



with AMANDA SPALDING



HOW MANY COUNCILLORS SHOULD EACH COUNCIL HAVE?

Councils in NSW can have a minimum of 5 Councillors and a maximum of 15. This is in contrast to Councils in England and Wales that have many more Councillors. For example, the last council I worked at in England, North Lincolnshire, had a population of some 150,000 and had 62 Councillors, so around 2,400 people per Councillor. It now has 43 Councillors, so some 3,500 people per Councillor.

Local Government in England and Wales now operates with an Executive or Cabinet of Councillors who work with the senior management of the Council and make decisions that are then scrutinised by the remaining Councillors, representing the community, at Council meetings. In North Lincolnshire the cabinet consists of nine councillors from the biggest political group on the council. The leader of the council chairs it and appoints cabinet members. The public are welcome to attend cabinet meetings that take place throughout the year at 4pm. So, between them the 43 Councillors perform the functions of both being like a board of directors (cabinet) and representing the community (scrutiny members or backbenchers), whereas in NSW, Councillors are required to act as a board of directors, which is somewhat incompatible with them also representing the community.

In NSW, not less than 12 months before the next ordinary election, the council must determine the number of its councillors for the following term of office. If the council proposes to change the number of councillors, it must, before determining the number, obtain approval for the change at a constitutional referendum. I assume that Orange City Council has decided to continue to have 12 councillors and therefore is not going to have a constitutional referendum at the next local government elections on 12th September 2020. So, if Council decides to reduce the number of Councillors in 2023, that will go to a referendum at

the 2024 local government elections and then will finally come to fruition in the 2028 elections.

When I was Deputy General Manager at Manly, I made the case for the reduction of the number of Councillors (including the Mayor) from 12 to 9. This was voted on at a referendum at the 2008 elections, so the number of Councillors was reduced to 9 for the 2012 elections. At that time, I compared Manly with some 40,000 residents (3,333 people per Councillor) with the largest NSW Council, Blacktown with a population of 350,000 and 15 Councillors or 23,333 people per Councillor.

The NSW Council with the largest population now is Canterbury-Bankstown with a population of 368,040 or 24,356 people per Councillor.

It is now much easier to make comparisons between councils because of the new website: <https://yourcouncil.nsw.gov.au/>

Orange City Council has 12 Councillors, including the popularly elected Mayor, and a population of 41,468 or 3,456 people per Councillor.

Orange is categorised by the Office of Local Government in Group 4 Regional Town/City which has 28 Councils for which the average population per Councillor is 3,965. The Local Government Remuneration Tribunal categorises Orange as Regional-Rural and there are 37 Councils in this category. I understand that an issue of concern during the debate on amalgamations was the population per Councillor. This does not take into consideration the size of the area a Council serves.

I have made some comparisons between Orange and some of the other Councils for 2017/18 in the same category, and highlighted Councils that are the result of recent amalgamations:

Council	No. of Councillors	Population per Councillor	Total Mayor and Councillor Fees \$
Orange	12	3,456	274,000
Bathurst	9	4,753	206,000
Lithgow	9	2,396	117,000
Dubbo Regional	10	5,209	244,000
Wagga Wagga	9	7,141	215,907
Armidale Regional	11	2,781	199,000
Cessnock	13	4,425	293,000
Port Stephens	10	7,174	234,000
Quenbeyan-Palerang	11	5,343	245,000
Griffith	12	2,216	271,000
Wollondilly	9	5,567	231,000
Snowy-Monaro	11	1,878	244,000
Shoalhaven	13	7,924	294,000

It is considered better to have an odd number of Councillors, so a reduction of Orange Councillors to 11 (using 2017/18 figures) would be a population of around 3,770 people per Councillor. A reduction to 9 Councillors would be 4,608 people per Councillor.

Councillor fees are set each year in April by the Local Government Remuneration Tribunal, with a maximum and minimum and it is up to each Council to set the level of fees for each year. For 2019 in Orange's category the following fee levels were set:

Category	Category	Councillor Annual Fee Minimum \$	Councillor Annual Fee Maximum	Mayor Additional Fee Minimum \$	Mayor Additional Fee Maximum \$
General Purpose Non-Metropolitan	Regional Rural	9,190	20,280	19,580	44,250

This suggests that reducing from 12 to 9 Councillors would reduce fees by around \$61,000.

I have received feedback that many people find these columns informative and I am happy to receive comments from readers about this column and other issues you would like me to cover so please either contact me at Orange City Life or aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com