



BUSINESS PAPER

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

To be held on

Wednesday, 10 February 2021
4pm

at

Armidale Council Chamber

Members

Councillor Ian Tiley (Mayor)
Councillor Debra O'Brien (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Peter Bailey
Councillor Jon Galletly
Councillor Andrew Murat
Councillor Margaret O'Connor
Councillor Dorothy Robinson

AGENDA

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Item:	6.1	Ref: AINT/2021/02846
Title:	Review Of Council Committees - Results of Public Exhibition	Container: ARC20/4323
Responsible Officer	General Manager	
Author:	Marissa Racomelara, Acting Director Organisational and Corporate Services	
Attachments:	1. ARC Council Committee Review - Report Final	

1. Purpose

As a result of concerns expressed in relation the operation of Council's Community Advisory Committees in September 2020, it was resolved that a review of their structure and operation be undertaken. The draft '*Review of Council Committees*' was presented to Council on 25 November 2020 (Ref: AINT/2020/41121 (ARC20/4323), Minute 349/20). The *Review* was then placed on placed public exhibition until 26 January 2021.

This report briefly outlines the submissions made whilst the *Review* was on public exhibition and the changes made to the draft document as a result of the comments received.

2. OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION:

That Council Endorse the report entitled '*Review of Council Committees*' and the adoption of the following recommendations:

Recommendation – Community Strategic Plan Review

1. Subsequent to the election of a new council in 2021, invite participation in two Community Strategic Planning Panels of 20 people that bring local community leaders (from community, business, education and the region's villages) together to work on developing a refreshed and inspiring Community Strategic Plan, that clearly articulates the needs and aspirations of the Armidale Region

Recommendations – A Refreshed Approach – Partnership Panels

2. Move away from 'Committee' terminology to the concept of Partnership Panels
3. Implement a 'back to basics' name for each of the Partnership Panels
4. Create refreshed charters to reflect the key priorities of the new Panels
5. Aim to create Panels with a minimum of eight and no greater than 12 members
6. Seek to recruit members who represent professional groups with a significant interest a Panel's topic area (members of the Access Partnership Panel may be an exception to this rule)
7. The chair of the Partnership Panels should be drawn from and elected by the community members of the Panels
8. Provide opportunities for leadership training to staff who will support the chair of the Partnership Panels
9. Should Partnership Panels recommend the allocation of resources beyond those allocated in the annual budget, they should be subject to a report to Council considering the budgetary implications of the proposals
10. Move administrative matters from the Panel Charters to a separate manual that applies to

all panels, to ensure greater consistency in their management

11. In partnership with the newly formed Panels, set three goals to be achieved in the first 12 months
12. Resist the creation of working groups that potentially raise expectations that cannot be delivered, and divert resources away from a core Partnership Panel's prioritised work plan
13. Celebrate successes with the Panels' members and the broader community as they occur, and provide ongoing feedback on progress towards goals
14. Include as a mandatory or desirable qualification, skills and/or experience in working with Partnership Panels, in the position descriptions of staff who will undertake the role of chairing or supporting their chair
15. Introduce performance measures in annual appraisals so that staff can be supported to improve their skills in engagement and leadership if necessary.

Recommendations – Local Advisory Panels – Currently LACs

16. Retain the existing structure of the LAC's, however, change their title to Local Advisory Panel (LAP) to bring consistency across the refreshed Advisory Panel structure
17. Promote the use of the electronic logging of customer requests (Report It and Snap, Send, Solve), so that they can be easily tracked on-line, and escalated to responsible managers when standards are not met
18. Provide information and data on works programs to the LAPs where it is available, so that they can advocate for Council and better demonstrate the equity in funding to village residents
19. Consider creating a roster for senior council staff to visit 1 - 2 of the LAP meetings each year
20. Consider an Engineer being allocated to visit each LAPs on an annual basis to listen to and explain responses to road / grading issues
21. Create a single point of contact within Council for the LAPs (see also recommendations 24 & 25).
22. Consider including a member drawn from the LAPs on the Environment & Economic Development and Tourism Partnership Panels
23. Where LAPs have transactional relationship with Council, LAPs should be required to be Incorporated Not For Profit Associations
24. Annual acquittals of the funds supplied by Council to the LAPs should be made to Council together with copies of the LAPs' Annual Reports (including financial reports) supplied to the NSW Department of Fair Trading

Recommendation – Business Groups

25. Create a single point of contact within Council for the Business Groups (see also Recommendation 20 & 25)

Recommendation – Community Engagement

26. Consider centralising accountability for community engagement activities under the auspices of a single team where advanced skills and the application of differing approaches to engagement can be nurtured (see also recommendations 20 and 24)

Recommendations - Volunteers

27. Celebrate the achievements of the volunteer Partnership Panels wherever possible

28. Ensure feedback is provided to volunteers on how their input has influenced decision making and, if not, provide background for reasons why, thus ensuring that members are better informed of constraints they may need to consider when providing further advice

Recommendation Section 355 / 356 Delegation

29. Subject to the adoption of the proposed new model, the Partnership Panel - Sports be provided with a Section 355 / 356 delegation enabling the group to levy a charge on behalf of Council

Recommendation – Financial Support

30. That a review of the financial support provided to the former Advisory Committees be undertaken with a view to standardising governance procedures in grant making, ensuring transparency in its allocation, accountability in its application and greater recognition of Council support under the new Partnership structure.

3. Background

The Community Advisory Committees are an important mechanism used to engage local residents in developing strategy and driving actions that are aligned with the goals of the Community Strategic Plan.

However, in September 2020 Council expressed some concern that the Community Advisory Committees were failing to effectively include the diverse views of the broad community. Instead, the perception was that many of the committee meetings focussed on 'loudest voices in the room', rather than providing forums where diverse views and ideas can be presented and debated.

As a result Council called for a review of its Community Advisory Committees to be undertaken. A key component of the specifications for the project required that an extensive engagement process be undertaken to hear the views of individual members of the Advisory Committees.

4. Discussion

A comprehensive engagement process was undertaken as part of the review process. A number of meetings were held with members of the specialist committees together with four forums that brought together representatives from across the Advisory Committee structure. Meetings were also held with nine village based local area advisory committees.

Specifically the engagement process included meeting with:

- Regional Growth and Place Activation Advisory Committee (RGPAAC)
- The Community Wellbeing Advisory Committee (CWAC)
- Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee (ESAC) together with members drawn from the Climate Emergency Working Group – a sub-committee of ESAC
- The Sports Council
- Members of the former Youth Advisory Committee (ARYAC)
- Members of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee (ACHAC)
- Members of the former Access Advisory Committee (AAC)
- Armidale Region Aboriginal Advisory Committee (ARAAC)
- Armidale Chamber of Commerce
- Guyra & District Chamber of Commerce

- Locals 4 Locals
- Renew Armidale
- Two individual interviews were undertaken with prominent community members
 - The General Manager of the Powerhouse Hotel and
 - Mr Ray Chappell, former member for the Northern Tablelands in the NSW Parliament
- Meetings with nine of the region's village based local advisory committees
- Interviews were also conducted with the key Council staff who support the operation of the Advisory Committees

Notes were taken during each of these forums and meetings and feedback provided to each of the participants. Eleven responses were received from committee members on receipt of these notes. These ranged from minor corrections and additional ideas and suggestions on opportunities to improve their operation to concerns about the committees no longer meeting and the loss of volunteer engagement and active involvement in driving the Community Strategic Plan.

The draft 'Review of Council Committees' was presented to Council on 25 November 2020 where it was resolved in part that:

- *The report "Review of Council Committees" be placed on public exhibition until 26 January 2021*

In addition to the Draft Review being placed on the 'Your Say' area of Council's web site, each of the participants in the engagement process were provided with a copy of the report and encouraged to provide further comment.

5. Implications

Thirteen submissions were received during the public exhibition process. The key points from the submissions can be summarised as follows:

- The Sports Council noted that their committee had been working successfully for many years and made the following comments:
 - The chair of the committee should continue to be a member selected from the community with the support of the Council staff member. It is the community members that bring the expert knowledge to the committee
 - The Sports Council already has a priority list of 15 projects that it continues to work through as funds become available. It was suggested that limiting the Sports Council to three goals over a 12 month period may limit its potential
 - Given Council's current financial position it is essential that the community be supported to attract grant funding for projects wherever possible
- Four submissions raised concerns around the loss of democracy should Councillors no longer be engaged with the Partnership Panels
- Three submissions suggested that the chair of the Committees should be selected by the members

- One submission raised concerns about the loss of working groups
- One submission raised the need to link the work of Partnership Panels more closely to the annual operational budgets of Council
- The Ben Lomond Local Advisory Committee (also representing the Ben Lomond Local Landcare Group) made a very detailed submission raising many frustrations with Council relating to funding, valuing and respecting volunteers, constant turnover in Council staff and lack of feedback / progress on projects. The Ben Lomond group would like to move towards the concept of being a largely autonomous committee making decisions on how all Council funding is allocated in their village.
- The New England Greens Armidale and Tamworth (NEGAT) expressed concern about the suspension of the Advisory Committee meetings whilst the review was underway. NEGAT suggested that:
 - The new model recommended largely cosmetic changes to the existing committee structure
 - The existing advisory committees *be re-instated as soon as possible to address the primary concerns of committee members as expressed in the Ackroyd report to ensure volunteers are respected and valued, that their expertise, knowledge and long-term commitment to our community is recognised and that committees are appropriately managed to allow a partnership between Council and community to flourish.*
- Two submissions called for the Access Advisory Committee to be re-established

Comment on issues raised

Sports Council

The success of the Sports Council model is acknowledged in the body of the review. A councillor has been nominated to attend Sports Council over many years, however, the chair is elected from the various members of sports groups. Other than re-branding of the committee to reflect the partnership approach across all groups the proposal by the Sports Council to keep a community member as chair and a Councillor representative as part of the Panel is supported.

Chairing of Partnership Panels and Councillor Involvement

The draft report recommended that a staff member chair the Partnership Panels. Community members did raise several concerns in relation to the recommendation that Councillors no longer be involved in the Partnership Panels.

The Sports Council model of Councillor attendance at the Advisory Committee meetings drawing the Chair from the community has worked well and it is suggested that this could be trialled across the Partnership Panel model.

Staff would still need to fulfil a critical role in supporting the chair, and hence the need to offer opportunities for staff training in the effective chairing of community based committees should remain.

Recommendations of Partnership Panels – Resourcing Implications

The potential resourcing of recommendations from actions developed by Advisory Committees was a concern expressed by staff. Should recommendations from Partnership Panels seek to allocate resources beyond those made available in annual budget allocations, then it is considered that those recommendations be subject to a further report to Council enabling full consideration of the resourcing implications of the recommendations from Panels prior to their adoption by Council.

Working Groups

The recommendation in the draft Review does not prohibit the establishment of working groups, but rather seeks to keep Panels focussed on a small number of achievable objectives. Ensuring the achievement of goals is critical to keeping volunteers motivated. Equally, it is important to ensure that staff and the Panels are not diverted to projects that are not foreshadowed in the Delivery Program and resourced in the Operational Plan. There will be times when unforeseen events, opportunities or emergencies will arise that require a realignment of priorities, but it is critical that the focus of the Panels is maintained as far as possible.

Better Alignment with Operational Budgets

The review recommends the need to start planning for the new Community Strategic Plan and that the work of the Partnership Panels be closely aligned to this Plan subsequent to its adoption. This will further assist in more closely linking the work of the Panels to Council's operational budgets. The requirement for further reports to Council on all recommendations requiring the allocation of additional resources will further focus the work of the Panels on the adopted annual Operational Plan and budget.

Re-instate existing Advisory Committees

Overall, the engagement process for the Review clearly indicated a lack of confidence in, and trust with the current operation of the Advisory Committees. This is a view that was widely held, not only by the community members, but by staff and the executive of Council. These concerns are articulated in the body of the Review. Some committees were no longer meeting (Access and Youth) and the membership of one committee in addition to being unwieldy in size, actually attracted very few members. Several advisory committee members referred to an 'us and them' feeling in the operation of the existing committee structure.

As such it was considered that a refreshed structure and branding would 'draw a line in the sand' and set a framework that would foster a genuine partnership approach to engagement going forward. The new structure also addresses concerns relating to loss of some committees and the functioning of another.

Notwithstanding the above, the core advisory groups are largely determined by Local Government Act 1993 Section 402 which highlights the importance of the Community Strategic Plan and community engagement. Council must ensure that the Community Strategic Plan *addresses civic leadership, social, environmental and economic issues in an integrated manner.*

Ben Lomond Local Advisory Committee

A lengthy submission was made by the chair of the Ben Lomond Local Advisory Committee. The concerns raised are broadly covered in the body of the review and its recommendations. These include recommendations on better valuing the work and ideas of volunteers, providing a central point of contact within Council for the Local Advisory Panels, improving communication and closing feedback loops, keeping a list of the top three priorities for each group providing a foundation for the allocation of grant funding, and creating a group within Council to specialise

in engagement practices thus building and strengthening the relationship between Council and the villages.

The suggestion of moving to more autonomous committee taking responsibility for the allocation of funding with the village is, however, not considered practicable.

The detailed comments raised by the Ben Lomond Local Advisory Committee in relation to specific projects have been forwarded to relevant staff for consideration.

Independent Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee

The *Review* recommends that the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) be expanded to include a community engagement professional. This recommendation is not supported as a number of changes have been made to the ARIC since initial consultation for this review were undertaken, and these changes should result in the intended outcomes. It is suggested that the recently adopted ARIC Charter and new membership as resolved by Council in December 2020 remain unchanged for a period of 12 months to enable assessment of outcomes.

Issues Flagged by Returning Councillors

The Review contains 30 recommendations that address the concerns raised by Advisory Committees in the engagement process. A brief summary of the key recommendations that relate to the issues raised by Council are provided below:

- Council has its own agenda
- Little commitment from Council to embrace anything but their own ideas
- Council doesn't listen – 'We are advised committees not advisory'
- Committees are a 'tick box' exercise, not genuine engagement
- Having a committee that you take no notice of is worse than having no committees at all
 - The Review recommends that planning for a new Community Strategic Plan (CSP) due in 2022 starts now. The Community Strategic Plan should highlight the *community's* priorities for the region. The CSP will then drive the content of the 4 year Delivery Program and Annual Operational Plans, ensuring that Council is focussed on community priorities
 - The Review recommends creation of a group within Council that has specific responsibility for engagement. The goal is to further develop contemporary skills in high quality engagement practices that can be shared across units. The overall aim is to move consultation beyond simply giving information, to one of genuinely engaging with local communities and harnessing their local knowledge for the benefit of all
 - The review recommends the Audit Review and Improvement Committee (ARIC) include a member with engagement knowledge and skills with a view to auditing the efficacy of the engagement practices implemented by Council
 - Overall, the Review's recommendations seek to engender a culture of genuine engagement.
- Communication
 - Poor communication around the roles and expectations of the committees
 - Feedback is rarely provided to close the loop in the engagement process
 - The Review recommends a review of each groups' Terms of Reference with a focus on outcomes rather than administrative procedures
 - The Review recommends the creation of a single group within Council that has advanced skills in engagement processes and can promote consistency in providing advice on how engagement has influenced decision making

- The review recommends greater marketing of electronic tools that assist communication and easy tracking of requests from groups once they are lodged
- Volunteers
 - Volunteers are not valued or respected
 - Council fails to harness the potential that volunteers bring to the committees
 - The Review makes several recommendations relating to these issues including:
 - Celebrating the achievements of the Partnership Panels
 - ‘Closing the loop’ in the engagement process by providing feedback on how volunteers’ work and ideas have been included in Council’s decision-making
- Management
 - Top down approach
 - Inconsistencies in management styles across the committees
 - Administration can be overly bureaucratic
 - The implementation of a refreshed Community Strategic Plan built on a quality engagement process should ensure community priorities drive the development of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan which will in turn guide the priorities of the Partnership Panels
 - The Review recommends the creation of a single group within Council that has advanced skills in engagement processes that can support a more consistent more streamlined approach to engagement across Council’s Units
 - The Review recommends a review of each groups’ Terms of Reference with a focus on outcomes rather than overly bureaucratic administrative procedures

Where necessary, the draft Review has been amended to reflect the feedback and comments outlined above.

5.1. Strategic and Policy Implications

The Review does require that a number of documents be updated: These will include:

- Terms of Reference / Charter – Partnership Panels
- Guidelines For Meeting Practice - Partnership Panels
- Community Engagement Policy – updating terminology
- Funding Guidelines – Local Advisory Panels
- Job Descriptions – to include desirable / mandatory skills and qualifications in leadership / engagement
- Commence planning for the refreshed Community Strategic Plan

5.2. Risk

Council must comply with its responsibilities to engage with the local community under the Local Government Act 1993. Implementation of the review will ensure ongoing compliance with the Act.

5.3. Sustainability

The implementation of the Partnership Panel model will continue to enhance environmental, social and economic sustainability by engaging and partnering with the local community in developing new initiatives and gaining community support and action in implementing them.

5.4. Financial

Resourcing Implications

Effective engagement does require adequate resourcing. Currently the organisation does not have sufficient resources to comprehensively implement the recommendations of the review, however this should not preclude forward planning to enable relaunch of the panels in the new financial year. It is proposed to commence work on the policy documentation and preparing an Expression of interest process at the conclusion of the current round of engagement processes towards end March 2021.

Should Council resolve an alternative model or an accelerated timeline resource implications and the reduction of service levels in other areas will need to be considered.

Any financial / resourcing implications that may flow directly from recommendations made by the Partnership Panels will need to be subject to a further report to ensure achievement of the budgetary goals set by Council and the Performance Improvement Order.

Budget Area:	Governance and Communications						
Funding Source:	General Revenue						
Budget Ref: (PN)	Description	Approved Budget	Actual	Committed	Proposed	Total Forecast Expenditure	Remaining Budget
210050	Governance, Risk & Safety – Employee Costs	\$402,408	\$49,419	\$0	Ongoing – salaries & wages	\$49,419	\$352,989 Required for recruitment of staff to support Governance processes

6. Consultation and Communication

The engagement model used in the delivery of this project is outlined above.

7. Conclusion

The report titled *Review of Council's Committees* proposes a new model of engagement that seeks to build a genuine and productive partnership with the local community. It is recommended that the Review and its recommendations be adopted and a timeframe for implementation be developed.