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1. SUMMARY

1.1 Methodology

The key objectives of this research were to explore:

- Views on local issues that are important to individuals or their families;
- Views on things Councils do that are important to individuals or their families;
- Levels of trust and confidence in Council and reasons driving trust and confidence;
- Assess if respondents are aware of ways of participating in local government and the extent to which they may participate;
- Strategies to address barriers to participation and what types of information people need and how that is best delivered, and;
- The efficacy of tools to encourage public participation in local government.

Qualitative research involving six focus groups were held in Auckland, New Plymouth and Christchurch from 18-20 June 2007. The groups were all of mixed gender and comprised:

- 1 x Auckland Māori;
- 1 x Auckland 30-55 years;
- 1 x New Plymouth Māori including Taranaki rural;
- 1 x New Plymouth 30-55 years including Taranaki rural;
- 1 x Christchurch Māori including Canterbury rural;
- 1 x Christchurch 30-55 years including Canterbury rural.

Māori from affiliated to at least 15 different Iwi participated in the groups.
1.2 Overview

The research highlighted opportunities to encourage greater participation.

Local issues that are important to respondents can be leveraged to encourage participation, however councils will simultaneously need to implement strategies to overcome current barriers to engagement. Local government needs to proactively establish an environment of trust with residents in its communities by demonstrating an ability to listen and respond. Local government was generally perceived by the focus groups to be difficult to access, slow and inconsistent in its responsiveness, and at times manipulative with respect to decision-making. Even so, levels of satisfaction with the way in which councils carry out their activities is relatively high in most areas. Building trust will need to address responsiveness at both the individual inquiry level as well as with broader community issues around which genuine consultation and public feedback needs to take place.

The diagram below summarises the main barriers to participation in local government as well as the tools to enable greater participation. Central to encouraging greater participation is the need for councils to pro-actively seek public opinion on key issues that are of interest, such as, the desire for a safe environment, and to being responsive and accountable to public input when making decisions on those issues.
1.3 Views on local issues that are important to individuals or their families (unprompted)

The things that matter most to people locally cover many activities and issues that are the responsibility of local government with recurring themes including, having a secure and safe environment, issues with regional infrastructure and planning, rates increases and recreational spaces and opportunities.

As the activities local government carries out are rated as highly important to respondents, this provides a strong foundation on which to construct communication strategies to encourage greater participation.

Respondents generally identified local councils as the key influencer over the things they had identified as important locally. However, it was clear that in some instances there was confusion over whether council, particular central government agencies or private organisations were the parties to contact to address issues.

A pre-requisite to engagement with local government is motivation and this is driven primarily by whether an issue will have an impact on an individual. Although this is not a sufficient reason for engagement, it is a necessary one therefore it will aid those who seek to encourage engagement with local government to focus on those issues that individuals consider most important to them locally.

For all respondents, the key unprompted issues that they identified that were important to them locally were:

- A safe environment;
- Access to recreation areas and amenities;
- A clean environment;
- Efficient transport routes.

A second tier of issues that were identified in almost all groups were:

- Rates (generally criticised for being too high);
- Town Planning (criticism of housing developments linked to increased traffic congestion and ongoing roadworks);
- Water quality (more specific to New Plymouth and Christchurch);
- Family and community.

Several groups also identified issues such as education and employment.

There were few issues that were specific only to Māori, but there were some respondents in the Māori groups who identified issues that were not raised in the other groups. These were:

- Importance of Māori culture;
- Quality and cost of housing.
1.4 Importance of Local Government activities and satisfaction with them

Respondents rated 20 prompted activities that councils do in terms of their importance to them and how satisfied they were with the delivery of those activities. The table below summarises the mean ratings across all focus groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance VS SATISFACTION – ALL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MEAN SCORE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Importance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction – Importance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe streets in your neighbourhood for yourself/ children, street lights at night, dogs etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution control, protect environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish/waste disposal/recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMA consents and district planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Defence, emergency facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads, footpaths and street lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street beautification/graffiti removal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste treatment (sewage), Drainage and storm water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise control, (food inspections) and liquor licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks/reserves/sports grounds, cemeteries and crematoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art galleries, museums, and music venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming-pools/recreation and convention centres, halls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote city in NZ/overseas, economic/business development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor/provide public events (fireworks displays, park concerts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: n=49; Those who did not provide a rating or were unsure have been omitted from the mean calculations.
The third column identifies the gap between satisfaction and level of importance. The key areas for councils to focus on are those activities with a high mean importance rating and a significantly lower mean satisfaction rating. Thus, the provision of safe streets is a critical issue as its has the highest mean rating in terms of importance yet one of the lowest mean satisfaction ratings with a gap between the two mean ratings being -3.3.

Other activities that demand some focus are:

- Setting rates (-2.5);
- Parking (-2.3);
- Pollution (-2.0);
- Rubbish disposal (-1.8).

Further analysis of ratings given by each focus group was done. This identified activities that were of high importance to the group and where their satisfaction with their local council doing that activity was lowest. Only activities that where there was a significantly higher level of dissatisfaction than in other groups were included.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auckland 30-55 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Galleries/Museums, and Music Venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise control, (Food Inspections) and liquor licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads, footpaths and street lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste treatment (sewage), Drainage and storm water</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auckland Māori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe streets in your neighbourhood for yourself/children, street lights at night, dogs etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting rates</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMA consents and district planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noise control, (Food Inspections) and liquor licensing</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>New Plymouth 30-55 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish/waste disposal/recycling</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Plymouth Māori</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish/waste disposal/recycling</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Christchurch 30-55 years</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe streets in your neighbourhood for yourself/children, street lights at night, dogs etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street beautification/graffiti removal</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christchurch Māori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish/waste disposal/recycling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No such activities were identifiable from the New Plymouth 30-55 year group*. 
It is worth noting that the Māori groups in the two urban centres were significantly less satisfied than other respondents with how safe streets in their neighbourhood were.

The results in the tables above must be treated as indicative since this was qualitative research and not statistically valid. However, the results do indicate the kinds of issues that are likely to motivate individuals to engage with local government on.

1.5 Awareness of participation with Local Government

Although in all groups almost everyone indicated they voted in local government elections, engagement outside of that activity was somewhat limited. The reason why respondents engage with local government outside of elections most frequently centres on an issue that is quite specific to that individual and involved either a complaint about a problem or a request for information. That kind of contact is almost exclusively done by phone or letter.

Few respondents had engaged in more formal processes such as attending a meeting or making a formal submission even though they were aware they could do so. Respondents thought that participation in more formal processes required specialist assistance, such as legal support. Direct contact with council representatives was also rare, although, residents in rural areas were more likely to be comfortable approaching their council representatives.

Some respondents from New Plymouth and Christchurch noted the use of surveys by their councils to gain public opinion on issues. The extent to which respondents participated in local government was limited by a general sense of powerlessness. The factors behind this are detailed more fully in Section 1.7.

1.6 Trust and confidence in Local Government

Respondents in most groups identified examples of activities that had undermined their trust and confidence in local government and had the potential to deter them from engaging with local government. This was because these experiences had given them the impression that decisions they had sought to have input to had already been made or would be made by councils regardless of the individual’s participation.

Respondents cited examples where they believed genuine consultation between council and residents had not occurred. For instance, consultation had taken place so late in the decision-making process that they felt their voice would not hold any sway, or at times the outcome of consultation was disregarded which was particularly damaging to further engagement. Sometimes consultation timeframes were so tight as to frustrate genuine consultation. These barriers drove to the heart of trust and confidence in councils and affected the confidence respondents had in engagement.

Two examples of such activities that undermined trust and confidence and thus also created barriers to future participation included:

- A council making a decision counter to the popular views expressed by the public in a survey;
- A perception that some critical council decisions have been made by an inside clique of councillors and private companies behind ‘closed doors’.

These examples together with a strong desire across all the focus groups for councils to be pro-active, open and accountable in seeking the views of the community showed that trust and confidence was directly linked to how responsive and accountable councils are to public input to key decisions.
Individuals also lack confidence in contacting their council on a range of reasons that are more fully covered in the next section on barriers to participation.

1.7 Barriers to participation in Local Government

A number of negative perceptions about local government’s complexity, limited accessibility, and lack of both responsiveness and openness create barriers to participation. Respondents, particularly those from urban areas and to a lesser extent from provincial areas, tend to regard local government as large, complex and bureaucratic. They tend to think that in order to get things done or to carry influence it is a case of ‘who you know’ rather than ‘what you know’. Key decisions tend to be seen as being made behind ‘closed doors’ which undermines trust and confidence in the decision-making process.

There were no significant differences between the 30-55 year-old groups and Māori with respect to perceived barriers to participation in local government. The key barriers identified across all groups were:

- The size and complexity of local government which was more pronounced in urban areas;
- The size and complexity of issues;
- A sense of being an isolated voice on an issue;
- Sense of powerlessness;
- Lack of openness;
- Lack of knowledge;
- Lack of sense of community;
- Council impacts;
- Lack of responsiveness;
- Council in-fighting;
- Lack of trust;
- Personal impact.

Some respondents found the scale of the issues they wanted to have addressed were too daunting. For example, if an issue involved a significant engineering challenge or the expenditure required to address an issue were too big then participation was inhibited. In such instances, respondents indicated that they lacked the knowledge or expertise to have the confidence to participate, and so did not do so. This extended to perceptions about written submissions which some respondents saw as requiring some legal skills to do effectively. Strategies are required to minimise the intimidation of apparent complexity.

There were also barriers to engaging on issues that did not directly impact on day-to-day life. Due to the demands of everyday life, respondents noted that to become involved in an issue for altruistic reasons was a bit of a luxury. Some just begrudged the time and effort that would be involved.

Respondents were also unclear or even unaware of whose responsibility a particular issue might be, for example, a roading issue might partly be a Transit responsibility or street safety a Police matter. And even if they did know that a matter was a council responsibility they were not likely to know who they should contact to have a say on the issue. Thus, lack of knowledge also limits participation.

Delays and inconsistent responses to inquiries are other contributors that influence respondents negatively toward engaging with local government.
New Plymouth Differences

There were some differences by location in terms of barriers to participation. Respondents from rural areas, who were present in both the New Plymouth groups, demonstrated a much greater awareness of who their local representatives were and could access them easily even to the point in some instances of respondents knowing representatives personally. Both New Plymouth groups had respondents who were more alienated toward their local council than the other groups. This was based on a perception that there was in-fighting and key decisions were made by a clique of councillors and companies and concern about the changes the council was making to the character of the central business district.

Christchurch and New Plymouth Differences

The Christchurch and New Plymouth groups did identify ways in which their councils had sought public opinion on key issues by employing some form of survey, a tool to enable participation that found firm support across all groups. However, in Christchurch several respondents recalled the council ignoring the public’s views in one survey it had conducted which had undermined confidence in the use of that tool.

1.8 Enabling participation in Local Government

Barriers to participation can be taken down by adopting a multiple layer of strategies. Strategies need to be put in place to motivate engagement, the right information needs to be provided to all residents about what councils do, steps must be taken to make it easier to make contact and for that contact to be a positive experience, and a range of communications tools need to be employed.

The tools identified in the groups to enable participation in local government are summarised in the following diagram.

![Diagram of tools to enable participation in local government]

- Perceived personal impact
- Feedback/ accountability
- Achievable solutions
- Proactive consultation
- Better service
- Visible communication channels
- Better information
- Positive outcomes

- Contact points and responsibilities
- Procedures and processes
- Council services
- Advance notice of council plans
- Feedback and timeframes
- Clear and simple information

- Surveys
- Face-to-face contact
- Internet contact
- Telephone contact
- Mail contact
- Advertising
- Simplify paperwork
- Better service
- Intermediary
- Better access

Motivation
What would make me engage?

What would be the best way for them to engage with me?

Information needs
What information do I need?

Facilitating Input
How can they make it easy to engage?
Motivating engagement

Councils must proactively contact and elicit opinions from residents through the use of surveys and through opportunities for face-to-face contact at times and in places that suit the target audience. Importantly, communications need to be open and balanced and must also include feedback to residents that demonstrates that council has listened and can be influenced by the voice of its community. When councils depart from public opinion, the reasons for doing so need to be explained to ensure there is clear accountability for decision-making. If councils adopt these measures, they will go a long way toward establishing the levels of trust and confidence required for residents to feel it is worth their while participating on issues that matter to them.

Not only will higher levels of participation demand the use of multiple communications channels and the wide distribution of basic information, it will also require local government to target its engagement with the public appropriately. It should start by engaging on issues that matter most to residents because that is where the impact of a positive, responsive and consultative approach is most likely to be noticed.

For instance, this piece of research identified issues such as rates, traffic flows, public transport, parking, safety on the streets, boy racers, rubbish collection (New Plymouth and Christchurch) and pollution (Christchurch) as high on the list of issues respondents felt were important and where there were relatively lower levels of satisfaction with local government’s performance.

- **Information needs**

  Respondents need to know what councils do and who within the council was responsible for different issues. This information needs to be provided to all residents not just ratepayers. There is also a need to provide information on the procedures and processes that needed to be followed and notification of council plans in advance with enough time for public input to make a difference.

  There were also requests for feedback on input which would illustrate the council were taking an issue seriously and likely response times to address issues which would confer some level of accountability. All information would need to be clear, simple and easy to understand.

- **Facilitating input**

  Respondents called for more opportunities for face-to-face contact with suggestions ranging from more formal contact such as public meetings to informal ‘surgeries’ where councillors made themselves available to talk one-on-one with residents.

  An 0800 number and using text messaging for feedback and providing information were viewed as effective ways to facilitate input.

  There were also a number of internet tools that could be employed including setting up a council related blog (although some felt this could deteriorate into just a ‘whinge session’), online forms, organisational contact details on the website for each department, email forums and feedback loops and possibly providing free internet access at council sites.

  Some suggested facilitating engagement by providing information via advertising and freepost feedback forms that could be sent out in flyers or put in the local paper.
Better customer service by council staff was also seen to facilitate engagement as it provides a more welcoming and less intimidating ‘face’ to the council. Some would also like council paperwork and processes to be streamlined. Related to council service was having enhanced accessibility by extending office hours and having a 24 hour telephone line.

One of the most common unprompted strategies that respondents suggested for promoting greater engagement in local government was the use of some form of survey so councils could provide a simple and easy way of enabling residents to provide input on issues. The survey was also important as it provided a measure of public opinion and accountability for council. Several ways of ensuring more personal contact between councillors and the public were also suggested across all groups such as councillors holding weekly ‘surgeries’ or more pro-actively making themselves available.

- **Best way to engage**

Respondents wanted more open and honest communication with council. There was a general preference for face-to-face or telephone contact as these forms of communication were seen to enable a more personal connection to be made.

To make communication more personal, it could also be more localised. For example, it could involve targeting information to a particular neighbourhood about a matter affecting just that small part of the city, town or locality or it could involve taking an environmental issue about recycling to a supermarket mall to promote use of recyclable bags. Where face-to-face meetings are planned, the location and timing of meetings need to be scheduled to ensure maximum opportunity to participate.

Other common communication channels were mentioned as of ways of engaging with people, including mail, face-to-face contact, television, internet and surveys.

In summary, individuals will be motivated to participate in local government by issues that impact on them or their families. There are clearly important issues, such as safe environments, that are common to all respondents which would provide the firmest foundation for councils to expect their communities to engage with them on. However, a second set of conditions need to be in play to ensure participation occurs. These are:

- Confidence that there will be feedback and accountability for decisions made;
- The likelihood that an achievable solution can be found to the issue;
- Proactive consultation by the council;
- Easier ways of enabling contact between the public and council;
- Clear, simple information, particularly on who to contact about any particular issue, but also on; procedures and processes, advance notice of council plans, feedback loops and timeframes;
- Better interface between council staff and the public;
- Positive outcomes experienced from participation.
The principal tools for facilitating communication across all groups were:

- Surveys using free-post return;
- Face-to-face engagement e.g. public meetings, citizen ‘surgeries’, information evenings;
- Internet enabling e-mail feedback, input through a blog space;
- 0800 numbers;
- Visible advertising of initiatives and easy ways to participate;
- Simple submission templates;
- Extended hours and more flexible times to make contact;
- Customer–friendly attitudes of council staff.

1.9 **Promoted strategies to encourage participation**

Two different sets of prompted strategies to encourage participation in local government were tested with the Māori and 30-55 year-old groups.

Across the 30-55 year olds, the strategy that attracted the most support was the mail-out consultation process which several respondents thought could be improved by allowing input from multiple communication channels. Use of website and internet media and having councillors meet the public face-to-face at local events to discuss concerns were also popular strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE YOUR PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT – 30-55 YEARS</th>
<th>MEAN SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mail-outs with a list of issues residents may want to be informed about and ways of contacting them on issues. Residents send back form ticking their preferences and Council contacts them on the issues they choose.</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of website/Internet activities e.g. chatrooms, message boards, online forums with councillors, email submissions.</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors meet face-to-face at local sports clubs, halls, schools, pubs etc to hear concerns and talk one-on-one with residents. Could involve ‘trusted sources’ to convey messages e.g. local celebrities, musicians etc.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional analysis of the activities was undertaken across each 30-55 year-old focus group. These tables can only be indicative as the number of respondents is so low that it does not enable any statistical conclusions to be drawn from the results, however, while a similar pattern of rating for each activity occurred across the three 30-55 year-old groups there were two exceptions being that:

- Question-Answer booths in high pedestrian areas or at key events where people can ask questions of councillors – this was rated a mean of 3.7 in New Plymouth compared with 7.4 and 6.3 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively.
- Free days at council facilities and give information on activities council does - this was rated a mean of 3.6 in New Plymouth compared with 5.9 and 5.4 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively.
The most highly rated activities for Māori involved meeting on marae or similar venues where councillors met with Māori on their terms. While an on-line activity rated relatively well too, respondents in the Auckland group pointed out that this option would better suit those people who would not have an opportunity to speak in the formal setting of a marae. Equally, it was noted that few older Māori were likely to use the Internet to communicate with council on issues. The mail-out option, which was the top rated prompt among the 30-55 year-old groups, was not tested with the Māori groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities to Increase Your Participation in Local Government – Māori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate each activity on a 0-10 scale where 0 means ‘not that likely’ and 10 means ‘very likely’ on how likely each activity would be to increase your participation in local government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN SCORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors meet face-to-face on Marae or local sports clubs or art and culture groups with opportunities to have a say/present views. Could involve ‘trusted sources’ to convey messages e.g. Kaumatua, celebrities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online e-forums with councillors where Māori email councillors their opinions/ideas and get a response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors volunteer on projects important to Māori, so improving contact with Māori and giving councillors a chance to participate in things important to Māori e.g. local Kohanga-reo campaign to build a new swimming-pool, group fundraising to go to the nationals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Great care should also be taken to avoid activities which provide some kind of reward to Māori for participating as this was considered insulting and demeaning to Māori.

Again analysis of the activities across each Māori focus group was undertaken. As noted previously these tables can only be indicative as the number of respondents is so low that it does not enable any statistical conclusions to be drawn from the results, however, some notable differences were:

- Councillors meet face-to-face on Marae or local sports clubs or art and culture groups with opportunities to have a say/present views. Could involve ‘trusted sources’ to convey messages e.g. Kaumatua, celebrities - this was rated a mean of 4.8 in Auckland compared with 7.7 and 6.7 in New Plymouth and Christchurch respectively.

- Online e-forums with councillors where Māori email councillors their opinions/ideas and get a response - this was rated a mean of 4.1 in New Plymouth compared with 6.3 and 8.2 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively.

- Political speed-dating where local councillors met with Māori at an event. Each person attending is allowed a short time with each councillor to discuss whatever issues they want. This could be an event on its own - this was rated a mean of 2.9 in Auckland compared with 5.6 and 5.7 in New Plymouth and Christchurch respectively.

- Council sponsored awards for Māori involved in council processes and initiatives - this was rated a mean of 2.1 in New Plymouth compared with 4.3 and 5.4 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively.
1.10 Māori

Māori affiliated to at least 15 different Iwi were among respondents, including some respondents who identified with at least two different Iwi, and in many instances respondents lived outside their rohe. All but two respondents in the three Māori groups were able to identify their Iwi. Some respondents identified their Māori as well as other ethnic aspects of the genealogy stating all aspects were important to them.

There were few, clear, discernible differences between the things that mattered to Māori locally and those that mattered to respondents from the 30-55 year-old groups. The exceptions were issues that were only raised by some Māori respondents and were:

- the importance of Māori culture which was raised by respondents in the Auckland and Christchurch groups;
- an environmental issue that arose with the New Plymouth Māori group relating to coastal erosion and sand-mining;
- housing which was raised as something that was important to respondents or their families was raised in the Auckland (2 respondents) and New Plymouth (1 respondent) Māori groups. Although care should be taken in interpreting too much from a mention by two respondents in one group, we are aware from other research that housing costs and housing quality for renters are issues that are pronounced in Auckland. The encroachment of housing subdivisions on available space was an issue for both Christchurch groups.

As noted earlier, Māori were more inclined to be less satisfied with the performance of their local councils in providing a safe environment, and the Auckland Māori group showed low levels of satisfaction with respect to setting of rates and RMA consents and district planning.

Only two Māori respondents across the three groups were aware of their Iwi being involved in special consultation with local government on issues related to land, water, sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna or taonga. However, respondents did express the view that consultation on those issues would happen if required.

Respondents readily identified individuals such as ‘aunties’, who they would speak to if they knew of significant issues that were important to Māori that they wanted their Iwi to take up with local government. Māori living outside their rohe regarded it as the role of the local Iwi to deal with issues of specific interest to Māori. Thus, their engagement was likely to be more limited.

Some prompted strategies (see Appendix 3) that were tested to encourage Māori participation should be avoided as respondents found them insulting. These were strategies that involved any form of reward or grant for participation in local government. Strategies that appealed the most were ones that involved councillors meeting Māori face-to-face on Māori terms, such as, on a marae. Some strategies, such as the use of online communications, it was noted would be useful for providing individual input which would not be possible on a marae where only certain individuals would speak on behalf of others, but would be inappropriate for older Māori. Thus, communications need to be tailored to the needs of each audience.
1.11 30-55 years

Many of the respondents in the 30-55 year-old groups had dependent children, so the focus of their issues revolved around ensuring clean, safe environments with facilities that catered for families.

Face-to-face meetings with council members also appealed to this group though care should be taken in selecting appropriate venues as, for example, the suggestion of pubs was regarded as highly inappropriate. The most attractive strategy for encouraging engagement was a mail-out of issues which enabled residents to express their preferences on issues. The attraction of this option was that it let people respond in their own time and had the potential to deliver to council a clear measure of public opinion that could in turn be made public in order to provide valuable feedback and to hold councils accountable. Online and phone options for channelling responses should also be used as alternatives to posting responses to council.

Activities that should be avoided are those involving competitions to encourage greater awareness of council activities as these were not attractive and seemed to trivialise the issue for some. There was also weak support for opening up council facilities for free visits. Several respondents were confused about what facilities would be open for free that were currently charged for.

1.12 Rural/Provincial/Urban

For those from rural areas there was evidently a much stronger familiarity with key elected representatives than elsewhere. Three respondents in the two New Plymouth groups, for instance, knew their Mayor personally and all three had approached the Mayor to have a say on issues and had had some success.

This, however, contrasted sharply with provincial and urban respondents, who were unlikely to be aware of their local councillors and certainly would not seek their assistance on issues. Several respondents talked of seeing their local MP if a local issue was significant enough rather than a councillor. Individual councillors were not generally regarded as influential individuals who could get things done. This suggests the need for councillors to have more direct public contact, for instance, holding weekly clinics for residents. This was a suggestion made in Auckland which was echoed in Christchurch when respondents spoke highly of the clinic the Mayor held in the city’s Square.

In New Plymouth, there was a stronger sense of general alienation between respondents and their council with a perception that an ‘inside’ clique comprising key councillors and private companies were making many of the key decisions. It was evident that employment and tertiary opportunities were key issues for respondents in terms of the community’s sustainability. And issues with respect to water quality were more pronounced.

In Christchurch, environmental pollution issues and the encroachment of housing subdivisions were two issues that emerged that were more pronounced than in the other two centres. There was a stronger identification with the use of parks and reserves than elsewhere.
In Auckland, concerns about living in a safe environment were more pronounced though evident in the other two cities. Safety was not an issue for rural respondents, but school enrolments which were linked to the numbers of teachers at schools and the availability of school buses were more uniquely rural issues.