

## TWELVE MONTH REVIEW OF FORUM

### 1. Background

At the inception of the Minister's Local Government Forum, the Minister for Local Government and the President of the Local Government Association agreed that the Forum be reviewed at the end of its first year of operation. As the Forum has now been operating for twelve months, it is appropriate that this review now take place.

As members are aware, the Forum was established with specific terms of reference:

*"To advise the Minister for Local Government, the Premier, Cabinet and the Local Government Association on matters referred to the Forum by the Minister that are*

- *of significance to the State Government and the local government sector that require a high level of co-operation between the State Government and local government for their objectives to be achieved;*
- *at the interface between the State Government and local government activities and service delivery that have significance across more than one portfolio;*
- *substantial, achievable and relevant to local government generally or at least a substantial part of it;*
- *only capable of being delivered with the support of both sectors of government."*

These terms of reference were decided upon in order to fulfil the objectives of the Forum, which are, broadly:

- to provide a mechanism through which State and Local Government can together, in a spirit of mutual respect, tackle an agenda with some concrete matters that are of importance to both state and local governments.
- to offer an opportunity to identify imaginative and more effective cross-agency and intergovernmental approaches to strengthening communities through cooperation with the local government sector.

Fundamentally the Forum strengthens the cooperative approach to issues of wide significance to State and Local Government through a formalised, constructive relationship based on mutual respect between the two spheres of government. The presence of four Ministers as Forum members and the high level of Local Government representation at the Forum indicates the value in which the Forum and the frank discussion that takes place at meetings is held by State and Local Government.

## 2. Achievements of the Minister's Local Government Forum

Over the course of its first year of operation, the Forum has made significant progress on the achievement of these objectives. It has proven to be the primary mechanism by which State and Local Government can discuss issues that concern both spheres of Government in a constructive manner, and to facilitate solutions to these problems.

In general, the approach the Forum has taken in considering issues that cross a number of State agencies has considerably raised the profile both of these issues and of Local Government as a sphere of government amongst State agencies. Consideration by the Forum is a catalyst for substantial work on issues by State and Local Government. Local Government has responded by strategic consideration of these issues by the sector as a whole. These approaches will be pursued further in the specific work the Forum has endorsed on State-Local Government Relations.

Whilst the overall improvement of cooperation and communication between State and Local Government has undoubtedly been a significant achievement of the Forum, the intent of the Forum was to facilitate solutions to particular issues. These issues have included:

- Stormwater Management and Flood Mitigation (a referral to the Forum). Both State and Local Government are now devoting considerably more time and resources to this issue. State funding to the Catchment Management Subsidy Scheme was doubled to \$4.0m for four years. Local Government is also approaching the issue strategically, with metropolitan councils working closely with State Government and the LGA to develop the *Stormwater Management Strategy*, and funding an extensive study to identify needed areas of work across Adelaide.
- Septic Tank Effluent Disposal Scheme (STEDS) Whilst this item has only been on the Forum agenda for two meetings thus far, significant progress has been made on it. The profile of this issue amongst State agencies has increased considerably, with Ministerial responsibility transferred to the Minister for Local Government, and confirmed State Government participation on the STEDS Advisory Committee.
- State-Local Government Relations As mentioned above, the Forum has endorsed the development of an agreement between State and Local Government that will improve consultation arrangements and government communication practices. This is an important piece of work that will build a closer and more productive relationship between State and Local Government to benefit the community.
- Regional Passenger Transport Due to the increased prominence that this issue gained from its appearance on the Forum agenda, the Passenger Transport Board organised an advisory committee to ensure that the issue was being dealt with fully.

- Other Items The Forum agenda has included issues such as waste management, development planning, natural resource management and the State Housing Plan. The Forum has provided an excellent opportunity for frank discussion on these issues between representatives of Local Government and the Ministers and senior public servants responsible for the implementation of change and reform in these areas. This discussion has resulted in a greater appreciation of the interests of Local Government in policy areas such as these, and the implications that any changes have for the sector.

### **3. Twelve month Review of Forum – implementation**

Preliminary discussion between the Minister and the President of the LGA on the review of the Forum agree that there has been excellent progress with the Forum thus far, despite a tentative beginning. Given this, it is suggested that a review of the Forum focus on administrative details as opposed to a fundamental review of the terms of referral and membership for the Forum.

Feedback from Forum members has strongly indicated that there is a need for the role and achievements of the Forum to be more broadly publicised and understood, particularly amongst councils. The following actions have been suggested to accomplish this, after consultation with both Forum members and the Independent Reference Group:

- Continuing to hold Forum meetings on council premises.
- Holding a Forum meeting in regional South Australia (possibly to coincide with a Community Cabinet)
- Distributing the proposed agenda for the Forum meetings well in advance of the meetings, and inviting any interested elected members or executive staff of Council to attend the meetings as observers. Those interested in particular issues could register their attendance at the upcoming meeting.
- Inviting other Ministers to attend future meetings to discuss particular issues.
- Greater distribution of news from the Forum meetings to increase the profile of the Forum amongst councils. This may be by the publication of a brief newsletter or another form of communication to all councils, as well as continuing to publish Forum meeting notes and papers on both the OLG and LGA websites.

Administrative procedures for the Forum have also been considered, with members suggesting several changes. Some of these have already been implemented in order for meetings to proceed in the most efficient manner:

- Streamlining Forum agendas and papers.

- Specifying the nature of each issue on the Forum agenda (as a referral to the Forum, topic for further exploration, update report or information briefing).
- Producing more succinct meeting notes after each Forum meeting (as of the October meeting).

#### **4. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Forum members :**

- 1. Note the achievements of the Forum over the last twelve months.**
- 2. Endorse the implementation of the actions listed, and suggest any other particular action to improve the operation of the Forum.**
- 3. Receive a brief report on the implementation of the Forum review at the first 2004 meeting.**