



11 March 2015

Submission on Auckland Council's long-term plan 2015-2025

Prepared and submitted by Community Waitakere, with the support of:

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EcoMatters Environment Trust
Love to Live Trust
McLaren Park/Henderson South Community Initiative
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Community Waitakere (previously West Auckland District Council of Social Services) has been working in West Auckland since 1982. We provide neighbourhood and environment-based community development initiatives, training, mentoring, information and brokerage to the community sector. Our vision is for connected, thriving and sustainable west Auckland communities.

We wish to submit on Auckland Council's long-term plan (LTP) 2015-2025, with particular reference to the information detailed in [Supporting Documents, Section 5.5 'Parks, community and lifestyle'](#).

We would like to speak to our submission.

We note the intention that is signalled in the plan to move "to a more community empowered approach to community development with more local board involvement".

This follows the direction signalled by the Mayor in his Proposal for the LTP 2015 – 2025, released prior to the consultation process.

The community development function is an area where I would like to see us change our delivery to a much more empowered community approach. This would see us move away from direct delivery (and therefore save overheads) and fund community groups to deliver more. I also would like to see local boards play a much more active role in this area by allocating more of the funding through them. (P. 15)

This proposed direction raises a number of issues for community sector organisations in West Auckland (and we expect more widely across the whole of Auckland). There is likely to be a significant level of interest and a willingness in our sector to respond positively to the opportunities for a new way of working that this seems to signal, both within the community and with Council.

There are also however, important questions that need to be answered and a process undertaken to ensure that this does not become an exercise simply in saving money and disinvesting from our communities. In our view, community sector organisations, as well the community more broadly are well motivated to partner with Council and to work constructively to promote community wellbeing.

The specific issues that need to be addressed and which this submission will briefly consider are:

- The work that is envisaged will be undertaken 'in-house' by Council and that which will be devolved to communities
- The importance of building a placemaking or community development perspective across all of Council's operations
- The need for an effective mechanism to be developed to facilitate community development that encompasses more than one Local Board
- The need for an effective mechanism to facilitate engagement between Council and the community sector (at different levels)
- A strengthened ability for responsiveness and action at a local level by community and Local Boards working in partnership.

'In Council or In Community'

The LTP signals a shift in activities to be undertaken directly by Council staff, and by implication those to be undertaken in communities. The community sector is wary of its experience with central government getting out of direct delivery and moving to a purchasing model. We don't want to become a 'service provider' delivering contracted services – effectively in competition with ourselves, or possibly commercial providers. We understand a service contract model may be appropriate in some circumstances – but we also want the opportunity to share in an active process of 'place-making' of developing, growing and enhancing our communities. Our capacity to be active in this process would be significantly constrained if we were restricted to the role of delivery of specific pre-determined services.

In this sort of work we need and want to partner with Council, who also have a prime interest in exactly the same things. An understanding of the broader interest of our sector within Council is vital to ensure that we can engage positively in a way that is more far reaching than the simple provision of contracted services.

Recommendation: That Council actively engages with the community sector in any consideration of which services or activities are to be undertaken within Council, or devolved to community.

The importance of building a placemaking or community development perspective across all of the Councils' operations

In this context one of the key roles for community development workers within Council is to act as a gateway – an enabler between community and the wider Council. Urban design, waste management, environmental sustainability issues and physical infrastructure development all have enormous impact on those places where we live, play and work. A community development approach needs to be understood and practised internally throughout Council, from the Chief Executive, through Senior Management and across staff in all sections. A community development lens needs to be applied broadly and not seen as the exclusive preserve of a small group of community workers whether they are employed by Council or not.

Recommendation: That all staff within Council are committed to understand and practise the principles of community development through the broad range of Council operations.

A mechanism to facilitate community development across more than one Local Board

The LTP signals an intention to strengthen the role of Local Boards in funding and delivering more 'empowered' communities. We welcome the development of the Local Board role in this area. Local Boards are the most 'local' point of elected representation in our system and are generally well connected to their communities. In addition to this however it is vital to also acknowledge that there is a significant amount of community activity that transcends Local Board boundaries and that requires facilitation and support more broadly. In West Auckland community members live, work and play across at least three Board areas often on a daily basis. Robust mechanisms need to be developed to provide support for this and to guard against any tendency for very parochial perspectives to grow. The system currently incentivises a very local focus and while this can be a strength, it also runs the risk of fragmentation, duplication and a reduction in community support.

Recommendation: That a robust mechanism be developed to facilitate community development and associated funding across Local Board boundaries to reflect community interest at a sub-regional level.

A mechanism to facilitate engagement between Council and the community sector (at different levels)

There currently is no effective way in which the community sector and Council can engage in an ongoing, sustained way. In an environment where we are looking to community to play a larger role, this engagement takes on even more importance. If the community is not confident that its' insights and concerns are being heard, and if Council is not aware of community issues in a timely and meaningful way, then opportunities are lost and relationships deteriorate. This engagement needs to be invested in. It requires dedicated staff and political time, and sufficient resource to facilitate the involvement of the community.

It will also be important that this engagement is located at both an overall Auckland Regional level as well as sub-regionally. Auckland is a large and complex place and this needs to be recognised and accommodated. Our concerns in West Auckland are not exactly the same as those experienced on the North Shore and we need to be able to connect at a West Auckland level, as well as locally, as well as regionally.

Recommendation: That processes be implemented to facilitate ongoing engagement between Auckland Council and the community sector at regional and sub-regional levels.

A strengthened ability for responsiveness and action at a local level by community and Local Boards working in partnership

As has been noted above there are implications associated with an increased role for Local Boards in this area. There is also clearly an opportunity to develop an agile and speedy responsiveness at the local level. If Local Boards, Council staff and community organisations are empowered to take action, this in turn will build momentum locally, and over time will build trust amongst all those involved. If resources and decision making are to be devolved (within clear parameters) this needs to be seen to result in a changed way of things happening 'on the ground'.

Recommendation: That money and staff be available at Local Board level to facilitate quick responses to local issues and opportunities and that this involve both Council staff and appropriately resourced community organisations.

Conclusion

Community Waitakere is pleased to acknowledge and support the direction signalled in this LTP to strengthen the role of the community sector in community development. This direction however cannot be seen as leading to an easy or quick 'fix'. There is a very significant amount of work needed – to facilitate, energize and embolden communities to become more actively engaged both in democratic processes of local government – and also to actually take responsibility and initiative in their local patch. The pay-off from this over time will be great – but we shouldn't underestimate the size of the task.

It is important that it is explicitly understood that this cannot simply be a mechanism for saving money. There is no reservoir of unspent capacity or resource in the community waiting to be engaged. Even the best community sector organisations are often only one failed grant application away from disaster.

We understand that there is strong pressure on resources – and there is undoubtedly opportunity to spend money effectively and perhaps with less 'overhead' contribution – and more agility. At the same time we need to be prepared to take at least a medium term time frame – to see the real value in developing social capital in all our communities – and that the points of connection need to be grown and nurtured. If we can do this effectively – over time we can certainly have communities – our city of 100 villages – that really do own their neighbourhood – and feel empowered to look after it, both socially, culturally and physically.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation: That Council actively engages with the community sector in any consideration of which services or activities are to be undertaken within Council, or devolved to community.

Recommendation: That an important role for community development staff within Council is identified to promote and facilitate community perspectives across the broad range of Council operations.

Recommendation: That a robust mechanism be developed to facilitate community development and associated funding across Local Board boundaries to reflect community interest at a sub-regional level.

Recommendation: That processes be implemented to facilitate ongoing engagement between Auckland Council and the community sector at regional and sub-regional levels.

Recommendation: That money and staff be available at Local Board level to facilitate quick responses to local issues and opportunities and that this involve both Council staff and appropriately resourced community organisations.

Nga mihi,

Charlie Moore
Community Waitakere