



Speech By  
**Charis Mullen**

**MEMBER FOR JORDAN**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISSOLUTION OF IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL) BILL**

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (4.11 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Local Government (Dissolution of Ipswich City Council) Bill 2018, and I do so with a heavy and conflicted heart. I am a fairly new member in the Ipswich region, having secured the state seat of Jordan at the most recent state election. My electorate takes in the established suburbs of Gailles and Camira and the more newly developed and growing areas of Greater Springfield which includes Springfield Lakes, Augustine Heights and Spring Mountain. In many ways my electorate represents the new Ipswich—dominated by new housing, new industries and a new way of doing things—but in the nine months that I have been representing the electors in Ipswich I have seen the conflict between the old and the new, the ‘business as usual’ versus ‘disrupting the expected’, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ that sadly pervades and has been allowed to pervade.

This may have something to do with our location, sitting halfway between the Ipswich centre and the Brisbane CBD—never quite belonging to one, not quite with the other. We have also been particularly fortunate in our part of the world where good master planning via early state government approvals and a single developer has allowed Greater Springfield to grow in a more cohesive, strategic and community centred manner than perhaps other more established regions of Ipswich. We have certainly been blessed with quality community infrastructure—the Robelle Domain parklands, the impressive Orion Lagoon, the smaller district parks, the sports fields and community facilities. These are all things that the council can point to as achievements, and I agree, but they must also credit that much of this has been achieved through the significant infrastructure contributions imposed on housing developments within our part of Ipswich. Most of what has been spent in Greater Springfield has come from the ratepayers of Greater Springfield—something I struggle not to remind critics of when they say that Springfield gets everything.

In the last nine months I have worked closely with all three of the local government representatives within my electorate. I do wish to thank Councillor Paul Tully, Councillor Sheila Ireland and Councillor David Morrison. They have all been very helpful as I have settled into my role. I have found them to be professional in representing their divisions and I am sad at the thought of losing these good working relationships that have been established. But here is the conflict I feel and of which I spoke earlier: I have struggled to reconcile these individual working relationships with what has clearly now been shown to be an unhealthy culture within Ipswich council—a lack of oversight and accountability and a clear lack of transparency.

I have not been swayed by hearsay and innuendo. I have not followed Facebook comments, irate community associations or potential future mayoral candidates. I have not sought to take advantage of this extraordinarily sad situation for our community by making comments I cannot validate just to garner front-page headlines in the *Queensland Times*. I have waited diligently for evidence and I have kept quiet and respectful for the process to unfold.

The Crime and Corruption Commission has undertaken a long and thorough investigation into the Ipswich City Council through Operation Windage. The resultant charges that have stemmed from this and the final public report into Operation Windage released last week has, as the CCC states—

... identified significant governance failures and cultural issues that appear to have been occurring over many years and which would not have occurred in an environment in which the values of transparency, accountability and good governance were paramount.

The report goes on to say—

While the CCC accepts that some individual councillors may not have been directly involved in or aware of the extent of some practices, they were none the less during their time as councillors part of a collective body that was accountable for the good management of the Council, as entrusted to them by the voters and ratepayers of Ipswich.

Further, the three reports prepared by advisory firm McGrathNicol on behalf of Ipswich City Council into the council owned entities also highlighted serious concerns of multiple alleged breaches of the Corporations Act including failure to lodge audited financial statements, to prepare a director's report and failure to sign off on board minutes, putting decisions into doubt. There was also no oversight through the appointment of any independent directors, allowing the perception of a closed shop or something to hide to pervade these companies.

I have read each of the reports outlined above, the CCC's report into council and the Economics and Governance Committee report into the draft bill we are debating today. I have relied on evidence, not supposition, to determine my position on the future of the Ipswich City Council. I have also given bearing to the views of my constituents who have approached me directly to discuss the legislation. I feel that collectively there has been a collapse of public confidence in the council and in the councillors. Whilst many have sympathy for individual councillors, as I do, most agree that, in the words of the CCC chairman, they stand or fall as they must under the Local Government Act and the Constitution of Queensland as the body—the entity—collectively responsible for the good governance of that community. There has been a failure of that.

The decision to appoint an interim administrator is extraordinary though not unique, having occurred in Queensland previously for the Gold Coast City Council in 1978, the Johnstone shire council in 2007 and a number of smaller regional councils that have had similar long-term administrator appointments to improve their capacity. I do not propose to stand here to say the next two years are going to be a walk in the park. If the legislation is passed by the House, the role of the administrator will be complex and is likely to be greater than just the skills and experience of one individual. The Local Government Act does provide the minister with the ability to create an advisory committee to give the interim administrator advice about the performance of the council's responsibilities, and I am pleased the minister will proceed with this provision.

I also wish to ensure that ratepayers have confidence that they will be able to raise issues of concern around council matters and that these issues will be addressed. I appreciate that some ratepayers may also wish to revisit decisions or actions of the council that perhaps they felt were unfair or not taken seriously enough at the time. My intention is to work with my local Ipswich communities on ensuring their voices are heard during this time of transition and I and my office will be there to assist where we can. Most importantly, I want to see confidence return to our region. Our business community deserves to have their businesses judged on their merits, not the sadly sullied reputation of their location. We have strong and innovative industry within the Ipswich region and the capacity to see that grow even stronger. We have an incredible livability within our region that can and should be envied and we need to continue to build the necessary infrastructure to not compromise or devalue that livability. We need to create more local employment to stop the drain to Brisbane and we need more and better social and government services in our communities, and we need a council that understands and is committed to this shared vision.

I recently met with 60 new residents at a welcome to the neighbourhood event. I was struck by their happiness of building or finding their dream home, their enthusiasm for what our region offers in terms of amenity and the belief that they had made the right decision to move to Ipswich. I want to ensure that they never regret that decision. Finally, I would like to say that this has not been an easy time for me or for my colleagues in the Ipswich region. As I have stated publicly, there are a number of councillors whom I consider to be friends and who have supported me as I have supported them. As we all know, friendships in politics are not always easy to make and it hurts to know that some of my friendships with these councillors may not be the same after today.

I was elected to represent my community in Ipswich—a community that has gone through a very difficult time this past year. We need confidence and certainty returned to the Ipswich City Council. As the Queensland Local Government Reform Alliance put it so simply, you have to make a break and a temporary administration is the only way to make a break. I commend the bill to the House.