



TRUST IN THE SHIRE OF CHITTERING – SUMMARY



Matthew Gilfellon – Chief Executive Officer
SHIRE OF CHITTERING

1 TRANSPARENCY PROJECT DISCUSSION PAPER

1.1 BACKGROUND

At the November 2021 Ordinary Meeting of Council, the following Council Decision was made following a Notice of Motion from Cr Aaron King:

MOT01 – 11/21 Cr Aaron King: Transparency and Accountability

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| <p>MOTION / COUNCIL RESOLUTION 161121 Moved Cr King, seconded Cr Angus That:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. “The Shire of Chittering” adopts the following position statement: “the Shire of Chittering is committed to being a leader in the areas of transparency, disclosure and public accountability. In line with this commitment, we will continually be looking for relevant new opportunities to adopt best practice.”2. Council instruct the Chief Executive Officer to report to Council at the December 2021 Ordinary Council Meeting, a draft project plan and discussion paper to provide the basis for a Council Workshop to be held by 28 February 2022 to discuss the Transparency Project. <p style="text-align: right;">CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 7 / 0 TIME: 9.12pm</p> |
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The following information was provided to support the Motion to Council:

Introduction

Council is requested to consider adopting a position statement committing to transparency, disclosure and public accountability; and to workshop a draft report from the CEO detailing initiatives designed to improve transparency and accountability in the Shire of Chittering and built trust with the community.

Background

A perceived lack of transparency and accountability in Council and the Administration of the Shire of Chittering has led to misinformation and created distrust from the community. Whilst the Shire of Chittering has endeavoured to implement changes to its processes to increase transparency and accountability, these initiatives have been undertaken in a haphazard manner and without consulting the community to gauge what they believe are the most important transparency and accountability initiatives and what resources are both necessary and willing to be provided to improve transparency.

Result

- *Acknowledges and responds to the community’s attitude to what is expected of government and non-government organisations, elected members and employees.*
- *Confirms commitment to improving transparency and accountability to the community*
- *Provides a process for community engagement;*
- *Provides Council with a clear pathway.*

1.2 TABLE OF INITIATIVES

| Source & Transparency Option | Estimated Resource Required | CEO Comment | |
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| Local Government Reform Package | | | |
| Recording and Live-Streaming of All Council Meetings | Nil if it replaces the audio recording currently performed. | Council Chambers is being set up in a way that allows this. Videos will need to be stored on YouTube otherwise there will be additional costs for website hosting as the required storage would go into the next tier. | |
| Additional Online Registers | One day per month to maintain registers. | This will help to combine available information and potentially add to it, but it may not have the desired effect of increasing the level of public trust. | |
| Community and Stakeholder Engagement Charters | To properly carry out a policy, a part-time to full-time skilled officer would be required to undertake engagement activities. | This would help to cement some of the work that the shire has been undertaking. A positive would be the reduction of the influence of special interest groups. It would increase the accountability of Council to engagement method and may be viewed as reducing the role of Council as it may usurp some of Council's decision making ability. There are already structures around such as the iap2 that could be used as a base for the policy. | * |
| Monthly Reporting on Credit Card Statements | This will depend on where they are reported. 0.5 days per month. | This can be implemented straight away, though it would appear to create just as much mischief by delving into the minutia instead of concentrating on issues around standards and performance. Most major fraud is not via Credit Card, so in terms of actual accountability, it would be more towards window dressing. | # |
| Local Government Review Panel | | | |
| Local Government Elections | Only time to set up the policy. (1-2 days) | Council have been choosing to have WAEC run their elections anyway, so this would be an easy position to take. | |
| Minimum Service Levels | This could be done currently, however it would need to be a focus of the shire over the next 2-3 years to the exclusion of other potential initiatives that arise. | Before determining minimum service levels, the current service levels would need to be determined. By doing this though, it would help to create greater accountability and transparency between Council | * |

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| | Conversely, the employment of a full-time, high-level officer with the necessary skills and expertise would be required. | and the community, Council and the shire, and the shire and the community. Regular service reviews would also then assist in determining the level of performance that the community wants. | |
| Select Committee into Local Government | | | |
| Community Education on the different roles | This could be incorporated into Community Forums and shared by other avenues. 1 day per year to implement. | This is an important step as it will assist the community in understanding how the shire functions. This increases the transparency as they will have a greater understanding of how and why decisions are made. | # |
| A policy outlining the different functions and tasks of each of the roles | Only time to set up the policy. (1-2 days) | The roles are already legislated, though this policy (or information sheet) could add background to what the roles in the legislation means. The legislated roles could not be over-ridden in a policy. | # |
| City of Perth: Local Government Accountability and Transparency – Opening the Door on International Best Practice | | | |
| Public value management approach | This could be done currently, however it would need to be a focus of the shire over the next 2-3 years to the exclusion of other potential initiatives that arise. Conversely, the employment of a full-time, high-level officer with the necessary skills and expertise would be required. | This has been included as while the most complex of these ideas, and will require a lot of time, effort and resources, it is also the approach that would introduce the highest level of accountability into the shire and move the shire away from its short term approach that has plagued the shire for the past 15-30 years. | * |
| City of Vincent: Raising The Bar – New Transparency Reforms for WA Local Government | | | |
| Greater Oversight and Consistency in Financial Reporting | - | This is outside of Council's scope. | |
| Easier Ratepayer Access to Information and Public Online Reporting | 1 week to develop the portal and 1-2 days per month to keep the portal updated. | Much of the transparency information is already available. This portal could be set-up on the website as a way to bring all the information together. | # |
| Public Reporting of Travel Undertaken by Councillor Members and Staff | 0.5-1 hour per month. | It is assumed that this is intended for travel other than attending meetings & public events. This could be incorporated, however currently does not appear to be an issue. | # |
| Disclosure of Councillor Allowances and Expenses | 0.5-1 day per quarter. | This is now captured in the annual report but it would increase to quarterly publishing on the website. | # |

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| Public Reporting of Disclosure of Conflict of Interest | 0.5-1 hour per month. | This already happens through the Council Meeting process, however this would make it more available online. | # |
| Leasing Arrangements | 2 days to set up. 2 days per year to keep updated. | This would appear to be a similar direction to the facilities review, though that didn't create a lot of feedback or discussion. It would increase transparency for this that take the time to look at the portal/website. | # |
| Improving Transparency and Accountability for Council Meetings | - | This already happens at Council Meetings. | |
| Creating a Genuine Opportunity for Ratepayers to Have Their Say | - | This already happens at Council Meetings. | * |
| Mandatory Training of Council Members | - | This already happens at Council Meetings. | |
| Greater Transparency within Senior Executive in Local Government | 1-2 days per year for an online register. | The Annual Report already contains some salary information and our website contains an outline of responsibilities. Salary information is useful when it is compared to other similar positions. This though can have the opposite effect of leading to an increase in salaries, as when the ASX started reporting CEO salaries. | # |
| Better Governance Regarding the Appointment of Chief Executive Officers | - | This already happens in Council Meetings. | # |
| Greater Transparency and Accountability in Council Elections | - | This already happens in Council Meetings. | |
| Greater Transparency in the Selection of Mayors | - | This can be changed via Council. Most of the additional workload would fall on the WAEC. There are potential downsides to this though. | |
| United Kingdom: Local Government Transparency Code 2015 | | | |
| How money is spent | 2 hours per month | All expenditure is already made publicly available via the accounts payment agenda item. Adding it to a transparency portal on the website would be the only additional time. | * |
| Use of assets | This could be done currently, however it would need to be a focus of the shire over the next 2-3 years to the exclusion of other potential initiatives that arise. | This is heading towards setting service levels, which is a great accountability and transparency measure, but it will require many resources. | * |

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| | Conversely, the employment of a full-time, high-level officer with the necessary skills and expertise would be required. | | |
| Decision making | Will depend on the level of decisions to be made public. | Education about roles and responsibilities would go towards making this redundant. | * |
| Issues important to local people | Will depend on what and how many issues are identified. | - | * |
| Victoria: Local Government Act 2020 | | | |
| Community Engagement | To properly carry out a policy, a part-time to full-time skilled officer would be required to undertake engagement activities. | This would help to cement some of the work that the shire has been undertaking. A positive would be the reduction of the influence of special interest groups. It would increase the accountability of Council to engagement method and may be viewed as reducing the role of Council as it may usurp some of Council's decision making ability. There are already structures around such as the iap2 that could be used as a base for the policy. | * |
| Financial Management | This could be done currently, however it would need to be a focus of the shire over the next 2-3 years to the exclusion of other potential initiatives that arise. Conversely, the employment of a full-time, high-level officer with the necessary skills and expertise would be required. | This is heading towards setting service levels, which is a great accountability and transparency measure, but it will require many resources. | * |
| Cr David Dewar | | | |
| Clear Rating Information | 2 days – 1 week per year. | Work has been done to try and improve the simplicity of rates & budget reporting. The main issue is not so much the time it takes, but with a limited finance & executive staff, the people involved in making the information available are also involved in developing the budget. As Council and staff get better at strategic planning, the budget process will become less time consuming which may increase available time. | # |

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| Simplified Budgeting, Accounting & Auditing Documentation | This will depend on the potential integration with current statement production and how different statements are produced. | Work has been done to simplify these statements, however regulations determine the minimum standards for the statements so any simplification will be on top of the statements already produced. | # |
| Council Expenditure Policy | Only time to set up the policy. (1-2 days) | This could be added to a policy, however a willingness to adhere to the policy and a culture from Council of doing so, it would likely result in little change. | # |
| Cr Carmel Ross | | | |
| Publish the LPS on the website | 0.5 days per year | There is currently a link through to the Planning Scheme located on the Department of Planning Website. Hosting the documents with other transparency initiatives may make it more visible. | # |
| Improve accountability and transparency by having more information available to the public | Dependent on the level of information provided. | This ties in with other suggestions. | # |

(*) Elements that would be incorporated in a public value approach

(#) These items could fit into a 'Transparency Portal'.