

1. Report: Whangarei District Council Briefing Wednesday 26 July 2017

Report of a Briefing to the Whangarei District Council held in the Council Chamber, Forum North on Wednesday 26 July 2017 at 9.00am

Present:

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai, Crs. Stu Bell, Crichton Christie, Vince Cocurullo, Tricia Cutforth, Shelley Deeming, Sue Glen, Jayne Golightly, Phil Halse, Cherry Hermon, , Greg Innes, Greg Martin, Sharon Morgan and Anna Murphy

Apologies/Absent:

In Attendance:

Chief Executive (Rob Forlong), General Manager Community (Sandra Boardman), General Manager Planning and Development (Alison Geddes), General Manager Corporate (Alan Adcock), General Manager Strategy and Democracy (Jill McPherson), Senior Communications Adviser (Ann Midson), Resource Consent Manager (Murray McDonald), Strategy Manager (Tony Horton), Commercial Portfolio Manager (Mike Hibbert), Acting Community Development Manager (Carla Janssen), Venues and Events Manager (Gary Parker-Nance), Library Manager (Paula Urlich), Customer Services Manager (Lesley Ashcroft) and Democracy Adviser (Jennie Thomas)

Facilitators:

Her Worship convened the meeting at 9.00 am.

Facilitators:

General Manager Planning & Development (Alison Geddes) and General Manager Strategy & Assurance (Jill McPherson) & General Manager Community (Sandra Boardman)

1. LTP Assets and Operations - Strategy, Planning and Development

District Development Group - this is a new group in this area including Economic Development, Commercial Property and Urban design. This group will be used to develop a business friendly environment and to promote early engagement. It will encourage better design and be used to lead development in certain areas.

District Development Issues and Challenges –

- Some of the issues and challenges include we can influence but not direct.
- The results are usually seen in the long term.
- The current measure needs to be reviewed.

Strategy Overview – roles include working with Council to set direction. Working across the organisation to deliver strategic programmes. Providing data and analysis to track trends and representing Council at staff level on external groups.

Future work programme includes:

- The Growth Strategy.
- Direction setting with Council.
- Long term Plan/Annual Plan coordination.
- Continuing to represent Council on external groups and continuing to carrying out monitoring.
- There will be a quick review of the 30:50 plan. National Policy statement required review.

Strategy Issues and Challenges –

- Increasing compliance requirements.
- Funding the implementation of strategies – Blue/Green network
- Precinct Plans (Sense of Place) staff are going through and putting together a list for Council in September.

District Plan – Level of Service

- Is hard to measure
- Need to put more resource into expertise in District Plan area. Want to continue with rolling review but need to be resourced to do this.

RMA and Building Consents – Level of Service

- Easier to measure and can adjust resources for demand.
- Building Consents - challenges of finding more staff when required as we are competing with the building industry when it gets busy.
- RMA compliance identified as an issue – not meeting levels of service.

General Issues and Challenges -

- Matching demand and supply.
- Keeping up with changes in legislation, growing central Government requirements and ever-increasing complexity. These extra requirements seldom come with funding.
- Recruiting and retaining talented staff.

Discussion:

Economic Development -

We are starting to look at a more design approach. Government reform is creating uncertainty with the district plan. There is more ability for private plan changes. If the developers are prepared to fund this then council needs to be prepared for that situation.

Economic development is the way we go about our business. It is a component across the council groups. The culture of the council needs to be encouraging to developers and visitors.

If we get the urban design right, economic development will follow. Urban capacity – market can determine where the development should be. Change in emphasis enables development but we need the infrastructure – need to be prepared. Spatial plans are where everything is combined but we need the District Plan to align with these. We should put an economic benefit lens on each activity we are involved in.

We have restricted resources so need to define the priorities. We need to get good staff engaged, use locals rather than an outside consultant. We need to decide what we want for this city. How do we enable these changes and encourage growth where we want? We can look at other aspects e.g. working with Northland Inc, contractors and other Councils.

An economist is going to be essential for this process. We can encourage the design that we desire. We can also look at what other cities are doing.

There are concerns that the District Plan has not allowed more land for residential areas. Needs to be reviewed quickly. We need to ensure there is a choice/availability for urban development. Commercial zoned land is required as well.

Compliance –

A lot of money can be spent on compliance with very little result from chasing small issues. If we wish to change the approach on compliance more resourcing would be required.

Strategy Overview -

There was a query regarding why Bylaws is now under the Strategy Department. Bylaws are a powerful tool for deciding and creating strategy. The development of bylaws is not regulatory and the best fit is in Strategy, Planning and Development.

Discussion on Council committing to projects but not always being capable of implementing them. Staff are presently looking at all the projects out of strategies across the organisation and investigating our ability to implement them. We run a relatively lean organisation.

Statutory requirements

Council is undertaking a 10-year rolling review of the District Plan. We have reviewed and notified plan changes for nearly two thirds of the plan. We need to make a collective decision if this is a priority. Discussion on the implications of not completing the review of the District Plan by the statutory time frames. One of the consequences is we will have to continue to work with the old District Plan rules which can be constraining. We could be seen as constraining development and our community.

An economist and ecologist would be a substantial investment in expertise. We have the budget at present to employ the services of an economist and ecologist but appeals on Rural Plan changes could reduce the budget, this is very hard to predict.

The comment was made that as a district we are experiencing high growth. Under the New National Policy Statement, we are required to plan for that growth and allow for urban capacity. With growth, we will see more resources coming in.

There was the view expressed that in future, there will be more requests for staff to be involved in externals groups and we will require more resources. Council is not just a business and not having the people we need does not do the district any favours. We will need more staff as growth happens. We could look at sharing resources such as an economist with other organisations.

As we work through LTP Early Engagement we need to decide on the priority to progress this and balance against all the different demands. Be clear on what the statutory requirements are to ensure these are prioritised.

Blue/Green network

Discussion on the Blue Green Strategy. We adopted it and it has a work plan with budgets. Should it be in the LTP or not? Elected Members to make that decision.

Meeting Adjourned at 10.30

Reconvened at 10.45

2. LTP – Assets and Operations Overview - Community

Sandra Boardman introduced the presentation

Venues and Events Whangarei

Gary Parker-Nance presented and answered queries:

Current Performance – we have way over delivered compared to resources. This has been achieved by drawing in staff across the organisation as well as staff overtime.

Financial Performance Targets - want to stabilise by June 2018. We need to be more planned around what costs involved for events. Plan to breakeven by June 2019 etc. By June 2020 have an annual net profit – less reliant on WDC subsidies.

Key Challenges and Risks:

- Sustainable Programme – we are running a great programme with the resources we have. Need to be supported by our community and attractive to visitors.
- One Off Major Events - 2018 include the under 19 Cricket World Cup match and Ngapuhi festival. 2019 - dedicated to Sestercentennial.
- Venue suitability for matches.
- NECT agreement a bit vague. Need to provide clarity for both groups.

Discussion

We need to ensure that we are also planning for events held outside Council facilities e.g. hockey tournaments, BMX events. There are a whole range of activities on Council land. We can use events to market the district as well as the events.

We need to be clever around what events we own as a district. We can also use our natural environment that can attract a range of events e.g. multisport events at Whangarei Heads.

Discussion on possible upgrade for Toll stadium and why it would be required, the suitability of the stadium and maintenance needed. There is a need for facilities within the stadium to be upgraded. The difficulty of sourcing replacement parts for the floodlights, as they are so old, is only one of the areas that need considering. We need to identify the upgrades that are required so they can be put in the LTP.

Toll Stadium is a Council owned facility. Assets have a use by date and we need to be realistic. It is going to need substantial investment to maintain these assets. Discussion on the Regional Facilities Fund for new projects around region.

The NRU were extremely impressed on the event plan used for the Lion's match. They have indicated they would like us to start bidding on further matches.

Feedback received from the community was that the Lion's test was a great event but there was nowhere to go after the match. There could have been somewhere or something organised for after the test. Better planning needed in future.

Discussion on the cost benefit of the Lions event and comparisons to other events e.g. the International Rally of Whangarei and the need to be analytical on what events we host and how we measure it.

Comment was made that the pride in our community from successful events can be as important as the economic return.

Customer Services – Residents, Ratepayers and Visitors

Lesley Ashcroft presented and answered queries:

Challenges and Issues:

- Do we need two Visitor Information Centres?
- Resourcing vs activity - significant seasonal fluctuation
- Staff and public safety – incidences at the bus stop outside the Hub
- Clock museum – space for clocks and care and condition of the clocks (environment at museum)
- Customer services - peaks and troughs – building, rates
- Ruakaka service centre do we want to develop this as an information centre
- Changing demographic -evolving technology - responding to this

Discussion

Level of Service Measures – Discussion on whether the total visitor guest nights as a performance measure was appropriate. This was an existing measure previously reported on. We need to be clear about what we are measuring and whether they it is appropriate.

Staff and public safety at the Hub - Incidences have increased over the last 6 months. These incidences are in relation to users of the bus station. It is an issue which has an impact on staff and the public as the incidences move from the bus station into the Hub. Discussion on the appropriateness of the site for a bus service. We need to look at the percentage of incidences in relation to the number of people travelling. The health and safety aspect does need to be addressed.

Two Visitor Information Centres (isites) - Needs to be an informed debate. Need conversations around designs. Tawera Park is the gateway to the North. Need to ensure visitors travel into Whangarei rather than travelling North.

Views expressed that the Tawera site was the best location. It was important to have one main information centre that everyone can access. Tawera needs to be increased in size and the Hub was not capable of growth.

Whangarei Libraries

Paula Ulrich presented and answered queries:

Key Challenges and Risks:

- Technology – ever changing environment
- Budget – remaining capable of supporting excellent service delivery
- Suppliers and vendors – risk of a vendor not fulfilling contract obligations

Proposed Projects:

- IT Upgrade – continuation of upgrade of IT following the implementation of RFID
- Furniture Renewal – replacement due to wear and tear
- Book Purchases – ongoing maintenance and renewal of collections

Discussion:

Discussion on surveying why people are at the library. This has previously been surveyed. It could also be useful for finding out the demographics of the users.

Weekend hours - Saturday 9.00 am - 1.00 pm Sunday 10.00 am - 1.00 pm. People would like to see longer hours on a Saturday but it is a matter of resources and getting the balance right for staff as well as opening hours. Sunday is popular with the older generation.

Level of Service - look at measures around distinguishing between urban libraries and the library bus. The library is the single biggest visitors' venue in the district. Numbers of books is changing with online services. We have reduced the number of physical books. Govt documents etc have gone on line. We provide a significant online service which is continuing to expand. The digitisation project will free up more space.

Discussion on how valuable the café is in the library and the use of the May Bain room for the community. The school programmes are buoyant, in particular the school holiday programmes. The library has a close relationship with the schools.

There was a query whether Raumanga had been identified as a venue for another branch of the library. Paula advised that Raumanga had not been identified - if there was any need for another one it would be at Whangarei Heads.

Community Development

Carla Janssen presented and answered queries:

Activity Overview:

- Providing affordable pensioner housing
- Providing and supporting community venues and facilities
- Collaborating with Police etc on community safety and crime prevention
- Supporting forums for youth, older people and those with disabilities
- Supporting communities to thrive through initiatives such as village planning

Levels of Service:

- Pensioner housing
- Community safety
- Grant applications

We perform well in all areas. There could be other measures that would be better – reviewing at present.

Key challenges and risks

- Demand for affordable pensioner housing is expected to increase.
- Reliance on volunteers - community safety programme. Not seeing a lot of younger volunteers coming through.
- Many communities and organisations relying on council for operational funding.
- As we move to a community development approach, these groups will require work on their sustainability.

Discussion on:

Pensioner housing – The question was asked “Has there been any investigation on partnerships with other pensioner housing groups?” This would be a significant change to what we are doing now. We will look at LTP feedback in this area. In future Central Government, may want to work with us in partnerships offers, possibly offer lower interest rates for social housing etc. There was a view expressed that we provide some pensioner housing but this doesn't mean we wish to increase our level of housing.

Comment was made regarding whether Council should be providing housing at all. We don't want to be competing with developers. Central Government has its own subsidy schemes.

There was discussion on the difference between providing affordable pensioner housing and Council's processes such as resource and building consents being a hurdle to providing more pensioner housing. This is a separate issue.

As a Council, we have an ability to influence developers' designs. We could ensure diversity of houses and stipulate a percentage of affordable housing.

Pensioner housing is a different process where health and income is taken into account. It is a very complicated area and any changes would have a profound impact on how we operate.

Community groups – Council needs to be careful that we don't make it more difficult for the groups receiving operational funding as a lot of these organisation are doing significant work in deprived communities.

Community funding needs further investigation. We have maintained the same levels for years. We need to look at where we are investing community funding and clearly align through this process.

Other views were that we could look at partnership funding rather than grants. We could play a role rather than organisations just coming to us for funding. We could have a shift in our Community Development approach.

During the Early Engagement process, there were some views from the community that funding should be returned to the communities where the money came from. Questions were asked why some groups qualify and some areas seem to be getting more funding. The question was asked, “How do new groups come onto the funding list?” There was discussion on community funding being directed into catchments. There were varying views expressed.

Village Planning Process - Would like to see a fuller conversation around this area. Engagement is a key outcome in village planning. Disadvantaged people i.e. the unemployed could be involved in projects

What do the staff, who are in touch with the community feel? We should also be taking these views into account and the online comments from the feedback and surveys.

Closure of meeting - 12.25 pm