

No additional funding for advisory groups (or other new engagement mechanisms) is requested for 2006/07 as investigatory work in this area will be ongoing through 2006, with a focus on implementing new initiatives during 2007.

The costs of the other initiatives mentioned in this paper will be met through existing resource allocations.

5. Project Outline

This proposal outlines some initiatives that can be undertaken to help strengthen the community's engagement with the Council, and make it simpler to participate:

- A. *Developing a "civic network"* – groups of local people with expertise and/or interest in particular subject/portfolios areas of the Council's business would be regularly provided with information on Council issues and consultations and asked to provide feedback. This group could be an extension of an advisory group – as an additional, wider level of expert advisors. It would not be as broad as the e-Panel group suggested in the e-Democracy initiative (45G), which would be targeted to citizens with a general interest in providing the Council with feedback on a range of issues. As with e-Panels, the internet could be a useful tool for keeping in contact with this group (which could also include an interactive facility). The officer time allocated for both this initiative and the e-Panel initiative could be merged to be part of one position.
- B. *Extending the advisory group network* – A review of the Council's current network of advisory groups will be carried out during 2006/07. This may result in a new advisory group network – for example, one that covers an extended spectrum of Council interests, which could be along the lines of the portfolio areas or filling identified gaps in the current structure (e.g. additional cultural communities, a sports/recreation focused advisory group). Funding for any additional advisory groups resulting from the review will be budgeted from 2007/08.
- C. *Developing and implementing different consultation methods* (initiatives in this area are being looked at through the Communication and Participation Project).
- D. *Providing support (e.g. training, website support) to community groups* – work will be undertaken to consider the Council's role in providing such groups as the residents' associations with resources that can enable them to more easily engage with the Council and participate in Council consultations.
- E. *Developing "have your say" guidelines* – the guidelines will provide simple and clear information on how people and groups can engage with the Council and participate in its decision-making processes (e.g. through public participation, deputations, making submissions – including for such processes as District Plan changes and notified resource consents) as well as provide advice on how best to present written and oral submissions.

Drivers for the proposal

The identified drivers for this proposal are the same as those of the Communication and Participation Project, which was initiated due to:

- concerns expressed by elected members and members of the community about Council's engagement practices
- a declining level of satisfaction in regard to the way the Council involves people in decision-making (February 2005 Residents' Satisfaction Survey).

Deliverables for 2006-09

If some of the projects described above are to be implemented, this could result in:

- additional targeted advisory groups operational by mid 2007
- a "civic network" operational by early 2007.

Risks of postponing the proposal

The Council has publicly undertaken to review the way it engages and communicates with its communities. Postponing the implementation of new methods of engagement may undermine trust and confidence in the Council.

Benefits

The potential high level benefits to accrue from the Project are improved community involvement in decision-making processes, which could include greater diversity in those engaged, higher quality feedback and potentially better decisions being made.

Alternative options

Alternative options for delivering on improved engagement are being explored, such as:

- e-Democracy initiatives
- means of enabling early involvement in policy development.

6. Conclusion

A number of options for strengthening the Council's interactions with different groups and communities are being explored. This is part of the process for implementing the Council's draft Governance Strategy and relates closely to the exploratory work being undertaken on engagement focused initiatives as part of the Communication and Participation Project.