

Citizens' Assembly on the Long-Term Plan

An evaluation of Wellington City Council's pilot in deliberative democracy

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Absolutely Positively Wellington City Council

Me Heke Ki Pōneke

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Executive Summary

Over four consecutive Saturdays in September and October, Wellington City Council (WCC) hosted a Citizens' Assembly with a diverse group of Wellingtonians. The Assembly was convened as part of WCC's engagement for the Long-Term Plan (LTP). A group of 42 people were selected through a detailed sortition process.

Deliberative processes like the Citizens' Assembly can help produce better policy outcomes as they are based on decisions made by an informed 'mini public' rather than public opinion. They help officials understand policy priorities and where public consensus is possible.

Assembly members were tasked with answering the question: 'We need to find a balance between what WCC could deliver, and what resource it has available, which is fair to everyone. How might we do this?' They were asked to apply this question to a reduced set of services in the LTP (including arts, community facilities, open spaces, recreation, transport and urban planning).



10,000 households received an invitation letter in July.



786 people responded, double the expected response rate.



42 Wellingtonians, aged 16+, were randomly selected for the Assembly.



The Assembly met **4 times** in September – October and had access to information and experts.



The Assembly produced a report with **10 recommendations**, accepted by Council in November.

The Assembly aimed to **improve public perceptions** of WCC engagement and **improve public understanding** of the issues facing WCC and the city.

The evaluation looks at the effectiveness of:

- the process design,
- the experience of Assembly members,
- and identifies early impact and lessons learned.

Design of the Assembly

The sortition, led by external research company Global Research in conjunction with WCC, was very successful at bringing together a diverse group of Wellingtonians. The initial mailout of 10,000 letters had a high response rate of 7.86%, double what was expected. This meant participants could be selected across a wide range of demographic factors, boosting diversity and representativeness.

The Assembly represented a good cross section of the population and participants felt there were diverse viewpoints in the room. However, women were underrepresented as a few people dropped out before it started. People with no qualifications were also slightly underrepresented. In addition, four people did not complete the Assembly process, including two women and a non-binary person.

As a pilot project the organising team took advice from people who had run similar processes before. The organisers worked long hours to ensure a good experience for participants. More time or resource in between sessions was needed, however learning from this Assembly could help streamline processes for a future Assembly. Staff would have benefited from training on the process (including roles and responsibilities).

The scope of the topic and availability of information made it challenging to ensure all participants were well informed across the topics. Most participants felt the length of the Assembly process was about right, while some felt it was too short and wanted more time for discussions, hearing from experts and developing the recommendations.

Bicultural facilitation ensured elements of te reo and te ao Māori were woven through the Assembly sessions. This was well received by participants. Consideration of the Treaty of Waitangi and implications for Māori could have been more fundamentally integrated into the process.

Information on the Assembly was shared with the wider public, but some felt more could have been done to publicise the process and bring the public along on the journey. The independence of the facilitators and Global Research was an asset and may help bolster the perceived legitimacy of the findings.

The deliberative experience

Assembly sessions were held at an accessible venue with lift access, accessible gender-neutral toilets and a private space that could be used for participant needs (e.g. spaces for breastfeeding and prayer were requested). Participants were well supported to attend Assembly sessions, with a koha payment, additional costs covered (e.g. transport and parking) and parents were able to bring infants to the sessions. Participants reported there were no barriers to their attendance. The venue and catering were rated highly.

Most participants thought the quality of information provided was neutral and included diverse viewpoints and the facilitation was free from bias, although they were divided on whether the information resources were too broad or narrow in scope. Participants were able to request information to help their understanding of the issues but not everyone received the info they requested (although sometimes information was unavailable, or requests were out of scope). Most participants thought the organisers and experts shared their own opinion during participant discussions.

Everyone understood the evidence presented by speakers at the Assembly to an extent, although half of participants reported it was difficult initially, but they understood it much better by the end. Most participants thought the issues were discussed from a variety of perspectives and other participants explained their opinions. Some participants felt pressured to agree with others, with one person reporting they felt greatly pressured to agree with others. Conversely, about one-fifth of participants felt no pressure at all.

Most participants felt they had fair opportunities to speak, with about one-third strongly agreeing by using the highest value available. However, one person scored this the lowest value, meaning they did not feel at all like they had fair opportunities to speak. Most participants felt Assembly members were heard equally and that their own views were heard. The vast majority also felt other Assembly members were respectful even when there was disagreement.

Participants enjoyed meeting new people, the diversity of the group, hearing others' views and the discussions, but some felt more time was needed. Some participants felt their expectations were met or exceeded, while a few had not known what to expect as it was new to them. Where expectations were not met, a few people felt they did not have enough time to learn and make an informed decision. Whatever the limitations, the vast majority of participants felt WCC should use the Citizens' Assembly process again in the future.

Pathways to impact

The Citizens' Assembly helped **improve perceptions** of WCC and government engagement and **improve understanding** of issues facing WCC and Wellington.

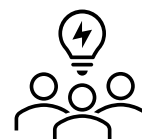
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of participants said after the Assembly they will be involved in government decisions that affect them, up from 41% beforehand.

- **81%** felt their understanding of the issues became clearer through the Assembly process.
- **63%** said the Assembly has made them more likely to engage with WCC in the future.
- **63%** are 'likely' or 'very likely' to engage with WCC on topics outside of the Citizens' Assembly.

Before → **After**... the % of Assembly members who felt informed about:

- 60% → 94%** Types of services WCC provides
- 38% → 84%** Who pays for different WCC services
- 29% → 81%** Cost to WCC of providing different services
- 36% → 63%** How the level of rates is set



‘[It] was a real learning journey to be a part of, even just being in a room that diverse was really valuable to get out of my day-to-day echo chamber and have some of my beliefs and opinions challenged like that.’

Assembly member

An impressive effort was made to produce a report during the final Assembly session. The facilitators guided a group consensus exercise to arrive at the final advice. The bar for consensus was that everyone could live with a recommendation, even if they did not strongly agree with it. Discussions on the last day were intensive and in the end more time was needed to finalise and wordsmith the final report.

However, most participants think the final recommendations broadly represent the different views of Assembly members. They also felt time was well used throughout the Assembly to arrive at the final recommendations. Nearly all participants said they would implement some or all of the recommendations if they were decision makers at WCC.

Participants were uncertain whether their recommendations would be implemented by WCC, but they hope to be informed if their recommendations are accepted and influence the LTP.

Participants generally thought the recommendations would be one form of input for WCC when developing the LTP but understood there would be other sources of information.

Most Assembly members had not participated in a central or local government consultation or engagement previously. Following the Assembly there was a significant shift in expected participation in the future, as all members report they will now be involved in government decisions that affect their lives. Most participants also said they are likely to engage with WCC on other topics outside of the Assembly and that the Assembly has made them more likely to engage with WCC in the future.

It was certainly a learning experience, and most participants report increased understanding of the issues and others' opinions through the Assembly process. Participants were also better informed about the types of services WCC provides, the cost of providing those services, who pays for different services and (to a lesser extent) how the level of rates is set. Some Assembly members were keen to stay involved in the LTP process and advocate for their recommendations, but it is unclear to what extent this will be possible.

Conclusion

The Citizens' Assembly shows great promise as a new form of public participation and deliberation. The Assembly led to a more informed group deliberating and providing collective advice on the future of the city. Although the topic was informationally complex and more time was needed, the final report nonetheless largely represents the views in the room.

WCC can use learning from this pilot to strengthen future use of deliberative processes. Such processes should be grounded in Te Tiriti and adapted to our local context. They should also be used where Council processes allow for timely sharing of detailed information. It would be beneficial to use a range of deliberative methods alongside other forms of public engagement, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each and choosing the most appropriate approach for the policy issue at hand.

Background

The Future for Local Government report (2023)¹ points to several challenges with local democracy in Aotearoa, including low voter turnout at local elections and engagement processes that do not meet the diverse needs of communities. The report acknowledges councils often struggle to engage in a meaningful way with diverse groups, in particular Māori, Pacific peoples, youth, and lower socioeconomic communities are underrepresented.

Strengthening democracy is identified as a key area for reform, including the recommendation ‘that local government and councils develop and invest in democratic innovations, including participatory and deliberative democracy processes. Such processes should reflect the increasing diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand, embody Tiriti-based partnerships and use innovative ways to hear all voices in the community.

‘Research across the field has shown that a well-facilitated group of citizens can make better decisions than a group of experts, even on issues with technical elements.’
The Future for Local Government report

Another key area for reform is around local government enabling more authentic relationships with hapū/iwi and Māori. ‘Local government must embody a more culturally specific exercise of kāwanatanga, where te ao Māori, mātauranga Māori and tikanga are woven into its fabric,’ the report states. ‘This will support councils to create a safe place for Māori and deliver enhanced wellbeing outcomes for all communities.’

Ways to exercise a more culturally inclusive kāwanatanga include: incorporate tikanga into council engagement practices; have te ao Māori values underpin council decision-making; mātauranga Māori sits alongside Western science; champion the use of te reo; and reflect the histories and stories of the area. These concepts are relevant to Council engagement and the report further states that Māori citizens should be able to express their culturally specific preferences for participation.

The report also points out that Māori and Pacific communities have long used collective decision-making and deliberation processes. Local bodies can learn from existing Māori and Pacific methods such as wānanga and talanoa for making decisions that have intergenerational impact. The report suggests councils should implement participatory and deliberative democracy practices in a way that incorporates te ao Māori and draws from Pacific processes.

Innovative citizen participation

The OECD produced influential 2020 report Catching the Deliberative Wave² that looks at different forms of representative deliberative processes. These involve randomly selected citizens, who broadly represent the community’s diversity, spending significant time together to discuss and learn through facilitated deliberation with the aim of producing informed collective recommendations for public bodies. Deliberation involves having access to accurate, relevant, and diverse information, carefully discussing and weighing different options and finding common ground so participants can make a group decision.

The OECD has gathered evidence that suggests ‘citizen participation in public decision making can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy and build trust’. Representative deliberation can

¹ Review into the Future for Local Government (2023) He piki tūranga, he piki kōtuku, Wellington: New Zealand.

² Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave. OECD (2020).

produce better policy outcomes as recommendations are based on considered public decisions rather than public opinions.

Deliberative processes help officials better understand policy priorities and identify where consensus may or may not be possible. They are also useful in situations of political deadlock. For participants, these processes can empower citizens to understand and influence political affairs and help overcome polarisation between groups. More widely they can enhance public trust in government decision making.

The OECD finds that deliberative processes are well suited to complex problems, where there is no single or straightforward answer. Such complexity requires weighing different options, exploring trade-offs and the values that underpin decisions. Deliberative processes are also better suited for addressing long-term issues, as they remove short-term motivations of political parties or electoral cycles and ask participants to deliberate for the public good. However, they are not able to solve all democratic and governance problems and ideally a range of methods and types of participation would be available.

WCC's Citizens' Assembly aligns with what the OECD calls a Citizens' Jury / Panel (although the term 'jury' can have negative connotations and so 'assembly' was used instead). Looking at use of Citizens' Juries across the world, they tend to have 35-50 randomly selected participants and last for around four days. They have most commonly been convened to address policy issues related to infrastructure, health, urban planning, and the environment. Citizens' Assemblies tend to be larger (on average about 90 people) and last for longer. Citizens' Juries require less time and resource and are useful for seeking advice on a specific policy issue.

WCC convened a Citizens' Jury in 1996 to consider divestment of its controlling interest in Capital Power.³ The Jury consisted of 14 Wellingtonians recruited from a market research panel who were representative of key demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, work status, occupation, and suburb). They met over two days and were tasked with providing a view on whether WCC should sell, merge with another energy company, or maintain current investment in Capital Power. A majority voted to maintain the status quo. However, a few months later WCC sold its shares in the energy company and approved a merger with Energy Direct.⁴

More recently, in 2022 Watercare organised a Citizens' Assembly that looked at future water sources for Tāmaki Makarau Auckland.⁵ Overall, they found this method promising and it was successful in terms of the Assembly engaging deeply with the question and producing actionable recommendations. They suggest learning for other practitioners, such as the importance of the process being Tiriti-led, upfront commitment from the convenor to implement recommendations to the fullest extent possible, making the invitation to participate accessible and the value of skilled facilitators to ensure equal opportunity of participation for all members. They also found that an additional day (five full days rather than four) would provide a useful buffer for unanticipated events.

In Porirua, an innovative Tiriti-based Climate Assembly has also been established called Te Reo o Ngā Tāngata – The People Speak.⁶ The Assembly process has been co-designed with mana whenua and has a steering group of community leaders. Te Reo o Ngā Tāngata includes two deliberative groups – one solely for mana whenua to deliberate among themselves, and the other is a representative group of Porirua community members. There is also space where the two groups come together to develop and integrate their recommendations. It is a valuable example of how a Tiriti-led process can be implemented and highlights the importance of allowing sufficient time to nurture the necessary relationships.

³ Summary of the decision reached by the Citizens' Jury which considered the Wellington City Council's controlling interest in Capital Power | Archives Online (1996).

⁴ Capital Power Ltd | Archives Online (1996).

⁵ Watercare - Citizens' Assembly project (2022).

⁶ The People Speak / Te Reo o Ngā Tāngata, <https://www.thepeoplespeak.nz/>.

Evaluation method

The OECD identifies good practice principles for deliberative processes and what success looks like. It provides detailed guidance on evaluating representative deliberative processes⁷, which this evaluation largely follows. The guidance identifies three key areas to evaluate:

- Process design integrity – framing of the policy issue, clear and legitimate objectives, transparency of process, representativeness and inclusion, the process allows members enough time to learn and deliberate.
- The deliberative experience – this includes the diversity and clarity of evidence provided, quality of facilitation, perceived knowledge gains by members, opportunities for members to participate and speak, mitigation of attempts at interference.
- Pathways to impact – influence and uptake of recommendations, Council response and member aftercare.

This evaluation uses mixed methods, including survey, interview, observation, and document review. This report focuses on the quality of the WCC Citizens' Assembly process and includes findings on initial impacts. In the interests of sharing results in a timely manner, longer-term impacts will be followed separately.

An online survey was emailed to participants prior to the Assembly and was completed by all 42 people. A follow up survey was sent to participants after the final Assembly session and was completed by 32 participants. Six people did not provide a response despite several attempts to follow up. They included four males, two females and a few were among the youngest people in the Assembly. This evaluation may not adequately capture the experiences of younger Assembly members.

An additional four people did not complete the Assembly process, one person on medical grounds, another expected a different Assembly model, and another was ill and felt they had missed too much to return. The fourth person did not provide a reason and did not respond to requests for feedback on their experience.

A brief online survey was also sent to all 14 experts who attended the Assembly sessions to present, facilitate small groups or answer questions from Assembly members. A response was received from all but two experts. Group interviews were conducted with the two facilitators and seven WCC staff on the organising team. Observational notes were taken by members of the Research and Evaluation team at all Assembly sessions. Care has been taken to ensure individuals cannot be identified in this report.

⁷ Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes, OECD (2021).

Citizens' Assembly design process

WCC's Citizens' Assembly was a pilot in deliberative democracy. The aim was to improve public perceptions of WCC engagement and improve public understanding of the issues facing WCC and the city.

The Assembly was convened to answer the question: 'We need to find a balance between what WCC could deliver, and what resource it has available, which is fair to everyone. How might we do this?' The question was developed with input from staff across different WCC departments and was approved by the LTP steering group.

Two external facilitators - Anne Cunningham and Tihou Weepu - were brought on board to lead participants through the Assembly sessions. The facilitators were chosen for their skillsets as well as their independence from Council, so they would be seen as neutral by participants.

A background information pack on WCC was shared with all participants before the Assembly. It provides info on citizens' assemblies, the cost and funding of WCC services and the LTP. The organising team prepared information for the first session and then were responsive to requests for information from Assembly members. They coordinated collecting information and organised presenters as required for the Assembly. Most of the information came from within WCC, as WCC is best placed to provide information on the LTP. In addition, three external experts were invited to present to the Assembly. Their topics included equity access to open space, Tiriti-based urban design and transport and disability.

Choosing Assembly members

Participant selection was outsourced to research company Global Research, who worked in conjunction with WCC to carry out the sortition process. The aim was to be representative of the population of Wellington City based on key demographic variables, including age, ethnicity, gender identity, disability status, suburb, sexual orientation, education, home ownership and dependent children.

An initial mailout to 10,000 households selected at random across Wellington suburbs was sent in July 2023. People interested in participating were asked to complete an online Expression of Interest (EOI), which collected demographic information for use in the sortition.

The mailout had a fantastic response rate of 7.86% (786 responses), double what was expected based on the response to Watercare's postal invitation to a citizens' assembly in Auckland.⁸ The demographic profile of people who submitted an EOI closely matched the population of Wellington City, based on the characteristics listed above as well as some additional variables not used in the sortition process. These include whether people were born in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas, languages spoken and employment status.

Some demographic groups were underrepresented by the EOIs, including Māori, Pacific peoples, people with lower educational attainment, renters, and disabled people (see Table 1 below). Conversely there was a very positive response from the rainbow community. Although some demographic groups were underrepresented, due to the high response rate there were enough responses overall to select a representative sample through the sortition.

⁸ Case study on citizens' assembly. Kōi Tū: Centre for Informed Futures (2023).

Global Research reported the mailout to residents was a cost-effective way to connect with a wide group of potential participants. Taking a random sample from a comprehensive city address list avoided the biases inherent in using a more targeted or self-selected list. Care was taken to ensure only one person per household could register and that the invitation could not be forwarded on. The invitation asked the person with the next birthday to register to reduce self-selection bias. It was useful to have a phone option for completing the online EOI and improved the accessibility of this approach.

Global Research suggest allowing extra time in the sortition plan for unanticipated events. In addition, the initial timeframe for confirming Assembly participants slipped and some people who submitted EOIs put things on hold in case they were selected. Accurate and timely communication is important to keep people interested and ensure they have a pleasant experience. There were issues with the privacy statement being too restrictive and so Global Research could not share the demographic info of Assembly members with WCC and this info had to be collected again.

Who were the Assembly members?

A total of 42 people currently living in Wellington City agreed to take part in the Assembly process. Their demographic characteristics were broadly representative of the population for a range of factors (see Table 1 below).

The proportion of females in the Assembly was lower than the population as three women who were selected did not end up participating. Assembly members with postgraduate qualifications were overrepresented, while members with no qualifications were slightly underrepresented.

Four people did not complete the Assembly process, including two females and the one non-binary person recruited. Two of those who did not complete the process identify as Māori or Pacific and one has a permanent disability. Māori and Pacific people were recruited at higher proportions than the population in case of attrition, as was found in the Watercare Citizens' Assembly.

Table 1. Summary of sortition outcome: Actual and interested Assembly members, compared to Wellington population.

Variable	Value	# of Assembly members	% of Assembly members	% of those that submitted an EOI	% of Wellington
Age	16 to 17 years of age	2	5%	2%	3%
	18 to 24 years of age	7	17%	9%	16%
	25 to 34 years of age	7	17%	16%	22%
	35 to 49 years of age	6	14%	27%	24%
	50 to 59 years of age	8	19%	18%	15%
	60 to 69 years of age	4	10%	15%	10%
	70 to 84 years of age	4	10%	13%	8%
	85 years or older	2	5%	0.4%	1%
	No information	2	5%	4%	0%
Gender	Female	18	42%	49%	49%
	Male	22	51%	47%	49%
	Non-binary	1	2%	3%	2%
Ethnicity	New Zealander/ NZ European	29	69%	74%	67%
	Māori	7	17%	6%	8%
	Pacific	5	12%	3%	5%
	Asian	7	17%	14%	16%
	MELAA	3	7%	22%	3%
	Other	2	5%	8%	1%
Education	L1 overseas	2	5%	2%	6%
	PhD (L10)	2	5%	5%	2%
	Masters (L9)	5	12%	18%	9%
	Degree & Hons (L7 & L8)	13	31%	44%	35%
	Post-school (non-Uni, L4-6)	6	14%	12%	13%
	School qual. (L1-3)	11	26%	17%	27%
	No qualification	2	5%	2%	9%
	Prefer not to say	1	2%		0%
Home ownership	Home not owned	19	45%	31%	41%
	Home owned	23	55%	69%	59%
Family type	Total dependent children	11	26%	33%	29%
	Total no dependent children	31	74%	67%	71%
Living with a disability	No	24	57%	88%	78%
	Yes	9	21%	12%	22%
	No information	9	21%	—	—
Sexual orientation	LGBTQ+	3	7%	17%	7%
	Non LGBTQ+	28	67%	83%	93%
	No information	11	26%	—	—

Source: Data prepared by Global Research for WCC.

Process design integrity

The Citizens' Assembly was a new form of engagement for Council and advice was sought from a range of people externally on how to design and deliver a successful Assembly. The Assembly was a pilot project and the organisers took a 'learn by doing' approach.

A vast range of services are included in the LTP, too many to cover in a four-day Assembly process. Efforts were made to reduce the number of services included for discussion, excluding areas with little discretion to make changes or that are subject to reform. The Assembly included the following areas:

- Arts and culture
- City promotions and business support
- Community facilities and services
- Community support
- Parks, beaches and open spaces
- Recreation facilities and services
- Transport
- Urban planning

The scope of the Assembly was ambitious given the time available and feedback from various sources points to the scope being too broad. Initially the plan was to deliver simple scenarios around increasing or decreasing the level of service (e.g. for the bike network), but due to other Council processes the information was not available in time and the scope of the Assembly changed as a result. There was a lot to cover in the time available and it was challenging to provide sufficient depth of information across the areas listed above.

The Assembly process is resource intensive, and the organising team worked long hours to ensure a good experience for participants. It would have been useful early on to carry out an assessment of the resources required to deliver the Assembly process and its impact on workloads. It would also be useful to identify areas where staff training is needed, e.g. training on the specific engagement method (especially when using new methods like the Citizens' Assembly), including roles and responsibilities. There was some confusion over roles, with people stepping in as needed to take on extra tasks. It would be useful to have a project manager to take overall responsibility for the work done and ideally, they would have sufficient seniority to make budgetary and operational decisions.

More time was needed to plan the overall approach as well as more detailed planning for each Assembly session. Staff worked hard to gather requested information, but they needed more time or resource in between sessions to prepare information and respond to questions from the Assembly. Similarly, the facilitators needed more time to plan how to deliver what was needed over the four sessions, with the ultimate aim of producing a report with Assembly members' advice to the Council.

The bicultural facilitation helped ensure elements of te reo and te ao Māori were included in the Assembly sessions. However, consideration of the Treaty of Waitangi and implications for Māori could have been more fundamentally integrated into the Assembly process. A discussion on the Treaty was cancelled from the first session due to staff availability and a discussion on the Treaty at the third hui was planned and delivered by WCC kaimahi Māori. While generally well received, it was noted in the small group discussions that some people had little to no background knowledge of the Treaty.

Application process and attendance

The people who submitted an Expression of Interest were asked whether they had ever participated in a local or central government consultation or engagement. The vast majority (75%) had never participated, while 17% had participated, 5% were unsure and 3% ticked 'other'. The fact most had never participated before indicates the Citizens' Assembly was seen as different and perhaps more enticing.

Most Assembly members found the application process easy (29%) or very easy (60%), 10% were neutral about the ease of applying, and 2% found it very difficult. The application process could have been improved by letting applicants know sooner whether they had been chosen to participate and explaining more clearly that the selection process had two phases. Demographic information ended up being collected through two surveys, but this was not explained at the start.

None of the participants reported obstacles that made it difficult to attend the Assembly sessions. Participants appreciated the effort made to enable people to attend, such as support for transport costs and being able to bring children to the space. Suggestions for how to improve attendance if another Assembly is held include: more advanced notice of the session dates; more publicity so people are aware it is happening when they receive the invite; online options to attend in case of illness or other disruptions; provision of Snapper transport cards; and dedicated parking.

Motivations and expectations for participating

Prior to the Assembly participants were asked their motivations for wanting to participate in WCC's Assembly, and they responded:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • The topic of Wellington's future | 90% |
| • The idea of a citizens' assembly | 64% |
| • The topic of financial and service planning | 43% |
| • Compensation | 26% |
| • Something else | 10% |

The fact most people were interested in Wellington's future and the idea of an assembly indicates that assemblies on other topics might be well received by the public too. The people who responded 'something else' mostly wanted to add to the diversity and represent people like themselves.

Participants were also asked their main expectations for taking part in the Assembly, and the responses were:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • To contribute to an important decision that concerns the future of the city | 93% |
| • To learn about a new process of public engagement | 62% |
| • To spend time in an interesting and productive way | 60% |
| • To earn some money in an interesting way | 55% |
| • To learn about the issues of financial planning, Council services and the city | 38% |
| • To meet new people | 33% |

Before the Assembly participants were asked to describe the purpose of the Assembly in their own words. Generally understanding was high. Most people said they were providing feedback on the Council's LTP and/or they were being convened to give a representative view of what residents would prioritise over the next 10 years.

Participants were also asked prior to the Assembly what they thought would happen with the Assembly's recommendations. People generally thought the recommendations would be presented to Council, and some thought the recommendations would inform Council decisions, that they would represent public opinion, they might be checked for feasibility by subject matter experts and some people hoped action would be taken as a result of what the Assembly puts forward. A number of people were unclear what would happen after the Assembly and hoped it would be explained during the process.

Participants were asked what would make them feel like the Assembly was a success. The most common responses were that the Council would take action as a result of Assembly recommendations and that the Assembly's recommendations would be visible in the LTP. A number of people were also hopeful the Assembly would achieve positive change for Wellington and that diverse voices would be heard (both within the Assembly sessions and by Council). A few people also wanted to have meaningful, constructive discussions, participation by a diverse range of people, agreement among Assembly members and the chance to learn something new.

Diversity of the Assembly

Two-thirds of participants felt there was adequate representation of different sectors of society in the Assembly, while almost one-third felt some groups were missing. For those who felt like some people were missing, they particularly would have liked more inclusion of the disabled community (although it is worth noting that disability status was included in the sortition, but not all disabilities are visible). Other mentions included refugees, the business community, Pacific peoples, Māori, non-English speakers, unemployed people, community leaders, kaumatua, neurodiverse individuals and people who are time poor due to work and family commitments.

All participants felt that to some extent the other Assembly members had different viewpoints compared to their own. When asked how many members had different views, the responses were:

- A few of them – 50%
- About half of them – 34%
- Most of them – 16%
- None – 0%

Length and format of Assembly process

Most participants felt the length of the Assembly process was either about right (56%) or too short (41%), while just one person thought it was too long (3%). People who felt it was too short were asked how much additional time was needed and they responded:

- A half day or less 1 person
- At least one full day 6 people
- At least 2-3 more days 5 people
- 4 days or more 1 person

People who felt the Assembly was too short felt extra time was needed to:

- Develop the recommendations 10 people
- Discuss different arguments before developing recommendations 9 people
- Hear from experts 8 people
- Agree the final wording of recommendations 7 people
- Hear from more stakeholders 6 people

Two-thirds of Assembly members agreed they could have given additional time to the process. Participants indicated they could have attended:

- 1 more day 25%
- 2-3 more days 34%
- 4 or more days 9%
- No extra time 31%

Most participants felt that having a week in between Assembly meetings was about the right frequency (88%), while a few felt there should have been more time in between meetings (6%) and the rest were unsure.

The facilitated Assembly sessions included a mix of working in small groups and working together as a whole group. Most participants (66%) felt the right balance was struck in this regard, although 31% thought too much time was spent in whole group discussions. Only 3% felt too much time was spent in small groups and not enough in the whole group.

Outside of the in-person Assembly sessions, two optional online Zoom meetings were convened for Assembly members. The main purpose of them was to provide additional information, answer questions and progress the conversation in between Assembly sessions. Just over half (53%) of participants report they attended at least one Zoom meeting. Of those who attended, 8 people reported some level of difficulty using Zoom to attend the meetings. Most of those who attended found the Zoom sessions helpful for the Citizens' Assembly process, but 3 people did not think they were helpful. The most common reason people did not attend the Zoom meetings was due to being unavailable at the times they were held, due to work, family, or study commitments.

Transparency

While it is important Assembly members have time and space to deliberate as a group without external influence, the wider public also need to know about the process for the findings to be transparent and perceived as legitimate. WCC shared info about the Citizens' Assembly online and through press releases. Before the Assembly information was shared about recruitment and why the Assembly was taking place. A few participants thought more could have been done to publicise the Assembly so that people knew about it already when they received the invitation.

After the Assembly, a video filmed during the Assembly that explains what took place was posted on the Let's Talk website.⁹ The participant handbook, final Assembly report and some of the presentations were also shared online after the Assembly. Reading online comments on media content about the Assembly, commenters asked about the independence of the people chosen, the facilitation and information provided. The independence of the company responsible for the sortition and the facilitators may help bolster public perceptions of validity and legitimacy of the process.

The deliberative experience

Quality of information provided

Participants were divided on whether the information resources provided to help discussions were too broad or too narrow. On a scale from zero (the information provided was too narrow) to 10 (the information provided was too broad), 50% scored the information base 0-5, meaning they thought it was too narrow. Conversely, 50% of participants scored it 6-10, meaning they thought it was too broad.

Participants were also asked the extent they thought the information resources provided were neutral with fair and diverse viewpoints represented. On a scale from zero (the information base felt very biased) to 10 (the information base felt neutral with a large diversity of sources), 59% of participants scored the information base 6-10, meaning they thought the information provided was to an extent neutral and diverse. Conversely 41% scored it 0-5, meaning they thought that to some extent it was biased.

Question: To what extent do you feel that the information resources provided, as a whole, were neutral, with fair and diverse viewpoints represented?

0 – the information base felt very biased	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 – the information base felt neutral with a large diversity of sources
3%	-	-	9%	16%	13%	9%	22%	9%	3%	16%

Most participants thought the facilitation was reasonably free from bias, meaning facilitators did not favour certain opinions or offer their own opinions. On a scale from zero (completely neutral) to 10 (very biased), 72% of participants scored the facilitation 0-4, meaning they thought it was to an

⁹ Phase 2: Citizens' Assembly | Let's Talk | Wellington City Council.

extent neutral. The remaining 28% scored the facilitation 5-10. Within this, 2 people (6%) thought the facilitation was very biased.

Participants were encouraged to request additional information during the Assembly to address any knowledge gaps and understand the issues well enough to make an informed decision. Most participants requested information and received some or all of the information they requested. Two people report they did not receive the information they requested, and one person was not aware they could ask for additional resources. Across everyone, participants reported:

- All the info I requested was provided 34%
- Some of the info I requested was provided 41%
- The info I requested was not provided 6%
- I did not feel we needed additional info 16%
- I don't know if we were able to request additional info 3%
- We were not able to request additional info 0%

Almost half (47%) of participants found the evidence presented by speakers during the Assembly easy to understand right from the beginning. The remaining participants found that initially it was hard to understand but they understood a lot of it much better by the end of the process. Nobody who answered the survey found the evidence from speakers difficult to understand throughout the whole Assembly process, although there were comments from participants during Assembly sessions that some of the terminology was unclear. Some terms related to government, finances and the Treaty needed more explanation.

More than half of participants thought the issues were discussed from a variety of perspectives, considering background issues, existing structures, trade-offs, underlying values, etc. On a scale from zero (the issues were discussed from a very limited variety of perspectives) to 10 (the issues were discussed from a wide variety of perspectives), 56% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning they thought a variety of perspectives were discussed. The other 44% scored 0-5, meaning they thought a limited number of perspectives were considered.

Question: To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the issues were discussed from a variety of perspectives (for example, considering background issues, existing structures, trade-offs, values etc.)?

0 – the issues were discussed from a very limited variety of perspectives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 – the issues were discussed from a wide variety of perspectives
-	3%	9%	6%	3%	22%	3%	19%	19%	6%	9%

Most participants felt other Assembly members provided justifications and explanations for their opinions. On a scale from zero (most members never provided justifications and explanations) to 10 (most members always provided justifications and explanations), 69% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning they thought other Assembly members explained their viewpoint. The other 31% scored between 3-5, meaning they thought members did not always justify or explain their opinions.

Some participants felt pressured to agree with the arguments of others, although to varying degrees. On a scale from zero (did not feel pressured at all) to 10 (felt pressured to a great extent), 69% of participants scored this question 0-5. Within this, 19% of participants scored this question a

zero, meaning they did not feel pressured at all to agree with others. Conversely, 31% of participants scored 6-10, meaning they felt greater levels of pressure to agree with other Assembly members. One person scored this question a 10, meaning they felt greatly pressured to agree with others.

Question: To what extent, if at all, did you feel pressured to agree with the arguments of others?

0 – not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 – to a great extent
19%	25%	16%	6%	3%	3%	9%	9%	6%	0%	3%

Most participants felt that to some extent their contribution to the Assembly made it into the final recommendations. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 78% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning they saw their contribution in the recommendations. The remaining 22% of participants scored 0-5 meaning they did not feel the recommendations adequately represented their contribution.

The majority (84%) of participants felt they had a fair number of opportunities to speak. Within this, almost one-third scored a 10, the highest point on the scale, meaning they strongly agreed they had a fair number of opportunities to speak. One person scored this question a zero, meaning they did not feel at all like they had fair opportunities to speak. From observing the Assembly sessions, it seemed there was good participation from members and in the small groups many self-facilitated as needed. There was not necessarily equal participation among participants, but especially in the small group discussions it looked like everyone had a turn to speak. When the experts were talking to the small groups, it might have been beneficial to have a facilitator assist with managing group dynamics.

Overall participants tended to give higher scores for whether they felt other Assembly members had a fair number of opportunities to speak. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 75% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning they felt other Assembly members had fair opportunities to speak. The remaining 25% of participants scored at the mid-point of the scale at either 4 or 5.

Participants were asked whether they felt all Assembly members were heard equally. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 59% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning to varying degrees they felt Assembly members were heard equally. When participants were asked whether other Assembly members dominated discussions, 47% of participants thought to some extent others had dominated discussions.

Most participants felt their own views were heard. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 84% of participants scored this question 6-10, meaning they felt their views were heard to an extent. The remaining 16% scored between 3 to 5, with no one scoring at the lower end of the scale. The vast majority also felt their fellow Assembly members respected what they had to say even when they weren't in agreement. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 81% of participants scored a 6-10, with almost one-third (28%) of participants scoring 10 for this question.

Participants were asked to what extent they felt organisers or experts expressed their own views during Assembly members' discussions. On a scale from zero (not at all) to 10 (to a great extent), 41% of participants scored this question 0-4, meaning they felt experts and organisers did not share their own opinions very much. The remaining 59% felt organisers and experts had shared their own opinion to a greater extent.

External influence

One Assembly member said they had been approached outside the Assembly sessions and offered more information or invited to communicate privately. The question was designed to gauge whether people had been approached by media or interest groups, but this person reported they had been contacted by a university. When participants were asked if any other Assembly members were approached by media or interest groups, one person suspected someone had been and the rest were not aware of any such contact.

Comfort and enjoyment of sessions

The Assembly sessions were held at an accessible venue with lift access, accessible gender-neutral toilets and a private space that could be used for participant needs (e.g. spaces for breastfeeding and prayer were requested). There was an offer to cover transport and childcare costs incurred by participants attending the Assembly and four people took up support for transport/ parking.

Two parents brought their infants with them to the Assembly sessions and one of them commented this 'made it a lot more accessible'. The host team were adaptable and wanted participants to have a good experience, e.g. a microphone was used when the sound was too quiet, and one person requested a special chair which was provided at each session. Most participants rated the venue and catering highly.

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Venue	56%	19%	16%	9%	0%
Catering	47%	31%	19%	0%	3%

Participants were asked about their favourite aspect of the Citizens' Assembly and the top responses were meeting new people (13 people), the diversity of the group (10 people), hearing other views and opinions (8 people) and the discussions/ debate (6 people). Other aspects include: manaakitanga from the organisers, food, learning new things (especially learning about Council), the facilitation and making a positive contribution to the city.

Participants were asked if anything could be improved about the Citizens' Assembly. The most common comments were around use of time (16 people). A number of participants would have liked less time spent on team building activities. Some participants would like to have had more time for: learning about the issues, discussion with experts, group discussions and interacting with councillors. Other suggestions include better time management and keeping discussions on track, time to learn and prepare in between Assembly sessions and greater clarity around objectives. Some people wanted greater transparency with the financial information provided.

There were other suggestions, such as providing a coherent briefing paper in advance, laying out the policy problem, the range of potential solutions and a short discussion of their advantages and disadvantages. However, this was not possible because of where things were at in the LTP cycle. There was also a suggestion it would be valuable to have people present for each session that can answer questions as they arise, as happened on the final day, rather than waiting for a response back from Council.

Another person suggested there is a need to be able to capture thoughts and opinions from people who cannot express themselves in whole group discussions, e.g. the facilitators could offer separate conversations with them. One person said it would be good not to focus too much on

practicalities early on, but rather encourage participants to 'reach for the stars' and 'think outside the square'.

Participants also said:

- '[It] was a real learning journey to be a part of, even just being in a room that diverse was really valuable to get out of my day-to-day echo chamber and have some of my beliefs and opinions challenged like that.'
- 'Facilitators managed the group very well. Everyone was given time to talk, everyone's opinion was valued. Those that over-talked were well managed and didn't control the assembly. An extra day would have been good as it was very rushed at the end. I enjoyed taking part and learned a lot. The team were awesome.'
- 'It was a very challenging process for me yet rather rewarding.'
- 'I commend the council staff for their hard work, insight and support to get the best involvement and inclusion in our group, as well as support us to make informed decisions and recommendations.'

Participants were asked whether the outcome of the Assembly process (such as the quality of the recommendations) matched their initial expectations. About a third of participants agreed their expectations were either met or exceeded. A number of people were satisfied with the quality of the recommendations and felt they were well thought out and represented the group. Some participants were surprised by how much the group managed to produce in a relatively short space of time. One person said, 'I was surprised what we managed to achieve. The task seemed so huge that at the start I did not know how we could produce the report.'

Other people felt their expectations were not met, with a range of reasons given. A few people questioned the time and info available to learn and make an informed decision. One person said, 'I thought we would have more time to learn about the issues before making recommendations. I don't think we were sufficiently informed.' Other people mentioned there was at times a lack of focus on the main task of the Assembly and a couple of people would have liked to produce more in-depth recommendations (e.g. using SMART objectives).

Participants also said:

- 'The result matched my expectations. I expected that there would be quite divergent views and the recommendations would need to strike a compromise between these views. The fact that only one person seemed to opt out on the last day was a positive outcome.'
- 'I felt as though the group created the focus areas with little influence from WCC which created a good base for our recommendations.'
- 'There were some interesting views/recommendations and there needs to be more time devoted by council members to analyse them, map them out and find the underlying commonality between and among these.'

Future use of the Citizens' Assembly

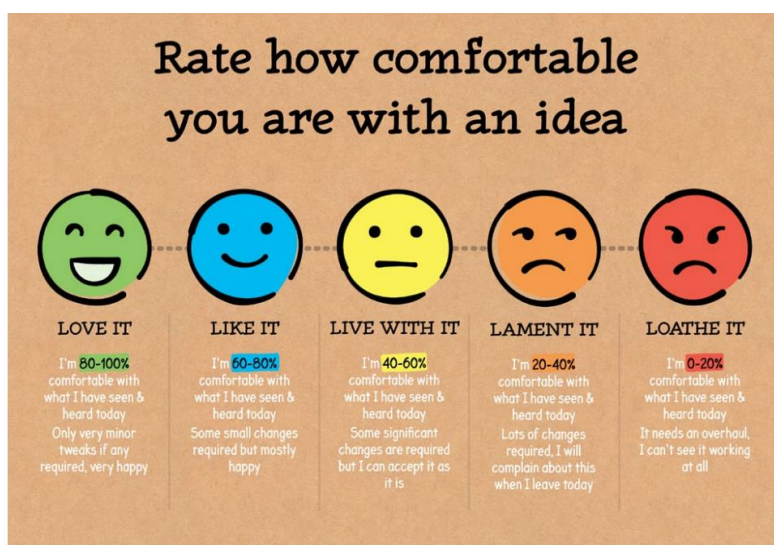
The vast majority (88%) of Assembly members thought the Citizens' Assembly process should be used again by WCC, while 9% did not know and 3% said it should not be used again.

Pathways to impact

The Assembly's final report

An impressive effort was made to produce a report during the final Assembly session.¹⁰ The facilitators used Mosaic Lab's 'love it to loathe it' scale below to build group consensus and arrive at the final advice. All participants had to be able to at least live with a recommendation for it to be included in the final report. If people lamented or loathed an option, their concerns were discussed and if changes were made to the recommendation's wording, then the group voted again.

Figure 1. This five-point scale developed by Nicole Hunter at Mosaic Lab was used to guide group consensus processes in WCC's Citizens' Assembly



More time was needed at the end of the Assembly process for participants to finalise and wordsmith their recommendations. While participants agreed in principle with the final report, the wording for some of the recommendations was not clear and they could not be changed after the Assembly concluded.

Most participants felt the Assembly time was used well to arrive at the final recommendations. On a scale from zero (time was not at all well used) to 10 (time was extremely well used), 84% of participants scored the process 6-10 meaning they felt time was well used to arrive at the recommendations. The remaining 16% scored 0-5, meaning they did not think the time was well used.

The vast majority of participants felt the final recommendations reflected the different views of the Assembly members. On a scale from zero (the diversity of Assembly members was not represented) to 10 (our recommendations broadly satisfied the concerns of all members), 94% of participants scored the process 6-10 meaning they felt the recommendations broadly represented the Assembly. The remaining 6% (two people) scored 0 or 1, meaning they did not think the diversity of Assembly members was well represented in the final recommendations.

¹⁰ The final, designed report can be found here:

<https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/news-and-events/news-and-information/news/files/2023/longterm-plan-citizens-assembly-report.pdf?la=en&hash=30AC185E047BEBC5B56FF25B696DDCAFB9E661B3>.

Nearly all participants said if they were a decision maker at WCC they would to some extent implement the Citizens' Assembly recommendations. They differed in terms of what proportion of the recommendations they would enact:

- All of them 19%
- The vast majority 38%
- About half 22%
- Only a few 19%
- None of them 0%
- I don't know 3%

Expectations for recommendations

Before the Assembly started participants were asked how confident they have been in the past that community input influences WCC decisions. Most participants did not feel confident about the ability of community to influence Council decisions. After the Assembly, participants were asked how confident they felt WCC would implement the Assembly's recommendations, and the levels of confidence were similar. The questions were designed to see if the Assembly increased participant confidence that Council is responsive to community input.

Pre Assembly: Confidence community input will influence WCC decisions	
Very confident	7%
Fairly confident	21%
Slightly confident	45%
Not at all confident	21%
I don't know	5%

Post Assembly: Confidence WCC will implement Assembly recommendations	
Very confident	6%
Fairly confident	24%
Slightly confident	41%
Not at all confident	9%
I don't know	19%

Participants generally thought the recommendations would be one form of input for WCC when developing the LTP but understood there would be other sources of information. No one seemed to think implementation of the recommendations was guaranteed or would be enforced. There was a perception the recommendations would help inform Council of citizen sentiment and would act as a guide when making decisions about what to prioritise. A few participants felt the recommendations might only be enacted if they align with what Council wants to do. A number of participants expect to hear back from Council whether their recommendations will be accepted and implemented.

Civic engagement with government

Before taking part in the Assembly, participants had different experiences of government participation. 25 Assembly members (61%) had not participated in a local or central government consultation or engagement in the past. The main barriers for those who had not participated in government consultation or engagement were:

- Lack of time/resources (34%)
- Lack of opportunity (29%)
- Lack of interest in the process (17%)
- Lack of interest in the topic (12%)
- Other (7%) – this included feeling the need to be apolitical due to the nature of employment, missing deadlines for submissions and not feeling informed enough to participate.

14 Assembly members (34%) had previously participated in government consultation or engagement and 2 people (5%) didn't know. Types of government participation include making submissions, joining discussions, and providing feedback. Engagement covered a variety of topics such as transport, justice, city design, education, and housing.

There was a significant shift in expected involvement with government following the Assembly. Prior to the Assembly 57% of participants were rarely or not at all involved in government decisions that affect them. After the Assembly experience, all participants felt they would remain involved in government decisions.

Pre Assembly: How involved are you currently when it comes to government decisions that affect you?			Post Assembly: Now you have had this experience, how involved will you be when it comes to government decisions that affect you?		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Very involved	4	10%	Very involved	13	41%
Sometimes involved	13	31%	Sometimes involved	19	59%
Rarely involved	10	24%	Rarely involved	-	-
Not involved at all	14	33%	Not involved at all	-	-
I don't know	1	2%	I don't know	-	-
Total	42	100%	Total	32	100%

After the Assembly, participants were asked how likely they were to engage with WCC on topics outside of the Citizens' Assembly. The responses were:

- Very likely 13%
- Likely 50%
- Neutral 34%
- Unlikely 3%
- Very unlikely 0%

When asked whether taking part in the Citizens' Assembly has made participants more or less likely to engage with WCC in the future, the responses were:

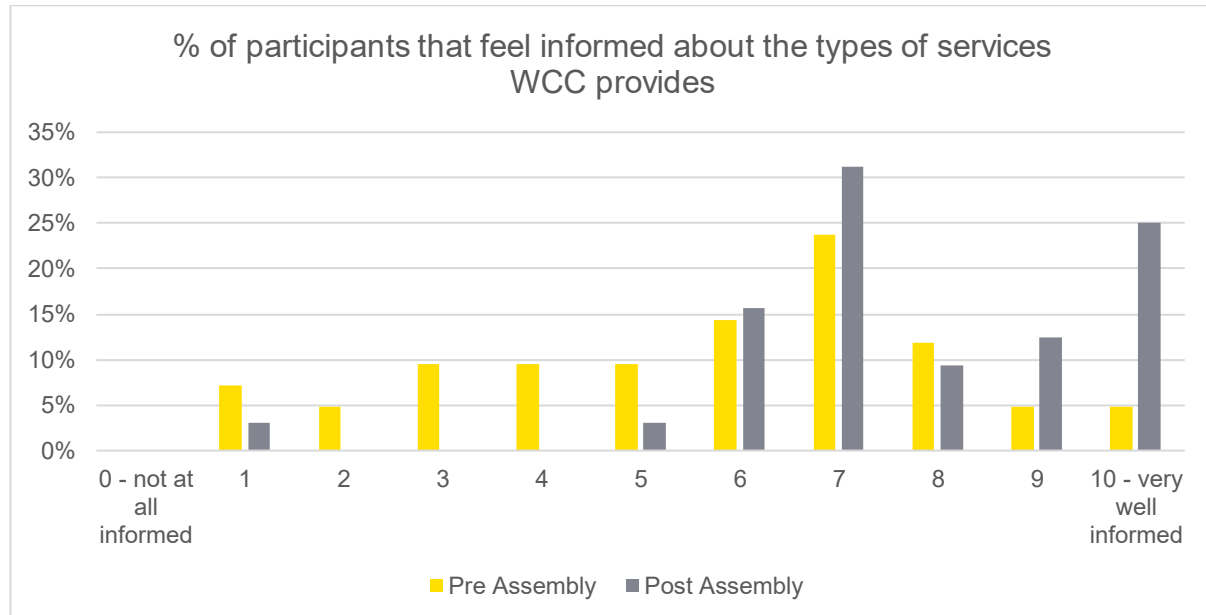
- More likely 63%
- No change – about the same 31%
- Less likely 0%
- I don't know 6%

For the people that reported no change, most reported before the Assembly they were already involved to some extent in government decisions that affect their lives. Two people said they were rarely involved.

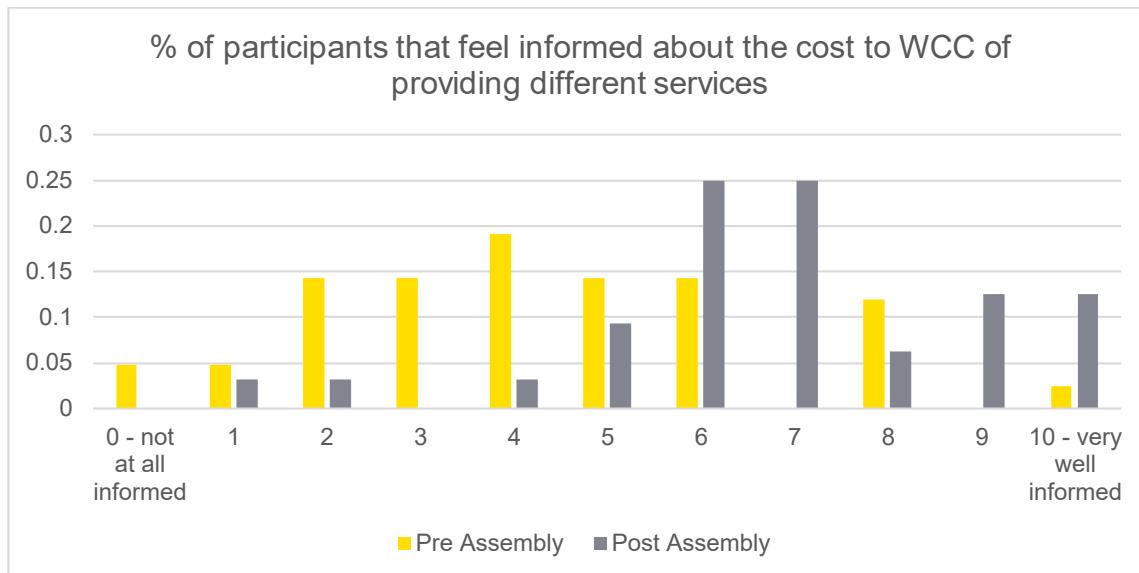
Knowledge and learning

The majority (81%) of participants felt their understanding of the issues became clearer through the Assembly process. Most participants (69%) felt they gained more arguments and perspectives to support their own opinion about the issues. Most participants (81%) reported they understood the arguments, perspectives, and concerns of the other Assembly members. At the same time, 88% of participants felt their understanding of others' opinions of the issues became clearer through the Assembly process.

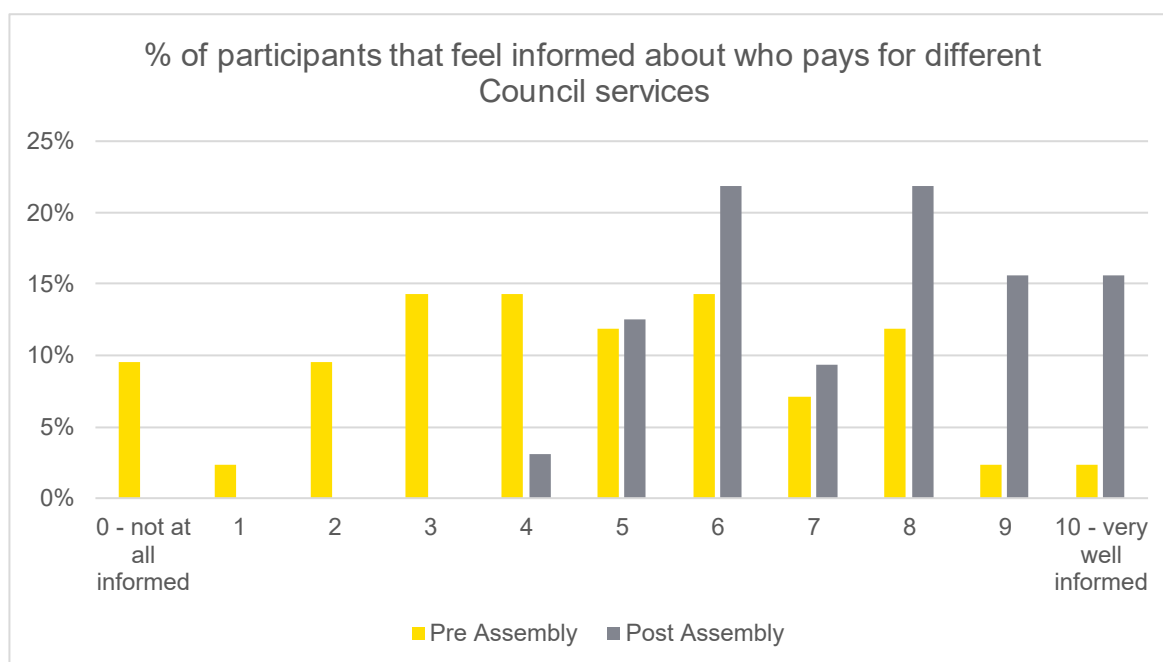
Participants were asked to self-rate how informed they felt about aspects of Council service provision before and after the Assembly. There was a marked increase in the scores indicating most participants felt better informed by the end of the Assembly process. When asked how informed they felt about the types of services WCC provides, on a scale from 0 (not at all informed) to 10 (very well informed), 60% of participants scored themselves 6-10 before the Assembly started. After the Assembly finished this rose to 94% of participants.



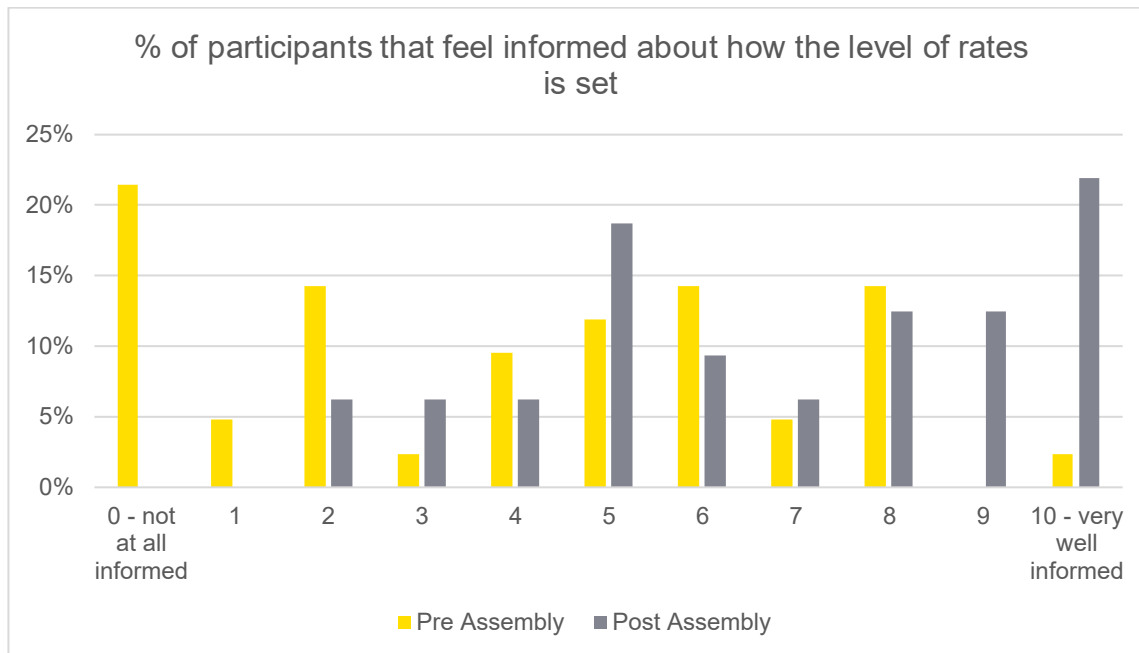
Participants were also asked how informed they felt about the cost to WCC of providing different services and 29% of participants scored between 6-10 before the Assembly started. After the Assembly this rose to 81% of participants, meaning they felt reasonably well informed about what it costs WCC to provide services.



Participants were asked how informed they felt about who pays for different Council services (e.g. how much is funded through rates, user charges, leases, licences, or other sources) and 38% of participants scored themselves 6 or higher before the Assembly started. After the Assembly this rose to 84% of participants, meaning many participants felt better informed about who pays for WCC services.



Participants were asked how informed they felt about how the level of rates is set by Council and 36% of participants scored themselves 6 or higher before the Assembly started. After the Assembly this rose to 63% of participants, meaning many participants felt better informed about how rates are set.



After the Assembly

At the end of the Assembly a group of participants indicated willingness to stay involved, to advocate for their recommendations or explain them if needed. It is unclear to what extent and in what ways Assembly members can stay involved in the LTP process. More planning would have been useful to see how the Assembly's advice fits in with the policy cycle and to know in advance what participants could expect after the Assembly. However, the organisers see it as positive that the Assembly has created a more informed group of residents who want to have their say and see how their advice is used.

It is beyond the scope of this first stage of the evaluation to look in detail at the impact of the Assembly's report. However, there are early indications the recommendations were well received by Council. The report was accepted by WCC's Long-Term Plan, Finance and Performance Committee on 9 November 2023.¹¹ Councillors agreed to incorporate the Assembly's advice into the LTP throughout the development of the plan and report back to the Citizens' Assembly.

¹¹ Minutes of Kōrau Tōtōpū | Long-term Plan, Finance, and Performance Committee - Thursday, 9 November 2023.

Discussion

The Citizens' Assembly shows great promise as a new form of public participation and deliberation. There is evidence to suggest the Assembly improved public perceptions of WCC engagement (and government engagement more widely) and improved public understanding of the issues facing WCC and the city.

The Assembly led to a more informed group deliberating and providing collective advice on the future of the city. Although the topic was informationally complex and more time was needed, the final report nonetheless largely represents the views in the room. There are valuable learning points from the pilot that can help strengthen any future use of deliberative processes.

The topic was broad, and the depth of information participants needed was not always available. This led to some people not feeling well informed on the issues at hand. Some would have liked more detailed information, such as planned future budgets and the financial and operational trade-offs of different scenarios. However, the information available at the time was shared and participants had time with senior WCC staff. Deliberative processes are about bringing everyone up to a common level of understanding and this can be difficult to demonstrate by the end.

However, the diversity of participants was a real strength. Participants engaged with the issues and seemed to take the task seriously. They enjoyed deliberating, learning, and hearing others' perspectives. In the end, the recommendations were a reasonable representation of the people in the room, who in turn were a good representation of Wellingtonians.

The sessions were well facilitated, and organisers worked hard to deliver an enjoyable experience for participants. At times the content of the sessions strayed from the question participants needed to answer. More time was needed to complete the process, but perhaps a narrower topic could have been covered in 4-5 days. With a future Assembly the planning and execution could be streamlined based on learnings from the pilot, but nonetheless it is useful to include extra time as a buffer.

The issues with the scope of the Assembly and information not being available relates to wider processes in Council that were outside the organisers' control. The nature of Council processes and changing timeframes can affect how to plan and use deliberative processes as information needs to be available at the right moment. Once recruitment starts it is difficult to delay or change the Assembly process. Using an approach like this requires trust and transparency from Council and a commitment to share the necessary information.

New modes of democracy need to be adapted for the local context. The Treaty of Waitangi is unique to our context and should be foundational for any new democratic practices. The Porirua example of Te Reo o Ngā Tāngata provides one model for a Treaty-based approach and highlights the time it takes to develop and grow the necessary relationships. It is a more complex proposition but represents a true partnership with mana whenua.

Bicultural facilitation and opening and closing addresses by a mana whenua representative ensured te reo and elements of te ao Māori were present in the space. However, WCC's Assembly fell short of integrating the Treaty into the process. The principles and values of the Treaty could have been included across sessions, rather than treating it as a standalone issue. Better planning was needed for sensitive issues such as discussions of the Treaty. WCC needs to continue strengthening its cultural capability and capacity and resource iwi for their contribution to local government activities.

There is a fundamental question about whether processes like this work for minority groups. On the one hand, people who may be juggling work and family commitments and other stress factors will find it harder to attend initiatives like this. In this regard, the WCC Assembly provided practical

support for people to attend, through providing a koha payment, additional support for transport and childcare, etc. But there is also a question about how we create culturally and socially safe spaces and ways of working. Perhaps we could draw on Pacific traditions to anchor how we implement deliberative processes locally.

Ideally a range of participatory and deliberative processes would be used depending on what is required. It is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each model when choosing a process to help address a policy issue. For example, Citizens' Assemblies are not about achieving equity and this kind of process is not good for elevating minority voices. If that is the main goal another method should be used. However, its strengths lie in a diverse group learning and deliberating to make informed decisions together. When done well it is also a chance for WCC to bolster public perceptions and experiences of engagement processes.

A few learning points from this document are summarised below:

- Allow sufficient time for the complexity of the topic.
- Decide the extent the process will be Treaty-led, engage with mana whenua early and allow time to build mana-enhancing relationships.
- Do a formal assessment of the resources required early on.
- Provide training to staff as needed, e.g. on the deliberative method being used.
- The independence of Global Research and the facilitators was an asset and may help alleviate public concerns about the legitimacy and validity of the process.
- Providing practical support for people to attend was appreciated and helped attendance.
- The process needs to facilitate learning across all relevant issues, which is challenging when people come with different prior knowledge.
- Be adaptable – plan as much as possible but there needs to be time and resource available to prepare info and respond to arising issues.
- Allow time for the final report to be a document participants can be proud of.
- Include evaluation in the time participants spend at the Assembly. The final participant survey was not completed by everyone and with such a diverse group even a few missing responses can change the picture.
- Keep participants informed of the outcome of their recommendations and plan early how interested people can stay involved.
- Look forward to a more informed, engaged group of residents interacting with WCC in the future!