

ELECTIONS.

In February 1864 Armidale Borough Council discussed proposed by-laws for the management of council business. One important issue arose concerning the voting rights of the mayor. The mayor used a vote and a casting vote to support a motion which gave the mayor this power. Prior to this council meeting, the mayor had only used a casting vote but it was now determined to allow the mayor a regular and a casting vote. Council also determined the salary of the town clerk at £50 per annum with five per cent per annum for collecting the rates.

Council received its seal from the government in March. That month council also accepted the tender of £50 by Lewis Markham for the position of assessor and unanimously appointed Ald. Moore as treasurer. In April Markham raised a number of issues concerning unimproved land. He was informed by the Town Clerk Thomas Lamb, that public property including 'churches, chapels, racecourse, school of arts, public schools, and such like'¹ were not to be assessed.

At the council meeting on 11 April 1864, Ald. Fitzgerald gave a notice of motion that council meetings should be held fortnightly instead of weekly. Two weeks later the motion was defeated.

The 1858 Municipalities Act allowed women the right to vote through accident rather than design and the *Armidale Express*, 4 February 1865 reported a number of female ratepayers were added to the roll. Mayor John Moore took action in 1866 to prevent women from voting; an action endorsed by the Attorney General.² But the 1867 Municipalities Act restricted the vote to adult male ratepayers with the right of up to four multiple votes depending on the assessed value of property. The Act 'declared the existing thirty-five municipalities legally constituted as boroughs though not all fulfilled the stipulated conditions'.³ A borough could be declared for a minimum population of 1000 and a maximum area of nine square miles. The division into wards was optional and was dependent on population. Aldermen held office for three years with one third to retire annually and the mayor was to be elected annually from and by the aldermen.

For election to council, residents would call on individuals to stand and names of candidates and supporters were published in the newspaper. Nomination speeches were also published. Meeting of ratepayers for the purpose of nominating and electing aldermen would be heard and the proposer and nominee would speak. In February 1865, 'Alderman trim, who was received with cheers, said that he had no idea of coming forward as a candidate but in consequence of

¹ *Armidale Express*, 16 April 1864, p.2.

² *Armidale Express*, 24 November 1866, p.2.

³ F.A. Larcombe, *The Stabilization of Local Government in New South Wales 1858-1906. A History of Local Government in New South Wales. Volume 2.* Sydney University Press, in association with the Local Government Association of N.S.W. and Shires Association of N.S.W., Sydney, 1976, p.158.

receiving such a numerously signed requisition from so many respectable householders he had consented to do so'.⁴

Under the 1867 Act the municipality of Armidale was constituted into a borough with six aldermen. Each of these aldermen held office for three years with one third retiring annually. Adult franchise was granted to occupier owners or lessee of any rateable property.

Ald. Fitzgerald suggested to council in October 1866 that 'the time had arrived for increasing the number of members from six to nine'.⁵ Four months later in January 1867, Fitzgerald expressed the opinion that difficulties arose in council when there were only six votes. The town clerk was instructed to write to the government seeking to have the number of aldermen increased from 6 to 9 because the population was now over 1000. At the following council meeting in February, a letter was received from the Colonial Under Secretary stating 'in addition to the return showing there was a population of over 1000 in the municipality, a petition from 50 electors was necessary before the Government could authorise the increase of the members from 6 to 9'.⁶ A letter was sent to the Governor in March with a petition for an increase to nine members with the town to be divided into three wards; eastern, western and middle. In July a letter was sent to the colonial secretary again requesting requesting three extra aldermen but there was no support for wards.

Council moved unanimously in July 1868 that a petition be prepared, signed and forwarded to the Governor. At the same meeting, a motion that the municipality be divided into wards was defeated on the casting vote of the mayor. The aldermen signed a petition to the Governor at the meeting on 1 September 1868 asking for an increase in members of council.

An election was held on Monday 12 February 1877 from 8 a.m. until termination of the election at 3 p.m. The mayor presided as returning officer assisted by the town clerk. Once the election terminated and votes counted, the mayor then announced the results. The *Armidale Express*, 16 February 1877 reported: 'There was a considerable amount of excitement throughout the day. and some money invested as to the probable success of the different candidates'.

The *Armidale Express*, 27 April 1883 announced Glen Innes was to be shortly divided into three wards and commented: 'Is it not quite time that Armidale was similarly divided?'

The *Government Gazette*, No 120 published the declaration that Armidale was a City on Friday 20 March 1885. Other cities declared in the same declaration were Bathurst, Grafton, Goulburn, Newcastle and Sydney. Somewhat surprisingly, the *Armidale Express* did not publicise the declaration and four days later, the minutes of the council meeting made no reference to the proclamation.

⁴ *Armidale Express*, 11 February 1865, p.2.

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 27 October 1866, p..2.

⁶ *Armidale Express*, 23 February 1867, p.2.

In March 1889 it was announced Armidale would be divided into three wards. At the February 1891 elections, candidates were questioned on their attitude to the division of Armidale into wards. Discussion was postponed until after the census to see if the population was over 4000 in which case four wards would be needed. Two weeks later, the planned division was accepted by council in April with East Ward extending to Marsh Street, Central Ward from Marsh-street to Allingham-street, and the West Ward from Allingham-street to Niagara- street. A petition from the council of the Borough of Armidale 'representing that the population of that municipality now exceeds 1000 and praying for the division thereof into three wards'⁷was gazetted on 30 June 1891.

A proposal to increase the number of aldermen from nine to twelve was passed unanimously by council in October 1901. However a motion to create four wards and conduct a plebiscite of ratepayers to decide on a ward system was defeated. Thus at the election held on Tuesday 4 February 1902 to fill one vacancy caused by the retiring in rotation of aldermen caused by 'the effluxion of time', there existed in Armidale three wards: central, east and west ward. There was a public meeting of ratepayers convened for the purpose of receiving nominations and listening to speeches. Thus candidates spoke to solicit votes. In the election, J. Jones and W.J. Hawke received eighty six votes each with four informal votes. The returning officer Ald. D.P Claverie declined 'to give his vote on personal grounds'.⁸ Two papers were placed in a hat and the returning officer drew out one of them, W.J. Hawke's name. That July council determined that electors could only vote if rates had been paid.

In August 1902 council decided to increase the size of council to twelve aldermen and it was felt that the aldermen could be elected at the next annual elections in February 1903. According to the provisions of the 1897 Municipal Act, a petition had to be first presented to the Governor. This action was not taken until May and a committee was appointed to investigate the need for twelve aldermen in July. The special committee tabled their report in September. A sketch was provided of the municipality and the committee recommended the creation of a fourth ward to be called the north ward. Consideration of the report was postponed for a month On 12 October 1903 council approved the plan as presented previously but again adjourned discussion on the wards. Finally two weeks later, council adopted the plan for four wards. The name of central ward was changed to south ward despite the opposition 'of the three aldermen representing central ward'.⁹

Prior to 1906 non-ratepaying residents could not vote in elections. The plurality voting system was abolished by the 1906 Municipal Act and ratepayers were compensated by being 'given the right to vote in any ward where qualified by ownership of rateable property'.¹⁰ Women also re-gained the right to vote by this act. The system of annual elections was replaced by simultaneous retirement so that aldermen faced the electors together'.

⁷ *N.S.W. Gazette*, Volume 3, 1891, p.4925.

⁸ *Armidale Express*, 11 February 1902, p.4.

⁹ *Armidale Express*, 13 November 1903, p.2.

¹⁰ Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New SouthWales. Vol. 3, p.382.*

The election of 1 February 1908 was the first triennial elections held under the new Local Government Act. The method of voting was similar to that adopted at the Federal elections. Armidale was still divided into four wards: north, south, east and west. Ald. Fitzgerald moved 'in March 1908 'that a petition be forwarded to the Minister for Public Works, asking for the abolition of the ward system'.¹¹ He thought as Armidale had the new ordinance the ward system was unnecessary especially as they had one man one vote. The Under Secretary informed council of the requirements concerning the abolition of the system: '100 or more ratepayers might ask for a poll on the subject if they desired'.¹² Council offered no objections to the proposed abolition of wards in June and the Public Works and Local Government Department informed council in July 1908 the proposed abolition of the ward divisions in the municipality of Armidale had been approved.

Last election of aldermen took place on 31 January 1914 and at that time there were 706 on the roll. In June 1917 there were 1238 voters as under new legislation council now saw that all eligible residents were enrolled whereas before this was left wholly to those who were interested. In the 1911 elections, 405 voted out of 699 (60%); 1914 elections, 210 voted out of 700 (30%) and at the 1917 elections held on Saturday 30 June, 532 voted out of 1238 (43%). 'Of this number 23 per cent were ladies'.¹³

The Armidale Municipal Progress Association formed early in 1917 decided to run a team of twelve candidates for the June elections. All of the candidates were elected.

The Local Government Act 1919 changed the date for the triennial elections to the first Saturday in December. The electoral provision remained practically the same 'except that returned soldiers were given the vote on the grounds of war service'.¹⁴ Women were also given equal rights of citizenship with men under the Women's Legal Status Act 1918 and could now stand for the position of aldermen or councillors. However they 'were denied the ordinary local franchise, unless they held independent qualifications'.¹⁵ It was not until 1938 that the first woman was elected to council. Dr Ellen Mary Kent Hughes was elected and she remained an alderman until 1968. She was followed in turn by Margaret M. Harvey, Marilyn R. Pidgeon, Janet H. Jackson, Rosemary E. Leitch, Patricia A. Dixson, Julia M. Cosker, and Sue King.

The Local Government (Amendment) Bill introduced by the Hon. J.J. Fitzgerald on 17 February 1927 included the franchise provisions by extending the residential qualifying period from three to six months continuous residence on land whether rateable or not'.¹⁶ Council supported the Petersham Municipal

¹¹ *Armidale Express*, 6 March 1908, p.3

¹² *Armidale Express*, 29 May 1908, p.3.

¹³ *Armidale Express*, 3 July 1917, p.4.

¹⁴ H.E. Maiden, *The History of Local Government in New South Wales*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966, p.125.

¹⁵ Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales. Vol. 3*, p.395.

¹⁶ Maiden, p.137.

Council 'in asking the Government to initiate postal voting for Local Government elections for absentee voters'¹⁷ in August 1928.

The 1919 Act provided for a system of proportional representation provided one-fifth of the electors of an area requested a poll. Council affirmed the principle of proportional representation at elections and in August 1928 a petition signed by 400 ratepayers seeking a poll on the question was presented to council. At the poll taken in September, only 13.35% exercised their franchise; 223 voted yes and 187 no. Council forwarded the result to the Local Government Department asking 'that the matter of gazettal be treated as urgent, to enable the next election to be carried out under the new system'.¹⁸ By October the system had been gazetted but council believed it should be compulsory for contingent votes to be given for the full number candidates to be elected. The Minister for Local Government was not prepared to take such action but commented 'the Council might well give the existing system ... a trial at the forthcoming election'.¹⁹ The proportional representation voting was instituted in Armidale as the result of efforts of Mayor W.H. Watson and Ald. J.B. Sullivan who organised the petition. Armidale was the only council which adopted the system and it was not until 1953 that the State Government introduced proportional representation and preferential voting for the election of alderman to New South Wales.

Various Armidale councils believed the system should be changed and unsuccessfully attempted to have the proclamation revoked. In January 1929 council was advised it was not possible to abandon the system of proportional representation unless the Local Government Act was amended. Colonel Bruxner, Minister for Local Government informed council in August 1930 the 'Government intended to introduce legislation ... empowering Councils which have adopted the proportional representation system to revert to the old method, if they so desired'.²⁰ Some Armidale aldermen felt the system should be abandoned. Again in June 1932 council moved that the Minister for Local Government be asked to expedite the passing of an amendment to allow of an referendum being taken to revert to the old system of voting.

An innovation was introduced in 1931 with the provision of an additional polling booth at West Armidale apart from the Town Hall. The West End Progress Association had asked council in January 1925 to establish 'a polling booth at West Armidale for all municipal elections'²¹ but council rejected the proposal. Following the by-election of September 1938, 'the town clerk (Mr Milner) reported that the polling booth at West End had not been justified' because 'only 76 out of 1082 electors had voted at the booth'.²² Two weeks later the general purposes committee recommended its closure but council deferred consideration of the recommendation. Council agreed to the use of the polling booth for the council by-election in November caused by the resignation of Ald. Farrah, an

¹⁷ *Armidale Chronicle*, 15 August 1928, p.2.

¹⁸ *Armidale Chronicle*, 12 September 1928, p.8.

¹⁹ *Armidale Chronicle*, 10 October 1928, p.2.

²⁰ *Armidale Express*, 30 August 1930, p.7.

²¹ *Armidale Chronicle*, 31 January 1925, p.10.

²² *Armidale Express*, 14 September 1938, p.7.

accountant who was leaving Armidale. Only 535 (12%) of the 3830 enrolled, voted at the election.

The 1934 elections created more interest than usual and 61% of those entitled to voted exercised the privilege. The number who voted exceeded by 230 the number who voted at the previous election.²³

In May 1936 council instructed Ald. Watson to protest against the proposal by the Minister for Local Government to introduce preferential system of voting at the next meeting of the Local Government Association. The voting for the 1939 by-election was held on the proportional scheme and the *Armidale Express*, 10 March 1939 commented: 'Armidale City Council being the only Council in Australia to apply this method'.

The Local Government Association sought expressions of opinion concerning the possible postponement of local government elections. Council favoured postponement 'for any time the Government may see fit'.²⁴ Council was advised a month later that municipal and shire elections were postponed for the duration of the war and electoral rolls would not be prepared. The roll had been prepared in 1937 for the usual triennial municipal election with supplementary rolls completed in 1938 and 1939. Because of the government's decision to postpone elections, no rolls were prepared by August 1940. However, an Armidale subdivision roll was compiled on 18 April 1941 and the municipal roll compiled in December.

Ald. H.J. Robinson resigned in July 1940 but it was not until December that a by-election was held; the results were George H. Price 541; Herbert W. Oxford 221 and informal 2: total 764. Voting was not compulsory and only 20% voted out of 3500 residents entitled to vote. This was much lower than the last election in 1939 when Ald. J.B. Sullivan was elected; on that occasion there were 5 candidates and 1049 votes cast.

At the 1942 by-election in December 1942, Kenneth Jones a businessman, and Francis W. Harvison, a teacher were elected from five other candidates. Nine hundred and eighty five residents voted; not far short of the total effective vote in the triennial election in December 1940 for a full council. Harvison was the A.L.P. endorsed candidate and it was the first occasion on which a candidate had been nominated by any political party.

Council added its support to the move by the Local Government Association in December 1943 for compulsory voting at local government elections. In the December 1944 elections 'first past the post' was used in all other councils outside the metropolitan area apart from Armidale which used proportional voting. When the proportional system was applied there was no provision for it to revert to the first-past the post method. On one occasion a motion asking that the Act be amended was carried and sent to the Department but the request was shelved. The town clerk F.W. Milner anticipated that 2200 persons would vote in the December 1944 council election but the valid votes cast was only 1524.

²³ *Armidale Express*, 2 December 1934, p.4.

²⁴ *Armidale Express*, 19 June 1940, p.8.

Compulsory voting was introduced in 1947 by the Local Government (Electoral Provisions) Bill in an attempt to increase citizen interest. Proportional representation was used and for voting council established a polling booth at Ben Venue School in addition to the Town Hall and West Armidale School booths. Ald K. Jones had suggested the use of the Ben Venue voting booth for the 1944 elections but the request was too late. A total number of valid votes cast was 2968 with 56 informal votes; 66% of electors enrolled cast their votes and this approximately doubled the numbers who voted in previous elections. However Premier Askin restored the voluntary system in 1968 and the percentage dropped to former levels.

The various Progress Associations became an important political force. In the 1947 elections, the West Armidale Progress Association supported three candidates: D. Cameron, a railway employee; W.P. Ryan cordial manufacturer and V. Whan a hairdresser. All three were elected. In October 1947 membership was extended to all citizens residing in and west of Jessie Street and by that date there were over 120 financial members. The North Armidale Progress Association was created in 1950 and sponsored three candidates for the December elections: L. Menzies, Keith McRae and Thomas Monckton. All three were successful. One candidate, Alfred Hamilton a railway employee, stood on a Labour ticket and received a heavy vote in West Armidale.

Similarly the newly formed South Armidale Progress Association decided at their first meeting in September 1954 'to put forward one or more candidates'²⁵ for an approaching by-election. At the November election, the association endorsed Percy Rustin, hospital secretary and Sydney Humphreys, car sale director but neither candidates were successful.

At the December 1950 election people were warned of compulsory voting and 76% voted of the 4766 electors. This compared with the 66% who voted in the 1947 election. There was no absentee voting but postal votes were accepted. There were four polling places: the town hall, West Armidale Public School, Ben Venue Public School and the East Armidale public hall. Only one candidate standing on the Labour ticket, A.C. Hamilton was elected. North Armidale supported their Progress Association candidates, Menzies, Monckton and McRae.

In response to the suggestion at a Sydney A.L.P conference in Sydney that aldermen and councillors should be paid, Mayor T.G. Monckton stated in June 1952 that 'he did not think payment of local government officials was desirable'.²⁶

In the 1953 elections, 1147 electors did not vote; 583 were accounted for and 564 had to explain. In February 1954, council imposed 'please explains' for the non-votes. That month, council expressed satisfaction for the recent changes to the voting system to the Local Government Association. Council had worked with the system for the past twenty years.

²⁵ *Armidale Express*, 15 September 1954, p.3.

²⁶ *Armidale Express*, 13 June 1952, p.8.

Following a request from the Commonwealth Migration Office, council agreed in February 1954 to conduct naturalisation ceremonies in the town hall or council chambers.

At the 1956 triennial election 84% of the residents voted but 'at the by-election held early ' in 1958 'the voting percentage had dropped to 68 per cent'.²⁷ Council enforced compulsory voting in a further by-election held in November and 71.4% voted.

Venues for the November 1962 elections were the Town Hall, West Armidale Public School, Ben Venue Public School and East Armidale Hall. The total number of electors (6460) was about 20% up on the 1959 election because of the extension of boundaries but the percentage (74.3%) who voted was also down.

In September 1968 the Armidale I.B.C. appealed for residents supportive of the preservation of open space creeklands to stand for the local government elections in December. Decisions of council taken after this election reflected the interest in the development of the creeklands project however the abolition of compulsory voting by the State Government led to a remarkable drop in the number of votes cast in those elections. The 'poll dropped from an average of 75 per cent, in previous municipal elections to 32 per cent'.²⁸

The 1959 Local Government Elections (Amendment) Act extended the popular election of chairmen to all municipalities and shires but the principle was abolished in 1968. The Bill introduced non-compulsory voting; preferential voting and abolished the popular election of mayor. On a state wide basis 'the 1968 elections set the pattern for those of 1971 and 1974 when vote percentages were 32.9 and 28.1 respectively'.²⁹ A similar trend developed in Armidale. Only 17.5% voted in the May 1971 by-election to elect David E. Olsen from a field of three candidates. Only 35% voted in the September triennial election. Three years later, only 23% voted at the September 1974 elections. Despite the provision of a booth at Earle Page College only 124 students voted out of 1000 students at the University of New England. The first Aboriginal person, Steven Widders aged 18 years, stood for this election but despite receiving many primary votes lost the twelfth position to Claude Cainero by 250 votes.

Armidale pioneered proportional voting in local government elections in 1928. Council continued with that system until 1968 when a change in the Local government Act made preferential voting mandatory. Councils could only revert to proportional voting if this was approved by a poll. In October 1969 aldermen decided 'that compulsory voting should be reintroduced, and that counting should revert to proportional representation'³⁰ but in May 1971, council decided not to conduct such a poll in the September triennial elections. The editor of the *Armidale Express*, 14 May 1971 commented: 'Armidale electors could be

²⁷ *Armidale Express*, 14 November 1958, p.6.

²⁸ *Armidale Express*, 2 December 1968, p.6.

²⁹ F.A. Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales. Vol. 3*, p.405.

³⁰ *Armidale Express*, 31 October 1969, p.5.

excused if they got the impression that their City Council sold them short on the proportional voting issue'.

Council decided to meet in open council once every three weeks and then only after a committee meeting. The *Armidale Express*, 9 December 1970 claimed 'Local Government; (is) to become even more remote'.

In May 1976 the Armidale Ratepayer's Association 'investigated a survey among local citizens asking if they favor a government investigation into the city council'.³¹ Following a request from the association, council agreed to 'make copies of the business papers available to the public on the morning before each Council meeting, for a trial period of six weeks'.³²

In the 1970s local government associations lobbied for the introduction of compulsory voting elections. Once the Labor Party won the 1976 elections State Cabinet re-introduced compulsory voting for the council elections in September 1977 and council welcomed the decision.

Committees.

One of the first actions by newly boroughs was to establish committees to undertake the work required of the newly created local government body. The works committee was vital because it undertook work associated with roads and bridges. Since that time the number of committees increased as the work of council became more complex and greater demands for new services arose. An issue that sometimes arose was the question of the authority of the committee in relationship to that of the council as a whole.

By 1888 the council operated a number of committees including public works and lighting, finance, library and general purposes committee. On 12 June Ald. Brown presented an improvement committee report which led to a scene of disorder in council. The mayor left the chair whilst discussion took place and council was then adjourned for week.

A special meeting was called in February 1901 to consider a serious charge against the works committee for carrying out works not authorised by council. Ald. Solomons defended his action because the work was urgent but the aldermen felt 'Ald Solomons should not have spent money without authority of council'.³³

Under Ordinance 1 of the Local Government Act 1919 a council was required to establish a finance and a works committee and appoint or elect other committees as necessary. Every meeting of council, except in committee was to be open to the press and the public.

An examination of council records demonstrates the changes in the types of committee structure from 1920 to 1948. From 1920 to 1940 the standing committees included finance, works, water, lighting, general purposes and

³¹ *Armidale Express*, 26 May 1976, p.1.

³² *Armidale Express*, 13 August 1976, p.9.

³³ Council minutes, 3 February 1902.

health. After the war the work of councils became more complex and the standing committees included: finance; gas; building, health and general purposes; works; electricity; water and sewerage; town planning, beautification and recreation

In 1949 council created two groups of standing committees, namely group A and Group B. Group A included finance; building, health and general purposes; town planning, beautification and recreation. Group B included gas; works; water and sewerage. The standing committees formed in February 1954 were: Group A finance, works, water and sewerage; Group B building, health, and general purposes; beautification and gas .

By January 1955 the Armidale City Council had created only two committees involving members of the public: town planning and library service. The *Armidale Express*, 24 January 1955 felt that the council could have taken further action because 'there are many matters that would benefit from the combined wisdom of aldermen and non-aldermen comprising committees with delegated powers'. That December council created further committees including the baths and folk museum.

The situation had changed in December 1956 because the special committees then included: library; folk museum; city beautification and improvement; national fitness; homes for the aged and advances of education. Prior to that month, council had elected two groups of committees: Group A- finance, works and gas and Group B- water and sewerage, buildings, health and general purposes and beautification. Delegates had also to be elected to the New England County Council and the New England Tablelands (Noxious Plants) County Council.

In December 1957 there was a slight re-arrangement of committees: Group 2 included works, beautification and water and sewerage, beautification; Group 3 included gas, building and health, general purposes and baths. A development committee was formed consisting of the vice-chairmen of each of the various committees. There was also a town planning committee and war memorial homes for the aged committee.

During a meeting of council in August 1959 council agreed to invite Miss Evalyn Bates from the University of New England to address them on community development. A permanent body had been recently formed as a result of a recent seminar on Community Development held at the University under the leadership of Miss Bates. During the debate they rejected a proposal to appoint a liaison officer between council and the town improvement and beautification committee.

Outside committees formed in December 1961 included the war memorial library; folk museum; Dumaresq Shire planning; Armidale improvement and beautification; homes for the aged; community development; tourist bureau and festival committee. Group B committees included building, health and general purposes; beautification and baths and the development committee. Group B committees had four members with the mayor an ex-officio member of all committees.

In December 1963 prolonged discussion took place in council 'on a proposal to set up a special advisory committee to press forward with the beautification of the city, to replace or to supplement Council's own standing committee'.³⁴ Eventually council voted against the formation of a special committee but agreed to appoint three representatives to the town improvement and beautification committee. In 1966 the committees formed included gas, finance, baths, building, health and general purposes, works, art gallery and folk museum. Two new committees were formed in 1968: the christmas crib and saleyards committee.

In January 1965 council decided to open all council committee meetings to the press but to ban the public. Members of the public would be admitted only to open meetings. At that stage such action was endorsed by Ordinance 1 of the Local Government Act 1919. In moving the unopposed motion, Ald. R.E. Esdaile said his main aim was to to improve relations with the Press.

In the December 1968 council meeting to determine committees, there was a departure from previous practice. The vice-chairmen of the standing committees were to be elected at a meeting of council rather than at the first meeting of the committee. At this stage there were six new aldermen in council but in March 1969 council rejected a move by two aldermen to make the meetings of the standing committees open to the press. In May council sought legal advice on whether there was a distinction between the press and the public.

In December 1968 council determined the three County Council committees and other committees formed included the library; folk museum; Armidale tourist bureau and New England tourist zone; street tree planting; art gallery; recreation areas and flood plain; parking; cemetery; saleyards; public appeal (open space lands); New England regional development; improvement and beautification; homes for the aged and New England Local Government Association.

Council reverted to fortnightly open meetings and to smaller committees in December 1969. A month later the *Armidale Express* congratulated council on the establishment of a press liaison committee 'to meet three times a week in order to pass on to the public, through the press and radio, news of council's activities'.³⁵

Council established a special advisory committee in July 1976 to investigate a submission on road safety by Dr Brian Connor.

In 1991 the advisory committees consisted of arboretum, Aboriginal community, Australia day, folk museum, Kent House home and community centre, library, mall, public relations, saleyards, sports and recreation, tidy towns, tourism and tree planting. Council also had delegates on New England Electricity, New England (Noxious Plants) County Council and external committees including Armidale city traffic, Armidale community services and Armidale development committees. Ordinary meetings of council were held on the second Monday of

³⁴ *Armidale Express*, 4 December 1963, p.2.

³⁵ *Armidale Express*, 12 January 1970, p.2.

each month and committee meetings on the fourth Monday. All meetings were open to the press and public.