



COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN CHRISTCHURCH
TE KAUNIHERA KAUPAPA ORANGA KI OTAUTAHI

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**Submission to Christchurch City Council
on its draft
Long Term Council Community Plan 2009 - 2019**

Introduction

The purpose of the Council of Social Services (COSS) is to promote social equity, justice and wellbeing by advocating on issues, empowering groups and facilitating collaboration in the social services sector.

COSS is administered by a voluntary Board drawn from a range of statutory and voluntary social services, including a Council staff member; and employs an Executive Officer to carry out the day-to-day activities of the organisation. Membership includes over 100 voluntary agencies, although services and initiatives are not limited to members. COSS views draw on and reflect the wide networks we work within and are mandated by our broad, cross-sector membership.

COSS would like to thank the Council for its continuing support and contribution to the social wellbeing of the citizens of Christchurch. We consider social initiatives and community support to be crucial to not only to the social health of Christchurch city but also its economic health.

We would also like to thank Council for the longer timeframe allowed for submissions to the LTCCP. In previous years we had been concerned that the timeframe had been insufficient for smaller groups and organisations and we appreciate the more adequate provision this year.

Community Sector Support

The social impact of the current recession is growing and becoming an increasing challenge to our city. These challenges require the combined efforts of all of us to address. The tangata whenua, community and voluntary sector is uniquely placed to engage with and support stressed and vulnerable communities in a way that neither central nor local government can. With its skills, expert knowledge, diversity, and grassroots perspective, this sector is a key partner for Council in achieving desired Community Outcomes and mitigating the effects of the recession.

The leverage that the sector gets from funds provided to it is unmatched and represents a remarkable investment. The VAVA project¹ found that for every dollar received by a voluntary agency, between \$3 and \$5 worth of services are delivered in the community. In terms of longer-term outcomes, the project showed that whether from savings in public

¹ *Counting for Something: Value Added by Voluntary Agencies*, NZFVWO, 2004; and *Counting for More*, NZFVWO, 2007

costs, or economic gains due to employment and income, the return on investment was conservatively estimated at between \$14.30 and \$39 for every dollar invested, over time periods of 15-30 years.

Therefore there is a pressing need to at least maintain and preferably increase investment in community. At the very minimum, grants to the community need to acknowledge increasing costs that the sector faces and be adjusted annually in order to maintain their real value. Further investment in the sector would make sound economic and social sense in the current downturn.

It was initially with appreciation that COSS saw in the draft LTCCP (p.186) that the budget for community grants had increased from \$5.397 million to \$10.22 million. This was of course tempered with some reservations due to our previous experience of trying to reconcile figures in Council plans. In due course it was confirmed with staff that what at face value appeared to be a substantial increase was actually no more than the amalgamation of grants that had previously been included in several different budget lines.

However we then discovered that this amalgamation had the effect of concealing a cut to grants of \$1.5 million, apparent only by reading Appendix 2 of the 2009 LTCCP Overview and Capital Programmes which was part of papers for Council's meeting of 16-18 February. In this paper we also learned of the decision not to adjust the grants budget for inflation for at least the life of the LTCCP.

COSS is extremely concerned about this decision for two reasons.

Firstly, it is very short-sighted to severely reduce grants just at the time when our city needs the efforts of the community sector more than ever. The amount of value that the Council would get from maintaining its investment in the sector is unable to be matched elsewhere in the Council budget. COSS urges the Council to reinstate the level of the grants and ensure they maintain their real value by adjusting for inflation yearly.

Secondly, the lack of information about the cuts and the impression of an increase given in the draft LTCCP is totally misleading and also undemocratic. Citizens cannot meaningfully take part in a democratic process when the information available to them is incomplete. To have the presentation of the information in the LTCCP described to us as "more transparent", as one staff member did, when in fact it camouflages the reality, strays dangerously close to Orwellian territory.

Policy on Determining Significance

COSS endorses in principle the Council's wish to simplify the policy. However we do not believe that democratic process is served by replacing the old criteria for determining significance with the requirement that full Council decisions be considered significant except where the matter is approved in the LTCCP or an Annual Plan or any other public process.

Our experience outlined above in the discussion of community grants shows that the LTCCP draft consultation documents cannot be relied upon to give the full picture of Council proposals. Specific criteria should be retained in order to avoid the possibility of the public not noticing matters that it might consider significant in any public consultation document such as the LTCCP.

Summary

In summary, COSS recommends that:

- Grant levels be reinstated to their former levels.
- The grants budget be adjusted annually to at least keep pace with inflation.
- The Policy on Significance retain the specific criteria outlined in the current version.

COSS wishes to be heard in respect of this submission.

Yours sincerely



Helen Gatonyi, QSM
Chairperson