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Hub News

I have rights. I have human rights enshrined in state, federal and universal laws, including the Four Freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want.

In New South Wales, I also have a legal right to know.

This inalienable right is contained in the Government Information Public Access Act (previously called the Freedom of Information Act [FOI]), effective 1 July 2010.

When Clover Moore was in State Parliament as the Honourable Member for Bligh, she championed these rights as part of her Charter of Reform, and was a public palladin for more access for more people, more of the time. This was designed to give greater accountability and transparency in local and state governments. She sprouted these changes like a fountain as one of her major achievements: “FOI changes included reduced time for processing applications from 45 days.. to 21 days, stronger powers for the ombudsman, extension of FOI to fully cover local councils, and limited agency authority to refuse access on diversion of resources grounds.”

Hansard records show she said, “We aim to strengthen freedom of information legislation to make it more accessible and more affordable to the community. Having freedom of information legislation is one thing; implementing and using it is another. Unfortunately, agencies and bureaucrats may not release information to members of the public even though they should do so under the Freedom of Information Act.”

These words now haunt her, highlighting her hypocrisy.

As Lord Mayor things are very different indeed.

Costs of Sydney Council’s photocopying and search fees have risen dramatically. Council’s FOI little hovel, run by a coven of dumkins and bureau-trolls, toil away high up in Town Hall House.

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documents and allow access if there is no political fallout for their boss. Otherwise, they find reasons for refusal or claim extended rights for time extensions. When asked for legal justification for extensions none are provided.

This department was once independent and made its own decisions. After I accessed Clover Moore's own DA for her own property and discovered it was approved in record time, it shut down access and changed procedures. A junior staffer, told me, "We've been politicised".

The department's independence is now neutered with all major FOI decisions going to its legal governance section for scrutiny first. It seems to be another tentacle of Clover's political party. Staff have no qualms in trying to limit political fallout: they call me late at night offering deals such as cost reductions for GIPA (FOI) applications if I withdraw another part of my request. I refuse. It smells like bribery to me.

I am still waiting for council's protocol on dealing with conflicts of interest with DA's to be put on its website. I received this under a court subpoena some years ago. Council's own janus-faced policy claims, "The City of Sydney is committed to the following principles regarding public access to information: open and transparent government; consideration of the overriding public interest in relation to access requests; proactive disclosure and dissemination of information, and respect for the privacy of individuals."

But it's just more motherhood statements and part of their business optics.

As Clover previously said when she was on the outside looking in, "Having freedom of information legislation is one thing; implementing and using it is another." Now she's on the inside looking out, it's a different story.

Council's FOI section only approved four requests for information in the last 15 months according to its own official website – if it can be believed.

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This negligence contravenes the GIPA Act.

“Keeping an up-to-date and accessible disclosure log improves openness and transparency,” Mr Chung says, “especially about politically sensitive data regarding Clover’s infamously lavish, ratepayer-subsidised New Years’ Eve parties.”

When he issued a question on notice for this week’s council meeting. Suddenly, the log was updated.

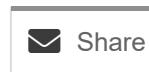
“There is a clear culture against transparency in this council,” he maintains.

“Clover is frustrating live streaming council meetings. She has refused to allow public questions to the Lord Mayor and rejected moves by Councillor Scott to improve the transparency of the Housing Affordability Fund.”

He claims Clover wants a “Secret Sydney” and he insists the disclosure log must include all GIPA DA requests approved to businesses and residents, so council can be better connected with its ratepayers.

I agree. After all, whose council is it? There’s or ours?

Andrew Woodhouse, is President, Potts Point and Kings Cross Heritage and Residents’ Society.



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**Ellie and Jake** • 3 years ago

Superb. We love the cartoon, as usual = brilliant.
This Clover/council anti-disclosure attitude should now
be also be referred to Gabrielle Upton, Local
Government Minister.

Ellie and Jake

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