

Recent and Ongoing initiatives and strategies

In recent years Council has embraced the concept of transformation and change management and has introduced a number of improvement and amendments to how we operate. The characteristics associated with a rural Council mean that we need to continually improve and look to better and different ways of doing things. The fit for the future process represents a good opportunity to critically evaluate how we are performing and acknowledging that we do need to continuously improve. Many of the strategies outlined in this statement have already commenced in some form or are ongoing.

Some of our recent initiatives include

- *Large Investment in modern IT systems*
- *Workplace reform including reduction in middle management and specialist positions*
- *Ongoing Training to meet future needs*
- *Ongoing Review of Service Levels*
- *Regular Community consultation including fortnightly newsletter (Snippets)*
- *Procurement Improvements (Council was one of the first rural Councils to participate in the road map program)*
- *Plant rationalisation including replacing under utilised plant with contractors*
- *Resource Sharing – Council currently has arrangements in place with Holroyd, Deniliquin, Balranald Griffith and Carrathool Councils as well as participating in Ramroc group's arrangements*

1. Make Hay Connected Program

One of the key strategies to increase and improve our capacity as a Rural Council is with technology. The Make Hay connected program has been developed with this in mind to improve how we connect existing resources, improve both our internal and external communications and our capacity and efficiency with technology. The world is changing so we need to adapt and take advantage of the digital revolution. Technology will impact our organisation so we need an early response and to make the right decisions. Council has only recently invested in a new server and an offsite mirror server as part of our risk management data protection strategy, however, it is recognised this is most likely our last on site hardware and in the future, we will utilise cloud technology to access hardware and most likely software from the same vendor. There are still a number of enhancements and strategies we can undertake to improve efficiency, capacity and information.

The make Hay connected program has been developed in house by Council staff and Councillors without input from any vendors. It was felt that taking advice from people within the industry would compromise the plan. Employees had input to the plan through department meetings, Senior Management Team meetings and the Fit for the Future working party. Essentially the strategy was to look at what needs to be improve, what is available and what can we achieve as part of our improvement Plan

The main feature of the program will be:-

- a) Develop an app to allow the community and employees to use their smartphone to lodge requests which will interface with Councils Customer Request Management System. This will allow community members to download a simple app from our website to report problems, service disruption and other complaints. These will be than simply transferred to Councils CRM system. Council operational staff will also use the same software. Council sees it as a very cheap simple solution with no risk and huge potential
- b) Develop a modern business web page with social media facilities and electronic and remote business functionality. Unfortunately our webpage is outdated, does not provide sufficiently for social media or business transactions and has limited community engagement. Now is the time to take advantage of the efficiencies a modern web site could provide.
- c) Video conferencing facilities at the Council Chambers and Library. Council is a relatively remote community and with NBN about to be rolled out in our area now is the time to take advantage of this technology. The facility in the Council Chambers would be used for training, conferences, consultancy, meetings and other business. In the library it is proposed to expand on our alliance with Holroyd Council where we already have developed a joint Literacy program called "Paint the Town Read". The equipment could be used to expand on this program but also there is the potential to link Holroyd Library and our Library for other activities such as shows and performances. Potentially it could be used for a whole range of entertainment and educational activities with a number of other providers
- d) Improve remote access and Wi-Fi. It is proposed to improve how we connect with each other and the community by upgrading our Wi-Fi fi facilities remote connection and the intranet. A

secure mobile platform will be implemented to allow content to be safely distributed to employees and Councillors. It is also proposed to upgrade our intranet which is already used extensively to take advantage of the change to allow it be accessed on a mobile device

- e) Mounted Cameras in Vehicles. An idea developed through employee consultation was to install a mounted Camera in selected vehicles not only for driver safety but also to allow recording of inspections, damage and technical issues. This would mean that specialist technical workers would not necessarily have to visit areas which in our case could be 100 kilometres from the office.

Cost of Plan

Council intends to submit an application for innovation funding for this program which is estimated to cost \$100,000 to fully implement

Risks

There is an obvious financial risk and the potential that there may be a small impact on services in the implementation stage but it is believed the potential benefit far outweighs the risk.

2. Workforce planning restructure and staff training

The Better Practice Review recommended Council review its workforce plan. This will be undertaken by the General Manager in consultation with the employees during 2015-2016. Council will continue to train our employees to obtain the capacity needed, recognising that, whilst we can engage short term specialist help, we also need to grow our own people to meet future challenges. It is planned to continue with our training program with the objective of succession, transformation and productivity.

Council is proud of its recent achievement in human resources and training and its subsequent ability to meet new challenges and requirements. In recent years Council has reduced its number of middle management positions substantially which has led to significant savings on a recurrent basis. This would not have been possible without a plan and a training methodology and regime.

In recent years Council has had a policy of an ongoing review of its structure in the pursuit of productivity improvements and savings. Council has restructured its workforce in such a way that there are now only minimal middle management positions with a very lean structure. In 2013 Council was able to reduce its total wages bill by over \$350,000 in real terms, which has improved our financial position significantly given these are recurrent savings. The long term financial plan of Council provided for a further \$200,000 saving by 2018/2019 through restructure and natural attrition which will be achievable.

Cost of Plan

Council will continue to invest in training and staff development as it is the most effective way to improve our capacity and capability. If you reduce investment in this area you increase the risk across all business areas

Risks

There is a strategic and financial risk that we may not achieve our objectives but not adapting and changing must represent a higher risk and also that a restructure may impact service levels in the short term.

3. Review Business Process

One of the Key improvement strategies in our proposal is to review our business processes recognising that business as usual is the least credible option that we have. It is proposed we undertake a thorough review and prepare a roadmap for five of our key business areas. It is expected that improvements will be identified and implemented. Lessons learnt in these key functions can then be rolled out across the organisation. Council has experience in this area having undertaken the same exercise with procurement which has been a great success. Part of the process will also be to educate and train staff in this area. The General Manager will be responsible for the implementation of this process who will work closely with the Directors.

There are also a number of tools available to assist with reviewing our business including peer review, initiatives such as “lean six sigma” and other case studies. The program will be conducted in house and will not involve any additional costs except for training which is provided for in that budget.

Costs

Funded within the existing service and training budgets.

Risks

The only risk identified would be a small risk to service delivery efficiency in any identified change phase.

4. Resourcing Sharing

A key part of Council future revolves around its resource sharing arrangements that it has with neighbouring Councils and also its alliance partner Holroyd City Councils. Details of these are listed in section 3.1 Option 1. These are not only highly efficient in terms of filling resource gaps in a contestable efficient way, but also provide additional services as has occurred with the “Paint the town Red” program with Holroyd CC.

These resource sharing opportunities will continue to be part of our service delivery with hopefully potential to expand on these. It is believed the fit for the future process will change other Councils attitudes to resource sharing and not see sharing a staff member or skill as losing autonomy or giving something up. Through resource sharing our Council has been able to reduce costs by having more lower paid and lower skilled positions and only buying in the high end specialist skills when they were needed. In a Council our size with what is generally a lower level of complexity it is inefficient to have highly paid workers who for a significant period of time undertake lower skilled duties.

Council has in the past provided ranger services to Balranald Council and as we are strategically placed in terms of been adjacent to the western Councils we are certainly open to any requests to provide assistance to those Councils on a fee for service basis.

It is also much easier to fill lower skilled positions and buy in short term skills from neighbouring Councils. Our resource sharing arrangements have been in place for some time with success and efficiency. Like any system it only works with commitment from all parties. In 2015-2016 Council will look at all resource sharing opportunities and will be included in our review business process review.

Costs

To date resource sharing has only led to cost saving especially in our wages bill.

Risks

May not be the commitment from all parties but residual risk is small with proper management.

5. Review Governance Procedures

Council has an efficient Governance process with a robust code of meeting practice (recently reviewed) and a history of strong and effective governance. Council has never had a code of conduct complaint. The fit for the future program is a time to evaluate how we do things and whether there are any benefits in changing how we do things. There is no doubt that technology will have a greater role to play and there is potential to possibly reduce meetings with the additional information able to be provided in electronic form.

The short time frame available to prepare our fit for the future proposal has meant this issue has not been considered by Council. It is proposed that one of our actions in 2015-2016 is to review our Governance procedures to identify if Council can do things more efficiently, provide more information and consultation to the community and perhaps eliminate practices that are no longer needed. It is pleasing to note, however, that in the recent community survey results indicated 74% believe Council is very important in the community and we do enjoy positive community support, so any review would be made on the basis of refinement and efficiency, not major change to how we operate our Governance functions.

Cost

Review will be funded by existing budgets with Technology upgrades part of innovation funding application.

Risks

Changes might not be supported by some of the stakeholders.

6. Review Service Levels and introduce measurement into what we do

As part of our ongoing improvement strategy, service levels have been looked at in the search for efficiency and reducing costs. It is acknowledged we need to improve in this area, particularly around community consultation and measurement.

Council has recently conducted a survey which collected responses on areas the community believes may be possible to have a reduction in service levels. These and other areas will be investigated. It is proposed to implement a more robust and comprehensive measurement system under the premise that what gets measured gets improved. There is also an acknowledgement from staff and the Councillors that we need to put simplicity back into our operations. Council has a modern information and technology system more than capable of expanding our financial and performance data.

The key objective of this strategy is to ensure our relatively scarce resources are used in an efficient and sustainable way and we minimise waste. This is a long term action that will be part of what we do in conjunction with our review of business process. To be efficient resources not only need to be allocated correctly, but, also used in the most efficient way. It is no use doing something very well if it doesn't need to be done at all.

Costs

It is proposed to complete this project in house on an ongoing basis and will be part of how we do business and should not have any significant costs

Risks

No significant risk as long as adequate controls are implemented

7. Mobility based working

Council has recognised that the traditional working model of desks, paper trails and workplace are not always appropriate and we need to take more of an activity approach. In the future staff will work remotely, part time, short term and in teams which all require business to be done electronically with less reliance on paper. Council already has an effective electronic records system and remote access but the capabilities in these areas need to be improved.

It is acknowledged that one of the biggest deficiencies of a Rural Council is the Difficulty in attracting and retaining skilled and experienced staff. One of the ways we can overcome this is to have more flexible staff arrangements. A shift away from the traditional model can also lead to productivity gains and can help overcome skilled shortages in allowing people to more easily work as a team or on specific projects.

Costs

There will be I.T. and implementation costs some of which will be included in the Make Hay Connected innovation project.

Risks

The change may have some negative impact with some staff members.

8. Asset Rationalisation (Infrastructure and Plant)

The Promoting better practice review identified that Council should complete an asset rationalisation plan as part of its asset management strategy. It is proposed this will occur in 2015-2016. It should be acknowledged Council will continue to look for savings and efficiencies with its assets, having already made a number of changes to the composition of the plant fleet which has led to an overall reduction in heavy plant which is leading to long term savings.

Hay Shire Council is also participating in the Ramroc regional asset coordination project under the direction and management of Jeff Roorda and Associates which will assist staff in their asset management processes.

Costs

Insignificant

Risks

There is a risk around the availability of contract plant at certain times and some assets which may be seen as surplus could still have community support which may require careful managing.

9. Renewable Energy and Energy Saving Initiatives

Council will be submitting an application for innovation funding to convert its Administration building to renewable energy and install LED lighting in all areas. An energy audit is being conducted and will be completed shortly on Councils electricity, the outcomes of which can be used in this process. There is always the potential to use innovation to meet our energy costs with the recent advancement in power storage technology from companies such as “Tesla” looking to have huge potential for communities like Hay that have an abundance of solar capacity.

Council views this strategy as not only a long term investment to reduce recurrent costs but also it is good community leadership.

Costs

Capital Costs will be in the vicinity of \$100,000.

Risks

Financial in terms that Technology and equipment can be quickly outdated.