

10. HOW BUSINESS-FRIENDLY IS THE CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL?

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The purpose of this report is to respond to the Council resolution adopted at the Annual Plan meeting on 16 July 2002, regarding information on the concept of the CCC proclaiming itself to be the most business-friendly unit of Local Government in New Zealand.

BACKGROUND

Under the Council Strategic Goals and Objectives three very clear outcomes are identified.

1. Community Cohesion and Wellbeing – Defined as: provide or facilitate the delivery of services and opportunities in order to enhance the safety, health and well-being of Christchurch people.
2. Economic Development – Defined as: foster opportunities for sustainable economic development in order to generate employment and income and enhance the quality of life of all residents.
3. Environmental Sustainability - Defined as: conserve and where practical, restore the natural environment and develop the built environment to enhance the distinct character of Christchurch and maximise the quality of life for current and future generations.

How the Council deals with the above three strategic objectives is the key to ensuring a strong and vibrant Christchurch now and in the future, and actions taken will also contribute to meeting the triple bottom line objectives of the Council. A vibrant and prosperous business sector is one of the important components in the overall city well-being.

THE CHALLENGE

Recognising that the three objectives are mutually supportive and that a strong business sector and environment are a crucial component to success for our community to grow and prosper, the challenge from the Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce is for the Christchurch City Council to be proactive and state that it is actively working on being the most business-friendly local authority in New Zealand.

DISCUSSION

Christchurch is already probably unique in New Zealand in that the key agencies, both private and public, have worked well together on key issues affecting our community. There is already a strong working relationship between the CCC, CDC, CECC and CMA and an acceptance that we need to work effectively together to achieve all our objectives. This was evidenced last year during the development of the Economic Development Fund Assistance Criteria and ongoing cross representation on the external agencies to ensure a common understanding of issues and a consistent approach to solutions. During the Annual Plan discussions each year the CECC and CMA also provide constructive input from a business perspective to Council decision-making and meet on a regular basis with Council officers and elected members for informal discussions. The Council is also actively working with other local government and government organisations to ensure alignment and co-ordination of activities to achieve better community outcomes.

Christchurch already has some of the key relationships in place to ensure successful business outcomes for the community which will assist in achieving the broader social, environmental and economic objectives and responding to the challenge of declaring that we aspire to be the most business-friendly Local Government in New Zealand will reinforce this message and ensure continuing focus and partnering to achieve our common aims and objectives. In addition the Council needs to ensure that decisions made and services delivered are aligned and support the achievement of the strategic objectives stated above, including continuing and enhancing the open and constructive working relationship with the business community.

While in some service delivery areas the Council may not meet the expectations of customers every time for a number of reasons, not always of the Council's making, we should always look for continuous improvement in delivery, improved two-way communication and a focus on working well with all sectors of our community, including the business sector for the following reasons:

- Because of the compelling linkage between sustainable, profitable business, community wellbeing and individual welfare.
- Because Christchurch is a low wage economy. This will only be improved by strong sustainable economic growth. Meetings between some key business leaders have targeted 25% GDP growth for Christchurch over the next five years.
- Because the CCC has a mission and key role to play in ensuring an environment to enable economic growth to occur and in partnering with other organisations to provide the best outcomes for the community as a whole for which it is an advocate.

What are some of the actions CCC currently takes that support being business-friendly in a tangible way?

- Thinking business-friendly in our decision-making. Ensuring we foster and enhance the environment to give our local businesses the opportunity to grow, prosper and create more high value jobs.
- Continuing work on reducing compliance costs and timeframes. The CCC currently has a number of key KPI targets relating to resource consent and building consent processing times measured in number of days. These targets should be reconfirmed and highlighted. A number of initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of regulatory services have recently been implemented and others are in the pipeline. The pre-application process and the project co-ordination service for large or complex developments were both introduced at the request of customers and have been well received by the business community.
- Continuing to roll out the customer responsiveness project leading to a customer charter and 'promise' of levels of service.
- Continuing to canvass the views of business as well as the community on major infrastructure decisions.
- Continuing to reduce the rates modifier as part of the Annual Plan process to ensure ongoing equity and transparency of process.
- Continuing to work to enhance the relationships and to work collaboratively and consistently with local business support agencies to grow the economy.
- Continuing to hold regular meetings with the business community to discuss areas of concern and build on the quarterly meetings currently held between the Mayor, senior staff and these organisations.
- Continuing to support the education/business linkage through the CDC and core Council activities.
- Where appropriate, supporting local business in lobbying central government to ensure an environment that enables business to succeed.
- Continuing to actively work with Canterbury regional communities to promote business success.

What further actions could the CCC take?

- Respond to the challenge and make the declaration that Christchurch aspires to be the NZ city of choice where people want to live and work because of the excellent interrelationship between the public and private sector and the environment. Being seen as the most business-friendly city in NZ is an important part of the mix. Attitude is important. We need to be upfront and strive to be the best to keep the advantage over other NZ cities.
- The CCC reconfirming its commitment to supporting local businesses subject to quality and cost comparisons. Ensuring a level playing field and consistency in dealings with businesses.
- Jointly with the CECC, CDC and The Press actively support the Champion Canterbury Business Awards Event to celebrate the excellence and success of local businesses.
- Set up a formal process for appropriate Council officers to meet with the CDC, CECC, CMA and other agencies on a regular basis to discuss areas of concern and mutual interest.
- Review the service delivery processes for dealing with businesses issues to ensure good understanding and communication by all parties.

CONCLUSION

Christchurch can be proud of its achievements to date in the economic development and business support area. In 1993, the CCC had the foresight to establish the CDC to focus on supporting small businesses and employment issues which gave our community a head start.

Many small businesses have benefited from this support over the years and continue to trade profitably and provide employment. We are the envy of other centres in NZ and are held up by central government as leading the way in innovative solutions for the Christchurch community. We need to ensure a continuing focus on providing a business-friendly environment that enables our businesses to thrive leading to economic growth and contributing to the achievement of the Council strategic objectives for community wellbeing.

Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That, given the role the Council plays and the influence its actions have on ensuring that Christchurch is the NZ city of choice for people to live and do business, the Council acknowledge and accept the spirit of the CECC challenge and commit to further development/clarification of agreed criteria and outcomes.
 2. That the Director of Business Projects and other appropriate staff meet with the CECC, CDC, CMA and other agencies to develop and agree on the criteria and outcomes to be achieved in recommendation 1.
 3. That the CCC demonstrate its commitment to achieving these objectives by continuing and enhancing the actions already identified in this report.

Chair's

- Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.