states have reflected emerging ideas on this issue.

Discussion here focuses on the Australian experience, but with reference also to recent practice and debates in England and New Zealand. The chapter draws on literature, case studies and interviews with mayors,² senior local government managers and commentators in each of the three countries, and seeks to:

- place emerging practice within a conceptual framework of governance, strategic planning and leadership;
- summarise the 'state of play' in Australia;
- consider the lessons to be learned from recent developments in England and New Zealand; and
- develop a model for directly elected, (semi)executive mayors that would be appropriate across Australia and might usefully be applied elsewhere.

Over recent decades, Australian local governments have been subject to wide-ranging reforms imposed or urged by the state governments that establish and control them (e.g. Marshall 2008; Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government [ACELG] 2011). These have focused on structure and efficiency (amalgamations, regional collaboration and resource sharing); aspects of the New Public Management (separation of powers

between the body politic and management, councillors as a 'board of directors'); strategic and corporate planning (requirements for long-term strategic plans and 'delivery programmes', improved asset and financial management, workforce plans); greater community engagement and accountability (in part through community-focused and place-based strategic planning); and corporate governance (probity, risk management).

However, little attention has been given to how the intended direction of these reforms – especially the pursuit of efficiency, effectiveness and community engagement through strategic and corporate planning – interacts with frameworks for political and community governance. Changes to local government Acts over the past two decades have largely adopted (and adapted) the managerialist provisions of equivalent New Zealand legislation. There too the issue of political governance appears to have received scant attention, at least until the recent creation of the Auckland 'super city' (see below).

This contrasts markedly with the strong focus on trends in local politics evident in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. In those countries, particular attention has been given to the role of directly elected mayors, and there has been extensive debate about, among other things, how the functions of mayors should be structured and evolve, as well as the relative merits of different models of governance (e.g. Svava 2006; Borraz and John 2004; Elcock and Fenwick 2007).

12.1 Governance, planning and leadership

Recent trends in the election and role of mayors have reflected the widening international discourse on local governance and civic leadership. New functions and enhanced authority for mayors are part of broader changes sweeping through local government. These include the increasing emphasis on *governance* as opposed to *government*; the introduction of new forms of strategic and corporate planning; the growing importance of closer engagement with a broad range of stakeholders – notably local communities, nearby councils and central governments; and the perceived need for stronger political and community leadership. There is now an extensive literature on these issues, some of which has been canvassed in previous chapters. What follows is a brief summary of some key themes that are taken up in later sections of this chapter.

In Australia, an early discussion of local and community governance was provided by Sproats (1997). He argued that the 'largely instrumental reform agenda' of the time – focused on local government's role as a service deliverer, efficiency and effectiveness in achieving outcomes, performance excellence and value for money – needed to be balanced by 'engagement of an informed citizenry in collectively solving community problems' (ibid.:3). Better local management should thus be matched by better local governance, with greater emphasis on local people and social, as well as physical and financial, capital. Sproats applied Osborne and Gaebler's (1993: 24) definition of community governance as 'the process by which we collectively solve our problems and meet our society's needs'. His ideas are summarised in Figure 12.1.

More recent thinking about governance has focused on the increasing fragmentation of public and democratic institutions (Borraz and John 2004: 110) and the perceived

Figure 12.1 Sproats’ components of local governance

<i>Better local management</i>	
Corporate governance	+ Community governance
Customers/clients	+ Citizens
Management	+ Leadership
Public opinion	+ Public judgement
Financial and physical capital	+ Social capital
= <i>Better local governance</i>	

Source: Modified from Sproats (1997: 5)

inability of governments to address all the complex issues and ‘wicked’ problems facing modern societies, especially in a globalised world. Hambleton (2011: 13) thus argues that ‘governance’

... involves government plus the looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private and non-profit sectors ... Whilst the hierarchical power of the state does not vanish, the emphasis in governance is on steering, influencing and co-ordinating the actions of others.

This view of governance, in turn, highlights the importance of partnerships, planning and leadership. Collaboration – partnerships – requires a foundation, a basis for agreement on what needs to be done and how to go about achieving agreed objectives: in other words, a plan. At the local level, the tenets of urban and regional planning, environmental conservation and the New Public Management were already being applied in the later years of the twentieth century to require local governments to prepare a range of strategic and corporate plans. It was a short step to apply such planning concepts to a partnership approach to governance, thus giving rise to mechanisms such as long-term ‘whole-of-community’ and ‘whole-of-government’ strategic plans, and multisector partnerships. Previous chapters have outlined initiatives such as New Zealand’s Long-Term Council Community Plans and ‘Community Outcomes’ process; South Africa’s Integrated Development Plans; and Local Strategic Partnerships and ‘Total Place’ in the UK.

These models suggest a need for what has been described as local ‘facilitative leadership’ (Stoker et al. 2007) in order to:

- engage the community and other local stakeholders in the planning process;
- negotiate with central government agencies and neighbouring local governments;
- secure political support within the council for the adoption and concerted, consistent implementation of strategic plans and associated budgets; and
- maintain ongoing partnerships with others involved in implementation, especially sound intergovernment relations in which the local voice is heard and respected.

Hambleton (2011) has added the notion of 'place-based leadership'. This refers to the importance of concerted action by a range of players at the local level to counterbalance potential adverse impacts of 'place-less' leadership: globalised corporations and central governments that may care little for community well-being and the qualities of local places. Hambleton (2009: 538) has also set out indicators of good political leadership that draw together the various concepts of governance and leadership outlined above (Box 12.1).

A further consideration is how the different players in local governance each contribute to civic leadership. Hambleton (2009: 522–523) argues that civic leadership comprises three important groups: political (elected), managerial and community (civil society) leaders. However, as Sproats (1997: 8–9) makes clear, while management and leadership should be complementary, the central tenets of the two are quite different. Managers may be good leaders, but the skills of community leadership – even when exercised in part by managers – are inherently political (see Figure 12.2).

This leads to the question of whether a 'separation of powers' is meaningful and appropriate in the local government context – the idea that elected members should

Box 12.1 Indicators of good political leadership

- **Articulating a clear vision for the area**

Setting out an agenda of what the future of the area should be and developing strategic policy direction; listening to local people and leading initiatives

- **Promoting the qualities of the area**

Building civic pride, promoting the benefits of the locality and attracting inward investment

- **Winning resources**

Winning power and funding from higher levels of government and maximising income from a variety of sources

- **Developing partnerships**

Fostering a range of partnerships, both internal and external, working to a shared view of the needs of the local community

- **Addressing complex social issues**

Taking the broader view and bringing together the right mix of agencies to tackle a particular problem

- **Maintaining support and cohesion**

Managing disparate interests and keeping people on board

Source: Adapted from Hambleton and Bullock (1996)

Figure 12.2 Comparing management and leadership

<i>Management</i>	<i>Leadership</i>
Plans and budgets	Vision and strategy
Organising and staffing	Communicating and aligning
Controlling and problem solving	Motivating and inspiring
Minimising risk	Taking risks

Source: Based on Sproats (1997: 9)

set policy and strategy and monitor performance, while management should be otherwise left alone to deal with implementation of policies and plans and service delivery. It is debatable whether such an approach is either workable or desirable given the often fine line between policy and practice across many local government functions, the often small scale of local authorities, the representative role of elected members in addressing specific community and individual needs, and the valuable skills and local knowledge elected members may offer in support of management (e.g. Munro 2000; Sansom 2001; Svava 2006). Hambleton (2009: 532–533) provides a brief overview of recent research on this issue and describes the idea of a sharp separation of roles between politicians and officers as a ‘longstanding myth’. Following Peters (1995), he suggests that the ‘dichotomy idea shields administrators from scrutiny and serves the interest of politicians who can pass responsibility for unpopular decisions to administrators’.

12.2 Australian context and practice

A key distinguishing feature of Australian local government is its diversity. Australia currently has around 560 local councils: the count varies slightly depending on whether or not some non-elected special purpose bodies are also included. Because Australia is a federation, those councils are divided into seven different systems: one for each of the founding states plus an emerging system in the Northern Territory.

Over time the total number of councils has fallen dramatically due to amalgamation and/or restructuring of local government areas. As a result, the average population of Australian local governments is now around 40,000 – small by comparison with the United Kingdom or South Africa, but considerably larger than across much of Europe. However, this masks a huge diversity in size of both populations and geographical areas: there are still many rural and remote local government areas with populations of fewer than 5,000, but also some 50 large urban centres with populations in excess of 120,000, including Gold Coast City with more than 500,000 and Brisbane City with more than 1 million. This diversity militates against ‘one size fits all’ approaches to issues of roles, responsibilities and governance, even within state or territory systems.

Since the 1990s, increasing emphasis has been placed on the potential for larger units to improve the capacity and viability of local governments, notably in relation to the widespread restructuring that took place in Queensland in early 2008 (Local Government Reform Commission 2007). This is linked to a growing expectation that local government will contribute to the achievement of national- and state-level policy goals, such as regional development, addressing climate change, reducing indigenous disadvantage etc. Since the late 1970s, the federal government has been the largest external provider of funding for local government, and there has been progressively closer engagement between the two. Local government is now represented on the peak federal forum, the Council of Australian Governments, alongside the federal government, states and territories. It also has a seat in a number of intergovernment ministerial councils dealing with different aspects of public policy. This implies a need for more capable local governments that can make a substantial contribution to tackling complex local, regional and intergovernment agendas.

As noted earlier, a great deal of attention has been given to what these changing expectations of local government might mean in terms of structures, strategic planning and various aspects of corporate management, but the need for new approaches to political governance has received little consideration. Here too, the Australian scene is marked by enormous diversity: ratios of electors to councillors vary greatly (from fewer than 100:1 to more than 40,000:1); councillors may be elected 'at large' in a single electorate across the whole local government area, or by wards (local electoral divisions); the number of councillors per ward may be one, two, three or more; elections may be conducted for the whole council every four years, or for half the councillors every two years; voting may be compulsory or optional, in person or by post; mayors and deputy mayors may be elected directly by all voters, or indirectly by and from the councillors; the term of mayors varies from one to four years; the legislated role of a mayor may be largely ceremonial or semi executive; and so on.

Table 12.1 provides a summary of how mayors (and their equivalents) are elected in each state and the Northern Territory, as well as their designated roles and responsibilities and how they relate to those of the other councillors. Substantial variations are evident both between and within states.³ In Queensland and Tasmania, plus urban areas of the Northern Territory and most of the central capital cities, mayors must be directly elected. In New South Wales (NSW), South Australia, Western Australia and the rest of the Northern Territory, local councils or their electors can choose between popular and indirect election – but only in South Australia has a large proportion favoured popular election. In Victoria, legislation generally specifies indirect election and only two councils – the central capital city of Melbourne and the large regional centre of Geelong – have directly elected mayors. Thus popular election is compulsory or available by choice in all states except Victoria, but operates in fewer than 40 per cent of all Australian councils.

The role of mayors – as defined by legislation – is clearly strongest in Queensland, where all mayors are directly elected and voting is compulsory. This is reinforced in many cases by the relatively large size and budgets of the local governments they lead. The *Queensland Local Government Act* was amended in 2009 and again in 2012 to extend to

Table 12.1 Election and roles of Australian mayors

State or territory	Method of election and term	Designated role
New South Wales	• Direct or indirect (Sydney Lord Mayor must be directly elected) • Local referendum required to introduce popular election • Popular election is for the full four-year term of the council; indirect election takes place annually • Less than 20 per cent are directly elected • Mayors of municipal (urban) councils are directly elected • Presidents of rural shires may be either directly or indirectly elected • All mayors are directly elected for the full four-year term of the council	• Principally that of chairperson plus civic/ceremonial duties • Policy decisions if required between council meetings • Councillors collectively direct council affairs and provide civic leadership • Council may delegate additional functions to mayor
Northern Territory		• Chairperson and civic/ceremonial duties, plus ‘principal representative’ and spokesperson of the council • Councillors collectively direct council affairs and provide civic leadership
Queensland		• Semi-executive role plus civic and ceremonial duties: ◦ leading and managing meetings; ◦ preparing a budget to present to the council; ◦ leading, managing and providing strategic direction to the chief executive officer (CEO); ◦ directing the CEO and other senior executives in accordance with the council’s policies; and ◦ ensuring provision of information to the minister about the local government area • Lord Mayor of Brisbane has additional executive responsibilities • Preside at meetings, principal spokesperson of the council, civic and ceremonial duties • If requested, provide advice to the CEO on the implementation of council decisions • Councillors collectively direct council affairs and provide civic leadership • Council may delegate additional functions • Lord Mayor of Adelaide has additional responsibilities
South Australia	• Directly elected for the full four-year term of the council, or indirectly elected for up to four years • Council decides which method to adopt • Almost three quarters are directly elected	

(continued)

Table 12.1 Election and roles of Australian mayors (continued)

State or territory	Method of election and term	Designated role
Tasmania	• All mayors and deputy mayors are directly elected for two-year terms • If no nomination, the councillors elect one of their number	• Substantial leadership role: ◦ leader of the community of the municipal area; ◦ chairperson and spokesperson of the council; ◦ liaison with the general manager on the activities of the council and its performance; and ◦ oversee the councillors in their functions • Chair council meetings and take precedence at all municipal proceedings within the municipal district
Victoria	• Nearly all are indirectly elected for a term of up to two years • Mayors of Melbourne and Geelong are directly elected for full four-year term of the council	• No other functions specified for either the mayor or councillors • Melbourne City Council may delegate limited additional powers to the Lord Mayor
Western Australia	• Directly or indirectly elected • Council may decide to move to popular election • Local referendum required to go back to indirect election • Lord Mayor of Perth must be directly elected	• Preside at meetings and speak on behalf of the local government • Liaise with the CEO on the local government's affairs and the performance of its functions • Civic and ceremonial duties • Councillors collectively provide leadership and guidance to the community

all mayors a modified version of the established powers and responsibilities of the Lord Mayor of Brisbane. The Lord Mayor's powers are truly executive in nature; they extend to leading *and controlling* (emphasis added) the business of the council; implementing the policies adopted by the council; and developing and implementing other policies.

Tasmania is the only other state where legislation gives all mayors an added degree of authority within the body politic. Again, all mayors are directly elected, but voting is optional.⁴ Section 27 of the Local Government Act requires Tasmanian mayors, among other things, to:

- act as a leader of the community of the municipal area;
- liaise with the general manager on the activities of the council and the performance of its functions and exercise of its powers; and
- oversee the councillors in the performance of their functions and in the exercise of their powers.

Elsewhere in Australia, local government Acts typically limit the prerogatives of the mayor to presiding at council meetings, having the right to sit on any committee, and carrying out civic and ceremonial duties. This applies whether mayors are directly or indirectly elected. Moreover, only in NSW, South Australia and the City of Melbourne do councils have an explicit power to delegate additional functions to the mayor. In practice, however, mayors often play a significantly greater role and exercise more authority than the legislation implies.

First, the mayors of the seven 'capital city' councils⁵ in Australia's metropolitan regions are well-known, high-profile figures and to varying degrees exercise power or influence significantly greater than indicated by the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act – even in the case of Brisbane, where the mayor's legal powers are already considerable. This reflects their personal mandates – all are directly elected – as well as the importance of their councils as home to the country's major business centres and public facilities of state and sometimes national importance. The Lord Mayors of Melbourne and Sydney are especially prominent, although lacking specific powers under the relevant Acts. In the case of Melbourne, the council's power to delegate additional responsibilities to the Lord Mayor is very limited. However, under the NSW Local Government Act, councils may delegate a wide range of functions to the mayor, and current delegations to the Lord Mayor of Sydney confer what might be described as semi-executive status (see Box 12.2). In addition, the Lord Mayor is ex officio chair of the Central Sydney Planning Committee (a joint committee of the council and the state government).

The City of Adelaide Act gives two additional responsibilities to the Lord Mayor 'as the principal elected member of the council representing the capital city of South Australia'. These include a unique (in Australia) reference to intergovernment relations:

- to provide leadership and guidance to the City of Adelaide community; and
- to participate in the maintenance of intergovernmental relationships at regional, state and national levels.

Box 12.2 Examples of council delegations to the Lord Mayor of Sydney

(to be exercised in a manner consistent with council's policies and decisions as applicable from time to time)

- Exercise, during recesses of council, the powers, authorities, duties and functions of council other than those reserved to the council itself or delegated to the Chief Executive Officer
- Direct the Chief Executive Officer, except as otherwise provided by the Local Government Act
- Review, approve and implement governance and accountability structures and processes for the performance of the organisation, and oversee the performance of the Chief Executive Officer
- Make changes to the organisational structure which the Lord Mayor reasonably considers to be minor
- Approve all expenditure from contingency funds (excluding the Chief Executive Officer's contingency fund) provided it is within the terms of the budget adopted by council, and after consultation with the Chief Executive Officer
- Determine who should represent council on external organisations and committees and inter-agency working parties, and at civic ceremonial and social functions
- Direct that council's internal auditor to carry out a review or audit
- Obtain direct and independent advice (including legal advice) relevant to council functions
- In respect of the Office of the Lord Mayor, determine the structure, allocate expenditure, and direct staff and allocate tasks in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer

Source: City of Sydney Delegations to the Lord Mayor, current at August 2012

Second, there are many other mayors across Australia who, regardless of their method of election, exercise considerable authority and provide forceful leadership, irrespective of the precise wording of legislation. This may be as the strong leader of a dominant party-political or other grouping of councillors, or by dint of their personal qualities and acknowledged skills and experience. Some have occupied the position of mayor for a decade or more.

A third significant factor is the emergence of influential groupings of mayors. Two stand out: the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) and the South East Queensland (SEQ) Council of Mayors. CCCLM has a small secretariat based in the

national capital, Canberra, and represents the seven councils mentioned earlier, plus the government of the Australian Capital Territory.⁶ It also includes a few large regional cities as ‘associate’ members. In particular, CCCLM has sought to develop a close relationship with the federal government on matters of urban policy. In that regard, it is to some extent a rival of local government’s ‘official’ peak national organisation, the Australian Local Government Association, which is a joint body of the seven state and territory associations.

The Council of Mayors (SEQ) was established in September 2005. It covers Australia’s fastest-growing metropolitan region, centred on Brisbane, comprising 11 local government areas with a combined population of around 2.7 million. The organisation is chaired by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, and most of its members are high-profile mayors of (by Australian standards) very large councils: South East Queensland contains Australia’s four most populous councils. Like CCCLM, the primary goal of the Council of Mayors is political – to influence federal and state government policy and funding priorities – and it plays a significant role in intergovernment relations.

Nevertheless, despite these developments there has been minimal discussion about the status and role of Australian mayors and how that role appears to be changing. This may reflect an assumption on the part of most people that mayors already exercise considerable authority; this would be reinforced by popular election and the regular appearances of prominent mayors in the media. However, one recent issue that did generate considerable debate was the move by the state government of Victoria to legislate for popular election of the mayor of Geelong, Victoria’s largest regional city, with a population of around 220,000. The government issued a discussion paper in March 2011 proposing a directly elected mayor on the grounds that (Victoria Department of Planning and Community Development [DPCD] 2011a: 2):

- allowing the voters of Greater Geelong to directly elect their mayor will recognise the state and regional significance of the city;
- a directly elected mayor will have a high public profile and clear public endorsement, and this allows him or her to provide strong leadership for the council and the community; and
- a mayor elected for the full four-year term of the council can also contribute to providing stability of government for the city.

The proposal attracted considerable public and media interest. Most responses, especially those from business groups, favoured a directly elected mayor in some form (DPCD 2011b: 2). In its submission, the Geelong Chamber of Commerce (2011: 4–5) also set out what it regarded as the key expectations of the mayor in office. These included:

- setting up an effective governance structure and presiding over decision-making;
- managing the councillors and building a cohesive team;

- providing motivation and leadership to the administration to convey a strong sense of what is important (but not managing the staff, which is the chief executive officer's role);
- effectively positioning the council in its strategic relationships with federal and state governments, key agencies and institutions, community organisations and stakeholders;
- bringing people together around a specific vision for the future and acting as a catalyst for finding the best solutions to issues;
- aiding co-ordination and cohesion; and
- being the spokesperson for the council and making public statements which project a positive image.

The Committee for Geelong, also strongly business-based, argued that the mayor should be given additional powers, at least commensurate with those of the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, but preferably also including the power to establish a 'small decision-making executive', perhaps comprising the chairs of major committees.⁷ The Committee for Geelong asserted that this would free up other councillors to be community representatives, rather than being expected to function as a 'board of directors' (Committee for Geelong 2011: 9).

By contrast, the two main representative bodies for local government, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), adopted a cautious approach, arguing that the case for change had not been made and that further research and/or an inquiry was required. The MAV sought 'a clear and detailed discussion of the benefits and any disbenefits on democracy and governance, and the additional cost to the community and council...' (MAV 2011: 1). However, the state government announced in November 2011 that it would be going ahead with the change (DPCD 2011c).

In summary, and apart from Queensland, approaches to the role of mayors across Australia could best be described as ambivalent. There is an evident reluctance to institutionalise strong local leadership through the office of mayor. Only in Tasmania, Western Australia and the City of Adelaide are mayors specifically tasked with community leadership. In NSW, Queensland, the Northern Territory and the rest of South Australia, that role is given to all the councillors individually and collectively. In Victoria it is not mentioned at all. Yet calls for more effective local leadership abound. The remainder of this chapter considers how they might be answered.

12.3 Developments in England and New Zealand

Governments in both England and New Zealand have recently addressed the role that mayors should play and amended legislation accordingly. A move to introduce directly elected mayors with semi-executive powers was part of broader reforms of English local government undertaken by the Blair Labour government around the turn of the century. The prompt for similar action in New Zealand was a decision in

2007 by the then Labour-led government to hold a Royal Commission into the future governance of Auckland.

12.3.1 England

In England, the decisive step towards new forms of mayoral leadership was the creation in 2000 of the Greater London Authority (GLA), headed by a directly elected Mayor of London. This followed a successful referendum to establish the new arrangements. The GLA is a regional authority that operates at a strategic level in conjunction with the 32 London borough councils. The mayor is answerable to an assembly of 25 elected members which scrutinises the authority's activities, spending and performance, and can – by a two-thirds majority – amend the mayor's proposed budget.

The mayor exercises the executive functions of the GLA. His/her role encompasses:

- promoting a vision for economic, social and environmental improvement;
- formulating plans and policies covering transport, planning and development, housing, economic development and regeneration, culture, health inequalities, and a range of environmental issues including climate change, biodiversity and environmental quality;
- ensuring those plans and policies contribute to sustainable development and the health of Londoners;
- responsibilities for culture and tourism, including managing Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square;
- setting the annual budget for the Greater London Authority and the wider GLA group, which includes the Metropolitan Police, Transport for London and the London Fire Brigade;
- appointments to the boards of the Metropolitan Police Authority, Transport for London, and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and chairing those boards if s/he so chooses.⁸

Subsequently, the Local Government Act 2000 introduced new governance options for all local authorities, including one of a directly elected, semi-executive mayor – as opposed to the previously universal model of a 'leader' elected by and from the councillors, with decision-making in the hands of a series of committees. The position of mayor had previously been essentially ceremonial and subservient to that of the leader. Local authorities were required to hold a local referendum if they wished to adopt the new mayoral model: only 37 out of 353 did so, and only 12 succeeded. The overwhelming majority of authorities selected a governance option that retained or was similar to previous arrangements (Stevens 2010).

The 2000 Act did not detail the role and powers of elected mayors, beyond those of appointing a deputy and members of an executive group of councillors that would manage the local authority in conjunction with the mayor, chief executive and senior officers. The underlying concept here was that of a ministerial and cabinet system, with other 'backbench' councillors acting as community representatives and

scrutinising the work of the executive – a major departure from previous practice and one aimed at more decisive, innovative and responsive local leadership.

The specific functions and decision-making powers of the mayor and executive were to be the subject of ministerial regulations and/or individual council constitutions. Thus they can and do vary considerably from one authority to another. In the London Borough of Lewisham, for example, the council constitution sets out the role of the mayor as follows (London Borough of Lewisham 2011: 47):

- to be the council's principal spokesperson;
- to give overall political direction to the council;
- to appoint (and dismiss) the executive;
- to decide on a schedule of delegation of executive functions;
- to chair meetings of the executive;
- to represent the council on external bodies that deal with executive functions; and
- to be the council's lead member for children's services.

The key point here is the mayor's power to allocate and delegate 'executive functions', i.e. the wide range of decision-making powers vested in himself and the executive. In Lewisham, he may delegate any of those powers to:

- the executive as a whole or a committee of the executive;
- an individual member of the executive;
- an officer;
- an area committee;
- a joint committee;
- an individual ward councillor, to the extent the function is exercisable within the ward; or
- another local authority.

The mayor is also responsible for leading the preparation of a number of key strategic and corporate plans, and of the annual budget. The council as a whole may amend the budget submitted by the mayor and executive, but requires a two-thirds majority to do so.

Debate continues in England over the merits or otherwise of elected mayors: Stevens (2010) provides a pithy summary:

Depending on your preference or affiliation, elected mayors are, like reform of local finance, destined to remain either a desirable panacea for declining rates of participation and underperformance by local councils, or an aspirin in search of a headache. What has been shown is that mayors, like council leaders possibly, have mostly been capable of

putting their local authority on an improvement journey, which in some cases has shown dramatic turnarounds (Hackney, North Tyneside) and in other cases simply steady progress (Lewisham). Whereas some mayors have provided stability after considerable chaos (Hackney) or underperformance (Torrey), others have simply got on with the job and been recognised for it (Hartlepool, Middlesbrough). And where they haven't, the electorate have had their say (Doncaster, Stoke on Trent). Either way, they've got people talking about local government, which remains in most people's eyes a municipal theme park of mayors' chains of office, dull committee meetings behind closed doors and possibly even irrelevance.

Interestingly, the key point for debate has not been the concept of replacing the old committee system with a strong council executive, but rather whether the head of that executive should be a directly elected mayor or an indirectly elected leader. Amendments to the Local Government Act since 2000 have given leaders similar roles and powers to those of mayors, and this is used by some to argue that there is no need for popular election. The central issue thus becomes one of whether the presiding member of a council should enjoy a popular mandate, and the value to a locality of having a clearly identified 'first citizen' with significant political and executive authority.

Further fuel was added to the debate by the decision of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat government elected in 2010 to seek to extend the system to another 12 major city councils across the country. Two of those councils (Liverpool and Salford) voluntarily adopted the model; referenda were held in the other 10 cities in May 2012, but only one (in Bristol) succeeded. Elsewhere majorities against elected mayors ranged from 53 to 63 per cent (Wilks-Heeg 2012). This may represent a decisive rejection of the model, although voter turnout was very low (nowhere more than 35 per cent) and a number of other contributing factors can be identified (*ibid.*). These include the lack of an effective 'yes' campaign, especially by the government itself; the wording of the question, which appeared to favour the status quo; the lack of clarity around the proposed powers of a mayor; and the failure to pursue a metropolitan regional model like the GLA.

12.3.2 New Zealand

All mayors in New Zealand have been directly elected for many years, but they have had no specific powers beyond chairing council meetings. Even when the Local Government Act was comprehensively reviewed and rewritten in 2002 it seems that little or no thought was given to moving away from the prevailing 'weak mayor' model. The 2002 Act does contain a provision (section 40) for 'governance statements' that, together with the use of delegations, could be used to codify and extend the mayor's role, but the provision does not appear to have been used in that way (Local Government New Zealand undated: 51–52). As in Australia, lack of formal powers does not necessarily preclude the emergence of 'strong' mayors, and New Zealand provides many examples of forceful and effective civic leadership based on the mayor's popular mandate and personal qualities (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2009: 423).

However the Royal Commission, established in October 2007 to review the governance of the Auckland metropolitan region, saw a need for a much more structured approach. In recommending establishment of a 'super city' council covering the entire metropolitan area and with a population of around 1.4 million, and drawing to a significant extent on the English model of elected mayors, it argued as follows (ibid. p. 8):

Auckland needs an inspirational leader, inclusive in approach and decisive in action. Auckland needs a person who is able to articulate and deliver on a shared vision, and who can speak for the region, and deliver regional priorities decisively.

The Auckland Council will be led by a mayor who is elected by all Aucklanders. The Mayor of Auckland will have greater executive powers than currently provided under the Local Government Act 2002, although these additional powers will still be more modest than in many international models of mayoralty. The additional powers will be limited to three key abilities:

- *appointment of the deputy mayor and committee chairpersons*
- *proposal of the Auckland Council budget and initiation of policy*
- *establishment and maintenance of an appropriately staffed Mayoral Office.*

The Mayor will be expected to chart and lead an agenda for Auckland. To ensure the Mayor remains fully accountable, all policy will need to be approved by the full Auckland Council. There will also be additional obligations on the Mayor to engage with the people of Auckland through regular 'Mayor's Days' and an annual 'State of the Region' address.

In the event, the government decided to go somewhat further. It rejected the Royal Commission's recommendation for six 'sub-councils' and instead further strengthened the role of the over-arching 'super city'. The functions of the mayor were also expanded, and articulated in section 9 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 as follows:

- articulate and promote a vision for Auckland;
- provide leadership for the purpose of achieving objectives that will contribute to that vision;
- lead the development of council plans (including the LTCCP⁹ and the annual plan), policies and budgets for consideration by the governing body;
- establish processes and mechanisms to engage with the people of Auckland, whether generally or particularly (for example, the people of a cultural, ethnic, geographic or other community of interest);
- appoint the deputy mayor, establish committees of the governing body and appoint the chairperson of each committee; and
- establish and maintain an appropriately staffed office of the mayor, with an annual budget not less than 0.2 per cent of the council's total budgeted operating expenditure for that year.

While this set of powers and functions falls short of creating an executive mayor (McKinlay 2011), it clearly establishes a new benchmark for New Zealand local government, in the same way that the powers of the Lord Mayor of Brisbane were seen as a point of reference for other Queensland mayors. In March 2012 the New Zealand Government (2012) launched a new wave of local government reform proposals under the banner 'Better Local Government'. Those proposals included the following statement on mayoral powers (ibid.: 8):

Mayors are the public face of councils and publicly carry the responsibility for their decisions. The problem is that there is a mismatch in the current local government framework between the high level of public interest, scrutiny and engagement in mayoral elections, where they are elected for an entire city or district, and their limited formal powers over the governing body of a council. Mayors need the capacity to provide clearer and stronger leadership.

This was recognised with the Auckland council reform. The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 provides Auckland's mayor with governance powers not available to other mayors, although substantial decision-making remains with the full council. It makes good sense for mayors across New Zealand to have similar governance powers.

Subsequent amendments to the Local Government Act mean that from late 2013 all mayors will be able to lead the development of council plans, policies and budgets; appoint the deputy mayor; establish council committees; and appoint chairpersons to council committees. However, councils will be able to reverse mayoral decisions on establishing committees and appointing chairpersons, thus requiring a consensus approach.¹⁰

12.4 A future model

We now turn to the central issue of defining a model for the future role that mayors could and should play in the Australian context, but one that might also be applied elsewhere. Based on the literature overview and other material presented above, six key dimensions have been identified for further consideration. These comprise:

- the merits of popular election;
- the need for stronger community leadership;
- ensuring effective strategic and corporate planning;
- enhancing political governance;
- the respective roles of mayors and chief executives; and
- intergovernment relations.

12.4.1 The merits of popular election

In New Zealand, Queensland and Tasmania, there is no evident debate about whether mayors should be directly elected, and all the mayors interviewed in those jurisdictions affirmed the value and importance of having a personal mandate. Even though mayors

may not enjoy specific additional powers, and may sometimes find themselves in a minority within the elected council, a personal mandate was seen to enable them to appeal directly to constituents, to represent a diverse range of community interests, to work more effectively with central governments, business and other key partners, and to exercise more influence within the council organisation, both in negotiations with other councillors and with senior management. Similar arguments were advanced by all the other directly elected mayors interviewed.

In England, debate still rages on the merits of popular election. Some claim that elected mayors have provided more visible and accountable 'facilitative leadership', improved the performance of their councils and established a platform for devolution of authority from central government (Kenny and Lodge 2008). Fenwick and Elcock (2005: 64) similarly concluded that the English mayoral system was beginning to exhibit gains in terms of clear local leadership, a concentration on strategic issues and an engagement with the wider governance role. The contrary view is that an indirectly elected 'council leader' (the head of the controlling political party or group) can and does achieve similar results; that indirect election avoids personality politics and ensures leaders have sound local government experience; and that effective devolution requires broader systemic change (Kemp 2006). Elcock and Fenwick (2007: 236–237) found a lack of evidence that directly elected mayors increase public interest and involvement in local government.

In a similar vein, some of those opposed to the popular election of the mayor of Geelong pointed to the dangers of personality politics and the potential for candidates with greater resources to 'buy' the mayoralty. Other concerns were that the mayor might veer 'out of control', running a purely personal agenda, or conversely that there could be gridlock between the mayor and an opposing majority of councillors. Such concerns reflect the need to ensure that the mayor's powers and responsibilities are articulated in sufficient detail to establish clear 'rules of the game' – either by statute or through a mechanism such as a council constitution or specific delegation of decision-making authority. This is recognised most clearly in Brisbane (and to a lesser extent the rest of Queensland), Sydney (in terms of the delegation from the council) and England (through council constitutions). Also, in Tasmania section 27 (1A) of the Local Government Act requires the mayor to 'represent accurately the policies and decisions of the council' in performing his or her functions.

Where a popularly elected mayor exercises considerable executive authority, regular and effective scrutiny of his or her performance is also essential. This is normally inherent in the way Australian local governments operate, but more structured and rigorous processes may need to be introduced if there is a risk of corruption (Elcock and Fenwick 2007: 236), or that the representative role of other councillors may be unduly impaired. National or subnational (state or provincial) governments commonly exercise close oversight and supervision of local councils, and such processes could be extended to monitoring the performance of directly elected mayors and intervening when necessary. Another option would be to introduce 'recall' provisions, empowering the electors and/or the councillors to remove the mayor by referendum or, say, a two-thirds majority vote, but such provisions may introduce unwarranted disruption and instability.

An alternative approach favoured by some is for the mayor to be indirectly elected, but with a guaranteed term of not less than two years or possibly the whole of the council's term. This would ameliorate the problem of mayors having to be re-elected every 12 months, with the attendant risks of inaction or instability in the lead-up to each annual election, as well as that of deals being done to share the role of mayor among three or four councillors over the life of the council, diminishing the authority and effectiveness of the position. However, unless the mayor is the unqualified leader of a dominant political grouping within the council, as often occurs in the UK, it is difficult to see how indirect election for extended periods would be democratically justified or work in practice.

12.4.2 The need for stronger community leadership

Entwined with the issue of popular election is the commonly perceived need for decisive and effective community leadership (Denters and Rose 2005: 254). There appears to be widespread agreement on this point: it was an explicit objective of government moves to introduce elected mayors in England, Auckland and Geelong, and is supported by the literature on facilitative and place-based leadership. The question that arises, however, is how best to construct such leadership: to what extent should the power to lead be vested in the mayor as opposed to a broader collective of councillors and indeed other non-elected community representatives. This was a key issue raised in the Geelong debate. Certainly, the provisions of Australian local government Acts, apart from Queensland, suggest a reluctance to move away from the collective council decision-making model, even though councils are frequently criticised for indecision and lack of strategy.

All the mayors interviewed for this study emphasised the need to build consensus and none saw any value in operating as a 'one man band'. However, they also agreed that someone had to be responsible for taking the lead, both in proposing action and in seeking consensus. All saw themselves as playing a leadership role in liaising with a broad range of government and non-government stakeholders to promote the interests of their locality and its communities. Again, few local government Acts explicitly confer such responsibilities on the mayor.

Of special relevance here is the increasing emphasis placed on community consultation and engagement. This may be linked specifically to preparation of plans and policies (discussed below) or expressed more broadly. The wording of the Auckland City Act is particularly interesting, requiring the mayor to 'establish processes and mechanisms to engage with the people of Auckland, whether generally or particularly'. The Mayor of London is similarly charged with consulting Londoners. By contrast, no Australian local government Act gives mayors any special role in community engagement: where communication or consultation with the local community is mentioned, it is listed as one of the responsibilities of all councillors. The inherent risk is of this loose approach that engagement becomes largely ad hoc and administrative: what should be seen as a continuous political function is instead treated as a matter of compliance when specified plans and policies are being prepared, and is conducted principally by managers.

A further issue is whether or not central governments are serious about enabling local leadership. One of the arguments put forward by those opposed to elected mayors in England is that they cannot make any real difference unless there is genuine devolution of authority from central to local government (Kemp 2006). To a significant extent, that may be a chicken-and-egg issue: devolution (legislative or de facto) may be more likely if local leadership is more effective and better able to exercise greater authority. The experience of Brisbane City Council and more recently the Greater London Authority and Mayor of London appears to support such an argument.

Interestingly, the head of the UK's New Local Government Network recently linked the need for devolution to a call for compulsory voting in local elections (Parker 2012). He argued that:

This is a way to solve the localist's dilemma: councils complain that nobody votes for them because they have no power, but Whitehall refuses to pass down more power because councils are not fully accountable. Compulsory voting would transform the practice of local politics, forcing parties to appeal to a much wider range of voters.

In Australia, voting in local elections is already compulsory in the three largest states and there is little doubt that this adds significantly to the authority of directly elected mayors.

12.4.3 Ensuring effective strategic and corporate planning

Following the New Zealand model, recent amendments to most Australian local government Acts have placed considerable emphasis on the importance of long-term strategic plans, typically linked to goals of well-being and sustainability, and prepared in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. These strategies are then to be translated into a series of shorter-term corporate plans; in NSW the term 'delivery programme' is used to make the purpose clear. The purpose of all this is to make councils more policy- and future-focused, committed to the ongoing pursuit of agreed community objectives and to sound management of assets, finances and human resources.

However, only in NSW and Tasmania does the legislation indicate explicitly that one of the functions of councillors is to involve themselves in the preparation of strategic plans, and none of the Acts suggests leadership by the mayor in this regard. Only the Queensland Act gives mayors associated functions: to give strategic direction to the CEO and to prepare the budget. In the case of the City of Brisbane, these functions are extended to developing policies.

This situation contrasts markedly with New Zealand and England, where mayors (and now also indirectly elected council leaders) are variously charged with formulating and promoting a vision for their city or area, and with leading the preparation of plans and budgets – in part to give effect to that vision. Like community engagement, strategic planning is fundamentally political rather than technical: it is about community preferences and expectations, setting objectives and balancing competing claims on resources. If legislation requires such planning but does not require and enable elected representatives to lead the process, then it is not difficult to understand why plans prepared largely by officials are adopted by councillors without sufficient

consideration of their implications and with little solid commitment to their implementation. The same applies to annual or multi-year budgets.

12.4.4 Enhancing political governance

An underlying theme in the evolving role of mayors is the need for enhanced political governance. This relates to the goal of effective leadership discussed earlier and involves issues of 'good governance': the way the body politic of the council organises and conducts itself to ensure sound decision-making.

A number of interesting developments are apparent. First, mayors in England, Auckland and (subject to the necessary delegation) Melbourne are variously responsible for appointing their deputy, delegating decision-making, determining the committee structure, and appointing councillors to internal committees (including as chair) and as representatives of the council on outside bodies. In other words, the mayor is empowered to set up the structure of political governance in such a way as to reflect his or her vision and priorities (and potentially, of course, to reward his or her supporters).

From interviews with mayors, the selection and role of deputies emerged as particularly important. All emphasised the need for a close and trustful working relationship: having a deputy they could rely on to 'fill in' where necessary and, importantly to liaise with other councillors and help secure votes in the council on key issues. While some thought that removing the right of councillors to elect the deputy could prove counterproductive, the majority felt that the benefits of being able to appoint a trusted colleague or strategic ally outweighed the risk. In the case of Melbourne, the requirement for candidates for mayor and deputy to stand for election together is designed to ensure an effective leadership team, although relationships may not always last the distance.

Second, the mayor may be expected to take the lead in ensuring probity and appropriate behaviour on the part of all councillors. In Tasmania, for example, the Local Government Act requires the mayor to 'oversee the councillors in their functions', and the mayor plays a key role when complaints are made against councillors. This can be seen as an important element of civic leadership: in its submission supporting a directly elected mayor, the Geelong Chamber of Commerce (2011) identified a need for the mayor to 'manage' the councillors and build a cohesive team.

12.4.5 The respective roles of mayors and chief executives

The relationship between mayors and chief executives is a complex and often vexed issue: it lies at the heart of the debate about whether and to what extent mayors should exercise executive powers. This is a particularly sensitive question in Australia, where the general trend of local government legislation over the past two decades has been to apply the concept of 'separation of powers'. The responsibilities and prerogatives of chief executives are described in as much detail as those of mayors and councillors, or more, typically such that they become (officially at least) the sole point of contact between the body politic and the administration, entrusted with all aspects of the 'day-to-day' management of the organisation, including appointment of all staff, and allowed considerable discretion in the implementation of council policies.

In legal terms, the only significant departures from this model in Australia are Queensland, where the Act now empowers mayors to direct senior staff and prepare the budget, and Sydney, where the Lord Mayor may direct the chief executive under a delegation from the council, together with the power to make 'minor' adjustments to the organisation structure. Elsewhere, legislation limits mayors to 'advising' or 'liaising with' their chief executives. However, this does not necessarily prevent a politically powerful mayor from exercising a considerable measure of de facto executive authority, especially when senior managers are employed under fixed-term, performance-based contracts.

The situation in New Zealand is generally similar to that in Australia: even the new mayor of Auckland has not been given explicit executive powers. However, as noted earlier, he or she does 'lead the development' of strategic and corporate plans and, perhaps most importantly, the budget. Moreover, the mayor has dedicated support staff and a guaranteed minimum budget to maintain that office.

In England, elected mayors (and indirectly elected council leaders) may have much more explicit and extensive executive authority, depending on their council's constitution and scheme of delegations. The London mayor is also able to exercise powerful influence, if not executive authority as such, by appointing and chairing the boards of key service-delivery organisations, such as Transport for London.

None of the mayors interviewed for this study expressed a desire to administer the day-to-day operations of their council organisation: all saw their primary focus as on the one hand looking outward (formulating strategy, engaging the community and stakeholders and working with partner organisations); and on the other 'political management' (creating an enabling environment within the council so that agreed objectives are achieved). However, in most cases it was evident that this 'hands-off' approach to administration was conditional on having a chief executive who appreciated the mayoral role and mandate, and did not seek to apply 'separation of powers' in a literal and rigid manner. In this regard, there appears to be considerable merit in the English concept of a council constitution that can be negotiated and updated after each election, and that sets out the important 'rules' governing operations and key relationships. This would apply equally to issues of political governance discussed previously.

While having a separate chief executive remains the norm, some English councils are now experimenting with the 'mayor as CEO' model (Stevens 2011), and downgrading the position of chief executive to 'chief operating officer' or 'head of paid service' or the like. In some instances this follows the advent of a mayor or council leader who wishes to be the dominant authority, but elsewhere it may reflect a view that the head of the body politic ought to deal directly as required with all the senior officers (as is now the case with all Queensland mayors), and that granting the title 'chief executive officer' to an appointed official is inappropriate (although Queensland retains that terminology). In the UK, the need to reduce expenditure is also a significant factor: eliminating the separate position of CEO and making one of the senior officers 'head of paid service' may be seen as a worthwhile saving in the current environment of severe cuts to local government budgets.

12.4.6 Intergovernment relations

A necessary corollary of community leadership and strategic planning is involvement in intergovernment relations. All the mayors interviewed spoke about their role in dealing with and advocating to central governments on behalf of their local area. As noted earlier, the Auckland Royal Commission highlighted the need for someone to ‘speak for the region’.

Only two Australian local government Acts specifically mention intergovernment relations. The City of Adelaide Act includes the strongest reference, making it a duty of the mayor ‘to participate in the maintenance of intergovernmental relationships at regional, State and national levels’ (section 21). The Queensland Act includes a somewhat odd requirement for the mayor to provide information to the minister about the local government area. In addition, the Northern Territory Act makes the mayor the ‘principal representative’ of the council, while, as noted earlier, Sydney’s Lord Mayor chairs the joint state–council Central Sydney Planning Committee, an important intergovernment mechanism.

Regardless of legislation, it is evident that Australian mayors are generally expected to play a significant role in intergovernment relations. When the Rudd federal government established an ‘Australian Council of Local Government’ in 2008, its nominal membership (and annual plenary gathering) consisted of all the country’s mayors (or equivalents). Similarly, a recent move by the NSW government to launch ongoing reform and revitalisation of local government began with a meeting of all the state’s mayors and council general managers (chief executives). This suggests that some codification of the mayor’s intergovernment role, along the lines of the Adelaide Act, would be appropriate.

12.5 Conclusion: a framework for legislation

This concluding section builds on the lessons drawn in this chapter about key elements of the evolving role of mayors, to suggest a framework of legislative provisions that might be applied in Australia and perhaps elsewhere. Its starting point is that the evidence reviewed points to the value of mayors who are directly elected and thus enabled to exercise strong, facilitative community leadership. At the same time, however, popular election of mayors makes it more important that their roles be defined in some detail so that their powers and responsibilities are clear and suitably balanced, and in order for them to be held to account by their fellow councillors and constituents. Based on that approach, Table 12.2 proposes a set of principal mayoral functions and prerogatives, and legislative provisions that would give effect to them. The suggested provisions draw principally on those contained in Australian local government Acts, as previously summarised in Table 12.1, plus some from New Zealand.

While the legislative provisions suggested in Table 12.2 would considerably strengthen the role of most Australian mayors, they are by no means radical in the international context and stop short of conferring executive powers in the commonly accepted sense of the term. Indeed, it may well be that greater executive authority is seen as desirable in some cases, such as currently applies in Brisbane and Sydney (the latter under delegation).

Table 12.2 Suggested framework of mayoral roles and legislative provisions

Function or prerogative	Legislative provision (and origin)
Principal member of the council	• Lead and control the business of the council (Brisbane) • Chair and manage meetings (all Australian Acts) • Speak on behalf of the council as the council's principal representative (Northern Territory) • Conduct civic and ceremonial functions (all Australian Acts)
Community leadership provisions of various Australian and New Zealand and engagement	• Articulate and promote a vision for the area (Auckland) • Provide leadership and guidance to the community (Adelaide) • Establish processes and mechanisms to engage with the community (Auckland)
Selection of deputy mayor	• Appoint the deputy mayor (New Zealand) or • Mayor and deputy to stand for election as a team (Melbourne)
Effective political governance	• Establish committees of the governing body and appoint the chairperson of each committee (New Zealand) • Oversee the councillors in the performance of their functions and in the exercise of their powers (Tasmania) • Represent accurately the policies and decisions of the council (Tasmania)
Strategic and corporate planning	• Lead the development and implementation of council plans, policies and budgets (New Zealand/Queensland) • Prepare the budget (Queensland)
Guiding the chief executive	• Lead, manage and provide advice and strategic direction to the chief executive officer on the implementation of council policies (Queensland/South Australia) • Direct the chief executive officer and senior staff in accordance with council policies (Queensland) • Exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council between meetings (New South Wales) • Liaise with the chief executive officer on behalf of the other councillors (Tasmania) • Conduct performance appraisals of the chief executive officer (Queensland)
Intergovernment relations	• Participate in intergovernmental relationships at regional, state and national levels (Adelaide)
Exercise delegated authority	• Exercise such other functions as the council determines (New South Wales/South Australia)

On the other hand, there is perhaps little need for change in many of Australia's thinly populated rural and remote local governments that discharge only limited functions. Such distinctions might well apply in other Commonwealth countries.

Nevertheless, packaging existing provisions of various Australian and New Zealand local government Acts in the manner suggested would probably be seen as a significant change of direction, particularly granting mayors powers to appoint their deputy,

to establish committees and appoint chairs, and to direct the chief executive and other senior staff. As discussed earlier, such changes would need to be accompanied by arrangements to ensure effective scrutiny of the mayor's actions by the council as a whole, plus, if necessary, external oversight (perhaps by an independent local government board or commission). This might also involve enabling councillors to overturn some mayoral decisions: in England mayoral budgets can be amended by a two-thirds majority, and in New Zealand councils can reverse mayoral decisions on establishing committees and appointing chairpersons.

If mayors are to do more, they will need increased resources and support. The Auckland model, under which there is a legislative guarantee that the mayor will have an adequately resourced personal office, appears desirable in the case of large urban local governments. Mayoral offices have been established in a number of Australian city councils.

Essentially, what is being suggested here is that the functions of mayors – who are already generally acknowledged as the principal member of their councils – should be updated and recodified to match other changes that have occurred in local government structures and processes. The Australian experience is that, with the exception of Queensland, the frameworks and norms of political governance have largely failed to keep pace with the expanded functions of local government, and especially the growing expectation that councils will act more strategically to reflect and represent the needs and aspirations of their communities. These goals cannot be achieved unless the political arm of local government has the capacity to discharge its responsibilities effectively alongside those of management. To build that capacity, the role of the mayor seems a good place to start.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter was released by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government under the title 'Australian Mayors: What can and should they do?' Comments received and issues raised in ensuing discussions on that paper have been incorporated into the chapter.
- 2 Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with mayors and former mayors, along with numerous informal discussions.
- 3 Henceforth 'states' should be read to include the Northern Territory.
- 4 At the time of writing, the Tasmanian government had introduced legislation to extend the term of mayors and deputy mayors to the full four-year term of the council, and to introduce the option of compulsory voting where supported by the council concerned. See: www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/186685/SummaryOfAmendments_LocalGovernmentAmendment_Elections_Bill2013.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).
- 5 Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin. Except for Brisbane, these councils cover only the central business district and, to varying degrees, adjoining inner suburbs. Metropolitan governance is a state responsibility. There is no local council for the national capital, Canberra, which is administered directly by the government of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).
- 6 The ACT consists largely of the city of Canberra and is a 'city-state' of around 400,000 people with no separate local government.
- 7 This would be a similar arrangement to the City of Brisbane's longstanding 'civic cabinet' structure.
- 8 See: www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/mayor/role (accessed 19 August 2012).
- 9 Long-Term Council Community Plan – a wide-ranging strategic and financial plan.
- 10 See: [www.dia.govt.nz/pubforms.nsf/URL/BLG-Fact-Sheet-Mayoral-Powers-November-2012.pdf/\\$file/BLG-Fact-Sheet-Mayoral-Powers-November-2012.pdf](http://www.dia.govt.nz/pubforms.nsf/URL/BLG-Fact-Sheet-Mayoral-Powers-November-2012.pdf/$file/BLG-Fact-Sheet-Mayoral-Powers-November-2012.pdf) (accessed 10 June 2013).

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