

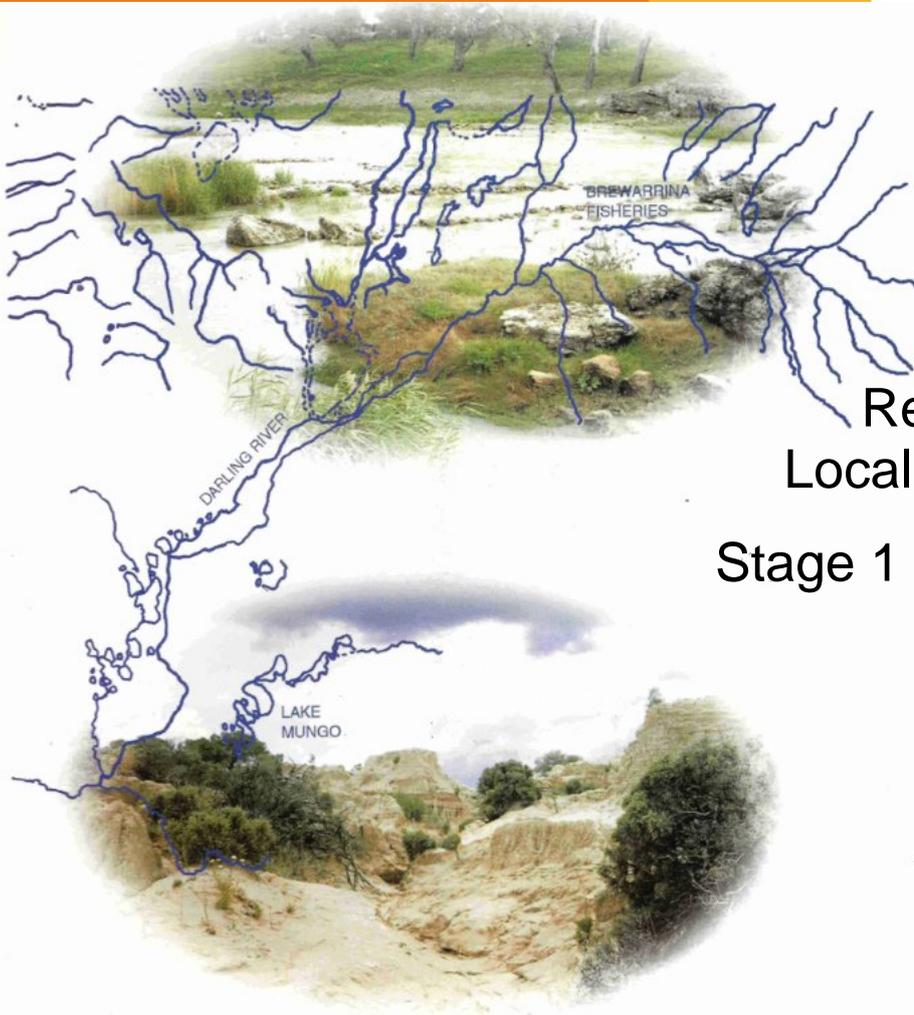


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OCHRE

The Continuing Conversation

Evaluation | Stage 1:
Implementation and early outcomes



Murdi Paaki
Regional Assembly
Local Decision Making
Stage 1 Summary Report

June 2018

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This report was prepared for and belongs to Aboriginal Communities of the Murdi Paaki Region, and members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre

The evaluation team from the Social Policy Research Centre acknowledges Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands we work on and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and to all Aboriginal peoples of the region.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Aboriginal communities involved for their support and participation in this evaluation.

We would like to thank Tony Dreise and Dr Lynette Riley – both members of the Evaluation Steering Committee – for reviewing the report.

The *OCHRE* evaluation was funded by Aboriginal Affairs NSW. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and may not reflect those of Aboriginal Affairs or the New South Wales Government. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of NSW Aboriginal Affairs for their support.

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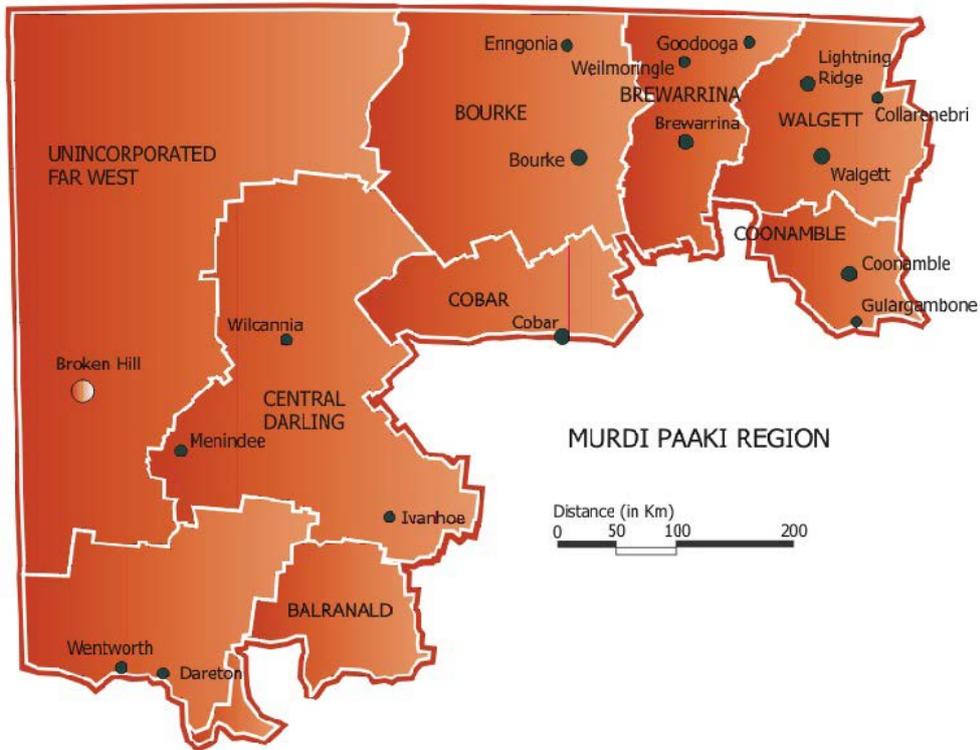
The Social Policy Research Centre is based in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at UNSW Sydney. This report is an output of the *OCHRE* Evaluation, funded by Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

Suggested citation:

Katz I, Idle J, Bates S, Jopson W, Barnes M, (2018). *OCHRE Evaluation Stage 1 Summary: Implementation and early outcomes. Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making (SPRC Report 16 /18)*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney.
<http://doi.org/10.26190/5b428a5b3dc60>

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Images of Murdi Paaki region provided by Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making: What we have found

<p>What is working?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Accord priorities are decided by representatives of Aboriginal communities. • Government services are more likely to be held to account because of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Local Decision Making and the Accord. • Local community representatives are able to ask the Regional Assembly to escalate local concerns. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LDM model has worked well in the Murdi Paaki area and the regional assembly is well established and functions well. • Regional representation of Aboriginal community concerns by the Assembly has seen senior government representatives 'come to the table'. 	<p>What needs further work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the Regional Assembly and Local Decision Making priorities and responsibilities under the Accord needs to be circulated more widely to all local communities. • Increased resources are needed at the local level to support Community Working Parties (in communities) and to improve representation and infrastructure at the Regional Assembly. • Volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly need resources to improve communication between the Regional Assembly and their local communities. • All relevant agencies and service providers should attend CWP meetings and services at the local level, and work together to serve the identified needs of local Aboriginal communities. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region. • Financial, transport and communication resource support from government could help local communities address concerns about representation. • Services and government need to become more culturally competent. • Structural resourcing and engagement with young people are needed to access, develop, and enhance the Young Leaders program. • The name 'Local Decision Making' is misleading. The name should be changed to better represent the model, namely 'Regional Decision Making', 'Devolved Decision Making' or something similar.
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Summary of *Continuing Conversation* process

Researchers find out about OCHRE's history

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly agreed to continue the OCHRE conversation (14 September 2016)

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council checked the conversations will happen respectfully (9 August 2016)

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly met with researchers to decide how and when conversations would take place (8 Dec 2016)

Researchers had conversations in Communities:
Dec 2016: Ilan and Priscilla visited Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Ivanhoe, Dareton and Menindee
Dec 2017: Michael visited Bourke, Enngongia, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Coonamble.
Other conversations took place by telephone in Feb 2018.

Community helps researchers to understand the information collected (8 March 2018).

Community decides what happens with findings. Phase 2 of the evaluation begins July 2018.

The *OCHRE* Local Decision Making and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

The *OCHRE* Evaluation adopts the approach of ‘continuing conversations’. Over the past two years SPRC evaluators have had conversations with 16 Aboriginal communities of the Murdi Paaki Region, members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), and government representatives, to talk about Local Decision Making (LDM) and MPRA. The evaluation team have used culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the research.

Community-controlled research involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research *with* and *not on* communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program’s success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to research participants in communities and asked for their feedback, (validation of findings) which has been added to this final report.

The evaluation team have addressed any concerns about the draft report to ensure participants are comfortable with what has been written. The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has accepted the report. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (on 30 June 2018 if acceptance is prior to this date) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

We have drawn lessons from *OCHRE* sites being evaluated and presented a Synthesis report to the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA).

Context of these findings

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has been in place for nearly two decades and *OCHRE* Local Decision Making is only one aspect of the Assembly’s work.

There has been a long history of mistrust and betrayal of Aboriginal communities by governments in Australia. *OCHRE* and Local Decision Making will take time to build working relationships of accountability and respect with Aboriginal communities. We do not have anything to compare the Assembly and Local Decision Making with in terms of how people relate to other representative bodies, and in some communities in Australia, community members can have little awareness of the workings of their representative bodies.

What people told us about Local Decision Making

There are all these different groups that exist within and I think the great thing about the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly model is that those Community Working Parties are open to the whole community to attend, to share those issues.

The only other thing I want to say, I believe the Regional Assembly has... all the 16 communities now have a voice whereas before they didn't. And you know, we have people from the Federal Government and the State Government turning up to our meetings over there on different issues that affects our communities.

And I think if the Regional Assembly wasn't there and the community working parties weren't there, we'd be still at home – everyone else would be still coming in and telling us what we should do. Now we're telling the government what to do.

What is working well?

- The Accord priorities were decided by Aboriginal community representatives.
- Regional representation of Aboriginal community concerns by the Assembly has seen senior government representatives 'come to the table'.
- NSW Government services are more likely to be held to account because of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Local Decision Making and the Accord.
- Local community representatives ask the Regional Assembly to escalate local concerns. The Assembly can escalate local and regional issues to government.
- Local Decision Making process is being implemented by a well-established Aboriginal Regional Assembly. The Assembly has out-last-ed different governments and initiatives.
- The Assembly has strong relationships with member communities.
- MPRA will be co-designing housing policy and delivery in the region with Local Aboriginal Land Councils, NSW government and the Commonwealth government.

What needs further work?

- All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region.
- Services and government need to become more culturally competent.
- There is limited knowledge of the *OCHRE* Local Decision Making model at the local level. Information about the Regional Assembly and Local Decision Making priorities and responsibilities under the Accord needs to be circulated more widely to all local communities.
- Increased resources are needed at the local level to support Community Working Parties (in communities) and to improve representation and infrastructure at the Regional Assembly.

- Financial, transport and communication resource support from government could help local communities address concerns about representation.
- Volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly need resources to improve communication between the Regional Assembly and their local communities. Community representatives are in voluntary roles and are under-resourced.
- Communication channels (including face to face) from regional to local communities are under-resourced, making it difficult to provide feedback and information.
- A history of multiple short-lived initiatives makes it difficult for communities to trust new initiatives and to plan for longer term outcomes.
- All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region.
- Services and government need to become more culturally competent.
- All relevant agencies and service providers should attend CWP meetings and services at the local level, and work together to serve the identified needs of local Aboriginal communities.
- Structural resourcing and engagement with young people are needed to access, develop, and enhance the Young Leaders program.
- The name 'Local Decision Making' is misleading, especially as there is a vast geographic area. The name should be changed to better represent the model, namely 'Regional Decision Making'.

Specific findings

Knowledge of Local Decision Making

- The Local Decision Making model was recognised by some research participants but not everyone. Local Decision Making and the role of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needed to be better explained to local communities.
- Some participants said the Local Decision Making, Accord and structure of decision making has led to an improvement in relations with government.
- The name *Local Decision Making* is confusing as many participants felt decisions are being made at a regional level and not a local level. This is particularly relevant given the vast geographic area of the region.

People don't even connect to them really, not in their head. Assembly is even further removed from the community. I bet three-quarters of this community couldn't tell you what the Regional Assembly is, or who's on it, or how it works, or how it's connected to CWP probably. It's just something that's out there somewhere.

People don't know what LDM is, it can cause issues when people can't articulate it, are we making the decisions? Are we part of that conversation?

Community representation at the Regional Assembly

- Working together at a regional level provides opportunities for local communities to share and support each other.
- Local representation at the Assembly depends on local community capacity and agreement.
- Representation relies on an operational Community Working Party, which is difficult in some communities.
- Community representatives must volunteer to attend the Regional Assembly and there are high expectations of them.
- A collective voice of local communities through the Regional Assembly makes government take notice.
- NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils need to be better represented; the existing Local Aboriginal Land Council structure could support Local Decision Making.
- Decisions about local representation at the MPRA were not transparent across all 16 member communities.

... it's actually starting to come to the point where we do have service providers just going straight to the Regional Assembly and not engaging with Land Councils, and then before we know it projects are starting to roll out and then they're just coming to Land Councils and going we're on the ground, we realise we need to use some of your assets, or we need to use this, or we want help with this, and it's like well you guys haven't engaged with us, you've **completely bypassed us**, we've known you've been around for a good six to twelve months.

Communication with local communities and organisations

- Clear communication between local member communities and the Regional Assembly is critical.
- Aboriginal Communities need support and resources to be part of the Regional Assembly, including a co-ordinator or project officers to support their work.
- Lack of resources presents challenges for communication between the Regional Assembly and local communities and organisations.

... the framework of LDM is great, it looks great on paper, but how it will actually roll out on the ground from a community level is I think where the main concern is, because there's no **communication coming back** from the Regional Assembly back into the communities and there's a lot of disrespect with that.

Developing leadership

- Developing leadership is a priority of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. Older community members are keen to support younger people to become culturally confident and represent their communities.
- Young people who have participated in the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders) were positive about their experiences
- The Young Leaders coordinator position is under resourced (one day a week).
- The program is difficult to keep running due to a lack of funds for the project officer.
- Young people often have other priorities, work commitments and family responsibilities.

I've got to give like the assembly credit as well. They've been – in the short time that I've been with the Young Leaders, the Assembly have been very active in their support of the Young Leaders. Not just talking about it, but actually, you know, valuing our opinions you know talking about you know – and its I suppose, it's a big privilege for us and culturally as well that we maintain that respect but also, it's a great privilege and its very great to see that the established leaders are actually serious in what they talk about.

Local issues and the Regional Assembly

- The Regional Assembly needs to cover a wide range of issues from 16 different communities across a large geographical footprint of the Barwon Darling river system – some have common issues and some locally specific issues. This presents some challenges for the Assembly.
- Local Decision Making is not an avenue for *actual* local community level issues.
- There is sometimes a tension between regional decision making and local issues.

How can the LDM cover all communities in a day? How can the conversations or focus cover everywhere? Every community is different. And at the end of the day, the Regional Assembly is an advocacy body, so how is an advocacy body going to determine funding agreements without having some form of interest.

If under LDM the capacity is given to the Regional Assembly to nominate or have a say in where the funding is allocated in regional towns, that's a major concern for [some] Land Councils. It pretty much means that with ... community fractures [that local area] will not get any state or federal funding for any projects.

Regional Assembly, local communities and Government

- Local Decision Making is perceived as a government driven process but does provide opportunities to form regional relationships with government.
- The Assembly can engage service providers by putting the question back on service providers about their roles and responsibility in the community.
- Local communities continue to work with governments at a local level and feel that government services are not employing or training local Aboriginal people.
- Government services are perceived as not always culturally competent and can be racist.
- The relationship between LDM and NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils is not straightforward and varies between different communities and levels.

The high racism that exists in local communities and the cultural incompetence of a lot of workers that work there makes it very difficult for our people to be able to get equitable services from the service delivery that's delivered.

Local community experiences with service provision

- Despite operating well, there is much less satisfaction at the local level about service delivery, and most participants in local communities reported that relationships with different levels of government had yet to improve.
- Local community members explained that they have consistently represented their communities to highlight local issues and develop community action plans.
- We heard from some communities that local issues of racism in housing and relationships with police remains, and that service delivery does not accommodate local contexts. In some places services are still:

fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out.
- There is considerable community frustration about the time it takes to create change and to address racism and cultural insensitivity.

I think one of the things in relation to service delivery, which is what was one of the priorities, and I think it still is in a sense, the priority of being able to have proper monitoring and evaluation processes of services that are being delivered; to be able to evaluate that services and things to see where the gaps and why things seem to be still failing and the majority of funding that comes to our communities is mainly provided to mainstream services that provide that delivery to our communities.

Communities' views of success

We asked the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly how we will know if Local Decision Making is going well. Community members suggested we consider:

- Whether the priorities in local Community Action Plans are actually being addressed and what outcomes (short and longer term) are being achieved.
- Whether communities feel heard by government. Aboriginal communities will know that the government has listened to them when services are implemented in a way that the communities want and need, and when Aboriginal communities are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services.
- What isn't working, because this will assist in learning what has been successful and why.

Success measures of the Accords will:

- Show government is listening to community and there is an equal relationship in decision making.
- Be seen in long-term outcomes of service provision of priority areas and engaging Aboriginal people in their local communities.
- Demonstrate improved trust between Aboriginal communities and government at all levels
- Show Aboriginal organisations and representative bodies are better resourced to participate in decision making
- Ensure that programs that are working are maintained and resourced.

Some community members suggested:

- The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needs to develop some short, medium and long-term objectives which can be measured and described.

To achieve this community members recommended there be more opportunities to come together and discuss how well different plans are being implemented, both during implementation and when evaluating outcomes. This relates to the next phase of the evaluation

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on what we heard was working well and what could be improved.

Recommendations for NSW Government:

Theme	Recommendation
<p>Accord Process – Accountability of service providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all service providers work with the Accord process and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), including engaging with Community Working Parties (CWPs) at the local level. • Put in place Local Accords or other forms of agreement to ensure that all agencies and service providers attend CWP meetings and to commit services to meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities. Make attendance at CWPs a contractual requirement for all local service providers.
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Local Decision Making (LDM) process and outcomes more widely with local communities. Clarify the role of MPRA and CWPs in that process. • Communicate and promote LDM priorities and responsibilities under the Accord more widely to local communities. • Provide additional resources – for communication and secretariat support of volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. • Increase communications between the MPRA and local communities and organisations to provide information and feedback.
<p>Continuing Professional Development in Cultural competency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Government to continue to improve cultural competence across all departments and services.

Theme	Recommendation
Aboriginal Cultural competence standards in government services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All service providers (government and non-government) to continue to develop cultural competence, particularly at a local level.
Leadership – Young Leaders Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more structural resources to increase the number of young people accessing the Aboriginal Young Leaders Program. • Provide more resources to expand Young Leaders Coordinators and Project Officer positions to support the Young Leaders Program. • Design and implement a succession plan for Young Leaders – as young leaders age, provide succession planning for the next generation of young leaders.
Representation and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully engage other Aboriginal representative structures such as NSW AECG Inc., ACCHOs, etc. in the process of LDM.
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resources and support for all 16 member communities to ensure local participation at the regional level through the MPRA and to enable members to feed back to CWPs. • Provide greater transparency in processes for representation at MPRA. • LDM is not 'local' but regional decision making. It is therefore important that the LDM label is changed to something more representative of the actual model.
Representation and inclusion of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve relationships between CWPs, MPRA and LALCs. • Better align roles, responsibilities and accountability structures of LDM and LALCs. • Explore options for greater inclusion of LALCs in LDM and MPRA.

Theme	Recommendation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mechanisms for communication and representation for LALCs with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.
Representation and inclusion of local issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more time, processes and resources for members to discuss issues with the CWP's and local communities prior to making decisions at the Regional Assembly.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide better support (financial and administrative) to ensure MPRA LDM and Accords are discussed with all 16 member communities. • Resource the LDM to match the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region and the Accord priorities.
Service System – capacity building connected services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link local services with local Aboriginal services; for example, train and employ local Aboriginal people to carry out repairs and maintenance on local housing. • Ensure a commitment by <u>all</u> NSW Government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed.
Service System – connected and responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All levels of government and other service providers to plan and operate a more connected and responsive service system. • All relevant agencies and service providers to attend and participate in CWP meetings as part of their working towards building a connected service system that is responsive to the self-determined needs of local Aboriginal peoples.
Service System – evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure thorough monitoring and evaluation of services, including service needs and gaps, using local Aboriginal determined indicators.

Direction for next conversations

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by communities, outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Based on the conversations to date (including co-design), we propose the next conversations include and discuss:

- LDM and local community Accord services – regular monitoring to ensure programs are adapted to suit each community and are working well.
- Better feedback about the Evaluation to communities.
- If possible, the co-design process should involve members of the broader community, and not only MPRA members.

It was not possible in this stage (Stage 1) of the continuing conversation to use community researchers to collect information for the evaluation. In the next stage we will work with the MPRA and develop a feasible method for involving community members in data collection.

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