

REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S WAROOKA OFFICE

BACKGROUND

As formally requested by the Elected Body, Yorke Peninsula Council is currently undertaking a series of service level reviews to identify appropriate levels of service and investigate possible organisational efficiencies.

As part of this review, the operations of Council's Warooka Office has been examined and visitation rates over the past year show that there is no longer a reasonable demand justifying the decision to keep this office open. Visitation rates are very low and it is now considered that the only justification to continue current operating hours is "community spirit".

Following the completion of the Yorketown Depot in early 2013, all Assets and Infrastructure staff previously based at the Warooka office were re-located to Yorketown. At this time a review was conducted on the operating hours of the Warooka Council office.

Following a period of community consultation, it was agreed to reduce the operating hours to Tuesdays and Thursdays (excluding public holidays) with operating hours of 9.00am to 5.00pm.

This change was effective from May 2013.

As part of this recommendation, Council endorsed that the Director Corporate and Community Services, in conjunction with Warooka Progress, conduct a review of the Warooka office services in April each year to determine if the recommended opening hours remained appropriate.

Warooka Progress currently share the premises with Council staff, utilising the old Council Chamber as their administration and meeting base with access to council facilities as required and appropriate.

As it has now been almost five years since the reduction of Warooka office hours and given the recent decision of Council to review service levels, it is considered timely to re-examine the most appropriate level of service that will yield benefits for the entire community.

With continuing cost pressures on Council and almost no utilisation of the services provided at the Warooka office over an extended period (average 1 visit per week) there is no longer financial justification that the continued operation of the Warooka office is in Council's or ratepayer's best interests.

Since May 2013 Council have deployed one staff member from its Finance section to this location for two days each week. This staff member is substantively employed for the rest of the week at Council's principal office in Maitland or at the Minlaton branch office dependent on requirements at the time and is effectively trying to undertake their substantive duties whilst 'looking after' the Warooka office on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Significantly there are no customer visits on the majority of these days making it difficult to continue to justify the separation of this officer from the rest of the Finance section.

Whilst all Council customers are important, the types of enquiries handled at the Warooka office can generally be managed via Council's website or by phoning Council's main switchboard number. It is acknowledged that occasionally customers may need to visit another Council office to conduct some tasks.

A further consideration in coming to a decision in this matter are risks posed by staff members working alone in locations such as the Warooka office.

Whilst Council has put safeguards in place at the Warooka office, such as security cameras and duress alarms, to mitigate these risks, these steps do not completely eliminate the risks involved with staff working in isolation.

The Warooka office is also very outdated and in need of maintenance and renewal of facilities. The level of expenditure required will vary dependent on the determined future use of the office. Savings in this area are likely if the office is not to be used as a Council branch office in the future.

PROPOSAL

Full community consultation is being undertaken prior to formally recommending any direct course of action to Council.

"Community spirit" issues associated with the closure of the Warooka office have long been recognised by Council and the opportunity to present on these grounds is made available as part of the consultation process.

It is envisaged that a report will be taken back to Council in April 2018 presenting the results of the consultation to enable an informed decision by Elected Members.

Following the period of community consultation, and should Council proceed with the closure of the Warooka office, it is intended that the building will be made fully available for community use. How this will be instigated in the best interests of the Warooka community will be discussed at the appropriate time with Warooka Progress and its members representing the community.

BUDGET AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Whilst Council has been able to "juggle" the current arrangement and manage costs it is recognised that the cost of staffing the Warooka office 2 days a week equates to approximately \$20,000 per annum.

Minor operating savings are also expected to be realised should the closure of the Warooka office be endorsed (i.e. utilities, depreciation and asset insurance).

Maintenance and renewal expenditure is likely to reduce dependent on the determined future use of the office.

INQUIRIES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact David Harding, Director Corporate and Community Services at Council's Maitland Head Office – Phone (08) 8832 0000.

SUBMISSIONS

Written submissions should be sent to:



Review of Warooka Office

Yorke Peninsula Council

PO Box 57, MAITLAND, SA 5573

Alternatively email to:

admin@yorke.sa.gov.au marked "Review of Warooka Office"

Should you wish to appear before Council on this matter please contact, in the first instance, Mr David Harding, Director Corporate and Community Services – contact details above.

All submissions must be received by 5:00 pm Friday 23 March 2018.