
REPORT 3
(1215/52/IM)

RESIDENTS' PANEL

1. Purpose of Report

To present the Residents' Panel pre-consultation report as background information for the Strategy and Policy Committee, ahead of the Committee's consideration of the draft Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP).

2. Executive Summary

In establishing the Residents' Panel, the aim was to compose a panel that was diverse and reflected the composition of the Wellington community. The Panel has met twice and discussed the Council's approach to the LTCCP and its activities under each of the strategy areas. The attached report (Appendix 1) gives a preliminary indication of some of the views and ideas put forward by Panel members. The report has not been discussed by the Panel but has been circulated to them and commented on by some. The views and ideas should not be regarded as having been adopted by the Panel but are indicative of the matters raised by the Panel members.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*

4. Background

In preparing for the draft LTCCP, the Council initiated a broad programme of engagement with the community. That engagement programme was designed to give the Strategy and Policy Committee information about the views of the community to inform the Committee's deliberations on the draft LTCCP. One component of the programme was the establishment of a Residents' Panel.

The Residents' Panel was established as a forum of people that were broadly reflective of the Wellington community. The Panel was asked to:

- provide input to Council on the content of the draft Plan and
- to review the draft Plan and provide a report responding to the draft prior to the adoption of the LTCCP in June.

The attached report from the Residents' Panel indicates subject areas that have been identified by Panel members and which the Panel will be considering in formulating its contribution to the LTCCP. It is envisaged that that contribution will be provided primarily by way of the Panel's comments on the draft LTCCP once it is available.

Forty seven people agreed to become members of the panel. Panellists were selected using a three stage process. Firstly 19 people from sector groups that have a relationship with the Council were approached. The second group were self-nominated and responded to advertising. There were 15 places available on the Panel for this part of the selection and we received 63 nominations. The selection was based on an aim for the Panel to be as diverse as possible with a fairly even mix of men and women, across age groups, interest areas and from across the city. The third group of 15 were identified by a research company to fill gaps in the demographic spread of the Panel. The individual panellists were not asked to represent the views of the organisations that they were involved with, but rather, bring to the discussions their variety of backgrounds and different perspectives. This selection process was recommended by the independent facilitator as giving a microcosm of the Wellington community and including people that were knowledgeable or involved with Council activities and also some that were not.

The Panel has met twice. At the first meeting there were 41 people and at the second there were 35. On January 29 the Panel were given contextual information about the challenges facing the Council and the approach Council has taken to addressing those challenges. At the second meeting on February 18 the Panel discussed Council's approach to the LTCCP and its response to that approach.

The Panel will meet again in late April and again in May to discuss the draft LTCCP and formulate a response to it.

5. Discussion

The Panel Report contains a variety of views and suggestions on a range of Council activities. The report is drawn mainly from comments and discussion points of panel members at the second meeting.

6. Conclusion

At this stage, it has not been possible for the Panel to sufficiently develop its thinking to be able to provide substantive input to the preparation of the draft Plan. However, the attached report provides an indication of areas in which the Residents' Panel is developing its thinking, in preparation for providing more substantive input in reaction to the draft Plan.

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Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

This report is aligned with Council Outcome 7.1 More Inclusive and 7.2 More actively engaged

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

This paper provides input to SPC deliberations on the LTCCP

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

n/a

4) Decision-Making

This is not a significant decision.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

This report is a component of a programme of engagement activities.

b) Consultation with Maori

Selection of panel members aimed at ensuring a diversity of people including Maori

6) Legal Implications

There are no legal implications

7) Consistency with existing policy

This report is consistent with existing policy

Report of the Residents' Panel

to

**Wellington City Council
Strategy and Policy Committee**

February 2009

1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Residents' Panel initial discussions as background for the Committee to be aware of as it reviews the draft LTCCP at its current stage of development.

At the first meeting Chief Executive Garry Poole presented an overview of the approach taken by Council to the draft LTCCP.

During the second meeting, the Panel considered:

- Council's assumption about capping rates increases to 4% per annum during the lifetime of the LTCCP
- the principles, priorities and ideas that make up the Council's general approach to the LTCCP as presented by the CEO and published in Council documents provided to the Panel.

Small groups of panel members had conversations focussed on each of the Council's seven identified strategic areas and identified issues and advice or noted their views on different options.

This report is based on those preliminary discussions and views expressed by individual panel members at the second meeting. Panel members have had the opportunity to read the report, and have made some comments on it, but the report has not been discussed or debated by the Panel as a whole. The comments received have reinforced that the ideas and views captured should be regarded as only preliminary. They also acknowledge that many of the ideas and views will need to be further developed so that, when reviewing the draft LTCCP the Panel will be able to provide clear guidance to Council on what it would like to see incorporated into the final LTCCP.

Subsequent to the second meeting, some panel members have expressed concern about the lack of time available for the Panel process, and consider that it needed to have commenced some months earlier to be effective.

2 Comments on Council's approach

The Panel was asked at the start of Meeting 2, before having discussions, how comfortable they were with the Council's approach. Panel members indicated their support on a scale of 0 – 10 with 0 being very uncomfortable and 10 being very comfortable.

The following 2 photographs show the results:



Panel members indicating Levels 1 - 6



Panel members indicating Levels 5 - 9

3 Comments on Principles, Priorities and Rates

Panel members' comments have included that:

- There is a difference between what the Council is statutorily obliged to do and what is discretionary, this should be more explicit.
- Serious consideration needs to be given as to how much the Council can free up resources by looking closely at how effectively and efficiently it is performing existing operations – before focussing on which services are scaled back and which are maintained.
- Consideration could be given to which services the Council can exit and what other funding options or sources are available.
- The Council can draw on community resources to a greater extent and can access resources through a greater use of partnerships.
- There is a need for greater clarity around the overall purpose of the Residents' Panel and its place in the engagement. Some Panel members were unsure whether the Panel's role is to trim Council spending or to review what the Council might do and provide input to the draft LTCCP.
- Some Panel members wanted more emphasis to be given to the long term horizon for the LTCCP.

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Specific comment on the principle: Continue with projects that have been started

Projects already started should be within the scope of the review and that requires the consequences of stopping, deferring, or continuing them to be well thought through. In some cases absorbing costs from deferring or cancelling a project that has already commenced can be warranted.

The Council's aim of 4% rates rise

At both the start and the conclusion of our second meeting Panel members were asked what they considered to be a reasonable / acceptable level of rise in rates (if any).

One third of the members considered that this was the wrong question. They said that rather than adopting a numerical percentage increase, the Council should take a different approach. In the main the different approaches suggested were either:

- To link any rates rise to the Consumer Price Index (or level of inflation) - since it was impossible to know what the rate of inflation would be over the next decade;
- That the Council should identify what services should be provided and strike the rate accordingly.
- To set a pre-determined rate cap was considered pointless particularly in a volatile financial situation. For a ten year plan the Council should follow a principle such as balancing residents' expectations against affordability.

The remainder of the panellists indicated a view on an acceptable increase in rates by standing on a line marked out from 0 – 10%. The following photographs show the distribution of those panellists' views at the start of the meeting which were mainly spread between 0% and 6% rate rise.



The Panellists standing on points 0 – 6%



The Panellists standing on points 5% - 10%

At the end of the discussions, panellists (who agreed to indicate an acceptable level of rates increase) were mainly clustered between 3 and 5%. As can be seen from the photograph, 18 out of 35 panellists responded that an appropriate cap for rate increases over the life of the LTCCP is between 3 and 5%. There were about 12 panellists who did not indicate an acceptable rate increase.



Panellists standing from 0% - 6%



Panellists standing from 5 – 10%

Panel general comments on rate affordability

- Wellington's rates are comparatively low and this has implications for affordability.

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- Consideration should be given to the differential between commercial and residential rates in the context of “affordability”. Given that increases in the residential weighting had been deferred in the past, a delay in the planned further differential transition should be regarded as ‘within scope’ and should be considered.
- The targeted rates needs to be better understood, particularly around how it is applied. There are people who are paying targeted rates that are not well aligned with the benefits.

Strategic Areas

The following captures the principal thoughts offered by individual panellists in the course of conversations at the second meeting. Those conversations were organised on the basis of the Councils seven strategic areas of activity. No attempt has been made to refine, clarify or more precisely define proposals that were put forward in what was only an initial conversation. That is something that the panel will need to consider doing in subsequent meetings. Also, the proposals should not at this stage be taken as representing a whole-of-Panel view; rather they are indicative of the matters that the Panel is giving attention to.

4 GOVERNANCE

Name is misleading

The name for this area, governance, is misleading. It inadequately represents the place of governance and democracy within the organisation. For example the cost of Councillors is not aligned with a single activity (governance) but overarch all of the activities.

Relationship with other authorities

Relationships with other local authorities is a critical governance issue facing the Council as it is concerned with how the Councils in the region work together and calls for a position by the Council on amalgamation.

Councillor Code of Behaviour

Councillors need to ensure that their behaviour is consistent with their role and they should have a code of practice.

Bicultural city and Council

The Council needs to be more bicultural and pay more attention to Maori culture. The city should be more visibly bicultural.

Engagement with the Community

The Local Government Act 2002 envisaged an engagement culture and the Council could improve its performance on engagement. The Council needs to budget for more funding to be spent on community engagement and use different techniques for carrying out that engagement. This is also important in building trust with the community and in being transparent. An alternative

view was that the Residents' Panel should have been the major source of community input.

Concern was expressed that the Council sometimes initiates a project with community support and then over time makes significant changes to the project which go against the community's expectations. The Council needs to consult again in these circumstances.

5 TRANSPORT

Modes of Transport

The Council should resist the temptation to reduce transport network spending for example on footpaths and roads and should also encourage the use of public transport.

There is a need for a 50 year vision for the city or region which also addresses the mode of public transport that we aspire towards.

Pedestrians

Pedestrians are a priority. Low cost actions, such as decreasing the delay between activating a pedestrian crossing and the lights changing, could be undertaken to help improve the walkability of the city and increase pedestrian safety without requiring additional spending. Additional spending is required, however, to manage infrastructure, upgrades and streetscaping with pedestrian's needs in mind. Design streets for people not vehicles. There is a need to increase spending on walking.

Safety

Safety on the streets / at night means that there must be adequate lighting and public transport stops.

Transport suggestions

- improve information on road conditions
- bus lanes for city centre are important – railway to Courtenay Place
- more transport oriented development
- invest in city shuttle bus and link to cruise ships
- improve cycle safety and facilities

6 URBAN DEVELOPMENT

There was concern over the speed of development, its size and quality and the density related to growth. There needs to be more investment in public spaces to match growth and an increase in investment in suburban centres relative to the city centre.

Housing standards need to be improved and address both size, quality and impact on surrounding buildings and there is a need for more protection of heritage buildings.

An opinion was expressed that encouraging growth may not be the best long term policy for the city for financial and environmental reasons.

7 ENVIRONMENT - INFRASTRUCTURE

Water Management

Water management is an issue and the Council should give serious consideration to water metering along with other incentives for water conservation before planning new dams. For example, rainwater can be conserved by residents having a home tank with the cost subsidised by Council or Central Government. There could also be regulatory requirements on new buildings for rainwater tanks, grey water systems and recycling.

Performance measures should include measures of storm water going into the harbour causing pollution. There should be no pollution in storm water.

The Council should explore options to have less hard surfaces to decrease the water run off, that is, have surfaces that absorb rainwater before going into a drain.

The Council should also consider an education programme to explain simple ways that water can be saved in the home, garden and business at low cost, with targeted subsidies for particular technology (e.g. retrofitting low-flow shower heads).

Kerbside Recycling

Kerbside recycling is supported and some panel members expressed a lot of concern over the proposals to move to plastic bags for recycling. It was acknowledged that key issues are to keep costs down, avoid wind problems and keeping different recyclables separate. Funding could come from landfill charges (as it does currently), from rates or from user charges.

Advocacy

The Council and other territorial local authorities can use their clout to advocate to central government to reduce bureaucracy for example around consents.

Flood Prevention

There was discussion about flood prevention; in particular that protection is planned for floods that would be expected once in 50 years. It was questioned whether this was the right level of protection and whether there are other options for flood protection. For example, Council insures its own assets at different levels using self-insurance, a local authority pool and international options; could cover be extended? There is a need to balance outcomes against the ability to insure against events.

8 ENVIRONMENT - OPEN SPACES

The panel considered open spaces and infrastructure separately.

Green Spaces

Money spent on green spaces is well spent and Wellington has really good tracks and waterways. The Town Belt is wonderful but the inner city needs more quiet green places for older people to enjoy and there is a need for more green spaces and play equipment on the waterfront. The Great Harbour Way project is worthwhile and should be progressed.

Ongoing Maintenance of parks and beaches

Maintenance should not be deferred for some beaches and parks and mowing must be frequent enough to prevent pollen and grass seeds as this impacts on health and safety for people and animals. The Council should not prioritise a few selected elite areas.

Specific Funding

An opinion was expressed that the Council should provide no more money to Zealandia (Karori Wildlife Sanctuary) (\$15) but put money and help into Otari (free). Other panellists would like to see support for Zealandia maintained.

9 SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The Panel considered social issues separately from sport and recreation issues.

Avoid cuts in a recession

Spending in the social area is important especially during a recession and that spending can often support the community by providing a hub.

Empowering community members

If there are cuts to social spending, options need to be developed that are more positive and empower communities. There are often community based solutions, for example if it is proposed to withdraw late nights at branch libraries, the community can volunteer or take other action to maintain the service.

Unemployment

With an expected rise in unemployment the Council should ensure to the greatest extent possible that its own contracts go to local people. With unemployment people are often at the risk of social isolation and therefore activities and services that support people feeling connected with their community are very important. This includes events such as the Cuba Carnival and also access to services.

Libraries

There was opposition to reducing library hours with comment that the evening opening of a library is probably the only opportunity for most people to visit the

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library. Late night on a Friday may not be the best night for people working during the day to go to the library.

Vibrancy and Safety

There is a tension between strategies for example vibrant city versus safety. Safety is not just an issue in Courtenay Place but also in the city corridors. The vibrancy of the city also supports employment and the economy.

Other Comment

The Council is in a good position to increase information and facilitate relationships between central government and citizens using their mandate as a Council. This includes Council having a leadership role in establishing or being a catalyst for joint/partnering approaches with central government. Council has the power and the knowledge and relationships and needs to use them well and wisely.

There is no need for the Khandallah Town Hall redevelopment. There is Nairnville Park recreation centre which can be used as a venue for community events.

Mixed views about Guy Fawkes day celebrations as savings of \$80k could be made and it would be safe. However others believed that Guy Fawkes was an important social event that added to the vibrancy of Wellington City.

There needs to be equity in the Council spend between geographical areas.

The Older Persons Policy should be reviewed.

10 SPORT AND RECREATION

Using the Ageing Population

Concept of Guardians – the Council needs to value and utilise the ageing population. They often have the time to create, maintain and use tracks, flower beds and facilities generally. Volunteering has positive outcomes including comradeship.

There is discrimination against older people which can be seen in the provision of built assets being predominantly for younger people and that Passport to Leisure is restricted to community service card holders. Passport to Leisure should be reviewed.

Sports Centre at Kilbirnie

Three positions were expressed on the Indoor Community Sports Centre. One was that the Centre should proceed because the cost was prudent, it would offer a wide range of sports and it was for the community. An alternative view was that it should not proceed because it is on the wrong site, would cause traffic disruption, and because less money could be better spent on a number of smaller facilities, avoiding the need to make cuts elsewhere. A third view was

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that it should proceed (at whichever location is best) but that it should be delayed until financial times improve (ie should be off the agenda for the next five years).

Pay to play principle

The Council could consider pay to play principles and make money where it can to subsidise activities – bringing it closer to zero.

External funding and leveraging is likely to prove more difficult or unrealistic in a recession.

There was some support for installing astroturf on some sports fields. Money saved by not constructing a stadium could be used to install Astroturf on some sports fields (thus providing all weather sports options) and for continuing maintenance of green spaces that are used for active recreation (ie sport and leisure) by the public, as well as having benefits as green space.

11 CULTURAL WELL-BEING

The Council should not be the only authority responsible for cultural well-being in Wellington. Central government and other agencies also have a role. There are also volunteers, friends and guardians willing to provide input and help.

Charging for Museums

A small charge (such as a gold coin donation) on non-NZ residents for entry to Wellington Museums is a good idea.

Festivals

Festivals help engender a feeling of pride in the city. Community festivals like the Cuba Carnival are important for vibrancy and also make money for the economy. Festivals can be the reason people come to Wellington and stay in Wellington. For example both the International Arts Festival and JazzFest attract artists and visitors to Wellington.

Community activities are an important part of the city and must not be lost or impaired. Continue to fund festivals at current 08-09 levels – the quality is important.

The Council could consider running a competition for village festivals as a way of retaining and promoting the unique character of local areas

Events

We should have more events in a recession rather than less. Pride and the feeling of vibrancy is even more important in a recession and the economy will decline if events are cancelled.

No events will be more depressing than paying for recycling.

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Local talent may miss opportunities because of the spending on commercial events – would rather put money into local talent to encourage emerging talent as that is where “big talent” is grown from.

Public Art

It would be OK to stop public art as long as we didn't forget to start it up again. It may be better to reduce the level of spending and buy less or cheaper art.

An arts hub is a good idea as it will provide space for people to try art such as music and painting. Activities such as graffiti provide an outlet for expression of feeling and passion – might create a space for graffiti where artists do planned art such as a mural.

Archives

It would be good to have archives available on line and also publicise what archives are held using a road show. The city archives should continue to accept the records of local community groups.

12 ECONOMIC

Funding of Events

Need both justification and results from WCC financial investment in events and activities which should be made publicly available. There is a need for greater understanding of the relationship between events, funding, promotion and the economic strategy. Targeted events are supported where they provide payback. There is support for event investment, particularly the iconic events, given the economic benefits and that both the promotion of events and events themselves help promote positive Wellington image.

Economic Development

Economic development comes from a range of activities and cannot be seen in isolation for example roads influences economic outcomes e.g travel times for trucks. It is important to recognise that there are economic benefits for local people when Council focuses on local jobs. There is also an economic impact of Council activities eg proposals for Manners Mall and business closures, that Council must take account of.

GROW Wellington

GROW Wellington also has an influence on programme and priorities.

Wellington Airport

The Council needs to consider its role in supporting Wellington airport. For example what is the plan for long haul flights? What is being done?

International Relations

An option for Council could be to reduce its spending on international relations in the short term.

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Out of Towners Levy

Is there an opportunity to combine “out of towners levy” with regional amenities? The regional amenities levy is supported. Would a fee for out of town people have a negative impact on visitor numbers to cultural facilities? (Also see Cultural Well-being – Charging for Museums).