

Sydney office aimed at recruiting specialist staff

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Wagga Wagga City Council will soon have a presence in Sydney in a bid to attract specialist staff after approval to establish an office in the city was endorsed at the most recent Ordinary Council Meeting.

A report to Council outlined the significant challenges faced in recruiting specialist staff, particularly in the infrastructure and project delivery areas.

Council will now enter into a lease with Property NSW for office space at 1 Prince Albert Road, Sydney. The leased area will be shared with the NSW Government Special Activation Precinct team, other local government authorities and regional councils.

Council General Manager Peter Thompson said the move is aimed at overcoming the challenges of recruiting specialist staff such as engineers, project managers and construction supervisors – and ultimately to get people to move to Wagga Wagga.

“In August 2018, the State Government identified Wagga Wagga as an area of significant growth that will swell to 100,000 residents under its 20-year plan for the region,” Mr Thompson said.

“If Council is to work towards these ambitious targets, then it needs to have the skilled workforce in place to facilitate this growth.”

Mr Thompson said the move in to Sydney is a positive step for Wagga and is endorsed by local developers who are keen to see Council be more proactive in delivering future planning.

“We’ve got projects that need to roll out in Wagga and the community expectation is that these projects are delivered quickly, on time and on budget.

“We raised this notion with the developer group we regularly meet and they’ve indicated they see it as a positive step for Council to be far more proactive in terms of delivering future planning because they face the same issues as we do in getting the right staff.”

Mr Thompson said Council has sought to fill numerous engineering, project management and various other specialist roles for the past 18 months.

He said there has been some success, however, the pool of applications has been limited, and in some cases, Council has been to the market on three occasions for key positions and not found suitable candidates.

“The challenge for Wagga Wagga is getting people to move themselves and their families to regional NSW, particularly before experiencing it first,” Mr Thompson said.

“Wagga is a very attractive and growing city. However, the leap to move from metropolitan areas such as Sydney to Wagga is a significant one. We have, until now, given people an ‘all or nothing’ proposition which means to accept the role – you must move to Wagga.

“Establishing a Sydney office means staff can continue to live in Sydney with a view that in time they may relocate once they familiarise themselves with regional living.”

Mr Thompson said Wagga is currently experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with significant grant opportunities being offered through State and Federal funding.

He said this has led to a strain on existing resources with Council not increasing its capacity to align with these commitments.

“It is anticipated that these opportunities will only increase over the coming term of the State Government, and we need to be on the front foot to capitalise,” Mr Thompson said.

“Our worst case scenario is that in the next one, two or three years we deliver more to the Wagga community in terms of construction, road construction and design work for the growth of the city.

“The best case scenario is that it’s a cracking success, we’ve been proactive in terms of delivering infrastructure and future planning, and it’s a new way to introduce Sydney people to relocating to regional areas. Ultimately our goal is to get people to come to Wagga to live.”