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CASE STUDY PALMERSTON NORTH

A BEST PRACTICE WASTE MINIMISATION COUNCIL CONTRACT WITH A COMMUNITY GROUP

This case study concerns:

“The effective processes used by Palmerston North City Council for production of their consultation documents in the area of waste management,”

This was an integrated process; involving Councillors, Council Officers, Project Managers, Specialist Consultants and the public.

BACKGROUND - HOW DOES YOUR COUNCIL OPERATE?

Throughout New Zealand, Councils have a range of different cultures and different methods of progressing Council action. Within some Councils, the employed staff drive the process, with Councillors participating by providing guidance and governance. Other Councils are strongly directed by the Councillors, with Council officers operating in a straight service role. The process outlined in this case study could be modified to fit particular Councils.

Some of the variables between Councils and other considerations are:

- the balance of innovation between councillors and council staff, - where is the drive for a waste plan coming from?
- topics such as waste can become polarised along party political lines. It makes much more sense for these discussions to be Council-wide, pan-party by agreement if party voting exists.
- to create a sense of working together the person sponsoring the waste management plan must share his/her ownership.
- In the majority of cases, the officer puts up the discussions and needs to identify where the elected members knowledge is at, and assume each is an individual and that there is no corporatisation of thoughts
- there is the psychology of managing a difficult political process - to get people pulling together, to discuss, to modify, to build a consensus.

1.0 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

There are several vital factors which made the Palmerston North process successful:

1.1 Putting together a team with the capabilities that moved the process forward at a reasonable speed, **incorporating opinion in the plan as it progressed**. In Palmerston North's case, project managers assisted the Council officers with this role.

1.2. Defined time-frames were agreed and adhered to.

1.3. Education of all parties - all must be arguing from a common point of knowledge - decisions must be made by people who are fully informed.

1.4. Involvement of the Community. All appropriate segments of the communities need to be identified and involved in an appropriate way.

1.5. Communication to the public in a colloquial and easily understood way, with a capacity for ownership statements from Councillors being used during the public consultation process.

1.6. Elected officials had genuine input into the process, so buy-in was progressive and continuous; therefore a reasonable consensus was reached prior to final Council sign-off.

1.7. Individuals, including Councillors, who were following the process could see comments and ideas incorporated from one stage into the next, and this demonstrated that the consultation was active and empowering.

2.0 THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A CONSENSUS BETWEEN COUNCILLORS, OFFICERS, BUSINESS AND RATEPAYERS

The stages undertaken in the process are itemised below with a brief description and an outline of the perceived advantages and or disadvantages from the activity.

2.1 LEVELS OF SERVICE

There was a general and council-wide consultation process with the public prior to writing the waste minimisation draft. This was important because it was indicative of what people were using to rate or judge the service.

This process was a study into what the community wanted from Council in their services; solid waste was one area of consultation. Stakeholders, key users and interest groups were identified in each area of consultation. These groups had a specialised level of knowledge; they were known prior to the process or in some cases were found during the process. All were likely to have different needs. So the process was designed to gain inclusion, but it needed a framework so that material could be collated. Two discussion tools were used to assist with this. Firstly, there was the use of an H diagram, which had a scale on the cross-bar from negative through neutral in the center of the cross bar to positive on the right hand side. This focused the discussion and led to a judgement from the participants. In some cases, during discussion opinions were written on post-it notes and then placed on the H diagram in a position to indicate the value. This established for the Council a series of indicators which the public were using to measure the quality of the level of the

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service. The second tool, the Rich picture diagram, which illustrated the services and listed them in bullet points, also helped focus the discussion. The Rich picture diagram and the H diagram were combined so the diagram could act as a prompt and remind people of the process prior to seeking their response. This clearly showed the Council the difference between the Council and the community expectations. The process and the collation of data from this activity was overseen by Janet Reid of Massey University.

This process established the conflicts that existed in the area, and thus the draft waste minimisation plan was able to address and incorporate this. This technique was used again in the Mayoral Forum and in other discussions during the consultation process.

2.2 DRAFTED FIRST WASTE MINIMISATION PLAN

Using the results of the Levels of Service consultation, the Draft Waste Minimisation plan was written by Council Officers for preliminary consultation with the Councillors.

This plan proposed seven strategies for waste minimisation and what the strategies were, but not much detail on how it would be done. During consultation one whole additional strategy, that of Advocacy was added.

2.3 PLAN WORKSHOPPED WITH COUNCILLORS

The first process was to work-shop the plan with the Infrastructure Committee of the Council, which in Palmerston North is responsible for waste.

Changes were requested in neutral language - the Councillors wanted less prescriptive language, but the content remained virtually untouched.

Once the changes requested were incorporated, the Councillors in their governance role reviewed and signed-off the draft for consultation with the public.

2.4 USE OF CONSULTANTS

During this process, Project Managers were contracted to work with the Council staff to drive the process through on the agreed time-line. This allowed the process to move at the agreed speed and not get delayed by staff work-loads.

It is not critical who plays the organisation roles (hired or in-house project management), but responsibility is delegated to drive the process and ensure the timelines are adhered to and the process is successful. The project managers hired in Palmerston North were ex-Council employees who understood the culture well.

The consultation that followed took the forms itemised below, although actions were not exactly sequential. Councillors took a significant role in each of these stages.

2.5 MAYORAL FORUM

The Mayoral Forum was advertised in the Community newsletter and the local newspaper, and had an attendance of around 200 people. During this meeting there was an introduction and then the attendees divided into interest groups. Each group had a theme or subject to discuss and each group was facilitated by a Councillor and a Council officer. Councillors were able to lead informed discussion with constituents. Use was made of sticky pads, and comments were recorded on an H diagram (described above) for later collation.

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Councillors were very positive about the process and recommended that the model be used for further consultation.

2.6 FORMAL HEARINGS

Formal hearings of oral and written submissions on the plan were held. These followed the normal pattern found in most Councils.

2.7 BUSINESS LEADERS' BREAKFAST

This was run on corporate lines. In this case it did not provide a lot of direct feedback, but it did inform the sector. The meeting was planned and run to mirror the familiar format with which this sector was comfortable.

2.8 REGIONAL WARD COMMITTEES

Different concerns arose from different geographical areas and these concerns were reflected within the plan.

2.9 PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

During the consultation, a series of articles, one on each of the strategies, was written and placed as advertorials in the local paper. Each one outlined some aspect of the plan, and included invited comments from Councillors. Ownership statements of the process, with a couple of sentences each, were included from a number of Councillors. In general this communication was in colloquial language using colourful clear vocabulary.

2.10 FORMALLY ADOPTED BY THE PNCC.

Finally, once the consultation period of approximately six months had passed, and changes had been progressively incorporated over that period, the plan was formally adopted by the Palmerston North City Council.

3.0 SUMMARY

The Council officers and project management team were willing to take feedback and incorporate it into the plan.

There was active and decisive incorporation of new material into the discussion, during the process. The whole process had a high level of engagement. "This didn't start with a destination - it started with a journey".

The process of working together created a sense of ownership and a sense of achievement which melded the Councillors into an agreed direction. The officer was then entrusted to carry out the agreed plan. In other words, this result allows the professional staff to have some certainty and confidence to move ahead.

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Monitoring and review of the whole process to capture the learning for next time, is a process perhaps still to be done.

Determination of the levels of service identified potential stumbling blocks prior to the consultation process.

Information gathering and dissemination made sure all communities of interest were engaged; advocates, coffee cup environmentalists, business sector, hospital, Massey University, media, professionals in the waste sector, and academics.

Staff led initially with expertise, then Councillors showed leadership to the public.

Future changes in policy can come via another review process

People interviewed:

Deputy Mayor John Hornblow

Councillor Marilyn Craig

Councillor Phil Etheridge

Chris Pepper - Water and Waste Services Manager, *City Networks*

Janet Reid - Senior Lecturer, Institute of Natural Resources, Massey University

Sue Gould and Denise Kenley of Ess'ndee Associates

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