

8.1 MAYORAL MINUTE - SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT 2

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WORKFORCE ISSUES

As a relative newcomer to Council, I have recently raised a number of issues which I believe need to be addressed by Council as a Whole to provide solutions to what are becoming entrenched problems.

One of these issues is the organizational culture and the fact there is some feeling within the organization and community that Council, as the largest employer within the Shire, is no longer an “employer of choice” and is not a supportive employer of its most important asset - the employees!

At nearly every meeting there are concerns raised and suggestions made on improving the culture. Council’s role under the Charter includes being a responsible employer, section 232 of the Act requires Councillors *to review the performance of council and its delivery of services*.

Currently some service delivery is less than adequate and impacted by low morale and distrust between management and staff, which has increased staff turnover and the indications are that many more staff are considering leaving and looking for a better work environment. When morale is low it affects productivity and pride in work resulting in poor service delivery.

In deliberating how to raise this issue, I gave consideration as to whether it is “operational” and therefore not the role of Council. However, having checked Council’s adopted Code of Conduct document these issues are “*matters relating to a broader workforce policy*” and, as such, fall within the remit of Councillors to address.

Areas of concern are recruitment and selection and the impact of current practices relating to human resources policies and procedures in managing the workforce.

Some jobs are not advertised in a timely manner, with one example being the plant operators which went out in February but only just last week, some five months after, the successful applicants were advised. Undoubtedly, Council has the work particularly on roads and applicants are looking for jobs, if we do not fill jobs quickly, we will lose the applicants to other organizations resulting in another unavoidable and costly recruitment process.

When staff give notice, positions should be promptly reviewed, advertised and filled as a matter of priority. In the current environment filling vacancies should be a matter of urgency.

Councillors and staff need to work together to achieve the goals of Coonamble Shire Council. Councillors are charged with directing and controlling the affairs of Council in accordance with the Act – refer (s232 (1)) and, as such, Councillors cannot ignore

issues that are negatively impacting our workforce. This is a concern across the organization that needs to be addressed by Council.

As an entity Council is losing too much operational knowledge too quickly. I am concerned that the continued loss of skilled staff who have background knowledge of our community can only be to the detriment of Council and its residents.

We, as a Council, cannot “unhear” what we are being told, mental health issues attributed to the work environment, lack of morale among staff, not being paid appropriate pay rates and a reluctance by prospective job candidates to consider a career with Council. I have also heard situations where staff have been ‘spoken down’ to and ridiculed in a disrespectful and inappropriate manner. I feel that some staff members may be over-stepping their delegations and position responsibilities. An example is that overseers are not the decision-makers in recruitment processes that effect their teams.

Councillors may recall that Walgett had similar issues in the early 2000’s which ended up costing that Council over \$500k in staff entitlements.

At the June 2022 meeting, Council unanimously passed the following resolution:

That an appropriate organisational review of Council’s structure be undertaken in order for Council to consider the structure within our first 12 months of office. As such Council requests that the Acting General Manager makes the necessary arrangements to have the review completed and tabled for Council’s consideration within the legislated time frame.

Staff need to be reassured that Coonamble Council is a supportive employer and an employer of choice within the community. As Councillors we need to take the lead and ensure we move forward with the concerns raised being addressed.

Although some feedback was obtained earlier in the year, it was evident that a vast majority of staff did not have faith in that process and did not speak up at the time. It was also the case that this feedback was sought in a group environment, rather than given the opportunity to speak one-on-one in a confidential manner. My understanding is that staff are now prepared to speak up due to the ongoing issues but need to be reassured this will be done in a confidential setting.

The Code of Conduct is a policy created to provide direction to staff and the organization. Sadly, we see it used solely as a punitive tool and a “big whip” on a daily basis. The Code should be used to create a supportive and caring workplace, not a threatening one which I observe it to be. It’s on this basis that more staff are now prepared to speak out about their concerns.

If there are problems within the organisation, we should acknowledge them and fix the issues - under no circumstances, should we ignore them. If there are none then we have lost nothing, and the current circumstances will continue.

Tim Horan
Mayor

Following on from the June 2022 resolution I would like to move:

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Council includes in the organizational review and as a matter of urgency, a review of Council's employment practices, which will include independent and confidential (one-on-one) feedback from current staff and those that have left the council within the past 6 months as to their experiences working for the organization that is Coonamble Shire Council. Further, that this confidential report be provided to Council in full.**
- 2. That the confidential review be a continuation of the initial survey of staff movements facilitated by Mr. Peter Evans of the Local Government Management Solutions team.**
- 3. That Council review and create the three Director positions and have them filled as a matter of urgency.**