

## UMR Report - Barriers and Enablers to Participate in Local Government General Findings

### Overview

UMR was commissioned by the Department of Internal Affairs in June 2007 to conduct the following research to determine what prevents or inhibits individuals participating in local government, and to identify which strategies might help to overcome these barriers.

The research involved six focus groups made up from the local population of three different areas of New Zealand, and concentrated on respondents in the 30-55 year age group, and Maori.

### Findings

Overall the respondents' rating of local councils was positive and the respondents generally identified local councils as a key influence in things they identified as important locally.

The following are examples of services rated by respondents as being more than satisfactory:

- Libraries
- Water supply
- Parks/reserves/sports grounds, cemeteries and crematoria
- Swimming-pools/recreation and convention centres, halls
- Sponsor/provide public events (fireworks, displays, park concerts)
- Waste treatment (sewage), drainage and storm water, and
- Rubbish/waste disposal/recycling.

Major barriers to participation identified by the respondents include:

- Size and complexity of local government in different geographic areas
- Size and complexity of issues
- A sense of isolation and powerlessness
- Lack of openness, trust, knowledge, responsiveness and sense of community, and
- Council impacts.

However, the report has identified some strategies that councils can use to overcome some of these barriers:

- Confidence that there will be feed back and accountability for decisions made
- Likelihood that an achievable solution can be found to issues
- Proactive consultation by the council
- Facilitating contact between the public and council
- Clear, simple information on contacts, procedures and processes
- Provision of advance notice of council plans, feed loops and timeframes, and
- Improved interface between council staff and the public.

