

Building Māori Capacity to Contribute to Council Decision Making

Over the past year Council have given real consideration to how we foster Māori capacity to contribute to decision-making, improving relationships and communication with Māori and developing staff cultural capability and awareness.

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) states that a local authority must:

- Establish and maintain processes to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to the decision-making processes of the local authority; and
- Consider ways in which it may foster the development of Māori capacity to contribute to the decision-making processes of the local authority; and
- Provide relevant information to Māori for these purposes

A long term plan must set out any steps that the local authority intends to take, having undertaken the considerations as above, to foster the development of Māori capacity to contribute to decision-making processes for the local authority over the period covered by that plan.

What are we doing now?

Iwi Chairs Forum

The newly established Iwi Chairs Forum had its inaugural meeting in May 2014. The Iwi Chairs Forum was established in recognition of the changing Māori environment in particular with six of the seven Iwi achieving comprehensive settlements. This relationship is developed on the understanding of equality and sincerity with all engagement being approached with moral fairness, integrity, honesty and open-mindedness.

The Iwi Chairs Forum is made up of Iwi Chairs of Post-Settlement Governance Entities or Iwi who have achieved mandate to negotiate historical grievances with the Crown on their Iwi's behalf. The Whakatāne District Council Mayor is also a member of the Iwi Chairs Forum. The Iwi and Council Chief Executives attend the meetings to provide advice only.

The purpose of the Iwi Chairs Forum is to;

- Enable strategic issues of mutual interest to be raised and discussed;
- Explore opportunities to integrate and coordinate strategic planning;
- Advocate to central government for the collective benefit of the Whakatāne community; and
- Better understand our differences and respect each other's position or viewpoint.

The Iwi Chairs Forum is not an independent Committee of Council which is an approach supported by Iwi Chair members to enable prompt progress without the restrictions of legislative processes. This does not inhibit the ability of the Iwi Chairs Forum to submit to Council plans, policies or strategies.

Hui-ā-Iwi

Hui-ā-Iwi is a Chief Executive to Chief Executive relationship where Council and Iwi are able to discuss projects or plans specific to that Iwi. The purpose is to maintain enduring relationships and provide relevant information to provide opportunities to contribute to decision-making at the earliest possible stage. Information from this meeting is fed back by the Whakatane District Council Chief Executive to relevant staff for immediate action and response.

Cultural Training Wananga (Workshop)

Cultural development is an integral component for staff to be able to effectively and meaningfully give effect to their obligations to Māori under various legislations. A wānanga (workshop) has been developed with a purpose to bring about an awareness of our District's Māori landscape and cultural practices to improve the way in which we engage with our Māori communities. The wānanga focusses on:

- Iwi backgrounds;
- The Treaty and Settlements;
- Engagement in Practice;
- The meaning of Kaitiakitanga;
- Our obligations to Māori under the LGA and RMA; and
- Cultural Protocols.

What have we achieved?

- Māori policy, objectives and methods of implementation in the Operative Whakatāne District Plan and Proposed Whakatāne District Plan.
- Contracted cultural support to assist the organisation with Māori cultural ceremonies, engagement with Māori and Māori translation of corporate documents and promotional material.
- Employment of a part-time Māori Policy Analyst to provide a high level of advice and support; and develop initiatives to improve Māori capacity to contribute to Council decision-making.
- Council participation in the annual Te Konohete Kapa Haka event in partnership with the Bay of Plenty Regional Council.
- Continue to provide opportunities for staff to be involved in cultural activities and engagement with Māori communities through Māori language week.

What we can improve on?

Council Policies and Plans

We undertake many capital works projects each year and develop strategic plans and policies. We are committed to meaningful and ongoing consultation in advance of projects commencing. While the planned (capital expenditure) programme is provided to Iwi at the beginning of each year, we will look to cast the net wider through the development of a Māori Contacts database.

The Treaty of Waitangi

The current Government aim to settle all Treaty of Waitangi claims by 2017. The Whakatāne District has seen six of the seven Iwi achieve comprehensive settlements with the Crown. This has led to Statutory Acknowledgements being formalised and a requirement to consider the effects of a Resource Consent application in, adjacent to, or directly affecting a Statutory Acknowledgement Area.

While our standard practice is to forward a summary of any applications received for resource consents to Iwi authorities, a review of all Statutory Acknowledgements will be undertaken to ensure we are meeting our obligations to each Iwi and implement processes for continued monitoring.

What do we hope to achieve?

Improved Access to Information

While we currently have an Iwi contacts list, it is important to also identify other Māori groups such as Land Trusts and Hapū to assist staff as part of consultation processes.

Our Geographic Information System (GIS) has the ability to produce information such as contact details, boundaries, waahi tapu sites, marae and more. Māori information held on the system is very minor and requires development and improvement.

As well as looking into a more robust system to hold Māori contacts information, a concentrated effort will be made on building on the information we currently have to assist staff as part of the processes for consultation under the RMA 1991 in respect to all issues affecting Māori, whilst respecting any confidential information that has been provided to us.

Cultural Training Packages

The development of individual training packages both ongoing and through the staff induction process, will help to improve staff cultural knowledge to be able to give effect to their legislative responsibilities. The sessions and workshops outlined in the Cultural Training Wananga will be developed into individual training packages. These will be delivered annually in particular for new staff and current staff who require a refresher course.

Equally important is training for the District's Māori communities to fully understand how Council works to be able to contribute to decision-making. The Māori Policy Analyst will work closely with departments to develop and deliver Local Government training for Māori communities.