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Waimakariri District Council

Independent assessment report | July 2020*

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.

*Assessment completed March 2020

Assessment Summary

AT A GLANCE



The Waimakariri District has a rapidly growing population managing to retain its rural/small town character.



LARGE METRO

SMALL METRO
AND PROVINCIAL



PROVINCIAL AND RURAL

RURAL

The current situation

Waimakariri District is a medium-sized, high-growth district which has emerged from the Canterbury earthquakes as one of the most popular residential destinations in the region. 10,500 people have moved into the district in the past six years, and significant growth is forecast to continue.

The Council underwent a CouncilMARK™ assessment in 2017. Since that time they have transitioned out of the final stages of earthquake recovery and into a business as usual state. Nevertheless, some of the issues identified in the 2017 assessment continue to challenge the District. These include:

- Co-ordinating the priorities for financial and community resources between the District's main towns; and
- Seeking to maintain the District's lifestyle appeal to residents, while adjoining a large urban centre, by:
 - Addressing the ongoing demand from all sections of its residents for better and more community facilities;
 - Developing the town centres, particularly Rangiora and Kaiapoi, in a manner that helps maintain their commercial viability while retaining their community feel; and
 - Progressing effective transport solutions across the District, including the commuter connections to Christchurch.

Period of assessment

The assessment was conducted on 16 and 17 March 2020.



\$2.17b

GROSS DOMESTIC
PRODUCT¹

SERVES

62,800

PEOPLE², A MIX OF
90% EUROPEAN/PAKEHA
7% MĀORI
1% PASIFIKA
2% ASIAN



POPULATION TREND

HIGH GROWTH

MAKES UP

0.84%

OF NEW ZEALAND'S TOTAL LAND AREA
REPRESENTING WAIMAKARIRI
DISTRICT³, FROM PEGASUS BAY TO THE
PUKETERAKI RANGE, AN AREA OF:

2,255 km²

RESPONSIBLE FOR

1,545km

ROADS AND

329km

FOOTPATHS⁴



Key learnings

The District enjoys a particularly enviable lifestyle with a strong economy, steady population growth, good standards of living and adjacency to a major urban area (Christchurch). Notwithstanding the financial and social challenges of recovering from the Canterbury earthquakes, population growth has enabled the Council to develop a high standard of core infrastructure and community services for its residents. However, growth has brought its own challenges, and the Council continues to develop responses to these.

In order to maintain its favourable position as a lifestyle destination, the Council will need to consider:

- > Any effects that the COVID-19 pandemic may have on population growth, and the manner in which its regulatory framework and services may have to adapt to ensure the District remains an attractive destination for developers and the commercial sector.
- > In the short-term, how to most effectively build on its success of the past 10 years under the leadership of a new Mayor and, in the near future, a new Chief Executive.
- > How it can continue to address the increasing importance that its community places on better online services and digital connectivity, and on environmental sustainability in delivering its infrastructure and developing its spatial planning policies.

¹ Waimakariri District Quarterly Economic Monitor – December 2019

² Waimakariri 2048 – Page 5

³ Waimakariri District Council Long Term Plan 2018-28 – Page 14

⁴ Waimakariri District Council Long Term Plan 2018-28 – Page 52

Assessment Summary

continued...

OVERVIEW

Waimakariri District Council continues to be a high-performing Council, with all-round strengths in its people and delivery of operational services. Relatively modest improvements to the rigour of some of its governance and management processes could result in it being a national exemplar for local government excellence.

RATING



Findings

1.

THE COUNCIL IS GENERALLY RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF ITS VARIOUS COMMUNITY INTERESTS GROUPS, AND PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING WELL-CONNECTED ACROSS THE DISTRICT.

2.

THE AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IDENTIFIED IN THE 2017 ASSESSMENT HAVE NOT BEEN COMPLETELY ADDRESSED, AND AN OPPORTUNITY EXISTS FOR THE NEW MAYOR AND COUNCIL TO SET A REFRESHED SET OF GOALS FOR THE DISTRICT.

3.

SOME OF THE COUNCIL'S OPERATIONAL UNITS, PARTICULARLY THE INFRASTRUCTURE TEAM, HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN THE PAST THREE YEARS. THEIR ACTIONS SHOULD BE USED AS A MODEL BY OTHER TEAMS FOR FURTHER ORGANISATIONAL IMPROVEMENT.

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 (playgrounds, 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	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
Performing well	Stand out	Performing well	Performing well

STRENGTHS

A well-developed relationship with a broad cross section of the community.

Excellent long-term financial planning.

A commitment to continuous improvement in its operational services.

Use of values and interests-based surveys to better understand what is important to its community, and tailor services accordingly.

A high level of constructive interaction across community groups from the Mayor, Chief Executive and Council.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Clarifying the Council's governance structures and the interactions of governance and management.

Identifying greater opportunities for cost-efficiency.

A more strategic approach to the development of future workforce capability.

More succinct and targeted communications.

Leading locally

Governance, leadership and strategy

Waimakariri District Council continues to perform well in this priority area. They have particular strengths in their community engagement (both formal and informal) and in their stakeholder relationships. The governance culture around the Council table and across the organisation remains very strong. Considerable progress has been made since the first CouncilMARK™ assessment in organisational development work resulting in the development of the strategy, Tā Mātou Mauri, and its underlying principles.

Priority grading

Performing well

<The Council is aware of the implications of the impending departure of its long-serving and highly respected Chief Executive.>

The impending departure of the Chief Executive, coupled with the recent departure of the District's long-serving Mayor, will require the recently elected Mayor and the future Chief Executive to quickly form an effective partnership that maintains the continuity of Waimakariri's successes, but also identifies further opportunities for growth and improvement.

Setting the direction for the community

The Council has ended its post-earthquake recovery phase, having spent much of the past nine years on repairing critical infrastructure. The community had extensive input into the Council's new vision and strategy through the process of developing the 2018-28 Long Term Plan (LTP). The adoption of the LTP's objectives based around growth, responsiveness to community expectations and national standards, and development of community facilities and services, was a logical

progression from the post-earthquake period. The objectives of the LTP are well supported by five broad community outcomes: governance, environment, places, spaces and services. The community outcomes are strongly embedded in the Council's planning, policy making and reporting.

There was strong community consultation leading to the adoption of the LTP objectives and outcomes, as shown by the resulting community support for them. The high rate of response to the LTP consultation process (over 800 submissions) alone is indicative of success. Outstanding work has also been done to improve the availability and quality of information for the public on Council proposals and subsequent decision-making. This includes the use of "main street" consultation (ie direct public engagement on the streets) to supplement the formal submission process which received strong acknowledgement and support, and greater use of social media as a communication tool.

External stakeholders were positive about the vision and leadership provided by the Council over the past decade, both within and beyond the District. The Council is a leading participant in the Greater Christchurch Partnership as well as the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, and that contribution is highly regarded and respected by regional stakeholders.

The Chief Executive's Performance Agreement remains well aligned to the direction set by the current LTP. The Tā Mātou Mauri principles are similarly aligned.

Creating confident councillors

The Council has continued its process of thoroughly briefing prospective councillors, including providing role descriptions for the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the committee chairs and

councillors. Its post-2019 election induction practices were particularly extensive.

The first assessment identified the need for greater structure and formality as part of councillors' professional development. All elected members have agreed to address this need through structured discussions with the Mayor followed by preparation of a development plan and training record for each elected member (dependent on previous experience and training). A bespoke training programme on governance and finance skills is also planned.

It is also encouraging to note that the councillors elected in 2019 are open to developing a self-assessment process, and designing it with best practice advice. Similarly, the incoming Mayor has been active in seeking informal feedback on his performance, and there is an opportunity to move to a more formal review process as his term progresses.

Effective working relationships

The Council has a tradition of councillor teamwork and collaboration. This is fostered by practices such as the designation of portfolio leaders and the rotation of Council standing committee chairs. These are sound practices and there is a continuing commitment to these practices by elected members.

Like the first assessment, it is clear that the recently elected Mayor and the Chief Executive have an excellent working relationship. That is illustrative of the positive working relationships within the Council more generally. The incoming Mayor has continued the highly consultative and inclusive approach of his predecessor, and both he and the Chief Executive are recognised for their understated and diligent approach to serving their community.

The Mayor has also continued the practice of participating in Executive Management meetings. Although this is unusual, and risks blurring the lines between governance and management, it illustrates the trust and confidence that exists within the Council's working relationships. Similarly, there is a high level of elected member (particularly portfolio leader) interaction with Council senior managers and staff. While reflective of the informal and collaborative relationship between elected members and staff, consideration should be given to establishing some clearly defined "ground rules" as a safeguard to potential problems that may result from blurring management and governance roles.

Specific areas for improvement discussed during the current assessment included developing a "governance charter" for elected members that could foster a better understanding of the risks involved in elected member interaction with staff; developing formal terms of reference for each portfolio; a more structured approach to portfolio leaders' regular engagement with senior managers; training in governance; and instituting safe "speaking up" mechanisms for staff to report uncomfortable or ambiguous interactions with elected members.

The Chief Executive has signalled his intention not to seek a further renewal of his employment term. The Chief Executive has been both long-serving and highly successful in his role, and the challenge that his departure creates should not be underestimated. The Mayor and councillors acknowledged that Council will need to carefully manage the transition. There is potential for the transition to be disruptive to the culture of the organisation, as the new appointment will have to strike a balance between continuity and new approaches that he or she may bring.

Strengthening risk and conduct management at governance level

The Audit and Risk Committee does not have an independent member, as recommended in the first assessment, with a majority of councillors again voting against appointing one in March 2020. Although within the Council's prerogative, competing views have been expressed with some stakeholder feedback questioning the depth and quality of Council and Committee scrutiny. The Council should continue to keep this matter under review, recognising that good practice generally supports the use of independent members to supplement the work of elected members in overseeing financial management, assessing organisational risk and holding management to account. For example, deeper consideration by the Committee of long-term financial risks could be aided by the presence of a suitably qualified, independent expert member.

The Code of Conduct has been updated since the first assessment to include detail on probity issues such as conflicts of interest and sensitive expenditure. There is now an interests register for members, however, the level of disclosure in the register was noted by the assessors to be inconsistent. For example, references to property ownership interests were not included, which could give rise to a conflict.

Health and safety

The Council has extensive health and safety processes and information, including a review schedule of policies and documents, a work plan for the year and an annual survey of staff. While there is good statistical reporting, the Council should continue moving beyond data capture to a deeper understanding of the Council's health and safety culture. Consideration should be given as to how greater analysis could be reported and discussed with elected members, both through the Audit and Risk Committee and with Council itself.

This work should also seek to utilise the benefits to be gained from the use of Promapp, the Council's business planning tool, to gather real-time data on health and safety issues. Over time, this approach could enable deeper assessment of trends and progress against the higher risk activities, especially involving field staff, which can then be expected to flow into enhanced reporting to elected members. Those gains should also be reflected in improvements in the reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee,

which (following the finding of the first assessment) still appears to have a primarily statistical focus.

Managing the organisation and reporting on results

The Council continues to perform well in its understanding of staff culture and views on issues such as remuneration, the quality of performance management and communication. There is good tracking of trends, with many of the issues surveyed showing improvement over the years. The first assessment noted Council's intention to increase the focus on organisational development issues, and this work has now been realised in the organisational development strategy, *Tā Mātou Mauri*. This strategy appears to have improved the quality of internal collaboration, including cross-disciplinary interaction (eg policy makers, asset managers and engineers) in setting the Council's strategic direction. However, there was some feedback that Executive Management needs to broaden its thinking on major strategic risks, such as those arising from climate change, and that it needs to consider their thinking throughout the organisation on such issues.

While Council's management and performance reporting is comprehensive, Executive Management remains focused on improving the quality of its reporting including its reporting to elected members. The focus on continuous improvement in written reporting (as evidenced by the enhanced report template) is an ongoing strength. However, Executive Management needs to keep looking for ways to encourage staff to give a more complete view of issues to elected members in particular beyond standard template reporting. For example, there may be presentation opportunities for staff members at elected member workshops.

To build on the Council's internal reporting of KPI's, the Council intends to seek improvements on the scope of its external performance reporting. This should include thinking about how to report at the level of community outcomes, in anticipation of the well-being reporting framework being rolled out from central to local government.

Strengths

The Council's strategy is well focused and has charted a strong, growth-focused approach beyond the earthquake recovery stage.

Community engagement continues to be an area of strength, as evidenced by the high rate of response to the LTP consultation process.

The Council is diligent in managing the conduct of its business, supported by generally sound information from Executive Management.

There continues to be strong and effective relationships between the Mayor, Councillors, and the Chief Executive and his team.

The induction process for new elected members (including community board members) remains very high, and is coupled with good progress towards individual professional development for councillors.

Areas for improvement

Ongoing review of the appropriateness of independent expertise on some Council committees should be considered, in particular the Audit and Risk Committee.

Establishing a governance and management charter which details the respective roles of elected members and executives, and clearly sets the appropriate boundaries, should be considered.

Greater and more consistent disclosures of elected member interests in the interests register is required

The Council will need to carefully manage planning for the succession and transition required by the retirement of the incumbent Chief Executive.

The Council should move from statistical capture and reporting to more extensive analytical reporting of the Council's health and safety culture.

Investing money well

Financial decision-making and transparency

The Christchurch earthquakes necessitated an unprecedented level of financial investment in the District, but this work was done with the long-term needs of the community in mind. The prudent and long-term approach taken to financial management has paid off, and now provides a strong platform for funding the District's needs into the future.

Priority grading

Stand out

<The Council has a strong financial strategy, which continues to reflect the care with which it has managed the District's finances over the past six years. The effectiveness of the links between the Financial Strategy, the Infrastructure Strategy and the overall District vision are important in the success of the Council's planning and delivery.>

Planning and evaluating financial goals

The Financial Strategy clearly identifies the most critical factors that will influence spending over the period of the LTP: catering for growth, responding to community expectations, standards for water quality and the environment, and delivering better facilities and services. As the LTP notes, the age of Council assets is relatively young, with the peak of asset renewals occurring between 2070 and 2120. This has enabled the Council to model its

renewal programme for the next 150 years to ensure planned asset renewal and intergenerational funding of asset renewals is achieved. The emphasis on avoiding short-term decisions of convenience for the long-term good of the community is a particularly meritorious aspect of the Council's financial planning.

While the Council makes significant use of targeted rates to allocate costs fairly, the LTP appears to have addressed rates affordability issues for the community in a transparent way, particularly through the use of an online rates calculator. The Council plans to make more use of this online facility in the future.

Assessing the financial data

The Council's Finance Team is experienced and capable, and produces a very thorough range of financial information. There is full compliance with statutory reporting requirements, and the standard of information provided to the Audit and Risk Committee, and to the full Council, is high. There have been no modified audit opinions in the past, nor are any expected in the future. There is a robust development contributions policy which ensures that significant growth costs are met by those who create those costs.

The linkage between the finance and infrastructure strategies is overseen by the Asset Management Steering Group. A Procurement and Contract Management Strategy with supporting policies has recently been implemented through a Centre of Excellence.

The Council still does not have a comprehensive budget management system to support what it described as its "complex budgeting model and finance/rating system". This should be kept under review as Executive Management identifies suitable products in the market.

The first assessment identified as an area of concern that financial planning documents and budget processes do not expressly address cost-efficiency or opportunities for savings. This remains the case, although some steps have been taken to identify cost

efficiencies. This will soon include establishment of a “cost efficiencies” group to consider suggestions from forums and steering groups. Staff feedback reinforced the importance of this type of initiative to improve information flows between units and to senior managers.

Being clear and transparent

The first assessment noted some concerns about the complexity of the financial information presented to the community in its planning documents and the summary financial statements in the Annual Report. A review of the 2018-2028 LTP documentation, and the most recent Annual Plan consultation document, demonstrates substantial improvement in the quality of information presented. As with any process, however, there are still opportunities for continuous improvement.

Identifying and managing risk

Significant work has been done since the first assessment to address the need for a more effective approach to risk management. The comprehensive reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee and the full Council, including on key risks, enables elected members to be aware of the key risks and be guided by strategic risk awareness in decision making.

The adoption of the Risk Management Framework in 2018 was a milestone achievement in the Council’s maturing approach to risk management. This Framework and its supporting strategy are broadly based on good practice. Nonetheless, risk assessment and management and risk reporting are still maturing, and Council staff acknowledged it as an area for ongoing improvement.

An integrated risk management system takes time to achieve across most organisations. A risk awareness culture is now clearly evident in respect of workplace health and safety. Time and energy are being invested by managers into the broader risk management approach. This includes understanding how external inputs can be integrated into risk identification, and developing a more agile approach to managing risks beyond “desk-top analysis” based on static, programmatically updated registers. Managers should continue discussing this with the Audit and Risk Committee.

Meeting financial targets

The Council has an AA Standard and Poor’s credit rating and remains well within the benchmarked limits in terms of servicing interest costs. Its ratio of debt to total assets, as well as its debt control, is also within benchmarked limits.

The Council’s membership of the Local Government Funding Authority ensures it obtains the most competitive interest rates. It maintains healthy surpluses which will fund future renewals. Its level of capital expenditure on essential services is significantly

above the required benchmark. The Council’s core financial risk management process remains strong, supported by the Council’s Treasury Policy and the use of an external member on the Treasury Committee.

Strengths

The Council has emerged from an earthquake recovery phase in a strong financial position and is well placed to afford and deliver on its LTP objectives.

The Council’s Financial Strategy is comprehensive, well explained, and (in particular in respect of funding for asset replacement) very long-term in its vision. It balances community wishes against fiscal responsibility, and there is strong integration with the Infrastructure Strategy.

The Council has a very capable Financial Team.

Financial reporting, both to Council and externally, is comprehensive.

The business improvement strategy and use of Promapp is improving the capacity to capture business system processes and to enable financial data to be integrated into decision making.

Areas for improvement

Further work is needed to integrate the risk management approach into the organisation, including risk identification and management.

The Council would continue to benefit from explicitly identified cost-efficiencies in budgets and financial reports.

Delivering what's important

Service delivery and asset management

The Council has made improvements to its already well-functioning operations, particularly amongst its Infrastructure and Community Development Teams. The substantive quality of the Council's core services could be enhanced by more demanding and relevant performance measures and by bolstering the quality of its project reporting and business case development documentation.

Priority grading

Performing well

< The performance of the Council against its current service levels is satisfactory, but not outstanding, with achievement of service levels ranging from 57-75 per cent in the past two years. The Council is, however, diligent in monitoring performance against agreed service levels on a more regular basis, and performance is well reported.>

Monitoring and assessing service levels

Although the Council regularly consults on major initiatives, consultation tends to be about the provision of services as distinct from the quality or level of service that should be provided with these services. The Council should not assume from consultation that support for a new service is also public support for the level

of service intended, and it should more explicitly seek public feedback on both current and proposed levels of service.

The performance standards set by the Council are largely based on legislative requirements such as the mandatory standards set by the Department of Internal Affairs, or on the use of customer surveys and/or response times to service inquiries. The Council is aware that many of the service levels reflect historic (ie pre-2009) service levels that have not been reviewed and refreshed for some time. As a generally high-performing entity, the Council should be using its community surveys to translate the community views on what is important to them into service levels that better reflect these values. This should include more challenging standards that demonstrate service efficiency and value for money.

Assessing capability and capacity

Human resources (HR) planning is detailed and thorough, and staff are encouraged to identify future development opportunities and training needs. Importantly, the staff development process places the same emphasis on "softer" skills and behaviour in assessing staff capability as it does on core technical skills.

While HR planning is thorough at a transactional level, a more strategic perspective could be taken with regard to the Council's medium to long-term workforce planning. Workforce planning is relatively simplistic – looking at how many staff are needed for future projects and operations. It emphasises staff numbers, rather than thinking about what the Council of the future might need to provide, where and how those skills will be developed and the opportunities to make staff efficient and add to their complement of skills.

The Council culture is very strong and staff retention is high, with less than 10 per cent turnover. This is in part due to having a good range of policies and programmes such as graduate recruitment, employee benefits and flexible working arrangements. The staff

are well-engaged, with well over 90 per cent of staff saying they are proud to work for the Council and consider it to be “a great place to work”.

Staff feedback during the assessment was generally consistent with the survey. Reported strengths of the Council included the organisation’s emphasis on staff development and well-being, the strong connections with the community and the ability of the organisation to adapt to change. Areas for improvement included being less bureaucratic and more commercial in mindset, lifting expectations for completion of projects (doing fewer projects but getting more done) and more frequently holding people accountable for getting things done.

Assessing service quality

Infrastructure

The Asset Management Plans (AMPs) reviewed impressed with good outlines of the planning framework, links to community outcomes, organisational context, asset management maturity and issues of sustainability. The AMPs are also visually linked to the Infrastructure Strategy, the Council’s visions and goals and other documents via an introductory chart. They are well-written, set out in a logical order and strike a good balance between not overloading the reader with too much technical information, while still providing sufficient information to ensure that an informed decision can be made on the key issues presented.

The Infrastructure Team identified perceived inadequacies of the TechOne system as an asset management tool, and, as a consequence, the Council has invested \$1m in a new asset management system. The quality of analysis underpinning this procurement decision was not as good as it could have been (see section on “Capital investment decisions and delivery”). However, the system should prove its worth by enabling the Council to better manage time asset re-investment decisions (ie not make re-investment too early or too late) and ensure that the level of investment is proportionate to the needs of the District.

A significant feature of the Infrastructure Team’s planning was recognition that it is moving from a purely infrastructure maintenance, renewal and replacement focus, to one which takes account of wider issues such as environmental concerns related to water and biodiversity. The recent appointment of a Water Environment Adviser is illustrative of the Council recognising the need to meet community expectations regarding sustainable development.

Water

The Council provides reticulated water supplies for about 80 per cent of the District’s population from 14 District schemes. Two small schemes are not currently compliant with Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand 2005 (DWSNZ) for protozoal criteria, with one of these schemes scheduled for upgrading to compliant

levels by mid-2020. This will leave the Council compliant for 99 per cent of the District’s population.

While rural restricted water supplies are chlorinated, elected members are keen to maintain unchlorinated water supplies in its urban schemes, but this may not be feasible with new standards. The issue of chlorination has been extensively discussed with local communities and all have expressed a strong preference (about 75 per cent) to be chlorine free.

Wastewater

The Council provides four separate wastewater schemes that collectively dispose of sewage from about 63 per cent of the properties in the District. Each scheme provides varying levels of service in terms of effluent quality, capacity, reliability and affordability, and are mostly operated in accordance with their resource consent conditions.

The major (Eastern District) scheme meets its consent conditions, although discharge to water remains a cultural concern for local iwi. The discharge consent expires in 2039 and Ngāi Tahu have expressed a strong desire for discharge to water to cease. This creates a significant challenge for the Council and, although they are committed to improving the level of treatment, iwi expectations may not be able to be met.

The smaller two rural schemes create ongoing compliance challenges, and options are being evaluated to connect both schemes to the major Eastern Scheme. With proper financial and project planning, this is a prudent course of action from a sustainability and regulatory compliance point of view, particularly as the main scheme has capacity to meet forecast growth for the next 50 years.

Stormwater

The Council currently complies with the Land and Water Regional Plan. However, Environment Canterbury has promulgated Plan Change 7 (PC7) which has significant implications for the District, including protecting the habitat of indigenous freshwater species, enabling the consideration of Ngāi Tahu values in relation to a broader range of activities and requiring specific water quality and quantity provisions to be met in the Waimakariri Zone.

Currently only the Council stormwater systems delivered after 2000, provide any form of stormwater treatment (ie other systems are about flooding control and not treatment of discharge), but PC7 will require the Council to put funding aside for upgrades from 2025 to 2035 in order to comply with its criteria. The Council is currently undertaking a stocktake of all stormwater discharge consents, with a view to surrendering unnecessary consents. Again, in terms of prudent management and regulatory compliance, such a stocktake is wise.

Transport

The in-house Rooding Team manages routine network management, programme management, investigations and reporting as well as other functions, while physical works are carried out by external contractors. The priorities for the rooding network are set through the Infrastructure Strategy and the LTP, and are generally well-aligned to the Government Policy Statement (GPS) on transport and the NZTA expectations.

The Transport AMP is well-considered and recognises the key rooding and transport issues that have been identified by residents which include: the impact of increased congestion delays on business productivity and personal lifestyles; an increasing crash rate due to traffic conflicts at key intersections; more risky behaviour as people try to make up lost time; and, the impact of increased population (and therefore traffic) density on rural amenity.

While planning and management of the rooding assets is very good, the Transport AMP makes little reference to public transport. The Council has a Walking and Cycling Strategy, but it lacks specific goals or performance targets, such as increasing the percentage of residents biking, walking or using public buses in preference to private vehicles. This is a challenge for most New Zealand councils, but one that is particularly critical to Waimakariri if it is to maintain the rural appeal of the District while also enabling many residents to take commuting advantage of the District's proximity to Christchurch.

Community facilities

The Council provides a relatively large and diverse range of greenspace and recreational facilities, including 920ha of parks and reserves, three pools, 29 community buildings (halls, community centres, etc) and 67 playgrounds.

The 2017 assessment highlighted a growing expectation for improved community facilities as the District population grew post-earthquakes. The Council has recognised this with two important actions. The first is acknowledging the divergent needs of different sectors of the community (eg older people want more walking and cycle paths, while younger people want public wifi and good transport). In recognising this, the Council has developed both an Age Friendly Community Plan and a Youth Strategy and is seeking to implement funding programmes that meets both needs.

The second is the construction of a multi-use indoor stadium which is the first major addition to the District's community facilities since the Christchurch earthquakes. It will be owned and maintained by the Council but operated by a Sports Trust. When complete in 2021, it will be a significant step forward for the District in providing a modern and substantial range of community facilities.

Libraries

The Council has three libraries that are well patronised with an average of eight visits per annum per resident, a high-level of use by local youth, and a 97 per cent satisfaction rating. The regional appeal of the new Christchurch main library has presented a particular challenge for smaller rural libraries. However, the Council is receptive to new ways of operating, such as providing study spaces, "noisy" spaces and e-sports areas for the future. The Council sees libraries as being more a central community feature, with additional meeting space being added to broaden the emphasis of them from a place where one just borrows books, to encouraging more diverse community meetings and interactions. Although District youth can at times be a relatively disruptive element in the libraries, staff see their presence as a long-term positive trend and welcomes the challenge of finding the right outlet for them in the libraries.

Community development

The Council is rightly proud that it has been an accredited International Safe Community for 20 years and gained reaccreditation in November 2019. The Council has a strong community spirit across the organisation, and places considerable value and importance in its role as a facilitator of community services and community development.

The role of community development is seen as one of providing leadership, advocacy and project coordination services. This work is delivered by the Council's Community Team which is collaboratively funded by the Council and a variety of Government and non-Government funding bodies. The Community Team is acutely aware that its role is not to replicate social services of government or private agencies, but rather to facilitate and advocate for its community groups and the District as a whole. Its activities include: welcoming and connecting new migrants to the District; supporting volunteer groups and supporting residents' groups and associations as well as supporting community organisations to acquire funding for their operations and initiatives. Although a relatively small team, it is apparent from stakeholder feedback that the Community Team play a significant role in generating and maintaining a strong community spirit within the District and in ensuring that the Council is an integral part of community life.

Addressing regulation

Resource Consenting

The District continues to be one of the busiest in New Zealand for processing resource consents as subdivisions continue to grow. Given the volume (approximately 420 per annum of which some three to five per cent are notified), the achievement of 98 per cent of consents being processed within the mandatory statutory timeframes is a relatively good outcome.

In the intervening period since the 2017 assessment, it is apparent that the relationship between the Planning Team and the development community has matured. While the Council's relatively small qualitative survey still shows room for improvement, it can be seen that the Planning Team is making constructive steps to improve perceptions of its regulatory performance, with ratings of 57 per cent for professionalism, 71 per cent for being approachable, 43 per cent for being "solutions-focused" and 57 per cent saying they are a "trusted partner." Comments from stakeholders demonstrate that things are heading in the right direction. However, some stakeholders also mentioned that a commercial perspective was not always acknowledged, and elevating issues to the Chief Executive was a common approach to resolving matters.

Spatial planning

A particular current priority for the Council is a focus on natural hazards which are a growing issue in the District's low-lying areas. Planning staff are acutely aware that the Council has some difficult decisions on what to protect, how to adapt and where they will need to retreat from, with the District's beach communities presenting a particular challenge. These decisions will put political expediency against difficult, but essential, long-term sustainability considerations. It is a challenge that elected members will need to grasp.

Regulatory Services

The Council has a blend of internal and external resources to deliver regulatory services. Although the Council carries out an occasional dog prosecution, it is otherwise a relatively passive regulator with very rare abatement or prosecutions in other areas, with one staff member noting that they cannot remember when they last did any planning or building prosecutions. As with many other councils in New Zealand, there is a contradiction between the District's desired outcome of "A Safe Environment for All" and what some commented on as a lack of political appetite for enforcement action.

The Council has recently developed a Compliance Strategy (noted as an area for improvement in the 2017 assessment). As strategies go, it is extensive but unnecessarily wordy and complicated. It is also very generic – lacking any reference to the specific issues of the District. It emphasises process (ie how and when to take compliance action) over the strategic and regulatory issues facing the District that need to be addressed to help contribute to the District's "Safe Environment for All" outcome.

Without good context, regulatory staff cannot direct their energies – whether through education or enforcement – to effective or efficient use. There is still significant opportunity for the Council to make improvements in this space and, with

relatively modest internal resources, they may benefit from external expertise to support staff in this activity.

Capital investment decisions and delivery

Project reporting

There is no detailed reporting on major capital projects in the Annual Report, but there is capital expenditure reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee at an individual project and group activity level. The reporting to the Committee provides information on the percentage of expenditure complete and forecast outturns. It does not, however, reference any changes to scope or delivery milestones. While this level of reporting may not be required for minor works, there should be greater transparency and accountability to both the public and elected members for major projects.

Capital investments

The Council staff acknowledge that business case and business justification processes is an area requiring further work. The capital work project justification template is an appropriate tool for minor works (perhaps under \$500k). It covers most of the issues that should be considered for a modest capital investment – costs, strategic context, alternative options, implications of not acting and other issues. However, the reports reviewed did not give an impression of having been completed with the appropriate level of diligence. The assessment of alternative options was, at best, perfunctory with little consideration given to opportunity costs.

The Better Business Cases (BBC) reviewed also fell short of expectations and were not compliant with the minimum standards required for an accredited BBC writer. The Chief Executive has acknowledged that, with much-reduced major capital projects, the Council may not be able to justify the need for in-house accredited BBC capability and may give consideration to external support.

Strengths

The Council has a highly engaged and community-minded staff.

The Infrastructure Team has a much improved knowledge of the District's assets, and well-considered plans for future development that have a strong sustainability focus.

The Council has placed a strong focus on the need to improve the District water and soil quality through improved stormwater management and treatment.

The Community Team is strongly connected with community groups across the District.

The Council is highly responsive to the community calls for improved community facilities.

Areas for improvement

Consideration should be given to developing more challenging and relevant service levels and a performance framework that better engages and reflects the issues of importance to the community.

A Strategic Workforce Plan, which includes succession planning that has a strong focus on the future skills, and experience needed to achieve Council outcomes, could be beneficial.

The current Compliance Strategy should be modified to something that more specifically reflects the strategic goals and outcomes of the District.

Further enhancing current capital investment planning processes and capital project reporting is required.

Progress needs to be made to reduce the number of single-occupant commuter trips by encouraging greater use of public transport and other means of transport. Council should collaborate with Environment Canterbury on such a goal.

Listening and responding

Communicating and engaging with the public and businesses

The Council devotes significant resourcing to its communication and engagement activities. The outcome of these efforts is a community that is positively engaged and generally appreciative of its Council.

Priority grading

Performing well

< The Council has developed some very positive initiatives, particularly amongst community groups, but needs to draw all initiatives into a single, coherent strategy for the future.>

Planning effective engagement

The Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy is a lengthy action plan of things the Council wishes to progress, but lacks an overall strategy. When integrated with a wealth of similar documents (including the Significance and Engagement Policy, the Communications and Media Procedures, the Communications and Engagement Plan and the Communications and Media Policy), there is some difficulty in getting a clear, concise picture as to what the Council is endeavouring to achieve in this space. There is a wealth of information in their planning documents, and a central issue which is very apparent from the documents is the ongoing work required to tailor information to the increasingly diverse needs and expectations of residents.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy acknowledges that the Council has a strong practice and track record in face-to-face engagement with over 50 different infrastructure, community and recreation advisory groups. However, it also suffers from an excess of ambition which in reality means that many ideas are not progressed with the speed or completeness required. There are two clear and consistent pieces of feedback that the Council should pay greater heed to: (1) the community cares about quality and relevance of information, not the quantity

of information ("I want to know about things important to me, not what the Council thinks is important."); and (2) the community want a far greater volume of communication coming via digital sources.

Engaging digitally

The Council's work in this space is improving, but is incomplete. In the past three years, the look and feel of the website has improved. However, relative to other councils in New Zealand, it has fallen backwards (from 7th in 2017 to 65th in 2019) in the ALGIM audit of council websites. It generally rates well in terms of quality and quantity of information, but performs poorly in terms of functionality (ie online transactions), inter-operability (ie integration of systems) and levels of public participation.

The Council has developed a new digital engagement platform, "Bang The Table", through which they will create a "Peoples Panel" to obtain feedback and get insight into public perception in a more time efficient and interactive manner.

Reputation

The Council remains one of the best councils for having a very strong and positive relationship with its community. Having emerged from the post-earthquake rebuild, one might have anticipated a "toughening" of expectations from residents. However, the Council has maintained very strong levels of community support, with satisfaction levels remaining around 85 per cent. Other surveys also show that the Council out-performs the other greater Christchurch councils when it comes to levels of public confidence and community satisfaction with opportunities for the community to have a say in council matters.

While these results are generally very positive, the Council has not shied away from also acknowledging that challenges remain. The 2019 Communications and Engagement Framework Development Report conducted a qualitative analysis of the Council's relationships with residents. Some stories surfaced of instances where Council interactions communicated a sense of frustration and disempowerment. The report also highlighted that residents were often not aware of Council communications beyond those they passively come across and happen to notice.

Several issues emerge from this situation that the Council need to consider and respond to, including:

- There is a lack of motivation for people to get involved in Council issues because it is not clear “what’s in it for them in their busy lives?”;
- Information can be too hard to find amongst a plethora of reports and strategies; and
- Written information is often too complex and jargon-filled.

A particularly valuable initiative by the Council is the Community Surveys which seeks to identify the issues that are important to residents, including views about personal safety, sustainability, environment and climate change, as well as views about the range of shops and services in the District and levels of community and civic participation.

The Community Survey contains some key messages that the Council should heed in its future planning, such as 90 per cent of residents say a sense of community is important, but only 50 per cent are satisfied with their opportunity to participate in sporting, recreation or community groups. Sustainability is an important issue for 91 per cent of residents, but only 23 per cent are using public transport. The survey is a more nuanced and sophisticated tool for understanding community priorities and values than the traditional surveys which simply seek to establish whether residents are happy or unhappy with council services, and the Council should be encouraged to make greater use of it.

Communicating through the media

The Council has established a Communications and Media Policy, but it is primarily a process document (ie how media inquiries should be handled, or who should be a spokesperson on a matter). There is no overall strategy that defines the goals to be achieved from media interaction. This is despite the Mayor and Chief Executive having a very constructive relationship with the local media.

The Mayor noted that the key messages Council needed to send to the community were that the Council is in control, they understand things, and importantly, they have got a plan. The Mayor also acknowledged that his approach was to be honest in the media stories that Council put out, and “not to give spin and headline grab.”

There is also a social media policy that outlines what the Council is trying to achieve through social media and the responsibilities of staff in using social media in a work context. It is extensive and practical in the advice and guidelines provided.

Although lacking a media strategy, the Council has extensive media training with notes that provide good tips and practical advice. Media briefing notes are also provided to elected members with advice to keep key messages short and simple. The training notes also encourage staff and councillors to ask questions themselves of media so that they can better understand the media’s motivation for the interview and also understand

whether the media think the Council is performing well on handling the issue in question.

The Mayor receives weekly updates from the Communications Team on issues likely to be of interest in advance of his meetings with local media. The Communications Team also produce a quarterly report which effectively summarises media and engagement actions for the period.

Engaging with iwi

Engagement with iwi remains a particular strength of the Council. They have regular liaison meetings, engage external resources (Maahanui Kurataiao) to act as a specialist liaison point between iwi and council on Resource Management Act (RMA) issues, and have recently established a council committee - Mahi Tahī Joint Development Committee – to provide advice and recommendations on issues of common interest to iwi and Council. There is also iwi representation on a wide variety of other Council committees and groups. Despite these initiatives and the very positive feedback which was provided anecdotally by iwi, there is no tangible measure of the Council’s effectiveness in its engagement with iwi. The only measures currently reported are KPI’s for quarterly executive meetings and annual Hui with iwi. It is an obvious gap in the Council’s performance reporting which should be remedied.

Building relationships with business

The relationship with business interests is another area of improvement over the past three years. The new Mayor has the challenging task of establishing and maintaining the respect of the business community, but he appears to have done well in meeting that challenge. He is well-attuned to their interests which includes ensuring that the town centre remains attractive to locals (and not lose shoppers to Christchurch), growing stronger partnerships with developers, and meeting the transport challenges for commuters.

The Council’s regulatory interface with business is generally positive and more active than one would normally see with councils. Satisfaction ratings emphasise Council staff professionalism, approachability and their solutions-focused approach. While the Building Team has a more positive rating than the Planning Team, the latter show a marked improvement from three years ago. Anecdotal comments from stakeholders highlighted significant improvement, with the Council seen as being more collaborative and solutions-focused than it has been in the past. An external stakeholder did comment that Council seems to be genuinely committed to seeing value in projects that they deliver to the community, and are proactive in assisting them through the regulatory processes.

Engaging with communities

It is apparent that the Council has put a lot of resources into engagement across a more diverse range of community interests,

which was noted as an area for improvement in the 2017 assessment. The Council has been active on a range of matters, from District-wide issues such as water supply, town centre redevelopment, park and ride systems and community reserves, through to more “niche” community issues such as support groups for migrants, suicide prevention training and family violence education.

A particular strength of the Council is its Community Team which focuses on community and youth development, and safety. It is a group that is particularly connected to the diverse social and cultural interests across the District.

Strengths

The Council has a generally strong relationship of trust and confidence with the community as a whole, which is underpinned by the active roles of the Mayor and Chief Executive.

There is a strong commitment to iwi interests, supported by a wide range of consultative forums.

The quality of written documentation is much-improved and is visually appealing and distinctively local.

Comprehensive and practical media training materials are available.

A Community Survey initiative has been undertaken that seeks to establish what the community values are, which provides better insights and is a valuable tool for Council planning.

An increasing breadth of community engagement is apparent.

Areas for improvement

A more concise and coherent strategy for communication and engagement would be very helpful.

Reduced, but better, targeted forms of community consultation and engagement should also be implemented.

The Media Strategy could be revised to be less procedural and more strategic, and would be complemented by a constantly updated action plan.

Council’s performance assessment needs to include an outcomes based measure for assessing the success of iwi engagement.

Demonstrating value for money from the volume of communication materials that are produced would be very helpful for the community.

The Council should give greater priority to the delivery of online services and information in response to clear public demand.

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