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## SUMMARY FINDINGS:

# Filling the gaps – what is missing in the new structure and processes

*This is one of three summaries of the main findings of a research report completed by the Auckland University of Technology to stimulate discussion on how social issues in Auckland might be best addressed under the proposed new local government structure.*

The framework for the new structure is already in place. The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 has been passed and Cabinet has approved a new Social Policy Forum for Auckland. Further details will be finalised over the next few months.

This paper is about the missing links – where the gaps are in the new structures and processes to date, and what might be done to connect them.

***Please note:** The report is a work in progress, as much is still to be decided about Auckland's future in the coming months. At the time this paper was produced, March 2010, many of the details about how the new structures and processes would operate had not been made public.*

### A new way for Auckland

The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 changes the way Auckland will be governed. Under the new Act, the eight current local bodies in greater Auckland are amalgamated into one 'super city', with one mayor and one council. Local boards provide a vital link between communities and the new Council. (The boundaries for local boards are now out in draft.)

The Auckland Council is responsible for the economic, environmental, cultural and social wellbeing of all Auckland people. How it plans to do this is still being discussed, but already indications are that social issues have not been given enough emphasis. In its latest draft organisation structure, released earlier this year, the Auckland Transitional Agency\* ranks social concerns well below the other three aspects of wellbeing.

Central government has signaled clearly it wants a role. Last year it approved the establishment of the new Social Policy Forum, to be led by government agencies with local body and community input, where social issues can be discussed and assessed at a strategic level, and addressed with the full weight of government behind it.

Decisions have yet to be made about the new structures. The government has released a discussion paper on the forum, with feedback due on Friday 25 May.

\* The Auckland Transition Agency was established by the Government to amalgamate the councils across the Auckland region into the new Auckland Council by 2010.



### Making the new structures work

**The context** According to the 2009 Act, Auckland Council is responsible for the social wellbeing of Auckland people. This is considered a core business of the new Council. It is now up to the Council to put appropriate structures and processes – as well as the staff and resources – in place. How they do this is up to them; the Council may choose to meet minimum requirements under the Act or to exceed legislative expectation.

Central government wants to be actively involved in the region's social issues at a strategic level. The Minister of Social Development will head the new Social Policy Forum, supported by the Mayor of Auckland and the chairs of the relevant Council committees. Local boards will have a role, as will community agencies and organisations.

**Local government powers** Between them, local and central government have considerable and distinct powers they can use to improve the social wellbeing of New Zealanders. Central government can put up the big money and universal policies that underpin what is decided at a local level, but local government's specific knowledge and particular powers to put policy into action can potentially contribute most to a community's social wellbeing. Auckland Council must take advantage of these.

**'Place-shaping' powers** Local councils have explicit powers that can make a material difference to the social wellbeing of individuals and communities by physically changing (or 'shaping') an area. They include economic development, transport, urban design and development, environmental planning and parks and open spaces. Change can also be effected through the Resource Management Act.

Councils may zone land, affecting where facilities such as schools, hospitals and early childhood centres are built, for example. At a more local level, they decide where a library can be located, if a swimming pool can be built and what buildings are available for community groups. These smaller-scale decisions also alter the urban environment.

**Many roles** Local government plays many roles – from helping transform a community to supporting local activities. This means it can promote social wellbeing on many fronts – as planner,

landlord, advocate, analyst, facilitator, funder, coordinator and deliver of services. All are critical to Auckland's success.

**Local knowledge** The most effective current councils know their communities much better than central government – or the Auckland Council – can hope to. They know what resources are there. They know what the problems are and what has been tried before. Local government can create strong and durable links between residents and central government if this information and resource base is kept and made available where and when it is needed.

### **New ways of working**

Beyond the powers that local and central government can bring to the new structure, there is a burgeoning wealth of knowledge and experience happening in local communities. New ways of working are being experimented with, in the many and diverse projects throughout Auckland.

Most aim to improve the social wellbeing of people in the area. Most involve the combined energy and expertise of council and community in some form. These include sharing project ownership and consciously tapping into, and using, the knowledge and resources of central and local government and their own communities. Many of the projects show positive results, although participants have not always found the new ways of working straightforward or easy.

Studies of the projects have identified four key components that need to be included for the new structures to work well. These have the capacity to provide more rigorous links between local and central government and community to improve social wellbeing.

### **Integrate – Sense – Advise – Act**

**Integrate** — A central mechanism within the Council to integrate action across the four wellbeings (social, economic, environmental and cultural).

**Sense** — An analytical team to bring together and make sense of data, evidence about what is most likely to work to address issues and priorities, and local 'soft' knowledge to provide decision-makers with clear community information.

**Advise** — Capacity within the Council to provide evidence-based advice to the chief executive and the mayor on social strategies to improve the lives of all Aucklanders.

**Act** — Mechanisms to engage well with residents, bringing them into the decision-making and change processes.

### **Integrate**

In the new environment, social issues have a separate mechanism from the other wellbeings (environmental, economic and cultural). This is the Social Policy Forum.

The establishment of the forum reflects the importance of central government's involvement in social issues and the significant role of local government. A capacity within the Council to gather, interpret and integrate knowledge from many different perspectives – social, cultural, environmental, economic, as well as political at local, regional and central government levels – will add to its importance.

### **Sense – the 'brain'**

Social decisions need to be made using the best possible information. Studies on community projects in Auckland highlight the need for an analytical capacity (the 'brain') that brings together data analysis, evidence about what is most likely to work, and local knowledge.

Core functions of the 'brain' could be to:

- integrate information from central, regional, local and international sources
- monitor the impact of actions taken to improve social wellbeing
- provide information to those who will find it useful. This includes the mayor, council, local boards, the Social Policy Forum and local communities and residents.

For information collected by the 'brain' to be useful to communities and residents it needs to be tailored to specific geographic areas. It needs to be ongoing and continually updated and refined.

The 'brain' could provide advice – to residents, local boards, NGOs and philanthropic organisations as well as to the council.

Ideally, it would have a small core of staff who could call upon people from other agencies (central government, DHBs and local boards, for instance) to work on specific projects or for defined periods of time.



*The flying squad is about working with internal actors (residents) and creating the environment with external agencies to act on a jointly agreed agenda.*

### **Advise**

Under the 2009 Act, the Auckland Council is responsible for regulatory decisions and certain non-statutory decisions. The new Council will also make broad policy decisions on most issues that affect the social wellbeing of Aucklanders. Local boards, acting alone or together, may also have considerable political power.

The Council and the local boards will need robust internal advice to help them make sound decisions. This could come from a social strategy unit created within the new council structure. The unit would draw on independent, publicly available information in its work.

### **Act – the flying squad**

The primary function of the Social Policy Forum is to identify priority social issues and communities. To do this well, it needs to connect what is decided with what happens on the ground.

The forum's priorities need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate what emerges from the council's engagement with its communities, the mayor's vision and the priorities and interests of local boards and residents.

A flying squad with a rolling programme of intensive, geographically based interventions could link decisions made at a strategic level with action at the local level. It would make sure change happened. Essentially, the squad would work with a community to prepare it for change and action, and stay until the project was ready to be managed locally. This could be for up to five years.

The squad would focus on developing and releasing residents' knowledge and skills. It would build on community strengths so that residents can take decisions for action, and would bring in other agencies to support local initiatives as needed.

The flying squad's work programme would be set by the forum, identifying the types and numbers of projects to be undertaken – with a strong focus on local priorities.

As with the 'brain', the flying squad could be a small core team of 'development officers' who would work with residents to design individual projects. The final project design would be signed off by the forum.

The report, from which this summary of findings on social issues is taken, *Making Links Taking Action*, was written by Elisabeth Rowe and Dr Emma Davies. A full report can be downloaded from [www.asbcommunitytrust.org.nz](http://www.asbcommunitytrust.org.nz) and [www.ipp.org.nz](http://www.ipp.org.nz)

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