
REPORT 4
(1215/52/IM)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW ZEALAND CONFERENCE – REPORT BACK

1. Purpose of Report

This paper is a report back on the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) Conference 2009 attended by the Mayor and three Councillors 26-29 July 2009.

2. Executive Summary

The Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors Ahipene-Mercer and Coughlan accompanied by officers, attended the LGNZ Conference in Christchurch from 26-29 July 2009. The theme of the conference was “*Local Government – Our Place in the World*” which aimed to stimulate thinking about the role of local government in the context of New Zealand and globally, and how elected officials can lead and respond to the changing needs of our communities.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*

4. Background

Through a combination of key note addresses, break-out sessions and workshop sessions, the conference explored a number of topics under the theme of the place of local government in the world. The Conference took place against the background of uncertainty about the Government’s policy direction and intentions for local government.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of LGNZ was held on the last day of the conference.

Points of interest to note from the conference include:

- ***The Chair of Local Government New Zealand, Lawrence Yule,*** opened the conference and set the scene for the key topics for discussion during the conference, and in particular welcomed the opportunity to seek clarity on the Government’s thinking on local government.

- **Prime Minister John Key** spoke about 4 key matters. The first was the various streams on the regulatory reform work programme, including the RMA and the Building Act. He also referred to the work being undertaken by Minister Hide on the LGA 2002 and acknowledged that while concerns had been expressed to him on those proposals, he was confident that a lot of common ground will be found that will help local government to do its job better. The second topic related to Infrastructure, where he spoke in particular on the establishment of the National Infrastructure Unit to co-ordinate the Government's infrastructure activities, and the Infrastructure Advisory Board, made up of representatives with private sector and local government experience, to provide independent advice on investment priorities. The third topic was Governance, and in particular the proposals for Auckland. He noted that while there may be opportunities for improving local government structures in other regions, it is not something he sees the government leading at this point. And lastly he spoke on the National Cycleway, and announced the first steps on the national cycleway in what is effectively a co-funding exercise with councils across the country. This was a powerful reminder of how the Government will need local government to deliver on many of its policy platforms.

- **The Leader of the Opposition, Phil Goff**, expressed the key concerns that the Labour Party has with the Auckland governance reforms and the review of the Local Government Act 2002, in particular any restriction on the services that local government delivers.

- **Hon Rodney Hide, Minister of Local Government**, spoke about the challenge he sees for local government and its critical importance to New Zealand increasing its economic performance. He commended many of the local authorities he has visited and in particular applauded Manukau City's Education Trust - COMET and the crucial role local government can play in better directing and facilitating centrally-funded programmes such as education.

He then turned to speak about the concerns that have been expressed to him over 'rate increases, red tape, unacceptable delays and bureaucratic bungling' – and expressed a need to do better. He referred to ensuring that central government does not place increased costs on local government, amending the RMA and other regulations that impose costs, and reviewing the LGA 2002.

He outlined that his work programme on the LGA 2002 recognises that:

- local government should operate within a defined fiscal envelope;
- Councils should focus on core activities, and;
- Council decision-making should be clear, transparent and accountable.

On core services, he made the following comments:

- Councils should identify and focus on their core roles and functions;

- the basic infrastructure needs of this country, and of ratepayers should be at the top of the list of council spending, with the “nice to have” coming much further down the list, if at all.
- he is interested in hearing views on what are the core roles of local government.
- he does not plan to tell local authorities what they can and cannot do – but rather it is about encouraging greater local democracy where councils consult more widely and effectively and seek a mandate for “non-core spending.”

Linked to this he said that Councils need a clear fiscal strategy identifying the rating level and exactly what ratepayers will get for that spend. He said that ratepayers should be the decision makers on this fiscal strategy –and that he is looking into councils doing this through a poll or referendum at election time. He made it clear that he is not proposing rate capping or setting by central government.

He concluded with outlining his key objectives for Auckland governance.

- **Peter Biggs, CEO, Clemenger BBDO**, spoke about branding, and gave some very powerful (and colourful) examples of effective branding. His key message was that people were interested in action now more than what a brand says. He then very skilfully related his extensive marketing experience to explore the question what communities want from ‘government’. Using research undertaken in Australia, he showed what services communities value (i.e. ‘action’) and concluded that local government is in the best position to deliver those services.
- **Hon Peter Salmon, Chair Royal Commission on Auckland Governance** spoke about the Royal Commission report and the Commission’s key findings. He expressed disappointment that the Government adopted significant changes to the recommendations 9 days after the report was released.
- **Mai Chen, Chen Palmer** spoke about the 10 key challenges that she sees as arising out of the programme of local government reform. These challenges (as recorded in her paper - which is available on the website set out below) largely related to how the very tight timeframe for resolving Auckland governance will link with the timing of the broader review of the LGA, in light of the complexity of what is involved.
- **Judge Andrew Becroft, Principal Youth Court Judge** gave a very powerful presentation on types of youth offenders and the cause of youth offending. He then went on to explore how local government can assist with the steps being taken to deal with youth offending – principally be being involved in activities and programmes that enhance community connectedness. The link to his presentation is http://www.lgnz.co.nz/events/conference/2009/Judge_Becroft.pdf

Technical Sessions

Technical Sessions held at the conference were:

- ***Local Democracy: An Endangered Species:*** this session looked at the lack of public participation in local government elections and consultation and how to address the challenge through education and advocacy. The session outlined a project called 'Growing Our Citizens' which has been working now for three years focusing on youth engagement, enhancing voting participation and finding ways to make local government more relevant and meaningful to your average resident. This has included a project working with schools to increase awareness of voting and what local government does (through a programme called "What's under my street"). The session launched a resource called "A Guide to setting up and running a youth citizens jury".

- ***World Economy – Challenges and opportunities:***

Global financial events over the last year have focused our minds on financial markets. While there is pressure to reduce council expenditure, there is also an expectation for local government to play a role in stimulating the local economy. This session reviewed the current economic climate and provided views and examples on where local government should best invest its time and resources. The link to view Dr Ganesh Nana's presentation is:

http://www.lgnz.co.nz/events/conference/2009/Dr_Ganesh_Nana.pdf

- ***Treaty Settlements – ensuring effective co-management:***

This session looked at the current settlement environment, the role of Councils, and considered how Councils can contribute to enduring arrangements in the wider community interest. There were presentations from Taupo District Council on their new regulatory management approach and from Environment Waikato on the new co-management of the Waikato River. These more recent settlements herald a new era of Treaty settlements that focuses on current and future management processes.

- ***Climate Change – You might need more than a raincoat!:***

This workshop was led by the Ministry for the Environment. The key message was that mitigation and adaptation is required. The workshop explored the issues around flooding, wind and storms associated with climate change. The discussion focused on planning, emergency management, and disaster recovery. It was acknowledged that the local government sector is working well in the areas of emergency management and disaster recovery.

There was recognition that further work could be undertaken in the area of planning and preparedness across the infrastructure sector, in particular the need to have focused conversations with utility companies to ascertain their forward plans and preparedness. The Ministry advised

that the National Environmental Standard (sea level rise) is to be released for discussion in August.

➤ ***RMA Policy Statements and plans – what we have learnt and where we are heading?:***

This session looked at the 'second generation' of policy statements, regional and district plans, and in particular councils' experiences developing their 'second generation' plans and the differences (and similarities) from plans of the past. The Wellington RPS was used as a case study. There was also a useful commentary on the impacts of the 2009 RMA amendments on plan development and plan change processes.

➤ ***Rugby World Cup 2011 – ensuring a legacy:***

This session gave an insight into the planning for RWC2011. The session explored how councils can work to ensure there is a lasting legacy. The particular areas of focus were on the events 'around' the RWC2011, and developing opportunities such as our environmental reputation, developing the hospitality industry, creating new infrastructure, promoting regional economies and growing international tourism.

➤ ***Alcohol in our communities: are we past the tipping point?***

Sir Geoffrey Palmer presented an outline of his thinking as a result of the Law Commission review in to alcohol. Key issues in this area are:

- Supply controls – including licensing, conditions, hours, age, individual and parental responsibilities, product types and Licensing Trusts
- Demand Reduction – including tax and price, advertising, enforcement, liquor in public places, labelling, treatment options, penalties and transport.

These issues have since been fleshed out in some detail in the Law Commissions report 'Alcohol in our lives – an issues paper on the reform of New Zealand's liquor laws'.

The need for a cultural shift regarding binge-drinking was noted and the issue acknowledged as a major hurdle.

➤ ***Using your Community Boards for added value:***

This session provided participants with information on what boards do, what they have achieved and how boards can contribute to enhancing community well-being.

Annual General Meeting

LGNZ held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Conference. Points of interest to note from the AGM were:

- Life membership to B. Morman
- Three remits were considered – NPS on siting of wind farms; infringement fees for illegal deposit of waste; and dog attacks. All were supported. It is noted that Wellington City spoke and voted against seeking the NPS on siting of wind farms and voted against the remit regarding dog attacks.

Further information on the remits, and on the conference itself, is available on the LGNZ website – www.lgnz.co.nz

5. Conclusion

The LGNZ Conference 2009 was a valuable opportunity to network with our colleagues, hear their experiences about the challenges and opportunities facing the local government sector, and to share ideas and best practice.

Contact: Mayor Kerry Prendergast

Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact
The project relates to C532: Elections, Governance and Democratic Process

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations
Not Applicable.

4) Decision-Making
This report does not seek a decision.

5) Consultation
a) General Consultation
Not Applicable.

b) Consultation with Maori
Not Applicable

6) Legal Implications
Not Applicable.

7) Consistency with existing policy
Not Applicable.