Exploring residents’ dissatisfaction with WCC decision making processes

Key Findings

17 September 2013
Background: WCC survey findings

- Wellington City Council (WCC) 2013 survey of resident satisfaction showed increased dissatisfaction with the council’s governance and decision making compared to 2012 and 2011 survey findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the council consult you?</td>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with the way WCC involves people in decision-making?</td>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand how WCC makes decisions</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC makes decisions that are in the best interests of the city</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much influence do you feel the public has on decisions WCC makes?</td>
<td>Small influence</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from WCC is easy to access</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Purpose and method

- To explore residents' views on WCC decision making processes and engagement to gain an understanding of:
  - awareness and involvement in WCC’s decision making
  - reasons for dissatisfaction
  - what WCC could do differently

- 3 focus groups with people dissatisfied with WCC decision making (n=16), grouped by age:
  - 20 – 29 (young)
  - 30 - 55 (middle)
  - 56 – 85 (older)

- Recruited from survey respondents who were dissatisfied with the Council on the governance and decision making questions, plus additional people recruited to supplement the survey respondents.

- Groups were held at Litmus on September 10 and 11
Recognition of WCC’s strengths

- Good at the day-to-day, service delivery, facilities and events
  - Clean, tidy city and buses
  - Responsive to service and maintenance issues
  - Free Wi-Fi
  - Call centre response good
  - Events eg summer festival and outdoor films, supporting events around All Black matches
  - Trying to inform/ engage with residents

Sourced from WCC website, http://wellington.govt.nz/events/annual-events/summer-city
Perceptions of WCC decision making

- **Young:** Faceless, invisible, corporate, behind closed doors, ‘big guys’ making decisions

- **Middle:** Hidden, slow, disorganised, over consulting, convoluted, not deciding

- **Older:** Murky, talk fest, not deciding
Young people’s views on WCC decision making

- Ignored
- Behind closed doors
- Faceless
- Bland
- Big guys making decisions
- Barren of people
- Corporate
- Wgtn is festive and fun
- Ostracised
Middle group’s views on WCC decision making

- Green, environment
- Convoluted
- Hidden
- Slow
- Over consulting
- No decision making
- Unsure how decisions are made
Older people’s views on WCC decision making

- Murky

- Too many councillors

- Playing lords and ladies

- Sit around talking; lack of decision making
Awareness of WCC decision making

- **Young**: no knowledge of decision making processes, how decisions are made, who is involved, and ways people can contribute. Hard to access information

- **Middle**: some awareness of decision making processes and ways to be involved
  - Awareness of process to resolve local/personal issues

- **Older**: informed about decision making process
Involvement in WCC decision making

- **Young:** not involved, feel *ignored* as a group, but want to be involved with relevant issues
  - Requires enabling awareness of *relevant* issues and enabling mechanisms that fit with lives
  - Current feeling that WCC has low profile, can’t see them in the city, and no awareness of what the issues are or where to find out.

- **Middle:** some limited involvement through online surveys, oral submission, talking with visible local councillors

- **Older:** some people had active involvement in processes as individuals and groups e.g. writing submissions, letters to councillors, trustee members.
  - *Disillusioned* due to process and outcomes
Barriers to involvement

- Lack of awareness about relevant issues being debated
  - Local neighbourhood issues as well as other Wellington-wide issues that will affect me (e.g. airport, waterfront, flyover)
  - Inaccessible information - information tailored to show relevancy

- Lack of influence
  - Individuals cannot change things; need to be collective to be heard (e.g. Residents Group, Special interest group – VAU Association)
  - Some individuals are more influential than others

- No feedback
  - Limited acknowledgement of previous involvement
  - Lack of feedback on decisions made
Reasons for dissatisfaction - young people

- Feel ignored
  - Corporate not community focused
  - Wellington’s diverse voices missing

- Lack of recognition of their issues
  - Life stage focus ie transport, transient community, low income, events

- No process to facilitate discussions in their space
  - Lack of visibility of councillors
Reasons for dissatisfaction - young people

We are living here and having families and we should be listened to and there should be something for us.

Maybe have a hub at university and open meetings and stuff like that. Students are busy so get amongst the students rather than making the students go to you. We are never going to sit and look carefully at the political magazines. They could market how we can get information, great tag line and multi media.
Reasons for dissatisfaction - middle and older groups

General theme

- Need for leadership and shared direction
- Improve the visibility of mayor and councillors
- Some concern about devolution of services; inability to access relevant information and enable change

Issues

- Issues based dissatisfaction: transport and infrastructure
- Awareness of issues that affect me

Process

- Trying to involve me; but not making easy for me

Outcomes

- Decisiveness - consult then decide
- Transparency – what is the decision and why, how was my information used
Reasons for dissatisfaction - middle and older groups

There is lots of talk, talk, talk and nothing has changed. It’s almost as if the council has got so big it can’t actually move. They have extensively consulted the public.

Access to meeting minutes, suburb meetings. I won’t read them all the time, but if I wanted to know what happened I would read them to see if my local representative said what we told them… It is a bit like the client relationship where the people are the client. So you have got to keep them informed every step of the way.
Increasing satisfaction with decision making

**Issues:** Demonstrate and communicate issues relevant to life stage and neighbourhood

- Tell me what is being decided and I’ll tell you what I want to be informed about. Present the issues in a way that I understand the relevance to my life
- Create awareness of issues: back of supermarket receipts, WCC APP, Our Wellington newspaper, front window of library, bus stops/ on the bus, events, linking with my groups, social media

**Process:** Relevant, interactive, visible and representative

- Relevant engagement process - ensure I can engage in ways I prefer
- Interactive process through registering interest to receive information and updates (eg through Apps, QR reader, website and use of RSS feed, twitter, Facebook, online surveys/ panels which show us the results)
- Increase visibility of councillors – being present, fronting events, letters and newsletter
- Ensure representation of diverse populations (ie student rep)

**Outcomes:** Decisive, timely and transparent

- Decisiveness – informing us when decisions are made through e-updates and provide process and timeframe for implementation
- Transparency – show us why this decision was made through meeting minutes, webcam of meetings
- Influence - show me that I have influence in decision making
Reflections

- Celebrate successes – good at core business, service delivery, events

- To increase satisfaction with decision making focus on relevancy, interactive engagement, local processes, decisiveness and transparency through closed loops, and visible leadership

- Life stage focus – young people the future of Wellington are being excluded, foster and support engagement with middle group to avoid future disillusionment