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**Waimakariri District Council**

**Independent assessment report | October**

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**WAIMAKARIRI**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

\*Period of assessment March 2017



A measure  
for better  
community value.



# Assessment Summary

## AT A GLANCE



The Waimakariri district is expecting continued rapid growth yet retains its rural/small town character.



LARGE METRO

**SMALL METRO  
AND LARGE  
PROVINCIAL**



SMALL PROVINCIAL AND RURAL

REGIONAL

## The current situation

Waimakariri District Council is a medium-sized, high-growth council emerging from the rebuild that has followed the Canterbury earthquakes. In addition, approximately 10,000 people have moved into the district since the earthquakes, with a further 8,000 forecast to move there over the next seven years. As a result, some substantial issues have emerged.

Competition over resources and priorities for development has built up between Rangiora, Kaiapoi and Woodend.

Notwithstanding the significant capital investment which has occurred post-earthquakes, particularly in infrastructure, there continues to be strong demand for further investment in local facilities.

Transport solutions are needed to ensure the district remains a viable commuter suburb, with 42 per cent of the workforce now commuting to Christchurch.

### Period of assessment

The assessment was conducted on 13 and 14 March 2017.



**\$1,100m**  
GROSS DOMESTIC  
PRODUCT<sup>1</sup>

SERVES

**57,800**

PEOPLE<sup>2</sup>, A MIX OF  
91% EUROPEAN/PAKEHA  
7% MĀORI  
2% ASIAN



POPULATION TREND

HIGH GROWTH

MAKES UP

**0.841%**

OF NEW ZEALAND'S TOTAL LAND AREA<sup>3</sup>  
REPRESENTING WAIMAKARIRI  
DISTRICT, FROM PEGASUS BAY  
THROUGH TO PUKETERAKI RANGE, AN  
AREA OF:

**2,255 km<sup>2</sup>**

RESPONSIBLE FOR

**1,546km**  
ROADS<sup>4</sup>



## Key learnings

The Council needs to be responsive to the pace and timing of change expected by its community relative to its own plans. It will need to complement its good face-to-face service ethic by being more digitally engaged with its community and by providing the technology infrastructure necessary to support increased online communication and services.

- > With the on-going volume of work and public expectation, the Council will need to continue to refine and improve its processes for prioritising, managing and reporting projects across the entire organisation.
- > The good work undertaken in re-establishing the Council's infrastructure network can be used in detailed strategic planning to deal with the potentially large impact of increased regulatory requirements as well as community and Māori/Iwi expectations in relation to the environmental issues posed by drinking water, stormwater and wastewater management.
- > Having experienced rapid growth, the Council will need to ensure it benefits from the current district development strategy process to deliver a clear vision of the future shape and character of the district.

<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

Waimakariri District Council has demonstrated leadership and vision for the recovery of its district following the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes. This has been achieved through careful financial management and re-investment in critical infrastructure. The Council recognises it needs to increasingly shift its focus to the future in order to tackle the key issues facing the district.

### RATING



## Findings



THERE IS STRONG AND COHESIVE LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE ORGANISATION, PARTICULARLY FROM THE MAYOR AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THAT HAS RESULTED IN THE COUNCIL EMERGING FROM A POST-EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY PERIOD WITH A STRONG AND UNITED ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE.



ASTUTE FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT HAS ENSURED SOUND REINVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS, AND THE COUNCIL HAS COMPLEMENTED ITS STRONG INTERNAL FOCUS ON OPERATIONAL DELIVERY WITH GENERALLY HIGH STANDARDS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE AND ENGAGEMENT.



THERE IS STAFF CAPABILITY IN THE MAJORITY OF SERVICE AREAS, BUT ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE STRATEGY AND EXECUTION OF ITS REGULATORY SERVICES, AND THERE IS RECOGNITION OF THE NEED TO “CATCH UP” IN THE DELIVERY OF ONLINE SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION.

## Commonly used terms

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



Governance, leadership and strategy	Financial decision-making and transparency	Service delivery and asset management	Communicating and engaging with the public and business
Stand out	Performing well	Better than competent	Performing well

#### STRENGTHS

The Council has presented comprehensive and compelling visions, first for recovery and more recently for the district's future growth.

The Council's leadership and management have been highly effective in taking the district from a period of earthquake recovery into a new era of growth and development.

The Council's financial and infrastructure strategies are comprehensive and well integrated, and are focused on medium to long-term issues.

The Council maintains a strong spirit of partnership in all its engagements with Māori/Iwi and the community.

The Mayor and Chief Executive clearly understand and act in their respective roles and understand they are different

#### AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

The Council should provide its community with simpler, more understandable financial information.

The Council needs to obtain greater clarity on how the community sees future affordability issues, especially given the prospects for continuing growth.

Greater capability should be developed in the use of business cases and in project governance and reporting.

The Council's website and wider digital capability require enhancement.

# Leading locally

## Governance, leadership and strategy

With its district development strategy, the Council is transitioning effectively to a more expansive long-term vision for the future which tackles all the key issues it faces. The vision is supported by well-aligned and cohesive political and executive leadership.

### Priority grading

Stand out

<Like other Canterbury territorial authorities, the Council has been strongly focused on earthquake recovery for the past six years, and consequently priorities have been more short- to medium-term rather than long-term.>

There are some differences of opinion amongst stakeholders whether the long-term vision for the district should have been more substantively refreshed during the recovery period, but steps are now well-underway within Council to set that vision.

### Setting the direction for the community

The Council acknowledges it is nearing the end of the post-earthquake recovery, having spent much of the past six years on repairing critical infrastructure. The community had extensive input into the Council's vision and strategy in 2009, and it is going through a more fundamental review in advance of the 2018-28 Long Term Plan. The leading document for this review is *Our District, Our Future – Waimakariri 2048*, which sets out the district development strategy.

The Long Term Plan has four key components to its strategic direction, which is focused on earthquake recovery and prudent financial management. While the direction is conservative and fiscally focused, councillors were quick to highlight its underlying community goals. One councillor described the vision as “more of the same” – preserving the “small town” feel and values which have attracted people to the district.

External stakeholders were generally positive about the vision and leadership provided by the Council over the past six years, but they expressed a desire to see more visionary thinking on issues such as developing community facilities and enabling the district to retain its youth. The future vision expressed in *Waimakariri 2048* provides this more expansive view: “The Waimakariri district is a great place to live, visit, work and play in – a self-sufficient, culturally diverse and sustainable place with well-connected and attractive urban and rural living environments ... and abundant community facilities and green spaces that excite our people and encourage participation.” It is a comprehensive and well-focused summary of the issues being raised about Waimakariri's future.

The work priorities within the Long Term Plan and the Annual Plan are strongly linked to the immediate vision of recovery, reinstatement, and careful management of finances to ensure on-going affordability. The Chief Executive's performance agreement is well aligned to the direction set by the current Long Term Plan, as are the Māori/Iwi principles which have been developed “to assist in achieving community outcomes and create better understanding for staff and managers across the organisation.”

### Creating confident councillors

The Council is particularly thorough in the information it provides to prospective councillors, and it has an extensive induction and training programme for newly elected councillors. In the lead-up to the 2016 local body elections, all candidates were given a comprehensive 64-page guide. Once elected, councillors receive a very full guide to working within the Council, including role descriptions for the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the committee chairs and councillors.

The induction process is extensive, balancing formal presentations from staff with tours of the district that give a practical perspective on the Council's activities. There is a budget for on-going training, although the Mayor noted “we under-use the training budget a bit.”

There are no formal self-review processes for councillors. The lack of formality reflects the very effective and constructive working relationships that exist, rather than a disinclination to ensure that there is some process for self-reflection.

## Effective working relationships

It was evident from observations during the assessment and from comments by external stakeholders that the Mayor and the Chief Executive have an outstanding working relationship which is illustrative of the positive working relationships within the Council more generally. The Mayor and the Chief Executive have similar working styles and both are recognised for their understated manners and their drive to serve their community. The Mayor's participation in executive management meetings, although unusual, illustrates the trust and confidence that exists within the Council's working relationships.

The Chief Executive's performance plans and annual review process are thorough, and it is evident that councillors hold the Chief Executive in high regard. The review process includes an independent facilitator, which adds objectivity and transparency.

## Strengthening risk management

The Audit and Risk Committee has existed for 20 years. It has some powers delegated to it, including the powers to review, monitor and recommend to the Council. It has limited decision-making powers on rates issues and the writing-off of bad debts.

The Code of Conduct was last revised in 2010. Its detail on probity issues such as conflicts of interest and sensitive expenditure is limited. It has minimal explanation of non-monetary interests and little recommended action in relation to these. There is no register of interests, which is a gap that should be addressed.

The Audit and Risk Committee does not have an independent member, and a majority of councillors voted against appointing one in February 2017. The minority view was that independence provided transparency, lent objectivity to decision-making, and provided the public with greater confidence. The majority view was that "we're elected to make decisions and the public don't want paid people making decisions for us." The Mayor acknowledged there are strong arguments either way, and considers that the Council should re-address this issue at the start of each new term.

The Council has extensive health and safety processes and information, including a review schedule of policies and documents, a work plan for the year and an annual survey of staff. While there is good statistical reporting to the staff committee on health and safety, the latest (February 2017) report to the Audit and Risk Committee was light on detail, being primarily a commentary on actions to improve health and safety rather than a report on statistical information or trends.

## Managing the organisation

An internally developed staff "climate" survey was conducted each year from 2004 to 2008, and has been conducted every two years since then. It surveys staff views on issues such as remuneration, the quality of performance management and communication. There is good tracking of trends, with many of

the issues surveyed showing improvement over the years. There is an annual action plan resulting from the survey, although it is relatively brief in detail. The Council recognises the need to increase the focus on organisational development issues and, subsequent to this review, it has confirmed that the survey is to be conducted annually again. Objective input from independent human resources professionals may assist this process.

### Strengths

The Council's strategy is well focused and has led it effectively through the post-earthquake recovery.

The Council has an expansive post-recovery vision that embraces a strong community focus, while continuing to ensure high standards of financial responsibility.

The Council's internal values are aligned with its vision.

There is an extensive and interactive induction process for councillors.

The Mayor and the Chief Executive have a highly cohesive working relationship. Both clearly understand and act in their respective roles and understand their roles are different

The organisation's culture is healthy and strong.

### Areas for improvement

The Council would benefit from additional structure provided for councillors' professional development.

The Council and its committees should undertake annual formal self-reviews.

Risk reporting could provide more analysis of the trends towards improving the health and safety culture.

The Council should revisit the question of having an independent member on the Audit and Risk Committee.

The Code of Conduct should contain a register of members' interests, and should have greater clarity and detail on managing conflicts of interest.

# Investing money well

## Financial decision-making and transparency

The Council has excellent financial management and a long-term strategic perspective on expenditure which has enabled rates increases to be well-managed through the post-earthquake recovery. The cost of future regeneration plans will need continued vigilance, particularly to ensure affordability issues are addressed for those on fixed incomes.

### Priority grading

Performing well

<Although the long-term vision for the district has not been substantively changed during the earthquake recovery period, the Council has been taking a long-term view of their financial planning throughout this time.>

The earthquake has necessitated an unprecedented level of financial investment in the district, but it has been done with both the immediate and long-term needs of the community in mind.

### Planning and evaluating financial goals

The Council has a strong financial strategy, which reflects the care with which it has managed the district's finances over the past six years. This strategy looks beyond the 10 years of the Long Term Plan, noting that the following 20 years will continue to be influenced by population growth and the demand for additional infrastructure. The links between financial strategy, infrastructure strategy and overall vision are important in the success of the Council's planning and delivery.

The strategy clearly identifies the most critical factors that will influence spending over the period of the Long Term Plan: the continuation of the rebuild, the impact of continued growth,

investment in community facilities, expenditure on stormwater mitigation and planning for natural disasters. This last factor highlights the care taken by the Council in its financial planning. It recognises that there is a moderately high possibility of further damage from earthquakes and, as a result, its ability to borrow may be restricted. Accordingly, it maintains capacity in its budget to address these possible costs. This is a very conservative, but arguably prudent, approach, and reflects the forward thinking that the Council brings to its strategy.

The finance team acknowledges that rates affordability could become an issue, particularly for the district's older population. The team has done some initial work on superannuitant incomes relative to rates. However, while the Council makes significant use of targeted rates to allocate costs fairly, it is unclear at this stage whether individuals in all sections of the community will be able to easily afford the projected levels of rates increases.

### Assessing the financial data

The finance team is experienced and capable, and it produces a very thorough range of financial information. There is full compliance with statutory reporting requirements, and comprehensive information is provided to the Audit and Risk Committee and to the full Council. There is a robust development contributions policy, which ensures that significant growth costs are met by those who create these costs.

The finance team recognises that its next step is to "add value" to the financial reports by better identifying business costs, and providing real-time reports. Although the budgets are not zero based, a balanced budget has consistently been delivered. The Long Term Plan notes that there will not be a balanced budget from 2017 onwards because of the level of funding required for depreciation.

One area of concern is that financial planning documents and budget processes do not expressly address cost-efficiency or opportunities for savings. The finance team has acknowledged that there is room for improvement, and that they have been "somewhat intuitive" in how they looked at cost-effectiveness,



and noted that “we could do it more smartly.” It was stated that “the pressure around the council table hasn’t been strongly focused on savings. There’s an envelope of what’s palatable and we spend within it.” While the financial results produced do not suggest poor spending, the budgets would benefit from being zero based or from having cost-efficiencies identified as part of the development and finalisation of budgets.

## Addressing financial risk

Risks are documented in the risk register provided to the Audit and Risk Committee, and Council reports provide information on risk issues as a matter of course. A Treasury policy outlines the Council’s appetite for risk in relation to its financial activities.

The risk register is relatively thorough, with risks categorised and scored. But the presentation of the risks could be improved. It is not clear what specific control measures have been taken for adjusting the risk scores, and the detail provided on a given risk and its controls are relatively generic. For example, “political” risk has “Code of Conduct” as a mitigation action, but there is no detail on what this achieves or whether it is reviewed for effectiveness.

## Meeting financial targets

Given the scale of costs incurred from the earthquake, the Council is in a very sound financial position. While debt levels are relatively high, and growing, they are off-set by the district’s growth and its relatively low levels of deprivation. The Council has an AA credit rating and is well within benchmarked limits in terms of servicing its interest costs. Its ratio of debt to total assets, as well as its debt control, is also within benchmarked limits.

The Council’s membership of the Local Government Funding Authority ensures it obtains the most competitive interest rates. It maintains healthy surpluses, which will fund future renewals. Its level of capital expenditure on essential services, which is 176 per cent of its depreciation costs, is significantly above the required benchmark of 100 per cent.

## Being clear and transparent

The Council is transparent in the sense that it provides all the financial information it is required to provide. But some of that transparency is lost in the way the information is presented. For example, the explanation of the Council’s targeted rating system runs to 14 pages of text and tables that are not likely to be read by many people in the community. While this detail and volume is required for legislative purposes, the essential information could be explained much more succinctly.

The summary version of the Annual Report presents key financial information in a table with no explanation of the terms used. The

variances between budget and actual also have a minimal level of detail. Accessibility of the financial information could be improved by following the example set by the councils that provide their communities with brief summaries and make greater use of charts, graphics and non-technical language.

### Strengths

Despite six years of significant earthquake-recovery costs, the Council is in a strong financial position.

The Council’s financial strategy is comprehensive, well explained, and very long term. It balances community wishes against fiscal responsibility, and is well integrated into the infrastructure strategy.

The Council’s financial management team is very capable.

Financial reporting is comprehensive.

### Areas for improvement

The Council needs to have a clearer picture of whether rates affordability will become an issue for some groups in the community, for example people on fixed incomes (pensions).

The Council should develop a risk policy, with the risk appetites in relevant areas clearly stated beyond that provided in the Treasury policy.

There needs to be clearer and more specific risk reporting, and a focus on strategic risks being reported to the Audit and Risk Committee, especially without an independent chair.

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

Financial information should be made more accessible to the community through simpler presentation and explanations.

# Delivering what's important

## Service delivery and asset management

The Council is managing its infrastructure assets well, and is unifying its financial management and asset management systems. Its community services are well delivered, with an eye to greater cost-efficiency and community involvement. However, the performance of its regulatory functions is variable.

### Priority grading

Better than competent

< The Council performs very well in several aspects of asset management, and has good knowledge of its assets and their condition. The Council is aware its asset knowledge could improve, and data mobility would assist in this. Asset management is integrated with financial management, although maintenance schedules are still spreadsheet based. >

Since the earthquakes, there has been a high rate of infrastructure investment from which the Council is emerging. It is now focusing on managing incremental growth in its networks. However, both its business planning and project management skills need developing. There are very significant uncertainties, particularly in stormwater and wastewater management, which are becoming apparent in the Canterbury region.

The Council stands out in its ability to work with others. It is an active participant in regional forums, and works with neighbouring councils in joint procurement. However, its regulatory performance is mixed and there are conflicting internal and

external views on the management of resource and building consents. The Council take an innovative approach to community facilities and their management. The Council has managed the costs of sports fields well by working with the clubs in the district to determine both the level of maintenance undertaken and who does it. For example, line marking and rubbish removal is carried out by clubs themselves, and they advise their members directly on the state of the fields. Astro-turf is used to enable higher levels of use, and provides a more economic option compared to buying additional land.

The Council took the opportunity following the earthquake to rebuild or extend Council community facilities to meet changed and growing needs. Some of the redesign is particularly innovative, including the redesign of the Kaiapoi library to include an arts space, a community space as well as client service desks. Sports facilities are developed in collaboration with other councils acting within the greater Canterbury region.

### Assessing capability and capacity

The Council has 16 supplies for drinking water, which service from 40 to 8,000 connections. The larger plants are well managed and maintained. The Council acknowledges the smaller water supplies pose challenges for meeting and maintaining drinking water standards. All supplies comply with the Bacteria Treatment Standard. Nine out of 15 systems comply with the Protozoa Treatment Standard, and the Council is looking for full compliance over the next two years.

The discussions around water have triggered a review that is assessing a change from targeted rates to a district-wide rating.

There is relatively little knowledge whether there is significant water loss due to leakage, but water metering is not proposed as a way of managing demand (because there is ample supply). Although the Council does not inspect drinking water reticulation, it has a robust maintenance schedule, keeps records on its burst pipes, and undertakes criticality assessments.

The Council's stormwater management will be challenged on several fronts, especially given the growing numbers of "life-style

block” landholders. There are issues around the capacity of existing catchments, particularly in Rangiora. Inflows into (and infiltration of) the wastewater network after heavy rain is a significant problem that needs addressing. The Council recognises this, and it is a high priority for capital expenditure. It also recognises that stormwater treatment is a growing issue for the community. It is prioritising capital investment accordingly.

The Council has confidence in its wastewater asset information, with 10 to 15 per cent of the network viewed by CCTV. The most critical or oldest parts of the network are inspected, and around five per cent of the network is reviewed each year. Overflows into areas of water are infrequent (approximately two in five years), and there are approximately 15 overflows onto land each year. The Council is addressing pipe capacity issues to limit future overflows. In one area, it exceeded e-coli levels in a sand bed, which it corrected with further work. It is waiting for a report on another area. The marine outfall has had some asset durability and maintenance issues. The issue of discharging treated wastewater into the sea is likely to remain an issue for the community.

The Council recognises that managing growth well depends significantly on a reliable and resilient transport network and is working constructively with NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) and the Christchurch City Council on options for achieving this. It is adapting well to the NZTA’s One Network Road Classification, and works to maintain its network cost-effectively through a single contract with a private company.

## Addressing regulation

The Council has no enforcement strategy for its regulatory responsibilities and has not determined how to balance the two tools it uses for compliance (education, and enforcement through infringement notices or prosecutions). There are only limited (response timeliness) measures for assessing the performance of the regulatory services. This could be improved by performance measures aimed at improving community safety (eg reducing the number of dog attacks).

Resource and building consent issues are managed in an integrated way. However, stakeholders consider the decision-making for consents to be opaque, inconsistent and time consuming.

Planning for land use (“spatial planning”) is being re-examined in a considered and competent way in partnership with other councils in the greater Canterbury region. Two major issues are township development and the balancing of “life-style block” activities against more traditional rural activities.

## Meeting capital-investment goals

Infrastructure investment is dominated by a bottom-up engineering oriented perspective. Although some capital projects

(eg the indoor courts facility) have undergone feasibility studies, there is no comprehensive and consistent use of formal business case methodologies.

The delivery of capital projects is an area for improvement. Project management disciplines are being increasingly used across the infrastructure team, although they are still to be introduced for the entire organisation. The Council has recognised the need to address this, along with ensuring that all projects are reviewed, audited and reported to the executive and elected members.

### Strengths

The Council demonstrates strong and strategic asset management that informs its infrastructure planning.

The Council’s asset registers are aligned with its financial management system.

The Council’s financial strategy, asset management strategy and risk planning are integrated.

### Areas for improvement

There needs to be improved knowledge of the Council’s infrastructure assets, particularly asset condition.

Digital devices need to be used more extensively, so that databases can be updated in real time.

The Council would benefit from establishing an enforcement strategy that creates priorities within its regulatory activities (particularly animal control) and that manages risk better.

To ensure accountability, there should be public reporting on the outcomes of all major projects, with details on timeliness, cost and scope.

Capital projects need to be developed and delivered using appropriate levels of expertise in business case planning, and in project management and governance.

# Listening and responding

## Communicating and engaging with the public and businesses

The Council's face-to-face engagement and communication is very good, and its relationship with Māori/Iwi is excellent. However, more comprehensive communication and media strategies are needed, particularly in the use of social media and other digital communication.

### Priority grading

Performing well

< The Council's communications and engagement strategy is variable. It excels in direct face-to-face communication. >

However, it does not have a published digital strategy, although it advises that work is underway on consolidating its work in this area. Its website is significantly out of date in terms of both its presentation and the transactions it offers, although it again recognises the need to prioritise further development.

### Planning effective engagement

The Council communications staff acknowledged that they were *"on the launching pad for improving digital communication"* and are now open to improving digital channels, after what was a low priority during earthquake recovery. There has been some initial success with Facebook, and views of its Facebook videos are strong. A development proposal involving the Kaiapoi River received more than 18,000 views. Email and text have been used to alert users about a bridge under repair, but neither medium is used systematically. The website is due for an upgrade. There are other gaps, such as an inability to text residents, and a heavy reliance on the local newspaper for issuing notices. The Council has identified its digital engagement strategy as one of the 13 enablers of the Council's revised strategy.

### Communicating through the media

There is very close engagement between the Council and the local media, and media stories related to the Council appear to be

balanced and generally constructive. The Council has a page in the local paper advertising its notices and events. It responds quickly to questions or issues through a range of spokespeople. The Chief Executive and the Mayor both participate in a regular weekly media briefing.

### Building relationships with Māori/Iwi

Engagement with Māori/Iwi is outstanding. There is a regular meeting with representatives of the local Iwi, Ngai Tuahuriri Runanga, which includes their resource management advisors. Māori/Iwi feel listened to and have seen positive action by the Council, so there is a high degree of trust.

There are annual planning hui which the full Council attends with the venue alternating between the Council building and the marae.

### Building relationships with the community

Through its community services group, the Council is very successful in connecting with more than 300 disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in the community. This includes networks that focus on important local themes such as domestic violence, refugees and alcohol. Initiatives are networked across community groups and with the Police, Women's Refuge, etc. Youth is a strong focus, and community assets such as the library and the pool are used actively for community connection.

### Engaging with the community

There has been strong community engagement, particularly on issues arising from the earthquake. This engagement was led by the Mayor and the Chief Executive, and their strong leadership performance through that difficult period now resonates positively with the community.

The quality of printed communication could improve, particularly in the Council's statutory documents such as the Annual Plan. Although infographics are used, it is difficult for a household to identify how much it spends and how it compares with other households.



Complaint mechanisms need to be reviewed. There are delays in the Council's response times, and it is not clear whether systems or process issues are causing these delays.

## Communicating when there's a crisis

In addition to the usual avenues of radio, print and telephone, Facebook is increasingly used as the alert mechanism for an emergency. The Council earned particular praise for its "door-knocking" in the period after the earthquakes as every household was visited. The Council would benefit from using text messages for alerts that are less crucial (eg a "boil water" notice) that would otherwise challenge the Council's ability to visit every household.

## Building relationships with business

Businesses generally have a positive view of the Council but this is dominated by the relationships formed with the Mayor and the Chief Executive, who are regarded as accessible, reasonable, practical and focused on solutions. In some of its regulatory activities, particularly consenting, the Council is viewed as risk-averse, inconsistent and lacking a commercial understanding.

### Strengths

The relationship with Māori/Iwi is one of trust, built through active engagement and changes in behaviour.

There is extensive community engagement, with supportive leadership from the Mayor and the Chief Executive.

The Council puts considerable effort into making face-to-face contact, particularly in emergency situations.

### Areas for improvement

The Council needs to establish a media and communications strategy.

The Council must develop its digital capability, so that more of its business can be transacted online and more of its communications can be delivered through texts, emails, social media, etc.

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