



FALCON
CONSULTING

UNREINFORCED MASONRY BUILDINGS PROGRAMME

DEBRIEF REPORT TO WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

30 APRIL 2019

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Focus

1. The focus of the debrief of the Unreinforced Masonry (URM) Buildings Programme is Wellington City Council and how the Council and staff responded to the challenges of implementing the programme to secure parapets and facades on URM buildings in a very short timeframe, in the interests of public safety, following the Kaikoura 7.8 magnitude earthquake on 14 November 2016.

Approach

2. The reviewer conducted 23 interviews with building owners, project managers, RCP Support Package users, corporate body representatives, builders, Wellington City Mayor and Wellington City Council senior staff. Workshops were held with WCC staff involved in the process and with staff from MBIE. Workshops were also held with engineers involved in the work and a meeting with the NZ Society for Earthquake Engineering Inc. Additional meetings with staff from both MBIE and WCC were also held for the purpose of information gathering and clarification of details.
3. The first workshop was undertaken with WCC staff on 17 December to provide background to the URM Programme. The main workshops and interviews were conducted from 29 January to 6 March 2017. All interviews were conducted face to face with the exception of 2 by telephone.
4. The reviewer would like to thank all those who participated in the review for their willingness to make themselves available and their constructive input and valuable insights into the URM Programme. Thanks also to the Council officers for their assistance and support to organise interviews, workshops, meetings and the prompt provision of information requested.

Purpose of the URM Programme Debrief

5. Wellington City Council's stated purpose of the URM Programme Debrief is to record the reflections, good and bad, of the people involved in the URM Programme in order to embed the positives into Council business and to expunge or otherwise overcome the negatives.
6. The formal review is to be undertaken by an independent person based on interviews and workshops across a broad range of participants – building owners, engineers, officials (WCC and MBIE), builders, corporate bodies, RCP Support Package users. A written report is to be provided to the Council with a written summary of findings and recommendations for improvements to the way the Council approaches future cross-organisational initiatives and learnings to take forward into the wider Earthquake Prone Building Programme of Work which addresses the longer-term seismic strengthening of Wellington's building stock to create a safer more resilient city.
7. The Review focusses on three broad areas: strategic/regulatory policy; operational implementation and logistics. Key matters to be addressed in the review and final report, but not limited to, are:
 - The use of the Order in Council to provide the regulatory framework for the URM Programme –was this approach workable? What improvements could have been made to the OIC?
 - Could the regulatory process have been improved?
 - Funding – Did the level of public funding work? How might the level of funding have been better optimised? Was the process for funding applications appropriate? Did the MBIE/WCC partnership deliver on the outcomes?

- Operational and logistics – Were timeframes realistic? Did the process bypassing consents work? Was there reluctance from the engineering profession to be involved? If so why?
- The use of the case management system appears to have been successful. What were the contributing factors from a range of perspectives both within WCC and externally.
- Was the contract between MBIE and WCC adequate and the way the funding was managed appropriate?

Summary of Findings

8. The proactive, constructive and facilitative approach taken by the WCC URM Programme team working to secure parapets and facades that created a risk to public safety in the aftermath of the Kaikoura earthquake was viewed positively by all interviewed.
9. Adopting a dedicated cross organisation team approach to provide a “one stop shop” within Council to support building owners, facilitate work and remove barriers for those undertaking the work required on URM buildings, together with financial assistance to building owners, were seen as critical success factors to achieving the outcome sought and reducing potential harm to public safety from falling masonry in the event of any substantial aftershocks.
10. Those interviewed commented on how the Council changed the way it worked during the Programme from an administrative, process-driven approach to taking an active leadership role and a constructive, supportive approach with building owners to get the work done. Several individuals, in particular the project manager and case managers, were singled out as having been particularly helpful and willing to go the extra mile to ensure the work required was undertaken and completed within the required timeframe.
11. The positive relationships established with building owners, building managers, project managers, engineers and building professionals provide a good platform for WCC to build on and to work with the sector to progress the larger Earthquake Prone Building Programme to ensure a more resilient and safer Wellington.
12. The availability of funding and the way this was administered made a big difference to the cost impact on building owners and created a positive incentive to get the work done within the very tight timeframe. In the absence of the funding support it is unlikely the URM programme could have been successful. Funding support was critical for many who in the absence of this could not have undertaken the work required.
13. Notwithstanding the challenges faced WCC and MBIE worked well together to implement and adapt their approach in response to issues that emerged and more real time information.
14. The Council’s initial “light touch” approach based on provision of information, active communication and monitoring was insufficient in the circumstances. In response to the difficulties and challenges that emerged in the first months of the project to getting the building work required done the Council re-evaluated its approach and changed the way it operated. The project structure was strengthened, resources increased and greater priority given to the project and a cross organisational team approach was put in place.
15. This move to a more formally structured project management regime for the URM Programme and bringing in additional resources with project management and building skills, while adding additional costs, made a discernible difference to the outcome.
16. This was a new way of working for the Council and created some tensions and challenges internally in terms of culture and practice and at times conflicting priorities, however the commitment to giving priority to public safety and the URM Programme enabled these to be overcome.

17. The URM programme demonstrated the benefits of working with a cross organisation team within a dedicated project structure to provide active leadership and direction to deliver results.
18. The insights and learnings from the URM Programme are applicable to the wider and more complex Earthquake-prone Building Programme. It is recommended that the Council review its current approach to the EQPB Programme to ensure it has the governance, leadership, project structure, resourcing and skills necessary to be successful.
19. It is also recommended that Council, working with Government /MBIE, give consideration to possible funding options to assist with the costs of earthquake strengthening particularly for affected apartment owners and small building owners who may struggle to meet the costs of earthquake strengthening.

Background

20. Following the 7.8 magnitude Kaikoura Earthquake on 14 November 2016 advice from GNS (Institute of Geological and Nuclear Science) was that there was an increased risk of further earthquakes/aftershocks from Amberley in the South Island to Lower Hutt in the North Island.
21. The risk of further earthquakes/aftershocks in Wellington, Lower Hutt, Marlborough and Hurunui posed an increased risk to public safety from possible collapse of parapets and facades on unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings. This was particularly so in locations with high concentrations of street-facing URM buildings and high levels of pedestrian and vehicle traffic.
22. While the initial Kaikoura earthquake was unusual in that it impacted more on some modern engineered structures than on stiffer low strength unreinforced masonry buildings, the risk to URM buildings from aftershocks remained high especially if further earthquakes/aftershocks occurred closer to Wellington.
23. Wellington is vulnerable to seismic events and has a significant number of URM buildings. Public safety concerns were raised by the New Zealand Society for Earthquake Engineering and the Structural Engineering Society of New Zealand in a submission to the then Minister of Building and Housing Hon Nick Smith on 8 December about unsecured parapets and facades on URM buildings. These organisations also raised their concerns directly with the Mayor of Wellington City Justin Lester.
24. The Societies strongly recommended the introduction of a financial incentive to earthquake prone building owners to accelerate securing of “at risk” facades and parapets adjoining public spaces within a limited timeframe to reduce the threat to public safety.
25. Unreinforced masonry buildings can perform poorly in earthquakes. Parts of the masonry can break away from the building and parapets and facades can collapse onto the ground endangering lives. Thirty-nine people lost their lives in Christchurch in February 2011 when URM buildings failed during the earthquake and collapsed on building occupants, pedestrians and a passing bus.
26. Work undertaken by the Department of Building and Housing in 2012 which included review of the cause of death from failure of unreinforced masonry buildings in the Canterbury February 2011 earthquake, found that 70% of the deaths occurred to people outside the building.* [Submission from the Society for Earthquake Engineering and the Structural Engineering Society NZSEE to the Minister of Building and Housing, *Public Safety Initiatives Kaikoura Earthquakes, 8 December 2016.*]

27. The Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission of Inquiry established to examine building issues following the Christchurch earthquakes found the need to secure or remove hazardous elements of URM buildings in the interests of public safety.
28. In response to the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016 had been passed in May 2016 and was due to come into force in July 2017. The Amendment Act addresses overall building performance in earthquakes longer term and sets specific requirements in terms of priority buildings and timeframes for earthquake strengthening.
29. Buildings in high and medium seismic risk areas that are considered to present a greater risk because of their construction type, use or location are designated “priority buildings” and are required to be identified and remediated in shorter timeframes. This includes URM buildings that have parts that could fall in an earthquake onto certain roads or thoroughfares and buildings that could impede strategic routes if they were to collapse in an earthquake
30. Securing parapets and facades of URM buildings was identified as a cost-effective way to reduce the risk to people in future earthquakes. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) had already undertaken work on developing standard details to enable facades and parapets to be secured with minimum engineering involvement.* [Submission from the New Zealand Society of Earthquake Engineering and the Structural Engineering Society NZSEE to the Minister of Building and Housing 8 December 2106 and MBIE Guidance Document: *Securing parapets and facades on unreinforced masonry buildings*, February 2017].
31. In response to the increased risk from unreinforced masonry buildings after the Kaikoura earthquake and the concerns raised by seismic and structural engineers the Government brought forward some of the requirements of the new Building Act by way of an Order in Council to address public safety concerns.
32. This Order in Council amended the Building Act to require owners of URM buildings to secure the street-facing parapets and facades to address the increased risk to public safety from these buildings in a much shorter timeframe and to provide for temporary securing of parapets and facades until such time as longer-term strengthening was done. The Order in Council was made under the Hurunui/Kaikoura Earthquakes Recovery Act 2016 and came into force on 28 February 2017 and was revoked on March 2018.
33. A \$4.5 million fund was established to support building owners to undertake the works in recognition of the cost imposts on building owners within a short timeframe and also the public safety aspects. The fund was jointly funded by Government and territorial authorities. It was intended to fund up to 50% of costs with initial limits of \$10,000 for a parapet and \$15,000 for a façade. These sums were later adjusted to reflect the reality of the costs involved. Wellington City Council’s contribution was \$1 million.

The Hurunui/Kaikoura Earthquakes Recovery (Unreinforced Masonry Buildings) Order 2017

34. The Order in Council is attached as Appendix 1.
35. The key components of the Order in Council were as follows:
 - Created a new class of dangerous building – street facing URM buildings;
 - Enabled territorial authorities to issue notices under section 124 of the Building Act to building owners requiring them to do work to secure parapets and facades of their dangerous street-facing URM buildings within one year of the date of the notice;

- Set out the requirements for notices regarding dangerous street-facing URM buildings, including the requirement to notify Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Toanga if the building was a heritage building
 - Required that notices be issued by the territorial authorities no later than 29 March 2017 to owners of URM buildings that had street facing parapets or facades that may fall onto any part of a listed street in an earthquake;
 - Specified the streets to which the Order in Council applied
 - Clarify that penalties apply to building owners that fail to comply with a notice from the territorial authority relating to a street-facing URM building and that owners could be fined up to \$200,000 for this offence.
 - Clarified that a territorial authority could take further action if a street-facing URM building posed an immediate danger;
 - Amended Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Building Act to exempt building work needed to secure the parapets or facades from the requirement to obtain a building consent, as long as:
 - The design was carried out by or reviewed by a chartered professional engineer;
 - The design had regard to any applicable heritage values of the building or the area in which the building was located to the extent that was reasonably practical in the circumstances;
 - Work is carried out in accordance with the design;
 - The relevant territorial authority is advised of the intention to carry out any building work not less than three working days before any building work was carried out.
 - Provided that a resource consent under the Resource Management Act was not required for work to secure URM parapets and facades of street-facing buildings as long as:
 - The building owners had received a section 124 notice from either the Wellington City, Hutt City, Hurunui District or Marlborough District Council and was required to secure the parapets and facades of the building within 12 months;
 - The work did not involve demolition.
36. The rationale for the streets included in the Order in Council is set out in the MBIE Guidance document put out in February 2107 based on the following criteria:
- Areas where people are concentrated (outdoor cafes, restaurants, bars, theatres, malls)
 - Public transport hubs or stops, or where people congregate for public transport
 - In central business areas or areas of high economic or social activity
 - Areas of high foot traffic – eg walking routes to and from central or local public transport centres (railway station and carparking buildings)
 - Routes likely to be used by emergency services, either in an emergency or because they are the only route to central services such as hospitals.
37. The Order in Council made territorial authorities (Hutt City Council, Wellington City Council, Hurunui District Council and Marlborough District Council) responsible for overseeing the requirement to secure unreinforced masonry parapets and facades.

Comment

38. The use of an Order in Council made under the Hurunui/Kaikoura Earthquakes Recovery Act was to enable a rapid regulatory response in a situation of heightened danger to public safety. The Order was prescriptive and set out in detail what was required. It created the legal obligation on building owners to undertake the work and provided the necessary powers and penalties to enable the territorial authorities to enforce the Order and ensure the work was done.
39. To enable work to be done quickly and to expedite the process the Order in Council provided for an exemption from the usual building consent and resource consent requirements in specific circumstances. The work required needed to be designed and/or certified by a Chartered Professional Engineer and have regard to any applicable heritage values to the extent that was reasonably practical in the circumstances, for the exemption to apply. .
40. As with any legislative vehicle prepared in a short timeframe, with imperfect information and in response to an emergency situation, some of the implications and consequences had not been fully worked through/considered. The likely costs and timeframe required to undertake the work were underestimated and the Order in Council provided no mechanism to adjust for this. The Order in Council was an inflexible mechanism given it was timebound (one year only, 28 February 2017- 31 March 2018) and linked to emergency legislation which would be repealed.
41. Undoubtedly there were some Wellington building owners who thought the deadlines would be movable and/or the Council would not enforce the Order and prosecute based on past performance and thus were not seized with a sense of urgency. The majority of Wellington building owners, however, accepted that the public safety risks had to be addressed. A significant number faced considerable delays to the work they were required to do due to difficulties getting engineering assessments completed and extreme pressure on resources to undertake the work in what was already a “hot” construction market.
42. The assumption that Chartered Professional Engineers would be willing to carry out and/or sign off the work without going through the building consenting process turned out not to be the case in practice for a lot of the work required.
43. This is discussed in further detail later in the report but in summary many engineers were concerned about their liability in the absence of Council consenting and checking as well as concerns about documentation for future work. The work was also seen by many as difficult and often uncertain in scope and there was plenty of other work available that was more straightforward. This led to difficulties getting engineering assessments done particularly for small building owners that didn’t have an existing relationship with a structural engineer or structural engineering company.
44. It also put pressure on the Council’s building consenting processes and created delays as there had been an underlying assumption that this fast track approach would be attractive to many building owners and engineers and a business as usual approach to building consenting could be maintained. This was not the case.
45. Under the Order in Council if building owners did not complete the work within 12 months and meet the March 2018 deadline their access to funding support would be lost and they would be liable to prosecution.

46. This created very considerable anxiety and stress for building owners particularly for small building owners, who did not have the capacity and capability to progress this work at speed and for residential apartment buildings with multiple owners with individual circumstances.
47. Building owners who had bank finance contingent on them meeting the requirements and accessing the funding support faced considerable financial risk in the event they could not meet the requirements. For many building owners there was a loss of rental income as tenants had to be moved out. For many tenants and apartment dwellers there was considerable costs and stress associated with having to vacate premises, find alternative accommodation and/or the inconvenience of the building work being done.
48. By mid July 2017 104 Wellington buildings remained on the URM list and only 46% of building owners had been able to engage a structural engineer. By end of September 98 buildings remained on the URM list.
49. Government and Council recognised the problems being faced by building owners in complying with the Order in Council and took a pragmatic approach to addressing the issues in order to achieve the public safety outcomes sought.
50. The Council recognised that a “light touch” approach was not going to be successful and it needed to change the way it worked. It changed its approach to one of active leadership and hands on management of the URM programme to support building owners facing significant challenges and started to drive the work that needed to be done. Additional resources and expertise were brought in to bolster Council’s capability and capacity. This was the beginning of the turn around and is discussed in more detail further in the report.
51. In December the new Minister for Building and Construction, Hon Jenny Salesa, announced that in response to the “constraints building owners were facing” changes would be made to the flexibility and level of funding available and the time before penalties would apply to building owners would be extended.
52. Funding was increased from February 2018 to a grant of up to \$65,000 for buildings larger than two storeys and for others up to \$25,000 to secure either a single parapet or façade or both. Other changes were also made to make the funding more flexible.
53. The Government made the Hurunui/Kaikoura Earthquakes Recovery (Unreinforced Masonry Buildings) Amendment Order 2018 on 5 March 2018 with a sunset clause of 31 March 2018. The effect of this was to provide building owners with a defence against prosecution if they missed the 31 March deadline contingent on the following:
 - Completion of the works within 18 months of the original URM Notice being issued and
 - Proof that “reasonable steps towards complying with the notice” had been taken by 31 March 2018.
54. This in effect provided a six month extension for building owners to complete the work and retain access to funding. Failure to do this would result in prosecution and loss of funding. The incentives to complete the necessary work were compelling. As long as building owners were determined to have taken reasonable steps by 31 March they would be able to access funding support.
55. The use of the Order in Council to address the public safety concerns regarding URM buildings by amending the regulatory framework (the Building Act) and setting a short, defined timeframe for the work to be completed created some challenges due to lack of flexibility, technical legal constraints and unforeseen issues that emerged. Nevertheless it provided for a fast track response to an immediate public safety issue and focussed the attention of building owners on what needed to be done.

56. The funding that supported the Order in Council was a critical incentive to getting building owners to buy into the programme, recognise the public safety issues and be willing to undertake the work. It was in building owners interests to do the work given that much of the work done would contribute to meeting their obligations under the Earthquake-prone Building Act. For many small building owners the funding, together with the support package the Council offered to get the work done, made the difference between being able to carry out the work or walking away from their building.
57. When the limitations of the Order in Council became apparent regarding the timeframe imposed and underestimation of the complexity and cost of the work required Government/MBIE and Council worked together to come up with a pragmatic solution to extend the timeframe without removing the impetus to get the work done. Ultimately the Order in Council achieved its purpose notwithstanding the challenges.

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) Guidance Document - securing parapets and facades on unreinforced masonry buildings.

58. The MBIE Guidance document first released in February 2017 provided background and context for the Order in Council. It provided information and guidance in plain English to building owners, Councils and engineers as well as technical advice to assist engineers design and develop solutions for securing facades and parapets on the types of buildings identified as a public safety risk in the event of a significant aftershock following the Kaikoura earthquake.
59. It set out the roles and obligations of the three Councils to identify the buildings that were subject to the Order in Council, to issue notices under section 124 for “street-facing URM buildings”, to liaise with building owners to provide guidance and to assist them understand their obligations under the Order in Council. This included whether or not building and resource consents would be required for the work proposed or would be covered by the exemption provided for in the Order in Council. It also required Councils to take into account heritage considerations as far as practical.
60. The Guidance document identifies that there was likely to be significant pressure on available resources, in particular chartered professional engineers and building contractors, and encouraged building owners to work with neighbouring building owners to share resources. It also suggests that Councils may wish to setup a network of engineers and contractors available to undertake work in their areas to support building owners get the work done.
61. The document provided clarification as to what was an acceptable scope of works (for securing parapets and facades to the existing structure rather full earthquake strengthening). It also provided examples of good practice in securing URM facades and parapets, particularly in relation to heritage buildings, and technical advice around securing concepts. It was noted that URM buildings have their own particular characteristics and there is no one size fits all solution. Distinction was made between “securing” as distinct from “strengthening” and noted that securing would be adequate given time constraints and financial constraints on building owners. Also securing could be temporary or permanent. This was a signal to engineers and building owners that a temporary solution that did the job would be adequate in the short term prior to completion of longer-term earthquake strengthening work.

Comment

62. The MBIE Guidance document was regarded as helpful by the majority of those interviewed. Notwithstanding that some engineers were critical of errors in some technical calculations in the initial edition (this was subsequently addressed in a further edition) most found the document useful in providing context and purpose for the Government’s decision and in setting out the respective roles of Councils and building owners, and how the exemption from building consents would apply.

63. Some engineers were critical of what they regarded as a lack of clarity around the requirements from a technical perspective and were uncomfortable with a temporary fix approach. In part this was because of broader concerns about the earthquake-prone nature of the buildings in question and whether a temporary fix could be successfully achieved and meet 34% of the New Building Standard. This was a matter of some discussion and debate.
64. It was suggested that given the breadth of the audience the document was seeking to inform it may have been better to produce a separate technical document specifically for engineers and construction professionals.

Funding arrangements

65. The Government and affected councils set up a \$4million fund to support building owners who were subject to the requirements of the Order in Council. This reflected the substantial public safety element to the work required to be done and the very tight timeframe for this to be completed. It also recognised that affected building owners were being faced with costs that they hadn't budgeted for as requirements for earthquake strengthening were being brought forward in the interests of public safety following the Kaikoura earthquake.
66. Initially the funding was to contribute approximately half of the design and construction work a for securing parapets and facades, up to a maximum of \$10,000 for a URM parapet and \$15,000 for a URM façade and was administered by MBIE. Application for funding could only be made on the completion of the work with appropriate documentation/invoices.
67. Subsequently it was recognised that the real costs of the building work to be done were in excess of what had been anticipated and the process was more complex. Changes were made to make the funding process more responsive to the reality of the situation and levels of funding were increased. By this time there was also better understanding of what likely costs would be and how funding could be better allocated given that the level of funding was limited. Changes were made.
68. Wellington City Council took over administering the funding for buildings in Wellington City of one to two stories as part of a more hands on approach and was able to be more flexible in how it worked with building owners that needed more support. MBIE continued to administer the funding for more complex buildings of three stories or more.
69. Funding was increased from February 2018 to a grant of up to \$65,000 for buildings larger than two storeys and for others up to \$25,000 to secure either a single parapet or façade or both.
70. Other changes were also made to make the funding more flexible allowing for claims for engineering assessments to be made when the work was invoiced rather than only when the building work was completed. This assisted building owners considerably in managing cash flow and costs. It did not however contribute to the consequential costs many building owners faced as a result of lost tenant income or the costs of temporary residential accommodation where premises had to be vacated to enable work to be done.

Comment

71. All of the parties interviewed for the review were complimentary about the way both MBIE and the Council dealt with applications for funding. It is clear that good processes had been put in place to expedite claims and where further information/documentation was required this was communicated quickly to the building owner so the applications could be expedited. The focus was on getting the funding to the building owners as quickly as possible to assist them manage the costs and process.

72. Changes that needed to be made to make the funding more flexible and of greater assistance to building owners were made.
73. The funding arrangements entered into later in the project which split the administration of funding between MBIE and the Council seemed to work well although there undoubtedly will have been some loose ends to tidy up and the Council's costs were higher than projected.
74. Building owners are not a homogenous group and funding and support made available needs to recognise this.
75. Those building owners that are professional operators and property developers generally have the capability and resources to invest in and manage their property to maintain the value of their assets and to continue to attract tenants. Many of these building owners were already undertaking, or planning, earthquake strengthening work to meet the new earthquake-prone building requirements and in response to market demand for buildings that meet higher NBS. The funding created a positive incentive for these building owners to undertake particular work that contributed to overall strengthening in a faster time frame than would have otherwise been the case.
76. Other building owners are not in the same league – they own just one or two small commercial buildings and have done so for a long time. The building is their place of business or provides them with some income, or it is their home and income. They could not be described as property developers. This group has limited resources and capacity.
77. The other category is apartment owners. The building is their home and they are in a different situation to other residential dwellings. Because of the multiplicity of owners holding unit titles and their different circumstances, particular problems and challenges emerged with apartments that are likely to be ongoing with future earthquake strengthening requirements.
78. For these two types of building owners the funding to support the URM project was critical. Without it would not have been possible for a significant number to meet the costs of getting the work done in the timeframe required.
79. This raises issues for the Council and Government in terms of the broader earthquake strengthening programme that is underway (albeit with a much longer timeframe) and how small building owners and apartment owners will meet these costs and the associated costs incurred through loss of income or temporary rental accommodation.
80. Some buildings will not be worth the investment to strengthen further due to age or design and will be sold and/or demolished. For others strengthening will be viable but potentially unaffordable, or they won't be able to access the necessary funds, which is likely to result in some building owners selling their property. For apartment owners this is a vexed issue and a matter of considerable concern.
81. In the absence of funding support to assist apartment owners to manage costs and possibly for small building owners facing hardship (additional to that available for historic buildings) it is hard to see how the much bigger, more complex and costly earthquake strengthening programme can achieve the results sought without considerable negative impact on some building owners.

Wellington City Council response to the requirement to address public safety risks of URM buildings

82. While no state of emergency was declared in Wellington the Kaikoura earthquake had a significant impact on some Wellington buildings particularly in parts of the CBD. Wellington Council officers were involved in the response to the earthquake from the beginning working with MBIE, EQC, GNS and technical engineering societies and engineering consultancy practices to respond to the earthquake damage caused to some buildings
83. Wellington City Council was involved in discussions on the risk presented by URM buildings with unsecured parapets and facades from the start and contributed to the development of the URM policy and the Order in Council from an operational rather than policy perspective. A WCC staff member was seconded to MBIE part time to assist.
84. The Council was well placed to move quickly to issue notices to possible URM building owners under section 124. It had already identified most of the likely earthquake prone priority buildings in Wellington and had advised the relevant building owners of this and the requirements of the new Earthquake-prone Buildings Act. Under the auspices of the Order in Council Section 124 notices were issued to owners of 113 URM buildings by end of March 2017.
85. A programme of work and small project team was set up (with Legal and Communications support) within the WCC Building Resilience group. Case managers were assigned to each building on a “watching brief” basis. The approach at this stage was described as a “light touch” where the Council would communicate with building owners and provide information and advice and let them get on with it. There was an underlying assumption that the exemption from the need to secure building consents by using chartered professional engineers would be the likely course taken and therefore have less impact on Council’s building consenting resources. This did not turn out to be the case in practice.
86. Some of the information held by the Council regarding status of buildings was incorrect or inadequate and building owners received section 124 notices that were not warranted. This required some building owners to have an engineering assessment done and/or to provide evidence that work had already been undertaken so that the section 124 notice could be lifted. In some instances this was a point of dispute between engineers/owners and the Council as to what work was required and whether the work undertaken was sufficient to meet the requirement to remove the risks related to parapets and facades in the short term.
87. URM Building Owners’ Forums were held by the Council on Monday 3 April and Wednesday 5 April. The meetings were for the Council to provide background on the URM Programme and the requirements of the Order in Council, to introduce the Council team who would be the point of contact throughout, to discuss how to apply for funding and answer questions. Building owners were invited to these meetings when they were first notified about the URM Programme and issued with the section 124 notices.
88. The Council also ran “small building owner hubs” on a weekly basis from 10 May – 1 June 2017. Case managers made themselves available to meet with individual building owners to discuss specifics of their building(s), answer questions and provide advice on how to navigate the process. The weekly hubs were held at the Earthquake Recovery Information Centre in the Public Trust Building Lambton Quay and Kia Ora Newtown from 9.30am – 12.30pm.
89. The Forums and hubs were supported by an active communication strategy – largely by email. Updates and reminders were provided continually to owners. As time progressed the emails became more focussed on what was required and what the implications for building owners would be if they failed to complete the work within the timeframe.

90. During the first months of the programme dedicated staff resources were light with the Council continuing to work on a business as usual basis. There was also an internal restructuring and staff changes which impacted on leadership of the project and changes in personnel.
91. By mid May 2017 only 5 section 124 notices had been lifted, predominantly from buildings that had just been strengthened, had been demolished or were not covered by the URM policy. By mid July 104 buildings remained on the URM list and only 46% of building owners had engaged an engineer. By September 98 buildings remained on the URM list.
92. In May additional resources were added to the project team together with support from other parts of the Council – most importantly from the building consenting area, resource consenting and heritage and technical advice. The Council began to move from a “light touch” to more active leadership of the Programme and engagement with building owners.
93. A stocktake made it clear that many building owners were struggling, not only with securing engineering advice but being able to contract and manage the building work necessary to complete the repairs. There was widespread anxiety particularly amongst small building owners and residential apartment dwellers and their corporate bodies that they would not be able to fund or complete the required work within the timeframe and thus be liable to prosecution.
94. The Council recognised that it would need to change the way it was operating to support buildings owners and achieve the public safety goal the URM programme was required to deliver.
95. Led by the Council Chief Resilience Officer a stronger mandate was sought to change the way the Council operated and to actively lead the URM programme to achieve success and give it priority. This was supported by Council senior leadership and the Mayor as public safety remained of great concern to all.
96. In November additional funding of \$500,000 was provided to the Programme through reprioritisation of Council funding for other earthquake strengthening work. Additional resources were engaged, most importantly specialist project management resources were brought in. This provided stronger project management and the necessary project disciplines. Planning, tracking and reporting were strengthened to drive the programme to completion together with some redesign of processes to better take account of how the construction industry worked.
97. Leadership of the programme was clarified and strengthened and the URM Programme became a dedicated project team reporting directly to the Chief Resilience Officer. At this point the project moved from a somewhat organic, responsive approach to a structured, actively driven, cross organisation approach focussed on achieving the purpose of the Order in Council to ensure better public safety. Priority was given to this work across the relevant areas of the Council.
98. Case managers who had built good relationships with building owners and had a customer-focussed approach became the liaison between building owners and Council processes. Their job was to maintain an active relationship with building owners, remove barriers and find ways to make things work.

99. The building consenting process was streamlined to facilitate and expedite consenting for URM work and the inclusion of resource consenting and heritage expertise onto the URM project team allowed for a simplified, pragmatic and consistent approach to issues that arose. Technical support and assistance was provided by the traffic control team to manage the impact on traffic as work often required road closure or traffic management which was challenging given the buildings were on main thoroughfares and in high pedestrian areas. All the relevant parts of Council worked together across the organisation focussed on achieving a common goal.
100. Weekly meetings were put in place comprising the URM project team and staff from across the Council providing support to the URM project in their particular areas of expertise to ensure good planning, communication and information flow and identify and manage risks and solve problems.
101. To facilitate and support building owners facing significant challenges the Council brought in further resources to bolster its capability and capacity and the Council shifted to a much more hands on leadership approach and management of the URM programme to get the work done. This was a critical shift in approach.
102. The Council contracted RCP, a construction project management company from Christchurch initially to provide project management expertise and then to deliver the URM Support Package to those building owners of small one/two storey buildings who were struggling to get the work done.
103. RCP had led the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Agency's (CERA) demolition programme in Christchurch for 5 years and had experience in dealing with building owners and access to technical and construction expertise as well as providing project management skills.
104. Through RCP the Council effectively offered a "turn key" assistance package to owners of smaller/simpler projects where it was considered that costs were likely to be around \$50,000 (in practice the costs were often considerably higher). This offered building owners who were in effect "stuck" a pathway to get the work done.
105. By November 2017 RCP was on board and contracted by the Council to deliver a hands-on assistance package to small building owners who had struggled to find structural engineers and contractors to do the work required to ensure the work was done. For building owners opting into the Support Package RCP took over the work to be done from engineering assessment through arranging and overseeing the necessary building work and ensuring timeframes were met.
106. The Council paid RCP directly for the work undertaken and had in place contractual arrangements with the building owners to secure payment. This removed the risk from RCP, engineers and builders about being paid for the work and took some pressure off building owners who were struggling to fund repairs.
107. The Council put in place a process whereby it would recoup the building costs for the work, net of the funding support applicable, from the building owner. In the event the building owner was experiencing severe hardship arrangements were put in place to pay the amount owed.
108. The Order in Council had given the Council the power to undertake whatever works were necessary on URM buildings to protect public safety if the building owner failed to do so, and to be able to recoup these costs through prosecuting the building owner. Rather than take a heavy-handed approach the Council chose to offer a Support Package to achieve the same result in a constructive way.

109. This approach was greatly appreciated by those who accessed the package many of whom were simply unable to get the work done themselves and were very stressed and anxious not only about costs and the threat of prosecution but also about the fact their building posed a threat to public safety.

Comment

110. In the first stages of the programme the Council response was “light touch”. This approach evolved organically to a more structured approach in response to the difficulties that arose and challenges faced with getting the building work required completed as building owners struggled to meet the requirements of the Order in Council. This responsiveness and willingness to adapt reflects well on the Council staff involved and the commitment they had to the completion and success of the project and ensuring public safety at the time.
111. With hindsight better planning and dedicated leadership of the project could have potentially achieved the results with less stress and pressure on staff, and also possibly building owners, and at less cost.
112. Initially the URM Project was added to an existing role and lacked dedicated leadership and appropriate project structure. The initial project planning and identification of risks was limited and the scope of the project was underestimated as were resourcing requirements. In part this was due to how the Council viewed its role and an underlying assumption that the exemption from building and resource consent requirements using chartered professional engineers would be the likely route many building owners would take.
113. At the time the Council was also dealing with the demolition of several large buildings in Wellington that had been severely damaged by the earthquake as well as the implementation of the new Earthquake-prone Building legislation. In short Council resources were under pressure. There was also an internal restructuring taking place that impacted on staff and expertise in the relevant work areas and that caused some disruption to personnel and leadership.
114. While communication and engagement with building owners was active and comprehensive no work appears to have been done to assess the likely impact of demand on existing construction resources and how this might be managed. The Council did publish a list on the WCC website of engineers that had indicated they were available to do the work. Owners were directed to this when they couldn’t find an engineer.
115. The resources and leadership approach required to drive a programme of this nature within the very tight time frame, and in a building market that was already stretched, were underestimated and critical project management skills were initially lacking. The Council needed to work differently. This was not “business as usual”.
116. Changes at MBIE resulted in some loss of technical expertise and continuity which created some challenges for the Council to get clear direction on issues that arose that had not been anticipated.
117. That fact that these issues were recognised and addressed during the project is to be commended.
118. The Council changed the way it worked to operate on a cross organisational project team basis, with the right resources and skills, and the priority and leadership required to ensure the success of the project. It adapted and responded to the challenges of implementing the programme and started to work actively alongside building owners. In effect it offered a “one stop shop” to building owners to process consents, funding applications, provide advice and monitor progress.

119. The case manager approach ensured that building owners were actively engaged with, the issues they were facing were known and understood and building owners felt they had “someone in their corner” to help them navigate Council processes, remove road blocks and help them get the work done.
120. The case managers were sensitive to the different needs of building owners and tailored their approach. In some cases they were very hands on, in other cases they let the building owners get on with it but maintained sufficient contact to make sure things were progressing well and to see if any assistance was needed. Building owners felt they could contact their case manager directly if needed and they would get a timely response.
121. Bringing in RCP to provide a managed solution for those building owners that were struggling to get the work done at all was a game changer. RCP instilled strong project management skills, project reporting and brought additional resources.
122. Moving from an administrative, process driven approach to an active, client/customer focussed approach was welcomed by those involved and much appreciated. Working in this way changed the way the Council was perceived by those involved.
123. Without exception building owners and others interviewed were positive in their comments about the Council team and how they operated, particularly the project manager and case managers whose approach was described by several building owners as “above and beyond”. The focus on facilitating the work and removing roadblocks was widely seen as very positive and something building owners and building professionals/engineers would like to see more of.
124. This was a new way of working for the Council. It created some tensions and challenges internally in terms of culture and practice and at times resulted in conflicting priorities across work areas which was stressful for staff. The commitment to giving priority to public safety and the URM Programme enabled these to be overcome. The pressure on staff involved to get the programme over the line within the deadline was intense and required considerable resourcing and cost.
125. With hindsight the Wellington Council response would have benefitted from a more formal, structured project approach from the beginning rather than evolving as it did in response to events. Improved planning, project management skills and dedicated leadership could have delivered a more proactive approach from the beginning.
126. A more formal governance, project and reporting structure would likely have provided earlier insights to senior managers of the resourcing requirements, the challenges and difficulties that emerged for building owners, the constraints within the building sector and that the consent exemption process was not proving to be the preferred path. All of these had wider implications for the Council and its ability to successfully deliver the URM programme.
127. The resources and skills required to implement the programme successfully would have been identified earlier which would have resulted in a better, more efficient way of working and possibly reduced costs. An active approach to bringing together a cross organisation team from the start would have reduced some of the internal tensions and conflicting priorities. It would have given the project higher visibility within the Council and ensured appropriate priority was given to the work.
128. Improving and strengthening governance and project structure as well improving technical project management capability and disciplines within the Council are important factors to take from the learnings and insights from the URM programme.

129. Just as important however is how the Council works – it’s culture. One of the things that made a real difference to the success of the URM programme and how the Council was perceived by building owners and all those involved, was the change in the way the Council worked – the change to a customer/client focussed approach as distinct from an administrative, compliance process approach was significant.
130. Working across the organisation during the URM programme to provide a one stop shop/single point of contact for building owners, engineers, contractors etc made it easier to engage with the Council rather than with separate operational silos which can be difficult to navigate and to find the right person. Operating on a cross organisational basis paid dividends. This way of working was fundamental to the success of the URM programme. Staff were given the requisite authority and were totally committed to delivering a public safety outcome and supporting building owners to do this. They were focussed on results for the city and people, not just process.
131. This shift in approach and the outcomes it can deliver is something worth taking forward. The Council might reflect on how it can integrate this approach into its operating model and organisational culture and how it engages with its citizens and communities.
132. The lessons learned from the URM programme and the way the project evolved have direct application to the way the Council leads and manages the bigger Earthquake-prone Building Programme. Appropriate governance and project structure, leadership, planning, reporting and resourcing will be vital to the success of this substantial programme of work which will extend over many years. So too is the approach that Council choses to take to managing this programme and how it engages with building owners and the community to gain buy in, facilitate the work needed and achieve the outcome it wants for Wellington - improved earthquake resilience that benefits all.

Exemption from building consenting process and engineers’ response

133. The Order in Council amended Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Building Act to exempt building work needed to secure the parapets or facades from the requirement to obtain a building consent, as long as:
 - The design was carried out by or reviewed by a chartered professional engineer;
 - The design had regard to any applicable heritage values of the building or the area in which the building was located to the extent that was reasonably practical in the circumstances;
 - Work is carried out in accordance with the design;
 - The relevant territorial authority is advised of the intention to carry out any building work not less than three working days before any building work was carried out.
134. This exemption was provided as a means of expediting the process and thus assist getting the necessary building work done quickly given the urgency and heighten risk to public safety. It allowed building work to be undertaken to secure facades and/or parapets on URM buildings, without going through the normal building consenting process, as long as a chartered professional engineer was used and/or certified that the work met the requirements of the Building Act, in particular 34% or greater of the New Building Standard (NBS) and achieved the purpose of addressing the risk. The overall building could still be earthquake prone and still considered a “priority building” under the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act, but the immediate presenting risk to public safety had been addressed.

Comment

135. While there had been discussion with the engineering community led by MBIE and respected seismic and structural engineers about the need to urgently address the public safety risk posed by URM building parapets and facades in the aftermath of the Kaikoura earthquake and the merits of providing a fast track process to address these issues, what was attractive in theory turned out not to be so attractive in practice. The assumption that chartered professional engineers would be willing to carry out and/or sign off the work without going through the building consenting process turned out not to be the case for a lot of the work required.
136. There were a number of chartered professional engineers and engineering companies that stepped up and took on the responsibility of this work. This was particularly so where there was an existing relationship between the building owner and the engineering company. In many cases this was because earthquake strengthening work was already planned or underway and the building owner and engineers knew what they were dealing with.
137. Some engineers preferred to work through the building consenting process as the work to secure parapets and facades was part of a broader suite of earthquake strengthening work. There was also some uncertainty around technical interpretation of how just addressing facades and parapets on an URM earthquake-prone building could meet 34% of NBS.
138. For many engineers and building owners the first best option was to secure parapets and facades as part of the broader earthquake strengthening work rather than do a temporary fix. This was potentially the most cost effective and efficient way to do the work and also to take advantage of the funding available. This way work done in the short term to address this specific issue would not be wasted /redundant in the overall strengthening that needed to be done to comply with future requirements. Engineers interviewed said that for the most part work undertaken to comply with the Order in Council would be used as part of further strengthening work and was not redundant, although there were some instances of this.
139. Many engineers, however, were concerned about liability in the absence of the Council consenting process and had concerns about possible lack of documentation and how this would play out in the future. This impacted in two ways: either engineers didn't utilise the fast track route and opted for the consenting process, or the fact that the work could be difficult and scope was often hard to establish meant that many engineers decided not to do this work as there was plenty of other work available that was more straight forward and as one described it "not as difficult and dirty".
140. This led to difficulties getting engineering assessments done as the number of engineers willing to undertake the work was limited and it also put pressure back on the Council's consenting processes which had not been anticipated.
141. Many small building owners struggled to find engineers willing to undertake the assessments at all let alone use the fast track exemption route.
142. The provision of the exemption from having to obtain a building consent (within clear parameters) if chartered professional engineers carried out and/or reviewed and certified the work was an innovative response to the urgency of the situation, the concern about public safety and the tight timeframe imposed. Concerns about liability and how the exemption would work in practice as well as uncertainty about longer-term implications meant, however, that many engineers did not find this approach attractive.

143. If there had been more time to work through the detail and implications of the exemption (particularly in relation to liability) some of these concerns would undoubtedly been addressed and the response and take up potentially different. The opportunity for further work on this approach for future application remains. The potential to develop standardised parameters for fast tracking building consents in urgent situations is also worth exploring. With each of these approaches how liability is addressed will be key.

Conclusions

144. The URM Project was a success and achieved the outcome sought to reduce the risk to public safety through securing high risk facades and parapets on URM buildings in Wellington in the aftermath of the Kaikoura earthquake.
145. The Council's initial "light touch" approach based on provision of information, active communication and monitoring was insufficient in the circumstances. In response to the difficulties and challenges that emerged in the first months of the project to getting the work needed done the Council re-evaluated its approach and changed the way it operated.
146. Considerably more resources were allocated and the project was given greater priority within Council. At a critical point the Council moved to an actively led programme of engagement and facilitation to support and assist building owners to get the work done within the very tight timeframe, recognising that many building owners were going to struggle to achieve this without support.
147. The way the Council adapted and changed the way it operated in response to the difficulties and challenges being experienced on the ground by building owners was key to the success of the project and is to be commended. It greatly assisted building owners who, without exception, were positive about the support they received from Council officers especially the Project Manager and case managers. Several used the description "above and beyond" to describe the service they received and their appreciation for the client focussed approach taken. Many commented that it was not their usual experience of the Council and that it was an approach and culture they would like to see more of and felt they had built valuable relationships with Council staff.
148. Operating on a cross organisational team basis to provide a one-stop service to support buildings owners undertake the work required, to facilitate process and remove road blocks within the Council was a very different way of working. It was challenging for those involved and at times created tensions in terms of competing priorities within work areas. It demonstrates that with strong leadership, a clear sense of purpose and direction and clear targets, challenging goals can be achieved. It also demonstrates that notwithstanding the Council has a regulatory, quality control role in the issuing of building and resource consents which is essential, this role can be carried out in a way that is more administratively efficient, more customer facing and provides a better experience to the client/building owner. This is likely to promote more willing compliance with the building regulatory framework than just compliance per se.
149. The other critical factor in the success of the URM Programme was the provision of funding to assist building owners and how this was administered. Again both MBIE and the Council responded to challenges that arose and adapted both the quantum of funding available and how it was applied so that it better reflected the reality of the situation and building owners experience.

150. In the absence of the funding the URM Project could not have succeeded. This is particularly the case for small building owners and apartment owners in URM buildings who did not have the capability and resources to carry out the work required and who faced considerable disruption and associated cost impacts in terms of loss of income or alternative rental costs where they had to move out of their homes.
151. Apartments in URM buildings, and in earthquake-prone buildings more broadly, are an issue that needs further consideration in terms of how funding support might be provided. This is a cost other residential dwellers do not face. Many apartment owners have limited or fixed incomes and limited ability to access additional funding.
152. While in the long term the benefits of making buildings more earthquake resilient can be expected to be reflected in the value of the building and its attractiveness to tenants, for many apartment owners the short-term costs are likely to be at best daunting and at worst prohibitive.
153. Currently banks seem to have little appetite to lend for this work and for owners (particularly elderly and those on fixed incomes) their ability to borrow and service borrowing is limited. This is causing considerable concern and anxiety amongst affected apartment owners according to those body corporate representatives interviewed.
154. Corporate bodies also advised that the ability of apartment owners to exit their property is also constrained by the current market which discounts the value of such property quite heavily given the work required to bring it up to the required standard and uncertainty about the costs. This is creating a very difficult and potentially insurmountable situation for some apartment dwellers which has consequences for the other apartment owners within a building.
155. It is not possible to foresee all events. This is especially the case when responding rapidly to an urgent situation, with imperfect information and limited time to consider impacts and consequences. The willingness of Government and Council to adjust and adapt in response to the realities and challenges of the situation in delivering the URM Project was commendable.
156. In light of the experience and learnings from the URM Project consideration needs to be given to the challenges of the broader earthquake prone building programme which is considerably more complex, costly and impacts on a greater number of buildings.
157. In particular consideration needs to be given to the priorities identified, the timescale, and ability for the building and construction market to respond as well as provision of some funding support and possible ways to manage the strengthening costs. Apartment owners are facing substantial costs they are not well placed to manage and small building owners could face hardship in some circumstances. As identified earlier building owners are not a homogenous group, there is a range of capability, capacity and circumstance. One size will not fit all.

Responses to specific questions from Wellington City Council

158. Questions and responses:

<p><i>The use of the Order-in-Council to provide the regulatory framework for the URM Programme - was this approach workable?</i></p> <p><i>What improvement could have been made to the OIC process?</i></p>	<p>The use of the OIC to amend the Building Act to address public safety regarding URM buildings and the tight timeframes imposed, created challenges due to lack of flexibility, technical legal constraints and issues that emerged. It did however enable a rapid response to an immediate public safety issue following the Kaikoura earthquake and ensured building owners gave priority to this work. The OIC was used in the context of broader earthquake strengthening requirements which were known to building owners with earthquake-prone buildings.</p> <p>When the limitations of the OIC became apparent regarding the timeframe imposed and the higher cost and complexity of the work required the Government/MBIE and Council worked together to devise pragmatic solutions. A further OIC was used to address issues that arose regarding the timeframe for completion of work.</p> <p>Ultimately the OIC achieved the intended purpose. It would have been useful if the OIC could have had some flexibility or provision for adjustment if required once better information on costs/ complexity and timeframe were available.</p>
<p><i>Could the regulatory approach have been improved?</i></p>	<p>The Council was involved from the beginning in discussions on the risks presented by URM buildings. Council staff contributed to the development of policy and the OIC albeit from an operational perspective. A Council staff member was seconded part time to MBIE to assist.</p> <p>The regulatory approach taken was devised within a very short time frame, with imperfect information. Undoubtedly this led to some short comings in process and outcome however given the urgency of the situation it was a pragmatic approach.</p>
<p><i>Funding - Did the level of public funding work? How might the level of funding have been better optimized?</i></p> <p><i>Was the process for funding applications appropriate?</i></p> <p><i>Did the MBIE/Council partnership deliver on the outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>Was the contract between MBIE and the Council adequate and the way the funding was managed appropriate?</i></p>	<p>Provision of funding was critical to achieving the public safety outcome and the success of the URM Programme. Building owners were appreciative of the funding but noted that there were additional costs that weren't covered eg loss of tenant income or costs of alternative accommodation while building work was undertaken.</p> <p>While initial levels of funding were inadequate relative to costs, levels were increased and the application process made more responsive to meet building owners' needs and to assist them undertake the work required.</p> <p>WCC taking over administration of funding for smaller building owners where a more hands on approach was required was a good decision that enabled greater flexibility and support to be provided.</p> <p>All parties interviewed were complimentary about how MBIE and WCC dealt with applications and expedited payments.</p> <p>The partnership arrangement between MBIE and WCC appeared to work well although at the time of writing this report there were some "loose ends" to tidy up regarding additional costs incurred by WCC.</p>

<p><i>Operations and logistics - were timeframes realistic?</i></p> <p><i>Did the process by-passing consents work?</i></p> <p><i>Was there reluctance from the engineering profession to be involved? If so, why?</i></p>	<p>The timeframe for completion of the URM Programme was very challenging but must be viewed in the context of the urgency of the situation and public safety risks. Setting such a tight deadline ensured priority was given to doing the work. However the timeframe was not achievable for many building owners due to complexities and challenges faced and a six month extension was provided to complete the work.</p> <p>The exemption from having to obtain building and resource consents within specified parameters was not favoured by many building owners/engineers for a variety of reasons. This was due to the limitations of the exemption and the nature of the building work being undertaken. Also many engineers were reluctant to use this process due to concerns about liability (in the absence of Council involvement/approval).</p> <p>Other engineers were willing to use the process to fast track building work.</p>
<p><i>The use of the case management system appears to have been successful - what were the contributing factors from a range of perspectives both within Council and externally?</i></p>	<p>The case management approach worked well. Case managers actively engaged with building owners and understood the issues owners were facing. Through this they were able to provide information, support, facilitate process and also influence changes to the way the Programme operated.</p> <p>The case managers were sensitive to the different needs of building owners and tailored their approach accordingly. Building owners had a single point of contact and felt they had "someone in their corner" they could contact directly and get a timely response.</p> <p>The case managers were committed to the success of the URM Programme and achieving the outcome sought. They were prepared to "go above and beyond". It was a stressful role given case managers were at the interface between building owners – particularly those facing difficulties, many of whom were under a lot of stress – and Council processes.</p> <p>The change to a cross organisational project team later in the Programme made it easier for the case managers to work across Council and facilitate actions required and to be supported in doing this.</p> <p>Without exception building owners and other building professionals involved in the URM Programme were positive in their comments about the project manager and case managers and their focus on facilitation, support and removing road blocks.</p>

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the Council to consider based on the lessons learned and insights gained from the Debrief of the URM Building Programme. In particular the recommendations relate to the broader Earthquake-prone Building Programme underway and how the Council can adjust its approach to be more effective, inclusive and outcome focused in its dealings with building owners and the building and construction sector.

It is recommended that Wellington City Council:

- 1) Adopt a more customer-focussed “one stop shop” cross organisation approach to building and resource consenting processes and embed these in the way the Council works with the building and construction sector in the future;
- 2) Promote a more proactive culture within the Council that engages actively with the building and construction sector and supports building and development within appropriate parameters, standards and controls, as distinct from a compliance-based focus.
- 3) Invest in and strengthen project management capability and skills within the Council to provide the necessary leadership and skills for future projects that the Council will need to undertake.
- 4) Take a more whole of organisation view about what outcomes the Council wants to achieve from the new Earthquake-prone Building legislation and its implementation.
- 5) Establish a cross organisation team implement the Earthquake-prone Building programme.
- 6) Review the current approach to the implementation of the new Earthquake-prone Building legislation to ensure appropriate governance, programme ownership and management and reporting structures are in place and the Programme has the right leadership and a dedicated team with the right skills, adequate resources and is given the priority required.
- 7) Consider establishing a Steering Group for the EQPB Programme chaired by the Chief City Planner as Programme Sponsor. The Steering Group should include relevant senior Council leaders (eg CFO) and 1-2 independent parties with building sector/engineering expertise to provide the necessary senior leadership oversight of a critical programme. This would bring a broad range of knowledge and experience to the table to assist and support the Council successfully implement the legislation and improve the seismic performance of buildings in Wellington.
- 8) Work together with Government regarding provision of further funding and ways to assist residential apartment building owners manage the costs of future earthquake-strengthening requirements given the circumstances of many apartment owner/dwellers.
- 9) Consider what assistance might be provided to small building owners that face hardship as a result of the costs of earthquake strengthening and their ability to manage these costs.

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