



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - THE GENERAL MANAGER

The role of General Manager of a Council in NSW is a difficult juggling act of keeping a majority of Councillors satisfied, as I know from my time as General Manager of Hay Shire Council where my contract was terminated immediately after I informed Council that I had made a Protected Interest Disclosure about corruption.



FUNCTIONS OF GENERAL MANAGER

In NSW the role of the general manager of a council does not include the word 'leadership' and has the following functions:

- to conduct the day-to-day management of the council in accordance with the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council,
- to implement, without undue delay, lawful decisions of the council,
- to advise the mayor and the governing body on the development and implementation of the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council,
- to advise the mayor and the governing body on the appropriate form of community consultation on the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council and other matters related to the council,
- to prepare, in consultation with the mayor and the governing body, the council's community strategic plan, community engagement strategy, resourcing strategy, delivery program, operational plan and annual report,
- to ensure that the mayor and other councillors are given timely information and advice and the administrative and professional support necessary to effectively discharge their functions,
- to exercise any of the functions of the council that are delegated by the council to the general manager,
- to appoint staff in accordance with the organisation structure and the resources approved by the council,
- to direct and dismiss staff,
- to implement the council's workforce management strategy.

Other jurisdictions give more specific responsibilities as an employer including, in South Australia where the chief

executive officer must ensure - that employees are treated fairly and consistently, and are not subject to arbitrary or capricious decisions. I do quite like this description as I have seen general managers in NSW who enjoy making arbitrary or capricious decisions!!

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The role of the Mayor includes: **in consultation with the councillors, to lead performance appraisals of the general manager.**

As the CEO of Local Government Managers NSW I had a leadership role in the development of the General Manager Performance Management Guidelines.

Within 3 months of the commencement of the General Manager's contract a performance agreement setting out the agreed criteria must be signed between the General Manager and Council.

Within 2 months of the performance agreement being signed the General Manager must prepare and submit to Council the detail of how the performance criteria are to be met and this will include performance indicators and standards.

The Guidelines for the Appointment and Oversight of General Managers includes the advice that:

'As one of the general manager's key responsibilities is to oversee the implementation of council's strategic direction, it is important to align the general manager's performance criteria to the goals contained in the council's Community Strategic Plan, Resourcing Strategy, Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

The performance agreement should also include the general manager's personal contribution to the council's key achievements and the general manager's core capabilities, including leadership qualities.'

The NSW Government mandates a Standard Contract of

Employment for all General Managers and Senior Staff in NSW local government. The performance of the General Manager must be reviewed at least annually against the agreed performance criteria for the position.

Council may also choose to undertake more frequent interim reviews of the General Manager's performance. Reviews can either be undertaken by a Panel of Councillors or full Council and are conducted in confidential sessions. It is proper that performance reviews are conducted confidentially.

I personally believe that it is good practice to have a 360 degree review of the General Manager's performance involving staff, Councillors and external stakeholders. At Hay Shire Council we used the Local Government NSW Capability Framework to establish the behaviours expected of the General Manager in leading the delivery of the community and Council values. Then we asked a random sample of staff; all Councillors, and agreed external stakeholders to complete a questionnaire for the General Manager's performance review.

As we know, councils are required to be transparent, and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions. I wrote in a previous column about how our local councils could improve their accountability to the community by making reports on their performance more accessible, as feedback is an important part of accountability. Making the performance criteria for the General Manager public and using the kind of 360 degree review I have described here, could also increase the level of trust between Council and the community.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

<https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Guidelines-for-the-Appointment-and-Oversight-of-General-Managers.pdf>

I am happy to receive comments from readers about this column and other issues you would like me to cover so please either contact me at Orange City Life or aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com

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