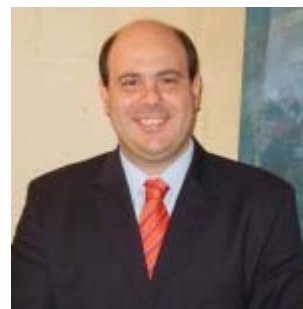




‘Whenever you find that you are on the side of the majority, it is time to reform.’ (Mark Twain)

Fifteen years after they were set up, local Councils have become an integral part of our everyday lives. The good work they have done over the years has enhanced the quality of life enjoyed by residents. This is certainly how the majority of Maltese and Gozitans feel about the contribution of local councils to the well-being of our communities. The high opinion the general public has of local councils stems from the sterling work that councillors have done in order to raise their prestige and the good name of the institutions they represent. These Local Councils have become the citizens’ mouthpiece. Citizens find their councils a source of refuge for their problems and a means of satisfying their needs that may be different in nature but are always present as the citizen, the community and the country strive to make their dreams come true. Indeed the rationale underpinning the setting-up of local councils is the pressing need to create a political means that can draw politics closer to the common people. The closer councillors are to the members of their community, the better they can identify their needs and plan their strategies accordingly.



Any reforms that are envisaged in the area of local councils have to take into consideration all the positive initiatives that have been launched over the past fifteen years. In this way we can look towards the future with confidence and make the necessary urgent changes that need to be effected. We cannot drag our feet and avoid implementing certain useful proposals simply because certain elements and circumstances exist within local Councils that can potentially undermine positive developments. Otherwise we risk ushering in reforms that are merely cosmetic and lacking in substance. I believe that in the light of the experience throughout these years we all deserve better. In cases where there is a potential abuse of power in proposals meant to bring about a holistic reform, we should create a formal disciplinary set-up that deal with each individual case. However, as I have already mentioned, bad practices should not be allowed to dispel the many good things that have been done.

This Local Council is taking this reform very seriously. It is our opinion that this reform is potentially capable of providing us with the means and resources that can help us cater for and respond to the needs of our residents with urgency and efficiency. At this moment in time we have no hesitation in stating that when compared to our responsibilities the resources at our disposal fall very short of expectations. This has been said time and again since the setting-up of the Local Councils. The allocation of resources, especially the financial ones, does not do justice to the complexity of the administrative tasks assigned to our Council. Indeed our brief entails the governmental administration of the whole island - seven schools, eighteen churches and chapels, two hospitals, two theatres, a Magistrate Court, a good number of commercial establishments, five banks, a main tourist area that includes the historic area and the Citadel. The list is endless. Moreover, we should keep in mind that as Victoria is at the very centre of the island, its arterial roads provide the only access to cars and heavy vehicles from one village to another. All this exerts unbearable pressure on the physical infrastructure of our Council. Paying lip service to this fact is not enough. Words should be accompanied by action. Therefore, as I have mentioned before, this reform has the

potential to provide us with the necessary means to make the necessary changes in the main city of Gozo.

Finally a word of gratitude goes to our locality's previous Mayors in appreciation to their work carried out on this reform, who immediately accepted our invitation to form part of this ad hoc committee. Their experience surely was a big asset towards our aim in providing proposals in the best interest of our residents and our locality. A special thanks should also go to our locality's elected councillors for their support and commitment to better our locality and the quality of life of our residents. Last but surely not least a word of appreciation is also due to our Council's secretariat who try their best to respond efficiently and effectively to the various needs and demands of both the Council and the general public.

Robert Tabone  
Mayor

## **1. Elections every four (4) years**

The four-year term of office is too short to allow the Council to plan its course of action, ask for the necessary permits, and implement the identified tasks.

Therefore, our proposal is that the current four-year period should be extended to a minimum of five years. This would give the Council more time to plan its course of action; it would also help to make up for generally unjustified delays by Government entities and authorities in granting the necessary approvals for projects. This extra year would serve to bring the local councillors closer to residents. It would also help relieve some of the pressure the Council feels because of the continual race against time in its efforts to fulfil its obligations.

## **2. All the roads and the city squares that are situated in a residential zone should fall under the responsibility of the Local Council.** The following are our proposals:

- a. the Architect appointed by the Government and the Council's Architect's should carry out a joint inspection of all the arterial roads and main squares (23 in all) and therefore fall under the Central Government's responsibility;
- b. A list of all estimates that have to do with the work that needs to be done in every road and square, including asphalt laying, the reconstruction of certain roads, pavements, patching and other services should be compiled;
- c. Subject to agreement between the two parties, a priority list of the roads that need to be built during the next ten years should be compiled (a road or a square that is top priority should take precedence over a road or a square that is lower down the list);
- d. when the list is finalised, the Council is proposing that:
  - i. the Government should either pass on the yearly extraordinary allocation for ten consecutive years to the Council based on the estimates provided, so that the Council would be able to carry out the necessary work according to the approved priority list,
  - ii. or else in line with the approved priority list the Government should directly carry out the necessary work, after which every finished road and square should be formally placed under the responsibility of the Council.

## **3. A radical change to the financial allocation formula.**

- a. This formula should acknowledge that certain cities and villages do not only cater for the needs of their residents but are also centres of administration, business and/or tourism. As a result they attract and host thousands of Maltese and foreign people every day. Victoria is a case in point and this happens all year round. The following are some important points that have to be kept in mind:
  - i. Victoria's population doubles every day when Gozitans commute to Victoria for work.
  - ii. Besides, there are also thousands of other Gozitans that commute to Victoria to do their shopping, to pay their bills in Government departments, to visit a bank, a hospital, to go to court, attend one of our seven schools, to hear mass in one of our eighteen churches and chapels, to enjoy its historical heritage or simply to have a drink or a snack.

- iii. Apart from all this one has to mention the numerous heavy trucks and other vehicles that pass through the centre of our city on their way to other towns since Victoria is situated in the centre of Gozo.

Unfortunately, the considerable number of vehicles, particularly heavy ones, that drive through the main streets in Victoria, exert unbearable pressure on the infrastructure of the city. As a result considerable damage is being caused to services, pavements and also to private homes, and Church and public buildings. Moreover, one has to keep in mind that this large influx of people in Victoria inevitably leads to a substantial increase in waste in streets, squares and alleys.

Therefore, it is quite important that the Government's allocation is worked out on the basis of the specific situations and circumstances prevailing in each village.

- b. The Council is proposing the setting up of a Government-administered fund central fund that can finance projects proposed Local Councils. Such projects should be prioritised by the Government and the fund should be used to support these identified priorities. This would certainly stimulate local councils to come up with their local and national proposals. The criteria to be adopted by the Government should include not only the worth, value, level of innovation but also how relevant and visible the project is from a regional and national perspective. For example. For all its worth, a project that targets Mgarr would not have the same visibility as a similar project that targets Valletta.
- c. Moreover, the Council is asking either for exemption from VAT, or being entitled to VAT refund. If these are not granted, the Council is proposing that there should be an automatic increase of 18% to the annual ordinary allocation to make up for VAT. the Council has to pay.

#### **4. The elected Mayor should reserve the right to do his or her work on a full-time basis or employ a private secretary.**

The Local Councils' areas of responsibility are becoming increasingly wider. The reform process should acknowledge the wider scope and see to it that decentralisation of power should gather pace. This would add to the pressure on the Council's administration, particularly on the Mayor, since the system mainly revolves around him or her. Therefore, the Council is recommending that every Mayor should be allowed to choose between carrying out his or her duties on a part-time or a full-time basis unless s/he is the Mayor of a village with a population of less than two thousand (2000) people. For Councils that are in excess of 2000 residents, the Council's proposal is:

- a. that the Mayor should reserve the right to choose between a part-time or a full-time role.
  - b. the Mayor should be authorised to choose a person (or more than one) directly appointed by him/her, that would take up the role of the Mayor's secretariat (this is quite similar to a Ministerial secretariat or a Parliamentary Secretary but on a much smaller scale).
- a. The Councils recommends that if the Mayor chooses the full-time role, s/he should reserve the right to choose a number of people as his/her secretariat. This would be done

according to the locality's population and also according to the situation prevailing in the community. Some of these recommendations could be found in proposals 3a i and/or ii. The Council's proposals are the following:

- i. communities having 5 councillors should have a secretariat made up of one person;
- ii. communities having 7 councillors should have a secretariat made up of two persons;
- iii. communities having 9 councillors should have a secretariat made up of three persons;
- iv. communities having 11 councillors should have a secretariat made up of four persons;
- v. communities having 13 councillors should have a secretariat made up of five persons.

In communities where the situation is quite similar to those shown in number 3a i and/or ii, an automatic mechanism should be put in place and the Council (not the Mayor) would be authorised to employ between three or five additional officials according to the particular needs of the community. This should be done through a public call for applications. The cabinet should decide the number of officials to be employed on the basis of the needs and after a careful examination of the impact of external forces on the particular locality.

- b. If the Mayor decides to have a part-time role s/he should be authorised to employ a Personal Assistant. The latter should head the Mayor's secretariat. The Personal Assistant would represent the Mayor if s/he is not in his/her office.

## **5. The status of the Mayor and the Councillor for Protocol purposes**

It is important that this reform should reinforce the importance of the role of Protocol. Nowadays, local residents are still in the dark about the status of their local councillors. The reasons for this could be that the Mayors' and the Councillors' status has hardly ever given the importance it deserves or it could be that the role of the local councillor has not been communicated to the locals directly and transparently. It does not make any sense from a Protocol point of view to assign Mayors and the Local Governments to level five (5), on the same level as the public officials. Moreover, it seems that the Councillors are not even included in this list.

Therefore, we strongly believe that this situation needs to be changed. The Mayors' and the Councillors' status should be elevated on a national scale in appreciation of their formal role as political leaders of a local government. The Council agrees with the way the present protocol system works in relation to Mayors and local Councillors since this reflects the city's or the village's status. We believe that upgrading the status of mayors and local councillors would automatically inspire more respect from the general public. As a result, the following are the recommendations of the Council :

- a. the Mayor should be given precedence when they represent his/her community in the case of a formal occasion (social, religious or cultural) organised by the Council or by a community's association. Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries should follow the Mayor. The Council is proposing that these should be followed by the Councillors of the locality and then by the Members of Parliament.
- b. on a regional and a national scale the Mayor should be considered for protocol purposes, on the same footing as parliamentary deputies on formal occasions (social, religious, cultural etc...) that are organised by the Government or a regional or a national association. Moreover, the Councillors should be on the same level as the Principal Permanent Secretary.

## 6. Payment/Remuneration of the Mayor and the Councillors

The Council believes that to ensure the success of this reform there should be an instant response to the needs and demands of residents. It believes that the biggest investment should be in the Mayor, who is the leader of the Local Government and in Councillors who are elected democratically by the residents and who therefore are mouthpieces for these local residents. This would help cater for the immediate needs of the community and its residents. This should be not only formally acknowledged by upgrading the status of the Mayor and the other local representatives for protocol purposes. This formal acknowledge should be accompanied by an appropriate remuneration that covers the substantial and ever-increasing responsibilities of Mayors and Councillors. Therefore the Council is recommending the following:

- a. in communities with a population of less than two thousand (2000), and where the Mayor has a part-time role, his/her remuneration should be 7,000 Euro annually, together with incentives that are due to public officers who are on Scale one (1), excluding the use of car and petrol.
- b. When the Mayor decides to carry out his/her duties on a part-time basis, he should command an annual salary of 7,000 Euro, together with incentives (perks) due to public service officers who are on Scale one (1), excluding use of car and petrol.
- c. when the Mayor decides to do his/her job on a full-time basis, the Council suggests that:
  - i. if the Council has five (5) or seven (7) Councillors their remuneration should be equivalent to that enjoyed by public service officials at level four (4), together with incentives (perks) due to public officers who are at level one (1), excluding use of car and petrol. If a complex situation exists in the particular community like those, but not those, referred to in proposals 3a i and/or ii, the Mayor's remuneration should be equivalent to that of public service officials at level two (2). The Mayor should also be entitled to a performance bonus of 15%, that he or she can benefit from, according to the quality of the service s/he delivers. This could be worked out on the basis of performance bonus criteria that are adopted in the case of public service officials who are on Scale one (1). The decision as to whether the Mayor should be entitled to this performance bonus and the percentage to which he/she is entitled should be the prerogative of the Prime Minister.
  - ii. if the Council has nine (9) or eleven (11) or thirteen (13) Councillors their remuneration should be equivalent to that of public service officials who are on Scale two (2), together with incentives (perks) due to the public officer at level one (1), excluding the use of car and petrol. In case there is a complex situation in the particular community like the latter one, and also shown in proposals 3a i and/or ii the Mayor's remuneration should be equivalent to that of public service officials who are on Scale one (1). The Mayor should also have a performance bonus of 15% that would be determined by the quality of service s/he provides and his/her end results. This could be worked out on the basis of performance bonus criteria that are adopted in the case of public service officials who are on Scale one (1). The decision as to whether the Mayor should have this performance bonus and the

- percentage of this performance bonus to which he/she is entitled should be the prerogative of the Prime Minister.
- iii. the Councillors' remuneration should be that of 5,000 Euro annually. The latter would also cover any expenses that Councillors may incur during the course of the year, as well as a bonus of 2,000 Euros based on their performance. The Council recommends that Mayors should have the authority to assign particular sectors of the work to be done to individual councillors at the beginning of the term of office. Every Councillor would be responsible for these sectors during this period. Depending on the assigned responsibilities, it is every Councillor's duty to present to the Council his/her action plan that covers the whole year for the Council's approval. This should be done in less than two months from his/her appointment and also in less than a month before the start of a legislative year. Whether the Councillor deserves a bonus or not and the percentage of the performance bonus to which the Councillor is entitled would depend on the Mayor's assessment of the Councillor's performance vis-à-vis the action plan that was presented. The Council proposes that if the Councillor does not agree with the Mayor's assessment, the Councillor has the right of appeal to the Minister responsible for the Local Council.

Mayors should be entitled to the use of a car and petrol that are due to public service officials who are on Scale one (1). However, this privilege should not be linked to the person but to the post. Therefore, as in the case of Ministers, this privilege is lost once the Mayor no longer occupies the post, in which case the car becomes the property of the Local Council.

## **7. People that could object to the elections of the Local Council**

The introduction of Local Councils attracted several locals who had a clear political vision for their own community as well as other people who had considerable managerial and administrative skills to deal with the challenges of running a local council. In such a small country such as Malta one should avoid limiting as much as possible the number of people who are ready to take the opportunity to contest to local elections.

Although the Council agrees with the list included in the same law that regulates Local Councils, the Council would like to recommend some changes in the Government's estacode that prohibits a public service official, from the rank of director up to that of Main Permanent Secretary, from contesting a local election. We admit that the posts of Permanent Secretary, Main Permanent Secretary, CEO, Chairperson and Executive Chairperson, being 'political appointments', and could potentially create a certain political unease; however, the Council cannot understand why the estacode prohibits directors (level 4) and general directors (level 3) from contesting local election.

The Council believes that these people have a lot to offer in terms of years of experience in the public service's senior management and Malta and Gozo stand to lose if they are not allowed to contest local elections.

However, the Council would like to make it clear that it believes that directors and directors general who decide to contest elections for local Councils and who become Mayors would not be allowed to perform their duties as Mayors on a full-time but on a part-time basis. In this way they would be able to fulfil their duties as top management in the public sector as well as Mayors.

**8. More executive power to the Mayor so that s/he could:**

- a. be formally considered the main active stakeholder in the planning of those Central Government's policies that are going to impinge directly on their particular community;**
- b. be able to formally request information and also demand specific action from ministries, departments, corporations and Government entities which directly deal with the public;**

The rationale underpinning the introduction of Local Councils in our countries was that of bringing citizens closer to politics. Moreover, it is quite obvious that locals know what is best for their own community since they have a first hand knowledge of the place and its inhabitants. Therefore, the Council is recommending;

- a. a plan for the setting up of a formal structure in which the Council has an official representative in every forum that could be planning a particular development that is either going to happen in a particular community or is going to impinge on a particular community. If a ministry, department, corporation or entity does not actively involve the Council in the project planning phase, and this project is submitted for approval and eventual implementation without the Local Council's backing, this project should automatically become ineligible until the Local Council is allowed to express its opinions. It should be made mandatory to have the Local Council's approval for any work that is to be carried out in the locality by another entity, otherwise the work would be considered illegal;
- b. The Mayor or his/her delegate that represents the Council should be authorised on behalf of all its residents to ask for information and demand immediate action on issues that may be causing an inconvenience to residents. Strictly speaking, it is the Prime Minister who should send a letter to the heads of ministries, departments, corporations and entities, informing them of the action to be taken. This letter should ask the employees of every ministry, department, corporation or entity to acknowledge Mayors or their delegates as political authorities and encourage them to do their best to help Mayors cater for the needs of their residents. The letter should also stipulate a definite time limit that regulates when the ministry, department, corporation or Government entity should send a formal reply with the requested information containing relevant and effective solutions. The Council believes that this deadline should not exceed forty-eight hours. If they refrain from replying, an automatic disciplinary mechanism should come into effect against those who ignore their civic duties. A typical example of the benefits of such a system is when the Mayor on behalf of the Council, would be granted the authority to ask for immediate and definite action to be taken to tackle the problem of the lack of parking space in Victoria, to solve the problem of the excessive number of cars driving along Victoria's primary and secondary roads and the worst one of all, and to deal with the continual flow of heavy vehicles which cause massive inconvenience to the residents apart from causing substantial damages to our local infrastructure.

The Council is proposing that eventually, that is, in the next ten to fifteen years, the ministries, departments, corporations or Government entities which are in direct contact with the consumer should fall under the responsibility of the Local Council so that people would receive a better service. This should form part of an overall plan that would allow people who have been providing services to residents in departments, ministries, corporations or Government entities to be seconded to the Local Council. Therefore, a one-stop-shop would be created so as to cater the residents' needs. This financial shift could make up for the increased remuneration granted to Mayors and Councillors, that was recommended in Proposal number 6.

#### **9. The setting up of a Gozitan Regional Council.**

Nowadays, Gozo's regional status as an island is widely acknowledged. This status is annexed to the official agreement Malta signed with the European Union when Malta became a full member of the EU. This agreement has imposed certain responsibilities and obligations on the part of the central administration as the Government has committed itself to set up regional structures. Gozo's Ministry is a regional representative within the Cabinet; however, we believe that there should be more to this regional structure.

Local Governments need to be involved in decisions taken by the Central Government to ensure that we do not just pay lip service to the concept of Gozo as a region. Our Council is proposing the official and formal setting up of a Gozitan Regional Council. The latter should be made up of all the Local Councils in Gozo and it should be given the authority to plan and implement a holistic policy in the interests of all the residents whom he represents. The benefits are very rewarding especially in the international or European sphere.

#### **10. Villa Rundle, the public garden, should fall under the jurisdiction of the Local Council.**

As part of the decentralisation process, the Council believes that the Villa Rundle should form part of the Local Council for the following two reasons;

- i. Its potential would be fully exploited;
- ii. It would be administered more efficiently.

We are firmly in favour of this measure as whenever a place is administered by local people the chances are that local people would be more dedicated to their job of taking care of it out of pride.

#### **11. A cooperation agreement between the Local Council, that has been elected to protect the historical heritage in this community and 'Heritage Malta together with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage should be formally signed. This agreement should place the Citadel under the jurisdiction of the Victoria Local Council.**

Several of Malta's and Gozo's local councils are responsible for numerous historical sites and marvellous natural and cultural heritage sites. These all fall under the jurisdiction of Local Councils who at times find it difficult to maintain, promote and make this heritage accessible to locals and to foreigners alike.

Because of its onerous responsibilities, the Victoria Local Council believes that there should be close links or better still a formal agreement that would make 'Heritage Malta' and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage the consultants of the Local Council in matters that fall under their competence. Such a consultancy should not incur any expense on the part of the Council. This agreement would facilitate the decision to place the Citadel under the responsibility of the Local Council as together with the expertise of the technical specialists the Local Council can regenerate this zone.

## **12. A Committee for the rehabilitation of Victoria, including the Citadel.**

Valletta, Mdina and Cottonera's rehabilitation committees have been recently re-established. This is a wise decision that should be supported. However, the Council does not understand how a city that is so rich in historic, artistic and architectural heritage and in the midst of which lies the Citadel, a unique architectural jewel, could still be without a rehabilitation committee.

Therefore, the Council is proposing that the Government should set up this Committee. The co-chairperson should be an official chosen jointly by the Government and Victoria's Mayor. The committee's members should include every institutional stakeholder, as well as the local ones. This would serve to create the largest possible bank of ideas. This Committee should have ambitious terms of reference and clear priorities that are informed by the needs of the community and visitors. Top priority should be given to a Master Plan for the whole community.

## **13. There should be procedures regulated by the Central Government that would make it mandatory for MEPA and ADT applications by the Council to be effectively put on the fast track. Moreover, these procedures should also oblige MEPA and ADT to discuss these applications individually with the Council.**

Several of the Council's projects need to be approved by MEPA before they can be implemented. The Local Councils are elected to represent local residents for a three-year period (a period which we believe should be increased to four years). The short term of office makes it very frustrating for the Local Council to be forced to wait for a number of years to obtain the approval of a project that the residents would benefit from.

The Council proposes that although the Local Governments' applications should still be analysed according to cross board assessment scale, the approval of the application should take not more than six months, regardless of how complex the application may be. When this six month period has elapsed with no justifiable excuse, an automatic mechanism should come into effect and this application should become the responsibility of the Chairperson. Moreover, disciplinary measures should be taken against those MEPA officials that did not carry out their civic duties. As a result, the Councils would be free to carry out their plans in a professional and concrete manner.

## **14. Applications for minor amendments in the residential buildings under construction (for example changing the apertures, converting a door into a window facing the street etc...) and DNOs should be received and assessed by Local Councils.**

There are many instances where a MEPA's decision on an application for minor amendment about construction or building plans, takes months because of the inevitable bureaucracy. This can pose considerable problems to the residents.

The Council is recommending that these minor applications, including the DNOs, should be processed by the Local Council and should be settled within fifteen days. If the applicant does not agree with the decision of the Council, the former has the right of appeal at MEPA, whose time limit for taking a decision should not exceed thirty days.

**15. The Council should have an active representative in Government-chosen committees and he or she should help organise cultural, social and/or artistic events.**

Most of the regional and national events organised by the Government, or funded by the Government, take place in Victoria's squares and roads. The Council supports this and it is ever ready to lend a hand in the organisation in order to make such events successful. The Council is aware of the fact that there are other communities where local councils support social and cultural events.

However, the Council emphasises that the relationship between those who organise regional and national events and the Local Council of the community where these events are taking place should be made official in the interest of both parties. Therefore, the Council is recommending that it should be represented in every Government committee that decides on the organisation of various events such as the Cultural Committee and the Carnival Committee amongst others. Another committee that the Council believes should have a representative from Gozo is the one that organises the main social, educational and musical events in Gozo such as Notte Gozitana and Gozo 1234. The contribution of the Council to the organisation of such events and co-operation between the various entities that are involved are crucial in the successful outcome of these events.

**16. An automatic representation of Victoria's Local Council in every regional committee that includes Local Councils.**

The complex situation that the Local Council of Victoria has to deal with on a daily basis moulds the political ideas of the local representatives and help the councillors under the leadership of the Mayor take informed decisions in order to improve the quality of life of residents. The Council believes that this political maturity is the result of the experiences that the members of the Council go through. Having to face difficult and complex circumstances becomes a very useful learning experience that can then be used to improve the quality of people's lives.

Therefore, the Council feels that it would be wise to exploit this wide experience on a regional scale by having a representative from Victoria's Local Councils on all the committees set up on a regional basis. We should not forget that Victoria is the only city in Gozo and that it hosts the highest population of the island. Therefore, it would be appropriate that this Local Council should represent other Councils on a regional

scale, similar to the situation in EU countries. The Council would accept any other representatives from Gozo's Local Councils on these committees.

#### **17. A total revision of the law enforcement, particularly on a local level.**

The local wardens' system that was introduced a couple of years ago is a controversial topic. Surely, the advantage of the introduction of these local wardens brought with it a certain degree of discipline in our communities. However, the Council believes that today's warden system is not the most efficient one and therefore it insists that it should be reformed.

The starting point of the Council's argument is that this particular system can never be a commercial one. The commercial nature of this system benefits neither those who enforce it nor those who make use of it. Moreover, we believe that this system undermines its credibility.

The main problems that this community has to face are lack of parking, excessive traffic and the issue of local wardens. The Council believes that wardens were introduced too early and this was done without sufficient research about their widespread social impact. When we take our community in consideration, we realise that the traffic and parking law enforcement is an inflexible and impractical one. We believe that enforcing a law without providing alternatives does not make sense. This means that one cannot impose a fine for illegal parking if there is nowhere else to park. The fine would be justifiable if the Council provided car owners with sufficient parking space.

One of the reasons why the Local Council always stressed the importance of more parking spaces was to make up for what we consider to be an unjust, discriminatory and at times absurd situation. In fact, Victoria's Local Council has put forward in the past two years numerous proposals that dealt with these issues and handed them to the Government prior to the budget. Another reason behind the reactivation of the ring road idea or any other idea that can offer solutions to the problem of traffic congestion was to make up for injustices that the residents might have suffered because of the continual flow of traffic and the ensuing congestion that might have caused some drivers to break driving regulations and incur a fine. We believe that this has not only had a negative effect on people's financial situation but also on the economic and social progress of our community. It would be a great idea if an in-depth study is carried out in order to research the direct and indirect impact this system has had on our community.

Therefore, this Council is proposing a total revision of this system. This revision should be based on the past experiences of this system, people's opinions and the Council's vision. It is only through genuine consultation that informed decisions can be made. The Council's recommendation is that, in the near future, this system should be administered by a central Government authority so it could lighten Councils' financial burden and as a result, it could function in a more transparent way. Moreover, it could operate primarily to educate and then to enforce.

#### **18. Professional services that are provided to the Councils should be based on quality and experience of the former rather than on the price.**

The councils are in dire need of professional services. Due to several reasons and circumstances the Council is in constant needs of professional advice given to them by experts. The services that are mostly wanted are those of lawyers, architects and engineers. As was previously agreed upon by the parties concerned, payment should be the same as that of other professionals in their field of work.

Therefore, the Council is proposing that instead of issuing a call for tenders in order to hire the services of professionals who could offer rates that are lower than the pre-established ones, the Council should be authorised to issue an ‘expression of interest’ for any services that are needed and consequently be in a position to hire professionals according to their particular competencies and work experience. The Council would rather do the latter than put out request for any offers, with the hope of finding someone who would ask for less money so that the latter could be chosen over those who want to be given the same payment as the other professionals in their field. As a result, the Council would be able to use a professional or a firm of professionals in order to provide identified services in one sector. The criteria for selection would take into consideration the curriculum vitae of the professional or the professional firm that applied for the provision of services.

#### **19. The Local Council should benefit from the Structural Funds.**

When Malta joined the EU the latter agreed to give Malta financial help so that its residents’ quality of life could be improved and would eventually be equal to that of other EU countries. These funds that were made available to Malta are better known as Structural Funds and they are meant to promote investment in the infrastructural, social, educational, tourist, agricultural and fishing sectors amongst others. The aim of this financial aid is to improve Malta’s chances of competing on a global scale. Malta’s Government managed to strike a commendable deal for 850 million Euro.

Local Councils were encouraged to apply for these funds and they were also promised to be treated favourably. However, this never happened and although a number of Councils put forward serious and professionally prepared applications that required a sizeable financial outlay, they never received any funds. Our Council was one of these Councils that presented a project that would have regenerated the historical centre of Victoria. Unfortunately, all our efforts came to nothing as the project was not approved even though our application was praiseworthy.

Apparently, the Government decided to take up the majority of these funds and transfer them to several departments and entities that are under its responsibility. Non-governmental organisations put pressure on the Government to spread out the funds. This pressure has fortunately convinced the Government to make a call for application for projects in the sector of NGOs. We have no hesitation in praising this initiative. However, Councils have yet to receive anything on these lines.

Therefore, the Council is suggesting that:

- i. a call for projects should be open only to Local Governments. Obviously, Local Councils’ proposals would have their community’s best interests at heart.

- ii. The government should, as it does in the case of its own Ministries, departments and entities, guarantee a refund of the co-financing expenditure incurred by the Council for projects that need to be implemented..

Moreover, one should not forget that Local Councils were among the first to start recycling and submitting several meticulously prepared projects for other EU funds that proved to be successful. However, sometimes, the Council has to limit the number of projects that it would ideally like to submit because it lacks the necessary funds to submit projects that can benefit the residents of Victoria.

Therefore, the Council is proposing that the Government should refund, as it does in the case of Ministries, departments and entities under its responsibility, the money spent by Local Councils on the implementation of projects. In this way we would be exploiting all the opportunities that full membership of the EU provides in the best interests of citizens.

**20. There should be a separate allocation to Councils so that the latter could be able to help several non-governmental organisations plan social and cultural initiatives and events.**

Recently, many Local Councils have come up with a wide variety of artistic, musical, social and cultural initiatives and events. Therefore, many events still are being organised for the community, not only on a local but also on a regional and national level. Such events can help these communities promote their own identity. We are also aware that these initiatives have proved popular among locals as attendance is very encouraging. Obviously, these initiatives incur expenses and even though the Council may have sponsors, sometimes it still has to make up for the costs from its own limited funds.

There are a number of non-governmental voluntary organisations that plan several successful initiatives on a national and international scale. In Victoria there is an opera season organised by our two theatres. Victoria also hosts the Victoria International Arts Festival, the Gaulitana Festival and other significant events. These not only honour the organisers but also the host community.

Therefore, the Council is proposing that in allocating funds the Central Government should make allowance for these type of events. Allocation of funds should take into consideration the expenses incurred when events are directly organised by the Council together with other events organised by other entities but which are partly financed by Local Councils. Thus, we would be promoting the community's identity and encouraging voluntary organisations to keep active and strong. The Council is proposing that this allocation should be based on a business plan that is presented to the Ministry of Finance, prior to the budget debate. This business plan would include the rationale behind the following year's planned cultural programme. The same method should be used in the case of non-governmental organisations. The Council should collect the programme of the following year's planned events from NGOs and then allocate funds to NGOs accordingly.

The Council stresses that more attention should be given to certain problems that are arising in several communities. The Council is usually the entity that is in the

frontline of such problems; however, it has insufficient resources to tackle these problems in a holistic way. Most of the time it is crisis management.

Therefore, the Council is proposing that it should have the authority to set up a committee made up of experts. Together they would come up with efficient solutions. Ideally, the committee would have enough human resources to be able to implement a course of action.

The Council is encouraging the setting up of a Committee on the same lines as the one that was launched by our Council in order to face the challenges offered by Taċ-Ċawla housing estate. The Committee was made up of a representative from departments that could offer a worthwhile contribution in different areas. These included the Foundation for Educational Services, the Family Commission, the Ministry for Gozo, the Episcopal Curia, the Employment and Training Corporation, the Social Services Department and the Housing Department. The Mayor was the chairperson of this Committee. They achieved amazing results and as a result the feeling of closeness became stronger in the neighbourhood. However, such an exercise should become an integral part of the Local Council. Moreover, when the Government assigns certain responsibilities to the Local Governments, it should also give them the necessary resources in order to carry out their work in a professional manner. Finally, we are very grateful to our ex-Mayors, who accepted our invitation to form part of the ad hoc committee that has as its goal the accumulation of these persons' experiences so that together we will put forward proposals based on a realistic evaluation of the current situation and short-term and medium-term needs and expectations. A hearty thanks goes to my partners, the Councillors, for their constant interest in everything that concerns Victoria, and also to the Council secretariat that did all they could to cater for the needs of the public and the Council, despite our very limited resources.

Robert Tabone  
Mayor