



Skewered ... the facts are too delicious and too nauseating to need embellishment in the production starring Arky Michael, Jane Phegan and Kym Vercoe.

Council's canker purged with wit and style

THE TABLE OF KNOWLEDGE

Illawarra Performing Arts Centre,
August 31

Until September 11

Reviewed by John Shand

THE documentary about Leichhardt Council, *Rats in the Ranks*, proved that whatever it can't do, local government can at least entertain.

The Table of Knowledge shows just how far the bar can be lowered – not in entertainment value but in the behaviour of council crooks and the spivs, racketeers and, if this is not a tautology, some of the developers surrounding them.

The setting is Wollongong just a few years ago. The table in question was at a kebab shop: the early-morning meeting place for a plague of unsavoury characters from council and business.

This joint production by version 1.0 and the Merrigong Theatre Company is a group-devised work, almost entirely based on ICAC hearings and media reports of the corruption.

Verbatim texts are potentially dry affairs, but not this one. It drips with the lascivious dealings of the town planner Beth Morgan (an excellent Kym Vercoe) and the developer

Frank Vellar (Arky Michael). It also flirts with the involvement of Rod Oxley (David Williams), then the council's general manager and now, remarkably, a mayoral candidate at this weekend's Wollongong election.

Other characters are played by Jane Phegan and Yana Taylor, with the whole cast involved in devising the show, alongside Alan Flower and video designer Sean Bacon. The performances are suitably understated, so fiction does not mess with fact. The facts are, by turns, too delicious and too nauseating to need embellishment.

The play is often wildly funny, so improbable is the mire of greed and lechery, and yet every laugh is another nail in the coffin of the council's probity. If the piece staggers occasionally under the weight of cross-examination testimony, it soon picks itself up and becomes rampant entertainment once more, thanks in part to imaginative theatrical sleights of hand and brilliant video projections.

This is vital, engaging theatre that serves an invaluable function in helping to purge the canker. It will reward a trip to Wollongong.