



Corporate Planners Special Interest Group

Council Plan Development Guidelines



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Executive Summary

The Council Plan Development Guide has been developed by the LGPro Corporate Planners Special Interest Group (Corporate Planners SIG) as an aid to the development of the Council Plan following the November 2005 Council elections.

The guide includes the context in which the Council Plan will be developed, Principles, Models and Processes to the development of the plan. It includes extracts from the Local Government Act that govern the legislative requirements of the Council Plan.

The guide has been developed by representatives from all sizes of local government in Victoria: metropolitan, fringe, rural cities, large and small shires. The over riding objective has been to develop a document that can be used by staff developing their first Council Plan, by large and by small Councils, as well as providing benefit to the practitioner with many years experience.

Whilst the guide does not advocate a minimalist approach, it does provide options that will allow the development of a plan that meets all legislative requirements. It also provides options to further enhance the Council Plan, depending on the needs of the Council and the community.

We anticipate that this guide will be updated in the future, particularly as the outcomes of a range of State Government initiatives, such as outcomes of the Victorian Community Indicators Project and the Joint State Local Government Planning Project come to fruition. In addition, the experience of Councils after the 2005 election, and anticipated issues associated with all 79 Victorian Councils developing their Council Plans post the 2008 elections are likely to reflect on the contents of this document.

The Corporate Planners SIG hopes that the guide will be a practical aid to the development of the Council Plan in early 2006, and we look forward to feedback on its content and use.

Context

Introduction

Background and Context

Historically, local government based its organisational planning on a budget driven model, ‘what can we do with the rates we collect or the grants and loans we can secure’? Budget driven models allow for services to be delivered and the meeting of short term promises of the elected representatives. In addition the budget model allowed for the accumulation of funds for specific major capital works projects in the short term future.

Over time the private sector identified that organisations need to plan further into the future than just one financial year. Borrowing from the military term ‘strategy’, businesses began developing longer term strategies for business growth, which later as businesses became larger, became known as corporate planning. In a corporate planning model, strategy becomes the informer of long term financial planning.

“Within [government](#), strategic planning provides guidance for organisational management similar to that for business, but also provides guidance for the evolution or modification of public policy and laws. Areas of such public policy include:

- *Funding of infrastructure and rate-setting (streets, water-supplies, sewers, and parks)*
- *Functional plans such as for land use, transportation, and water resources*
- *Growth management and/or comprehensive planning”¹*

Status of Corporate Planning in Local Government

Introduction of Corporate Plans

A Labour State Government introduced corporate planning, as a statutory requirement of Local Government, in 1992. This initiative was a component of the government’s reform of municipal finances, which included the introduction of AAS27, auditors and the advertisement of the draft budget. The rationale for these reforms was to improve local government’s efficiency, transparency and accountability to the community and reflected the micro-economic reform agenda of the time.

¹ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning

Corporate planning was “to provide a solid base for council policy development and decision making” as well as increasing Council’s accountability to the community. To quote from the Minister’s second reading speech:

“As part of the Bill’s overall philosophy to improve the good management of local government, councils will be required to produce corporate plans. These plans will outline council’s objectives, strategies for achieving these objectives and appropriate performance indicators...As these plans will be available for public scrutiny, they will also give the community a clear view of its council’s activities and directions” (Hogg 1992).

The State Opposition at the time welcomed these changes. Hallam (1992) described the initiative as “part of the overall drive to make local government more accountable and to promote long-term planning as part of the accountability test”. Napthine (1992) commented that

“the Bill will require the council to prepare a forward-looking document on where it sees services going in the next three years and how it will deliver its services to the ratepayers and residents. This is an opportunity for increased accountability and public scrutiny that should be welcomed by everyone involved. It may require more work by local government, but the benefits in terms of public accountability and the chances for public input will far outweigh any costs involved”.

The preparation of a corporate plan was considered to be a critical aspect of forward planning and complemented the new reporting requirements.

Ongoing Reform

The micro-economic reform of the early 1990s continued with council amalgamations and the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. Councils implemented corporate planning and new reporting requirements, such as, mandatory 21 financial and over 70 non-financial indicators, were included in the mix.

With the election of a new Labour State Government, the reform agenda moved away from micro-economic reform to broader policy agendas. This shift is best reflected in the introduction of the Best Value principles in 1999, which add three new principles to the existing principles of accountability (that is, reporting against some form of performance measure or standard) and consultation, namely continuous improvement, responsiveness and accessibility.

Democracy and Community Engagement

Since 2000, the policy debate has broadened with State Government talking about community engagement and fostering local democracy, seeking to strengthen the connection between local communities and their councils. For corporate planning, the policy debate has moved beyond accountability and

transparency issues. The 2003 amendments to the legislation, introducing four year Council Plans, were designed to *“fulfil community expectations in regard to democracy, accountability and probity”* (Broad 2003). The amendments to the “accountability framework” of council plans, budgets and annual reports were designed to *“increase public input to the development of council plans and ensure that the activities and performance of councils are more open to public scrutiny”* (Broad 2003).

The Government’s view was that having three-year rolling corporate plans that were reviewed annually was confusing, and have provided instead for four-year council plans adopted by a new council after each general election. To quote from the Minister’s second reading speech:

“These council plans will be developed in consultation with the community and will specify the objectives, resources and performance indicators for the council for the next four years “ (Broad 2003).

The challenge before practitioners and councillors is to engage all the relevant stakeholders in the corporate planning process so that the outcome – a four year council plan - meaningfully represents both the aspirations of the community and the intentions of the incoming council.

Differences between each Municipality

The Victorian State Government grouped the 79 Victorian councils into five categories, Inner and Outer Melbourne Metropolitan Councils, Large Rural Cities and Regional Centres, Large Rural and Small Rural Shires (Groups 1 – 5, refer Appendix 1).

The variability of geography, community needs and aspirations, availability or resources, political will and local challenges have all combined to affect the ability of councils to embrace the notion of corporate planning.

Larger Councils and Shires often have the ability to have dedicated Officers whose role is to coordinate the development of the council plan. In smaller councils the responsibility for the development of the council plan rests either with a single person, or with a person who has multiple roles.

Availability of the financial and human resources to support the development of council plans has impacted on the practice and outcome of the corporate planning process. These issues in themselves have not necessarily produced poor quality corporate plans. In many cases lack of resources has led to the development of innovative community engagement process and plan development.

Background to the preparation of the ‘Council Plan Development Guide’

In addressing these issues it seems appropriate to refer to the Best Value Review process undertaken by Victorian local government over the past few years.

Under the Local Government (Best Value Victoria) Act 1999 Council is required to review its services in line with the Best Value principles concerning cost and quality standards, responsiveness to community needs, accessible, continuous improvement, consultation and reporting.

The Best Value review for Corporate Planning came to the forefront of the Corporate Planners Network as in 2003. It was at this time after changes to the Local Government Act had come into place as a result of the Democratic Reform Act that a number of issues and processes were identified as significant to best practice. Namely:

- Benchmarking against other Councils;
- Review of processes as a result of legislation changes.

Changes to the Local Government Act have made it particularly timely to review corporate planning and the council plan processes at Council. The Best Value Review covered Council’s statutory requirements for the preparation of Council Plans, and also the elements that support corporate planning, including the community long-term vision.

a) Statutory requirements

Council Plan

A Council Plan must be prepared every four years and submitted to the Minister - comprising Strategic Objectives, Strategic Indicators and a Strategic Resource Plan – and reviewed annually.

Annual Report (text preparation)

Many Corporate Planners are responsible in part, excluding financial statements, for the content of the annual Report and are required to prepare the Annual Report, which was written to be compliant to the 1989 Local Government Act.

The review will present recommendations for reporting on Council activities in future Annual Reports, compliant with the updated Local Government Act.

b) Non-statutory functions

Annual Plan

It is worth mentioning that there is no longer a statutory requirement for an Annual Plan. Under the Local Government Act, Council does however produce an Annual Budget which provides financial and non-financial initiatives.

Long-term visioning

Many councils undertake long-term visioning practices and prepare a community plan, This requires community engagement. Preparation of a community plan often falls on the Corporate Planner. It is not a statutory requirement, but it has become a key planning document for councils, and has also attracted a good deal of favourable attention in the community and externally, enhancing Council's image.

There are a number of elements to these plans, from development of long-term visions (often 20 years), to monitoring and supporting implementation of the Plan. These long-term visions act as guide to Councillors in their development of the Council Plan.

Corporate Planning – Benchmarking exercise

The Victorian Corporate Planning Network undertook an informal benchmarking exercise in December 2003. The purpose of the benchmarking exercise was to prepare a confidential report on Corporate Planning in local government at that time. An analysis of the benchmarking outcomes is presented in Appendix 3.

Principles

Connectivity

- The Council Plan must have a direct connection to the aspirations of the community in whatever form it takes, such as the community plan and/or council vision.
- Key strategies that deliver the vision / community plan must be reflected in the plan.
- Any subordinate plans/actions (eg Unit plans, Individual plans) must relate back to objectives within the Council Plan.
- Formulation of the strategic resource plan and budget should reflect the resourcing of the Council plan and community plan/vision

Responsiveness

- The plan must be able to respond, in a controlled way, to changes in the environment (Social, Economic, Environment)

Participation / Ownership

- All key stakeholders should be involved in the formulation of the plan either directly or via other consultative occasions. Eg strategy, vision reviews surveys etc.
- Agreement on the overall direction of the plan and its priorities should be gained from all key stakeholders.

Accountability

- The plan should contain clear accountabilities for its implementation
- A robust and transparent monitoring mechanism should support the plan.

Language

- The plan should be written in plain English
- Clear, plain English communication should be used in all communications regarding the plan
- LOTE requirements should be catered for to ensure all stakeholders can access information

Statutory Requirements

- The council plan process and content must conform to any statutory requirements detailed in the Local Government Act

Models

Legislative Framework

Essentially the Council Plan documents the core values, vision, mission, purpose, goals, objectives and outcomes for the organisation. These elements are aligned to the policy, planning and budget processes of council.

Crucial to the formation of the Council Plan is the requirements under Section 126 and 127 of the Local Government Act 1989. These sections are outlined in Appendix 2.

The Council Plan format and the presentation style are left entirely to the preferred approach of each council. The content of the published product has three main elements: statutory requirements, common elements and optional information. There are obviously common themes and approaches between each Council and a guide is presented here that takes into consideration the approach of all Victorian Councils.

This guide is presented in the form of a table of contents with an indicator of requirement for each section noted. These fall into the three categories of statutory, common and optional.

Table of Contents - Guide

- (1) Foreword (optional)
- (2) Mayor's Introduction (optional/common)
- (3) An introduction to the Council Plan (optional)
- (4) Council's Values (common)
- (5) Council's Vision (common)
- (6) Council's Mission (common)
- (7) The Council/Councillors (optional/common)
How to contact your elected representatives
- (8) CEO's Message/Overview (common)
- (9) Organisational Structure (common)
- (10) Planning framework (optional)
- (11) Best Value (optional)

- (12) Snapshot of Council (common)
 - Facts and figures
 - Survey results

- (13) Triple Bottom Line Reporting (optional/common)
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Environmental

- (14) Key Strategic Objectives (statutory – section 125(2))

- (15) Strategies for next 4 years (statutory – section 125(2))

- (16) Strategic Indicators (statutory – section 125(2))

- (17) Council priorities (optional)
 - Tasks and challenges facing the local government

- (18) Strategic Resource Plan (statutory - sections 125(2) & 126)
 - Human Resources
 - Four year financial plan (Standard Statements – refer item 19)
 - Key Assumptions
 - Rating Strategies
 - Fees and Charges Strategies
 - Borrowing Strategies
 - Capital Works Strategies
 - Infrastructure Assets

- (19) Standard Statements (statutory – section 126)
 - Four-Year Statement of Financial Position
 - Four-Year Statement of Financial Performance
 - Four-Year Statement of Cash Flows
 - Four-Year Statement of Capital Works
 - Four-Year Statement of Non-Financial Resources (including Human Resources)

- (20) Managing Risks (optional)

- (21) Information Technology and Management (optional)

- (22) Customer Service Strategy (optional)

Process

Assumption: developing a Council Plan following a Council election.

Common Steps

1. Collecting data that identifies needs, priorities, obligations and commitments

- Issues arising from community consultations and community surveys
- Existing Council commitments reflected in Vision statements
- Existing strategies and plans eg long term financial plan, long term capital works plan, MPHP, MSS, Road Management Plan, Early Years Plan
- Departmental business or service plans
(Refer figure1)

2. Strategic planning with Councillors and senior management

- Identify existing priorities
- Identify emerging priorities
- Seek consensus on future directions and broad strategies

3. Prepare draft Council Plan

- Discussion with senior management
- Discussion with Councillors

4. Statutory process

- Council adopts draft Plan for consultation
- Council sets timeframes to follow s223 consultation process – advertisement, date for closure of submissions, date to hear submissions, committee to hear submission
- Submission received and heard

5. Adoption of Council Plan

- Issues raised at consultation analysed and any proposed changes to draft are discussed with senior management and Councillors
- Council adopts Plan
- Plan sent to Minister
(Refer figure 2)

Strategic Resource Plan (SRP)

The legislation requires that the Council Plan include a Strategic Resource Plan. Councils differ in how the preparation of this Plan is included in the process. There are at least two approaches being used within the sector:

- (i) Include the SRP within the development of the Council Plan:
 - Prepare SRP on the basis of existing long term financial plans
 - Include SRP tables and text in draft Council Plan and subject to formal consultation as one document
 - Adopt SRP as part of Council Plan

- (ii) Include the SRP as part of the annual budget process (This only works if Council adopts the Budget before 30 June):
 - Prepare SRP on the basis of budget projections
 - Include SRP as part of the draft budget document and subject to formal consultation as part of the budget process
 - Adopt SRP as a separate document after the consultation process
 - Incorporate into the published Council Plan document and send to the Minister

Minimum Steps

As noted in the Act, the minimum requirement is that a Council must:

1. draft a Council Plan and a Strategic resource Plan.
2. conduct a formal consultation process in compliance with section 223.
3. adopt the final Council Plan and SRP and send to the Minister by 30 June.

Enhancements

Ideally a Council Plan needs to reflect the aspirations of the community and be relevant to the organisation. Therefore the quality of the Plan will be enhanced if there is broad ownership of the Plan by Councillors, community and staff. Some of the strategies used by Councils to achieve this goal are:

- linking the Plan to long term visions and financial or resource plans
- linking Plan to existing strategies, plans and operational business plans
- having a facilitated planning session with Councillors
- seeking community input in the development of the plan eg using existing consultative strategies and surveys
- seeking staff input in the development of the plans through staff workshops, business plans, service plans, setting up in-house project team on development of the plan.

Figure 1 – Planning Circle

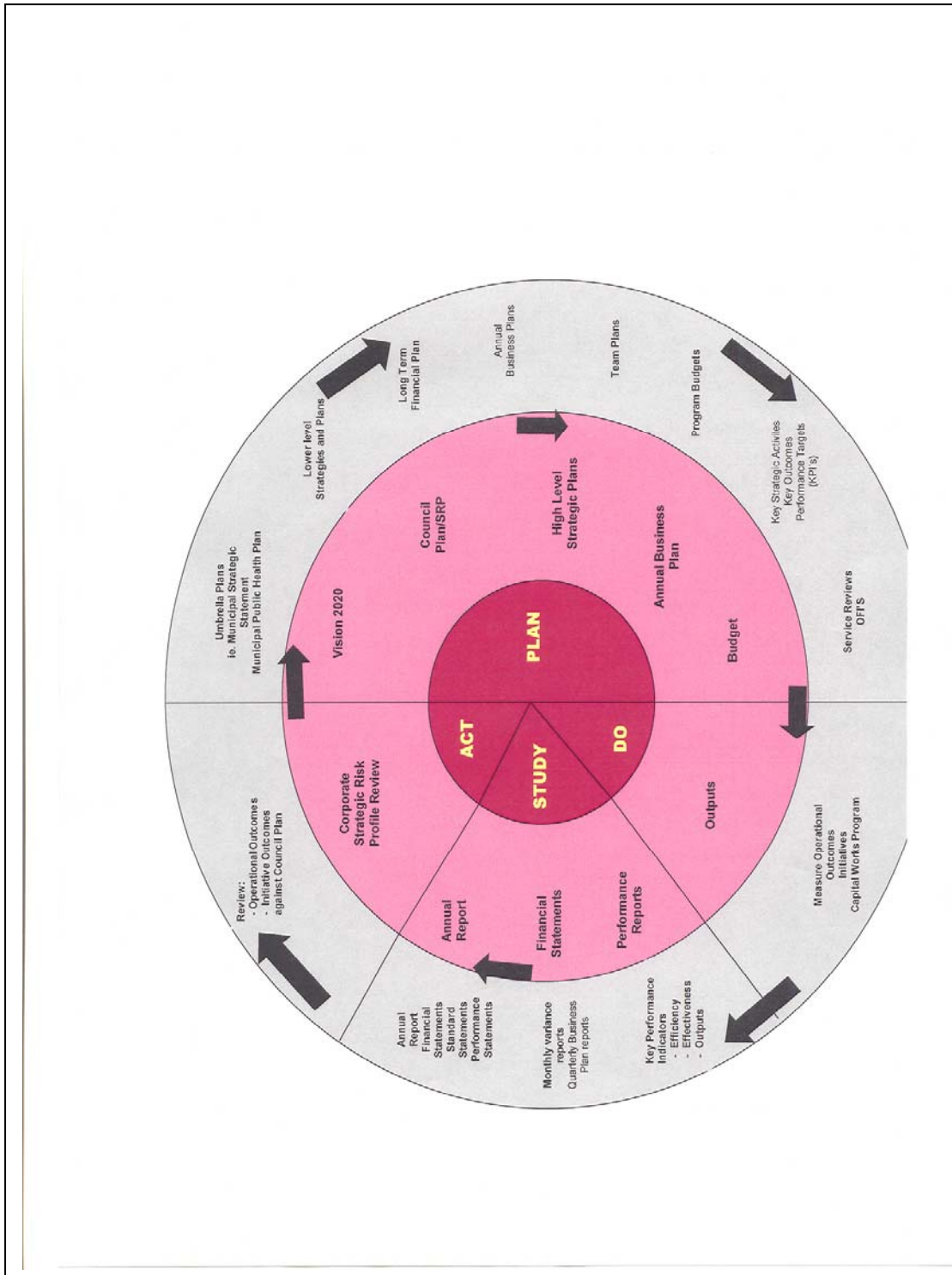
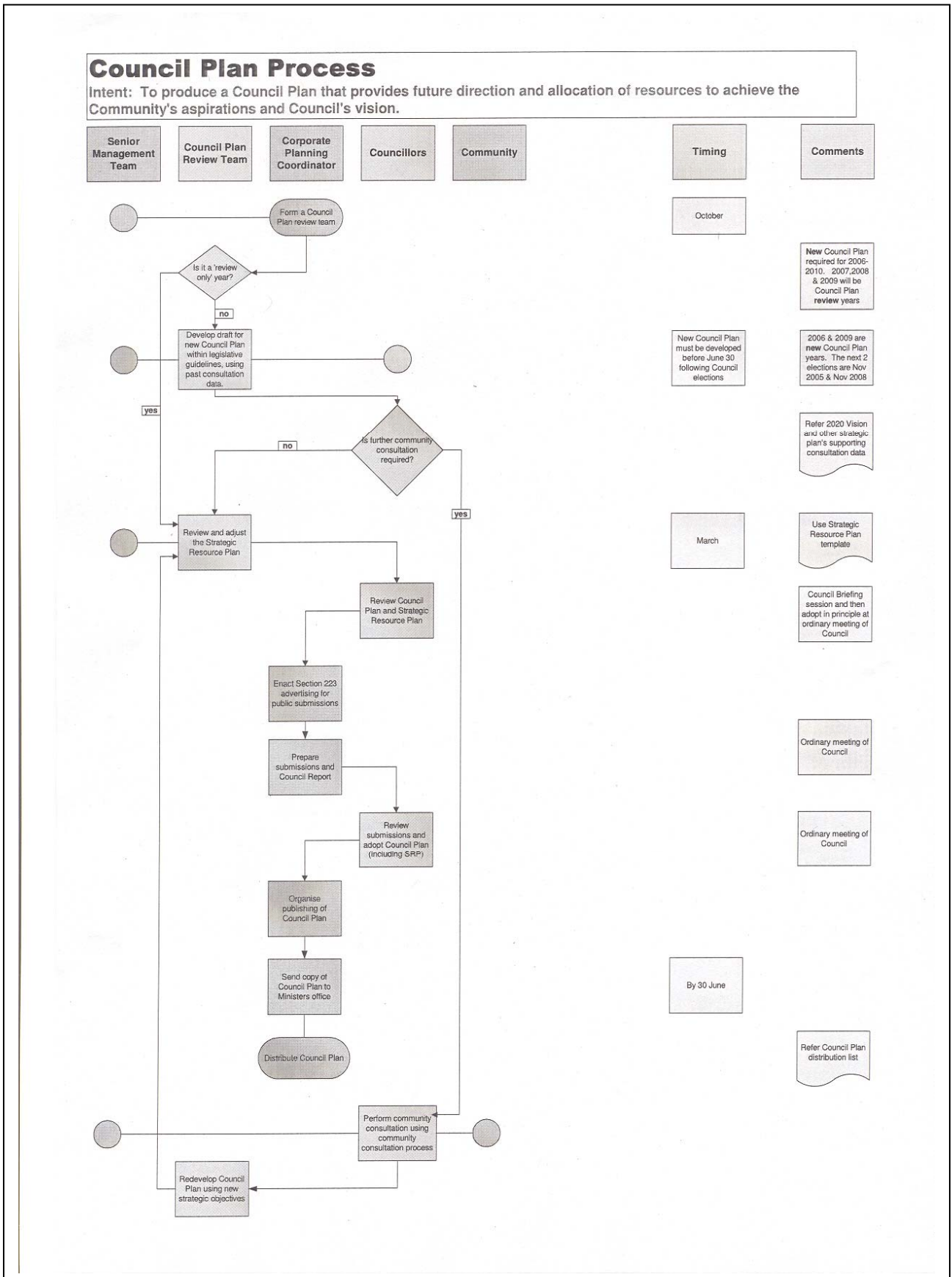


Figure 2 – Council Plan Process



Challenges and Solutions

1. Legislation and Government Direction

The Local Government Act specifies the content of Council Plans as documented in the previous section.

Benefits:

- Accountability.
- Responsibility.
- Enhances reputation of local government (pre-amalgamation and Commissioners).
- Enhances quality of work and services.

Issues:

- Perceived as State Government wielding the 'big stick'.
- Less flexibility as to the content.
- The required community consultation period decreases the time available for completing the Council Plan.

2. Councillor Support

Councillor engagement is often best achieved through holding Councillor Planning events such as weekends. This is particularly important post Council elections so that new Councillors can be familiarised with the corporate and business side of Council, including the importance and relevance of developing a relevant 4-year Council Plan that will see their aspirations for their local community achieved during their Council term.

If Council have a Community Plan, it is also important that Councillors are clear about the connection between the Community Plan, Council Plan, Budget and Business Plans.

Suggested steps for engaging with Councillors are:

- Host Council Planning event post Council election, preferably no later than mid December. This will be incorporated in their overall induction timetable. At this event/weekend Councillors will commence discussions about the direction of the new Council Plan.
- It might be necessary to meet with some Councillors individually, particularly new Councillors.
- Host another Council Planning event in February/March to take back a version of the new 4-year Council Plan based on the discussions at the December event
- Draft Council Plan goes to a Council Briefing in May to endorse the community consultation phase.

- Any community feedback can be taken back to individual Councillors as necessary if they would like to give some input about the response
- Adopted by Council end of June.

3. Timeframe – Learnings from Councils that had elections in 2004

Issue

Preparation of the Council Plan is only one of a range of issues that need to be addressed prior to 30 June 2006. The list of issues to be undertaken and completed during that timeframe includes:

- Induction of new Councillors
- Development of Council Plan (section 125)
- Development of the Strategic Resource Plan (SRP) (section 126)
- Development of the Annual Budget (section 127)
- Review the code of conduct (section 76Q)
- Set Councillor and Mayoral allowances (section 74)

Outcomes

Of the above-mentioned tasks, the development of the Council Plan, the Strategic Resource Plan and the Annual Budget will consume most time, due to the issues included within the documents, and the need to conduct a section 223 public consultation process. A copy of the timetable developed by a rural council to develop their plan and budget after the 2004 election is attached for information.

The main lesson from those Councils that held elections in 2004 is that the time available to undertake all the above tasks is limited because of the Christmas/January break, and careful planning is required to complete all the tasks prior to 30 June.

Most Councils chose to combine the development of the Strategic Resource Plan with the development of the Annual Budget (preparing one financial plan, rather than two).

Annual Development Process

Attendance (4)

Actions	November			December			January			February			March			April			May			June			July					
	8	15	22	6	13	20	27	31	3	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	2	9	16	23
1 SMT/GM's prepare issues papers for Councillor Workshops																														
2 Strategic Priorities workbooks given to Councillors for pre reading																														
3 Councillors return their completed workbooks for collation																														
4 Council and CEO/GM's Strategic Planning Workshop																														
5 Council reviews Draft 1 strategic priorities document																														
6 Draft 1 reviewed by the organisation																														
7 Draft 2 signed off by the Mayor/CEO																														
8 Revised Draft 2 of the strategic priorities document sent to Key Stakeholder for pre reading																														
9 Workshops with community, stakeholders etc.																														
10 Draft 3 developed incorporating workshop feedback																														
11 Councillor and CEO/GM's feedback incorporated into Draft 1 Council Plan																														
12 Draft 1 - Council Plan document open for public exhibition and comment																														
13 Comments from Public Exhibition incorporated																														
14 Draft 2 of the Council Plan																														
15 Budget Preparation begins																														
16 Council meeting to Adopt Draft Annual Plan																														
17 Draft Budget Advertised for Public Inspection for 6 weeks																														
18 Council Plan sent to the Minister by 30 June																														
19 Special Council meeting to Adopt Final Budget & Council Plan																														

■ Council Action
 ■ Consultation
 ■ Budget Timeline
 ■ GM's and SMT Action

Future Directions

Initial Document

This document has been produced to add value to the corporate planning process for council experiencing elections in Nov 05. It is planned to revise the manual by gathering feedback from corporate planners and progressively adding material relating to the other future directions listed below.

Indicators Project

The Victorian Community Indicators Project is being run over 2005 and 2006 to develop a framework and process for the development of indicators designed to support local governments. The indicators are being developed as tools for measuring health, wellbeing and sustainability and for improving citizen engagement, community planning and policy making. Funded by VicHealth the project is working with an initial group of 'Partner Councils' to pilot new 'best practice' models.

Alignment of Council Planning

Recent changes to the Local Government Act have brought about an alignment of the development and submission of Council Plans for all Victorian Councils. This will come into effect in 2008. At this time Councils elections and the subsequent development of Council Plans will be on a four-year cycle.

Alignment of Council Plans with Community Plans

The approach to the development of community plans varies dramatically across Victorian Local Governments. Some councils are still developing their approach while others have community plans well entrenched into their community consultation and engagement practices. With the community plan seen to be a guiding tool for councillors and councils in the determining strategic objectives, it is seen that good practice is to develop and review these plans prior to the development and review of Council Plans. The long-term approach is generally considered to be on a four-year cycle aligned with the Council Plan cycle.

Integrated Planning

Victorian Councils acknowledge that an integrated and consistent planning approach is a critical part of good governance, business and risk management.

To achieve this Councils must develop a process that sets out the steps for developing and implementing a new, or reviewing an existing, strategy, or plan. The process needs to guide the development of a strategy or plan so that there is:

- a focus on achieving Council's vision;
- accountability for the development and review of all strategies and plans;
- consistency in approach to planning and decision making;
- improved communication and information sharing; and
- opportunity to integrate and coordinate planning efforts and maximise capacity.

Definitions and Acronyms

Annual Report

The annual review of council's performance as measured against the Council Plan and Budget.

Best Value

The Victorian Government has amended the Local Government Act 1989 to require each council to achieve a set of Best Value Principles. The Act requires council to involve and inform the community on progress toward addressing the principles.

Budget

The annual strategic activities and financial statements council has adopted to monitor its performance. The Budget is subject to an annual audit at the end of the financial year.

Business Plan

The council's priorities from the four year Council Plan are followed through in annual targets to be achieved by business units.

Business Unit

A council department, branch or team.

CEO

Chief Executive Officer

Council Plan

A four year overriding strategy that provides the planned vision and direction for the organisation outlining where it wants to be in the future.

Financial Plan

A four year financial projection that determines when, how and where council will spend ratepayers' money to achieve the strategic direction set in the Council Plan.

Human Resource Statement

The Human Resource Statement reflects the identified staffing levels and mix funded in the Strategic Resource Plan.

Mission

A clear statement of what an organisation does

MPHP

The Municipal Public Health Plan is a set of policies and strategies to provide a framework for public health and wellbeing services.

MSS

The Municipal Strategic Statement is a legal document that sets out the objectives the council has set for the land use zones and policy statements in the planning scheme. The statement is reviewed annually.

Strategic Activities

Projects or tasks to be completed within one year.

Standard Financial Statements

- Standard Statement of Financial Performance;
- Standard Statement of Cash Flows;
- Standard Statement of Financial Position; and
- Standard Capital Statement

Strategic Indicators

Quantitative information that measures progress toward achieving the strategic goals and objectives.

Strategic Objectives

Statements that outline the four primary areas council is focused on to achieve its vision.

Strategic Resource Plan (SRP)

Financial and non-financial resources for the next four years that are required to achieve the strategic objectives.

Triple Bottom Line

Triple Bottom Line Reporting acknowledges that an organisation has impacts on society, the environment and financially on its stakeholders. Local Governments' governance responsibilities provide a fourth area of impact.

Values

Beliefs, commitments and principles that guide everyday decision-making, whether consciously or subconsciously. They are what individuals and organisations believe to be truly important.

Vision

A vivid picture of an ambitious, desirable future/state; a powerful compelling image of where the organisation wants to be.

Work Area Plans

A working document that ploys the future path a business unit will take. Used as a planning tool for managers and business unit leaders, it shows how we are going to close the gap between where we are today and where we want to be in the future.

Appendix 1 – Group 1 – 5 Councils

Group 1 Councils – Inner Melbourne Metropolitan Councils

- Banyule City Council
- Bayside City Council
- Boroondara City Council
- Darebin City Council
- Glen Eira City Council
- Hobsons Bay City Council
- Kingston City Council
- Maroondah City Council
- Melbourne City Council
- Monash City Council
- Moonee Valley City Council
- Moreland City Council
- Port Phillip City Council
- Stonnington City Council
- Whitehorse City Council
- Yarra City Council

Group 2 Councils – Outer Melbourne Metropolitan Councils

- Brimbank City Council
- Cardinia Shire Council
- Casey City Council
- Frankston City Council
- Greater Dandenong City Council
- Hume City Council
- Knox City Council
- Manningham City Council
- Melton Shire Council
- Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
- Whittlesea City Council
- Wyndham City Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Group 3 Councils – Large Rural Cities and Regional Centres

- Ballarat City Council
- Greater Bendigo City Council
- Greater Geelong City Council
- Greater Shepparton City Council
- Horsham Rural city Council
- Latrobe City Council
- Mildura Rural City Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Wangaratta Rural City Council
- Warrnambool City Council
- Wodonga Rural City Council

Group 4 Councils – Large Rural Shires

- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Colac-Otway Shire Council
- Corangamite Shire Council
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- Macedon Range Shire Council
- Mitchell Shire Council
- Moira Shire Council
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Surf Coast Shire Council
- Wellington Shire Council

Group 5 Councils – Small Rural Shires

- Alpine Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Bass Coast Shire Council
- Benalla Rural City Council
- Buloke Shire Council
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Golden Plains Shire Council
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Hindmarsh Shire Council

Group 5 Councils – Small Rural Shires (cont)

- Indigo Shire Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Mansfield Shire Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Murrindindi Shire Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- Borough of Queenscliffe
- Strathbogie Shire Council
- Towong Shire Council
- West Wimmera Shire Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council

Appendix 2 – Extracts from Local Government Act

125. Council Plan

- (1) A Council must prepare and approve a Council Plan—
 - (a) by 30 June 2004; and
 - (b) within the period of 6 months after each general election or by the next 30 June, whichever is later.
- (2) A Council Plan must include—
 - (a) the strategic objectives of the Council;
 - (b) strategies for achieving the objectives for at least the next 4 years;
 - (c) strategic indicators for monitoring the achievement of the objectives;
 - (d) a Strategic Resource Plan containing the matters specified in section 126;
 - (e) any other matters which are prescribed by the regulations.
- (3) A person has a right to make a submission under section 223 on the proposed Council Plan.
- (4) The Minister may extend the period within which a Council must comply with sub-section (1).
- (5) A Council must submit a copy of the Council Plan to the Minister by the date specified in sub-section (1) or applying under sub-section (4).
- (6) If a Council fails to submit a Council Plan to the Minister within the time allowed, the Minister must ensure that details of the failure are published in the annual report of the Department for Victorian Communities.
- (7) At least once in each financial year, a Council must consider whether the current Council Plan requires any adjustment in respect of the remaining period of the Council Plan.
- (8) Subject to sub-sections (9) and (10), a Council may make any adjustment it considers necessary to the Council Plan.
- (9) A person has a right to make a submission on a proposed adjustment to a Council Plan under section 223.
- (10) If a Council makes an adjustment to the Council Plan, the Council must within 30 days of making the adjustment advise the Minister of the details of the adjustment to the Council Plan.

- (11) A copy of the current Council Plan must be available for inspection by the public at—
 - (a) the Council office and any district offices; and
 - (b) any other place required by the regulations.

126. Strategic Resource Plan

- (1) The Strategic Resource Plan is a resource plan of the resources required to achieve the strategic objectives.
- (2) The Strategic Resource Plan must include in respect of at least the next 4 financial years—
 - (a) the standard statements describing the required financial resources in the form and containing the information required by the regulations;
 - (b) statements describing the required non-financial resources, including human resources.
- (3) A Council must—
 - (a) review the Strategic Resource Plan during the preparation of the Council Plan; and
 - (b) adopt the Strategic Resource Plan not later than 30 June each year.
- (4) A copy of the current Strategic Resource Plan must be available for inspection by the public at—
 - (a) the Council office and any district offices; and
 - (b) any other place required by the regulations.

223. Right to make submission

- (1) The following provisions apply if a person is given a right to make a submission under this section (whether under this or any other Act) to the Council—
 - (a) the Council must publish a public notice stating that submissions in respect of the matter specified in the public notice will be considered in accordance with this section;
 - (b) the Council or where the Council so determines a committee of the Council must consider any written submission which is received by the Council within 14 days after the publication of the public notice stating that submissions will be considered in accordance with this section;
 - (c) any person who has made a written submission to the Council and requested that he or she be heard in support of the written submission is entitled to appear in person or

by a person acting on his or her behalf before a meeting of the Council or the committee;

- (d) the Council must—
 - (i) fix the day, time and place of the meeting referred to in paragraph (c); and
 - (ii) give reasonable notice of the day, time and place of that meeting to every person who has lodged a separate submission and in the case of a submission lodged on behalf of a number of persons, to the person specified in the submission as the person to whom notice is to be given;
 - (e) the Council must take into consideration all the submissions made under this section and after it has made a decision must notify in writing every person who has lodged a separate submission and in the case of a submission lodged on behalf of a number of persons, notify in writing 1 of those persons, of the decision and the reasons for the decision.
- (2) If a proposal by the Council involves the exercise of powers at the same time under more than one section giving a right to make a submission and written submissions are received under more than 1 of those sections the submission procedure may be carried out in respect of all the written submissions at the same time.
- (3) Despite section 98, a Council may authorise the appropriate members of Council staff to carry out administrative procedures necessary to enable the Council to carry out its functions under this section.

Appendix 3 – Analysis of Corporate Planning Benchmarking Data.

The objective for this benchmarking exercise was to produce a confidential internal working paper. Although the responses remain confidential, the analysis of the results is presented here.

The working paper presented seven questions. Officers responsible for corporate planning were asked for frank and honest answers in the knowledge that the responses would be kept confidential and some responses may not be favourable to current corporate planning processes. Responses were received from fifteen Victorian councils. The results are outlined below.

Question 1

Is the Council Plan seen as a genuinely transformational tool, i.e. a tool to focus organisational energy and effort, or does Council produce the plan to meet its statutory obligations?

Analysis

Council ideology generally matches personal ideals.

Question 2

Who are the primary drivers in developing the Council Plan – Councillors, senior management, other Council staff or the community?

Analysis

For most councils the primary drivers are Councillors and senior management, with the exception of one council where the Plan is strongly driven by Councillors.

Question 3

What drives the development of the Council Plan - is it the budget, work area plans or commitments, or long-term plans and strategies?

Analysis

For most councils the Council Plan influences the expenditure items in the budget.

The result regarding the relationship between the Council Plan and work area plans or commitments is split. This may reflect differences in council processes or ideologies.

Those councils with a long-term plan use this to inform the development of the Council Plan.

Question 4

Do corporate planners operate in isolation and where are they located in the administrative hierarchy?

Analysis

Most corporate planners work to the CEO or to a second level officer.

Question 5

What resources are required to produce a Council Plan?

Analysis

The annual cost of producing a Council Plan is usually under \$100k. Most councils take half a year to develop their Council Plan while other plans such as Community Plans are difficult to estimate.

Question 6

How is performance measured?

How often does council report against its Plan's objectives/ commitments/ actions?

Is there a report to Council after the action has been achieved?

What proportion of the Plan is regularly executed i.e. completed?

Analysis

Most councils report against their Plan on a regular basis.

Most councils report on the achievement of the outcome although there may be debate about whether any further action or reporting occurs once the task is completed.

At least 50% of the Plan is regularly completed.

Question 7

Where is the corporate planning function located within Councils?

Analysis

Planners are located in various organisational units, mostly in Corporate Services or in the CEO's office.

Summary

It is fair to say that there is no 'one size fits all' in the production of council plans. Some councils produce the minimum requirement necessary to meet legislative purposes, while other councils produce a comprehensive plan.

Although it can be said that local government has always engaged in community building, current practices vary. Long-term visioning and planning also varies considerably across local governments and the question that perhaps needs to be asked is whether there is a need to develop a standard approach across all Victorian local governments.