

Officer responsible Director of Policy	Author Jonathan Fletcher
Corporate Plan Output:	

The purpose of this report is to seek Council agreement to the hosting of an International Forum on Local Democracy.

It is time that local government moved onto the front foot in its relationship with central government and began establishing itself as a critical part of the democratic fabric of New Zealand. In the current debate about local government there seems to be no recognition that local government is in fact the democratic mechanism closest to the community which enables people to collectively develop visions, address needs and give meaning to their collective identity.

Informal discussions in various forums over the last few months have suggested that there is widespread support both within the local government community and in the general public for forward looking initiatives to be taken from within local government itself rather than simply responding to a series of generally piecemeal proposals from central government.

To start this process it is proposed to hold a forum in Christchurch in June or July. The forum would be jointly hosted by the Mayor and other leaders of Canterbury local government. Invited to attend would be a range of interested parties from throughout New Zealand and three or four leading experts from overseas.

The Mayor has already discussed this idea informally with a number of mayors from throughout the country and has received strong support for it, so we can be fairly confident that such a forum would strike a chord and be well supported.

The next steps in the process include:

1. Establish a small Christchurch based working group to undertake the nuts and bolts of setting up the forum. It is suggested that the group include the Mayor, the Chair of Strategy and Resources, and one other Councillor from the Christchurch City Council, together with an invitation to the Canterbury Regional Council, and two of Canterbury's District Councils to nominate Mayors as representatives. This group would be serviced by staff from the Christchurch City Council, and probably involve the appointment of a professional conference organiser.
2. Aside from this organising working party, the Mayor has suggested that he write to all local authorities in New Zealand telling them about the forum and seeking support.

3. Approve funding provided by the Christchurch City Council for the up-front costs involved in running the forum. The forum should aim to be partially self funding from registration fees, but the Council needs to be prepared to provide funding, recognising that in a forum of this sort it is unlikely that all costs will be recovered. Based on experience with organising other conferences it is suggested that a sum of \$40,000 be provided as seed funding, this money to be taken from the Council's contingency funds.

Recommendation:

1. That the holding of a Christchurch based forum on the future of local government in June or July 1999 be supported and that the working party and budget of \$40,000 be approved as above.
2. That the Council members of the working group be the Mayor and Councillors Close and Evans.
3. That the main political parties be contacted regarding the issues which are to be addressed at the forum.