

THE PLAN IN ACTION

THE AFP's first Corporate Plan is being prepared and is expected to be completed by 30 June, in time to provide a basis for budget allocation for the 1989-90 financial year. This article by DAVID HAILES briefly discusses the reason for having a Corporate Plan, what it is intended to achieve, and what we need to do to make it work.

Supervisors at all levels of the AFP have, to varying degrees, always undertaken planning. Indeed, we have managed to date without a corporate plan, so why do we need one now?

Well, yes, we have managed without one, but how well have we managed? Have we always shared the same view of where we should be heading?

Have we always had a clear understanding of what our priorities should be, and have we always allocated resources consistent with our priorities?

Have the people with operational and administrative responsibility for functions been adequately involved in planning?

A further question concerns our ability to periodically determine whether we are achieving our targets, whether they are the right targets, and whether we are using resources to the best effect, or, to put it another way, whether the Government and the community is getting good value for its law enforcement dollars.

Without systematic planning and monitoring of our activities it is impossible to respond to these questions with confidence. Among other things, the Corporate Plan is about system and consistency in all AFP planning and reporting on achievements.

What it should achieve

As its starting point, the Corporate Plan spells out the Mission of the AFP — our reason for existing, our overriding responsibilities, i.e. to prevent, detect and investigate crimes against the Commonwealth, and to make the ACT a safe and peaceful place in which to work, live and visit.

Against this backdrop, the Plan defines our six major priorities or objectives. These are not expressed as functions and processes, but rather in terms of what we will be trying to achieve.

The distinction here goes to the very heart of the Corporate Plan. By concentrating on achievement targets we will be able to measure our results and thereby be able, with some certainty, to provide answers to the questions mentioned above.

Our ability to answer such questions is not only important for our own sense of achievement and professional development. It is crucial to the success of our budget bids — maintaining appropriate resource allocations and, in some areas, convincing government that additional resources will provide a good return on the money invested.

Making it work

The Plan itself is fine as far as it goes. However, without supporting detailed planning at all management levels, it is merely an academic exercise. That detailed planning takes place in the form of Strategic Management Plans (SMPs) for each Division and Region.

In essence, SMPs detail:

- sub-objectives for all activities — statements of measurable and challenging results to be achieved over the next year;
- action plans which set out how the sub-objectives will be achieved and the resources to be used; and
- performance indicators based on information such as crime clearance rates, response times, etc. which allow measurement of our achievements.

At the individual level, we are moving to merit-based promotions. A key bench mark will be the evaluation of the extent to which the results specified in sub-objectives are achieved.

Obviously, a well thought out and imaginative action plan which makes efficient use of resources complements both achievement and the recognition of achievement.

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Meaningful sub-objectives and quality action plans, incorporating input from those actually responsible for doing the work, also increase job satisfaction:

- by eliminating confusion about who has responsibility and accountability for particular tasks;
- by encouraging people to question the status quo and to suggest better strategies; and
- by reducing frustrations about actual or inappropriate resource allocations — resource bids in future will need to be justified with projected and actual results.

Many people were involved in the development of the Plan — it was their input to the consultations which took place during the development of the Plan by the project team that made it possible.

These inputs helped the Commissioner and his management team to focus on the many issues confronting the AFP, and to crystallise what we need to do to achieve our aspirations.

It is the Plan for the entire organisation and as such belongs to all.

The initial implementation of the Corporate Plan, involving as it does a major change in our approach to planning, will not produce a perfect result. The first SMPs already have been undergoing refinement in the light of on-the-job experience and as people become more familiar with the concept.

Such revisions will continue to be made to take advantage of developments and experience gained in this, the first step in marketing and implementing corporate planning throughout the AFP.