



KEMPSEY
Shire Council

DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES REPORT

13th June 2006

DCS4	USE OF MICROPHONES AT COUNCIL MEETINGS		
	FILE: 469	PJH	{ Folio No. * }

SUMMARY:

Reporting on a proposal to improve the use of Council's microphone system.



DESCRIPTION:

Council's microphone system in the Council Chambers was installed in 2002. The purpose of the system was to improve the clarity of the Council meetings for Councillors, officers and particularly for members of the public attending the meetings.

The system installed was not "state of the art" as funding was limited to \$9,000 in the budget. However the system purchased has worked quite well but there have been continual comments from the gallery about being unable to hear the speakers clearly.

In 2005 the wall speakers were replaced by ceiling speakers which has improved the sound system to a degree. But what is critical is the use of the microphones themselves.

The microphones have an extended stem as our Code of Meeting Practice provides for Councillors and Officers to stand while addressing the meeting. This results in poor use of the microphones as the Councillor has to lean forward to get sufficiently close for clarity of the speech to be picked up. Any turn of the head can reduce this clarity to such a degree that the public cannot hear what is being said.

A better quality microphone has been purchased for the Mayor. What is needed is a way to improve the clarity of the other Councillors and Officers when speaking.

Trial of Councillors and Officers remaining seated while addressing the Chair.

Council's concurrence is sought to trial at the 20th June Extra-Ordinary Council meeting a procedure where Councillors and Officers remain seated when addressing the Chair.

This will allow for the microphones to be reduced to their proper format with short extensions in use. It also presents a far neater appearance in the Chambers and will also allow use of the microphones during other meetings in the Chambers and during "Committee of the Whole" meetings.

The system of Councillors remaining seated is one that relies on an orderly and well controlled meeting and our meetings are run well under our current Mayor, with each speaker nominated and having the floor. This smooth running of the meetings should not be affected.

The Councillors will also find it easier to slide the microphone close to them when speaking as to be effective the microphones need to be used within a few inches of the speaker.

It is also worth noting that very few other councils require Councillors to stand when addressing the chair as most have microphone systems designed for Councillors to speak while seated.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

Nil

- ***Social***

The clarity of council's microphone system is an important aspect of our community consultation process as we encourage residents of the Shire to attend the Council meetings and hear what issues are debated. It presents poorly if the public cannot hear what is being said.

- ***Economic (Financial)***

Council initially provided \$9,000 in 2002 - 2003 to set up its microphone system. A further \$7,000 was provided in 2005 - 2006 to upgrade the speakers into the ceiling. A better quality microphone for the Mayor was also purchased from this allocation.

If Council wanted to upgrade to a top of the range system with push button on / off for each microphone and the

Mayor having a control switch for each Councillor this would be in the vicinity of \$25,000.

- *Policy or Statutory*

Section 10 of the Local Government Act requires that all Council meetings are open to the public so consideration needs to be given to providing a sound system to meet the public expectations to hear the matters being debated. There is no requirement in the Act or Regulations which states a Councillor must stand when addressing the Chair. This has been included in our Code of Meeting Practice as being specific for this Council. The clause in our Code (5.19(5)) states "Council's practice is for all members to stand when they address the Chair".

- *Director's Review*

The recommendation is supported.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the use of shorter stem microphones be trialled at the 20th June Extraordinary Council meeting with Councillors and Officers remaining seated when addressing the Chair for that meeting.

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G B Snape
DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES