

Council Briefing Agenda

Date: Wednesday, 7 May, 2025

Time: 9:00 am

Location: Civic Centre, Te Iwitahi, 9 Rust Avenue

Elected Members: His Worship the Mayor Vince Cocurullo
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Jayne Golightly
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Deborah Harding
Cr Patrick Holmes
Cr Scott McKenzie
Cr Marie Olsen
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid
Cr Phoenix Ruka
Cr Paul Yovich

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

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2.1 Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion – Project Update

Meeting: Council Briefing
Date of meeting: 7 May 2025
Reporting officer: Simon Charles, Manager - Wastewater

1 Purpose / Te Kaupapa

This report provides Council with an update on the Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant (RWWTP) Expansion Project.

2 Background / Horopaki

The Ruakākā Wastewater Network was first installed in the mid-1980s and consists of a pipe network, a series of pumping stations, a treatment plant and wastewater discharge ponds. It is located in the industrial area of Ruakākā, on Ruakākā Pipeline Road Track, close to the dune network that runs along Ruakākā beach.

The plant has run effectively since installation with no significant breaches of its consent conditions.

In 2012 a consent was granted to expand the treatment plant and install a 3km pipeline to enable discharge to ocean. This was in response to the Ruakākā Wastewater Strategy to address the predicted growth in the Marsden Point and Ruakākā area. The consent application was met with concerns from sectors of the community (hapu, fishery and shellfish operators, NIWA and some members of the local community) mostly focussed on the environmental and cultural impacts of discharge to the ocean. Consequently, Council agreed to treated water quality standards that are significantly higher than might otherwise have been required and established a Liaison Group made up of representatives of groups who had raised concerns.

The consent also established Patuharakeke as a mana whenua partner in the project including delivery of the cultural monitoring programme.

Subsequent to the consent being granted, the expected growth did not eventuate and giving effect to the consent was put on hold. However, in recent years growth has picked up and that combined with the closure of the Refinery (and resulting increase in the demand on the plant's capacity to discharge treated wastewater) means that Council is now progressing the implementation of:

- The upgrade to the wastewater treatment plant (in terms of capacity and improved quality of the treated wastewater); and
- Implementation of an ocean outfall discharge option (3km pipeline)

OR

- Implementation of a discharge to land option and/or land contact and into water.

Development Area

- GNLC
- Marsden Bay
- Marsden City
- Marsden Cove
- Marsden Point
- Marsden Point Road
- One Tree Point
- Ruakaka
- Ruakaka South
- St Just Enterprises
- Tamure Place - Keith
- Tamure Place - Other
- The Landing

3 Discussion / Whakawhiti kōrero

A project team has been established with all key disciplines now resourced. The project team meets weekly, with the steering committee providing management direction and oversight.

An aspect of the early project stages has been the establishment of a risk register. Key risks have been identified.

3.1 Top Project Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Allowing existing Consents to lapse	The section following this table details the expiry dates of Consents associated with this WWTP. The team are working hard to ensure that consents do not expire.
Non-compliance - Enforcement action by Regional Council due to plant not meeting current consent limits.	The team will work closely with the operations team to ensure that treatment quality requirements are met, however the discharge flow projection graphs included later on in the report indicate that flow will exceed permitted limits within the next 18 months.
Land availability - The project will require additional land to accommodate the larger plant and possible land discharge areas.	The team will prioritise land that Council already owns but is also exploring alternative options that may also be suitable. We will work directly with land-owners to explore their interest in making any identified land available and the best approach to securing the land.
Public concern - The consent in 2012 revealed some significant concerns in the community, particularly about environmental impacts of the outfall. These may be raised again as the options are firmed up. There are also concerns from the business and development communities about the constraints on growth being created by the existing infrastructure.	The team is committed to working with all parties to ensure that concerns are understood and wherever possible solutions will be identified in partnership with those who raised them. We will work closely with the Community Liaison Group (established by the consent) to seek their views and feedback on options as early as possible. We will engage with the wider community on realistic options to ensure we fully understand the implications of those options and community preferences. To address the concerns from the development community, the team will implement short term solutions that generate additional capacity while the plant expansion and more permanent discharge options progress.
Political Uncertainty - 2025 is a local government election year. A new council could bring a new approach. This could affect the priority and budget availability for the project. The outcome of Local Waters Done Well may impact the direction of the project.	The team is working to ensure the current council is able to consider and make well-informed recommendations for the next council to build on. We will deliver regular briefings to Council to support them to build understanding and to ensure they are fully prepared for decisions according to a planned project schedule. This schedule is covered later in this report.
Constructability - Any large-scale infrastructure project is susceptible to unforeseen issues such as geotech or logistics challenges. This project also faced uncertainty about the conditions in the	The project discovery and design phases have extensive exploratory work to attempt to identify and address these uncertainties. Aecom have been appointed to assist with identifying the gaps

<p>marine environment. Each of these could impact on the constructability of options.</p>	<p>in existing knowledge and the work that is required to address those gaps.</p> <p>Final decisions on options will only be made once a reasonable level of certainty has been established.</p>
<p>Delays -Linked to the constructability risk, there is also a risk of delays that could result from technical, political, consenting and concession obstacles or logistics challenges. Delays will further impact on development in the area and could put the plant at risk of environmental breaches.</p>	<p>The team has varying degrees of control over the risk of delays.</p> <p>Controllable risks include contractor availability, logistics and technical understanding.</p> <p>The project procurement process is focussed on minimising the risk of delays due to contractor availability. There is a key emphasis in all engagement that time is critical in the delivery of the project.</p> <p>The work being undertaken to identify and address knowledge gaps will also help to address this risk of unforeseen delays.</p> <p>Less controllable risks include challenges with obtaining concessions on particular blocks of land and obtaining consents for particular activities (e.g. odour, land discharge etc). The project has a very tight timeline and any delays on these aspects could push it out significantly.</p> <p>Traditionally consenting can take up to 18 months. This would create unacceptable delays.</p> <p>To address the risks around concessions and consenting delays, the team is progressing pre-engagement (to identify concerns and possible solutions) on concession and consent applications as early as possible.</p> <p>The project schedule sets May 2026 as the decision-making point for which technical options will be progressed. Consenting will commence much earlier than this so that whatever option is the preferred one, can move quickly into construction at that point.</p>
<p>Flow Rates – There is a significant risk that the flow rates will exceed the capacity of the plant prior to the construction of the new plant and discharge capacity as consented .</p>	<p>Officers are working on a plan to expand the discharge capacity of the existing plant using land adjacent to the plant. The intention is to implement this additional discharge capacity by Q3 2026 when modelling suggests flow rates will meet capacity.</p>

3.2 Resource Consent AUT.021532

The existing consent for the expansion of the wastewater treatment plant and either ocean outfall or alternative land discharge option includes nine discharge permits and 106 conditions. Seven permits have deadlines for action (Lapse periods), meaning they will expire if Council does not 'give effect' (start work) by that time. WDC officers are working on a definition of what 'giving effect' to the consent means as there are multiple factors that need to be considered. This will be presented to NRC as the consenting authority for their response.

CONSENT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	EXPIRY DATE	COMMENCEMENT DATE	EXTENDED LAPSE PERIOD	Current Status
AUT.021532.01.02	WWTP contingency pond discharge to ground (Via Seepage)	31-May-46	16-Mar-12	10 YEARS	Expired
AUT.021532.02.02	Discharge to land Zone 3 (660m ³ /d ADF)	31-May-46	11-Jul-19		Expires 31 Mar 2046, management report required by 11 July 2022
AUT.021532.03.01	Discharge to Air WWTP	31-May-46	16-Mar-12		Expires 31 March 2046
AUT.021532.04.01	Discharge to land Roger Hall Memorial Park (260m ³ /d)	31-May-46	16-Mar-12	10 YEARS	Expired
AUT.021532.05.02	Discharge to Land Rama Rd Block (1700m ³ /d)	31-May-31	16-Mar-12	10 YEARS	Expires 31 May 2031 (actioned)
AUT.021532.06.01	Discharge to Air Rama Rd Block	31-May-31	16-Mar-12	10 YEARS	Expires 31 May 2031 (actioned)
AUT.021532.07.01	Treated Wastewater Discharge to CMA (16,000m ³ /d)	31-May-46	16-Mar-12	15 YEARS	Lapses 16 Mar 2027
AUT.021532.08.01	Coastal Outfall erection and Placement	31-May-46	16-Mar-12	15 YEARS	Lapses 16 Mar 2027
AUT.021532.09.01	Coastal Outfall Occupation of Coastal Space	31-May-46	16-Mar-12	15 YEARS	Lapses 16 Mar 2027

Before construction can start, 44 conditions must be met, with three key areas being:

- Consulting with the Community Liaison Group on implementation of the strategy, Management Plans, project progress, surveys and assessments.
- Engaging with Patuharakeke on the ongoing progress, cultural monitoring programme and the development of Management Plans, surveys and assessments.
- Exploring alternative discharge options, new technologies, and beneficial water reuse solutions.

3.3 Flow Rates Analysis

Analysis of likely flow rates for both the Ruakaka and Waipu wastewater treatment plants over time has been undertaken to ensure proposed solutions will be appropriate for likely demand over the lifetime of the plant and beyond. Modelling demand for both the plants gives us clarity on the combined demand across both towns. This allows Council to consider combining the two plants into one at some future date although there is no current plan to do so.

The initial findings of these investigations are summarized below:

RUAKAKA

Off Peak	DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	a	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d	
2023	1347	290	300	55	82		391	404	74	110
2050	3927	290	300	55	82		1,139	1,178	216	322
2084	6841	290	300	55	82		1,984	2,052	376	561

Peak	Peak DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	BOD kg/d	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d
2023	2537	310	320	66	89	786	812	167	226
2050	5091	310	320	66	89	1,578	1,629	336	453
2084	8410	310	320	66	89	2,607	2,691	555	748

WAIPU

Off Peak	DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	BOD kg/d	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d
2023	500	318	260	45	70	159	130	23	35
2050	1,005	318	260	45	70	320	261	45	70
2084	1,428	318	260	45	70	454	371	64	100

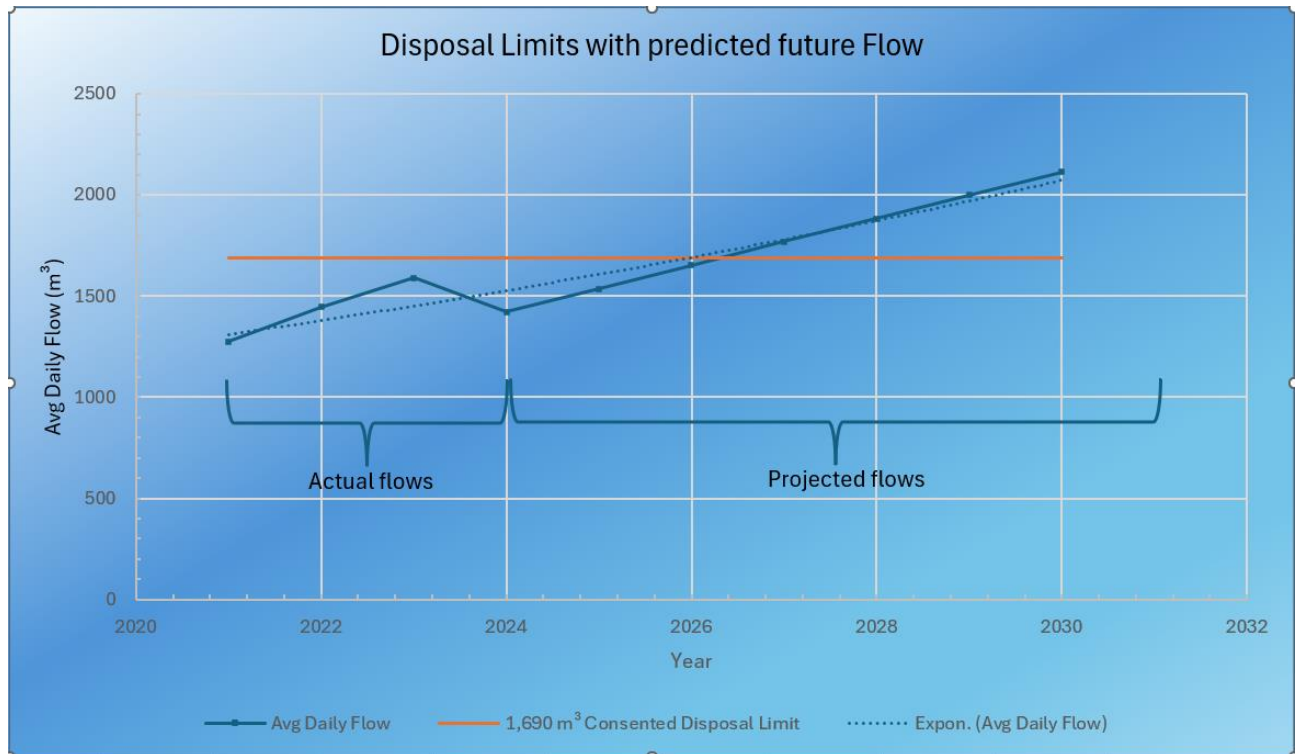
Peak	Peak DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	BOD kg/d	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d
2023	889	400	400	86	120	356	356	76	107
2050	1,869	400	400	86	120	748	748	161	224
2084	2,656	400	400	86	120	1,062	1,062	228	319

Combined

Off Peak	DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	BOD kg/d	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d
2023	1,847	298	289	52	79	550	534	97	145
2050	4,932	296	292	53	80	1,458	1,439	261	392
2084	8,269	295	293	53	80	2,438	2,424	441	661

Peak	Peak DWF	BOD mg/l	TSS mg/l	NH3 mg/l	TKN mg/l	BOD kg/d	TSS kg/d	NH3 kg/d	TKN kg/d
2023	3,426	333	341	71	97	1,142	1,167	244	332
2050	6,960	334	341	71	97	2,326	2,377	497	677
2084	11,066	332	339	71	96	3,670	3,754	783	1,067

The chart below shows the short term actual flow into the plant versus the consent limit for disposal. Based on the current growth in the approved connection area we anticipate being at capacity in 2026. Officers are working on an interim measure to address this more immediate need.



3.4 The Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant (RWWTP) Expansion Project Scope

The Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant (RWWTP) Expansion Project has two key goals:

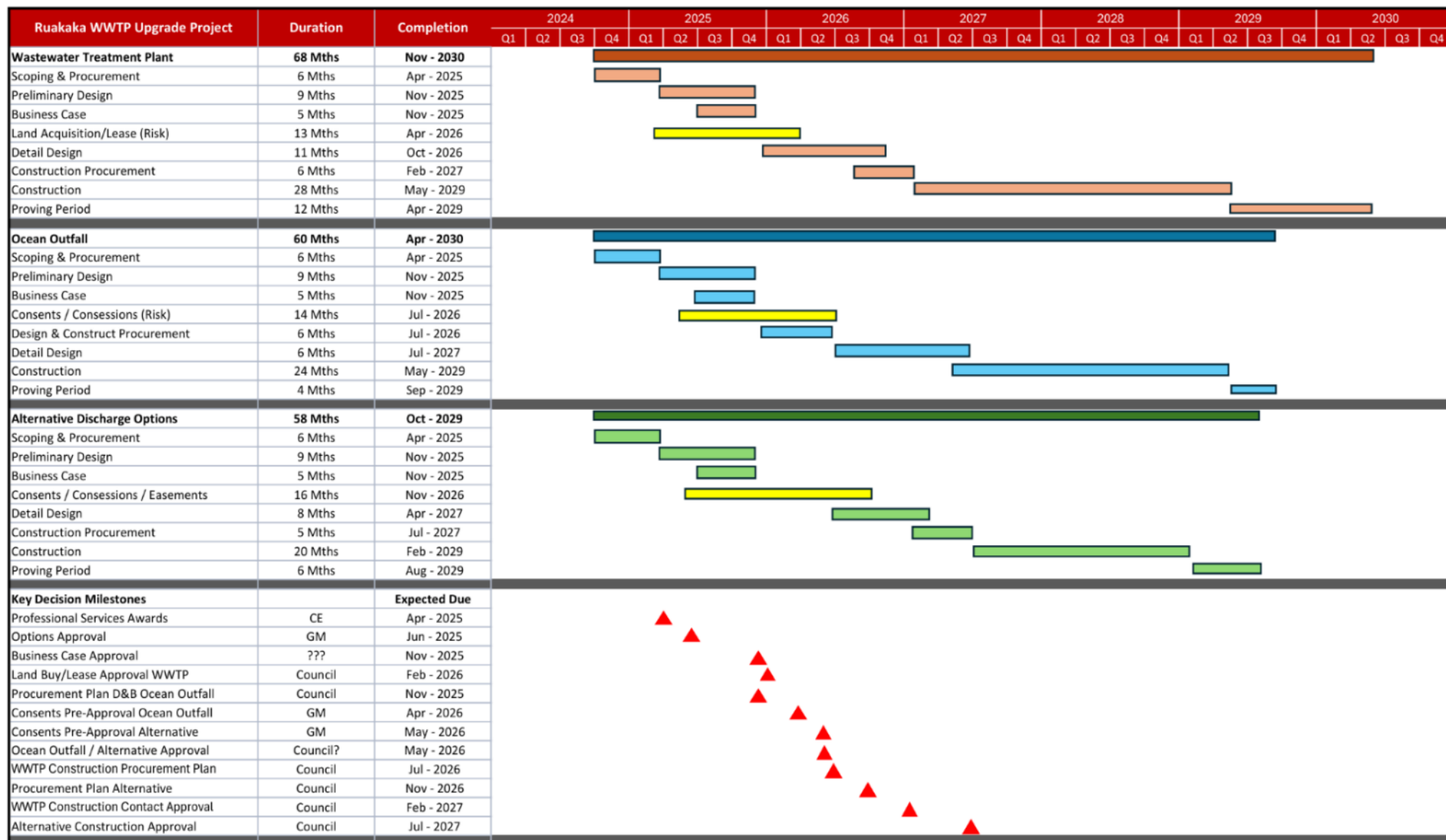
- To upgrade the Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant (RWWTP), which is approaching treatment capacity and consented flow limits to allow increased connections, and;
- To design a new system to safely discharge treated wastewater.

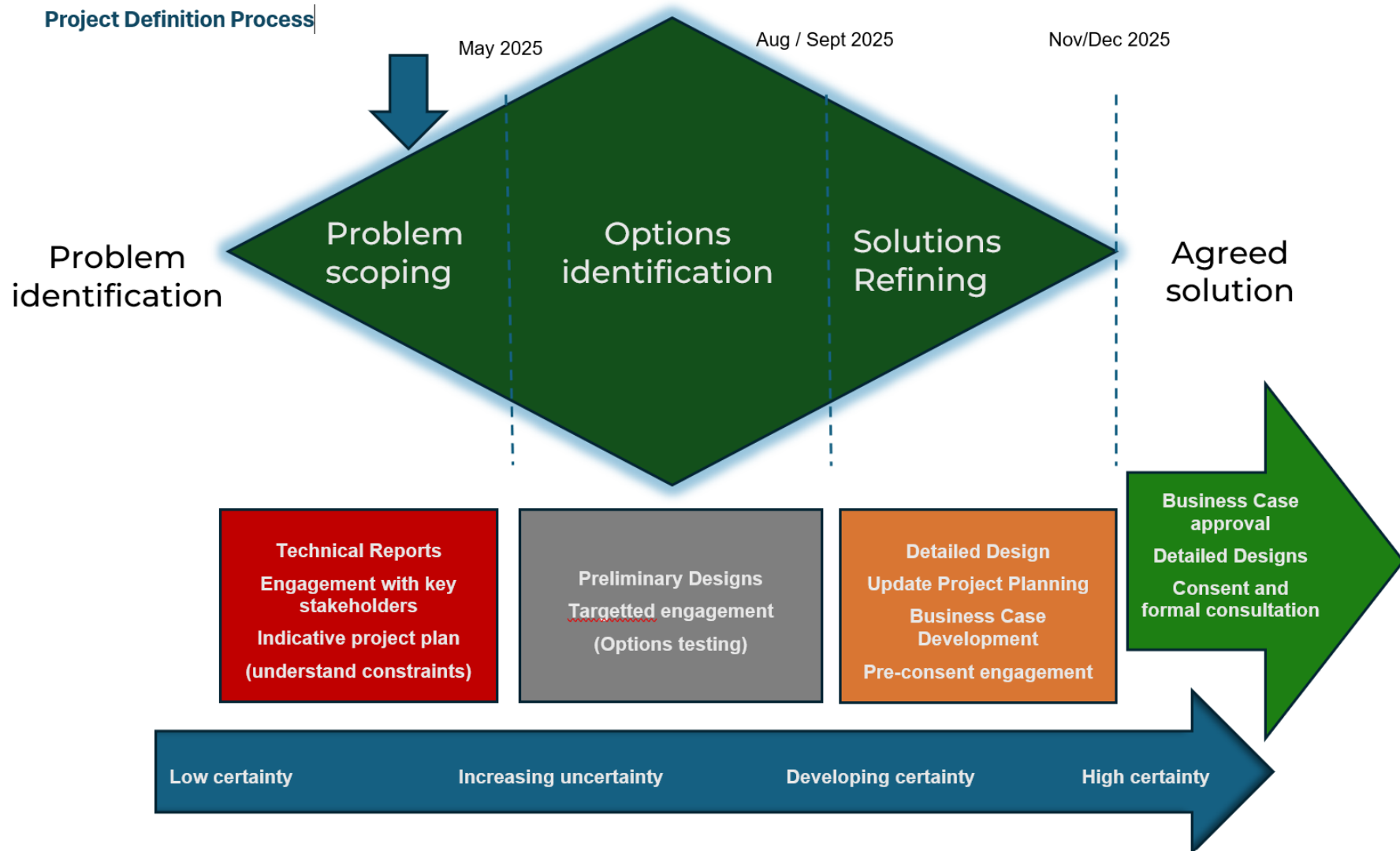
Both objectives must comply with the conditions of Resource Consent AUT.021532 (Parts 01 to 09).

The project involves investigating, designing, building, and upgrading the wastewater treatment and discharge system at RWWTP. Key components include:

- Ensuring the project is cost-effective, timely, and complies with all regulations.
- Managing health and safety according to WDC policy
- Planned and responsive engagement with key stakeholders, including the community, iwi, Northland Regional Council (NRC), and WDC elected members, management, and operations team.
- Setting up and maintaining project governance and management systems (Attachment 1), including reporting functions.
- Undertaking all procurement in compliance with WDC Procurement Policy and Project Governance process.
- Managing project scope and variations.
- Managing contracts and agreements in compliance with WDC policy
- Financial management including the project financial profile, forecasting and budget compliance.

3.5 Project Programme





3.6 Project Progress – Current Phases

Since the last briefing several workstreams have been progressed:

- Interim capacity options exploration
- Flow analysis with initial result included in this report
- Engagement strategy and stakeholder list established
- Community Liaison Group reactivated and 1st meeting held
- Procurement for preliminary design across the three key options complete
- Gap analysis for ocean outfall complete and for the treatment plant in progress
- Initiated contact with Northland Regional Council to clarify requirement for ‘giving effect’ to the consent
- Progressed identification and evaluation of possible land options and availability

Phase	Overview	Task	Status
Sequencing of Work Phase	Project establishment	Strategic assessment (Attachment 2)	Complete
		Validate G1	Complete
		Governance, management and workstream structure setup (Attachment 3)	Complete
		Project execution plan (Attachment 4)	Complete
		Core team procurement	Complete
		Cultural Induction delivered by Patuharakeke to team members and contractors.	Complete
Analysis Phase: Investigations, Options, Preliminary Business Case (March – July)	The consenting process considered environmental impacts and established quality and environmental guidelines. The Analysis Phase explores the implementation options available within these guidelines, working towards the	Forecasting flow rates	Complete
		Preliminary design procurement	Complete
		Gap analysis – Plant expansion	Complete
		Gap analysis and treatment analysis– Ocean Outfall (Attachment 7 has a summary of findings)	Complete
		Gap analysis – Alternative Land Discharge Options	In progress

	development of a business case.	Gap analysis treatment analysis for plant expansion	In progress
		Land options exploration	In progress
		Flow rate forecasting	In progress

Phase	Overview	Task	Status
Analysis Phase: Investigations, Options, Preliminary Business Case (March – July)	Gap analysis treatments	Hydraulic modelling and operational strategy development.	Planned
		Geotechnical and bathymetry investigations.	Planned
		Coastal and seabed erosion assessment	Planned
		Wave, tide and sea current assessment	Planned
		Current NZ construction capability	Planned
		Identification of additional consenting requirements	Planned
		Investigation into potential impacts on wildlife	Planned
		Site evaluations and confirmation (including community engagement)	Planned
	Preliminary Design	Preliminary Design – Ocean Outfall	Planned
		Preliminary Design – Treatment Plant	Planned
		Preliminary Design – Land Discharge Option	Planned

The Business Case outlining the outcome of this work is expected to be ready to present to Council at the end of this year.

Interim Discharge Expansion Option

As mentioned earlier flow rate analysis has identified that the existing plant is likely to meet its demand limits towards the end of 2026. In response, Council has committed to identifying interim solutions that will add additional discharge capacity to the existing plant.

Two options are being considered:

1. Using the previously consented area at site 6B and 7, adjacent to the existing plant. It is likely that this additional capacity may require a new consent (which may happen as a fast-track consent) and a Department of Conservation concession. Procurement is underway for scoping and design for implementing this additional disposal capacity with construction scheduled to start in Q2 2026 if approved.



2. Increasing the discharge amount on the existing discharge area in addition to 6B and 7. This would likely require a change to the existing consent. An impact assessment for this option is being undertaken to understand the benefits of implementing this as well as reactivation of 6B and 7.

Both options may also trigger the need for increased capacity in pipelines to the discharge fields.

3.7 Engagement and communication

Engagement on the project is in early stages while the preliminary design work is undertaken. This will firm up the viable options and possible impacts. Activities will support both decision-led engagement and community connection building (that will underpin future decision-led and co-design engagement (if needed).

There are two levels that engagement will operate on:

Targeted

Audience	Approach
Council	Regular briefings will be provided to keep Council up to date with progress and to allow any options to be considered by Council.
Staff	An internal newsletter “The Clarifier” has been established to keep staff in key departments informed. The first edition is attached (Attachment 5)
Iwi/Hapu	Council is partnering with Patuharakeke on several aspects of the project. Our relationship with them is key. However, we are identifying other key iwi and hapu and what level of engagement will be most appropriate with each. Our intention is to ensure that every opportunity is given to explore and understand concerns and to work together to identify possible solutions.
Interested Stakeholders	There are a number of agencies who have an interest in parts of the project. These include Meridian, Department of Conservation and Northland Regional Council, environmental groups and affected community groups. Our approach is to work directly with these agencies on matters that concern them.
Liaison Group	The consent specifies that Council must establish and maintain a Liaison Group made up of representatives from groups who had expressed concerns during the consenting process. This Liaison Group meets at least annually to review monitoring reporting with more frequent meetings when there are plans for technical changes to the plant e.g. expansion of the treatment facilities, implementation of the ocean outfall or land discharge areas or other issues that might benefit from community views. The Liaison Group met in late February and over the next year will likely meet again in May/June to provide input into possible options. The Group is also kept informed as different input becomes available. Officers are also producing a document that will help to educate them on the key information they will need to understand as the process progresses.

External

Audience	Approach
General Public	Council will keep the general public informed via regular updates in the media (called ‘The Pipeline’), town hall meetings, website updates and social media updates. The first edition of “The Pipeline” is attached as Attachment 6)
Adjacent Parties	More direct communications are planned for community members who live, engage in recreational activities or have business premises in the immediate vicinity of the plant or possible discharge areas. This could include the high school if the preferred option was close to the school. There could be opportunities to work with these groups in a more

	collaborative way on aspects of the project, e.g. the integration and design of recreation amenities that may be possible. An update was sent to the Bream Bay developer community early in 2025 to communicate Council's intention to pursue interim measures to free up capacity in the WWTP to allow development to continue.
Media	The media is being kept informed via media releases and prompt responses to questions. As the project progresses there may be opportunities for deeper media engagement e.g. interviews.

The core Engagement Programme will be largely decision-led ensuring that we are only asking the community about things that we genuinely need an answer on. However, in order to build understanding in the community about the wastewater treatment plant expansion and the discharge options the team is also exploring options for an educational programme.

Key messaging

We are aware that bringing the community along with the project is critical. Our engagement and communications will be grounded in the following key messaging:

1. There are current limitations to growth caused by constraints on wastewater capacity.
2. Council has consents in place to build a new wastewater treatment plant and discharge treated wastewater.
3. Council is considering every option (no stone unturned) to underpin the best solution.
4. We are focussed on identifying and implementing outcomes that balance the needs of the community and the environment.
5. We are moving quickly to enable development to maximise the growth opportunities in the area.
6. We understand there is high community interest in this work.
7. The voices of the community matter and will help to shape outcomes wherever possible.
8. We recognise that the area we are working in is a sensitive environment and respect the cultural values present.

WWTP Expansion Engagement Phasing

Activity	Phase	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Treatment Plant Expansion	Prelim Design	Inform Consult					
	Detailed Design		Consult				
	Construction			Inform			
Ocean Outfall	Prelim Design	Inform					
	Detailed Design		Consult				
	Construction			Inform			
OR							
Preferred Discharge to Land Option	Prelim Design	Inform Consult					
	Detailed Design		Consult / Engage				
	Construction			Consult / Engage			

Interim Discharge Expansion Option

The intention to add additional interim discharge capacity has been communicated to the development community.

Consent Pre-engagement and Consultation

The team is working on an engagement programme in the lead up to preparing for any consent application that may arise. Our intention is to identify concerns early in the process and to work with stakeholders and the wider community to identify possible solutions before finalising the consent application. This should improve the likelihood of a fast turnaround on the consent. At this point we are waiting for some additional technical input on the possible options. Once we have that, we will confirm the exact timeline for the engagement. The methods we will be using will likely include:

1. Face to face meetings with affected stakeholders
2. Letters to adjacent parties
3. Hui with hapu
4. Media releases
5. Town hall / drop in meeting/market stalls
6. Social media posts

4 Financial/budget considerations / Ngā pānga pūtea/tahua

The spend to date (end of March 2025) is \$1.16m against a budget of \$1.44m. At this stage the project is on budget but given the large capital spend in future years a forecast at this stage is difficult. Detailed reporting on the budget will be provided as the project develops.

The project to upgrade the Ruakākā wastewater treatment plant and discharge system has budget allocated in the 2024-34 Long Term Plan as follows:

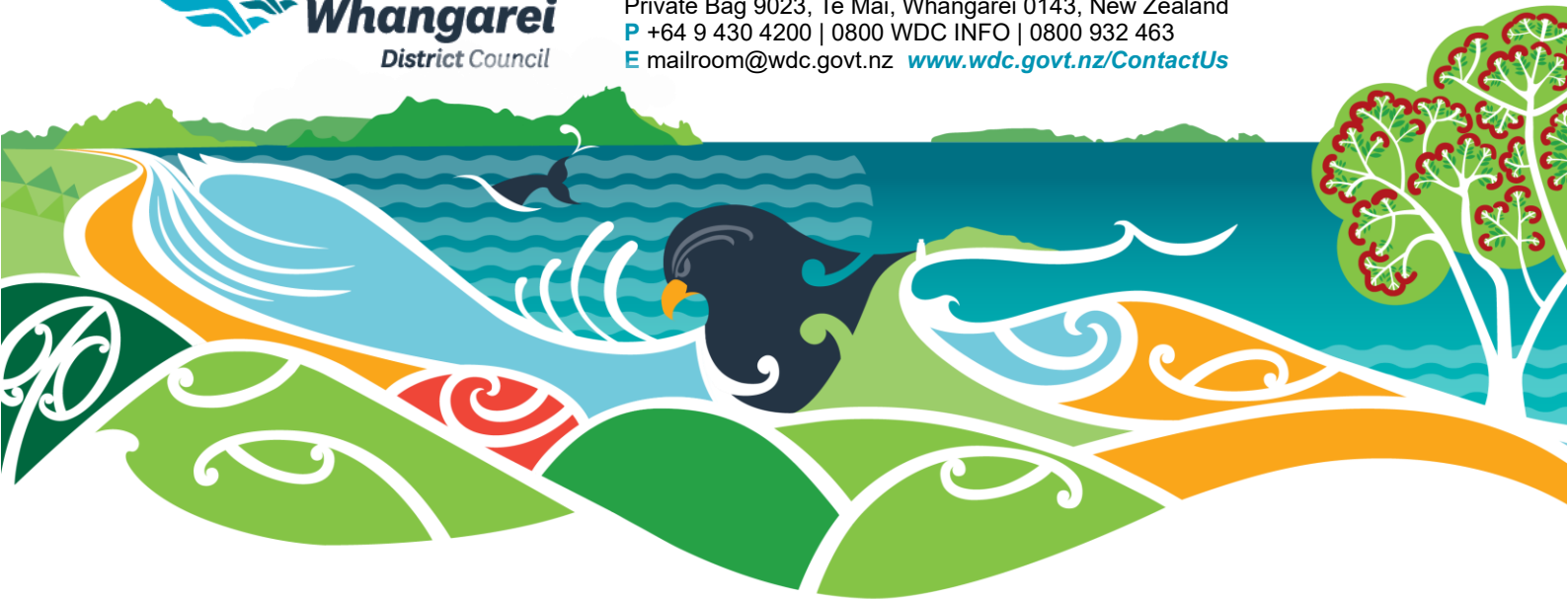
Previous years costs		\$94,768
FY2024/25		\$1,438,496
FY2025/26		\$4,500,000
FY2026/27		\$11,000,000
FY2027/28		\$28,000,000
FY2028/29		\$27,000,000
FY2029/30		\$8,000,000
FY2030/31		\$5,000,000
TOTAL BUDGET AVAILABLE:		\$85,033,264

5 Significance and engagement / Te Hira me te Arawhiti

The decisions or 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 and via the Project page on the website.

6 Attachments / Ngā Tāpiritanga

1. "The Clarifier" internal newsletter
2. "The Pipeline" community update
3. Summary of Ocean Outfall Gap Analysis Findings



Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion Project

“The Clarifier”

March 2025 Update

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of “The Clarifier”; an internal newsletter to keep staff informed about the Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion Project, one of Council’s largest projects.

Background

In 2012 Council was granted a consent to expand the Ruakaka Wastewater Treatment Plant and to implement an ocean outfall disposal option. The growth (and resulting capacity demand) that the consent was intended to address did not eventuate at the time and plans to implement the expansion of the plant and the disposal capacity were shelved.

Recent indications are that demand is very much back on track and the existing wastewater treatment plant has limitations on its capacity which are now limiting the ability to consent new development in the area.

This update sets out the interim and longer-term plans to alleviate the problems.

How is Development being Constrained?

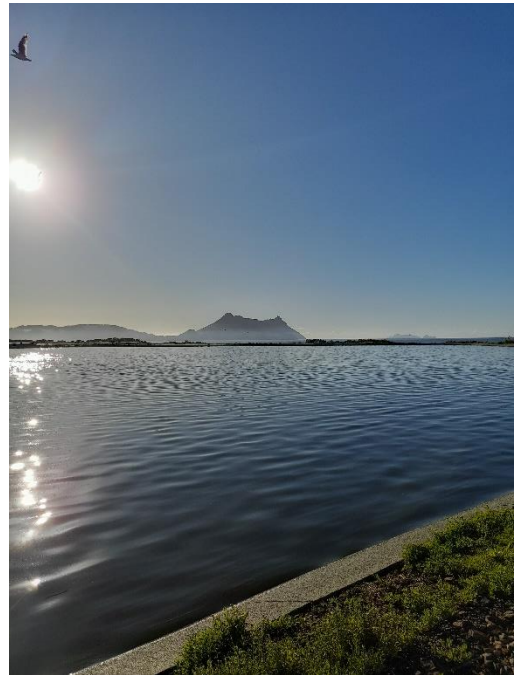
At the time of the consent, development of the RWWTP was planned to meet the demands of growth that were projected at the time. Two things have changed since then:

- 1) The expected growth at the time did not eventuate so improvements to the RWWTP were not progressed as urgently as originally expected.

- 2) Marsden Point Refinery had been intended to be a big consumer of treated wastewater (taking over 2000 m³ per day as part of their operations). The sudden closure of the Refinery meant that the RWWTP needed a much larger disposal capacity than had been planned for.

The RWWTP must operate within the limits set in the consent. These limits include:

- Discharge capacity – how much treated wastewater can be discharged into the consented area each day. The plant is currently nearing those constraints (given we now have to dispose of the treated wastewater that was previously being used by the Refinery).
- Quality limits – this relates to the quality of the wastewater to be disposed of. The increase in development means that the RWWTP is nearing its capacity to meet the quality standards.



Impact of Growth

The Bream Bay area is now experiencing significant development demand in both the domestic and commercial/industrial categories.

Drivers of Growth	
Four-laning of SH1	Marsden Rail Link
Proposed Northport expansion	Planned Brynderwyn bypass
Port Marsden highway link	Growth in the Whangarei area predicted to grow between 7,500 and 37,000 in the next 10 years
Proposed relocation of NZ Navy facilities to Northport	Bream Bay is identified as a growth node in the Future Development Strategy

The limits described earlier mean that growth in the area is being constrained by the lack of adequate capacity to address the demands on the system created by growth.

Council has already consented significant development in the area and modelling informs us that these consents will take up all the remaining capacity of the plant within the next few years. This means that further consents will need to include wastewater capacity conditions.



While we can predict the capacity implications for domestic development, commercial or industrial development can be harder to manage (think of the difference in wastewater produced by a mail warehouse and a meat works).

As a result, consents for commercial or industrial activities in the Bream Bay are most likely to have capacity constraint conditions attached. These constraint conditions may include things like requiring a

trade waste consent so they have to meter their wastewater flows and requiring low use mitigations such as re-using wastewater.

What is Council Doing About it?

Council recognises the impact that this is having on development in the area and is addressing the issue in a number of ways:

Interim (shorter-term) Solution: Expand existing disposal capacity

The treated wastewater disposal area is a key limitation of the ability of the RWWTP to accept higher inputs. A planned expansion of the discharge area around the treatment plant was shelved several years ago because of the reduced demand.

Council is looking at options that will enable more discharge to land and provide some increase in capacity to cater for growing development demand. Re-activation of disposal zones 6B and 7 at the RWWTP (as shown in the photo below) could help. Council stopped discharging to these areas in 2018 as the demand was not there. Reactivating this additional discharge area requires a Department of Conservation concession and modification to the existing consents. Council is also considering increasing the capacity of other existing discharge areas

Work on these interim solutions has started with engagement with key stakeholders and the public planned for later in the year.



The team expects to be able to provide clarity on the additional discharge capacity by Easter.

Longer Term Solutions

The 2012 consent covers expansion of the treatment plan to enable it to process higher levels of wastewater, to a higher standard. The consent also covers changing the discharge method to ocean outfall but it also asks Council to explore other disposal methods before proceeding.

Initial high-level investigations into alternative discharge options were conducted during the consent preparation phase. This process is being explored in more detail using more current methods, understanding of technologies and flow rates and in collaboration with Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board as required by the consent.

Wastewater being treated to a higher standard opens up further options for discharge. These could include expanding existing areas, establishing year-round wetlands, water reactivation and discharge into forestry areas. Ultimately the team is looking for solutions that solve multiple problems holistically. These investigations are being undertaken by Council using staff and external expertise to ensure a broad range of views are included.

Procurement is underway for the preliminary design of the plant expansion, ocean outfall and alternative land discharge options using professional services.

We expect to have a decision confirming the preferred disposal options by mid-2025 with a decision to be made later in 2025 before detailed design work starts.

Meet the Team

A project team has been established to cover all three activities (expansion of treatment plant, ocean outfall other disposal options).



Andrew Carvell
 General Manager,
 Waters: Project Director



Simon Charles
 Manager, Wastewater:
 Business Owner



Bill Down
 Kaiarahi Pukenga -
 Project Manager:
 Project Lead



Martell Letica -
 Contractor - Hoskin
 Civil: Resource
 Management Consultant



Andrew Springer
 Contractor : Lead
 Technical Specialist



Jody Kelly
 Contractor: Assistant
 Project Lead and Project
 Manager – Alternative
 Disposal Options



Tim Manning –
 Contractor: Project
 Manager – Ocean
 Outfall



Anna Curnow –
 Contractor – Decision
 Works: Engagement



Dave Milner
 Patuharekeke: Ahikā
 Mana Whenua Partner
 Cultural Specialist



Adam Donaldson
 Patuharekeke: Ahikā
 Mana Whenua Partner
 Technical Specialist

What's Next?

We'll be engaging with key stakeholders including hapu and the wider community as part of all of each of these projects.

We invite you to subscribe to our project page ([Bream Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade - Whangarei District Council](#)) to be notified of further updates and we'll keep you informed through The Clarifier regularly as the projects progress.

In the meantime, please contact Anna Curnow, Engagement Lead, on anna@decisionworks.co.nz or 021 667 124 for further information.

Moth plant - weed of the month for the Piroa Conservation group



Jette De Jong clears moth plant from an infestation at the Flagstaff subdivision. A group of residents of the gated community meet on Wednesday mornings to attack weeds.

Moth or kapok plant is popping up more frequently in gardens around Waipu, Ruakākā and One Tree Point.

The Piroa Conservation group has this pest plant in its sights this month as the seed pods are about to pop open and its windborne seed will be dispersed far and wide.

Moth plant will grow almost anywhere being tolerant of: shade, drought, damp, wind, salt, and many soil types. It is frost tender but heavy frosts are becoming less frequent.

Once they take root plants grow rapidly forming large, heavy, long-lived masses that can reach the forest canopy, smothering even mature native trees

When pulling out plants or removing pods you need to wear gloves and long sleeves to, protect your skin against contact with the caustic, milky sap bleeding from the pods and stems. Contact with this can cause dermatitis in some people.

Pods need to be disposed of carefully: taken to a landfill station or burned. Leaves and stems can be left to rot down on the ground.

If large plants are sawn away at the base they need to be treated with an herbicide paste to prevent the plant re-sprouting and growing more vigorously than ever.

The Weed Busters website has many images of moth plant including: seed pods, seeds, flowers, a close up of a leaf, mature vines to help with identification.

The also meet on Tuesday mornings from 8.30am to clear wild ginger, wild passion fruit and moth plant from the Waipu Cycle and Walkway Trail which runs alongside Flagstaff. For more information contact Coralie Roberts - 027 432 0293.



Moth plant in flower



"The Pipeline"

March 2025

Welcome

Welcome to "The Pipeline" Whangarei District Council's update on the Ruakākā Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion Project (RWWTP). The purpose of "The Pipeline" is to share information with the community on a regular basis. We are pleased to be working on this in collaboration with the Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board, and we are looking forward to achieving the best community outcome.

Background

In 2012 Council obtained a consent to expand the RWWTP and to implement an ocean outfall discharge (as well as considering alternative discharge options).

The growth that the consent was intended to address did not happen at the time and plans to expand the plant were shelved. Demand is now very much back on track and capacity limitations on the existing wastewater treatment plant are now constraining new development in the area.

In addition, Marsden Point Refinery had been expected to take over 2000 m3 of treated wastewater per day as part of their operations. The sudden closure of the Refinery left the RWWTP needing a much larger discharge capacity than planned for.

Local development is now constrained – this is how

The RWWTP must operate within the limits set in the consent, including:

- 1.Quantity – The RWWTP is nearing the current limit on how much treated wastewater can be discharged.
- 2.Quality – The RWWTP is nearing its capacity to meet the water quality standards.
- 3.Capacity – Council has already consented significant development in the

area which is likely to take all the remaining capacity within the next few years.

What's Council doing about it?

Shorter-term Solution:

Expand existing disposal capacity

We're looking at options that will temporarily increase the plant's capacity until the new wastewater treatment plant is built.

Longer Term Solutions:

The 2012 consent covers expansion of the treatment plant to enable it to process higher levels of wastewater, to a higher standard and the disposal of this treated wastewater to sea (ocean outfall).

This higher standard also opens up additional options

for discharge of treated wastewater such as disposal to land, which are currently being investigated.

High-level investigations into alternative discharge options conducted during the consent phase are being reviewed using current methods, understanding of technologies and flow rates.

What's Next?

We expect to have a clear direction on preferred disposal options by mid-2025 ready for engagement with stakeholders including hapu and the wider community. A decision on the final preferred option is planned for late 2025.

Subscribe to our project page: www.wdc.govt.nz/RuakakaWWTP to be noti-



Ruakākā Ocean Outfall – Gap Analysis Summary



Background and Introduction

- WDC started the procurement process for preliminary design professional services for the Ocean Outfall in December 2024
- The successful tenderer (AECOM) was invited to undertake a “gap analysis” before contracting is completed.
- This helps them to be able to finalise the scope of work and ultimately their pricing.
- The “gap analysis” was undertaken in February/March.
- WDC is now evaluating the “gap analysis” to agree a scope of work for the Investigations and Assessment Phase.
- This agreed scope will form the basis of the preliminary design contract.

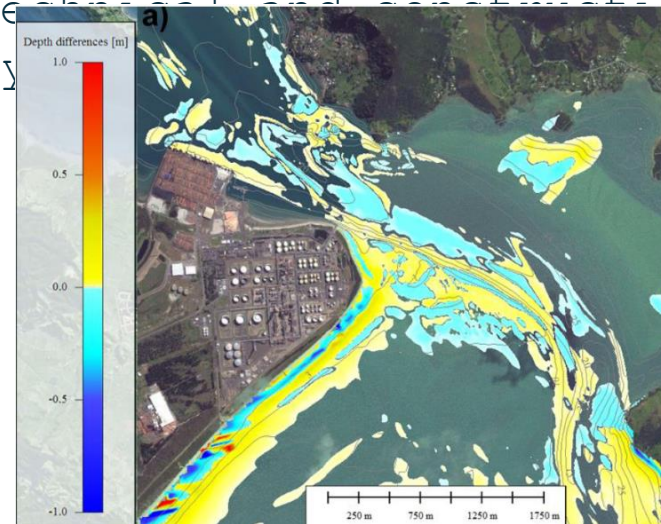
What follows is a summary of the “gaps” identified in the analysis, and WDC’s response. This will allow the contractors to proceed.

High level summary of gaps identified

- Hydraulic model and operational strategy - to identify whether gravity or pumped is most suitable and how this impacts operational costs.
- Geotechnical and Bathymetry information - to inform trenchless design, foundations, marine trench.
- Coastal and seabed erosion assessment - to inform how to retain sand cover on pipe under seabed.
- Wave, tide and sea current assessment - to inform how to retain sand cover on pipe under seabed.
- Current NZ construction capability - contractor capability and availability to identify the most cost effective suitable solution.
- Any requirements for additional consents -Likely to not be anything significant and can be covered at the next stage (estimated to take approximately 6 months).
- Potential wild life permit application - again can be covered in next stage, but could take 12 months to achieve.

Scope for preliminary design phase

- 1) Additional investigations - geotechnical, seabed scanning (up to 10m below seabed), lab sampling, soil chemistry. **Output** - *Geotechnical Factual and Interpretive reports.*
- 2) Contractor discussions - liaison with 3 to 4 different construction experts in this type of work. *Consider all options and relevant technology (i.e. direct drilled, HDD, trenching etc).*
- 3) Design philosophy - after reviewing geotechnical and construction
- 4) Geography firm undertake a wave methodology **Output** - *Feedback on construction methodology, current, coastal process and sediment transport assessment. Model likely seabed changes along the alignment. Consider sand mining impact. Output - required burial depth for pipe.*



Scope for preliminary design phase

- 5) Outfall operational strategy - to understand what are the flows, flushing, storage requirements.
- 6) Hydraulic model of the outfall
- 7) Ecology scope and advice
- 8) Contaminated land testing - one area being considered is classified as contaminated land. Testing is needed to understand the scope and impact of the contamination on the design.
- 9) Further engagement with Patuharakeke (possible additional Assessment of Environmental Effects).
- 10) Public health analysis to ensure that there are no issues with the outfall.
- 11) Identification of pipeline string assembly locations.
- 12) Concept design allowing for best construction approach taking into account all of the above.

Preliminary Design – Outputs

The preliminary design process will produce the following outputs which will allow Council to develop the Business Case.

- Concept drawings
- Cost estimate
- Programme
- Design and construction Tender documents
- Geotechnical Factual and Interpretive reports

Preliminary Design Programme

The local government election in October 2025 may create a short delay.

Stage	Title	Timeframe	Status
1	Gap Analysis	February/March	Complete
2	Investigations and Assessment	April to mid-June	In progress
3	Concept Design	Late June to mid-August	Not yet started
4	Business Case Contributions	August/September	Not yet started
5	Operational requirements The Business Case is likely to be presented to Council in November or December 2025.	Late June to mid-August	Not yet started
6	Construction methodology	Late June to mid-August	Not yet started
7	Risk Register	Late June to mid-August	Not yet started

2.2 Advisory Groups Review – Workshop session

Meeting:	Council Briefing
Date of meeting:	7 May2025
Reporting officer:	Claire Wilson – Community Development Adviser Nicole Stanton – Community Development Adviser

1 Purpose / Te Kaupapa

To provide Council with an opportunity to work through and provide feedback on the Advisory Groups Review. Feedback will be used by staff to inform the drafting of the decision paper.

2 Background / Horopaki

Council has operated an Advisory Group model for almost two decades.

While smaller reviews have occurred from time to time, this is the first time a comprehensive review has been undertaken to consider the appropriateness of the model for Council's current needs.

The review was commissioned for a range of reasons including:

- Poor corporate performance measure results overall
- Dissatisfaction from both liaison staff and members about how the groups function and whether they are making any difference.
- Workload and capacity for liaison officers
- Terms of Reference review is overdue
- Repeated requests for increased remuneration from Disability Advisory Group members to match other councils and to show the value of their expertise.
- Levels of elected member engagement with and awareness of advisory groups vary greatly.

An independent review took place in the last quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025 by Decision Works in collaboration with the Community Development Department.

2.1 The Advisory Groups

There are currently three Council Advisory Groups:

1. Disability Advisory Group
2. Positive Ageing Advisory Group
3. Youth Advisory Group

Advisory Groups are not decision-making bodies. Instead, they provide valuable community insight from the lens of lived experience as an older adult, or disabled person, or as a young person.

An effective Advisory Group model helps to mitigate unintended consequences and costly fixes. At times, their feedback has considerably improved community outcomes that benefit everyone.

2.2 Review scope:

Purpose

- To determine if the current advisory group model is still fit for purpose; and if not, explore alternative models or mechanisms.
- Identify opportunities for improvement.

Objectives

- Review the current advisory group model, including its structure, processes and outcomes.
- Assess the effectiveness of the current model and understand pain points.
- Identify strengths and areas for improvement within the current model.
- Explore alternative models for mechanisms for community engagement
- Analysis of engagement levels and effectiveness with specific sectors of the community.
- Ensure resources are invested efficiently in the style of the Section 17A of the Local Government Act.
- Provide recommendations for future direction, including potential changes or enhancements.
- Development of a roadmap for implementation of any proposed changes including short term and long-term recommendations.

2.3 March Community Development Committee

The interim report was tabled and received at this meeting by elected members to information the background, purpose and progress of the review.

Representatives of each advisory group spoke to the committee about their respective groups' positions and recommendations, and what they wanted advisory groups to look like in the future.

See Attachment 1 – *Advisory Group Review Workshop, Record of activities and priority recommendations.*

Following that meeting, elected members indicated their desire to workshop the future direction of advisory groups to better prepare for decisions at the next Community Development Committee meeting.

The final report – Attachment 2 - *Whangarei District Council Advisory Group – Comprehensive Review by Decision Works Limited*, has been completed and will help inform this workshop and the decision-making process.

3 Discussion / Whakawhiti kōrero

3.1 Current position of the Advisory Groups

- Three advisory groups with 8-12 members each
- Meetings monthly (apart from December and January)
- Paid \$40 per meeting attendance
- Supported by Community Development Advisors
- Chaired by a member
- Each advisory group has one or two elected members
- Reports to Council on feedback via the liaison councillor(s) and operations reports
- Single Terms of Reference covering all groups
- First comprehensive review in 20 years
- Relatively ad hoc approach to bringing projects/issues to AGs
- Advisory groups bring community matters to Council
- Advisory groups create their own strategic priorities – not always followed or effective
- Lived experience is essential in current membership – diversity is varied
- Multi Ethnic Advisory Group not included in this review

Current purpose of advisory groups is:

“To support Council’s vision of Whangārei being a vibrant, attractive and thriving District for all the people living here. Advisory Groups contribute to this vision by providing advice to Whangarei District Council on the following areas:

- council policies, plans, strategies, design and capital works projects
- matters of particular interest or concern to the communities they represent”

3.2 Identified concerns

The review uncovered a range of issues and concerns including:

- Unclear purpose and role ambiguity
- Inadequate feedback mechanisms
- Inconsistent reporting to council
- Disconnect with council priorities
- Resource constraints
- AG members feeling undervalued

These issues and concerns are not limited to council’s Advisory Groups but are common across other council advisory groups/panels. Throughout the report there are suggestions on how to mitigate these and possible solutions.

Please refer to pages 11-14, 46, 51-54, 56-57, and the issues analysis table on pages 100-112, for more detail.

3.3 Key questions for workshop

Question	Page reference from report (Attachment 2)
1. What do you see as the purpose/focus of advisory groups?	<i>See pages 6, 13, 19, 28, 48, 56, 61, 79, 102</i>
<p>2. There are various structure options and changes discussed in the review. Please indicate the preferred option:</p> <p>a) Status quo/do nothing – there was no support for this option.</p> <p>b) Enhanced advisory groups – significant support for this option.</p> <p>c) Hybrid - quarterly meetings for all three advisory groups with extra Community Forums as appropriate. This approach allows anyone to attend without ongoing commitment and obtains a broader community voice.</p> <p>Last year the Youth Advisory Group experimented with Community Forums for the Future Development Strategy and the Knowledge Precinct with great success.</p> <p>Some support for this option.</p> <p>d) Extensive change – options include Community Forums, Expert Panels, Targeted Engagement, Community Connector, Deliberative Practice, Community Boards.</p> <p>Support for additional engagement opportunities, but not to replace advisory groups. Youth Advisory Group particularly keen to look at other opportunities.</p>	<p><i>See pages 54-55 for indicative costings for this option.</i></p> <p><i>More information about the structural options can be found on pages 15-17 of the report.</i></p>
<p>3. What does elected member involvement look like?</p> <p>Think about formal and informal involvement, i.e. liaison councillors or not, and elected member awareness in general.</p>	<i>See pages 14, 18, 39, 41, 58-61, 71, 80-81, 101, and 80.</i>
<p>4. What is Council prepared to resource?</p> <p>The review indicates the current budget is insufficient. Consider staff capacity, wider organisational support, budget and remuneration.</p>	<i>See pages 5, 6, 12, 14, 18, 19, 24, 29, 36, 40, 63, 105, 106-108.</i>

4 Financial/budget considerations / Ngā pānga pūtea/tahua

Depending on the final decisions on the structure (number of groups, frequency of meetings, governance support training, and remuneration etc.), budget will vary.

Currently Advisory Groups has a budget of \$22,000 which covers member attendance fees, interpreter fees, and catering (biscuits) costs.

To enhance the model and do it well, but with fewer meetings and more training support, it would likely require an increased budget.

More detail will be provided in the May Community Development Committee meeting agenda paper.

5 Significance and engagement / Te Hira me te Arawhiti

The decisions or matters of this Agenda do not trigger the significance criteria outlined in Council's Significance and Engagement Policy.

6 Attachments / Ngā Tāpiritanga

Attachment 1 – Advisory Group Review Workshop 2 – held on 03 February 2025. Record of Activities and Priority Recommendations

Attachment 2 – Whangarei District Council Advisory Group – Comprehensive Review by Decision Works Limited.

Attachment 3 – Advisory Group Review – workshop with elected members (presentation).

Whangarei District Council – Advisory Group Review

Workshop 2 – held on 03 February 2025

Record of Activities and Priority Recommendations

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Structural Options	6
Evaluation of Structural Options against Key Themes	7
Recommendations	8
Final Comments	9

Overview

16 members attended.

Activities included:

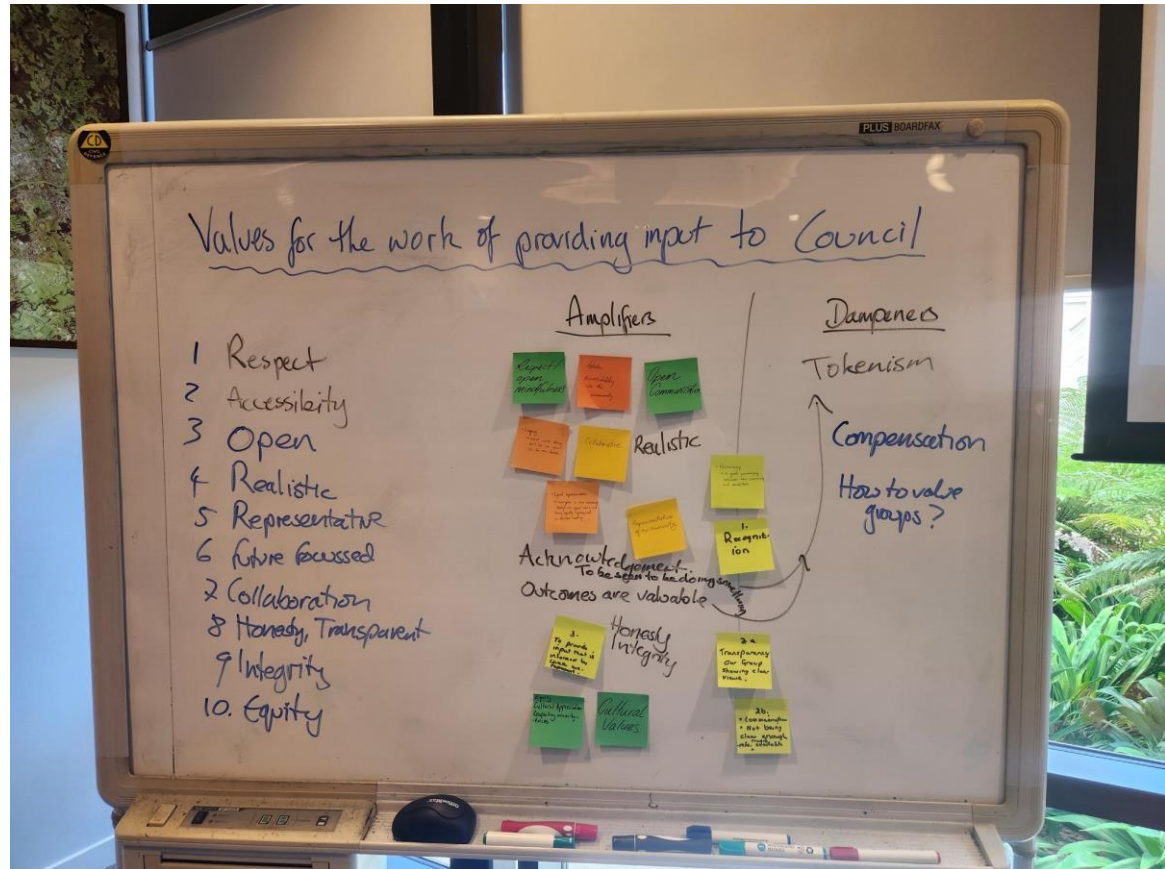
- 1) Reflection on previous workshop
- 2) Emerging values
- 3) Prioritisation of Key Themes
- 4) Identification of Preferred Structural Options
- 5) Evaluation of Structural Options against Key Themes
- 6) Development and Evaluation of Recommendations

Emerging Values

Four groups of participants worked to agree three values that they felt underpinned the work of the providing input into Council decisions. These were then discussed to establish if they amplified or dampened the culture of what they were doing. These were themed onto the board as below:

Key emerging values were established as being:

- 1) Respect
- 2) Accessibility
- 3) Open
- 4) Realistic
- 5) Representative
- 6) Future Focussed
- 7) Collaboration
- 8) Honesty and Transparency
- 9) Integrity
- 10) Equity

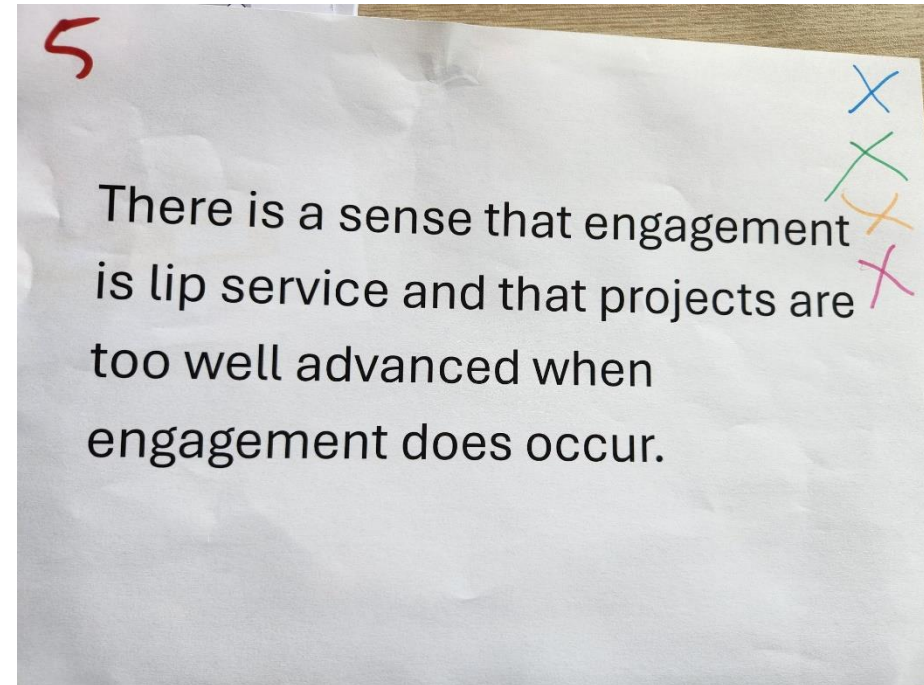


Prioritisation of Key Themes

The Key Themes from Workshop 1 were prioritised at an individual level using a 'dotmocracy' approach with three colours of sticker that participants could use to identify their first, second and third priority level for each of the key themes. Participants were free to 'spend' their dots across range of key priorities or use several dots for specific items.

Following that, participants were asked to calculate the score at a group level for each of the key priorities and then to identify their top 10 scores on the key priorities on the wall. There were 6 that each of the four tables identified as a top priority. Three of the Key Priorities were selected by three of the groups.

Plenary discussion ruled out one of them leaving the group with eight Key Priorities that were to be the focus of the Preferred Structural Option evaluation.



Structural Options

Workshop 1 identified four Structural Options that were possible methods that the participants could consider.

- 1) Enhanced Advisory Groups
- 2) Expert Advisory Panels
- 3) Community Forums
- 4) Targeted Engagement

Further deliberation on this was done within each of the four groups around which option they preferred. These table preferences were considered in plenary and the list was refined to:

- 1) Enhanced Advisory Groups
- 2) Expert Advisory Panels (with concerns that experts may not being the “lived experience lens”)
- 3) Community Forums (with concerns that attendance may fluctuate and would not be regular and that facilitation standards may be variable and affect the outcomes.

Targeted Engagement was removed as the group felt that this was something that Council should be doing anyway so was not an option for replacing the considered and partnership-based approach that the other options could provide.

A further option being using Community Connectors was discarded due to wide concerns about it being a “one way channel” and limited to the skills attitude and capacity of the staff member involved (which may change over time).

Handwritten table titled "Structural Options" showing preferences for four options across five criteria.

	1	2	3	4
Enhanced Advisory Groups	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expert Advisory Panels	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Forums	✓	✓	✓	✓
Targeted Engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Connectors	✓	✓	✓	✓

Handwritten notes:

- Experts may not have lived experience
- Concerned - Attendance - Facilitation
- One way channel. Limited to staff member?
- Concern & Cost.
- Concern

Evaluation of Structural Options against Key Themes

Groups were allocated two of the agreed Key Themes/Priorities and asked to evaluate those against each of the three agreed structural options (Enhanced Advisory Groups, Community Forums and Expert Advisory Panels).

We then collated the pros and cons for each of the models (as in how they would address the Key Theme/Priority) to produce an evaluation of each option as follows:

	Enhanced Advisory Groups	Expert Advisory Panels	Community Forums
Pros	<p>Would have closer links to Council with regular whole of council meetings/interaction</p> <p>The whole of Council would be aware of the value of the AG work.</p> <p>Community flows would be stronger and more structured.</p> <p>The AG work programme would be better aligned with Councils.</p> <p>Effort could be more targeted to priorities.</p>	<p>Reporting to Council could be clearer.</p> <p>Participants may have better relationships with officers.</p> <p>Members may find it easier to stay focussed on one thing per meeting.</p> <p>Councillors may be keener to share their views with experts.</p>	<p>Lower cost</p> <p>More representative of the wider community.</p> <p>Open forums could lead to broader voice.</p> <p>Better for creating awareness in the wider public.</p> <p>Councillors are not formal members.</p>
Cons	<p>The cost is likely to be higher.</p> <p>Doesn't add any pre-engagement information</p> <p>Information could still be unstructured.</p> <p>Could be time-heavy on councillors and officers.</p> <p>Council and Advisory Groups get intermingled.</p>	<p>Could be more costly than the status quo.</p> <p>Possibly less interaction with Council.</p> <p>Could be more challenging to get information to flow between Council and the Expert Panels.</p> <p>Panels may not be able to work across (between different sectors) as much as the AG model.</p> <p>There is no forum for "other issues" that are not directed by Council.</p>	<p>Delays in getting issues to the community for discussion (fewer forums).</p> <p>Additional costs for the facilitator and venue costs.</p> <p>Input at forums could be hijacked by lobby groups.</p> <p>Input from forums could be skewed in the facilitator report writing.</p> <p>Higher risk of misrepresentation in the feedback loop.</p>

Recommendations

Each group was given the task of now coming up with two recommendations (which could be based on addressing the concerns in their Key Themes/Priorities). Once these were drafted each participant was encouraged to indicate their response to the recommendations through a 5 point scale (Love it, Like it, Live with it, Lament it, Loathe it).

Only one of the recommendations had more than one lower than Live with it score. Deliberation led to that score being amended. As a result, all eight recommendations were adopted (noted that time was very short for this last part and the process could have been enhanced by further deliberation to refine the recommendations).

Recommendations	
1	Councillors need to adhere to the Long Term Plan and Asset Management Plan. We need a structure that will bring to the Advisory Groups the relevant information when needed about these plans. (NB focus on timing before building by consulting with young adults, seniors and disability and advise if the feedback is not used and why).
2	Implement a Register of Issues – responses from Council, whether resolved or not etc (clear and accurate feedback loop). There can be more than one council member attending i.e. not necessarily one or two. Their job is to take our requests and questions back to Council and get responses.
3	In an enhanced advisory group, the liaison council member for each group would need to be committed to the group, as well as committed to relaying agreed upon feedback to the Council from the Group.
4	Compensation needs to be reviewed and to reflect the actual costs e.g. travel, childcare and be inflation adjusted. Remuneration to demonstrate that the Group is valued by Council.
5	Council needs to agree on what it needs each Advisory Group to focus on in its meetings. Both Council and allocated councillors need to commit to the process.
6	Councillors should know as part of their induction what the Advisory Groups do.
7	In order for multiple groups to come together in discussion we could organise collaborative meetings across the groups on specific issues e.g. YAG, PAAG and DAG would need to be in conversation regarding public transport.
8	In order to create a feedback loop between the community and the Council we recommend that during meetings councillors should have a period of time to tell the Group what past meetings have gone towards. Clear communication would create a better idea to the community as to what decisions are influencing. We would recommend an advanced Advisory Group with better staff training and better communication. Council representatives would need to feed back to the Elected Members.

Final Comments

The process in Workshop 2 was quite rushed meaning deeper conversation wasn't possible on the final recommendations. I'll leave that to the Advisory Group members to consider with officers whether any follow up work is required.

Following one further round of input from Senior Leadership Team, the report will be finalised. The final report, a covering report from Council officers and the recommendations from the Advisory Group workshop will be presented to Council in March or April. Members of the Advisory Groups will be invited to speak to their recommendations at that presentation.

I want to thank all participants who contributed extensively and gave their full attention to the matters at hand, throughout the process. The topic is complex and challenging but the input from members has been valuable and is an important component of the work.

Thank you all.

Anna

Whangarei District Council Advisory Group - Comprehensive Review

March 2025

Prepared by:

Anna Curnow
Director and Lead Facilitator
Decision Works Ltd

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Executive Summary

Whangarei District Council (WDC) has operated an Advisory Group model for almost two decades. While there have been smaller reviews undertaken from time to time, this is the first time a comprehensive review has been undertaken to consider the appropriateness of the model for Councils current needs. WDC has four Advisory Groups:

1. Disability
2. Multi-Ethnic
3. Positive Aging
4. Youth

This review is focused on the Disability, Positive Aging and Youth Advisory Groups. The Multi-Ethnic group has only recently been established and was therefore excluded.

The review was undertaken by Decision Works Limited in the last quarter of 2024 and the first quarter 2025 with recommendations being presented to Council in March or April 2025.

Data analysis included a survey of all councils in New Zealand / Aotearoa followed up by in depth interviews with key Councils; a survey of Advisory Group members and interviews with representatives from the Advisory Groups, Council and Council officers. A desktop review of selected international models was also undertaken.

Evaluation of the data was initially conducted by Decision Works Ltd with two follow up sessions with Senior Leadership Team and two Advisory Group workshops to produce a set of recommendations/advice from the Groups themselves.

This review found that the effectiveness of Advisory Groups has been hindered by a lack of consistent clarity of purpose with different groups and stakeholders having different views as to purpose and effectiveness. There is also a lack of coherent planning that connects their work to the overall Council work programme. Finally feedback on outcomes of the recommendations and “advise” that the Groups provide is not extensive, leading to dissatisfaction amongst members and adversely affecting trust in the model.

The lack of clear direction and purpose leaves the model open for distraction by more operational issues and for the Groups to take on different priorities to those planned by Council.

While there is a clear Terms of Reference, Advisory Group members are not offered much in the way of training and development and as such can founder when things are more challenging.

Advisory Groups do their best work when properly resourced, supported, given clear direction and feel valued by the Council and community. This is not currently the case with the Whangarei District Council Advisory Groups.

The Review presents a significant opportunity to consider whether this is the right model for today's needs and how Council can ensure that the community voice is well-represented in the decisions they make.

Decision Works wants to offer thanks to the many members of the AGs (past and present), officers and elected members who took the time to share their insights for this review.

Introduction

This review was commissioned to explore the structure and effectiveness of the current Advisory Group model and to evaluate other models and approaches taken to the job of gathering a trusted community voice of topics of importance to Council.

According to the Terms of Reference for the current Advisory Groups, the purpose of the Advisory Groups is:

“to support Council’s vision of Whangarei being a vibrant, attractive and thriving District for all the people living here. Advisory Groups contribute to this vision by providing advice to Whangarei District Council on the following areas:

- *Council policies, plans, strategies, design and capital works projects*
- *Matters of particular interest or concern to the communities they represent.”*

Advisory Group members are charged with contributing to the outcomes of the communities they represent, building effective relationships between their respective communities and Council, connecting WDC into the youth, disability and positive aging communities and any other groups deemed to have a positive role to play and finally to develop key priorities for the year/term.

This is a tall order and an important role to be played. Many members of Advisory Groups may not have had experience of this type of work. As such a significant level of support is needed.

Without this support, Advisory Groups will likely struggle. If Advisory Groups is to continue to be the model for WDC, then it appears that additional focus, and resourcing may be needed. If that is not an option, then Council may need to consider a different approach to building that community voice into their decision making.

To support this, the Review considers other structural options for collecting community voice to inform Council projects.

The total budget for the Advisory Group function including payments to members, refreshments at meetings and interpreters to support members is \$22,000. There will likely be a call for some additional budget if Advisory Groups are to be continued.

Methodology

The methodology of this review was designed by Decision Works in collaboration with the Community Advisory Team and included the following steps:

1) Broad Data Collection via:

Councils of New Zealand/Aotearoa survey	To identify local trends in focused sector group engagement in local government.
Targeted interviews with councils who were particularly active in this space or had indicated innovative approaches in the survey.	To delve into more detail about innovation or particularly effective advisory group models.
Desktop research on overseas approach to focussed sector group engagement by local government.	To explore different models used by councils in other western democracy countries use (US, UK, Australia). Research was also undertaken to broadly understand the approach in Pacific Island nations.
Survey of some past and all present members of Advisory Groups	To understand the current effectiveness, successes and challenges from an Advisory Group member point of view.
Targeted interviews of past and present members suggested by the Community Development Advisors team.	To delve into more detail of their experiences of what has worked and what could be improved.
Targeted interviews with elected members who were currently involved in the Advisory Groups and some who were not involved.	To understand the current effectiveness, successes and challenges from a councillor point of view.
Targeted interviews with council staff members who have contact with Advisory Groups.	To understand the value of the model, the experience of engagement with the groups, where the value lies and challenges faced by officers.

Data collection for the review took place from October to December 2024. (with two further interviews undertaken in January and engagement with the Senior Leadership Team conducted on 21 January and 25 February 2025 to consider the purpose of the Advisory Groups (or the function) and the appropriate structural option and resourcing to achieve that purpose.

2) Data Analysis

This was undertaken by Decision Works with a sense-checking workshop with Advisory Group members in a workshop held on 28 January 2025.

3) Options Review

Decision Works has also undertaken an initial options review and again this was explored further with an Advisory Group in a workshop held on 03 February, along with two sessions with the WDC Senior Leadership Team on 21 January and on the 25 February.

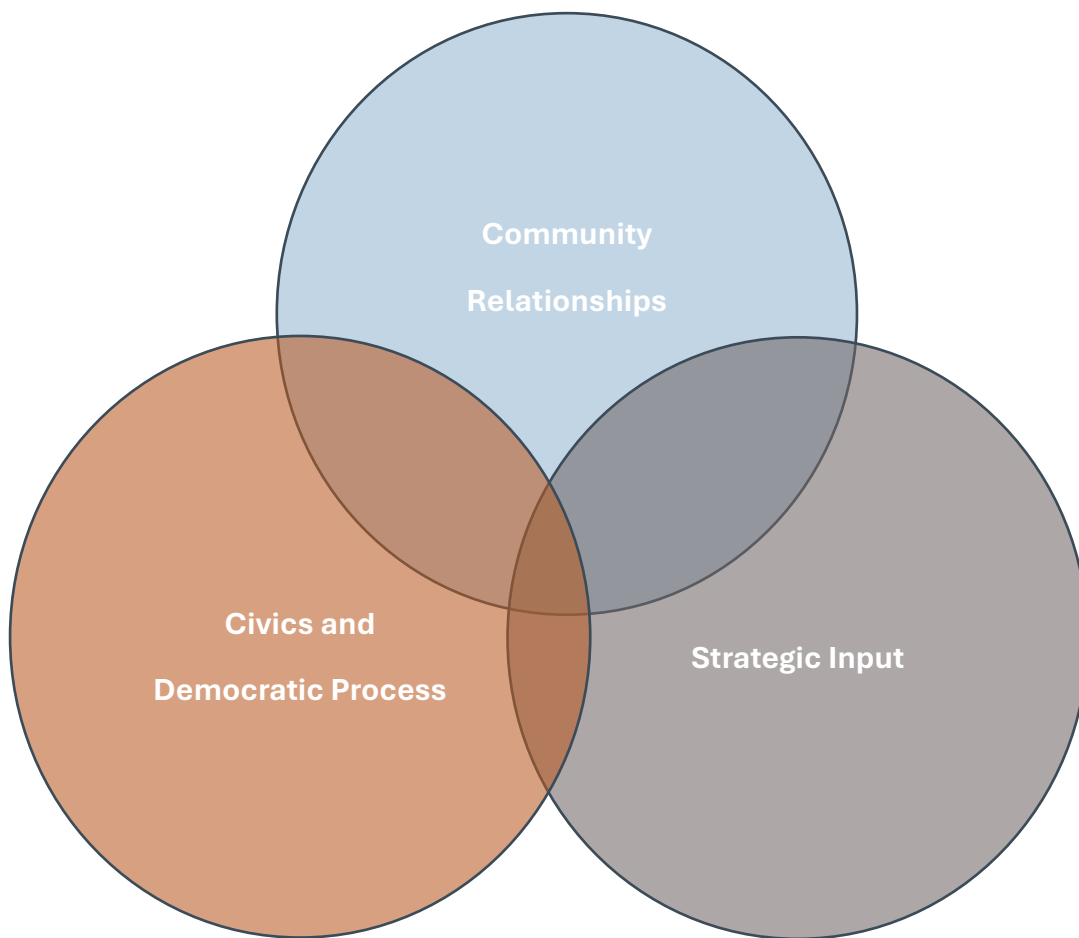
4) Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in a comprehensive report which sits alongside recommendations from the Advisory Groups generated at the second Advisory Group workshop. Both of these will be presented to Council with a supporting Council report that may highlight issues that are specific to the organisational ability to respond to the recommendations in both the report and from the Advisory Groups.

5) Decision Making

Decision making rests with Council, given the strategic nature of the topic. It is suggested that any changes are scheduled to be actioned in time with the start of the next Council term towards the end of 2025.

Advisory Group – Spheres of Influence



The review found that most Advisory Groups operate in three realms of influence:

- 1) **Community Relationships** – Groups have a role to play in building connections between Council and key community sectors that might not ordinarily have a clear voice in Council. Group members can also become advocates for Council and the work programme, sharing their insights out into their communities as well as bringing the community voice in.

However, if those relationships are not well managed to be purposeful and produce meaningful engagement, trust can be eroded with members feeling dissatisfied with their experiences.

- 2) **Strategic Input** – A key function for Groups is to test out strategies, plans, policies concepts, designs and ideas from a place of understanding Council's

priorities. They can bring a community lens to evaluating Council work.

The risk is that without the education and time to absorb the issues, the advice provided by Groups may not be appropriate. Additionally, each Group brings a specific community perspective which can result in different groups providing conflicting advice. This creates confusion for staff as they then need to map out a way of balancing these strongly held perspectives.

- 3) **Civics and Democratic Process** – Hosting Advisory Groups is often seen as a way to inspire and develop future community leaders, by giving them a taste of Council’s activities. Research undertaken in the deliberative practise area suggests members of citizen assembly panels are significantly more likely to stand for election following participation. Members of this Council’s Advisory Groups did refer to the development of leadership skills as one of the more positive experiences. They also reported enjoying building a clearer understanding of the complexity of Council’s work.

Having Advisory Groups is also a way for Council to demonstrate the importance of community voice and a commitment to listening. However, if the mechanisms for responding to the advice provided by the Groups is not strong, then that perception of being a Council that listens to its community can be eroded. Members can feel like their effort is wasted.

Building a Group membership that broadly represents the community they come from can be difficult in a small group. Whangarei’s Advisory Group membership is recruited from those who respond to an advertisement. This can lead to the membership becoming skewed towards one demographic over another.

Some Councils have also experienced the role and scope of the Group ‘creeping’ creating unforeseen conflicts of interest.

Key Findings

1. **Role and Functionality:** In principle, Advisory Groups contribute to the decision-making processes of Council by providing a trusted community voice. They do this by reinforcing relationships with the communities they represent and bringing their lived experience lens to the discussion.

Currently, in Whangarei District Council this is primarily done through formal monthly meetings with occasional ad hoc activities such as site visits.

The Review highlights that there are varying views as to the exact scope of the work of the Advisory Groups within the various stakeholders. This can lead to scope creep where members feel their influence might be higher than it actually is, or that Council is responsible for things that it does not in fact have legal responsibility for, or the Group might slide into a very operational focus with much of the discussion centred around minor matters.

While there is a work plan for some of the Groups, this is sometimes not well-aligned with the overall Council priorities and can also lack clear focus on specific high priority projects.

2. **Effectiveness:** The Advisory Group members have mixed views about their effectiveness. They feel that there is little structured feedback as to what happens with the input they provide. Where they are aware of the outcomes, they generally feel there was value in what they did. However, there is a strong sense that additional feedback and evaluation of effectiveness would be helpful.

There are also some questions about the efficiency of the model with officers sometimes having to present to each group, obtaining different advice from each with no mechanism to reconcile the differences.

Input from officers and senior leadership indicated that the work of the Advisory Groups, while in principle valued, did not always provide significant additional insight and could sometimes create tension when it conflicted with Council's statutory obligations and limitations.

3. **Engagement Levels:** There is a sense amongst members of uneven effort with some members attending regularly and providing significant input and others having much more patchy attendance and poor participation. There can be many reasons why members might not attend a meeting or why they feel uncomfortable about attending. Further work would be beneficial to help the Groups craft methodologies that improve participation and engagement.

In terms of engagement by council officers with the Groups, there is a lack of consistency in the approach with some departments using the Advisory Groups

regularly (eg infrastructure) and others potentially missing the opportunity. There appears to be an uneven level of understanding across the organisation about what the Groups can provide.

4. **Challenges and Barriers:** The Advisory Groups at WDC are facing a range of barriers and obstacles to success. These include a lack of clear purpose, inadequate feedback from the organisation about the effectiveness of their work, inefficiencies created by siloed groups, a lack of connection with the wider work and policy programme of Council, capability gaps around governance and strategy and difficulties in attracting diverse members.
5. **Resourcing Constraints:** The Review found a significant administrative burden on Community Development officers (taking up to 50%) of their time. This has impacts on the organisation:
 - Insufficient time to provide training and capability building;
 - Reduced ability to service other aspects of the community development role;
 - Inadequate levels of feedback reporting to Groups.
6. **Support for the Model:** Given the limitations established in these findings, it is clear that there is still a level of support for the model across the organisation. Officers see that there is value in obtaining specific community voice on particular projects. Members feel they bring a valuable “community lens” to the work. However, most agree that the model is currently not operating optimally and would benefit from enhancement to deliver greater productivity, focus and relevance.

The Need for Change

Feedback from the Advisory Groups, Elected Members, Officers and the Senior Leadership Team and the opportunities identified through looking at other instances of sector engagement suggests that there are challenges with Whangarei District Council's current approach to sector engagement. However, there are opportunities for change that could facilitate a more productive model.

The need for change can be summarised here:

Current Approach	Impact	Opportunity
Transactional Relationships	Success is only seen in evidence of action taken by Council based on advice. When this doesn't happen, trust and relationships are damaged	Create an environment that supports building skills and capability (people), that recognises contribution even when it can't be given effect.
Operational Focus	Advice is short term focussed, can be disjointed and misaligned to Council's overall needs.	Higher quality advice that is strategically aligned to the overall direction of Council
Low Organisational Uptake	Much of the work of the AGs is around Infrastructure projects. This creates missed opportunities with other departments not benefiting from the input.	All key Council strategies including input from AGs and being sense checked with a community view.
Meeting Driven	The operations of the group are focussed on the meetings rather than the work programme.	A more strategic view of the work of the group will lead to more efficient use of their time and effort and could open up opportunities for engagement beyond the meetings.
Siloed Groups	Groups work in isolation from each other and from wider council. This creates inefficiencies in effort and competing demands.	More efficient use of council resources and co-ordinated work programmes. Additionally, members can learn from each other.
Unclear purpose	Members feel unclear about the rationale for their work, are unclear about what happens to the input they provide.	A clearly understood role with a strategically focussed work programme would provide purpose and a sense of achievement as well as enable more focussed work.

Resourcing challenges	<p>Community Development work outside the Advisory Groups work is being negatively impacted due to the amount of resource needed to service the Groups.</p> <p>In addition, CD officers are not able to provide the level of training needed to support building capability. Finally, the budget does not allow payments that allow the members to feel valued.</p>	<p>Change to the function of the Groups (eg frequency, level of focus, or using other structural models) could produce higher quality, more targeted input from Groups. Officers could direct more attention to other aspects of their CD work.</p> <p>Group members could feel more valued if they were paid more and felt they were having more valued input. Including departmental managers in the discussions around resourcing the final solutions will increase the chances of the Advisory Groups being the best fit for organisational needs and capacity.</p>
Strained Relationships	<p>At times there are strained relationships between Group members and elected members. Given elected member liaison members are a key communication channel between the Groups and Council, this is an area of risk.</p> <p>In addition many staff reported feeling uncomfortable about how the feedback was delivered, making them less keen to present to Groups.</p>	<p>A higher level of trust and clear understanding of roles and responsibilities would lead to more focus on the issues being discussed and clearer communication between the Groups, Council and officers.</p>

Structural Options

The input from the Council survey, in-depth interviews with key Councils and the review of international approaches brings to light a range of options for sector group engagement:

Model	Description	Pros	Cons	Evaluation
Advisory Groups (with a possible collaborative forum)	The current WDC model with suggested enhancements to generate improved outcomes. Enhancements include a collaborative Advisory Group Panel that meetings regularly with Council and reduced frequency with additional focus..	AGs are generally supported by the organisation. Members are enthusiastic about the Groups. The AG model builds strong relationships and loyalties with Council. With a clear focus on priority project, can provide thoughtful insight.	Is labour intensive. Can be costly. Requires focus from the top of the organisation too. Requires good relationships with Council. Is very dependent on the capability of members. Roles can get confused/blurred.	Overall, this model is well-supported by the organisation. It generates a clear community voice. Investment in capability building and strong chairs reaps rewards. Works best when work programme is highly focussed and well aligned with Council's priorities.
Expert Advisory Panels	An appointed panel of experts on a particular topic.	The input provided by EA Panels, is well qualified and generally deeply considered. Council is likely to trust the input from EA Panels. Can be convened for a specific purpose and timeframe.	Can be costly. Information provided may need to be more extensive. Does not constitute broad community engagement.	May not meet the 'trusted community voice' test, albeit that their advice may have strong value. Consider use for specific technical projects eg significant developments

		Less administration effort on staff.		
Community Forums	Regular facilitated community workshops with an open invitation approach, externally facilitated. Could include contracting with sector service provider organisations to administer and facilitate.	Includes a broad range of community voices. Builds relationships with a wider range of community members and also with service provider organisations (if partnered with). Can be work programme driven. Lower cost option.	Open to capture by lobby group. Very dependent on skilled facilitation. Relationships are less strong with attendance being optional and ad hoc. Dependent on the facilitator to translate feedback for Council.	Relationships are less strong as attendance is optional and can be ad hoc and issue based. Can be work programme driven.
Community Connectors / Portfolio Model	Officers who hold specific portfolios form strong connections with specific communities and facilitate specific engagement on topics of interest.	Creates a direct relationship between council officers and community sector groups. Can reach a broad and representative audience. Flexible and agile to address issues as they arise. Can be lower cost.	Highly dependent on the relationships between officers and community groups. This can fail if a staff member leaves. Can still require organised large scale events for engagement. Dependent on the officer to translate the feedback to Council.	Can be a way of building relationships with a broad and representative range of community members. Perhaps more suited to smaller councils?.
Targeted Engagement	Engagement is undertaken as issues arise by Council engagement officers. Can include a range of tactics.	Highly customisable and responsive to the needs of the issue and community sector.	Open to capture by lobby groups. Highly dependent on the skill of the engagement	Council already uses this and is likely to continue.

		Can generate a broad range of views from a large number of participants. Not relationship based which creates an independence.	officer to design the appropriate approach. More complex engagement can be resource intensive and costly.	
Deliberative Practice	A more structured form of engagement with more depth. A representative panel of community members is educated over a period of time on a topic and then supported to deliberate and come to an agreed set of recommendations	Highly suitable for more complex and contentious topics where a representative view is needed. Much more resource intensive but usually generates a positive response from participants.	A costly approach. Not suitable to more “business as usual” projects. Creates a significant requirement on Council to deliver on the input provided.	Could be considered for highly contentious issues that justify the higher spend and resource requirements.
Community Boards	Community Boards are closer to their communities and are useful in higher population or more geographically spread-out councils. These Boards can be used to represent their community voices.	They to have a good knowledge of their areas, the communities they represent and are useful where they are already in place.	Council does not currently have Community Boards. Members are elected and are therefore not necessarily representative of the broader community. Open to political influence.	Council could reconsider this should it become an option following a representation review.

Recommendations

Analysis of the feedback produced by the review identifies a number of key points and actions. (A full Issues Analysis is shown in Appendix 3). These have been outlined here.

1) Support for Formal Structure

- Generally, there is support for retaining and enhancing the formal Advisory Group structure.
- Consider the (careful) inclusion of members representing support groups.

2) Establish Community Forum for the Youth Sector

- Suggest twice a year events
- Facilitation and administration to be delivered by a sector group provider.
- Ensure agenda is strongly connected to Council priorities
- Ensure connections to YAG
- Evaluate after 2 years to consider relative effectiveness.

3) Suggested Changes to the Operation of the Groups

- Consider less frequent formal meetings with the opportunity for more informal activities eg site visits, community meetings etc between formal meetings
- The number of members was supported
- Consider the inclusion of permanent seats on the AGs for sector service provider groups.

4) Elected Member Role

- Retain elected member involvement but ensure each has an alternate to ensure attendance.
- Refocus the Elected Member role to be bringing a Council view and insight to the AG table with the sharing of AG feedback to Council being done via other channels.

5) Sectors Represented by Advisory Groups

- There was general support for the existing sectors being represented
- Consider the possible inclusion of rural and business (although these could be addressed by supporting more formally existing non-council groups).

6) Resourcing the Groups

- Evaluate the resources needed to manage the AGs (with consideration for less frequent meetings).

- Allocate tasks to or obtain support from the appropriate teams eg Democracy to manage/support the meeting administration, Strategy and Infrastructure to support the Work Programme development and Engagement to support engagement events.
- Evaluate how to administer additional less formal engagements eg site visits and community meetings
- Identify if additional administration resourcing is needed and secure budget (eg refreshments, training, etc).
- Retain Community Development as the best fit for programme ownership.
- Review the remuneration for AGs and develop a policy position eg attendance fees, transport costs, childcare or carer costs etc) and to reflect a fair compensation for the contribution.
- Consider funding for additional work eg networking events, conferences, attendance of events outside of meetings, writing reports etc

7) Role Clarity and Purpose

- Ensure new members understand their role as being the lived experience lens.
- Review the existing Terms of Reference to ensure clarity about purpose.

8) Relationships with Council and Inter-Group

- Set up regular/annual engagement with whole of council for reporting back eg a Collaborative Forum (including all AG members and full Council) to share their work programme and opportunities for information and resource sharing to be identified.
- Consider the value in inter-group collaboration perhaps twice a year.

9) Group Diversity and Representation

- Implement a skills/representation matrix to guide targeted recruitment.

10) Capability Building

- Review Induction Training to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Establish governance training for AG members
- Establish more extensive training on the role of Council
- Provide facilitation training for meeting facilitators
- Identify new technology approaches to broaden the scope of the training
- Establish chair and deputy chair training
- Consider a formal mentoring programme for chairs and perhaps wider membership (with EMs or with external mentors)

11) Group Effectiveness

- Change the term of AG members to be three years and aligned with the electoral cycle to assist with strategic alignment.
- Work with the Strategy and Infrastructure (and when appropriate the Engagement) teams to develop a work programme for each AG that is aligned with the council work programme.
- Establish metrics and data collection process to evaluate the work programme effectiveness.
- Include a mechanism for progress reporting to Council
- Ensure the AGs are focussed on work that is associated with Council priorities.
- Clarify where the role of facilitation sits and ensure that is clear in the Terms of Reference (currently sits with Chair).
- Explore methods of reinforcing the Terms of Reference through regular reflection
- Consider changing the term to be three years and bring into line with the electoral term.
- Review and strengthen conflict resolution clause in Terms of Reference.
- Encourage a range of meeting formats including workshops, brainstorming sessions, site visits and break out groups to encourage participation.
- Consider creating Member only time sessions at the start of each meeting.

12) Feedback and Recognition

- Identify opportunities for reporting back to council in person
- Improve feedback loop reporting to the groups to demonstrate value provided.
- Identify a clear and accountable feedback tracking process eg Actions Register
- Develop a recognition programme for Council to acknowledge the work of the AGs
- Report on successful AG activities in wider Council communications
- Consider a formal recognition of service when a member leaves eg letter with certificate from the Mayor.

13) Reality Check with Departmental Managers

- Involve DMs in the final discussions about options for improvement to ensure the 'doability' of recommended improvements and realistic transition planning.

Proposed Timeline:

While the Review is recommending that the Advisory Group model is retained, there are some significant steps that are indicated in order to bring the model up to full functionality. These are now set out in a proposed timeframe with a focus on bringing the Advisory Groups in line with the electoral cycle. This is intended to create closer links between the Council and the Groups.

Proposed time	Task	Details
March / April 2025	Review and agree Advisory Group Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Discuss 'doability' with Departmental Managers 2) Confirm whether AGs will be linked to electoral term eg 3 years established after the election. 3) Confirm membership numbers 4) Confirm whether any seats will be allocated for service provider representatives 5) Confirm whether any new groups are needed 6) Confirm frequency of AG meetings (monthly or six weekly), Chair/GM meetings (quarterly), all AGs and Council full (2 yearly)
April 2025	Review Elected Member role	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Suggest it is simplified to providing Council input 2) Confirm 1 member per group with 1 alternate 3) Consider whether EMs need voting rights or if this creates a conflict of interest at the Council table.
April 2025	Resourcing Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Undertake a compensation review and establish clear policy on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings attendance • Ad hoc attendances eg on site meetings • Additional duties eg report writing (but not submissions) • Transport costs • Carer/childcare costs • Conference attendance • Networking meetings <p>Identify any additional budget required.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Confirm Officer Resourcing eg 3) Including Democracy Services, Engagement and Strategy, confirming the roles and expectations. Identify any resourcing issues and how to respond.
May 2025	Capability Building	<p>Review Induction Process to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Training on role of Council and different legislation (consider online tutorial package – can LGNZ help?) 2) Consider group dynamics and deliberation training 3) Establish Chair training to include leadership and facilitation. 4) Consider establishing mentor programme for chairs and possibly other members? 5) Consider a guest speaker programme (quarterly) for AG members to build capability 6) Establish online Teams group for information sharing in between meetings.
May 2025	Recruitment Process Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Confirm the term (recommend 3 years in line with electoral cycle) 2) Plan for recruitment at the start of the electoral term. 3) Consider using a skills matrix to build a broad range of skills and competencies in the new groups. 4) Establish process for support group representative recruitment if appropriate.
June	Feedback and Reporting Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Review and enhance the Actions Register for each group (to be attached to agendas as an information item. 2) Confirm a twice yearly meeting between Council and all AGM members to report on progress. 3) Consider quarterly meetings between Chairs and GMs.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Add AG input into Council report template (optional where relevant). 5) Establish quarterly internal comms to share AG impact with the organisation. 6) Create a recognition tool for leavers (eg certificate and letter of thanks from the Mayor).
September 2025	Meeting Processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Consider member only time at the start of meetings (10 minutes?) 2) Review Agenda Structure to ensure strategic items are at the front.
September 2025	Work Programme Process	Establish the process for building the work programme for each AG.
November 2025	Recruitment of new groups	May include reappointment of some existing members if appropriate
December 2025	Agree new Terms of Reference	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Consider a specific set of ToR for each group. 2) Update to reflect new Groups structure 3) Strengthen the managing conflict section. 4) Confirm 'reflection points' so the Groups are reminded of the ToR from time to time.
January 2026	Establish Work Programme for each Group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Officers to present on Council priorities for the Groups to consider explaining the link to Councils work programme. 2) Agree KPIs to demonstrate the Group's effectiveness (what the Groups will do, not what Council does with their advice). 3) Identify the reporting framework for the work programme.

Resource Implications

Council is currently developing a Non-Elected Member Fee Framework. It is recommended that this process be expanded to include Advisory Groups. This will ensure that the review of compensation for Group members is aligned with the overall Council approach.

Resourcing the different options being put forward as options are considered here including compensation, community development team (EDA), administration, strategic and democracy costs).

Option	Estimated Cost	Considerations
Status Quo	\$22,000 approx. in fees and food 50% of CDA time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members feel undervalued. Compensation does not cover actual costs of attendance in some cases (eg travel, childcare, lost income etc) Compensation levels is not aligned with any Council policy position
Enhanced Advisory Groups	\$22,000 approx. (no change) This would cover somewhat elevated fees (following review), food and some training. Estimated 25% of CDA time (half as many meetings) Additional input from Strategy and Democracy team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option allows for more intensive support including strategically aligned work programme development, training, travel and childcare costs. Members feel more valued. Work programme is more focussed. Reduced pressure on staff
Community Forums for Youth Sector - Trial	\$2,400 contract cost with a youth service provider to administer the meetings (say 2 x year at \$1200 per meeting). Estimated 10% of CDA time plus some Strategy time to align the Forum work programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YAG members involved in the Forums. Opportunity to trial a model. Forums focussed on strategic priorities. Brings in a wider community voice.
Replace Advisory Groups with Expert Panels	Costs unknown (see Non-EM Fee Framework policy development). 0% of CDA time required Increase in other department time (Strategy, Infrastructure, Democracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unknown frequency of meetings, number of topics and intensity of work.

Stakeholder Feedback

A key component of this Review was extensive data gathering from a range of sources with the goal of establishing:

- The rate of take up of the Advisory Group model
- Key themes and methods used in Advisory Groups
- Key challenges that are common
- The rate at which Advisory Groups are reviewed
- Other options for engaging with specific sector groups

Data was gathered in the following way:

Councils in NZ/Aotearoa	International Councils	Advisory Group Members	Elected Members	Officers	Senior Leadership Team
Survey of 78 Councils (30 responses)	Desktop Analysis -Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Member Survey (Current and former members)	Interviews with AG members and non-members	Interviews with officers who are connected with AGs (work with or present to regularly)	Presentation and feedback workshop
Interviews: -Auckland -Hastings -Waitomo -Wellington -Tauranga	-City of Portland, Oregon -City of Melbourne -City of Sydney -Pacific Islands	Interviews with current and former members			
Key Themes					

Councils in New Zealand/Aotearoa Survey

All 78 councils were sent a survey via email, with a follow up email and an attempt to contact each by phone. 30 councils responded either via the survey or through a telephone conversation (Auckland, Waitomo, Wellington, Tauranga, Hastings). The detailed survey results are shown in Appendix 1.

Key themes arising from the council survey include:

- 1) 40% of respondents do use some form of formal structure for engagement with specific sector groups.
- 2) Maori liaison groups are not seen as part of this sector group engagement, perhaps because of the legislative requirements around inclusion of Maori in local government decision making.
- 3) Outside of the use of formal structures councils use a wide variety of engagement tactics to obtain input from different sectors in the community. These include:
 - Innovative ongoing partnerships eg partnering with schools (Waitomo)
 - The main subject areas that triggered the use of a formal approach include; youth, aging, disability (or mobility and access), environment and biodiversity, water quality, community safety, road safety, health, walking and cycle ways, migrant support, rainbow community, pacific communities and economic development.
 - Some deliberative practice particularly for more significant or complex topics eg spatial planning
- 4) Established groups had generally been in place for some time with the majority in the 10 to 20 years.
- 5) Membership numbers tend to be in the 10-15 members range. However, there is a broad spread.
- 6) Most advisory groups meet monthly or quarterly.
- 7) For councils who do have a formal structure for sector group engagement, the management of these groups falls mostly with the community development advisors or dedicated advisory panel advisors. Others had a dedicated community partnerships role or allocated the task to the democracy or council secretary roles.
- 8) Most councils do include elected members in the formal membership of the advisory groups.
- 9) 40% of respondents had undertaken a review in the last 5 years and two more were currently undertaking a review.

Detailed Feedback from NZ/Aotearoa Councils

Detailed interviews were undertaken with 5 Councils;

- 1) Auckland
- 2) Hastings
- 3) Waitomo
- 4) Wellington
- 5) Tauranga.

This section outlines the detailed feedback provided by each and seeks to identify key themes, challenges and opportunities.

Auckland Council

Interview with Victoria Wicks Brown, Principal Advisor, Advisory Panels

Structure

The Auckland Council Advisory Panel structure is seen as part of the governance structure. Under the Auckland Council legislation, the Mayor has responsibility to ensure adequate engagement with Aucklanders and how this is to be done must be clearly set out. There should also be clear engagement with a broad range of sectors eg youth and ethnic groups.

Auckland Council currently has nine Advisory Panels:

1. Youth
2. Seniors
3. Ethnic
4. Pacific
5. Rainbow
6. Disability
7. City Centre
8. Rural
9. Small Business

These are established by the Mayor in line with the political term. The new Mayor must decide on the actual structure with staff making recommendations. Following the establishment of the structure, officers recruit from the community, using a process described as “robust”. While the Mayor does the appointments, these must be endorsed by the governing body.

Membership is restricted to two terms with no automatic renewals. The Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct is provided during the recruitment process. Officers

are very clear with new recruits that their role is neither representative nor elected; they are appointed to provide advice to the Mayor, councillors, staff and CCOs through a lens of lived experience.

Focus

The Advisory Panels provide input and insight into regional plans and policies.

They are also able to raise other matters of interest or concern to the communities they represent. They can also choose to do some community engagement on topics where it aligns with Council priorities. Officers will also support members to bring issues they are passionate about into the group although it is not technically a core part of the role.

While Council does not have to have Advisory Panels (other than for Pacifica), Council values the input and members have a high level of satisfaction with their involvement. They are seen as a vehicle for drawing in engagement on topics faster than if Council was to go direct (eg input into the outdoor swimming facility at the waterfront).

Council sees the advice provided by the Advisory Panels as “candid, trusted advice”. Generally Council is keen to hear the input from the Panels and have an appetite for authentic engagement and an appreciation of the calibre of the Panel members.

Panel members see membership as an opportunity to have an impact, to raise awareness especially around longer term issues that are of concern to their communities. Opportunities can include leading engagement activities eg CDEM workshops for the disability community.

Work Programme and Roles

Generally, there are more requests from the organisation for Advisory Panel involvement than can be accommodated in the time available. The Principal Advisor is responsible for co-ordinating the work programme across all groups.

The political link between the groups and Council is the Chief Liaison Officer. There are also elected members who are Liaison Members and whose role is to act as a go between between the Panels and Council. These elected members are generally selected for their adjacent interests and characteristics eg youth, Pacifica, seniors.

Some officers volunteer (in addition to their full-time role elsewhere in the organisation) to act as Lead Officers for specific Advisory Panels, helping to guide the strategic focus of the Panels and seeking out opportunities for a Panel to add value. These officers are close to their specific Panel and understand well the areas of interest of that Panel.

Function

There is an expectation by Council that officers are regularly talking to the Panels.

The Panels are seen as a key way to engage more with these communities. Having the planned work programme for the Panels means the communities affected can be set up in advance ready for engagement.

There is a challenge in managing the expectations of the Panel from the community. Officers work to protect the Panel when the community feels they are more accountable than their level of influence allows.

Panels are also seen as a way to hold the organisation to account on delivery of action plans.

Operations

Meetings are held every six weeks and are generally in public with occasional closed workshops when justified.

Panels prepare a term-end report to report to Council on the progress they have made on their strategic priorities.

Panel members are remunerated on the following basis:

- Panel Member: \$270 per meeting (5.5 hours of work)
- Chairs: \$454 per meeting (7.5 to 8 hours of work)
- Additional duties are paid at an hourly rate eg writing reports on engagement activity outcomes.

Members from paid roles with other groups are not paid eg Federated Farmers members of the rural Panel.

The budget is described as tight given the large number of people involved and the significant workload.

Conflicts of Interest are carefully managed and set out in the Code of Conduct.

Contractors and employees of council are not eligible to be members.

Extensive training for Chairs and members is provided for all aspects of the Panel functions.

Minutes are taken but because Advisory Panels are part of the governance structure these are restricted to decisions and actions rather than documenting discussions. This has created some challenges in the past.

Panels tend to operate in three seasons; researching the topics, implementation of the programme, building up to election time. The end of term report is a big focus of the third season with a mid-term check in to ensure the priorities agreed at the start of the term are still appropriate.

Council officers must use a template to engage with Panels. These help them to clarify what they want to ask and why. Organising the engagement is a constant challenge as staff are always busy.

Cross-Panel Integration

Cross-panel workshops are curated to build a culture of cross-over. Panel members enjoy these opportunities to share and cross over. These larger hui are used especially for the bigger topics eg the LTP, when a cross-panel hui 'looks more like Auckland'.

Annual budgets are set by each Panel, depending on the type of work planned, but are confirmed at a cross-panel review session.

There is a Co-Chairs Panel hui every eight weeks. These are looking for opportunities to work collectively and are attended by the Chief Executive, key Directors and the relevant General Managers. The focus is to understand where the Panels might have the most impact.

Influence

Panel members have influence at a high level, both operationally and politically. However, this influence is limited to providing advice, with no decision making authority.

Panel engagement with their communities can include any of the usual engagement tools depending on the topics and timeframes. However, Panels are not authorised to make a central government submission but can provide advice to Council on a Council submission.

Hastings District Council

Louise Stettner – Manager Governance and Democracy

Structure

- Hastings District Council has a number of formal sector groups that cover a range of sectors:
- Hastings/Havelock North Business Association (Council is a member)
- Primary Producers Round Table – regular meetings
- Citizens' Panel – provides input on project concepts prior to formal consultation – a litmus test. Also used as part of the consultation process.
- Youth Council – This is a very active group that advises on projects that are of significance to young people eg skate park in Hastings. Council consults with them on specific projects to incorporate their views before design or scope is finalised. The Youth Council were very proactive when consulting on the representation review and wanted to be more formally involved in council discussions around policy formulation. Council has responded by including representation from the Youth Council on sub-committees. This measure had unanimous support. Subsequently, the Youth Council requested voting rights and for representation on full Council committees. This had a split response in Council but the Mayor used her casting vote to pass the motion. This has created an interesting conundrum; the Youth Council was in the past very active with their submissions, but now they are represented on full Council, they have a conflict of interest and can't do submissions to Council.
- Multi-cultural Advisory Group – Implementing action to support multi-cultural communities.
- Older People - nothing formal but the Mayor meetings regularly with the strong local grey power group.
- Landmarks Advisory Group – this had been in place since the 1980s to promote and protect built heritage. It was folded at the last election because it wasn't really achieving the goal. This was identified through a review. There is now a direct relationship between a local community trust and the Council rather than having to go through the Advisory Group.
- Flaxmere Futures Group – This came in with the last representation review and consists of one Flaxmere Councillor, one Maori Ward Councillor, an officer in charge, the Chair of the Flaxmere Planning Committee. The group provides input and advice to Council. It has recently morphed into a subcommittee on wellbeing. It is currently being considered for its relevance.
- Disability Reference Group – This group is a number of years old and is made up of people who work in the sector and in similar roles at the other councils in the

region. Meetings are held regionally, 4 to 6 times a year with the agenda being put together by the hosting Council. It is regarded as a good opportunity for information sharing eg community grants and empowering the community at election time.

Focus

Hastings District Council has not taken a single approach to sector group representation with a bespoke approach for each sector. There is no record of any review of the structure with some changes being made following representation reviews.

For the Group members there is value in the networking that happens, being more informed about Council services, building relationships with Council officers and other group members.

An unexpected benefit the groups was that during Cyclone Gabrielle, Council was able to lean into those relationships to assist with response and recovery work.

Influence

Council values the groups for the sense-checking that they provide. Officers do take on board the input from the groups who are seen to have mana at Council. The Youth Council for example is regarded as higher up than general public feedback.

Groups are seen as bringing expertise, community connections and adding value to the Council.

Emerging Trends

1. Financial constraints are very front and centre and may impact on Council's willingness to continue with certain activities.
2. The Maori wards referendum may have an impact, meaning that Council may have to bolster the existing Maori Committee to Council.
3. The Youth Council is likely to remain ambitious and want to have a stronger voice and to be more representative.

Waitomo District Council

Sarah McElroy – Community Engagement Manager

New Approach to Youth Engagement

Waitomo District Council did have an Advisory Group model, with a particular focus on their Youth constituency but they were finding it hard work with little interest in attendance and the formal structure. Recently they undertook a review, noting that many other councils had moved away from the formal model. For the review, they engaged through the schools in an informal way that included food and listening to the views of the students and community.

The feedback was that young people were very keen to be involved but did not want to attend drop in sessions or attend council meetings. Different young people wanted to engage at different levels and on different topics.

The schools were identified as a good conduit to engagement with youth. Council funds a Rangatahi Pathway Programme that includes career planning, worksite visits and the goal of having no child leaving school without employment or training to go to. Waitomo is also involved with the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs which is well aligned with the new approach. Council is also working with the schools to bring back ‘service academies’. Council is also engaging with alternative education providers to identify natural leaders.

The feedback indicated that youth were most interested in events and guest speakers. Waitomo now works with the schools and youth to develop a programme of youth-led events.

Council also goes into every school for consultation programmes and is developing partnerships with schools for curriculum programmes eg connecting the science departments with the waters teams. There are also other youth focussed events that partner with local pools and community barbecues. This new approach to working with youth is definitely getting lots more interest than the formal Advisory Group.

Elected members are invited to be part of youth engagement events and will continue to be included as the new model evolves.

Maori Engagement

Council meets with the main local iwi each month through a Trustees meeting.

They also have a broader iwi and happy engagement meeting “Te Nihinui” with representatives from each marae monthly.

Regional Collaboration

Council is part of a regional coalition across all sectors which meets monthly and is guided by the Vibrant Maniopoto strategy.

Community Action Plans

Waitomo also has community connectors who work with communities to develop Community Action Plans.

Wellington City Council

Alisi Folaumoetu'i – Senior Democracy Advisory

A Refreshed Approach

Wellington City Council recently undertook a review of their Advisory Groups. This included spending time with Auckland Council's Advisory Group team. The findings were presented to the November 2024 Council meeting and change will be enacted following the next election.

Key issues identified in the review were:

- Lack of clarity of purpose
- Inconsistent engagement from officers
- Limited resourcing

These are issues that have also been identified in the Whangarei review.

Wellington had six Advisory Groups prior to the review. It will now have five:

- **Disability** (now known as Accessibility)
- **Pacific communities**
- **Youth Council**
- **Rainbow Communities** – this is a new group that had its first meeting in February 2024
- **Ethnic Communities** – this is also a new group and will have its first meeting in February of this year.
- **Environmental Reference Group** - following the review this is being changed to be a Mayoral Forum and will no longer be considered as an Advisory Group.

The new groups have been set up with the existing Terms of Reference but these may change as the full change rolls out. There will also be a combined panel made up of all the groups that will meet quarterly.

The Advisory Group function currently sits with the Democracy Services team but under the new model, will move to the Engagement Team as the review identified that it was a better fit there.

Each Advisory Group has one councillor (and an alternate) currently. Under the new model, elected members will not be formally part of the Groups but will be invited to a quarterly combined panel made up of all forum members, elected members and the executive leadership group.

Wellington's review emphasized the importance of recruitment and the need to ensure that candidates understand the strategic focus of the groups, rather than a more open

focus group approach. It is felt that maximum effectiveness will be achieved through a clear focus on the work plan which is based on Council's work plan (from the LTP and AP). The Strategy team will be brought in to support Groups to build a work programme that is fully aligned with the Council programme.

Training should also include significant governance training to help Group members understand the nature of their role.

The review also identified the feedback loop as being critical and it is hoped that the implementation of the clear work programme will enable better feedback on the value the Groups add. Wellington are also considering including a section in reports to Council that sets out what the feedback from the relevant Groups might be. This may assist elected members to identify the value of the Advisory Group feedback.

Currently Groups (other than Youth Council) meet monthly but this may change as the rollover to the newer model takes place following the next election.

The role of the Advisory Group members will also be clarified to ensure new members understand that they are there as members of the community with lived experience in their area but not as representatives of the community.

Group membership numbers are currently around 12 (with slightly higher numbers for Pacific and for Youth) but these are likely to be reduced as the new model rolls out. Current plans are to look at around 8 members for each group with 2 seats reserved for Maori. Terms will be extended to three years to align with the electoral cycle. Automatic rollovers will be removed.

The new model will also encourage information sharing and engagement outside of formal meetings although work has not been completed about how to compensate members for additional time. The current per meeting rate is \$110 for members, \$130 for co-chairs and \$150 for chairs. Youth Council members are currently paid \$45 but meet fortnightly but for 90 minutes (in recognition of the importance of the stronger social drivers for youth).

Resourcing was identified as a key area. Wellington have identified that they need to wrap additional resourcing around the Groups to ensure the best outcomes.

Tauranga City Council

Dani Jurgeleit – Community Development Team Leader: Inclusive Cities

A Community Driven Response

Tauranga City Council has recently undertaken two reviews of their established Advisory Group model (which included Disability, Youth and an Elders Forum. The first review was a desktop review with a focus on understanding the other models in use in New Zealand/Aotearoa. This provided a range of models for Tauranga to consider.

A second review undertook a community survey and series of forums with the public to establish what might work best for Tauranga. The findings of this review included:

Closed groups are not popular with the community. People prefer open forums where everyone can participate if they want to (noting that participation should be based on what is on an agenda).

- People are reluctant to be ‘pigeon-holed’ into one or other group eg disability or aged, when often their interests span a range of topics.
- Meetings should not be too frequent. In Tauranga’s case, meetings were held every 6 weeks. This was perceived to be too frequent.
- The community should have more freedom to inform the themes, topics and intent of the forum/group.

Following on from these two reviews Tauranga have now established groups that operate in a forum model and are facilitated by outside sector groups. These are:

- **Rainbow Community Special Interest Group** – a newly established group. The first forum was attended by 27 people from the rainbow community. The forums are facilitated by Rainbow Youth.
- **Accessible Tauranga Interest Group** – this is facilitated by CCS. Attendance is usually around 30 people.
- **Ethnic Leaders Forum** – this can have around 100 people attending.
- **Migrant Support Network**
- **Age Friendly Special Interest Group** - This uses a focus on positive aging and brings together 15 agencies who work in this sector. The focus is on celebrating aging, food insecurity and housing. Meetings are ad hoc as dictated by the group itself.
- **Welcoming Communities Governance Group**
- **Homeless Provider Network** – this has 65 members from the homeless sector. Tauranga has recently also joined a regional homeless lived experience group. This group takes a regional approach with direct links to central government.

- **Youth** – Tauranga is currently reviewing this sector specifically. The plan is to establish three separate groups. Elected members would like to consider a youth council or a strategic youth advisory group. Council is also involved with and supporting an external strategic youth working group with a focus on development of a youth hub. Council is also supporting and involved with Instep Young Leaders which consists of around 35 young people to meeting for a breakfast meeting regularly. Council has provided a Mayoral breakfast and facilitated a specific discussion. Council is considering whether to create its own Youth Forum or to focus on supporting and engaging with existing ones.

The biggest challenge that the previous Youth Advisory Group had was churn. The entire membership was turning over every 12 to 18 months. There was also a skew towards driven and ambitious young people who were there to improve their CV. This led to a diversity deficit. While the groups are not intended to be representative they do need to have a diversity of views. The previous group had 14 members with terms of two time three years. Tauranga is finding the open forum to have a much wider range of participation with higher numbers. Staff feel they are getting more diverse feedback that is more representative of the youth voice.

There can be a challenge with getting different people attending each time the forum is run but overall Tauranga is happy that they are getting improved input.

Key differences between the old Advisory Group model and the new forum based model are:

- External facilitation – Council has contracted external groups to facilitate the forums. These groups come from the sector so have strong knowledge and networks. The community appear to prefer this facilitation approach, seeing it as community led.
- No Formal Group Structure – the forums are open to anyone to participate. However promotion of the meetings tends to be through the mailing lists that relevant organisations hold so is targeted at those who have an interest.
- Building Database - Participants are invited to join a specific mailing list for the forums, building a substantial targeted database over time.
- Reduced cost and complexity - The facilitation agencies are paid \$5000 per year, including doing the minutes, agendas and preparing submissions when required. No other members are paid (although there are honorariums for chairs and deputy chairs of \$250 per annum).

- More Open Agenda – The forum is invited to discuss anything of interest with the ability to draw in other agencies who might be able to answer specific queries beyond Council.
- No Elected Member Formal Involvement – Tauranga found that the elected member involvement could be inconsistent and was not adding much value. The new arrangement has the groups making presentations to Council directly when necessary. This is felt to be providing more value.
- Reporting – the Chairs of the forums present to Council each year (and more often if needed) to outline the work completed and what the opportunities are for future work. The groups also submit on key planning documents such as the Long Term Plan and the Annual Plan.

Tauranga's learnings include that the right facilitator is critical to the function of any group whether it is an open forum or a closed Advisory Group. They also found that transparency is key. The community want to feel that their efforts lead to real and visible change. They also found that groups became frustrated when they were asked to give time on topics that weren't going to lead to anything meaningful.

Prioritisation is seen as key. Tauranga involves the strategy team from Council to assist with the prioritisation of work. Emphasis is also given to ensuring that when a topic has been addressed, the learnings are embedded back into Council eg feedback from the Disability Advisory Group led to the development of a Universal Design Manual.

Under their previous model, induction training was given a high priority covering roles and responsibilities and governance training and culminating in the development of a work programme.

Tauranga have developed a Priority Community Engagement Toolkit focussing on nine key communities. They see this as an important outcome of their work to date.

Key Themes from In-Depth Interviews

1. Youth is the most complex area	This is one of the more challenging areas as rangatahi are less comfortable with a formal approach but once engaged they expect a high degree of influence and agency.
2. Cross-integration/collaboration works	Groups and the host Council benefit from collaboration with each other, allowing for work programmes to be aligned and resources to be shared.
3. Financial constraints put the groups at risk.	All councils are experiencing financial constraints. Without clear purpose and elected member buy-in, advisory groups can be seen as optional. Conversely, they can be seen as a more cost-effective way of engagement, which is challenging given they are not necessarily representative of the community.
4. High level of support needed to be effective	To get the most from advisory groups, a high degree of support is required in terms of administration, training, induction, support with strategic planning etc. This helps the groups to stay on task and provide the most value to the host council.
5. Clarity around representation helps to keep everyone on track	As mentioned above, these groups are not generally truly representative of the community they are sourced from. They have knowledge of their communities but there is not usually any mechanism to check the representation of the group (eg demographics, ethnicities etc). With the smaller number in these groups, this would be challenging to achieve. As such it is important that the members, councillors, staff members and the public, understand their role, and they are supported to remain within their parameters.
6. Managing expectations – clarity on the expectations and purpose is vital	Without clearly articulated purpose group members can experience a 'scope creep' that distracts them from where they can add the most

	<p>value. Host councils need to set a clear direction for the group.</p> <p>This goes for managing expectations in the community too. Advisory group members can be seen as ‘quasi’ councillors by community members. This can undermine the established council protocols for managing service requests etc.</p>
7. Agility and flexibility helps to keep group members engaged	<p>While it is important to have structure and a clear work plan, there also needs to be space for the group to address issues that arise from their communities in a way that does not impact on the planned work programme.</p>
8. Structure and planning matters	<p>Groups are most successful when they take a strategic planning approach to their work with clear alignment with the host council priorities. Given the nature of the group make up, there will likely be varying degrees of understanding of strategic priorities and so support is likely to be needed to develop the group strategic plan and to monitor and evaluate progress.</p>
9. Elected member buy in is vital	<p>Ensuring a close connection between the groups and the host council members is also an important indicator of likely success. This could be by having elected members present at meetings, or by having regular pan-group hui that involve council members.</p>
10. Top-down support gives credibility	<p>The most successful groups are supported from the top of the council organisation with the chief executive and general managers being involved in the activities of the groups from time to time.</p>
11. Accountability maintains focus on value	<p>The most effective groups have mechanisms for measuring their effectiveness through the term and reporting to council on their outputs.</p>

12. Induction really matters	Many group members may not have any experience of dealing with strategic matters. The induction training should have a strong focus on governance and the importance of strategic focus that is aligned with the council's own workplan. Innovation in the training and induction space is needed to help new members really understand and stay focused on their role.
13. Opportunities to Partner	There are often sector support groups who can be valuable partners when engaging. They can have wider and deeper networks than Council has. Tauranga's (albeit early) experience is that partnering with sector groups is providing a broader voice and building a database of interested community members, at a lower cost.

International Examples

This section provides an overview of some key international examples of successful advisory groups within councils. This was collected through desktop research.

Examples were taken from the UK, US and Australia given our western democratic roots in New Zealand / Aotearoa. For completeness, additional research was done on the role of advisory groups in Pacific Island nations.

A more detailed review of the international examples is included as Appendix 4.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (UK)

Equalities - Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is a large local authority in the UK, made up of several local councils that have come together in the combined structure for the more regionalised functions. It has a number of advisory/sector groups that facilitate the connection between the council organisation and community sectors.

In general, these panels are charged by GMCA to provide insight into their sector, to support key messages to those communities, to co-design policies, programmes and strategies and to support an asset based approach (ensuring the right assets and infrastructure are in place).

These are collected under the “Equalities” heading and include Youth, Disabled Persons, LGBTQ+, Race, Women and Girls, Faith and Belief and Older Persons.

Summary of GMCA Equality Panels

Each panel appears to have a clear Terms of Reference which sets out its own specific purpose that aligns with the overarching GMCA statement of purpose for the groups. Each panel submits regular reports to GMCA annually but can be more frequent if needed. The ToRs are fine-tuned by each group to reflect the purpose defined by the panel and the agreed panel expectations within their own group.

Support provided by GMCA includes travel expenses, fair notice of meetings and opportunities (and funding) to attend outside events. There is no mention of a per-meeting fee (which does not rule it out).

City of Portland Council, US

[Advisory Groups | Portland.gov](#)

City of Portland is well-regarded for its inclusive and innovative approach to engaging with communities.

They have an extensive network of advisory bodies (covering topics as diverse as budget making to cannabis) that cover a wide range of area of interest to the people of Portland. They are considered to be an important tool for community members and City officers and elected members to work together on projects, providing insight on Portlanders' diverse needs and interests.

The Advisory Bodies Program provides training and resources to advisory body members, ensuring advisory bodies follow their rules and bylaws, and handles recruitment for open member positions. It appears that the positions are, in general, considered to be voluntary and unpaid.

Advisory Bodies can:

- Host public meetings,
- Provide policy advise and participate in the development of policies,
- Oversee grant applications,
- Advise staff on community engagement plans for specific projects and reviewing the community engagement manual,
- Manage specific leases and concessions, and
- Provide general advice and lived experience input on relevant topics.

Summary of City of Portland Advisory Bodies programme

City of Portland's Advisory Bodies have a wide range of powers and activities that they are involved with, including to set their own rules (subject to approval by the Bureau Director). They do appear to be unpaid, although information on the website was inconsistent and at times not easy to find.

City of Melbourne, Australia

[Committees and advisory groups | City of Melbourne](#)

City of Melbourne hosts a number of key advisory bodies whose work facilitates development and implementation of “a range of programs and initiatives that contribute to the cultural, social and economic vitality of Melbourne”.

Key advisory committees, bodies and groups include Audit and Risk, Invest Melbourne, Disability, First Nations, City Art Collections, City Design, Homelessness, Parks and Gardens and Safe City Cameras amongst others. Members are paid around \$300 per meeting and are appointed for a three year term.

Summary of City of Melbourne Advisory Bodies programme

City of Melbourne's use of Advisory Bodies appears to be more restricted to more operational matters that are directly related to delivery of services. However, they do appear to pay significantly more for members participation.

City of Sydney – Australia

Sydney has a range of Advisory Panels to facilitate input from key sector groups. They also use a Citizen Jury with a single focus on the development of the Sydney 2050 vision.

Groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Public Art, Inclusion and Disability, Business and Economic, Multicultural, City Design, Development and Housing. Terms are three years and capped at two terms with payments being \$300 per meeting. Membership varies between members of the public and experts on the topic depending on Council needs.

Terms are three years and capped at two.

Pacific Island Communities

Information about the more detailed governance structures of Pacific Island nations local governments is limited. However, these countries draw on their more traditional tribal/village and chiefship model with representatives from formal groups of chiefs having influence on local and indeed central government. Chiefs are strongly connected to their local communities which tend to be smaller. This local connection and high level of influence by local chiefs could arguably bring a stronger focus on local issues to political governance.

Advisory Group Feedback

Member Survey Outcomes: Former Members

10 former members responded to the survey. Of those six had only been on their advisory group for two years, two had done three years, one had done four years and one had done 5 years. Appendix 1 provides the detailed results.

Key Findings:

1) Reasons for Leaving

Reasons include relocation (both moving away and moving for university), dissatisfaction with the perceived value or enjoyment, and completion of tenure. Two of the ten respondents reported dissatisfaction as being their reason for leaving.

2) Group Purpose & Understanding

Members generally understand the purpose of the Advisory Group, but there is a notable lack of faith in its effectiveness and impact.

Concerns include tokenism, language barriers, insufficient leverage in council processes, inconsistent attendance from Elected Members, and lack of feedback on impact.

3) Role of Elected Members

Elected Members are expected to act as a link between the Advisory Group and the Council, advocate for the group and provide advice (as per the Terms of Reference Appendix B). There is also the suggestion that they should assist with submissions, which may create conflicts of interest for the Elected Member.

Suggestions for improvement include more engagement, respect, and feedback from Elected Members.

4) Role of Council Officers

Council Officers are seen as record keepers and group supporters but there were comments about them sometimes being ignored by the Council.

Suggested improvements include providing the officer providing more practical support to the Group and potentially a pay rise (unclear whether this was for the group member or the officer).

5) Group Management & Impact

There is a mixed perception of how well the group is run and its ability to meet its priorities.

While some felt the group provided insights into Council priorities, others felt it lacked impact and integration with Council processes.

There were suggestions that more tangible feedback on outcomes could help understanding around achieving priorities.

6) Personal Value and Development

Members found personal value in the leadership opportunities inherent in the role, felt they had built understanding of civic processes, and formed strong relationships.

However, some felt disillusioned over time due to limited impact and systemic issues.

7) Understanding of Council Operations

Participation in the Advisory Groups had increased respondents understanding of Council operations. However this understanding included a reinforcement of the perception that barriers like red tape can limit action.

Key Recommendations for Improvement (Former Members):

1. Engagement & Communication: Increase engagement and clear communication channels between the Advisory Group, Elected Members, and Council Officers to ensure feedback from the Groups is acknowledged.
2. Impact Evaluation: Establish clear metrics and follow-up processes to evaluate the impact and value of Advisory Group feedback and communicate this to members regularly.
3. Structural Support: Address systemic barriers that are inherent in bureaucratic organisations.

Member Survey Outcomes – Current Members

14 current Advisory Group members completed the survey. Of these eight were from the Positive Aging Advisory Group, and three each were from the Disability and Youth Advisory Groups. Most respondents were shorter term members with 11 being in the 1 to 2 year band and the three others spread evenly over the 3, 4 and 5 year bands.

What follows is a summary of the findings. Appendix 2 contains the detailed results.

1) Purpose of the Advisory Group

- Many respondents understand the purpose to be mostly in the space of advocacy and representation for specific communities (e.g., older people, youth and those living with disability).
- The Advisory Groups are seen as being there to provide feedback on council policies and strategies.

There is a possible misalignment between these two themes. Members are not really representative of their communities. Instead they bring lived experience to inform feedback on Council policies and strategies.

2) Perceived Role and Improvements

- Respondents generally feel the Advisory Groups are fit for purpose, though some suggest improvements like more serious consideration by the council and better feedback mechanisms.
- There's a desire for more direct communication with council members and a stronger presence in decision-making processes.

3) Elected Member Role

- Elected members are viewed as conduits between the Advisory Group and the council.
- Suggestions for improvement include having more contact with council members.

4) Council Officer Role

- Respondents felt that officers can be expected to facilitate meetings and act as liaisons, ensuring communication between the Advisory Group and the council.
- Feedback suggests Advisory Group members rely on officers to represent their views council meetings and that they hope for a proactive and strong voice in that forum.

5) Operation and Priorities

- There's a mixed perception of how well the Advisory Group operates and meets its priorities.
- Respondents value the group's work but express a need for more evidence of their impact and consideration by the council.

6) Personal and Group Value

Personal value is derived from being a voice for peers and contributing to community improvements.

Respondents felt that they provide valuable and educated input, although there is a strong desire for evidence of this input being valued and acted upon by the council.

Suggestions for Enhancements:

Increase Involvement and Feedback

- Earlier engagement on projects to allow for feedback to have real value
- Richer participation with council as a whole and with relevant subcommittees
- Respondents seek acknowledgment and evidence that their contributions are heard and valued.
- There is an openness to more and richer involvement eg site visits

Diversity and Accessibility

There were several references to the need for more ethnic representation within the Advisory Groups, reflecting the growing diversity of the community. It is unclear whether this is in addition to the Multi-ethnic group that has been recently established or whether it that group actually meets those needs.

Respondents were also clear that they expect more in the accessibility and disability area.

Improved Communication

Suggestions include better communication tools (e.g. notepads for meetings), and more direct feedback from the council.

Role Clarity

While respondents didn't directly mention this, responses indicate that there may be a lack of clarity on the purpose of the groups with the advocacy aspect of the role taking a higher precedence than the Terms of Reference might indicate. There is a tension between representation and the provision of strategic advice.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey indicates that while respondents recognize the importance and potential impact of the Advisory Group, there is a strong desire for more effective communication, acknowledgment, and integration into the council's decision-making processes. Enhancements in feedback mechanisms, integration, recognition and role clarity are seen as key areas for improvement to increase the group's value both to its members and to the council.

Member Interviews

Face to face interviews were held with a range of Advisory Group members:

Advisory Group	Number of Interviews
Positive Aging	Current (3)
	Past (2)
DAG	Current (3)
	Past (1)
YAG	Current (2)
	Past (2)

In general interviews were around an hour each using a structured conversation approach which allowed for the subject to introduce their own perspectives. Members of the PAAG group were invited to be interviewed as pairs (two groups of two).

Analysis of the feedback from the Advisory Group (AG) Member interviews highlights several key themes and insights:

1) Uncertainty about Roles and Responsibilities

Many members expressed uncertainty about their roles within the AGs. While some are familiar with the Terms of Reference, there is a general need for clearer role descriptions and expectations and many found it difficult to recall or explain how they were applied in practice.

Some members noted that their understanding of their roles had evolved over time, often through informal learning and interaction with others, rather than through structured guidance.

This indicates a need for a more comprehensive induction process that clearly outlines expectations, responsibilities, and the impact of their roles. There may also be a need for a more structured work programme to help groups remain focused on their priorities.

2) Deficiencies in Feedback and Communication

A recurring theme is the lack of feedback from the Council regarding the input provided by AGs. Members feel that their contributions often go into a "void," with little information on whether their advice is acted upon or valued. Members expressed a strong desire for updates on how their advice is being used and what outcomes it has led to

Implementing a transparent, consistent and structured feedback loop could help members see how their input influences council decisions.

3) Uncertainty about Value and Impact

Members have mixed views on the value and impact of AGs. While some believe they provide valuable insights and have influenced decisions (eg influencing special projects like the new building design), others feel their contributions are undervalued, not fully utilised or appreciated. The perceived performative nature of engagement, (some felt that this was especially prominent during election periods), suggests a need for consistent and meaningful follow through and feedback.

It may also be helpful for Council to clarify exactly what they expect from Advisory Groups and ensure that groups are clear and have a structure work programme for that work.

4) Some Meeting Structure and Dynamics Frustrations

The effectiveness of meetings varies, with some members highlighting the need for effective meeting facilitation and more structured agendas. The ability to focus on strategic issues rather than operational ones was also a point of concern. Some members felt that meetings can sometimes lack focus, leading to discussions that deviate from strategic issues.

The current meeting schedule was felt to be about right for many of the interviewees. However, some members suggest more frequent meetings could help maintain momentum and engagement.

The importance of a well-defined agenda was also mentioned. Interviewees noted when the agenda was not adhered to, this could lead to frustration and lower levels of participation.

5) Good Levels of Cohesion and Respect

Many members reported positive interpersonal relationships within their AGs. There is generally a sense of camaraderie, with members respecting each other's opinions and contributions.

6) Some Issues with Leadership and Facilitation

The effectiveness of the chairperson was noted as playing a significant role in group dynamics, facilitating balanced discussions and ensuring all voices are heard. A lack of strong leadership can lead to meetings becoming unproductive or dominated by a few voices, which was frustrating to some respondents.

At times council staff can be drawn into facilitation at the meetings. Interviewees found that this could help with guiding discussions and providing necessary context. Their ability to manage discussions and deal with conflicts was felt to be important for maintaining a positive atmosphere.

7) Variable Levels of Inclusivity and Participation

Icebreakers and collaborative activities are noted as being effective in building rapport and encourage participation, especially among new members.

Factors such as unclear roles, lack of preparation, or personal conflicts can be seen as barriers to participation. Some members noted that meetings could sometimes feel like a "therapy group" when discussions drifted from the agenda.

However, there were suggestions that some groups faced challenges with certain members not participating actively or dominating discussions. It was felt that this can disrupt the balance of contributions and hinder effective dialogue.

8) More Equitable Compensation and Recognition

While some members feel the compensation is fair, others believe it doesn't adequately reflect the time and effort involved, especially when compared to other committees.

Some comments suggested that more equitable compensation could recognize the importance of their contributions and encourage more diverse and perhaps higher calibre participation.

9) Consider Greater Diversity and Representation

There is a call for greater diversity within AGs, both in terms of demographics and perspectives to better reflect the communities being represented. Some felt that the inclusion of various community groups, including youth, aged, and multicultural communities, could enhance the richness of feedback and advice provided.

10) More Comprehensive Training and Development

Members expressed a need for more training and professional development opportunities, including governance training, understanding council processes, and effective communication skills. This could empower AG members to contribute more effectively.

11) Improve Integration with Council Processes

There is a perceived disconnect between AGs and the broader council processes. Members suggest more integration, such as involving AGs earlier in the decision-making process and ensuring their input is considered in strategic planning.

12) Member Engagement and Churn

High turnover and engagement issues among members affect the continuity and effectiveness of AGs. Strategies to retain members and ensure active participation, such as mentorship programs could be beneficial. Additionally more overt recognition and connection with Council could also help to address some of the frustrations that former members leave with.

Options for Enhancement of Advisory Groups:

Based on the analysis of these key themes, member inters identified several options that Council could consider to enhance the effectiveness and experience of the existing Advisory Groups (AGs):

1) Improve Induction and Training

- Develop a comprehensive induction program that clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for AG members.
- Include training sessions on council processes, governance, and effective communication strategies to empower members to contribute meaningfully.
- This could include the use of online tutorials to allow for members to undertake training outside the meeting environment.

2) Establish a Robust Feedback Loop

- Create a structured process for providing feedback to AG members about how their input is used in council decisions.
- Provide regular updates and reports on the impact of AG advice to help members understand the value of their work.

3) Enhance Meeting Facilitation

- Provide training for chairs and deputy chairs and facilitators to ensure effective meeting management, focusing on maintaining agenda focus and encouraging balanced participation.
- Consider sharing leadership roles (eg when workshopping) to bring diverse perspectives to meeting facilitation.

4) **Optimize Meeting Structure and Frequency**

- Evaluate the current meeting schedule and structure to determine if changes could enhance engagement and productivity.
- Consider more frequent meetings or additional workshops for specific topics to maintain momentum and focus.
- Consider three year term

5) **Foster Inclusivity and Diverse Representation**

- Consider a more targeted recruitment approach to ensure AG better represent the diverse demographics and perspectives of the community.
- Encourage participation from underrepresented groups and provide support to help them engage effectively.
- Consider including sector service provider groups in the AGs (noting that this should not lead to domination of the AG by the service providers).

6) **Address Compensation and Recognition**

- Review compensation policies to ensure they fairly reflect the time, effort, and value that AG members bring.
- Recognize members' contributions through formal acknowledgment from Council.

7) **Improve Communication and Integration with Council**

- Facilitate regular joint discussions sessions or feedback meetings between AGs and council members to build understanding and collaboration.

8) **Develop Clear Strategic Plans for AGs**

- Support AGs to develop strategic plans that align with council priorities and outline clear goals and objectives.
- Provide support for AGs to track progress, evaluate their impact and report to Council regularly.

Officer Feedback

Interviews were conducted with 12 Council officers including representatives from the Community Development, Engagement, Communications, Transport, Infrastructure, Events and Landscape Design teams.

In general interviews were around an hour each using a structured conversation approach which allowed for the subject to introduce their own perspectives.

Commentary from Officers has been analysed and what follows are the key themes:

1. Purpose and Functionality of AGs

Role Ambiguity: AGs are intended to provide feedback and advice on council strategies, plans, and policies, offering perspectives from lived experiences. However, there is ambiguity about how well they adhere to the purpose as set out in the Terms of Reference. Some officers view them as more of a feedback mechanism than a more formal advisory body.

Need for Defined Scope: The lack of a clear, strategic vision and scope for AGs is highlighted, suggesting a need for more structured objectives to guide their activities and ensure they align with council goals.

2. Engagement and Representation

Representation Concerns: There was a recurring concern about whether AGs adequately represent the communities they are meant to serve, with discussions on whether they adequately capture diverse voices, especially the more marginalised sectors.

Improving Diversity: Suggestions included enhancing the recruitment process to be more structured and representative, ensuring diverse community input, and potentially merging groups to provide more cohesive input on broader issues.

3. Value and Effectiveness

Mixed Perceptions of Value: While AGs are acknowledged for providing valuable perspectives, particularly in specialized areas like accessibility and youth engagement, there are mixed opinions about their overall effectiveness. Some see them as influential, while others view their impact as limited.

Influence on Council Decisions: The feedback emphasized the need for a better understanding of how AG input is integrated into council decisions, with calls for improved mechanisms to measure and communicate the AGs' contributions.

4. Challenges and Limitations

Purpose Ambiguity: A key challenge identified by officers was the perceived ambiguity of purpose, and the need for more strategic planning to guide their work.

Administrative Burden: There was significant feedback on the administrative challenges faced by staff in managing AGs, including the time and resources required. This was perceived as being compounded by limited budgets, which restrict the implementation of AG recommendations.

Internal Group Challenges: Issues such as lack of continuity, leadership weaknesses, and the need for strategic planning within AGs were highlighted as barriers to their effectiveness.

5. Communication and Feedback

Better Feedback Processes: All acknowledged the importance of closing the feedback loop, ensuring AG members are informed about the impact of their input on council decisions. This included managing expectations regarding the level of influence held by the AGs and providing regular updates on the progress of projects that the AG has engaged on.

Transparency and Communication: There is a call for more transparent communication with AGs about how their advice is utilized, which could help enhance their perceived value and effectiveness.

6. Potential for Improvement

Suggestions for improving the AG model included:

- Restructuring the groups for better representation,
- Clearer definition of roles,
- Transparency about the level of influence,
- Possible merging some groups for more cohesive input on broader issues like accessibility
- Creating a more focused and strategic approach to AG activities.

7. Alternative Models and Ideas

Public Forums or Workshops: Alternative and/or additional methods of collecting community input were discussed and mainly covered broader public forums or workshops that engage a wider audience and provide more actionable feedback.

Elected Member Feedback

Interviews were conducted face to face, over Teams and on the phone with six of the 14 elected members (3 of whom are not currently Liaison Members of an AG, including the Mayor).

Interviews were around an hour each using a structured conversation approach which allowed for the subject to introduce their own perspectives.

Commentary from Elected Members has been analysed and what follows are the key themes:

1) Role and Responsibilities

Elected Members generally consider they are liaisons between AGs and the council, tasked with listening, providing guidance, and ensuring that AG feedback is communicated back to the council.

There were varying views on the effectiveness of officer roles with some frustration expressed around risk aversion and the slowness of implementation of recommendations from AGs. Elected Members tended to see officers as being responsible for facilitation of discussions.

Some Elected Members feel undervalued or unclear about their roles, particularly when they perceive overlap with staff responsibilities eg around facilitating discussions or reporting back to Council. There was an appetite for Elected Members to be more involved in setting the agenda and facilitation of meetings.

There have been instances of Elected Members facing a dilemma when the views of the AG they represent differ from their personal views.

2) Effectiveness of the AG Model

Ratings for the effectiveness of the AG model vary, with feedback suggesting moderate effectiveness. There was a general consensus that improvements are needed.

Key areas suggested for improvement include better feedback loops, ensuring AG input is acted upon, and better integration of AG feedback into council decision-making processes. Additional areas of improvement suggested included more extensive training and induction for Elected Members (and other Advisory Group members).

There was also a suggestion that AG input should be required to be included in reports to Council, where appropriate. This would elevate the profile of the work of the AGs.

There was some discussion about the fact that each of three groups has a different characteristic and perhaps the one model might not fit well with each.

3) Value of AGs

Despite challenges, Elected Members recognise the value of AGs in providing community insights and helping to shape council policies according to diverse perspectives.

4) Challenges and Barriers

Several Elected Members note issues with the existing structure, such as unclear role definitions, inadequate induction processes, and the need for better collaboration between Elected Members, officers, and AG members.

There is a perception that the feedback from AGs is not always considered or integrated into council actions, leading to frustration among AG members.

Some feedback suggested that broader training on the importance of engagement with communities (rural and urban) and how to do this, could be helpful.

In some instances AG members have gone directly to the Mayor to assist with resolving an issue. This would suggest that the current conflict resolution (Chair, officer and liaison Elected Member) methods are not necessarily working well.

There was some feedback that meetings might be too frequent with a suggestion that once every two months with additional informal activities and engagement in between meetings might be more effective.

Many AGs experience significant churn in membership which the Elected Members felt could be affecting the performance of the AG body. This could perhaps be linked to the shorter term (two years) that is not connected to the electoral cycle and the absence of a well-managed work programme.

5) Compensation and Recognition

There is a feeling that AG members are not fairly compensated for their contributions, which could affect engagement and retention. AG members are paid significantly less than the Te Karearea Committee members (noting that most councils reported treating their Maori liaison bodies differently from Advisory Groups).

6) Suggestions for Improvement

Elected Members suggest that the council should consider the following actions:

- Give more weight and recognition to AG reports. Establish robust systems to ensure AG feedback is acknowledged, considered, and communicated back effectively to both AG members and the council.
- Consider changes to meeting frequency and format to enhance engagement.
- Consider merging certain AGs
- Ensure member representation is broad and diverse to better capture community needs
- Consider more extensive induction training for Elected Members in community engagement and in the role of the Liaison Member and AGs
- Consider providing training for Chairs and Deputy Chairs
- Consider whether there are additional AGs that might be needed eg Rural and Business
- Provide opportunities for AG members to host events for their communities
- Encourage closer collaboration between Elected Members, Council, officers, and AG members through joint initiatives and regular communication channels.
- Clarify role and responsibilities of Elected Members through reviewing the Terms of Reference description of Elected Member roles within AGs to ensure all parties understand their responsibilities and contributions.
- Evaluate the compensation and recognition methods for AG members to ensure fairness and encourage active participation.

Senior Leadership Team Feedback

In principle the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) expressed support (at the workshop on 21 January and 25 February) for the continued place of the Advisory Groups in Council's structure with some adjustments to improve productivity, focus and relevance.

Purpose (in order of priority):

SLT felt that there needed to be clear purpose and suggested that the various functions should be prioritised as follows:

1. Strategic input to Council on identified priorities (this is the lead function)
2. Strategic/operational focus input to Officers on identified priorities
3. User experience testing on identified priorities
4. Building community networks
5. Encouraging democratic involvement
6. Developing civics knowledge and understanding of Council

SLT were keen to see AGs being able to focus more on projects that were identified priorities for Council, giving more depth on these rather than being spread widely across multiple projects in an ad hoc way.

Elected Members role:

This needs clarity. SLT feel the Elected member role could perhaps deliver more value providing Council insight into the group.

They suggested that the function of reporting back to Council was not necessarily appropriate as it opened up the possibility of conflicts between Elected Members own personal views, the views of Council and the views of the AG. They suggested that this might be better addressed through AG members presenting to Council directly or including feedback in officer reports, clearly identified as AG feedback.

There was support for the model of having one member per group with an alternate to ensure that Council was always represented on each AG.

There was also recognition of a possible need for additional training for Elected Members on AGs to reflect the specificities of the role.

Structural Feedback Mechanisms

SLT agreed that the process for providing feedback to the AGs needs to be strengthened and should include more direct contact between Council and the AGs.

They agreed this may include some form of regular Collaborative Forum (all AG members and Council).

Representation

SLT support consideration of the idea of some membership seats being set aside for representatives of groups operating in the sector – to bring a broader professional view in line with Council's strategic priorities.

SLT supported the idea of a three year term agreeing that it may assist with strategic alignment.

Accountability

SLT felt it was important that there were performance measures in place to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the AGs on a regular basis. Ideas included:

- Presenting feedback directly to Council on priority topics
- Reporting in writing mid-term and at term end on structured work programme
- Collaborative Forum – each group reports on progress against work programme

Organisational Uptake

SLT supports the AGs being used by a wider range of Council departments eg Comms Strategy and other non-infrastructure areas. However, they felt it was important consideration was given to managing the expectations and understanding of what Council has agency over so that the input is focused and usable.

They also encouraged seeking opportunities to collaborate across AGs when a topic spans all areas to bring more efficiency.

Recognition

SLT noted the importance of AGs receiving appropriate recognition for their work. They felt the following measures may help with this:

- Undertake a formal review of remuneration and expenses to more adequately reflect the value expected and received.
- Formalise the feedback process
- Consider including AG input in officer reports to Council when appropriate to demonstrate the value.
- Encourage AG members to present directly to Council on priority topics

Resourcing

SLT acknowledged that the changes being suggested could increase the resourcing needed to operate the AGs. However, they were felt that some of the resourcing challenges could be addressed through better utilisation of existing resourcing eg:

- Democracy Services to support the meeting administration through training and possible involvement.
- Strategy and Infrastructure to support the development of a structured work programme
- Improved training for AG Members, EM Members and Chairs
- The Community Development Manager was encouraged to discuss 'doability' with Departmental Managers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive review of the Whangarei District Council's Advisory Group model highlights several key areas for improvement and enhancement. The analysis of feedback from various stakeholders, including Advisory Group members, elected officials, and council officers, as well as insights from other councils and international examples, underscores the need for a more structured, strategic, and integrated approach to sector engagement.

The review reveals that while the current Advisory Group model is valued for its potential to provide diverse community insights to inform council decisions, challenges such as role ambiguity, inadequate feedback mechanisms, and resource constraints have hindered its effectiveness.

To address these issues, the report recommends retaining the formal structure with enhancements (including aligning the AG member term with the electoral cycle being three years), including the establishment of a collaborative forum for regular engagement with the full Council, clearer role definitions, and a more strategic focus aligned with Council priorities.

Key recommendations also emphasize the importance of improving induction and training processes, developing a structured work programme for each Advisory Group, enhancing feedback loops, and ensuring adequate resources and recognition for members' contributions.

This report also notes that there may be resourcing implications in implementing the recommendations and that departmental managers should be consulted about the impacts on their departments before confirming the final recommended actions.

By implementing these changes, Whangarei District Council will strengthen and focus the Advisory Groups, fostering more meaningful engagement and ensuring that diverse voices are effectively reflected in Council's decision-making processes. This approach will support Council's broader goals of building a "vibrant, attractive and thriving" District for all the people who live here.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Council Survey Results

<p>Do you use a formal structure for sector group input into council decision making?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 councils use a formal structure • 1 used a system of less formal forums that focus more on LTP issues but also address non-LTP issues, through less formal meetings in cafes and online. • 1 council reported that while it did not have formal structures, it did have specific community advisors who look after portfolios eg disability, youth etc and who design specific engagement activities for each project, as appropriate. • Several councils referred to having specific Maori groups and treated them as different from other sector groups.
<p>If not, how do you obtain input from sector groups eg disability, youth, aging?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of options were used including” • Public/community meetings • Submissions • Reaching out to specific interest groups • A Citizen’s Panel (can tend towards the older community members) • Deputations and presentations to Council meetings • Reaching out through councillor portfolio holders • Reaching out through community boards • Specific engagement activities • Public notices • Posters • Social Media • Radio • Emails • Peoples Panel • Customer Surveys • Antenna app • Ward updates • Direct engagement with community organisations • Portfolio facilitators / Community advisors / Partnerships Team / Community Connectors • Deliberative approach (esp for Spatial Planning)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching out through schools - detailed approach using partnership with local schools eg involving science departments and building a youth led programme of events, Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, service academy • Regional coalition (Vibrant Maniopoto) to bring all agencies together.
If yes, what are they called	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity Advisory Group • Road Safety Advisory Group • Safer Ashburton • Clutha District Youth Council • Freshwater and Forestry Advisory Groups • MSD, MBIE, Iwi, Business Chamber, Great South, Health Localities • Dark Sky • Water Zone Committee • Youth Council • Older People • Youth • People with Disabilities • Health Advisory • Cycleways/bridleways/walkways • Economic Development • Iwi • Youth • Access and Mobility • Older Adults • Priority Communities • Migrant Support Network • Disability • Rainbow • Youth • Pacific • Ethnic • Environmental Reference Group • City Centre • Rural • Small Business
When were they established?	10 years + 12 years + Community Plan groups < 20 years Advisory Groups <10 years 1 years

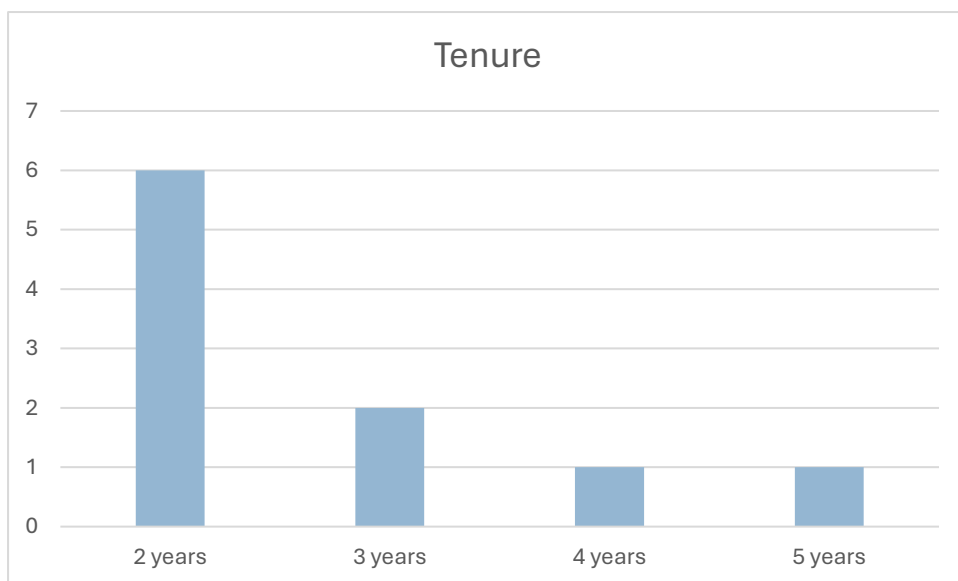
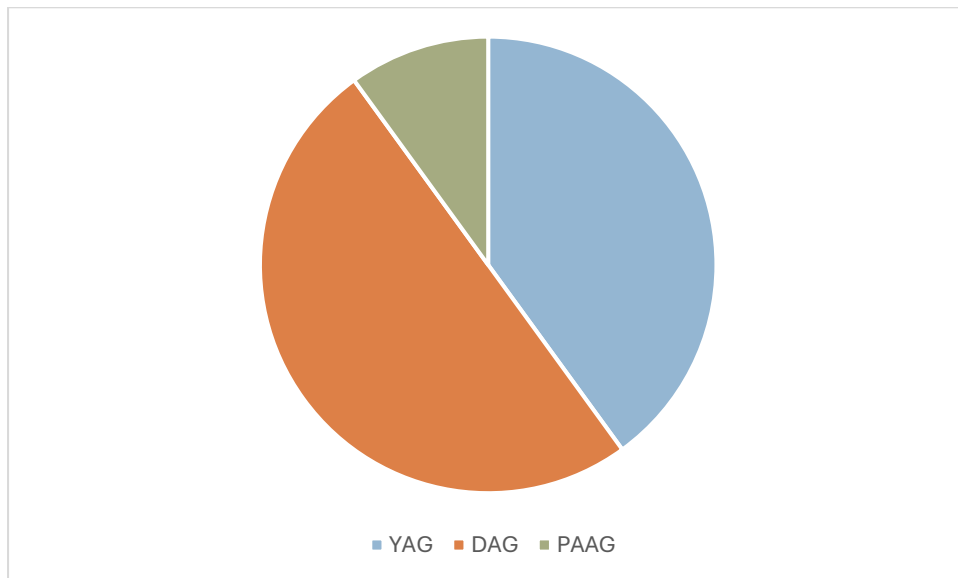
	<p>4 years</p> <p>Between 4 and 20 years</p> <p>Some newer, people based ones long term</p> <p>5 years or longer in some cases</p> <p>Some up to 9 years</p> <p>Most for over 10 years</p> <p>Rainbow one is in its first term</p> <p>Ethnic one is just starting up</p> <p>Auckland Council was required to establish Advisory Group for Pacifica in legislation that established Auckland Council</p>
Number of members in each group	<p>5-10 – (2)</p> <p>10-15 – (6)</p> <p>15-20 – (2)</p> <p>20+ - (1)</p> <p>Some answers gave several options, some did not respond.</p>
Meeting frequency	<p>Fortnightly – (1)</p> <p>Monthly- (6)</p> <p>6 weekly – (2)</p> <p>Quarterly – (4)</p> <p>6 monthly – (1)</p> <p>Twice a year – (1)</p> <p>As required – (3)</p> <p>Answers depended on the nature of the group.</p>
Are Elected Members involved?	<p>Yes – (7)</p> <p>No – (1)</p> <p>Sometimes – (2)</p> <p>Can attend but not formally involved – (1)</p>
Has the model been reviewed in the last 5 years?	<p>Yes – (12)</p> <p>No – (18)</p>
If yes, what were the key issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal contacts worked better than formal groups • Keeping the groups inspired • Refreshing membership • Model varies with a new council – this term it is a very small structure • Efficiencies • It is important to align the groups with the issues • Can be difficult to get participation that broadly reflects the population • Communication is the key – need simplified language • Face to face meetings work best

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenty of notice of the topic under discussion • Underrepresentation • Better opportunities to go to our community and build a better bridge between council and the community • How to ensure a consistent approach to all communities (2) • Changes in wards and numbers of councillors • Lack of up to date data • Lack of training for community advisors • Community (youth) didn't like the formal structure but were keen to be involved. Arose from a careers day when teachers were surprised by how much councils do. Now have science departments working water teams and partnering with the local pool and other community groups for events. • Looking for lower cost initiatives • Lack of clarity on the purpose for advisory groups • Inconsistent engagement from the organisation • Limited and siloed resourcing • In a review currently (Kapiti Coast DC)
Is there a review planned in the next 3 years?	<p>Yes – (8)</p> <p>No – (7)</p> <p>Ongoing/current review – (3)</p>

Appendix 2 – Former Members Survey Results

Advisory Group Member Survey

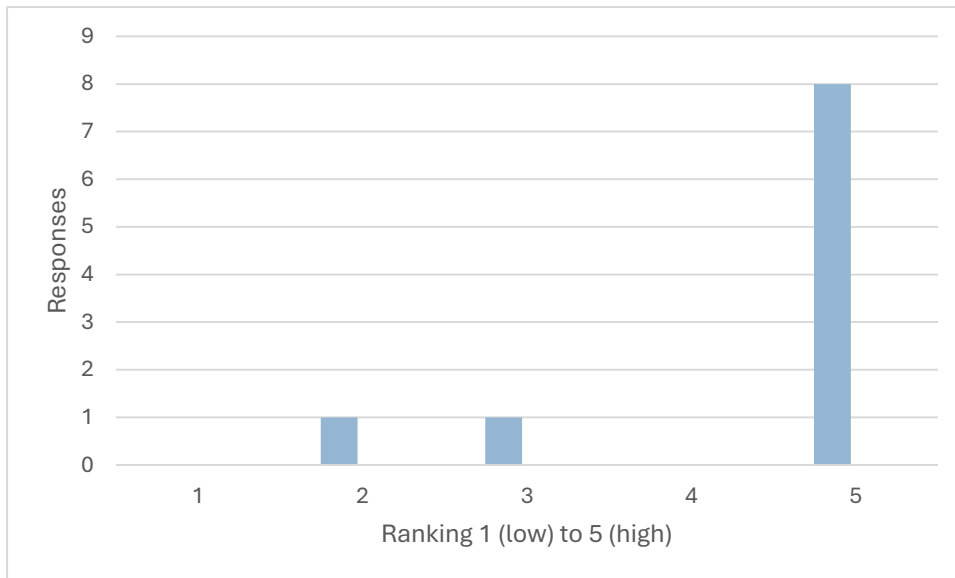
Former Members



Reasons for leaving:

- Moved away (4)
- Some other reason (1)
- Didn't believe it was worth it (1)
- Didn't enjoy (1)
- Moved away to uni (3)
- Term Ended (2)

Question: How well do you understand the purpose of the Advisory Group you were involved with?



NB: Comments indicated clear understanding but some suggest a lack of faith in the delivery.

Expanding comments included:

- Concern about tokenism
- Challenges with language barrier
- Need for more leverage in council process
- Inconsistent attendance by Elected Members
- Lack of feedback on impact
- Wanting the Advisory Group to have more impact with central government.

Question: Please describe what you understand to be the role of the Elected Member appointee to the Advisory Group.

Responses included:

- To be a link to Council (providing feedback from council and taking the AG voice to chambers)
- To listen
- To advocate for the group
- To help with submissions
- To provide advice on how council works. Unclear on what the role is or even that there is an EM on an AG.

Question: Are there any improvements that could be made to the Elected Member role that you would suggest?

- Run a bylaws workshop (DAG)
- Show respect for the group by turning up and being engaged
- Helping the AG to understand the role of CG
- Actually listening and providing feedback and advice.

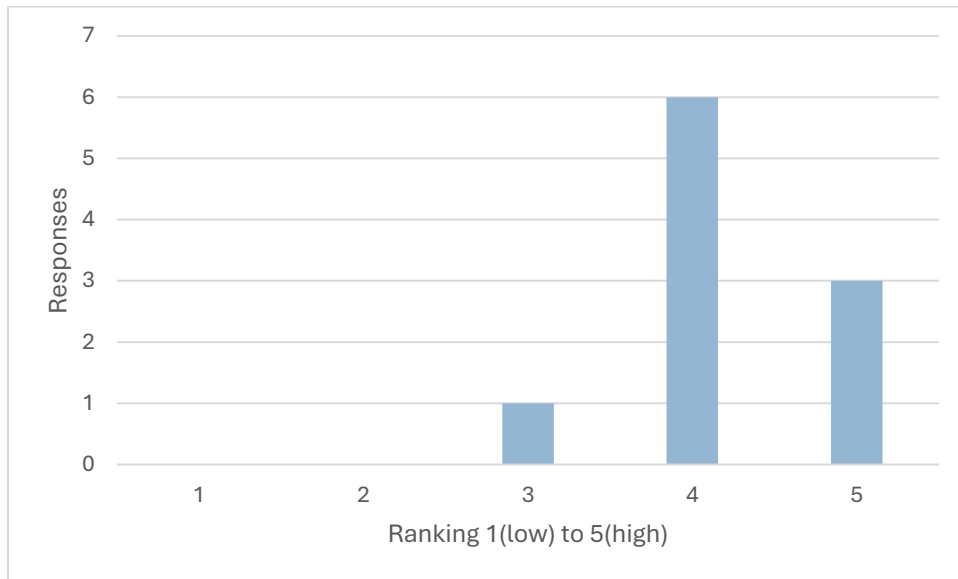
Question: Please describe what you understand to be the role of the Council officer to the Advisory Group.

- Don't know
- Taking feedback to Council and report back
- Be a record keeper
- Support the Chair
- Support the meeting (agendas, minutes and actions)
- Keep the group updated
- Be ignored by Council

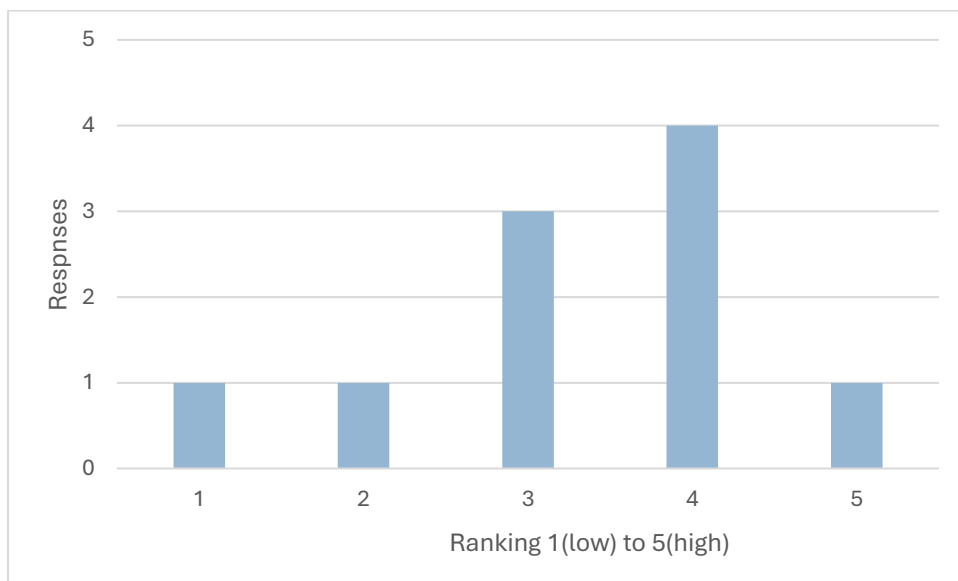
Question: Are there any improvements that could be made to the Council officer role that you would suggest?

- Provide advice
- Pay rise would help
- More practical support for members to enable full participation and preparation for meetings and support with actions.

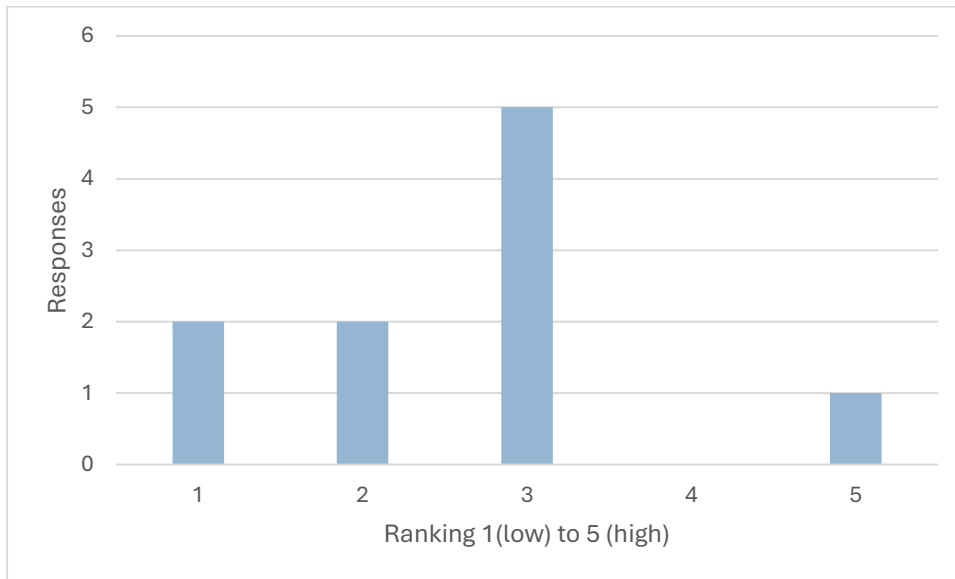
Question: How well do you believe the Advisory Group you were involved with was run?



Question: Do you think the Advisory Group you were involved with met its priorities?



Question: How much value do you believe the Advisory Group you were involved with delivered to Council?



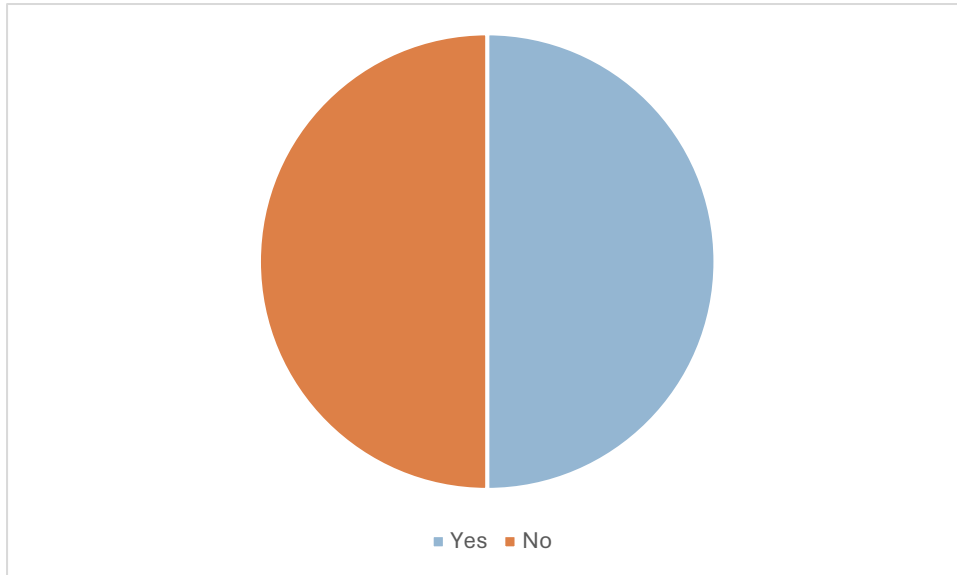
Question: Please provide reasons for your response.

- Gave Council insight into youth priorities
- Didn't feel like we made much impact
- Needed more effort from members
- Very little interaction from Council
- Felt tokenistic - weren't advised of things in time to make a difference
- Didn't seem like there was any integration
- The group was actively trying to make seniors lives better
- We did promote some changes especially around universal design
- Nothing materially changed or was acknowledged
- Some group members didn't understand the purpose - just brought personal gripes and wasted a lot of time.

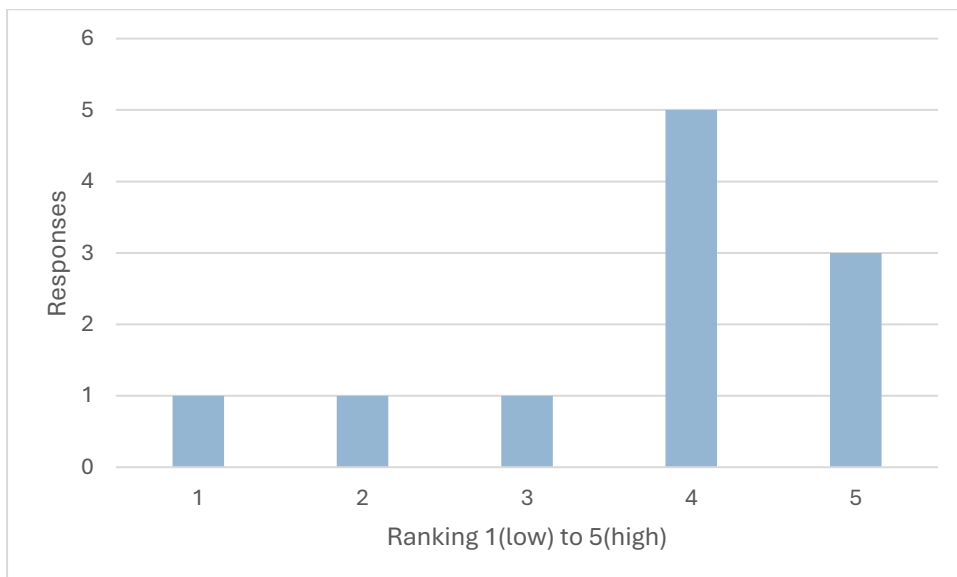
Question: Can you think of any changes that might help the Advisory Group you were involved with to deliver more value to Council?

- Can't think what
- Institutional issue that needs the input from planners and sociologists
- Better communications between advisory groups and council
- Clear definitions of expectations and good follow-up
- More cash from central government and powers over non-compliance to disability access in the private sector
- Council to be more prescriptive about what it wants and what will be done with the information provided
- Having more impact.

Question: Did you get information in enough time to be able to make a meaningful contribution?



Question: What value did you personally get from being involved with the Advisory Group?



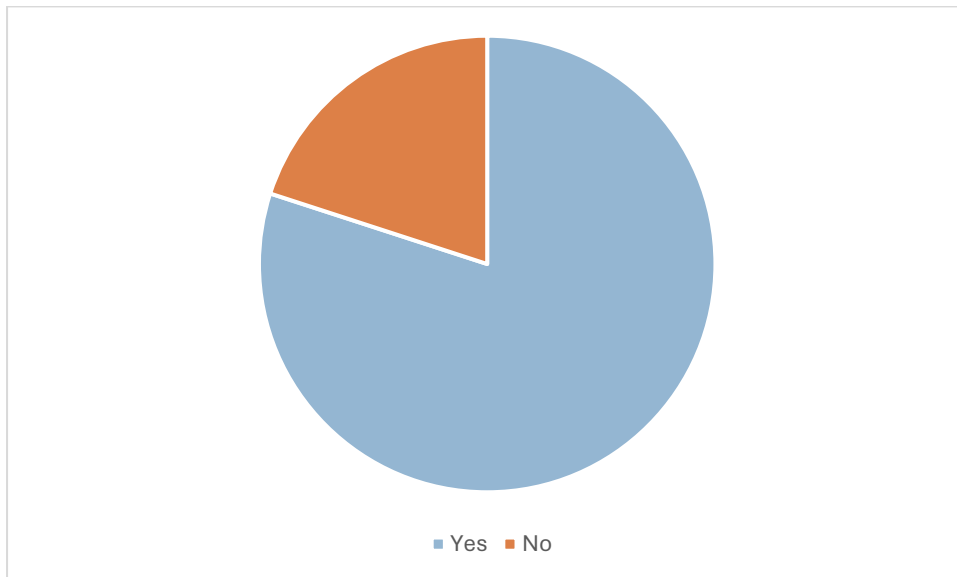
Please describe what that value was.

- Leadership and the feeling of being involved and maybe even just slightly being able to change little by little
- By joining the YAG I gained insight into how things are run in the council and felt like I had a chance to raise my concerns to be heard
- Experience of running meetings, meeting councillors, grew an understanding of civics
- How members of the public can take initiative and interact with Council to change things in their region
- Found it valuable to make relationships with Council staff and group members
- Enjoyed learning about projects and speaking up regardless of if that feedback went anywhere
- Potential (but not actual) ability to influence change
- 1st year I felt valued but 2nd year that dissipated and I felt disillusioned
- Always felt valued by the staff member
- Always felt valued by the group
- Excellent
- Learned a lot about how Council works and was able to help some 100 people to have input and make submissions
- Realised central government has choked the life out of councils financially/ LTPs lock out disabled people by pushing back projects for disabled.

Question: Can you think of any changes that might have helped you get more value from your involvement with the Advisory Group?

- The group wasn't the problem but an institutional/systemic look into processes and values would be wise
- Better consultation between the DAG and council
- Each member must represent their sector group and not just their own ideas
- Money from central government
- More structure, detail and tangible outcomes
- Seek more qualified members and pay them according to their experience and knowledge
- The remuneration is less than minimum wage. People with disabilities already face wage discrimination
- Chairs have been awesome - props to them.

Question: Did being part of the Advisory Group change your understanding of how Council worked?

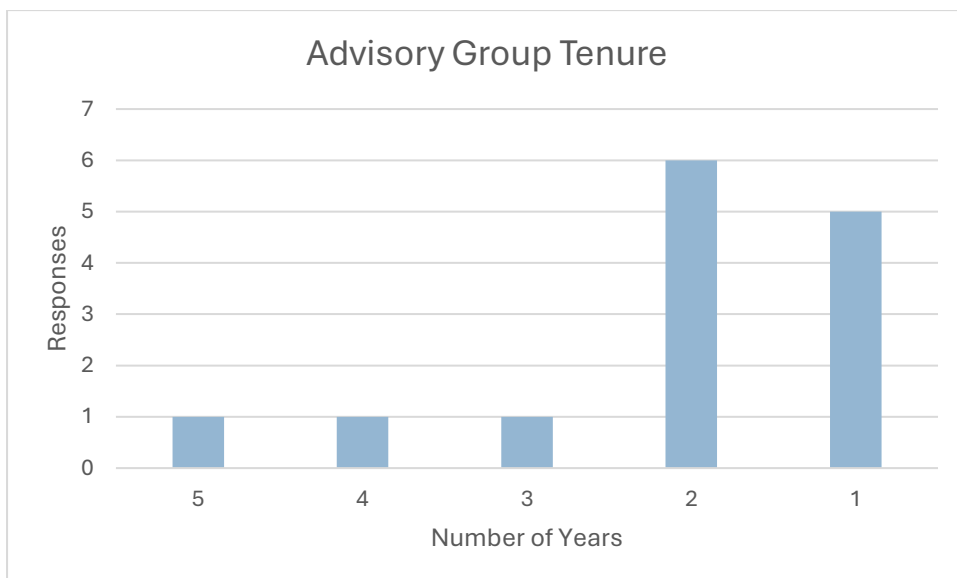
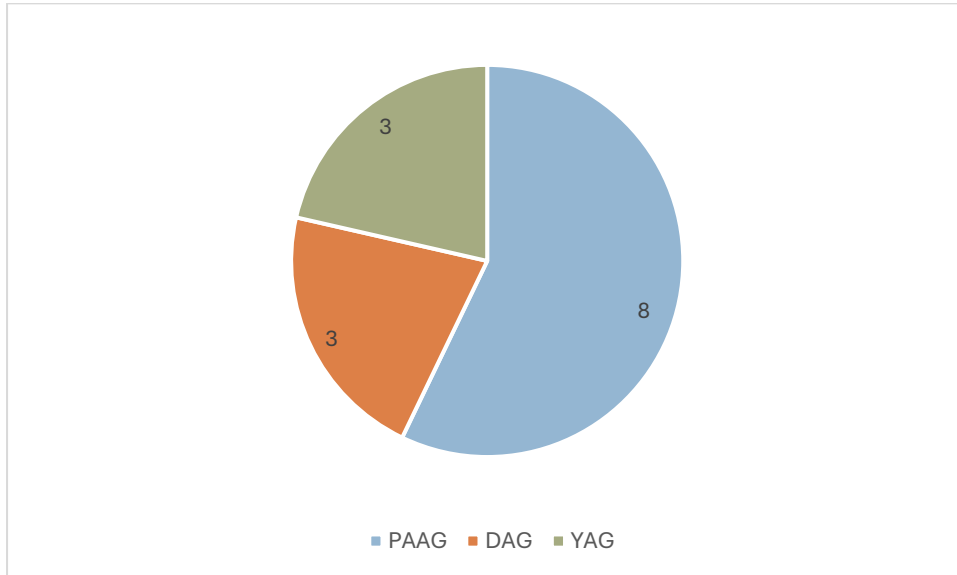


If yes, what changed for you?

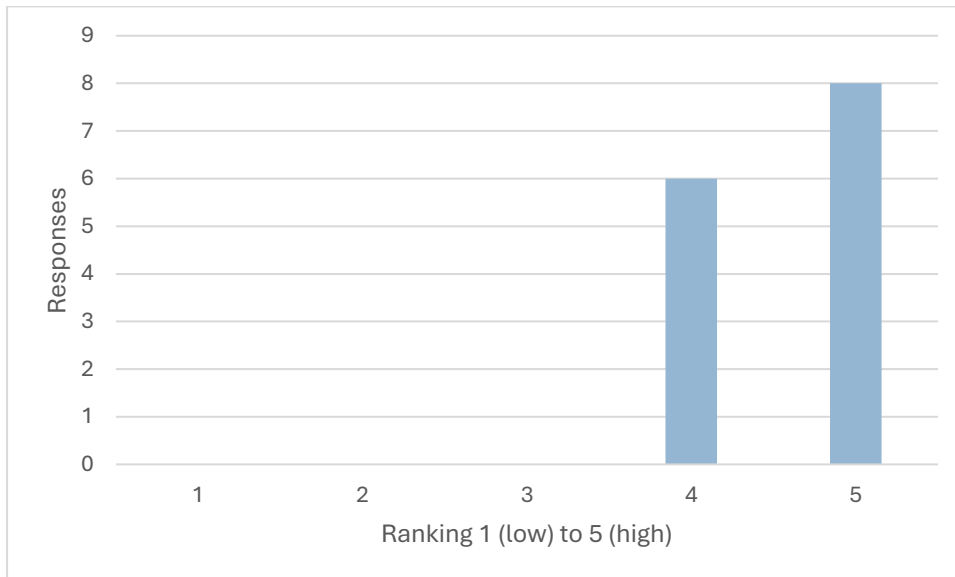
- They have a lot going on and it's a much bigger organisation than I expected
- Too much red tape - not listening to the disabled community
- Having a clear idea of how to make submissions; I'm still encouraging others to take an active part in Council
- Complex system, vague links and limited action
- Listening to people working in Council helped me to see that everyone really is just trying their best
- I still believe there is potential for more to happen in a shorter time
- Just grew understanding - very bureaucratic though
- How public priorities influence the work of Council.

Appendix 3 – Advisory Group Member Survey - Current Members Survey Results

Respondents



Question: How well do you understand the purpose of the Advisory Group you are involved with?



Question: Please describe what you understand that purpose to be.

- Represent and advise Council on relevant issues of older people in our community
- Understand the needs of older people and advocate for and represent them
- Providing council with advice regarding policies, plans, strategies, projects etc to assist them when making decisions and to advise Council on matters of concern or interest to the communities we represent
- To be a voice of the community and advise on specific topics
- To review Council's activities and what impact they may have
- Give Council guidance around what they are doing and how it impacts the disabled community
- Gather, discuss and advise the Council and provide feedback to the community
- Provide a voice for youth regarding issues in the community
- To offer a youth perspective.

Question: Can you think of any changes that you would like to see in the purpose of the Advisory Group you are involved with?

- It is fit for purpose.
- No (7 respondents)
- Although there are crossovers with DAG I think it's important we remain focussed on the elderly

- The Advisory Groups should be taken more seriously and given more credit
- Improved feedback from council (5 respondents mentioned this)
- Would like feedback on the quality of the group and what's helpful or even if they considered our input
- Set up a Facebook community so we can get educated on what Council covers and what aren't Council owned or responsibility
- Talk to more councillors and have more direct conversations.

Question: Please describe what you understand to be the role of the Elected Member appointee to the Advisory Group.

- To understand the needs of our older community, advocate and empower through representation (3)
- To be a conduit between the Advisory Group and Council (5 respondents)
- Providing relevant information to the Advisory Group arising from Council meetings and in turn to be the spokesperson for the group
- To provide input on our behalf
- Engaging with other councillors to attempt to resolve matters of concern raised at Advisory Group
- To help co-ordinate the group correspondence between members and the council documents for meetings
- To advise on council policy and requirements
- The EM is the only governance link the Advisory Group has
- To hear our advice straight from the horse's mouth
- So councillors are more connected to the communities
- To sort out misunderstandings and get the facts
- To supervise and connect youth to council.

Question: Are there any improvements that could be made to the Elected Member role that you would suggest?

- Have a second Elected Member on the Advisory Group to ensure attendance (5 respondents)
- Have a member of the Advisory Group present to council on relevant topics
- Have subcommittees of the Advisory Groups to focus on specific areas and to attend council meetings when relevant
- They were really great and kept us connected
- Councillors have expressed frustration at the role and may find it overly time consuming. But it increases the groups effectiveness

- The Elected Member needs to do some fact finding to be sure whatever information they come up with is appropriate.
- Rotate through different Elected Members regularly.
- No change (2 respondents).

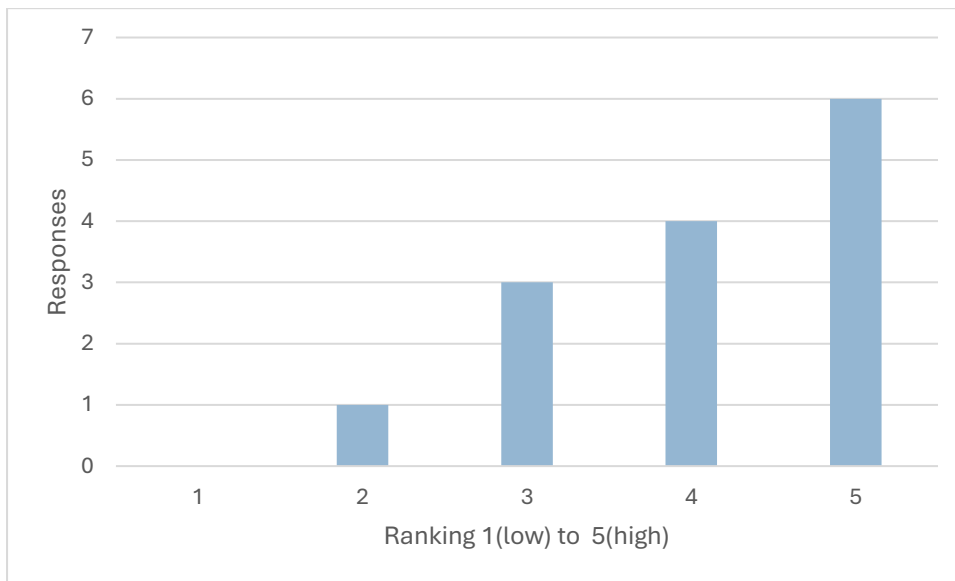
Question: Please describe what you understand to be the role of the Council officer to the Advisory Group.

- To facilitate meetings (2 respondents)
- Liaise between Advisory Groups and Council keeping both parties informed
- Representing Advisory Groups at Council meetings (be our voice).
- Obtain information requested by Advisory Groups
- Try to attend all Advisory Group meetings
- Liaise with other council staff for areas of expertise
- To bring to Advisory Group attention when Council needs input or submissions
- To co-ordinate Council staff or external organisations to present to us
- To provide background information when Advisory Groups views are requested
- To help bring the group together and assist when issues arise
- To provide feedback on outcomes from the advice provided
- Administration, communications, co-ordination and facilitation.

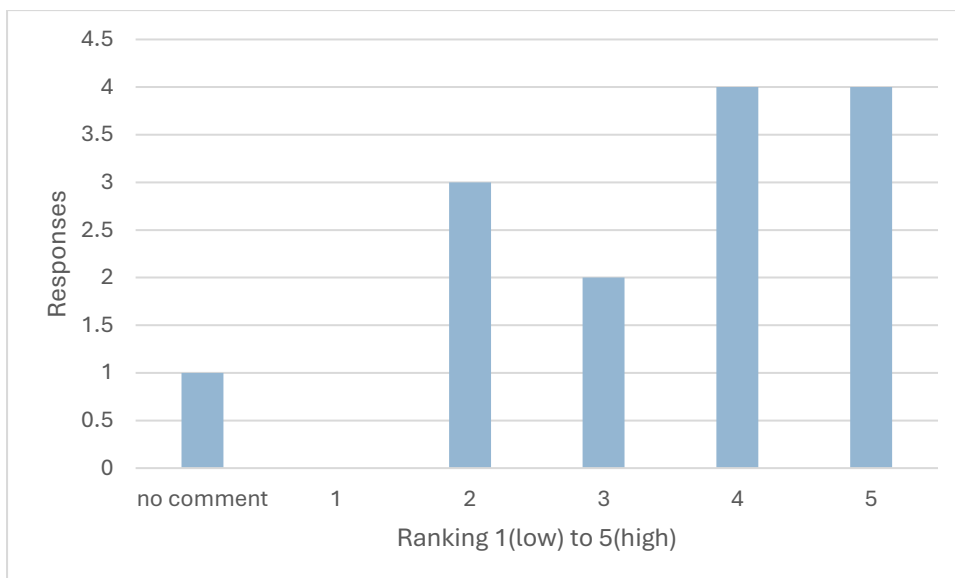
Question: Are there any improvements that could be made to the Council officer role that you would suggest?

- Regular attendance (3 respondents)
- Officer should be passionate about the constituency of the group and be able to be forceful and vocal when representing their Advisory Group at Council meetings
- Be part of the group
- Does a great job (4 respondents)
- Depends on what Council is using the Advisory Group for now and in the future
- Continue interactive feedback (2 respondents)
- Improve response speed with more clarity and detail
- Allow Advisory Group member only time.

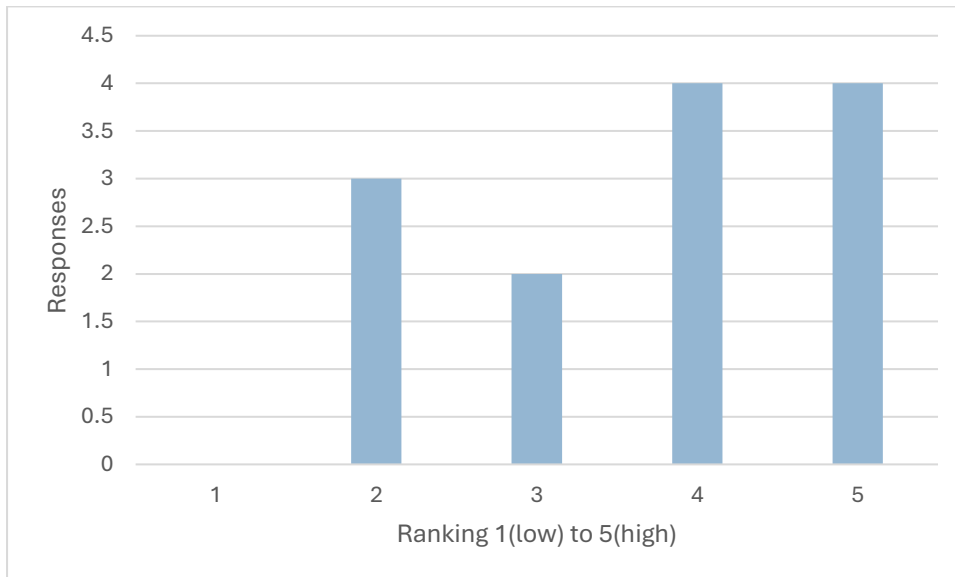
Question: How well do you believe the Advisory Group you are involved with is run?



Question: Do you think the Advisory Group you are involved with is meeting its priorities?



Question: How much value do you believe the Advisory Group you are involved with delivers to Council?



Question: Please provide reasons for why you think the Advisory Group you were involved with provides value to Council.

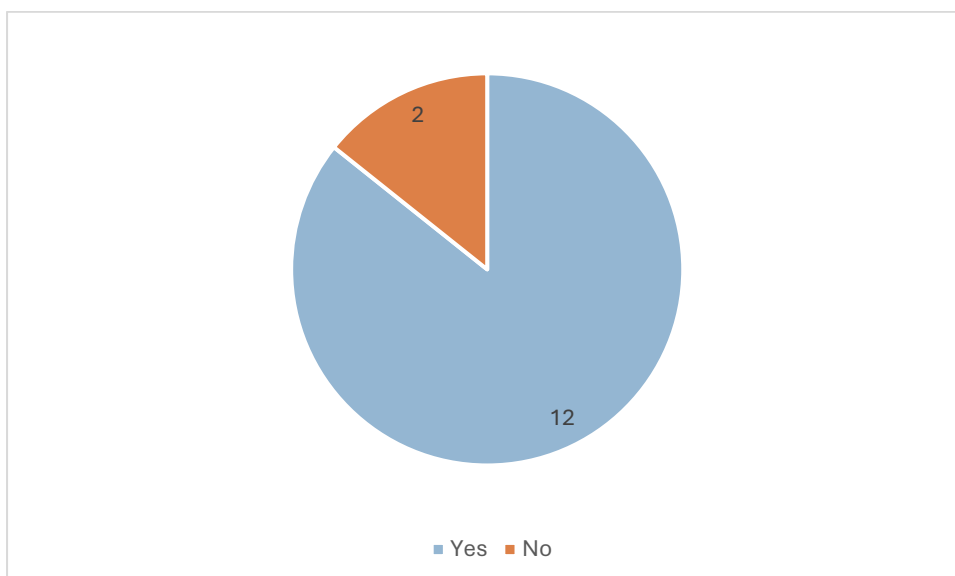
- Advisory Groups provide educated, informed and researched submissions; members are passionate and well-informed for their cohort (3 respondents)
- A great deal of work is done behind the scenes
- We hoped that our advice was noted (even when it can't be taken into account at that time) and is taken into account at a later stage
- I feel like we were heard and acknowledged
- We have consistently put forward ideas and submissions to ensure older people are not invisible
- We provided good community feedback and had projects that we took to Council for consideration
- Checking that footpaths and buildings are fit for purpose
- Hard to know your impact when you never hear anything more from a submission, meeting etc
- There were some significant changes that have improved the city and areas
- There were some events that have disability access sorted early on so no issues later
- Input into the LTP, consultations etc that showed some improved results
- We give a source of reference for council decisions
- Why should it left to older people to design a future that we are going to live in.

- It's very important that council always has youth feedback, should they choose to use it.

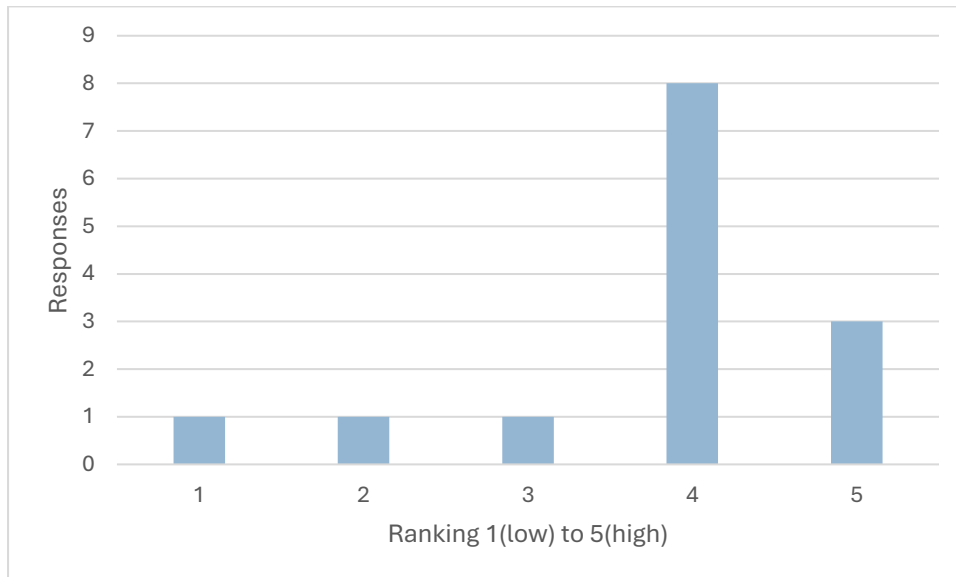
Question: Can you think of any changes that might help the Advisory Group you are involved with to deliver more value to Council?

- Provide evidence of Council considering our ideas as often we feel unheard (5 respondents)
- Having an Advisory Group representative seconded onto working committees that are relevant to us eg pensioner housing (2 respondents)
- Advisory Group subcommittees that appoint a representative to present to Council (committees) (2 respondents)
- No (2 respondents)
- Increase the term of members
- Give Advisory Groups more credit for the input they provide
- Better remuneration would improve attendance and likely attract higher calibre members
- Members to join Elected Members to do site visits
- Earlier inclusion in scoping and design discussions
- More opportunities to have input
- Presenting our ideas directly to Council.

Question: Do you get information in enough time to be able to make a meaningful contribution?



Question: What value do you personally get from being involved with the Advisory Group?



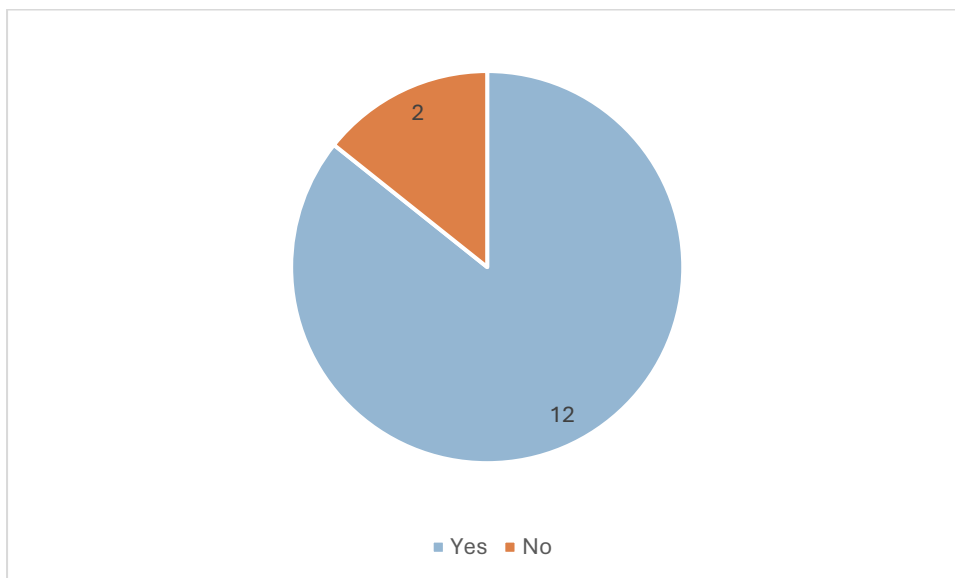
Question: Please describe what that value is.

- Enjoy the honour of being a voice for my peers
- Doing my part to make a change in Whangarei
- Contributing to improve outcomes for older people in our community, who often don't have a voice and are not heard (4 respondents)
- Contributing to improved outcomes with my knowledge and experience
- Learning how processes work in a council (2 respondents)
- Understanding and sharing the Council vision with people in the communities I represent
- Good to see the passion as we all try to 'drive home' the aged person's opinion to Council
- Enjoy delivering the Silver Festival information to everyone I know
- Good to understand how we can represent the community
- Meeting with like-minded people in the wider community (2 respondents)
- To live good and fulfilled lives the people that control council need to be aware of our needs
- Satisfaction when asked by the community that council is listening
- Wanted to give back
- Knowing what is going on; trying to reduce possible issues before they occur
- Get to be involved with meaningful decisions and see inside council operations (2 respondents).

Question: Can you think of any changes that might help you get more value from your involvement with the Advisory Group?

- Representation on council working groups and sub-committees (2 respondents)
- Evidence from council that our input is being heard (3 respondents)
- No (5 respondents)
- Get an ethnic view on the Advisory Groups; ethnic community is growing
- Getting Advisory Groups involved in projects earlier
- Council is often patronising to DAG members; don't appreciate the tone; many of us are high functioning members of the community
- Invitations to more site visits, to observe council and to organise events
- Providing notepads to write questions and comments on, some feel anxious about voicing their thoughts.

Question: Has being part of the Advisory Group changed your understanding of how Council worked?



Question: If yes, what has changed for you?

- It's a long and complicated process to get some issues resolved and over the line (3 respondents)
- More insight into the forward planning done
- I feel there should be an ethnic Advisory Group
- They do actually listen

- A lot; I know what areas of Council is responsible for and what is central government responsibility; and that we need to educate the community to redirect their complaints to the right people
- I didn't know much about it before and now I do.

Appendix 4 – International Examples

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (UK)

Equalities - Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is a large local authority in the UK, made up of several local councils that have come together in the combined structure for the more regionalised functions. It is widely regarded as one of the more progressive and influential local government structures both in the UK and with global influence.

GMCA has a number of advisory/sector groups that facilitate the connection between the council organisation and community sectors. In general, these panels are charged by GMCA to provide insight into their sector, to support key messages to those communities, to co-design policies, programmes and strategies and to support an asset based approach (ensuring the right assets and infrastructure are in place).

These are generally collected under the “Equalities” heading (although others exist eg Armed Forces Hub, Social Enterprise Action Group and a Digital Inclusion Taskforce) and include:

1. **Youth Combined Authority** – Made up of 29 members who represent the local council youth councils. They advise the Mayor and GMCA on key issues and concerns to young people and provide suggestions for solutions. They also “provide a critical voice and scrutinise the work of the Mayor and GMCA” and undertake specific pieces of work (eg a bus travel card for young people. Their work includes specific working groups on environment, health and curriculum for life.
2. **Disabled Peoples Panel** – Established to ensure that disabled peoples involvement in is better represented in all aspects of the running and planning for the future of the city region. Membership is made up of representatives from disabled peoples groups across the region. Members should reflect the skills, knowledge and experience of a diverse range of impairment specific groups.
3. **LGBTQ + Equality Panel** – Consisting of 12 members this group tackles inequality, injustice and discrimination. They advise the Mayor and GMCA of those challenges and potential solutions. They “hold to account political leaders” and support the GMCA to develop effective solutions.
4. **Race Equality Panel** - Works to promote racial equality, tackle racial discrimination and foster positive relationships between ethnically diverse communities, and embed the Public Sector Equality Duty in policies, processes, procedures, practices and people development. Membership is based on individual rather than sector group representation (although individual members

might also be members of sector groups). There is no indication of the number of members.

5. **Women and Girls Equity Panel** – Made up of 25030 members who can represent sector groups (including business and industry), be individuals, experts in a relevant topic, local government representatives and community leaders and activists. The panel purpose is to challenge and make recommendations to the GMCA on policies and initiatives, to build understanding of the key issues, advocate for the perspective of women and girls to be reflected in policy making, to draw in network of alliances and to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of GMCA activities on this group.
6. **Faith and Belief Advisory Panel** – Made up of representatives of 33 organisations that reflect all the boroughs and the city's diverse faiths and beliefs. It also intends to be inclusive and open to new networks. Its purpose is to optimise the faith and belief contribution to the Greater Manchester Strategy, to ensure the role of faith and belief in society is recognised and valued, to foster good relations and dialogue between people of faith and belief and with people who do not share any belief or faith, and to advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination.
7. **Older Peoples Equality Panel** – Purpose is to advise the Mayor and GMCA on key issues and concerns affecting older people and to help provide and influence solutions, providing a critical voice and scrutinising the work of the Mayor and GMCA and to undertake specific pieces of work focussing on particular issues or projects. Membership is currently at 19 but the intention is to ensure a member from every borough. No Terms of Reference are available for this Panel.

Summary of GMCA Equality Panels

Each panel appears to have a clear Terms of Reference which sets out its own specific purpose that aligns with the overarching GMCA statement of purpose for the groups. Each panel submits regular reports to GMCA that annual but can be more frequent if needed. The Terms of Reference (ToR) set out clearly what the expectations and accountability are and what level of support will be provided by GMCA. The ToRs also show evidence that each group fine-tunes its own ToR to reflect the purpose defined by the panel and the agreed panel expectations within their own group.

Support provided by GMCA includes travel expenses, fair notice of meetings and opportunities (and funding) to attend outside events. There is no mention of a per-meeting fee (which does not rule it out).

City of Portland Council, US

[Advisory Groups | Portland.gov](https://www.portland.gov/advisorygroups)

City of Portland is another council that is well-regarded for its inclusive and innovative approach to engaging with communities.

They have an extensive network of advisory bodies that cover a wide range of area of interest to the people of Portland. These include any City of Portland board, committee, or commission that advises City bureaus and special projects. They are considered to be an important tool for community members and City officers and elected members to work together on projects, providing insight on Portlanders' diverse needs and interests.

These bodies provide opportunities for City officials and communities to come together to hear appeals and concerns, provide expertise and advocate, develop and implement policy, review current practices, and plan future services.

City of Portland's advisory body network covers such things as:

- Budget making and investment guidance
- Community involvement
- Input from specific communities eg River communities and urban areas
- Specific infrastructure
- Development planning
- Equal opportunities
- Equitable mobility
- Fair housing
- Street design
- Gun violence intervention
- Local government transitions (eg from one term to the next)
- Special interest groups eg migrants, ethnic groups, youth
- New arrivals welcoming
- Noise management
- Transport, parking, freight, pedestrian safety, walking and cycle
- Climate adaptation investment
- Police oversight
- Clean energy
- Cannabis policy
- Golf
- Historic landmarks

The Advisory Bodies Program provides training and resources to advisory body members, ensuring advisory bodies follow their rules and bylaws, and handles

recruitment for open member positions. It appears that the positions are, in general, considered to be voluntary and unpaid.

Each Advisory Body operates under a specific bylaw. These can be changed on the recommendation of the Advisory Body but changes must be endorsed by the Bureau Director. The Advisory Body Bureau may also recommend changes to the Bureau Director. The Bureau Director must sign off on original bylaws and any amendments to the bylaws. Members have no authority to amend bylaws without approval.

Advisory Bodies can:

- Host public meetings,
- Provide policy advice and participate in the development of policies,
- Oversee grant applications,
- Advise staff on community engagement plans for specific projects and reviewing the community engagement manual,
- Manage specific leases and concessions, and p
- Provide general advice and lived experience input on relevant topics.

Summary of City of Portland Advisory Bodies programme

City of Portland's Advisory Bodies have a wide range of powers and activities that they are involved with, including to set their own rules (subject to approval by the Bureau Director). They also are involved in a very broad range of topics of interest to the council.

However, they do appear to be unpaid, although information on the website was inconsistent and at times not easy to find.

City of Melbourne, Australia

Committees and advisory groups | City of Melbourne

City of Melbourne hosts a number of key advisory bodies whose work facilitates development and implementation of “a range of programs and initiatives that contribute to the cultural, social and economic vitality of Melbourne”.

Key advisory committees, bodies and groups include the following:

Audit and Risk Committee – This is a mix of elected members and professional people with relevant expertise eg accountants. They meet five times each year to oversee the activities of council particularly its risk management and internal control processes in addition to the activities of the Council's external and internal auditors. The Committee provides independent advice to Council on:

- appropriate accounting
- auditing
- internal control
- business risk management
- compliance and reporting systems
- processes and practices.

They recommendations to the Council and its management on many issues and internal audits.

It should be noted that most council bodies will have some form of audit and risk committee. Of note for this one, is that the membership is evenly balanced between elected members and external members.

Invest Melbourne Advisory Board – This board was established to provide strategic advice to the City of Melbourne on the potential opportunities for growth of investment in the city and to offer feedback on proposed City of Melbourne initiatives that support investment in the city. The Board works with state and federal governments to enable and reinforce Melbourne as a key investment destination.

The board's purpose is to:

- Provide strategic advice and independent thinking to inform policy and productive investment in the municipality.
- Proactively advocate for Invest Melbourne to Australian and international business communities, as well as key government departments, industry associations and other prominent stakeholders.

- Provide critical understanding of business, market and industry trends while also providing insights and options for improving the delivery of strategic business development initiatives in Melbourne.
- Provide advice on ways to streamline business processes making it easier for the business community to operate in and with the city.

Members are all community members who have significant professional expertise that can inform their work.

Disability Advisory Committee – This Committee is a consultative forum that provides strategic advice on policy and practice issues to the administration and Council.

The Committee is charged with:

- Representing issues that impact on the life opportunities of people of all abilities
- Advising on ‘best practice’ in universal access planning and co-design engagement
- Participating in the development of Council’s Disability Action Plan

The Committee is made up of twelve community members. Of these, nine members will have direct personal experience of disability, including parents or carers of disabled children. Three members will be persons without disability from fields such as academia, disability rights, tourism and the business sector. These members should have a commitment to universal access and the rights of disabled people.

Members are paid \$300 per meeting and are appointed for a three year term by the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Committee.

First Nations Committee – Established in March 2024, the First Nations Committee
The First Nations Committee aims to:

- Provide guidance on initiatives to embed self-determination of First Nations peoples in the work of City of Melbourne.
- Reduce disadvantages and increase social justice opportunities for First Nations peoples and communities.
- Support the establishment of partnerships with relevant agencies to strengthen outcomes for First Nations community within the municipality.

The committee is co-chaired by a First Nations Elder alongside the Council’s Aboriginal Melbourne Portfolio Lead. Members include nine First Nations representatives with a broad range of skills, knowledge and lived experiences. The committee also includes two City of Melbourne elected members and the Director of Aboriginal Melbourne.

Members are appointed for a three year term and are paid \$300 per meeting.

City Collection Advisory Panel – This panel is made up of one councillor officer (in charge of Visitor experience) and two external industry professionals.

Design Excellence Advisory Committee and the Melbourne Design Review Panel – Both of these groups are involved with the delivery of the Design Excellence Programme. Each includes a mix of council elected members, technical experts and community members.

Homelessness Advisory Committee – This committee includes two elected members (as the Chair and Deputy Chair). The remaining eleven members bring a mix of lived experience, service sector experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, youth (18 to 25) and representatives from the health and homelessness sector. Members are appointed for a three year term and are paid \$200 per meeting.

Parks and Gardens Advisory Committee – There are twelve members of this committee but little further information about its structure or activities. Members look to be primarily external and would likely include some technical expertise.

Public Art Advisory Committee – This committee has four members who are all external and come from the public art sector.

Safe City Camera's Programme Audit Committee – This committee was established to:

- provide an independent review and checking mechanism for the camera program that ensures that it meets the requirements of its Protocols and Operating Procedures
- promote public confidence in the camera program by ensuring its operations are transparent to the public and under ongoing independent scrutiny and review
- recommend action that will safeguard the camera program against abuse.

The Committee provides a written audit report to Council on an annual basis evaluating the operations of the camera program and compliance with the Protocols and Operating Procedures. It appears that there are three members of the committee who are all external governance professionals.

Summary of City of Melbourne Advisory Bodies programme

City of Melbourne's use of Advisory Bodies appears to be more restricted to more operational matters that are directly related to delivery of services. However, they do appear to pay significantly more for members participation.

City of Sydney – Australia

Sydney has a range of Advisory Panels to facilitate input from key sector groups. They also use a Citizen Jury with a single focus on the development of the Sydney 2050 vision.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel - The primary role of this Panel is to inform the policies of the City of Sydney in relation to matters of importance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including;

- Advising Council on the development and implementation of the Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050, the City of Sydney's Reconciliation Action Plan and other relevant plans as they are adopted by Council;
- Promoting an increased knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and society in the wider community and representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the local area;
- Advising Council on programming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events;
- Providing input to policy development, planning and advice to Council across all areas where there is likely to be an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including economic development, Indigenous employment and Aboriginal business development;
- Actively promoting and facilitating reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples and Council;

This panel consists of up to 16 community members who have a three- year term. The Mayor and one other councillor are also members. There are 6 meetings per year. Members are paid \$300 per meeting.

Public Art Advisory Panel – This panel comprises seven professional artists, curators and architects who provide advice to the City of Sydney on matters relating to public art.

- Cultural and Creative Sector Advisory Panel – This panel provides strategic advice on making space for culture and focus on addressing the loss of creative employment floor space in Sydney. The Panel will help provide direction for the City's to cultural infrastructure programs including:
- Providing advice on the implementation of Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision and the City of Sydney Creative City Cultural Policy;
- Advising the City on the communication, consultation and collaboration with creative sector and property sector stakeholders;
- Providing strategic advice pertaining to the retention and development of new creative employment space in Sydney;
- Advising the City on its own creative infrastructure programs including defining optimal spatial needs and determining what is affordable;

- Providing input as to how we value the creative sector in relation to the property sector and how we embed creative space in the planning process; and
- Advocating on behalf of the cultural sector for increased visibility and strategic importance of creative employment lands and creative floorspace.

The Terms of Reference emphasize that the Panel's advice must be in alignment with the City's policies, strategies and operational plans.

There are 18 members and the Mayor and one councillor. Members are appointed for a 3 year term. Meetings are four times a year and members are paid \$300 for each meeting.

Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel - The panel provides strategic, expert and impartial advice to the Council on the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the City's policies, strategies and plans to advance the inclusion of people with a disability, including by.

- Providing input to policy development and review, planning and advice to Council across all areas relevant to people with disability;
- Providing input to enhance inclusion and accessibility of City's infrastructure, facilities, events, services, programs, systems and information for people with disability
- Advising the City on submissions the City may make relating to State and Federal Government policy and legislation; and
- Providing advice to Council on how to identify issues that are relevant to people with disability.

The Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel consists of a maximum of 12 members.

Members are appointed in an individual capacity and not as a representative or an organisation, advocacy body or stakeholder group. At least 50% of the Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel membership will be constituted by members who have a direct experience of disability whether personally or through a caring and support role.

Terms are up to three years and capped at two.

Business and Economic Development and Covid Recovery Advisory Panel - This panel provides strategic advice to the Council to ensure sustained recovery of the economy.

The advisory panel includes members from relevant professional fields who have demonstrated experience, seniority and knowledge of economic areas.

The panel also advocates to other government agencies, the private sector and relevant peak bodies on key priority economic issues.

The panel consists of up to 18 membership including:

- Up to eight senior (CEO or equivalent) representatives from the local business sector, including First Nations businesses and small business;
- Up to eight senior (CEO or equivalent) representatives from research, academic or peak body organisations with relevant knowledge and expertise
- Up to two State Agency representatives relevant to the economic development of Sydney;
- Two elected representatives, comprising the Mayor (or delegate) and one Councillor.
- Members may be individuals or appointed as a representative of an organisation, body or agency.

Terms are three years and capped at two.

Housing for All Working Group – The primary role of this working group is to bring together industry leaders and experts to share knowledge and provide strategic, expert advice and guidance to the Council on the development of agreed strategies and initiatives to increase the supply of affordable and diverse housing (including social housing) within the City of Sydney Local Government Area.

Membership consists of up to thirteen members including:

- Up to four representatives from the Community Housing Provider (CHP) sector (currently or previously) or housing peak bodies;
- Up to two community representatives who live in and/or access affordable and diverse housing;
- Up to two representatives from research (or similar) organisations and industry. Including those (currently or previously) with relevant knowledge and expertise on affordable and diverse housing issues, including culturally appropriate housing and universal housing design;
- Up to one representative from the not-for-profit or philanthropic sector.
- Up to two State Agency representatives relevant to affordable and diverse housing, including funding bodies.
- Two elected representatives, comprising the Mayor and one Councillor.

Terms are three years and capped at two.

Multicultural Advisory Panel - The primary role of this panel is to provide advice on policies and operations of Council in relation to matters of importance to culturally diverse communities, including:

Advising Council on the makeup of diverse cultural groups and populations living in the City of Sydney's Local Government Area and the needs and desires of people within those groups;

- Advising Council on the implementation of Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision and other relevant plans as they are adopted by Council, including supporting the communication, delivery and review of the City's community engagement plan and strategy;
- Promoting an increased knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures and society in the wider community and facilitating partnerships that nurture cultural diversity, capacity building, and increased community connections;
- Advising Council on appropriate methods of communication to diverse cultural groups and populations, including regarding City of Sydney strategies and policies, and of events and programs produced and delivered by the City of Sydney;
- Providing input to policy development, planning and advice to Council across all areas where there is likely to be an impact on multicultural communities, including multicultural businesses and economic development; and
- Advocating on behalf of culturally diverse communities, including strategies to combat racism and discrimination, and promoting greater understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism.

The Panel's advice must be in alignment with the City's policies, strategies and operational plans.

Membership consists of up to thirteen members including:

- Two NSW Government organisation representatives;
- Four multicultural organisation representatives;
- Two representatives (one each) of universities in the local government area;
- Three community members; and
- Two elected representatives, comprising the Mayor and one Councillor.

Terms are three years and capped at two.

Sydney Design Advisory Panel – This panel provides officers with high level independent expert advice and expertise on urban design, architecture, landscape architecture, heritage, art, and sustainability. The advice is to inform the assessment by Council officers of development applications with a view to promoting the delivery of high-quality urban design, architecture and sustainable and inclusive design in Sydney's buildings and public spaces. The advice is to inform the assessment process. It is not the purpose of the Advisory Panel to have a role in the process of determining development applications.

Panel members should be highly recognised in their profession and who:

- (a) have demonstrated experience and knowledge of urban design, architecture, landscape architecture, sustainable design and the arts;
- (b) possess the relevant skills and experience to provide judicious and independent expert advice.

Membership consist of at least three and not more than eleven permanent members.

Terms will be reviewed every three years following the engagement of members or re-engagement of existing permanent members.

Pacific Island Communities

Information about the more detailed governance structures of Pacific Island nations local governments is limited. However, these countries draw on their more traditional tribal/village and chiefship model with representatives from formal groups of chiefs having influence on local and indeed central government. Chiefs are strongly connected to their local communities which tend to be smaller. This local connection and high level of influence by local chiefs could arguably bring a stronger focus on local issues to political governance.

Appendix 5 - WDC Advisory Group Review - Issues Analysis

Issue	Other Councils	Elected Members	Officers	WDC Advisory Groups	Summary and Actions
Formal Structures	40% of responding councils used some form of permanent formal structure. It was noted that youth are less keen on the formal structure and prefer a more dynamic fluid approach eg community forums. Some councils had a mixed membership approach with some members being individuals and others being drawn from	Support with the suggestion of maybe combining some	Support with the suggestion of maybe combining some. Officers had some concerns about including representatives from support groups as in the past these have tended to dominate the groups.	Support – do not combine. Some AG members were supportive (if cautiously) of the inclusion of members from community groups, feeling they could add a richness to the feedback and advice that could be provided.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generally there is support for formal structures. 2. Consider the (careful) inclusion of members representing support groups.

	sector support groups.				
Appropriate Sectors	Wide range. Maori engagement not seen as part of this model.	Disability, Youth, Aging, Rural and Business	Accessibility (combined Disability and Aging) and Youth	No change to existing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There was general support for the existing sectors being represented 2. Consider the possible inclusion of rural and business (although these could be addressed by supporting more formally existing non-council groups)
Member numbers	10-15	Perhaps reduce?	No comment	No comment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No change recommended to existing numbers.
Elected Members involvement	60-70% replied yes – mostly in a formal capacity	Yes	No comment	Yes with more interaction between AG and Council	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retain elected member involvement but ensure each has an alternate to ensure attendance.
Meeting frequency	Most councils with AGs had them meeting monthly or quarterly.	Some Elected Members felt that monthly meetings were too frequent and that it might be better to look to a two-monthly meeting with	Officers were interested in the idea of less frequent meetings with specific engagement	AG members were generally happy with the frequency of meetings being monthly. There was some interest in the idea of less	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider less frequent meetings 2. Evaluate how to administer additional less formal engagements eg site visits and

		targeted activities/engagement in between meetings when needed.	activities as needed. They felt this could address some of the resourcing challenges. However it may bring forward other challenges in terms of how to pay for ad hoc activities.	frequency with more targeted activities in between meetings.	community meetings
Clear purpose	Was reported as a significant issue by some respondents. Overall the purpose was seen as providing input and insight into plans and policies through “candid, trusted advice”.	Purpose is clear but understanding of that purpose needs training	Lack of clear understanding whether AGs are to provide feedback or to provide formal advice. Structured objectives needed	Purpose is somewhat unclear with a distinct lack of confidence in the effectiveness. Some confusion over representation and bringing lived experience to inform policies and strategies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the existing Terms of Reference to ensure clarity about purpose 2. Identify opportunities for reporting back to council 3. Improve feedback loops to identify value provided by the groups.
Relationship to Council	Advisory Groups are seen as part of the governance structure at the	Valued for providing insights and helping to shape policies. Bringing diverse perspectives.	More structured objectives needed along with better integration into	Want more integration with council processes and clearer feedback loops.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set up regular engagement with whole of council for reporting back

	higher end and a key and enduring part of engagement at the lower end. Having a formally appointed elected member (with alternate) can be helpful.	Want advice from AGs to be more prominent and integrated more fully.	council decisions.	Feel the relationship should be more collaborative with council	
Level of representation	AG members are not expected to be 'representative' but are expected to provide advice through a lived experience lens.	Membership should be broad and cover diversity of views.	Officers felt that the AG composition should be able to capture the diverse voices.	AG members feel that they represent their communities even if they are not representative. AG composition has become skewed at times meaning the voice provided may not be adequately representing the wider voice.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement a skills/representation matrix to guide targeted recruitment. 2. Ensure new members understand their role as being the lived experience lens.
Feedback and response	Formal processes are built in to ensure feedback is passed back to the groups. It is seen as an	Elected members felt that there was a need to improve the feedback loops and ensuring AG advice is acted on. There was also a suggestion to	Officers felt that there was a need for more transparency about how the advice is used. This was seen as	An absence of formal reporting back mechanisms has lead to dissatisfaction and lower engagement levels. Members	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify a clear and accountable feedback loop process eg Actions Register

	important part of ensuring continued engagement and support for the AG. This can be reinforced by regular meetings between the AG members and the whole of Council with reporting back on a clear work programme.	include AG input in council reports where appropriate.	an important way to understand the value and effectiveness.	expressed a strong desire for updates on how their advice is being used and the outcomes.	
Group consistency	Some councils have different models for different groups eg youth councils, forums etc	Different characteristics of the different groups was noted and the idea of customising models was noted.	There were real concerns about inadequate resourcing of existing groups. However, alternate methods of engagement eg forums and workshops were accepted	AGs are aware of the other groups. Differences in how each is handled could lead to dissatisfaction.	1. Establish “pan group” hui to allow each group to share their work programme and opportunities for information sharing to be identified.
Training and induction	Induction training is important and	Training for Elected Members was mentioned to build	Limitations on resourcing was of concern to	AG members can feel like being part of an AG is training	1. Review Induction Training to identify

	<p>chair/co-chair training should be extensive. Training should emphasize the strategic focus aspect of the AG work. Induction can also include the development of a work programme and governance training.</p>	<p>capability in community engagement. Induction training for Elected Members (as well as AG members) was seen as needing to be enhanced. Chair and deputy chair training was also suggested.</p>	<p>officers when considering training. However, leadership and strategic planning training were seen as being helpful. Officers also acknowledged the need for more comprehensive induction training to help with role clarification.</p>	<p>in itself (esp around civics and how councils work). The induction process could be more comprehensive and clearly outline expectations, responsibilities and the impact of the role. Governance training would also be appreciated. Online training modules could work well for some.</p>	<p>opportunities for improvement.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Establish governance training for AG members. 3. Identify new technology approaches to broaden the scope of the training. 4. Establish chair and deputy chair training.
Resourcing and funding	<p>For all councils that responded with AGs in place, adequate resourcing was seen as both a necessity and a challenge. This is only likely to get worse as financial conditions</p>	<p>Elected members where not asked about funding and resourcing. However they did make comments that would suggest they felt more rigour was needed in the system to ensure better outcomes.</p>	<p>Officers felt strongly that the model (with the inherent role ambiguity and lack of strategic focus) was taking more resource than had been allocated. Community</p>	<p>AGs were very generally very supportive of the officers who administer their groups. They did question the efficiency of officers presenting to them when nothing was done</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the resources needed to manage the AGs 2. Allocate tasks to the appropriate teams eg Democracy to manage the meeting administration and Strategy to support the Work Programme development.

	continue to be hard for local government.		development officers reported spending about half their working time on the AGs leading to compromise on other aspects of their work. There was a sense that support from other departments might be appropriate eg from Democracy for meeting administration and from Strategy for the development of strategic work programme.	with the feedback they provided.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Ensure feedback loop is established to demonstrate the value of work. 4. Ensure the AGs are focussed on priority tasks. 5. Identify if additional resourcing is needed. 6. Consider whether outside agencies (eg support groups) could be involved eg chairing
Programme ownership	While the community development team was the most common owner of this	Elected members did not make any comments about where the programme ownership should sit.	Community Development officers were passionate about their AGs. However, there	AG members seemed comfortable to remain with the community development team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the best fit for programme ownership 2. Resource that team appropriately

	activity, both democracy and engagement teams were also seen as owners. There was a sense the function sitting across all three departments. Many councils see it is part of the governance function.		was a sense of being somewhat overwhelmed by the work involved. Some of this came from the scope creep that ambiguity of purpose has allowed into the system. Other departments were adamant that the programme should continue but that it should remain with community development.	although there was an acknowledgement that there was a fit with engagement.	
Attendance Fees	Fees per meeting ranged from no compensation through to \$35 per and up to \$270 per meeting	Some Elected Members recommended a formal review of remuneration as they felt the rates may be low.	Officers provided a schedule of fees paid by councils that was collected a couple of years ago. It suggests	AG members from Youth and Positive Aging were reasonably comfortable with the \$40 per meeting fee. Disability AG were less	1. Review the remuneration for AGs and develop a policy position eg attendance fees, transport costs, childcare or carer costs etc)

	<p>(Auckland) for AG members with more for chairs. Other models included a \$5000 per annum payment to a facilitating sector group, rather than paying forum attendees. Some councils provided funding for conference and network group meetings.</p> <p>Some councils provide an hourly rate for AG members who undertaken additional duties eg writing a report.</p>		<p>that the WDC fees are not unusual. Officers noted that there is little opportunity to pay more and that budget does not cover meals at meetings and that there was no allowances for the costs of attending conferences or network meetings.</p>	<p>comfortable with it and felt it should at a minimum cover the costs of attending (transport, childcare, support etc). AG members are aware that the fees paid to Te Karearea are significantly higher than those to AGs.</p>	<p>2. Consider funding for additional work eg attendance of events outside of meetings, writing reports etc</p>
Facilitation	<p>Generally AGs are facilitated by the Chair. However some</p>	<p>Some Elected Members felt there was a lack of clarity around their role and</p>	<p>Officers felt they were sometimes drawn into discussions in a</p>	<p>AG members noted that the chair should be the facilitator but that</p>	<p>1. Clarify where the role of facilitation sits and ensure that is clear in the Terms</p>

	have officers facilitating discussions or bring in external facilitators (generally from a relevant sector group).	whether they should be taking a more 'facilitative' role.	facilitation role especially where conflict might arise. Generally they did not feel comfortable with being drawn into facilitating discussions, preferring the chair to do that.	sometimes a lack of capability in the chair made that impossible. They noted that when that happened, group focus was lost and discussions were more operational.	of Reference (currently sits with Chair). 2. Provide facilitation training for meeting facilitator 3. Review conflict resolution clause in Terms of Reference and strengthen.
Terms of Reference	Some councils had a unique terms of reference for each of their AG and supported the AGs to review them at that beginning of each term and the make amendments if needed during the term.	Elected Members felt the existing terms of reference were appropriate (noting that some were less familiar with them).	Officers (where they were aware of the Terms of Reference as presenting officers would not be), felt that the Terms of Reference were about right. They did note that AGs seemed to drift away from them over time.	AG members did not make strong reference to the Terms of Reference but did acknowledge a lowering level of familiarity as time went on.	1. Review Terms of Reference in line with agreed outcomes from this Review. 2. Explore methods of reinforcing the Terms of Reference through regular reflection
Term	Most councils have AG terms that are aligned with the electoral cycle.	Elected Members made no reference to changing the term but did support the idea of closer collaboration	Officers were generally in support of aligning the AGs and council and	AG Members were concerned about the level of churn feeling that it affected the	1. Consider changing the term to be three years and bring into line with the electoral term.


	<p>This allows the new Mayor and council to appoint the new groups and members. This also made it easier to set a work plan that was aligned with the council one. They reported lower levels of churn in most cases.</p>	<p>between the AGs and the council.</p>	<p>extending the term. They felt that the existing two year term may be contributing to a lower level of commitment, leading to higher churn.</p>	<p>continuity and effectiveness of the AG. They did not specifically mention longer terms but were interested in considering strategies to improve retention.</p>	
Recruitment and retention	<p>Councils mentioned that it can be challenging to get the groups to broadly reflect their communities but that this was important. Its made easier by aligning the council and AG terms so that recruitment is</p>	<p>Elected Members noted that recruitment should focus on broad and diverse membership to capture the community needs.</p>	<p>Officers reported that recruitment was an ongoing and sometimes onerous task. They noted that it can be challenging to achieve a diverse group as the applicant pool was sometimes small. They also noted that the higher churn</p>	<p>AG members suggested that strategies to retain members and ensure activity participation such as mentorship programmes could be beneficial. They also suggested higher levels of recognition by council may encourage membership. A</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider a formal mentoring programme for chairs and perhaps wider membership. 2. Develop a recognition programme for Council to publicly acknowledge the work of the AGs 3. Consider the use of a skills and capabilities matrix

	largely being done in one go.		created a lack of continuity and sometimes leadership issues.	more targeted approach to recruitment was also suggested, directly encouraging participation from under-represented groups.	for targeted recruitment. 4. Align the AG and Council terms
Work Planning	Most councils had some sort of formal work programme for the AGs. This was aligned to the council's work programme (from the LTP and AP). It was felt that this was an important way to keep the AG on track and built cohesion based on understood common purpose. This structured work programme	While Elected Members did not directly mention work programming they were keen to identify ways to encourage closer collaboration between Elected Members and AG members through joint initiatives and regular communication.	Officers were very supportive of a clear work programme for the AGs and saw it as a way to build cohesion and better understanding in the wider organisation about the value of including the AGs.	AG members were also in support of a more structured work plan that aligned with council priorities and set out clear goals and objectives. They were also keen to have support to track progress against these plans and to evaluate impact with regular reporting to Council.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with the Strategy team to develop a work programme for each AG that is aligned with the council work programme. 2. Establish metrics to evaluate the work programme effectiveness. 3. Include a mechanism for progress reporting to Council

	approach is usually accompanied by regular reporting to council.				
AG Collaboration	Some councils have cross-panel workshops that are curated to build a culture of cross-over and resource sharing. Panel members report enjoying these sessions which are usually focussed around a bigger topic eg the LTP.	While Elected Members did not directly address the possibility of AG collaboration they did make suggestions about possible merging of groups.	Officers could see the benefit in collaborative workshops but did have some concern about the resourcing needed for these.	Some AG members were interested in the opportunity to understand what other groups were focussing on and about the possibility of collaborative projects.	1. As part of the work programme development, identify opportunities for collaborative hui across the groups.

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A photograph of a group of people sitting at tables in a workshop or meeting room. The people are of various ages and are looking towards the front of the room. One person in the background is raising their hand. There are papers, a yellow water bottle, and a blue cup on the tables. The room has a modern, casual feel with wooden tables and chairs.

Advisory Group Review Workshop with Elected Members

Workshop Purpose

To provide you with an opportunity to provide feedback on this Review and workshop future direction which will inform the drafting of the decision paper.

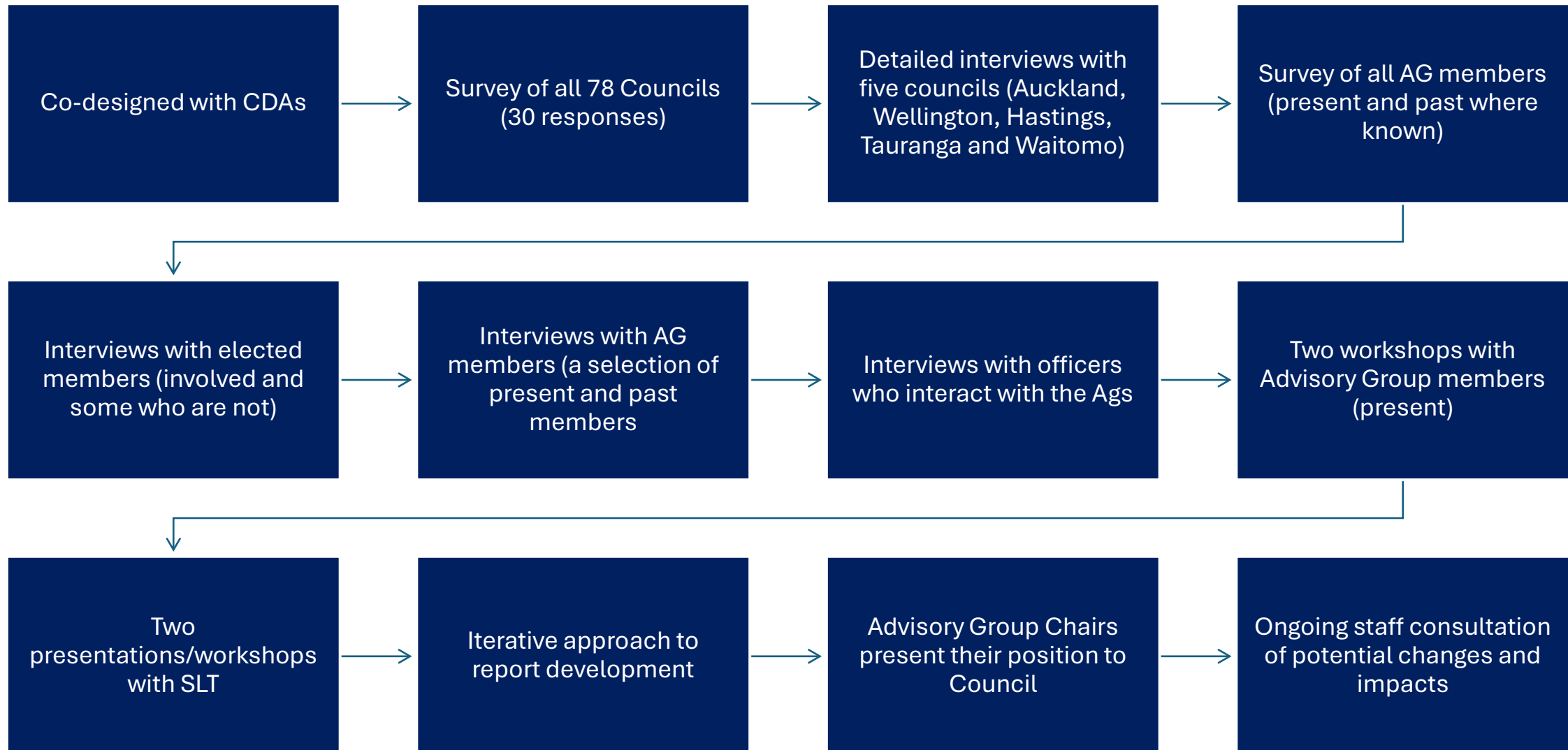
Today we will focus on purpose, structure, elected member involvement and budget.

Review Scope

To determine if the current advisory group model is still fit for purpose; and if not, explore alternative models or mechanisms. The review will also help identify opportunities for improvements.



Review Methodology



Current Position



- Each advisory group has two elected liaison Councillors (apart from PAAG)
- Meetings monthly (apart from December and January)
- Paid \$40 per meeting attendance
- Supported by Community Development Advisors and Chaired by a member
- Reports to Council on feedback via the Elected member liaison and Ops report
- Single Terms of Reference covering all groups
- First comprehensive review in 20 years
- Relatively ad hoc approach to bringing projects/issues to groups
- Advisory groups bring community matters to Council
- Advisory groups create their own strategic priorities – not always followed or effective
- Lived experience is essential in current membership – diversity is varied
- Multi Ethnic Advisory Group (not included in this review)

Key Themes

Identified Concern	Impact
Unclear Purpose and role ambiguity	While ToR is clear, it is not well-reflected in the implementation. Outcomes and feedback do not align well with Council priorities. Confusion on strategic or operational advice/position
Inadequate feedback mechanisms	Groups do not feel that they have clarity on what happens as a result of their input. Groups do not feel valued by Council (although they feel they provide valuable insight)
Inconsistent reporting to Council	Reporting to Council is dependent on EM members Council reports do not refer to AG input Groups are unclear how their feedback gets to Council
Disconnect with Council Priorities	There is little process that connects the Groups work with Council priorities. Groups are unclear how their work aligns with Council's programmes
Resourcing constraints	Advisory Groups work takes on average around 50% of Community Development Advisor time. Fees paid to members often do not cover the true costs of attendance No resourcing and budget for capability and engagement building.
Members feeling undervalued	A combination of the above contributes to members feeling undervalued for their volunteer time and commitment.

Break-out Session

- We will focus on 4 questions: Purpose, Structure, Elected Member Involvement and Budget.
- We will split into 4 tables – ideally at least one EM who has been a Liasion Councillor in the past at each table.
- We will run through the questions and then move to our tables for discussion.
- 5 minutes for each question.



Purpose

The current purpose is:

“to support Council’s vision of Whangarei being a vibrant, attractive and thriving District for all the people living here. Advisory Groups contribute to this vision by providing advice on:

- council policies, plans strategies, design and capital works projects
- matters of particular interest or concern to the communities they represent.”

What do you see as the future purpose/focus of advisory groups?



Structure

There are various structure options and changes discussed in the review:

- a) Status quo/do nothing,
- b) Enhanced advisory groups,
- c) Hybrid - quarterly meetings for all three advisory groups with extra Community Forums as appropriate,
- d) Extensive change – options include Community Forums, Expert Panels, Targeted Engagement, Community Connector, Deliberative Practice, Community Boards.

Which structure do you support?



A Hybrid Approach

Enhanced Advisory Groups (4 x year)

1. Operational improvements
2. EM role clarified
3. Strategically aligned work programme
4. Compensation review
5. Broaden organisational support
6. Training in governance and facilitation
7. Inter-group forum (2 x yearly)
8. Group/Council forum (annual)
9. Recruitment review to be more representative
10. Improved reporting to Council
11. Clear feedback mechanism



Community Forums (up to 2 x year)

1. All sectors
2. Trialled by YAG
3. Partner with external sector agency to support, facilitate and report
4. Strategically aligned work programme
5. Build database of engaged communities
6. No compensation for forum participants, provide catering
7. Supported by engagement staff
8. Budget implications are minimal

An Enhanced Approach

Status Quo	\$23,000 approx. for fees, catering, NZSL interpreters + 30% of Community Development Advisers time approx.	Monthly meetings \$40 members and chairs Minimal catering (biscuits) NZSL interpreters (costs going up due to no northland-based interpreters)
Enhanced Advisory Groups To do it well and retain all 3 groups	\$30,500 approx. for increased fees, catering, NZSL interpreters + 25% Community Development Advisers time approx. + Additional input from Strategy, Democracy and Engagement.	Quarterly meetings Chair: 195 (65 p/h), members 120 (40 p/h), catering 200 Training/additional mahi budget: 1640 per group NZSL interpreters: \$5000 per year
Enhanced Advisory Groups To do it well within current budget	\$23,000 approx. + 20% Community Development Advisers time approx. + Additional input from Strategy, Democracy and Engagement.	Merge PAAG and DAG to create an Accessibility Advisory Group Quarterly meetings Chair: 195 (65 p/h), members 120 (40 p/h), catering 200 Training/additional mahi budget: 1640 per group NZSL interpreters: \$6000 per year May not be politically appealing
Enhanced Advisory Groups To make some changes in line with recommendations and within current budget	\$23,000 approx. + 25% Community Development Advisers time approx. + Additional input from Strategy, Democracy and Engagement.	Keep current advisory groups Quarterly meetings Chair \$150 (\$50 p/h), member \$100 (\$33.33p/h), catering \$150 training budget/payment for additional mahi \$400 per AG NZSL interpreters: \$5000 Lower training budget – unlikely to address gaps in capability.

Councillor Engagement

What does future elected member involvement look like?

Points to clarify:

- Formal involvement and role
- Wider elected member awareness and understanding of sectors and advice
- How feedback is reported to full Council?
- Opportunities to workshop together or use insights strategically
- How do we strengthen advice pathway to Council?



Budget & Rem

What is Council prepared to resource?

The review indicates the current budget is insufficient.

Points to consider:

- Staff capacity, wider organisational support, budget and remuneration
- There is a balance between having advisory groups and doing them well.
- How we resource this reflects in members feeling valued and meeting their purpose.
- A new way of working may mean aligning with annual plan/ LTP for budget requests.



Next Steps

1. Analyse workshop feedback
2. Provide more clarity on budget implications
3. Return with options and a decision paper to the May Community Development Committee
4. Define operational impacts and implementation
5. Transition to new approach after local elections



Confirmation of direction

To clarify, Council's direction on the below is:

1. Purpose
2. Structure
3. Budget/Rem
4. Influence and involvement of Council

Is there anything else you would like to flag to staff on this review and the future direction?



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Thank you