RECOMMENDATIONS
Evaluating the Department of Internal Affairs’ Facilitation of the Central / Local Government Interface in the Community Outcomes Process

Department of Internal Affairs

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Recommendations

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Recommendations

This report summarises the recommendations drawn from the process and impact evaluation of the Department of Internal Affairs’ (the Department’s) role in facilitating the central and local government interface regarding the community outcomes process, and central government agencies’ engagement with the Department in this role. It focuses on the refinement of the Department’s facilitation role, given the acknowledgement by central and local government participants of its ongoing need.

Introduction

Both central and local government agree there is an ongoing need for a refined version of the Department’s facilitation role. Based on the evaluation findings, we detail below suggested refinements to the Department’s facilitation role in relation to its: vision, governance, linkages, structure, operational plan, promotion and review.

The suggestions below:

- Acknowledge that the Department is facilitating between central and local government therefore both sectors’ unique needs and barriers to engagement are considered
- Offer a more clearly defined role for the Department. However, flexibility is required within this structure to enable the Department to respond to opportunities as they arise, and as the central and local government’s needs evolve through the community outcomes process.

Note: Litmus has drawn together the following suggestions based on the evaluation findings. These need to be considered in the context of the complexities of engagement for central and local government relating to the community outcomes process and the variations in local government need. Further, these suggestions need to be considered in the context of the Department’s and its branches’ roles and broader goals.

Vision

A clearly articulated strategic vision and goals are required to enable the development of an appropriate structure, operational plan and promotional strategy. To assist in defining the vision and goals for the Department’s role, consideration may be given to:

- The Cabinet paper’s requirement of facilitating engagement between central and local government in the community outcomes process. Over time, this facilitated engagement of central and local government is likely to achieve a better understanding of each others’ goals and constraints, progress community outcomes, improve policy development, ensure efficient use of public resources, and reduce compliance costs. To achieve these long-term aims, the Department needs to:
– Identify the community outcomes where it is mutually beneficial for central
government agencies to assist local government, (i.e. this may include central
government agencies not currently engaging)
– Facilitate targeted engagement between these identified central government
agencies and local government who require assistance to engage.

Note: the responsibility for the emergence of the long-term engagement benefits lies with
central and local government, and not the Department.

- The identification of the short-term impacts due to the Department’s facilitation role of:
  - Connecting central government to the community outcomes process, and to
    identify opportunities for central and local government to work together
  - Creating relevance for central and local government to work together through a
    shared understanding of the each other’s roles, responsibilities, accountabilities
    and constraints
  - Smoothing engagement between central and local government by making the
    interaction process easy, and by facilitating any tensions or barriers arising
  - Sharing good practice about the community outcomes process, and central and
    local government working together that will minimise duplication of effort,
    increase knowledge, and capability and support changes to practice.

Note: To address current confusion, the Department needs to clearly communicate whether
or not the role encompasses ‘doing projects’ related to the community outcomes process, or
be clear about the projects that lie within its scope.

Governance

The Department has been identified as the appropriate central government agency to
manage this facilitation role. Currently, the role is located under Operations. However,
consideration needs to be given to the advantages and disadvantages of locating the role
within the Department’s policy division. This reflects local government participants’ desire for
stronger links between the information supplied to relationship managers and policy
development.

The location also needs to support and maintain linkages between the Department’s
facilitation role and other key stakeholders, as discussed below.

Linkages

The Department’s facilitation role needs strong linkages within the Department and across
central and local government leadership networks:

- Linkages to the Deputy Secretaries Group and central and local government’s Chief
  Executive and/or General Managers will enable the Department to develop more vocal
  leadership across government for engagement on community outcomes. Without this
  high level support, it will be difficult to sustain focus on community outcomes or embed
  them into central government work plans.
Linkages across the Department to ensure relevant information are exchanged and actioned. The Department also needs to ensure its processes are supportive of the intent of central and local government engagement within the community outcomes process, and is seen to model desired interaction between local and central government.

Structure

We suggest the following structure for the Department’s facilitation role:

- Relationship managers as the face of the role.
  - Their number will be dependent on the level of interaction required following the development of the operational plan, (see below)
  - Skills required are strong regional networks, ability to prioritise and facilitate relationships across levels and sectors, and up and down within hierarchies, communication, persuasion, and analysis skills to understand subtleties of the environment, collaborative working style, negotiation skills, and tenacity.

- Information sharing and networking based initiatives, maintained by the information broker, to support relationship managers in their role including:
  - Central Government Interagency Group with a clearly defined and communicated strategic purpose, high levels of attendance from senior central government representatives, and offering central government agencies relevant information about the community outcomes process and opportunities for engagement
  - The annual workshop - clearly differentiated from other local government conferences, timed to maximise attendance and offering relevant and future focused information
  - Local central website with enhanced presentation and navigation, and containing a complete up-to-date list of central government contacts, other relevant information, and being widely promoted
  - Communications material, including brochures and newsletters, which offer unique information and have timely distribution to maximise their usefulness
  - Issue based initiatives developed on an as-needs-basis, promoted appropriately, and if seminar based using an action learning approach.

- Policy analyst to transfer learnings into relevant policy.

Operational plan

We suggest the development of a strategic operational plan to offer direction to the Department’s facilitation role using information and guidance from:

- A central government engagement strategy. Using the Department’s analysis of the community outcomes themes across New Zealand, central government agencies could

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1 This list excludes the e-discussion group, given its limited use and appeal.
be identified whose engagement are critical to their realisation, (for example the role of the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards in realising community outcomes relating to healthy communities). The Department working one-on-one to:

- Inform the central government agency about the potential alignment between the community outcomes and their work streams, and negotiate how they are willing to engage
- Determine local government expectations of this potential relationship
- Negotiate and facilitate the parties to work together.

This targeted approach will enable the Department to focus on the areas were the greatest gains may be made. It will also minimise any potential duplication of effort for central government.

- A local government engagement strategy. Using the Department’s knowledge about the 85 local authorities to determine where they can be most effective in supporting community outcomes processes and facilitating engagement with central government. The latter would enable the Department to be explicit about its level of engagement across local authorities, and the number of relationship managers required.
  - The latter needs to be complemented by the relationship managers’ ongoing attendance at regional interagency forums to identify emerging issues about the community outcomes process, and opportunities for central government engagement to meet local government needs.

- An information review. Identifying the type of information local and central government want to receive about the community outcomes process and their engagement. This will offer the Department a framework in which to collect, collate and disseminate information of greatest use and/or interest. Thus, keeping information flows open, relevant and interesting. The latter could also include:
  - The development of communication tools to effectively and easily disseminate information about the community outcomes process through central government agencies. This may assist the process of information dissemination within central government agencies
  - A stocktake of the first full community outcomes process to be available on www.localcentral.govt.nz.

Promotion

The Department’s facilitation role requires ongoing promotion to ensure its purpose and benefits of interacting are well known to central and local government. Promotion can occur via one-on-one interaction, and communications vehicles, (e.g. ‘At the interface’ newsletter and the localcentral website).

The core purpose of this promotion is to ensure that central and local government staff know the scope of advice and assistance the Department offers, and when to contact the Department’s relationship managers. It will also ensure continuing awareness of the Department’s role following staff turnover across central and local government sectors.
Review

The community outcomes process is an evolving one, which is currently entering a new action – focused-phase. Central and local government acknowledge the need for the Department’s refined facilitation role over the next two to three years. However, as the community outcomes process embeds into central and local government processes, the need for the Department’s facilitation role will also evolve. On this basis, there is a need to monitor central and local government’s facilitation needs around their interface to meet these changing needs and to revise the Department’s role appropriately.