

Opportunities for change

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ABSTRACT

At the present time the only constant is change. Everywhere change is occurring. Governments, Community Organisations and Business are re-evaluating their objectives, their human resource requirements, their structure, their location and their markets.

How should we, who have an interest in urban animal management, respond to this change force?

My position is that we should view change as an opportunity to improve our operations.

This paper provides some examples of the change process at work at Blacktown City Council in the areas of:

- Strategic Planning
- Financial Planning
- Human Resources Management
- Community Education
- Compulsory Competitive Tendering
- Community Consultation
- Legislation

INTRODUCTION

Blacktown City Council has the highest population of any Council in NSW, currently 235,000. It comprises an area of 247 sq km, contains 800 parks and reserves, 20 shopping centres, 95 schools, 2 technical colleges and 1 University campus.

Urban Annual Management is an important area of Council's operation with Council operating an animal housing service, an animal collection service and an animal investigation service.

Data on the areas of Council involvement is reproduced in Table One.

Table 1

Animal Housing Service - Blacktown Dogs					
Staff	Dogs Housed 1995/96 No. Percentage	Dogs Reclaimed 1995/96 No Percentage	Dogs Sold No Percentage	Dogs Destroyed No Percentage	
1 Poundkeeper 2 Clerks 1 Labourer	4649 100%	388 8.3%	658 14.2%	3204 68.9%	
Animal Collection Service - Blacktown City					
Staff	Dogs Collected Total	Dogs Collected from Premises No. Percentage	Dogs Collected from Public Areas No. Percentage		
4 Dog Catchers	2281	1781 78%	500 22%		
Animal Investigations Service - Blacktown City					
Staff	Complaints		Noise Control		
1	Properties with barking dogs	650	Notices served	15	

STRATEGIC PLANNING

At Blacktown a planning process has begun at officer level to consider the options available for future strategic directions in urban and rural management.

What business are we currently in?

Is Council currently engaged in an Unwanted Animal Destruction and Disposal Service or is council engaged in an Animal/Human Reuniting and Adoption Service?

Is Council currently conducting an unwanted animal collection and transportation service or a stray animal collection service?

Is Council in an enforcement or education business?

What business should we be in?

At Blacktown we are undertaking all of the above services, however a detailed companion animal management strategic plan for the future direction of Urban Animal Management has not yet been completed.

What has occurred is the identification of the options and the barriers to achievement.

Barriers include funding availability, human resource issues, community attitudes and expectations and legislative changes.

Our plan at Blacktown is to utilise a Companion Animal Advisory Committee, customer questionnaires, and management plans to assist in the formulation of our strategic plan. It will be a plan that is uniquely Blacktown's and will outline the direction and key steps along the way.

From this planning exercise the change process will be documented and the direction set.

An extract from Council's 1996/1997 Adopted Operating Plan is reproduced as Table Two to show the short term operating plan.

Future changes will be reflected in the operating plan with funds allocated.

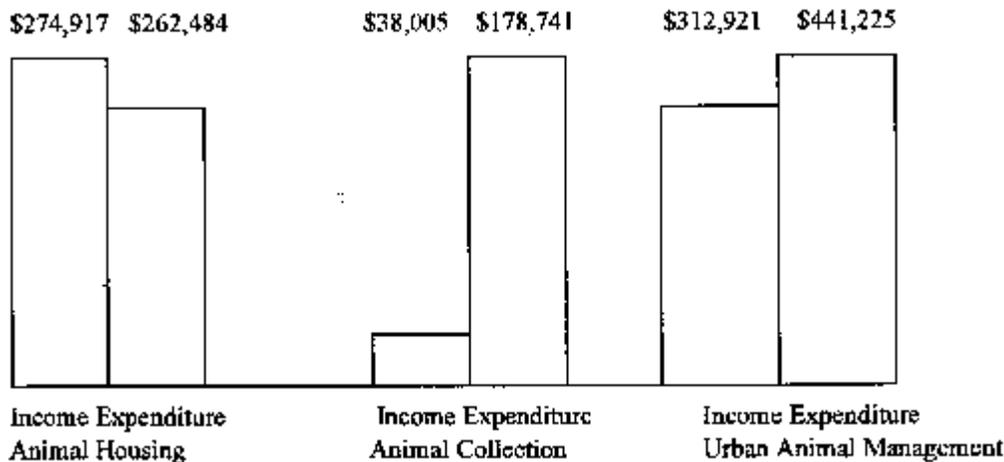
Table 2

BLACKTOWN CITY COUNCIL OPERATING PLAN - SERVICE DESCRIPTION		EN1
PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY ENVIRONMENT SERVICE URBAN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT BUDGET PERIOD 1996/97		
Service Objective	To maintain effective urban animal management for the provision of an animal collection and animal housing service	
Sub-service Operational Statements		
Animal collection	Undertake collection of approximately 2,000 dogs from private properties and approximately 130 dogs from public places within the city in accordance with the provisions of relevant legislation	
Animal Housing	Provide animal housing to approximately 8,000 dogs per year in accordance with the provisions of the Dog Act 1966 and the guidelines for the care and management of companion animals in pounds issued by the Dept of Local Govt	
Key Performance Measures		
Workload	Efficiency	Effectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of dogs collected from public places • Total number of dogs impounded from Blacktown, Penrith and Parramatta and Holroyd and housed at animal pound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of collection service for each dog collected • Housing cost per dog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater than 80% of customers in a survey consider pound's service to be satisfactory or better • Kennels rated to be operated in accordance with the guidelines for the care and management of companion animals in pounds by the RSPCA

FINANCIAL PLANNING

An area that constrains change programs at Blacktown is the income/expenditure gap. The gap can be seen from Figure Number 1.

Figure Number 1



1994/95 Actual Figures

These figures do not reflect the real cost as full cost attribution has not yet occurred. Council is currently developing the mechanism to enable this to occur.

Reliance on income from dog registration has not produced sufficient funds to close the gap and Council is reluctant to expand programs until this occurs.

While initiatives have been proposed to increase registration income, the new Companion Animal Legislation in NSW may provide a new opportunity to rationalise income. A levy for urban animals not affected by rate pegging means that animal owners and non-animal owners will contribute to the expenses associated with urban animal management.

Community service obligations need to be identified and clearly recorded.

An effective financial strategy is essential if change programs are to be viable.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Many opportunities for change relate to the effective utilisation of Council's Human Resources. At Blacktown we have undertaken a skill analysis of our animal control staff and are progressively redesigning jobs to fully utilise skills. Putting the right people into the right job is common sense.

When a position becomes vacant an extensive analysis of options occurs. The skill gaps are examined and consideration given to importing the skills needed. We also examine the issues such as spread of hours and days of work.

Through this process we are progressively improving our accessibility to the public by extending our hours and days of operation.

We are asking questions such as -

"Why do we only open for two hours on Saturday morning and not at all on Sundays?"

"Why do we open at 7.00am and close at 3.30pm on weekdays?"

"Why don't we have a stray dog collection service on the weekends outside emergency call outs?"

The hours of operation need to provide an adequate service to meet the needs of our customers. We have conducted customer surveys to assist us in the organisation of this.

For change to occur Human Resources need to be considered, consulted with and effectively managed. A commitment is required to ensure that staff and management have a focus on providing quality customer service. For this to occur continued change is required.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

There are many wrong perceptions and much ignorance in relation to Urban Animal Management issues. These problems must be addressed by a focused positive education program. To be focussed, the perceptions and present understanding of the different sub sets of the population need to be determined. Socio economic factors, cultural and ethnicity factors need to be understood and structured programs introduced.

To achieve this a macro program at a state or regional level is required and it is pleasing to note that the Green Paper on NSW Companion Animals explores the option of a funding mechanism for community education programs through compulsory permanent lifetime identification.

At Blacktown a comprehensive education program has been devised as an outcome of the City Health Plan Consultation process. This program is reproduced at the end of the paper. The Pet Pep Education Module will be used as a resource for the broadly based school education initiatives. Change will occur as the strategy is progressively implemented.

COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE TENDERING

While each State will provide different requirements and expectations, CCT provides a process for change to occur.

At Blacktown we have been preparing for CCT for two years. We have already nominated Urban Animal Management as a separate activity, a service unit. Sub-activities have been identified as Animal Housing and Animal Collection.

While Blacktown Council has no short term plans to submit the Urban Animal Area to competitive tendering, it is proposed to compare our performance with other similar operations by Benchmarking and establishing any performance gaps. The standards of service required will be documented and the key performance indicators kept. Some indicators that are currently being kept are

- Cost per animal kept at pound
- Cost per animal collected from public area
- Percentage of animals collected from public place/area
- Percentage of animals collected from private property

Council is proposing an independent internal group to evaluate the performance of all Council's service units. The group will monitor the performance of the Urban Animal Management Services and advise of any performance gaps. This potential performance gap exposure provides an incentive for the existing teams to review all aspects of the present operation, to introduce improved procedures, to ensure the team remains competitive and to provide quality services.

C.C.T. is an important aid in bringing about changes and improvements.

CONSULTATION

Blacktown Council has a number of mechanisms for the community to have input into Urban Animal Management. Key stakeholders have an opportunity to influence change.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Once a year Council seeks input from the public into its rolling three year management plan. An example of the layout in the area of urban animal management is reproduced below.

Strategy	Issue No	Targets	Action/Timing/Responsibility
H11 Owners of dogs and animals be educated as to their responsibilities		T-H11A Residents comply with relevant regulations	350 Investigate the expansion of dog registration centres to include veterinarian, boarding establishments and pet shops including the distribution of educational literature by June 1997 Director Health

URBAN ANIMAL COMMITTEE

Following the call for persons to join an Urban Animal Committee a committee was formed. To date it has provided input into a questionnaire produced to obtain customer and resident input into animal services provided by Council. It has also contributed to Council's submission to the Department of Local Government on the Companion Animals Green Paper.

The proposed legislation in NSW may require Councils to form Companion Animal Advisory Committees and for such committees to provide input into Council's Companion Animal Management Plan.

HEALTH PLAN

In conjunction with the Area Health Service of the Department of Health, Council assisted in the production of a Health Plan for the City. The process included broadly based community consultation. I want to include a brief discussion of the Health Plan process because it shows how the consultation process can assist in the change process.

A Steering Committee was formed from Council, Western Sydney Area Health Service, Healthy Cities Committee, Blacktown Police Service, Healthy Older Persons Association and Western Sydney Division of General Practitioners.

This Steering Committee produced a framework containing five areas:

1. Healthy Environment
2. Healthy Lifestyles
3. Safe Environments
4. Opportunities for Good Health
5. Social Aspects

A process was then undertaken to ascertain the issue that should be focussed on in the first year of the Health Plan. Factors that influenced the choice were:

- Area of shared responsibility or concern
- Opportunity for success
- Opportunity for participating in existing programs
- Community concern
- Morbidity/mortality rate

Following a meeting of the Steering Committee the issue selected from the framework of "Healthy Environments" was "Dogs and Health".

This area was not my preferred choice, however it indicated to me the concern that many people have for dog related problems. Issues such as dog attacks, fear of dogs and annoyance from dog barking were all cited as reasons why this topic should be selected. A meeting of an invited group of persons and organisations operating within the City with an interest in dogs and health was held. Groups attending were:

- Veterinarians
- Councillors
- Dog Clubs
- Senior Citizens Groups
- Department of Housing
- Blacktown Council Staff
- Animal Pound Staff
- Western Sydney Area Health
- Blacktown Healthy Cities
- Dog Aids Supplies
- NSW Police Service

The group brainstormed the issue and the final set of actions and time frames is reproduced as Attachment One (find at end of document). This is an example of change through a consultative process.

LEGISLATION

Legislation can restrict opportunities for change or can provide a framework for change to occur to meet the needs of the various areas.

In NSW the NSW Companion Animal Green Paper has the potential to provide new legislation that will enable greater flexibility to occur.

The formation of a Companion Animal Advisory Committee, the production of a Companion Animal Management Plan, and a method of funding the plan, provides an excellent mechanism for change to be planned and forwarded with community consultation.

While the final legislation is yet to be prepared and evaluated, I am hopeful that the process adopted by the NSW Minister for Local Government and input by the Companion Animals Working Party will continue and that the final product will be of assistance to the change process.

CONCLUSION

Change must occur or we cease to provide relevant services.

Market research needs to be ongoing to establish the needs of the community.

Change must be planned and must take into account revolutionary and evolutionary steps.

At Blacktown we are on a change journey utilising every available strategy. These strategies include strategic planning, financial planning, human resource management, community education, compulsory competitive tendering and community consultation.

We will never reach our journey's end but we will continue to improve, provide better value for money and most importantly to more effectively meet the needs of all of our stakeholders.

REFERENCES

Anon 1996, *Health Plan for City of Blacktown*, Western Sydney Area Health Service and Blacktown City Council

Blacktown City Council 1996, Blacktown City Council 1996/1997 Adopted Operating Plan

Blacktown City Council 1996 Management Plan, Blacktown City Council 1997/97 to 1998/99

ATTACHMENT ONE

Healthy Environment Issue: *Dogs and Health*

Strategy	Co-ordinating Organisation	Affected Organisations	Timeframe	Performance Measures
Investigate the implementation of a program to offer dog owners the opportunity to attend training programs as an alternative to paying a fine or being prosecuted for dog offences	BCC		March 1997	Numbers of fines issued Number of offenders attending training courses
In conjunction with Department of Housing, develop a package of information which could be provided to Housing Department tenants about responsible dog ownership, legal issues and Council requirements	BCC	Dept Housing	December 1996	Information package developed Information package being used by Dept Housing Staff
Co-ordinate and assist in providing training to Department of Housing staff who have significant client contact, about dog ownership responsibilities, legal issues and Council requirements to support the package of written information	BCC	Dept Housing	April 1997	Number of staff who have attending training Number of Dept Housing staff providing information to clients

Display information about the responsibilities of dog owners in foyers of Department of Housing offices	Dept Housing	BCC	June 1997	Displays held in Mt Druitt and Blacktown offices
<p>Endeavour to improve rates of registration by encouraging registration through points of sale, dog kennels, vets, etc:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● utilise revenue raised for education strategies ● promote benefits of registration through local papers, Dept Housing strategies etc 	BCC	<p>Dog boarding kennels</p> <p>Vets</p> <p>Pet Shops</p> <p>Local media</p>	April 1977	<p>Registrations increased as a proportion of estimated dog population</p> <p>Dog boarding kennels, vets, pet shops participation in registration</p>
Develop strategies to improve liaison between Council and Department of Housing staff about complaints relating to dogs in Dept of Housing properties	Dept Housing BCC		April 1997	<p>Number of complaints where liaison has occurred</p> <p>Mechanism established for liaison about complaints</p>
Using model developed with Dept of Housing approach other Commonwealth and State agencies to educate their staff to be able to effectively distribute relevant information about dog ownership to clients	BCC	<p>Dept Housing</p> <p>DEET</p> <p>WSAHS</p> <p>Dept Community Services</p>	June 1997	<p>Package of information provided to other Departments where appropriate</p> <p>Training sessions held with other Departments where appropriate</p> <p>Staff of other Departments providing information to clients</p>

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George Coward has been in senior management in Local Government for 23 years with the past two being as Director of the Health and Environmental Services Department of Blacktown City Council. His responsibilities include Urban Animal Management and he is committed to providing a quality customer service to meet the diverse needs of the community in accordance with allocated funds.