

## 7. REVIEW OF THE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION FORMATION AND RECOGNITION POLICY

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Community Services Committee of the outcome of a review of Council support for Residents' Groups and to recommend changes to the existing policy and processes.

### INTRODUCTION

This report provides the summary and recommendations from a review of the 1992 Residents' Association Formation and Recognition Policy. The review aimed to evaluate the existing processes and guidelines and identify appropriate policy changes and any likely financial implications.

The Community Relations Unit Manager (Stephen Phillips) initiated the review due to issues around the resourcing of "acknowledged Residents' Groups" and particularly the budgetary implications for the forthcoming financial year 2001/02 which were highlighted by the 2000/01 Annual Plan Working Party. The review was also consistent with the Community Policy Guidelines (ref 1.1.4).

A full report of the review is available on request.

### BACKGROUND

The Christchurch City Council has had a commitment to foster and encourage the formation of Residents' Groups since the 1980s. In 1991 the Council introduced the Residents' Groups – Formation and Recognition Policy.

The 1992 Christchurch City Council Policy states:

1. *That the Christchurch City Council encourages the formation of local Residents' Groups.*
2. *That local Residents' Groups be able to apply to their Community Board for recognition as the "official" Residents' Group for the area.*
3. *That Residents' Group boundaries within each community be determined by the relevant Community Board.*
4. *That such groups, upon recognition, receive the right to be consulted by the Council on all work planned within their boundaries.*
5. *That the Council provides free typing and photocopying for official Residents' Groups, within limits approved by the Community Advocate.*

As a consequence of the policy an increasing number of Residents' Groups were formed. In an effort to manage and ensure resources were fairly shared, criteria between each Community Board and guidelines were developed in 1993 for Community Advocacy Teams.

Community Advocacy Teams respond to a request to establish a Residents' Group by funding, publicising, meetings, setting up and facilitating of initial meetings, attending initial meetings to explain the responsibilities, assisting in determining suitable boundaries, consulting with adjoining existing groups, and preparing the request for recognition and funding from the Board.

The Residents' Group "register" indicates city-wide coverage of approximately 70 to 75% (by area), with 96 groups listed. However, a number are shown as either in recess or inactive. The current support provided to Residents' Groups in the financial year 2001/2002 by Community Advocacy Teams for photocopying costs ranged from \$5,700 to \$10,500 per community. Residents' Groups have been able to seek funding support from local Community Board Project and Discretionary Funds for specific projects. Such projects have involved on-going or one-off projects, for example, Burwood/Pegasus Community Board allocated \$2,000 and \$4,000 from its Project Funds for 1999/2000 and 2000/01 respectively for Community Residents' Associations and Hall Management Support, and Shirley/Papanui Community Board allocated \$1,300 to St Albans Residents' Association towards costs of publishing a newsletter. Residents' Groups have also sought financial assistance and support from their Community Boards to assist with resource consent costs/appeals.

### THE REVIEW OF COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR RESIDENTS' GROUPS

The review was conducted by a team of staff from the Community Relations Unit and included consultation with key stakeholders.

The review process included:

- Review of current support.
- Three consultation forums held with Staff, (Community Advocacy Teams, Area Parks Officers, Area Traffic Engineers and Community Recreation Advisers); Elected Members; and Residents' Group Representatives.
- Informal input via submissions, letters, and phone calls.
- Analysis of Findings.
- Presentation of report to Community Boards and incorporation of feedback in recommendations.

## **FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW**

The review found that there was still support for Residents' Groups both within the Council and amongst residents. The following sections provide a brief summary of some specific issues related to Residents' Groups and the Council which were identified in the review.

### **1. Residents' Groups Boundaries**

The review identified that there was a need for boundaries to be more flexible. It identified that the policy needs to accommodate different processes that may be used to reach a boundary decision/resolution between groups and the Community Board.

### **2. Consultation**

The review identified that there is no standard or formal arrangements regarding communication between Community Boards and Residents' Groups. A number of Community Boards have instigated processes, including the formal appointment of board members as a liaison representative, six monthly collective meeting with all Residents' Groups, and staff liaison.

The review found that there were a number of difficulties associated with consultation processes, including the time allowed for feedback, the reliance on Resident Groups by Council staff, the quantity of information Residents' Groups received, and a lack of consistency of consultation. Some participants in the review argued that in some instances there appeared to be disregard for the Seeking Community Views Policy and its guidelines and a lack of appreciation that Residents' Groups are voluntary with their own timeframes and processes. Some argued that the Council often worked under the model of *Plan-Consult-Defend*. The Review Team identified that the preferred consultation process was *Consult (to find the consensus on an issue) – Plan – Consult And Discuss – Result*.

### **3. Functioning of Residents' Group**

The review identified that Residents' Groups are voluntary groups which should exist for the benefit of their members, not merely to serve the Council's need to consult or fulfil its policy requirements. The Review Team believe that Residents' Groups should be allowed to define their own role, the model they will work under and the path of their development. The review identified that the Council should be wary of dictating a role for a group that the group does not see for itself or deciding what the definition of a successful group is.

### **4. Communication and Relationships**

The review identified that Council officers should develop relationships with a range of community groups. It also identified that Residents' Groups need to be aware of the importance that other groups in their community play and not to see themselves as the sole guardians of their locality.

The review found that the communication between Residents' Groups, community advocacy teams and other local service centre staff was very good. It identified that communication with all other Council units was not always as good and for some Residents' Groups, the Council is a labyrinth of people, processes and documentation.

Residents' Groups identified a number of ways to improve communication, for example wider group meetings to discuss matters from an inter-ward perspective, to share information, training, and to give feedback to Council, and time set aside at Board meetings to allow Residents' Groups to have input into relevant agenda items.

## 5. **Resourcing**

The review identified that a process, including guidelines/criteria, for allocating resources needs to be developed. This process needs to be equitable, accessible and transparent for Residents' Groups and other community groups.

## 6. **Residents' Groups Advocate**

The review identified that there was some support for a Residents' Groups advocate. For example, some Residents' Groups suggested that the Council provides funding to employ a Residents' Group Advocate, Ombudsman and/or a legal advisor. It was suggested that the advocate would support and provide guidance and act on behalf of residents and ratepayers. It was also envisaged that this advocate would have some legal background or at least good knowledge of resource management procedures and the Act.

The Review Team considered that more dialogue in the area of a Residents' Group Advocate and further investigation of the proposal is necessary. The Team suggested that this could be a topic for a future city-wide Residents' Group forum.

## 7. **Community Board Feedback**

A report was presented to each Community Board in July. Community Boards endorsed the review, its outcomes and recommendations with one or two minor changes which has been incorporated into this report.

## 8. **Recommendations**

### 8.1 **General Recommendations**

- That the Community Board act as an arbitrator when no consensus decision can be made on the boundary between neighbouring groups.
- That there is a need for further education and development around the use of the Seeking Community Views Policy incorporating the CPCR (Consult to find the Consensus – Plan – Consult and discuss - Result) model, across Units.
- That Community Boards and Council officers need to consult in a manner that is timely and appropriate for community and Resident Groups.
- That Resident Groups recognised by the Council must be able to demonstrate that they have good communication processes in place with their members and the community. This may be as simple as a regular newsletter containing relevant information (i.e. disseminating information, encouraging or inviting community input).
- That the Community Relations Unit undertakes to organise a minimum of two annual forums for Residents' Groups across ward areas. The content of these forums to be defined by the groups.
- That Community Boards be encouraged to set aside time during Community Board meetings to allow Residents to have input into relevant agenda items or urgent issues that have arisen and how a right of reply may occur.
- That a resource manual be developed for Residents' Groups, that includes clear advice on Council processes and other relevant information.
- That a formula for resourcing groups through an annual grant be developed.
- That the Community Relations Unit, through the annual budget round, allocate funding which the Unit administers (based on the formula to be developed) for the purpose of a small annual grant to recognised Residents' Groups.
- That consistent city-wide accountability measures be developed.

## 8.2 Recommended Policy Changes

Based on the review the Review Team recommended a number of amendments to the Residents' Association Formation and Recognition Policy. The Team recommend that the Council adopt the following amended policy:

- That the Christchurch City Council supports the formation of local Residents' Groups.
- That local Residents' Groups be able to apply to their Community Board for recognition as an official Residents' Group.
- That Residents' Groups be encouraged to establish and set their own boundaries in consultation with other groups and Council officers that a Community Board can officially recognise.
- That official Residents' Groups receive the right to be consulted along with other relevant community groups by the Council on all works and services planned within their boundaries.
- That official Residents' Groups be eligible for a small annual grant (according to an agreed formula) to spend at their discretion for the benefit of their community.
- That Council staff and elected members use the Seeking Community Views Policy and Policy Guidelines when consulting with Residents' Groups and other relevant community groups.
- That the Council support communication within and between Residents' Groups.
- That the Council seek to foster a positive working relationship with Residents' Groups and other relevant community groups.

**Recommendation:** That the Community Services Committee endorse the recommendations of the Review team as outlined in this report, and recommend to the Council adoption of the amended policy.

**Chairman's Recommendation:** For discussion and consideration on the basis that more emphasis now be given to the formation and establishment of residents' groups.