

Principles of “Good Governance”

Municipal governments today are facing demands for more and better services, expectations of accountability, transparency and value for taxpayer investment, increasing costs and sometimes decreasing resources. More and more, local governments are critically reviewing their programs, services and their supporting systems and structures from governance and leadership to front line service delivery.

Municipal governance, like all governance, has a critical role in the leadership, stewardship and oversight of the organization. It also sets the tone for organizational behaviour and is integral to creating a culture that will deliver sustainable performance. Openness and accountability matter at every level. Good governance means a focus on how openness and accountability is carried out throughout the organization and by those who act on its behalf. Effective governance requires more than individual dedication and commitment to responsible and responsive decision-making. It requires a system and structure that provides clarity, informed, efficient and democratic decision-making, and promotes accountability and performance in the organization.

While there is no “one size fits all” model of governance, sound governance principles and processes help to guide those charged with governance. Principles applied in the review of the City of Winnipeg’s governance structures and processes were identified through a review of related literature as well as common expectations of government. They include the following:

Accountability – The ultimate accountability of an elected official or body is to their voting constituents, who may choose not to re-elect them. Between elections, accountability can be supported by related principles. *Oversight* is the ongoing monitoring to ensure policies are implemented and resources are used as intended, and related reporting to the public. *Recourse* includes the means of correcting either incorrect action or unintended impacts, and includes processes to investigate public complaints, protect whistleblowers, and provide access to appeal of municipal decisions (Taylor, 2016).

Transparency – Open access to information regarding decisions, the decision-making process, and the basis for or influences on decisions such as outcomes of consultation processes or lobbying activity allows citizens to evaluate the quality of decisions and implementation, and satisfy themselves as to the fairness of governance processes (Taylor, 2016). While transparency is also a significant aspect of accountability, it is important enough in today’s society to be considered separately.

Efficiency – Efficiency in governance involves ensuring the best possible use of available resources (Council of Europe, 2008). This includes streamlined processes that minimize duplication and overlap, with only deliberate redundancy. Timeliness of governance processes is included within this principle as a balancing factor for the time and resources needed to support accountability, transparency and inclusivity. A perfect process is not valuable if decisions are too late to respond to urgent problems or if delays impose undue burdens on stakeholders.

Effectiveness – At its most basic, effectiveness means results meet the agreed objectives. It also includes the systems and processes to evaluate performance of the organization. Audits are carried out at regular intervals to assess and improve performance (Council of Europe, 2008).

Inclusivity – Inclusive processes are both an inherent good and a necessary condition of effective action, supporting social capital. People who feel they have had a reasonable opportunity to participate in a process are more likely to voluntarily comply with the outcome (Taylor, 2016) (Wilde, Narang, Laberge, & Moretto, 2009; Nogales & Zelaya-Fenner, 2012). For the purpose of this review we consider

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inclusivity as the opportunity for citizens to provide input to decision-making processes, and the degree to which Council deliberations reflect democratic process.

Impartiality – Impartiality generally refers to fairness and objectivity in decision-making processes, without bias towards a particular interest. These are generally supported by codes of conduct that emphasize honesty, and impartial treatment, as well as a duty to follow political direction within the law (Taylor, 2016) (Council of Europe, 2008).

Learning – Includes the processes and degree to which the knowledge and skills of those charged with governance are continuously maintained and strengthened, and performance is reflected upon to identify opportunities for growth. It also includes how decisions may be informed by both information and lessons learned from past experience (Council of Europe, 2008)

REFERENCES

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