



August, 2016

Monthly Chronicle, Sydney

Author: Anthony Brewster • Section: General News • Article type : News Item  
Classification : Suburban • Audience : 54,799 • Page: 1 • Printed Size: 813.00cm<sup>2</sup>  
Market: NSW • Country: Australia • Words: 682 • Item ID: 631072832

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# KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL'S SPENDING QUESTIONED

## • ANTHONY BREWSTER

Ku-ring-gai Council's fight to stand alone in the face of a forced merger with Hornsby Council has reached new heights with the release of documents detailing the current and possible future cost of legal challenges in the Land and Environment Court.

So far the legal challenge to stand alone has cost Ku-ring-gai ratepayers a total of \$128,110 while the remaining budget allowed for "Land and Environment Court matters is \$303,416".

The documents also detail additional monies put aside for future challenges as well.

Specifically, the Director Corporate of Ku-ring-gai Council has identified a further \$168,315, "quarantined" from "other departmental legal budgets" for the "potential use in the merger legal case."

In total, if all legal challenges and appeals are pursued, Ku-ring-gai ratepayers could be up for \$599,841 in legal fees alone.

In response, a spokeswoman for Ku-ring-gai Council told the *Monthly Chronicle*, the Council is yet to determine the total cost of the court action and legal challenges

against any merger with Hornsby Council. Ku-ring-gai Council is arguing the majority of residents support Council's decision to stand against forced merger.

"The decision to mount a legal challenge to the forced merger is a resolution of Council. It reflects the majority view of Ku-ring-gai residents, of whom over 80 per cent have indicated they do not wish to be forcibly merged with Hornsby Council," the spokeswoman said.

In response to questions asked in reference to whether Council stands by the decision to spend these specific amounts of monies on the legal case, Ku-ring-gai Council declined to comment citing "legal privilege."

An identical response of "no comment" and "legal privilege" was received by the *Monthly Chronicle* when querying whether the quarantining of "other departmental legal budgets" has had any detrimental effect on any current legal proceedings or other decisions made by Council.

Back in May, with the release of the delegate's report into the merger of Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Councils, Ku-ring-gai Mayor Cheryl Szatow said in a statement that the

contents of the report, was based on a "cookie cutter template, designed to deliver the State Government what it wants."

Further, Mayor Szatow said in part, "...we will keep fighting for our resident's rights in the courts till we have exhausted every avenue..."

State MP for Hornsby Matt Kean has used the release of these expenses to describe Ku-ring-gai Council as "completely out of control."

He cites other information that has recently come to light which further details what he refers to as "Wall St. inspired perks."

Although all approved by Council, Kean says the Mayoral robes redesigned by Carla Zampatti, ordering of fresh cut flowers for the Mayoral office and the Mayoral use of a European car is evidence ratepayers are assisting to fund a Mayoral "lavish lifestyle."

Additionally, the Hornsby MP is questioning the use of ratepayer's money to fund Council's decision to attend numerous conferences during this term.

"Perhaps the Mayor and the Senior Staff at Ku-ring-gai should spend more time fixing roads, building infrastructure and providing services than

wasting time and money looking after themselves," said Kean.

"I've got news for the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, the ratepayers are not there to fund her lavish lifestyle. This is exactly why local government needs to be reformed. To clean up dysfunctional outfits like Ku-ring-gai"

In response, a spokeswoman for Ku-ring-gai Council has defended Council's decision to send staff and Councillors to the NSW Local Government annual conference, the NSW Government tourism conference and the NSW Government planning conference.

"The conferences provide the most up to date information on matters such as planning law and issues of importance to the NSW local government sector," the Council spokeswoman said.

"In the case of the tourism conference, the Council is obtaining valuable insights to assist the organisation create and nurture a tourism precinct at St Ives."



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KMC's spending on council mergers has been questioned  
by State MP Matt Kean



Hornsby State MP Matt Kean  
Photo: Anthony Brewster