

**5. CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL CONTINUING MEMBERSHIP  
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW ZEALAND**

RR 9276

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Corporate Plan Output:	

The purpose of this report is to give the Strategy and Resources Committee an opportunity to consider whether to recommend to the Council that it serves notice of its intention to withdraw from membership of Local Government New Zealand.

This report has been prepared in response to a request from Councillor O'Rourke.

The formal purpose of Local Government New Zealand is to promote the national interests of Local Government

A summary of the major benefits that acquire from membership of Local Government New Zealand would include:

- Its ability to represent member Councils' collective interests to Central Government and other stakeholders.
- It provides access to information on issues and developments affecting local authorities both individually and collectively.
- It provides access to the sharing of information about other local authorities.
- It provides access to strategic advice and expertise on public policy issues affecting the local government sector.
- It provides opportunities for personal support networking and development.

The stated goals of Local Government New Zealand are as follows:

- *To help develop and promote a strategic agenda for local government that will create a strong and successful future.*
- *To promote autonomy, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency in local governance.*
- *To influence public policy in order to achieve the strategic outcomes of local government.*
- *To enhance sector performance through collective developments.*
- *To provide value for Local Government New Zealand members.*

*with the focus being on the policy and governance interests of its members.*

The total budget for Local Government New Zealand for the 1998/99 year was \$3.0m of which the Christchurch City Council paid a membership fee of \$68,000. We also paid to attend their annual conference and our own costs in attending Zone meetings and contributed a significant amount of staff and Councillors' time contributing to work programmes of Local Government New Zealand.

My understanding is that the major concern of those who propose that we reconsider our membership of Local Government New Zealand is that it does not do an adequate job in representing our interests to central government and other stakeholders and that it is failing badly in its efforts to achieve the goals given above in the areas of developing and promoting a strategic agenda for local government and in influencing public policy in order to achieve good outcomes for local government. Obviously in trying to achieve these goals Local Government New Zealand has to reconcile the widely disparate views amongst its membership. This means that on any given matter it is unlikely that Local Government New Zealand's view will coincide precisely with that of any one of its members', the best that a member should expect is that the actions of Local Government New Zealand on a particular issue do not run counter to its own lobbying and representation activities.

If we were to withdraw from Local Government New Zealand:

- (i) We would be the only local authority in New Zealand which is not a member.
- (ii) Local Government New Zealand would still be looked to by the Government and others as the representative of local government in New Zealand, we would simply lose any ability we have to influence its position.
- (iii) By not being part of Local Government New Zealand those opposed to our point of view (both inside and outside Local Government) would be able to paint us as 'the one that is out of step'.
- (iv) We would have to rely solely on our own resources and our own efforts to represent our point of view.

If Christchurch City Council withdrew from Local Government New Zealand it would need to adopt some alternative strategies to ensure that its voice is heard. These could include:

- (i) Devoting at least the resources it puts into Local Government New Zealand into representing its views in Wellington and elsewhere. I suggest that to maintain a lobbying presence in Wellington would take considerably more resources than we currently put into Local Government New Zealand. That presence would still be of only limited effectiveness as it would be seen as the partisan representation of Christchurch and not a local government sector view.
- (ii) We could try to establish an alternative representational organisation either nationally, geographically based, or based on cities. Any such attempt would parallel representational bases already provided by Local Government New Zealand, would require an enormous amount of effort on our part and would only succeed if there is a groundswell of disillusionment with Local Government New Zealand. I am unaware of any such widespread disillusionment and if it does exist I suggest it would be easier to harness disillusionment to reform Local Government New Zealand rather than to set up a rival organisation. Further, if we were successful the process of distilling the views of the new group could easily lead us to having similar frustrations with that group as we currently have with Local Government New Zealand.

While it is galling to be a member of an organisation and see it use our resources to represent a point of view with which we are not strongly in sympathy, it is even more frustrating to see an organisation speaking on behalf of our sector representing points of view over which we have no influence at all.

I would suggest that the best approach that Christchurch City Council can take to its frustrations with Local Government New Zealand is not to withdraw but rather to put significantly more effort and energy into Local Government New Zealand and its activities than it has done over the past few years. There seems to me to be no doubt that those local authorities who have placed their energy into the activities of Local Government New Zealand have been the ones whose point of view has been most clearly heard by the organisation.

**Recommendation:** That the Christchurch City Council continue to support Local Government New Zealand, and seek to take a high profile and active role in the organisation at zone, sector and national level in order to ensure that the Christchurch view is clearly articulated and well understood.