

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND (INC)

**CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS
OF
NON-AMALGAMATED COUNCILS**

2009 SCOPING STUDY

Morton Consulting Services Pty Ltd

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This project was aimed at identifying issues impacting on non-amalgamated councils in Queensland along with actions and initiatives that could address needs in relation to the capacity of these councils to provide sustainable local governance for their communities.

The target for the project was the 18 non-amalgamated councils with a population less than 5,000 (Refer Table 1.1). The Local Government Reform Commission report identified concerns for these councils in relation to an extensive reliance on external funding sources, their capacity to provide a full range of services along with their ability to attract and retain human resource skills.

Issue Identification

The study process included:-

- Background research on capacity building in a local government context;
- Teleconferences with the Mayor and CEO of each council to identify issues and desired initiatives;
- The opportunity for each council to further quantify issues and potential initiatives through a structured questionnaire;
- A forum at the LGAQ Annual Conference to discuss capacity and capability requirements of smaller bush councils.

Key themes identified in discussion of issues included:-

- Recruitment and retention of human resources and skill development needs;
- Resource and service sharing opportunities;
- General governance issues including councillor capacity;
- The impact of legislative requirements or compliance on resources and capacity;
- Financial sustainability and revenue capacity and stability;
- Business systems and technology;
- The local community building role;
- Government agency roles, expectations and interaction.

Potential Capacity Building and Support Initiatives

The consultations undertaken identified a range of possible initiatives to be considered in capacity building. These included:-

- Regular sharing of experiences eg Forum at Annual Conference, more LGAQ generated “face-to-face” contact with target group (could be via video or teleconferencing or at regional meetings).
- Greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements.
- More support (including financial) to cooperative regional initiatives to help to overcome barriers.
- Bulking up plant purchases across groups of councils.
- Encouraging candidates for Local Government election to attend pre-election seminars.
- Introducing requirement for new elected members to attend relevant seminars and training in the first year of office.
- Providing tailor-made support for elected members, particularly in terms of what information or reporting council should have to improve decision making.
- Developing more sample templates to meet new requirements (eg reporting, meeting agendas).
- Government reporting requirements being focused on supporting local needs rather than micro-management from central agencies.
- Ensuring formal council meetings can be held legally by telephone as required (not just in emergency).
- Increasing elected representatives from four to six for some of the larger geographic areas.

- Seeking funding to meet costs involved in meeting mainstream standards or having requirements tailored to suit remote rural circumstances.
- Recognising local impacts/revenue loss in decisions of state/national significance and compensating where necessary (e.g. National Parks, Wild Rivers, Emissions Trading, Water Buy-Back).
- Providing financial support/low interest loans for staff housing.
- Enhancing broadband capacity for small communities in Far West.
- Providing independent support on IT requirements.
- Supporting regional economic development initiatives to create more sustainable communities (eg inland highway, agricultural initiatives).
- Seeking to change attitudes toward this group of small population 'bush' councils – considering them as key builders of local communities rather than grant dependent/non-viable organisations.
- Establishing a 'register' for exchanges, mentoring or buddying opportunities to enable skill development and broad experience diversification.
- Establishing a 'register' to enable contact with relieving personnel.
- Marketing local government career options to senior school and tertiary students – link this to study/cadetship opportunities.
- Establishing a resource bank (forms, policies, templates, procedures prepared by other councils) for ready download to stop 'reinventing the wheel'.
- Greater emphasis on establishing 'true' alliances with neighbouring councils.
- Investigating the opportunity for a bureau service for IT with a centralised or host server.
- Trying to move State employees into rural towns rather than large provincial centres.

Annual Conference Forum

A discussion paper was circulated to all participating councils prior to the forum at the LGAQ Annual Conference in August 2009.

A particular focus of the forum discussion related to strategies to attract young graduates to western communities. The need for mentoring and support from senior officers and the CEO was highlighted. Difficulties for young graduates were identified (eg engineering graduates) where no appropriately qualified supervisor was available to allow work experience to be formally recorded.

The importance of strategies to provide career paths for locally based people was noted including use of cadetships. Government incentives, such as reducing HECS debt for graduates working in bush communities (as used in the HECS Reimbursement Scheme for rural doctors), were suggested as one way to attract young graduates to western communities.

The developing role of regional road groups was also discussed. Consideration could be given to expanding their role in regional initiatives and collaboration beyond the road task.

Mechanisms to enhance communication between remote councils (e.g. when specialist trades and professional resources were coming to the area) were seen as providing the opportunity to more efficiently obtain these services.

A number of participants saw the need for this type of 'Bush Council' forum at the Annual Conference to become a regular feature, but with more time being available to discuss matters of common interest and concern.

Action Plan

Based on the research and analysis conducted for this project, the following Action Plan has been developed to address the major issues and concerns in relation to capacity and capability of the more remote rural councils in Queensland.

Other potential initiatives were also identified but the Action Plan focuses on a number of key themes which are considered as the initial focus of attention.

Action	Key Agencies
Skill Development	
1. Priority to be given to elements of Local Government Skills Plan which focus on para professional responses to skill issues (eg Building Surveying Technician, Environmental Health Technician, Para-Planners) and associated legislative issues.	LG Skills Formation Taskforce
2. Lobby Federal Government to expand the HECS Reimbursement Scheme to cover other rural professions which are difficult to attract to remote locations (eg engineers, planners, EHOs).	LGAQ
3. Introduce requirement for newly elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.	DIP
Regional Collaboration	
4. Consider broadening the focus of Regional Road Groups to cover other aspects of regional collaboration and cooperation.	LGAQ, DTMR, RRGs
5. Provide funding support to enable employment of regional co-ordinators to progress joint regional initiatives	DIP
Impact Assessment & Recognition	
6. Government departments, agencies and statutory authorities should be required to prepare and publish Rural Community Impact Statements prior to implementing significant changes to existing Government services in rural and regional areas and in legislative reviews.	LGAQ, DIP, Dept Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Local Govt.
7. Increased emphasis to be placed on LGAQ Policy Position that legislation affecting Local Government in Queensland should be framed recognising the variety of capacity, size, resources, skills and physical location of Local Governments. The 'one size fits all model' is not appropriate.	LGAQ, DIP
Support Services	
8. Establish a 'Resource Bank' which includes information on relieving personnel, opportunities for exchanges and mentoring or access to/sharing of skills along with templates/sample documents for key compliance requirements.	LGAQ, DIP
9. A "Bush Councils" Forum to be included in the agenda of future LGAQ Annual Conferences.	LGAQ
Financial Support	
10. State capital works subsidies should include staff housing for remote rural communities.	LGAQ, DIP
Technology	
11. LGAQ, District Associations and ROCs to promote and trial greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements.	LGAQ, District Associations, ROCs

The following sections of this report provide the detailed results of this scoping study on capacity building needs of smaller bush councils across Queensland.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This project was aimed at identifying issues impacting on non-amalgamated councils in Queensland along with actions and initiatives that could address needs in relation to the capacity of these councils to provide sustainable local governance for their communities.

The Local Government Reform Commission in its 2007 report identified many problems it considered could not be solved by amalgamation in this group of councils. These included:-

- The need for western Queensland councils to sustain the social fabric of communities, filling the gap in delivering human and other services normally provided by the private sector;
- The remoteness coupled with distance and area over which councils in western Queensland must deliver services making it difficult to gain scale economies from larger entities;
- Specific difficulties in financial sustainability, including a lack of revenue flexibility as a result of a high dependence on grants and external revenue sources (eg MRD);
- Human resource difficulties particularly for more remote councils.

The project has focused on the capacity building needs of small non-amalgamated councils (therefore excluding Brisbane, Redland, Burdekin, Mt Isa and Hinchinbrook). Nevertheless, the issues faced, and potential responses are relevant to a number of other western Queensland councils, particularly those with a relatively small population and resource base.

While the 14 indigenous councils plus Torres Shire also require support in building capacity, this was considered to be better addressed by separate initiatives more focused on the particular circumstances and specific needs of this group of councils.

1.2. Profile of Participating Councils

Table 1.1 provides a broad profile of the 18 councils included in the consultation elements of this project. While some data is only available for the 2006/07 financial year, the table provides a broad overview of the geographic, demographic and financial situation in which these councils operate.

As the table shows, the target councils encompass a wide range of situations in terms of geography, demography and financial resources:-

- Population size ranges from almost 5,000 down to less than 300 and typically declining;
- Service area over 100,000 sq kilometers to just under 30,000 sq kilometers;
- Own-source rates and charges range from around 50% of operating revenue to less than 10%.

Table 1.1: Profile of Councils included in project consultation

Council	area (sq km)	Est. residential pop. as at 30 June 2007	Annual growth 2006 to 2007 %	Net Rates and Utility Charges \$000s	Total Operating Income \$000s	Rates as share operating income	Employee Expenses \$000s	Depreciation Expense \$000s	Unfunded Depreciation (if available) \$000s	Total Operating Expenses before Interest \$000s	Outdoor Staff	Indoor Staff	Total Staff	General purpose grant received (GPG) 2006/07 \$'000	Identified road grant received (IRG) 2006/07 \$'000	Total financial assistance grant received 2006/07 \$'000
Balonne	31144	4,882	-1.1	5,896	13,554	43.5%	4,780	4,242	0	11,746	52	26	78	2,120	1,012	3,132
Murweh	40740	4,786	-1.7	4,184	11,025	38.0%	5,243	3,958	0	13,144	78	26	104	2,608	1,144	3,752
Cook	106121	3,728	1.1	4,284	24,477	17.5%	8,470	4,153	0	27,207	71	56	127	3,349	1,041	4,390
Cloncurry	48112	3,343	-0.6	6,418	12,052	53.3%	4,344	5,268	2,912	13,746	39	23	62	1,078	592	1,670
Carpentaria	64381	2,107	1.1	2,447	16,956	14.4%	6,205	3,880	0	18,326	38	32	70	2,171	687	2,858
Paroo	47727	2,001	-2.6	2,246	11,574	19.4%	5,322	NS	0	5,661	NS	NS	NA	2,221	939	3,160
Flinders	41538	1,871	-1.9	2,300	18,111	12.7%	4,056	2,332	0	13,134	52	21	73	1,948	937	2,885
Winton	53935	1,450	2.4	2,919	13,834	21.1%	4,966	2,362	0	12,234	54	27	81	2,967	1,059	4,026
Quilpie	67615	1,012	-3.9	2,150	8,923	24.1%	2,180	1,782	362	8,498	37	15	52	2,116	1,046	3,162
McKinlay	40885	971	0.3	1,718	18,195	9.4%	2,525	1,525	0	15,413	39	14	53	707	2,038	2,745
Richmond	26602	939	-2.4	1,085	10,074	10.8%	2,920	2,284	0	9,298	50	10	60	1,495	460	1,955
Etheridge	39309	932	3.8	1,117	18,562	6.0%	3,232	1,561	0	8,895	30	16	46	2,499	629	3,128
Burke	41802	546	2.1	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	NS	NA	1,469	382	1,851
Boulia	61093	438	-2.7	801	9,928	8.1%	2,882	2,216	1,177	11,104	32	13	45	1,653	543	2,196
Bulloo	73805	377	-4.6	2,858	10,575	27.0%	2,957	2,305	0	9,768	46	20	66	2,008	1,010	3,018
Barcoo	61974	373	-2.6	574	14,329	4.0%	3,015	1,793	0	15,299	30	11	41	1,457	654	2,111
Diamantina	94832	312	1.6	516	16,363	3.2%	3,234	2,549	0	14,556	38	10	48	2,622	475	3,097
Croydon	29582	263	-3	395	5,782	6.8%	2,189	822	0	5,560	35	16	51	1,299	356	1,655
Total		30,331		41,908	234,314	17.9%	68,520	43,032	4,451	213,589	721	336	1,057	35,787	15,004	50,791

Source: DLG Comparative Local Government Statistics 2006/07

1.3. Local Government Reform Commission Analysis

The following table summarises the key points made by the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) in relation to each of these councils.

Table 1.2: Local Government Reform Commission Comments, 2007

Council	Financial Sustainability	Revenue Capacity	Service Provision	Human Resources
Balonne	QTC Weak Rating, forecast operating deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills
Barcoo	QTC Weak Rating, forecast operating surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills
Boullia	QTC Weak Rating, forecast operating deficits, asset base eroding	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills
Bulloo	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast minor operating surpluses/deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills
Burke	No QTC Review undertaken	No comments	No comments	No comments
Carpentaria	QTC Very Weak Rating, forecast operating deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Cloncurry	No QTC Review undertaken, past deficits, low current ratio	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Cook	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast operating surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Croydon	QTC Weak Rating, forecast operating surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Diamantina	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast minor operating surpluses/deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills
Etheridge	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast operating deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Flinders	No QTC Review undertaken, past surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills: capacity to attract, retain staff limited
McKinlay	No QTC Review undertaken, past deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills: capacity to attract, retain staff limited
Murweh	QTC Very Weak Rating, forecast moderate operating deficits	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills: capacity to attract, retain staff limited
Paroo	QTC Very Weak Rating, forecast small operating surpluses but concerns on whether can be achieved	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills: capacity to attract, retain staff limited
Quilpie	QTC Weak Rating, forecast operating surpluses, asset consumption greater than replacement	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills: capacity to attract, retain staff limited
Richmond	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast operating surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	No comments	May need support with skills
Winton	QTC Moderate Rating, forecast operating surpluses	Extensive reliance on external sources	Limited capacity to provide full range of services	May need support with skills

Source: Report of Local Government Reform Commission, Volume 2, 2007

As can be seen from the LGRC comments, the common themes relate to the extensive reliance on external funding sources, concerns in relation to capacity to provide a full range of services along with the ability to attract and retain human resource skills.

The key differences relate to the QTC assessed financial sustainability, which ranges from 'Moderate' through 'Weak' and to 'Very Weak'.

The Local Government Reform Commission also made a number of recommendations on capacity building, in particular highlighting the need for priority for assistance in building capacity for these non-amalgamated councils which are the subject of this review. The Commission noted the difficulty in obtaining and retaining appropriate staff to undertake core functions as a key issue to be addressed.

Three specific recommendations of the Commission¹ are of relevance to the councils involved in this project. These are:-

- *Give priority for assistance to councils that have existing capacity or financial sustainability issues;*
- *Foster targeted training and joint initiatives with higher education institutions for the purposes of developing skills relevant to the local government sector;*
- *Investigate strategies to build on existing initiatives to address skill shortages and build capacity of local government in Queensland.*

1.4. Study Process

The initial stage of the project focused on consultation with representatives of the 18 target councils along with other stakeholders of relevance. Teleconferences were held with the Mayor and CEO of each participating council to identify key issues, capacity problems and potential initiatives of relevance to each unique situation. The key messages from these teleconferences are summarised later in this report.

In addition, a review of relevant studies and literature of was undertaken.

Following teleconferences with each council, a questionnaire was developed to provide further quantification of the significance of issues identified and the importance of particular initiatives.

A discussion paper was then prepared and circulated to all participating councils.

A forum covering capacity and capability requirements of bush councils was included on the agenda of the 2009 LGAQ Annual Conference.

¹ Report of LGRC 2007 Volume 1, Recommendation 21, p77

2. Review of Literature and Initiatives of Relevance

2.1. Queensland Initiatives of Relevance

2.1.1. Roads Alliance Capability Development

The *Roads Alliance* is seeking to build Regional Road Group (RRG) and member capability as road managers through the provision of increased training and improved systems that meet local and regional needs.

Funding is available to help RRGs maintain and build capability in a range of functions/roles including:

- asset management
- project prioritisation and program development
- resource sharing arrangements
- joint purchasing opportunities
- administrative outcomes for RRGs and Technical Committees.

A group of ‘capability champions’ is expected to be established as part of this project.

State-wide, some \$700,000 per annum is available to improve capability. Additionally, there is a recurrent \$1 million per annum available to RRGs for capability enhancement through application to the Alliance Board. This funding is usually provided on a matching basis - 50% Main Roads and 50% local government.

Capability development is expected to be a key focus for RRGs in the next twelve months. Capability Improvement Plans reflecting the capability challenges and opportunities for each RRG are expected to be put in place. These plans are intended to be pro-active planning documents which set out developmental milestones and activities to assist individual RRGs move forward.

Based on recent experiences of RRGs, it is apparent that the availability of a dedicated coordinator (part-time or full-time) to manage and progress joint initiatives is an important element in keeping RRGs moving forward and achieving desired milestones. Capability funding allocations can be used for this purpose.

2.1.2. Local Government Skills Plan, Queensland

In 2007 the Local Government Skills Formation Taskforce, a collaborative partnership between relevant government agencies (DIP, DET, DLGSR), industry associations (LGAQ, LGMA), professional bodies (PIA, EHA, AIBS, IPEWAQ), and education and training providers was formed.

The charter of the Taskforce was to look at ways to address current and future skill shortages to ensure that the sector has the capacity and capability of delivering the level services expected across our communities.

A Skills Shortage Survey was conducted by the Taskforce in August 2007, at the height of the boom. The results highlighted that at that time skills shortages were

endemic to local government impacting on the capacity to deliver services to communities at a local, regional and national scale. Coupled with local government reform, plus an ageing workforce, the issue of skills shortages was seen as requiring urgent action to be taken across the sector in the short, medium and longer terms.

The particular skills typically identified in the council areas covered by this project were:

- Building Certifiers
- EHOs
- Technical Officers
- Works Engineers/Supervisors/Project Managers
- Tradesmen (Plumbers, Electricians, Diesel Fitters)
- Plant Operators (heavy plant & equipment)
- Accountants
- IT professionals

The top five key drivers of the skill shortage identified by councils at that time were:

- Inability to compete with market rates of pay
- Resources/Infrastructure Boom
- Shortage of skilled professionals
- High cost of living in regional areas
- Lack of services/lifestyle issues in regional areas

Post amalgamation and even in the current economic climate, councils across Queensland continue to face significant workforce challenges.

The research undertaken on skills highlights that 45% of the workforce in local government is over 45 years of age. Over 50% of engineers employed in councils are over 50 years of age. Around 90% of building certifiers are due for retirement in five years with nowhere near enough cadets in the system.

In the 2007 survey of councils across Queensland it was found that:

- Of those surveyed, 100% of councils were experiencing shortages and expected those shortages to continue into the foreseeable future;
- 44% of councils were forced to recruit from overseas on a regular basis in order to fill vacancies;
- 18% of councils were forced to employ less skilled personnel because of shortages at the professional levels – which raises issues of risk management in some fields like environmental health;
- 75% of councils located in Northern Queensland source staff internationally;
- 64 % of councils in SEQ recorded a shortage of engineers compared to say 25% of councils in North Queensland.

During the 2009-2011 period, it is expected that there will be an increased demand for:

- Finance/Payroll Officers
- Asset Management
- Community Development
- Water Industry Workers
- Building Surveying Technicians

- Skilled IT Operatives
- Records Management Personnel
- WH&S Personnel
- Human Resource Personnel
- Middle Managers

Current strategies of particular relevance to rural and remote councils include:-

- **Building Certifiers** – developing a program to fast track builders into the profession, including articulation arrangements between building and building surveying along with RPL and gap training arrangements to support fast track option for builders and carpenters. This includes amending the Building Act (Qld) to allow Building Surveying Technicians (BST) to operate across all council areas and redefining the scope of the BST to more closely align it to a “housing” level.
- **Environmental Health** - increase the number of Environmental Health para professionals including clarifying the role of Environmental Health Technician. This includes identifying and clarifying what functions can be performed by the para professional level. Develop an EHO Cadetship Program.
- **Planners** - Re-design DA process: Smart eDA, allowing for applications on-line. Promote the function and role of para planners in this process.
- **Water Industry** - Developing a strategy to support the demand for water industry workers over the next 5 years. By 2010 expecting 500 workers will need training up to Diploma of Water Operations.
- **Plant Operators** – seeking to increase User Choice funding allocations to RTOs prepared to provide Civil Construction – plant operator training to support the training needs of remote communities/ councils in northern and western Queensland.
- **Travelling Workers** – seeking to harness the capacity of “grey nomads” who are looking for opportunities to supplement their incomes whilst travelling.

2.1.3. CEO Recruitment and Retention Issues for Rural and Remote Councils

A number of issues of relevance to this current project were canvassed in the review of CEO recruitment and retention undertaken by LGAQ and LGMA in 2004². The project report makes the following points in relation to human resourcing issues for rural and remote councils:-

- The complex issues relating to the recruitment of professional people to non-coastal areas are not unique to local government or to Queensland. There is no single action that is going to reverse the national pattern of population movement from the country toward the coast.
- There appears to be a greater reluctance in the current generation of senior managers to seek positions in localities that do not fit with their broader lifestyle aspirations.

² Review of CEO Recruitment and Retention Issues for Rural and Remote Councils, LGAQ/LGMA, Feb. 2004

- There is no definitive group of attributes that will encourage numerous people, with or without a family, to make a life long career in rural and remote Local Government.
- The focus needs to be on better utilisation of resources that are available within a community, and on attracting people to relevant areas to work in Local Government as a part of their professional and family life experience.

Some of the actions of particular relevance to the issue of capacity building for rural and remote councils outlined in the report included:

- Establish a 'register' for exchanges, mentoring or buddying opportunities to enable skill development and broad experience diversification. Build on strengths of existing contacts and relationships.
- Recognise the professional value of remote experience across many facets of local government – this is likely to be facilitated through exchanges and secondments.
- Market local government career options to senior school and tertiary students – link this to study/cadetship opportunities.
- Consider options to contract routine operations (eg payroll, issue of rates and renewal notices) to external service providers.
- Establish a 'register' to enable contact with relieving personnel.
- Candidates for Local Government election should be encouraged to attend pre-election seminars.
- Introduce requirement for new elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.

2.2. Interstate Initiatives

2.2.1. Western Australia

In December 2008, the State Government announced the Country Local Government Fund which will provide \$400 million over four years to assist country local governments build and maintain community infrastructure as part of the Royalties for Regions program.

The fund acknowledges the findings of a number of studies regarding sustainability and infrastructure backlogs across the local government sector. The fund targets asset management and renewal and also enables the creation of new assets and infrastructure.

The WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development is providing capacity building support of \$2.5 million a year to local governments as part of the Country Local Government Fund. The funding is to be used to focus on supporting capacity building and encouraging standardised asset management practices.

A key focus of this funding includes developing a sector-wide framework for asset management supported through departmental programs, including the development of detailed asset management plans and policies, funding assistance for engaging planning and management assistance, tools to assist asset management plans and support for data collection and data management. The funds will also be used to develop different regional governance models for local governments to use and trial.

The Department also conducts programs, such as the Council Advice Program, CEO Support Program, Mayors' and Presidents' Support Program and Peer Support Program to provide assistance and advice and draw on the experiences of people in the industry to comment on council processes, recommend best practice and provide a mentoring role.

2.3. International Experiences

2.3.1. Local Government Capacity Building in the UK

The UK local government capacity building program was established in 2003. The aim of the program was to develop councils' confidence, leadership and skills as well as develop their capacity to learn, innovate and share knowledge and expertise about what works and how.

The current emphasis is on supporting improvement partnerships either at a regional or sub-regional level. Improvement Partnerships provide a framework with which councils act collectively to address common challenges, share best practice and share resources.

The program is predicated on four concepts:

Leadership - focusing on elected member and officer capacity both individually and collectively;

Corporate capacity - focusing on peer support, performance support, and transfer of knowledge and learning;

Workforce capacity - focusing on issues around recruitment and retention, strategic HR, and people management; and

Support for generic skills - focusing on procurement, performance management, and financial and project management.

A review of the capacity building program conducted in 2008 noted that councils identified as poor performers in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) program had most to gain from some of the national capacity building initiatives but that these organisations were often inward looking and resistant to change.

The review suggested that these councils benefited more from tailor made support delivered inside the council but struggled to effectively engage with 'external' programs of support.

The review also suggested a need to ensure that future capacity building focuses on the delivery of local outcomes, with due recognition of local autonomy. This involves starting from the point of view of desired local social and economic outcomes, defining what needs to be delivered to achieve these, and by whom, before identifying what capacity building is needed.

The message is that generic programs and initiatives will not meet the real needs at the local level.

While the UK local government profile does not mirror the remoteness, large geographic area and small populations of the target councils in this study, a number of messages from the UK experience may be relevant to the Queensland situation.

As part of the capacity building initiatives in the UK, the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA), owned by local government, provides support to councils.

This support includes the use of experienced councillors and senior officers to support and challenge councils to improve themselves, sharing of good practice through the national Beacon Scheme and regional local government networks, along with programs through the Leadership Academy to help councillors become better leaders for their community.

IDeA advises councils on improving customer service and value for money as well as promoting the development of local government's workforce.

3. Identifying the Issues

3.1. Council Teleconferences

An initial component of the project was to conduct a teleconference with the Mayor and CEO of each of the 18 councils identified earlier. This was considered as an effective approach to engaging each individual council and to discuss specific issues of relevance to effective local governance and capacity.

This section summarises the themes from these discussions in terms of the overall picture identified.

The discussions covered a range of topics including:-

- General governance issues including councillor capacity;
- Recruitment and retention of human resources and skill development needs;
- Resource and service sharing initiatives and experience;
- The impact of legislative change on resources and capacity;
- Financial management issues;
- Impact of dependence on external funding sources, issues for stable forward funding for long term plans, lack of revenue flexibility and potential own-source revenue initiatives;
- Business systems and technology;
- Demographic and economic structure and change;
- Government agency roles, expectations and support;
- Opportunities to improve efficiency and work flows or work practices;
- Possible initiatives or actions by government agencies and others.

3.2. Key Issues

3.2.1. Human Resource Recruitment, Retention and Skill Development

Issues directly and indirectly associated with human resource recruitment and retention were a common theme. A number of councils pointed to very high turnover rates (over 70% in a twelve month period – internally or externally) and the difficulty in retaining staff with young families particularly once secondary school attendance was required. While it was also reported that recruitment difficulties had reduced marginally in the current economic climate, problems still existed in relation to senior staff and professional skills.

Comment was made that a career development path, including time in a smaller rural council for younger administrative staff interested in progressing to senior management, no longer existed.

It was noted that the local community (and council office) culture often made it difficult for a new recruit to feel welcome and fit in. This added to the turnover rate particularly for more senior positions. In some councils, the turnover of CEOs and other senior staff had been an annual event, making it very difficult to achieve effective leadership.

A number of councils noted issues in relation to human resource management skills at the local level. Flinders and Richmond Shires have secured some funding under *Blueprint for the Bush* to address this issue as shown by the text box.

**Regional Human Resource Management Project
Flinders Shire Council & Richmond Shire Council**

Outcome / Goal:

Develop a specialist local government Human Resource Management System for Flinders Shire Council and Richmond Shire Council as a pilot project. Implement the Human Resource Management System to help develop human resources within remote and rural local government areas. This will develop local government's most valuable resource and achieve the following:

- Local Government Career Paths
- Training of employees and supervisors
- Multi skilling opportunities
- Human Resource Management policy, procedures and protocols
- Attraction and Retention of skilled staff
- Remuneration consistency in line with Local Government Awards
- Potential efficiencies identified for development of Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

Comment was made that there needed to be capacity and legislative capability for para-professionals to undertake some tasks (eg planning, building, environmental health), rather than requiring fully qualified professional for each discipline. As noted earlier (section 2.1.2), the local government skills plan is focused on a number of these issues.

The issue of standards and compliance requirements for smaller remote communities was raised in the discussions about regulatory skills. The problem of a "one-size-fits-all" approach was regularly raised. Regulations and compliance requirements were typically described as being drafted for the circumstances of major coastal centres with little demonstrated understanding of the needs and operational issues faced in small remote communities.

A greater recognition of the capacity constraints in smaller councils, and possibly some exemptions from particular requirements, were seen by some as the way forward if sustainable local governance was to be achieved for these remote locations.

The ageing of the workforce was also raised. Long-term employees with diverse experience have often covered a range of these regulatory tasks, but upon retirement, replacement with one skilled person only is unlikely to be possible.

While external contract support was used for a number of these disciplines, in some cases this meant an element of over-servicing because of the time and cost involved in the person accessing the remote locality. Opportunities to share such services (EHOs, WH&S, Building/Plumbing) with neighbouring councils were typically considered but were often seen as unworkable. “Grow-your-own” strategies were however seen as having good potential provided regulatory requirements could generally be undertaken by para-professionals able to develop skills and undertake training locally. A number of councils reported local people moving into apprentices through the council.

Some councils have been able to attract required trade-skills by allowing people the rights to private practice (eg builders, plumbers). The comment was made that there is often sufficient combined workload between the council and the local community to sustain one full time position, whereas when viewed in terms of council needs alone, the workload would not be sufficient.

A trades register on the local council website was also suggested as another way of providing the community with access to trade skills (eg electricians) when these people visited town for council or other projects.

While some councils saw opportunities to use skilled travelling workers (eg grey nomads) to supplement staff resources, others saw the short time frames (eg six months) as too limited to enable effectiveness in the role, with significant resource costs in terms of repetitive induction and training.

The cost and time involved in sending staff to training programs in regional centres was noted as an issue for some councils. Flight frequencies often meant that it was necessary for a person to have a whole week away, including a weekend, to undertake a few days of training.

Associated with the problem of attracting and retaining skills was the problem of staff housing as well as the availability of the range of local services expected by people who had lived in larger centres (eg health, education). Most of the rural and remote councils operate a substantial housing portfolio to try to attract key personnel. Support by way of low interest loans for staff housing was seen as a possible initiative to help redress housing problems.

The changing demographics of council and government agency employees was also noted as an issue. Often single persons were recruited but accommodation was typically a family house. Some councils are looking at strategies to provide greater flexibility in the range of staff housing.

A particular problem identified for small towns in relation to new recruits by council or government agencies being singles or couples with no children, was the potential impact on the viability of the local school. A few children leaving a school when families relocate and not being replaced in the family structure of new recruits, can lead to teacher numbers being reduced. This compounds the ongoing decline in service levels and town population. The community building role of the council was often highlighted in this context.

3.2.2. Resource Sharing

The issue of sharing of staff, resources and services between councils in a region brought a number of different responses. While most accepted that there were situations where this would be necessary (eg with EHOs, planners, building inspectors), there was often concern in relation to not having the resource on the ground in the local situation and capable of responding to day to day needs.

The conflict between efficiency versus the need for the council to maintain employment in the community was often raised as an issue. Most councils are the largest local employer with a sense of a strong obligation to support their local community.

The concept of a regional service provider for some functions (possibly a larger council, bureau or enterprise) might have technical merit, but from a community and political perspective this was often not seen as an acceptable option relative to having people on the ground.

While such joint arrangements were regularly discussed at regional meetings very little was ever put into practice because of political resistance and “town-centric” views. The comment was made that egos often get in the way at the local level and councillors do not want to go home from such meetings saying “we didn’t get the cream”.

Some councillors see resource sharing as a step on the way to amalgamation (despite the reform agenda having moved on). On the other hand there was a recognition, particularly by CEOs, of the need to “give up to get” as it was described.

A number of respondents noted initiatives that they were involved in or considering. For example, Diamantina, Boulia and Barcoo have been looking at a joint tourist promotion initiative and joint plant purchasing.

Comment was made that, while there is a desire to progress a number of joint initiatives, day to day responsibilities often result in a loss of focus on joint initiatives or very slow progress. Funding to allow a dedicated co-ordinator for joint initiatives could help in facilitating their implementation.

3.2.3. Elected Representatives and Governance

There were mixed views on the adequacy of elected councillor numbers following reform. Most of the target councils were reduced to four councillors and a Mayor where previously in most cases there were at least six councillors.

For some, this reduced number represented an efficient boardroom, capable of acting in a strategic manner as required by legislation. For others, the potential for a lack of a quorum at council meetings, particularly in flood or other emergent situations, was

raised as a significant concern. An increased workload as a result of smaller numbers was also cited as an issue by some councils.

Teleconferencing in emergent situations is an effective mechanism to overcome the in-ability to hold a formal council meeting due to lack of a quorum.

The level of remuneration for Category 1 councillors was seen by some as an impediment in terms of attracting the skills needed when operating with only four councillors. There was a view by some that this resulted in a lot of workload being shifted to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, each of whom received greater remuneration.

There was some discussion of the need for up-skilling of councillors in relation to their roles, including the need for training before standing for election. Targeted support which provided best practice templates (eg for meeting agendas, reporting measures and use in decisions, long term community plans) was considered as desirable by some councils.

3.2.4. Impacts of Legislative Change

The requirements of new legislation, particular for long term financial and asset management plans, was discussed in terms of capacity and capability issues.

While there was general acceptance of the importance of effective long term planning, there were some concerns in relation to the potential impact on limited staff resources. For such plans to be meaningful and not simply compliance oriented and left on the shelf, significant resources are required to engender local ownership and commitment.

Community engagement and reporting requirements are considered to be quite different for very small, remote councils with a relatively large number of representatives per capita, compared with major urban centres. Again, this was described as a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Comment was made that legislation did not account for the particular situation of these smaller councils and their communities. Legislative requirements that might be necessary in larger urban centres made little sense in small rural communities. Cat registration was cited to illustrate this particular concern.

3.2.5. Financial Sustainability and Revenue Sources

The QTC Financial Sustainability Reports had been used by most to highlight matters that needed to be addressed, and to take steps to move towards enhanced financial sustainability.

However, for a significant number of the councils, it was recognised that the low percentage of own-source revenue to total operating revenue (less than 15% for half of the 18 councils) meant that it was very difficult to take initiatives on the revenue side to address financial sustainability. There was a general perception that rate revenue had been maximised.

However, comment was made by a number of councils on the impacts on the rate base caused by decisions related to broader state or national agendas. For example, acquisition of land for National Parks removed previously rateable land without any direct compensation to councils. For one council, up to 50% of land was said to be non-rateable.

Other matters identified as impacting on rate revenue or growth potential included Wild Rivers, Water Buy-Back, Carbon Credits and Native Title. The view was that whilst offering merit at a national or state level, the incidence of costs versus benefits was never properly assessed so that local communities are compensated for potential negativities and loss of sustainability.

The high reliance on external funding resources particularly Main Roads and NDR funding was discussed. It was recognised that natural disasters cause peaks and troughs in workload, but most councils had mitigation strategies in place. Initiatives ranged from spreading the work over a sufficient period to iron out the peaks, to changing local work practices or using contractors for peak requirements.

Opportunities for sharing major plant items were described as limited, with relatively high utilisation rates being reported for most major plant items. Nevertheless, there are some plant items that need to be shared across a number of councils to justify their existence in a region (e.g. road stabiliser).

Flexible outdoor work practices (eg 10 days on, 4 days off, 10 hour days, etc) were cited as achieving efficient and effective outcomes, and facilitating good staff morale.

3.2.6. Business Systems and Technology

A significant number of the councils had used *Practical* for IT systems, but anticipated change with the take-over by Civica. Comment was made that there was a need for “independent” advice about suitable systems for smaller councils to better assess IT options. The approach taken by LGIS in evaluating infrastructure delivery options was seen by some as what was needed for the IT sector.

For most of the councils, broadband capacity was regarded as adequate although for some in the Far West relying on satellite access, communication technology was a major issue. The national broadband plan is not addressing the problem because the centres fall below the population threshold.

Given the long distances to be travelled to attend meetings, greater use of video-conferencing to achieve “face-to-face” contact was advocated by some, particularly for some meetings called by government agencies. For others, the “being there” interaction was regarded as important with video-conferencing seen as of limited use.

In the context of technology, the role played by many of these councils in providing TV retransmission without any funding support was noted. Balonne Shire recently sought funding under the Digital Regions Initiative to support digital TV transmission to Bollon, Thallon and Dirranbandi. The response from the relevant Federal

Department was that *“your proposal does not appear to be in keeping with the objective of the initiative, which is to fund projects that support improved education, health and emergency services in regional, rural and remote communities.”*

3.2.7. The Community Building Role

The comment on roles such as TV retransmission lead to comments regarding the need to recognise the wider service roles of these more remote councils with services in health, education, electricity being noted as often being necessary for councils to fill the gap when not adequately provided by mainstream service providers. There was comment on this in the context of “cost shifting”.

Some respondents expressed a view that councils should not step in to fill these gaps, and the lack of service should be seen as the responsibility of the mainstream service providers. Others had a different view in terms of the need to ensure adequate service standards were available and the role had to be taken by the council to bolster town and community sustainability.

3.2.8. Interaction with Government Agencies

The role of State agencies was also discussed. The regionalisation of DLG officers was seen by some as beneficial in terms of better local support particularly in relation to funding programs. However, others commented that many of the regional officers did not have the practical skills/experience in local government to provide useful support. “They do the best they can” was the sentiment expressed.

There is a need for better inter-agency communication particularly in relation to gathering information. The view was expressed that too often the same information is requested from different government agencies. There was also comment that state agency timelines (eg 30 days to apply) for some funding programs were quite inappropriate for smaller remote councils in terms of the day to day commitments and capacity of staff to address offline tasks.

Where councils are providing services often undertaken by community or private providers (eg child care), the approach taken by the relevant government agency was considered by some as inappropriate and too regulatory when dealing with another sphere of government.

Some government agencies need to re-evaluate their attitude toward these smaller remote rural councils and recognise their importance in delivering local services as the provider of last resort. Funding to small remote councils to undertake contract work for government agencies on a fee for service basis is a practical outcome for the community and the state or federal agency. Without these councils cost effective delivery of some programs or services would be unlikely.

3.3. Possible Initiatives

The opportunity to offer specific initiatives or actions to overcome problems/issues generated these suggestions:-

- Regular sharing of experiences eg Forum at Annual Conference, more LGAQ generated “face-to-face” contact with target group (could be via video or teleconferencing or at regional meetings).
- Greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements.
- More support (including financial) to cooperative regional initiatives to help to overcome barriers.
- Bulk up plant purchases across groups of councils.
- Candidates for Local Government election should be encouraged to attend pre-election seminars.
- Introduce requirement for new elected members to attend relevant seminars/training in first year of office.
- More tailor-made support for elected members, increasing their decision making capacity, particularly in terms of what information or reporting council should have to improve decision making.
- Develop more sample templates to meet new requirements (eg reporting, meeting agendas).
- Reporting requirements should be directed at supporting local needs not micro-management from central agencies.
- Ensure formal council meetings can be held legally by telephone as required (not just in emergency).
- Increase elected representatives from four to six for some of the larger geographic areas.
- Seek funding to meet costs involved in meeting mainstream standards or have requirements tailored to suit remote rural circumstances.
- Recognise/compensate local impacts/revenue loss in decisions of state/national significance and compensate where necessary (e.g. National Parks, Wild Rivers, Emissions Trading, Water Buy-Back).
- Financial support/low interest loans for staff housing.
- Enhance broadband capacity for small communities in Far West.
- Provide independent support on IT requirements.
- More support for regional economic development initiatives to create more sustainable communities (e.g. inland highway, agricultural initiatives).
- Seek to change attitudes relating to this group of councils – see them as key builders of local communities rather than grant dependent/non viable organisations.
- Establish a ‘register’ for exchanges, mentoring or buddying opportunities to enable skill development and broad experience diversification.
- Establish a ‘register’ to enable contact with relieving personnel.
- Market local government career options to senior school and tertiary students – link this to study/cadetship opportunities.

3.4. Survey of Councils

Following completion of the teleconferences a questionnaire was developed for participating councils to rate the importance of particular issues, as well as to evaluate the potential value of specific initiatives.

In addition, the opportunity was given to provide details of compliance matters considered as an onerous impost, along with details of the extended range of services provided by these smaller rural and remote councils.

Attachment A provides a copy of the questionnaire forwarded to each council. Responses were provided by 14 of the 18 councils (77%).

3.4.1. Significant Issues

The first question asked each council to rate the significance of the issues identified from the perspective of their council. Respondents were asked to rate the issues on a scale of 1 (not a concern) to 5 (a very significant concern &/or impact).

Of the 35 issues identified, only 10 had a rating of 3.4 or greater, suggesting that these are the key issues of concern to this group of councils. Table 3.1 profiles the priority issues identified from survey responses.

Community expectations for these councils to step in and fill service gaps left by other agencies received the highest concern rating followed closely by the issue of standards being of a “one-size-fits-all” approach not appropriate to these very small communities. Reporting and compliance issues also received high concern ratings.

Table 3.1: Key Issues of Concern

Issue	Rating
1. Expectations for council to step in and fill service gaps left by other agencies	4.1
2. Appropriateness of standards for small communities	4.0
3. Reporting requirements	3.9
4. Time taken to meet legislative compliance requirements	3.9
5. Impact of new requirements (long term financial and asset plans, community plans)	3.8
6. Stability of other external funding programs	3.8
7. Local revenue impact of state/national policies or requirements (eg National Parks, Wild Rivers, Water Buy-back, Emissions Trading)	3.6
8. Loss of government services/facilities (rail closure, withdrawal of government personnel)	3.6
9. Capacity to provide/find staff housing (council owned or private)	3.4
10. Expectations to maintain and increase local employment (council and other)	3.4

In some cases, there was a diversity of views on significance of an issue indicating that, while not a concern at the aggregate level, it is a concern to some of the councils in the group.

Those issues where more than 35% of respondents gave a significant concern rating (4 or 5) not included in the above list along with the aggregate concern score were:-

- Expectations to use local services/contractors/purchase locally (3.3)
- Recruitment & retention of outside supervisors (3.2)
- Recruitment & retention of senior management staff (3.1)
- Recruitment & retention of plant operators (3.0)

3.4.2. Possible Initiatives

A list of possible initiatives to support capacity building in rural and remote councils was provided to allow a rating of the relative importance of each element.

The following table provides details of those that scored an importance rating of 3.5 or above which shows that these are regarded as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ by the group.

Table 3.2: Priority Initiatives

Initiative	Rating
1. Seek to change perceived external agency attitudes relating to rural & remote councils – consider them as key builders of local communities rather than grant dependent/non viable organisations.	4.8
2. Seek funding to meet costs involved in meeting mainstream standards or have requirements tailored to suit remote rural circumstances.	4.4
3. More support for regional economic development initiatives to create more sustainable communities (eg inland highway, agricultural initiatives).	4.2
4. Reporting requirements to be directed at supporting local needs not micro-management from central agencies.	4.1
5. Recognise local impacts/revenue loss in decisions of state/national significance and compensate where necessary (National Parks, Wild Rivers, Emissions Trading, Water Buy-Back).	4.1
6. Candidates for Local Government election be encouraged to attend pre-election seminars to enhance knowledge of roles/function.	4.0
7. Introduce requirement for newly elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.	4.0
8. Establish a ‘register’ for exchanges, mentoring or buddying opportunities to enable skill development and broad experience diversification.	3.6
9. More support (including financial) for cooperative regional initiatives to help overcome barriers/resistance to involvement	3.6
10 Improve broadband capacity/speed for your community.	3.5
11. Establish a ‘register’ to enable contact with relieving personnel.	3.5

The highest scoring initiative relates to the way in which these councils feel they are perceived by external agencies. For these councils, recognition that they are a vital participant in service provision to remote parts of the State is a key to sustainability.

The next priority initiative relates to the “one-size-fits-all” issue. Either agencies must recognise that standards and reporting requirements can be developed to provide for the different circumstances of these communities, or additional funding must be allocated to compensate for more staff and for the disproportionate effort expended to meet legislated standards, compliance and reporting requirements. The need to register cats was typically quoted as the ‘overkill’ that results from applying mainstream urban regulations across the diverse State.

As for the issues rating, there were initiatives where views were divergent. Those initiatives (and rating score) where more than 35% of respondents gave a score of 4 or 5 not listed above were:

- Regular sharing of experiences eg Forum at Annual Conference, more LGAQ generated “face-to-face” contact with target group (3.4)
- Greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements (3.4)
- Market local government career options to senior school and tertiary students – link this to study/cadetship opportunities (3.4)
- Financial support/low interest loans for staff housing (3.2).

Other initiatives suggested by respondents (not covered by the questionnaire list) were:

- Establish a resource bank (forms, policies, templates, procedures) prepared by other councils for ready download to stop ‘reinventing the wheel’;
- Try to establish ‘true’ alliances with neighbouring councils;
- Investigate the opportunity for a bureau service for IT with centralised or host server;
- Try to locate state employees in rural towns rather than large provincial centres.

3.4.3. Compliance Burden

Respondents were asked to identify compliance requirements they felt were onerous along with personnel resources that could be saved if these compliance requirements were eliminated.

A range of compliance requirements was noted. The main themes related to legislative standards (eg water, building and plumbing), pest management (weeds, dogs, cats), reporting (water, sewerage, airports, performance) and asset valuation requirements.

Estimates of potential time savings varied. At the aggregate level up to six (6) employees across the respondent councils could be released to other tasks if reduced compliance processes were to be introduced.

3.4.4. "Extra" Service Roles

The teleconferences identified a wide-range of "extra" services that rural and remote councils are called on to provide (either fully or partly funded by council). These service provider roles are typically not required of councils in more populated centres.

The one service identified by almost all respondents relates to TV/radio retransmission along with associated upgrades where necessary (digital services). The respondent councils identified a cost in excess of \$180,000 (around \$13,000 per council) for this service. The cost varied depending on the number of small population centres in the respective council area.

Other services identified by respondents included the following:-

housing (community, student, staff)	aged, youth and child services
bus transport (community, school)	airports
health services (medical centres, community nurse)	banking, centrelink and post office services
pest management (wild dogs)	saleyards
skill centres and training/employment schemes	funerals
night patrols	

In addition, councils play a significant role in providing sporting facilities, racetracks, community grants and events relative to their population size.

While some of the above may be provided by non-rural/remote councils, it is the dispersion of the population across a number of small centres that makes each role far more critical for these small population councils.

In total, respondents identified a net cost over \$3 million for services not typically provided by councils in more populated urban centres.

3.5. LGAQ Annual Conference Forum

At the August 2009 LGAQ Annual Conference a split plenary session was devoted to capability and capacity building in bush councils. This forum provided an opportunity to present results from the teleconferences and survey, and allow council representatives to further discuss issues, opportunities and possible initiatives to support these small rural and remote councils.

Discussion further highlighted the range of issues identified in the teleconferences.

A particular focus was on strategies to attract young graduates to western communities. The need for mentoring and support from senior officers and the CEO were highlighted. Difficulties for young graduates were identified (eg engineering graduates) where no appropriately qualified supervisor was available to allow work experience to be formally recorded.

The importance of strategies to provide career paths for locally based people was noted including use of cadetships. Government incentives such as reducing HECS debt for graduates working in bush communities (as used in the HECS Reimbursement Scheme for rural doctors) was suggested as one way to attract young graduates to western communities.

The developing role of regional road groups was also discussed. Consideration could be given to expanding their role in regional initiatives and collaboration beyond the road task.

Mechanisms to enhance communication between remote councils (eg when specialist trades and professional resources were coming to the area) were seen as providing the opportunity to more efficiently coordinate these services.

A number of participants proposed this type of forum at the annual conference becoming a regular feature, but with more time being allocated to discuss matters of common interest and concern.

4. Action Plan

Based on the research and analysis conducted for this project, the following Action Plan has been developed to address the major issues and concerns in relation to capacity and capability of the more remote rural councils in Queensland.

Action	Key Agencies
Skill Development	
1. Priority to be given to elements of Local Government Skills Plan which focus on para professional responses to skill issues (eg Building Surveying Technician, Environmental Health Technician, Para-Planners) and associated legislative issues.	LG Skills Formation Taskforce
2. Lobby Federal Government to expand the HECS Reimbursement Scheme to cover other rural professions which are difficult to attract to remote locations (eg engineers, planners, EHOs).	LGAQ
3. Introduce requirement for newly elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.	DIP
Regional Collaboration	
4. Consider broadening the focus of Regional Road Groups to cover other aspects of regional collaboration and cooperation.	LGAQ, DTMR, RRGs
5. Provide funding support to enable employment of regional co-ordinators to progress joint regional initiatives	DIP
Impact Assessment & Recognition	
6. Government departments, agencies and statutory authorities should be required to prepare and publish Rural Community Impact Statements prior to implementing significant changes to existing Government services in rural and regional areas and in legislative reviews.	LGAQ, DIP, Dept Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Local Govt.
7. Increased emphasis to be placed on LGAQ Policy Position that legislation affecting Local Government in Queensland should be framed recognising the variety of capacity, size, resources, skills and physical location of Local Governments. The 'one size fits all model' is not appropriate.	LGAQ, DIP
Support Services	
8. Establish a 'Resource Bank' which includes information on relieving personnel, opportunities for exchanges and mentoring or access to/sharing of skills along with templates/sample documents for key compliance requirements.	LGAQ, DIP
9. A "Bush Councils" Forum to be included in the agenda of future LGAQ Annual Conferences.	LGAQ
Financial Support	
10. State capital works subsidies should include staff housing for remote rural communities.	LGAQ, DIP
Technology	
11. LGAQ, District Associations and ROCs to promote and trial greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements.	LGAQ, District Associations, ROCs

ATTACHMENT A

CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS OF NON-AMALGAMATED COUNCILS

LGAQ 2009 SCOPING STUDY

QUESTIONNAIRE

As you are aware, this LGAQ project aims at identifying issues impacting on non-amalgamated councils in the state. Actions and initiatives that could address needs in relation to the capacity of these councils to provide sustainable local governance for communities are also being collated.

Following the teleconferences with Mayors and CEOs of the 18 councils involved in the project we now seek further detailed input.

LGAQ would like you to provide a rating of the significance to your council of a range of issues identified during discussions, and to rate the importance of some of the initiatives or actions identified to date.

There may be other issues or initiatives that you consider are of particular relevance to your situation. The opportunity to add these is also provided.

Your support in completing this questionnaire and returning it by **17 July 2009** would be appreciated. Could you please email your completed questionnaire to Alan Morton at mortona@ozemail.com.au If you prefer to fax your completed questionnaire please send it to Alan Morton at 07 54769966.

Please complete the following contact information

Council Name:
Contact person:
Phone No.

If you are involved in an initiative relevant to capacity or capability building which could be used as a case study, and would like to share this with others, could you please attach details.

Thank you for your support

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, could you please rate the significance of the following issues for your council. (where 1 = not a concern, 2= only of minor concern, 3 = some problems at times, 4 = a significant concern &/or impact, 5 = a very significant concern &/or impact)

Issue	Rating	Specific Issues/Comments (if any)
1. Human Resources		
Recruitment & retention of senior management staff		
Recruitment & retention of other office staff		
Recruitment & retention of key trade skills (plumbing, building, electrician, mechanics)		
Recruitment & retention of outside supervisors		
Recruitment & retention of plant operators		
Recruitment & retention of other staff		
Ageing of current workforce		
Capacity to provide/find staff housing (council owned or private)		
Lack of adequate support services to attract staff (health, education, etc)		
2. Governance		
Adequacy of number of elected representatives to achieve effective governance		
Current electoral arrangements (divided or undivided)		
Councillor workload		
Adequacy of elected member remuneration		
3. Community Expectations		
Expectations for council to step in and fill service gaps left by other agencies		
Expectations to maintain and increase local employment (council and other)		
Expectations to use local services/contractors/purchase locally		
4. Government/Agency Support/Attitudes		
DLG support, capacity and local knowledge		
LGAQ support, capacity and local knowledge		
Other key agency support, capacity and local knowledge (specify agencies if issues exist)		
Duplication or overlap by agencies		

Issue	Rating	Specific Issues/Comments (if any)
5. Legislative Requirements and Compliance		
Appropriateness of standards for small communities		
Reporting requirements		
Time taken to meet legislative compliance requirements		
Impact of new requirements (long term financial and asset plans, community plans)		
6. Financial Sustainability		
Stability of contracted work programs (eg MRD)		
Stability of other external funding programs		
Capacity to increase rates at least in line with cost increases		
Capacity to cope with peaks and troughs in outside workload		
Local revenue impact of state/national policies or requirements (eg National Parks, Wild Rivers, Water Buy-back, Emissions Trading) (identify specific issues if any)		
7. Technology and Communication		
Broadband capacity		
Appropriateness of internal IT systems		
IT support		
8. Demographic/Economic Change		
Loss of government services/facilities (rail closure, withdrawal of government personnel)		
Population decline/loss of families & children		
Potential for loss of significant industries		

If there are other specific issues that you regard as of particular relevance for your council, could you please identify these below.

.....

2(a) Following is a list of possible initiatives that could be considered to support capacity building in rural and remote councils. Please rate the relevance or importance of each of the following to your council and its needs at this time. (Use a rating scale of 1 = not relevant, 2 = only marginal relevance, 3 = nice to have, 4 = important, 5 = very important)

Initiative or Potential Action	Rating
Regular sharing of experiences eg Forum at Annual Conference, more LGAQ generated “face-to-face” contact with target group (could be via video or teleconferencing or at regional meetings)	
Greater use of technology (eg video-conferencing) for some regional meetings to reduce travel requirements - specific example?:	
More support (including financial) for cooperative regional initiatives to help overcome barriers/resistance to involvement	
Bulk-up plant purchases across groups of councils	
Candidates for Local Government election be encouraged to attend pre-election seminars to enhance knowledge of roles/function.	
Introduce requirement for newly elected members to attend relevant seminars/ training in first year of office.	
More tailor-made support for elected members, specific to needs of individual councils. - specific example?:	
Develop more sample templates to meet new requirements (eg reporting, meeting agendas). - specific example?:	
Reporting requirements to be directed at supporting local needs not micro-management from central agencies.	
Ensure legislation enables formal council meetings to be held by telephone as required (not just in emergency).	
Increase elected representatives for your council	
Seek funding to meet costs involved in meeting mainstream standards or have requirements tailored to suit remote rural circumstances.	
Recognise local impacts/revenue loss in decisions of state/national significance and compensate where necessary (National Parks, Wild Rivers, Emissions Trading, Water Buy-Back).	
Financial support/low interest loans for staff housing.	
Improve broadband capacity/speed for your community.	
Provide independent support on council IT requirements.	
More support for regional economic development initiatives to create more sustainable communities (eg inland highway, agricultural initiatives).	
Seek to change perceived external agency attitudes relating to rural & remote councils – consider them as key builders of local communities rather than grant dependent/non viable organisations.	
Establish a ‘register’ for exchanges, mentoring or buddying opportunities to enable skill development and broad experience diversification.	

Initiative or Potential Action	Rating
Establish a 'register' to enable contact with relieving personnel.	
Market local government career options to senior school and tertiary students – link this to study/cadetship opportunities.	

2 (b). There may be other potential initiatives of particular relevance to your council or to other rural and remote councils. Could you please list others that you consider to be important.

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3. Regulatory compliance is often mentioned as a significant impost on councils. If this is an issue for your council, please list specific compliance requirements you believe are unnecessary or should be reduced. Also provide a rough estimate of the equivalent man days per year for resources involved in each of the matters you identify.

Compliance Requirement and change suggested	Man days saved

4. Rural and Remote Councils have identified a wide-range of “extra” services they are called on to provide (either fully or partly funded by council) which are not normally required in more populated centres (eg TV retransmission, health services/support, transport, etc). Please list such services/activities provided by your council along with a rough estimate of cost to council (net of subsidies or payments).

Service/Activity	Cost to council

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT
 Email to mortona@ozemail.com.au by **17 July 2009**