



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 9 June 2010

CITY OF BRISBANE BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (12.58 pm): I rise to speak in support of the City of Brisbane Bill 2010. This bill gives formal legislative acknowledgement to Brisbane as the capital city of Queensland. And what a beautiful and vibrant city it is! Eighty-six years is a long time, but that is how old the City of Brisbane Act is. I believe that it is clearly in need of modernisation. The current act is definitely out of date for a progressive and fast growing city in 2010, especially one that seeks to be Australia's new-world city.

Although Brisbane was proclaimed a municipality on 6 September 1859, Brisbane owes its status as Queensland's capital city to custom rather than status authority. Nevertheless, I believe that Queenslanders know that Brisbane is our capital and this bill gives the legislative acknowledgement to Brisbane as our Queensland capital. It is the largest local government in Australia and so warrants this standard-alone legislation.

The bill recognises that, in comparison to other Queensland local governments, the Brisbane City Council—or the BCC—is unique because it is the largest provider of local government services in Queensland. There are 26 councillors, other than the Lord Mayor, who each represent the interests of residents of a ward. The mayor has a unique responsibility as the mayor of a capital city. The council has an establishment and coordination committee that coordinates its business. The chair of the council presides at all of its meetings and is responsible for ensuring that its rules of procedure are observed and enforced.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

Ms GRACE: Mr Deputy Speaker Powell, it is great to be speaking during your first time sitting in the chair as Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you. Well done. The bill retains and updates provisions unique to the BCC such as the wonderful City Botanic Gardens and river crossings as well as our lovely malls here in Brisbane. The bill also ensures, and I welcome, best-practice measures in public administration standards with emphasis on transparency, effective processes, democratic representation, open good governance and ethical and legal behaviour of councillors and council employees.

Brisbane ratepayers do expect and deserve a local council that is genuinely transparent, is responsive to public needs, practices social inclusion and whose processes are above reproach. I believe that this bill ensures this outcome. The BCC Establishment and Coordination Committee is recognised in the legislation because the committee is the peak body of the council and reflects the size and complexity of decision making made by the council.

The Establishment and Coordination Committee is what the BCC terms its civic cabinet, with similarities to state cabinet. The committee consists of the mayor and BCC standing committee chairs, who each have specific portfolio responsibilities. The committee often addresses sensitive issues such as employees' remuneration and working conditions, water restrictions and contracts. Consequently, council can choose to withhold committee documents, such as minutes, from public release if doing so is not in the public interest. Information that has been brought into existence for the consideration of the BCC Establishment and Coordination Committee is exempt under the Right to Information Act 2009. Information

that would reveal any consideration of the committee or would otherwise prejudice the confidentiality of committee considerations or operations is also excluded from right to information. Committee meetings are not open to the public, although committee reports are presented to an ordinary meeting of council for approval. Details of committee activities can then be included in council minutes which are published on the council website.

This bill also recognises the unique roles and responsibilities of the mayor. The City of Brisbane Act is largely based on the Local Government Act but with some differences. Similar to the principle of the separation of powers that operates at the Commonwealth and state levels of government, the bill makes clear the separate and distinct responsibilities of councillors, the mayor, the chief executive officer and council staff. It is the responsibility of all Queensland mayors to provide a visionary and strategic role in economic, social and environmental management.

The Brisbane mayor has additional responsibilities. The differences for the Brisbane mayor reflect the size and complexity of council organisation and decision making. The Brisbane mayor alone has powers to appoint the CEO and senior contract employees who are council's senior executive service—I think that is most appropriate; prepare the budget for presentation to the council; chair the Establishment and Coordination Committee; and develop and implement new policies.

Equally important in this legislation are the roles and responsibilities of the CEO. BCC CEO responsibilities are legislated for the first time in this bill. The role of the town clerk is no longer necessary and so is not part of this legislation. Under the bill the CEO is clearly responsible for the appointment and direction of all staff, other than senior contract employees. This supports the separation of responsibilities between the executive arm and the administration arm of council and is essential to reinforcing the line management authority of the CEO. The bottom line is that this separation is a key feature of effective democratic governments.

Under the bill, council is required to publish annually the remuneration of the CEO and senior contract employees. This can be done by publishing the number of these most senior of contract employees within each remuneration band. In order to provide a level of flexibility, council staff, including the CEO, may be concurrently employed by more than one local government. Obviously this would be dependent on the size of the local council, workloads and their ability to fulfil the requirements of the position.

In closing, I also support new provisions in the bill that enable councillors from all sides of politics to better service their wards by providing them with rights to obtain and use information relevant to their wards. Obviously the bill includes provisions prohibiting misuse of such material and clarifies information that will not be available. I believe that this is a very important provision that will enable councillors to better service the wards they represent and not be unreasonably denied access to relevant and necessary information such as on a purely political basis. I commend the minister and staff and all stakeholders for their hard work and input in the development of this bill and I commend the bill to the House.