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Reform and Renewal in social housing – responding to social exclusion

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Session 3 Workshop
Determining Priorities for Community Renewal – Who Decides?

**DETERMINING PRIORITIES FOR A STATE – TASMANIA'S APPROACH
TO BUILDING OUR VISION, OUR FUTURE**

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It has been said that “*measuring progress is not the same as making it*” (1). In Tasmania, we are attempting to do both.

AIM

Soon after I assumed my role as Director of the Policy Division in the Department of Premier and Cabinet this time last year, we were given the task of developing two of the new Government’s major policy initiatives

- the creation of a long term strategic vision for the State of Tasmania and
- the building of Partnership Agreements between the State Government and Local Governments.

This afternoon I am going to provide an outline of how we have attempted to achieve these tasks with particular focus on what it means for deciding priorities within communities.

I’m told I’ve got 15 minutes, so I’ll get straight to the main points I want to make.

MAIN POINTS:

The five key points that I wanted to outline for you today are

- the concept of the Tasmanian Government’s long term plan
- the critical factors for success
- the process for developing our Plan
- how we are going to implement it; and
- the process for monitoring and evaluating it.

[Slide 2: “*Tasmania Together*” – *What is it?*]

When the Bacon Government was elected in August 1998, they had a clear agenda for revitalising the Tasmanian economy and community. The theme of this agenda was “Partnerships for Change”. It had three key planks

- negotiate Partnership Agreements between every local government and the State Government
- build an Industry Strategy around key sectors; and
- develop a **long term (20 year) Social and Economic Plan for Tasmania.**

This Plan – now known as “*Tasmania Together*” is seen as the overarching policy initiative into which the Local Government Partnership Agreements and Industry Strategy will dovetail.

What is meant by a Social and Economic (and Environmental) Plan? We envisage that it will be a set of vision statements and broad goals underpinned by specific indicators that are regularly monitored.

It is not a detailed economic prescription for the State – and yet it is about setting priorities (and in a sense about allocation of scarce resources – a model that all economists understand!) What sets our new approach apart however is the recognition that a Plan has to go beyond an economic strategy.

It is a Plan based on the ethos of **community ownership** in terms of determining a preferred future for the people of Tasmania? What would this picture look like? A strong economy with jobs for our young people to return to, a “clean and green” environment, a cohesive community where people feel safe and secure? The main ingredient for the Plan was to be “driven by the community for the community” not just written by a group of us closeted away in an office.

It is a Plan that will **shape government policy, service delivery and budgets**. If we get it right, the community ownership of the Plan will also ensure that it goes beyond Government policy and into the planning and policy processes of industry and the non-government sector.

How will we know that we've got to where we want to be? One of the keys to “Tasmania Together” will be that **the progress of the Plan towards its goals will be measured**. From what we understand, Tasmania is the first State in Australia to attempt such an approach – I'm not sure whether this makes us brave or foolish!

This strategic long term approach HAS been attempted overseas though and we have looked at several different models from different countries or jurisdictions – notably Oregon, Ireland, and Minnesota We found several critical **success factors** that have been common.

[Slide 3: Success Factors]

High level leadership and bipartisan support

An essential ingredient in effective sustainable long-term social and economic planning is bipartisan (or tripartisan) support and involvement. A similar process in Oregon has survived through several changes of Governor both /Republican and Democrat. The more the process is associated with a particular party or leader, the more vulnerable it is to collapse when power shifts to new players.

The Premier and his Cabinet have already shown strong commitment and enthusiasm for a Plan for Tasmania's future, and the Opposition and Greens have been prepared to acknowledge the need for such a concept. All have been involved in some key aspects of the process which I will outline in

greater detail. We are conscious of the need to develop other mechanisms that promote the tripartisanship nature of the process.

As mentioned above, community ownership is essential and we have an underlying principle of ensuring that there is **opportunity for 100% participation by the Tasmanian community** in the development of "*Tasmania Together*".

If there was a quick-fix solution to Tasmania's problems, I'm sure it would have been found by now – there isn't. That's why "Tasmania Together" is about achieving a **long term focus with measurable indicators**. That is why it is also important to get tripartisan support – so that this lasts beyond the next election. Again, using the Oregon example their process has been developing since 1988.

And finally, and most importantly, the process needs to be clearly linked to **budgets, policies and legislation** to ensure that the Plan guides new spending and policy proposals. This last factor requires a whole of Government approach to the development of a Plan, and a willingness to change the bidding process that currently forms the basis of Budget development in most jurisdictions.

It sounds like a big task – and it is. My third point was to outline some of the ways we are setting out to achieve the task.

[Slide 4: Development process]

First, we came back to one of our principles: community ownership. How could we ensure two things – that the Plan wasn't just seen as "the Government's Plan" (and hence maybe have a short shelf life) and how could we try to ensure broad participation and community ownership?

This led to the establishment in May 1999 of a **Community Leaders Group** – made up of 24 individuals from across the State. They were not the 'usual suspects', although key stakeholder groups were invited to nominate. Nominations were also sought by public advertisement. The criteria was to find people that were enthusiastic and committed to a long term strategic vision, people that had the ability to tap into a range of community networks, that the Group had a good cross-section of regional and sectoral interests, and had a gender balance. The Premier was particularly keen to ensure that there was an emphasis on younger people (those that might be around in 20 years time!)

The role of the CLG is primarily to oversee the broad consultation process required to develop the Plan which means ensuring the opportunity for 100% participation mentioned previously.

There has always been debate about whether such consultation should start with a blank sheet of butchers' paper or whether there could be a draft Plan already drawn up. We fell somewhere between the two and believed that the

CLG needed something to consult with, although a paper prepared by Government would be seen as 'top-down' and predetermining outcomes. The compromise was to develop a paper from the 'bottom up'. The CLG thus kicked off their process with a **Search Conference** held at the end of June 1999. The purpose of the Conference was to develop a draft vision document that could form the basis of the community consultations.

The Search Conference was an intensive and highly interactive process spread over three days, where 80 Tasmanians (including the CLGers) from all walks of life developed their vision of where they wanted the State to be in 20 years time. Although it was a deliberate decision to keep attendance of politicians to a minimum, the participants did include both the Leader of the Opposition (just prior to her appointment to that position) and the Greens MP as well as two Legislative councillors and several Local Government elected members. Again there was a strong emphasis on youth participation. From the Conference has been developed a document "*Our Vision Our Future*" which articulates ten vision statements and some related goals.

These vision statements range from "a job for everyone who wants one" to "an inclusive and compassionate society", from "invigorated rural and regional communities" to "a high quality of life and healthy lifestyle". The goals are the next level down – examples that reflect the respective vision statements are things such as "the creation of new and niche markets based on Tasmania's economic strengths" and "a community with a high level of self-esteem, goal setting and self-determination".

This draft vision document is due to be launched publicly in early December.

The main role of the **community consultation** will be to seek feedback on these draft vision statements and goals. Are these the sort of goals that Tasmanians want to aim for in 2020? What other goals are important?

It needs to be made clear in this consultation process that the draft vision and goals are not a *fait accompli*. Those of us that attended the Search Conference as observers believed we saw some gaps. It will be interesting to see if the consultation process will also identify them (ie aged/public safety issues.)

The community consultation process has the difficult task of trying to find some level of agreement on the vision and goals.

Once the vision and goals have been agreed, the next step in the process is the development of indicators of progress. We are seeking advice as to the best method of developing such indicators. Some of the models that have looked at to date had processes such as **sectoral committees** which included representation from both government and non-government agencies, with people with relevant expertise in the particular subject area.

It is clear that the process for developing the indicators is just as crucial for developing the high-level vision and goals, if not more so:

- extensive community involvement is essential as people must own the indicators and they must reflect the real aspirations of the community;
- indicators should be ambitious but with long enough timelines to ensure real possibility of success – they should be “challenging but achievable” according to our Premier;
- measurability is crucial – data collection strategies should be an integral part of choosing the indicators because without measurability the integrity of the process is undermined.

Both Oregon and Minnesota established sets of very broad-based indicators (known as “benchmarks” in Oregon, “milestones” in Minnesota) which were intended to be as inclusive as possible. Minnesota has maintained the depth and breadth of its “milestones” (with strong community support) while Oregon has reduced, significantly, the number of benchmarks (from 259 to 92) believing that greater focus will yield better results.

Whilst we are still at the stage of gathering more information and research as to the best models for developing indicators, we are conscious that the overall process is about change – and that change is difficult. It is fair to say that there is some tension within public sector agencies in being able to identify how soon they can be involved in a process which is about identifying where their key resources will be directed. *Some see a loss of control, others see huge opportunities – I think those involved in social housing, who have been working with communities for some time, particularly in housing estate areas like Bridgewater and Ravenswood in Tasmania can see the opportunity, and are positioned for the future.*

This leads me to the issue of implementation:

[Slide 5: Implementation]

The best plans can never see light of day unless they are clearly developed in such a way that encourages people to actually want to DO them!

As the process for developing “*Tasmania Together*” unfolds, the vision and goals are endorsed by the community and the specific indicators for each of these goals are articulated, it is envisaged that there will develop **coalitions of interest around major chapters of the Plan.**

These coalitions will represent the range of stakeholders with a shared interest in a specific priority area under the Plan. Having shared in the development of the goals and indicators, it is assumed that these same stakeholders will want to be engaged in the development of strategies and actions to deliver the goals.

This in turn will assist in identifying responsibilities – some of which will inevitably lie outside of government – and the way in which various sectors of the community will contribute to the end results.

The coalitions may also play a crucial role in the future when the evaluation process focuses attention on an indicator which is not being met. In these cases, coalitions will form the backbone of partnerships involving relevant levels of government, business and community organisations targeting a particular indicator and will work collectively to turn performance around.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, this development of a Plan for Tasmania was seen as the overarching policy initiative into which several other key initiatives would dovetail, in turn these initiatives provide the means by which the Plan can be extended beyond just the State Government.

This will support the Government's focus on "localism" – "Tasmania Together" needs to be directly relevant to local communities, and these communities in turn need to be able to establish priorities for their community, within regional, and ultimately statewide directions.

Through the development of Partnership Agreements, the State Government is building a **link with local government** that will help to ensure that the strategic objectives of both spheres of Government have some cohesiveness.

The objectives of the Agreements are to identify opportunities to work in partnership with local government to progress agreed social and economic outcomes for local areas and to ensure effective service delivery arrangements including improved coordination and joint service delivery arrangements. The process for Partnership Agreements requires both parties to identify and put their key issues for that particular municipality or region on the table.

"Tasmania Together" will eventually provide the State Government with a clear agenda for what it wants to achieve. Similarly local governments will already be aware of these broader objectives and will hopefully be prepared to focus on what might be the local components of broader Statewide policies.

There have been two Partnership Agreements negotiated to date, and both have recognised the need in the future to reflect the outcomes of the "Tasmania Together" process. To this end, the performance indicators in the Agreements have been written more as milestones – what will be done by who by when.

I'd like to use Ravenswood to ground this. Ravenswood is a housing estate of nearly 1,800 homes, geographically a "satellite" of Launceston. The Launceston City Council, and the Ravenswood "Walk Tall" committee and other "Players" are exploring a Ravenswood plan.

Pursuing this direction, the Government has made a parcel of land available to a "Business North" task force to create employment opportunities within the suburb. Housing Tasmania, the Department of State Development, and Education (TAFE) are contributing to the process.

Another priority for Launceston is its environment. Located at the head of the Tamar Valley, it has severe smoke pollution problems in winter caused by inversion within the valley. In developing its agreement with the Tasmanian Government, a strategy to address this is for Housing Tasmania to contribute to the solution – you guessed it – a joint strategy is being developed to have an accelerated replacement program for the outdated, polluting wood heaters in the 650 public housing properties in Ravenswood.

These things could, and may have happened independently, but what we are seeing is development of a shared vision of a possible future, of mutually agreed priorities, and a belief that communities can influence what happens. We think “Tasmania Together” is already starting to work.

If “Tasmania Together” is also to succeed as a long term strategic plan, there needs to be an acceptance in the broader community that it is not just about finding Government solutions to the problems of the State. It is in this context that the **links with industry** are important and why the Industry Plans currently being developed are an integral part of the overall Plan.

Again, like the Partnership Agreements, while the process for the Industry Plans is proceeding at the same time as the development of “Tasmania Together” there is a recognition by the players involved that the eventual outcomes will need to reflect the broader Plan and the outcomes of the community consultation process.

Overall, the major challenges of the implementation process will be about ensuring that there is **alignment of broad Government policies, priorities and funding**.

The final point I would like to articulate is: how do we know that we have got to where we said we were going?

[Slide 6: Monitoring and Evaluation]

Monitoring and evaluation is crucial to ensuring that the Plan “Tasmania Together” is a “living” document – not just another set of recommendations to Government that will be left on a shelf gathering dust. The Government has made a clear commitment to ensuring that there are appropriate mechanisms for such evaluation.

Some of the models from elsewhere have addressed this through the establishment of a **Progress Board** or similar body. In Oregon this is an independent entity, composed of community leaders, chaired by the Government and supported by a small staff. In Minnesota, an already-established agency – Minnesota Planning – was given the task. Both models have as their primary task the monitoring and reporting regularly on whether the established goals and indicators were being met. The second – and equally important – task was to work with government departments and legislatures to make the indicators meaningful and useful.

The periodic public reporting of achievements and failures has been identified as important for public accountability. If after all, you are going to involve the community so intensely in the process of developing the vision, goals and indicators, there needs to be adequate feedback of whether they are being met. There are several challenges in doing this however, so that is not merely a page in an Annual Report somewhere. One is that the existing processes in the legislature may need to change from the current "Estimates Committee" scenario that most of us are familiar with. Secondly, there is the emphasis of where the responsibility for the achievements and failures may lay. If it is to be seen as a community-driven plan, there needs to be some cultural or attitudinal shift away from only seeing Government as responsible for the outcomes (which is why strategies and actions need to be developed by the coalitions of industry, Government and community as mentioned previously.)

And, as noted earlier, there is clearly a link with budget reporting processes. The overall set of indicators should provide the Budget framework. This might range from actually building the Budget around the key indicators to making "new initiatives" money available only to activities that directly support high priority indicators. One way or another agencies should be required to show, in their business plans and budgets, how they intend to help achieve the indicators. I would also extend this proposition to programmes that fund industry and the non-government sector would also need to amend their guidelines such that a key criteria ensured such funding went to initiatives and activities that reflected the indicators.

To illustrate this, I'd like to point to the Bridgewater/Gagebrook Urban Renewal Project. BURP was started under the Better Cities II program, but has outlived it with strong community, local and state government commitment. It has been nationally recognised as a project of excellence, in engaging the local community, in creating opportunities for youth, in achieving major reductions in vandalism, and in building community pride and control of priorities.

Strategies include creation of employment opportunities, improving local transport and access, promoting activities and opportunities for young people, development of community skills, knowledge and capacity in community development, etc.

There are measures to ensure strategies and approaches are achieving change. Initial measures include

- *improved stability of residents in the area*
- *increased community and public perception of the desirability of the area as a place to live, and*
- *maintenance and improvement of relative property values in the area*

This has built a joint commitment to applying resources to agreed priorities to build community capacity, and for all players to focus on whether plans are working by measuring improvement.

Clearly we have a lot to do to reach a point where broad goals and performance measures can be linked to local area priorities, strategies and targets. However, there are clear strong links between the outcomes sought at statewide and local levels, and we believe performance measurement can have a similar synergy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, I have given just a snapshot of the underlying principles of the “*Tasmania Together*” concept and some outline of the process that we are undertaking to achieve this long term Plan for the State. I have told you about the concept, the critical success factors, the process for developing the Plan, for implementing it and for evaluating it.

You will notice that I have not mentioned timeframes. If there is one major lesson we have-and are-learning, is that this is the hardest aspect to define!

At this stage, we have a timeframe that would see the launch of the Plan next June – that is with agreed vision, goals and indicators for the Tasmanian community.

In conclusion, “*Tasmania Together*” is about making choices - its about defining where Tasmanians want their State to be in 20 years, working out the steps we will take to get there.

Its about deciding how we’re going to put our scarce resources to best use. We can’t do everything, but we can make the decision that what we WILL do will be innovative and valuable. We don’t have to choose to do lots of things second-rate. Its about having an inclusive system of decision-making. One of the benefits of a small population is that this SHOULD be possible! We know the agenda that we have set for ourselves is challenging (Sir Humphrey would say it was “courageous”).

We are encouraged by the comments made recently about “*Tasmania Together*” by Mike Steketee in “*The Australian*” when he said that whilst the concept of 24 community representatives consulting with their fellow citizens on the sort of society they want by 2020 “may sound hopelessly starry-eyed to cynics ...if such measures can make even a small contribution to addressing voter alienation and giving them a sense of involvement and ownership of decision making, they will be worthwhile”. (1)

References:

- (1) Besleme, K., Eriguiaga, E and Swain, D., 1998 “Community Indicator Projects: Practical Tools for Addressing the Quality of Life”.

Proceedings of the First International Conference on Quality of Life in Cities, 4-6 March 1998. Singapore: National University of Singapore.

(2) "The Australian", November 5, 1999