



## SCENIC RIM

### **Scenic Rim Council like a castle built to lock us out: ratepayers**

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Scenic Rim residents have likened their council to a medieval castle built to lock them out, according to an independent survey.

And the Scenic Rim Regional Council used this survey as evidence it was becoming more transparent even as it fought to bury the results, one of its own councillors argues.

More details of that survey have emerged thanks to a right to information (RTI) request filed by Councillor Derek Swanborough.

Cr. Swanborough first tried to have five pages of the survey made public at a SRRC meeting on June 22, but lost by a single vote.

He then filed the RTI which, several weeks later, succeeded in disclosing those pages, previously labelled as “commercial in confidence”.

Cr. Swanborough said it was very unusual for a councillor to file an RTI against his own council. “I’ve not experienced it before,” he said. “But I’ve not experienced a council so untransparent as this one before, and I’ve worked in five councils”.

SRRC commissioned Brisbane-based consultants Customer Frame to survey its perception amongst “customers”, which included councillors, staff, business owners, community organizations and residents.

One of the five pages Cr. Swanborough fought to make public is an executive summary of the Customer Frame survey, two pages summarize the sentiments among external stakeholders and two pages summarising the sentiments of more than 1800 ratepayers.

The survey was a key plank in council's "customer centricity project" launched in 2019 and was used to form its "customer charter" adopted in the meeting on June 22.

The report tabled at that council meeting praised the council's "courageous decision" to undergo the survey, without detailing its findings.

"In summary, council has experienced excellent survey result [sic] and is the first local government in Australia to conduct a customer sentiment survey," the report read.

'The results speak for themselves'.

Having seen the survey, Cr. Swanborough said he could not accept that summary.

"Was that not untruthful, or sanitising or putting the wrong slant on it?" he said.

Even more galling, Cr. Swanborough said, was that the decision to withhold those five pages went against the very charter itself.

One of the key commitments in that customer charter relates to transparency.

"We'll be open and honest, always," the charter pledges.

"We won't hide facts from you or keep you in the dark....We will always tell you the truth, as soon as humanly possible"

Cr. Swanborough said that the council's actions contradicted those noble intentions.

"They didn't want to tell the truth as soon as humanly possible when they knocked back my request," he said.

Other findings in the survey included a widespread belief that council was difficult to work with and was "holding the region back".

There was a "markedly higher level of sentiment for SRRC" from rural areas but "exceptionally high levels of negative sentiment" in the more urban Division 1, which Cr. Swanborough represents.

The survey did not make for all bad reading for council, with many believing SRRC was delivering services to a satisfactory standard and was doing a good job with events, tourism, parks and facilities for families..

Customer Frame also noted an unusually high volume of written responses to their survey, from which they inferred that residents want to be heard and engaged.