Older adults live well in Waitakere

- Older adults know their neighbours
- Older adults can get around their city
- Older adults are warm and safe
- Older adults are valued by others in the community

Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007

All families with enough to live on

- Families can make healthy food choices
- Families can pay their bills on time
- Families can take kids on holidays
- Families live in warm, safe houses
- Families can buy clothes for themselves

Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007

Phase 1

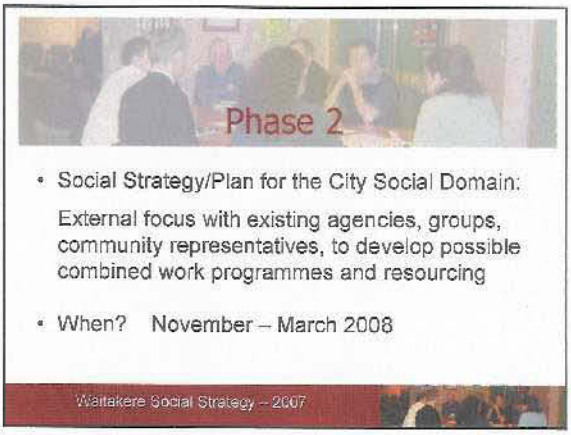
- Council Social Strategy:

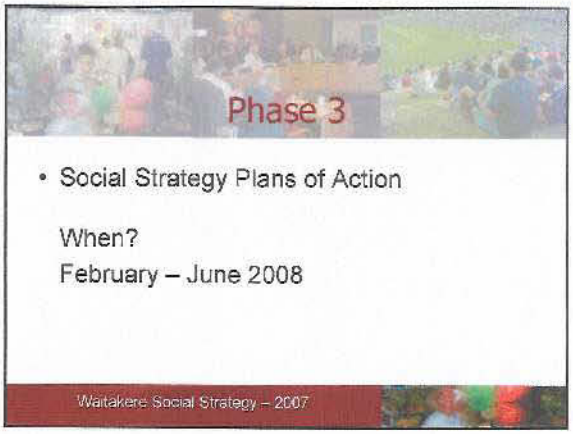
  Identify key result areas
  Achieve internal council alignment
  When? Happening now until September

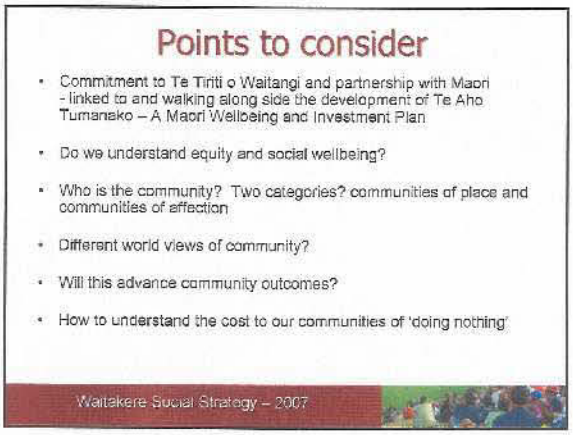
  Consultation, discussions and input from communities –
  When? September – November 2007

Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007

M57


Phase 2
• Social Strategy/Plan for the City Social Domain:
External focus with existing agencies, groups, community representatives, to develop possible combined work programmes and resourcing
• When? November – March 2008
Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007


Phase 3
• Social Strategy Plans of Action
When?
February – June 2008
Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007


Points to consider
• Commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and partnership with Maori - linked to and walking along side the development of Te Aho Tumanako – A Maori Wellbeing and Investment Plan
• Do we understand equity and social wellbeing?
• Who is the community? Two categories? communities of place and communities of affection
• Different world views of community?
• Will this advance community outcomes?
• How to understand the cost to our communities of 'doing nothing'
Waitakere Social Strategy – 2007

MS8

"A post card from the UK" some thoughts from the Lyons Inquiry

Local Government New Zealand Conference 16th July 2007

Sir Michael Lyons

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

MS9

Background and context

- Lyons Inquiry ran 2004-07
  - Initially focused on finance (2004-05)
  - Extended to consider role and function too (2005-07)
- Continues at least 30 years of debate on role and finance of local government
  - Layfield Committee of 1974-76
  - Thatcher reforms (poll tax 1990, council tax 1993)
  - Balance of Funding Review 2003-04

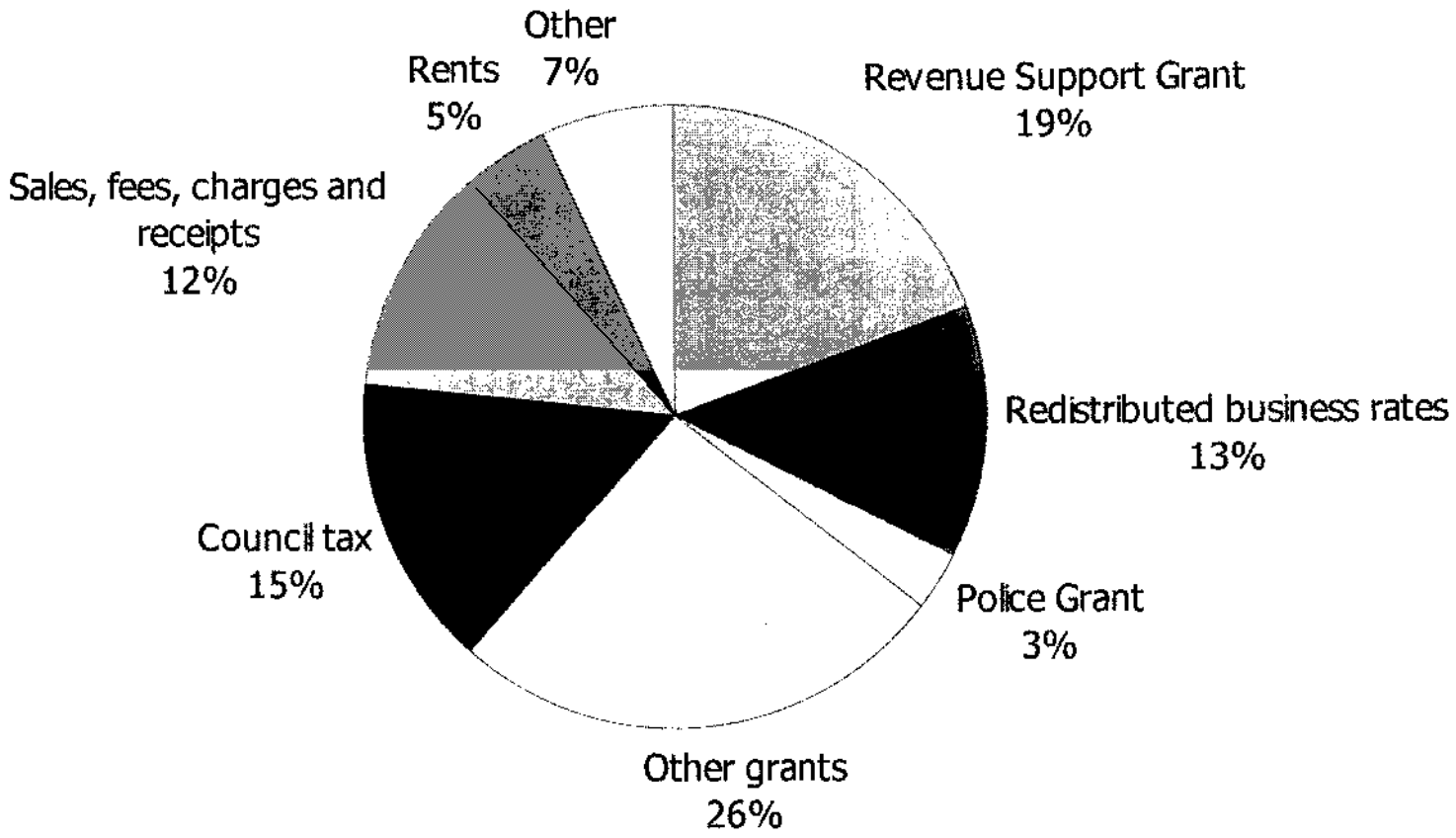
M60

Key issues throughout

- What do we want local government to do in the C21st
- Balance of funding: local taxation vs central grants
- Contested definitions of 'fairness'
- Acceptability of difference and variation within the country
- How to ensure vigorous, trusted local government

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

Local authority income



LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

Figures for 2005-06

Role: *National prosperity, local choice and civic engagement* May 2006

- Argues in favour of local choice in order to better meet local needs and improve value for money
- Local Government potentially important part to play in making ends meet
- Local government can contribute to national prosperity through effective 'place-shaping'
- But LG must rise to the challenge, particularly by better engagement with local people (should be one of its biggest advantages)

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

M63

Place-shaping: The creative use of powers **and influence** to promote the general well-being of a community

- Building and shaping local identity
- Providing a sense of direction
- Regulating harmful and disruptive behaviours
- Maintaining the cohesiveness of the community by **ensuring all voices are heard**
- Helping to resolve disagreements
- Working to make the local economy more successful and sustainable
- **Understanding needs and preferences, and making sure the right services are provided**
- Playing the role of **convenor** across all public services.

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

M64

Place-shaping: leadership

- **Anticipating future challenges** and opportunities
- Building coalitions and **looking outside community boundaries** for knowledge and collaboration
- Advocating powerfully on behalf of the local community
- Arbitrating between different interests and supporting community cohesion
- Being accessible and visible
- Communicating effectively and **building trust**
- Being **open with information** and ensuring transparency
- **Demonstrating a deep understanding of local issues**
- **Looking outward rather than upward** - focusing on service performance for its impact on the community
- Championing efficiency and service innovation

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

M65

Final report march 07

- Not a simple argument for the local
- But our system does suffer from centralisation
  - Local **flexibility** to choose and act is restricted
  - Confused **accountability** undermines trust
  - Poor **incentives** fail to reward local efforts
  - **Fairness** has many definitions needed to promote trust
  - **Efficiency** pursued by making right local decisions, not just the cheapest decisions
- Council tax not 'broken' but under too much pressure, exacerbated by other problems
- Need a developmental approach to change (to build trust and create the conditions for further reform)

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

MGC

Lyons: the headlines

- The type of country we want to live in
- Communities to choose more for themselves (satisfaction)
- Need to argue the value of difference
- Need for a grown-up debate about what we want and what we are willing to pay for
- A single system of Government not a spat
- Confused accountability undermines trust
- A New Constitutional settlement?

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

L9W

A Possible Read Across

- Its difficult to make tax changes
- Consistency & "Managed Difference"
- Outcomes and Well-being
- Unfunded Mandates and Accountability
- "*Placeshaping*" and Convening
- Infrastructure,Growth & Sustainability
- Competence

LYONS INQUIRY
into Local Government

The Rates Inquiry- Some Issues

David Shand

LGNZ Conference

Dunedin, 17 July, 2007

M69

Establishing credibility

- Initial cynicism to be overcome ?
- What does the inquiry and panel add ?
- Keeping our distance from government and DIA
- Independence, different backgrounds, pulling previous work together
- What are the facts ? Give us chapter and verse
- Panel's willingness to consult widely and listen
- Managing public expectations of the Inquiry
- "Narrow" terms of reference ?

Panel Consultations

- Meetings with mayors, councillors and senior officials – productive (high quality and relevant submissions)
- Meetings with public – a mixed bag, much angst
- Hui with Maori land owners – a mixed bag, but useful and essential
- Meetings with government ministries
- Meetings with "the industry" – SOLGM, LGNZ
- Meetings with interest groups
- 950 submissions, all but 8 councils
- Consultation, not a referendum

M71

Nature of the Report

- A comprehensive review of the wide range of issues
- Something sustainable in the long-term, no quick fix
- A detailed program of action, to be driven at a high level and involve all stakeholders
- Maintaining LG empowerment and autonomy – a key advantage of NZ LG
- Most of the changes are for LG to implement, rather than for CG to mandate
- Recognising the partnership between central and LG
- Considerations of sustainability, equity, economic impact and affordability

M72

Some Cross Cutting Issues

- Coordination within central government on LG and consultation with LG needs improvement
- Inadequate information and data on the operation of LGA and LGRA and on council finances
- Current consultation with the community doesn't work – better, not more consultation needed
- The LTCCP concept is sound - but the process is constipated ?
- Is LG exercising sufficient spending restraint ?
- And adequately considering affordability to all groups of ratepayers ?

M73

Sustainability of Rates

- Sustainable if people don't understand them ?
- Flexibility of rating tools – benefit or curse ?
- Need for standardized and honest reporting on rates levels and changes
- Improve rates assessment information
- Better demonstrate services and benefits provided
- Transparency of rates allocation – differentials, UAGC and targeted rates ?
- Better information on impact and affordability for LG decision making
- LG is involved in income redistribution whether it likes it or not

H74

LG Funding Strategies

- Understanding and explanation of funding policies
- OAG report on 2006-16 LTCCPs
- ".. There is no clear reason for rates and surpluses of this level" (para. 3.43)
- " ..Without further explanation .. of their financial strategies there is no apparent need for surpluses of this level" (para. 3.84)
- Issues concerning debt and depreciation funding
- By 2016 after high capital expenditures, LG will have low debt and high financial assets ?

SLW

Some Key Issues

- Replacing rates or supplementing them ?
- Rates as a property tax or user charge ?
- What is an “affordable” rates burden ?
- Power of general competence argument -“place shaping” role of LG
- “unfunded mandates” ?
- Crown exemptions ?
- Valuation quality ?
- Rating of Maori land – many grievances remain

M76

Some Key Issues

- Councils are redistributing, whether they like it or not. Need information on impacts
- Is all the forecast capex in LTCCPs really necessary, affordable and feasible ?
- Auckland as a special case ?

M77

Hon Mark Burton
Minister of Local Government

16 July **Speech**

Speech to the Local Government New Zealand Conference "Investing in Our Future"

Introduction

(Mihi)

Opening Remarks

Good morning and thank you for your warm southern welcome. It is a pleasure to be here today as Minister of Local Government, and in particular on behalf of the Prime Minister who sends her warm best wishes to delegates, to open your 2007 Conference. I would also like to compliment the conference organisers for their work in bringing an excellent programme together.

I want to begin by thanking all local government representatives for your endeavours in serving your communities over the last year. Your work is critical to ensuring that our system of local democracy functions effectively.

Our thoughts are with our many colleagues and communities seriously impacted by recent adverse weather events.

Overview

The theme of this year's conference is "Investing in our Future," which is equally a key focus for the Government.

I see the conference programme outlines workshop sessions that, today alone, will cover key issues such as:

- Sustainability;
- Building heritage into our future; and
- Partnerships of the future.

M78

This conference enables me, as Minister, to acknowledge the recent achievements that local authorities have made in their focus on sustainability. This is evident in the work that has been done to develop practical frameworks toward sustainable development.

The conference will also allow us to further explore collaborative partnerships between local and central government in achieving community outcomes.

Budget 2007 context

The theme of "Investing in our Future" is very much in line with the theme of this year's Budget. Budget 2007 presented the next step in this Government's long-term approach toward building sustainable communities. Our message is simply this: that future local and national prosperity can only happen by committing to, and investing in, a sustainable development strategy.

To be sustainable is to be insightful about our future needs, it is to develop creative solutions, and address problems while minimising impacts on the environment.

The Government has identified the country's infrastructure as a critical factor in furthering New Zealand's economic transformation. Accordingly, the Budget allocated an additional $650 million for major rail projects, which include Auckland electrification and improvements to the Wellington and national rail network. Another $145 million in capital has been provided to guarantee the delivery of the five-year State Highway Construction Plan and protect against potential cost increases. This is in addition to the $13.4 billion provided for the five-year programme last year.

We have already determined some of our milestones toward achieving sustainability, and a wide range of policy and operational work is under way.

But it is local leadership, in collaboration with central government that will achieve the best outcomes for social, environmental, economic and cultural wellbeing.

Central and local government working together

Genuine cooperation and collaboration between central and local government benefits local priorities and communities. There are many good examples of this partnership.

A number of us here attended the 13th Central/Local Government Forum held last month. There we discussed ways in which the two arms of government can work in partnership to

achieve better outcomes in procurement, funding and regulation. We considered ways to encourage innovation when formulating policies for sustainability. And we examined how we can best engage with local communities to accomplish local, regional and national goals.

We are all well aware of the concerns of ratepayers in many parts of New Zealand about increases in rates. The fact is significant investment in infrastructure, some of it long overdue, is the key driver of these increases. Effectively conveying just how much in terms of the essential services we all take for granted is provided to residents through local government, is perhaps one of the greatest challenges confronting us.

The Government does recognise that in addition to the substantial, direct contributions it makes, it should, and indeed has, responded in a number of other ways.

An important example has been to work with local authorities to significantly upgrade the Rates Rebate Scheme.

To date the take up of the scheme has been extremely positive. The Scheme has assisted more than 106,000 households with their rates to the collective value of more than $46 million this year alone. Our analysis does show that there are appreciable variations between councils in take up rates. While initial figures are very positive, I encourage all councils to continue actively publicising this Scheme to your residents.

With the roll-out of the expanded scheme, we've been able to define the number of issues that require further consideration and officials will report to me on these before the end of the year.

The Government has also been working collaboratively with the Local Government sector on the local government-funding project, which is awaiting the outcome of the Independent Rating Inquiry.

As you will know, the objective of the Inquiry is to consider issues relating to current local government rating, and to other revenue raising mechanisms, and provide recommendations to the Government for enhancing rating and other funding mechanisms for local authorities.

This is a very important initiative for our sector and I look forward to the Inquiry's final report. What no Inquiry can of itself resolve is the gulf between what we all want of infrastructure and services, and what we want to pay for it.

The Inquiry's panel is made up of three members whom many of you, I'm sure, will know – David Shand, Graeme Horsley and Dr Christine Cheyne. I am advised that the panel received around 1,000 submissions and consulted with local authorities and communities, hapü and iwi, and various interest groups.

By focussing collaboratively on local government funding, the two arms of government can better service community needs, and have a clearer picture on how to best invest in a sustainable future. We will be able to plan for future service delivery and infrastructure development, and will be better equipped to assess administrative and implementation costs to local authorities, while providing for the effective provision of crucial services to our communities: land and waste management, the administration of public facilities and amenities, the issuing of licenses and permits, civil defence and emergency co-ordination, and parking and property management.

There are also times where the two arms of government must work together to respond to unforeseen and sometimes tragic incidents.

All of you, I'm sure, will be aware of the recent death that resulted from a dog attack in Murupara earlier this year. While fatal attacks like this are rare, the Government is now taking a fresh look at dog control laws and enforcement.

My colleague, the Associate Minister of Local Government, Nanaia Mahuta asked officials to consider what could be done to further improve public safety and awareness around dogs. Officials are working closely with staff from local councils.

I know that the Associate Minister has also consulted with many of you directly on what can be done to improve mechanisms for dog control and public safety.

This collaboration will allow us to determine what may be the best intervention to ensure our communities are safe.

Assisting local authorities working together

Since November 2005, I have observed increasing co-operation between local authorities. You are finding ways to work with *each other* to achieve common objectives. I am particularly encouraged by the increase in 'clustering initiatives', or groups of local authorities coming together to create their own development strategies.

Cluster arrangements set up enhanced systems for shared services and improve access to resources across regions. These arrangements advance the principles of cost-effective sustainable development and encourage long-term productive partnerships.

These initiatives include:

- nine lower North Island councils banding together to produce the Wellington Regional Strategy; a sustainable economic growth strategy for the region;
- three authorities in the Western Bay of Plenty forming 'Smart Growth'; an initiative that addresses the social, economic and environmental issues in their communities; and
- the Regional Sustainable Development Forum producing the 'One Plan' project in Auckland – a project to strengthen Auckland's regional strategy and promote social, economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing throughout the Auckland region.

The role of central government here is that of supporter or facilitator. Central government can help clear the path for the launch of these clusters, we can offer support through co-ordination and funding, and we can assist in agenda setting.

Various central government agencies already proactively support these initiatives. The Department of Building and Housing assists new clusters with technical assistance and funding, and help cluster members meet the requirements of building consent accreditation.

The Ministry for the Environment has helped local authority clusters meet their resource management responsibilities through technical help and information sharing. The Ministry also proposes further assistance through the funding and co-ordination of cluster meetings.

And I, as Minister of Local Government, have commissioned work due later this year, to identify how Government can even better support these cluster arrangements.

Sustainability

Our nation's objective is to become truly sustainable. We are a small nation on the world stage, but we are a nation with the people, the expertise, and the vision to become, and remain, a leader in sustainable development.

Sustainability principles have been introduced across central government portfolios in legislation and in policy. In 2003, we launched the Sustainable Development Programme of Action in which we set down principles for our policy setting and decision-making.

These principles have been adopted across a range of Government projects, which include water and energy use, urban development, and child and youth development. And, of course, sustainable outcomes became a key driver in the Local Government Act 2002.

I want to acknowledge here that local government has responded strongly to this challenge. I am aware of numerous examples of councils taking the lead in developing long-term strategies – individually, with other councils, and in partnership with central government.

The Communities for Climate Protection project epitomises these efforts. This voluntary programme includes councils that represent 75 percent of the population. This collaboration is actively supported by central government and Local Government New Zealand. Members have addressed issues such as the processing of food waste and the reduction of gas consumption and greenhouse emissions. Members have also promoted different forms of recycling, and encouraged alternative forms of transport.

But we must acknowledge the challenges that remain. How we deal with our solid waste, for instance, is crucial. New Zealand sends 3.2 million tonnes of solid waste to landfills each year. This would fill a rugby field 30 stories high – each month. Some 65 percent of household waste could be recycled or composted. New Zealand businesses produce 5.1 million tonnes of solid waste every year, of which 3.2 million tonnes includes materials like concrete, rubble, steel, brick and glass.

There are of course many notable innovative and progressive council-led projects, such as:

- Otago Regional Council's new project 'Strategies for Sustainable Community Futures' to develop strategies to shape and provide sustainable futures for Otago communities. 'Strategies for Sustainable Community Futures' addresses issues such as water allocation, infrastructure planning, electricity distribution and climate change.

- Kaikoura District Council's 'Green Globe' community certification – this Council's highly successful sustainability policy has earned Kaikoura New Zealand's (and the world's) first Green Globe community certification; and
- the development of a Resource Recovery Centre on Stewart Island by the Southland Regional Council. This sustainable approach to waste management saw the Council awarded a Ministry for the Environment's 'Green Ribbon' award.

There are many more examples. So, I hope everyone attending this Conference will use the occasion to re-asses our progress toward the goal of true sustainability. What are we doing as individuals and as organisations, and how can we do it better? How can we contribute toward the spirit of collaboration? What will produce the best outcomes for our communities? What can we learn from and share with each other?

Closing

Our future – the critical decisions that will determine our personal, local and global quality of life, are upon us – now.

This is our opportunity to build a secure society, a strong economy, a healthy environment, and a vibrant culture. Sustainable practices and our prosperity go hand in hand.

We can position New Zealand and our national identity at the forefront of the drive toward a sustainable world. The building blocks for such a future inevitably require a solid foundation of local initiatives and action – based on strong and committed local leadership.

That leadership comes in no small part from the people in this room and your colleagues. So I conclude as I began by thanking you all for your service to our communities and to New Zealand. I wish you well for the rest of your conference.

Hon David Benson-Pope

Minister for the Environment

17 July 2007

Speech

Investing in our Future – LGNZ conference

Good afternoon everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today – I am always pleased to get home to Dunedin and I trust you have all enjoyed the hospitality of the city – I'm sure you've contributed to the cashflow at the Kathmandu sale!

I want to talk today about the relationship between this government and local government, specifically in my role as Minister for the Environment, Minister for Social Development and Employment, and as a City Councillor for 14 years in this beautiful place.

The environment you have been enjoying, in this venue, in the Octagon with New Zealand's leading Art Gallery, more cafes and restaurants than you would risk visiting at the Viaduct in Auckland, the brick-paved streets, with the period street furniture, enhanced heritage buildings, and the student-proof trees characterise what we are about.

This city now is the result of opportunity seized. We had a gold rush in the 1860's, but Dunedin's current prosperity has been the result of decades of hard work and commitment.

This City met the challenge that faces us all, got on with the job, marketed its advantage, faced off the naysayers, and stamped our footprint on where we are going and established our place in New Zealand now and for the future.

If any of you think that was simple, ask Sir Clifford, his predecessors and the councillors of the day or think of your own council meetings and the debate that ensues over even the most minor issues.

I suspect that dynamic is the reality for all of us here.

M85

But in many ways the wider context has changed.

The achievements I detail happened in a wider context of conflict. The relationship with central government used to be entirely negative. Cooperation and respect were not words anyone in Wellington wanted to spell. My how we have changed.

Many of us remember the visionary reforms of Max Bradford which meant that Dunedin was forced against its will to sell the Waipori Dam. The same people were also telling us we needed to privatise our roads. Things were tense.

Thank goodness it is now different. There is now a sound working relationship between this Labour-led government and local government. This in part is due to the leadership of Helen Clark. It is also due to the principles behind the Local Government Act 2002, with its emphasis on local decision-making and community outcomes, and the devolution of a power of general competency. It's also due to the engagement of your leaders.

And a number of you have described the recent central/local government forum as the best yet.

I am very pleased to see local government and councils have the capacity and have taken the opportunity to lead in areas inside and outside the traditional sphere of local government.

And we have all observed a greater confidence in local government to step up and engage with central government on a range of issues, some of which I will touch on later.

I wasn't surprised when I read John Key's comments to you to see that when it comes to local government reform in Auckland John was unsure last week and didn't know yesterday.

Nor that he hinted at increased public spending at the same time as his party is promising to reduce public spending – a promise he reinforced yesterday morning at a National Party meeting at the Savoy, just prior to his speech to this conference.

And that he extolled the virtues of environmental standards but at the same time doesn't feel the residents of Owaka or dozens of similar towns should be entitled to expect safe drinking water.

But I do need to rebut the fanciful suggestion that central government has imposed over 60 new responsibilities, unwanted and costly on local government.

This is quite dishonest so let's set the record straight.

As my colleague Mark Burton has said on many previous occasions, 28 of the pieces of legislation were specifically requested in whole or in part by the local government sector – a reflection of our close working relationship.

26 of those new responsibilities do not impose any additional costs on local government. A number were in direct response to serious public concerns around issues such as leaky buildings and attacks by dangerous dogs.

And let's face it, the public rightfully expects legislation to ensure first world standards in areas like building inspection, food hygiene and dog control. These costs are recoverable from the actual businesses or individuals who use the services, and are not therefore costs to be covered by general rating through councils.

The issue of affordability of rates is taken seriously by central government too. The extension of the Rates Rebate Scheme is a very significant initiative for many low-income households.

Rates Rebates totalling over 48 million dollars were paid out to 107,653 New Zealand households since the expanded scheme came into effect on 1 July last

year. You will be only two aware of the effect of that spending in your own local economy.

Some recent rates increases have been driven by the need to invest in upgraded or new infrastructure, such as roads, drinking water, wastewater and waste management. In some cases, we are facing the consequences of previous investment opportunities deferred.

It is important to note that central government is playing its part in terms of investment in local communities.

It is a fact that between 1999-2004 central government funding was the fastest growing source of revenue for local councils.

Budget 2007 is no different. The Labour-led government has invested an additional 500 million dollars to electrify commuter rail in Auckland –and lets hope the trains for Auckland continue to be built at Hillside. We have made possible a regional fuel tax – a means for investing more in public transport. We have invested in more schools for growing regions and expanded and improved health services.

But our investment has not just been in roading, in health, in education, we are also facing up to the challenges we all acknowledge in respect of the core values in our environment.

And I'd like to turn to those key issues now.

First of all, challenges around water. As we all know, water is a vital resource for New Zealanders' recreation, economy, environmental values, tourism industry, and health. If we don't preserve it, the impact will be felt on all the things that make New Zealand what it is.

Through the Sustainable Water Programme of Action, central and local government are working in partnership to develop effective and workable

approaches to freshwater management - in particular, issues of allocation and quality.

Access to water is becoming much more competitive at the same time as intensification is challenging our water quality.

But we do require more New Zealand-wide consistency in our approach. It is not good enough to observe examples of best practice alongside the worst.

It is not good enough to have a council striving for greater compliance in one part of the country while in another dairy conversions are taking place without resource consents.

Reports from the Ministry for the Environment and the OECD Report released in April on New Zealand's environment highlight the need for New Zealanders to pull together and look after fresh water better.

In addition to the Programme of Action the government is also investing in the areas of greatest need.

For example, we are providing funds towards several projects important for tackling lake water quality issues around Rotorua. We have invested 4 million dollars towards the Ohau Channel diversion structure to provide short-term remedial works for Lake Rotoiti, and I acknowledge that is just the beginning.

We have also provided 645 thousand dollars for land user initiatives through the Ministry for the Environment's Sustainable Management Fund, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Sustainable Farming Fund.

Protecting the water quality of Lake Taupo has also involved central and local government working together in partnership.

Environment Waikato took the innovative step of proposing to cap nitrogen levels in the lake, and central government committed nearly 38 million dollars to the protection of Lake Taupo.

In respect of waste, we all know reducing our waste to landfill by recovering resources from waste streams, and improving our waste management systems is essential to our future.

Local government has made impressive headway with addressing the issue of waste and recycling. This has been achieved by improving community access to recycling and green waste diversion schemes. A number of councils have also developed innovative waste minimisation and management initiatives within their communities.

Timaru District Council has been a leader in the area of recycling and waste minimisation. Auckland and Manukau City councils have also increased their recycling programmes, providing positive examples for other local authorities to follow.

The Government is looking to work closely with local government to complement existing waste management and minimisation processes. This will include working together to:

- implement public space recycling facilities through an investment of 4.5 million dollars over three years
- improve waste management and minimisation planning and reporting
- and ensure best contracts practice for waste services they undertake

Most significantly the government is proposing a new and comprehensive product stewardship framework for dealing with waste streams, which involves all those involved in the life cycle of a waste stream working collaboratively together to divert waste from landfill.

Additionally, the government is committed to introducing a waste levy regime on waste to landfill to invest further in waste minimisation infrastructure.

The government is progressing these policies through the Waste Minimisation (Solids) Bill. The Bill provides an opportunity to develop a long-term framework for waste minimisation in New Zealand. This work is consistent with the 2002 New

Zealand Waste Strategy which set the first steps towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand.

The Bill will include the capacity to respond more quickly to waste minimisation and resource recovery issues, and to do so in new ways.

As to air quality, you know the first ever National Environmental Standards for air quality were introduced in 2004.

If we ever needed evidence to show why, we got that last week with the release of the Health and Air Pollution in New Zealand (HAPiNZ) Report, the results of which further demonstrated what we already know about air pollution in our country - it is leading to the premature deaths of far too many New Zealanders.

We are repeatedly seeing the damage air pollution does to human health, society and the economy. These effects are felt throughout the country, from towns such as Timaru to cities such as Auckland.

We have recently seen improvements to air quality in some areas, such as Christchurch, but I would like to emphasise now the importance for all councils to progressively work towards meeting national air quality standards by 2013.

On top of other clean air initiatives, the Government has recently committed $72 million over the next four years for energy efficiency measures including funding to help New Zealand families live in warm, dry, healthy-homes that have clean and efficient heating.

In the wider context I was somewhat amused recently to read that someone called RMA was responsible for banning the ringing of a church bell in Christchurch – and that a few days later a very helpful council official decreed that the bell could ring again.

This story underlines the fact that the RMA is a very good framework for balancing the interests of the community, but that it is just that, a framework. It is

the plans and decisions that communities make within that framework that are of most critical importance.

The results of the review of the RMA and the resulting 2005 amendments to the Act further empowered local government decision-making.

Council hearings have been strengthened by clarifying powers and requiring decision makers to be accredited. The Environment Court is now required to have regard to the council decision when determining appeals.

The Act provides the framework for sustainable management. Ensuring that the RMA is working effectively is therefore a priority for me.

Initiatives which aim to assist the public and small businesses include the 0800 RMA INFO free phone line, the rma.govt website, an interactive CD-ROM and a range of booklets aimed at facilitating a better understanding of the resource consent process.

The Quality Planning website also provides a comprehensive source of articles and publications for people on a range of planning related issues. There has been a phenomenal increase in use of this site to around 30,000 visits per month.

The Making Good Decisions Programme aims to help people involved in decision making. The quality of individual decisions on resource consents and plans is critical. Good decisions at the outset will also influence the number of cases which end up in the Environment Court.

By accrediting decision makers, we are well on the way to improving performance and helping local decision makers make the best possible decisions for their communities. That programme was only possible with local government support.

But it's not just the issues of the physical environment that I wish to address today. Earlier I spoke of the investments we have already made. The most important I haven't yet covered. The most important of these is of course in our young people.

The positive relationship established between Mayors and Central government in 2002, when the Mayors' Taskforce for Jobs Memorandum of Understanding was signed, included a commitment to the shared goal of getting all 15 – 19 year olds in appropriate activities by the end of this year.

I know you are all 100 percent committed to fulfilling this commitment, as is this Labour-led government.

Already our combined efforts and commitment are starting to show good results and there are some excellent indicators of our success which I want to talk about today.

Most notably, our commitment has shown that the number of young people receiving an Unemployment Benefit has reduced hugely and, for those young people requiring the benefit, it is for a shorter period of time.

As at the end of June, 26 Work and Income centres had zero 18 and 19 year olds receiving an Unemployment Benefit. There were a further 69 Work and Income service centres with fewer than 10 youth receiving this benefit.

In 1999 under a National government the number of 18 and 19 year olds receiving an Unemployment Benefit was 17,600. When I spoke to the Taskforce in Hamilton a few weeks ago I was able to tell them that number was just 1,200.

This is a notable achievement. Is it the work of central government? Of local government? Of Work and Income? Of Youth Transition Services or of teachers and schools?

Well of course it's all of those. It's the result of a coordinated effort by a community that values its young people and is prepared to make the most important investment in their future and the future of New Zealand.

17,600 to 1,200. Well that's sixteen and a half thousand young people who are making a positive contribution to their community and taking home a pay packet.

They are earning respect, they are developing self esteem, they are contributing to New Zealand's economy. And let's hope they are making their contributions to KiwiSaver.

That's sixteen and a half thousand young people who will not know the numbing effects of inter-generational benefit dependency. If we keep doing what we're doing, supporting our youth through different initiatives in the community and supporting them we will break that cycle – and it's about time.

Well, let me tell you some even better news. Just to set the scene for you again, in 1999 there were 17,600 18 and 19 year olds receiving the Unemployment Benefit. The last figures from May showed this number was at 1,200. New figures I am releasing today show this number is at just 990.

Not bad at all. But is there more to do? You bet.

We want to make a big impact in supporting young people to stay at school and to complete their education. International evidence and common sense tell us that the longer students stay engaged in schooling, the better their life outcomes.

For example, students who stay at school until senior secondary years typically go on to experience better health, more stable employment and higher earnings than their peers who leave school early.

We have made a start on supporting students to stay at school by more tightly managing school leaving exemptions.

We are also looking at ways to keep in touch with young people who are leaving school and need help to move into good transitions – especially as we know that students who drop out of school early are unlikely to make a successful transition to further study or employment.

We also need to make sure that while young people are in school, they are being provided with the right experiences that will equip them for the world or work and help them lead fulfilling lives into the future.

I hope to announce in the next few weeks a new initiative that will build on Youth Transition Services which already help school-leavers into work or further training.

And I look forward to continuing that work in partnership with local government in supporting our young people – investing in our future.

Thank you for the opportunity to wrap up your working day by focusing on the positives and looking to the future. I wish you well for your local body elections in a few months time.

Thank you.