

Source: Daily Liberal, 4 Mar 13

Council stays silent on vote

By FAYE WHEELER

DUBBO City councillors have gone to ground since voting to charge airline Regional Express (Rex) the cost of security screening not required by law.

Ten representatives of the people yesterday continued the silence they had shown as the matter came up for debate in the chamber last week.

The decision made then - unexplained by individual councillors - has prompted Rex to threaten to withdraw its services from Dubbo.

While the leaders made no comment about whether the vote had been just a formality - an accusation leveled by more than one resident - Dubbo mayor Mathew Dickerson did the talking, as he has since the stoush erupted.

The Daily Liberal asked the 11 councillors if a decision about the revenue policy had in effect already been made before Monday's meeting, where airlines Rex and Qantaslink and a passenger spoke during the public forum.

This publication also asked if it was damaging to the council if constituents perceived the decision as a foregone conclusion they could not influence.

No councillors responded to the request for comment, which was issued once more yesterday.

In response to the second invitation, Cr Dickerson attempted to hose down the controversy, saying it was of little interest to the public.

The airport issue had been subject to extensive discussion and consultation since October, the mayor said.

It had been through working parties, committees and council meetings and more, he said.

"It would be fair to say that by the time the agenda item had come up at the meeting last Monday there was nothing more to say," Cr Dickerson said.

"Everything that could possibly have been said had already been said."

He referred to the Dubbo City Regional Airport's website for an explanation of the "logic behind the decision".

Political scientist Dominic O'Sullivan suggested the community could expect better from their 11-member council.

"I would have thought something attracting public debate should be debated in the chamber," the Charles Sturt University associate professor said.

“While one can’t expect them (councillors) to do as they’re told, one can expect explanation and justification.”

When asked if the saga would damage the council, Professor O’Sullivan said the next local government election - three-and-a-half years away - would be telling.

“Some people may feel disenfranchised, alienated and lose confidence in the democratic process,” he said.

“If it happens in a series of occasions over time, then it can be very damaging for people seeking re-election.”

Long-time Dubbo businesswoman Anna Samuels attending last week’s meeting and said she was perplexed by the lack of debate about the airport issue when councillors had questioned other agenda items.

She called on the council to show more courtesy to Rex, which she said had provided “a very important service to Dubbo” for years.