ACELG NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE
ON
RURAL - REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CANBERRA
29-30 July 2010

LGAQ CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT - 2009

Study Process

- Background research on capacity building in a local government context;
- Teleconferences with Mayor and CEO of each council to identify issues and desired initiatives;
- The opportunity for each council to further quantify issues and potential initiatives through a structured questionnaire;
- Circulate a Discussion Paper
- A forum at the LGAQ 2009 Annual Conference to discuss capacity and capability requirements of smaller bush councils.

Target council background

- 22 bush councils in Qld (excl. indigenous councils) where population less than 5,000. Six have less than 600
- All other mainstream councils >10,000
- Service area over 100,000 sq kilometers to just under 30,000 sq kilometers;
- Own-source rates and charges range from around 50% of operating revenue to less than 10%.

Qld Reform Commission Views

- Common themes from Reform Commission for these Bush Councils were:
  - extensive reliance on external funding sources,
  - concerns in relation to capacity to provide a full range of services
  - inability to attract &retain human resource skills
  - many given 'Weak' or 'Very Weak' QTC Financial Sustainability ratings
  - councils sustain social fabric of communities – filling service gaps normally responsibility of other agencies
  - amalgamation would not help

Council Views

- Interviews and Surveys of 18 Bush Councils showed the following as priority capacity issues:
    1. Expectations to step in/ fill service gaps left by others
    2. Inappropriate standards for small communities
    3. Excessive reporting requirements & time taken to meet legislative compliance requirements
    4. Impact of new Act requirements
    5. Stability of external funding programs
    6. Local revenue impact of state/national policies
    7. Loss of government services/facilities
    8. Capacity to provide/find staff housing
    9. Expectations to maintain/ increase local employment
    10. Community & Councillor expectations to purchase locally
    11. Difficulties in recruitment & retention of key staff

Initiatives suggested

- Change external agency attitudes - be more positive
- Standards should be tailored to suit remote rural circumstances (or provide funding to cover)
- Compensate for impacts/revenue loss in decisions of state/national significance
- Support regional econ. development initiatives
- Reporting directed at supporting local needs – not bureaucratic micro-management
- Candidates for election to attend pre-election seminars
- Require newly elected members to attend relevant training
- Improve broadband capacity/speed
- Establish a 'register' for exchanges, mentoring or buddying
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Priority initiatives (cont)

- Support (including financial) for cooperative regional initiatives
- A 'register' to enable contact with relieving personnel
- Regular sharing of experiences eg LGAQ Conf. Forum & more "face-to-face" contact
- Financial support/low interest loans for staff housing
- Use technology (eg video-conf. for regional meetings)
- Establish a resource bank (forms, policies, templates, procedures) prepared by other councils;
- Try to establish 'true' alliances with neighbours;
- Investigate the opportunity for a bureau service for IT;
- Move state employees to rural towns not provincial centres.

Compliance Burden

- Mentioned often as a key issue
- Compliance requirements which were seen as unnecessary focused on:
  - legislative standards (eg IPA,water, building and plumbing),
  - pest management (weeds, dogs, cats),
  - reporting (water, sewerage, airports, performance)
  - asset valuation requirements

Extra Service Provision

- Teleconferences identified a wide-range of "extra" services that rural and remote councils are called on to provide. Estimated $3 million p.a. for 18 councils on:
  - TV/radio retransmission/ digitial upgrades
  - housing
  - health services
  - bus transport
  - banking, centrelink and post office services
  - aged, youth and child services
  - skill centres and training/employment schemes

ACTION PLAN

- eleven priority actions identified under six themes:-
  - Skill Development
  - Regional Collaboration
  - Impact Assessment & Recognition
  - Support Services
  - Financial Support
  - Technology

Skill Development

- Priority to a Local Government Skills Plan which focus on para professional responses to skill issues (eg Building Surveying Technician, Environmental Health Technician, Para-Planners) and associated legislative issues.
- Lobby Federal Government to expand the HECS Reimbursement Scheme to cover other rural professions which are difficult to attract to remote locations (eg engineers, planners, EHOs).
- Introduce requirement for newly elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.

Regional Collaboration

- Consider broadening the focus of Regional Road Groups to cover other aspects of regional collaboration and cooperation.
- Provide funding support to enable employment of regional co-ordinators to progress joint regional initiatives

Impact Assessment & Recognition

- Government departments & agencies to be required to prepare and publish Rural Community Impact Statements prior to implementing significant changes to existing Government services in rural and regional areas and in legislative reviews.
- Increased emphasis on LGAQ Policy Position that legislation affecting Local Government in Queensland should be framed recognising the variety of capacity, size, resources, skills and physical location of Local Governments. The 'one size fits all model' is not appropriate.

Support Services

- Establish a 'Resource Bank' which includes information on relieving personnel, opportunities for exchanges and mentoring or access to/sharing of skills along with templates/sample documents for key compliance requirements.
- A "Bush Councils" Forum to be included in the agenda of future LGAQ Annual Conferences.

Financial Support

- State capital works subsidies should include staff housing for remote rural communities.

- ## Technology
- LGAQ, District Associations and ROCs to promote and trial greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements.

Comments

- Human resourcing issues were not as big a concern to these councils as was expected – may be timing of survey in GFC context. Resources boom may impact.
- A lot of focus on needing to be recognised as community builders – maintaining social fabric of community.
- Much comment on time taken on meeting legislative requirements and reporting – but difficult to pinpoint the real issues/solutions
- Feedback from State Department (DIP) indicates general support for proposed actions (apart from subsidies for staff housing)