



MEETING NOTES

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMUNITY GROUPS TO PROVIDE INPUT INTO THE HUMAN RESOURCE REVIEW AT EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL

MONDAY 11 JULY 2011, 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM
LUHANA MOTEL, MORUYA

BACKGROUND

Blackadder Associates Pty Ltd was engaged in February 2011 to assist in conducting a review of human resources within the Council. The scope of the review was to examine organisation efficiencies, capacity and capability and how organisation outputs are aligned to the organisation's strategic direction. Opportunities to develop a best practice model for the future were also to be identified. The review would involve a benchmarking of the current structure against other, contemporary models, reviewing the ideals within and providing employment advice in relation to executive staff positions to create a leaner, more efficient and productive organisation.

After some delay in the ability to commence the consultants visited the Council in early June to meet with councillors and staff and continued to progress the review over June and July.

The Council received an approach from the community for input to the review and the consultants offered to visit and meet with a number of community representatives. Invitations were issued to Chambers of Commerce, Progress associations and the Eurobodalla Ratepayers Association to attend a meeting on Monday 11 July from 7 pm to 9 pm.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES MEETING INTRODUCTION

18 representatives of community organisations attended the meeting on Monday 11 July 2011 at the Luhana Motel. The following were represented:

- Bingie Residents Association
- Batemans Bay Chamber of Commerce
- Broulee Community Association
- Durras Progress Association
- Eurobodalla Ratepayers Association
- Long Beach Community Association
- Maloneys Beach Residents Association
- Moruya Chamber of Commerce
- Nelligen Progress Association
- Tilba Chamber of Commerce
- Tomakin Community Association Inc.

Stephen Blackadder and Russell Lloyd from Blackadder Associates Pty Ltd facilitated the meeting. At the outset Stephen introduced his and Russell's background – a combined local government service exceeding 80 years with a human resource and asset management expertise, and over 25 years combined service as Council general managers.

Stephen read the scope of the review as outlined above in Background, and the purpose of the meeting - to hear from the community their perspectives on three issues:

What the Council does well – so that the review report can examine areas of high performance and ensure that continues.

What the Council does not do so well – so the review can identify areas of improvement within the Council operations.

What can be done (from the community perspective) to improve Council performance – practical suggestions and alternative approaches to service delivery

WHAT COUNCIL DOES WELL

The representatives present in an overall sense expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Council and recognized that many of the services are highly valued by the community and are performed well by the Council, including:

- **Maintaining community areas** – it was noted that there is a lot of pride in the community and most public areas look clean and tidy. The issue of equity came up – that all areas of the Shire need attention eg money needs to be spent on ALL public conveniences

- **Roads** – the condition of roads within the Shire was pleasing but it appears their attention might be to the detriment of other services
- **Environmental policy and protection** – this Council is seen as performing at a very high level
- **Staff communication** – this is improving but it is still variable – some areas are excellent and others poor.
- **Reliable water supply** - this is appreciated by the community – there has been a significant investment in recent years.
- **Community and Council partnerships** – there has been a lot of hard work by community volunteers with generally good council support
- **Consistent rubbish collection** – this is a very reliable and much appreciated Council service.
- **Response to maintenance requests** – there is generally a good response to requests (but poor feedback after action taken)

WHAT THE COUNCIL DOES NOT DO SO WELL

There were many areas where the meeting considered the Council performed poorly. At the same time it was acknowledged that funding is an issue for the Council and that the capacity of the community to pay for improvements is also limited.

The issues and items submitted at the meeting were as follows (with quoted comments as shown):

Community consultation – this is regarded as *“hopeless”*. Whilst there are many opportunities for having input the feeling is the Council pays lip service to community feedback - *“They collect our views then ignore them”*

Planning too complex – whilst the meeting recognized the Council has undertaken numerous planning studies the feeling is its over-done and when done it appears there is no action to implement the plans after the event and to advise the community of progress.

Governance – the meeting indicated that the decision making ability of the Council is jeopardized because councillors don't get on with each other, there is factional fighting and there are *“too many single representatives with little or no vision”*.

Lack of liaison between council groups/crews teams – when working on a project it appears there could be improved liaison between the different council teams which have responsibilities for assets. An example was given of community volunteers painting a local amenity building with council support and at the same time another group turning up to provide a mural.

Poor response times to letters and/or phone calls – it was noted the Council does not have a customer service charter like some other public bodies – where the standard of service that can be expected is outlined. The meeting gave a number of examples where it takes far too long to receive a response to a letter. At the same time examples were given of no response at all – to both letters and phone messages left. Internal systems seem poor.

No consistency in Council service – examples were given of being passed on from one staff member to another on the same matter.

Value for money – particularly in the high cost of some works projects

Management of regulations – the response times to action requests is too slow and the DA process appears cumbersome and hard to follow

Lack of skills and knowledge to encourage development - there is a need for the Council to encourage the “right” developments and not chase them away.

Lack of respect for the ratepayer - many staff members appear aloof and “*don’t seem to care sufficiently for ratepayers*” although participants acknowledged that most staff members are ratepayers.

Problem solving attitude to planning land use – the planning staff are considered to have a bureaucratic and reactive approach and attitude towards planning. A common sense and practical approach is required.

Financial management - the management of public funds has been below reasonable expectations – the investment of surplus funds is an example. The Council capacity to make good financial decisions was questioned.

Budget management and transparency of reporting – the complexity of the Council budget was raised as an issue – the general public do not understand the budget and, as an example it is impossible to tell what works are to be undertaken in any given year

An imbalance in priorities - some areas within the Shire, in particular small villages believe the allocation of funds is inequitable and more attention to their areas is required.

Government Grant Funding – it was noted that the Council should prepare in advance worked up proposals to take advantage of Commonwealth funds when they become available

Council Versus Community priorities – “*they don’t give us what we want but what they want*” Some consider that the staff set their own priorities and do not listen to resident priorities

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

At this stage of the meeting each participant was provided with 3 votes each and were invited to go up to the whiteboard and give 3 votes to the 3 issues/concerns that the Council needs to address on their behalf. The result of the voting was that four (4) issues clearly emerged as the most important. They were:

Priority 1 – Financial and Budget Management

Priority 2 – Community Consultation

Priority 3 – Customer Service

Priority 4 – Planning and Delivery

The 18 participants were then invited to form 5 tables and to elect a person who could record suggestions. The participants were asked to suggest ways and means by which the Council can address these 4 priorities. The table results were combined as follows (Note the table recordings have not been amended – they are quoted as recorded on the butchers paper):

PRIORITY 1 – FINANCIAL AND BUDGET MANAGEMENT

Suggestions for improvement:

- Provide more detail
- Provide more frequent reports
- Explain funding annually (annual business plan)
- Spread the levy \$ equitably
- Divest non core business (Botanic Gardens, Information Centre, Airport, Caravan Park)
- Clarity of how funds are spent – responsible to rate payers
- Prioritise the commitment of funds – how they are allocated
- Take notice of experts and community knowledge
- Managing funds as project is developed and delivered and having that project come within or under cost
- Divisional accounting
- Consolidated accounting
- Measure budget against achievement
- Preparedness to act on outcomes of the above
- Include unfunded employment costs
- Improve hiring and firing flexibility and be prepared to challenge the union – more people on contract
- Comprehensive independent review
- Keep it simple stupid
- Stop the spin regarding the financial position
- Demonstrate greater accountability and transparency
- Select quality senior staff

PRIORITY 2 - COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

- Do some training and development of staff (e.g. crucial issues)
- Independent facilitators
- Demonstrate they listen to feedback
- Community impact statements for major developments
- Response to organization in a timely fashion and follow up within set timeframes
- More determined effort to obtain community needs and expectation via regular face to face meetings
- Community co-ordinator who will follow up and listen to each community need and act upon that
- Comprehensive independent review
- Talk with the people not to them
- Ditch the many intermediaries who become involved (the consultants)
- Liaison within and between council departments to ensure efficiency and better utilization of funds
- Make website more user friendly
- State departments cause problems for council –frustrates community
- Despite consultation council does not listen
- More responsibility to councillors to act on complaints

PRIORITY NO 3 - CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Customer service strategy
- Customer standards
- Clear KPIs required and should be published and their measurement transparent
- Training and development
- Demonstrate respect – customer first – not second
- “Can do” attitude – timely feedback – “time is money” for consumer
- Set objective of helping people meet regulations
- Some people easy – however others never phone back.
- Comprehensive independent review
- Pilot customer service agreements
- Negotiate agreement between councillors and General Manager
- Respect, time, greater accountability and follow up

PRIORITY NO 4 - PLANNING

- Develop overall structure for strategic and operational plans to ensure they align
- Clear KPIs and reporting frequently
- Benefits monitoring
- Fewer plans, more actions – outcomes for rate payers
- Reporting what progress on current and future plans are taking place
- Co-ordination between planning groups so that all parties are on same path
- All plans should be costed and prioritized and how to save – calculate those savings
- Nurture growth and development - place in plan of action for the whole of communities
- Lack of support for volunteers
- Building cycleways
- Gulf between council and staff
- Establish realistic measurable objectives and implement in terms of sound financial environment management
- Comprehensive independent review
- Do less but implement and supervise
- Keep it real
- To be taken more serious the importance of good balanced planning

MEETING CLOSE

The meeting closed just after 9 pm with Stephen indicating that the meeting outcomes would be recorded and copies provided to all participants. Stephen sincerely thanked everyone for attending.

Stephen Blackadder

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