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Waikato Regional Council

Independent assessment report | October 2017*

An independent assessment report issued by the Independent Assessment Board for the CouncilMARK™ local government excellence programme. For more information visit www.councilmark.co.nz



* Period of Assessment: March 2017



A measure for better community value.

Assessment Summary

AT A GLANCE



The Waikato region's natural environment supports its people, culture and economy and is the fourth largest region in the country.



LARGE METRO

SMALL METRO AND LARGE PROVINCIAL

SMALL PROVINCIAL AND RURAL

REGIONAL



The current situation

The Waikato Regional Council is performing well in most assessment areas. The Council's performance has improved over the past three years, and is widely regarded as a more effective organisation compared to when it was Environment Waikato. The Council faces a complex set of economic, environmental and social issues, which it treats as interrelated principles.

The Waikato region contains around 10 per cent of New Zealand's population, and its largest river and lake. Its population is diverse and growing.

The Council has generally constructive relationships with the other councils in the Waikato region, and with stakeholders. These relationships have enabled the Council to show leadership and innovation in major policy and collaborative areas.

Period of assessment

The assessment took place on 6 and 7 March 2017.



\$43,350

GROSS DOMESTIC
PRODUCT PER CAPITA¹

SERVES

403,638

PEOPLE², A MIX OF
77.4% EUROPEAN/PAKEHA
21.9% MĀORI
6.9% ASIAN
3.8% PACIFIC



POPULATION TREND
GROWTH

MAKES UP

9.327%

OF NEW ZEALAND'S TOTAL LAND AREA³
REPRESENTING **WAIKATO REGION**,
FROM THE BOMBAY HILLS IN THE
NORTH, SOUTH TO MOKAU ON THE
WEST COAST, AND COROMANDEL ON
THE EAST COAST AND SOUTH TO MT
RUAPEHU AN AREA OF:

23,902 km²

RESPONSIBLE FOR

4,400km

RIVERS⁴ AND

620km

STOPBANKS



Key learnings

Collaboration enabled by councils and led by communities can generate consensus to own and address local issues. The Council has shown a high degree of innovation, leadership and trust in its regional communities to successfully consult and empower the Council to make a plan change to improve the health of New Zealand's largest river, the Waikato River.

Implementing this change presents the Waikato region, its councils, communities, stakeholders and the Waikato Regional Council with a major environmental, economic, cultural and community opportunity. Any changes have to also account for issues of affordability across the region, ongoing public support and adequate resourcing by the Council.

The Council has the benefit of a strong financial position and generally positive stakeholder relationships to make progress on major initiatives. It has broad strategic ambitions. The Council's proposed *Healthy Rivers* plan demonstrates the wisdom of trusting regional communities and stakeholders, supported by

the Council, to enable policy changes. The challenge remains how well the Council can implement significant change across the region that is acceptable and achievable.

The Waikato Regional Council is one of only two councils in New Zealand who have Māori seats, and this greatly assists collaboration. The establishment of Māori seats is a key mechanism to facilitate Māori participation in Council business. The Council also has co-management arrangements between Iwi and the Council, and agreements and committees that determine the way they work together, for example on *Healthy Rivers*.

¹ MBIE 2016

² Stats NZ Census 2013

³ DIA 2013

⁴ Above 4th order

Assessment Summary

continued...

OVERVIEW

Waikato Regional Council demonstrates competency and leadership in delivering its core functions and addressing a range of regional issues. The Council has wide environmental, economic and social responsibilities, and in general it collaborates well with stakeholders to achieve its strategic outcomes. While areas for improvement have been identified, the Council’s overall performance is good.

RATING



Findings



AT THE START OF ITS NEW TERM, THE COUNCIL HAS A STRONG AND CLEAR STRATEGIC DIRECTION WITH SPECIFIC AIMS. THE COMMUNITY HAS NOT BEEN CONSULTED ON THESE AIMS, BUT THE COUNCIL WILL BE MAKING THEM PART OF ITS CONSULTATION ON THE 2018-28 LONG TERM PLAN. THE AIMS WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE PERFORMANCE AGREEMENTS FOR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND MANAGEMENT.



THE COUNCIL IS LED BY A CHAIR AND A CHIEF EXECUTIVE WHO EMBODY THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO COUNCIL PRACTICE. THIS HAS RESULTED IN IMPROVED AND GENERALLY POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS, AND IN SUCCESSFUL POLICY INITIATIVES. STRONGER COLLABORATION BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND STAFF IS REQUIRED, HOWEVER, THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER IMPROVE CULTURE WHICH THE COUNCIL IS SUFFICIENTLY RESOURCED AND SELF-AWARE TO ADDRESS



THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY ADDRESSES THE NEED TO EXPLAIN TO DIVERSE SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY, IN A MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT WAY, WHAT THE COUNCIL DOES. THE SAME APPROACH IS REQUIRED FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS, SO THAT THE STAFF CAN BE THE COUNCIL’S CHAMPIONS.

Commonly used terms

Term	Definition
Asset Management Plan	A tactical plan for managing a council’s infrastructure and other assets to deliver an agreed standard of service.
Infrastructure	Local and regional roads, pathways and cycleways, flood protection, drinkingwater, wastewater and stormwater assets, sports and recreation facilities (parks, sportsgrounds, green spaces etc), community and tourism facilities (playgrounds, public toilets, libraries, museums, galleries and public art etc), town centres, and other facilities.
Local Government Act 2002	The legislative act that provides a framework and powers for councils to decide which activities they undertake and the manner in which they will undertake them.
Long Term Plan	The document required under the Local Government Act that sets out a council’s priorities in the medium to long-term.



Governance, leadership and strategy	Financial decision-making and transparency	Service delivery and asset management	Communicating and engaging with the public and business
Better than competent	Standout	Performing well	Better than competent

STRENGTHS

The Council uses a “holistic” policy perspective which integrates economic, environmental and social issues to achieve lasting outcomes across a range of challenging and complex regional issues.

The Chair and the Chief Executive have demonstrated collaborative leadership and innovative approaches in enabling the community to address potentially divisive regional issues.

The Council has a clear strategic direction which is supported by staff and largely supported by stakeholders.

The Council is acting to further partner with Iwi.

The Council is in a healthy financial position and has prudent financial and risk management practices.

There is a focus on planning processes and a clear line-of-sight within the Council towards the needs of the Waikato region.

Information available to stakeholders and the community is comprehensive and up to date.

The Council’s quality of service delivery and verification are noted by stakeholders.

The Council is a leader on regional matters and initiatives such as *Healthy Rivers* for the Waikato River, and creating New Zealand’s first marine spatial plan for the Hauraki Gulf in collaboration with Auckland Council.

Efficiencies are being achieved through shared services and shared operations.

The Council’s communications are focused towards its community, and it has a digital engagement strategy.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

The Council should recognise the need to consult on its Strategic Direction and integrate it with its Long Term Plan.

The strategic outcomes sought must be tied closely to the key performance indicators for the Chief Executive and management.

The Council needs to mature relationships with some Iwi.

The Council would benefit from an independent stakeholder audit.

The Council must work with the other councils in the region so they are “on board,” and can afford to implement its initiatives (eg *Healthy Rivers*, “clean fires and clean air”).

To increase efficiency, the Council’s information technology (IT) systems and capability require rationalisation and improvements.

The Council should improve its workplace conditions and culture.

Internal and external communications should be targeted to specific audiences, and should clearly demonstrate how the Council’s work benefits the region and its communities.

Leading locally

Governance, leadership and strategy

The Council is performing competently particularly in areas of leadership and innovation. The Council is a leader on issues and services for the Waikato region. While it previously had a more antagonistic relationship with regional stakeholders, the Council now works with them to meet integrated economic, environmental and social goals. Greater regional coherence reflects the Council's adoption of collaborative governance, leadership and strategy with stakeholders, if not (yet) with the broader public. There is room for improvement in the Council's internal systems and its culture to support its improved external position.

Priority grading

Better than competent

< The Council has a focus on providing leadership in economic, environment and social change through effective working relationships and organisational management. >

Some opportunity exists for the Council to create greater inclusion in its objectives with external stakeholders.

Setting the direction for the community

The Council has broadened its strategic focus and priorities over the past six years, from being primarily an environmental regulator (formerly called "Environment Waikato") to promoting a sustainable future for its region. It has established a vision for its

region, "The Waikato cares locally, competes globally," and has three integrated aims to achieve this vision: healthy environment, strong economy and vibrant communities.

The Council's strategic direction, which is the primary driver of the Long Term Plan and the Council's work programme, is set at the start of each new term. At the time of the assessment, business, some Iwi (including co-governance partners) and councils across the region had seen the new strategic direction – but most Iwi and some stakeholders had not. Stakeholders and the community had no input into the strategy, which will be the prime driver for the Council's Long Term Plan. There will be consultation on the strategic direction as part of development on the new Long Term Plan, although the Council will have applied the strategy well before the Long Term Plan is approved and comes into effect.

There are several major plans and documents that relate to the Council's strategic direction – for example *The Waikato Plan* (a broad community-owned plan to advance the region's interests, agreed by the Waikato Mayoral Forum in February 2017), *Waikato Means Business* (a Council-initiated and community-owned plan to advance the region's economic future), the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and *Healthy Rivers* (a major consultation on a change to the regional plan). Councillors told the assessors that these plans may "morph into one" in the 2018-28 Long Term Plan.

Councillors have also said that, while they and staff understand the business they are in, the Council could be seen to be trying to be "all things to all people", which would perpetuate "vagueness"

about its role and function. Clarity of purpose will assist the Council in its consultation on the Long Term Plan, and further assist the Council on consultation and brand expression.

The Council places emphasis on achieving economic, environmental and social change, and has developed programmes to encourage behavioural change in areas such as water and air quality. It is not always clear whether the Council itself, or other councils in the region, are leading these programmes. Nor is it clear whether the other councils can afford to implement the programmes, such as *Healthy Rivers*. A clear definition of the purpose of these programmes would help stakeholders and the community better understand and value them.

Creating confident councillors

The information provided to councillors, both during the local body elections and as part of their induction, is generally successful in preparing them for their duties. It could, however, be more specific about councillors' time commitments. The Chief Executive held individual interviews with each new councillor, and this reportedly worked well.

Councillors do not assess their own performance, although they do decide on their own training. Councillors see value in self-assessment, particularly in relation to governance and in identifying areas for further training.

Some Councillors see the Council as a "slow wheel," with too many committees. They regard the information provided to them as "sufficient" (albeit sometimes too detailed). Councillors also believe that Council papers need to have much clearer definitions of "the problem" being addressed, and that reports should have less jargon and fewer acronyms.

Effective working relationships

Councillors reported a good working relationship with the Chief Executive, who had faced a difficult time in the previous term because of reported discord amongst some councillors.

Councillors felt there were "no surprises" from staff. However, they also saw the Chief Executive as facing an internal culture that was at times difficult. In the 2016 internal "climate" survey, 62.8 per cent of staff reported feeling "ambivalent", 18.1 per cent of staff "disengaged" and only 19.1 per cent of staff reported feeling "engaged".

Staff mentioned several examples of councillors allegedly interfering in operations, which (if it is true) would be in breach of the Council's code of conduct. There was frustration that the line between governance and operations was not always clear to councillors or respected by them. However, no complaints have been lodged to allege political interference in operations.

There is a general acknowledgement that the Chief Executive's key performance indicators need to closely relate to the strategic aims of the Council.

Managing the organisation

The Chief Executive has a commitment to continuous improvement, and councillors and staff acknowledge improvements since the fit-for-purpose internal review and restructure took place. There are regular third and fourth tier management meetings, and several initiatives by the Chief Executive (eg an "away day") designed to encourage a more coherent culture and a more efficient organisation.

Staff said that work priorities are not always clear and there can be a "disconnect between the executive team and work programmes." Some staff felt they had limited input into programmes that directly affect their work areas. Resourcing is also an issue, particularly for upgrading IT systems and servicing ambitious community-consultation programmes such as *Healthy Rivers*.

Strengthening risk management

The Council's finance, audit and risk responsibilities are split across two committees: Audit and Risk, and Finance. The Audit and Risk Committee is a full committee of the Council and has two independent members. This strengthens both its expertise and its transparency.

The Council maintains a risk register and there is a comprehensive list of risks, but it does not include the earthquake risk rating of the carpark building.

Strengths

The Council is a respected organisation, locally and nationally.

There are formal co-governance relationships with Iwi.

The Council's Audit and Risk Committee (which is separate from its Finance Committee) has two independent members which gives it external expertise and greater transparency.

The Council's strategic direction is set at the beginning of each new term, which provides certainty.

The Council's bold and collaborative approach to issues helps stakeholders and the community to "own" issues and solutions.

The Chair and the Chief Executive embody the Council's strategic direction and its collaborative approach.

Areas for improvement

The Council's decisions and what it does are not understood by most of its community. The Council should combine its different plans into a coherent Long Term Plan, with firm linkages between its work programmes and the region's needs.

The number of Council sub-committees should be reduced, and council work programmes should be aligned with the Council's strategic direction.

The Council would benefit from using an informal session of Council to discuss context for decisions, a common governance practice to improve decision-making.

Councillors need to undertake self-assessment and training, especially in relation to governance and identifying training needs.

Councillors must, in all instances, follow the Code of Conduct's separation of governance from operations.

The Council's earthquake-prone carpark building must be added to the risk register.

The Chief Executive's performance agreement needs to be closely aligned to the Council's aims, and contain key performance indicators that are measurable.

Workplace culture needs further improvement.

The use of jargon and acronyms in council reports needs to be considerably reduced, if not eliminated, and issues being addressed need to be more clearly defined.

Investing money well

Financial decision-making and transparency

Council finances and oversight of risk are in hand. The Council has no external debt and its investment fund is prudently managed and governed.

Priority grading

Stand out

< The Council operates few public utilities apart from bus services across the region. Regional public services include navigation safety, river management, flood protection, drainage, biosecurity, farm extension, road safety, waste minimisation and enviroschools. >

The Council is funded primarily from rates and charges, and has the benefit of an investment fund to draw upon (internal debt). There is full budgeting of all Council activities.

Assessing the financial data

The financial strategy is clear. Monthly financial reports to the executive leadership team and quarterly financial reports to councillors are simplified and contain clear graphics. However, uncompleted major projects are not clearly reported in annual reports. The Council budgets for its major initiatives, such as the support services it provides for the *Healthy Rivers* consultation.

Addressing financial risk

The Audit and Risk Committee has two skilled independent members to enhance transparency and to add to the overall capability of the Committee. The risk register is largely comprehensive, and is updated quarterly, although at the time of assessment, it did not include the Council's earthquake-prone carpark building as a risk issue.

There is general transparency of the Council finances.

The Council has no external debt. It operates an investment fund, with an independent agency (Mercers) providing advice and the Finance Committee overseeing the fund's performance. The full Council sets the fund's strategy. The Council could consider appointing an independent member to the Finance Committee, to improve transparency.

Strengths

The Council is in a healthy financial position, and its low increases in rates provide an incentive for cost-efficiencies.

The Audit and Risk Committee is a strength of Waikato Regional Council and the willingness to have independent members builds confidence and capability.

The Council's investment fund is managed prudently, with independent advice and governance oversight.

The Council uses simplified and graphic reporting that clearly shows trends and targets.

Areas for improvement

Uncompleted capital projects need to be fully reported in the Council's annual reports.

The Finance Committee would benefit from having an independent member who could contribute external expertise and enhance the Committee's transparency.

Delivering what's important

Service delivery and asset management

The Council's overall quality of service delivery generally responds to and in some cases anticipates needs. Given the range of councils in the region, and its size and the complexity of the broad issues addressed by the Council, the quality of planning and service delivery is generally of a high standard. The Council is active in leading regional initiatives, shared services and collaborations that have widespread benefits, providing they are affordable and achievable across the region.

Priority grading

Performing well

< Significant restructuring has resulted in a re-alignment across all areas of the Council. >

The Council's planning processes, as well as the information it makes available to stakeholders and the community, is comprehensive and up to date. There is verification of the quality of its service delivery, and the leadership role that Council takes on regional matters and initiatives is recognised and actively supported.

Planning and evaluating service goals

Community outcomes are well-integrated into the Council's strategic direction. These outcomes are driven by the Council's economic, environmental and social aims, which are determined through inputs such as legislation, national policy statements, regional and district plans, consultation, the community "satisfaction" survey and the stakeholder audit.

At the time of assessment, the community outcomes were in the process of being translated into key performance indicators, beginning with those for the Chief Executive, then cascading down to managers. A number of separate plans and strategies within the Council are now being rationalised and connected.

The Council uses formal "satisfaction" surveys to measure the experiences of stakeholders and the community. Understanding of "what the council does" has a low rating, but the Council's services receive higher ratings. The Council undertakes "customer journey mapping" and "net promoter score analysis."

Stakeholders such as the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA), the South Waikato District Council, Mighty River Power, the Matamata-Piako District Council and the Te Arawa Iwi Trust emphasised the work the Council has done with the region's economic development agency. They also cite the Regional Transport Committee as a good example of a forum where a range of stakeholders interact with the Council in a forthright and solution-focused manner. The *Waikato Means Business* plan demonstrates the Council's collaborative approach.

The Council's Integrated Catchment Management Directorate is well-resourced and capable. The integrated approach is evident in terms of the "healthy catchment lens" that this directorate operates under, as noted by stakeholders. An example is the collaborative and consultative approach between the Council and community, industry, individual land owners and Iwi, for example in the *Healthy Rivers* programme. All monitoring data is publicly available. Internal reviews of effective environmental monitoring and service delivery are regular and identify areas for improvement.

All staff have professional development programmes/plans that are reviewed annually as part of the staff performance evaluation process in order to further lift skills. A significant review of the Council's organisation structure was completed in 2014. In the period leading up to this review, staff turnover was relatively consistent, and it is now decreasing.

Staff are generally positive about the progress being made in restructuring the organisation. One particular issue being

addressed is having the organisation spread across seven sites in Hamilton. This will be addressed subject to a Council decision to approve the business case for change via the Long Term Plan (there is no formal property strategy), and the need to attract the necessary capability, particularly in the planning field.

Staff referred to the Council's internal systems as being "clunky" at times. For reporting, there are five core system applications used across human resources, payroll, finance and infrastructure. The Council needs to improve integration between systems which makes some reporting manual and time consuming.

Assessing service quality

Stakeholders report excellent interaction in service delivery reviews, and point to the Council taking up the region's surf rescue/lifesaving function as an example of the regional services funding mechanism administered by the Council. The Waikato's Local Authority Shared Services (LASS) works well, and there is co-ordination with other regions to identify other collaborative opportunities (eg with the Bay of Plenty's LASS). The Council's reviews under s.17A of the Local Government Act are well-planned and scheduled, and are focused on outcomes. The positive relationship with the Department of Conservation is evident. The Maritime Mate app is recognised by stakeholders as good practice and as a useful tool updated with regional maritime information.

Flood control schemes, including stop bank management (as principal assets owned by the Council) are sound, and the Council uses a number of nationally and internationally recognised infrastructure management processes to monitor and improve its performance in this area.

The Council has a good understanding of the region's transport requirements and manages these well. NZTA and other stakeholders see the Regional Transport Forum as a very useful setting for managing transport issues. There is a procurement strategy for public transport. All regulatory policies and plans are publicly available.

Planning, regulation and accountability

The Regional Policy Statement, Regional Plan, and coastal plans are integrated and aligned. Alignment with national plans and policy statements is sound.

Overall, environmental management of the Council is strong and highly regarded by stakeholders. There is a strong level of community and stakeholder collaboration on major environmental and social and economic issues.

The Regional Transport Forum and its working groups (SH1, SH29 and SH3) are supported by neighbouring councils.

IANZ, New Zealand's leading accreditation agency, has provided positive reports on the Council's building consenting processes. Compliance with consenting timeframes is measured at 99.7 per cent. In instances where there has been non-compliance with timeframes (and where allowable), small discounts have been given to applicants.

Annual reports are comprehensive and link the Council's objectives, measures and performance. Outside of the annual reporting cycle, there is regular communication with the community on progress and performance.

The Council uses the Better Business Case methodology.

The Council has simplified its tendering processes for transport, and consequently the last response rate was better than the previous one. NZTA has confirmed that the Council's tendering process is regarded as national best practice.

Strengths

The Council has very clear strategies and plans.

The Council largely meets the needs and requirements of its stakeholders and its community.

The Council is appreciated for its wide knowledge, regional connections and strong leadership.

The Council is open to having the "difficult conversations" and working in an outcome-focused manner.

Area for improvement

The Council's internal systems require integration, and some manual procedures could be rationalised.

Listening and responding

Communicating and engaging with the public and businesses

The Council adopts a strategic and audience-centric approach to engagement and communications. The new communications strategy is comprehensive and include issues management as well as customer services and brand promotion. While the Council is effectively engaging and communicating, there remains widespread public misunderstanding about what the Council does.

Priority grading

Better than competent

< The Council faces complex and often entrenched issues across the Waikato region, and its audiences are diverse – for example, there are 208 Iwi and hapu in the region. >

The Council is not well-understood by Iwi, or by its communities and region. It needs to carefully manage its engagement and communications to help it achieve the broad aims outlined in its strategic direction.

Planning effective engagement

Despite its extensive economic, environmental and social responsibilities, there is not a wide understanding of what the Council does. As noted earlier, the Council can appear to be “all things to all people,” resulting in a lack of brand recognition and defined purpose. Its communications strategy identifies the need to provide simplified information about real issues that the Council can do something about (eg water and flood control), and it is moving towards providing “bite-size” information to specific parts of the community as well as to media. The strategy also identifies customer service as key to providing this information.

The communications strategy is robust in describing why and how the Council’s purpose and value is communicated with stakeholders. However, the Council needs to address the confusion that the general public have in understanding what the Council does. The Council’s messages also need to be aligned with the internal communications strategy, so that the Council’s staff can become its champions. The strategy does not identify the key performance indicators for communications.

The performance of the Council’s external communications strategy is measured by its community satisfaction survey, which is independently conducted. The survey does not measure the community’s views on the Council’s leadership or the extent to which the community trusts the Council, but the Council will consider including these in future surveys. Similarly, customer service requires a range of measurements that record the experience of customers along the customer journey with the Council.

Engaging digitally

Digital communications is a developing area, with the Council linking customer services and communications on a digital platform.

Communicating through the media

News media relationships appear to be well-managed.

Building relationships with iwi

The Iwi who spoke to the assessors reported that the Council has a good relationship with them, with the relationship strongest with the Chief Executive and staff. The Māori/iwi relationship with

councillors needs to improve. There is room for the relationship to mature and both iwi and the Council should decide where the relationship should go. Iwi feel they assist the Council on Resource Management Act consent issues and on the *Healthy Rivers* consultation. They want the Council to show a similar level of co-operation on Iwi consents, particularly where the Council is a co-governance partner.

Some Iwi representatives report not being consulted on the Council's new strategic direction. There has been no "big discussion" on where the partners want the Iwi/Council relationship to go.

Building relationships within the region

Business and farming groups have a positive working relationship with the Council, and praise it for being "courageous" in initiatives such as *Healthy Rivers*. The Chief Executive has brought a collaborative and inclusive style to the Council, and has helped to improve relationships with Auckland Council. For example, it worked with Auckland Council to establish New Zealand's first marine plan for the Hauraki Gulf. The Chief Executive's collaborative style is complemented by the Council's strategic direction, and the KPI's set for the organisation.

Stakeholders such as NZTA have a good working relationship with the Council. They report that the Council takes a sensible approach to regional issues and treats other councils in the region fairly. However, there is a general view that the Council does not always have the technical grunt it needs, and employing contractors does little for ongoing successful stakeholder relationships.

Healthy Rivers was initiated and serviced by the Council, and drafting of the plan change was handed over to a collaborative stakeholder group. While the collaboration process has been successful, it is recognised by stakeholders that implementing *Healthy Rivers* could become unsuccessful if it is not owned and resourced locally during implementation. Implementation of *Healthy Rivers* is now an issue for rural landowners and the eight councils impacted by it. The cost of its implementation within the region is estimated by some territorial authorities to be as high as approximately \$500 million. Councils whose rural landowner communities are largely on fixed incomes may struggle to afford the cost to implement on-farm measures. Territorial authorities may also need to assess and upgrade infrastructure through their existing point-source discharge consents. *Healthy Rivers* does not impose any rules directly requiring point-source discharge infrastructure upgrades, but addresses this through a policy framework. In addition, there is effectively a disincentive to initiate any further intensive rural land use change or development in the region until hearings on *Healthy Rivers* are complete. Land use investment is unlikely to happen while there

is uncertainty and until the decision on the final plan change has been released (expected second half of 2018).

Council initiatives on "clean fires and clean air," in partnership between the Council and the South Waikato District Council and required under the National Environmental Standard for Air Quality will also impose costs on local residents.

There are differences on stormwater issues between the Council and other councils in the region, although these are being worked through. The various regional service forums, the Mayoral Forum, the Waikato Local Authority Shared Services (LASS), catchment and civil defence and emergency management committees, and other regional bodies supported by the Council provide high levels of community ownership and value and regional cohesion.

The most recent stakeholder audit, which recorded high levels of stakeholder satisfaction with the Council, was conducted by the Chief Executive. In future, the audit will be independently undertaken.

Strengths

The Chair and the Chief Executive are good listeners and are strong on working collaboratively.

The Council takes a collaborative approach to achieving community outcomes, transferring responsibility of issues and solutions to those who own them.

There is stakeholder, Iwi and community collaboration on big issues (eg *Healthy Rivers*).

Relationships with business and stakeholders are positive.

The Council's communications strategy addresses the needs of its customers and its communities.

Areas for improvement

The Council's relationships with Iwi need to mature, particularly at councillor level.

The Council through implementation of its communications strategy needs to promote its value to specific parts of the community (including the general public), both through targeted campaigns and through its staff as Council champions.

Internal and external communications need to carry a consistent message about the Council's value.

Council documentation should consistently be made simpler and clearer.

The communications strategy needs to include key performance indicators.

Communications should be represented on the internal Risk Forum.

The Council should undertake an independent stakeholder audit.

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