

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Wollongong's fresh start

HarOvey Grennan

IN THEIR last days in the job, the administrators of Wollongong Council laid down a series of policies to prevent the sort of corruption that brought down the elected council in March 2008.

Democracy will be restored to Wollongong when voters go to the polls on September 3. New councillors will be required to document dealings with ratepayers and lobbyists, especially about buildings and developments, and will be given iPads and smartphones to help them do so.

The policies lay down rules for councillors dealing with staff and make it clear they cannot direct or talk to staff without permission.

More than three years have passed since the council was sacked and the Independent Commission Against Corruption laid bare the web of sex, intrigue and corruption behind major developments. There have been seven convictions but the planner at the centre of the scandal,

Beth Morgan, escaped prosecution. The council's general manager at the time of the ICAC raid, Rod Oxley, is now running for lord mayor.

Two-member wards have been replaced with four-member wards, which will loosen the grip

the public and tell people lobbying them to put their argument in writing. Councillors must provide a written report after attending a conference.

"The policies will improve accountability and transparency [and] set the standard of conduct

'The policies will improve accountability and transparency [and] set the standard of conduct that is expected from councillors.'

Administrator Richard Colley

of the Labor Party on the council. The NSW government has legislated for a one-off, five-year term to avoid another election in 2012.

Under the new policies, councillors will be required to take notes about phone calls and meetings and submit them to the council's record-keeping system. They will be required to keep copies of emails, faxes and petitions received from members of

that is expected from councillors when representing the interests of the community, exercising their civic responsibilities and interacting with staff," administrator Richard Colley said.

"A comprehensive induction program and ongoing professional development program for councillors is nearing completion."

The new policies cover councillors' access to staff and inform-

ation and a code of practice for meetings, expenses and facilities provided to councillors and the lord mayor.

The statutory limitations applying to how councillors treat staff are given particular emphasis in the wake of the corrupt culture in the old council. Councillors wanting information must make a "carefully drafted" electronic request to the council's public officer, who has 10 days to respond. If "significant resources" are required to process a request, the public officer will tell the councillor the cost and time required and details of other work that will not be done as a result.

Councillors cannot direct staff in the performance of their work or even talk to them about council services or projects without arranging a meeting through a senior manager. They must also have permission from a senior manager to enter any work area.



### Chop to it: restoration of st

Hornsby Shire Council last week used a helicopter to deliver one-ton restoration of the Hornsby Heritage Steps, which provide access to Berowra Valley Regional Park. The steps were built in the 1930s to r Great Depression and have been damaged by years of water erosion.

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