5. REVIEW OF COUNCIL PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

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Corporate Plan Output: Public Accountability	

The following report was received at the recent meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee and has been included into today's order paper for information and discussion.

The purpose of this report is to recommend that a working party be set up to undertake a review which allows elected members to consider what has worked well and what has been less satisfactory in terms of the conduct of Council business during the current term. In short, a review of Council governance. It is recommended that the working party report back to the Strategy and Resources Committee in August or September. It must be noted that even if adopted by the Council at that time the status of any resolution is that of a recommendation to the Council following October's election. Partly for that reason the process of involvement in the working party and working through the issues may be at least as important as the recommendations themselves.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

There are essentially three sets of issues to be considered:
Process Issues
Structural Issues
Relationship Issues

Process Issues

With its governance role for Christchurch, the City Council engages in processes to achieve the following:

1. Long-medium term planning to provide leadership and to establish a framework for the quality of life in the City and its constituent communities. Generally this work is undertaken by policy development in particular the City Plan, the Council's vision and strategic objectives and major policy statements such as those for social wellbeing, recreation and transportation. How effective are we at achieving change as a result of such policy processes?

2. Effective and efficient delivery of Council services, including their planning, setting of standards and priority setting at the margin. While the Council has a leadership role and makes a contribution by way of advocacy and programme delivery to a very wide range of outcomes there are also the more specific traditional service areas where the Council is the sole or major supplier of a service. Are our processes such as asset management planning and service planning in areas such as libraries and leisure centres adequate to ensure effective outcomes?

3. The Financial Plan and Budget Process. This has been the subject of recent comment by the Mayor, other elected members, myself and the Director of Finance. There is a suggestion that budget review becomes an ongoing task involving comprehensive scrutiny. This, together with a shift in policy to bring forward new projects only when they can be funded within the existing financial model, will make the process for preparing the Financial Plan very much different. It has the potential to spread the process throughout the year and could to produce significantly less of a work "peak" during February-March.

4. Stewardship of Resources. A key governance role is the Council's care of the community's resources including the physical assets vested in the City Council and its financial assets including the trading activities. Again, the question can be asked as to whether or not there are any improvements which can be made to ensure less risk and greater certainty around the protection of these assets.

Structures

The key structures used by the Council to make decisions are the Council itself, the Community Boards and the substructure of Standing Committees.

In previous reviews there has been considerable focus on the mix in the terms of reference for Standing Committees. Some committees have been seen as more focused on long and medium term planning and relationships with other agencies (e.g. Environment Committee). Others more focused on Council's own service delivery activities (e.g. City Services and Property & Projects). The suggestion of a permanent budget working party has impacts for the role of Strategy & Resources Committee. This triennium has seen the innovation of a mayoral forum as a "new" structure and debate over the most appropriate structures for progressing Council's Central City objectives; over the last nine years this has been the area of constant change between each triennium.

The review must include discussion with Community Boards (perhaps through their Chairs) and further consideration of extent of delegation to them.

Relationships

From the point of view of the elected Council its two most important relationships are those with the community and with the staff organisation. In formal terms the latter is articulated through its relationship with the City Manager.

In terms of the community relationship the effectiveness of public consultation should be reviewed. For some four years now the Council has operated under its "Seeking Community Views policy". There are some outstanding examples of effective consultation and, though opinions will differ, there are also examples of ineffective consultation and of consultation which appears to be far too costly relative to the value of the project or programme in question. This is such a large and complex issue that it is unlikely to be satisfactorily reviewed as a part of the proposed exercise but a broad brush review is appropriate and I would suggest consideration be given to the task being given to a specific group of elected members (ie, working party or committee) to review the effectiveness of consultation on an ongoing basis.

In terms of the relationship between the Council and the Chief Executive and the staff organisation some work is already in hand. There is a strong case for following the practice of several other Councils and some corporates in providing greater clarity as to the respective roles and the delegations and authorities of management on the one hand and elected members with a governance role on the other.

The same issues potentially arise with Boards and Trusts which are owned or controlled by the Council. Clear practice has developed around the LATEs the relationship with which is managed by CCHL but there is considerable ambiguity with some other organisations in particular the Canterbury Development Corporation.

SUMMARY

Potentially this review could be very large. It will be important to canvass all the matters suggested above and then to focus on those where there appears to be significant gains to be made from potential changes. It is envisaged that a number of working party meetings is likely to be appropriate.

It is important that Community Boards, through their Chairs, are involved in the process and I would also recommend that at least one workshop for all Councillors be held towards the latter stages of the work to enable all elected members to contribute towards the key issues raised in the final report.
April 2001 meeting of Council.

1. That a working party to review Council governance, processes, structures and relationships be established and bring forward a report on any proposed changes to current arrangements to the August or September Council meeting.

2. That a Council seminar be held before the working party meets to identify key issues and the Chairs of Community Boards be invited to attend this meeting.

3. That the working party not be appointed until after the Council seminar.

Chairperson's Recommendation: That the information be received.