



COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN CHRISTCHURCH
TE KAUNIHERA KAUPAPA ORANGA KI OTAUTAHI

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10 May 2005

**Submission to Christchurch City Council
on its draft**

Annual Plan 2006

Introduction

The purpose of the Council of Social Services (COSS) is to promote social equity, justice and wellbeing by advocating on issues, empowering groups and facilitating collaboration in the social services sector.

COSS is administered by a voluntary Board drawn from a range of statutory and voluntary social services, including a Council staff member; and employs an Executive Officer to carry out the day-to-day activities of the organisation. Membership consists of over 100 voluntary agencies and a number of individuals or units from the state sector and local government, although services and initiatives are not limited to members. COSS views draw on and reflect the wide networks we work within and are mandated by our broad, cross-sector membership.

Community Services

COSS would like to thank the Council for its continuing support and contribution to the social service and community sector in Christchurch. We consider social initiatives and community support to be crucial to the social and economic health of Christchurch city and its citizens. Much of the community and social service activity in the city occurs in the voluntary sector. With its skills, expert knowledge, diversity, and grassroots perspective, this sector is a key partner for Council, not only in identifying but also in achieving desired Community Outcomes.

While economic development can help address social issues, the strong economic growth of recent years has not resolved the social issues that this city is challenged by. Indeed, as social issues often affect economic development, such an investment will also contribute to economic goals. Social problems are a drain and a hindrance to economic development, and funds spent on prevention are a wise investment. Therefore there is a need to at least maintain and preferably increase investment in community. It is with some concern that we note on page 38 of the Draft Annual Plan that the Council proposes to decrease spending in two key areas, while maintaining current spending levels on Economic Development (p48).

In the 2004/5 budget, Council allocated \$4,105,000 for community support for individuals and groups; and in the Long Term Council Community Plan planned to spend \$4,115,000 in 2005/6. In the draft Annual Plan the amount has been cut by \$448,000 (almost 11% of this year's budget) to \$3,667,000. It would also appear that the performance measures relating to this budget item (p.42) have not been adjusted for either the reduced resourcing or for the staff restructuring, as we understand that the Children's and Youth Advocacy team no longer exists. It would be unrealistic to expect the target of 15 children and youth projects to be met by two staff positions and a reduced budget.

Similarly, in 2004/5 \$5,476,000 was budgeted for grants to community projects and activities and the LTCCP allocated \$4,785,000 for 2005/6. This has now been cut even further, to \$4,213,000 – a cut of \$1,263,000 or 23% from this year. COSS understands that there has been no reduction in the funds available for distribution through the Council funding schemes, but this is impossible to ascertain from the presentation of the Plan. Further, we note that on p.39 the performance measure for funding is that \$5.7 million is available, more than the total allocated for this budget item on p38. This only adds to our confusion when trying to understand exactly what is provided for by this budget item.

The voluntary social services sector in Christchurch is under pressure to meet increasingly complex social needs. Efforts at the national level to work with government to address voluntary sector capacity have seen only slow and erratic progress, and work is currently stalled. Therefore we request that Council increase the amount of money available for grant distribution in order to remove some of the pressure from these services.

Capital Endowment Fund (p.97)

COSS wishes to address two matters in relation to this fund.

Firstly, we wish to invite the Council to reconsider the proportion of funds allocated to economic development and civic and community development. We believe that in light of the healthy economic climate, the maintenance of Council operational spending levels on economic development (p48), and the planned cuts in operational spending on community services (p38), a higher proportion of the funding allocation should now be targetted to civic and community development.

Secondly, the manner in which the figures are presented is difficult to understand for people without experience in financial reporting. We originally took the figures to mean that there was a total pool of \$1,234 million to be distributed for civic and community projects, of which \$99,000 had not yet been allocated. However we could not get the figures to balance on that understanding, and it now appears to us that the \$99,000 is included in the sums that we read as already allocated. We are now totally mystified as to what the figures actually mean.

If there is any unallocated funding available, we recommend that this be invested in strengthening the community sector infrastructure. The demands on Boards and management have become much more complex as the sector has become more professionalised, and support is urgently needed to assist organisations meet these demands.

Democracy and Governance

We note that one of Council's goals is that the public is able to participate in decision making processes (p46). The way in which information is presented in consultation documents such as the Draft Annual Plan is of great importance in achieving this. These documents must be meaningful and easily understood. COSS Board and staff members who have studied this Plan are experienced in considering and analysing such documents, but we found this one ambiguous and difficult to understand. We recommend that Council investigate ways of presenting some of the information it contains in a more accessible format.

Summary

In summary, COSS recommends that:

- Operational spending on community support for individuals and groups, and grants to community projects and activities be increased rather than cut.
- The distribution of Capital Endowment Fund allocations be adjusted by allocating a greater proportion to civic and community projects.
- Any unallocated funds in the Capital Endowment Fund be targetted for community sector infrastructure development.
- The presentation of the Draft Annual Plan be reviewed and made easier for lay people to understand.

COSS wishes to be heard in respect of this submission.

Yours sincerely

Kimberlee Woods
Chairperson