



Lyndoch board is changing lanes, but keeping its windows up

Description



Consultant Robert Lane, from SED Consulting, appeared at last month's Lyndoch Living AGM to outline changes to how the board will be selected, but ordinary members are still not a priority.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Lyndoch Living will this year change how it selects its board, but there is still no sign – yet – of allowing “ordinary” members anywhere near the action.

In fact, my sense is that Lyndoch is driving methodically toward becoming a fully corporatised, tightly controlled company and ditching any real input or scrutiny from the wider community about its operations.

I say this because while Lyndoch is changing how it chooses its board members – more about that in a second – it's in absolutely no rush to let every day people become “ordinary” members.

These pesky “ordinary” members are the ones who can keep an eye on the direction, priorities and performance of Lyndoch, ask questions and, if enough members agree, call meetings and vote on action.

They can be a powerful local voice.

They also reflect the people, or their offspring, who supported Lyndoch for decades – we must never

forget that harnessing “people power” is how Lyndoch started and how it has survived for more than 60 years.

Right now, however, Lyndoch has no “ordinary” members. Zilch.

As we know, more than 115 people applied to the board last year to become “ordinary” members and nobody made it through.

It turns out, however, the Lyndoch board has been looking at *itself* and, a year ago, hired a local consultant – Robert Lane from SED Consulting – to suggest ways it could do things differently.

Mr Lane popped up as a surprise guest at the Lyndoch Living AGM last month, and I felt a surge of hope that maybe the breakthrough we have been waiting for, where membership would become open and accessible, had finally come.

But after meeting with Mr Lane last week to learn more, that hope is on hold because encouraging “ordinary” members was not a part of his brief.

Mr Lane was tasked with other priorities, including setting up a new board selection process that will work something like this:

- All board vacancies will be advertised;
- Nominees will go to a new committee, chaired by Mr Lane and including two board members Kane Grant and Lorraine Mielnik;
- The committee will assess these people against a range of criteria and settle on those it thinks would be best;
- The committee’s decision is then assessed by another, as-yet-unnamed, independent person.
- The final, preferred nominees will then go to a vote at the AGM.

On paper, this looks better than the closed shop of recent years, but is it? I see a gaping hole – who gets to vote for board members at the AGM?

There ARE NO general members of Lyndoch so, once again, the board votes for itself.

Around we go.

I asked Mr Lane: aren’t we right back to square one, with only seven people – the seven board members – having full control and being answerable only to themselves?

We were.

This is not Mr Lane’s fault or responsibility, as he is only tackling what he has been hired to do.

“I am trying to manage an interim process,” Mr Lane said, “(and) in the absence of members outside of the board, this is the process that will take place.”

Mr Lane agreed the situation was “not ideal”, but stressed that he hadn’t “accepted this role to not have a positive influence”.

Well I really hope that Mr Lane’s influence can extend a lot further, because the biggest issue with the board right now is not who sits on it, but its refusal to talk to the people.

It has failed – repeatedly – to tell the community what is going on, or to answer questions.

This is why most people have no clue about the scope of the \$100m masterplan, or why Lyndoch became a “Company Limited by Guarantee”, or how it will pay for its \$22m medical complex, or why so many staff have left, or why it’s failing aged care standards, or why it even wants to run a medical clinic...because the board has explained none of it.

The board can change this, but does it want to?

In fact I wonder if the next step is for Lyndoch board memberships to no longer be voluntary, but paid positions to progress Lyndoch Living Ltd, rather than – in theory at least – to represent the community?

These next 12 months are critical: they will determine whether Lyndoch is fully answerable to the community, or whether – having become a Company Limited by Guarantee – that side of Lyndoch is now pure nostalgia.

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