

Model Local Government Policy #3

Community Public Relations

Introducing Public Relations

"Public Relations" is one of those political "buss-terms" proffered for a few decades now but relatively poorly understood.

Professor 'Google' defines it as *"the professional maintenance of a favourable public image by an organization."* In other words, it is the intentional manipulation of your mind to persuade you the organisation is respectable.

Given that our 1995 Local Government legislation tells us that a local government was intended to deliver:

- *"Greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of loval government"* and
- *"In carrying out its functions a local government is to use its best endeavours"...*

What could be a better inducement to building great partnerships though shared participatory engagements between local goverment and communities? ***Surely this implies it should also be incumbent upon the local government to use its best endeavours to ensure community Public Relations enhancement was a natural focus for every act, action or activity of the local government?***

However, legislating local government as a *"Body Corporate"* without ownership has covertly caused local government to be deeply segregated from both its own Council and community by a power which allows local government to desert openness and accountability.

The 'Code of Conduct', 'Ministerial Inquiries, threats to dismiss Councils and the establishment of WALGA as a covert government Department, are some of the symptoms of an intentional denial to make Public Relations outcomes mandated and compulsory obligations on the local government - body corporate.

Model Local Government Policy on Public Relations is a management tool available to Councils to force a Public/Community Relations obligation onto their local governments agenda.

Measuring Public Relations (Community Respect)

The best measure of community respect for local government is the extent to which the local government engages with and unifies their residents, ratepayers and their advocacy groups.

In contrast the extent of local government disrespect for community is directly measured across 'divide and conquer' methodologies used in segregating community clubs and organisations within a local government district.

The use of social media trolls by the City of Melville to denigrate members of the Melville Residents and Ratepayers Assn. is a topical example of measurable local government activity intended to disrespect Community Public Relations through a process that cannot be investigated nor participants held accountable.

A report generated by the immediate past CEO of Melville to quantify the costs incurred by the City in refusing resolution of disputation is another classic example of the improper use of resources to seek authoritative support to bully and intimidate upstanding community members, and who's participants again are outside the walls of investigation and accountability.

The current Melville CEO's reporting of a Councillor to SAT is yet another example of intent to bully that offends integrity of natural justice. This time an elected Community representative is harmed.

Impacts on Public Relations

The largest detriment to the reputation of Councils and Local Governments is the guided misuse of the content of the 1995 Act with respect to its prescribed intention given at section 1.3. (2) & (3).

The current reform process with its increased apartheid style class prejudices, under which the Minister, his Department, Councils, Local Governments, and Communities are each segregated before being pitted against each other. Neither the base legislation nor recent 'reforms' seek to deliver unity across these parties but do offer elements of domination of some over the others.

The corrupted decisions emanating from the Standards Panel regime has probably done more harm to the Public Relations reputation of local governments than the combined purported offences of all parties listed on the Departments name and shame page. Partly because the decisions have never undergone cause and effect analysis for identification of prevention strategies. And partly because the Panel's rules require truncation of examination.

Public Relations is further debased with the legislated removal of natural justice preventing the Standards Panel from integrity in decision making through segregating purported breaches from their causalational origins or impacting persons, ensuring class bullying and intimidation remains the dominant Public Relations outcome.

It is curious the State Premier has, through mandating training and education for Councillors, encouraged his reputational (Public Relations) position to be measured in legislation as less intelligent, less educated and less skilled than that of a local government Councillor!

Will reforms lead to a covert installation of a Local Government power to close their borders to stop threats like Covid?

This Local Government Act reform exercise has at best, been little more than an exercise attempting to use Band-Aids to slow the ulceration of pox sores instead of healing the victim's disease. Although fragments of good policy have been inserted in dribs and drabs. But just like any good psychopath would use, there is enough to buy the reader's conviction of validity, while still failing measurable functional community benefit. One does not need a crystal ball to see that if exemplified changes to date are a premonition of what is yet to come, then our next generation will be continuing this fight for skilled, educated, and knowledgeable reform, well into the future.

So far, this process has been nothing more than a very blatant Public Relations exercise, in seeking to purchase public support without identifiable intention to deliver community benefit. It is an insulting impost on those who dedicate their time and energy to serving their community.

Minister Carey's mantra to:

- Reducing Red Tape
- Greater Transparency, Accountability, and Simplicity
- Clearer Roles and Responsibilities
- Stronger Financial Reporting and Traceability
- Earlier Intervention, Streamlined Resolution, Stronger Penalties

are the criteria by which Public Relation should be measured as either a natural accolade or a purposeful intention to deceive.

Minister

For identifiable benefit to WA Communities, will you cause local government reforms to be measured, reviewed and analysed, for their impact on integrity, transparency, accountability, simplicity or resolution and thus ensure good Public Relations?

Building Model Public Relations Policy

It is difficult to build a 'stand-alone' Public Relations Policy because the reputation of a local government is built on what it does just as much as what it doesn't do. And what is to be done or not done is included in the other nine Model Policies.

A second difficulty arises from the interference as opposed to assistance of State politics. Some of which is debated in the previous columns and which can apply a secondary influence on local government reputation independent of anything the local government does or does not do.

This leaves the value of a Model Public Relations Policy with the task of establishing the attributes and means against which contribution or denigration of Public Relations could be measured, analysed then enhanced or repaired, with visible integrity.

For example: Minister Cary's forewarning of "Earlier Intervention, Streamlined Resolution, Stronger Penalties" delivers a frightening threat that causation removal is to be obscured by an enhanced autocratic bullying and intimidatory regime. Model policy would redirect intervention toward root cause analysis and making the application of penalty a rare occurrence in place of current penalty focus dominance. Thus, removing the currently regularly used element of bullying and intimidation from the local government armoury.

Establishing a Model Public Relations Policy assists Councils and local government to overcome legislated debilities and focus toward establishing Community Public Relations integrity across all local government functions.

Model Public Relations Policy Examples

It is not the normal business or function of a local Government to directly donate to Disaster Appeals. However, it should be a Public Relations Policy function to support its District Community groups whose projects which may include, compassionate, emergency or disaster relief. By this, the local government is encouraging community participation and not simply pandering to prejudices in non-community application.

It should be normal Public Relations Policy to use the best endeavours of local government Officers, to avoid conflict, or disputation by measuring, analysing and development methodologies to prevent occurrences or resolve by consensus those which had occurred. Penalties are preferred applications of careless bullies as vexatious pleasure is the dominant outcome. There is an infinite historical record of the use of penalties that have delivered detriment without quantifiable benefit.

It should be normal Public Relations Policy to ensure Codes of Conduct do not segregate groups or discriminate between classes. The Codes included in recent reforms deliver increased complexity, delay intervention, remove transparency, fail accountability and disguise avenues to resolution. "Jim Crow" would be proud of such callously legislated intentional class discrimination.

A ward office for access between Councillor and Community would go a long way toward measurably mproving Public Relations.

Members of the Community should lobby their local Councillors to value Model Public Relations Policy

For Model Local Government Policy #1 Corporate System Framework. See: *The Case for Model Local Government Policy* <http://www.fremantleherald.com/ARCHIVES/F29521.pdf>

For Model Local Government Policy #2 Community Engagement. See: <http://www.fremantleherald.com/ARCHIVES/C26621.pdf>