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Masterton District Council

Independent assessment report | February 2021*

An independent assessment report issued by the Independent Assessment Board for the CouncilMARK[™] local government excellence programme. For more information visit www.councilmark.co.nz



A measure
for better
community value.

* Period of assessment: September 2020

Assessment Summary

AT A GLANCE



Masterton District Council has focused on developing its competency and ability to work with its community and is on an encouraging development path.



LARGE METRO

SMALL METRO AND LARGE PROVINCIAL

SMALL PROVINCIAL AND RURAL



REGIONAL

The current situation

Masterton is the largest town in the Wairarapa, and Masterton District Council is the largest of the three councils in the area, the others being Carterton District Council and South Wairarapa District Council. Masterton District Council is experiencing a reasonable level of economic development and progress despite the impacts of COVID-19 throughout 2020.

- > Recent internal changes at Council level and within management are benefitting Council performance and therefore the community.
- > The district's make-up is changing through continued growth and steady internal migration. 'Wellingtonians' are discovering the joys of a more rural lifestyle after moving to the district.
- > As Council upgrades its response to the on-going changes arising from population growth and harnesses the passion and commitment of elected members and management alike, it will need to balance meeting community aspirations

with rates affordability and weighing up outcomes requiring significant investment – community services and development, with core network renewal and development.

Through its dedicated team and financial strength, Council is well placed to meet these challenges..

Period of assessment

The assessment took place on 17 and 18 September 2020.



\$1,182m
GROSS DOMESTIC
PRODUCT¹

SERVES
25,557

PEOPLE², A MIX OF
85% EUROPEAN/PAKEHA
21% MĀORI
4% PASIFIKA
4% ASIAN³



POPULATION TREND
STABLE/GROWTH

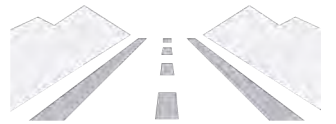
MAKES UP
0.86%

OF NEW ZEALAND'S TOTAL LAND AREA⁴
REPRESENTING MASTERTON DISTRICT,
FROM THE TARARUA'S TO THE EAST
COAST, AN AREA OF:

2,300 km²

RESPONSIBLE FOR
801km
ROADS

411km
THREE WATERS PIPES⁵



Key learnings

This is the second assessment following Council's participation in an initial CouncilMARK™ assessment in 2017. While Council's context has changed in the intervening three-year period, it has built on that initial assessment and made substantial gains. This is especially evident in the strengthened Strategic Leadership Team working with the Chief Executive. These gains, combined with the commitment and energy of the elected members and sense of buoyancy in the community, indicate Council is well positioned to lead its community. However, there are some challenges:

- > The assessment noted the capability within the elected members but this will be tested and needs further development through the 2021-31 Long Term Plan (LTP) process. Council should consider developing and integrating that capability into a stronger governance unit as a key focus.
- > Council has changed significantly in the last two years with a new Chief Executive, who has brought about effective changes at management level, as well as gaining some newly elected members through the 2019 local body elections.
- > Council has sought to methodically address the areas for improvement from the last CouncilMARK™ assessment.
- > Council has made a step change in performance over a reasonably short time which it now needs to consolidate. When it does that will enhance the role and effectiveness of Council in the community.

¹ MBIE - Modelled Territorial Authority GDP 2020 Release

² Stats NZ – Masterton District Council Census 2018 Usually Resident Population Count

³ Census respondents can select multiple ethnicities, resulting in higher than 100% calculation on ethnicity

⁴ DIA – Masterton District Profile, Land Area (2014)

⁵ Masterton District Council – Long Term Plan - Infrastructure Strategy 2018-48 – P28

Assessment Summary

continued...

OVERVIEW

Council is well positioned to lead its community. Its leadership is respected and there is substantial community support for its work. The 2021-31 LTP is important for Council to continue developing its commitment and aspirations for community well-being.

RATING



Findings



COUNCIL IS IN A POSITION TO IMPROVE ITS RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS AND NEED, WITH ITS WELL-BEING FRAMEWORK, COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT AND SENSE OF URGENCY.

Elected members displayed a passion for issues affecting their community and, on most topics, a sophisticated level of thinking. Working cohesively on the 2021-31 LTP presents an opportunity to effectively advance community well-being.



THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND HER TEAM HAVE BROUGHT A REFRESHED APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT OF COUNCIL'S AFFAIRS AND THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION FOR COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING, INCLUDING AN IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME BASED ON THE PRIOR COUNCILMARK™ ASSESSMENT.

The improvements have been significant across a broad spectrum of Council's activities. Of note is the reporting to Council and its Committees and the additional resources devoted to project delivery and management.



ELECTED MEMBERS AND MANAGEMENT DEMONSTRATE A KEEN AND ACTIVE COMMITMENT TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH THE COMMUNITY.

Council has been creative in its attempts to engage with its community, including responding to and changing the way it communicates to ensure good engagement.

Commonly used terms

Term	Definition
Asset Management Plan	A tactical plan for managing a council's infrastructure and other assets to deliver an agreed standard of service
Infrastructure	Local and regional roads, pathways and cycleways, drinking water, wastewater and stormwater assets, sports and recreation facilities (parks, sportsgrounds, green spaces etc), community and tourism facilities (playground public toilets, libraries, museums, galleries and public art etc), town centres, and other facilities.
Local Government Act 2002	The legislative act that provides a framework and powers for councils to decide which activities they undertake and the manner in which they will undertake them.
Long Term Plan (LTP)	The document required under the Local Government Act that sets out a council's priorities in the medium to long-term.



Governance, leadership and strategy	Financial decision-making and transparency	Service delivery and asset management	Communicating and engaging with the public and business
Competent	Better than competent	Performing well	Performing well

STRENGTHS

Council has an active and engaged group of elected members with development potential.

Council exhibits a genuine appreciation of the community and a strong desire to work for them and deliver on community well-being, supported by creative and effective communication.

Effective and collaborative external relationships are maintained.

Productive management reforms have been led by the Chief Executive.

A rejuvenated and developing Strategic Leadership Team has contributed to recent improvements in Council performance.

Council has a sound understanding of its finances and is monitoring its financial and non-financial performance well through the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC).

Council has sufficient financial strength to be able to adjust its strategy to respond to COVID-19 and support its community.

Council's Infrastructure Strategy is integrated with its Financial Strategy.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Active and empowering leadership from senior elected members will be needed to marshal the engagement of all elected members and their sense of urgency on delivering the well-beings.

Council will be required to retain flexibility in its governance to address the changing circumstances of its community and to balance such matters as water resilience with meeting social needs.

Council will need to synchronise its higher-level financial direction with its service delivery intentions.

Continuing to build its service delivery capability including collaborative arrangements will be essential.

Council should continue to develop and encourage iwi involvement.

Leading locally

Governance, leadership and strategy

Council has a district vision embracing the concept of well-being, but the sheer breadth of activity to be pursued will be difficult to achieve. The five well-being strategies require better defined roles and relationships with district stakeholders.

Priority grading

Competent

< Through the efforts of the Chief Executive and the Strategic Leadership Team, Council is being run well. Sustained, compounding population growth particularly in the Masterton urban area is heavily influencing the district's future direction.>

Council's vision, *'Masterton/Whakaoriori: Providing the best of rural provincial living'* is supported by a set of five outcomes (pillars) that help define what the vision means to the community. The outcomes include an engaged and empowered community; pride in our identity and heritage; a sustainable and healthy environment; a thriving and resilient economy; and efficient and effective infrastructure.

Setting the direction for the community

During the 2016-17 Annual Plan process Council identified a gap in its strategic approach and subsequently committed to investing \$400,000 of surplus for three years into its community and people.

In February 2018 *'My Masterton, our people, our land: He Hiringa Tangata, He Hiringa Whenua'* was adopted to sit alongside Council's infrastructure and financial strategies. The vision development process included iterative workshops with elected members and subsequent testing and consultation with the community. That resulted in 339 written submissions and 66

submitters speaking at various hearings. Each submission was considered, and the feedback played an important part in shaping the strategic direction. Four development areas (social, cultural, environmental and economic) emerged. However, complexity has resulted. With the overall vision having been altered twice in quick succession, five community outcomes, plus four development areas each with their own vision statements and respective implementation plans – simplicity is now required. Fortunately, the narrative from the Mayor, elected members, Chief Executive and senior staff was consistent and easy to understand.

Creating confident councillors

Around the Council table is a group of elected members comprising highly experienced members (ie six to seven electoral terms) as well as those in their first term. There is a strong sense of urgency amongst all elected members and some common sources of motivation, in particular, affordable housing. The elected members are comfortable to question and engage with staff but are in turn informed by staff. Conventional reporting is in place and staff provide regular project reporting to ensure elected members are up to date with progress and emergent issues.

Elected members' self-assessments were conducted in March/April 2020 and the Mayor used this opportunity to solicit feedback from each on their performance and that of her own. The Mayor operates an 'open door policy' and feedback can be provided at any time. At the time of this assessment, elected members were completing a self-assessment of their collective performance in preparation for an independent external review.

Effective working relationships

The Chief Executive Review process involves the establishment of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), contact throughout the year with a personal coach and Chief Executive Review Committee, as well as the Chief Executive reporting progress against the performance measures and discussions of any general employment topics. Elected members and iwi representatives attended a workshop session with the Chief Executive and external consultant to discuss the Chief Executive's achievements and performance. The Chief Executive's KPI's are based on 17 delivery areas, and 34 mission critical deliverables.

A proposed amalgamation of the three district councils in Wairarapa was rejected by residents in late 2017 (58 per cent against: 41 per cent in favour) leaving Masterton District Council (working together with the Carterton District Council and the South Wairarapa District Council) to explore opportunities to deliver better services for ratepayers through collaboration and shared service arrangements, where feasible. Various shared service agreements, some with the Greater Wellington Regional Council, provide a basis for funding decisions that deliver a consistent approach fair to all Wairarapa ratepayers.

There have been two quick changes to Council's committee structure. The effectiveness of the current structure is tested through conversations between the elected members and staff. The previous Council appointed an external Chair to the ARC to enhance skills of the ARC and this approach has been retained. Since 2016, Council has had iwi representatives appointed to nominated committees with full speaking and voting rights. Iwi have speaking rights at Council meetings, but no voting rights.

Improving risk management

Council meetings are held every six weeks. Special Council meetings are held as required and workshops, designed by senior staff to inform and subsequently equip elected members for effective decision-making, are held frequently to support decisions by the elected members. Meetings of the Infrastructure and Services Committee are also held every six weeks, and the ARC meetings are held quarterly.

The Chief Executive has notably improved the quality of report writing across the organisation, aiding understanding, enhancing clarity and contributing to better discussion amongst the elected members. There has been a notable improvement in the documentation of options, consideration of financial implications, assessment of significance, risk, and better consistency with strategies, policies and plans as a result of the improved reporting quality.

One area of risk management that needs further attention is raising the profile of health and safety reporting at the governance level. That would help achieve consistent application of health and safety priorities and practices across Council's activities.

Strengths

The Chief Executive has taken on the responsibility for elected member induction and produced a comprehensive framework for engagement and educating the elected members.

Reporting by senior staff is accurate and effective.

Alignment between the Annual Plan and LTP is maintained.

Appointing and retaining an independent Chair of the ARC has improved the functioning of the ARC.

Areas for improvement

Both the induction programme and ongoing professional development for elected members should include effective and collective decision-making.

Elected members need to agree a set of service delivery levels that balances ratepayer expectations and affordability.

The term 'well-being' in the Masterton context needs to be explained and readily understood by its community.

Organisational health and safety needs to be embedded consistently across Council activities.

Additional responsibility could be delegated to elected members by way of portfolios to enhance and capitalise on the skills each brings to Council.

The Mayor and elected members could consider setting the Chief Executive's KPIs in a manner that is more outcome focused rather than task oriented.

Investing money well

Financial decision-making and transparency

Council has an experienced Finance Team that supports it well in making sound financial management decisions and dealing with current issues, including COVID-19.

Priority grading

Better than competent

< Council has a sense of cautious economic optimism and confidence in its future, while still watching and planning use of its resources carefully. It will face demands in the future to both maintain and develop resources that meet rising community expectations.>

Council manages its finances effectively. This includes having a sound Financial Strategy - sensitive to the current environment, including the impacts of COVID-19, a suite of regular reporting to its ARC on Council's financial performance, its non-financial performance (levels of service) and results achieved in conjunction with other organisations such as Aratoi Regional Trust.

Planning and evaluating financial goals

Council maintains an effective understanding of its Financial Strategy and is capably supported by its Finance Team. Elected members and staff understand the financial direction of Council. There is a good alignment between governance and management on direction.

Council also demonstrates effective management of its current situation by reassessing its strategic direction in the face of COVID-19. Its response reflected a sensitivity to the demands on its community and Council effectively used its ability to fund activities through rates to reduce expenditure and re-prioritising its planned capital expenditure. Its ability to do so also reflects the careful management of its financial position by using reserves, while still maintaining the longer-term objective set out in its

2018-28 LTP of rebalancing its budget after significant capital development of its Homebush and Riversdale wastewater services. Maintaining the rebalancing is important for the future plans of rejuvenating Masterton (specifically, the town centre and Town Hall) and meeting the future water resilience challenge.

It is notable that Council not only was flexible in its planning but also kept a focus on its community well-being by contributing funding into the Wairarapa Recovery Plan.

Council demonstrated it does match financial performance with service delivery outcomes. That approach is also reflected in the alignment of its finances with its overall infrastructure needs.

Assessing the financial data

Reporting to elected members and management is substantial and detailed. Importantly, reporting covers both financial and non-financial performance. At both governance and management levels, there was a clear understanding of Council's finances and its relationship to actual and intended service delivery.

The emphasis on reporting to the ARC is on detailed activity reports and a focus on financial performance. That is entirely reasonable and an eye on cost control is important. However, higher level reporting on its key financial levers would be helpful on a quarterly basis. The question should be, is Council still on track to meet its Financial Strategy (ie the planned financial rebalancing to enable capital development after the substantial investment in wastewater services and social programmes in the community)? To answer that, more regular reporting associated with its financial position and how it is placed against the Strategy may be better. Achieving the Financial Strategy goals is important for the delivery of future service plans, as well as allowing for the current 2020-21 adjustments which sensitively allow for the impacts of COVID-19. Currently such information is limited.

Higher-level information would also be valuable to assist an active and engaged Council that is seeking to broaden its focus to deliver its well-being outcomes, and where prioritisation of programmes will be important.

Being clear and transparent

Council collectively demonstrated its understanding of its financial position and is capable of effective discussions on financial strategy and performance. This is based on:

- Sound financial information and an experienced Finance Team providing advice; and
- Key external documents: its 2018-28 LTP, 2018-19 Annual Report and 2020-21 Annual Plan – clearly showing the performance and future direction of Council.

The above is important as Council seeks to develop its LTP for 2021-31 and to address the well-being of the community, which will require clear information and options to be provided through consultation.

Addressing financial risk

Council has an experienced, independent Chair of its ARC. The value of the Chair is reflected in the quality of agendas, the workings of the ARC and in the training and induction support he has provided. That has assisted with development of the ARC.

Council's approach to managing risk is developing. Reporting to the ARC is sound and the nature of high-level risks being monitored are consistent with the size and nature of services provided by Council.

When Council's financial monitoring role is combined with its risk management work, this provides strong support to Council in monitoring achievement of its financial objectives while being risk aware.

Meeting financial targets

The day-to-day targets are well measured and monitored through the monthly reporting cycle to Council. The focus is on activity management and compliance with the standard statutory financial prudence regulations.

Council's financial performance

Council is in a sound financial position reflecting a careful approach over prior financial years. Council's 2018/19 net debt position is 58 per cent of total operating revenue and Council has external investments equivalent to 82 per cent of its rates revenue. Council has a strong working capital position. These are all indicators of financial strength – essentially capacity that can be used if warranted and indeed prudent to do so.

Its 2020-21 Annual Plan continues this sound approach, especially recognising the future investment needed in water security.

The planning for the 2021-31 Long Term Plan - the needed capital investment and addressing the well-beings - will probably challenge rates affordability. The prudence of past planning in maintaining its financial strength means that it has financial options on how to meet community expectations.

Strengths

Council maintains active governance engagement in aligning its Financial Strategy with its plans for service delivery.

There is effective alignment of the Financial Strategy with the Infrastructure Strategy.

Council has a capable and experienced finance function and Finance Team.

Effective monitoring of finances and risk through the ARC is led by an independent Chair.

Council's public reporting is clear and transparent.

Areas for improvement

Council could consider enhancing its quarterly reporting to include a focus on its future financial position and alignment with its Financial Strategy.

Maintaining full engagement with elected members will be advisable if they are to sustain their sense of urgency and direction supported by financial strategic planning.

Delivering what's important

Service delivery and asset management

Council's service delivery is well managed and is focused on its changing context and working on key areas of need, such as improving capital delivery.

Priority grading

Performing well

< Council demonstrated it is aware of the importance of service delivery to meet community aspirations. Council is demonstrating a constructive view of its own performance and addressing knowledge 'gaps'.>

Council's approach to service delivery is integrated with its Financial Strategy and a developing range of key community strategies such as the Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy. A noted feature is the on-going pressure on development within the district - especially growth-related subdivision activity.

High level issues Council is managing in the context of service delivery include:

- Monitoring and managing the effects of continued growth on the capacity of network systems and related investment;
- Delivery of its capital programmes which are currently challenged; and
- Maintaining rates affordability.

Council shows good awareness and is developing effective responses to these challenges.

Monitoring and assessing service levels

Council demonstrated an effective approach to service levels, such as:

- Elected members are close to their community and are sensitive to the quality-of-service delivery and aspirations;

- Service delivery is planned through a non-financial performance framework based on statutory requirements supplemented by Council's own measures; and
- Integration of its approach to infrastructure delivery with other plans, especially its Financial Strategy but also key documents such as its District Plan which is currently undergoing a partial review.

The base of service delivery is Council's network structures. The Infrastructure Strategy 2018-48 discloses an effective analysis of the state of current planning and an improvement programme which will support better future decision-making.

Like many other councils, the Masterton District Council recognises knowledge 'gaps' in some asset information. The lowest confidence is in its asset condition data.

Council's service levels are actively monitored by the Strategic Leadership Team and reported to elected members, with overall review by the ARC. The Annual Report is transparent on performance and notes issues with underachievement – for example, not achieving their planned service levels on air quality.

Through discussion with elected members, it is clear they have a strong sense of service levels. Their engagement in the direction of Council and a sense of urgency is noted. This will require the services delivered by Council to be well debated through the development of the 2021-31 LTP.

Assessing capability and capacity

A key feature of Council's capability and capacity was the recognition in 2019 that Council needed to address its under delivery in capital asset delivery (wastewater 67 per cent, stormwater 30 per cent - sourced from the 2018-19 Annual Report). At the time of the assessment, Council noted that overall performance was just 67 per cent.

Management sought Council approval after recognising the shortfall and is implementing an improvement plan which centres on additional staff being deployed into a Project Delivery and Assets Management group under its own manager. In effect, Council has created a *centre of excellence* to improve its ability to deliver on its asset renewal and development programme. The commitment to extra staffing reflects the seriousness with which Council is tackling this 'gap'.

Assessing service quality

Council regularly monitors performance, including its non-financial service performance, in relation to all activities. Discussion with elected members also reflected they have a broad and general concern around actual service, honed by being in the community. They also exhibited a strategic view of service delivery and development (in conjunction with Council's Financial Strategy).

Primary measures are centred on those required under statutes, supplemented by some customised measures of their own. A recent addition for the Annual Plan and Annual Report are measures associated with completed network renewal programmes.

Infrastructure

The Infrastructure and Asset group is experienced and demonstrated it recognised the importance of effective asset-based service planning. The Infrastructure Strategy supported by asset management planning reflected an insightful analysis of the quality of asset information on which to base decision-making. As noted previously, this included recognising the confidence levels in its information and strategies to improve that information.

It was noted that asset management plans had previously been peer reviewed in 2018. It is intended that an external peer review be repeated in 2021..

Its strategy recognised the challenges to quality in the following service areas:

- Transportation – logging trucks and maintenance of the gravel road network.
- The “three waters” - maintaining a renewals programme to ensure continuity of supply and quality, development of resilience in water supply and reduction of a loss rate of 30 per cent.
- Community facilities – alignment of actual and future facilities offerings with Council outcomes and community aspirations.
- Subdivision development – the quality of individual subdivision developments and the assets vested in Council.

Community services

Library services recognise the limitations of standard metrics of performance. It is looking to develop an approach which improves the effectiveness and relevance of its services to the community. An emphasis is on “seeding initiatives” in areas such as digital connection and English as a second language.

Council has a number of collaborative relationships to deliver services including Connecting Communities Wairarapa (community development initiatives), Aratoi (the local museum) and Sports Wellington (community sport). These groups have longstanding arrangements with Council but expressed some concern about the level of resourcing or a changing approach to such arrangements. These entities recognise that Council should review these collaborative arrangements from time to time. However, with a review underway it is clearly an unsettling time for those entities and if change is required, then effective open communication is imperative.

Housing

Several elected members were passionate about the availability and quality of social housing within the community. Trust House is Masterton's largest provider of social housing and there is a good relationship between Council and the Trust. However, if elected members choose to pursue initiatives directly in this area, they will need to ensure effective working relationships with the Trust, iwi and the Government.

The Trust indicated a willingness to work with Council, acknowledging the leadership of the Mayor and the Chief Executive.

Environmental services

There has been some stress within Environmental Services on completing its inspection programme. Over time the service has been down on its staff complement. In 2018-19, while performance was improving, completed inspections were lower than planned.

Environmental Services has, however, also had some successes. Through a facilitation programme it has greatly enhanced compliance by dog owners. This includes a proactive dog fees payment regime and a programme for micro-chipping dogs.

Addressing regulation

Council is closely linked with its immediate neighbours to the south (Carterton and South Wairarapa District Council and with Greater Wellington Regional Council). It has a combined District Plan with the two district councils and that Plan is affected by the Regional Council's proposed Natural Resources Plan.

There is a proposed partial review of the District Plan. Key issues are increasing demand for development land and the protection of high-class productive soils.

Maintaining and contributing to such a combined plan requires a high level of collaboration and Council was credited by its peers for being highly collaborative.

The Planning and Building Team processed 195 resource consents in 2018-19, all within the required statutory time limit. Staff put this down to a facilitative process with the development community.

Building consents are managed separately within each of the three Wairarapa councils. That may change by exploring the value of a combined Building Consent Authority (BCA).

Council's BCA is effective, achieving a 98 per cent compliance with statutory timeframes for issuing consents.

However, the BCA is reviewing its processes and procedures to ensure it is maximising the support it provides applicants – essentially the building industry – and that there is consistency in the approach and recording of decisions within the unit itself for precedents.

The BCA is proactively improving individual staff performance by 'clustering up' on training with other BCAs.

Capital investment decisions

Council has a strong sense of its investment direction as set out in Council's Infrastructure Strategy. Through its Infrastructure and Services Committee, it monitors the development of individual projects.

Seen as a strength, Council has shown itself to be analytical and deliberative over significant asset investments such as the rejuvenation of its town centre and redevelopment of the old Town Hall into a multi-purpose facility.

The development of the Project Delivery and Asset Management group will enhance future investment decisions.

Strengths

Council has a sound strategic view of service delivery and asset management.

Council has mapped its asset development with its Financial Strategy, to provide a coherent approach.

Council is aware of the 'gaps' in its approach. A key development has been the creation and resourcing of a Project Delivery and Asset Management group to provide a *centre of excellence*.

Individual service managers are encouraged to reconsider the nature of services being provided – of note were the library service and the BCA.

Areas for improvement

In seeking to upgrade its asset and service information, Council is encouraged to see through its plan to have asset management plans peer reviewed.

Collaborative arrangements are valuable to the total service initiatives in the community. Council needs to ensure effective communication with collaborators even if the approach to service delivery may change through service reviews.

Engagement in housing will require a strong assessment and alignment to Council's vision and outcomes.

As Council plans its services as part of the 2021-31 LTP, it needs a thorough and planned approach to engaging on the issue of social housing, including working closely with Trust House.

Listening and responding

Communicating and engaging with the public and businesses

Council is both comfortable with, and committed to, consistently setting engagement performance metrics which they then set out to achieve.

Priority grading

Performing well

< Council has performance-oriented engagement and communication processes that are measured. Creativity is also being applied towards how things are done, and Council is responsive to its residents' preferred channels.>

Council is the source of the *Monthly Wrap*, included in the local community newspaper, which is now an increasingly common feature amongst rural/small provincial councils.

Planning effective engagement

All Council engagements and communications are planned in detail. Engagement targets are set, and while these could be more challenging, they are being achieved and gradually increased over time. This approach is used irrespective of the engagement being sought, namely, the LTP, Annual Plan, Town Hall redevelopment programme or urban centre development. The process of measured performance against preset objectives is always used. The net result is that engagement and communication is effective, and Council is confident that they are meeting the needs of their residents and business community.

However, the focus of Council activities appears to be urban residents and businesses. Whether or not the rural voice is being heard, or actively solicited, can no longer be left to chance. Terms of Reference for a rural engagement community have been developed and needs to be enacted with some urgency.

Council prides itself on being accessible with staff that are often 'out and about' and visible to the community. As an example, more than 1,300 responses were received on the future of the

Town Hall, including more than 1,050 surveys and over 250 pieces of other feedback including emails, "post-it" note style feedback forms and talking to the community at different events including Waifest and the Castlepoint fishing competition.

Engaging digitally

Council has a strong social media presence and uses Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube to promote and communicate Council activities, with a five-hour response rate.

Council measures the open rates and click through responses across its pages on each digital platform and exceeds industry benchmarks for most metrics. Where possible it measures the impact achieved through different links and monitors which content is driving the most interest. Council has an email database of approximately 6,500 unique email addresses which has been developed over the past 18 months and is integrated with its rates database. Council started using this channel in late 2019 to send out its *Monthly Wrap* and other communications material by digital means directly to readers.

Building good relationships

A stakeholder analysis is completed as part of each project to identify key audiences, targeted messaging and appropriate communication channels. Numerous channels are used to meet with and discuss with stakeholders including pop-up engagement sessions at events, regular pop-ups at the Masterton car-boot sale, working through the elected members to engage through their networks, and presenting directly to community groups at their regular meetings (eg Henley Lake and Queen Elizabeth Park stakeholder groups). Council staff also engage with high-profile community groups and attend Resident and Ratepayer meetings (eg Riversdale) and neighbourhood group meetings (eg Lansdowne, Solway etc) to discuss neighbourhood plans and Council activities.

In June 2016, Council voted in favour of appointing iwi representatives to Council committees with full voting rights. The representatives also attend Council meetings with speaking rights and actively participate in strategic planning days and Council workshops. Formalised iwi involvement promotes an obvious two-way engagement and information sharing channel with Council and they are now the first stakeholder to be considered when engaging with the community.

Council supports the Wairarapa Youth Council, with the Mayor and elected members participating and engaging with young people on various topics via this forum. The Mayor also mentors a Youth Ambassador, and Council runs a range of programmes through the library to engage young people.

However, the relationship with some of the community funded organisations, such as Connecting Communities Wairarapa, is tense. Much of this is to do with uncertainty over funding, and arguably some confusion over roles and responsibilities. A Section 17A review is required urgently in both the economic development and social development space.

Communicating through the media

The most valuable communications channel used by Council is the Masterton *Monthly Wrap*. It started in 2018, with a single page print in the local midweek paper (which has been measured to be the most read print product in Masterton). Since that time it has become a monthly double page spread.

Council uses an annual community satisfaction survey which has been conducted for more than a decade. The 2018 survey results highlighted that an increasing percentage of residents thought the district was getting better. The analysis produced from the survey is commendable and provides Council with the necessary granularity for an effective response, but also provides insight towards residents' attitudes toward their local government. Most metrics have improved over time, but recent declines amidst rural residents should be noted and responded to effectively.

Engaging with Iwi

Council has a definite and developing relationship with iwi.

However, iwi are also challenging Council to move beyond engagement to encouraging and supporting a programme of local Māori empowerment and enabling a Māori world view.

Key areas of development that Council are looking for greater involvement in are:

- Development of the LTP;
- Management of natural resources; and
- Social procurement supporting.

While challenging, it is noted that the two iwi representatives who sit on Council and local Ngāti Kahungunu and Rangitāne iwi were positive about the leadership and engagement of the Mayor and Chief Executive with iwi. That is a sound base to start from, but one of which will need to be built on.

Strengths

Council effectively uses quantified performance setting for engagement and communications activities, with targets agreed by the elected members.

Structured communication and engagement plans accompany service and project delivery.

A commendable engagement process for the Town Hall development was recently conducted.

Well aligned communications channels and use of conventional print media that meets residents' expectations are evident.

Areas for improvement

Engagement with the rural community and rural ratepayers in particular needs to be enhanced.

There is an opportunity to develop in-house capability for the analysis of data.

The confusion with Connecting Communities Wairarapa with respect to Council's longer-term intentions needs to be resolved.

Council needs to continue to develop its relationship with iwi.

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