
REPORT 5
(1215/52/IM)

**CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION PLAN: 2011/2012
DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN**

1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks approval of the consultation and communication plan to be undertaken for the 2011/2012 Draft Annual Plan.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Agree the key messages for the 2011/2012 Draft Annual Plan listed in section 3.3.*
- 3. Agree the communication and engagement tools that will be used to support the consultation on the 2011/2012 Draft Annual Plan as outlined in section 3.4.*
- 4. Agree that the Strategy and Policy Committee hear all oral Draft Annual Plan submitters in mid May 2011.*
- 5. Agree that the formal consultation period start 11 April 2011 and close at 5pm on 12 May 2011 with hearings scheduled in mid May 2011.*

3. Discussion

3.1 Background

The purpose of the 2011/2012 Draft Annual Plan is to:

- provide the opportunity for the community to provide feedback on proposed variations to the Long-term Council Community Plan (long-term plan) and on any other matter
- extend the opportunity for public participation in the decision-making process
- allow for new ideas to be tabled
- contribute to Council's accountability to the community
- detail the annual budget and funding impact statement.

The wider matters of role, scope, strategic direction, overall service levels and priorities of Council have been confirmed for a three year period through the long-term plan process after substantial engagement with the community.

As the primary purpose of the Draft Annual Plan is to consult on the proposed variances to the long-term plan – the consultation programme is tailored and targeted towards communicating with, and receiving feedback from those affected by the savings, and fees and charges proposals.

3.2 Overall approach and message of the Draft Annual Plan

The wider operating environment influences the planning process. The impacts of the economic downturn continue to flow through to households and businesses making rates affordability a continuing challenge. At the same time the Council faces significant budgetary pressures from interest and depreciation, inflation, leaky buildings, and from service level increases that were agreed in previous years.

The primary message is structured around Council's overall approach – the need for balance in these difficult economic times – one that responds to rates affordability through efficiencies and small adjustments in levels of service (and budgets) that do not adversely impact on the overall outcomes sought for the city, while continuing to deliver the wide breadth of quality services that are value for money.

This balanced approach has been used for the last few years and has served the city well. Rates increases have been below forecast levels and Wellington continues to perform as evidenced by key indicators:

- 92% of Wellingtonians rating their quality of life as good or very good, and 94% believe Wellington is a great place to live
- 75% of Wellingtonians rate our services highly and 76% consider our services good value for money¹
- Wellington being recognised internationally. It is ranked 12th in the world for quality of living, 5th for its eco credentials. It has also been listed as one of the top five must see destinations in 2011 by the Lonely Planet travel guide.

The response to affordability will feature prominently in the consultation material. The emphasis will be on the proposed savings and changes to fees and charges with these being placed in the context of other options that have been considered – but that on balance have not been recommended at this time. This will allow submitters to review and place feedback on the full range of options that have been considered in preparing the draft statement of proposal.

¹ A further 20% indicate they are 'about right'.

3.3 Key messages of the Draft Annual Plan

In addition to the overall approach the Draft Annual Plan consultation material will include the following key messages:

- i. Rates need to increase to meet the cost of delivering city services.
- ii. We have reviewed budgets and services to keep any increases to a minimum.
- iii. Our ongoing commitment to find efficiencies has resulted in a reduced rates increase.
- iv. Current services are highly valued – there is no clear signal from the community that services should be substantially cut in order to reduce rates.
- v. We seek views on what city services (if any) could be changed to reduce rates.
- vi. The annual plan, as with any budget process, is about setting priorities. This year's plan aims to reach a balance between affordability and sustaining services. The steps we have chosen are to:
 - Prioritise efficiencies in our delivery over cuts to services.
 - Prioritise the balancing of fees and charges with rates subsidies for services - ensuring those who benefit most from a service contribute an appropriate share of the cost.
 - Prioritise reductions to service levels where tolerance is greatest instead of removing entire services. The focus has been on reducing *aspects* of a service where they will not adversely impact on the overall service experience and the outcomes sought for the city.
- vii. There are a number of ways to have your say. The details of this will be provided.

3.4 Communication and engagement

The following communication tools will be used to raise awareness of the Draft Annual Plan, inform the community of key issues, and encourage them to participate in the engagement process.

Consultation material:

The Draft Annual Plan document will outline the year three business-as-usual work programme, the funding and financial statements and highlight the proposed variances to year three – the savings options and changes to fees and charges. These will be placed in the context of all options that have been considered to allow submitters to place feedback on all options.

The Draft Annual Plan document will be made available from Council's libraries, swimming pools, service centres, and through the call centre. Submission forms will be available with the document.

A summary document will be prepared which will highlight the key issues for consultation. It will be widely distributed, including at the venues listed above as well as local cafes etc.

Both the summary and the full Draft Annual Plan will be available on Council's website.

Raising awareness of key proposals:

The Draft Annual Plan will be extensively advertised through traditional media - print, radio, public notices and media releases. This programme will be supported with a targeted engagement with affected community groups and organisations.

Targeted communications remains one of the most effective ways of reaching communities and organisations. Business units are in regular contact with community groups and organisations in relation to services the business unit delivers. As part of the engagement programme relevant business units will be asked to inform community groups with which they have ongoing relationships of matters proposed in the Draft Annual Plan that relate to them and encourage feedback ie Sport and Recreation will contact sporting codes on proposed changes to fees and charges and ask them to place feedback etc. The information presented in consultation material encouraging feedback will be placed in the context of cost pressures faced by Council, options available, level of rates subsidy the service receives etc to ensure a considered response.

As part of the focus on targeted consultation, officers will also offer to attend meetings of community groups and organisations during the consultation period to discuss and answer any questions on the draft proposals.

The targeted approach is favoured over ward or generic draft annual plan public meetings as they are seen as more effective in facilitating meaningful community engagement that allows issues to be discussed in greater depth. This approach puts the community engagement principle of going to where community is rather than asking the public to come to the Council into practice.

The Draft Annual Plan will also continue to be presented to Council's fora, reference groups and community boards.

3.4 Community feedback

The community will be able to place feedback online, through email, by letter or through submission forms that are included with the Draft Annual Plan document and its summary.

A full copy of all submissions will be presented to the Strategy and Policy Committee before final decisions are made.

Submitters also have the opportunity to present their views in person to a Committee of Councillors. In past years this has been a subcommittee based around portfolio responsibilities. In the current triennium with a greater spread of portfolio responsibilities across elected members it is recommended that the full Strategy and Policy Committee hear all submissions.

As with previous years the hearings schedule will be programmed to have sufficient flexibility to allow additional time for informal discussion as and when required.

3.5 Timeframes

The formal consultation period is scheduled to run for one month in keeping with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2002. It is set to run from Monday 11 April to Thursday 12 May 2011. This will be followed by public hearings, which are scheduled for mid May 2011.

The schedule will provide sufficient time for the public to prepare submissions and for officers to evaluate them and prepare any commentary ahead of the final plan being agreed in June.

4. Conclusion

This consultation and communication plan provides a range of communication / engagement tools to support the Draft Annual Plan during the consultation period.

Contact Officer: *Baz Kaufman – Senior Planning Advisor*

Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

The consultation and communication plan contributes towards the following outcome:

“Wellington will operate an open and honest decision-making process that generates confidence and trust in the democratic system.”

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

Development and consultation on the DAP sits within the following project: C530 Annual Planning and Reporting.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

Targeted consultation will be undertaken with support by the Director of Citizen Engagement and Treaty Relations.

4) Decision-Making

This is not a significant decision.

5) Consultation

The report provides a sensible range of communication tools and an appropriate mix of opportunities for people to express their views on the Draft Annual Plan 2011/2012.

6) Legal Implications

The consultation and communication plan meets all statutory requirements of the LGA 2002.

7) Consistency with existing policy

This report is consistent with Council’s Engagement Policy.