File ref: IRC-2345

14 September 2021

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Kia Ora ███████

Ross Tanner Report

Thank you for your request made under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act), received on 07 September 2021. You requested the following information:

- a copy of the report by Ross Tanner mentioned in this story https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/wellington/126308027/review-finds-lack-of-promotion-and-clear-messaging-at-wellington-city-council

Wellington City Council has granted your request for information. Please see the attached report as well as the summary presentation which was presented to staff on the findings.

Please note, we may proactively release our response to your request with your personal information removed.

Thank you again for your request, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Claudia Holgate
Assurance Advisor

Review of the Communications and Engagement functions of the Wellington City Council.

Report for the Chief Strategy and Governance Officer,

Wellington City Council

August 2021

Ross Tanner

1. Executive Summary

This report provides a review of the Communications and Engagement functions of the Wellington City Council. Communications and engagement are key functions of the Council which support both the Councillors and the staff organisation to connect with the community, stakeholders and media in a strategic and meaningful way. There are a number of imperatives for change facing the Council and its staff, arising out of the recently agreed Long-Term Plan, that have led the Chief Strategy and Governance Officer to initiate this review to ensure that the Communications and Engagement functions are set up for success. The Chief Executive has also initiated an organisational change programme, called "Working Better Together", which is intended to encourage staff to work differently in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for the Council's Long-Term Plan.

My review was based largely on interviews with Executive Leadership Team ('ELT') members and senior managers from across the Council, and I also met many of the staff within the overall Communications and Engagement Group. The team appears hardworking and committed. Internal culture has improved over the last eighteen months. All of the staff to whom I spoke however referred to the workload-related pressure that they face.

Part of their workload is of course generated by the need to respond to external enquiry to the Council, whether from the traditional news media, or from public inquiries for information, including through social media channels. The communications and engagement team also try to be proactive, generating or managing the release of stories about Council activity or topics of potential public interest. The external communications advisers work closely with the content and social media team in this respect, the work of which is described later in this report.

A significant contributor to the team's workload is requests from other business units within the Council for communications support. This activity, whether for external or internal communications tasks, generates most of the group's work. There are generally good consultation and working relationships with business units throughout the Council. But I also found that there is a degree of misunderstanding across the Council about the role of the communications team. My expectation was that the respective Communications or Engagement adviser would be asked to provide support to the relevant subject matter experts in the business units, and to review and add to or occasionally rewrite communications messaging as needed. But this was in fact not what seems to occur. Rather than being 'advisers' or communications experts in support of a business unit, the advisers (including both the communications and engagement advisers) are seen as the primary drafters/writers of all communications releases or messaging. It is a case of the subject matter experts in the business units briefing the messenger (i.e., the assigned communications adviser) and handing over responsibility for the communications task and product. That practice is the norm, with the communications advisers themselves now expecting or requiring to be consulted and involved in every piece of external communications (indeed, some of the advisers expressed concern to me that they were not always being consulted about media releases or communications messaging). The same applies for internal organisational communications, where the internal communications team expects to be involved, even to take charge.

A consequence is that the communications advisers have become a bottom-up resource for the business units, writing all of the communications messaging and public releases, and preparing communications plans for many of the Council's activities and projects.

While the communications team believe that they are being pro-active and doing their best to anticipate and prepare for communications requirements and messaging, and indeed are

working extremely hard to deal with the heavy transactional workload that is thrown at them, the Council's leadership team and business units consider that the communications team is not being sufficiently pro-active and strategic. They are not seen as focussing sufficiently on joined-up messaging for the Council. The staff do receive credit from their counterparts in the business units for their work. In particular, the media management duo receives very high ratings internally. There is also a requisite focus on big issues and projects such as transport, infrastructure and the three waters questions.

But there is a perhaps even stronger view that I came across, that the communications group is not good at supporting Council work on important projects and bringing them together under an over-arching narrative or story about the Council's direction and programmes. ELT members and business unit staff described to me how they look for updated media releases and key messaging to be created in advance for them on a range of issues, but such support sometimes seems to be missing.

So, I therefore sought to ascertain from key governance and strategy documents what the Council's priorities are in respect of communications, and how the Council's vision and intended profile is being portrayed, both internally and externally.

The Wellington City Council has recently agreed on a new 10-year Long-Term Plan (LTP), which is described as 'bold and ambitious'. The Plan incorporates the largest capital investment programme in the Council's history. Communicating the Council's strategic vision and priorities to residents and stakeholders is stated in my Terms of Reference as being vitally important to build and maintain a sense of pride in the City. My expectation was therefore that a statement about the strategic vision and priorities for the Council would be visible in Council communications, externally and internally.

The Council's strategic vision and priorities are included in the LTP and are also relatively easily searchable on the Council's website although they are not included or signposted on the front pages of the website. The LTP states that "Our vision for Wellington 2040 is an inclusive, sustainable and creative capital for people to live, work and play", and summarises four community outcomes that will be the basis of Council activities under this LTP, as well as six priority objectives for the next three years.

But I could find relatively few references to the Council's vision and priorities in other recent external publications. Nor do they seem to be referenced on the Council's social media channel. A search of the Council's Facebook page for example came up short.

There is no reference at all to the Council's vision and key priorities in the last three editions of the 'Our Wellington' publication. Nor is the recently agreed LTP mentioned at all in the June edition recently distributed to Wellington households (although there was a story about the LTP public consultation in the April edition).

There is also no overarching communications strategy for the Council as a whole. This lack of a communication strategy helps to explain other observations that became apparent during my review work, such as a lack of consistency in messaging across different parts of the Council's spectrum of activity. It also helps to explain why the communications and engagement activities across the Council appear to be very reactive and transactional, and not sufficiently planned or strategic.

The Mayor's civic office staff pointed out to me that there is seemingly more unity and positive work being undertaken than is being reported in the media. This is backed up by the Winder report which makes positive reference to the way that the full Council came together and agreed

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on the complex issues underpinning the LTP. It would appear that more could be done by way of pro-active preparation for and positioning of Council and Council Committee decision-making to the external media and public audiences.

As well as the lack of a communications strategy, there is currently no agreed media strategy for the Council. A draft media strategy was prepared in January 2021 but is on hold pending the outcome of this review. The draft needs more work and will also need to take the findings of this report into account.

How can these problems therefore be resolved, and a more strategic and co-ordinated communications programme be organised?

1) The Council should prepare an overarching communications strategy, consistent with its vision and desired outcomes for the city, underpinned by a strong statement about its corporate identity and priorities.
2) A media strategy should be agreed to complement and support the communications strategy. The media strategy should be agreed by the ELT and promulgated within the Council.
3) There needs to be a Council wide discussion and agreement about the responsibility within business units for communications and the role of communications advisers. At present this is not altogether well understood.
4) As project management disciplines improve and are embedded within the Council, a necessary part of this enhancement and new project management style should be Council-wide risk management and communications management consistency.

Having a communications strategy and clear set of priorities should facilitate a more proactive and innovative approach to Council communications, and also assist the Communications and Engagement Group staff to prioritise between competing demands for their time and expertise.

I was also asked to look at the Engagement function of the Council. Engagement and consultation with the community is a statutory requirement of the Council. The Communications Group's engagement staff provide skilled engagement support at the operational level, but the sense that I had from my discussions across different business units is that they currently rely on the engagement specialists to take the lead in respect of community engagement. The engagement staff are well regarded, both internally in the Council, and externally. But their workload seems very high, and both they and also staff in the business units have told me that the Council needs a major rethink of its entire engagement strategy.

The Council and its staff are currently perceived to talk **to** and **at** people in the community rather than listening or actually engaging. It has not yet managed to build long term stakeholder relationships in the community, for example with residents' groups and other key stakeholders. There therefore needs to be a renewed strategy for engagement, and better understanding across the Council about how to undertake community engagement. Simply adding more people into the mix will not resolve the above concerns.

What is suggested is a properly facilitated review (Council-wide) on how engagement should be conducted in future, including lessons learned from recent engagement efforts. The aim would be to produce a new Council approach and some practical guidelines for community engagement. These should not be over-complicated, and certainly not 'gold-plated'.

Engagement with the community is not a task that can be delegated within the Council to a few specialist staff. It is part of the responsibility of the whole organisation, with some specific (and

legislated) requirements on what must be done. There needs to be a stronger community voice (not just a tick-box 'consultation') to help shape future decision-making.

The placement and focus of the engagement work (currently inside the communications team) could be debated. In another major Council, the engagement function has been relocated to the Democracy Services team. But there are good arguments either way, and any further discussion about such a change should follow on from a reinvigorated Council engagement strategy.

I have not made any recommendations on resourcing levels for the Communications and Engagement function. The external communications team is currently carrying a number of vacancies (along with some other parts of the group), so depending on there being a new communications strategy and set of priorities, this should allow the Head of Communications and Engagement to align his overall group structure and resourcing to deliver on them.

2. Introduction

This report provides an independent review of the Wellington City Council's Communications and Engagement functions. The questions that I have been asked to address are:
- What is, and what should be, the key purpose of the Communications and Engagement functions?
- What should the desirable future state be, and what needs to occur to get there? What does success look like?

I have also been asked to consider what should be the priorities of the Communications and Engagement functions (within the overall strategic direction of the Council), how the functions should be organised/delivered and what are desirable resourcing levels?

3. Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) that I was given are attached to this report as Appendix One. Communications and engagement are key functions of the Council which support both the Councillors and the staff organisation to connect with the community, stakeholders and media in a strategic and meaningful way. There are a number of imperatives for change facing the Council and its staff, arising out of the recently agreed Long-Term Plan, that have led the Chief Executive to initiate this review to ensure that the communications and engagement functions are set up for success.

The Executive Leadership Team has a strong desire to improve the Council's strategic and operational effectiveness and build a high performing organisation to deliver the Council's vision and priorities. The Chief Executive has initiated an organisational change programme, called "Working Better Together", which is intended to encourage staff to work differently in order to rise to that challenge. An important part of the programme includes a focus on support services being fit for purpose.

The recent Independent Governance Review by Peter Winder (April 2021) also recommended greater levels of support for elected Council members, including communications support.

4. Method

I met with the Executive Leadership Team members and their own group managers. I also met individually with many staff members of the Communications and Engagement function and also with small groups of staff, some more than once. I also conducted some external research, including with the communications manager at the Auckland City Council. The findings and recommendations of this report are a result primarily of those interviews.

5. The Council's strategic vision and priorities

The Wellington City Council has recently agreed on a new 10-year Long-Term Plan (LTP), which is described as 'bold and ambitious'. The Plan incorporates the largest capital investment programme in the Council's history.

Communicating the Council's strategic vision and priorities to residents and stakeholders is stated in my Terms of Reference as being vitally important to build and maintain a sense of pride in the City. My expectation was therefore that a statement about the strategic vision and priorities for the Council would be visible in Council communications, externally and internally.

The Council's strategic vision and priorities <u>are</u> included in the LTP and are also relatively easily searchable on the Council's website although they are not included or signposted on the front pages of the website. The LTP states that "Our vision for Wellington 2040 is an inclusive, sustainable and creative capital for people to live, work and play", and summarises four community outcomes that will be the basis of Council activities under this LTP, as well as six priority objectives for the next three years.

But I could find relatively few references to the Council's vision and priorities in other recent external publications. Nor do they seem to be referenced on the Council's social media channel. A search of the Council's Facebook page for example came up short.

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A related question raised during my discussions with Council staff was whether a stronger and clearer distinction should be made between the branding of the city itself and the Council's own branding and identity. It was suggested to me that the Council might look at developing or refreshing its own refreshed <u>corporate</u> identity: this would desirably be based on 'what we promise and what are the core values that sum up what we stand for'? Responsibility for the marketing and branding of the city itself has been handed over to Wellington NZ (the recently established regional economic development and tourism organisation). The Council appears still to rely on the brand headline "Absolutely Positively Wellington City Council', which apart from being somewhat dated, is not explained in or by any reference in the Council's vision, priorities or Long-Term Plan.

A clear, unified corporate identity provides direction and purpose to an organisation. It underpins the image of the organisation, helps to recruit and retain employees, and can lead to more coherent marketing and communications. I also note in this respect that the Winder report at paragraph 47 and in the conclusion to that report, referred to there being '<u>a lack of an agreed</u>

vision to pull together and crystallise what the Council is trying to achieve'. This conclusion is probably incorrect since the Council does indeed have its own vision, community outcomes and priorities for the city decided and included in the LTP. The residual issue here seems to be that they are not widely publicised or recognised outside of the Council itself. In his report however Mr Winder also found that the elected council and its staff have not been working as a team, in the sense that adherence to good governance principles would normally require the board and staff of an organisation to work together in the best interests of the organisation.

I suggest that one way of achieving a more unified 'team Wellington" could be to refresh and agree on a Council corporate identity and values statement: this would respond to the questions: 'what do we promise and what are the core values that sum up what we stand for?' The basis of a such a statement has already been created, through the internal 'Working Better Together' strategy. That could also provide a suitable way to refresh the corporate identity of the Council and its external branding. If the Working Better Together outcomes have not already been agreed or endorsed by the Council, I recommend that the ELT consider the possibility of making them the basis of a refreshed corporate identity statement and branding and proposing that to the Mayor and the Council.

6. Communications strategy and messages

It became apparent during my interviews that there is currently no agreed communications strategy for the Council. This needs to be remedied.

The lack of a communications strategy helps to explain other observations that became apparent during my review work. First, as noted above, the Council's website lacks coherence, and there is no overall story about the city that is apparent from the website.   Indeed, the Council has an actively managed website, under the overall control of the Smart Council function but with different business units able to create their own specific pages. A consequence of the lack of a story that underpins the website is that there are a number of sub-websites and indeed sub-brands being created by Council staff and business units. This can lead to lack of consistency in messaging, particularly where there is no over-arching narrative. A reader has to search for the vision statement and Council priorities in order to find them.

The second observation is that communications and engagement activities across the Council are not sufficiently planned or strategic. I shall return to this point in section 8 of the report.

Third, the Mayor's office pointed out to me that there is seemingly more unity and positive work being undertaken than is being reported in the media. This is backed up by the Winder report which makes positive reference to the way that the full Council came together and agreed on the complex issues underpinning the LTP. It would appear that more could be done by way of pro-active preparation for and positioning of Council and Council Committee decision-making to the external media and public audiences.

As well as the lack of a communications strategy, there is currently no agreed media strategy for the Council. A draft media strategy was prepared in January 2021 but is on hold pending the outcome of this review. The draft needs more work and will also need to take the recommendations in this report into account. Having said that, I wish to note that there was a strong view from business units that the Council is well served by its current media management staff, who are long serving members of staff, and highly regarded by the media as well as the business units. Their work would be enhanced by having an overall communications strategy, key messaging and an agreed media strategy with priority tasks in that respect, in place.

A further point that I would note is that during the course of the LTP preparation, the Council engaged external assistance to create a narrative and key message about the city and the Council's priorities, to be the basis of communications and key messaging to publicise the LTP. This fundamental work has therefore been completed and is available for use. Now what appears to be required is, in the words of one staff member: "a simple story about the work of the Council, told often".

7. The communications and engagement function

During the course of my review, I was able to meet individually with many staff from the communications and engagement function. My overall impression was that the staff are a cohesive, passionate and high-output group. They enjoy working for the Council, many describing it as the best job they have had. Staff from other business units also remarked to me about the quality of the communications staff in similar terms. But equally, staff both within and outside the group also stated that the communications and engagement staff are currently faced with a large volume of work, and that the staff individually hold seeming excessively busy portfolios. By contrast, others within the Council expressed concern at the apparently high number of communications staff and wondered whether the numbers were actually justified and necessary. I therefore sought to understand more about the nature of their work and from where it is generated.

A further issue to which I was pointed, are the results of recent external satisfaction monitoring surveys, which as reported to the ELT, describe nation-wide perceptions of the city as consistent with previous years, showing strong destination attraction and a consistent reputation of a culturally rich artistic city with great access to nature. However, city residents' perceptions of the city and Council governance have declined in multiple areas, although satisfaction with most directly managed services/facilities remains steady. This result is now comparable with other cities, whereas Wellington was once a leader.

8. External communications

Workload concerns

The external communications team consists of eleven staff positions. There are two additional communications staff embedded in the (transport) network improvements team. The team appears hardworking and committed. Internal culture has improved over the last eighteen months. All of the staff to whom I spoke however referred to the workload-related pressure that they face.

Part of their workload is of course generated by external enquiry to the Council, whether from the traditional news media, or from public inquiries for information, including through social media channels. For example, the infrastructure group management team referred in my meeting with them to the Council receiving 65,000 transport-related enquiries per year. A sizable proportion of those will end up in the hands of the communications advisers to respond to directly or to review others' proposed responses. Other business units also receive large amounts of enquiries. I did not pursue a detailed investigation to ascertain the proportion of information requests or responses that are handled direct by subject matter experts in the business units as contrasted with those handed to the communications advisers to respond to

but satisfied myself by repeat interview questions that this makes up a solid proportion of the workload of the communications advisers.

This assessment begs the question as to whether the current demand for responsiveness could overwhelm communications (and also other) staff in the not-too-distant future, unless there is a change in approach. Staff (including the social media team) endeavour to respond to each and every request for information or comment.

The communications and engagement team also try to be proactive, generating or managing the release of stories about Council activity or topics of potential public interest. The external communications advisers work closely with the social media team in this respect, the work of which will be described further below.

A significant contributor to the team's workload is requests from other business units within the Council for communications support. This sort of activity, whether for external or internal communications tasks, generates most of the group's work. There are generally good consultation and working relationships with business units throughout the Council. But I also found that there was a degree of misunderstanding across the Council about the role of the communications team. My expectation was that the respective Communications or Engagement adviser would be asked to provide support to the relevant subject matter experts in the business units, and to review and add to or occasionally rewrite communications messaging as needed. But this was in fact not what seems to occur. Rather than being 'advisers' or communications experts in support of a business unit, the advisers (including both the communications and engagement advisers) are seen as the primary drafters/writers of all communications releases or messaging. It is a case of the subject matter experts in the business units briefing the messenger (i.e., the assigned communications adviser) and handing over responsibility for the communications task and product. That practice is the norm, with the communications advisers themselves now expecting or requiring to be consulted and involved in every piece of external communications (indeed some of the advisers expressed concern to me that they were not always being consulted about media releases or communications messaging). The same applies for internal organisational communications, where the internal communications team expects to be involved, even to take charge.

A consequence is that the external advisers have become a bottom-up resource for the business units, writing all of the communications messaging and public releases and preparing communications plans for many of the Council's activities and projects. I was shown examples of the 'communications plans on a page', that are prepared by the communications advisers. These plans are indeed created on one A3 page and aim to set out concisely what is intended or required by way of (external and internal) communications for the given issue or project. It was not my role to critique the actual content of these communication plans (albeit they appear to be good quality pieces of work), but I did check back with the business units during the course of my interviews about what they thought of the plans. To my surprise I found that those to whom I talked were seemingly unaware of the existence of these 'communications plans on a page'.

I have subsequently been advised that each of the A3 plans are signed off by the manager responsible for a particular project, which is a key part of the process. The majority of these are Tier 4 and 5 managers.

There appears therefore to be a disconnect between staff and team leaders working 'at the coal face' (and the communications advisers), and their business unit managers or ELT members, who were the people I interviewed. It also appeared to me that a good deal of the communications work of the Council is being undertaken without adequate input or direction

from senior management and leadership of the Council, and potentially without reference to the Council's or executive leadership's priorities. Indeed several of the communications advisers I talked with commented to me that they wished that they had more input from and contact with the Executive Leadership Team members.

This perception on my part is corroborated in that while the communications team believe that they are being pro-active and doing their best to anticipate and prepare for communications requirements and messaging, and indeed are working extremely hard to deal with the heavy transactional workload that is thrown at them, the Council's leadership team and business units consider that the communications team is not being sufficiently pro-active and strategic. They are not seen as focussing sufficiently on joined-up messaging for the Council. The staff do receive credit from their counterparts in the business units for their work. In particular, the media management duo receives very high ratings internally. There is also a requisite focus on the big issues and projects such as transport, infrastructure and the three waters questions.

But there is a perhaps even stronger view that I came across, that the communications group is not so good at supporting Council work on important projects and bringing them together under an over-arching narrative or story about the Council's direction and programmes. ELT members and business unit staff described to me how they continue to look for updated media releases and key messaging to be created in advance for them on a range of issues, but such support seems to be patchy.

Project management in the Council

A further problem that I became aware of is that the communications and engagement advisers have often become surrogate project managers. It would appear that project management disciplines are currently relatively immature within the Council (although this is changing and improving). The Chief Executive has recently established a central Project Management Office to assist staff by introducing project planning and management disciplines to the Council including risk and communications management. The PMO manager confirmed to me that project management across the Council is 'work in progress'. The communications advisers as a consequence are the ones often asking the questions: 'what are the messages you want to provide to the public, what risks to completion are envisaged, what public reaction is likely, and what might be an appropriate communications response etc?'

One could argue therefore that if the communications advisors are asking the questions outlined above, that would indicate they are indeed endeavouring to be proactive?

Innovation and foresight

The communications staff believe that they themselves are overworked and that their efforts to encourage business units to take more responsibility for managing project communications and potential issues sometimes go unheeded. Equally, the Council's leadership and business unit management consider that the communications and engagement group seems to miss strategic opportunities, and I encountered a widespread view that they are not sufficiently pro-active, that there is with limited forward planning, and insufficient attention as to how Council communications and messaging are going to 'land' into the public domain. Across the Council there appears to be lack of foresight and planning in terms of communications, and there is only limited scanning of the media 'horizon'.

This is therefore a problem not just for the Communications and Engagement function to resolve: it is a Council- wide issue. It is a further example of the apparent disconnect between

staff and team leaders working 'at the coal face' (and the communications advisers), and more senior managers or leadership team members. There is inadequate input or direction from senior management and leadership of the Council to the communications planning that does take place at working level and lack of appreciation by the communications staff of the Council leadership's requirements in terms of communications priorities and messaging.

Senior staff from the business units voiced the hope that the Council could become more innovative in use of technology for communications purposes (i.e., not just social media). An example of the potential for innovation suggested to me was in relation to land and property information. The geospatial land information system is mostly only accessible to valuers or surveyors or other property experts (and not directly accessible by the public via the LIMS system). Yet there is technology available that can transform geospatial information and make it much more accessible, that has the capability and potential to give ordinary citizens greater understanding of the nature of land and property assets that they own and associated issues.

Innovation in terms of access to geospatial information would require expertise in information technology of course as well as in communications messaging. This will require some innovative thinking about how it can be done but also the communications implications for the Council and for the public.

Publicising the work of the Council

A starting point for a refocus on the need to be more pro-active in terms of communications would appear to be the preparation and release of information on the work of the elected Council members, and Council committees. The Council's governance and decision-making work needs support from pro-active communications effort – pre-writing and shaping stories about upcoming decisions in advance.

An outcome of the Winder report and its recommendation was a Council decision to move away from individual Councillor portfolios and to adopt a new committee structure. Four Council committees have been established, which meet on a monthly cycle.

The mayor's office and his advisers are seeking to ensure that there is more planning and preparation in advance in terms of publicity about Council decisions. That implies preparation of draft media statements at the time that the meeting papers are prepared, so that they can then be released as soon as the decisions are taken. The perception is that too often the Council has to react to media stories about Council decisions rather than being in a position to shape the media story or stories. Council staff advised me that this sort of preparation already occurs and that there are scheduled meetings with Committee chairs prior to Committee meetings to check the agenda, meeting papers and likely communications requirements. Nevertheless, the perception remains that there is more work to be done in this area.

An additional strong concern at governance level that was iterated during my review discussions was that the Council must be more innovative and proactive in terms of telling its story. This would include celebrating delivery of services, publicising progress on major projects, and also getting the story out about potential changes to life in the city in future (climate change and environmental impacts etc).

Embed or centralise the communications function?

A different question that arose during my discussions was whether the Council's organisational placement of its communications staff was fit for purpose. Most of the of the communications staff are employed in a single overall Communications Group (and placed within the appropriate functional team). There are also some staff who are embedded within other business units of the

Council and who report to the leadership of those business units, with a secondary relationship to the Communications team. The question therefore was whether embedding most or all of the external communications advisers into business units might be a preferable way to organise the communications function.

There has been a debate within the communications profession whether the communications function in a large organisation should be embedded in business units or centralised. Arguments can be advanced either way, and there are research papers to support either view. Experience in other large city councils has been that a centralised communications function, with its own budget, is the preferred organisational form. That said, the Wellington Council's current practice of embedding a few communications staff within the relevant business unit makes sense, but its continuation needs periodic review to ensure that that remains the case.

Role clarity

There needs however to be some rethinking by the ELT about the role and purpose of having communications advisers in-house in the Council and role clarity in terms of who is ultimately responsible for (external) communications from the business units. Primary responsibility for communications messaging in relation to key Council projects should rest with the business unit leaders or project sponsors, supported by the relevant subject matter experts in their project teams. The role of the communications advisers would then be to act as skilled communications support, bringing their communications expertise to the task. They would prepare communications plans, review and reshape communications messaging and assist the business units to execute the communications plans relating to a project or event. Part of this discussion would be to decide on the need for and content of a specific project, task, or event-based communications plan. This would be co-designed with the business unit or subject matter expert. This shift in thinking about roles should be a Council-wide issue, and not something just for the Communications and Engagement Group to resolve.

A current consequence of poor understanding about communications responsibilities and less than effective project management disciplines is a tendency for scapegoating and blaming that is currently perceived by members of the communications staff. Fingers are pointed at the communications staff when the media portrays the Council negatively or partially. Part of this can also be attributed to the lack of an overarching communications strategy.

All of the responses suggested above will need to be underpinned by a clear strategy and priorities for the Council, simple communications messaging, and a strong set of Council priorities for communications and engagement.

Summary

How can these problems therefore be resolved, and a more strategic and co-ordinated communications programme be organised?

    a. The Council should prepare an overarching communications strategy (consistent with its vision and desired outcomes for the city), underpinned by a strong statement about its corporate identity and priorities.
    b. A media strategy should be agreed to complement and support the communications strategy. The media strategy should be agreed by the ELT and promulgated within the Council.
    c. There needs to be a Council wide discussion and agreement about the responsibility within business units for communications and the role of communications advisers. At present this is not altogether well understood.

d. As project management disciplines improve and are embedded within the Council, a necessary part of this enhancement and new PM style should be Council-wide risk management and communications management consistency.

e. Having a communications strategy and clear set of priorities should facilitate a more proactive and innovative approach to Council communications.

The external communications team is currently carrying a number of vacancies (along with some other parts of the group, so depending on there being a new communications strategy and set of priorities, this should allow the Head of Communications and Engagement to align his overall group structure and resourcing to deliver on them.

9. Internal communications

The internal communications team has four staff positions. The role of the team should be to support the Chief Executive and her ELT to communicate the Council's vision strategy and priorities, and also what is going on at the Council in its multifaceted aspects, to the Council's 1800 staff. They advised me that they seek to work closely with the People and Culture team, and the Smart Council teams (as well other business units to which they are assigned). Members of the internal communications team and the team leader commented to me how they feel under substantial pressure and that they are not 'keeping their heads above water' in terms of their perceived workload.

There was indeed an acknowledgement from their key 'customer' (the People and Culture team) that internal communications may be under-resourced. But that team also expressed concern to me that the internal communications team has not properly understood or agreed with them what the important tasks are, and what expectations exist around prioritisation as well as quality of output for internal communications. I formed the view that the aspirations of the internal communications team are misplaced. They appear to want to be 'across everything' in terms of communication about people and culture work within the Council, but clearly this is likely to be an impossibility.

This confusion about roles therefore parallels the comments made above about the relationship between external communications advisers and the business units in terms of who is responsible for internal communications to staff. Primary responsibility for communications messaging to staff should rest with the People and Culture team. The role of the communications advisers would then be to act as skilled communications support and to co-design communications plans and key messaging with their customer. Thus, I suggest that the Internal Communications team need to rethink their purpose and aspirations so that they focus on being advisers rather than 'controllers'. Their key customer is the People and Culture team (and of course, the Executive Leadership team of the Council).

The internal communications team perhaps also needs to recognise that while the People and Culture team is their key customer, in fact all of the business units are important, and that their work priorities should be directed by feedback from the ELT.

As a further example of the apparent problem that exists, I was advised by the People and Culture team that there is no current strategy for communicating what the Council is and does for the city, across the entire council organisation. Yet I was provided as part of my review reading with several strategy documents and plans. They included:

- "People and Culture: internal communications strategy" (seven pages)
- The Chief Executive's "Kia kotahi ra: Working Better Together" statement to staff

- 'Working Better Together Communications Plan (one A3 page)
- 'ELT Internal Engagement' plan (two A3 pages)
- 'Internal Digital Channels Roadmap – 2019-2021' (6 pages, prepared October 2019)
- 'Reporting and Assurance process (7 pages)
- 'Using Yammer at Wellington City Council' (Yammer is an electronic platform used for communications with and between staff).
- 'Strategies and Plans' (an extract from the Council's *Who We Are* pages on Pokapu (the intranet).

It would appear therefore that the internal communications strategy may be another example of a communications plan where the business unit leadership is unaware that it exists.

Having also read the suite of documents listed above I would also comment that there seems to be a lack of clarity and consistency between the documents. What I had expected to see was a discussion about what the Council's (external) vision, community outcomes, and priorities are and how they could be communicated to staff. Likewise, the (internal) Working Better Together strategy would be summarised, with a plan for how each of the four parts of that strategy would be explained and communicated throughout the Council. My expectations were however not met: the plans were largely operational, not integrated well with the actual strategies, and focussing on how to communicate rather than first on what should be communicated, then how. There was only an oblique, and therefore limited, reference to the Council's vision and strategy in these documents.

Other concerns about internal communications were also raised with me. The People and Culture team are concerned about the content and format of the staff intranet (Pokapu), which is apparently confusing and needs attention. This sentiment was echoed as well by the communications staff.

There was also reference made in my interview with the People and Culture team to the use and quality of video communications by the Council. Video presentations are increasingly being used as part of external as well as internal staff communications. The Council has an expert videographer on its staff (within the Creative and Design team) who produces work of very high quality and professionalism. High standards are set for all video productions and communications. But there is concern that the emphasis on all video output having to be of cinematic quality is preventing lower cost alternatives being used. It also results in an excessive workload for the videographer. I shall return to this discussion further below.

10. Community engagement

Engagement and consultation with the community is a statutory requirement of the Council. The Local Government Act 2002 stipulates that every local authority must adopt a policy setting out that local authority's general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions in relation to issues, assets, and other matters; and how the local authority will engage with its communities. The council has a Significance and Engagement Policy (2018) that is published on its website.

The engagement team is quite small (two FTEs currently on staff) but there are also three further FTEs embedded in the Planning and Infrastructure Groups who undertake specialist engagement activities for their particular business units (city design and planning, and transport).

The Communications Group's engagement staff provide skilled engagement support at the operational level, but the sense that I had from my discussions across different business units is

that they currently rely on the engagement specialists to take the lead in respect of community engagement. The engagement staff are well regarded, both internally in the Council, and externally. But their workload seems very high, and both they and also staff in the BU's have told me that the Council needs a major rethink of its entire engagement strategy.

The Council and its staff are currently perceived to talk **to** and **at** people in the community rather than listening or actually engaging. It has not yet managed to build long term stakeholder relationships in the community, for example with residents' groups and other key stakeholders. There therefore needs to be a renewed approach for engagement, and better understanding across the Council about how to undertake community engagement. Simply adding more people into the mix will not resolve the above concerns.

What is suggested is a properly facilitated review (Council-wide) on how engagement should be conducted in future, including lessons learned from recent engagement efforts. The aim would be to produce a new Council approach and some practical guidelines for community engagement. These should not be over-complicated, and certainly not 'gold-plated'.

Engagement with the community is not a task that can be delegated within the Council to a few specialist staff. It is part of the responsibility of the whole organisation, with some specific (and legislated) requirements on what must be done. There needs to be a stronger community voice (not just a tick-box 'consultation') to help shape future conversations.

The placement and focus of the engagement work (currently inside the communications team) could be debated. In another major Council, the engagement function has been relocated to the Democracy Services team. But there are good arguments either way, and any further discussion about such a change should follow on from a reinvigorated Council engagement strategy.

11. Content and social media

The content and social media team within the Communications Group has four staff, and again appeared to me to be a hard-working, committed team with considerable knowledge and expertise in things to do with social media and marketing. I had a limited engagement with the team and their leader but came away impressed with the work they are doing, notwithstanding my comments above about the Council communications efforts being too reactive and transactional.

The Council has launched its own digital news channel over the last year, called "Our Wellington". There is also a print publication produced under the same banner that is delivered four times a year to all Wellington households, including a selection of recently-published articles and details about upcoming events. The electronic channel is housed on the home page of the Council website and supported by a weekly email to registered email addresses, as well as through a number of social media channels. There have been 220 stories published in last six months and 150,000 page views, along with 18,000 social media comments or enquiries.

In order to find out more about the news channel I registered myself as a recipient of the weekly emails that are part of its operation. While interesting and informative, there was no inclusion of anything about the Long-Term Plan, or the Council's vision etc, during my participation. This has served to reinforce the conclusions that I have summarised earlier in this report about the direction and planning behind the Council's communications efforts.

I heard during my review interviews that what the Council does well is at telling the easy stories, but less well at the hard ones. This is partly because there are often multiple stakeholders

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involved (e.g., Let's Get Wellington Moving), who need to agree to the communications as well. It is debateable whether if there were more frequent stories about what is actually being achieved by the LGWM project, rather than having to react all the time to media questions and commentary, some of the negative media and public reaction might be alleviated.

The Council and its staff need to be less risk-averse at telling some of the important stories likely to be of major public interest. Examples include the Omaroro reservoir, the town hall rebuild, and the convention centre.

The town hall work did receive publicity in the April edition of 'Our Wellington' and since my review was commenced, the Council achieved a significant piece published in the Dominion Post about the innovative work being done to rebuild its foundations. But public interest in the project will be ongoing. An example of what can be achieved is the Omaroro reservoir build, where the regular (indeed weekly) communications to residents by the construction contractor is now regarded by local residents as exemplary.

My residual concern about the work of the social media team is that they would benefit from more direction from senior leadership and should also give more attention to communicating the council's vision, desired community outcomes, and priorities through their electronic channel and social media activities.

They could also be encouraged to provide more content about some of the big challenges that the city faces (infrastructure, environment and climate change, three waters etc.) and to invite feedback. Opinion pieces from outside of the Council might be an option in this respect and be positive for community engagement purposes.

12. Creative and Brand

There are currently 17 staff positions within a Creative and Brand team that is part of the Communications and Engagement function of the Council. The role of the team (my summary) is to:
- lead design thinking within the Council to provide quality visual communications on all mediums (digital and print);
- to provide accessible and culturally diverse visuals;
- to provide and brand consistency that reflects and supports the Council's values;
- provide creative art direction and creative services for the Council's projects, campaigns and communications.

The team includes a photographer and videographer, and also a printing room. Both functions have been part of the Council for many years. The quality of video production and photography work is rated extremely highly.

The Creative and Brand team has an overall reputation for top quality work, and they set high standards. The Council clearly employs some very talented individuals within the team.

But one of the matters of concern raised with me was that the team may be too rigid in requiring adherence to design and branding standards, and that this creates a degree of inflexibility about the Council's work. There appears to therefore be a need for them to communicate their own design principles and standards better internally, and to take feedback on board as there is a perception that some of their brand and design requirements are excessive.

A similar expression of concern raised with me was that, as mentioned earlier in this report, high standards are set for all video productions and communications. But there is concern that the emphasis on all video output having to be of cinematic quality is preventing lower cost alternatives being used. It also results in an excessive workload for the videographer. This problem could be addressed by having a broader discussion across the Council at business unit level, facilitated by the Head of Communications and with the videographer involved, about the likely ongoing demand for, and uses of video filming. ELT endorsement of the agreed outcome and future approach to be taken would also be useful. The goal would be to decide what sources are permitted and what quality standards should pertain. The same could apply as well to photography for use in Council publications or on the websites. The Council has an expert photographer on staff whose work is widely applauded, but modern (including mobile phone) photography technology is sufficiently good to potentially allow other staff to have approved photos published by the Council as well.

A further point of concern, raised with me both by this team and others within the business units, is that the team is required to operate an internal charging system for the use of their services. Business Units hold budgets for design work and are charged for branding and design work by the Creative and Brand team. But not all of the time spent on a task is necessarily translated into chargeable hours. For example, time spent in preliminary meetings related to design tasks (and any meeting follow up) is not included in the cost to the business unit. Nor are other overhead costs included. Only the actual design work and related expenditure are on-charged. The system is confusing to all concerned.

A better option would be to cease the internal charging mechanism and transfer the entire design budget to the communications team. This would provide opportunities for their work to be better aligned with Council priorities and not be constrained by business unit budgeting.

I checked this point with the Auckland Council, who advised me that they removed the practice of internal charging for internal creative and design, for similar reasons, some time ago. They also continued with the practice of having an internal design team, although some of their work is outsourced depending on the nature of the task and the need for any specialist expertise involved.

I also considered this latter point during my review i.e., should the Council continue to employ its own creative and design staff or outsource them? My conclusion was that there are likely to be net advantages for the Council to continue its current practice of retaining in house specialists. There are benefits of doing so (integrated approach by one business unit devoted to design work across the Council, integrated technology and management systems etc), that seem to outweigh the costs (potential cost uncertainties within a fixed budgeting environment, need for external contractors to work across many stakeholders, accountability and authority to make decisions etc.). So, I am not proposing any change in this respect. But there is room for flexibility here, and it may well be that the Council could 'test the water' by seeking to outsource more design work to external contractors. A particular design task might be outsourced (either because of the expertise required or simply for work management reasons), and this call would be made by the design team itself in consultation with the respective business unit.

The Creative and Brand team currently outsources many design jobs to contractors, most of whom are former employees, which ensures brand consistency. These are all managed by the in-house workflow team, which makes it a seamless process. In fact, the internal client would usually be unaware which designer has been working on their particular project. However there are a few Business Units who use external agencies for projects from time to time, with no reference to the Creative and Brand team, which creates brand consistency issues across the

organisation. This is a further reason in favour of centralisation of control of all creative and design work on one specialist business group.

13.   The print room

I visited the print room in Johnsonville and talked with the two staff and the Creative and Brand Manager to whom they report, who is based in The Terrace office of the Council. The print room has some large-scale (legacy) photocopying and printing equipment, most of which is leased from Fuji Xerox.

The print room does a few large pieces of work (e.g., rates invoices and dog-licensing renewals) and a range of smaller printing tasks for the Council as well as some for non-Council (mostly NFP) organisations. Some printing work is also done inside the Council on business units' own photocopiers, although the print room staff maintain that urgency should not be a factor in deciding on that: they maintain that they have the capacity to respond quickly.

A significant amount of WCC print work is outsourced, as the print room is not resourced for many of the Council's requirements. For example, the Our Wellington quarterly publication has to be printed externally, along with the frequent large format jobs requested by Business Units. Many hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent with external printers each year.

There are a number of options available to address the sporadic nature of the work that the print room currently undertakes, including marketing this facility to community and NFP groups as well as to Council BU's, or to consider outsourcing the function entirely.

14.   The Maori perspective

I met with the Council's senior Maori adviser, who told me that there is little knowledge and capability within the Council on communicating things to do with Maori, and only limited capacity to interact effectively with Maori right now. He and his team sometimes use external firms to assist them at present.

This concern has already been recognised as a Council-wide issue however and work is underway to address it. The Chief Executive created the new role of Head of Maori Strategic Relationships and has already commenced work to build a new set of relationships with mana whenua. Other priorities include Maori language content: the objective is for the WCC to be a bi-lingual Council by 2040. But attention will need to continue on incorporating more Te Reo and Maori content in Council communications.

There are also issues to do with the Council's branding that need attention. The Creative and Branding team don't always do a good job from a Maori point of view. They are seen as being too protective and not sufficiently accommodating of Maori considerations. For example, video and photography work can be culturally sensitive for Maori and so needs an understanding of tikanga when engaging in a Maori context.

15.   Conclusions

The conclusions that I have drawn from the discussion above, are that:

a.   The purpose of the communications function of the Council should be to support the Mayor and Council, and the Chief Executive and her ELT, to communicate the Council's

vision, strategy and priorities, and also what is going on at the Council in its multifaceted aspects, to Wellington's citizens as well as to the Council's 1800 staff.

b. The objective of this work should be to seek to enhance the Council's reputation and identity and celebrate its achievements by telling an integrated and consistent 'story' about the Wellington City Council.

c. The Council's strategic vision and priorities have not been widely publicised or acknowledged. They <u>are</u> included in the LTP and are also relatively easily searchable on the Council's website, but they are not included or signposted on the front pages of the website. The LTP states that "Our vision for Wellington 2040 is an inclusive, sustainable and creative capital for people to live, work and play", and summarises four community outcomes that will be the basis of Council activities under this LTP, as well as six priority objectives for the next three years. This statement needs stronger backing and regular inclusion in communications as part of the Council's story. There is an opportunity here to build public awareness of the LTP.

d. There could also be a stronger and clearer distinction between the Council's own branding and personality, and the branding of the city itself (which is the responsibility of Wellington NZ). The Council needs its own corporate brand identity: 'what do we promise and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for'.

e. All of the above will need to be underpinned by a clear statement about the strategic direction and priorities for the Council, simple communications messaging, and a strong programme of communications and engagement.

f. There is currently no communications strategy for the Council, nor agreed key messages. Without them being in place and a regular part of Council communications, the Council's communications efforts will remain reactive and ad-hoc i.e., tailored to specific events or information requests.

g. The Council's communications staff engage in largely reactive and transactional activity, and not either sufficiently proactive, or engaged in joined- up Council messaging.

h. There is a concern in the Council organisation and its ELT that resourcing levels in the communications team may be too high. I did not find evidence that this was the case. Indeed, the anecdotal response from different interviews within the team was that they are under constant pressure. Workloads are high for communications staff resulting in a degree of burn-out.

i. That is likely to be attributable to the largely transactional and reactive nature of their work, and the tendency for Business Units to use them as project managers in addition to their role as communications advisers.

j. If the opportunity can now be taken to reinforce and publicise the Council's strategic vision and priorities for the city, and its own corporate identity, and to agree an overarching communications strategy, this should enable the communications team to reset its own direction and establish some clear work priorities.

k. The desirable role for communication staff (both those in the centralised Communications Group and those embedded in business units) is as expert advisers and support staff for the BUs, including internal management units.

l. There has been a debate within the communications profession whether the communications function in a large organisation should be fully embedded in business units or centralised. Arguments can be advanced either way. Experience in other large city councils has been that a centralised communications function, with its own budget, is

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the preferred way of organising their communications function. That said, the Wellington City Council's current practice of embedding a few communications staff within the relevant business unit, makes sense, but the continuation needs periodic review to ensure that that remains the case.

m. The Council's communications function needs to be much more innovative and proactive in terms of telling the Council's story. This would include celebrating delivery of services, publicising progress on major projects, and also giving attention to potential changes to life in the city in future (climate change and environmental impacts etc).

n. The Council's engagement staff is also small, and they all have a heavy workload. Overall, the Council and its staff are perceived to talk **to** and **at** people in the community rather than listening or actually engaging. It has not yet managed to build long term relationships in the community, for example with residents' groups and other key stakeholders. There therefore needs to be a renewed approach for engagement, and better understanding across the Council about how to undertake community engagement. Simply adding more people into the mix will not resolve the above concerns.

I was asked to provide my perspective on what success in respect of communications and engagement might look like?

An easy way of describing success would be to state the objective of communications as being 'the right message, through the right channels, for the right audience, at the right time'. However, that would ignore the complexity of managing communications and engagement in an increasingly complex public and media environment.

Nor is the answer to be found by surveying the media themselves as to how they find Council communications. Success will be ultimately measured by changes in audience perceptions of the Council's brand identity and service performance, both external (citizens) and internal (staff). In order to achieve the degree of improvement in audience perceptions that is desired, it is suggested that the Council proceed by giving higher priority to communicating the Council's vision, strategy and priorities, and also what is going on at the Council in its multifaceted aspects. The objective of this work should be to seek to enhance the Council's identity and reputation and celebrate its achievements by telling an integrated and consistent 'story'.

16. Recommendations

My recommendations are therefore as follows:

A. The Council should prepare an overarching communications strategy (consistent with its vision and desired outcomes for the city), underpinned by a strong statement about its corporate identity and priorities.
B. A media strategy should be agreed to complement and support the communications strategy. The media strategy should be agreed by the ELT and promulgated within the Council.
C. There needs to be a Council-wide discussion and agreement about the responsibility within business units for communications and the role of communications advisers.
D. As project management disciplines improve and are embedded within the Council, a necessary part of this enhancement and new PM style should be Council-wide risk management and communications management consistency.
E. There needs to be a properly facilitated review (Council-wide) on how engagement should be conducted in future, including lessons learned from recent engagement efforts.

The aim would be to produce a new Council approach and some practical guidelines for community engagement.

F.   The Council should retain its centralised communications function, with its own budget. The Council's current practice of embedding a few communications staff within the relevant business unit makes sense, but the continuation needs periodic review to ensure that that remains the case.

G.   No change to the overall resourcing of the Communications Group is currently proposed. However, the Group is carrying a number of vacancies, so the Head of Communications and Engagement now has the opportunity to align his overall group structure and resourcing to deliver on the communications strategy and priorities.

H.   The internal charging system for creative and design work should be ceased and the entire design budget should transfer to the communications function. This would provide opportunities for their work to be better aligned with Council priorities and not be constrained by business unit budgeting.

Ross Tanner
August 2021

Appendix One

Terms of Reference

Review of Communications and Engagement functions

Background

The Wellington City Council has developed its 10-year Long Term Plan which is bold and ambitious. The Council is embarking on the largest capital investment programme in its history. Communicating the Council's strategic vision and priorities to residents and stakeholders is vitally important to build and maintain a sense of pride in the city. A clear and effective strategic communications approach is fundamental to support the Council's objectives, maintain trust and confidence and be an employer of choice.

Wellington City Council (WCC) has a new ELT. They have new energy and a strong desire to improve the Council's strategic and operational effectiveness. Within the next two to three years the WCC also needs to prepare for and respond to the Three Waters Reform; the Resource Management Act Reform; and the Government's review of the future of Local Government which has recently been announced. As a result, building a high performing organisation to deliver the Council's vision and priorities is essential. At its core, this means the way we are organised needs to enhance accountability, clarity, cohesive leadership and delivery. Strong expectations for change, means that urgency is required to address the imperative to being a high performing Council.

An independent Governance review has also been recently completed which aims to improve the way the elected body operates. A key finding of the review is the need for greater levels of support for elected members, including communications support. This will have implications for the way our Communications and Engagement functions are set up and delivered.

The Chief Executive has initiated an organisational change programme, called "Working Better Together". The key components are set out below. Whilst this is a pan-organisation programme, with specific deliverables, Executive Leadership Team members are reviewing how their Groups can play their part in delivering this programme. This includes delivering on our strategic priorities and demonstrating strong first team leadership.

An important part of the programme includes a focus on our support services being fit for purpose and

Accountable leaders
- Demonstrating strong First Team leadership
- Holding each other to account
- Delivering on our strategic priorities

Connected Council
- We work across the Council as one team
- We deliver through successful partnerships
- We build strong iwi partnerships to engage Māori in Wellington's future

High performing Council

Living our values
- We're living our values every day
- People are empowered to make change happen
- We do the right thing for our customers

The way we work
- Our processes are simple and efficient
- Internal services enable our people to do their jobs
- We're set up to deliver for Wellington

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enabling the organisation to deliver on its vision, purpose and priorities. A recent survey of our support services has identified areas for improvement, including in the communications and engagement area.

The Communications and Engagement functions

Communications and engagement are a key function which supports both the governing body and the staff organisation to effectively connect with the community, stakeholders and media in a strategic and meaningful way. The imperatives for change outlined above mean that there is urgency required to ensure that the Communications and Engagement functions are set up for success.

Purpose and Scope of the Review

The purpose of the review is to determine the key purpose of the Communications and Engagement functions, what success looks like, the desirable future state, and what needs to occur to get there. Part of the review will also need to consider what the priorities should be, how the functions should be organised/delivered and recommended resourcing levels.

Timelines and next steps

This review will be initiated in May, with the appointment of an independent consultant. They will first propose an approach to how they will conduct this piece of work, with sign off by the Chief Strategy and Governance Officer. Completion of the review is expected by 31 July 2021.

6 May 2021

Review of Communications and Engagement functions

7 September 2021

The task

- an independent review to address:
    - what is, and what should be, the key purpose of the Communications and Engagement functions?
    - what should the desirable future state be, and what needs to occur to get there? What does success look like?
    - what should be the priorities of the Communications and Engagement functions (within the overall strategic direction of the Council)?
    - how the functions should be organised/delivered?
    - what are desirable resourcing levels?

Method and approach

- Met with the Executive Leadership Team members and their own group managers. Also met individually with many (but not all) staff members from your Communications and Engagement Group, including small groups of staff, and some of you more than once.

- I used a common set of questions as the basis for each discussion. The questions were designed to enable me to put together an organisational diagnostic picture of the communications function.

- The topics covered included: organisational strategy, structure, roles and relationships, performance management, organisational systems, style, skills, shared values, and staff resourcing.

- It will be apparent from this list, which is in order of priority, that my focus was on strategy, structure, roles and relationships. I did not set out with some sort of restructuring in mind.

- The recommendations that I have made centre around strategy and priorities for communications and engagement, not resourcing.

- The group is currently carrying a number of vacancies, so the Head of Communications and Engagement now has the opportunity to align his overall group structure and resourcing to deliver on the communications strategy and priorities.

Findings (1)

- The Communications and Engagement staff appear to be hardworking and committed. Staff spoke highly of the Council as a workplace and their place in it.

- Many of the staff to whom I spoke however referred to the workload-related pressure that you all face.

- So, what seems to be generating this workload?

- The communications advisers are a bottom-up resource for the business units, writing the communications messaging and public releases, and preparing communications plans for many of the Council's activities and projects.

- In some instances communications advisers have become surrogate project managers i.e. a pro-active role. There is also several examples of proactive thinking and forward planning.

- But, the Council's leadership team, consider that the communications team is not being sufficiently pro-active and strategic, or supportive on priority tasks. There is a disconnect here!

- The Communications function is not seen to be effective at supporting Council work on important projects and bringing them together under an over-arching narrative or story about the Council's direction and programmes.

Findings (2)

- So, what indeed are the Council's priorities in respect of communications, and how is the Council's vision and intended profile being portrayed, both internally and externally?

- The Council's strategic vision, four community outcomes and six priority objectives for the next three years are stated in the LTP, as well as searchable on the Council's website.

- But there are relatively few other references to the Council's vision and priorities in other recent external publications, or the Council's social media channel.

- There is no overarching communications strategy for the Council, and a lack of consistency in messaging across different parts of the Council's spectrum of activity.

- Communications and engagement activities across the Council appear to be very reactive and transactional, and not sufficiently planned or strategic.

- There is currently no agreed media strategy for the Council: a draft strategy was prepared in January 2021 but is on hold pending the outcome of this review.

Findings (3)

- As an example of 'being more pro-active', more could be done by way of preparation for and positioning of Council and Committee decision-making to the external media and public audiences.

- The Communications Group's engagement staff (and those embedded in business units) provide skilled engagement support at the operational level. Business Units rely on the engagement specialists to take the lead in respect of community engagement.

- The engagement staff workload also seems high, and both they and also staff in the business units have told me that the Council needs a rethink of its entire engagement strategy.

- Council staff are perceived to talk <u>to</u> and <u>at</u> community groups rather than listen to them.

- External perceptions of the Council are that Councillors and staff are not working together as a team. One way of achieving a more unified 'team Wellington" could be to refresh and agree on a Council <u>corporate</u> identity and values statement.

- The basis of a such a statement has already been created, through the internal 'Working Better Together' strategy. That could provide a suitable way to refresh the corporate identity of the Council and its external branding.

Recommendations

A. An overarching communications strategy for the Council, underpinned by a strong statement about its corporate identity and priorities.

B. A media strategy to complement and support the communications strategy. .

C. A Council-wide discussion and agreement about the responsibility within business units for communications and the role of communications advisers.

D. As project management disciplines improve, aim for improved Council-wide risk management and communications management consistency.

E. There needs to be a properly facilitated review (Council-wide) on how engagement should be conducted in future, to produce a new Council approach and some practical guidelines for community engagement.

F. Retain a centralised communications function, with its own budget. The Council's current practice of embedding a few communications staff within the relevant business unit makes sense, but its continuation needs periodic review to ensure that that remains the case.

G. No change to the overall resourcing of the Communications Group. The Group is carrying a number of vacancies, so the Head of Communications and Engagement now has the opportunity to align his overall group structure and resourcing to deliver on the communications strategy and priorities.

H. The internal charging system for creative and design work should be ceased and the entire design budget should transfer to the communications function. This would provide opportunities for their work to be better aligned with Council priorities and not be constrained by business unit budgeting.