Looking Ahead to 2011

DR KATRENA STEPHENSON, POLICY DIRECTOR
Local Government Association of Tasmania

Recently, I prepared the Association’s submission under the State Government’s 2010-11 Budget Community Consultation. In looking ahead, I also looked back at what has been a tumultuous year for Local Government in Tasmania. A year which has seen a global financial crisis, extremely fast paced Federal policy implementation, an intense and not always welcome State Government reform agenda, and the focus of our own sector nationally on improving sustainability.

The many and varied drivers of activities in council have resulted in the Association identifying, in consultation with councils, eleven issues across five headline areas for consideration in the 2010-11 State Budget. Some are more familiar than others. Some issues require direct and significant funding, while others require a change of policy or practice, or they are more about productive working relationships.

Of course our priorities must then face off against the priorities of other peak and industry bodies, community and not-for-profit organisations and State Government agencies. I don’t envy those involved in weighing up the various proposals. They are not deciding ‘apples’ against ‘oranges’... more ‘apples’ against ‘giraffes’.

Over the past few years, there has been opportunity to speak to the issues raised at a community roundtable - but in an election year, the process going forward is less clear. Regardless, we will continue to advocate for Local Government as the 2010-11 Budget is developed in the period from now until June 2010. The LGAT has made the following recommendations to the Government:

**Financial Sustainability**

1. That adequate resource be allocated to support Local Government reform, including ensuring full and independent analysis and review in relation to merger proposals.
2. That the State Government (Local Government Division) and the Association work in partnership to secure sufficient funding to support the continued implementation of long-term financial plans and strategic asset management plans, aligned to a common framework across all councils.
3. That the State Government ensure their policy and legislation, which require implementation activities to be undertaken by Local Government, is adequately funded.

**Climate Change**

4. That funding be allocated, under the Statewide Partnership Agreement on Climate Change, to
support the development of adaptation and risk management strategies, and to adapt state-owned assets where they have been identified as key risk management priorities.

Planning
5. Continue to fully resource the Regional Planning Initiative to ensure the project outcomes are fully achieved.
6. That adequate funding be provided within the budget to support the requirements of the Cultural Heritage legislation such that councils are able to achieve the desired outcomes of that reform.
7. That, pending positive evaluation outcomes for the Electronic Development Assessment Project, the State Government support extension of this program to other councils.

Roads
8. That there is continued investigation and implementation of State/Local Government resource sharing opportunities in relation to road management.
9. That additional funding be allocated to the maintenance of the Local Government road network in response to the impact of the unusually wet winter in 2009.
10. That the present distribution arrangements for fees collected from heavy vehicle registrations be reviewed with the aim of providing greater equity in terms of the share provided to councils.

Social Inclusion
11. That resource be allocated, through the Social Inclusion Unit, to undertake an audit of Local Government’s social inclusion capability.

Staff Movements
We sadly said goodbye to Policy Officer, Sue Bronstein, in October as she left to take up a position in the State Government. Sue worked for the Association for just over twelve months and we benefited greatly from her skills and experience, and diligent and professional manner. I am sure those of you who interacted with Sue found her as easy to deal with as we did here. I anticipate that by the time you read this we will have a replacement on board. However, if you are uncertain as to who to direct queries to (particularly with regards to waste, emergency management and standards panel), then please feel free to contact me at katrena.stephenson@lgat.tas.gov.au.
A statewide television commercial is currently being produced on behalf of Tasmanian councils, to promote a range of Local Government careers and opportunities. The advertisement is being developed by the Local Government Association of Tasmania in association with advertising agency, Red Jelly.

Branded ‘Think Big - Work Local’, the advertisement will be shown in prime time on all commercial channels in the state over a six-week period, commencing in March 2010.

To provide the audience with a greater level of detail, a new ‘Work Local’ website is also being developed. The television commercial’s role is to excite interest in council careers and to guide viewers to the website.

New research for the Municipal Association Victoria has found councils most need to attract the young ambitious para/professionals. In our campaign we have taken an unusual step - noting the international and national career opportunities in local governments, as well as the local and statewide opportunities which exist. By doing this, we hope to interest younger people in starting big careers in Local Government.

The website will tell the Local Government story from the viewer’s perspective. Starting with their personal interests like: people, environment, machinery, or money, a ‘careers chooser tool’ will match their interests to compatible tasks and jobs in councils. We will provide the name(s) of those jobs - some of which will seem quite foreign to outsiders. The site will show some of the people that work in Local Government and their jobs, by playing a range of video files.

Localised skills shortages can be caused by a lack of access to training, or lack of awareness - just as much as by high economic growth, low unemployment, or an aging workforce. So the website will point the viewer in the direction of training opportunities available in Tasmania for the jobs that interest them. We will also move the automatic listing of council job vacancies to an easy to find location on the new website.

Some might imagine that the economic downturn has eliminated our skills shortages? There is no perfect way to measure skills shortages and the picture is quite complex. We do know that almost 15% of Tasmanian council jobs became vacant in the 08/09 period. This is only half a percent less than before the economic downturn. The average ‘vacancy rate’ for a Tasmanian council during 08/09 was higher than that of VIC, NSW and SA councils. We came close to the levels experienced in the resources boom state of QLD too. Job advertisements in our councils have declined since late 2008 but are recovering. Demographers say Tasmania has just hit the point where more workers are now leaving our workforce than are entering it. We lead the nation in ageing - and we face a host of other challenges. On the whole, Tasmanian councils still have significant skills challenges to overcome.

Without data, we would be working in the dark! Special thanks must go to the human resource officers from six councils who responded to LGAT’s request, and undertook the difficult task of supplying data about their workforces to the Western Australian Local Government Association’s ‘Remuneration Survey’.

Our projects rely on efforts from many council officers working with us to achieve results. I look forward to describing some of the other major actions we want to accomplish with you before the careers project finishes up in 2010.

For enquiries, contact Scott Blacklow at the Local Government Association of Tasmania on (03) 6233 5967, or email scott.blacklow@lgat.tas.gov.au.