

8. REVIEW OF THE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION FORMATION AND RECOGNITION POLICY

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Corporate Plan Output: Community Service Manager	

The purpose of this report is to inform the 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 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.

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 Policy states that the Christchurch City Council encourages the formation of local resident's groups. Through the policy local residents' groups are able to apply to their Community Board for recognition as the “official” residents group for the area. The policy identifies that

- residents' group boundaries within each community are determined by the relevant Community Board.
- upon recognition residents groups receive the right to be consulted by the Council on all work planned within their boundaries.
- the Council will provide free typing and photocopying for official residents' within limits approved by the Community Manager

The Council also produced a manual, Residents Groups and the City Council, for residents wishing to form groups to promote their neighbourhood.

As a consequence of the policy and the manual 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 Advocacy Team were adopted in 1993.

Advocacy Teams respond to a request to establish a residents group by funding, publicising, meetings, setting up and facilitating of initial meetings, attending at 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

As part of the seeking community views process residents groups are allocated time at Board Meetings for groups to address the Board on issues of concern or items on the meeting agenda. Residents groups also participate in meetings to discuss items of specific interest (eg proposed works in the area), changes in Council policy, the Council's Annual Plan, and the 5 year capital works programme. This consultation process is not necessarily confined exclusively to acknowledged residents groups as other affected local groups can and are invited to contribute input.

The Residents Group “register” indicates citywide coverage of approximately 70 to 75% (by area), with 96 groups listed. However, a number are shown as either in recess or in active. The current support provided to Residents Groups in the financial year 2001/2002 by Community Boards for photocopying cost ranged from \$5,700 to \$10,500. Each Board had increase its allocation by \$5000 from the last budget year. 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, such as a community service, local initiatives, or a community developmental task. 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 cost 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 were 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 phone 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 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 the Community Board.

The Review Team recommended that residents groups be encouraged to establish and set their own boundaries. The Review Team recommended that Community Boards act as an arbitrator when no consensus decision can be made on the boundary between neighbouring groups.

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 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*.

The Review Team recommended further education and development around the use of the Seeking Community Views Policy incorporating the Consult Plan Consult Result model, across all Council Units. It recommended that Community Boards and Council officers consult in a manner that is timely and appropriate for community and resident groups.

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 Team believed 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.

The Review Team recommend that resident groups recognised by the Council must be able to demonstrate that they have good communication processes in place with their members and their community. The Team identified that this may be as simple as a regular newsletter containing relevant information (disseminating data, encouraging or inviting community input).

4. Communication and Relationships

The review identified that Council officers should to 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.

The Review Team recommended that the Community Relations Unit organises a minimum of two forums for residents groups across ward areas. The Team identified that the content of these forums should be defined by the groups.

The Review team also recommended that Community Boards be encouraged to set aside time during Board meetings to allow residents groups to have input into relevant agenda items or urgent issues that have arisen and how a right of reply may occur.

5. Resourcing

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

The Review Team recommended that a resource manual be developed for residents groups that includes clear advice on Council processes and other relevant information.

The Team also recommended that the Council, through the annual budget round, allocate funding for small annual grants to recognised Residents Groups. It recommended that this funding should be based on a formula, to be developed, and should be administered by the Community Relations Unit. The Team recommend that consistent citywide accountability measures for this resourcing be developed.

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 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 also felt that such responsibilities could be accommodated or placed within existing staff roles. The Team suggested that this could be a topic for a future city-wide Residents Group forum.

The Team recommended that further investigation be carried out regarding the issue of a “residents group advocate.

7. 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:

- The Christchurch City Council supports the formation of local residents groups.
- Local residents groups are able to apply to their Community Board for recognition as an official residents group.
- Residents groups are encouraged to establish and set their own boundaries that a Community Board can official recognise.
- Official resident groups have the right to be consulted along with other relevant community groups by the Council on all works and services planned within their boundaries.
- Acknowledged residents groups will be allocated a small grant to spend at their discretion.
- Council staff and elected members will use the Seeking Community Views Policy and Policy Guidelines when consulting with residents groups and other relevant community groups.
- The Council supports communication within and between residents groups.
- The Council will seek to foster a positive working relationship with residents groups and other relevant community groups.

Recommendation: That the Community Board refer the review to the Community Affairs Committee for consideration.

Chairperson’s

Recommendation: That the Officer’s recommendation be adopted.