



Our role and direction

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OUR ROLE

We have two key jobs. The first is to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wellington and its people, now and into the future. The second is to enable democratic local decision-making and action.

The Wellington City Council is made up of 15 elected representatives – the mayor and 14 councillors. It's their job to make bylaws, set the city's overall strategic direction, and approve budgets, policies and plans aimed at achieving that direction. Part of their role is to listen and take the pulse of the community before making decisions.

The elected representatives are supported by the Council's chief executive and 1500+ staff, who provide advice, implement Council decisions, and look after the city's day-to-day operations.

OUR DIRECTION

We aim to help Wellington reach its potential as a truly world class city.

In 2006, we adopted a new 10-year strategic direction, based on 13 goals or 'outcomes' for the city. These goals are: to make Wellington more liveable, more compact, more eventful, more inclusive, more actively engaged, better connected, more sustainable, safer, healthier, more prosperous, more competitive, more entrepreneurial and innovative, and to help the city develop a stronger 'sense of place'.

These outcomes were developed after engagement with Wellingtonians during 2005 and 2006 about their aspirations for the city. They support our overall vision of creating global competitive advantage by positioning the city as Creative Wellington – Innovation Capital.

The detail of what our outcomes mean is contained in our 2006-16 strategies for urban development, transport, economy, environment, cultural wellbeing, social and recreation, and engagement/governance.

These strategies provide coherence in our work and ensure we retain a clear sense of what we want to achieve. They also show how all areas of our work are interlinked (how, for example, town planning rules influence demand for transport).

In 2007/08, we have continued to work towards our long-term 'outcomes' while also responding to a number of important challenges such as population growth and change, rising costs, economic uncertainty, public concerns about affordability, and environmental pressures associated with climate change and resource use.

ENGAGING WITH RESIDENTS

Wellington's residents have many ways to provide input into our decisions.

Residents vote in elections, make submissions, come to meetings, and contact us informally about issues of concern.

We have worked hard in recent years to improve engagement – for example, by making it easier to provide input online, and by increasing opportunities for face-to-face meetings between Councillors and residents through regular forums.

Residents also have many options for finding about Council actions and decisions – including our award-winning website and Contact Centre, Council newsletters, the Our Wellington page in the Dominion Post, Council reports and publications, and information in libraries and service centres.

KEEPING TRACK OF PROGRESS

We keep track of progress towards our 'outcomes' by asking residents' views, gathering information from official sources such as Statistics New Zealand, and gathering data internally about the work we do and the impact it has.

This helps us to determine priorities, allocate resources, and decide whether and how we should provide a service.

The vast majority of Wellingtonians are satisfied with their quality of life and believe the city is a great place to live. In national surveys, we consistently have the highest quality of life ratings of any New Zealand city. In some areas – in particular our work to protect and enhance the environment – our work for the year has generally exceeded expectations. In others performance fell below the standards we expect.

As you'll see throughout this report, we're working to address those areas.

MAKING OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE

We aim to keep you informed and make ourselves accountable.

In July 2006, we published our 2006-16 long-term plan explaining the services we planned to deliver, the costs, how we expected to pay for those services, and how we'd measure our performance. This annual report explains how we've delivered on the second year of that plan.

It contains our financial results, explanations of the work we've done and whether it met expectations, and – in the Governance and Management' section, a detailed 'real world' account of how we receive input from residents and make decisions. This year we're also outlining how sustainability is an integral part of our work.

SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW

All of our work is about sustainability.

'Sustainability' is about meeting today's needs in ways that don't compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Our legislative function is also about balancing present and future needs – promoting the well-being of Wellington and its people, now and into the future.

This function is reflected in all of the work we do. For example, we manage resources, guide development and land use, protect and enhance biodiversity, deal with waste, manage the transport system, support social and economic well-being, and even manage our finances with an eye on balancing future needs with those of the present.

On the following pages, and throughout this report, you'll find information about the work we do, and measures of its effectiveness at enhancing Wellington's environment and Wellingtonians' quality of life now with an eye on the future.

What is sustainability?

Sustainability is commonly thought of as relating to the state of the environment – and, with climate change and rising energy prices, environmental issues are becoming increasingly pressing.

However, sustainability also relates to long-term social, cultural and economic well-being. In practice, it is not possible to separate different types of sustainability; for example, social and economic well-being cannot be enhanced, particularly in the long term, if the environment is being degraded.

Environmental sustainability, too, is broader than climate change and energy use – it also relates to impacts on flora and fauna.

Is sustainability new?

Sustainability has always been a focus of the Council's work – from protection and management of the Town Belt over 150+ years and the original construction of the city's sewage network in the 1890s, through the introduction of kerbside recycling and the construction of the Moa Point wastewater treatment plant in the 1990s, to the wide range of current work to protect and enhance the environment, support improved standards of living, look after residents' health and safety, and foster strong communities.

The language has changed over time. Wellington's founders did not use the word 'sustainability' when they set aside 450 hectares of Town Belt land 'for the enjoyment of the public, and not to be built upon'.

Technology has also changed, as has understanding of the impact of our actions on the environment and the importance of environmental sustainability. As cities such as Wellington grow and develop, the importance of ensuring that today's actions don't cause harm for future generations has come into much greater focus.

How sustainable is Wellington?

In terms of environmental sustainability, Wellington is quite some distance from true sustainability. As a city, we've done a good job of looking after public reserves and open spaces. In recent years, we've also improved our management of waste.

In terms of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions, there has been progress in 2007/08. The city's use of energy and water declined, recycling increased, and the amount of waste dumped in landfills decreased.

We're fortunate in that our economy is based largely on providing services, rather than on extractive industries which can harm the immediate environment, or on energy intensive manufacturing.

However, there's still quite a lot of work to do, for example in terms of: reducing greenhouse gas emissions; ensuring land, water and other resources continue to be used wisely; protecting streams and waterways from the impacts of development and stormwater runoff.

In terms of social and cultural sustainability, Wellingtonians regard themselves as having very high quality of life, and as being part of strong communities. We are very welcoming of people from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds.

Though economic performance has been steady, we have some work to do in achieving sustainable economic growth.

How do we respond?

As mentioned above, the Council supports many initiatives to enhance sustainability. You can find more information about our work on the following pages, or in the chapters of this report on our urban development, transport, environment, economic development, social and recreation, and cultural well-being strategies.

Who is responsible for sustainability?

Though the Council has responsibility to play a leadership role, sustainability is a responsibility that everyone shares – including individuals, businesses and organisations, central government and other local authorities.

Some of the underlying issues go beyond what local government can address. For instance there are very real practical limits on a council stopping population growth within its boundaries. And in other instances it's more efficient for individuals to change behaviours than it is for remedial actions to be put in place.

THE COUNCIL'S SUSTAINABILITY

As well as considering the city's sustainability, we have a responsibility to ensure that our own actions as an organisation are sustainable. In 2008, we established a climate change office to encourage more efficient resource use and reduce the Council's greenhouse gas emissions.

You can find out more about our corporate progress towards sustainability in the Corporate Environmental Impact and the Management and Staff sections of this report.

ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

Sustainability reporting is about accounting not only for your finances and success as an organisation, but also for your impact on the surrounding environment, community and economy. It is also about accounting for the future impact of your actions and decisions, as well as the present-day ones.

All New Zealand local authorities are required, as part of their legislative role, to look after social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being, now and into the future. We have always accounted for the impact of our actions on the surrounding environment, community and economy – that's our job.

In many respects, therefore, this entire report is a sustainability report, as are all local authority annual reports.

Global reporting initiative

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Framework is the world's most widely used framework for sustainability reporting. The framework sets out principles and indicators that organisations can use to measure and report their economic, environmental, and social performance. The GRI framework was used as a guide in developing this report.