

4.0 People and resources

This section discusses the personnel and resource requirements for the long-term planning process. It links most closely to Tool D (on page 37).

4.1 The project sponsor

The function of a LTCCP project sponsor is to act as the overall champion for the project within your local authority, both with staff and with the elected members. This role essentially provides the project manager and project team with the authority to drive the LTCCP project. It is the sponsor's role to send the message that the various units of your local authority need to work together to integrate the information (and senior management's role to ensure this happens!). The sponsor should also be prepared to take action to remove/resolve any blockages to the progress of the project.

The sponsor should be a very senior person within the organisation, either the Chief Executive or a second tier manager. Some of the issues to consider are:

- perceptions of ownership – if the sponsor is a second tier manager there are risks that the project will be seen as being owned by that manager's group
- integration – if the sponsor is a second tier manager they will need to ensure that they can take the helicopter view necessary to ensure that all of the inputs to the project are properly integrated. If a second tier manager acts as sponsor it may be desirable to supplement the sponsor with some form of steering group or regular reports to the entire second tier
- time constraints – the sponsor will need to be able to commit the time to regular briefings, and be available at reasonably short notice to help put out fires, this may mean the Chief Executive may not always be the best person to be sponsor. If the Chief Executive is to be sponsor then the project manager is likely to need a higher level of skill and experience.

4.2 The project manager

Selection of the project manager is perhaps the single most important decision your local authority will face during the LTCCP project. The project manager is the person who bears the overall responsibility for making the project happen including development of the project plan; management of resources and monitoring and communicating progress against the plan.

It is critical that the project manager is clearly accountable for the management of the long-term planning process. Any ambiguity in this area is likely to have serious consequences as the deadline for delivery draws near.

Tool D indicates that the ideal LTCCP project manager needs a variety of skills and considerable experience, to operate most effectively. In summary, the project manager should be well versed in managing complex projects, and have substantial knowledge of several different facets of council operations. The project manager will also generally need to have a high level of credibility within the organisation. This will generally rule out outsourcing the relationship aspects of a project management role, and may mean that recruitment of a person, to fill an internal project manager's role², should occur at a point in the triennium that enables them to build their credibility before the bulk of the LTCCP development starts.

² An external project "manager" may be able to take responsibility for particular tasks and manage the mechanics (for example scheduling, monitoring progress and so on) but may struggle in tasks that require organisational knowledge. There is also a risk that key knowledge around systems and processes will be lost once the LTCCP is adopted and the project completed.

The nature of the project management role means it will be close to a full-time responsibility at key points in the project. For much of the 12 months leading up to the adoption of a LTCCP the project manager will most probably need some assistance with (or relief from) other operational responsibilities.

4.3 The project team

The project team is the engine room of the LTCCP project. This is the team that advances many of the day to day tasks associated with the LTCCP and acts as a clearing house/point of contact for those such as activity/asset managers who have tasks but will generally not be on the project team.

Experience from the 2006 round of LTCCPs tends to suggest that a core project team of 4-6 people tended to work best. Fewer than four people may not:

- provide sufficient resource to do the work
- create the risk that the organisation as a whole may not buy-into the project
- create risks to the overall project if one or more of the team gets hit by a bus.

On the other hand a core project team of more than six people:

- could potentially create coordination/duplication issues
- runs the risk that one or more of the team may not contribute (that is to say there is a risk of tokenism)
- further creep in the team size is more likely.

If additional resource is desired for workflow or buy-in reasons, the better way of handling these issues may be to form sub-groups to perform specific tasks than adding to the project team. There may be potential for people to rotate in and out of the team.

When establishing a LTCCP project team the object should be to find the right mix of skills, knowledge, mindset and experience rather than ensuring there is representation from all of the divisions that have involvement with the preparation of a LTCCP. Although it is important that all of these people buy into the process, alternative techniques can be used to secure this buy-in, such as:

- including a wider range of individuals on subgroups assigned to particular tasks (this works particularly well with asset and activity managers)
- circulating the project plan in draft form with reasonable time for people to digest, assess the implications for their division, and respond
- getting second tier management to sign-off the project plan both as a group and individually (some local authorities took this a step further and established a steering group drawn largely from the second tier management)
- regular communication with all involved.

So what skill sets and so on are necessary in a LTCCP project team? As a general rule the following help:

- working knowledge of the planning, accountability and reporting provisions of the Local Government Act
- financial management and reporting
- planning and reporting and the information systems that underpin these processes
- skills in designing and managing processes for community engagement (including engagement with Maori)
- communication skills (including at least one person who is able to write clearly for a non-technical audience)
- asset management planning.

But, in addition to skills there is a behavioural mindset that a successful LTCCP project team needs to include:

- an understanding of and support for the purpose and objectives of the Act
- high levels of personal commitment and perseverance
- an openness to new ideas, systems and so on
- a commitment to quality.

A mix of thinkers (people who are able to generate sound ideas) and more pragmatic doers is also a good thing to aim for when establishing a LTCCP project team.

Each team member should have a clear set of responsibilities. Ideally the project sponsor and manager would have some idea of the division of labour (that is to say what tasks are required and how these might be allocated) when membership of the project team is being finalised. This avoids the risk of duplication and/or non-contribution, increases the likelihood that the right people will be found for the right job.

4.4 Examples of differing approaches

Example 1: Strategic planning team focus

Council A (a city council) largely ran its LTCCP process out of the strategic planning unit. While the Chief Executive was clear that he bore the final responsibility for the project, he was not the sponsor. Instead this role was filled by two co-sponsors – the Group Manager Finance, and Group Manager Policy and Planning. The core project management group consisted of the two sponsors and:

- a financial controller – who project managed the preparation of financial statements and the overall financial aspects of the information systems
- three strategic planners – each of whom lead a particular part of the project. One led a project establishing levels of service, another led the development of the performance management framework, and a third acted as the overall coordinator (a full-time role).

In addition to the core project team there was a number of other staff that had involvement in a supporting role including:

- the Communications Manager – administering the communications aspects of the plan (including lead responsibility for the summary)
- the Democracy Services Manager – managing the submissions, hearing, and deliberations process
- a strategic planner who project managed the community outcomes process
- various activity managers – who prepared their own activity management plans and the supporting budgets.

What works well about this framework is that:

- the project team has sufficient senior level people involved to ensure the project is seen to be important and to drive preparation of the core information sets
- the project team members each had clear roles
- having four of the key personnel in the one team allows for more frequent and informal sharing of ideas amongst people who are close colleagues but are also heavily involved in the project
- the project team was able to draw on a wide range of other skills, knowledge and experience on an as required basis without having to significantly widen the project team.

Some of the potential risks of an approach such as this are:

- when so many personnel from one team are involved there are risks that the project may not be owned across the council (the dual sponsorship is one means of overcoming this)
- in a similar vein, with three of the six members from one unit the core team needs to regularly draw on, and be open to input from those whose involvement is less heavy (as this team did) or there is a risk of group-think
- the dual sponsorship arrangement could potentially lead to some lack of clarity between the two divisions involved.

Example 2: Executive management focus

Council B is a rural territorial authority. In setting up its LTCCP project team its main concern was not so much the need to identify particular skill sets, but achieving buy-in across the local authority and driving the project through the organisation.

The project team consisted of:

- the Chief Executive (who was project sponsor, and chaired team meetings)
- all of the four second tier managers
- a financial accountant
- an engineer (who oversaw development of the asset management plans)
- a policy analyst (who acted as the overall project manager).

The project team reported to a steering group consisting of the Mayor, several senior councillors and representatives from the Maori Liaison Standing Committee.

What works well about this framework is that:

- having all second tier managers on the team improves buy-in
- the collegial dynamic of senior management teams is replicated (and the council concerned notes that one of the things that worked well was that the team members looked for opportunities to assist)
- decisions such as sudden reprioritisation within the LTCCP project and between the LTCCP project and others can be made rapidly
- the selection of a lower level project manager may also counteract perceptions that the plan is owned by one part of council
- having the sponsor as a member of the team sends strong signals about the importance of the project and also as a spur to deliver
- political sensibilities can be explored outside of the formal council setting
- Maori are given a formal opportunity to participate in a proactive and significant way (although this sort of approach is one of several steps to meeting the obligations of the Act, not the only step).

The potential risks of this approach are:

- if a low level project manager is perceived as having insufficient authority the risk of non-delivery increases (although in this instance this risk was managed through involvement of the Chief Executive)
- the project team meetings need to be tightly run or they become another management meeting
- some of the non-asset activities could potentially have lacked the people to do the spadework in preparing the plan
- selection of the politicians and others on the steering group becomes critical – they

need to be strong communicators who will take ownership of the process, if not there is a risk that staff become the de facto link back to council and the benefit of the steering group is greatly reduced.

Things to remember: People and resources

11. **The project sponsor should be someone senior within the organisation – either the Chief Executive or one of the second tier. If the latter then attention needs to be given to ensuring that the other members of the second tier buy-in.**
12. **Appointing the right project manager is one of the biggest steps your local authority can take towards a successful LTCCP. This person needs to be experienced managing complex projects, have an in-depth knowledge of the local authority and community, be able to manage financial and human resources and most of all possess strong communication skills. Appointing the project manager should be one of the first things your local authority does.**
13. **Having appointed your project manager it is critical that they be supported with the necessary authority and support to fulfil the role.**
14. **Your LTCCP project team should be kept to a maximum of 4-6 people and ideally should look for a mix of skills rather than necessarily selecting on the basis of departmental representation.**
15. **Key skills/knowledge areas include: management of community engagement; asset management; financial management and reporting; general policy development, information systems**