

Auckland's social problems are many and complex, and if ignored, can only get worse. The extent of these issues and how they can be addressed more effectively are urgent considerations for the new Council.

The people of Auckland need to be part of the discussion. There is no better time to reflect on more effective ways to deal with Auckland's social issues. The framework for the new local government structure is in place – the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 has been passed and Cabinet has approved a new Social Policy Forum for Auckland – and the details of how the new structure will work will be finalised over the next few months.

Of particular interest is how central and local government and the local communities of Auckland will interact to produce positive, long-lasting solutions to Auckland's social concerns.

This paper looks at social issues facing the region and suggests ways of tackling them under the new regime.

Please note: The report is a work in progress, as much is still to be decided about Auckland's future in the coming months. At the time this paper was produced, March 2010, many of the details about how the new structures and processes would operate had not been made public.



A new way for Auckland

The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 changes the way Auckland is to be governed. Under the new Act, the eight current local bodies in greater Auckland are amalgamated into one 'super city', with one mayor and one council. Local boards provide a vital link between communities and the new Council.

The new Auckland Council is responsible for the economic, environmental, cultural and social wellbeing of all Auckland people. How this is to be carried out in practice is still being debated.

Auckland in context

Auckland is home to about a third of New Zealand's people. As with other parts of the country its population is aging; at the same time it is the youngest and most ethnically diverse population in New Zealand.

Nearly 40 per cent of Aucklanders are under 25 years, and there are more than 190 different ethnic groups in the region. About 46 per cent of people identify as Maori, Pacific Island, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, African or another ethnic group.

Auckland is the key to New Zealand's competitiveness on the world stage. It is also at greatest risk of rapid urbanization and urban decay, increasing disparities among people and lack of access to services.

Auckland attracts people

People are attracted to Auckland for employment, entertainment, diversity and culture. They seek a better standard of living.

To live well, people need a good job – and decent housing, health services and education. They need to live in safe neighbourhoods and to be able to move easily around the city. They also need well-maintained beaches, well-designed parks and open spaces, and cultural activities that enrich city life.

The wellbeing of Auckland's people – economic, environmental, cultural and social – is essential for the region to be an attractive place to live, work and do business.

Social issues in Auckland

The wellbeing of Aucklanders is directly related to age, ethnicity and location. Most residents live well. Those who are worse off tend to be young, poor and/or have disabilities. They are more likely to live in particular suburbs; Polynesians (Maori and Pacific) and migrants, especially refugees, are overrepresented among those with lower living standards. These groups often overlap.

Disparities between and within areas Social issues exist throughout Auckland; they are present in all council areas. However, there are considerable differences *between* councils and *between* suburbs within the same council area. Such inequalities are likely to get worse rather than better.

Poverty, overcrowding and ill health The relationship between poverty, neighbourhood deprivation, overcrowding and ill health is well documented. Children from low income areas, for example, are three times more likely to be sick, and much more likely to be hospitalised than those from more affluent neighbourhoods. They are more at risk from physical abuse, and more likely to struggle later in life with income, employment and general quality of life.

Supporting Auckland's youngest citizens is one of the most powerful investments New Zealand can make.

We will get the best out of investment concentrated in deprived areas because international evidence shows that the middle classes and the poor fare better in environments with fewer disparities. Improving the quality of life for the most disadvantaged Aucklanders will improve the wellbeing of everyone.

Investment decisions also need to recognise the importance of the first years of life. We currently spend most of our health dollars on acute adult conditions and the last few years of life. Research shows, however, that investing in young children gives the best spending rate of return.

■ One in six people in Auckland live in houses that are over-crowded. Generally, people who live in overcrowded housing live in Manukau City, are of Pacific Island origin and are children under 15 years.

■ Children in single-parent households, Maori and Pasifika children, and children in households where no adult is in paid work, are more likely to be living in poverty than other children.

■ The birth rate in Counties Manukau's District Health Board's most deprived areas in 2007 was more than three times higher than the birth rate in its least deprived areas – 64.3% compared with 18.5%.

What this means for Auckland

If Auckland's social issues are not addressed, gaps between and within Auckland's areas will get bigger, exacerbating divisions between communities and leading to tensions, even violence. Stresses on families and communities will increase. Poverty and hardship will likely be passed from generation to generation. Everyone in Auckland will feel the impact, both in terms of 'negative' spending (the cost of special education, youth justice, prisons, and physical and mental health services) and lost opportunity, as those who are deprived and disadvantaged are not able to achieve their full potential.

We will get the best out of investment in Aucklanders if we concentrate on the most deprived areas.

Tackling Auckland's social issues

Auckland's social issues are being confronted – by central and local government, and a wide range of community groups and individuals. Introducing new governance arrangements here provides a unique opportunity to seek out other and better ways and means to improve the social conditions of the people who live there. One key is to focus on areas of most benefit to most people.

Another key is to work more effectively with Auckland's diverse population to design systems and processes with those communities that better meet their needs. The region has a healthy mix of people from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The new Council can capture its 'cultural capital' to help strengthen vigorous, socially functional communities.



Image by Edwin Ng

Some ethnic communities fare better than others; some have more culturally appropriate services than others. All sorts of approaches have been tried to enable more effective interventions with and by families and communities who are struggling for whatever reason, often in restricted economic circumstances. The new governance arrangements in Auckland open up opportunities to learn from what has and hasn't worked well to do things better.

Combine resources

Central government already invests heavily in families and children – through family income, social support services, child health and early childhood education. The most underprivileged individuals and families, however, do not always receive the help they need, and different communities do not always have equal access to services. More must be done to ensure that those who need help can access it easily, as and when they need it.

Local government also contributes to the social wellbeing of children and families; as directed through the Local Government Act 2002. Despite this, local government's role in social development is not well recognised, and more can be done.

People generally want to take part in decisions that affect their wellbeing. Government actions are more likely to produce positive results when families, individuals, whanau and communities can help plan and make decisions about what is important to them.

The new Council needs to combine forces with local boards, central government agencies, Maori, non-government organisations and residents' groups for more effective results. Responsibilities are best shared, particularly when resources are tight.

Importance of place

Place-shaping Local government has an important role in 'place-shaping'. Good urban planning helps create public spaces where people want to be. It is important to plan well for public spaces in the suburbs and the central city.

Place-based initiatives can simultaneously improve the social and economic wellbeing of people in a dysfunctional neighbourhood. The outcomes may include respectable employment, healthy child development, educational achievement and family functioning, for instance.

Use of strong community engagement Local government is in a unique position to understand and interpret community needs and priorities for positive social outcomes. Strong community engagement is the key. Even transient neighbourhoods can become vibrant communities if local people feel involved in the change. A good example is Project Twin Streams, an urban sustainability project to restore Waitakare streams, which involves local government experts working with local communities and residents.

Using core business to work with communities Local government can use the power of its core business to help transform socially impoverished people and places if the Council has social issues high on its agenda. These powers include the regulation of land use, the provision and placement of facilities and the provision of public transport. However, as transport and some other core functions will be the responsibility of Council Controlled Organisation, their Statements of Intent with the Council will be critical in achieving social ends...

The report, from which this summary of findings on social issues is taken, *Making Links Taking Action*, was written by Elisabeth Rowe and Dr Emma Davies. A full report can be downloaded from www.asbcommunitytrust.org.nz and www.ipp.org.nz

The whole project was funded by: The ASB Community Trust, City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET), Enterprise North Shore, Enterprising Manukau, Waitakere and Manukau City Councils. Design by betsy.co.nz.

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SUMMARY FINDINGS:

Social issues and priorities for Auckland

This is one of three summaries of the main findings of a research report completed by the Auckland University of Technology to stimulate discussion on how social issues in Auckland might be best addressed under the proposed new local government structure.

How Auckland can improve its performance in the social wellbeing of its people in the new environment is a critical issue for the new Council. It is one that the people of Auckland need to involve themselves with.

The framework for the new structure is already in place. The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 has been passed and Cabinet has approved a new Social Policy Forum for Auckland. Further details will be worked out over the next few months.

This paper looks at the new legislation and structures and what has been decided in the new environment.

Please note: The report is a work in progress, as much is still to be decided about Auckland's future in the coming months. At the time this paper was produced, March 2010, many of the details about how the new structures and processes would operate had not been made public.

A new way for Auckland

The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 changes the way Auckland is to be governed. Under the new Act, the eight current local bodies in greater Auckland are amalgamated into one 'super city', with one mayor and one council. Local boards provide a vital link between communities and the new Council.

The new Auckland Council is responsible for the economic, environmental, cultural and social wellbeing of all Auckland people. How and where the social wellbeing of Aucklanders fits into the new environment has not yet been decided.

Indications are that social concerns are not top of the new Council's priorities. In its latest draft organisational structure, released earlier this year, the Auckland Transition Agency* ranks social wellbeing well below the other three wellbeings.

Central government clearly wants to be part of the action. Last year it approved a new Auckland Social Policy Forum, to provide an environment for communities and central and local government to work together, at a political level, to address social issues in the region.

So far there is no detail about how the forum will intersect with Auckland Council structure and processes. It is clear, however, that the Government is looking for new and better ways of working with local government to improve the social wellbeing of Auckland people.

* The Auckland Transition Agency was set up by the Government to amalgamate the councils across the Auckland region into the new Auckland Council by 2010. The ATA has recently released its discussion document on the role of local boards, for comment by 26 March.

The new Act

The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 introduces significant change in the way Auckland is governed. It does not change the overall purpose of local government as it is under the current Act (Local Government Act 2002), but gives the mayor and council new powers and opportunities.

What stays the same...

The purpose of local government is to:

- make democratic local decision-making possible, and to act for and on behalf of communities
- promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of communities.

Local bodies must be transparent and accountable. By law they are required to:

- listen to their communities
- be aware of how their decisions might affect the wellbeing of different communities, now and for the future
- be prudent stewards of their regions.

Local councils have a responsibility to provide opportunities and facilitate the involvement by Māori in council decision-making processes.

...and what changes:

Mayor

The new mayor needs to be a leader – of people and of processes. He or she needs to have a vision for Auckland and share this vision with the people of Auckland in a way they can understand and engage with. Further, he or she needs to work with the people and communities of Auckland, through the new Council, to realize the vision together.

Auckland Council

There will no longer be eight separate councils in Auckland. The new Council comprises a governing body (which consists of the mayor and 20 elected councillors), and between 20 and 30 local boards. The governing body and the boards work together but have distinct and different functions that clearly define the work they do.

Local boards

Local boards represent their communities. They have more scope and power than current community boards, and what they do complements, rather than being subordinate to, the work of the Council.

Council Controlled Organisations

New Council Controlled Organisations with responsibilities for the planning and delivery of particular activities of the new Council will be established. These CCOs will have independent directors or trustees and be accountable to the new Council via an annual agreement that sets out the CCOs activities and intentions and via contracts for service and reporting. Three CCOs have been legislated for (Auckland Transport; Watercare Services Limited; Waterfront Development Agency) and another four major CCOs are proposed (Economic Development, Tourism and Events Agency; Property Holdings and Development; Major Regional Facilities; Council Investments). Other existing CCOs may pass across in their current form to the new Auckland Council.

Social Policy Forum

The Social Policy Forum will be a new entity. The Government's Discussion Document released in January 2010 outlines the proposed forum membership, high level objectives on what the forum hopes to achieve and how the forum might work. The closing date for feedback on this document is Friday 21st May 2010. The discussion document can be downloaded at: <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/feedback+sought+auckland+social+policy+forum>



Image top by Ed Corkery and image bottom by Advåk from Flickr

The mayor is the lynchpin of the whole system.

What has been decided in the new environment

The mayor – setting the vision and terms of engagement

The new mayor of Auckland will have some significant new powers. How successfully Auckland addresses its social issues hinges on this office.

As owner of the vision and charged with selling it to the people of Auckland, the mayor has a considerable say in how the vision is achieved. He or she appoints the deputy mayor, sets up the council committees and appoints the chairs of committees.

Who he or she chooses for these positions will strongly influence the importance placed on different aspects of the Council's responsibilities. This includes which social issues are given priority, and what concerns are brought to the Social Policy Forum for consideration and action.

How the mayor articulates the vision for Auckland; how the mayor ranks the importance of social and economic wellbeing... and the role of the Auckland Council in achieving them, will probably do more to set priorities than any other action.

Auckland Council – unique powers, unique opportunities

The new unitary authority combines the powers of a regional council and a territorial authority. Responsible for all the functions of local government in greater Auckland, the Auckland Council will have more residents than any other council in New Zealand – a third of the country's population.

The Council is responsible for all regulatory activities, including those that have a social impact. It must work with local boards to agree on the work to be carried out in local communities, and to make sure this work is done. The programme of activities agreed between the board and the governing body is formalised in the long-term council community plan (LTCCP).

Local boards will be much larger than current community boards. They are likely to have 50,000–80,000 citizens each and encompass communities of interest rather than arbitrary geographic areas.

Local boards – working effectively with residents

Local boards are the ‘people on the ground’ in local politics. Organised effectively, they are ideally placed to help build healthy communities.

Promoting social wellbeing Under legislation local boards are to promote the wellbeing of people in their communities – this includes their social wellbeing.

Democratic decision-making Local boards are there to make it possible for people in their communities to help decide on things that matter to them. Boards take decisions to the Council on behalf of the community. Legislation does not specify how decisions are to be made collectively, and this lack of guidance gives local boards the opportunity to look at decision-making in a new and different way.

Reflecting community priorities Local boards must develop plans that reflect their community’s priorities about what local activities they want the Auckland Council to provide. These plans feed into the Council’s long-term council community plan (LTCCP).

Constraints on local boards

Local boards do not control two key areas:

- Regulatory matters are dealt with by the governing body. Decisions on non-regulatory matters are also made by the governing body – if such matters are best dealt with on an Auckland-wide basis.
- Budgets are set and distributed by the governing body on an ‘equitable capacity’ basis, which means taking into account factors such as the cost of services, rates revenue – and the community’s dependence on social services.

Making structures and processes work to improve social wellbeing

Whether or not the social wellbeing of Aucklanders improves under the new environment depends on how the legislation is interpreted and the new structures and processes that are put in place. At the moment this is not clear. Information is still coming through, and there are some inconsistencies to be worked through.

* This document was revised and re-released in February 2010 after submissions were received.

Transition to the new structures The Auckland Transition Agency is to put the new legislative framework into action. Its recently released draft discussion document* about the possible ‘shape’ of the new Auckland Council has no formal status but is an indication of the agency’s current thinking.

The document includes a proposed organisation structure, which shows social development relegated to a relatively low position, compared to the other wellbeings.

The 2009 Act does not specify how social wellbeing is to be handled under the new arrangements. The role of Local Boards is still unclear.

The Social Policy Forum Discussion paper invites commentary on the Government’s proposal for this political forum. The document shows that there is still much more work to be done to ensure that this Forum is more than a Talkfest. If it is to achieve its stated objectives, the Forum will need to have a social protection approach (i.e. addressing disadvantage) and a social investment approach (i.e. preventing disadvantage). Turning around Auckland’s social problems will involve broadening the range of central government politicians at the table from the Minister of Social Development to include the Ministers of Education, Health, and Housing, to name but three examples.

Comments on the discussion document are due in May. Now is the time to have your say.

It will be important the the Forum takes a broad approach, covering both social protection... and social investment...

The report, from which this summary of findings on social issues is taken, *Making Links Taking Action*, was written by Elisabeth Rowe and Dr Emma Davies. A full report can be downloaded from www.asbcommunitytrust.org.nz and www.ipp.org.nz

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SUMMARY FINDINGS:

Auckland Council and the Social Policy Forum

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The framework for the new structure is already in place. The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 has been passed and Cabinet has approved a new Social Policy Forum for Auckland. Further details will be finalised over the next few months.

This paper is about the missing links – where the gaps are in the new structures and processes to date, and what might be done to connect them.

Please note: The report is a work in progress, as much is still to be decided about Auckland's future in the coming months. At the time this paper was produced, March 2010, many of the details about how the new structures and processes would operate had not been made public.

A new way for Auckland

The Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 changes the way Auckland will be governed. Under the new Act, the eight current local bodies in greater Auckland are amalgamated into one 'super city', with one mayor and one council. Local boards provide a vital link between communities and the new Council. (The boundaries for local boards are now out in draft.)

The Auckland Council is responsible for the economic, environmental, cultural and social wellbeing of all Auckland people. How it plans to do this is still being discussed, but already indications are that social issues have not been given enough emphasis. In its latest draft organisation structure, released earlier this year, the Auckland Transitional Agency* ranks social concerns well below the other three aspects of wellbeing.

Central government has signaled clearly it wants a role. Last year it approved the establishment of the new Social Policy Forum, to be led by government agencies with local body and community input, where social issues can be discussed and assessed at a strategic level, and addressed with the full weight of government behind it.

Decisions have yet to be made about the new structures. The government has released a discussion paper on the forum, with feedback due on Friday 25 May.

* The Auckland Transition Agency was established by the Government to amalgamate the councils across the Auckland region into the new Auckland Council by 2010.



Making the new structures work

The context According to the 2009 Act, Auckland Council is responsible for the social wellbeing of Auckland people. This is considered a core business of the new Council. It is now up to the Council to put appropriate structures and processes – as well as the staff and resources – in place. How they do this is up to them; the Council may choose to meet minimum requirements under the Act or to exceed legislative expectation.

Central government wants to be actively involved in the region's social issues at a strategic level. The Minister of Social Development will head the new Social Policy Forum, supported by the Mayor of Auckland and the chairs of the relevant Council committees. Local boards will have a role, as will community agencies and organisations.

Local government powers Between them, local and central government have considerable and distinct powers they can use to improve the social wellbeing of New Zealanders. Central government can put up the big money and universal policies that underpin what is decided at a local level, but local government's specific knowledge and particular powers to put policy into action can potentially contribute most to a community's social wellbeing. Auckland Council must take advantage of these.

'Place-shaping' powers Local councils have explicit powers that can make a material difference to the social wellbeing of individuals and communities by physically changing (or 'shaping') an area. They include economic development, transport, urban design and development, environmental planning and parks and open spaces. Change can also be effected through the Resource Management Act.

Councils may zone land, affecting where facilities such as schools, hospitals and early childhood centres are built, for example. At a more local level, they decide where a library can be located, if a swimming pool can be built and what buildings are available for community groups. These smaller-scale decisions also alter the urban environment.

Many roles Local government plays many roles – from helping transform a community to supporting local activities. This means it can promote social wellbeing on many fronts – as planner,

landlord, advocate, analyst, facilitator, funder, coordinator and deliver of services. All are critical to Auckland's success.

Local knowledge The most effective current councils know their communities much better than central government – or the Auckland Council – can hope to. They know what resources are there. They know what the problems are and what has been tried before. Local government can create strong and durable links between residents and central government if this information and resource base is kept and made available where and when it is needed.

New ways of working

Beyond the powers that local and central government can bring to the new structure, there is a burgeoning wealth of knowledge and experience happening in local communities. New ways of working are being experimented with, in the many and diverse projects throughout Auckland.

Most aim to improve the social wellbeing of people in the area. Most involve the combined energy and expertise of council and community in some form. These include sharing project ownership and consciously tapping into, and using, the knowledge and resources of central and local government and their own communities. Many of the projects show positive results, although participants have not always found the new ways of working straightforward or easy.

Studies of the projects have identified four key components that need to be included for the new structures to work well. These have the capacity to provide more rigorous links between local and central government and community to improve social wellbeing.

Integrate – Sense – Advise – Act

Integrate = A central mechanism within the Council to integrate action across the four wellbeings (social, economic, environmental and cultural).

Sense = An analytical team to bring together and make sense of data, evidence about what is most likely to work to address issues and priorities, and local 'soft' knowledge to provide decision-makers with clear community information.

Advise = Capacity within the Council to provide evidence-based advice to the chief executive and the mayor on social strategies to improve the lives of all Aucklanders.

Act = Mechanisms to engage well with residents, bringing them into the decision-making and change processes.

Integrate

In the new environment, social issues have a separate mechanism from the other wellbeings (environmental, economic and cultural). This is the Social Policy Forum.

The establishment of the forum reflects the importance of central government's involvement in social issues and the significant role of local government. A capacity within the Council to gather, interpret and integrate knowledge from many different perspectives – social, cultural, environmental, economic, as well as political at local, regional and central government levels – will add to its importance.

Sense – the 'brain'

Social decisions need to be made using the best possible information. Studies on community projects in Auckland highlight the need for an analytical capacity (the 'brain') that brings together data analysis, evidence about what is most likely to work, and local knowledge.

Core functions of the 'brain' could be to:

- integrate information from central, regional, local and international sources
- monitor the impact of actions taken to improve social wellbeing
- provide information to those who will find it useful. This includes the mayor, council, local boards, the Social Policy Forum and local communities and residents.

For information collected by the 'brain' to be useful to communities and residents it needs to be tailored to specific geographic areas. It needs to be ongoing and continually updated and refined.

The 'brain' could provide advice – to residents, local boards, NGOs and philanthropic organisations as well as to the council.

Ideally, it would have a small core of staff who could call upon people from other agencies (central government, DHBs and local boards, for instance) to work on specific projects or for defined periods of time.



The flying squad is about working with internal actors (residents) and creating the environment with external agencies to act on a jointly agreed agenda.

Advise

Under the 2009 Act, the Auckland Council is responsible for regulatory decisions and certain non-statutory decisions. The new Council will also make broad policy decisions on most issues that affect the social wellbeing of Aucklanders. Local boards, acting alone or together, may also have considerable political power.

The Council and the local boards will need robust internal advice to help them make sound decisions. This could come from a social strategy unit created within the new council structure. The unit would draw on independent, publicly available information in its work.

Act – the flying squad

The primary function of the Social Policy Forum is to identify priority social issues and communities. To do this well, it needs to connect what is decided with what happens on the ground.

The forum's priorities need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate what emerges from the council's engagement with its communities, the mayor's vision and the priorities and interests of local boards and residents.

A flying squad with a rolling programme of intensive, geographically based interventions could link decisions made at a strategic level with action at the local level. It would make sure change happened. Essentially, the squad would work with a community to prepare it for change and action, and stay until the project was ready to be managed locally. This could be for up to five years.

The squad would focus on developing and releasing residents' knowledge and skills. It would build on community strengths so that residents can take decisions for action, and would bring in other agencies to support local initiatives as needed.

The flying squad's work programme would be set by the forum, identifying the types and numbers of projects to be undertaken – with a strong focus on local priorities.

As with the 'brain', the flying squad could be a small core team of 'development officers' who would work with residents to design individual projects. The final project design would be signed off by the forum.

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SUMMARY FINDINGS:

Filling the gaps – what is missing in the new structure and processes

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