

Officer responsible Community Relations Manager	Author Julie Macdonald, Community Adviser
Corporate Plan Output: Community Liaison Assistance and Advocacy	

The purpose of this report is to recommend a further course of action to the Council in the race relations area. This is in response to the visit by the Race Relations Conciliator (Dr Rajen Prasad) in March. The report also outlines a request for funding by the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator.

BACKGROUND

In February the Council agreed to “pursue discussions with the Race Relations Conciliator and Ngai Tahu about the possibility of jointly hosting a forum to progress race relations in Christchurch”. This was in response to an approach by a deputation requesting Council to form a working party to develop a Christchurch based organisation to co-ordinate race relations issues. There was some debate over the extent to which the Race Relations office was carrying out its functions in Christchurch, and the Committee felt this should be investigated further before the Council became involved in a new initiative.

DR PRASAD’S VISIT TO CHRISTCHURCH

In March Dr Prasad made a presentation to elected members (at the invitation of the Mayor and Cr Anderton). Among other issues, Dr Prasad discussed the intention of his office to hold a nation-wide consultation process to develop a race relations strategy. This concept, called Agenda New Zealand, will be launched throughout the week beginning 3 May. It is intended to develop the strategy (by October) following two months of intensive consultation, including consultative forums being held in Christchurch. Dr Prasad indicated he anticipates a major education programme is required to improve community attitudes to race relations.

Dr Prasad indicated that he is seeking to form a partnership with the Christchurch City Council to assist with funding two education staff positions in the Christchurch Race Relations office. These staff would deliver education programmes, provide information to the public and act as a referral point for complaints to the Auckland office. Dr Prasad has therefore requested that the Christchurch City Council grants the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator \$60,000 to cover overheads and salary for one of the education positions for one year.

DISCUSSION

The Office of the Race Relations Conciliator is about to undertake a major consultation process towards developing a national strategy. This will focus on education as the sustainable way to improved race relations. It would appear that this supercedes the proposal for Council to co-host a forum with the Race Relations Office and Ngai Tahu. The Christchurch City Council will have the opportunity to participate in this consultation along with many other interested parties in Christchurch. There seems little point in pursuing a parallel process of discussions while this national work is being done. Maria Tait (Ngai Tahu liaison person for Council) agrees with this view, providing that the consultation process is appropriate. (This will be relayed to the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator).

The Race Relations Office has statutory obligations which must be fulfilled, regardless of whether or not the City Council contributes to the costs of the Office. However, Dr Prasad has indicated he is interested in developing a more proactive role in race relations by employing education workers. The Office reports that it does not have sufficient funding to support both new education positions.

There would be some risk to Council in agreeing to grant the request for \$60,000. It could set a precedent for 'under-funded' government agencies to approach Council for financial support. It could also be seen to undermine the proposal still being developed by the group which came as a deputation to the Committee last year.

There would also be some advantage to Council supporting the employment of education workers in the local Race Relations office. The initiative would go some way towards addressing some of the concerns raised by the deputation earlier in the year. Many other groups in the city have concerns about awareness and education around race relations issues and this would be a very visible way of addressing some of these issues through education. Council involvement in shaping the climate for race relations is consistent with its strategic objective of celebrating, protecting and increasing understanding of cultural diversity. The Race Relations Conciliator would continue to be responsible for the statutory role of investigating and arbitrating complaints of racial discrimination.

The issue for Council is whether it wants to provide support for race relations initiatives through the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator or through some other means.

Recommendation: That the request by the Race Relations Conciliator for \$60,000 to fund race relations education programmes be declined.

(The above motion was declared carried by division no. 1 by six votes to four, voting being as follows:

For: Councillors Austin, Baker, Buck, Corbett, Stewart and Wells.

Against: Councillors Anderton, Ganda, Keast and Thompson.)