



LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERIES



CASE STUDY: WANGANUI DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Table of Contents

CONTENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Case Study Methodology	6
COMMUNITY OUTCOMES:	8
Legislative Intent	8
Wanganui District Council Community Outcomes Process: Response to the Legislation	8
Community Outcomes Benefits	10
Community Outcomes Issues	11
Future Community Outcomes	12
STRATEGIC PLANNING (LTCCP)	14
Legislative Intent	14
Response to the Legislation – How Wanganui Developed its LTCCP	14
Benefits of the LTCCP	15
LTCCP: Issues	16
Impact of the LTCCP on Wanganui District Council	17
COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING	18
Legislative Intent	18
Wanganui District Council Approach to Decision-Making under the new Act	18
Benefits of Decision-Making under the new Act	21
Issues with Decision-Making	22
Decision-Making under the new Act – the future in Wanganui	24
CONCLUSIONS	25

Introduction

1. New local government legislation administered by the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department) was enacted in 2001 and 2002.¹ This report presents the results of a case study of the perceived effects of the legislation upon the Wanganui District Council. It is part of a series of nine case studies providing a rich and deliberately detailed account of how these local authorities have adapted to the 2001 and 2002 legislation, and in particular Part Six of the Local Government Act (the Act) relating to planning, decision-making, and accountability.
2. These case studies were requested by the Manager of Strategic Analysis and Information of the Local Government and Community (LG&C) Branch of the Department as part of the research programme as laid out in the Strategy for Evaluating Local Government Legislation. This long-term research programme is intended to run until 2013 to understand whether the new legislation is operating effectively. Work completed so far on this programme has produced a strategy and a framework for the evaluation programme, and a report on the roll-out of the legislation.

Research Objectives

3. The purpose of the case studies is to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of how local government has reacted to, interpreted and applied the new Act. This research will contribute to the local government sector's knowledge of the effects of the new legislation. The specific objectives of the local government case studies are :
 - How local authorities have implemented and addressed the new legislation's provisions around planning, decision-making and community outcomes
 - How local authorities worked with their communities to develop community outcomes
 - How local authorities developed and implemented their Long-Term Council Community Plans (LTCCPs) and involved communities and stakeholders in the process
 - How local authorities have used the LTCCPs within their organisation
 - How local authorities have consulted and interacted with their communities and stakeholders over decision-making, and
 - How communities and stakeholders are interacting with local authorities, and
4. The case studies achieve these objectives by evaluating local authorities' application of the three key elements that are critical in achieving the Act's aims of promoting democratic accountability and a sustainable development to local government strategy. These three elements are community outcomes, strategic planning and decision-making.
5. Insight into the new legislation, provided by the case studies, will also allow the Department to identify opportunities for further research to improve understanding of the effects of the 2001/2002 legislation.

Legislative Intent

6. The Act "*is designed to provide democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities.*"² The Act enables local authorities to use a sustainable development approach to promote community well-being. To help make local government more effective, their powers were altered by the Act – they moved away from the prescriptive and restrictive nature of the previous legislation to an empowered environment. Balancing this empowerment, the legislation also promotes accountability and transparency in local authorities, as detailed in Part 6 of the Act.

¹ Local Government Act 2002; Local Government (Rating) Act 2002; Local Electoral Act 2001

² The Department of Internal Affairs, "Strategy for Evaluating Local Government Legislation," 2005, page 7. The emphasis (italics) is from the original document.

Available at: http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Resource-material-Our-Research-and-Reports-Strategy-for-Evaluating-Local-Government-Legislation?OpenDocument.

7. The responsibility for facilitating communities in the development of their community outcomes is a new role for all councils. However, some councils had already started a process for setting targets, goals and outcomes for community development before the enactment of the legislation.
8. While strategic planning was a part of the traditional role of local authorities, the legislation provided a new emphasis and added new, wider planning functions and responsibilities (e.g. the LTCCP) to improve the way local authorities performed this function. Further, the Act described a link between strategic planning and the community outcomes identified by the local authority's communities.
9. The Act requires local authorities to be more rigorous in their decision-making. Local authorities are required to identify all options for achieving the objective of the decision, and assessing those options by considering the benefits and costs in terms of the present and future well-being of the community, and alignment with community outcomes. It is expected therefore community outcomes will affect local authorities' decision making. The Act requires local authorities to use a special consultative procedure for consultation on particular issues and decisions. Further, the Act requires local authorities to establish and maintain opportunities for Māori to contribute to decision-making.
10. In summary, the three elements described are thematically linked as they make local authorities more accountable to their communities. Consequently, the case study reports are structured around the three parts of the Act with a conclusion section, which draws together the three parts of the Act. The specific legislative intent of each element is listed at the beginning of each section.

Case Study Methodology

11. The case study method was adopted to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of how local government has reacted to, interpreted and applied the three elements of the Act. In particular, the case studies provide the ability to select councils with significant differences in terms of population, location and nature; and contrasting responses to the legislation.
12. Local authorities were selected using the following purposive sampling criteria:
 1. Type of local authority (regional council / territorial local authority).
 2. Sector (Metropolitan/Provincial/Rural as defined by LGNZ membership).
 3. Councils who have not participated in previous or proposed future studies to expand knowledge about local government in New Zealand.
 4. Rate of general population growth to ensure inclusion of councils experiencing extremes of population growth/decline.
 5. Proportion of Māori residents to ensure inclusion of councils with high Māori populations.
 6. Location (North / South Island) to ensure inclusion of geographical spread across New Zealand and factors such as degree of urbanisation.
13. Each case study drew on multiple data streams including documentation review and key informant interviews.
14. In-depth document review of selected council material was undertaken to understand processes used and their deliverables. The document review enabled appropriate targeting of in-depth questions for the key informant interviews. The following are examples of local authority documents reviewed:
 - Published community outcomes
 - The 2006 LTCCP and most recent Annual Plan
 - Other available and relevant local authority documents associated with strategic planning, decision-making or community outcomes
 - Relevant local authority policies
 - Relevant submissions made to local authority by selected stakeholders (e.g. in Community Outcomes or LTCCP processes).
15. Key informant interviews were undertaken with some or all of the following:
 - Council officers

- Councillor/s
- Local business representative/s
- Residents/ratepayers representative/s
- Local community group representative/s
- Local Māori (such as Iwi Authorities).

Wanganui District Council Case Study Specifics:

16. The case study of the Wanganui District Council (WDC) was undertaken by staff from the Department's Research and Evaluation Services (R&ES) in conjunction with Litmus – a private Wellington-based research company. R&ES holds membership in the Association of Social Science Researchers (ASSR) and the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES), and the research for this report was conducted to the ethical standards of those bodies.
17. Documents reviewed:
 - Wanganui District Community Outcome Process Report (2005)
 - Wanganui District Council 10-Year Plan 2006-2016 (Volumes One to Three) – Also known as Long-Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP)
 - Wanganui District Community Outcomes Monitoring Report February 2007
 - Wanganui District Council's Strategic Direction '05
18. Key informants interviewed:
 - Three WDC council officers
 - Two WDC Councillors
 - Three representatives of local tangata whenua organisations
 - Seven different stakeholder and community organisation representatives.
19. Those interviewed were identified by Wanganui District Council officers as knowledgeable about one or all of the three of the LGA elements being examined in the case. They were recruited to the case study by staff from WDC. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by staff from the Department's R&ES during March 2008. Interviews varied in length, and were digitally recorded. On request, interview notes were made available for review by participants.
20. Participants were informed that the Department will seek to keep their information confidential, and steps have been taken in the preparation of this report to reduce the likelihood they will be identified by their comments. All provided informed consent for their interview.

Case study scope and analysis criteria

21. The information and data available to address the evaluation objectives are qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted with a limited range of informants who agreed to participate. The Department's R&ES staff in conjunction with Litmus has undertaken a thematic analysis of the qualitative information to identify emerging themes, and to elicit differences across different stakeholders. Themes emerging were collaborated through triangulation of interviews with analysis of secondary data and documents. Key findings in the research are judged by the regularity with which they are mentioned by informants, and where there is significant difference in opinion on the same theme.
22. The case study report is therefore indicative, not definitive. That is, we are unable to categorically say whether or not the themes noted throughout the case study report are held by all stakeholders of Wanganui District Council. Nor is it possible to comment accurately about whether the strength of views presented in this report are widely shared or the strength of views held. We are, however, confident that this report accurately represents the views and perceptions of participants who contributed to this case study.

Acknowledgement

23. The Department and Litmus wish to express our thanks to all those who contributed to this case study. We would especially like to thank council officers of Wanganui District Council for assisting us in recruiting key informants and those who gave time and reviewed the draft case study.

Community Outcomes:

Legislative Intent

“The Act promotes greater accountability between local authorities and their communities and a long-term focus for the decisions and activities of the local authority. The Act requires local authorities to facilitate a process with their communities, at least every six years, to identify community outcomes for the intermediate and long-term future of the district or region. The role of the local authority is to facilitate the process, with the community having ownership of the identified outcomes.

Identifying community outcomes is designed to promote better co-ordination and application of community resources, and inform and guide priorities for activities undertaken by local authorities and other organisations. Local authorities' role is to facilitate the contribution other local authorities, government agencies, local organisations and the business sector make to the outcomes and priorities identified by the community.

Local authorities can decide what processes to use to identify and prioritise community outcomes but they must ensure that the processes encourage the community to contribute. They also must, before deciding on the process, identify other organisations and groups capable of influencing either the identification or the promotion of community outcomes, and, if practicable, secure their agreement to the process.”³

Wanganui District Council Community Outcomes Process: Response to the Legislation

The Wanganui District Community Outcomes Process⁴ 2003 – 2007

24. The Wanganui District Council first involved its wider local community in identifying long-term goals in 1995. By 1997 the council had produced a Community Strategic Plan, the first document to outline “*community priorities*”. This document was reviewed in 2003. This review process coincided with the implementation of the new (2002) Act, and the council took this opportunity to go beyond a review, and conduct an initial Community Outcomes Process. This process used the original 1997 document to inform the subsequent Community Outcomes.
25. The actual process started in 2002 with research by the council of local media, lobby groups, stakeholders and elected members as to “*what matters to different people*.” The council then went through a process to identify groups and organisations capable of influencing the community outcomes process. They started with the key stakeholders they already had established relationships with. These included “*two local Iwi, the Police,*

³ Quoted from the “Strategy for Evaluating Local Government”, Department of Internal Affairs, 2005, page 9.

⁴ The following is largely paraphrased from Wanganui District Council, Ten-Year Plan (LTCCP) 2006-2016; and the Wanganui District Community Outcomes Monitoring Report, February 2007.

the District Health Board, Whanganui UCOL and Work and Income New Zealand.^[1] After this consultation the council decided that the “*bodies capable of influencing*” the outcomes were much wider than this initial selection. To avoid any appearance of bias in favouring the views “*of a few*” the process settled upon was widely advertised, and encourage submissions and active participation from throughout the wider Wanganui community. The council stated to key stakeholders, that the process would be “*about capturing the views of the community, including the usual silent majority, about their priorities for improving wellbeing.*”^[2]

26. Council officers charged with interpreting the Act and recommending the council's response proposed that there be a large number of public meetings. To one council officer, they interpreted that the Act expected a “*comprehensive level of consultation*”, in the case of Wanganui this included:
- The significant part of public engagement in the process would be through meetings that took place in February and March 2003. There were 89 meetings, attended by councillors, with over 1,000 people turning up. The meetings started with a presentation about changes since the Community Priorities process in 1997 and the results of the research into what matters to people. The meetings then discussed these points. A record of the findings of the meeting and its priorities was passed back to the council.
 - Council officers took the records of these meetings and qualitatively analysed them using NVivo software. This identified the most commonly discussed issues and any relationships between issues. These issues were then placed into outcome groupings.
 - The draft outcomes were considered by the council before going out to public consultation, via a submission process in October 2003. “*Some minor amendments*⁵” were made to the outcomes as a result of this process. The finalised outcomes were adopted at a council meeting in December 2003. Submitters and meeting “hosts” were provided copies of these final outcomes, and they were invited to take part in the “*action planning process*” that the council would facilitate.
 - While the action plan (see below) was being developed, the district council was liaising with the Horizons (Manawatu-Wanganui) Regional Council to assist them in the development of their Community Outcomes.
27. At its completion, the Wanganui District had identified seven community outcomes each of which had a series of outcome statements. The number of outcome statements varied from four under the “*Diverse and quality education opportunities*” to eleven under the “*People Working Together*” outcome. These were the basis of the process for the development of the Community Outcomes Plan 2004.
28. Among other things this plan shows how different organisations (including the council) intend to contribute to the achievement of the Community Outcomes. This was achieved by showing the key stakeholders identified as primary contributors (there can be more than one) to a particular community outcome. Some stakeholders interviewed for this case study discussed the amount of engagement they had with the council during this time in very positive terms. One stakeholder emphasised the importance of the relationships built at this time, and that these relationships (referred to as “*partnerships*” by some stakeholders) became very important as “*the council has no money – it has to be very smart in what it does.*”
29. A councillor noted that, at this time, they also saw the Act as changing the focus of their role to delivering on the community outcomes. In this sense they thought that as councillors they would no longer be “*free to do what they want when they want and how they want*”, but would now need to be more aligned with the community.

[1] Wanganui District Council, Ten-Year Plan (LTCCP) 2006-2016, page 21.

[2] Ibid, page 22.

⁵ Ibid, page 22

30. At the end of 2004, there was significant change in the Wanganui District Council with the election of the new Mayor Michael Laws, and a new majority party in the council – Vision Wanganui. This leadership change subsequently affected the way the Council related to the newly developed community outcomes. After the election the new council changed its strategic plan and priorities, and through those the way the council contributed to the outcomes. The ‘new’ council saw themselves as having a mandate, that they wanted to express through a “*leadership role with the community.*”
31. In 2007, Wanganui District Council produced a Monitoring Report on the Community Outcomes. This 65-page document lists various initiatives and projects undertaken since the 2004 Community Outcomes Plan. It used statistics from various sources (such as Statistics NZ and the local Police station) on economic, social and other relevant indicators. It also presented the results of a council survey of Wanganui locals on their perceptions of various community outcome issues. This report states that its results “indicate that the Wanganui District is indeed making progress towards achieving its Community Outcomes.”⁶

Community Outcomes Benefits

32. As early as 1997 the Wanganui District had started involving the community in its long-term community planning. This resulted in its 1997 Community Strategic Plan. Taking the opportunity presented by the six-year review of its 1997 Community Strategic Plan, in 2003 it was subsequently an early “*conductor*” of a Community Outcomes Process introduced with the Act in 2002. This Process produced the outcomes that were also used in the council’s 2006-2016 10-year Plan (LTCCP). These processes have encouraged participation from a large number of Wanganui residents. They have also resulted in the creation of a plan for implementing the outcomes involving many different organisations from throughout the District.

Significant community involvement

33. Eighty-nine meetings were attended by more than 1,000 people in an area with a population of just over 43,000. This suggests there was real and significant interest and participation by the community in the process. The Act clearly intended for communities to be involved in the setting of their long-term goals, and this significant turn-out suggests Wanganui District Council was able to achieve this.

Given council a focus/aim

34. Two council officers interviewed praised how the community outcomes provided the council with a clear aim. One officer described how it emphasised the need to achieve outcomes and credited the process with moving the council away from thinking of itself as having silos of activities – as a result it is “*becoming a more joined-up organisation.*” The other officer noted how the process has helped the council clearly understand the future direction desired by the community. Councillors we spoke with noted that the outcomes are having an impact on the strategic direction of the council because “*when we look at everything, [we] do need to relate everything back to the Community Outcomes.*”

Improving relationships with stakeholders

35. In general, both council officers and local stakeholders were positive about the relationships formed over the course of the Community Outcomes Process. Although any member of the general public could participate in the meetings and submissions that formed the backbone of the consultation on the community outcomes, the council encouraged stakeholders and community representatives to participate.
36. Through the action-planning phase of the community outcomes the council further developed these relationships by getting many stakeholders to take on the role of “*key contributor*” to an outcome area. This role involved regular meetings between the stakeholder and the council to develop a relationship based on how they would each

⁶ Wanganui District Council, Wanganui District Community Outcomes Monitoring Report, February 2007, page 2.

contribute to the community outcomes. These meetings also sought agreement on monitoring and reporting of the community outcomes⁷

37. An informant noted to us that since the council election at the end of 2004, the relationship around the community outcomes had possibly not been as effective as previously, and that a “*slight disconnect has emerged*” at senior levels. They noted that the structure and general approach of the council had changed significantly since that election. The amount of contact between them and the council had also decreased, and in turn, so had the effectiveness of the co-ordination between them and the council, particularly around the achievement of the Community Outcomes.
38. However, two other stakeholders thought the Community Outcomes Process had been an effective beginning for building an ongoing relationship. These stakeholders talked about the partnership relationship they had developed with the council and how this had continued to improve since the 2004 election, as they worked with the council on specific projects.

Community Outcomes Issues

39. While the Community Outcomes process and the outcomes themselves were perceived to have value to both council officers, stakeholders and community representatives, there were some issues raised relating to:
 - The process used by the council
 - The overall usefulness of the deliverables from the Community Outcomes process.

Process issues

Possible need to review Outcomes more often

40. Councillors we spoke with considered there might be a need to review the Community Outcomes more often than the minimum six years currently proscribed by the Act. They noted that a lot had changed in Wanganui between when the original process was conducted in 2003, and that as a result a new process being undertaken at the time of interviewing (early 2008). One of the councillors suggested a review every three years may be more appropriate, “*particularly in the case of Wanganui*”. The other councillor noted that after the 2004 election the council had changed the way it addressed the outcomes to better match its elected mandate, and to fulfil the community leadership role they perceived the council would have. The first councillor did speculate as to whether a review of the community outcomes would occur after a new election.
41. Flood events in 2004 and 2006 had also a significant impact on the council and the community’s priorities. A councillor noted that because of these floods the council’s focus over the “*life*” of the 2003 Outcomes had been much more on the “*environmental issues ... at the expense of the other well-being outcomes.*” The council’s commitment to a new wastewater/stormwater scheme, a significant commitment of its resources⁸ could be seen as a leading to this apparent focus on the environment.

Large process that is difficult to review

42. The councillors also noted that the size of the process undertaken by Wanganui acted as something of a barrier to them undertaking a review at “*the same level*” as the original process. Judging by the interviews we conducted, the council is proud of the size and thoroughness of the consultation undertaken for its 2003 Community Outcomes Process. However, the councillors observed this amount of resource is not necessarily something that the Wanganui District Council can commit to often. The council is also becoming aware that it has to be careful about the amount of consultation it undertakes, as people are saying they feel “*consulted out.*”

⁷ Wanganui District Council, Wanganui District Community Outcomes Monitoring Report, February 2007, page 7.

⁸ “... *the wastewater/stormwater project remains a financial millstone around the council’s neck.*” Wanganui District Council, “10-Year Plan 2006-2016”, “Message from the Mayor”, page 4.

Issues with deliverables

Confusion over prioritisation

43. The LTCCP and the Monitoring Report do not show any priority ranking to the outcomes published, an observation backed up by observations from a council officer that the final community outcomes had not been prioritised. However, one stakeholder and an officer from a council-controlled organisation felt that the community outcomes had been prioritised. They pointed to the fact that the list of outcomes, whenever it was published, consistently placed “*a growing economy*” at the top. To these interviewees, this clearly meant that this was the most important of all the community outcomes, even though there was no apparent process for this. They were also critical of the council for what they perceived to be inadequate commitment to achieving that particular outcome.

Growing expectations placed on central government

44. A council officer, and a stakeholder noted that the community outcomes could be seen to raise expectations among the community. These interviewees felt that the council could not achieve these outcomes on its own, and it therefore required the participation of other stakeholder agencies in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. They went on to note two factors that could raise expectations among the community that there was also a significant commitment by central government toward achieving the identified outcomes:

- The Community Outcomes Process was required by the new Act which seemed to infer by extension, participation by central government,
- Some central government agencies participated in the consultation and some took on the role of key contributors to some of the outcome areas.

45. These interviewees discussed how the Wanganui community could ever hope to meet these expectations, without significant input (in terms of resources) from central government.

Difficulty in Monitoring Outcomes

46. According to a council officer, the Wanganui District Council had some difficulty in both implementing and subsequently monitoring the community outcomes. In part they felt this was because it had already conducted own its Community Outcomes Process before most other councils. The council had since implemented and monitored the outcomes as they interpreted them to be under the Act. This officer felt there was not sufficient leadership from central government in this field until 2005.

47. One stakeholder noted that their participation in the early years of monitoring of the outcomes had benefited them, as it gave them the chance to “*think about what [we] were doing and why.*” Since that time they did not see the same level of benefit in continuing to participate in monitoring, as their “*business as usual*” activities did not always seem to fit well into the council’s monitoring model. This judgement was based on their interpretation of the document the council now sends to stakeholders to show how the stakeholders activities are contributing to the community outcomes.

Future Community Outcomes

48. During the period of interviewing for this case study, the council was undertaking a new Community Outcomes Process. The council had decided to retain a process very much like that employed in 2003, as the council sees this as retaining the “*personable*” quality of the meetings. However some changes have been made:

- An officer noted that in their opinion, significant council resources had been devoted to organising the eighty plus meetings and forums for the 2003 process. This officer noted that in order to be more efficient with it’s resources, the council was making a conscious effort to get more people to fewer meetings.
- To strengthen the connection between the outcomes and the community, and to get increased stakeholder and community participation, many of the meetings are being facilitated by particular stakeholder organisations. For example The Police are facilitating the safety-themed forum.

49. An officer also mentioned that the council was considering prioritising the outcomes, possibly through a community survey. This had not yet been confirmed.

Reflections of Wanganui District Council implementation against the legislative intent

50. The table below summarises the legislative intent and Wanganui District Council's implementation of the mandated Community Outcomes Process. In reviewing the table, it needs to be acknowledged that at the time of writing only one formal round of community outcomes has been completed, and there was an appreciation there were still lessons to be learned and new processes to be developed. This development is likely to continue over time.

Legislative intent	Wanganui District Council response
Process to identify other organisations and groups capable of influencing either the identification or the promotion of community outcomes	Identified key stakeholders at the outset of the process and involved them in early planning exercises.
Processes to encourage the community to contribute	Eighty-nine meetings with the community and stakeholders were held, with more than 1,000 people attending
Identify community outcomes for the intermediate and long-term future of the district or region	Seven Community Outcomes Areas were developed with Outcome statements for each area
Long-term focus for the decisions and activities of the local authority	Community outcomes are referenced in council's long-term planning documents.
Guide priorities for activities undertaken by local authorities and other organisations	Although the final outcome areas were not prioritised, a Community Outcomes Plan was developed that included assigning "key contributors" (stakeholder organisations) to the outcome areas. Some interviewees felt the outcomes had been prioritised and that the council had ignored this.
Community having ownership of the identified outcomes.	Ownership of outcome areas seems to be best seen through "key contributor" stakeholders
Greater accountability between local authorities and their communities	Concern at growing expectations among the community, especially upon central government delivering to the community outcomes.
Promote better co-ordination and application of community resource	Relations with many stakeholders appear to have improved since Community Outcomes Process was undertaken. However some informants noted that the relationship between council and stakeholders does not seem to have been as effective since the change of council at the end of 2004.

51. In summary, Wanganui District Council undertook a comprehensive consultation process that involved a large number of people, as both stakeholders and community representatives/members. It subsequently developed an implementation plan that co-ordinated the input of many different stakeholder organisations and provided for detailed monitoring on the outcomes.

Strategic Planning (LTCCP)

Legislative Intent

“The LTCCP describes the community outcomes and priorities and the activities the local authority will undertake to contribute to the outcomes. The plan is designed to integrate decision-making and include information on the key policies of the local authority. It also describes linkages between activities and how they are funded.”

Included in the LTCCP are financial reporting requirements. Significant examples of this include making “adequate and effective provision for expenditure” by showing estimates for the next ten years of the council’s activities. The LTCCP includes statements of service performance and shows from what sources of council revenue they will be funded. An LTCCP is auditable as are any amendments to it. The Annual Plan reports a council’s progress to the LTCCP.

An authority must consult its “wider communities” over its LTCCP. The Act states that the authority must use a Special Consultative Procedure (SCP) to consult, although a council can use other consultation methods in addition to this.⁹

Response to the Legislation – How Wanganui Developed its LTCCP

52. As part of developing the 2006-2016 Long-Term Council Community Plan (sometimes referred to as the “10-Year Plan” in council documents) the Wanganui District Council produced “Council’s Strategic Direction ‘05.” This document was aimed at providing a “snapshot” of the council’s thinking as at October 2005, which was when the councillors and mayor held a workshop to develop the LTCCP.
53. The ‘Strategic Direction’ document starts by placing Wanganui in a socio-economic context in that it has a population that is older, less wealthy, and has fewer educational qualifications than the national average. It goes on to identify a vision statement for Wanganui and some values for the council to work under and overarching goal of promoting “the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the Wanganui district”¹⁰. This goal reiterates the four well-beings from the Act. The document finishes with a list of key result areas, strategies and actions for 2005 – 2007 which are assigned to various councillors, each of whom will act as an “advocates” for them.
54. Development of the detailed content for the LTCCP for Wanganui District then took place throughout late 2005 and early 2006. According to a council officer interviewed, the process was as follows:
 - Began by reviewing the best-practice guidelines for planning produced by central government
 - Established a “close and effective relationship with Audit” which involved getting their input into the development process early (and often), so as to ensure that the final document would be of a good standard
 - Developed a project plan for completion of the plan, that included a project team made up of members from all parts of the council
 - Using internal communications, established the preparation of the plan was to be a priority for all of the council, helping to ensure the document’s preparation was relatively smooth
 - Providing regular reports to the councillors, who also approved key decisions on funding reviews and specific policies.

⁹ Quoted/paraphrased from the “Strategy for Evaluating Local Government”, Department of Internal Affairs, 2005, page 9.

¹⁰ Wanganui District Council, “Council’s Strategic Direction ‘05”, page 2; available from <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/publications/plans/plans.asp>.

55. A council officer thought that the draft content put out to community consultation was focussed on presenting comparisons and options as to what could be achieved with the level of rates likely to be taken from the Wanganui District.

LTCCP Consultation/Engagement

56. Public consultation on the LTCCP was based around three processes:

- A referendum on council spending priorities held in May 2005.¹¹ The council had a policy of trying to undertake the top-three choices from this referendum. In 2005 they were (in rank order): expansion of the Splash Centre (public swimming complex), development of the city's waterfront, and the improvement of footpaths. Turn-out for the referendum was 54.2% of eligible Wanganui district voters.¹²
- A referendum held in early 2006 (without the same strong focus on capital projects as the 2005 referendum) indicated that investigating water softening was a priority for the people of Wanganui. Turn-out for this referendum was 55.4% of eligible Wanganui district voters.¹³
- The Special Consultative Procedure (SCP)¹⁴ for the LTCCP conducted through May 2006. Every household in the district was sent a submission form. In all 207 submissions made to the draft plan, with final consideration being made on June 6.¹⁵

57. The LTCCP has been amended since it was first published in 2006 to incorporate changes to the Investment Policy and the Development Contributions Policy. We were informed the chief reason for these changes was to introduce a Storm Damage Rate to address the impact of a major storm and associated flood that struck the district shortly after the LTCCP was first published.¹⁶

Benefits of the LTCCP

Improved strategic planning in council

58. According to one council officer, the LTCCP has improved the profile and practice of strategic planning in the council. This seems to be due in part to the improvement in processes associated with the LTCCP. This officer also noted that linking council's business functions directly to its strategic planning was proving to be effective. Another officer noted that the LTCCP was helping the council to budget more effectively, and through this it was in a position to be able to "*go beyond basic council services.*"

59. However, one of these same officers noted that there is still quite some work to do to get full "*buy-in*" to the LTCCP from some council staff and councillors. According to this officer, the LTCCP is not yet the council's "*definitive plan*" and that for some of the council it is seen as "*something of an exercise in compliance.*" This officer did note that they felt this attitude was changing, and the LTCCP was starting to be recognised as an important document, and that they intended to further promote this throughout the council.

Developed beneficial relationship with Audit NZ

60. A council officer noted that the relationship developed with Audit NZ as part of preparing the LTCCP had benefited the council. The benefits in this case were not just around preparing the amendments that followed the original LTCCP, but also in improving council's overall financial management processes.

¹¹ The council's referenda are covered in more detail in the next section of this case study – decision-making.

¹² Wanganui District Council, "Media Release: Referendum results tomorrow: 54.2 percent turn-out – over 16,000 votes cast", 2/06/2005 2 June 2005.

Available at: <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/news/showNews.asp?id=295>, May 2008

¹³ Wanganui District Council, "Media Release: Referendum Results Clear: Council will act", 11 February 2006.

Available at: <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/news/showNews.asp?id=455>, May 2008

¹⁴ The Act requires a council to have a SCP as a minimum level of consultation on a draft LTCCP.

¹⁵ Wanganui District Council, "10-Year Plan 2006-2016", page 17

¹⁶ Interview with council officer conducted 19 March, 2008.

Improved long-term council planning consultation

61. Two stakeholders noted that participating in the consultation process around the 2006-2016 LTCCP was better than their experiences on previous council long-term planning exercises. One of these stakeholders noted that the LTCCP itself “*seems more transparent [with] more open dialogue*” than previous processes they have been involved in. The other one of these stakeholders was complimentary about the way the council responded and fed back to submissions during the LTCCP.

LTCCP Issues

Value to the community of some audit requirements

62. One council officer noted that some of the financial requirements in the audit of the LTCCP do not seem to be of much benefit to the public. Another council officer noted that the need to publish some of the detailed financial information was also of little use to the public because they believed that “*no one reads it.*” Meeting the auditable requirements of an LTCCP was seen to allow for an independent statement to be made to the public that this plan is prepared to high standards of accounting.
63. However, these officers seemed to suggest that meeting these standards, should be something of genuine benefit to the council and/or its community. Both of these officers noted that at present, meeting the audit requirements (particularly around amendments) appeared more of a “*compliance exercise.*”¹⁷ One of the officers also wanted to note this is not intended as a criticism of the auditors as they have had these requirements placed upon them by the Act, this officer said that it seemed that “*they [Audit] are just complying with the legislation as well.*”

LTCCP not responsive to the changes in Wanganui – Regular amendments required

64. Wanganui District has amended its 2006-2016 LTCCP every year since it was prepared. As noted above this process has become a “compliance exercise” which is not seen to have any benefit for the council or its community. We were told that the most common reason for the amendments are the need for changes to funding and financial information, such as that caused by the introduction of a Storm Damage Rate in 2006. Two council officers noted that consulting on the amendments in the same process as the Annual Plan would improve this and reduce the burden on the council. This will be discussed further in a Cross-Case Study Report that will cover the themes and issues that occur across the different councils studied for this evaluation.
65. Two stakeholders interviewed also talked of how the LTCCP “needs to be constantly reviewed and revised in the light of changes in the environment”. The councillors we spoke to also noted the LTCCP is subject to change, and that it is a guide that needs to be continuously updated and adapted in the light of changing circumstances. They perceived that in “following the letter of the law [the Act]” the LTCCP could act as an impediment to achieving change in the community through the council, although this is not currently the case in Wanganui. Another councillor noted that in general they see that the plans are currently used to explain why things have been done differently than intended. While both these councillors viewed regular amendments to the LTCCP as being acceptable and necessary, it might be seen that the need for regular amendments suggests that the LTCCP is not presently performing its desired function of helping the council to plan effectively for the future. This will also be further discussed in the Cross-Case Report.

¹⁷ The focus is more on meeting the Audit requirements and less on making a document that is of use to the Wanganui community.

Impact of the LTCCP on Wanganui District Council

66. Two council officers interviewed were generally positive about the overall impact of the LTCCP, and its development process upon the council. One of these officers observed that preparing the Plan had helped the council improve its strategic decision-making, and that it had become “more aware of the social needs of the community.” The other council officer noted that while they used the LTCCP extensively, they felt there was still work to be done to get it used in a similar manner across the council. This same officer also noted that some elements of the LTCCP, especially some financial requirements and the amendment process, seem to be undertaken in order to be compliant with the Act, rather than for the direct benefit for the council or its community.
67. One of the councillors described the LTCCP as having significantly changed the way they now used the Annual Plan. To them the Annual Plan is now about “delivering the outcomes to communities”, showing which Community Outcomes will be addressed, and explaining any variance from the LTCCP. Both the councillors thought that the LTCCP was “not holding back” the council. Another councillor felt that requirements for the LTCCP were acceptable and that they would not want it “to be too rigid.” This councillor had come onto the council after the development of the community outcomes and the first LTCCP, and appreciated they were still able to make changes to the council’s important activities and decisions. They thought the council needs a long-term plan, as a short-term Annual Plan “is not enough.”

Wanganui District Council LTCCP against legislative intent

68. The table below summarises the legislative intent of the Act regarding the LTCCP and Wanganui District Council’s implementation of that requirements. This table refers to the 2006-2016 LTCCP prepared by Wanganui District Council, which was the first full LTCCP required under the new Act.

Legislative intent	WCC response
LTCCP describes Community Outcomes and shows local authorities contribution to them	The LTCCP lists the seven Community Outcomes Areas (and outcomes statements) developed at the end of 2003. The outcomes are assigned to particular council activity groups. Specific council activities and new projects and initiatives that contribute to the outcomes are also shown.
“Wider community” is consulted on the LTCCP	Wanganui District Council used a SCP for the whole LTCCP. They also held a district-wide referendum to identify council spending priorities.
LTCCP is auditable and meets important financial reporting requirements.	The LTCCP (and its subsequent amendments) was passed with an unqualified audit.

Council Decision-Making

Legislative Intent:

69. The following is quoted or paraphrased from the Strategy for Evaluating Local Government.

“The Act requires local authorities to be more rigorous in their decision-making [than prior to the new Act] by identifying all reasonably practicable options for achieving the objective of a decision and assessing those options by considering the benefits and costs in terms of the present and future well-being of the community, and the extent to which community outcomes would be promoted. Depending on the significance, local authorities are also required to consider the impact of each option on their capacity to meet present and future needs in relation to their statutory responsibilities.”

Local authorities must be rigorous in their decision-making by identifying all practicable options for achieving an objective or resolving a problem. The costs and benefits of these options have to be evaluated against the achievement of the Community Outcomes and the present and future well-being of the community.

When making a decision a local authority must consider if consultation of “interested and affected parties” is required. The authority must undertake that consultation in accordance with certain principles, which broadly speaking, require the authority to:

- provide easy-to-understand summaries of proposals and plans (such as the LTCCP);*
- identify who will be affected by decisions and encourage them to make their views known to the council – councils also must give reasons for their decisions;*
- find out what all the practical options are for dealing with issues and carefully assess them.*

A local authority has discretion in deciding how it interprets and meets the decision-making requirements of the Act. This discretion can be applied in terms of the significance of the decision. A council must develop a policy on significance that indicates what triggers must occur before undertaking a decision (although a council is not prevented from undertaking analysis or consulting on a decision that does not trigger this policy).

The Act also places requirements on council’s to involve Māori in their decision-making (especially regarding land and water), and to consider ways to foster Māori contribution to their decision-making processes.¹⁸

Wanganui District Council Approach to Decision-Making under the new Act

70. All those interviewed agreed that since 2003 the most significant change in how the Wanganui District Council makes its decisions was not due to the Local Government Act, but as a result of the 2004 council elections. The election of Mayor Michael Laws and a group of councillors affiliated under the Vision Wanganui banner brought in a new team over the previous Mayor who had held the office from 1986.

71. Judging by many of the comments we received, the new mayor and councillors were seen to have achieved significant change throughout the 2004-2007 term. One important priority for this new council was to alter how the council made its decisions, with the

¹⁸ Quoted/paraphrased from the “Strategy for Evaluating Local Government”, Department of Internal Affairs, 2005, pages 9-10.

mayor taking the “*advocate role*”¹⁹ in the “*Key Result Area*” of “*community participation in the decision-making process.*”

72. Two key parts were identified in the council's plan to increase community participation in decision-making. These were:
- A Quarterly Report to be published and distributed to all households in the district to keep them informed of the council's activities
 - A referendum to be held to determine council spending priorities²⁰
73. The Quarterly Report has become an important communication tool with the public. It is through this document that the issues around the council's referenda are promoted and discussed.

Wanganui Direct Democracy: Referenda

74. The council held its first referenda in May 2005. This presented the community with a choice amongst fourteen different spending projects that included both new capital projects (upgrade of the airport terminal) and the expansion or improvement of current council activities (improving footpaths). The projects for the referendum were proposed by councillors. Wanganui residents and ratepayers were then posted voting papers and asked to indicate their top-three choices for future council spending.
75. Voters were sent short descriptions of each proposal and these were repeated on a dedicated council website. The descriptions described the reason for the project and a [council] cost estimate that included capital and ongoing operating costs. Brief quotes from the representatives of stakeholder organisations that supported the project were also given.
76. The Mayor and the councillors indicated that the council would then attempt to undertake the top-three choices. The 2005 referendum was seen to present three clear priorities to the council. The table below gives the percentages for all proposed projects in the 2005 referendum.

¹⁹ Wanganui District Council, “Council's Strategic Direction '05”, page 3.

²⁰ There has been more than one referenda and they are sometimes referred to in council literature as “direct democracy.”

Percentage votes for projects in Wanganui District Referendum '05²¹

Rank	Project	1st choice	Total choices
1st	Splash Centre extension	26.11%	48.44%
2nd	City waterfront development	13.24%	39.86%
3rd	Footpath upgrade	17.40%	38.34%
4th	Airport terminal upgrade	9.19%	27.67%
5th	Kerbside recycling	6.58%	22.97%
6th	Fitzherbert Ave extension	6.77%	18.40%
7th	Castlecliff Beach upgrade	4.60%	17.60%
8th	Kowhai Park planning	2.27%	16.85%
9th	Inorganic waste collection	3.24%	16.67%
10th	Cooks Gardens sports turf	2.25%	13.85%
11th	Riverbank walkway extension	1.69%	13.21%
12th	Urban Lighting upgrade	1.58%	10.78%
13th	Sarjeant Gallery extension	3.52%	8.02%
14th	Public art works	0.18%	2.03%

77. The first three options above were prioritised in the 2006-2016 LTCCP.

78. Wanganui has since held referenda in 2006 and 2007. The 2006 referendum had five topics presented as opposing statements for voter to select their preference. The topics are presented below:

- Retaining the spelling of the district's name as Wanganui and not Whanganui (Yes = 82%)
- Whether to Investigate the softening of the city's water supply (Yes = 75%)
- Whether to fluoridate the district's water supply (No = 74%)
- Whether to reduce the number of councillors (Yes = 60%)
- Whether to replace the rural and urban wards with a single district-wide ward (Yes = 53%)

The topics for consideration in the 2007 referenda were:

- Whether to construct and operate a water softening plant for the city's water, including an estimated additional rating cost (Yes = 71.17%)
- Whether to introduce a "local bill" to Parliament to outlaw the wearing of gang insignia in public (Yes = 64.63%)
- Whether the council should introduce a kerbside recycling service with an estimated percentage rates increase (Yes = 66.08%)
- Whether to establish a separate Wanganui Anniversary Day (public holiday) from the Wellington Anniversary Day currently observed (No = 53.78%)²²

79. It is apparent that the referenda has expanded from initially being about council spending "projects" of the council, to now including "topics"²³ such as council governance and Wanganui's local identity.

²¹ Wanganui District Council, "Wanganui Referendum '05 - official results"; available at: <http://www.wanganuireferendum.govt.nz/05/results.asp>, May 2008.

²² The percentage figures are sourced from the council-maintained websites for the referendum. Available at: <http://www.wanganuireferendum.govt.nz/05/index.asp>, May 2008

²³ The council maintained website for the 2005 referendum referred to the options as "projects". The equivalent websites for the 2006 and 2007 referendums used the term "topics."

Other consultation methods

80. The Wanganui District Council continues to use other methods for consulting with its wider community. These methods include meetings with interested and/or affected parties, surveys of residents and SCs, and are used as the council judges appropriate. Since 2005, the referenda have become the preferred form of community consultation on important issues for the current mayor and councillors.³

Council's limits on decisions – rates and existing commitments:

81. The council elected in 2004 conducted its decision-making within two important limiting factors:

- A policy applied by the Vision Wanganui group of keeping rates affordable to the people of Wanganui, as they consider that "*Wanganui's 'ability to pay' is considerably lower than provinces of similar size.*"²⁴ The council is of the opinion that while Wanganui's rates are among the lowest in the country, because of the nature of Wanganui's population they should be considered as "*average-high real rates*"²⁵. Council had confined rate increases to 3% each year over the course of the 2006-2016 LTCCP, in line with the rate of inflation.
- Council is committed to a very significant capital project, the \$100 million wastewater/stormwater project which was started before the 2004 election. This project has large spending and debt implications for the council.²⁶

Benefits of Decision-Making under the new Act

82. As noted at the beginning, people interviewed thought that the most significant change in decision-making processes for the council was the approach of the new mayor and councillors elected at the end of 2004.

83. It is perceived that the impact of their new methods has affected the way council makes decisions in a more obvious way than any changes associated with the Act, although it is recognised that these methods are not necessarily in opposition to the Act. The Act encourages council's to consider the views of interested and affected parties in decision-making. The council's policy of referenda is seen as an example of this sort of approach. Having said that, participants considered that the policy of having referenda cannot be attributed to the Act and it is probable this council would have pursued this approach regardless of any intentions in the Act.

Referenda engages residents:

84. A council officer explained that the referenda appear to have "*revitalised the city.*" By this they meant that, as events, they had stimulated the people of Wanganui. For example they noted how the community had supported the Splash Centre expansion, not just through its first-placing in the 2005 referendum, but also in contributing an estimated \$400,000 toward the project.

Referenda communicates with the community:

85. Another officer felt that the council was able to effectively communicate with the people of Wanganui through the referenda, and that it offered the community "*good ideas and opportunities to express how [the community] sees how council should evolve.*" They noted that the impending completion of the wastewater project means the council is aware that may be able to undertake other projects. They also noted that the referenda gave the community an opportunity to input on how its rates "*burden*" should be spent. They went to say that since 2004 the council had moved to consider the wider community of Wanganui in its decisions, and this was reflected in the support for certain proposals.

²⁴ Wanganui District Council, "10-Year Plan 2006-2016", "Message from the Mayor", page 4.

²⁵ Wanganui District Council, "Council's Strategic Direction '05", page 1.

²⁶ Wanganui District Council, "10-Year Plan 2006-2016", "Message from the Mayor", page 4.

Council has developed close relationships with some stakeholders:

86. We interviewed a stakeholder involved with the Splash Centre project who noted how the council had worked closely and effectively with them to get this project through the referendum process. They also noted how this process had been of real benefit in helping to raise popular support for completion of the project. They were very complimentary of the council staff they had worked with.
87. We came across one surprising consequence of this behaviour. One stakeholder we spoke with, noted that as their initial discussions with the mayor and councillors were so positive, they felt they did not need to actively participate in council consultation. They also did not feel they needed to review the final decision, as the council appeared to have delivered on its promises.

Issues with Decision-Making

88. The following items are issues that were raised during the interviews.

Problems with referenda:

89. There appears to be a great deal of support for the council referenda process as the major form of consultation on major issues. However, some stakeholders we spoke to had reservations about the use of referenda in this manner. Two specific issues raised on this subject were:
- One stakeholder felt the “*electors*” in the referenda were not being adequately advised as to “*what the trade-off might be*”. This observations is based on the quality of the information made available as part of the referendum. They questioned whether it was even *possible* to adequately inform the public to make complex decisions through a referendum process.
 - On a similar subject, a council officer noted that the nature of referenda meant that perhaps certain outcomes, particularly around councils corporate activities were less likely. An example was that the capital expenditure needed to improve the council’s own IT system was likely to be of significant benefit to the council (and by inference the community), however this type of project would be unlikely to gather sufficient community support through a referendum.

Act should require consultation to be of a certain standard:

90. One stakeholder we spoke with felt that the quality of the council’s non-referenda consultation, in particular its research-style consultation such as surveying or focus groups, had not been of sufficient quality. They particularly felt that the consultation with businesses (surveying and interviews) around the LTCCP and community outcomes was not of sufficient standard to adequately reflect the range of views and opinions held by business operators. They considered that the Act should require that any such consultation be of a certain standard, and that adequate follow-up should be required to ensure it reflects the views of those consulted.

Relationship with Tangata Whenua:

91. In preparing this report, Research and Evaluation Services (R&ES) examined those parts of the the Act that require a council to give special consideration Māori in relation to decision-making. This topic is presented separately.
92. Interviews were conducted separately with two different representatives of local iwi (tangata whenua), and with a representative of a collective of local iwi. These are all referred to here as iwi representatives.

Relationship has improved since 2000/2004:

93. One iwi representative noted that they felt their relationship with the council had improved since the election in 2004. They characterised the relationship prior to this as being “*nineteenth century.*” The other two iwi representatives also noted there had been a change in the relationship. One representative felt that this had started from 2000 or

maybe 2001, while the other representative was more uncertain about attributing change to the new council in 2004.

94. All three noted the council had recently appointed a Māori Liaison Officer, and they felt this would help to improve the method of interaction between local iwi and the council. To them it was a sign that the council was looking to grow and improve their relationship.

Relationship with local iwi working parties:

95. All three representatives discussed a recent attempt by the council to create a Māori committee in the council to manage and improve the relationship it has with Māori. All expressed concern that the proposed make-up of the committee would have Wanganui tangata whenua out-numbered by non-tangata whenua. To them this was a potential threat to the established relationship they had with the council based on working parties with each iwi of the Whanganui River. They did not want the perceived success of these working parties (according to one representative based largely on the Resource Management Act) to be compromised, or for their status as tangata whenua to be lessened or ignored by the council.
96. Two representatives also felt that the council tended to treat iwi as stakeholders, which is not how they see themselves. Rather they wanted a relationship that reflects the notions of a Treaty of Waitangi partnership. As a result, they wanted the established working parties to be the starting point for this developing type of relationship.
97. One representative noted that there seemed to be strong desire for many of the councillors to be involved in the working party, which could be seen as a sign of success. However they wondered if this particular working party model may now be facing some problems, as the *“relationship may [now] be too good since we don’t want to be unpleasant to each other.”*
98. A representative also noted that, as far as they were concerned, the relationship with the council could not really progress until the council (and central government) acknowledged the iwi as tangata whenua, and allowed for the relationship between all Maori in the district to be managed along the lines of tangata whenua.

Wanganui / Whanganui:

99. One representative was adamant that the relationship between the council and tangata whenua could not improve until the spelling of the district’s name was changed to the *“correct spelling”* by including the letter *“h”* in Wanganui. This is an issue that is being discussed nationally in New Zealand at the time of writing this report. This representative felt it was disrespecting the tangata whenua to not include the *“h”*, and that the relationship could only develop further once there was a foundation of respect for the local language.
100. As seen earlier, the council has already put the spelling of the district’s name to a referendum, with a large majority of respondents in favour of retaining the existing spelling. One of the representatives felt that Māori were less likely to participate in the referenda as they were aware that they were numerically outnumbered by non-Maori in the district, and therefore unlikely to have an impact on the outcome of the referenda.

Maori capacity to contribute to Decision-Making:

101. The Act requires councils to consider ways help develop Māori capacity to contribute to decision-making. One representative discussed how the council had helped by funding iwi members to attend meetings and administration costs for some Māori who submitted to council. They noted that their particular iwi had limitations on the future growth in its capacity to contribute.
102. For example they described that gathering iwi together to gain their approval for something like accepting assistance from the council (i.e. for a consultant to help them prepare a significant submission) could take a great deal of time. They also said that even if the iwi were able to adequately fund its own people to contribute (perhaps through the direct assistance of the council), getting members to find the time may prove difficult. To this representative, the iwi’s capacity to contribute is limited by their small size and

their isolation from the district and wider New Zealand, two factors that will be difficult to overcome.

Decision-Making under the new Act – the future in Wanganui

103. At this stage it is unclear if the council intends to change its current decision-making processes. It looks set to continue the use of referenda into the future with discussion of a referendum to be held in 2008.²⁷

104. The current commitment to low rates increases also looks likely to continue, particularly as the council is facing a significant decrease in revenue due to loss of an expected dividend from the council owned local gas and electricity supplier.²⁸ This latter event has led to significant changes in council structure to be applied this year. These include:

- The replacement of all council committees by two “super-committees”
- Significant reductions in council budgets for the coming two years
- A freeze on the employment of additional staff.

This significant event will be the biggest effect upon the ability to fund future projects.

Wanganui District Council Decision-Making against legislative intent

105. It is difficult to judge how the Act has been applied within a particular council without examining every decision made by a council – which is outside the scope of this report. Below are three intents of the Act’s section on Decision-Making that this report can evaluate.

Legislative intent	WCC response
Improve community involvement in council Decision-Making	Since 2005 Wanganui District Council has used regular referenda to consult on capital spending priorities and then later issues such as local identity and council governance.
Council decisions will be more strategic (including a longer-term focus) in nature	Council’s key strategic aims in recent years have focused on keeping rates increases low and increasing community participation in decision-making through the use of referenda
Involve Māori in decision-making and help develop Māori capacity to contribute to council decisions	Council has grown relationships with tangata whenua through use of working parties. Further development of the relationship faces difficulties over issues, including the spelling of the district’s name and preserving a mechanism that protects the rights of tangata whenua when dealing with council.

²⁷ Wanganui District Council, Media Release: “Mayor says pokie gambling machines ‘an ideal decision for 2008 referendum 27/11/2007

²⁸ Wanganui District Council, Media Release: “Wanganui Holdings dividend & consequences”, 18/01/2008

Conclusions

Community Outcomes:

106. Wanganui District started its 2003 Community Outcomes Process having conducted a community-based long-term planning exercise in 1995-97. The 2003 outcomes process was therefore conducted using an existing historical document for reference. This existing commitment to community involvement in planning was further reflected in the good levels of community participation in the community outcomes process.
107. The level of consultation undertaken was due to an interpretation by council officers that the Act expected an extensive consultation exercise. This reflects the influence that council officers can have upon the process, particularly when officers are committed to involving the community.
108. Development of the community outcomes action plan, and moves to involve key stakeholders more directly in the achievement of the outcomes reflects a focus by the council on delivery of the outcomes for the benefit of the wider Wanganui community. Since the end of 2004, with the election of a new mayor and some new councillors, the council has placed more emphasis on leading the community and its outcomes. It has done this by working toward its own specific strategy and aims (often with the help of stakeholders) that are linked to the community outcomes. Since 2004 the council has also focused on monitoring of the outcomes.
109. Judging by the feedback from the interviews the community outcomes appear to have a real presence in Wanganui. Many stakeholders are aware of them, and many of the stakeholders we interviewed also appeared to have a real understanding of them, and the processes used to identify and monitor them.
110. Councillors interviewed noted that significant events had happened in the district since the 2003 outcomes process. The new council elected in 2004, changed their approach to the outcomes in line with their elected mandates and perceived role as community leaders. The relationship between the community outcomes (on a six year cycle) and the triennial elections could be subject for future research.

Strategic Planning (LTCCP)

111. The council's 2006-2016 LTCCP or 10-Year Plan is perceived positively by both councillors and council officers. They see it as helping to better integrate the council's decision-making and in turn the council itself.
112. Councillors tend to see the LTCCP as something of a guide, with its value often being in outlining why council made its decisions. These councillors also observed that the LTCCP needed to be continuously updated, especially in the case of the Wanganui which experienced unexpected events such as floods and a loss of expected investment income.
113. Following on from this, an officer noted that the LTCCP is not yet the "*definitive*" long-term plan for Wanganui. Although it has helped to improve the strategic quality of the council's decision-making, the impression that it is subject to change because of outside forces beyond the control of the council means that some in the council seem uncertain that it can achieve a truly solid basis for long-term planning. There is commitment from officers to improve the LTCCP and make it become the pre-eminent planning tool.
114. There also appears to be some concern over meeting the requirements of Audit on the LTCCP. The council does not always see these to be of benefit to the public of Wanganui.

Decision-Making

115. The 2004 election brought a majority to council that had a clear vision for how the council should make its decisions. It since has attempted to communicate more directly with the community through tools such as the Quarterly Report and the use of referenda. Council's commitment to community participation in the decision-making can be seen

through the extension of this “*direct democracy*” to subjects such as council governance and the local identity, with the mayor taking an advocacy and championing role in promoting community participation.

116. Relations between the council and local iwi were severely strained in 1995. Since then slow but significant progress has been made to improve the relationship, with the establishment of working parties between council and local iwi, and the recent creation of a Māori Liaison post in the council.
117. Areas of possible conflict remain. These include the proposed creation of the council’s Māori Committee and issues around the spelling of the district’s name. The last issue is currently being debated in the national press between the mayor (who points to significant support in a referendum to retain the current spelling) and Te Runanga O Tupoho (who have petitioned the New Zealand Geographical Society to change the spelling).
118. Some of those interviewed feel that the environmental well-being has pre-eminence in Wanganui, perhaps to the detriment of the other well-beings. Significant commitment of council resources to the wastewater/stormwater plant, and the necessary reaction to floods in 2004 and 2006 were seen as examples of this focus. The council still appears to be trying to achieve a long-term, sustainable focus for its decision-making however it feels that unexpected events make it difficult to do so.