

capacity building good governance improvement

Promoting Better Practice Program

REVIEW REPORT

RYDE CITY COUNCIL

March 2010



Division of Local Government
Department of Premier and Cabinet

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Overall, Ryde City Council is a well-managed and efficient local government authority.

Council has a clear vision for Ryde to be “*an innovative city, a leader in environmental, economic and social sustainability*”. It is working with the community to “*preserve and enhance its social, environmental and economic capital, for the benefit of present and future generations*”.

Council’s workforce appears to be dedicated and motivated and is constantly working towards best value principles.

Summarised below are initiatives, systems or processes that the review team identified as exceeding good practice and those requiring further development. They are grouped in key function areas.

COUNCIL’S STRATEGIC POSITION

What is better practice?

- Ryde City Council has a robust strategic planning and reporting framework.

Areas for further development

- Councillors and Council staff need to better understand their respective roles to work as a team to meet community needs.

GOVERNANCE

What is better practice?

- Council has a well defined corporate governance framework.
- The governance framework is underpinned by its Integrated Planning Framework.
- Best Value Reviews in key areas to ensure Council delivers best value services to the community.

- An inclusive and transparent approach to conducting senior management meetings.
- A Code of Behaviour Brochure which is a pocket sized guide to encourage acceptable behaviour among all Council officials.
- Council is a leader in information management and technology among councils in NSW. Some of Council's outstanding achievements are listed in the body of this report.

Noteworthy practice

- A pocket reference guide and a councillor help desk.
- A good *Expenses and Provision of Facilities for the Mayor and Councillors Policy*.
- Library staff members are part of the Customer Service Centre network.
- Council's sustainable procurement policy.

Areas for further development

- Council corporate values could be better promoted. For example, they could be included in the Code of Behaviour Brochure and/or on Council's website.
- Council meetings are not fully under the control of the Mayor.
- Overall, the relationship between Councillors and Council officers could be improved.
- Councillor records currently do not comply with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998*.
- Council needs to better guide staff in what is an acceptable token gift or benefit.
- Include reporting requirements in procedure manuals and guidelines for procurement, tendering and disposal.
- Adherence to purchasing and tendering policy procedures.
- Completion and implementation of risk management plan.

PLANNING AND REGULATORY

What is better practice?

- Council's local state of the environment newsletter that supplements the State of the Environment Report.
- Council's range of information sheets for residents, both in hard copy and online, relating to development matters.

Noteworthy Practice

- Council's domestic waste management system and waste reduction and recycling initiatives.

Areas for further development

- Companion Animals management plan needs to reflect recent changes to the Companion Animals legislation.

ASSET AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

What is better practice?

- *Best Value Review - Finance Unit* driving better practice and continuous improvement.
- Long term asset management modelled over 20 years and linking to the Long Term Financial Plan and Management Plan.
- PMCoR – City of Ryde's project management methodology.
- Property management – asset utilisation.

Areas for further development

- The implementation of the *Best Value Review – Finance Unit* recommendations.

COMMUNITY, COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

What is better practice?

- *Engagement Framework – Your City Your Voice.*
- A bi-annual children’s conference hosted in collaboration with a range of stakeholders.
- The City of Ryde Social Justice Charter.

Noteworthy practice

- The *Best Value Review – Community Services* report drives better practice and continuous improvement in this area.
- *Canvas-City of Ryde Arts Development Framework 2007-2012.*
- The *Building Partnerships for the Future-City of Ryde Annual Report.*

Areas for further development

- Improve the longer term sustainability of Council’s community services by implementing the recommendations of the *Best Value Review – Community Services.*

WORKPLACE RELATIONS

What is better practice?

- Occupational Health and Safety is an area where Council is performing well.

Areas for further development

- A number of high priority initiatives recommended in the *Best Value Review Final Report* need to be incorporated into the Unit Plan in order to move toward a best practice operation.

PART I. BACKGROUND

1 ABOUT THE REVIEW

1.1 REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Promoting Better Practice Reviews are primarily designed to promote good governance and ethical conduct within councils and foster a culture of continuous improvement within the local government sector.

For the council, a review acts as a "health check", giving confidence about what is being done and helping to focus attention on key priorities. For the local government sector, reviews have a developmental impact by identifying and sharing better practice and responding to issues through policy/legislative change or other means.

1.2 REVIEW PROCESS

The process is conducted by a review team from the Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The team evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of the council's operations. This essentially involves five steps - preparing, assessing, checking, analysing and reporting. The completion of a comprehensive self assessment checklist by the council is a key element in all reviews.

The review team takes a risk based approach targeting its resources to areas identified as core matters to be examined and those matters considered to be important having regard to the local circumstances of an individual council. It does not examine every aspect of a council's operations.

All reviews involve checking compliance with a range of statutory requirements, examining appropriate practices and ensuring that the council has frameworks in place to monitor its performance.

The primary legislation which sets out minimum requirements and standards for councils in NSW is the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (the Regulation). Unless otherwise stated, this report refers to that legislation.

1.3 REVIEW REPORT

The review culminates in a report which is provided to the elected council, the Deputy Director General (Local Government) and the Minister for Local Government. Consistent with review objectives, the report documents priority focus areas identified as follows.

| PRIORITY FOCUS AREA | DESCRIPTION |
|--|---|
| Better practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond or above minimum compliance requirements and good practice indicators. • Innovative and/or very effective. • Contributes to continuous improvement within the sector. |
| In need of improvement or further development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not satisfactorily meet minimum compliance and good practice indicators and may impact negatively on council operations. • Significant improvement initiatives that are in progress and which need to be continued. |
| Otherwise noteworthy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May include successful initiatives which respond effectively to local circumstances or practice that is in other ways significant for the council/community. • Practice which in general exceeds good practice but may have some aspects that require fine tuning. |

The council is invited to comment on the draft report before it is finalised.

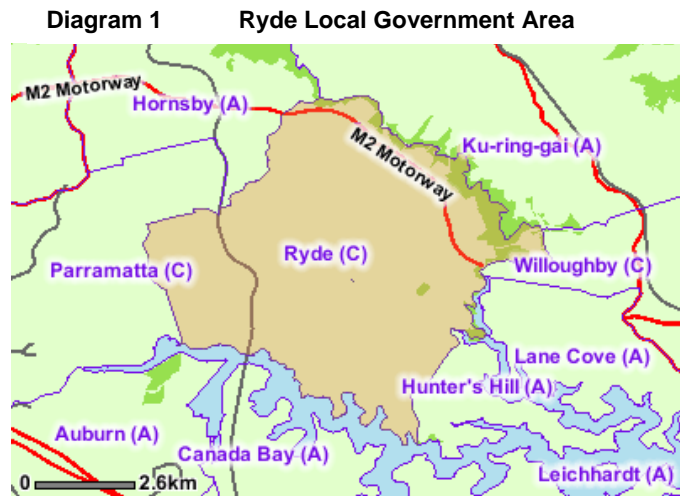
1.4 RYDE CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

The review team comprised Ms Caroline Egberts, Senior Investigations Officer, and Ms Marilyn McAuliffe, Acting Senior Investigations Officer. Ryde City Council completed the checklist about key Council practices and three councillors completed a survey designed to seek their views. The review team examined these responses and a range of other source documents in order to gain a preliminary understanding of Council operations prior to their visit to Council.

The on-site component of the review took place in April 2009. It involved initial interviews with the Mayor and the General Manager, interviews with a cross section of staff, observation of a Council committee meeting, individual meetings with two councillors, councillor surveys, a review of Council policies and other documents and visits to Council’s facilities/worksites and some localities in the area.

2. ABOUT THE CITY OF RYDE

The City of Ryde has an area of 40.651 square kilometres and is located approximately 12kms to the northwest of the centre of Sydney. The Ryde local government area occupies most of the divide between the Parramatta and Lane Cove rivers, and has 16 suburbs within its boundaries.



The Wallumedegal people are acknowledged as the traditional owners of the land. The population of the area in 2006 was 96,948.¹ It is a culturally diverse community with 37% of residents born overseas with 42% speaking a language other than English.

The Council was incorporated under the Municipalities Act of 1867 and proclaimed a municipality on 12 November 1870. In 1992 it became the City of Ryde.

Ryde City Council has 12 councillors including the Mayor. The local government area is divided into three wards being East, West and Central, with four (4) councillors elected in each ward.

Council's ordinary meetings are usually held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday month during February to November. Council generally has its last meeting on 2nd Tuesday in December. These dates as well as those for council committee meetings are set out in a meeting schedule which Council adopts annually.

Council's principal committees (made up entirely of councillors) are:

1. Works and Community Committee
2. Planning and Environment Committees
3. Committee of the Whole
4. Civic Precinct Committee.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data.

PART II. PLANNING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

This part of the review focussed on Council’s strategic intent and how it has involved its communities and other stakeholders in developing long term strategic plans. Monitoring and reporting progress to promote continuous improvement was also an integral consideration in regard to Council’s performance in this area.

1. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REPORTING

A new planning and reporting framework for NSW local government has been introduced to improve local councils’ long term community planning and asset management, as well as to streamline reporting to the community.

The new framework aims to improve the sustainability of local communities by encouraging councils, residents and State agencies to work together on long term plans and appropriate delivery programs. Community strategic plans will be supported by a long term financial strategy (resourcing strategy), asset management plan and workforce strategy. The framework is set out in the following diagram.

Diagram 2 Integrated planning and reporting framework



2. WORKING TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY – RYDE 2030

2.1 OVERVIEW

Ryde City Council has developed a robust planning, decision making and reporting framework based on economic, social, governance and environmental parameters.

Council has a clear vision of where it is headed:

“Ryde will be an innovative city, a leader in environmental, economic and social sustainability.”²

Work is well underway in developing the Ryde 2030 Community Strategic Plan. This process will translate future aspirations and hopes of the community into strategic directions to foster sustainable growth during the next 20 years.

To ensure meaningful community input to and shared understanding of this process, Council has developed *“Your City, Your Voice”*. This initiative is a comprehensive and practical model aimed at effectively engaging the community. More information about this model is provided in the Community and Consultation section of this report.

The Community Strategic Plan will be put into operation through Council’s Integrated Planning Framework. Essentially the strategies, policies and procedures of this framework currently form the foundation of the City’s governance and service delivery programs. This is explored in more detail in the Governance section of this report.

2.2 BETTER PRACTICE

The extent and manner in which Council has progressed strategic planning and meets or exceeds good practice in a number of ways is described below.

- Overall, the framework is consistent with the planning and reporting model introduced by the Division of Local Government.
- Council has a clear project plan to guide the development of the *Ryde 2030 Community Strategic Plan*. As previously mentioned, Council is undertaking

² Building Partnerships for the Future, City of Ryde Annual Report 2007/2008.

extensive consultation to engage councillors, staff, the community and other stakeholders to develop the *Ryde 2030 Community Strategic Plan*.

- The Ryde 2030 planning process has been developed by staff with input from external consultants. The process involves:
 - ‘Four Theme Committees’ each focusing on one of Council’s key areas of social, infrastructure, environment and governance
 - an Expert Advisory Panel will review information and recommendations from the ‘Four Theme Committees’ and provide guidance
 - an Internal Sustainability Steering Committee will focus on a quadruple bottom line approach to ensure the Strategic Community Plan’s strategies align with economic, social, governance and environmental parameters.
- There is evidence that Council’s current strategic directions and outcomes are used to inform major decisions. They also appear to be well integrated with Council’s governance and delivery programs.
- To ensure it has the necessary resources to achieve its strategic intent, Council has developed a Long Term Financial Strategy (20 year projections) which links to its Asset Management Plan and Workforce Plan.
- Council has demonstrated a commitment to reporting and continuous improvement. For example:
 - a community survey is conducted every two years to gauge public satisfaction. Information from the surveys is used to drive improvements
 - an external consultant has undertaken Best Value Reviews of Council’s service units to drive continuous improvement.
- Council participates in a number of relevant regional, state and national initiatives.

2.3 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

This strategic planning process represents an exciting opportunity for all councillors to provide input at the strategic level and help shape Council’s future directions.

However, there was a perception voiced by a few councillors that the engagement process may be somewhat token and that their involvement is somewhat limited.

Council needs to continue to assist councillors to understand that their input should be at the strategic level rather than at the operational level. The General Manager and councillors should approach the development of the Community Strategic Plan as a team/community building exercise.

Recommendation 1

The development of the Community Strategic Plan should be used by the General Manager and all councillors to clarify their respective roles and improve their working relationships.

Council's response

Clarification should be provided on the engagement process for Ryde 2030. The governance framework for the Ryde 2030 Community Strategic Plan included numerous opportunities for involvement by the community and decision making by Councillors.

This commenced with a two day workshop, one for staff and one for Councillors. Councillors day included the following aims:

- to understand strategic planning for the whole of the LGA.
- to explain the outcomes to be achieved in the development of a strategic plan.
- Councillors and community's role, to discuss the product including the nature of the plan, its purpose and role and the audience it is meant for
- to discuss the process, including consultation, role of theme committees, governance framework and the launch of the project.

A detailed and extensive engagement plan for community involvement was adopted by Councillors. Results of all engagement processes have been reported to both the Councillors, the Theme Committees and the community.

From initiation of the project (July 2008) and this Review (April 2009), Councillors received 3 reports and participated in 8 workshops. After this review period (*ie.*

Promoting Better Practice Review onsite visit) many other engagement strategies were undertaken to involve Councillors in the development of the Ryde 2030 Community Strategic Plan.

The Ryde 2030 initiative commenced in December 2008, with this review being undertaken in April 2009. Substantial work has since occurred and resulted in an understanding of roles and the establishment of a positive working relationship.

Review team comment

This report is based on the findings of the review and visit to Council in April 2009. The team acknowledges that Council has undertaken work since that time to clarify the role of Councillors and staff in order to strengthen their working relationships. Maintaining positive working relationships remain an ongoing challenge for all Councils. These relationships are crucial to the successful implementation of Council's Community Strategic Plan.

PART III. DELIVERING AND ACHIEVING

This part of the review focussed on examining key structures, systems and processes involved in delivering the stated outcomes of Ryde City Council's Strategic and Management Plans. This included considering the means by which Council:

- governs its day to day operations
- undertakes its planning and regulatory obligations
- manages its assets and finances
- involves the community, and
- recruits and retains its workforce.

1. GOVERNANCE

1.1 OVERVIEW

“Corporate governance refers to all the means by which entities are directed and controlled.” (Standards Australia, HB401-2004:12) Corporate governance is important because it enhances organisational performance; manages and minimises risks; increases the confidence of the community and the local government sector in the organisation; ensures that an organisation is meeting its legal and ethical obligations; and assists in the prevention and detection of dishonest or unethical behaviour.

1.1.1 Scope of review

- *Ethics and values*
- *Management planning*
- *Procurement, disposal & tendering*
- *Privacy management*
- *Code of conduct*
- *Communication devices*
- *Disclosure of pecuniary interests*
- *Risk management, legislative compliance & internal control*
- *Council's decision-making processes, including delegations and conduct of meetings*
- *Support for councillors*
- *Records management*
- *Access to information*
- *Complaints handling*
- *Information technology*

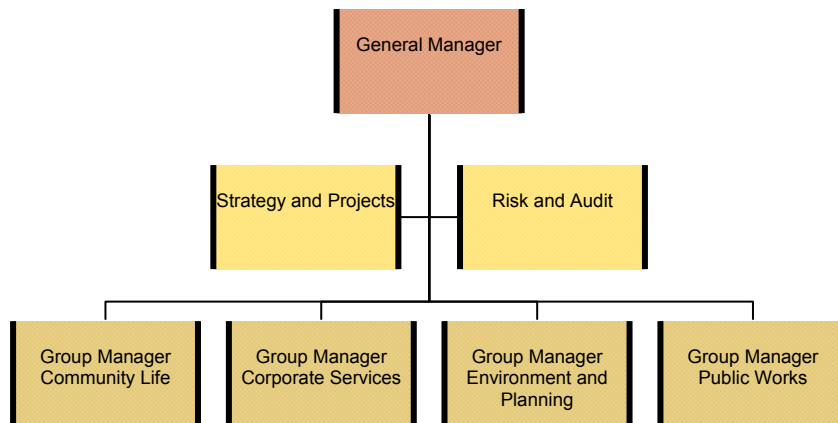
1.1.2 Overview of Ryde City Council’s governance practices

Overall, Council has sound corporate directions and strategies which are delivered through a well defined corporate governance framework. These are clearly articulated in the City of Ryde Management Plan 2008-2012 and Annual Report 2007/2008.

1.1.3 Organisational structure

Council’s executive team consists of the General Manager and four (4) Group Managers. The Strategy and Projects Team and the Risk and Audit Team report directly to the General Manager.

Diagram 3 Ryde City Council Executive Team



The organisational structure was last reviewed in 2009 to ensure that it continued to align with Council’s strategic and corporate directions. Linked to its key outcome areas, the structure enables Council to effectively resource and deliver the services, programs and initiatives set out in its Management Plan.

1.2 BETTER PRACTICE

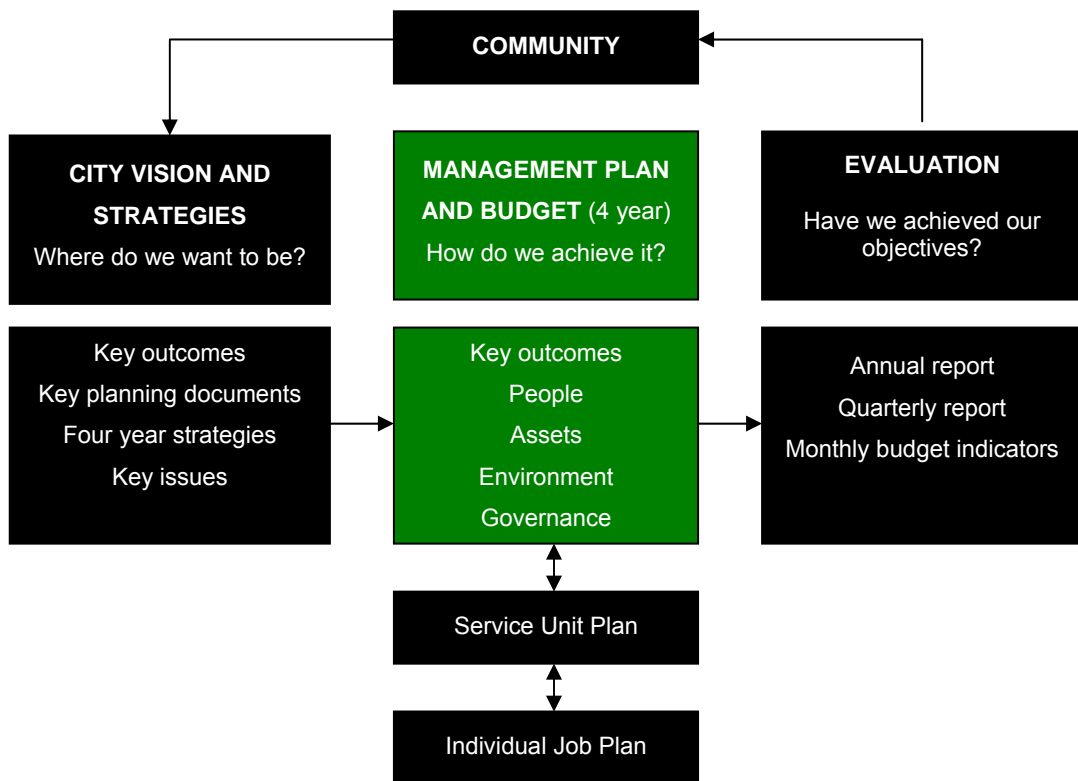
1.2.1 Integrated Planning Framework

Council’s Integrated Planning Framework provides the linkages between community needs, city wide vision and strategies, key outcomes, the management plan, service unit plans and individual job plans of Council employees. Evaluation is also a key component in order to measure whether Council has achieved its objectives.

This framework is also clearly articulated in the City of Ryde Management Plan 2008-2012 and Annual Report 2007/2008. This reflects a commitment to fostering transparency and accountability to the community and other stakeholders.

This framework forms the foundation of the City’s governance framework (ie, how strategic directions and outcomes are delivered and continuously improved). This is illustrated in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4 Ryde City Council Integrated Planning Framework



Ryde City Council Management Plan 2008-2012 meets legislative requirements and reflects Council’s strategic intent. The Plan is of a high quality and easy to read. Council’s Annual Report 2007/2008 is excellent. Further information about this report is presented in the Community and Consultation section of this report.

Council takes performance monitoring seriously. Performance measures used in the management plan are reflected in service unit plans and individual job plans. Results are considered by managers and the executive team on a quarterly basis and reported on in the Annual Report. The performance measures are clearly stated and linked to targets and specific actions thereby measuring performance in a realistic way.

A survey of ratepayers and non-ratepayers is carried out for some of the Council-wide customer satisfaction measures. The collected data assists Council in reporting on trends regarding Council's overall performance and also guides Council's decisions on services, plans and projects.

A comprehensive series of briefings and workshops were held by the Executive Team and other staff members with councillors about the management plan and other plans.

Overall, the model appears to be better practice. However, the perception of some councillors is that in practice the planning process is such that they are unable to provide input to, or influence the outcomes of, Council's strategic plans. While a councillor's role generally is to play a key role in the development and review of Council policies and strategies and the allocation of Council resources in the best interests of the community, it appears that their involvement in this is limited due to strategy and plans being developed by Council staff.

As mentioned in Part II, councillors and staff need to understand the role that councillors play in developing strategic plans and policies. The General Manager should ensure that all councillors have the opportunity to provide input to the development of strategic plans and that Service Unit Plans and individual Job Plans are directed to achieving the outcomes in the Community Strategic Plan.

Council's Response

Council has an extensive program of interactive and participatory workshops with Councillors to develop the Management Plan. More than ten workshops are undertaken to gain input from Councillors.

All strategic planning documents are adopted by Council, this process generally includes one or more workshops for Councillors to provide input, public exhibition and Council reports.

1.2.2 Best Value Reviews

Best Value Reviews are a process whereby Council, with the assistance of an external consultant, examines its products and services to determine whether or not they are providing best value for the community and Council. Best Value principles are designed to ensure local services are a reflection of the community's needs and expectations, both in terms of quality and cost. The best practice principles adopted by Council are:

- services must meet defined quality and cost standards
- services being responsive to changing community needs
- accessibility of services to those who need them
- continuous improvement in the delivery of services
- community and customer consultation on services and activities
- regular reporting to Council and the community on business performance.

There are four (4) key components to a Best Value Review, as follows:

1. Challenge – asking why a service is provided and whether it is necessary
2. Consultation – talking to users, suppliers and others to find out what they want the service to do for them
3. Competition – questioning whether other organisations could provide the service more efficiently and effectively
4. Comparison – looking at other local authorities or businesses that could provide the service better than Council does and following their example.

Council has undertaken a review of eight (8) of its service units. These are: Community Services; Health and Building; Finance; Access; Urban Planning; Human Resources; Open Space and Operations.

The final review reports are very comprehensive and available on Council's website. They identify processes and/or service gaps and suggest improvement initiatives. Ultimately, the reports form the basis for the development of an implementation plan

for each service unit. Council's commitment to transparency and ongoing consultation with service users and ratepayers is demonstrated in its Management Plan and Annual Report.

Each service unit has commenced implementing strategies to improve and deliver best value services. The review team noted that officers involved in these reviews are very enthusiastic about the Best Value Reviews and the continuous improvement of services. The Best Value Program is innovative and comprehensive. The dedication of the Council's employees and collaboration with the community will no doubt contribute to its success to deliver efficient and effective local services.

Council's Best Value Review program will cover all of its 21 service units and is planned to be completed in 2011.

1.2.3 Senior management team meetings

At the time of the review, it was evident that the General Manager took an inclusive approach to the way senior management meetings are structured. A range of individual employees are regularly asked to present information about their specific projects to the Executive Team. Information and decisions emanating from these meetings are made available to all staff. Most employees interviewed as part of the review process perceived that the General Manager (at the time) and the Senior Management group provided positive leadership.

1.2.4 Code of Behaviour Brochure

At its meeting on 8 July 2008, Council adopted the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW. The Code clearly sets out the standards of behaviour that are expected of council officials, including councillors and council staff.

Council has produced a Code of Behaviour Brochure, which is a pocket sized guide aimed at promoting acceptable behaviour among its officials. It is a handy reference to the more detailed Code of Conduct and other matters. This appears to be an innovative and effective initiative.

1.2.5 Information management and technology

Ryde City Council is a leader in information management and technology among councils in NSW. It has made a significant investment in its information management systems and technology. Dedicated staff members across the organisation have worked hard to establish or redesign these systems and technology over the past 18 months. This has resulted in some outstanding achievements as outlined below.

- Development of Council's IT Strategy 2006-2012 is well advanced.
- Upgrading of hardware including PCs and multi-function printers.
- Design and modification of software to suit each Council service unit. This has been followed up with training for each unit.
- Improved interconnectivity between various software programs.
- Case management principles have been successfully incorporated into Council's eDocument and Records Management System.
- Council already meets 2012 State Record Management standards.
- Work on developing public access to documents and systems via the internet such as development applications.
- Advice and support has been provided to other councils. Its eTRIM software has been recognised as best practice by one of the leading suppliers and sold to other councils. Council's successful Project Management (PMCoR) methodology has also been sold to another council and another organisation.
- Where possible the team working on this project have endeavoured to provide appropriate and timely communication about the changes, which were subsequently supported by training.

A major efficiency outcome has been that approximately 80% of Council operations are now paperless. The Human Resources Unit is 100% paperless and has been nominated for an Excellence Award.

1.3 NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE

1.3.1 Councillor development and resourcing

Ryde City Council has 12 councillors. Five of these councillors were newly elected at the September 2008 local government ordinary elections.

Council provides a range of information, support and training to assist councillors to fulfil their roles. Examples include:

- all councillors have been presented with a detailed information kit
- a weekly Councillor's Information Bulletin provides information about upcoming meetings, events and other matters
- a pocket reference guide containing key information and contacts. Some councillors indicated to the review team that they found this to be a useful resource.

The following initiatives could potentially represent better practice, however, they require some further development:

- a councillor help desk has been established which provides all councillors with an entry point to access Council information and resources. While the review team considers this an innovative concept, some councillors reported that they had not found the service useful.
- an induction program which consists of an extensive series of workshops. Some councillors indicated that the workshops covered very complex information which was difficult to digest and found that there was little opportunity for input or questions. Follow up training sessions for new councillors in relation to more complex topics in six months time was viewed as potentially useful.

Council's Response

It should be noted that the Councillor Help Desk initiative commenced in March 2008, feedback received during the first year resulted in a major overhaul in June 2009. From the latest survey of Councillors, 90% rated the response time as Excellent and Very Good. 80% rated the quality of responses Very Good or Excellent.

1.3.2 Expenses and Provision of Facilities for the Mayor and Councillors

Council adopted a policy to manage the payment of expenses and provision of facilities for the Mayor and councillors on 10 March 2009. This is a very good policy which with some minor improvements could represent better practice.

Some of the good features of the policy include:

- full compliance with the relevant legislation and guidelines
- a high degree of transparency and accountability
- clear and appropriate reimbursement process with an excellent claim form that summarises all clauses in the policy under which councillors can make a claim. It also includes a statutory declaration form for councillors who do not have receipts to declare expenses
- provision of expenses for special needs of councillors (eg, for councillors with a disability or dependant relatives)
- a dispute resolution process where a councillor disagrees with a decision not to pay a claim
- very clear and appropriate limits for all expenses and facilities
- a clear statement that no private benefit should be derived other than incidental. Also makes it clear that expenses cannot be used for function tickets that equate to political donations
- a well structured and readable format.

The policy could be enhanced by including a separate heading on general approval processes. Council could consider including a separate 'Approvals' subsection under 'Payment of expenses generally' to clarify the General Manager's delegated power in this respect (ie, limited to small requests) and what must be approved by Council (ie, larger requests).

Council should ensure that the total cost of councillor expenses and facilities is reported in its Annual Report in accordance with statutory requirements.

Recommendation 2

Council should ensure that reporting on the costs of councillors' expenses and provision of facilities complies with legislative requirements.

Council's response

The required information has been included in the 2008/09 Annual Report.

Review team comment

This recommendation is considered to have been completed for 2008/2009. However, reporting of councillor's expenses and provision of facilities is an ongoing responsibility.

1.3.3 Customer Service and Complaints Handling

Council has a well resourced Customer Service Centre which includes 'over the counter' assistance and a call centre. In 2007/2008 Council implemented a new Customer Request Management System. This system ensures that all phone enquiries and complaints are logged and categorised according to function area and type. Service standards are currently part of the request management system. Council intends to publish these standards on its website so that the community and stakeholders can be aware of what level of service to expect from Council. This level of accountability is commendable.

A very innovative and efficient feature of Council's approach to customer service is that its library staff members are part of the Customer Service Centre network. They are trained in the use of the Customer Request Management System and carry out customer service duties outside of Council's normal operating hours when the

libraries are open. For example, they can accept Vacation Care payments on a Saturday from residents or provide a range of information. Several staff members are able to provide language assistance for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

1.3.4 Procurement, tendering and disposal practices

Council has a sustainable procurement policy which supports its commitment to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable in the long term. The policy is supported by Supplier Assessment Questionnaires and worksheets that provide information on matters such as water and energy efficiencies and sustainable purchasing criteria for specific items.

1.4 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.4.1 Values

Ryde City Council has set clear organisational values which were based on responses to a staff survey in 2004. The values are clearly displayed in Council's Management Plan and Annual Report to guide councillors, staff and other Council officials on how to carry out their business.

The extent to which Council ensures that its values are visible, understood and practiced is above average. For example, posters containing the values are displayed in various locations such as meeting rooms and the lift. They are also displayed on corporate cups. However, the review team could not locate the values on Council's website.

It is understood that Council proposes to review the currency of the values as part of its next employee attitude survey and its development of the 2030 Community Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 3

Council should finalise the review of its corporate values and include them in its Code of Behaviour Brochure and website.

Council's response

Council is currently redesigning and improving the website capability, which will allow a more prominent position for the values.

1.4.2 Decision making

Council meetings are the primary means by which Council makes its decisions. The review team attended Council's ordinary meeting of 24 March 2009.

The review team found that:

- Council's Code of Meeting practice, which guides the conduct of the meetings, was reviewed in September 2008 and again in September 2009. This Code complies with the procedures set out in the Act and Regulation
- Council maintains an electronic Register of Voting on all matters at Ryde City Council meetings. The register records votes for and against each matter put before Council
- Overall participation by councillors appeared to be quite good, with most councillors participating in discussion and debate on issues before Council.

The following observations indicate there is room for improvement:

- The meeting was chaired by the Mayor and proceedings were generally orderly, although the review team noted that the Mayor did not always appear to be in control of the meeting.
- The General Manager's involvement in the meeting was considered to be excessive and at times the General Manager took control of the meeting.
- Councillors may need to be reminded of their role and responsibility while at Council meetings and that their full attention should be given to the matters at hand. Councillors should also be mindful that their PC monitors can be seen by those in the public gallery.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor should explore and implement mechanisms to ensure that control of the meeting is retained at all times.

Council's response

Councillors and the Mayor are provided with extensive training at the commencement of their term and throughout the term as required. The Mayor is provided with specific training in conducting meetings. Councillors have also requested that training in chairing meetings be provided for all Councillors and over a longer period of time.

1.4.3 Councillor and staff relations

In general, the review team found that the relationship between councillors and Council officers is workable. However, as previously mentioned, there is a need to focus on breaking down perceptions of “us versus them” among some councillors.

The challenge is for all councillors and Council officers to develop a more collaborative relationship so that they work as a team in providing services and meeting the needs of the community. The development of Council's Community Strategic Plan presents a real opportunity for councillors and Council staff to forge such a relationship.

Recommendation 5

Strategies to maintain and build a more productive working relationship between councillors and Council officers should be explored and implemented.

1.4.4 Councillor records

A State record, as defined in section 3(1) of the *State Records Act 1998*, is “any record made and kept or received and kept, by any person in the course of the exercise of official functions in a public office, or for any purpose of a public office, or for the use of a public office”.

A councils or county council is identified as a public office under section 3(1) of the State Records Act. Councillors are subject to that Act when they create or receive 'State records' while undertaking business on Council's behalf. They are not subject to the Act when conducting personal business or business that is unrelated to their role as councillors.

Council advised that it is aware that councillor records currently do not comply with the requirements of the State Records Act. Work has commenced on preparing a strategy or guidelines to encourage councillors to meet their legislative obligations.

State Records NSW has issued a recordkeeping publication for local government councillors, *Sample records management policy, procedures, leaflets and templates for local government councillors*. This publication provides guidance about the keeping of records that relate to a councillor's role and may be of use in more fully encompassing the roles and responsibilities of councillors into Council's policy.

Recommendation 6

Council should finalise a records strategy or guideline to encourage and assist councillors to meet their obligations under the State Records Act 1998.

Council's response

Councillor Record Keeping Policy was adopted by Council at 4 August 2009. This Policy provides Councillors with guidance and assistance in all Councillors meeting obligations under the State Records Act. Therefore matter has been completed and Council does comply.

Review team comment

The review team notes Council's adoption of a Councillor Record Keeping Policy. Councillors must at all times ensure that they comply with this policy and the State Records Policy. Therefore, while this recommendation is considered to have been completed, its implementation by councillors is of an ongoing nature.

1.4.5 Gifts and benefits of value

Council officials at some stage in their career may be offered a gift or benefit in the course of their work. The gift or benefit could be offered innocently, or in good faith, or could be offered in an attempt to influence the council official.

If council officials accept a gift or benefit, this can give rise to feelings of obligation on their part towards the giver. It can also create perceptions that they are or will be influenced because of the gift or benefit.

Council adopted a Gifts Policy in July 2003. However, this policy has not been reviewed since its adoption. Council's code of conduct provides some guidance in this area. Council's gifts register is well presented and maintained.

Some entries in the register appeared to reflect that some employees may have accepted gifts and benefits of value. This is contrary to Ryde City Council's code of conduct.

Under the code, Council officials *"must not accept gifts and benefits that have more than a nominal or token value"*.

Accordingly, Council needs to better guide staff in what is an acceptable token gift or benefit. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has produced the *Managing Gifts and Benefits in the Public Sector – Toolkit*. This resource has been developed to help NSW public sector agencies and local councils to develop, update and implement their gifts and benefits policy and procedures for reporting and managing gifts and benefits. The resource offers advice and guidance for developing policy, communication and training about the policy and an on-line reporting and management tool.

Recommendation 7

Council should review its Gifts and Benefits Policy and then provide training to its employees.

Council's response

Gifts policy is currently under review and will incorporate ICAC guidelines. Once finalised training will occur. Council's current process includes the completion of a Gift Disclosure form which is referred to the employee's Group Manager and General Manager to determine if the gift should be retained or returned by the employee.

1.4.6 Procurement, tendering and disposal practices

Council has a comprehensive procurement policy which incorporates procurement and asset disposal. Procedure documents have been developed to support this policy and are being reviewed in light of the implementation of the on-line requisition system. Council has a procurement site on its staff intranet which contains further information on procurement related matters.

The Best Value Review of the Finance Unit in March 2008 identified that Council needed to clearly define levels of authority, accountability and delegation and to enforce correct adherence to policies and procedures. Since that time, Council has undertaken a review of its policies and procedures and addressed some shortcomings in the process. However, it needs to be specific in respect to the reporting of outcomes to Council in certain circumstances. Council should also ensure that its staff members are adhering to policy and procedures by undertaking audits.

Recommendation 8

Procedure manuals and guidelines for procurement, tendering and disposal need to include requirements for reporting outcomes or intentions to Council.

Council's response

Council has a clearly developed set of policies and procedures and checklists in relation to procurement. In relation to tendering, Council's internal Tendering procedures were awaiting the release of the DLG's Tendering Guidelines (which have now been released). Council's own detailed tendering procedures will be released shortly.

Review team comment

The draft report acknowledges the quality of Council's policies, procedures and checklists in relation to procurement. However, recommendation 8 focuses on including requirements for reporting outcomes or intentions to Council. This extra step represents better practice.

Recommendation 9

Council should ensure that staff are adhering to purchasing and tendering policy and procedures by undertaking regular audits.

Council's response

Regular audits of staff adhering to policies and procedures is a recurring item in the Internal Audit Plan.

1.4.7 Internal Controls

Internal control processes, such as internal audit, fraud control, risk management and legislative compliance, provide for systematic assessment of the adequacy and weakness of Council processes and systems. Council has developed a range of strategies to strengthen internal controls and risk management which are in the process of being implemented.

Risk Management

Risk management is about the systematic identification, analysis, evaluation, control and monitoring of risks. Council is striving to achieve best practice in the management of all risks and has taken steps to promote a 'risk culture' within Council and through its Project Management methodology (PMCoR) ensuring that risk is considered and reported on for all projects. An Enterprise Risk Management program is currently under development, utilising risk management consultants.

Risk Management is co-ordinated through the Risk and Audit Service unit. The Unit has a dedicated Risk and Insurance Co-ordinator position and a dedicated intranet site for use by the Unit in identifying, assessing and treating risks.

Council undertook a risk assessment exercise during 2007 to identify key risks. This exercise also included fraud risk assessment. The identified risks were documented, analysed, evaluated and scored. Council's Audit Committee was involved in the process and subsequently prioritised the risks and developed Internal Audit plans. Council has identified the need for a formal risk management strategy/plan to achieve best practice and has engaged consultants to assist in the facilitation of the process in a staged approach. It is also considering the establishment of a Risk Management Committee as part of the Enterprise Risk Management program.

Council's Audit and Risk Unit was to undertake a further fraud risk assessment during 2009 using the NSW Audit Office's methodology.

Recommendation 10

Council should ensure that a risk management plan is finalised and implemented as soon as practicable.

Council's response

A Risk Management Advisory Group (internal management) has been established to coordinate the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) project and will form a part of the Risk reporting structure. It is envisaged that the ERM strategy will see higher level risks will be reported to the Executive Team with very high/extreme risk being reported to the Audit Committee and Council and be completed by July 2010.

Review team comment

Council is to be commended for its ongoing work in this area.

2. LAND USE PLANNING & OTHER REGULATORY FUNCTIONS

Council exercises regulatory functions in relation to a range of activities within its area. The efficiency and probity of Council's regulatory functions is important for effectively managing Council's responsibilities and for preserving public trust in Council and its staff. Regulation is important to achieve a wide range of social, economic and environmental goals.

2.1 OVERVIEW

Ryde City Council has a strong planning and regulatory framework together with a commitment by Council and staff to meet community expectations and work towards best practice principles.

2.1.1 Scope of the review

A review was conducted of a range of aspects of Council's planning and regulatory practices including:

- *Council's planning instruments and policies*
- *Development assessment*
- *Section 94 plans*
- *Companion animals*
- *Environmental management*
- *Compliance and enforcement practices*
- *Swimming pools*

2.2 BETTER PRACTICE

2.2.1 State of the Environment Reporting

Council is part of the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) which develops a regional Statement of the Environment Report (SER). Council contributes to the development of this report, however, it also supplements the report with a state of the environment newsletter for the local government area that highlights Council's achievements during the year. The SER is integrated into the planning process and informs Council's Environmental Strategy.

2.2.2 Environmental Management

Council has implemented a leading edge domestic waste management system and a number of initiatives to reduce waste. Council also has an education program for schools on waste recycling and has introduced recycling bins in its shopping centres. Additionally, Council undertakes community consultation and workshops on matters involving community environments such as parks and playgrounds.

Council is to be commended on its domestic waste collection initiative, which utilises scanning and information technology to provide a very cost effective service. To minimise rubbish dumping in the local government area, Council has 5 kerbside cleanups per year and offers a free pickup service for unwanted personal computers.

Council's initiative to provide a free tree chipping service to residents is also a commendable initiative. The resultant mulch from the tree chipping is retained by the resident for use in their garden, thus minimising water evaporation and ultimately reducing water usage.

Council is to be commended on its commitment to environmental management. Over recent years it has received awards for its initiatives in areas such as sustainable purchasing, climate protection and water and energy savings. These include:

- Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA) Excellence in the Environment Awards for overall winner for Sustainable Purchasing Team
- LGSA Excellence in the Environment Awards finalist for the Energy and Water Savings Category
- Milestone 5 of the ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability³ “Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Program” and also received an award for advancing to CCP Plus (support level of the CCP program)
- Finalist in the Local Government Sustainability Award, Green Globe Award, Department of Environment and Climate Change
- Keep Australia Beautiful – Sustainable Cities Awards 2009.

³ The 'International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives' became 'ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability' with a broader mandate to address sustainability issues in 2003.

2.3 NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE

2.3.1 Development Applications process

Council has developed a range of information sheets relevant to development and development applications (DAs) for residents. These documents are written in ‘plain English’ and provide information about the various types of development. They also explain related services that are provided by Council to assist residents, such as the Building and Development Advisory Service, Resident Advisory Service, and Pre-lodgement meetings. Additionally, Council’s website contains a large amount of related information including copies of the information sheets.

As the development application process is a manual one, applicants are currently unable to apply online or track DAs online. Council is developing an electronic DA process as part of its ePlanning initiatives. However, work was deferred until planning reforms were clear and fully established. The initial work focuses on providing sound capability for the capture and management of electronic documents to support online lodgement of DAs and the implementation of MapInfo.

2.3.2 Planning Awards

In 2007/08 Council won a number of awards in the area of planning and development. Awards include:

- Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division) Excellence Awards - The Approval Framework for the Top Ryde City Shopping Centre Development received the Excellence in Planning (Urban Design and Ideas) Award
- Local Government Excellence in The Environment Awards - Ryde Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy received the Sustainable Design, Planning and Building Award
- Australia Property Institute (NSW Division) Excellence in Property Awards - Commonwealth Bank Heritage Award for the restoration of Brush Farm House.

2.4 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

2.4.1 Companion Animals

Ryde City Council has a Companion Animals management plan, however, the plan has not been revised to take into account the recent changes to the Companion Animals legislation. Council should ensure that the Management Plan is updated to include all legislative requirements.

Recommendation 11

Council should review its Companion Animals management plan to ensure that the requirements of the Companion Animals legislation are included.

Council response

A review of the Companion Animals Management Plan will be completed by the end of March 2010 with the revised Management Plan to be presented to Council by 30 June 2010.

3. ASSET AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

3.1 OVERVIEW

Under its charter, a council has a responsibility to raise funds for the purposes of carrying out its functions. This can be achieved by the fair imposition of rates, charges and fees, borrowings and grants. The council is also the custodian and trustee of public assets and must effectively account for and manage these assets.

3.1.1 Scope of the review

A review was conducted of a range of aspects of Council's asset and financial management practices, including:

- *Financial management*
- *Asset management, including land assets, plant replacement and capital works*

3.1.2 Overview of financial position

A review of Ryde City Council's financial statements for the 2008/09 financial year shows that Council is in a satisfactory financial position. To account for the downturn in investments due to the global financial crisis, Council created a Financial Security Reserve fund in the amount of \$8 million. In the December 2008 quarter, Council wrote off three (3) of its financial investments amounting to a value of \$3.91 million against this reserve.

The downturn in developments in the local area has resulted in a reduction in Council's section 94 contribution income. Reductions in Council's operational and capital expenditure budgets were recommended after a full budget review in March 2009. These reductions did not result in a reduction to any Council services.

While Council has been prudent in reviewing its capital works program in line with market conditions, its working capital, one of the key indicators of Council's financial position, was projected to be \$4.1 million at 30 June 2009, an improvement of \$905K over that forecast in the December Quarterly Review. The actual working capital stood at \$4.331 at 30 June 2009, which is a further improvement over the March quarter projections.

Council established a Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) in 2005/06 that provided Council with detailed analysis and a forecast of its position over a period of 20 years.

This LTFS has been further developed to incorporate revised asset infrastructure projections and assists Council in replacing and maintaining its asset base.

3.2 BETTER PRACTICE

3.2.1 Best Value Review – Finance Unit

Council's initiative to undertake Best Value Reviews of its service units has enabled it to put its focus on those areas that require improvement. The Best Value Review - Finance Unit was undertaken in March 2008 and in addition to reviewing the Finance area using the Best Value principles, it benchmarked Ryde City Council against a group of similar councils within the Sydney metropolitan area. The report shows that Council generally fell within acceptable limits when compared with similar councils, but that a number of recommended initiatives would improve service delivery.

Council developed an action plan for the recommendations and a number of those recommendations have been implemented. Council's initiative for Best Value Reviews is to be commended.

3.2.2 Long Term Asset Management

Council has asset management plans modelled over a 20 year period for all of its assets. The Asset Management Plan is linked to the Long Term Financial Plan and the Management Plan. All jobs associated with an asset, such as repairs and maintenance, are linked to the asset within the asset management system.

3.2.3 Project Management

Council has developed its own project management methodology (PMCoR) which is applied to all projects, large and small. The methodology, utilising internally developed information technology, ensures that projects are well planned and managed throughout the lifecycle of the project. A key feature of the methodology is that all risks are identified early, assessed and reported in a timely manner.

The methodology is used throughout Council with around 200 of its staff fully trained in its use. So successful is this methodology that another Sydney metropolitan council has purchased the product from Council.

3.2.4 Property management – asset utilisation

As part of its asset rationalisation considerations, Council has recently moved away from leasing its properties to entering into licensing arrangements. Leasing limits the use of a facility to one lessee whereas licensing provides for use of the facilities to a number of licensees. This has enabled Council to increase the utilisation of its buildings thus ensuring best use of its assets while also providing an increased revenue stream.

Council has reviewed its properties under its property development program and sold off any that were considered to be no longer suitable or fit for purpose.

3.3 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

3.3.1 Procedures and training manuals

One recommendation from the Best Value Review was the need for Council to develop and publish clear procedure and training manuals for key processes which are easy for non-financial people to understand; clearly define levels of authority, accountability and delegation; and enforce correct adherence to policies and procedures. At the time of the review, Council had not implemented these recommendations.

Recommendation 12

Council should implement the recommendations from the Finance Unit Best Value Review as outlined in its action plan.

Council's Response

This is underway. All Best Value Reviews have an implementation plan developed. Depending on the actions, the time frame for implementation can span over four years. Key actions are incorporated into the Service Unit Plans and Management Plan and the implementation plans are reviewed every six months.

COMMUNITY AND CONSULTATION

4.1 OVERVIEW

A council's charter requires that a council:

- provides services after due consultation
- facilitates the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and coordination of local government
- actively promotes the principles of multiculturalism
- plans, promotes and provides for the needs of children
- keeps the local community and State Government informed about its activities.

4.1.1 Scope of the review

A review was conducted of a range of aspects of Council's community and consultation practices, including:

- *The methods Council uses to involve and determine the views of its community*
- *Ageing Population*
- *Social and community functions of Council*
- *Annual reporting*
- *Customer service standards*

4.1.2 Overview of community and consultation practices

Overall, the Ryde City Council has demonstrated that it is “committed to maintaining a socially sustainable city through community participation” in its products and services. It has had to respond to a demographic shift, which has occurred over the past 20 years, to meet the needs of a very diverse community. In 2008, this included almost 38% of its population being from non-English speaking backgrounds, with the largest groups being from China, Hong Kong and Korea. Also, the population of the Ryde local government area is ageing quicker than the Sydney average.

4.2 BETTER PRACTICE

4.2.1 Community participation and consultation

In 2008 Ryde City Council adopted its *Engagement Framework – Your City Your Voice*, which consists of the following:

- Part one outlines concepts, levels and principles of engagement
- Part two sets out the practical steps for planning engagement strategies and evaluation
- A toolbox to support effective engagement.

The framework will be used to develop Council's 2030 Community Strategic Plan, but will also act as a guide for engaging the community across all areas of Council on an ongoing basis. It appears to be an excellent resource to assist Council staff in this area.

Council conducted a community survey in 2006. The survey measures customer satisfaction across Council services and is conducted every two years with both ratepayers and non-ratepayers being surveyed. There is evidence that the data collected assisted Council to report on trends in its overall performance and guided Council's decisions on services, plans and projects. This data is referred to and used to drive improvements through the Best Value Reviews.

Ryde City Council also produces a regular community newsletter.

4.2.2 Children's Conference

During December 2007, Council hosted a very innovative Children's Conference. The conference had some noteworthy features, including:

- using the latest interactive technology to link over 200 students from Ryde schools with students from Wilcannia NSW, Kansas USA and Kenya to share their views on technology, health and the environment
- collaboration between Ryde City Council, Central Darling Shire Council, the Department of Education and Training, Macquarie University and local primary and high schools.

The Children's Conference is a bi-annual event.

4.2.3 Social Justice Charter

In 2008, Council adopted the City of Ryde Social Justice Charter. The Charter commits Council to building a just and inclusive community. In particular, it asserts that “*every citizen of Ryde is free and equal in dignity and rights*”. The key mechanism for implementing the Charter is the City of Ryde Social Plan, which in turn is implemented by the Management Plan.

The Charter is particularly unique in that it raises awareness among councillors and Council officers of the diversity of the community and identifies disadvantages that may exist.

The Charter is complemented by the Access and Equity Policy and Strategy adopted by Council in 2003. The policy and strategy was last updated in March 2009. The Access and Equity Strategy Steering Group is an inter-departmental group formed to foster a ‘whole of council’ approach to delivering services to its diverse and multicultural community. The group also monitors the implementation of access and equity initiatives in the Management Plan.

4.3 NOTEWORTHY PRACTICE

4.3.1 Best Value Review - Community Services

The Best Value Review – Community Services report was finalised in April 2008. A Sustainable Review Framework was used to guide the review of the Community Services Unit and considered factors such as:

- delivery of services against agreed quality and cost standards
- responsive to changing community needs
- accessibility of services to those who need them
- continuous improvement
- community and customer consultation on services and activities
- regular reporting to Council and the community.

The review found that the activities undertaken by the Unit are consistent with the Social Plan and organisational objectives. The findings also suggest that the Council’s service delivery programs perform well when compared to other similar services.

As well as identifying well-performing program areas, the review also highlighted a number of program areas and activities that for a variety of reasons are underperforming. Key areas of better practice and areas that require further development or improvement are outlined below.

The Better Value Review is a critical tool for driving better practice and continuous improvement. Council's initiative in conducting such a review and implementing its findings and recommendations is commendable.

4.3.2 Cultural planning

The Best Value Review identifies Council's cultural development program as primarily strategic, but also includes service delivery responsibilities of Brush Farm House.

By developing *Canvas-City of Ryde Arts Development Framework 2007-2012*, Council recognises the fundamental role that culture plays in the lives of its residents. The framework was developed as a result of community consultation and research. It will determine the strategic and service direction for Council's cultural development program. This in turn should be integrated with Council's 2030 Strategy and Management Plan to ensure ongoing implementation.

The presentation of the Framework is excellent. The document is easy to read and clearly sets out themes, strategic actions and projects. However, it does not include key performance indicators to measure progress.

Also, the Best Value Review identified a number of issues impacting on the progression of cultural development, in particular, "a number of essential strategic planning initiatives identified in the Arts Framework that are not being followed up due to the breadth of operational demands on the (cultural development) position created by the day to day management of Brush Farm House". Recommendations have been made in the Best Value Review report to address these and other concerns.

Council's response

The actions from the Arts Development Framework are integrated and measured in the Management Plan, Service Unit Plan and workplans.

4.4 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

4.4.1 Reporting to the community

The *Building Partnerships for the Future-City of Ryde - Annual Report* is an excellent document. The report is readable and community friendly. The presentation is clear and visual which engages the reader. The Annual Report showcases and displays photos of successful initiatives, community events and staff members. It integrates well with the Management Plan and clearly reports on actions planned, results achieved or not achieved and targets. The Annual Report includes a comparison of the actual and projected performance of Council's access and equity activities during the year, including reasons for any differences.

However, Council's annual report does not fully comply with NSW legislative requirements. For example:

- Council's comparison of actual performance against projected performance of its principal activities in accordance with the Management Plan does not include reasons for any difference
- statement of remuneration for senior staff members does not give the required information for each individual senior staff member
- there is no statement regarding the establishment of a complaints handling mechanism for competitive neutrality complaints and outcomes
- statement on activities relating to enforcement and compliance with Companion Animals legislation omits some required information.

Recommendation 13

Council must ensure compliance with all legislative requirements for the annual report.

Council's response

Council has included the required information relating to actual performance against projected performance and establishment of complaints handling mechanism in the 2008/09 Annual Report.

A compliance review will be undertaken on the statement of remuneration for senior staff members and compliance with Animals legislation.

4.4.2 Best Value Review - Community Services

The Best Value Review makes 25 recommendations to improve the longer term sustainability of its community services and drive the continuous improvement of these services. These recommendations are both operational and strategic. While notional timeframes have been provided, specific actions have not. To progress implementation of these recommendations, an action plan should be developed which then links or feeds into the Community Services Unit plan and the Management Plan. Consideration should be given to risk rating the recommendations (see Part IV).

Recommendation 14

Council should develop an action plan to progress implementation of the recommendations of the Best Value Review – Community Services. This plan should inform the Community Services Unit Plan and the Council's Management Plan.

Council Response

All Best Value Reviews have an implementation plan developed. Depending on the actions, resources and staff capacity the time frame for implementation can span over four years. Key actions are incorporated into the Service Unit Plans and the implementation plans are reviewed every six months.

Review team comment

The review team acknowledges that Council has developed implementation plans for all of its Best Values reviews and that they are integrated with Service Unit Plans. While this recommendation is considered to have been completed, the implementation of the Community Service Unit Plan is an ongoing process.

5. WORKFORCE RELATIONS

5.1 OVERVIEW

Council is required to conduct itself as a responsible employer in accordance with a number of legislative responsibilities.

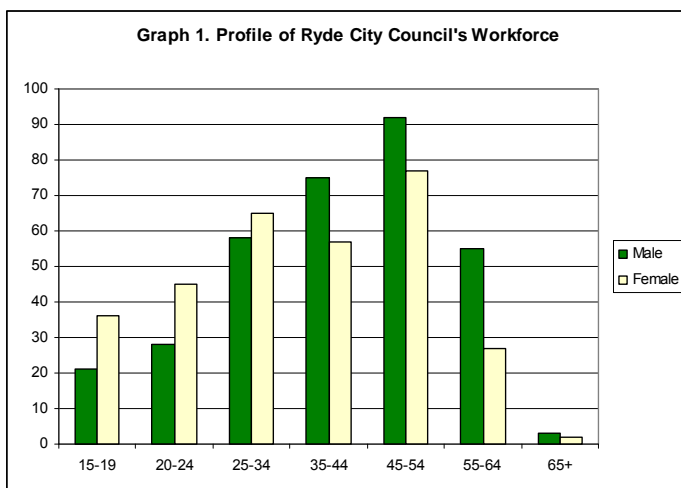
5.1.1 Scope of review

A review was conducted of a range of aspects of Council’s workforce relations practices, including:

- *Human resources strategy and workforce planning*
- *Employee attitude surveys*
- *Job descriptions and job evaluation*
- *Recruitment and selection processes*
- *Equal employment opportunity*
- *Occupational health and safety*

5.1.2 Ryde City Council’s workforce

Council employs approximately 486 full-time equivalent staff. The age and gender profile of these staff is displayed in graph 1.



Council’s workforce is somewhat diverse as follows:

- 1% of its employees identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin
- 20% are of culturally and linguistically diverse origins

- 6% of its employees have physical impairments.

Overall, the review team observed staff to be very enthusiastic, dedicated and skilled in their areas of expertise.

5.2 BETTER PRACTICE

5.2.1 Occupational Health and Safety

This is an area where Council is performing very well. Its structures, policies and processes are very sound. In particular, Council received an award for a Risk Assessment model/process. A successful Health and Well-being Program is also offered to staff, which includes health checks and awareness-raising about health issues.

5.3 AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

5.3.1 Human Resources Team – improvement initiatives

The Human Resources Team has undergone dramatic change over the last 18 months. A number of experienced staff left Council, which has meant rebuilding an effective team and documenting past practices into policies and procedures. The *Best Value Review Final Report – Human Resources* was finalised in October 2008.

The review identified “*some current areas of good practice within the unit which will, along with the implementation of improvement initiatives, provide a solid basis for moving toward a best practice operation*”. These include:

- strong leadership of the unit with the Manager bringing solid experience
- a dedicated team with a high work ethic and very positive attitude
- awareness of the team of the key people challenges and risks facing the organisation
- identification by staff of specific opportunities for improvement and their eagerness to introduce such initiatives.

Council’s initiative in conducting such a review and being committed to implementing its findings and recommendations is commendable. However, based on the recommendations, Council has a number of issues to address in its move towards best practice.

The Review recommended that the future state of human resources practice at Council be considered in terms of five key areas and proposed specific actions for each area. The reviewers also recommended a number of high priority initiatives related to each of these key areas be implemented over the next 12 months. These are summarised in the table below.

| Key Area | High priority initiatives |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Operational HR Services | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement work process improvements 2. Implement a Human Resources Information System 3. Establish on-line self service for staff 4. HR policies and procedures 5. Communication/training re policies and procedures 6. Transfer responsibility of producing the staff newsletter to the Corporate Communications Unit 7. Include continuous improvement within the Service Unit Plan template. |
| 2. Workforce Planning | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake a workforce analysis 2. Forecast future organisation needs and match the workforce to these needs 3. Analyse workforce gaps 4. Develop a framework to align workforce planning and business strategy 5. Collect, analyse and interpret data to inform strategies 6. Develop measures to evaluate outcomes 7. Include Workforce Planning as part of the Service Unit Plan template. |
| 3. Workforce Capability | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate and deliver online training opportunities 2. Conduct leadership training and support programs 3. Develop a risk profile and analysis. |
| 4. Recruitment and Attraction | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop marketing initiatives using existing branding 2. Review recruitment and selection processes 3. Review and strengthen induction processes/programs. |
| 5. People Retention | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Measure and strengthen employee engagement 2. Develop recognition programs 3. Analyse exit information and intervene when appropriate 4. Review salary system. |

Recommendation 15

The high priority initiatives identified by the Best Value Review – Human Resources should be included in the Human Resources Service Unit Plan and be progressively implemented over the next 12 months.

Council's Response

All Best Value Reviews have an implementation plan developed. Depending on the actions, resources and staff capacity the time frame for implementation can span over four years. Key actions are incorporated into the Service Unit Plans and Management Plans, and the implementation plans are reviewed every six months.

Council is currently recruiting the Human Resources Manager who will have skills in organisational development to assist in delivering the implementation plan of the Best Value Review.

Review team comment

The review team acknowledges that Council has incorporated the high priority areas identified by the Best Value Review –Human Resources into the service plan for that unit. While this recommendation is considered to have been completed, its implementation is of an ongoing nature.

PART IV. RISK RATING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made in this report have been assessed for a priority ranking based on the following risk analysis.

| | | CONSEQUENCE | | |
|------------|----------------|--|---|---|
| | | Significant <i>Significant risk to the operations of council and if not addressed could cause public outrage, non-compliance with council's statutory responsibilities, severe disruption to council's operations and council's ability to meet its goals.</i> | Moderate <i>Moderate risk to the operations of council and if not addressed could cause adverse publicity, some disruption to council's operations and council's ability to meet its goals.</i> | Minor <i>Minimal risk to the operations of council, little disruption to council's operations and will not limit council's ability to meet its goals.</i> |
| LIKELIHOOD | Almost certain | High | High | Medium |
| | Possible | Medium | Medium | Low |
| | Rare | Medium | Low | Low |

| Priorities for recommendations: <i>(based on application of risk analysis)</i> | Risk categories could include: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High • Medium • Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation • Compliance with statutory requirements • Fraud/corruption • Financial • Legal liability • OH&S |

PART V. ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan is to be completed and adopted by Council to guide the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations in this report. The review team have allocated notional priority rankings using the risk rating analysis in the previous section. Council is encouraged to review and revise these, if necessary.

| RECOMMENDATION | PRIORITY | ACTION PROPOSED | TIME FRAME | RESPONSIBILITY | PROGRESS REPORT |
|---|----------|---|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. The development of Community Strategic Plan should be used by the General Manager and all councillors to clarify their respective roles and improve their working relationships. | Low* | Staff to continue to work positively with Councillors on strategic issues through the Ryde 2030 process. | June 2011 | General Manager | |
| 2. Council should ensure that the reporting on the costs of councillors' expenses and provision of facilities complies with legislative requirements. | High | Revise the reporting template to comply with the legislative requirements. | | | Completed - ongoing |
| 3. Council should finalise the review of its corporate values and include them in its Code of Behaviour Brochure and website. | Low | Undertake review of values in conjunction with staff Climate Survey. Update current values on Council's website and Code of Behaviour. | October 2010 April 2010 | Manager Human Resources Manager Human Resources | |
| 4. The Mayor should explore and implement mechanisms to ensure that control of the meeting is retained at all times. | High | Council to continue and enhance the training program for all Councillors throughout the year (including a specific program on chairing meetings, meeting practices and facilitation). | Ongoing | Manager Councillor Services | |
| 5. Strategies to maintain and build a more productive working relationship between councillors and council officers should be explored and implemented. | High | Facilitated workshops to be conducted between Councillors and senior staff to further strengthen close working relationship. | September 2010 | General Manager | |
| 6. Council should finalise a records strategy or guideline to encourage and assist councillors to meet their obligations under the State Records Act 1998. | Medium | Develop a Councillors Recordkeeping Policy. | Complete | | Policy endorsed by Council at 4 August 2009 meeting. Completed - ongoing |

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| RECOMMENDATION | PRIORITY | ACTION PROPOSED | TIME FRAME | RESPONSIBILITY | PROGRESS REPORT |
|---|----------|--|--------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| 7. Council should review its Gifts and Benefits Policy and then provide training to its employees. | Medium | Review Gifts Policy in line with ICAC Guidelines, including relationship to Code of Conduct. Training provided to staff and Councillors. | June 2010 July-Oct 2010 | Group Manager Corporate Services Group Manager Corporate Services | |
| 8. Procedure manuals and guidelines for procurement, tendering and disposal need to include requirements for reporting outcomes or intentions to Council. | Medium | Review Procurement and disposal policies, procedures and checklists to confirm reporting outcomes/intentions to Audit Committee/Council are included. Review and update Council's Tendering procedures in line with Dept LG's recently released Tendering Guidelines. | May 2010 July 2010 | Manager Risk and Audit Manager Risk and Audit | |
| 9. Council should ensure that staff are adhering to purchasing and tendering policy and procedures by undertaking regular audits. | High | Continue to undertake general procurement compliance reviews as part of Council's Internal Audit Plan. | On Going | Manager Risk and Audit | |
| 10. Council should ensure that a risk management plan is finalised and implemented as soon as practicable. | High | Complete Enterprise Risk Management Strategy and submit to Council for approval. | July 2010 | Manager Risk and Audit | |
| 11. Council should review its Companion Animals management plan to ensure that the requirements of the Companion Animals legislation are included. | Medium* | Review and update the Companion Animals Management Plan to ensure that requirements and changes to legislation are included. | June 2010 | Manager Regulatory Services | |
| 12. Council should implement the recommendations from the Finance Unit Best Value Review as outlined in its action plan. | Medium | Continue to undertake the actions identified in the Best Value Review Implementation Plan. | June 2012 | Chief Financial Officer | |
| 13. Council must ensure compliance with all legislative requirements for the annual report. | High | Review and confirm requirements to comply with legislation for 2009/2010 Annual Report. | November 2010 | Corporate Planning Co-ordinator | |

| RECOMMENDATION | PRIORITY | ACTION PROPOSED | TIME FRAME | RESPONSIBILITY | PROGRESS REPORT |
|--|----------|--|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 14. Council should develop an action plan to progress implementation of the recommendations of the Best Value Review – Community Services. This plan should inform the Community Services Unit Plan and the Council's Management Plan. | Low* | Continue to undertake the actions identified in the Best Value Review Implementation Plan. | June 2012 | Manager Community and Culture | Completed - ongoing |
| 15. The high priority initiatives identified by the Best Value Review – Human Resources should be included in the Human Resources Service Unit Plan and be progressively implemented over the next 12 months. | High | Continue to undertake the actions identified in the Human Resources Best Value Review Implementation Plan. Recruitment of a Human Resources Manager with a focus on Organisational Development is underway, this will support the recommendations in the Best Value Review. | 2010 – 2013 2010 | Manager Human Resources Group Manager Corporate Services | Completed - ongoing |

Those priorities marked with an * have been amended from the DLG recommendation. The reason for the amendment is provided below for your reference:

Recommendation 1 – The review was undertaken only a few months into the Ryde 2030 process and since that time a lot of work has been undertaken to assist in clarification of roles.

Recommendation 11 – The Plan is currently being reviewed, with a revised version planned to go to Council for adoption in June 2010.

Recommendation 14 – An implementation (action) plan has already been developed and actions being implemented. Key elements of all Best value Reviews are included in the Management Plan and Service Unit Plan.