

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No 3

Portfolio Area: Local Government

Tuesday 15 September 2009

Responses to Questions on Notice

Question from Ms SYLVIA HALE:
(page 1)

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Minister, I wish to ask you a series of questions about the code of conduct committees but before I do can I read you an account of what is happening in relation to one council and the use of codes of conduct just to put it in context. In Tweed Shire Council councillors have lodged a code of conduct complaint against a councillor who provided the media and members of the community with a copy of the report that raised concerns about some aspects of the Repco car rally. The report was given to the councillor in the councillor workshop, was not labelled confidential and was not classified as confidential under section 10A of the Act. In fact, it was included in the publicly available council business papers not long after the council had given copies of it to members of the community. The release of the document was obviously in the public interest and it was clearly a document that would have been available to a member of the public had it been requested under section 12 of the Act.

Despite the fact that the council had had the report for some time, it had not been previously provided to the public. The councillor acted to ensure that it was so that its contents could be scrutinised by the public. Having done so, she is now being accused of breaching the code of conduct by not complying with the council's media policy, which appears to be designed to remove any right of councillors to provide information to the community unless such information has already been given to the public by the council administration. To my mind that clearly raises questions of the accessibility and provision of information that is in the public interest, but the fact that this councillor has been referred to the conduct committee of the council, I think, is equally concerning. I have a series of questions. Can you advise the Committee how many code of conduct violations have been notified in the last 12 months?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: Generally, across all councils?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Yes?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: Notified to the Department of Local Government?

Ms SYLVIA HALE: Yes?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: I will have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised:

In June 2008 the former Department of Local Government released a revised Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW. All councils are required to adopt a code of conduct that at least meets the minimum standards set out in the Model Code. Councils themselves are primarily responsible for determining whether the actions of councillors and staff constitute a breach of the standards of behaviour set out in their adopted code of conduct. It is also for councils to determine what should occur in cases of a breach of those standards.

The Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet would normally only intervene in a code of conduct matter where there is some evidence a council had failed to correctly apply its code of conduct or where the Division is exercising its functions under the misbehaviour provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Where a person writes to the Division of Local Government alleging a breach of a council's code of conduct by a council official, unless it determines to pursue the matter under the misbehaviour provisions of the Act or the complaint relates to a political donations matter, the Division will normally advise the complainant to raise their concerns with the relevant council in the first instance so that they may be dealt with in accordance with the council's adopted code of conduct.

A council is only required to notify the Division of an alleged code of conduct breach in two circumstances:

- Where the council has resolved to make a request pursuant to section 440H(1)(a) of the Act in which it states that it believes that grounds may exist that warrant a councillor's suspension under the misbehaviour provisions of the Act, and
- Where a general manager refers a matter under section 328B(1) of the Act where he or she reasonably suspects that a councillor has not complied with the provisions of the code of conduct relating to the disclosure of political donations or the manner of dealing with any perceived conflict of interest in relation to political donations.

In 2008/09, the Division received 1 referral under section 440H(1)(a). To date, in 2009/10, the Division has received no referrals under section 440H(1)(a).

In 2008/09, the Division was notified of two political donations matters under section 328B(1). In that year the Division also dealt with a further six political donations related matters raised by members of the public. To date, in 2009/10, the Division has been notified of one political donations matter under section 328B(1) and received two complaints from members of the public in relation to political donations related matters.

In 2008/09, the Division also dealt with three code of conduct related matters that were referred to it by the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Question from the Hon DON HARWIN
(page 7)

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, has there been an increase in the amount of funds provided for the Finance Management Branch in this budget?

ANSWER

Yes.

Question from the Hon DON HARWIN
(page 7)

The Hon. DON HARWIN: So you are not able to indicate whether you believe the amount was increased, whether it stayed the same or whether it decreased?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: Is that a question that you would like me to take on notice?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I would prefer you to answer it now but if you cannot I would obviously be prepared for you to take it on notice.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: I am quite happy to take that on notice.

ANSWER

I am advised:

The budget for the Finance Management Branch is as follows:

2008/2009 - \$1,048,700
2009/2010 - \$1,139,327

**Question from the Hon DON HARWIN
(page 9)**

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are those 77 on the website?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: They are still on the website. That is a list of Promoting Better Practice reviews as at 30 June 2008.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: If that is as at 30 June 2008, would you be able to supply to us, on notice, a list of those that have been completed subsequently and that are ongoing at present?

ANSWER

I am advised:

As at 30 June 2009 (rather than 2008), a total of 77 Promoting Better Practice (PBP) reviews of councils had been completed and final reports published on the Division of Local Government website.

Since 30 June 2009 PBP reviews are well underway for a further 12 councils.

Five (5) councils are in the final stages of their review with final reports issued or currently being completed. They are:

Griffith City Council (final report issued to Council – this will be added to the Division's website once the report has been tabled by Council and becomes a public document)

Guyra Shire Council
Mid-Western Regional Council
New England Strategic Alliance of Councils
Pittwater Council.

Division of Local Government review teams have conducted the on-site component of the PBP review for the remaining seven (7) councils and draft review reports are currently being compiled as follows:

Brewarrina Shire Council	(draft report issued to Council for comment prior to finalisation)
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Canada Bay City Council	
Goulburn Mulwaree Council	(draft report issued to Council for comment prior to finalisation)

Ku-ring-gai Council
Palerang Council
Queanbeyan City Council
Ryde City Council.

**Question from the Hon DON HARWIN
(pages 18-19)**

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In terms of the actual administrative expenses, which you have indicated is the minority of the remainder; can you please give me a figure as to how much of that is spent on the administrative costs of the department and what it is spent on, other than the SPOT program?

Mr WOODWARD: Yes, we can provide that. The SPOT program is \$700,000. The remainder is basically running the register and paying for the help desk that we provide for councils as well. There are four staff members in the companion animals area. I will have to find the exact figure for the cost of those four staff members.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Obviously, those four staff members do not cost \$700,000.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: No. In clarification, the SPOT program is \$700,000 and then there is a small remainder—

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The difference between—

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: We are talking about a \$5 million collection.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I think it is \$5.7 million.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: I think it is less than that, but it is over \$5 million collected and over \$4 million returned to councils. SPOT is \$700,000 of that gap. Some of that remainder goes to administration for us to implement the companion animals area. We might be able to tell you exactly what we do implement and what that covers.

Mr WOODWARD: There are things like the Pet Line, which cost in 2007-08 \$118,000. We also had to maintain the register, so there are some IT costs to keep the register up to date, as well as the administration. We can provide a detailed breakdown of all that, if necessary.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: If you would I would be very grateful, Mr Woodward.

ANSWER

I am advised:

Employee related costs for 2008-09 were \$498,770

Other operating/administrative costs for 2008-09 were \$665,333

Detailed breakdown of operating/administrative costs (\$665,333) for 2008-09:

External audit	\$7,454
Internal audit	\$24,099
Miscellaneous insurance	\$3,000

Training external	\$2,290
Printing	\$15,378
Annual Report costs	\$2,231
Software maintenance	\$11,265
Software licence	\$111,748
Data security expenses	\$31,854
Postage	\$2,050
Courier	\$8,135
Telephone charges	\$41,137
Motor vehicle leasing	\$4,008
Rent to State Property	\$42,996
Electricity	\$3,000
Off site storage	\$26,416
Legal fees	\$18,805
Fees – Contract staff	\$44,545
Fees – Contract service	\$253,888
Miscellaneous fees for service	\$1,840
Fees – recruitment advertising	\$1,601
Depreciation – computer HW/SW	\$5,004
Travel & accommodation, office stationery, catering	\$2,586

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009–2010

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

General Purpose Standing Committee No 3

Questions relating to the portfolio of Local Government

15 September 2009, 9.15am – 11.45am

Questions from Mr Ajaka

1. Cost Shifting

- a) What plans does the government have to either pay the current Sydney councils' contribution of 12.3% of the annual budget of the NSW Fire Brigade for the Sydney Fire District to reimburse councils for this contribution?**

I am advised:

Administration of the NSW Fire Brigade and the related emergency services levy falls under the portfolio the responsibilities of the Minister for Emergency Services. All questions regarding this matter should be directed to the Minister for Emergency Services.

- b) Why did the government insist that Gosford City Council pay 50% of the cost of dredging the Broken Bay channel and the \$500,000 involved could have been used by council for the provision of local services?**

I am advised:

State Government funding for the dredging of the Broken Bay channel falls under the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Ports, representing NSW Maritime, and the Minister for Lands, representing the Land and Property Management Authority (formerly the Department of Lands). All questions regarding this matter should be directed to the Ministers for Port and Lands, respectively.

2. Rate Pegging

- a) Why was the application from North Sydney Council for an increase of 11.87% rejected when council will now have to cut 24 jobs, as a direct result of the rejection of its application, and in the light of the NSW budget's purported focus on jobs?**
- b) Why was the application from Kempsey Shire Council for an increase of 11.5%, rejected when council may now have to cut staff, close swimming pools, reduce its library service and cut playing field maintenance?**

- c) **Why was the application from Muswellbrook Shire Council for an increase of 9.5% rejected when council will now have to ditch a roads program costing \$450,000, which would have created jobs?**
- d) **Why was the application from Dungog Shire Council for an increase of almost 10% rejected when council will now have to carry an operating deficit for the year and rely on neighbouring councils for resource pooling?**
- e) **Why was the application from Auburn Council rejected when council will now not be able to fund lights planned for playing fields, irrigation to sporting fields and road repairs?**

I am advised:

When applying for a special variation, councils must demonstrate prudent fiscal management, a sound business case and a level of community support for the increase.

Approval for a special variation will only be granted if a council adequately demonstrates that it has made significant progress in both planning and operational performance, policy development and benchmarking of its activities.

Applications for special variations were not approved where councils were unable to demonstrate that they had met these criteria.

- f) **Will the Minister ensure that future special rates variation application determinations are provided to councils before they commence their rate notice preparation cycle?**

I am advised:

There are a number of factors affecting the review and determination of special variation applications. Every effort is made, and will continue to be made, to ensure councils are advised of the determinations at the earliest possible opportunity.

- g) **Will the Minister ensure that future guidelines for special rates variation applications include reference to all the methods, which will be used to assess the applications?**

I am advised:

The guidelines prepared by the Division of Local Government provide details of the type and nature of information required as part of any special variation application. Councils are encouraged to contact the Division if they require any additional clarification of the application requirements.

h) How were the councils' financial sustainability taken into account, when considering their applications for special rates variations?

I am advised:

All aspects of a council's current and future financial health and sustainability are scrutinised as part of the review and determination process applied to all special variation applications.

3. Shellharbour City Council

a) The Department of Local Government conducted a Promoting Better Practice Review of Shellharbour City Council in 2005, which was finalised in July 2006. The Review's report recommendations included some which related to governance issues. Why did it take until the end of March 2008 to appoint a commissioner to conduct a public inquiry into Council?

I am advised:

Conducting a public inquiry into a council is an intervention strategy of last resort. The Division will generally first seek to utilise other strategies to resolve problems within a council before resorting to holding a public inquiry with the possible outcome being the dismissal of the elected councillors.

In the case of Shellharbour City Council, the Promoting Better Practice Review (PBP Review), finalised in July 2006, represented the first of a series of steps taken by the former Department of Local Government to seek to resolve issues within that Council. That review resulted in 48 recommendations being made with a view to addressing those issues. Council was required to furnish the then Department with regular progress reports on its implementation of the recommendations.

When it became apparent that there had been no improvement in the performance of the Council, the former Director General wrote to the Council on 5 November 2007 warning it about its performance and seeking an immediate response about what steps it intended to take in order to improve performance.

In response to ongoing concerns, on 3 December 2007, a meeting with the Council to reiterate the Government's concerns about Council's performance was held.

The decision to hold a public inquiry was made following the receipt by the former Department on 17 March 2008 of a further progress report on implementation of the PBP Review recommendations that indicated that notwithstanding the consistent support of the Department, council had failed to achieve the improvements necessary to continue under its elected representatives.

b) What progress has the Department of Local Government and the administrators made with the recommendations from its inquiry into Shellharbour City Council?

I am advised:

The Administrator of Shellharbour City Council, Mr David Jesson, has provided two reports on Council's progress in implementing the recommendations arising from the public inquiry to date.

Of the five public inquiry recommendations that relate to the Council, one has been completed. On the assessment of the Division of Local Government, Mr Jesson has made good progress towards implementing the remaining recommendations.

The Division continues to monitor the implementation of the recommendations arising from both the Public Inquiry and the Promoting Better Practice Review.

4. Auburn Council

a) The department's investigation into Auburn Council in relation to the Auburn Central project recommended a review by ICAC. What was the result of ICAC's review and when will it be made public?

I am advised:

The final report of the investigation of Auburn Council under section 430 of the *Local Government Act 1993* was undertaken during 2007 and 2008.

I can confirm that during the course of the investigation, a number of matters were identified, which the former Department of Local Government referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) under section 11 of the ICAC Act. I understand that some of these matters had previously been investigated by the ICAC and others were related.

A copy of the full investigation report issued by the former Department in August 2008 was also supplied to the ICAC.

The ICAC provided the former Department with its "in confidence" assessment in February 2009. It is a matter for ICAC to determine whether this information will be or can be made public.

5. Influence on Councils of Unelected Persons

a) What action does the Minister plan to take to ensure that the problems concerning the influence of unelected persons, as revealed by the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation into Brimbank Council, cannot occur in NSW local government?

I am aware of the Victorian Ombudsman's report on an investigation into the alleged improper conduct of councillors at Brimbank City Council. I have noted the recommendations from this report.

I am confident that NSW has established clear standards of conduct for NSW councillors that govern the situations outlined in the Victorian report.

The Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW provides clear guidance for council officials in relation to the standards of conduct that are expected. The standards in the NSW Model Code are more expansive than those provided in the Victorian legislation. For example, some of the recommendations in the Victorian Ombudsman's report provide that Brimbank Council introduce policies in relation to councillor access to and use of information. These standards are already in place in the NSW Model Code of Conduct.

I note that the Victorian Ombudsman has recommended that persons who are employed as electorate officers, ministerial advisers and parliamentary advisers or employed by federal or state members of parliament are disqualified from becoming or continuing as councillors.

The NSW *Local Government Act 1993* does not restrict members of the public from standing for civic office based on their business or political interests. Any person who is qualified to hold civic office may nominate as a candidate to hold the position of councillor.

Successful candidates are democratically elected by the community to best represent the wishes of that community. If the community is dissatisfied with their elected representatives, then they may express that view when voting at periodic council elections.

Additionally, the provisions in the *Local Government Act 1993* and the Model Code of Conduct are designed to ensure that councillors conduct themselves according to appropriate standards. This includes managing influence and declaring relevant private interests. The law also provides that councillors cannot participate in debate or vote on any matter in which they might have a pecuniary or significant non-pecuniary conflict of interests. This is to ensure that local government decisions are made in an open, transparent and accountable way.

6. Local Infrastructure Fund

- a) In the budget the government announced the establishment of the \$200 million Local Infrastructure Fund. The Treasurer has been unable to advise the source of the \$200 million required for the fund, could you do so?**
- b) Can the minister give an iron clad guarantee that no part of the funding for the Local Infrastructure Fund relates to Section 94 levies for growth centres?**
- c) In the light of the impact of cost shifting on local government of \$412 million in 2006-2007, as estimated by the NSW Local Government and Shires Association, why does the Local Infrastructure Fund not even reach the half way mark of cost shifting?**
- d) Why is the money from the Local Infrastructure Fund being loaned to councils rather than being the subject of NSW government grants?**
- e) Why are there timing constraints in relation to funds made available from the Local Infrastructure Fund?**
- f) Why is funding from this Local Infrastructure Fund being targeted towards high growth areas rather than across the board?**

I am advised:

Administration of the Local Infrastructure Fund falls under the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Planning. All questions regarding this fund should be directed to the Minister for Planning.

7. NSW Community Building Partnership

- a) The NSW Community Building Partnership discriminates against councils as it requires them, unlike other participants in the program, to match the funds contributed by the NSW government. This discrimination acts as a disincentive for councils to apply for funding. Why are councils, which are seeking funds under this programme, required to match the funds contributed by the NSW government?**
- b) Why aren't further grant funds, either with or without a matching requirement, being made available to local government?**
- c) Why does the NSW Community Building Partnership include timing constraints, which will result in some worth projects being ineligible for assistance?**

I am advised:

Administration of the NSW Community Building Partnership program falls under the portfolio responsibilities of the Premier. Applications are made through the local State Member of Parliament. All questions regarding this program should be directed to the Premier.

8. Councils Under Administration

- a) Given that councils pay for the costs charged by Elections NSW for the administration of local government elections, why are councils not allowed to come out of administration after a 12 month period in the interests of democracy?**

I am advised:

Where a council has been dismissed it is often found that in order to make the necessary organisational changes a period of administration is required. In determining the appropriate term of administration, consideration is given to balancing the benefits of a period of administration sufficient to allow the council to fully address the deficiencies in its operations with the rights of the local community to elect their representatives.

To reinstate the democratic processes too soon may result in a council failing to establish the changes necessary in order for it to function adequately and responsibly and for public confidence to be restored.

The cost of holding an election has no bearing on determining the period that a council is under administration.

9. Local Government Investments and Borrowings

- a) In view of the substantial losses incurred by local government from investing in Collateral Debt Obligations, at a time when the NSW Treasury had vetoed investments of this nature by state agencies, what action has the minister taken to ensure that financial disasters like this will not recur?**

I am advised:

The Ministerial Investment Order was last updated in August 2008 and replaced the previous Order, which was issued on 15 July 2005.

The revised order maintains the Government's position that when investing, councils should always seek independent financial advice, diversify their investment portfolio and protect their capital component.

- b) When will the minister request an inquiry to determine why the Treasury advice on these investments was not passed on to councils**

instead of the government blaming them for the losses on these investments?

I am advised:

In September 2007 it became clear that there was a significant decline in the US sub-prime mortgage market, which had exposed some local councils to potential losses through certain investments, particularly Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDO's).

As a consequence, Michael Cole was appointed to conduct a review into council investments. A Steering Committee, comprising representatives from the former Department of Local Government, NSW Treasury and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, conducted an oversight of the review. Councils were requested to forward detailed information regarding their investments by 17 October 2007.

The Review of NSW Local Government Investments (the Cole report) was released on 2 April 2008. The Government has implemented all eight recommendations identified in the report.

c) Why are the rates, at which local government can borrow, no longer regulated

I am advised:

Indicative maximum borrowing rates were provided by New South Wales Treasury Corporation (TCorp) on the basis of its weekly assessment of the rates at which banks were prepared to lend to councils.

In April 2008, the then Department of Local Government received advice from TCorp that it was no longer in a position to accurately assess the rates at which the various banks were prepared to lend to councils, as bank rates tended to vary not only with market conditions, but also with the financial strengths of different councils as assessed by the individual banks. As it was no longer possible to specify a maximum borrowing rate that could be applied to councils across the board, the maximum borrowing rate requirement for council borrowings was removed.

10. Federal Government Funding to NSW Local Government

a) What is the total amount of federal government funding to NSW local government over the past 5 years?

I am advised:

The NSW Local Government Grants Commission, which is established under the *Local Government Act 1993*, makes recommendations on federally funded financial assistance grants to NSW local councils. These are untied grants, able to be used by councils for any purpose.

The entitlements over the past five years were:

2008-09: \$588.0 million
2007-08: \$565.0 million
2006-07: \$536.3 million
2005-06: \$518.8 million
2004-05: \$500.2 million

The Division of Local Government does not collect details of other grants paid by the Federal Government to local councils.

11. Joint Ministerial Advisory Council on Women in Local Government

a) Why has the Joint Ministerial Advisory Council on Women in Local Government only met on one occasion, in May 2009, when a forum was organised by the then Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Women in December 2007 to discuss strategies to increase the representation of women in local government decision-making roles at both the elected representative and staff levels?

I am advised:

The former Minister for Local Government and the former Minister for Women announced the establishment of the Joint Ministerial Advisory Council on Women in Local Government in April 2008.

This followed the presentation of two Actions Plans to the Ministers in February 2008 to increase the representation of women in local government decision making roles.

The Ministers invited a number of organisations to participate in the Advisory Council. However, in the interests of ensuring that the Advisory Council is representative of the local government sector, an expression of interest process was also used to select two elected representative members, two senior staff members and one member from a women's organisation.

The final membership of the Advisory Council required the endorsement of Cabinet. Unfortunately, the seeking of this endorsement coincided with the local government elections in September 2008, which resulted in a further extension of the selection process due to a proposed member not being re-elected at that time.

In the meantime, work has continued towards implementing a number of strategies to address this important issue. These include the annual Ministers' Awards for Women in Local Government, a forthcoming workforce planning webpage and promoting the importance of women's participation in speeches made at key local government forums.

12. Integrated Planning and Reporting

a) Will the Minister advise whether the Local Government Department will provide financial support for smaller councils to help them to implement the integrated planning and reporting framework?

I am advised:

The integrated planning and reporting framework streamlines councils' existing planning and reporting activities to reflect the needs of the community. Many councils, including some smaller councils, are already well on the way to implementing the new framework. Transitional arrangements have been put in place to allow for smaller councils to plan and budget for the implementation of the new framework over a three-year period.

b) Which branch in the department provides advice to councils regarding how they can achieve the funding required for their long term plans?

I am advised:

Advice and support to councils is a matter for the entire Division of Local Government. All Branches contribute. Councils are already required to plan and to allocate funding based on priorities identified by their community. The new legislation does not change this, but rather provides a new framework for councils' planning and reporting activities.

c) Which branch of the department will provide councils with assistance in preparing their plans required by the integrated planning and reporting framework.

I am advised:

Advice and support to councils is a matter for the entire Division of Local Government. All Branches contribute.

d) How much has been included in the department's budget for this assistance?

I am advised:

Providing advice and support to councils is core business for the Division of Local Government. No additional funds have been specifically allocated.

13. Super Ministry

a) How will the Department of Local Government operate after it has been subsumed into the new Premier and Cabinet Super Ministry?

b) What will happen to the Department of Local Government's brief to oversee the provision of local services and the protection of the local amenity, when it forms part of the Premier and Cabinet Super Ministry, along with 11 other agencies?

c) What impact will this change have on the department's ability to assist councils with their financial problems?

I am advised:

The Division of Local Government will continue to provide a clear policy and legislative foundation to local government in NSW so councils are able to deliver quality services to their communities in a sustainable manner.

14. Department of Local Government Annual Report Objectives

a) What progress has the department made in achieving its strategic alliances objectives, which were outlined in its 2007-2008 Annual Report?

I am advised:

The Division of Local Government is working to progress its objectives, in regards strategic alliances, in a number of ways.

The Division continues to support the Strategic Alliance Network by chairing and providing executive support at meetings of its Executive Committee. The Division, in concert with the Network, also sponsored a workshop at Rockdale Council in July 2008. The workshop looked at the workforce relations implications of collaborative partnerships between councils. Over 40 councils and representatives of employee industrial and professional associations participated. This workshop has helped assist in the drafting of Workforce Relations resource which is currently being completed.

The Division has also taken an active evaluation role over strategic partnerships. Utilising its finalised evaluation framework, the Division has undertaken a review of the New England Strategic Alliance of Councils (NESAC).

Using the review of NESAC and the findings from a resource sharing survey of councils as a knowledge base, the Division is currently developing additional resources to assist in effective partnership development. It is anticipated these resources will be released in 2010. Further workshops may be held as part of their development.

b) What progress has been made with workforce planning objectives?

I am advised:

The Division of Local Government has completed a draft webpage to assist councils with workforce planning. It is expected that the webpage will be made available to councils as part of the implementation of Integrated Planning and Reporting.

c) Which staff members are working on these objectives and what are their qualifications?

I am advised:

Providing advice and support to councils is a matter for the whole Division.

d) What is the amount included in the department's budget for these people?

I am advised:

Providing advice and support to councils is core business for the Division of Local Government. No specific funds have been allocated.