

The Case for Model Local Government Policy

Background - The same head of department overseeing gaming and now under scrutiny of the Casino Royal Commission is responsible for oversight of local government.

Why are the alarm bells not ringing loud and clear for probity of content in the current review of the Local Government Act.by that department? Why is the Government playing games with local government? Are they wagering residents and ratepayers will remain blind?

Where are the Policies by which openness and accountability can be measured?

Just last month the WA Auditor General (A.G) reported that performance audits across 148 local governments found *a range of maturity in governance and administration, with varying risks to service delivery and resource management.*

For an industry spending \$4 billion annually, holding \$45 billion in assets and employing some 17,000 staff, ostensibly for residents' benefit, we should be able to expect better than *"a range of maturity"*.

Lack of uniform maturity exists because the Department, WALGA, LG Pro WA, and local governments are legislatively sponsored in combination, to act in unity, and have become self-serving. No legislated peak body represents, residents, ratepayers or community, so independent oversight remains the realm of unfunded, unresourced residents and ratepayers.

As Paul Murray puts it – the zealots!

The inherent danger of this one-sided approach is exposed in the amendments to law made since 1995, which cause benefit to these parties while measured to have depleted community engagement.

None of those tax or rates funded entities demonstrate measurable delivery of the local government Act's. requirement to;

- better decision-making;
- greater community participation;
- greater accountability to their communities;
- more efficient and effective local government.
- use best endeavours for communities;
- integrate environmental, social, and prosperity.

Why is the government sponsoring the unmeasurable who don't protect community?

Establishing a suite of Model Policies will set a baseline to guide and measure functional local government management in consistency, openness, accountability and culture.



Policy Confusion - Before first embarking down the road of Model Policies I enquired with WALGA – who did not bother to reply and the Department – who told me local government policy was not important. Being stunned by that view I explored my own local government to find over 110 random policies, plus local laws, plus regulations. None of which were cross referenced, some which were contradictory and all devoid of openness, accountability or functional consistency. After-failure management, at its best!

Clearly my own experience replicates the findings of the Auditor General, albeit in local government, not the department. The age-old management adage that *'no organisation can be better than its leadership,'* beams loudly.

Why does the government support 148 LG's each sporting over 100 policies? This leaves West Australian's the daunting task of ferreting through some 15,000 policies if they want to comply with L.G. requirements as they travel the State. Adoption of Model Policies could reduce this to around 10.

A further, classic resource wasting, borne of the absence of sound model policy, is seen in the minor-serious breach complaint system. Such a ludicrous system could only survive under the protection of the "sheltered workshop" local government industry.

It is telling that the Auditor General called out that, the department was not able to measure the soundness of its own internal decision making, yet this same department is responsible for assessing the soundness of local government decision making.

Consistency, openness and accountability established by a suite of Model Policies will make redundant, existing resource intensive petty incompetencies, like the existing 'big brother' complaint propagation system mentioned above.

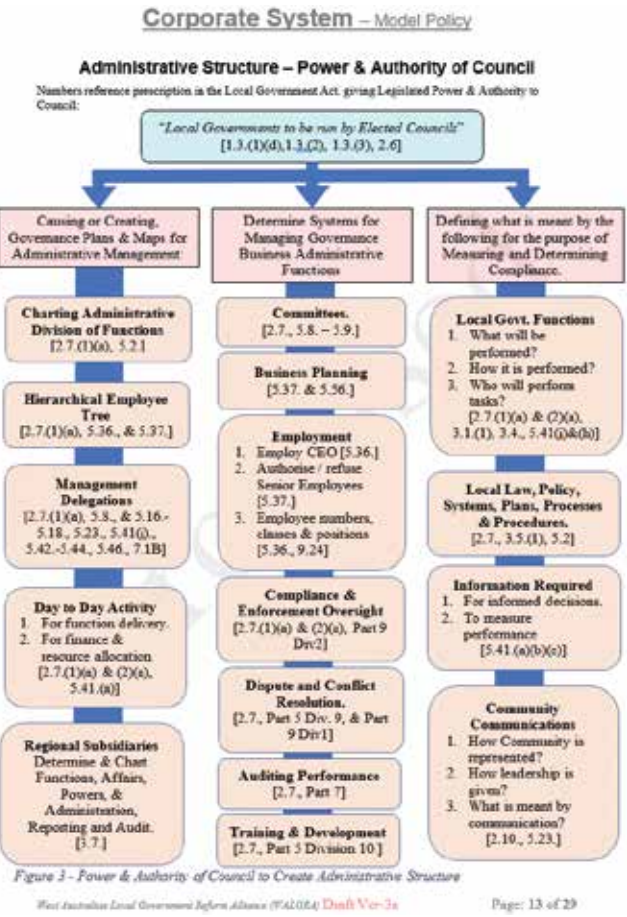
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Model Framework Policies Purposefully Measure:

- Reducing burdens on ratepayers.
- Reduced impost on Councillor efforts;
- Maximisation of Community engagement;
- Simplifying management guidelines;
- Frame-worked efficient administration;
- Clarification of Council or administrative roles;
- consistency across; words, behaviours, deeds, acts, actions and decisions; lists, records, systems, processes, plans, procedures functions, services, activities and resourcing. Each necessary for enablement, facilitation, management, measurement and reporting;

Model Policies Purposefully Deliver:

- Open, consistent respect;
 - Integrity in management;
 - Accountability to the community
- The WA Local Government Act is internally contradictory and fathers bullying, intimidatory values. But there is just enough prescription to enable councils composed of skilled elected councillors to salvage good business controls.
- Model Policies is a methodology to expand the knowledge of skilled councillors across those L.G.'s comprising unskilled councillors.



Model Policy for Building a Local Government Corporate System

The Dangers of Policy Failure

Where councils don't drive good policy control, the employed executive run riot. Often with 'official' impunity. Through shutting out community engagement, CEOs are able to drive up unnecessary employment, establish a sizable executive team and through this, influence increases to their own salary.

Another trick of the executive is to produce their own 'operations policy', claiming it to be necessary for 'day to day' management. Such practices turn local government activity into 'secret management business' despite that it dictates what treatment you and I receive. And notwithstanding the Act decrees all local government policy to be the exclusive authority of council.

Did you know that the Act requires the CEO to "ensure that advice and information is available to the council so that informed decisions can be made"? Many councillors are not well informed so this becomes the simplest thing in the world for a self-serving CEO to put his own biased information to council and drive benefit to him or herself. This practice is not audited and it is not regulated and by that makes mockery of local government claims of openness and accountability.

Model Policies drive such practices out into the open. The efficiency of Model Policy drives openness and accountability.

A 10% saving from adopting Model Policy could save ratepayer upwards of \$400 million annually across WA.