

Council Briefing Agenda

Date: Wednesday, 9 September, 2020

Time: 9:00 am

Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

Elected Members: 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

For any queries regarding this meeting please contact
the Whangarei District Council on (09) 430-4200.

1. Apologies

2. Reports

2.1 The long term future of Local Government - Water, RMA and
Caring for Communities

1

3. Closure of Meeting

2.1 The long term future of Local Government – Water, RMA and Caring for Communities

Meeting: Whangarei District Council
Date of meeting: 9 September 2020
Reporting officer: Rob Forlong (Chief Executive)

1 Purpose

To provide Council with the opportunity to discuss significant strategic matters relating to the long-term future of local government.

2 Background

Reform processes such as the Three Waters, RMA reforms, the four well beings and Caring for communities are continuing trends in public service delivery which have been going on for around two decades.

These trends include;

- Shifting decision making from local government to central government bodies (e.g. increased government intervention powers in the RMA and a self-regulatory role for Kainga ora)
- Shifting of decision making from elected to appointed bodies (RMA commissioners/EPA role expansion/water reforms)
- Aggregation of organisations and service delivery (water reforms, MBIE)
- Greater focus on regional rather than local decision making (RMA reforms/ Covid regional leadership groups)
- More use of corporate arm's length delivery bodies (FENZ/Water reforms)
- Creation of "new" bodies to replace those which lose their social license to operate (e.g. Worksafe for DoL, Taumata Arowai for DHB water regulators, Oranga Tamariki for CYFS, Kainga ora for Housing NZ)

Local government is potentially on the cusp of a large change in its role and delivery of services. For a number of years, central government has been enacting reforms which have the potential to significantly alter the structure and function of local government. Thus far the reforms have been relatively unconnected however, shortly the government will have little choice but to implement a work programme to look at the future structure and functions of local government.

The trends suggest that local government's current strong focus on infrastructure will diminish with the potential for new "wellbeing" functions to emerge. These functions could

complement government responsibilities such as a greater role for local bodies in the provision of social housing or other community welfare functions. However, removing three waters infrastructure from Councils is likely to place significant financial pressure on their operations perhaps making many smaller Councils no longer economically viable.

Against this backdrop, Council will need to consider how it responds to government initiative - in particular, the three waters reform. Thus far it has been a relatively straightforward process of understanding the proposals and opting in to the “no regrets” memorandum of understanding with associated funding.

WDC is in a good position with strong three waters infrastructure and a large enough population density to have the ability to fund and operate its own water and wastewater functions. When compared with Auckland and other Northland councils, the Whangarei municipal water supply coped very well with the recent drought, which was the worst on record. However, self-suppliers in the District fared worse, with many facing significant shortages and long waits for water delivery. Self-suppliers are also more likely to have water quality issues than those supplied by the municipal system.

Within 12 months WDC will need to decide whether it wishes to opt in to the water reforms and, if so, what is best for the Whangarei community. We understand that government is reluctant to force the aggregation of the Three Waters on councils, so Whangarei District Council has a genuine choice about how best to meet its citizens three waters' needs.

3 Significance and engagement

The matters of this Agenda do not trigger the significance criteria outlined in Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, and the public will be informed via Agenda publication on the website, Council News.