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Changing Times - Times of Change

(Elected member Survey Aug- Oct 97)

**Conducted by Dr John Robbins, University of Adelaide,
for the Local Government Association of SA
September, 1998**

Background

The survey was conducted of all elected members from August to October, 1997

This followed elections in May and June, 1997 following the majority of Council amalgamations conducted under 1995 amendments to the Local Government Act.

It was distributed to all elected members in personally addressed envelopes directed to Council offices. A reply-paid envelope was included. Two subsequent requests were made to Chief Executive Officers to encourage the return of survey forms.

The survey was in two parts, the first (Part A) containing information identifying the respondent with a small number of questions, the second (Part B) containing an extensive set of questions designed to match responses with a 1987 survey conducted by Dr John Robbins. The first part of the survey was detached from the second on receipt so that no identification of the more detailed responses with the respondent was possible.

Dr Robbins was commissioned to analyse the responses and prepare a summary report including comparison with the results from the 1987 survey.

Foreword

Local Government has undergone dramatic changes in the 30 years leading to the year 2000. Dr John Robbins of the Politics Department of the University of Adelaide, has chronicled many of the changes through his own research and study. It was logical therefore for the LGA to commission him to assist in the conduct of our first major survey of Elected Members in Local Government.

Conducted immediately following elections and amalgamations (the most extensive in SA's history) in 1997, the survey provides a useful base-line from which future development can be monitored. There is no doubt in my mind that Local Government is under-researched, in relation to the impact it has on society. I hope that in future years, the LGA will be able to build on this work for the future benefit of Local Government and its students and observers.

The report is that of Dr Robbins, although the Association commented on a draft. We have our own views about the meaning of the changes chronicled in the report, however the report is presented without such views. Clearly it presents a picture of a very dedicated and committed group of elected members who voluntarily and with inadequate allowances and support, provide enormous time and effort on behalf of their local communities.

My thanks to Dr Robbins, and to Mr Chris Russell and other LGA staff who assisted in the conduct of the survey.

In particular however, my thanks go to each and every Elected Member in Local Government in SA for the contribution which you make.

Rosemary Craddock
President

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Change has become (if it is not a contradiction in terms to say so) a permanent feature of our times. It has always been so during the modern age but in recent years the pace and extent of change has been such that instead of an occasional re-adjustment of an otherwise steady equilibrium there is a sense of being in perpetual and unstable motion.
- 1.2 In such times it is all the more important that we should continually examine our circumstances and monitor our progress. It is easy to be carried away by the momentum of change so that it accelerates beyond its originally intended reach. The fact that benefits demonstrably accrue from one set of changes is often converted into an assumption that all change will bring benefits. Equally, the ill-effects of one misguided attempt at change may dissuade us from adopting an alternative proposal which would be genuinely beneficial.
- 1.3 It is important to recognise that change is very rarely pre-determined in either its pace or its direction. It usually proceeds under human control and claims that a particular pattern of change is pre-determined are usually ploys to facilitate its carriage. Change invariably brings choice and it is sensible to ensure that the options are well-recognised, well-researched and implemented with due caution and careful scrutiny.
- 1.4 The purpose of this survey and report is to provide both a monitoring of previous policies as they are manifest in the current attitudes and operations of councillors and to review reactions to some current proposals. It will examine the composition of the councillor body and something of its operations, providing comparisons with a similar survey conducted in 1987. It will also deal with the reactions of councillors to the policy of council amalgamation, proposals for financial compensation and investigate some aspects of their servicing.

2. The Body Corporate

- 2.1 There has been much scrutiny in recent years of the composition of local councils, accompanied by complaints that, despite being representative bodies, they are too heavily weighted with "middle-aged, middle-class males of anglo-celtic origin". Campaigns have been mounted to encourage electoral nominations from under-represented groups and these, together with more general social trends, have produced some visible changes in council composition.
- 2.2 The most obvious of these is in the increasing proportion of female councillors. In 1973 they made up less than 3% of S.A. councillors. By 1987 this had expanded to almost 16% and by 1997 to 25% . The survey attracted a greater proportion of female respondents than the actual councillor composition would indicate. 106 respondents of the 353 total indicated that they were female, a proportion of 30% and thus in excess of the actual figure.
- 2.3 The trend towards the greater representation of women is not repeated in the case of age distribution. In fact, there appears to be a reversal of the trend noted in 1987. In that year a quarter of the respondents were 40 years or under. In 1997 the proportion did not quite reach 12%. The main switch was to the 51-60 group rather than to the over-60s. It is unlikely that a change of this magnitude is explicable in terms of the differential response rates of age-groups.

TABLE 1

Age Distribution of Councillors

Age	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	over 70
n	6	35	100	129	62	16
%	1.7	10.1	28.7	37.1	17.8	3.5
	[5 not stated = 1.4%]					
% 1987	4.4	20.5	29.3	26.2	16.0	3.1
Survey						
% 1991	12.9	25.4	20.9	14.7	13.6	12.6
Census						

(as a % of population 26 years and over)

- 2.4 Any explanation of this trend is obviously speculative. The reduction in the number of councillor positions available may have given advantage to those more firmly established, both within council and in respect of their careers. Amalgamated councils may produce a heavier workload which

deters younger aspirants with family responsibilities and a career to make. There may be broader forces operating. The greater instability of employment being experienced in recent years may make younger people hesitant to divert their attention and their energy towards public service.

- 2.5 The general level of educational qualifications had increased markedly between 1971 and 1987 and a further, though slighter, increase has occurred between then and 1997. 15% of the current respondents had degrees compared with 12.2% in 1987. The proportion of the general population with a degree in the 1991 census is given as 6.4%, though this figure is in respect of the population aged 15 years and over, and it would be more realistically converted to 7% for the population 20 years and over.
- 2.6 National origins - 79% of responding councillors were Australian born and 88.5% of these were South Australian. Councillors of British origin comprised 12% and 5.4% were born in a diversity of other countries. A comparison with 1987 is slightly skewed by 13 non-responses but if these are distributed in the same proportion as the respondents the Australian born segment remains almost the same while there is an increase in the British-born component and a decrease in the "other country category." This is despite an increase in the proportion of the South Australian population coming from other overseas countries and an associated decline in the proportion of the British-born. Again this tends to support the view that the reduced number of council positions has given a competitive advantage to the more "seasoned" candidates in securing election.
- 2.7 Since first generation migrants are usually pre-occupied with establishing themselves in a new country the representation of "ethnic" groups may fall to the second generation. Taking account of parents' birthplace does increase the proportion with an overseas connection from 17.4% to 25.2% . This is almost identical with the 1987 figures, but as might be expected from the previous paragraph an even greater proportion are UK born.
- 2.8 What is very clear is that diversity of national origin is generally overwhelmed by a commitment to Australia. 93.4% of respondents declare their national identity as unambiguously Australian. 5.7% indicate a shared source of identification as "hyphenated" Australians, two-thirds of these being British- Australians.

TABLE 2

National Origins Of Councillors

Country of birth	AUS	UK	OTHER
n	279	42	19
%	79.0	11.9	5.4
[13 not stated = 4.6%]			
% 1987	82.8	10.8	6.4
% 1991 Census	76.1	10.1	13.8

Parent's Birth	AUS	UK	OTHER
n	264	61	22
%	74.8	17.3	7.9

- 2.9 Domestic commitments are an obvious impediment to council service, particularly where they run in conjunction with full-time or even part-time employment. The "second shift" is a notorious burden and to extend this to a third limits the field to the most persistent and energetic. The demands of council work become more manageable without the daily round of attending the workforce and with a spouse to lighten the domestic load.
- 2.10 Family responsibilities are by no means a complete deterrent. 32 % of the respondents reported having dependent children and half of these (16%) had children in primary school. Almost 20% of respondents report a heavy domestic commitment and only 24% a light one. The remainder regard themselves as moderately loaded.
- 2.11 The bulk of councillors are in the workforce. Only 26.8% are not, most of them, 21.6%, being retired. The categories of household duties and unemployed register only 2.6% each.

TABLE 3

Employment Status

	Employ ee	Self Employ ed	Employ er of 1 to 10	Employ er of 11+	Un- employe d	House- hold duties	Retired
n	71	167	13	6	9	9	76
%	20.2	47.6	3.7	1.7	2.6	2.6	21.6

[2 not stated = .6%]

Female	23.1	37.5	2.9	1.1	1.9	8.6	25.0
%							
1987%	23.3	31.8	16.7	4.4	-	2.4	14.4

- 2.12 Reflecting the change in the age structure of the councillor body the current proportion of the retired is greater than in 1987. Another significant shift is among the employer and self-employed categories with a marked movement from the former to the latter. Whether this is yet another

consequence of the changed structure of local government and heavier council duties is something requiring further investigation.

- 2.13 In terms of the nature of employment, the respondents are very heavily skewed towards the managerial, professional and technical categories. Manual workers barely register a presence.
- 2.14 Organisational experience - it soon becomes apparent in any investigation of councillors' time allocation that in addition to work, home duties and council commitments there is a potentially heavy "fourth shift" in organisational attendance. In some cases membership of the organisations pre-exists and may have been the motivating factor in bringing the member to council work. Certainly as working councillors they are likely to be recruited to a variety of other bodies.

TABLE 4

Organisational Membership

(Number of councillors reporting membership)
(by type of organisation)

	Public	Sport- ing	Work	Welfare	Political	Relig- ious	Other
n	252	225	224	205	151	121	42
%	71.4	63.7	63.5	58.1	42.8	34.3	11.9

- 2.15 Apart from the obvious fact that most councillors belong to organisations across several categories, they may also belong to a number of different organisations within those categories and often hold offices within them. The actual commitment involved is thus much higher than these figures ostensibly depict.
- 2.16 Public bodies, most frequently school councils, though with a wide range of others, are attended by almost three-quarters of councillors (a more discretionary redistribution of organisations listed in the 'other' category would bring it in excess of this level).
- 2.17 On the same distributive basis two-thirds of councillors belong to sporting and work-related bodies. Welfare bodies attain a level of 60%.
- 2.18 Political activities account for the organisational membership of over 40%, many of them locality based, such as ratepayers' and residents' groups. 26% are affiliated with political parties operating at state and national level. This is probably an understatement as some councillors are diffident about declaring a party attachment in the context of a non-partisan local government system. However, it is to be expected that a substantial proportion of those sufficiently interested in public affairs to become

involved in local government would extend that interest to membership of a political party.

- 2.19 Just over a third of councillors report involvement in religious organisations, usually in the form of office-bearing rather than merely church attendance.
- 2.20 It is clear that councillors are involved in a intensive network of community activities of which council membership has an important, though not in all cases, a central role. It indicates well the complex grounding of democratic government in the broader social structure - the much invoked "civil society" whose absence impedes the transition to democracy in post-communist countries. The necessity of maintaining this interlinkage should not be overlooked in a concentration on the internal workings of local government.

3. Council Experience – ‘Recruitment’

- 3.1 The importance of the broader social context is very evident in examining the recruitment patterns of councillors. By far the most significant factors arise from personal connections rather than more formal political stimuli.
- 3.2 Respondents were invited to indicate all significant factors influencing their recruitment to council, rather than to isolate the most important, so that inclusion in one category does not exclude the possible influence of one or more of the others. However, it is clear from the overall distribution that it is "networking" that provides the main impetus. The most obvious method of stimulating nominations by an official recruitment campaign appears to have barely any direct impact, though it might act indirectly in activating a personal invitation.
- 3.3 Similarly, the other more directly political factor - a specific issue - is often the catalyst for a personal invitation. Any effective measures to widen the recruitment base of councils need to take account of the crucial importance of interpersonal networks.

TABLE 5

Factors influencing recruitment to Council

Factor	n	%	% 1987
Asked by friends	187	53.0	57.7
Asked by existing councillors	165	46.7	26.5
Specific Issue	93	26.3	57.7
Family Tradition	49	13.9	57.9
Asked by organisation	37	10.5	35.9
Asked by council officers	30	9.3	-
Business reasons	12	3.4	34.9
Official recruitment campaign	6	1.7	3.4
Other	120	34.0	16.3

- 3.4 A comparison with the 1987 survey indicates that the changes in the composition of the councillor body reflect some marked differences in recruitment factors. Some factors hold fairly steady e.g. those asked to stand by friends remains high and the impact of official recruitment campaigns remains low. In other respects there have been significant changes. The proportion asked to stand by other councillors has increased sharply while there have been marked falls in family tradition, organisations, business reasons and specific issues as stimulants to candidacy.
- 3.5 This suggests that it is becoming more difficult to enter councils on the basis of "impulse" such as a specific issue or the perceived business impact of

some council policy. The previous regime of annual elections clearly provided a vehicle for "impulse" nominations. With three year terms an issue may well grow "cold" before an election occurs. The reduced number of seats resulting from amalgamations may also act as a deterrent to "impulse" nominations.

- 3.6 The organisational factor which was also reduced may be triggered by a particular policy and thus be attributed to the general "impulse" category, though some organisations may seek to have representation on council as a permanent policy.
- 3.7 The substantial fall in those citing family tradition as a factor in recruitment is obviously not attributable to this blockage on "impulsive" entrants to council. Such councillors have hitherto been regarded as having an advantage in their entrenchment and continuity. One obvious cause of the fall would be the disruption of tradition by council amalgamations.
- 3.8 The amalgamation process may also have had the consequence of changing the "gatekeeping" rules for entry to councils. Under the previous system the natural attrition of council numbers would provide frequent opportunities for new entrants. As a consequence of amalgamation there has been a reduction in the aggregate number of seats, an enlargement of wards and, for outlying areas, an increased remoteness from the council's centre of operations. These factors are likely to create a deterrent to all but the most determined of new entrants. At the same time, incumbent councillors should have an advantage in securing election, having a better knowledge of the operations of the system and a higher profile with the electorate.
- 3.9 Some of these factors will have a greater impact in the initial period of amalgamation and once the new areas have become established there may be some revival of previous patterns of recruitment.
- 3.10 It is a standard presumption of amalgamation processes that they will produce a "better calibre" of councillor. This is based on the adage that "fewer means better", but it is not made clear how the "calibre" of the few is to be measured. What is certain is that councillor characteristics and operational experiences are changing.

4. Council Experience – ‘On The Job’

- 4.1 In order to understand what attracts or deters council candidacy we need to examine the various elements of councillors' duties and councillors' reactions to them. Some are readily anticipated, others run contrary to received opinion.
- 4.2 Foremost among these is councillors' attitude to public contact, which registers the highest positive response and belies that media version of the relationship which claims councillors avoid public contact and scrutiny. Similarly, involvement in council is viewed positively despite its general depiction as a dreary talking-shop. In fact all aspects of council's deliberative and policy-making role are viewed overwhelmingly positively. Policy-making in general, planning decisions, committee work and financial management all rate more than an 80% positive response.
- 4.3 Examining the balance between the very positive and slightly positive responses indicates rather less enthusiasm for committee work and financial management than some of the other duties. This is carried through to the legal implications of council operations which still attracts over 70% positive responses, but that reduced quantity is made up of a preponderance of the slightly positive, perhaps reflecting a degree of difficulty or frustration.
- 4.4 Electoral contest surprisingly attracts a positive response from two thirds of respondents despite being regarded in many quarters as a deterrent, both on the grounds of cost and the possibility of acrimony. Only 16% register this as a negative reaction. Presumably the majority regard it as a desirable part of the democratic process or perhaps enjoy the stimulus of campaigning.
- 4.5 Neither does the time involved act as much of a deterrent with almost 80% recording a positive reaction and only 14% regarding it negatively. Although the commitment of time is generally regarded as a deterrent, presumably serving councillors have successfully accommodated their council duties in their time management strategy.
- 4.6 The most negative response comes in respect of the financial costs of council involvement with almost a third indicating that this poses a deterrent. Less than half of respondents give a positive response and more than half of these are only slightly positive.

TABLE 6**Reactions to aspects of Council Duties**

	Positive				Negative			
	Very	Slight	Total	%	Slight	Very	Total	%
Time involved	197	83	280	79.3	40	10	50	14.2
Financial costs	74	97	171	48.4	73	37	110	31.2
Electoral contests	160	83	243	66.0	41	15	56	15.9
Public contact	253	63	316	89.5	15	3	18	5.1
Council duties	244	66	310	87.8	16	3	19	5.4
Policy making	206	97	312	88.4	23	6	29	8.2
Legal matters	97	158	255	72.2	66	5	71	20.1
Committee work	176	123	299	84.7	26	6	32	9.1
Financial management	157	133	290	82.2	35	9	44	12.5
Planning decisions	197	102	299	84.7	21	11	32	9.1

(% expressed on the basis of 353 total responses. Individual questions may attract some non-responses)

- 4.7 Some of the variance in councillor response is obviously a reflection of differing circumstances. If we examine 1997 electoral expenses, the "start-up" costs of becoming a councillor, there is a considerable range. Half of respondents report no costs, many of these presumably not having faced an election. Candidates canvassing small contested electorates may also be able to avoid financial outgoings. At the other end of the scale a few members report costs in excess of \$10,000. Generally, most councillors incurring costs contain them within \$500, a third of all respondents falling in this range. A further 10% extend their expenditure up to \$1000 and a few progress beyond into really serious costs. It might be assumed that these higher figures reflect the resources of the candidates concerned and their determination to succeed rather than a required level of expenditure.

TABLE 7**Cost of an election**

Amount \$	n	%
0	177	50.1
10-100	32	9.1
110-200	29	8.2
201-500	56	15.9
501-1000	36	10.2
1001-2000	13	3.7
2001-5000	7	2.0
5000+	3	0.8

- 4.8 Electoral analysts have suggested that human effort can replace financial resources so it is interesting to look at the amount of time dedicated to elections. Again a substantial proportion report none, though fewer than reported no expenses, suggesting that there are those councillors who substitute personal canvassing for expenditure on leaflets and advertising.

TABLE 8**Hours spent on election**

Total hours	n	%
0	155	43.9
1-10	32	9.1
11-20	23	6.5
21-40	52	14.7
41-60	34	9.6
61-100	27	7.6
101-150	12	3.4
151-200	7	2.0
201-500	7	2.0
501+	2	0.6

(2 non-respondents = 0.6%)

- 4.9 The distribution of hours spent on elections has a very similar profile to that of financial costs with most councillors reporting modest levels but a few reaching levels which are several multiples of the average. At least part of the explanation of the variation is in the duration of the electoral period. A handful of "high-fliers" are in electoral mode for between three and twelve months, but 44% of all respondents (77% of those engaging in an election

- 4.12 As would be expected, preparation for and attendance at full council meetings is the most significant element of time allocation with 60% spending over 8 hours per month and some extending to ten times this. Council committees are only moderately less demanding, 45% allocating more than 8 hours. External committees take only slightly less of councillors' time.
- 4.13 Consulting with officers and with the public are less demanding elements of councillors' time allocation but over a half spend in excess of 4 hours per month on public consultation and a third on consultation with officers.
- 4.14 This pattern is repeated in an examination of numbers of the public seen on council matters each month on average. Only 14.4% claim no contact. Over a third of respondents see up to 10 members of the public and almost a quarter between 11 and 20 each month. This accounts for three quarters of all respondents but the remainder extend upwards to the five who see in excess of 100, or over 10 times the numbers seen by the median councillor.

TABLE 11

**Contact With Public On Council Matters Per Average Month
(n = number of councillors)**

No. of people seen	0	1-10	11-20	21-40	41-60	61-100	100+
n	51	131	84	43	23	16	5
%	14.4	37.1	23.8	12.2	6.5	4.5	1.4

- 4.15 The much-cited "three Rs" of council concern, rates, roads and rubbish, require modification in the light of these results. Councillors reports of the major concerns of the public in making contact with them indicate a much wider range of issues. Roads clearly do still occupy a major role but are closely followed by planning matters as the subject of public concern. Refuse collection is a relatively minor matter, exactly equalled by those seeking attention to welfare matters. Concerns generated by community organisations are a major source of contact for over half of the responding councillors.

TABLE 11**Major Concerns of Public Contact
(n = numbers of councillors reporting)**

	Planning	Roads	Refuse	Welfare	Communi ity Orgs	Other
n	242	246	76	76	186	99
%	68.5	69.7	21.5	21.5	52.7	28.0

- 4.16 A great diversity of other concerns are cited by councillors, many of them to do with environmental management, but generally indicating that many councillors act as a broad conduit for community concern. Only five specifically mention rates.
- 4.17 What is apparent here is the wide range of activities and areas of expertise engaged in by councillors and the substantial commitment that this requires if it is to be done well. The median councillor would have a time commitment of around 33 hours per month, comprised of 10 hours preparing for full council, 7 hours each for committee involvement in respect of council and outside bodies, 3 hours in consultation with officers and 6 hours with the public.
- 4.18 At the eightieth percentile all of these allocations have more or less doubled. The aggregate amount is around 65 hours, made up of 19 hours on full council, 14 hours each on internal and external committees, 6 hours on officer contact and 11 hours on public contact. It follows that a fifth of the respondents have commitments in excess of this.

5. Amalgamations

- 5.1 The overall workload of councillors is considerably increased during radical policy processes such as council amalgamations. In this particular case the factors affecting the amount of time are more complex than in the case of standard council duties. Some councils were not engaged in amalgamations over this period and some cases proceeded more easily than others.
- 5.2 Just over half of respondents report no involvement in the amalgamation process. Of those who were engaged there is again a wide distribution in the time devoted to it. Just over half of them (24.9% of total respondents) contained their involvement within 60 hours over the two years, but a fifth (10.7% of the total respondents) extended to over 200 hours and a few report well over 400 hours.

TABLE 12

Time Spent on Amalgamations Over Last 2 Years

Hours	0	1-19	20-39	40-59	60-99	100- 199	200- 399	400+
n	187	35	25	28	13	25	27	11
%	53.0	9.9	7.1	7.9	3.7	7.1	7.6	3.1

(2 non-responses = 0.6%)

- 5.3 Obviously personal experience of the amalgamation process will colour response to the process in general and the principles involved. Almost two thirds of the respondents are favourably inclined towards amalgamations in principle, and half of them are quite enthusiastic. Only 22% are opposed to amalgamations with 13% being very opposed.
- 5.4 Support falls off when the actual process of amalgamation is considered. Some of the more enthusiastic response is downgraded to a milder form of support and overall almost 6% withdraw support. There is a concomitant increase in those opposed, greatest in the very opposed category.
- 5.5 This trend continues when respondents were asked to evaluate the specific impact on their own councils. The overall level of support now falls to below a half though the number of those very supportive remains reasonably constant. There is little change in the number opposed while the undecided category expands, presumably reflecting a desire to monitor outcomes further before making a final decision.

TABLE 13**Attitude to Amalgamations**

		In General	Current Process	Specific Effects
Very Supportive	n	113	82	81
	%	32.0	23.2	22.9
Mildly Supportive	n	117	128	93
	%	33.1	36.3	26.3
Total Supportive	n	230	210	174
	%	65.1	59.5	49.3
Very Opposed	n	46	66	70
	%	13.0	18.7	19.8
Mildly Opposed	n	33	40	33
	%	9.3	11.3	9.3
Total Opposed	n	79	106	103
	%	22.4	30.0	29.2
Neutral/Undecided	n	23	21	43
	%	6.5	5.9	12.2

- 5.6 This fall off in levels of support as we proceed from an enunciation of principle through procedural application to the perceptions of actual impact in particular cases can be anticipated as typical of any policy process. It is difficult to maintain the initial levels of support through the compromises of policy construction and actual implementation will reveal any weaknesses in the design as well as unanticipated problems of application.
- 5.7 This trend continues when respondents were asked to evaluate the specific impact on their own councils. The overall level of support now falls to below a half, though the number of those very supportive remains reasonably constant. There is little change in the number opposed, while the undecided category expands, presumably reflecting a desire to monitor outcomes further before making a final decision.
- 5.8 What is germane here is to consider whether the extent of the decline in support is merely a result of this anticipated reaction or whether it is an indication of an inappropriate framing of policy procedures and a flawed application.
- 5.9 The most interesting feature of the responses here is that the numbers opposed to the procedural process increases by 7.6% compared to those who are opposed as a general principle, but actually decreases marginally in an assessment of its immediate impact on the respondent's council. This would indicate that the actual application of the policy served to compensate for some of the perceived shortcomings in the policy itself. The very small decline in the proportion of those who were very supportive of both the policy process and its application in their council area tends to support this view.

6. Financial Compensation

6.1 The fact that councillors receive an allowance is an acknowledgment that their duties involve out-of-pocket expenses. What is currently in question is the amount of these expenses and the determination of an adequate level of compensation.

TABLE 14

Financial Outgoings Per Month

Amount (\$)	0	1-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-250	251 +
n	93	56	36	23	37	17	91
%	26.3	15.9	10.2	6.5	10.5	4.8	25.8

Further breakdown of \$251+ expenses

Amount (\$)	251-300	301-400	401-500	501-1000	1001-2500	2501+
n	19	13	21	17	9	12
%	5.4	3.7	5.9	4.8	2.5	3.4

6.2 The level of expenses incurred shows the expected wide range. Over a quarter of councillors report no expenses at all, while three record expenses in excess of \$5,000 each month. 60% of respondents contain their expenses within \$150 per month and at the \$250 level just short of 75% of respondents have been accounted for. Beyond this point there is a rapid escalation to in excess of \$2500. The final quartile thus extends the range by a factor of over ten. The median expenditure reported is \$100 per month.

TABLE 15

Amount Of Allowance Received Per Annum

Amount (\$)	0	20-499	500-999	1000-1499	1500-1999	2000-2499	2500+
n	30	9	29	51	30	75	129
%	8.5	2.5	8.2	14.4	8.5	21.2	36.5

Further breakdown of \$2500+ allowances

Amount (\$)	2500-2599	2600-2999	3000-4999	5000-7499	7500-9999	10000-24999	25000+
n	30	61	10	7	5	11	5
%	8.5	17.3	2.8	2.0	1.4	3.1	1.4

Note: There appears to have been some confusion over this question which was "What is your annual council allowance?". The basic personal annual allowance for councillors has a stipulated minimum of \$500 and a maximum of \$2,500 . The responses extend both below and beyond this range. The lower figures may be explained by the fact that some councillors arrange for their allowances to be paid to charitable organisations. The higher figures may be the result of aggregating the basic allowance with expenses claims or, in the case of mayors, with an expenses of office allowance.

6.3 It is obvious that there is a poor match between the pattern of expenditure and the receipt of allowances. The greatest disparities are at either end of the scale. 26.3 % of respondents declare no expenses but only 8.5% are in receipt of no allowance. At the other end of the scale over a quarter of respondents report expenses in excess of \$250 per month but only 9.9 % of them receive an annual allowance over this figure. The higher up the scale of expenditure the greater is the disparity in the allowance received.

6.4 Some of this disparity is rectified by claims for expenses incurred as a result of attending council meetings, which may cover travel, meals and the care of dependents. Almost two thirds of councillors make no claims but 14% claim in excess of \$1000 per annum and this climbs steeply to over \$4000 for a few.

TABLE 16

Additional Expenses Claimed Per Annum

Amount (\$)	0	25-200	201-500	501-1000	1001-2000	2001-4000	4000+
n	231	18	26	28	27	15	8
%	65.4	5.1	7.4	7.9	7.6	4.2	2.3

6.5 Councillors' views on the appropriateness of the form and the size of financial recompense for their services will be considerably influenced by their own experience. The survey offered them four forms of compensation and asked them to propose the amount of each as well as ranking them in order of preference.

- 6.6 The present form of compensation, the annual allowance is by far the most preferred. It is the only one that is not regarded as unacceptable by more than half of the respondents and is ranked first or second by 48 %. The sitting fee proposal is the next most preferred, but it is a distant second, being unacceptable to almost two thirds of respondents and securing first or second place with only 27%.
- 6.7 The two salary options are very much also-rans with objection rates of over 70%, reaching almost 80% in the case of full-time salaries. 16% rate part-time salaries as their first or second preference but only 8% rank the full-time salary at this level.
- 6.8 The allowances proposed by respondents vary widely, reflecting the dispersion of actual expenses incurred, though by no means exactly. While the number proposing a zero allowance almost exactly equals the number recording no expenses, at the other end of the scale only one respondent proposes an allowance of over \$30,000 though 12 recorded expenses above this level (i.e. over \$2500 per month).

TABLE 17

Preferred Form Of Financial Compensation

Rank	Annual Allowance		Sitting fee		Part-time salary		Full-time salary	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	132	37.4	39	11.0	25	7.2	16	4.5
2	38	10.8	56	15.9	32	9.1	9	2.5
3	29	8.2	17	4.8	35	9.9	11	3.1
4	8	2.3	15	4.2	6	1.7	35	9.9
0	146	41.4	226	64.0	255	72.2	281	79.6

(0 = unacceptable form of compensation)

- 6.9 The proposed amounts are certainly greater than the allowances currently received. The median amount proposed is \$2000 per annum while the median annual allowance is \$1200. Some of the difference may reflect a desire to integrate additional expenses claimed with the basic allowance. Others undoubtedly feel that there should be at least a nominal element of reward in the allowance as well as recompense for costs actually incurred.

TABLE 18**Amount of Allowance Proposed Per Annum**

Amount (\$)	0	20-600	601-1200	1201-1800	1801-2400	2401-3000	3001+
n	95	13	29	11	47	46	107
%	26.9	3.7	8.2	3.1	13.3	13.0	30.6

(5 non-responses = 1.4%)

Further breakdown of \$3001+ proposed allowances

Amount (\$)	3001-3600	3601-4800	4801-6000	6001-12000	12001-30000	30001+
n	2	13	48	26	17	1
%	0.6	3.7	13.6	7.4	4.8	0.3

6.10 A sitting fee as a means of compensating members is not a popular one. The low rating it received in the scale of preferences is further emphasised in the proposed scale of fees. 70% propose a zero fee, indicating that it is not an acceptable option, even though it would permit additional recompense to those whose workload was considerably extended by attendance at committees. Of those nominating a sitting fee around a third would opt for \$50 or under, a third for a fee up to \$100 and the remaining third propose in excess of this.

TABLE 19**Sitting Fee Proposed**

Amount (\$)	0	10-50	51-100	101-200	201-500	501-1000	1001+
n	248	33	35	22	9	3	3
%	70.2	9.3	9.9	6.2	2.5	0.8	0.8

6.11 The notion of a part-time salary was an even less acceptable option, again indicated by the high proportion registering a zero amount as well as giving it a low ranking. Those favouring a substantial part-time salary are presumably those advocating a substantial allowance and already engaging in a substantial work-load. For them the notion of a part-time salary is recognition of the heavy commitment of time involved. Councillors with more modest outgoings in expenses and commitment of time are unlikely to regard a "salary" as appropriate. There is, of course, the

additional philosophic dimension that the term "salary" indicates a principle of reward which may be at odds with the principle of service held by many councillors.

TABLE 20

Part-Time Salary Proposed

Amount (\$)	0	1-500	501-2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-15000	15001-20000	20001 +
n	289	6	2	12	16	10	10	8
%	81.9	1.7	0.6	3.4	4.5	2.8	2.8	2.3

TABLE 21

Full-Time Salary Proposed

Amount (\$)	0	1-10000	10001-2000	20001-3000	3001-4000	4001-5000	50001 +
n	304	5	4	10	18	7	5
%	81.9	1.4	1.2	2.8	5.1	2.0	1.4

6.12 The proposal for a full-time salary obviously carries the connotation of a radical revision of present arrangements since it presumably requires some or all councillors to have a full-time commitment to council duties. Accordingly, it attracts an even greater degree of opposition with 86% recording a zero amount as the appropriate salary. Some of the lower amounts proposed as appropriate may reflect the respondent's view of the time required to deal with council business in the smaller authorities rather than representing their assessment of an adequate full-time salary. Around 10% of respondents propose a level which might be regarded as reasonable if a full-time executive position were envisaged.

6.13 The overall conclusion must be that most councillors regard the current method of compensation as the appropriate one and believe a moderate increase in the amount paid would be adequate. There is very little support for a more radical revision of compensation and very little demand for elevated levels of payment.

7. Access to Support Services

- 7.1 Apart from the payment of allowances the work of councillors can also be eased by the availability of support facilities. There is already a substantial degree of provision but also an indication of an unmet need.
- 7.2 Fax machines have the greatest degree of availability and also produce the greatest perceived need. Almost a half of councillors have access to a fax machine at home and over a third can access one at council offices. They are the facility most indicated as needed with a fifth expressing a need for one at home. Obviously the ability to transfer documents by this means is regarded as important.
- 7.3 Computers rate only slightly lower on current availability and perceived need. 42.8% of respondents have access to one at home and a quarter at council offices. The second largest need indicated is for access to a home computer by 18.7%.

TABLE 22

Access to Support Services

	Secretarial services		Fax machine		Computer		Internet	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Available at:								
Home	60	17.0	165	46.7	151	42.8	43	12.2
Work	44	12.5	92	26.1	62	17.6	31	8.8
Council	134	38.0	120	34.0	89	25.2	62	17.6
Need at:								
Home	34	9.6	76	21.5	66	18.7	59	16.7
Work	11	3.1	10	2.8	12	3.4	7	2.0
Council	50	14.2	22	6.2	22	6.2	27	7.6

- 7.4 Internet access offers an alternative to the fax machine for the transmission of documentation and messages via e-mail as well as providing a search engine for a wide range of information. Current levels of access are quite light despite the wide availability of computers. Neither does it rate highly on perceived need. Presumably more basic provision has a higher priority at present.
- 7.5 Secretarial services, as might be expected, are mainly accessed at council offices with 38% of respondents drawing on them. They are also the most frequently nominated service needed at council offices, at 16% double the rate of other services.

7.6 Reflecting the realities of their situation most of these facilities are desired by councillors at home. Availability at work will be heavily dependent on the councillors' work situation with the self-employed and employers having easiest access. The services listed are not mutually exclusive and the most fortunate of respondents have access to the full range of services at all the stipulated locations.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 This report began with a recognition that change is an unavoidable feature of modern times but that it is malleable and best directed on the basis of full information and a careful analysis of all factors. What is presented here is a modest contribution to an assessment of the condition of South Australian local government during a period of substantial change.
- 8.2 It is clear that the changes of the last quarter of a century, beginning slowly and sometimes falteringly, aimed at changing the structure and operations of local government, have had a substantial impact. What is also clear is that some of those changes are not as anticipated, nor, in some cases, readily explicable.
- 8.3 A major part of the platform of change has been to make local authorities more accessible to the public, both as candidates for broader-based councils and as part of a process of involvement in policy-making. The latter aim appears to have been achieved with public contact becoming a major element in councillors' time allocation.
- 8.4 Councils recruitment base has certainly changed, though in restricted directions. The greatest extension has been in the proportion of women serving on councils, though how much of this is attributable to a more receptive local government and how much to the greater mobilisation of women in the broader society are questions needing more perceptive investigation to produce reliable answers.
- 8.5 In other respects the social base of councils has altered relatively little, being comprised largely of middle-aged, middle-class males of Australian or British birth. Migrants from non-British sources, notwithstanding the promotion of multiculturalism, have only a minor presence.
- 8.6 More youthful councillors did appear to be increasing at the time of the 1987 survey but their numbers are now on the wane. This shift has not been towards the far end of the age-scale since the proportion of over 60s has also declined. There has been a definite consolidation in the middle-aged bracket.
- 8.7 Employees in general, and "blue-collar" workers in particular, are poorly represented in comparison with their presence in the general community. Even within the "white-collar" section of the councillor body there has been a considerable shift, with a marked decline in employers and a substantial increase in the proportion of the self-employed.
- 8.8 Some glimpses of new selective forces at work are apparent in the process of entry to council membership. What have been termed "impulsive" factors such as particular issues, have declined markedly as a motivation. Equally however, family tradition, the least impulsive of routes to membership has also declined. The key to successful entry would appear to be one or another form of "networking" - possibly strategic alliances between groups of members which substitutes to some extent for the absence of political parties with their formal systems of mobilisation and recruitment.
- 8.9 The role of councillor remains a demanding one in terms of the time requirement, and, to an extent, of financial resources. It is all the more formidable in the context of the family

responsibilities and work commitments carried by many councillors. If the further dimension of organisational membership is added, often at the behest of council, the total work-load can be daunting.

- 8.10 Of particular note is the number of the public consulted with on council business and the amount of time dedicated to this purpose. This produces a picture of public access which runs contrary to the adverse view of council remoteness often promoted by sections of the media.
- 8.11 What is evident in all the patterns of commitment is the assertion of the notorious 'J' curve. While the bulk of councillors are bunched in their levels of commitment along the several dimensions, including financial outgoings, for a few the levels extends outwards by a factor which greatly multiplies the average. The principle of a normal distribution about a mean in an inverted 'U' curve is quite inapplicable. This makes any uniform provision of support or compensation problematic since a small, but significant, proportion of councillors is "off the scale".
- 8.12 This asymmetrical distribution of commitment probably accounts for a general diffidence about forms of recompense, accompanied by a minority support for more substantial and more radical forms of compensation. The greatest level of support comes for an enhanced form of the present annual allowance. It would be more generous than the present scheme but only modestly so.
- 8.13 The idea of transforming councillors into salaried officers has little support. It would involve a radical revision of the role of some or all councillors, and, in the case of full-time salaries, would presumably require a process of selectivity. It could be used to deal with the exceptional cases who occupy the extended axis of the 'J' curve.
- 8.14 The process of amalgamation has been a major pre-occupation of many councils in recent times and has undoubtedly made its contribution to some of the changes in the motivation and composition of the council body. Despite the inevitable destabilisation which occurred in many cases, it appears to have been viewed positively by most councillors. There is a negative response apparent at all stages of policy generation and application but the positive support holds up remarkably well. While this augurs well for the new council system, continued monitoring will be needed to ascertain if this support is sustained.
- 8.15 Support services available to councillors appear to be reasonably effective and there are no huge and apparent deficiencies needing attention. There is a perceived need for some enhancement of provision and that largely in the councillor's home. Presumably some elaboration of the system of allowances would serve to alleviate this need.
- 8.16 This report has probably generated as many questions as it has produced answers. That is as it should be, since it is only by the continued scrutiny of the processes of change and a further questioning of the conclusions of that scrutiny that we can ensure that we have a full awareness of the circumstances and are making a proper judgement of their effectiveness.

9. Appendix - The Survey

APPENDIX A

The Survey

- A1 This survey was commissioned by the South Australian Local Government Association to follow the the 1997 elections which were held on substantially modified boundaries following major amalgamations.
- A2 The basic questionnaire was derived from one used by the Maud Committee of Enquiry into Management in Local Government in England and adapted for South Australian application in a 1971 survey (John R.Robbins,"Local Government and Community in South Australia", Ph.D.Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1976; John R.Robbins, 'Councillors Compared: South Australia and England", Australian Journal of Public Administration, Vol.36, 1977, pp.367-371.).
- A3 This questionnaire, in its turn, formed the basis of a survey conducted in 1987 and designed to explore the characteristics, experiences and attitudes of South Australian local councillors, with particular regard to the measures needed to allow them to operate more effectively. The consequent report, "The Making of a Councillor " was made to the South Australian Department of Local Government in December 1987.
- A4 The 1997 survey was intended to provide a further comparative profile of local councillors, not only after the passage of a further decade, but following a period of radical reform, particularly in the shape of amalgamations, and with a revision of the Local Government Act in process. Accordingly, in addition to the "profiling" questions, reactions were sought to current policy proposals and to the experience of amalgamation.
- A5 Questionnaires were sent to Chief Executive Officers for distribution to all councillors in late 1997, followed by a reminder several weeks later. This produced a total return of 353 questionnaires from a possible total of 850, a response rate of 41.5%.
- A6 The 1987 survey was sent individually to all metropolitan councillors and to councillors in half of the country councils, a total of 1073. There was a first response of 335 or 31.2%. A reminder letter brought in a further 190 returns, bringing the total response to 525 or 48.9%. A third contact included a further copy of the questionnaire and produced a further 120 returns. A final reminder produced 77 returns though 12 of these were received after the questionnaires had been processed and the number of cases actually included in the survey was 710, 66.7% of the original sample.
- A7 The enhanced response of the 1987 survey is obviously the consequence of personal mailing and more frequent contact, both of which increase the cost of the exercise. In both cases there is a substantial proportion of non-responses which prompts concerns about the representativeness of the responding cases. While undoubtedly there will be some differences between those who respond and those who do not, the range of responses recorded in the 1997 survey indicates that a wide dispersion of conditions and views has been tapped, though the proportions may, in some cases, be skewed.

A8 The responses given often need to be evaluated in the context of the question posed if they are to be fully understood. A copy of the questionnaire is therefore appended to this report.