

THE POLITICIAN-PUBLIC SERVANT RELATIONSHIP UNDER PERFORMANCE BASED CONTRACT EMPLOYMENT: A STUDY OF VICTORIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores the issue of role relations between ruling politician and public servants. Having examined the literature at all three levels of governments, the paper empirically examines the issue in the context of Victorian local government. Based on a combination of secondary, survey and interview data, the paper argues that politicians have structured the organisation and employment processes to facilitate an environment where senior officers adhere to the politicians' view of the public interest.

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INTRODUCTION

Emy and Hughes (1991: 415) state that substantial change and reform of public management in Australia commenced in the 1980s and included the introduction of an open senior executive service, affirmative action, program budgeting, industrial democracy and ministerial consultants. These changes were essentially the vanguard of a broader reform program across all three levels of public administration which has been termed 'new public management' (NPM) (Hood 1991). Although posing under various guises and terminologies (Hughes 1998: 2), Hood (1991) identifies that NPM comprises seven doctrinal components. These are 'hands-on professional management', 'explicit standards and measures of performance', 'greater emphasis on output controls', 'disaggregation of units in the public sector', 'greater competition in the public sector', 'stress on private sector styles of management' and 'stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use' (Hood 1991: 4-5).

Taking a more focussed approach to public sector reform in Australia, Prime Minister Hawke in 1987 stated that there were two main objectives. The first of these was 'to enhance ministerial control over the public service' and the second was 'to give departmental managers more responsibility over day-to-day management' (Hughes 1998: 418). In contrast, in the context of local government it has been argued that the primary focus of reform was to reduce 'the governance role of local government, its autonomy and managerial freedom' (Van Gramberg and Teicher 2000: 477). That while the rhetoric may have espoused the 'creation of empowered, liberated public sector managers', the outcome has been an increase in control by the State government in Victoria (Van Gramberg and Teicher 2000: 476).

This paper is set in the context of the day to day policy advice and implementation relationship that exists between councillors and senior officers at the level of local government in Victoria. Its aim is to explore the issue of control in public administration by examining the balance of power between councillors and senior officers in that relationship.

METHODOLOGY

The paper draws on a combination of secondary, questionnaire and semi structured interview data sourced from a comprehensive study of senior officer employment in Victorian local government (Pullin 2002). The data is used directly or indirectly to explore three main features of the councillor – senior officer relationship in the context of impersonal mechanisms of control (Blau and Schoenherr 1971). These features are the structured control imposed on the relationship by the VLGA 1989; the process control exercised through the performance contract and appraisal system; and the nature of the values senior officers assume in their relationship with councillors. Structured control and process control can both be considered to be levers that are designed to elicit and/or activate a specific response or action in the context in which they operate. In contrast, senior officer values can be considered an outcome that is in some way associated with these levers. This paper argues that by utilising structured control and process control, politicians at both state and local government levels are able to influence senior officers to concentrate on the politicians' policy framework rather than on a policy framework of their own.

To explore this argument, copies of the VLGA 1958, the VLGA 1989 and respective amendments were obtained for analysis purposes. The legislative changes introduced to Victorian local government as prescribed in the VLGA 1989 were analysed to determine the statutory requirements framing the relationship between councillors and senior officers. These findings were built upon in the design of the questionnaire survey which aimed to develop a broad understanding of senior officer behaviour and action across more than one organisational setting (Fielding and Fielding 1986).

The survey questionnaire was developed specifically for the research (Pullin 2002) and data collection concentrated on all local government units in the State of Victoria, Australia. Seventy-eight LGU were

identified in this category and the questionnaire was sent to all 256 senior officers comprising the total population of senior officers. 138 completed forms were returned which equates to a response rate of 52 percent. Surveys were accepted where the respondent indicated they were 'acting' in the position.

The respondents came from diverse functional areas including corporate affairs, human resource management, customer service, strategic planning, budget and finance, and community services. This is consistent with the view that diversity among respondents strengthens the validity of results (Felts and Schumann 1997). All 138 surveys were useable and the questions were encoded and data entered utilising 'SPSS, version 10.0 for Windows' (Coakes and Steed 2001). Frequency distributions were determined and screened for data entry and other errors.

Of the 138 respondents who completed questionnaires, 26 were the subject of semi-structured interviews. This enabled the methodology to integrate both quantitative and qualitative research in a strategy where the quantitative research facilitated the choice of subject for qualitative investigation (Bryman 1992). In adopting this approach the study brings together the benefits of structure and process. As Bryman states 'quantitative research is especially efficient at getting to the "structural features" of social life, while qualitative studies are usually stronger in terms of "processual" aspects' (Bryman 1992, 60). The interview data is used in this paper to support the survey data and provide a richer analysis and discussion of the senior officer ER.

FINDINGS

Local government in Australia is the third tier of government. It sits below the federal government (sometimes termed the 'Commonwealth') and the various state governments (Kloot 1999). Each tier is legislated for separately, with each of the 'state' governments responsible for their own local government legislation within the laws and constitution of the state and the commonwealth. In the state of Victoria, the elected representatives or councillors in local government form the apex of governance with strategic input and operational support provided by appointed officials (senior officers) (VLGA 1989). However, structured control in local government occurs on both a 'politician to politician' and 'politician to appointed official' basis.

Structured Control

The Victorian State government has established a framework of control through the VLGA 1989 which determines the role of elected officials at the local government level and the structures, processes and procedures for local governance. Amongst many other aims and objectives, the VLGA 1989 specifies a politics-administration dichotomy in Victorian local government (s.7 and 97), the appointment of a CEO to manage the day to day operations of council (s.94 and 97) and the nature of the senior officer (manager) employment relationship (s.95A).

Politics-administration dichotomy

One of the ways to structure control in an organisational relationship is to impose a clear division in roles and responsibilities in the context of a hierarchical structure; where one party has the position power to monitor and influence the performance of the other. This has been enacted in Victorian local government by the allocation of a largely strategic policy formulation and performance monitoring role for councillors under the Act (VLGA 1989: s.7) and the restriction of the senior officer function, through the CEO, to a policy advisory, implementation and operational role (VLGA 1989: s.97). Our findings indicated that senior officers take this division in responsibility seriously.

The interviews demonstrated that senior officers have a high regard for the division of responsibility between themselves and elected officials. They also strongly believe in democracy and the democratic process, which empowers councillors to make policy decisions, whether the senior officers like them or not. These managers fully comprehend and accept their role in this process.

We found that the senior officers were highly pragmatic and professional in their work attitudes and behaviours. However, having said this, they do not explicitly view the roles of politicians and managers in dichotomous terms. The senior officers generally perceive themselves as having a shared responsibility with the councillors to manage local government affairs, where each complements each other by filling distinct but overlapping roles in policy and administration.¹ They understand their duties are to provide expert advice and to implement policies decided by councillors.

Essentially, these managers utilise neutrality values to 'manage' their organisational environment. In initiating policy development these senior officers may anticipate the intentions or objectives of their superiors (Keating 1995; Thompson 1985) but the nature of this advice is impartial, honest and given 'without fear or favour' (Armstrong 1989, 142). They put 'forward their own views, argue with their superiors, and contest proposals in the process of formulating policy' but the 'disagreement takes place within the agency and according to the agency's rules of procedure' (Thompson 1985, 556). This division is maintained in the operation of policy decisions. Once councillors have decided on a course of action, the managers will, overwhelmingly, implement that decision and not seek to obstruct or delay it, whether they agree with it or not. This is consistent with the neutral view of policy implementation (Armstrong 1989; Quinlan 1993; Williams 1985).

Finally, although it is well documented that a strict distinction between policy formulation and implementation is impossible (Henry 1987), the respondents indicated that their belief in and maintenance of neutral values help to maintain normality in the working relationship between councillors and themselves. Similarly, Felts and Schuhmann observed in their study of local government administrators in the U.S. that the administrators did 'not see themselves as political actors, per se, exercising political discretion by making choices. Rather they opt for a more neutral and perhaps safer role. They regard their role in a more limited way, that is, providing additional technical information to those they see enmeshed in a conflict' (1997: 367). This is supported at the Federal level in the U.S. where Maranto and Skelley in their study identify that 'neutrality suggests interdependence of expertise on one hand and political accountability in the federal bureaucracy on the other' (1992: 184). It would not be unexpected to find that managers, who seek a safer more neutral role, would also seek goal clarity in their performance evaluation outcomes. This finding is in direct contrast to the view prior to the reforms in public management, that appointed officials were not responsive to the policy framework established by elected officials (BRRSALGV 1979; Rose 1995; Thompson 1991).

Local Determination of Organisational Structure and Appointments

The VLGA 1989 further facilitates control by local politicians over senior officers by empowering councillors to establish organisational and staffing structures suitable to their needs. The Act is quite specific in this regard and states that:

- (1) A Council must establish an appropriate organisational structure.
- (2) A council must appoint as many members of Council staff as it thinks necessary for the performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers under this Act and any other Act.
- (3) A Council must appoint as a member of Council staff a person to be its Chief Executive Officer. (VLGA 1989: s.94)

The VLGA 1989 makes specific provision for the appointment of senior officers. It provides that the employment of senior officers be regulated by a limited term contract of up to 5 years duration. This renewable contract must specify performance criteria for the purpose of annual performance review by the CEO (VLGA 1989, s.95A & 97A). However, councillors do not have direct control over senior officer appointments and HR matters, they have to exert their influence through their authority to review the CEO's performance, also on an annual basis (VLGA 1989, s.97A).

¹ For a comprehensive conceptualisation of the politics-administration dichotomy in local government see Svava (1985, 1998, 1999).

The functions of the CEO are stipulated in the Act as follows:

- (a) ensuring that the decisions of the Council are implemented without delay; and
- (b) the day to day management of the Council's operations in accordance with the Council's corporate plan; and
- (c) providing timely advice to the Council; and
- (d) appointing, directing and dismissing the Council's staff; and
- (e) ensuring that staff are appointed in accordance with the organisational structure approved by the Council. (VLGA 1989, s.97)

It can be safely stated that what was previously a somewhat ill defined internal organisational environment, pre VLGA 1989, is more clearly defined and structured post VLGA 1989. Our interviews indicated that all of the councils had established their own organisational structures and were recruiting to their needs rather than external pressures imposed by statutory positions and professional bodies. The VLGA 1989 has structured the power over these activities and relationships to occur within rather than external to the LGU. These changes mean that politicians have the ability to directly influence the appointment of the CEO and through the CEO, the appointment of the other senior officers. In effect, councillors have the power to appoint who they wish to these positions, and importantly, to dismiss or not re-appoint those managers who choose to pursue their own notion of the public interest.

The Act has also made significant relationship change in the management of human resources within the LGU. Whereas council had responsibility for the human resource activity in their LGU under the VLGA 1958, they were effectively limited to appointing only certified staff to senior management positions. This restriction no longer applies. A LGU is able to competitively select anyone that they believe is suitable on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills rather than the needs of certification (VLGA 1989). We found that councils were indeed taking advantage of this more flexible arrangement.

We also found that the senior officer employment relationship has significantly changed. Under the VLGA 1958 senior officers were employed on virtually a tenured basis with no provision for assessing human resource performance or for staff development or internal promotion (unless they were suitable certified). All of the senior officers surveyed were now employed on performance contracts with provision for annual performance review and promotion based on relative efficiency. Although there is provision under the VLGA 1989 for staff development and training, we found little evidence of this occurring for senior level appointments.

Nature of Senior Officer Employment Relationship

The terms of the contractual nature of the performance contract under the VLGA 1989 are quite specific. It clearly states that:

- (1) A senior officer may only be employed by a Council under a contract.
- (2) The contract must –
 - (a) specify performance criteria for the purpose of reviews of the senior officer's performance; and
 - (b) specify the date on which it expires, which must be a date that is not more than 5 years after the date it is signed; and
 - (c) include any other matter required by the regulations.

The Act specifies that when the current contract of a senior officer expires a new contract may be entered into without recourse to advertisement. This provision again facilitates political power in the relationship

between the councillors and senior officers. It is highly unlikely that councillors will appoint a senior officer who has not complied with their policy framework.

The Act identifies a comprehensive list of principles to be observed in respect of council staff (VLGA 1989, s.95). These embrace such human resource issues as recruitment, promotion, staff development, and equal employment opportunity. However, the VLGA 1989 is quite sparse and relatively silent in its reference to senior officer performance evaluation. Apart from indicating that performance criteria must be established in the contract for the purpose of reviewing senior officer performance, the VLGA 1989 merely states that the council must review the CEO's performance at least once a year and the performance of other senior officers' must be reviewed by the CEO at least once a year (s.97).

Even though the Act specifies little in terms of the operational aspects of senior officer performance evaluation, the motivation for its potential successful implementation can be found in the nature of the CEO's appointment. The CEO's position is the sole appointment made by council. Given that all operational aspects of the LGU are vested with the CEO under the Act (VLGA 1989, s.97), the performance of the council rests very much on the performance of the CEO. In turn, the CEO's performance rests very much on the performance of the senior officers and their functional activities. Apart from the legislative requirements, this inter-relationship of common vested interests provides an ideal environment for politicians to exert control over appointed officials.

Process Control

Our findings indicated that the system of senior officer fixed term performance contracts enacted under the VLGA 1989 has compelled councillors to develop targets and set results they want the CEOs, and hence other senior officers, to achieve. These changes have made councils more focussed on outcomes and expectations, and have articulated themselves through the introduction of performance evaluation systems. It was found that all of the LGU operate MBO type performance management processes where performance targets are established mutually through joint discussion between the CEO and individual senior officers and between the CEO and the councillors. They hold regular and often frequent meetings, both formal and informal, to evaluate and re-evaluate progress on performance targets. They then agree on what is and what is not achievable. The targets and outcomes identified in this process are neither rigidly quantitative, nor exact, but are clear, simple and rational (Drucker 1955).

The MBO system does not provide unambiguous answers about senior officer performance and its value in contributing to contract renewal decisions is limited. In reality, with an MBO type system as a basis for determining senior officer performance, the legal threat of being denied contract renewal based on that performance (VLGA 1989) is largely an empty one (McCarry 1994). Under such a performance appraisal system, managers are able to accommodate an increased focus on results without threatening in any way their neutrality values.

The performance indicators themselves were established during meetings between the senior officer and the CEO (or the CEO and the councillors). In all cases the officer had the opportunity to provide input into the development and establishment of performance criteria. Although many of the items changed from year to year, even at times during the year, they were subject to annual negotiation and dependant upon the outcomes. One senior officer captures the level of interaction in stating that the process involved 'mutually set objectives. Sometimes they will have been drafted by myself, amended, discussed, whatever, negotiated, agreed, signed off and then that becomes the framework within which you would operate.'

In all councils, senior officer performance is judged on a set of key performance indicators. These are drawn mainly from corporate objectives, the numbers and nature of which vary from council to council and from position to position. Kloot (1999, 574) reports similar findings. In some of the LGU, the emphasis was not just on what had been achieved but also on how it was achieved. In many cases the performance evaluation systems were associated with performance bonus payments.

One of the performance indicators is maintenance of relationships with peers and, more importantly, with their immediate manager(s) and the elected officials (councillors). While one senior officer suggested this

was just one of many criteria which on its own may not significantly affect the overall performance evaluation of an officer, one CEO was clearly of a different opinion. This CEO argued that there are written and unwritten performance indicators and the relationship with the CEO and/or elected officials may be unwritten, but it is nevertheless a decisive one in their performance evaluation:

at the end of the day what it gets down to, I believe, in assessing the performance of a CEO is whether or not the council trusts you or not and has confidence in you ... if you don't have the capacity or the confidence, then you've had it really [even if one is extremely competent].

Another CEO agreed with this sentiment, and argued that performance indicators for CEOs can be quite vague, imprecise and inadequate for the purpose of performance evaluation and, as a result, there were written and unwritten performance indicators. The CEO indicated that this situation arises because councillors lack the expertise and ability to develop more precise performance criteria. They are often short-sighted and unable to project a CEO's performance requirements far enough into the future. Interestingly, the issue of imprecise and inconsistent nature of performance evaluation is consistently cited in the literature as a significant 'process' limitation (Hatry 1981; Lacho, Stearns, and Villere 1979; Moore and Staton 1981).

In spite of the comments in respect of CEO performance evaluation, the interviews identified that the LGU tend to try hard to develop objectivity in their performance evaluation. This is due to the relationship of performance evaluation to a series of other HR related decisions such as promotion, incentive bonus payments, and retention. In respect of terminating staff, there was not a situation found where a senior officer had been terminated for poor performance. Neither was there a situation found where a senior officer had not achieved performance targets. These two findings may be related but they may also be linked to the difficulty of quantification and accuracy in performance measures. Other research has shown that performance evaluation outcomes are rarely used in termination decisions because a termination based on inaccurate measures may leave the organization open to legal action (Lacho, Stearns et al. 1979).

It should not be assumed that the participative nature of the MBO type performance systems means that continued poor performance will pass by unnoticed. Although no senior officers were dismissed during their contract period, not all were reappointed at the end of their contract. Three instances were reported during the interviews where positions had been advertised and the incumbent senior managers had not been reappointed. The potential for non-reappointment is the reason senior officers take performance targets seriously. As one senior officer stated 'I think it's seen as a serious [exercise] ... we need to continually perform to achieve the outputs required of council, and it's not just a you know, sit back, job for life situation any more.'

Although our findings indicate that hardly any officers have lost their jobs based on the results of performance evaluation, this does not mean that councillors are not in control of council staff. There could be a number of reasons terminations do not occur. It could be because of the use of MBO type technique where officers and their superiors set only achievable performance targets. So the question of not achieving those targets does not arise. So no one loses jobs. Or it could be because of the use of a qualitative measurement method which does not provide definitive answers about the performance of managers. Thus it is difficult to take such hard decisions as a termination based on that. Or it could be that managers take performance targets so seriously that in most cases they achieve their targets, and, most importantly, operate within the politicians' policy framework.

The Disobedient Public Servant

Although we argue that the majority of public managers in Victorian local government are obedient to the lawful policies of their councillors we found there were some individual senior officers who did not neatly fit into these general findings. While variations in human behaviour are not unanticipated in research of this nature, exploring the exception can prove beneficial in developing a fuller and broader understanding of the issues at hand.

One senior officer was prominent in taking a quite different stand to other senior officers in respect of their relationship with elected officials. This was most apparent in terms of the officer's approach to loyalty and

obedience to councillors and it is interesting to separately consider the justification and rationale for this behaviour. From a broader perspective, this analysis provides a brief insight into the complex issue of 'to whom or to what' a public manager should owe their loyalty. Should they essentially do whatever the elected official asks them to do within the law (Armstrong 1989)? Should they obey an elected official even though the direction may be 'unlawful' (Rourke 1992)? Should their obedience to the elected official be conditional, as the public interest has the first command on their loyalty (Jackson 1987)? Or indeed, should they try to run their LGU as a business and make what they consider are businesslike decisions?

In the context of these questions, it can be considered that this respondent took a quite different attitude to the view of 'obedience to the law' expressed by the majority of other respondents. The individual can be thought of as an exception to the general finding that senior officers obediently implemented council's legally constituted decisions. The respondent was a senior officer with considerable experience in both public and private sectors. He had significant management experience in local government and was highly qualified at the tertiary level. During the interview he demonstrated considerable knowledge of the Local Government Act 1989 and was well aware of the respective roles and functions of councillors and senior officers and the distinctions between them. Indeed, the respondent expressed his dealings with the council and councillors as a dichotomous relationship (Roberts 1995; Svara 1985). The following comments supported the notion of a dichotomy:

Ultimately, they're the people who make the decisions about the future of this city and we are here to support them. We provide advice to them and we are here in some instances to implement those decisions. They're elected to make those decisions ... they sometimes do things we don't like, they sometimes do things that we will cheer and cheer about, but I mean, that is part of these roles, working through and making sure they are consistent in approaching those issues.

However, having clearly identified and supported a politics/administration dichotomy both in the Act and in practice in his LGU, the senior officer proceeded to demonstrate during the interview that he personally did not adhere to it. The term 'making sure they are consistent in approaching those issues' in the above quote, is indicative that loyalty to the council is conditional upon the officer's view of the public interest being satisfied.

While, on the one hand, the senior officer emphasised open and trusting relations with councillors, 'I think it is vital in the sense that they have your trust' ... and ... 'it is about having an open relationship with the councillors and not having secrets at the executive level', on the other hand, the individual did not discount the possibility of disobeying an order of council, 'I am a good believer in the Mahatma Gandhi approach to obedience. Which is? There are times when you exercise passive disobedience and there are times when you exercise active disobedience.'

There was open admittance to disobeying council at times, 'sure there are affairs the council has asked me to do that I have never done. I have no intention of doing them and they know I haven't done them.' In terms of a specific project it was stated that 'I might have two resolutions to pull my finger out and do it, but again I don't intend to. It's just a waste of time.' The senior officer was also not opposed to delaying implementation of a project or a process, 'there are also things which they would like to do which I will do in my time.'

The rationale for disobeying the council's wishes varied and included such justifications as the following:

they [the resolutions] are for political showmanship ... and ... they [the council] don't expect some things to be done.

my judgement is ... this is strategically not the right time to do that.

I would not be doing my job if I went ahead and built the thing.

I can comply but I am not going to ... I have got councillors asking me to put resources into something that is going to have a negative impact on other investments.

This senior officer clearly saw his role as duotheistic (Jackson 1988) in that he had two masters; one the elected council and the other the public interest. As Jackson identifies, this places the public manager in a judgemental role as it is 'unethical for a public servant is to be indifferent to the public interest' (Jackson 1988, 249) and they are responsible for serving and are intended to serve the public interest (Uhr 1991).

The individual essentially adopted a paternalistic approach to the council. This was justified on the basis that the council had yet to develop enough maturity in its role to be solely responsible for a business with a multi million-dollar turnover per annum. Somewhat depreciatingly, the officer stated that the council 'in terms of financial strategy planning ... had ... probably got no further than thinking through what to do to buy some Telstra or Commonwealth Bank shares.' Also, 'you cannot expect people who have been elected to come into a situation and suddenly decide to invest millions of dollars in a facility that I know is already duplicated in the shire.'

In summary, as this individual insight has shown, while the survey and interview findings indicate local government managers generally conform to the neutrality principle of obedience to the law, there are conditions that may encourage or breed exceptions. In this case, the perceived lack of maturity of the council was an issue for the manager, as was its perceived naivety in running a multi-million dollar business in a businesslike manner. This presented an opportunity for a strong minded individual with a well-developed, perhaps misguided, sense of ownership and pride in the LGU. Another condition was pressure from the government, the community and the VLGA 1989 to operate local government units utilising a more commercial approach. The manager has interpreted these pressures in a very individual and personal manner. As a result, he tended to operate the LGU as a pseudo 'private sector' manager, in a businesslike rather than democratic manner. In this situation the right way was the manager's way and the councillors' view of the public interest prevailed only as long as it concurred with the managers' view.

In the view of at least one observer, this manager's behaviour demeans his office:

any notion that it is right and proper for the values and policies of officials to be seen as a legitimate alternative to those of an incumbent government or the minister is not part of the Australian public administrative system. Officials do not have a role of public interest saviour of last resort in protecting the community against unwise political action. Such a view is demeaning of the Australian people's demonstrated commonsense over the century. (Rose 1995: 595)

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the issue of control in Victorian local government, in the context of the balance of power in public administration between councillors and senior officers. It utilised a combination of secondary, survey and interview data (Pullin 2002) and argued that politicians have structured the organisation and employment processes in Victorian local government and facilitated an environment where senior officers adhere to the politicians' view of the public interest.

We found that a politics-administration dichotomy existed and was supported by virtually all of those senior managers interviewed during the study. The notion of a politics-administration dichotomy is consistent with public managers adopting a neutral role in the relationship with elected officials. In taking a neutral perspective, Armstrong (1989) states that the 'civil service' has no separate constitutional role to that of the democratically elected government. He argues that the task of civil servants is to be obedient to the minister first and foremost, and by doing this they are serving the government of the day (Armstrong 1989). However, the politics-administration divide in the civil service is 'pragmatically bridged' by the civil servant having an advisory role in 'policy formulation' with the minister making the policy 'adoption' decision. In this study we found that managers were quite comfortable with an advisory role where their advice may or may not be taken.

In their interface with the minister, the public servant is charged with providing policy advice which is honest, impartial and without fear or favour (Armstrong 1989). They should not be fearful of raising issues that conflict with government policy. We found that managers were comfortable with the notion of providing fearless advice which may or may not coincide with the councillors' views. However, even though administrators have a policy role, the 'dichotomy' distinction is clearly drawn between provision and decision. Non-elected officials are not empowered to 'decide' what the public interests are; this is the role of the minister or 'elected official'. They should not push their view too hard as 'public servants need to understand that ministers have the last word, and they should not press their advice to the point of nagging' (Keating 1995, 23).

We found one disobedient senior officer who adopted a public interest view consistent with that argued by Jackson (1987). This embraced financial rather than social perspectives and these have been implemented irrespective of council decisions to the contrary. While this manager is atypical in overall response and attitude, compared to all of the other managers interviewed, he does represent the type of manager that politicians were seeking to structure out of appointed positions in public management. In many respects, he can be considered the exception that proves that the re-structuring of the political-administrative relationship has largely been successful.

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