

Council Briefing Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 26 November 2019
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
(Chairperson)
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Jayne Golightly
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Greg Martin
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid

Scribe Jennie Thomas (Democracy Adviser)

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Reports

2.1 2020 - 2021 Annual Plan and the Corporate Planning Cycle

Her Worship the Mayor convened the meeting and advised that Dominic Kula - General Manager – Strategy and Democracy, would lead the presentation on the overview of 2020-2021 Annual Plan process.

Mr Kula advised that year three of the Long Term Plan (LTP) is an opportunity for elected members to touch base on the direction to be set for the LTP. He acknowledged that Council staff have not yet completed a full review of the budgets and that this was just the first step in discussions on the process. He went on to explain the stages of the Corporate Planning cycle.

The Long Term Plan is driven by strategic priorities developed by Council and the community. It sets the direction for the services and functions of Council. It may be influenced by central government policies.

The Annual Plan is produced every non-LTP year. The 2020-2021 Annual Plan will be the last before the next LTP is developed in 2021. Consultation is not required on the Annual Plan unless significant and/or material changes occur (LGA criteria assessed).

Jane Ashely (Manager – Communications), with assistance from Merryn Stratham (Consultation Adviser), led the discussion on engagement. Ms Ashley advised that the two most important things to keep in mind are, “What you are seeking to achieve and what is the outcome we want to drive for the community?”

Both the pros and cons for the three options of consultation on the Annual Plan were highlighted.

- Consulting on AP even if not required –
Consulting provides an opportunity for early engagement with, and understanding of, the community, especially for new councillors. Benefits would need to be balanced. It is important not to detract from any consultation effort on the LTP proper. There is the possibility of creating consultation fatigue and possible confusion for communities.
- Consulting on AP if required –
If there are material and significant issues raised, or new priorities proposed consulting is compulsory. It provides an opportunity to respond to major new issues that have arisen. The cons would be the similar to Consulting – even if not required.
- Not consulting on the AP 2020 –
Provides clear head space to devote to the consultation of the LTP. Provides more opportunity for the community to get involved and to gain understanding of the process. A broader mix of engagement processes and feedback methods can be used. In terms of cons the community could get confused on what is early engagement and actual consultation on the LTP. If a successful consultation is to be undertaken resources need to be available.

Feedback and queries

There was a comment that the last LTP early engagement had created some confusion. Community members believed they had presented to the LTP when they had only submitted to the early engagement process.

It was noted that it was important to manage expectations of the community who were attending meetings and submitting. There needs to be clear communication

around the relationship of the AP and LTP. It was queried whether more flexibility of the LTP could be achieved through the AP.

Rob Forlong (CE) advised that the LTP process was deliberately designed to provide long term consistency. In his experience it is not the LTP, but the desire not to increase rates that constrains spending.

There was discussion on the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) and the Tourism Infrastructure Fund (TIF) and whether the LTP allowed enough flexibility to maximise these opportunities for funding.

It was queried whether submissions could be taken in the early engagement phase of consultation. It was advised that feedback will be noted and will help to form direction, but formal submissions need to be submitted during the LTP submission period. It was suggested that if details were provided by members of the community during this informal phase, that follow up communication could take place asking if they now wished to formally submit on the process. Staff confirmed that this was the approach taken in the last LTP.

It was advised that early engagement and feedback received in the early engagement phase, helps to build the document which then goes back out to the community for consultation.

It was suggested that an expo would provide the community with a better understanding of what Council does, to make comment and requests.

There was discussion on project delivery and the ability Council has to deliver its capital projects. It was stated that often Council will be judged on its level of service not so much the big capital works projects.

Grants enabling/assisting communities to undertake projects were suggested as an alternative.

The merits and disadvantages of consulting were debated. Views expressed included the risk of over consulting. It was stated that some areas of the community questioned why all the consultation was occurring. Others felt that the AP process was known and accepted by the community as the avenue in which to make requests. There was some agreement that any consultation process needed to be communicated clearly.

It was noted that during the last consultation process, traditional meeting type consultation took place but there was a range of other engagement tools used including social media, a consultation container which was taken to events and the film produced for the website which had been a great success.

Challenges for elected members being drawn into community requests was noted. There was comment made that the Growth Strategy was also an important document to consider. Tony Horton (Manager – Strategy) advised that an update on the Growth Strategy would be provided at Council's briefing on 4 December 2019.

Next Steps

Today's feedback will be incorporated into a report for a briefing to be held on 12 December 2019. This briefing will include known changes to Year 3 of the LTP and the suggested direction from staff on consultation or early engagement on the LTP.

Staff are reviewing budgets and a financial update will be provided in the new year. Following on from this a Draft Consultation Document would be presented to elected members for review.

The meeting adjourned at 10.22am for morning tea and reconvened at 10.35am.

2.2 Governance of the Northland Events Centre

Sandra Boardman (General Manager – Community) advised that today's briefing was to bring all elected members up to speed on the governance of the Northland Events Centre (NECT). Council will need to decide on an option for governance, by June 2020 when the current Management Agreement expires.

Both the NECT and Council have, in the past, expressed concerns regarding the governance arrangement. NECT have requested greater autonomy, flexibility and transparency and an annual operating grant. Council have been unclear on the benefits and costs of the Trust.

An independent review was undertaken by Bruce Robertson and Ruth Stokes of the RDC Group and a workshop was held with elected members on 27 June 2019.

The top three options provided included a Council in-house operation, a New Trust (lite) and a New Trust (full).

The new Trust (lite) option would operate with an annual operating grant, an operations manager and updated agreements. The New Trust (full) would operate similarly, but with full operational and administration staff. The Council in-house option would operate fully within Council.

Ms Boardman advised that Council should consider what level of control it wants to exert and to what extent they wish to prioritise a community facility. There had been no consensus on options at the previous meeting and there was an intention to have another workshop to consider options in March 2020. A decision paper would be brought to Council as soon as possible after that.

Questions and comments

Cr Halse declared an interest as Chairman of the NECT and provided some history to, and some of the challenges faced, by the Trust. He discussed how in the last six months the Trust and Council staff have worked more collaboratively to improve processes. He reiterated that the Trust and Council need to readdress previous documents and move forward rather than look back.

Staff were asked to and clarified the status of the catering contract for the stadium.

The stadium's anchor tenants and their relevance to the facility were discussed. It was noted that the original trust did envision that the tenancies would relate to the centre but that has not always been the case. The model for the stadium had been a regional multi-purpose facility with a commercial floor to provide a commercial return.

There was discussion and clarification on Northland Rugby's decision not to be based at the centre and locating to a new building on Pohe Island.

The composition of the Trust at present includes Cr Halse as Chairman, Daniel Yorke, Alastair Wells the NRC appointed trustee (NRC have indicated at the end of the term in December 2019 – they wish to remove NRC as an appointer of a Trust member) and Deborah Harding who has agreed to stay on as trustee until the end of June 2020 when the agreement expires.

The constraints of the resource consent for the centre was discussed. It was advised, that to increase the number of concerts and festivals held, a new consent would have to be applied for.

There was some support expressed for the option of leaving the operation with NECT. It was stated that passionate members of the community might achieve better outcomes with extra support and funding.

Another view expressed was the responsibility and skills required were too much to ask of unpaid trustees.

There was a request for Councillors to be provided with an updated report on operational matters and clarification on whether the two trust options would be able to attract funds etc.

Ms Boardman advised that there was an intention to have further discussions with the Trust prior to the workshop in February/March. When staff come back to Council, they will have a series of options with the pros and cons of each.

3. Closure of Meeting - 11.11am.