

REPORT OF THE CITY MANAGER

1. PROPOSED BANKS PENINSULA/CHRISTCHURCH CITY AMALGAMATION

RR 7029

Officer responsible City Manager	Author Mike Richardson
Corporate Plan Output: Various	

The Local Government Commission announced on 19 February a Draft Reorganisation Scheme for the amalgamation of Christchurch City and Banks Peninsula District Councils. The purpose of this report is to propose a framework within which the City Council can respond to the proposal.

The draft scheme is open to submissions until 20 May. The Commission will then meet with those who have made submissions and make any other investigations it considers necessary before making its decision. That decision will involve either the issuing of a final reorganisation scheme on which polls will be held separately in Christchurch and Banks Peninsula or the abandonment of the proposal if the Commission at that stage considers it does not meet Local Government Act criteria. I believe it would be fair to say that for the proposal to be abandoned at this stage after the consideration the Commission has given it over more than 12 months there would need to be quite powerful new evidence brought to light.

As Councillors are aware, there has been a considerable amount of detailed work undertaken on the likely implications of an amalgamation financially although some work is still required on the impact on rates of different funding policies. This work will be collated for Council consideration during May but there are two very significant “missing” elements which need to be put in place.

The first of these is the need to undertake consultation within Christchurch to gain some understanding of community attitude towards an amalgamation. Realistically such consultation will need to take place during the month of April, perhaps into early May. Given that all residents will subsequently have the opportunity of voting on the issue it may well be appropriate at this stage to target community consultation at residents associations and interest groups within the city. Such consultation will need to be informed by well prepared material on the main implications of the proposed amalgamation. There will be issues to do with the principle of amalgamation and also some of the specific details in the draft reorganisation scheme.

I would recommend that the task of overseeing this consultation exercise be delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee. At this stage I would not envisage that significant additional expenditure will be required but it might be prudent to delegate to that Committee approval of any expenditure to the limit of say \$20,000.

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The second strand of work that needs to be progressed is considerably more complex. It relates to defining ward and community board boundaries within urban Christchurch. The draft reorganisation scheme is specific with regard to ward boundaries for the Akaroa/Wairewa area and also the intention for the present Lyttelton/Mt Herbert ward of the BPDC to be included within a city urban ward. Otherwise the scheme is silent with regard to ward boundaries within the city.

Elected members will recall that in a determination which we received from the Local Government Commission in March 1998 it wrote as follows:

“The Commission will expect the Council to comprehensively consider its wards prior to the elections being held in October 2001. At that time, if not earlier, it should thoroughly review its governing structure with a view to identifying a possible reduction in the number of elected and appointed members of the Council, Community Boards and other Council operations.”

(“Other Council operations” was a reference to our LATES)

We have financial provision in Year Two of our current plan (i.e. post-July 1999) for a significant review exercise to look at the issue of communities of interest in Christchurch and alternative ward/community boundaries. The effect of the Local Government Commission’s Draft Reorganisation Scheme is to require this study to be undertaken faster than would otherwise have been the case. The work will need to be completed before the Local Government Commission is in a position to promulgate a Final Reorganisation Scheme as such a scheme must determine ward and community boundaries across the whole of the proposed new city. So, although the exercise needs to be undertaken in any event, its timing is now determined by the Draft Reorganisation Scheme. If a Final Reorganisation Scheme is promulgated by the Commission (which seems likely) and an amalgamation proceeds following polls then it is the Commission which will determine ward/community boundaries for Christchurch. If, on the other hand, we do not proceed towards an amalgamation then the responsibility rests with the Christchurch City Council (other parties having appeal rights).

The setting of electoral boundaries is a matter on which it is extremely important that the process used is one which is fair and is seen to be fair. In my view the Council should progress this matter by commissioning a report from two independent persons appointed to consider the issue in detail, undertake consultations and discussions with a wide range of interest groups in the community and recommend boundaries. I believe this exercise will take at least three months to complete satisfactorily. It is therefore urgent to bring it forward immediately with two appropriate local commissioners being appointed as quickly as possible to undertake the project.

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In my view, it would be appropriate to look to a pairing of say a retired judge together with an urban planning consultant or similar person with a good understanding of community issues and of Christchurch's geography. Given the potential sensitivity of the issue some thought is required as to the best means of appointing two such commissioners. The main options would be to delegate the task of appointment to a small group of elected members or to leave the matter in the hands of myself.

- Recommendation:.**
1. That the Strategy & Resources Committee be delegated the authority to define the parameters for a public consultation process on the proposed amalgamation.
 2. That expenditure of up to \$20,000 from contingency be applied to this consultation process.
 3. That two independent persons be appointed as local commissioners to prepare a report for the City Council on the pattern of community interest in Christchurch and the manner in which ward and community board boundaries can best reflect it.

Note: The Council should resolve the method for selection of these two individuals.

4. That \$70,000 (previously provided in year two of the programme) be applied to this task.

Mike Richardson
CITY MANAGER

23 February 1999

CONSIDERED THIS 25TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 1999

MAYOR