



**CITY OF
PARRAMATTA**

Electing the Lord Mayor

Engagement Report & Key Findings

May 2023 (internal use only)



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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

This engagement was prompted by a Notice of Motion raised on 26 April 2021. On 10 May 2021 a report was presented, and Council resolved to consult with the community. The resolution stated:

- (a) That Council consult with the community on the option of a popularly elected Lord Mayor in the six (6) months after the 2021 Local Government Elections.
- (b) That the results of the community consultation be reported to the new term of Council to inform whether it will hold a constitutional referendum at the 2024 Local Government Elections, for the potential to implement any change at the 2028 Local Government Elections.
- (c) [Part C detailing funding]

Following a Councillor workshop held on 6 July 2022 staff were briefed to:

- a) Focus on the options for electing a Lord Mayor i.e. popularly elected Y/N
- b) Defer discussion around implications for the wards and number of councillors for future consultation should there be support for a popularly elected Lord Mayor

Strategic objectives

- To understand community preferences regarding how the Lord Mayor is elected;
- To increase knowledge and awareness of the current process of electing the Lord Mayor;
- To provide transparency regarding the Council decision-making process;
- To ensure Council has the opportunity to consider the input of a wide range of community members in order to make well-informed decisions;
- To use a range of best practice engagement techniques and deliver engagement activities which are accessible and enable participation by the widest possible number of constituents.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, City of Parramatta Council began a comprehensive process of community engagement to consult and involve the community in a question about current and future options for electing the Lord Mayor.

This project has been led by the Governance team and Community Engagement with advice and assistance from Executive Support, Media Relations, Legal and Research.

A three-stage community engagement plan was developed and a consultant was engaged to conduct Stages 1 and 2 – pop-up surveys conducted in September 2022 in the wards; and online workshops with demographically representative groups of residents held in February 2023. Insights from Stage 1 and 2 were used to further refine the communication and engagement plan.

From **Monday 3 April to Wednesday 15 May 2023**, City of Parramatta Council conducted Stage 3 - an LGA-wide public campaign to seek community views on the questions:

1. Which option for electing the Lord Mayor do you prefer? and
2. Would you support a Referendum to change the way a Lord Mayor is elected?

Every household in the LGA received a letter and invitation to answer the community survey, supported by a promotional campaign on social media and Council's communication channels.

Highlights:

- This survey achieved the highest response rate to date on Participate Parramatta, generating 7,915 visits to the website and a 45% feedback rate (compared to the average feedback rate of 4.91%).
- Over 3,800 completed survey responses were received indicating the subject was of high interest and relevance to the community.
- 23.8% of responses were from residents under 40 years, 39.1% from those 40 – 59 years and 37.1% from those 60+ years.
- 3,259 comments were gathered and analysed to identify key themes within responses summarised in this report.
- The campaign reached 104K households via direct mail, and 120K audience via social media/Council communication channels, achieving widespread introduction to, and awareness of this project.
- The project appeared in local and metropolitan news coverage.

Findings:

- Election by popular vote was preferred by 64% of survey respondents.
- Election by Councillors was preferred by 34%.
- The Referendum received support from 71% of respondents.

- A snapshot analysis of 200 comments revealed key themes driving people's preference for electing the Lord Mayor, including...
 - o People who prefer the method popularly elected felt it was more democratic, less exposed to political deals, and more beneficial for a range of reasons such as transparency, fairness and stability.
 - o People who prefer the method Councillor-elected felt Councillors had more knowledge and were therefore in a better position to choose the Lord Mayor, disagreed with the cost of implementing a new method, and felt it resulted in better cooperation between the mayor and councillors.

More on themes can be found in Chapter 4 – Key Findings.

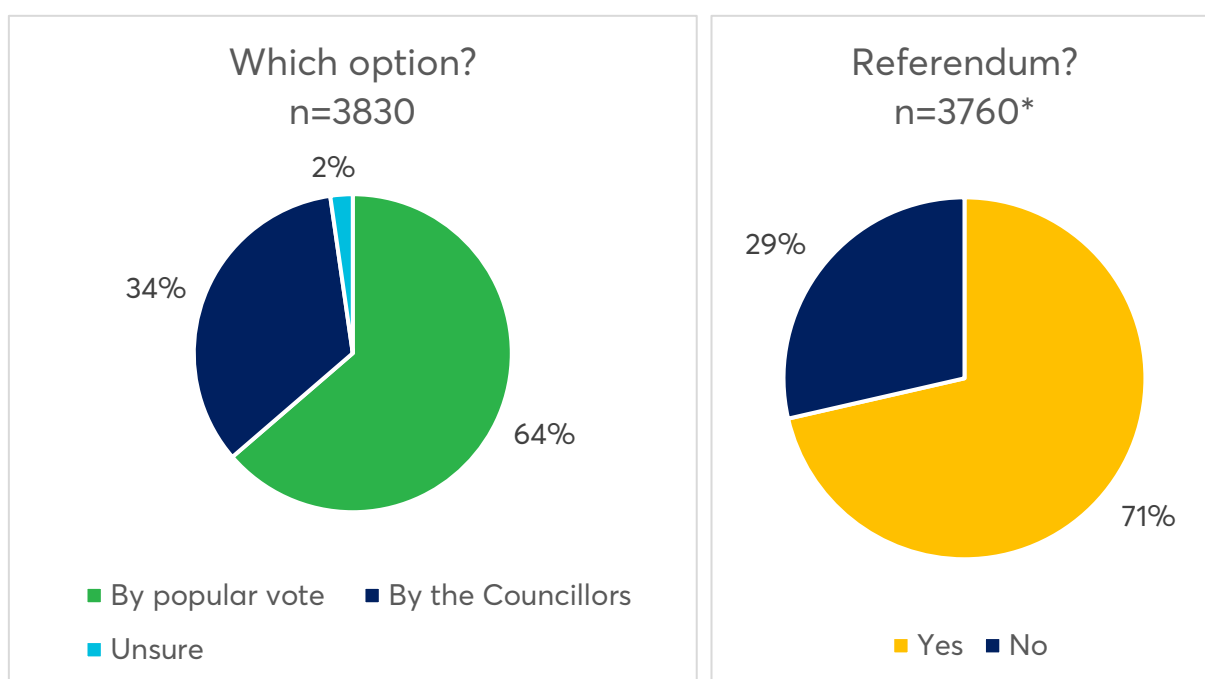


Figure 1 & 2 - Please note, not all email and call centre responses provided an answer to the Referendum question, resulting in different total numbers for Q1 and Q2.

Other observations:

- Analysis of the survey data indicates every ward reached the threshold of between 500 and 600 responses.
- The translated Participate pages and surveys promoted via translated social media posts, delivered 38 survey responses.

3. ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

Below is a description of the LGA-wide consultation and promotion.

3.1. Promotional methods

- Letters to every household in the LGA with QR code.
- Digital screens at Council libraries and the Customer Service Centre.
- Postcards with a QR code at Council libraries including a short response survey.
- City of Parramatta website homepage banner.
- City of Parramatta website news post with links to Participate Parramatta.
- Promotion in the Participate Parramatta newsletter, At Parramatta City News, Business News, and Community News.
- A paid, targeted social media campaign and organic posts on Facebook and Instagram; translated.
- Media release to CALD media outlets.

3.2. Campaign snapshot





104,000 letters delivered	4,397 QR code scans		Social Media 
		7,915 visits to Participate Parramatta	
94 emails, customer calls, survey cards	3830 submissions overall	3736 online survey submissions	

Figure 2 – Campaign reach and response rate

3.3. Social Media Campaign Summary

3.3.1. Paid Socials

A paid social media campaign ran from Thursday 11 April for four weeks reaching 41,036 people and resulting in 1,322 link clicks to the online survey. The first two weeks featured posts across the LGA with translated versions running concurrently. The campaign was then split targeting Parramatta and Rosehill (Ad set 1) and Epping, North Rocks and Dundas (Ad set 2) running for a further two-weeks.

The Parramatta/Rosehill ad set resulted in reach of 14,134 and 386 link clicks. The Epping, Dundas, North Rocks ad set reach was 11,853 and 337 link clicks. Overall, social media performed well with a younger, mainly female audience.



Figure 4 - Instagram post

Summary

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Spend	\$597.70	n/a
Reach	41,036	n/a
Impressions	73,183	n/a
Frequency (no. times ad seen p/p)	2.59	2-3
Link clicks	1,322	n/a
CPC (cost per click)	\$0.45	\$0.50-\$1
CTR (click through rate)	1.81%	More than 1%
Post engagements	1,338	n/a
Engagement rate (ER)	1.83%	More than 2%

LGA Wide Ad Set

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Spend	\$198.93	n/a
Reach	15,049	n/a
Impressions	23,725	n/a
Frequency (no. times ad seen p/p)	1.90	2-3
Link clicks	599	n/a
CPC (cost per click)	\$0.33	\$0.50-\$1
CTR (click through rate)	2.52%	More than 1%
Post engagements	606	n/a
Engagement rate (ER)	2.55%	More than 2%

Parramatta/Rosehill Ad Set

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Spend	\$199.64	n/a
Reach	14,134	n/a
Impressions	26,504	n/a
Frequency (no. times ad seen p/p)	2.39	2-3
Link clicks	386	n/a
CPC (cost per click)	\$0.52	\$0.50-\$1

CTR (click through rate)	1.46%	More than 1%
Post engagements	392	n/a
Engagement rate (ER)	1.48%	More than 2%

Epping/North Rocks/Dundas Ad Set

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Spend	\$199.13	n/a
Reach	11,853	n/a
Impressions	22,954	n/a
Frequency (no. times ad seen p/p)	2.55	2-3
Link clicks	337	n/a
CPC (cost per click)	\$0.59	\$0.50-\$1
CTR (click through rate)	1.47%	More than 1%
Post engagements	340	n/a
Engagement rate (ER)	1.48%	More than 2%

- The paid campaign performed moderately well, with good CPC and CTR although falling short of the benchmark for Engagement Rate (ER).
- Frequency was within the target range indicating the allocated spend was appropriate for the campaign length and audience size.
- ER fell just short of meeting CoP benchmarks (>2%) at 1.83%. Reasons for this could be the copy or imagery weren't engaging enough, as they were stock images. Alternatively, the audience wasn't relevant to the campaign. In future, we could look at being more specific with the audience and utilising age demographics or interests.¹
- 70% of results came from women, 30% from men. 45% from 18-24 year olds, 39% from 25-34 year olds, 8% from 35-44 year olds and 5% from 65+ year olds.

3.3.2. Organic campaign results:

The project was also shared organically on Council's Facebook and Instagram accounts resulting in further reach of 6,006 and 39 link clicks.

Facebook

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Number of Posts	1	n/a
Engagements	293	n/a
Reach	3,989	n/a
Link Clicks	39	n/a
Engagement Rate	7.06%	2-3%

Instagram

Metric	Campaign Result	Benchmark
Number of Posts	1	n/a
Engagements	22	n/a
Reach	2,017	n/a

¹ This social campaign began one-week after letter delivery, as a reminder, not the primary driver of engagement.

Link Clicks	n/a	n/a
Engagement Rate	1.01%	2-3%

3.3.1. Social comments

Five (5) people left comments on Council's official website and paid social media posts, three of which related to the engagement.

One mentioned changes to the Council ward structure should the method of electing the Lord Mayor change to Popular Vote. An answer was approved by Governance:

Response: Hi D___! Thanks for mentioning this. You are right, a change to a popularly elected Lord Mayor would also require changes to our current Ward structure. We mention this on the Participate Parramatta page but there isn't a proposal to share at this time. If Council decides to go ahead with a Referendum, there will be time for consultation on the Ward structure before the vote in September 2024. Both issues (electing the Lord Mayor and the revised Ward structure) would then be presented in one Referendum question.

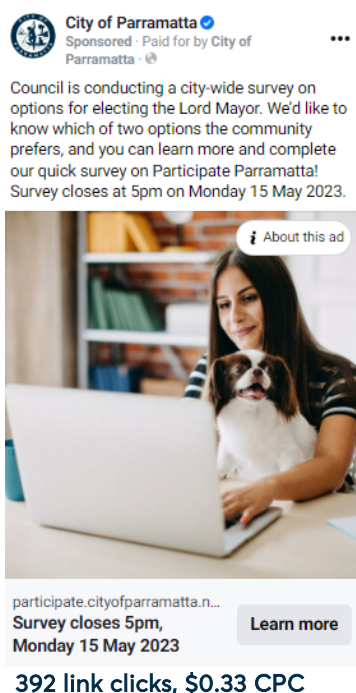
The second reported difficulty getting access to the online survey:

Response: Sorry to hear you are experiencing problems. If you still can't get through, you are most welcome to contact Council by phone and speak to a member of the Community Engagement team or email your preference to governance@cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au. The phone number is 1300 617 058.

The third shared some relevant information on The Tally Room, an election podcast stating, "I wonder how many people would understand how the system works and what the implications maybe. I came across the following links which provided an overview. The podcast features Ryde Council."

<https://www.tallyroom.com.au/44210>

No response required



City of Parramatta Sponsored · Paid for by City of Parramatta ·

Council is conducting a city-wide survey on options for electing the Lord Mayor. We'd like to know which of two options the community prefers, and you can learn more and complete our quick survey on Participate Parramatta! Survey closes at 5pm on Monday 15 May 2023.

[About this ad](#)

[participate.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au](#)
Survey closes 5pm, Monday 15 May 2023 [Learn more](#)

392 link clicks, \$0.33 CPC

Figure 5 - Top performing ad

3.4. Electronic Direct Notification

The project was featured in Participate Parramatta's April and May newsletters, receiving 675 link clicks and was promoted in City News, Business News and Community News.

Channel	List	Open rate	Survey link clicks
Participate Parramatta Community Panel Newsletter April / May	14,841	44%	675
City News – May	31,498	50%	110
Business News – April	26,717	41.5%	74
Community News - April	1,311	33%	Not avail.
Total distribution	74,367		

3.5. Engagement methods

3.5.1. Participate Parramatta website

The Participate Parramatta project page received 7,195 visits resulting in 3,736 completed online surveys, which is the highest response gathered since launching the engagement platform.

The page provided fast facts and FAQs on the two options for electing a Lord Mayor.

As a result of the campaign, 1,817 new people joined as members of Participate Parramatta.

Project Page Events	
Views	8,951
Visits	7,915
Visitors	6,322
Total contributions	3,736
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Main survey 3,698- Sim. Chinese 28- Korean 5- Hindi 5- Arabic 0	
New Participate Parramatta followers	1,817

3.5.2. Email, call centre and library response box activity

Ninety-four (94) submissions were gathered by email, the customer call centre and postcard bringing the final tally to 3,830 responses.

3.5.3. Translated content

FAQs and the online survey script were translated into Simplified Chinese, Korean, Hindi and Arabic and promoted on social media and through culturally and linguistically diverse media outlets.

This resulted in 28 Chinese-language surveys submitted and 5 surveys each from Korean and Hindi speaking participants.

3.5.4. Acquisition

Overall, the direct link (QR code) provided on the letter sent to residents generated more than 75% of engagement on the Participate Parramatta page. The social media campaign contributed ~16% of traffic and organic social media sharing and website referrals provided ~6%.

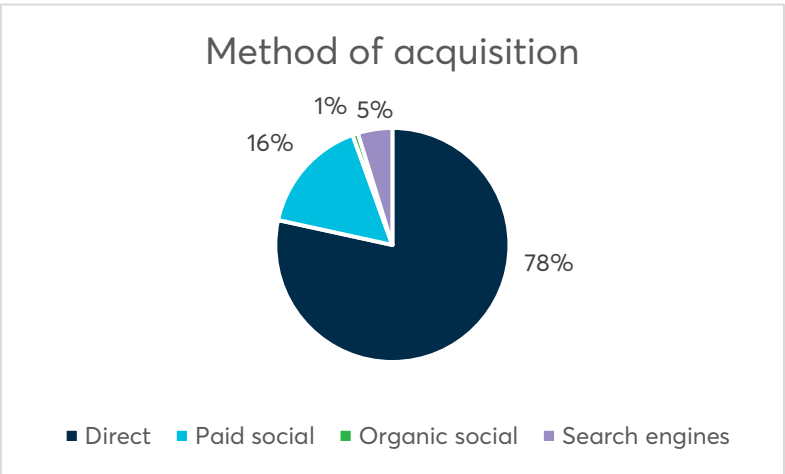


Figure 6 - Acquisition methods

*Direct represents those who came to the survey by QR code or a direct link to the PP page.

3.5.5. Participate Parramatta project page performance

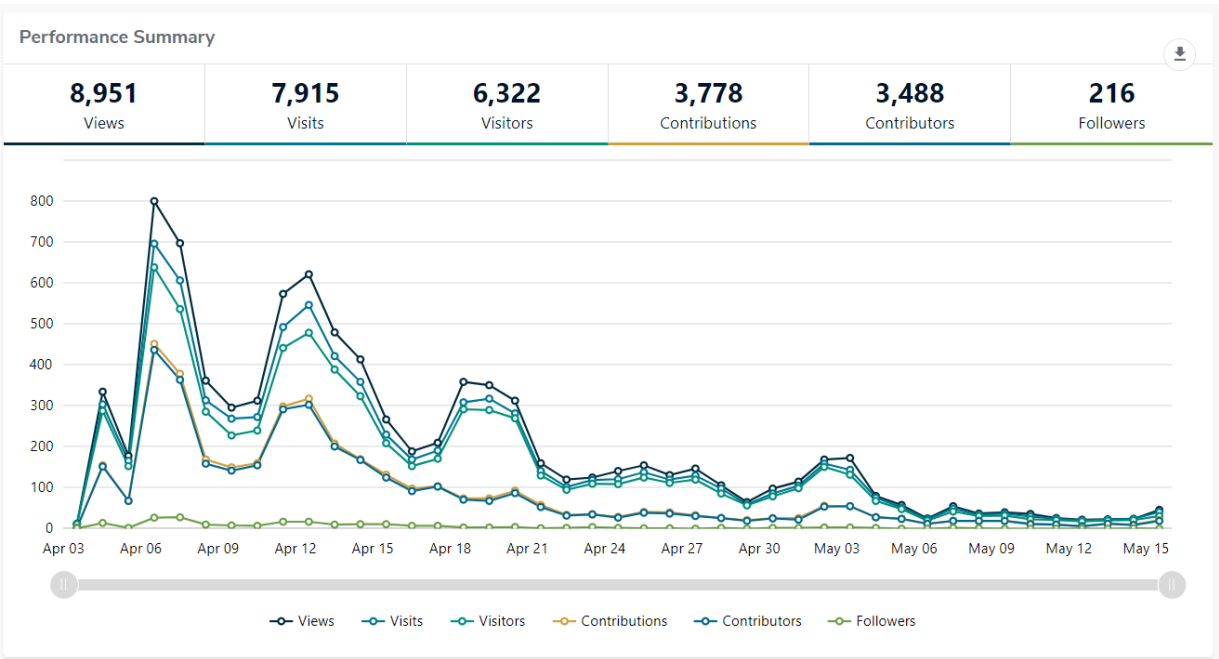
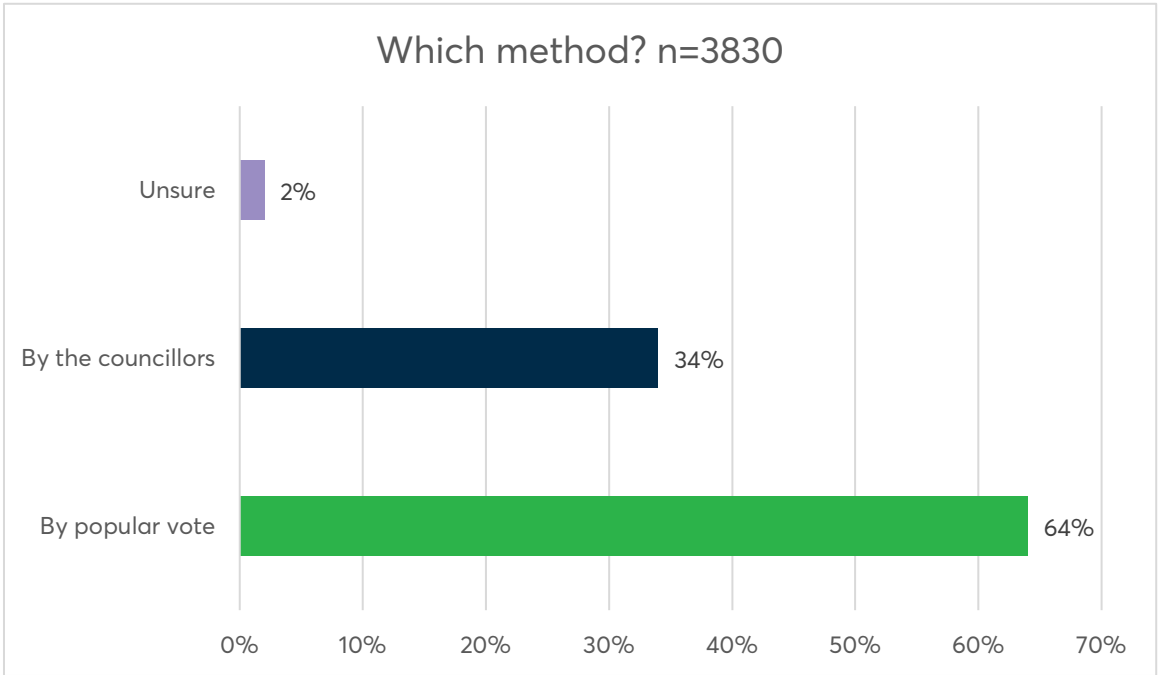


Figure 7 - Page performance

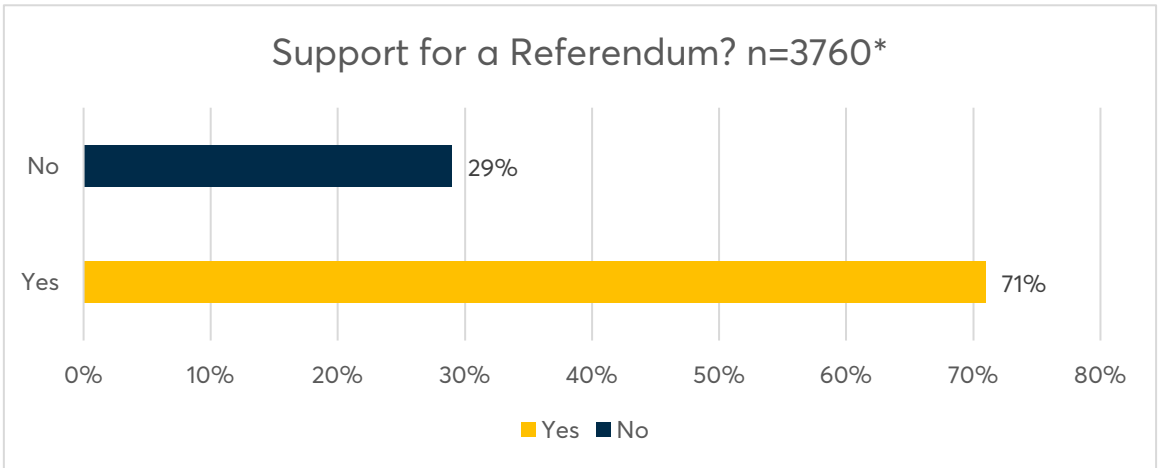
4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1. Survey data (consolidated email, call centre, hardcopy and online responses).

Q1 In future, would you like to see your Lord Mayor elected... Required

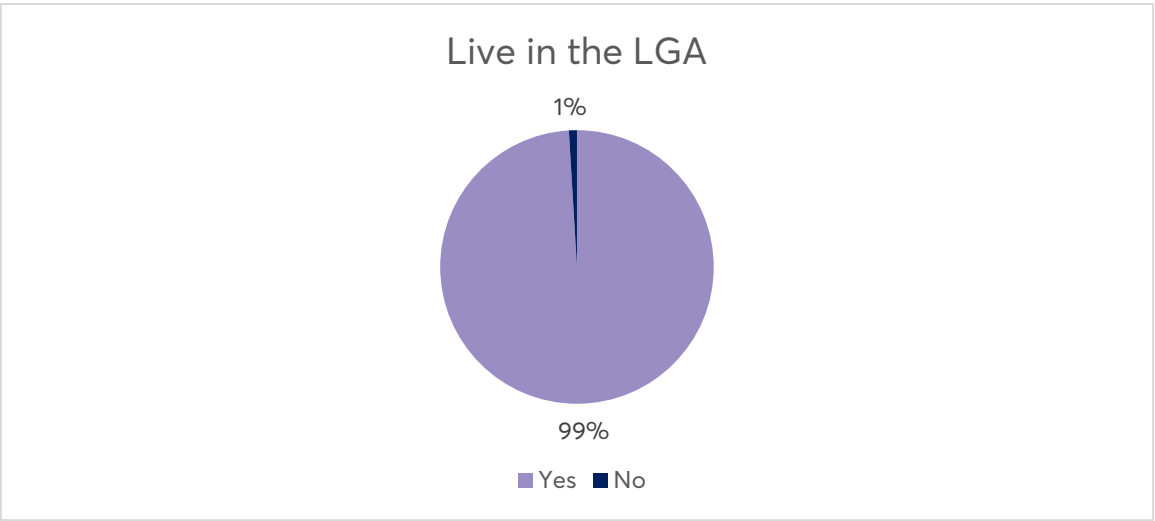


Q3 To change the way the Lord Mayor is elected Council would need to have a Referendum at the next Local Government Election in 2024. Would you support having a Referendum? Required



*Please note some email / call centre responses did not answer the question on a Referendum.

Q4 Do you live in the Parramatta LGA? Required

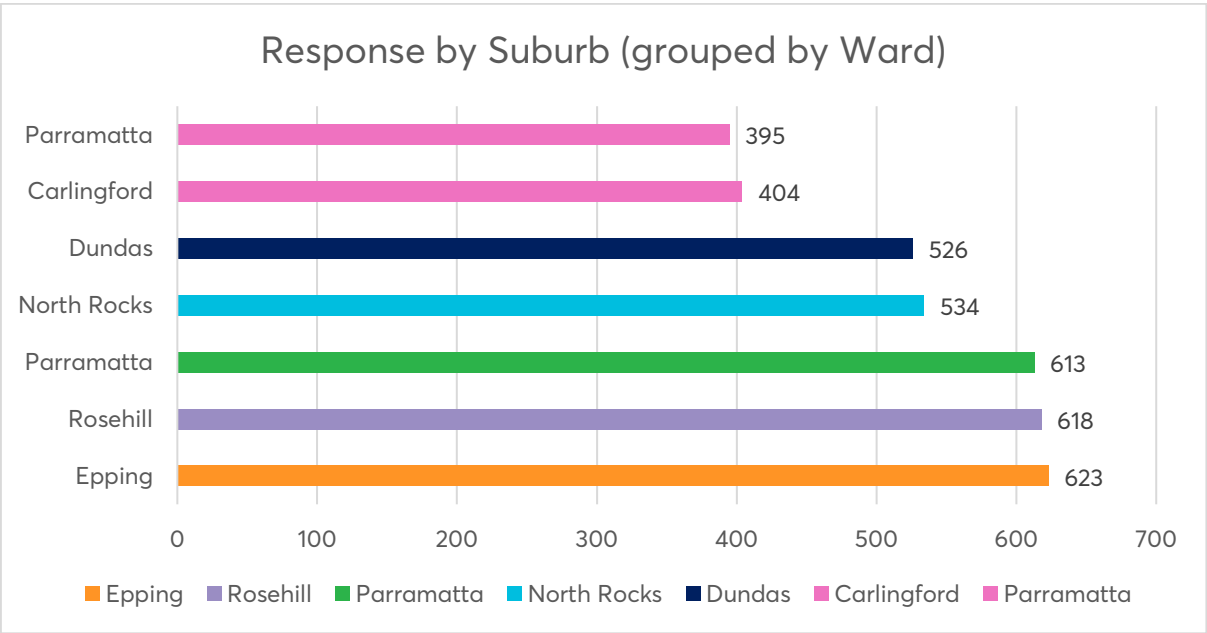


Q5 & 6 Suburb & Street Name

Suburb and street name were used to validate responses and distribute responses into Wards.

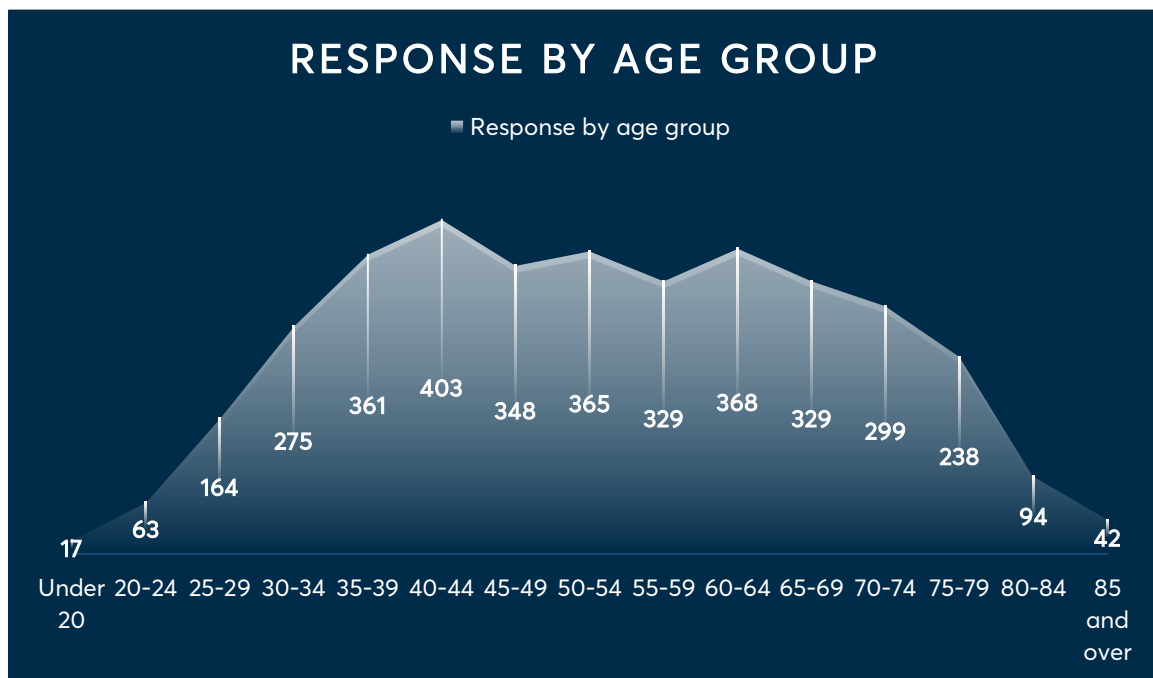
The chart below demonstrates each Council Ward reached a threshold of 500 responses.

This is before the suburbs of Parramatta and Carlingford are included, with Parramatta shared across Dundas, Parramatta, and Rosehill wards (395 responses); and Carlingford across Dundas, Epping, and North Rocks wards (404 responses).



Q7 Age group

Below is a graph showing the survey response (online only) by age group.



Q8 & 9 Questions related to further contact.

4.2. Key Themes

Key themes from 3,260 comments were identified from the answers to Q2 "Why do you feel that way?" in response to their earlier choice at Q1 "Which method".

Automated analysis was used to identify key themes from 3,260 comments. A manual snapshot of 200 responses (100 in favour of each option) was completed and compared with the automated analysis. A summary of leading themes can be seen below:

Major themes in favour of Popular Vote from 2068 open ended responses	
<p>Representation of people in decision making, of community diversity, of priorities and values</p> <p>Democracy democratic society, democratic process, fairness</p> <p>Transparency increased understanding of policies, approachability, avoid deals behind closed doors</p>	<p><i>"This will provide further transparency to the community of the inner workings of council. At this time I feel there is a lack of community engagement with the council process, and having the community actively engage in the election of their mayor further strengthens the democratic process, decentralizes power from a select few and allows the community to engage more with their council. A great initiative and very much welcomed!" - Participant</i></p>
Minor themes – corruption, choice, leadership	

Major themes in favour of Popular Vote from manual analysis of 100

<p>Democratic People have the right, responsibility, and desire to choose their leaders</p> <p>Less Risk Prevent corruption/political arrangements/politicising/factional influence and other councillor vote problems</p> <p>Beneficial A better system with more transparency, stability, consistency, accountability, fairness & enable projects/policies to be delivered effectively</p>	<p><i>"This person represents the people. The people should be able to choose who this person is, not just the person for their own ward." - Participant</i></p>
<p>Minor themes – empowering, dissatisfaction with current system, stronger connection between Council and community</p>	

Major themes in favour of Councillors from 1120 open ended responses

<p><i>"I like the current system because it allows for a greater variation in views to be represented across council's term, and it is not about a 'cult of personality' or political views connected with one person"</i> - Participant</p>	<p>Awareness Councillors better informed, people don't know the candidates well enough</p> <p>Representation Councillors elected to make decisions, Mayor needs support of the chamber</p> <p>Discretion Councillors should be able to choose someone knowledgeable, someone they can work with</p>
<p>Minor themes – good system, change will cause additional cost to ratepayers, change unnecessary</p>	

Major themes in favour of Councillors from manual analysis of 100	
<p><i>"Popularity amongst the community is less effective as councillors are best suited to know peers. Also 4 years is a long term especially if the Mayor is ineffective and requires a new approach."</i></p> <p>- Participant</p>	<p>Awareness Councillors are better placed to decide</p> <p>Cost a lot of resources for introducing/implementing popular elected PM system</p> <p>Less Clashes Between the Mayor and Council, better cooperation and governance</p>
<p>Minor themes – popularity contests favour influential people, not leaders; councillor elected is more representative; existing system works well</p>	

4.3. Capturing arguments for and against

Comments from the LGA-wide community survey also provide a range of pros and cons for each option. Below is a selection of quotes from the community for and against each option:

	Pros	Cons
Popular Vote	<i>We live in a Democracy. We should be able to choose who should be the mayor - Participant</i>	<i>Presidential style elections for any mayoral position would lead negatively towards the American system. I do not believe that system is in any way superior to our current approach. - Participant</i>
	<i>It gives people another chance for their local voice to be heard. - Participant</i>	<i>The mayor really only has authority if they have the support of the council - a lame duck mayor who doesn't have support from the council isn't effective. - Participant</i>
	<i>It can create a closer liaison with the community. People in the electorate have the opportunity to select someone suitably qualified who best understands community issues and needs. - Participant</i>	
	<i>I think the people should elect the Lord Mayor by popular vote. Leaving it up to a handful Councillors is open to prejudice. - Participant</i>	
	<i>Lord Mayor is a figurehead for the area and should represent people's choice. - Participant</i>	

	Pros	Cons
Councillor Vote	<i>We elect councillors to act as our representatives at council and they make all decisions on our behalf because they are our representatives. The election of mayor is just one more decision they make on our behalf. - Participant</i>	<i>Councillor elections will favour the largest party. - Participant</i>
	<i>Councillors know the candidates from their close association with them on Council and are better placed to make an informed decision. - Participant</i>	<i>Deals among councillors lack transparency- Participant</i>
	<i>I like the current system because it allows for a greater variation in views to be represented across council's term, and it is not about a 'cult of personality' or political views connected with one person. - Participant</i>	
	<i>The method is conducive with the mayor working cooperatively with the counsellors. The counsellors also have the ability to change Mayors in cases of incompetence or misbehaviour. - Participant</i>	
	<i>I think the other option will cost more. And that the current way of selecting the mayor is already very well established, and perhaps works well and doesn't need to be changed. - Participant</i>	

4.4. Questions from survey participants

A range of questions were raised in survey comments including requests for more detail on the political effects, what information would be provided on mayoral candidates, election costs, etc. See below:

- *I want more detail on possible impacts on ward structure and number of councillors elected if changed to a popular election*
- *I don't know the Councillor/Ward system that would result and whether that would favour only the Liberal & Labor parties*
- *You provide no pros or cons so how would I know what is best?*
- *I want to know how transparent the process is with the current method*
- *How will the council practically work if the mayor is not a representative of the party with a working majority?*
- *It needs to be laid out exactly what powers/abilities a popularly elected Lord Mayor can/cannot do*
- *How will all residents hear about candidates and make informed decisions?*
- *I don't know if candidate election expenditure is constrained by a good cap*

4.5. Reflection on questions (raised by Councillors and some members of the community) about

changes to wards and the number of Councillors

The brief for this engagement was specific (sentiment toward the two options); and the inclusion of detail or a question around implications for the wards was ruled out/deferred as a matter for future consultation. As a result, this survey delivers:

- sentiment regarding the two options offered in the Local Government Act,
- an indication of support for change
- an understanding of community expectations regarding representation and participation in electoral processes; and the role of elected representatives

5. RECOMMENDATION

This report presents and analyses the key findings from the recent consultation on Electing your Lord Mayor. Careful consideration should be given to all the feedback and views presented in this report before a decision is made.

A summary of findings should also be reported back to the community (when appropriate but in a timely manner), highlighting how community feedback has influenced the project. The final decision and reasons why should be made public and reported back to those who provided feedback.

These recommendations are in line with Council's engagement principles and commitments outlined in the Community Engagement Strategy and Community and Stakeholder Engagement Policy.

"We make our decisions in an open and transparent way and provide feedback to our stakeholders in order to explain our decisions and let them know how their input has been considered".

A recommendation for progressing this issue is:

- Acknowledge the generosity of feedback provided by the community
- Develop a strategic communication plan that maintains the conversation and provides further education
- Work with the engaged community to test the options of fewer wards/no wards/ in the case of a popularly-elected Lord Mayor vs maintaining the existing ward structure and system.

6. APPENDIX

6.1. Online workshops and intercept surveys

Prior to the LGA-wide consultation, an initial and more targeted consultation was undertaken to test the community's general understanding about the concept of a popularly elected Lord Mayor and to obtain an initial understanding of support for the proposal. The outcomes of the initial stages helped to design the broader phase of engagement.

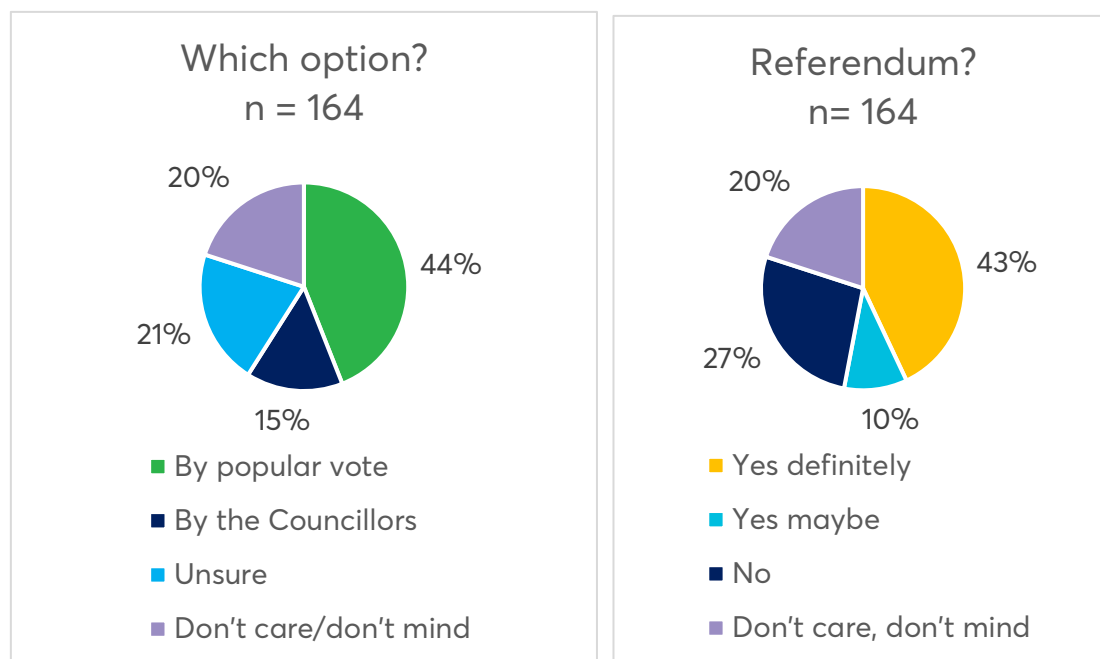
A consultant was engaged to deliver pop up sessions in each ward. These were held in September 2022 across 10 locations and 164 community members participated. The in-depth online workshops were held in February 2023 with a demographically representative group of residents.

A Summary (PDF) of these two initial surveys is attached and the findings were used to develop more FAQs.

6.1.1. The intercept (pop-up) surveys

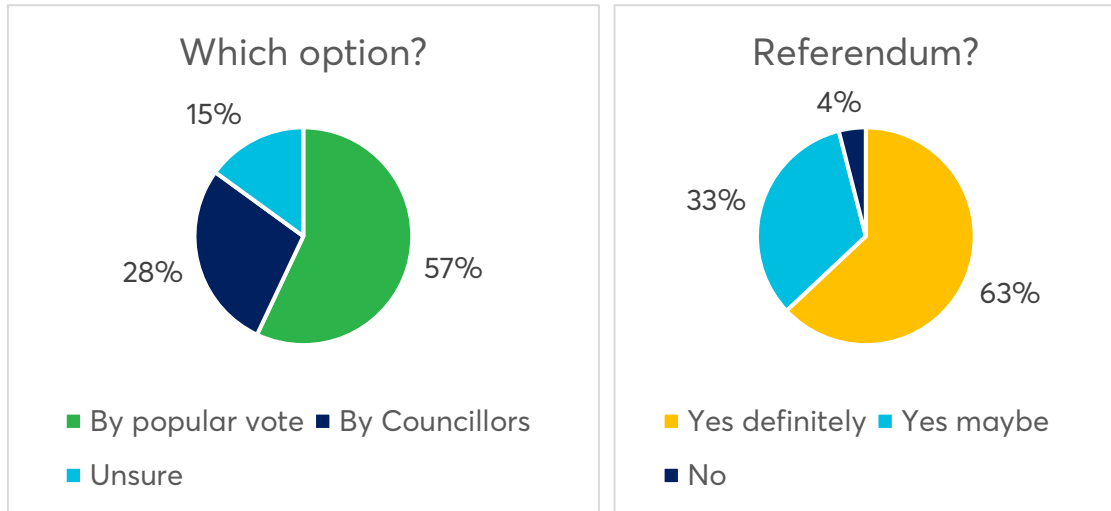
Among intercept survey participants 44% preferred the option of a popularly elected Lord Mayor and 15% preferred by the Councillors, 21% were unsure and 20% answered don't care/don't mind.

The option "don't care/don't mind" was included in the intercept survey as a measure of disengagement among members of the public who were interviewed. This option was not included in the online workshop and LGA-wide survey as participation pre-supposed engagement with the topic.



6.1.2. The online workshops

A popularly elected mayor was preferred by 57% of online workshop participants while 28% preferred election by the Councillors. Fifteen (15) percent of people were unsure about which option they would choose.



6.2. Media coverage



MP and mayor of
Parramatta Donna
Davis. Photo:
Oscar Colman

POLITICS IN PARRAMATTA

Leaders divided over who gets to elect mayor

Anthony Segart

Parramatta's leaders are divided over whether residents or councillors should decide who gets the council's top job after asking the community for feedback about changing the way the mayor is elected.

The City of Parramatta Council sent letters to residents asking if the council should move to popularly elect its lord mayor - where residents vote on their local government leader for a four-year term - or whether councillors should retain the power to decide who gets the job once every two years.

The debate comes as Donna Davis, the recently elected state MP for Parramatta - and also the council's mayor - fights accusations she is unable to hold both roles. NSW law will require her to resign as mayor at the next council elections in September 2024, but planning for the survey began before she was elected to state parliament.

Supporters of the popular election model - which is in place in every other major city of NSW - argue a popularly elected mayor would provide longer-term stability and vision to the city.

Of the 15 councillors at Parramatta, only two said they supported the idea when contacted. Most were uncertain about which model they would back.

Pierre Esber, a former lord mayor who tried to bring in the popular election model in the previous term of council, said the move was overdue. Labor's Cameron Maclean also supported the move but said more detail was required for councillors to make an informed decision.

"I just want to know more about it," he said, saying he agreed with it in principle. "Residents came back to me, saying, 'Well, I don't know a lot about it, I'd like to know more'. That's where I am."

Leanne Wearne, an independent, said the shift would reduce the amount of political diversity on the council. "When you look at the number of people you need to influence as a popularly elected lord mayor, you're looking at more than in a state seat," she said. "To successfully campaign throughout that area without substantial [financial] backers ... How does an independent fund themselves?"

Our Local Community councillor Henry Green labelled the idea "bullshit". But business leaders support

the notion, saying a popularly elected mayor would provide stability.

"Parramatta needs its own Clover," said executive director of the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue group Adam Leto, referring to City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore. "The leadership that's required for a big city is significant and this is the next step in [Parramatta's] maturity."

The role of Parramatta as "the most successful second CBD in Australia" means it needs a leader who is able "to attract investment and government infrastructure", said David Borger, the city's former lord mayor and executive director of Business Western Sydney.

The model would give the leader "a greater mandate for the community, and opportunity for a visionary platform", he said.

If the community response to the survey is positive, councillors would vote to put the matter to a referendum at the September 2024 local council elections. "If the referendum goes up, you can bet your bottom dollar that it'll be successful," said Labor's Maclean. "The community principally likes the idea of self-determination, whether or not they think of the implications."

Figure 3 01 May 2023 Author: Anthony Segart Article type: Publication Page: 21 Sydney Morning Herald, The Readership: 580000

Parra Matters | Alan Mascarenhas

alanmascarenhas09@gmail.com | @alanmasc



It's time to trust the community

Fairfield. Liverpool. Newcastle. Wollongong. Sydney. Melbourne. Brisbane. London. Berlin. Paris. New York.

What do the above cities have in common? They all allow local residents to directly elect their Mayor.

Now consider Parramatta. Our Lord Mayor is elected every two years by a closed group of 15. The public vote in council elections every four years. Following a major restructuring in 2017, both Parramatta and Cumberland elect five wards of three councillors each, with the mayoral ballot held shortly after.

In the time I've lived here, it's invariably been a saga of scheming and skulduggery, mostly out of public view. During the last term alone, there were three Lord Mayors - Andrew Wilson, Bob Dwyer and Steven Issa (who farcically served for a matter of weeks). Labor's Donna Davis currently wears the gown and chains, but her position is up for grabs this year.

Over in Cumberland, Steve Christou was famously elected as a Labor councillor, but subsequently switched parties to shore up the bloc votes necessary to become Mayor. Similar shenanigans have been legion across different Sydney councils, in a situation memorably exposed by the 1996 ABC documentary 'Rats in the Ranks'.

Now, City of Parramatta is consulting residents on whether the public should finally be able to choose their Lord Mayor. Feedback is being received until May 15 - but to change the system a referendum will be required.

35 local government areas across Sydney

operated under the direct election method in 2021. Ryde residents also voted overwhelmingly that year to change the rules. Presumably, they were sick of having nine different Mayors since 2009 and the winner even drawn out of a hat.

My support for a directly elected Lord Mayor is not a reflection on individuals past or present. While I'm a Labor member, mine is an individual perspective about what is best for Parramatta and if I offend an apparatchik somewhere, so be it.

There are also legitimate questions about how a directly elected Mayorality would affect the size and composition of the council chamber. (A report in 2020 by the Committee for Sydney and Business Western Sydney proposed abolishing all wards and establishing a unique governing model through a standalone City of Parramatta Act.) But I'll leave that debate to the experts.

The reality is Parramatta is no longer a side-show. We are a global, multicultural city with a projected population of 450,000 by 2041. As one of the nation's fastest growing urban areas, home to major projects and billions of dollars of investment, stability of leadership and governance is needed to deliver long-term outcomes.

Civic leadership is more than a game of pass-the-parcel. From New York's Rudy Giuliani to Chicago's Richard J Daley, Anne Hidalgo of Paris and Sydney's own Clover Moore, history has shown that Mayors with popular legitimacy can help shape a city's identity and

purpose. Surely, the role of Lord Mayor of Parramatta needs to be more than just ceremonial or involve chairing meetings.

This is a valuable position that someone should aspire to for a full four-year term, or if they're good enough, even a decade. And he or she should be a locus of power in their own right - able to stand up and argue the case for Parramatta and step where necessary on party political toes.

In future years, the City of Parramatta may need to make the case for different population targets or a better infrastructure deal from Sydney and Canberra. We will need to attract major events and new businesses, universities and other institutions.

At their best, the Lord Mayor can provide a strategic direction for how our city is to develop. They can energise the public around a uniquely Parramatta vision and agenda. Right now, residents in Epping or West Beecroft feel little in common with Wentworth Point or Toongabbie.

After the 2024 or 2028 council elections, it's easy to imagine a ragtag assortment of Labor, Liberals, Greens, Our Local Community and independents - even Councillor Kellie Darley's proposed new party of Community Champions. Just imagine who would emerge Lord Mayor from all that. It might make the Papal enclave at the Vatican look like tiddly-winks.

I think the public can do better - and it's time to trust the community and turn over Parramatta's future to them.

Deputy set to take over in Parramatta

Michael Koziol

Parramatta is poised to get its first lord mayor of Indian origin: Labor's Sameer Pandey is tipped to take over from Donna Davis, who announced her resignation yesterday.

After being elected as the state MP for Parramatta at the March election, Davis initially vowed to stay on as lord mayor and hold both roles concurrently despite opposition from some councillors.

But yesterday she said, having seen in the council's new chief executive Gail Connolly last month, she would now step down from the mayoralty - ahead of being sworn in as a member of parliament today.

"I will continue in my role as a councillor until the next election," she said. "I look forward to continuing working for the people of Parramatta in my new role."

NSW laws allow a councillor who is elected to parliament to continue



Parramatta Lord Mayor Donna Davis resigned yesterday. Deputy Sameer Pandey is tipped to take over the top job.

on council until their term ends, or for two years, whichever is shorter.

Pandey, who was elected to council in 2017 and has a background in IT, currently serves as deputy lord mayor of Parramatta and confirmed he would seek the top job. If successful, he would become the first lord mayor of subcontinental descent anywhere in Australia, he said.

Long-serving Labor councillor Pierre Esber, also known as Pierre the Plumber, said he was also talking to colleagues about a potential tilt at the mayoralty. "We're an amicable party," he said. Labor has a functional majority on the council.

Veteran independent councillor Lorraine Wearne, who led the push for Davis to leave the lord mayor's job, scotched speculation she would

put herself forward for the role. "Absolutely not. I have never suggested that I was interested in the lord mayoralty this term of council. That's not what this process has been about," she said yesterday.

Unlike other lord mayors such as at the City of Sydney, Parramatta's leader is elected by fellow councillors. They will vote at an extraordinary meeting on May 22. Pandey said it was a critical time for Parramatta, with several major projects in the works including the aquatic centre, town hall and Riverside Theatre redevelopments.

In a reference to claims of bullying and fractured relations between councillors and staff, Pandey said he would make workforce welfare a priority if he was elected mayor.

Earlier this year, SafeWork NSW hit the council with a formal warning about "personal criticism, unwarranted accusations, raised voices, ridicule and intimidation,

which, reportedly, are not being appropriately addressed during or following workshop meetings".

Pandey also said he would be prepared to stand up to the Labor government in Macquarie Street on issues such as stage 2 of the Parramatta light rail project. The council recently queried if Labor's \$200 million election commitment would be enough to deliver the scheme.

Separately, the council is examining whether it should move to a direct election model for the lord mayor's job, where ratepayers would get to pick the mayor instead of councillors. Business groups are pushing for the change, arguing it would give the lord mayor a greater mandate.

"Parramatta needs its own Clover," executive director of the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue Adam Leto has previously said, referring to Sydney's long-serving lord mayor, Clover Moore.

Debate on pros and cons of a of popularly-elected Mayor

DI BARTOK

TO have the Lord Mayor elected by the people or by fellow councillors - that was the question debated at a Facebook live forum on May 7. Independent Councillor Kellie Darley hosted the event, which featured former Ryde mayor and now Bennelong Federal MP Jerome Laxale and election analyst Ben Raue giving their arguments for both sides of the debate.

Ryde will have a popularly-elected mayor from next year, after 76 per cent of residents voted for it in a referendum at last year's local government elections.

Mr Laxale said that a mayor elected by the people led to stability in council, making for better decisions.

"I come from the private sector where there is stability in management," he said. "When I was first elected to council in 2008, mayors were elected every year and then every two years, which led to more stability."

Too many flaws

"Between 2008 and 2018, Ryde had eight changes in the mayor and general manager. That turnover creates instability for the council and stakeholders - residents and businesses."

"There are elements of Ryde that are similar to Parramatta. In Ryde we have some of the biggest organisations in the world moving here and they expect stability."

Mr Laxale admitted there were flaws in the system of having the people elect the mayor, such as the mayor not having the support of other councillors, but he felt it was still a better system than the present one.

Mr Raue, who works in the Tally Room and has been analysing and reporting on elections for more than 10 years, feels there are too many flaws in the popularly-elected mayor model.

"The popularly elected mayor



Councillor Kellie Darley.

system) would give unfair advantage to the party that controls council," Mr Raue said.

"The mayor really doesn't have the

power anyway; it is a soft power, more symbolic, chairing the meetings, cutting ribbons.

"Having a mayor elected every two

years (by fellow councillors) has led to more stability in councils (such as Ryde)."

Mr Raue thinks the present system serves the community well, with councillors who are seen as not representing people well voted out.

He does not feel that having a parliamentary-like system in local government would be in the best interests of the community.

His other concern is that only candidates with a lot of money behind them could fund their campaign for mayor, but Mr Laxale disputed this, pointing out that there were caps on what candidates could spend on their campaign.

"(Funding of campaigns) is well-regulated. There could not be a Clive Palmer-style campaign in local government," Mr Laxale said.

The debate moved into the make-up of the chamber - how many councillors and the ward system.

Mr Raue said in a city such as Parramatta, 15 councillors would be the bare minimum and said if wards were done away with, councillors could still give local representation to the people who voted for them.

Mr Laxale agreed on this, saying councillors would represent the whole area, not only in their area of origin.

Ms Darley said if councillors covered all areas in a ward-less system, "letterboxing" in election time would be a logistical problem.

Parramatta Council has put out a survey to residents, who have until May 15, to have a say on whether they want the issue to go to a referendum at next year's council election.

Councils that have a popularly elected mayor in NSW are Sydney City, Newcastle, Wollongong, Hornsby, Burwood, Canada Bay and Fairfield.

To view the Kellie Darley's online debate with Jerome Laxale and Ben Raue, go to her Facebook page

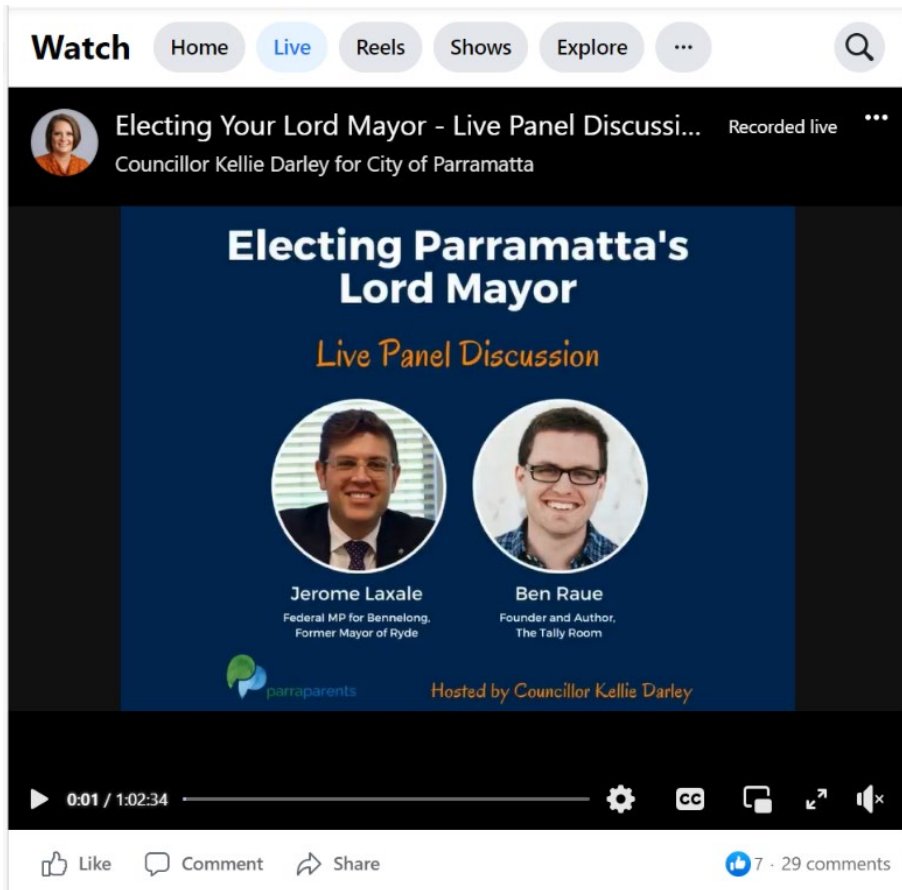


Figure 4 A live facebook information session presented by Clr Darley

6.3. Letter to households



Dear Resident,

City of Parramatta Council is seeking your feedback on a proposal to change the way the Lord Mayor is elected.

How is the Lord Mayor currently elected?

NOW	OR
The position of Lord Mayor is currently decided in a vote between Councillors.	Another option is for people to elect the Lord Mayor at the election.
Method = Councillor elected	Method = Popularly elected

To change the way the Lord Mayor is elected, the *Local Government Act 1993* requires Council to hold a Referendum.

Your answer to this survey will help Council understand:

1. Is this something the community wants?
2. Is there enough support to have a Referendum?

Let us know if you would like to keep the current method (Councillor elected) or if you would prefer to choose the Lord Mayor (Popularly elected).

Your opinion is very important and will help Council make a decision!

To have your say scan the QR Code or:

Visit: participate.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/lord-mayor-survey
Email: governance@cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au
Phone: 1300 617 058
Post: City of Parramatta Council
PO Box 32, Parramatta NSW 2124
Subject: Electing the Lord Mayor

Submissions close **5pm, Monday 15 May 2023.**

Thank you for having your say!



**PARTICIPATE
PARRAMATTA**



FAQs

What is this survey for?

This survey will help Council decide whether to ask voters if they would like to change the way the Lord Mayor is elected in a Referendum at the next local government election (September 2024). Council will consider the community's feedback and other factors before deciding how to proceed.

What does the Lord Mayor do?

The Lord Mayor chairs the Council and represents the City of Parramatta at official occasions.

What are the options for electing a Lord Mayor?

At the moment, residents of the City of Parramatta Local Government Area (LGA) elect 15 Councillors across the LGA. These 15 Councillors are then responsible for electing the Lord Mayor for a two-year period. After the two-year period, the Councillors may choose to either re-elect the existing Lord Mayor or elect another Councillor to the position of Lord Mayor.

Under a structure where the Lord Mayor is popularly elected by the people, residents of the City of Parramatta LGA would elect Councillors AND a Lord Mayor. The Lord Mayor would be elected for the duration of the election term (generally four years) and cannot be elected as a Councillor.

Why would a Referendum be needed?

A Referendum is required to change the structure of Council elections. The rules are defined in the *Local Government Act 1993*.

What else is involved in the process?

Changing the way the Lord Mayor is elected may require reorganisation of the number of wards and Councillors in the City of Parramatta.

Will Council make the survey results public?

The result of the community survey will be reviewed and a report prepared for Council. Participants in the survey will be updated following the report to Council.

When would any change occur?

The changes would be introduced in 2028 following a citywide Referendum at the 2024 local government election.

Call TIS National on 131 450 for a free interpreting service.
If you find it hard hearing or speaking on the phone visit relayservice.gov.au.

KOREAN

본 소식지와 관련해 통역 지원이 필요하신 경우, TIS (131 450)에 전화하여 Parramatta Customer Service (9806 5050)를 연결해 달라고 요청하시면 됩니다. 업무시간은 월요일에서 금요일 오전 8시 30분부터 오후 5시까지입니다.

ARABIC

إذا كنت بحاجة للمساعدة في ترجمة هذه النشرة، اتصل بـ TIS على الرقم 131 450 واطلب منهم الاتصال نيابة عنك بخدمة بلاك باراماتا على الرقم 9806 5050 من الإثنين إلى الجمعة بين الساعة 8:30 صباحاً و 5:00 مساءً.

CHINESE

如果你需要翻译协助阅读这份新闻简报，请联系 TIS，电话 131 450，要求他们代表你接洽巴拉马打市议会顾客服务处，电话 9806 5050。顾客服务处的工作时间是每星期一至星期五，上午8:30至下午5:00。

HINDI

यदि आपको यह सूचना-पत्र समझने में सहायता चाहिए तो कृपया TIS को 131 450 पर फोन करें और उनसे कहें कि आपकी तरफ से पैरामाटा कस्टमर सर्विस को 9806 5050 पर फोन करें। यह सेवा सोमवार से शुक्रवार, सुबह 8:30 बजे से शाम 5:00 तक उपलब्ध है।