

# WE ARE.

Council  
**MARK**<sup>™</sup>  
B

Making our

communities better

**Horowhenua District Council**

**Independent assessment report | July 2017\***

An independent assessment report issued by the Independent Assessment Board for the CouncilMARK<sup>™</sup> local government excellence programme. For more information visit [www.councilmark.co.nz](http://www.councilmark.co.nz)

**Horowhenua**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



A measure  
for better  
community value.

\* Period of assessment: October 2016

# Assessment Summary

## AT A GLANCE



A growing and changing district with disparity of income, young/old age profile, and increasingly diverse ethnic make-up.



LARGE METRO

**SMALL METRO  
AND LARGE  
PROVINCIAL**



SMALL PROVINCIAL AND RURAL

REGIONAL

## The current situation

Horowhenua District Council is in a period of transition. Assumptions of low growth were used in the Council's Long Term Plan for 2015-25 and in its internal strategic plan. However, recent remodelling work has seen adjustments made to increase Horowhenua's population projections, its housing demands, and employment and economic growth forecasts. These projections were lifted to better reflect:

- > the Wellington Northern Corridor, one of the Roads of National Significance (RoNS), whose completion is expected after 2024;
- > anticipated growth of small to medium-sized businesses, with Levin promoted as a service centre for the lower North Island; and
- > the increasing attraction of the district for retail, lifestyle, housing and retirement.

The Council is currently assessing where and how that growth will occur. In the interim, it is improving its operations, planning and resourcing so that it can meet current and expected needs.

### Period of assessment

The assessment looked at the current state of the Council and, given the changing environment, it also considered the likely future demands of the community as well as the Council's needs.

The assessment occurred immediately before the October 2016 elections, which saw a change of mayor and three new councillors elected (out of a total of 10 councillors). Because of these changes, an additional interview was conducted with the new Mayor.



**\$670m**

GROSS DOMESTIC  
PRODUCT<sup>1</sup>

SERVES

**30,096**

PEOPLE<sup>2</sup>, A MIX OF  
82.4% EUROPEAN/PAKEHA  
22.8% MĀORI  
4.9% PASIFIKA  
3.4% ASIAN



POPULATION TREND  
STRONG GROWTH

MAKES UP

**0.397%**

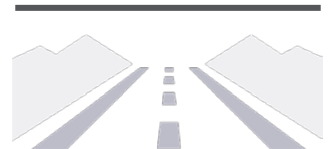
OF NEW ZEALAND'S TOTAL LAND AREA<sup>3</sup>  
REPRESENTING HOROWHENUA  
DISTRICT, AN AREA OF

**1,064 km<sup>2</sup>**

RESPONSIBLE FOR

**577km**

ROADS<sup>4</sup>



## Key learnings

The Council faces considerable challenges and opportunities. It is aware that to be a top performer it must balance the demands of sustainable growth while retaining assets that make the district appealing and distinctive for residents and businesses. The Council is demonstrating a good degree of readiness and commitment for meeting these challenges and opportunities, with a number of encouraging areas of work in progress for this transition.

- > Moving forward with *Horowhenua 2030* to formulate the best Long Term Plan and District Plan will require openness and high levels of community buy-in. This point is recognised by the Council, as is the desirability of taking a regional approach. Cooperation is underway with agencies such as NZ Transport Agency (NZTA), as well as with regional councils (principally Horizons Regional Council) and influential territorial authorities (principally Palmerston North City Council). Further shared services can assist efficiencies.

The Council sees value in all staff being committed to achieving well-defined and understood goals and outcomes. Councillors will need to ensure the highest accountability in a period of growth and change.

<sup>1</sup> MBIE 2016

<sup>2</sup> Stats NZ Census 2013

<sup>3</sup> DIA 2013

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Transport 2013/14



# Assessment Summary

## continued...

### OVERVIEW

Horowhenua District Council is performing competently across all rated areas, and has acknowledged areas where it can and should improve further. It is likely to have significant growth in future years, primarily from improved road links to the Wellington region, and has recognised this likelihood. It is undertaking significant adjustments to its strategy and operations in response to this expected growth.

### RATING



## Findings



THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN OUTLOOK FOR THE DISTRICT WILL LEAD TO A NEW COUNCIL STRATEGY, *HOROWHENUA 2030*, WHICH IS IN PREPARATION.

This will provide a renewed direction to the Council's strategic work programmes and services, influencing areas such as infrastructure renewal and capacity, land-use zoning for housing and commercial use, water supply, and community services.



MAJOR DECISIONS THAT WILL AFFECT *HOROWHENUA 2030* AND THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING ARE PENDING.

These include early 2017 consultation with NZTA and finalising of plans for the Ōtaki-Levin section of RoNS. While the current Long Term Plan had only limited community involvement, full stakeholder and community input is planned for *Horowhenua 2030* and the new Long Term Plan for 2018-28.



THE COUNCIL IS COMMITTED TO PLANNING AND WORK PROGRAMMES TO IMPROVE SERVICES, AND ENGAGEMENT TO MEET EXPECTED GROWTH DEMANDS.

Two teams, focusing on growth response and business excellence, have recently been formed to support the Council's strategic planning. The Council works to an internal strategic framework (known as *Horowhenua Inc.*) that reflects its desire and need to manage growth and change in concert with the local community.

### Commonly used terms

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



Governance, leadership and strategy	Financial decision-making and transparency	Service delivery and asset management	Communicating and engaging with the public and business
Variable	Competent	Variable	Competent

#### STRENGTHS

The Council realises that new strategic and operational goals are required for expected growth and change.

Performance improvements are being made and resources are being put in place to implement the changes necessary for the future strategic and operational environment.

The Council has moved to fully fund depreciation, and this has increased financial transparency.

Steps have been taken to improve Council efficiency, such as more shared services and use of Information Technology services.

The Council is committed to enhancing community, Maori/Iwi, business and stakeholder engagement.

#### AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

The Council needs to develop a compelling vision that is coherent and shared with the community.

A training and development programme should be introduced for councillors to ensure continuous education and investment in skills.

Succession planning for senior management should be considered.

Business cases for property and community projects would improve robustness of decision making.

Council should ensure management have in place a project delivery programme that aligns its Long Term Plan and vision with council capability to ensure objectives are attained.

There should be appropriate public reporting on all major projects, including details on timeliness, cost and scope.

Risk analysis should be moved from a "portfolio" basis, to becoming an integral part of all management processes.

Council should ensure its capital expenditure programme is meeting its asset renewals requirements. The Council and the community should increase their understanding of the trade offs that exists between expenditure and risk in different areas.

Learnings from the staff engagement should be included in new strategies.

The Council could improve trust with priority local stakeholders such as Māori/Iwi and business.

# Leading locally

## Governance, leadership and strategy

The Council is effective in recognising, planning and leading current and future strategic and operational needs.

### Priority grading

#### Variable

< The Council is working towards a higher growth future for its district. Council strategy is being revised to inform the Long Term Plan and District Plan.>

As the Council is the district's leading facilitator, strong Council leadership is required to involve the community in this high-growth transformation.

### Setting the direction for the community

The Council's current vision and goals serve the present state of its plans and work programmes. Although there has not been an internal engagement survey since 2013, this assessment's observations and discussions indicate that the Council's vision and goals are embedded across the organisation.

It is unclear how well the current vision and goals will guide the transition to growth. They have not been tested recently, and in particular have not been tested against the new growth forecasts. The new strategy framework *Horowhenua 2030* will be the setting for the new Long Term Plan and District Plan, and is expected to set priorities more effectively than they have been set in the past. Major external decisions, such as NZTA's final determinations on the route for the Kāpiti-Levin RoNS, will have an impact on the Council's strategy, as will community input. Fully informed community engagement is planned for testing directions and options and, from this, will help set the Council's vision and goals for both itself and the community.

The current strategy has limited community input. It is linked to activity areas, although not always to performance. *Horowhenua 2030* will benefit from being tightly linked to Council activities, performance assessment, and accountability procedures. It is expected to become outcome focused, with Council and community buy-in.

The Council is aware it must balance the competing needs of land use, environment and development through its planning, zoning, property management, asset use, partner support and community involvement activities. Many of these activities – such as Māori/Iwi involvement on wastewater, drinking water consents and zoning – are at an early stage.

In the face of increased service demand, future Council goals and plans face several key overriding issues. These include:

- > perceived high levels of Council debt;
- > the need for non-rateable income options, which is crucial given the district's dichotomous aging/younger population profile;
- > "catch-up" investment in infrastructure (such as wastewater and the clean-up of Lake Horowhenua);
- > the uncertainty about plans for regional unity and coastal land use;
- > NZTA's RoNS decisions, especially those affecting Levin;
- > the Council's operational alignments and efficiencies; and
- > the Council's appetite for risk.

As governors of a district facing such significant change, councillors realise they need to be well-informed peak performers.

### Confidence in capability

The councillors interviewed for this assessment report said they were confident in their capability to govern. There is an elected member transition and induction programme in place, but there are no processes that enable councillors to assess their performance. Councillors said they were clear about their role, and that generally there was a good working relationship between most councillors and the Council's management and staff.

The Council operates a code of conduct, which has been enforced, as required. The Council intends to improve its conflict of interest management by using the Institute of Directors' guidelines.

## Effective working relationships

Changes arising from the 2016 local body elections have introduced new challenges for relationships at a number of levels. Greater clarity and more specificity in Council documents, such as the code of conduct, may help the councillors work through these issues in a constructive manner.

## Focusing on health and safety

There is minimal health and safety reporting to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. Given the scope of changes arising from the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, the Council should be considering a more comprehensive policy on this, as well as reporting on it as a separate, standing agenda item for every meeting.

## Management in changing times

While the Council is agreed on its vision and goals, it acknowledges the need for change. However, it is not clear how adequate the existing vision, goals and strategy are for moving forward in a period of growth. *Horowhenua 2030* and the next Long Term Plan will set a new strategic direction for the Council.

The human resources (HR) capability appears limited. Discussions with staff indicate that while there is generally a positive culture, and senior managers are accessible, there is not a great deal of organisational emphasis on staff development. There is no documentation on issues such as senior management succession and career development.

A significant gap is the absence of any independent survey of organisational culture, with the last internal survey having occurred in 2013. The Council would benefit from having an annual independent survey to identify and action the opportunities for improving its culture and effectiveness.

## Improving risk management

A risk register exists, but it is not regularly reported to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and it largely addresses risk on a departmental and project basis. Its quality and consistency is very mixed. The Council's management has acknowledged that "...the departments of Council are at varying levels when it comes to how well risk information has been captured and maintained to date. It has also become evident that there is some inconsistency in reporting of risk across Council." It is proposed to have a risk management framework in place by 31 December 2017.

At an elected member level, the Council would benefit from implementing best practice guidelines on managing conflicts of interest. It should also consider introducing independent members (with an emphasis on legal and accounting skills if they

are lacking) and an independent chair to its Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

## Informing council decisions

Councillors consider the information and advice they receive are adequate to inform their decisions in most areas. There are some operational areas where improved information and advice is required (eg the state of the Council's infrastructure).

### Strengths

The Council is responsive to the need to revise planning and organisational capabilities and capacities so that it can meet the forecast demands of increased growth in the Horowhenua district.

There is commitment to extending engagement with the community in the Council's strategic direction.

The Council has some established relationships with key stakeholders and is developing additional ones.

The Council's internal culture is generally strong.

### Areas for improvement

Governance documents should be robust, and procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest should be made clearer.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee should have additional, suitably qualified, independent members and chair.

The risk management framework needs to be fully implemented.

*Horowhenua 2030* should be outcome focused and have a strong performance framework in order to provide confidence the Council will be accountable for agreed outcomes.

After its consultation on *Horowhenua 2030*, the Council should review its vision and goals.

# Investing money well

## Financial decision-making and transparency

The Council is making changes to enhance its performance and accountability reporting. There are challenges ahead, especially in relation to future debt levels and income sources in a growth environment, and significant investment in infrastructure is required.

### Priority grading

Competent

< Current financial performance benchmarks are generally being met, although a balanced budget was marginally missed (99.24 per cent instead of 100 per cent). Financial decision-making and transparency will be enhanced by the Council moving to fully funding its depreciation, and it is developing a new risk framework across the organisation, particularly for asset management plans and projects.>

The Council's financial strategy aims to balance the budget from 2018/19. It also notes that projected debt for 2019/20 will be just below the maximum net debt-to-revenue ratio (173 per cent versus 175 per cent). However, the Council recognises that this ratio is not viable in the event of an emergency that requires unbudgeted expenditure. It therefore has obtained a credit rating that will allow it to extend its debt limit to 250 per cent.

The affordability of the average rate (\$2,167 per year) is posited against the district's aging/younger population profile, a below average income level (or fixed incomes) for many of its households, and an unemployment level (eight per cent) that is higher than the national average. The demand for infrastructure

and the maintenance of assets and services in a growth environment mean the Council will need to constantly review budget forecasts and explore non-rating income sources as well as public-private partnerships.

### Planning and evaluating financial goals

The Council works to a financial strategy that informs a bi-monthly financial report and tracks indicators of expenditure and revenue, trends, and financial sustainability. Its financial strategy and its infrastructure strategy relate to the Long Term Plan, and include a move to full funding of depreciation. Balanced budgets are forecast from 2018/19, with asset funding coming from rates and surpluses. Debt is forecast to remain within limits and is used to fund new capital expenditure only. Rates and surpluses will be used to fund existing assets.

Financial performance benchmarks are currently being met. Much of the financial position is based on old assumptions, and the Council will need to ensure that current revenue and expenditure targets are realistic for the new Long Term Plan.

### Balancing the budget

All financial performance benchmarks are being met. Current revenue is up, with operating expenditure and debt being lower than forecast. The Council is moving to fully fund its depreciation, and, as a result, a balanced budget is not forecast until 2018/19. Budget and borrowing are within guidelines, although debt levels per ratepayer are higher than ideal (given household incomes in the district).

The Council has recognised that, with an ageing population, the rating base for the district will need to be supplemented by population growth and non-rating sources for future funding, and that these sources will include public-private ventures. Current forecasting will need to be adjusted to incorporate the needs identified in *Horowhenua 2030* and the Council's next Long Term Plan.



## Addressing financial risk

The Council uses a risk framework and tool kit. A new organisation-wide risk framework is to be presented to councillors for adoption. Monthly financial reports are also provided to them.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee oversee planning and reporting on finance and risk. The detail of current risk reporting needs to be improved, to provide councillors with a more integrated and comprehensive view of their strategic risks.

### Strengths

Current financial performance benchmarks are being met.

---

The Council recognises that non-rating revenue and public-private partnerships will be required to meet likely increases in the cost of Council services.

---

Depreciation will be fully funded, and a balanced budget is forecast for 2018/19.

---

The Council intends to fund asset renewals from rates and surpluses, rather than loans.

---

### Areas for improvement

Proposals for non-rate funding and public-private ventures need to be made clearer and more concrete.

---

The financial implications of the *Horowhenua 2030* strategy must be made clear, so that the community can understand the Council's requirements and commitments.

---

The Council's financial position, and its impact on ratepayers, should be clearly stated in the new Long Term Plan.

---

# Delivering what's important

## Service delivery and asset management

The Council is meeting most of its current performance benchmarks and is moving to future-proof its service provision. But there is a need for improved reporting on performance and accountability.

### Priority grading

#### Variable

< Most of the current performance benchmarks are being achieved. However, given the expected growth in the district, major pressures are expected on service delivery and asset management.>

These pressures include:

- > new local roading (resulting from the completion of the Ōtaki-Levin section of the Wellington Northern Corridor and associated roading changes);
- > infrastructure maintenance;
- > future wastewater discharges;
- > possible outsourcing of solid waste; and
- > new consents for drinking water supply.

There is public concern about the volume of untreated stormwater that is reaching environmentally sensitive areas, and about the potential failure of aging wastewater assets. Stormwater discharge into Lake Horowhenua, while being addressed, is yet to be resolved, and is out of step with the Council's claim of a "pristine environment" for the district. Without significant capital investment in the wastewater network (\$16 million over four years), there is a risk that the Council may breach the regional council's resource consent conditions.

The need for more drinking water in Levin is recognised, but the consent to increase take is contested. Consequently, improved water demand management is essential for the district.

Other service areas such as property management have been brought in-house to improve data management and efficiencies, with outsourcing where expertise is required. The Council has invested heavily in community amenities. Efficiencies and savings have been gained through meeting 24-hour Land Information Memorandum (LIM) requests and through consenting time being reduced by digitisation. Some shared services are operating.

### Planning and evaluating service goals

On current measures, most asset and service areas are achieving high performance. However, stormwater and wastewater are achieving around 70 per cent of their target, which is below the Council's averages (100 per cent for financial measures and 85 per cent for non-financial measures). Performance measures should be specific for all assets and services. For example, water loss from council pipes, and actual use of parks and reserves, community centres, libraries and other amenities. The Council has a planned and funded approach to improving its asset information over time.

The quality of operational services is judged by two-yearly external satisfaction surveys. These surveys are regarded by the Council as useful indicators, although further work is needed on the quality of service delivered and on how well they measure actual/unique usage. Generally, operational services are driven by demand, improvements and renewals. The Council is conscious that it needs to avoid pet projects and instead focus on quality business cases as well as performance measures that will assist informed decision-making.

### Evaluating asset effectiveness

The Council presented examples of reductions in infrastructure costs due to innovations (\$3 million saved in 2013/14) and improvements from in-house business services (LIM reports available within 24 hours of request, energy and telecommunications savings, digitisation of building and planning consents).

By its own admission, the Council is in catch-up mode on asset knowledge. For example, it is investigating its stormwater and drinking water assets, to reduce overflows and leakage, and the cost of managing aging assets such as drinking water reticulation is being budgeted for. However, the cost of new drinking water for Levin will depend on the outcome of consent applications to increase water take, and the cost of an alternative to discharging stormwater into Lake Horowhenua is not fully known. Having the best data and solutions would greatly assist the cost-effective management of assets.

Property management has been brought in-house with an improved database and skillset. Similarly, community services (which include libraries) have shifted in-house after having been in a council-controlled organisation. There is a need to more clearly identify outcomes, so that the efficiencies and effectiveness of ever changing library and community services can be improved.

## Regularly reviewing delivery

A review of service delivery is to be undertaken under section s17A of the Local Government Act. While there are roading joint ventures with Manawatu and Rangitikei councils, and a consenting cluster with Hawke's Bay and Palmerston North, there are no firm plans to partner with other councils for service delivery.

At present there are no direct development contributions to assist with infrastructure and service provision.

The current District Plan is substantially outdated by the new growth assumptions. Service provision will come under pressure from increased growth demands, especially as the pattern of growth and land utilisation across the district is still unclear. Understanding the implications of growth is essential for longer-term asset capability, and the Council acknowledges this. In the interim, knowing the full state of current assets and having robust business cases for new services and assets will greatly assist current capability as well as future-proofing of assets.

## Evaluating Council effectiveness

The quality of infrastructure performance measures can be made more precise. There is a need to measure and report on priority trends across all Council assets and work programmes, including customer satisfaction, actual performance (eg water loss recorded in pipes), savings and other salient measures.

Current performance measurement is poor, with measures largely limited to residents' satisfaction survey results, the Department of Internal Affairs' mandatory measures (eg holding a specified number of meetings per year), and completion of transactions. A better balance of quantity, quality and timeliness measures is needed. There is a particular need to identify and report crucial quality measures (such as data confidence in infrastructure assets) and to demonstrate links between measures and medium to long-term outcomes.

A broader range of financial cost efficiency and value for money measures should be considered. The performance results also need to be presented in a visually informative manner, including relevant graphs and charts to highlight performance trends over a period of time (eg five years) rather than providing an annual snapshot.

### Strengths

Asset management and services are aligned to the Council's vision and goals.

The Council is moving towards a full understanding of the state of its assets.

Reviews of service provision are planned.

There is evidence of significant cost savings on infrastructure projects and service delivery.

Services have been brought in-house, to increase efficiencies and effectiveness of service delivery.

The Council is responsive to community needs, through a customer-centric approach.

## Areas for improvement

The Council needs to demonstrate, in its Long Term Plan and District Plan, how it will balance growth demands with land use, environment, and sustainability.

---

The infrastructure strategy should be revised, to align it with *Horowhenua 2030* and the new Long Term Plan.

---

Council's expected outcomes for service delivery and asset management should be clearly defined across all service areas, including property and community services.

---

The Council should adopt an appropriate business case methodology, particularly where required to obtain central government funding for large infrastructure and other capital projects.

---

The Council should continue to explore cost-effective shared services opportunities with other councils.

---

An understanding of the state of assets and services could be improved.

---

The Council should resolve the wastewater discharge options for Levin.

---

The Council's Development Contributions Policy needs to be reviewed, to ensure that developers are fairly contributing to infrastructure development.

---



# Listening and responding

## Communicating and engaging with the public and businesses

The Council has active communications and is developing its areas of engagement.

### Priority grading

Competent

< Horowhenua district is experiencing a diverging stakeholder interest, with an increase in its youth and its 65+ population. The district has strong interests in northern and neighbouring areas - particularly southern Palmerston North – with workers from these areas commuting to Kāpiti, the Hutt Valley and Wellington.>

Engagement with a diverse community and several distinct communities of interest is an unavoidable challenge. This is amplified by growth changes and their effect on land use, infrastructure, services, the environment, cultural needs, and the Council's future plans (particularly its Long Term Plan and District Plan).

### Planning effective engagement

The communications strategy is being actively implemented in-house (having previously been out-sourced). Internal communications are being assessed for effectiveness, and the Council has had a brand refresh, with its website being further developed. The Council has constructive local media relations, and its communications team uses an app to record public issues for the Council to address. However, in terms of crisis preparedness, the Council needs clearer procedures for leadership and roles.

*Horowhenua 2030* will require extensive engagement with the various district communities. Currently, the strength of engagement varies. There was little public involvement in the

Long Term Plan, and none on the Annual Plan. However, communications are responsive and have good public reach. The external satisfaction survey records high levels of public attendance (30 per cent) at Council meetings and high readership (75 per cent) of "Community Connection", an insert in the *Horowhenua Chronicle*. There is a strong platform for more community involvement in Council plans.

### Communicating through the media

Media relations are reported as positive. The Council's website and its digital communications are proactive, although documents tend to be wordy and lack graphics that would increase readability and comprehension. Video is also used by the Council as a communications tool.

There is general satisfaction with council communications.

### Building good relationships

The Council has an active community engagement plan and programme. One example is its Community Well-being Committee and Forum.

The external engagement survey records high general satisfaction and strong community interest in Council affairs. There was good engagement and communications on the Council's community housing project (where the Council divested its rental stock), and for the Levin town centre development.

There is a memorandum of understanding with some but not all Māori/Iwi. Relationships with Māori/Iwi are a Council priority, although these relationships appear to be at an early stage and personal to the previous Mayor and the Chief Executive. Consulting Māori/Iwi on major issues such as water take, stormwater discharge, zoning of land and other issues means the quality of the relationship will be important to achieving mutually satisfactory outcomes.

In the absence of a local Chamber of Commerce, the Council takes both an advocate and a co-ordinator role with local businesses. Engagement is mainly via the Horowhenua Economic Development Board, an executive of business leaders. Māori/Iwi and business stakeholders have urged the Council to develop a broader understanding of local business – in particular, their need for greater input into formal planning processes.

Over the two years following the launch of *Horowhenua 2030*, the engagement strategy will need to be upgraded so that it involves the community and allows the new Long Term Plan to have high support from priority stakeholders such as business, Māori/Iwi,

and other communities, as well as from the wider community in general.

In addition, the Council has important regional and national stakeholders. At a regional level, there are active relationships with Palmerston North City Council and Horizons Regional Council, although the relationship with its southern neighbour, Kāpiti District Council, is less engaged. Nationally, the Council has constructive relationships with NZTA and central government agencies.

## How the community views the Council

While satisfaction surveys are extensively used throughout local government, they largely record attitude rather than behaviour. The Council is aware of the need to acquire evaluation tools, including stakeholder surveys that provide a more robust view of the effectiveness of internal and external communications and engagement.

### Strengths

The Council is committed to improving engagement with Māori/Iwi, business, the wider community, and it has established relationships with these stakeholders.

The Council is a recognised advocate and coordinator for the district.

Engagements on major issues such as rental housing ownership and the Levin town centre have been of high quality.

The Council has both an active communications strategy and team, which enables it to reach out to a diverse community.

### Areas for improvement

The Council's engagement strategy needs to be reviewed, to generate more community input into upcoming plans such as *Horowhenua 2030* and the new Long Term Plan.

The quality of engagement between the Council and Māori/Iwi and business should be improved, in particular by the Council broadening its understanding of stakeholder needs.

The Council needs to clarify its leadership roles in crisis preparedness.

The Council should supplement its existing satisfaction evaluations of engagement and communications activities with more rigorous measures such as reputation indices and qualitative assessments of specific experiences and encounters.

The CouncilMARK™ local government excellence programme is a proprietary programme operated by Local Government New Zealand (utilising independent assessors). The rating given to a council is an independent assessment of that council's performance in certain areas, as at the time the rating was given. LGNZ does not accept any liability to any person whatsoever in relation to any rating, or the council's participation in the programme. For more information visit [www.councilmark.co.nz](http://www.councilmark.co.nz)