

# **Council**

**Wednesday, 28 October 2009  
Commencing at 5.30 pm**

## **REPORT OF THE MAYOR**

**This report is dedicated to Aisling Symes**

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL TO BE HELD IN  
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AT WAITAKERE CENTRAL, 6 HENDERSON VALLEY  
ROAD, HENDERSON, WAITAKERE, ON WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2009,  
COMMENCING AT 5.30 PM**

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**6 REPORT OF THE MAYOR**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that the Council resolve to:**

**Receive** the Report of the Mayor.

**A boy up a tree and a little girl lost**

In the year I was elected Mayor, I was having an early morning run with my mate, Geoff Ross, around the Cornwallis Peninsula.

At around 6:30 am, we came to the track that goes up the ridge above the fishing rocks. There, crouching in a pohutukawa was a young boy in pyjamas. He was about four. We couldn't believe our eyes. He was very distressed and he told us he couldn't find his father. He couldn't tell us much more.

We coaxed him down from the tree and asked him to follow us up the track.

When we got to the top, the whole of the Cornwallis community was running frantically around the beach and the wharf. They believed the boy had drowned. It was clear their jubilation, tears and grief were all mixed when we said we'd found him on the other side of the peninsula. The boy had got out of bed at dawn and somehow found his way down the track.

We continued our run thinking very little of the situation. But the boy's father pursued us down the beach on a motorbike with a bottle of wine, weeping and overjoyed at the return of his son. He told us they'd been searching for two hours, but on the wrong side of the peninsula.

I kept thinking of that young boy, who would now be 21, as we searched for our missing young one - Aisling Symes. Each morning, I thought 'today she will be found and returned to her family'.

Instead of the tears of joy shed by that boy's father, there were tears of sorrow for Aisling.

As I write this report, Angela and Alan Symes are mourning the death of their two year-old girl, Aisling. Their grief and hurt has been on display to the whole nation.

Every one of us with kids or grandkids who watched the search for Aisling has thought 'what if it was us'. We have followed the case with deep empathy. Its ending is a devastating blow.

News of Aisling's disappearance came out on Tuesday, 6 October. When I arrived that afternoon at the search headquarters at Pomaria School, dozens of people had already gathered in the main hall. They were looking at maps, being briefed – it was like a war zone. I returned later that night to thank everyone. The next day I



walked the streets, talking to volunteers and to locals. We were all trying to fathom where she could be. Seeking answers and finding none.

The week that followed was one of confusion and fear. Many believed Aisling had been abducted. The Symes family described their situation as a living hell, an unending bad day. They were existing, rather than living, not eating or sleeping, only able to think of getting their daughter back.

Then on the afternoon of Monday, 12 October, the news came. A drain was being investigated close to the house.

I returned on a very cold night with Tony Miguel, our acting CEO Jaine Lovell-Gadd and Wally Thomas. This time hundreds were gathered. Many had helped the search a week earlier. Others had offered support and donations to the family. We waited anxiously as the video cameras searched down the manhole and the pipe towards the willow-root-filled cavity. Lit by generator lights, the digging started and went on unrelentingly until 1am. Finally, she was found.

It's possible to get numb to these kinds of tragedies. Situations like the disappearance of Aisling are played out regularly on our TV screens. Dramas such as Without a Trace dramatise the disappearance of children. Movies like Ransom and Taken are centred on kidnapping. We are obsessed with portraying the terror of having a child go missing. But perhaps in our attempts to re-enact the horror, we put it in the realms of fantasy.

Here in Waitakere a very real drama played out. There were no stage lights or actors – just a distraught and grieving family. They had lost their little girl. That grief will remain with them long after the TV crews have gone.

Our community too is distraught. Everyone here is bewildered and saddened. We are all shocked and horrified that a little girl could die like this in our city. All of us had wanted to know what happened to Aisling. Now we do, it has left us with a sinking feeling.

All we can do now is rally together again to support the Symes family.

I have never been so proud of Waitakere as in the response to this tragedy. Our people have gone out of their way to offer support and kindness every step of the way. At the news of Aisling's disappearance, they took to the streets in their hundreds to find her. When the search was called off they supported the family in any way they could – with practical help, kind words or silent support. Their actions proved that when a tragedy strikes one of us in the West, it strikes all of us.

So, my thanks go to:

- Waitakere City Police Commander Inspector Gary Davey and the hundreds of police who worked on the case;
- Pastor Russell Watts and the Ranui Baptist Church congregation for the support you gave to the Symes family;
- Principal Kevin Choromanski and the pupils, parents and staff members of Pomaria Primary School for enduring a week of fear;



- The residents of Pomaria and Longburn Rds and the wider Henderson community for taking to the streets to search for Aisling;
- Bill Morley and Waitakere City Council's Civil Defence team for aiding the police search;
- Neil Wells and the council's Animal Welfare team for helping the police investigation;
- Sandie Martin and the council's Call Centre staff for listening to a distressed community;
- Wally Thomas and the council's Public Affairs team for advocating on behalf of the family; and
- The thousands from around Waitakere who offered their thoughts and prayers.

I cannot thank you enough. You showed what being a Westie is all about.

As one of our residents emailed me in the aftermath of the tragedy, Aisling was our girl, our daughter, one of our own. She brought us all together. We all share in her loss.

Bob Harvey  
Mayor of Waitakere  
October, 2009

### **Milestones**

Aisling Symes, died age 2. A young life tragically lost in the West.

### **Welcoming the World Cup**

Are you looking forward to 2011?

You should be.

The 2011 Rugby World Cup will be the biggest event ever seen in New Zealand.

It will be more attended than the 1990 Commonwealth Games, more watched than any political summit.

Tens of thousands of sports fans will converge on downtown Auckland.

They will be looking for restaurants and entertainment. They will want to shop and sightsee. They will need places to stay.

We need to give them more than a venue. We need to give them an atmosphere.

I've just been appointed to the 2011 Group preparing the country for the Rugby World Cup. Our purpose is getting the most out of the event. It is going to be a make or break moment for our cities.

There's nowhere with more to gain and more to lose than Auckland. This city is receiving \$97.5 million funding to get itself ready for the World Cup.



If we get it right, we position ourselves as a safe pair of hands for more international events. If we don't, we can't expect to be trusted with other big events like the 2018 Commonwealth Games. It could see us shown up as a showpiece of international incompetence or it could be our lasting legacy on the world stage.

Getting it right means developing the waterfront. The Waitemata Harbour and the land around it have been subject to appalling management for decades. Our greatest asset has been wasted by visionless political hand wringing and tight fisted accountancy. This is a chance to right those wrongs. Projects like the redevelopment of Queen's Wharf are going to give the waterfront an identity that endures.

The cup must also mark the start of a public transport revolution for Auckland. Railways and bus routes are getting much needed upgrades for 2011. It could help us become like London or Sydney, where trains and buses are the most popular mode of transport. But if people struggle with shoddy public transport during the event, they may never go back to it.

We want Auckland to be a place people are proud of when it comes under the spotlight. That means celebrations and community events, urban art and design, collaboration and participation. It means marketing ourselves internationally.

This is a chance to establish an identity for Auckland and New Zealand. Our logo is the silver fern and our brand name is New Zealand 2011.

It is the greatest ad for this country of all time.

But it won't be without the help of all New Zealanders.

The World Cup will rely on thousands of volunteers. They will be involved with everything from ceremonies to Police patrols. In the end, no spectacle is going to mean more than a welcoming smile at the airport or directions to the game. We all have a role to play in making this a great event for Auckland. Our people are going to be the face of the 2011 Rugby World Cup.

We've got to become a nation of 4 million hosts.

### **Hail to the Fire Chief**

In 1990, I presented a centennial medal to Laurie Matthews, volunteer fireman and community activist. He was Mr Glen Eden. He'd outlived all the mayors (except Janet Clews) and continued to be at the very heart of the Glen Eden community until his death this month.

Born in 1924, Laurie was raised in Okato. His parents came to Glen Eden in September 1941. At that time, the railway line crossed the West Coast Road. The overhead bridge at Rua Road had yet to be built. During the war years, he joined the Air Force, serving in the Solomon Islands.

When he returned, the railway line was lowered under the West Coast Road. Laurie set up house and found work in a plaster factory in Kingsland. He would commute there on bike.



That was typical of Laurie. His passion for sport made him very fit. He played rugby for Suburbs and then Glenora. He's told me he was a pretty good player, but the West Auckland fields were nothing but a sea of mud. There was more complaints about the mud of the West than any foul play. He was also club captain of the Glen Eden Athletic Club in 1950, competing against the likes of Murray Halberg.

In 1955, Laurie helped put out a massive blaze at the PCL plant in Red Hills Road. It was so huge and intense it could be seen over the whole of Auckland. From that night, Laurie decided he would dedicate his free time to fire fighting. He joined in 1956 and ended up as the fire chief of Glen Eden for three decades. His retirement in 1986 was a sad day for the fire fighting volunteers and the community as a whole.

Laurie attended all the big fires around Auckland and in the West. He remembers many of the fire engines that served the West. In those days they wore a thick woollen uniform and brass hats. The volunteers around Glen Eden were generally wildly enthusiastic Dutch immigrants. Laurie was a tough task master when it came to their training. All the local houses were wired for fire alarms. I would hear my neighbours leaping out of bed into their boots in the middle of the night, awoken by the buzzer and listening to the sound of the sirens.

In his later years, Laurie was an outstanding contributor to the bowling club and the RSA. In his retirement, he was to be found at the bowling club every weekend and most days. The RSA became a second home to him. His funeral was conducted there.

The Glen Eden community and this Council extends our condolences and sympathy to Laurie's family. I'm certainly going to miss him. The Matthews family lived at the bottom of my drive and he was a magnificent gatekeeper and protector of my security and privacy. Nothing ever escaped Laurie's eye when he was home. He was a wonderful plasterer and house painter and was never short of good advice.

### **A Good Read**

The Iron Bound Coast was published in September. It is an account of the life of Wallace Badham, a Waitakere and Karekare icon.

I spent 10 years editing this book. I'd like to thank our Waitakere Libraries for their kind help with photographs and the Trusts for generous support with printing. Any profits will be going to the Karekare Surf Lifesaving Club for their building fund.

It is a relief to see it getting good reviews. Here is one by Lisa Scott:

The Iron-Bound Coast: Karekare in the Early Years

By Wallace Badham

Edited by Bob Harvey

Published by Libro International, an imprint of [Oratia Media Ltd](#)

*"The Iron-Bound Coast is a thing of beauty. Not just because of the New Zealand landscape of which it speaks, in all its public and private grandeur, but also because of the 215 photos which illustrate this life's-work, most never before published, making this book a treasure in every sense.*

*Lingering over the illustrations I was reminded of the days after my Grandmother's funeral. She, a dour and whiskery-chinned matriarch had always terrified me into dislike – until we small cousins, invited by an Irish*



*aunty to look through a handmade wooden box of crinkle-cut photographs, discovered that instead our grandmother had been quite a beauty, always surrounded by loved ones and, ever-present, the land. The past held out its arms to me and I became a part of it.*

*So too, Wally Badham's story of a life when the world was new on the coast of iron sands isn't just a tale of Karekare in the early years, it tells the lives of new New Zealanders (German, Irish, Dutch and Scots escaping the depression and looking for work clearing forest, on the gum fields, laying track, whatever) in remote settlements between the world wars. Like walking through the gallery of a natural history museum ringing with recorded birdcalls, *The Iron-Bound Coast* allows a peek into a world as rare, fleeting and near-extinct as remembered last glimpses of the Huia.*

*A story of happiness in a hard time and a gorgeous object in its own right, *The Iron-Bound Coast* was discovered by writer and Waitakere City mayor Bob Harvey while researching Auckland's spectacular west coast; originally, the two manuscripts for the work were written in long hand with photos laboriously pasted in.*

*"I realised this was truly a rich gem, a legacy of not only remote Karekare beach, but a grand story of this country." says Bob. "Wally speaks in a voice that reflects the time; a time that is now rapidly fading in memory and people." Setting out to preserve his crystal-clear recollections of early Karekare for his nieces, Wally has instead created a work of living history that speaks to all New Zealanders.*

*Sadly, Wally did not live a happy life after the Karekare years. After a golden youth in his own personal Eden, much went wrong in the life of this enterprising and likable man. As he aged he became taciturn and estranged from his family, drifting into a lonely decline. This was how Bob Harvey came into his life – to listen and to help tell his tale. Curmudgeonly, eccentric Wally had grown away from the person he was during those years in Karekare but thanks to his exceptional journals, the distinctive narrative voice of the jug-eared, beaming Wally of photographic record (in the best, happiest years of his life) shines through.*

*Wally as both a character and narrator is an Everyman for New Zealand in an oblivious past when a black horse could be called 'Darkie' and the enemy a 'Jap.' Brutally blunt, taking pleasures in small things, breathtakingly nose-y, caring enough to ride ten miles by horseback to supply much needed yeast for bread and totally without guile, this is the way we were. With a cast of locals, visitors, hermits and early settlers this book paints a beautiful miniature of a small world of private pioneers, living an almost secret existence in the ranges, refugees from society.*

*Without power, water or basic services, (actually Karekare had electricity before Auckland did) often without medical help, despite this the inhabitants thrived in the little cluster of houses that were Wally's life, raising children, writing books, painting and cooking. Dogs swam ashore from cattle ships to be rescued on the beach and Essexes attempted to ford mud rivers up to their axle rims. Everyday activities required the commitment of physical labour and the friendship of your neighbours. Wally's unpretentious manuscript is an inheritance not only for remote Karekare beach but also a grand story of this country. Beautifully designed by Dee Murch, I'm sure I'm not alone in closing this exceptional book and hoping my own life could leave behind even a tenth such a legacy".*



**20 Questions to Cheer You All Up**

1. Tired of mayoral candidates yet?
2. Would you like John "Obama" Tamihere as the super mayor?
3. Really?
4. Is Banks versus Brown a mayoral campaign or midget wrestling?
5. Were they picked to make Rodney Hide look tall?
6. Making any super babies for the super city yet?
7. Are you planning your campaign to be a community councillor?
8. Is it time for Russell Stewart to get a gong?
9. Are the residents of Herald Island and the North Shore sleeping easy now?
10. Do they know about the 10 new robot controlled surveillance planes yet?
11. Is Pita Sharples our next Prime Minister?
12. Would we know?
13. Have you seen John Key in The Warehouse lately?
14. Have you seen Mike Lee on a bus lately?
15. Had a punch up in the car park of The Hangar lately?
16. Is Inspector Gary Davey Brad Pitt's twin brother?
17. Had a text from Helen? Phil hasn't.
18. Has Chris Carter been away lately?
19. Too scared of Sandra Coney to go to the Piha Café opening?
20. Is Shaun Bignall related to Mr Bean?

A chocolate fish goes to the one with the best answers by the end of November.