

EMBARGOED until 10am, Wednesday 20 May 2015

LGNZ signals programme of work to build a stronger local government for New Zealand

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) and its membership councils are embarking on a significant programme of work to deliver improved performance and heighten the value that is delivered to communities by local governments across New Zealand.

Local government has an important role to play in delivering strong local economies and building vibrant communities across all of New Zealand. Councils provide important local and regional infrastructure that New Zealanders use every day. Although people agree that local government is important to New Zealand, many citizens and businesses are unaware of the broad range of services that councils provide.

LGNZ has undertaken independent research that has been instrumental in helping shape a significant programme of work to improve sector performance. As a result, LGNZ will now be working with councils across New Zealand on six priority areas:

1. governance, leadership and strategy;
2. financial decision-making and transparency;
3. asset management and infrastructure;
4. engaging with business;
5. communicating and engaging with public; and
6. building a stronger relationship with central government.

Each of these areas is being detailed in the new programme of work that LGNZ is currently scoping, and will include metrics and benchmarks that enable councils to demonstrate and deliver high performance.

“How well local government performs impacts on how well communities and citizens prosper and succeed,” LGNZ President Lawrence Yule says.

LGNZ’s inaugural Local Government Survey assessed how New Zealanders perceive local government. Results show that that the sector needs to strengthen its performance, particularly in governance, managing finances, making good spending decisions and delivering value for money.

“These research findings have been helpful in identifying the areas where we as a sector need to lift our performance,” Mr Yule says. “As a result, LGNZ and its member councils will be introducing a significant programme over coming months to drive positive change.”

“We need to continue to strengthen local leadership. The public and business have told us that mayors, chairs and councillors need to be bolder in leading strategies for greater prosperity and well-being of communities,” Mr Yule says.

“We need to ensure stronger interaction with communities and businesses across New Zealand on the infrastructure, services and issues that matter locally. We also need to build a stronger relationship with Government. This needs to occur with central government and local members of

Parliament. We currently have local accords in place for a number of important issues, such as housing , but as a sector we see value in establishing an agreement with central government on shared priorities and areas of work for the country as a whole.”

Better collaboration and communication across the sector will mean greater understanding of the breadth, value and quality of local government services. This will lead to stronger sector and council performance and, over time, an improved awareness of the work local government does for communities.

“Our aim is to deliver top quality value for the rate dollars to New Zealand communities and to grow citizens understanding of the breadth of services delivered each day by local governments across New Zealand,” Mr Yule says.

Over recent months, LGNZ has embarked on an extensive briefing of councils and local government stakeholders on the proposed programme of action and the findings of the inaugural New Zealand Local Government Survey.

Mr Yule notes that good progress is already taking place across the local government sector, including:

- adopting best practice governance through our partnership with the Institute of Directors and its associated training programmes;
- implementing services to assist all councils to put Audit and Risk Committees in place (with independent members);
- providing strategy and leadership support through Equip, LGNZ’s Centre of Excellence, which was launched in 2014;
- actively embracing financial and other benchmarks;
- in asset management and infrastructure, developing the “3 Waters” project to lift the performance of our potable, waste and stormwater services and infrastructure;
- in roading, forming a partnership between LGNZ and the NZ Transport Agency to ensure world-class investment and service levels across our roading network; and
- to assist better engagement with businesses, LGNZ has produced the Business Friendly Guidelines for councils across New Zealand to adopt.

“We have a range of initiatives in place with the sector but we need to continue to do more to lift the performance of councils over time,” Mr Yule says.

New Zealand Local Government Survey

LGNZ’s programme has been informed by independent research undertaken by Colmar Brunton in 2014. The inaugural New Zealand Local Government Survey of close to 3,000 citizens and businesses across New Zealand found that:

- public and business satisfaction with local government services is generally good;
- there is low awareness of the wide range of services local government provides – and the services tend to be under-valued, especially as they affect our daily lives;
- local government is seen to play an important role in developing the prosperity and wellbeing of New Zealand, although there is a sense that local government can achieve more than it does;
- local government performance factors such as financial management and community leadership are viewed as current weaknesses, although local engagement is generally

working; and

- local government does not enjoy a strong reputation with the public and businesses.

On a comparable basis, New Zealand local government service satisfaction is rated similarly to countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia.

However, the Colmar Brunton research goes beyond satisfaction with services and seeks to understand what communities view as the best performance by local government.

“For the first time in New Zealand, we have a clear national picture of how public and business communities view local government performance and reputation. It’s critically important feedback on what people think we do, what we do well and what needs improving,’ says Mr Yule.

The Local Government Survey will be conducted annually and is available at www.lgnz.co.nz.

Ends

For more information, please contact LGNZ’s Director of Advocacy, Helen Mexted, on 029 924 1221 or email helen.mexted@lgnz.co.nz

About LGNZ and local government in New Zealand

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) is the peak body representing New Zealand's 78 local, regional and unitary authorities. LGNZ advocates for local democracy, develops local government policy, and promotes best practice and excellence in leadership, governance and service delivery. Through its work strengthening sector capability, LGNZ contributes to the economic success and vibrancy of communities and the nation.

The local government sector plays an important role. In addition to giving citizens a say in how their communities are run, councils own a broad range of community assets worth more than \$120 billion. These include 90 per cent of New Zealand's road network, the bulk of the country's water and waste water networks, and libraries, recreation and community facilities. Council expenditure is approximately \$8.5 billion dollars, representing approximately 4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and 11 per cent of all public expenditure.

For more information visit www.lgnz.co.nz.