

Extra-ordinary Whangarei District Council

Notice of Meeting

A extra-ordinary meeting of the Whangarei District Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Forum North, Whangarei on:

**Thursday
11 April 2013
9.00am**

Committee

His Worship the Mayor (Chairperson)
Cr C B Christie
Cr S J Deeming
Cr A J Edwards
Cr S M Glen
Cr P R Halse
Cr J S Jongejans
Cr G M Martin
Cr B L McLachlan
Cr S L Morgan
Cr K J Sutherland
Cr W L Syers
Cr M R Williams
Cr J D T Williamson

1. Local Government Reorganisation in Northland

Reporting officer Alan Adcock (Group Manager Support Services)

Date of meeting 11 April 2013

Vision, mission and values

This item is in accord with Council's vision, mission and values statement.

Background

The Local Government Commission (LGC) has notified the Far North District Council's (FNDC) application to become a unitary authority and given Council until 15 April 2013 to lodge any alternative application. Council now has an opportunity to consider previous work undertaken on local government options for Northland (provided in the Agendas of 24 October 2012 and 27 February 2013) and feedback received through public engagement before deciding on whether to make an alternative application to the LGC.

Consultation Programme

Council had previously resolved to conduct a comprehensive community engagement programme on local government reorganisation in Northland. Unfortunately this programme had to be condensed considerably because of the early decision of the LGC to call for alternative applications and the short timeframe the LGC gave for applications to be lodged.

Public meetings held on 19 and 20 March 2013 explored possible structures for local government, the community's views on the ways we could improve community voice/grassroots' representation and options for Maori representation. These meetings provided an opportunity for both general and structured feedback.

The general feedback provides a feel for some of the key issues of those attending. This can be summarised as follows;

- Process and timeframes
Concerns were raised regarding the consultation timeframes. Attendance at the meetings was not considered representative and some people did not want the findings used as a 'poll'.
- Support for the status quo
There was general support for the status quo rather than structure change. Arguments in support included that no problem had been defined, Councils should be working on enhancing the status quo already, enhancement could be achieved by removing duplication and that positive leadership and the removal of egos would address many of the current issues.
- Identity
There was significant discussion around losing Whangarei's identity and momentum of the Whangarei: Love it here! promotion as a result of reorganisation. This was partially countered by calls to take a Northland perspective.
- Control of assets
Control, and the potential sale of, significant assets such as the Whangarei Port (majority owned by NRC) was raised.
- Enforcement
Concerns were raised regarding combination of the functions and accountabilities of the district and regional councils. The public concern is that the resulting authority would be both 'poacher and game keeper'.

- Debt

There was discussion of the debt of all districts with particular concerns raised around Kaipara and strong direction that the Kaipara's debt would need to be dealt with in any proposal of the LGC to avoid cross-subsidies.

In terms of the structured component of the meetings attendees were asked to provide feedback on the following three 'elements': governance structure, community voice and Maori Representation.

Governance structure

Attendees at meetings were worked through the pros and cons of the six potential governance structures before being asked to indicate their first and second choices. It is worth noting at this point that some meeting attendees were reluctant to participate in this process as they felt that feedback cannot be considered as representative of the overall Whangarei population and too much weight may be given to the findings. Overall it was however clear from the meetings that there was an element of support for some form of the status quo. Below this there was no one clear direction from feedback that could be sought in the timeframes provided.

Community voice

Mechanisms presented in relation to community voice were advisory committees, community boards or ward committees. The pros and cons of each were presented before attendees indicated their preference. There was no clear trend from the meetings. While Advisory Committees were strongly favoured at the first meeting, Community Boards were the preference at the second.

Maori Representation

Mechanisms presented in relation to Maori Representation included Advisory Committees, Committee appointees or Maori Wards. The pros and cons of each were presented before attendees were asked to indicate their preference. Again there was no clear trend from the meetings. Maori Wards were strongly favoured at the first meeting and Advisory Committees were the preference at the second.

Councillor Workshop

Feedback available from WDC public meetings was presented to councillors at a workshop of 28 March 2013 as part of an update on the local government reorganisation in Northland. The need to maintain communities of interest and local identity, ensure effective Maori Representation, and limit cross-subsidisation (e.g. Kaipara debt) were discussed as key issues to be addressed should the LGC see a need for changes to the status quo.

Other matters discussed included the potential for conflicts of interest between the issuing of consents and monitoring/enforcement (the poacher and game keeper dilemma) and a need to ensure the security of strategic assets such as Northport. These matters would need to be addressed under any unitary structure proposed by the LGC.

It was felt that communities of interest and the sustainability of large scale cross-subsidisation would be key considerations for the LGC if it sees a need for change and is to provide a structure that will meet the needs of Northland and be sustainable going forward. After considering potential governance structures, the majority position reached was that a Two Unitary model was the preferred option. The potential benefits of this structure were discussed and staff were instructed to do complete further analysis on this option for a decision of Council.

Alternative application requirements

The LGC must consider the status quo as part of its assessment of the Far North application. Council therefore need not put in an alternative application for the status quo for the LGC to consider this option as it is already on the table. Notes from the WDC public meetings outline a level of public support for the status quo however and can be provided to the LGC.

Following the public meetings and workshop staff have undertaken further work on a draft application proposing a structure for a Two Unitary model encompassing provisions that would address the concerns and issues raised through feedback at public meetings. Given the timeframes available the draft application

was not able to be tabled with this agenda and will be finalised and distributed as a supplementary item prior to the meeting.

The draft application will outline how effective, sustainable, local government could be delivered under a Two Unitary structure. This will provide the information required for Council to decide whether it wishes to lodge an alternative application or leave it up to the LGC to balance any applications received from other parties, including the original application of FNDC, against the status quo.

However, if Council wishes to have a direct voice in the process the recommendation of staff, as captured below, is to lodge an alternative application with the LGC.

Recommendation

1. That Council receive this information.
2. That Council lodge an alternative application for reform of local government in Northland with the Local Government Commission by the 15 April 2013 deadline.
3. That the draft alternative application for a two unitary structure (distributed under separate cover) is approved for lodging with the Local Government Commission.
4. That Council authorises the Chief Executive Officer to make any changes to the draft application agreed at this meeting and any necessary drafting, typographical or presentation corrections required to finalise the application.