

Mayoral Annual Report 2015-16

“In a small republic, the public good is more strongly felt, better known and closer to the citizen”.

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1748.

Cr. Peter Abelson, Mayor

Introduction

As I prepare this Mayoral Annual Report for 2015/16 it is impossible to do so without reflecting that this may be the last annual report in the 113 year's life and history of our Municipality of Mosman. As shown in our recently produced video, *Celebrate Mosman: Then and Now*, this is a truly rich history, a beautifully endowed and cared for environment and, above all, an active, caring and connected community.

As recent events around the world, the phenomenon of Donald Trump in the United States, Brexit in the UK, and indeed the weak support for the two major parties in the federal election in our own country, have shown, we live in an age where many people feel disconnected, we live in an age of anger and aggression, we live in an age where many people do not trust big government.

In his book *Disconnected*, Andrew Leigh (2010) explored the decline in community in Australia. Leigh found that, between the 1980s and the 2000s, Australians had fewer friends they could drop in on uninvited and fewer friends they could call on for help.

All of this indicates that the major challenges that we face today are social. We need to design empathetic responses. Most people want some empowerment over their own lives, their local services and their local environment.

Local councils are the embodiment of local community, of connectedness and of identity. Time and again our community, and others, have expressed their strong and heartfelt concerns that these critical needs for community, for connectedness and for identity will be greatly diminished by a move from a local council of some 30,000 people that they identify with to a remote council of over 150,000 persons.

Regrettably, the State Government seems oblivious to these fundamental human emotions and indeed to the core social challenges that we, and other societies, face today.

It is thus deeply saddening that the State Government proposes to destroy this community in the search for a mirage of financial savings.

On behalf of our community, I express the hope that, even at this eleventh hour, the State Government will recognise the extraordinary value of local communities and not proceed to put these values at risk by amalgamating us with other councils in a deeply unwanted merger.

I will return to this in my conclusion, but let me now tell you what your council has been doing over the past year focusing broadly on our three Directorates: social and cultural services, the natural and built environment and works, and finance and governance.

As always, in all three areas our aim has been to provide you, our community, on a day to day basis with efficient, courteous and inclusive services.

Social and Cultural Services

Council runs extensive services for our residents of all ages: for the elderly, for families and children and for youth, and for people of any age with disabilities. We regard these services as a fundamental role of local councils.

Services for the Elderly

Each week, our senior residents enjoy a wide array of local programs and services, including transport, Meals on Wheels, library books deliveries and weekly lunches and recreational outings. These are strongly supported by many volunteers.

Last year the Mosman Seniors Centre was refurbished with new furniture, paintwork and carpet and state-of-the-art audio visual equipment was installed in the Hall. This year, we have installed a fully accessible lift in the Seniors Centre. We thank the Commonwealth Government for funding 50% of the cost. We have also replaced the oldest community transport service bus with a new, fully accessible, community bus.

Services for carers have been augmented with the monthly Care Café which enables older people and their carers to socialise in a positive environment and provides support for carers.

I am pleased to report also that Council's Aged and Disability Services team has achieved accreditation for its Commonwealth funded services.

Family and Children's Services

For young parents and their children, we run a long day occasional care facility adjacent to Allan Border Oval and a much in-demand before-and-after school hours' child care service in the Drill Hall close to Rawson Oval. To increase access to pre-school opportunities, Council has re-introduced a pre-school program to the Mosman Occasional Care Centre. The Out of School Hours program cares for up to 75 children on weekdays during school holidays and also before and after school during school term. The weekly Connections Playgroup provides a valuable socialisation opportunity for new families with young children.

Youth Services

Over the last four years, this Council initiated a Youth Forum and has focused especially on Mosman Youth programs with a strong volunteer ethic. Youth Services and youth volunteers have produced an innovative blog accessed via www.mosmanyouth.com.au which provides a range of information about youth services and activities.

This year more than 55 young people contributed over 2,000 hours of time to the Mosman youth community by staging live music events, partnering with OzHarvest in a program that focuses on food nutrition and peer-to-peer education, advocating for environmental sustainability and providing a platform for the youth voice.

Services for People with a Disability

Council and staff are committed to the development of a *Disability and Accessibility Action Plan* and have been working towards the Plan's release next year following extensive community and staff consultation. Council has recently mapped its functions, to identify ways to ensure its services and programs are inclusive and accessible for people with disability. Consultation will soon be held with people with disability, carers, family members, service providers and the community as a whole to seek their views. It is anticipated Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be completed by early 2017.

Our Access and Mobility Community Consultative Committee provides regular input into plans and strategies that directly affect access for people with a disability.

The Saturday Youth Group operates once a month for young people aged 11-17 years. This is a low-support recreational group, offering a mix of in centre activities and excursions. Carer or parents may also attend. A Friday Night Group offers services to young people who are 18 years and over.

Saturday Respite provides support for older frail people and people with a disability with the principle aim of offering respite for their carers and families, and the Care Café provides an opportunity for older people and people with a disability to attend with their carer. People with a disability are also serviced through our other programmes such as Community Transport, Food Services and Social Support.

Council also offers an interesting and experiential day for local school students each year on International Day for People with a Disability.

Volunteering

Volunteers play a large and critical role in supporting the health and wellbeing of our community. At June this year, 331 volunteers were actively assisting Council's adult programs.

New programs include a Cappuccino Club at the Seniors Centre and two bush care programs: Harbour Care and Native Havens. These programs provide opportunities to care for Mosman's foreshores as well as backyard habitats (described further below).

Community Development

Regional work has continued during the year with Council contributions to the NSW Ageing Strategy, the Community Engagement Board managed by Family and Community Services, domestic violence initiatives, and ongoing assistance to the Mosman Community Connect Group that was established following the Mosman Community Forum last year.

Mosman Library

The Library is a core social hub for the community. It provides a place for residents to study, read and engage with other members of the community. Over the past year, the Library experienced 295,000 visits and 325,000 items were borrowed.

The Library has offered a wide range of programs and activities. Over 35,000 people have attended various programs including Author Talks, Children's and Youth programs, Monday Matters, Technology Tuesdays, HSC Lock Ins and Local Studies talks.

During the year, the Library's Local Studies team also curated eight exhibitions, including *Mosman 1914 - 1918* (for History Week 2015), *Mosman Library: 70 Years in the Making* and *Faces in the Crowd* (for the NSW Heritage Festival 2016). The Library also digitised the Mosman First World War Honour Boards 1914 - 1918 using ANZAC Centenary Local Grant funds. ☐ This year the Library launched four new on-going programs: *Friday Flicks* (a film discussion group), *eXplore eBooks* (drop-in sessions), *Colour Between the Lines* (a monthly colouring-in group) and *Friday Fun for Kids* (a monthly after school program for children aged 9-12 years).

The Library also expanded the *eLibrary* service with a film streaming resource. This provides members with 24/7 access to popular documentaries and independent movies from Australia and around the world. And there was a significant increase in 'loans' of eBooks, eAudioBooks and eMagazines.

In addition, the Library's public access Internet and wi-fi facilities were upgraded and a new audio-visual system with a large TV screen was installed for use with regular film, technology and training programs.

Mosman Art Gallery / Community Hall

Mosman Art Gallery has continued to deliver exceptional, innovative programming over the past year, staging an incredible 22 exhibitions including the regular highly regarded Mosman Art Prize and Mosman Youth Art Prize and the highly innovative exhibitions *Destination Sydney* and *An Unending Shadow*.

Destination Sydney was a blockbuster style exhibition developed and staged in partnership with the SH Ervin Gallery and Manly Art Gallery and Museum. The exhibition attracted 24,000 people in the summer months, normally the quietest time in the Gallery.

An Unending Shadow, by Mosman artists Ann and Sophie Cape, was developed to bring the issue of dementia to the public's attention. This was part of various art and health initiatives supported by Council, including partnerships with the NSW Department of Community Services, the development of the Picture of Health program for dementia patients and their carers, and a program of training Gallery guides in dementia awareness.

Over the year, over 92,000 people visited the Mosman Art Gallery and Community Centre. And the number of Friends of Mosman Art Gallery rose by 12% to a total of 446 people. The Gallery's education program reached over 2,500 children and young people during the year.

The Community Centre has continued to support the performing arts, providing a home for the Mosman Symphony Orchestra as well as a concert venue for over 30 musical groups including opera, choirs and ensemble groups.

As many will have observed, Council has created a new Sculpture Terrace in the forecourt of the Mosman Art Gallery, identifying the former church building as a significant cultural space. The Sculpture Terrace features installation of Aboriginal carved trees by Aboriginal artist Warwick Keen as well as significant sculptural pieces by noted Australian artists Ben Quilty, Anne

Ferguson and Stephen Coburn. The area also includes a bush tucker garden with a range of native plants.

The Gallery has also organised an innovative fundraising program called Create! whereby donors contributed to each of the 24 carved trees by Warwick Keen. Under an agreement with the Federal Government, any funds raised by the Gallery will be matched by Creative Partnerships Australia.

During the year, Council and the Gallery received numerous awards for the Bungaree's Farm exhibition which was staged in 2015 and has since toured to Cairns, Adelaide and Darwin. In the 2015 MAGNA Awards (the highest award that can be given to an arts organisation in Australia), Mosman Art Gallery was named overall National Winner as well as receiving the 2015 MAGNA Indigenous Project Award. The Gallery has also been invited to present on Bungaree's Farm at the 2016 Best in Heritage Conference to be held in Croatia in September this year.

Arts NSW has recognised these achievements by granting the Gallery triennial funding in place of previous annual funding.

Mosman Art Collection

In the past year, artworks to the value of \$222,050 have been donated to Mosman Art Gallery. I thank especially major donors: John Olsen (valuation \$115,000), the Goodnow Family (valuation \$34,800), Anh Do (valuation \$22,000) and Khaled Sabsabi (\$22,500). The value of the Mosman Art Collection now stands at \$5.13 million.

Recognising the value of the Mosman Art Collection donated specifically to the Mosman community, Council has established a charitable trust to retain all works in Mosman in the event of any future amalgamation.

Council Partnerships

Council partnerships within Mosman, more broadly within Sydney and across NSW as well as internationally are an important contributor to our service and to our work more generally.

In 2015 Council again partnered with the Mosman Chamber of Commerce to run the RAPT Christmas Window Decorating Competition for local businesses and extended the competition to residential properties.

Council staff also manage the popular monthly Mosman Markets in Mosman Square.

Council is continuing to working with the Rotary Club of Mosman to build connections in various ways, including by a web-based hub, between local community groups.

Over the last year, Mosman has continued to work with the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and the Mosman Football Club to provide floodlighting at Middle Head Oval.

Council is also working with Western Plains Zoo to deliver a special exhibition at the Art Gallery which will begin in October this year as part of Taronga Zoo's centenary celebrations.

Council is also funding an Aboriginal community tile project in Glen Innes, as part of our ongoing Friendship Agreement with Glen Innes Severn Council.

And Council, together with Mosman Rotary, continues to fund in a modest way the Girl-Child project in Mudanjiang in Northern China. This supports the education of young girls in Mosman's Chinese Friendship city.

Improving Council Engagement

Throughout the year, our Communications team has worked to increase engagement with our community through regular information and consultation campaigns and by increasing social media uptake as well as expanding our digital offerings. These include launching Mosman Art Gallery's new website, the Mosman Events app and mobile website and generally improving existing websites to ensure they are mobile-friendly.

Celebrating our Community

During the year, as usual, we celebrated our local community spirit through a series of public events, in particular the biennial Festival of Mosman which ran over two weeks in September 2015. This included the ever-popular Pet's Day Out and two new well attended outdoor cinema events on the Village Green next to the Civic Centre.

In June this year, Council held two very special events to celebrate our local heritage and the sense of community that makes Mosman a special community to live in. The first was a large cocktail event held at Mosman Art Gallery for the many volunteers and organisations that contribute to our community. The second was a special celebration dinner at the Sergeants Mess, Chowder Bay. At each event we enjoyed listening to several residents talking about their experiences living in Mosman and viewed a beautiful new 17-minute video produced by Council staff titled *Celebrate Mosman Then and Now*. In this video, we can learn and feel so much about our history, our environment, our culture and our community. The video can be downloaded from Council's website and a small number of DVDs remain available for sale.

The Natural and Built Environment and Works

As I remarked 31 years ago, in opening my annual 1984-85 Annual Report, "We in Mosman are fortunate to have inherited a suburb with so rich a history and charm. It is our responsibility on Council to preserve what we have inherited, to repair what has fallen into disrepair and to make it possible for our community to enjoy the amenities that are now available in modern living, while preserving our environment."

Planning

A key Council service is planning controls and development determinations. To protect the residential amenity of our community, in December 2014, Council effected significant changes to the Mosman LEP 2012 and Residential DCP. The amendments strengthened objectives within the LEP and reinforced fundamental controls for maximum wall height, maximum number of storeys and minimum landscaped area for residential buildings which have defined the character of housing in Mosman for over two decades.

In the last year, Council finalised a Planning Agreement Policy to ensure that when developers seek to increase the development potential of their sites beyond standard guidelines, the community will receive a public benefit to capture any added value that might be afforded to the developer.

Council also prepared submissions to the State Government advocating Mosman's position in regard to proposed changes to planning policy relating to medium density housing and managing short-term holiday lettings as well as matters such as proposed developments at Taronga Zoo and on Middle Head.

Council has also made submissions on numerous other matters over the year with potential impacts for our community and local government. These matters include the proposed Exempt and Complying Development Codes SEPP, changes to the Impounding Act in relation to boat trailer parking, and proposed changes to planning policy relating to medium density housing and managing short-term holiday lettings.

Protection of Public Land

An important theme of this Council has been protection of public land with Councillors taking responsibility for determining the use of public land (essentially a public interest determination rather than a technical planning decision). During this year, Council rejected a proposed major expansion of the Catalina Anchorage Marina from 3 to 17 berths as Council considered that this would have resulted in congestion and significant disadvantage for existing users of the area, especially for the Middle Harbour Skiff Club, such that private interests did not outweigh the public good nature of the water. This decision was upheld in the Land and Environment Court.

Just recently, Council refused the development application by Mosman Rowers Club to develop a new storage facility for kayaks on Harnett's Reserve. The Council acknowledged that some improvements could be made to existing boat storage on the Reserve. However, the proposal would have taken up a significant amount of land on the small but highly valued Reserve and have detracted greatly from the iconic view through to Mosman Bay and beyond on the Cremorne walk.

Protecting our Foreshores

Protection of Mosman's significant foreshore slopes continues to be a priority for Council. Under the provisions of the General Housing Code, State planning policy allows new two storey houses to be built as complying development without a development application. However, due in large part to the persistent advocacy of our Planning staff, the State Government has agreed that, to ensure maintenance of both general scenic views and residents' amenity in our foreshore areas, development applications on the foreshores will continue to be subject to detailed Council assessment and approval at least up to November 2018.

Protecting our Bushland

During this year, various amendments have been made to Mosman's local environmental plan (LEP). To ensure the continued protection and enhancement of bushland areas, several sites were rezoned to E2 Environmental Conservation. This strategy was strongly supported by the community and reflected community and Council working together to achieve improved planning outcomes.

Protecting our Heritage

The conservation of Mosman's heritage has been strengthened with recent amendments to the listing of archaeological sites in Mosman LEP 2012. These sites - such as former tram infrastructure, wharves, bridges and other relics of early European settlement in Mosman during the 1800s and early 1900s - are now identified more clearly in the LEP reflecting new State planning requirements.

Our heritage gives us a sense of living history and provides a link to the lives of earlier generations. We have worked to ensure that our past will be protected for future generations. A review of the listing of former quarries in Avenue and Royalist Roads, and former tram infrastructure at the southern end of Avenue Road, affecting privately owned land is currently underway.

Improvements in Development Assessment

Over the last year Council has continued to undertake improvements in the area of development assessment, with average determination times well down from four years ago. The Mosman Development Assessment Panel, chaired by the Hon. Justice Stein, adjudicated over 100 development applications on private land ranging from large mixed used proposals to residential additions. Improvements have also been made to our DA Tracker website to assist the community in accessing information on proposed developments in Mosman.

Civic Centre Redevelopment Options

Over recent years Council has investigated options to improve community and civic facilities on the Civic Centre site at Spit Junction. This includes Mosman Square, the Council building, the Village Green, the adjacent car parking areas and Library Walk from Military Road through to the Library. This area has great potential for much improved civic facilities, underground parking, a vibrant outdoor community square, improved landscaping and the development in Library Walk at little or, even no, net cost to the community. Mosman Square could be an extraordinary and vibrant urban area of international standards instead of the ad hoc add-ons that now characterize the Square.

The significance of the site and the potential implications of development mean that detailed consideration of development options is necessary, including a comprehensive analysis of refurbishment versus redevelopment options for the Council building, a traffic study, site planning and design, project staging and financial analysis.

Council's vision for the site was exhibited in early 2015 and community feedback considered. During the last year, with professional architectural support we have undertaken more detailed consideration of development options for the site, including site planning and design, staging, traffic and financial analysis. Unfortunately, this high-value project had to be put on hold until the outcome of the Council amalgamations process is known.

Sporting Improvements

Following the success of the Middle Head Oval floodlight installation, Council retrofitted its existing floodlights with automated timing devices that can be updated remotely by SMS. This will

allow floodlight use to be matched to booking times and allow lights to be changed quickly during periods of wet weather improving energy efficiency and restricting unauthorised use of our well used sporting fields.

Council completed its annual playing surface restoration works, with additional capital works including the installation of retractable cricket nets at Allan Border Oval, new practice turf wickets, storage facilities at Balmoral and Allan Border Oval and the resurfacing of the Drill Hall Common outdoor netball courts.

Parks and Reserves Upgrades

Several public garden upgrades were undertaken during the last year. These included the Bicentennial and Belmont Road roundabouts, Civic Centre, Memory Park and Balmoral Pavilion gardens. In some locations, gardens were built with design and plant selection provided by members of the Mosman Garden Club and plants were purchased where possible through the Friends of the Botanic Gardens Sydney.

Balmoral Oval, Rosherville Reserve, Sirius Cove Reserve and Reid Park have all received new gates, replacing the old slip rail gates. The upgrade has increased the amenity and life span of the gates whilst making access easier and safer.

Over the last year Council has improved turf surfaces at The Esplanade and Sirius Cove Reserves and planted over 160 advanced trees in parks and in street verges. The walking path at Balmoral Island was resurfaced. Works at Balmoral Island included the replacement of the grey gravel path with crushed sandstone making the path consistent with the natural environment. Works also included drainage improvements and the upgrade of steps.

Playground Renewal Works

In May 2016, the upgrade of Balmoral playground was completed. Works included new playground equipment, new rubber matting, additional pathways, fencing and furniture. A new shade structure was installed at Memory Park to replace the shade previously provided by adjacent trees that were removed due to potential failure. Shade cloths were renewed at Clifton Gardens, Reid Park, Countess Park and Memorial Park playgrounds.

Over the year, Council also renewed play equipment at Reid Park and Sirius Cove playgrounds whilst Clifton Gardens received a new fence, and renewal of the Liberty swing, see-saw and climbing equipment. Bark and sand cushioning materials were assessed and renewed at all playgrounds where required.

Environmental Volunteer Programs

As noted above, Council has established two new environmental volunteer programs to supplement the popular Bushcare Program. The Native Havens program, launched in February 2016 with guest speaker, Angus Stewart (ABC Gardening Australia Presenter, author and horticulturalist) will assist residents in providing backyard habitat for wildlife and to connect green corridors. Participating residents receive free advice, assistance in planning, limited free plants, onsite training, loan of tools and an information kit. Many Mosman residents have expressed an interest in participating.

Council has also established a HarbourCare program. HarbourCare, originally established by North Sydney, is a volunteer program in which locals collect rubbish from Mosman's foreshores and report the data back to Council. Council will provide volunteers with personal protective equipment (PPE) and assistance in rubbish collection if required.

Biodiversity Management

In 2015/16 Council undertook a comprehensive biodiversity assessment of our bushland areas including unmade roads sites zoned E2 (Environmental Conservation). Key findings include 490 recorded indigenous native plant species (up from 454 from the 2006 survey), and identification of two, previously unlisted, threatened plant communities. An inventory of fauna habitat features has been created for each bushland area within Mosman, showing the species likely to occur and habitat niches that can be created for a site to improve biodiversity.

An audit of bushland contract sites during the year also found that native vegetation cover has increased across all sites from 53.7% in 2011 to 65.8% in 2016.

Visual Amenity and Signage

Turning to visual amenity, we are fortunate to live in a naturally beautiful environment. But we often clutter up our roads and parks with a proliferation of clashing and ugly signage. Under this Council we have been actively working to reduce signage and improve their design.

During the year Council's Visual Amenity and Signage Committee oversaw further reduction in unnecessary signage with over 200 signs removed over the past year. Through its work this Committee has overseen the removal of over one thousand signs, and remains a work in progress. Unfortunately, Roads and Maritime Service (RMS) does not share our aim of sign reduction.

The Committee also oversaw development of a new design and branding for civic signage in Mosman. Pilot signage was rolled out in January. Progress on manufacture of the new signs has been slow, but the new signage is now being progressively installed in public places around Mosman.

Separately, fairy lights have been installed in the large tree in Mosman Square as well as other locations on Military Road and at Balmoral Rotunda to provide greater vibrancy in our public spaces and major thoroughfares after dark.

Building Improvements

Over the past year, Council has completed improvement works at several civic and operational buildings and amenities. These include replacement of inefficient heating ventilation and air conditioning equipment in our Civic Centre, various improvements at the Drill Hall, and works in the Council owned Mosman Bowling Club.

At Balmoral, works were undertaken for the Balmoral Tram Shed amenities, Bathers Pavilion public amenities and the Balmoral disability toilet and change room.

Coastal and Marine Works

During the year, Council completed a partial replacement of shark nets at both Balmoral and Clifton Gardens.

The March/April 2016 rough seas and storm surge caused significant erosion at Spit East. Beach replenishment with sand from the low water area was implemented as an interim measure to manage the erosion issues, with improvements also to the existing drainage outlets. Council and RMS jointly undertook further investigations and Council has now prepared concept designs to assist in the long term management of beach erosion in this area.

Pedestrian Safety

With funding assistance from RMS, a capital works program was implemented to improve pedestrian safety in Mosman. Works included the construction of pedestrian crossings at Upper Almora Street and Gouldsbury Street together with streetscape improvements near these crossings.

Council also continued implementation of the Bicycle Plan 2013-2018. Council has now completed 80% of the identified works and is one year ahead of schedule.

Parking Improvements

Parking management is essential to allow access to shops and to manage turnover in our congested public streets. During this year, following extensive consultation, Council has implemented new parking technologies designed to improve the efficiency of parking in Mosman.

This strategy includes the installation of parking sensors and accompanying signage at Bridgepoint and Vista Street car parks (together with overhead guidance indicators), as well as at Mosman Square and Raglan Street East and West car parks. It also includes the marking up of parking spots and the installation of in-ground sensors in Military Road and surrounding streets. In the first instance, this is designed both to facilitate parking and to provide an efficient database on parking usage.

A new parking guidance app called SmartApp is scheduled to go live in August, providing motorists with remote access to information on parking availability across the area.

Road and Footpath Improvements

During the year Council completed 4 km of road surfacing works including challenging roads such as The Esplanade, Waitovu Street, Gurrigal Street.

Council also completed renewal works for about 3 km of footpaths including Belmont Road, Gouldsbury Street, Keston Avenue, Archer Street, Harbour Street and Gladstone Avenue.

Council also assessed 102 Vehicular Crossing Applications, 91 Road Opening permits and 43 Applications for Works on Council Property and Stormwater Connections.

Managing Waste

The Council program to reduce waste generation continues. The variable domestic waste charge based on size of waste bin has provided a significant incentive to reduce waste bin size below the 240L general waste service. Currently 92% of residents are using a 120L general waste bin or smaller.

Council also provides E-waste drop-off collections for residents twice a year in the Civic Centre car park, in partnership with the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme. Under this scheme the industry partners cover the costs of recycling of the collected products. Over 600 residents used the most recent event which involved recycling 30 tonnes of E-waste.

Improved Results for Street and Gutter Cleaning

Council's current Street and Gutter Cleaning Contract has demonstrated its effectiveness in removing leaves from the streets, with a 41% increase in the quantity of leaf material collected using the new equipment supplied as part of the contract.

Finance and Governance

Financial Management

Council has a strong financial position in terms of our operating balance, our key financial ratios and our net assets. For 2014-15, our Council had an audited operating surplus, before capital grants and contributions, of \$2.95m. This was an extraordinary turnaround from the inherited operating deficit of \$2.98m in 2011-12.

This year Council has incurred significant expenses with meeting the State Government's merger process requirements and in appealing against what we perceive to be a minimalist and biased process. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that Council will achieve a small operating surplus in 2015/16.

Following approval of Council's Special Rate Variation, effectively a 5.6% increase in rates after allowing for inflation, Council reviewed our 10-year Financial Plan 2016-2026. This Plan incorporates a low annual \$400,000 borrowing program and a one-off \$2.0m loan to reduce the small asset backlog. Council projects small ongoing budget surpluses within on-going rate pegs. In summary, Council is fully sustainable on the basis of the State Government's preferred financial ratios.

Council has also been upgrading its technical management systems with the introduction and active use of the financial reporting tool PowerBudget, to analyse how funds are budgeted and expended, and the asset management system AssetFinda, which will facilitate improved financial management of projects.

Employee Engagement and Work Health and Safety

Council's employees continue to provide positive feedback in the annual staff engagement survey, with the overall response rate of 82% in 2015. A high proportion of staff reported strong pro-active engagement in their work with Council.

I am pleased to report that Council has maintained its excellent record in relation to Workers Compensation and has received significant financial benefits in the form of premium rebates and reduced premiums. It was reported late last year that during 2014/15 Mosman Council was StateCover's (Council's Workers Compensation Insurer) best performing Council in NSW.

Customer Services

Council has reviewed the operations of its Customer Service team to provide greater focus on service delivery and business efficiencies. Important features have been the re-design of the Customer Service foyer to create a warmer, more inviting space, introduction of a Q Flow ticketing system, as well as a new telephone contact centre and upgraded telephone system.

The introduction of the Q Flow enables customers to nominate the purpose of their visit for more efficient response to their enquiry. Council is now able to capture accurate data on the number of enquiries being handled, the type of enquiries, service time for each enquiry and the waiting time. This information assists in identifying business improvements to further improve services.

The major upgrade to the VOIP telephone system has enabled better data being captured across Council to identify where efficiencies and improvements in phone call handing to our customers can be achieved.

Behind the scenes, and in addition to the above there have been some significant technology upgrades to improve productivity and services. These include: fibre links to the Civic Centre and Library sites to upgrade the internet performance and prepare for future NBN services; major upgrades to the Financial and Document Management applications; implementation of a point of sales and inventory system for the Mosman Art Gallery; and a major upgrade of Council's server and desktop security software.

Managing Compliance

Enforcing legislation and other local policies is a challenging task. An early action of this Council was to set up a separate compliance section under a Compliance Manager. A particularly challenging area is in developments where private certifiers have formal responsibility for signing off on building compliance but where Council also has a responsibility to the community to ensure compliance.

This year Council's Compliance team has been managing an increase in applications for swimming pool compliance certificates following amendments to swimming pool legislation in April 2016. Between April and June, Council received 91 such applications. This had a substantial impact on current resourcing. System improvements have been made to ensure the applications are being dealt with as quickly as possible.

As the face of compliance, our Rangers have a difficult job to do. I am pleased to report that over the past year Council has received an increase in compliments relating to compliance staff behaviour and exceptional customer service. A recent compliance initiative was a School Zone Blitz in early 2016, involving rangers and parking officers educating and enforcing school safety, resulting in favourable feedback from school Principals.

Service Partnerships

It should also be mentioned that some important services are provided jointly with a variety of other councils. These include various procurement and waste services with SHOROC (then the Northern Beaches councils and ourselves), and the Shorelink library services and internal audit, which are services shared with various councils.

Mosman's Future

Over the past year Council has been heavily engaged in advocating for Mosman's independence in the face of the State Government's determination to forcibly amalgamate councils. In June 2015, Council made a detailed and lengthy submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) demonstrating our capacity (or 'fitness') to deliver high quality, sustainable services for the Mosman community well in to the future. Regrettably, IPART entirely ignored these arguments. It declared that Mosman, like every other Council east of Parramatta except Sutherland, is 'unfit for the future' solely on the arbitrary criterion of "scale", that councils should contain some 200,000 population or more, imposed by the State Government which IPART simply accepted.

Following the IPART report, in October 2015 the NSW Government asked councils to provide their own merger proposals in a 50-word response. Our response was as follows;

Forced amalgamation is opposed. At the 2012 Election 81% of voters opposed amalgamation. In recent polling only 23% of residents supported merger with North Sydney, 17% with Manly and 7% the Government's six council model. Surveys show opposition to amalgamation increases significantly the more councils involved in a proposed amalgamation.

In December 2015, the NSW Government announced that it intended to merge Mosman with Manly and the southern half of Warringah and it formalized this proposal publicly on 4 January 2016. However, following strong opposition to this proposal from Warringah as well as Mosman, on 25 February 2016 the NSW Government announced a new proposal to amalgamate Mosman, North Sydney and Willoughby.

Notwithstanding demonstrated public polling opposition to such a merger, Council's lengthy and excellent response arguing against this proposal, and the large numbers of public submissions against the proposal (some 95% of submissions opposed the proposal), the State Government's Delegate reported to the NSW Government that he could see no major objection to the Government's proposal. By any standards, this was an extraordinary conclusion from the evidence provided.

Mosman and North Sydney Councils have commenced legal proceedings against the process.

Acknowledgement and Thanks

Council work is a team effort with numerous contributors, including councillors, staff and members of our community. I thank especially the Deputy Mayor, Cr Carolyn Corrigan, for her assistance throughout the year. Cr Carolyn Corrigan is also our leading Councillor on social issues and has played a key role in our Youth Forum and the Access and Mobility Committee. I thank Cr Roy Bendall for his work on the Audit Committee and Expenditure Review Committee and for his major contributions as a lawyer in providing input to our legal case against the merger process. Cr Tom Sherlock has been invaluable for his expertise and time on planning issues, waste practices, Audit Committee and active transport. I thank Cr Libby Moline for her work on the Shorelink Library Committee, the Friendship Cities Committee, Arts and Culture Committee and Visual Amenity Committee. Cr Peter White has the onerous role of Chair of the Traffic Committee and is a member of the Arts and Culture Committee and the Mosman Public Art Trust. And I thank Cr Simon Menzies for his work on the Access and Mobility Committee and Friendship Cities Committee.

Council is very fortunate with both our senior officers and with our staff throughout the organisation. Our General Manager, Veronica Lee (who leaves at the end of this week) has been very hard working, provided timely and well-informed advice to me and all councillors, and provided respected leadership to the staff under stressful circumstances. We are also exceptionally fortunate in our three Directors, Max Glyde (Corporate Services), Di Lawrence (Community Development) and Craig Covich (Environment and Planning). The services they give to the Councillors and to the public are exemplary.

The General Manager and Directors are ably supported by a range of specialist managers. They are all experts in their field and work very hard to meet the needs of our community. In many ways local government is a 24/7 business and our Managers are highly conscientious in support of the many after-hours community events and activities.

I acknowledge especially the expertise and work of two managers that I am especially familiar with. John Cheeseman manages our extraordinary award-winning Art Gallery. Niki Atmore manages with great efficiency and empathy our many valuable services to our children, our youth, and our many senior residents. I know that both would, in turn, acknowledge the great support they get from Directors and other Managers and especially from their own staff.

I must give a special mention to Council's Caretaker, Neal Garrett, who has served Council for 37 years. Neal has accumulated a wealth of knowledge about our community, is a highly -regarded member of staff and is always available, working quietly, courteously and efficiently behind the scenes in ensuring that Council meetings and numerous and various other events of Council run smoothly. Thank you Neal.

I also wish to thank especially Jeannie Moran-Fahey who has been my Executive Assistant (along with her role as EA to the General Manager) for the last two years when she took over the role(s). Jeannie is sensitive to both public and staff feelings, has an abundance of common sense in responding to these feelings and is extraordinarily reliable. Jeannie has provided invaluable assistance to me in my work as Mayor over these two years. Thank you, Jeannie.

I thank also the many members of our community who support our committees or who provide voluntary services with Council in so many different ways. Volunteers play a critical role in providing community services, both through councils and also outside it. Our community benefits greatly from your generous gift of time, in many cases from your professionalism, and in all cases for your kindness and contributions. Thank you, Volunteers.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank my wife, Jeanne, who has been fully supportive of the time I have been involved with Council work. Thank you, Jeanne.

In Conclusion

In his classic, best-selling, book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) showed that while Americans have grown more affluent, their sense of community has withered. Many cities and traditional suburbs have become anonymous places where people sleep and work and do little else.

Fortunately, this has not yet happened in Mosman or, indeed, in many other communities across the fortunate nation in which we live. In *The Art of Belonging*, Hugh Mackay, one of our leading social analysts, wrote: "We rely on communities to support and sustain us and, if those communities are to survive and prosper we must engage with them and nurture them". Yes, indeed.

It is devoutly to be hoped that the State Government will yet come to appreciate the enormous benefits of small, self-helping, vibrant communities and work to achieve its aims collaboratively without destroying local communities and local democracy.

Thirty-one years ago, I ended my 1984-85 Mayoral Report with a quote from Benjamin Disraeli: "All power is a trust...and we are accountable for its exercise."

It is a privilege to be a Councillor on any council. We in Mosman are also fortunate to live in an especially beautiful area. With this fortune, we have a responsibility to preserve and enhance our built and natural environment, both for our residents and for those who reside elsewhere, both for current and for future generations.

As Mayor, it has been my aim over the past four years to provide our community with an inclusive, friendly and professional service and to build a supportive, tolerant and creative community that will enhance the lives of all who live within our community. I am pleased to say that this has also been the aim of all my fellow Councillors and Council staff. I hope that, over these years, we have kept the trust that you, our community, put in us.