

5. REVIEW OF THE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION FORMATION AND RECOGNITION POLICY

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The purpose of this report is to inform Community Boards 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 regarding the resourcing of “acknowledged residents groups” and in particular, the budgetary implications for the forthcoming financial year (2001/02) which were highlighted by the 2000/01 Annual Plan Working Party. 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 Advocacy Teams.

Advocacy Teams currently respond to a request to establish a residents group by:

- Arranging funding
- Publicising the group
- Arranging and facilitating initial meeting
- Explaining responsibilities at initial meeting and assisting in determining suitable boundaries
- Assisting with consulting adjoining existing groups
- Preparing application to the Board for formal recognition of the group, together with a request for funding.

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 Advocacy Teams for photocopying cost ranged from \$5,700 to \$10,500. Residents groups have been able to seek funding support from local Community Board Project and Discretionary Funds for specific projects. Such projects have involved ongoing 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 \$1300 to St Albans Residents Association towards costs of publishing a newsletter. Residents groups have also sought financial assistance and support from their Community Board 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, (Advocacy Teams, Area Parks Officers, Area Traffic Engineers and Community Recreation Advisers); elected members; and residents group representatives.
- Informal input via submissions, letters, and telephone calls
- Analysis of findings

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

The review found that there was still support for residents groups both within Council and amongst residents. The following sections provide a brief summary of some specific issues related to residents groups and 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 the policy needs to accommodate different processes that may be used to reach a boundary decision/resolution between groups and community boards.

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 residents 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 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 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 argued 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, 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 and 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. Resident Groups Advocate

The review identified that there was some limited 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 Resource Management Act.

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

7. Recommendations

7.1 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 CPR (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 residents groups.
- That residents 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 data, 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 Council, through the annual budget round, allocate funding (based on the formula to be developed) for the purpose of a small annual grant to recognised residents groups, which the Community Relations Unit administer.
- That consistent city-wide accountability measures be developed.
- That the Council assists residents groups to further investigate the issue of a "Residents Group Advocate".

7.2 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 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 allocated a small annual grant to spend at their discretion.
- 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 Board endorse the recommendations of the Review team as outlined in this report.

**Chairman's
Comments:**

I can see a number of opportunities to improve the policy. I think it would be helpful if the policy defined "community" for the purpose of this policy, and gave some guidance as to the size of a community that a residents group should attempt to represent. I think it would also be helpful if the policy gave a clear indication of Council's expectations of residents groups.

Other Board members may wish to consider how the policy could be more useful.