



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Business plan 2009 - 2011

Procedural, analytical and administrative support

‘the provision of accurate, timely and impartial procedural, analytical and administrative support to facilitate the efficient and effective operations of the House and its committees.’
Strategic Plan 2009 - 2011

Background and current services

The strategic objectives and principles of the New South Wales Legislative Council are embodied in the Department of the Legislative Council Strategic Plan 2009 - 2011. The first priority is to enhance the procedural, analytical and administrative support currently provided to the House and its committees. The New South Wales Parliament’s Results and Services Plan 2008-2009 identifies as one of the Parliament’s three overarching responsibilities, the effective functioning of the Parliament and its committees through chamber and committee support.

The Department of the Legislative Council has a total of 39 full time equivalent staff, working in the Clerk’s Office, the Procedure Office and the Committee Secretariat. These officers provide a high volume of support services to the 42 members, often under considerable time and workload pressures. It is notable that since 1988 the government of the day has lacked control of the Council in terms of having an absolute majority of members of the House. Procedure and committee staff support a highly active House and committee system, driven principally by this lack of government control and the diversity of membership of the House.

As an upper House the role of scrutiny of the Executive is carried out through a range of parliamentary proceedings, involving activities in both the House and committees. The activities, together with the diverse composition of the House, result in a range of procedural activities requiring staff annually to draft 200-300 procedural scripts, motions and amendments, process orders for papers, petitions and hundreds of questions on notice. On every sitting day the Procedure Office produces a range of documents to support the running of the House, including the daily programs, several business papers and numerous loqs. Extensive work is also required to support members’ in presenting legislative amendments in committee of the whole. On non-sitting days the Procedure Office is involved in the production of publications such as the Procedural Highlights, the production of journals of the House, updating statistical records of the House and supporting the work of the Privilege and Procedure Committees.

The political makeup of the House also leads to a highly active committee system with the ten Standing committees typically undertaking 20-30 inquiries and reports in a year, with over 90 hearings and public forums, hundreds of submissions and arrangements made with close to 1,000 witnesses. The annual Budget Estimates inquiry, during which every Minister and head of Department appears at a public hearing, results in over 5,000 questions on notice being processed in a short period.

All the procedural work of the House and committees is underpinned by the recent publication of *New South Wales Legislative Council Practice* by Lovelock and Evans, and supported by a procedural precedents database. In recent times the quality of the work of both the Procedure Office and the Committee Office has been recognised with invitations to senior staff to support parliamentary strengthening projects in the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, PNG and Vanuatu. A senior staff member has also co-ordinated an international training course for committee secretariats for 2008 and 2009 and has been asked to conduct a review of the Queensland Committee Office.

Following the restructure of the Parliament in 2008, the Department of the Legislative Council realigned its services resulting in the separation of the Procedure Office into two distinct units, a Table Office and a Research and Training Office. The aim of this restructure has been to enhance new and existing research and training activities (the subject of separate business plans), while allowing the Table Office to focus on supporting members in their role in the House and on improving the procedures for publishing records and documents of the House.

This business plan provides broad objectives for consolidating and entrenching the services that the Procedure and Committee Offices already do well, as well as adding a number of new objectives.

Business plan objectives

1. To continue to provide accurate, timely and impartial procedural, analytical and administrative support to facilitate the efficient and effective operations of the House and its committees
 - Use the new structure of the Procedure Office to focus on research and training objectives while maintaining the current high level of service provided by the Table Office
2. To utilise new technology to improve processes
 - Enhance the availability of precedents in the Procedure Office
 - Trial use of a Bulletin Board for circulating to the Procedure team documents and information relating to the Business of the House
 - Trial by the Procedure Office of an on-line dynamic record of proceedings
 - Trial of secure electronic access to committee documents and use of video conferencing facilities for committee hearings
3. To develop new resources to assist in the provision of advice to members
 - In line with strategic priorities outlined in our business plan, 'Enhancing procedural knowledge and skills', provide training and support to members and their staff on procedural and other matters
4. To foster the professional development of staff to ensure the Legislative Council continues to have a highly skilled, knowledgeable and motivated workforce
 - In line with strategic priorities outlined in our business plan, 'Enhancing procedural knowledge and skills', develop and deliver training programs for Department of the Legislative Council staff

Our clients

The Department of the Legislative Council Strategic Plan 2009-2011 lists the clients and stakeholders of the Department. This business plan engages with, and provides services to the following specific client groups:

- The President, Deputy President and Assistant President
- Members and members' staff
- Ministers and Ministers' staff
- The Office of the Governor
- Government agencies, particularly legislation and policy sections and CEOs offices
- Stakeholders in committee inquiries.

The Procedure Office

As noted above, following a restructure in late 2008, the Procedure Office now has two sections, the Table Office and the Procedural Research and Training Office. While the two sections have distinct and unique responsibilities, the teams work closely together to achieve the broad objective of providing procedural services to members, staff and other stakeholders. The section below provides a detailed outline of the specific services and projects for 2009-2011.

Aim: Provide support essential for the effective functioning of the House	Delivery date: March 2009 – Ongoing
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and enhance procedures in relation to the preparation of the Business Papers (ie. Minutes of Proceedings, Notice Paper, Questions and Answers Paper, Journals) • Review and enhance access to procedural documents such as the 'Procedural Highlights', 'President's Rulings' and 'Bills Summary' • Review procedures for providing advice and support to members during sittings • Review procedures in relation to the Questions and Answers database, and liaise with Parliamentary Information Services on further modifications as required • Produce a manual on procedures for supporting all functions of the House, for use by Table Office staff • Transfer Tabled Papers to State Records for long term secure storage • Prepare resolutions, sessional orders, correspondence as required 	
Aim: Continue to provide high level research and analysis on significant procedural matters	Delivery date: May 2009 - Ongoing
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare briefings and discussion papers for the Procedure and Privileges committees, as required • Produce briefing paper on the impact of the introduction of E-petitions to the Council 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce for publication an analysis of the Council's exercise of its powers in relation to orders for papers and returns to order since 1998, including case studies • Produce other papers and publications as required 	
Aim: Improve access to procedural information by enhanced electronic procedural systems	Delivery date: May – November 2009
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue enhancing the comprehensive database of the procedural precedents and research material held by the Council, and in particular convert hard copy documents for electronic access and storage • Develop and trial a Bulletin Board providing information relating to the Business of the House, for use by Clerks-at-the-Table, Procedure Office staff and others • Review the content of the legal opinions database and possible merging with the procedural precedents database • Train staff in the use of new database systems, as required 	
Aim: Review and improve Legislative Council records management processes	Delivery date: March – December 2009
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to restructure of Parliament in 2008, establish records categories to reflect the Council's current focus on procedure and committee support • Conduct audit of Legislative Council records to ensure integrity of former and current records • Establish and implement consistent procedures for the registration, storage and disposal of Legislative Council records • Establish Records Administrator role and train staff in records management • Liaise with Parliamentary Information Services in relation to the Parliament-wide initiative to establish an integrated electronic records management system 	
Aim: Improve access to information on proceedings of the House – on-line minutes	Delivery date: August 2009 – March 2010
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Parliamentary Information Services on the development of a system for a real-time, on-line version of minutes of proceedings during sittings • Investigate application of the 'Dynamic Red' currently used by the Australian Senate • Prepare briefing and implementation plan for the introduction of real time, on-line minutes for the Council • Trial real time, on-line minutes and review and update as required 	

Committees

Continue to provide accurate, timely and impartial procedural, analytical and administrative support:

Aim: Protocol for vulnerable witnesses	Delivery date: March - December 2009
<p>Recent inquiries have shown that committee staff and members need a consistent approach to situations that arise with vulnerable witnesses, including children, prisoners and persons at risk of self harm or harming others.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A protocol was used during the recent inquiry into bullying in the NSW Ambulance Service • In response to a request from the Chair of that Committee the President has agreed to meet with Committee Chairs to consider this issue. • Briefing paper will be prepared with a draft protocol for consideration by committee chairs • Training of secretariat staff in assisting and referring vulnerable witnesses has begun 	

Utilise new technologies to improve processes:

Aim: Trial secure electronic access to documents for members (ie. Federal and WA systems)	Delivery date: March 2009 – March 2010
<p>Several Parliaments, particularly the House of Representatives and the Western Australian parliaments, currently use a secure electronic site by which members access committee documents. The advantages of such technology include reduction in paperwork and greater document security. The potential disadvantages include whether failure to use the system by members leads to problems in meetings and hearings with papers not available.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation of the experience of other Parliaments • Advice sought from Parliamentary Information Services prior to any trial for a specific inquiry • Consultation with members as to a system which is suitable to their needs 	

<p>Aim: Trial email subscription list - utilising developments in technology to enhance delivery of committee information to clients.</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 – June 2010</p>
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the experience of the Queensland Parliament and other committee offices that use email subscription lists for specific committees. • Depending on the results of this investigation, trial this with one of the Government chaired standing committees and evaluate the usefulness for application to all committees. 	
<p>Aim: Trial and evaluate NVivo qualitative analysis software.</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 – June 2010</p>
<p>NVivo software is a tool for qualitative analysis which is used by researchers to identify themes which occur in large volumes of written data. Parliamentary Information Services has asked the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council whether they wish to trial the software for inquiry submissions and transcripts.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial and evaluate the use of this software for an inquiry with a number of submissions regarding its usefulness in qualitative analysis. 	
<p>Aim: Facilitate greater use of video conferencing facilities in hearings (with assistance of DPS)</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009- March 2010</p>
<p>Currently any use of video conferencing to enable witnesses to appear remotely is ad hoc and administratively difficult. Members are increasingly requesting interstate and international witnesses and are critical of the Parliament's existing infrastructure in delivery of conferencing services.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee staff would work with Parliamentary Information Services to investigate the most effective way to establish permanent facilities for use during hearings and meetings. • Identification of potential costs savings in terms of witness travel expenses which could offset any initial set up cost. 	

Develop new resources to assist in the advice of members and their staff:

<p>Aim: Booklet and workshop for members and their staff on how to be an effective committee member. Enhancing the written information directed to members and members staff on committee work, including information pamphlets</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 – March 2010 March 2009 - ongoing</p>
<p>Currently members receive a briefing on committees during their initial induction, and an annual Estimates briefing to which their staff are also invited to attend. There is no committee guide to members, unlike those produced by some other parliaments.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a guide to committee members • Consultation with members regarding the guide, prior to publication • Use of the guide as a foundation for a training workshop and other specific information aimed at members and their staff. The appropriate time for delivery may be a new Parliament, but it can be used for induction of new members over the next 2 years. 	
<p>Aim: Using the presentation skills of committee staff to deliver information seminars to clients and internal staff</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 - ongoing</p>
<p>Many committee staff have strong presentation skills which have already been used in strengthening Parliament programs, in providing the annual School Leadership talks and with delegations.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use presentation skills systematically in a program of annual training, by contributing to other organisations' training (eg PIAC workshops) and by offering formal in house training and seminars to external clients. 	

Ensure the professional development of our staff

<p>Aim: Contribute to research projects concerning parliamentary committees – ie. through the ARC Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions grants at the Parliamentary Studies Centre ANU</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 - ongoing</p>
<p>The “Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions” ARC project at ANU Parliamentary Studies Centre, co-sponsored by the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate, seeks to publish a range of research papers on aspects of parliamentary practice. Many LC procedure and committee staff have highly developed research and writing skills which could be used to contributed to academic development of parliamentary studies.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions could be held with the Parliamentary Studies Centre to examine opportunities. 	
<p>Aim: Joint LA/LC committee seminar topic series aimed at committee staff</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 - ongoing</p>
<p>While the political culture and standing orders of both Houses committee systems differ considerably the practical tasks undertaken by the secretariat staff of both Houses is very similar. The recent CDI sponsored “Effective Committees” workshop showed how the staff of both committee offices can work constructively together on training initiatives.</p> <p>Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint training initiatives to be discussed at Clerk Assistant and Committee Director level. 	
<p>Aim: Examine collaborative projects with other Parliaments</p>	<p>Delivery date: March 2009 - ongoing</p>
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently the Queensland Legislative Assembly has requested assistance from the Clerk Assistant in reviewing its Committee Office • Victorian Standing Orders Committee met with members and committee staff in March 2009 to examine the Legislative Council Committee system as a model. Both this and the Queensland project may provide opportunities for committee staff to collaborate on future projects with other Australian Parliaments. 	

Monitoring progress

Progress towards the objectives of the business plan will be contained in the Department of Legislative Council annual report. The evaluation will include output and activity indicators linked to the proposed objectives and actions.