

'Think Piece' contribution to the Taituarā response to Future for Local Government Review.

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Achieving Wellbeing of the People, Wellbeing of the Environment, in Partnership with Iwi/Māori: Keeping it real - a 'practical - strategic' perspective

Introduction

This paper has been produced as an initial 'think piece' contribution to inform the response of Taituarā to the Future for Local Government Review process. It explores a strategic approach that is grounded in the case for practical solutions that are developed from a community perspective, rather than a top - down viewpoint.

It suggests some specific ideas design to support the development of how to create the conditions for effective collective action to deliver on wellbeing, for further exploration and development in an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The proposals have been developed with a focus on the reality of implementation of ambitious wellbeing policy at community level. This reflects the authors extensive experience of the conversion of complex, multi - faceted policy on community regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, integrated public services into practical, impactful and community centred delivery models in the UK and internationally.

The Aotearoa New Zealand well - being challenge and opportunity - diagnosis

The interim report from the Future for Local Government Panel 'Ārewa ake te Kaupapa' 'Raising the Platform' sets the scene for a new and progressive way of thinking about how Local Authorities can promote wellbeing.

The report's core diagnosis on wellbeing is clear enough. Local Government has so much potential in its democratic mandate, connections and on the ground perspective to bring partners and communities together to deliver the joined - up responses that well - being really needs. This mission is central to the Leadership of Place.

But the brake on this potential is that Local Government does not hold or strongly enough influence all of the levers needed to assure local people of an effective response across all of the social and economic determinants of well - being. Nor does it always enjoy the trust of and understanding from Central Government needed to provide the mandate and empowerment to broker partnership and delivery at local level.

This 'chicken and egg' scenario plays out in real time in Aotearoa New Zealand's communities. The lack of a clear mandate and leverage for LG across Government and its agencies can hinder delivery on the ground. This in turn erodes trust at a local level – the magic ingredient when working alongside communities that is hard to earn, easy to lose.

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Developing solutions to this ‘collective action’ challenge, between central, regional and local levels of Government and local communities is especially vital for the people and places in Aotearoa New Zealand that are most disadvantaged. These are the people furthest from economic and social opportunity who need the Government’s well - being ambition to work most, and where more progressive ideas are needed – exploring approaches to delivery that have previously been in the ‘too hard box’.

Through the eyes of communities

Our view is that it is through the eyes and lived experiences of people in these communities that any suite of policy proposals for this element of the future role of Local Government should be viewed and tested.

As the Minister has said, this work is about achieving “Wellbeing of the People, Wellbeing of the Environment, in Partnership with Iwi/Māori”. We assume this means ‘whatever it takes’.

For sure this joint work will have taken a wrong turn if it turns out to be dominated by questions of organisational sovereignty, boundaries, power relationships or primacy. This is our chance to establish a mature negotiation and a long term Central - Local Alliance focused only on well-being outcomes for communities.

It is from this perspective that the ideas and angles set out in this ‘think - piece’ paper have been developed. It looks beyond traditional ‘Machinery of the State’ solutions to proposals that embrace what is needed to genuinely empower and enable individuals, families and communities to release their energy, hopes and dreams and to fulfil their potential.

It also explores a specific Taituarā perspective, reflecting the crucial role and experience of Local Government workers and indeed those in other local public services. We see huge potential in finding ways to release their own passion and ideas for communities they know so well and which they often both live and work in.

All of this should acknowledge and learn from the experiences of our communities and partners of previous attempts at delivering well-being in Aotearoa New Zealand, and from relevant international examples to provide inspiration. This paper draws on some of these learnings and examples and suggests a deeper permanent and highly visible joint effort between Central and Local Government to continually explore research and explore the art of the possible on well-being and to track and support progress at a local level.

Keeping it real

We suggest that the product of this work should ‘keep it real’ and be a simply stated, compelling and practical vision for a future way of working together.

When we are done, we should be able to sit on a bus or park bench and explain to any New Zealander in plain terms what we have proposed and why it has a fighting chance of breaking the cycle and delivering well-being for everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand. This

story should be compelling, bold and ambitious, taking us to places we have never been before. The prize is worth the risk.

The bottom line – what is it we are trying to achieve together at community level?

We suggest that a ‘community outward’ perspective on what this work should be trying to achieve that means something real and tangible at community level, can be captured in three core related questions:

- **How can the reforms enable communities to be empowered, trusted and supported where necessary to develop solutions that work ‘inside – out’ from their families and neighbourhoods?**
- **When there is a need for public services to work together at the level of individual, family, community or neighbourhood, how can the reforms create the conditions that encourage, foster and expect integrated working. A ‘Unified Public Service’ approach at a very local level.**
- **To enable 1 and 2 above what are the specific roles, mandate and relationships that Central Government and Local Authorities will need to best support and broker these two mutually interdependent elements of wellbeing delivery?**

We are clear that individually and collectively the answers to these three questions represent a major strategic change management challenge. This requires a focus on systems, structures, cultures, people and operating plans and controls. In our view there are not binary choices between these – a whole system response is required.

We have set out below six proposals that could be explored further to advance this ‘community outward’ ambition and support the relationship building and conditions for whole system change required to create a powerful Central – Local Alliance on wellbeing. We have provided an outline of these ideas at this stage, in some cases with links to practical examples, for further exploration.

We start at the local community delivery level and work outwards, reflecting our view on where the real focus of the review and reforms should be centred – i.e. whatever emerges, will it make a difference for the people who need it to?

Suggestions for further development and exploration

1. Fostering Community Self Help/Self Determination

We suggest that it would be a progressive and bold step if the reform process proposed an emphasis in wellbeing policy, practice and a future central - local relationship on enabling and encouraging self – help, self - determination, independence and capability.

These are factors that sometimes well intended public service interventions can ride over. In the worst excesses this can suck people into support systems upon which they can become reliant, and which can in some cases also be traumatic and stigmatising for them.

Fundamentally this is about an approach that is focused on strengths rather than deficits, and on understanding and releasing the inherent and active or latent assets within communities to promote wellbeing and deliver practical outcomes.

In practice, this has deep implications for the way we traditionally go about supporting communities, particularly those deemed to have the greatest needs – the deficit perspective. For example, a strengths - based approach would imply:

- Policy that makes a presumption of ‘community self - help first’ rather than treating this as a ‘nice to have’ by-product of the public service delivery system – or something that is only developed through local initiative and enlightened leadership.
- Shifts in funding and commissioning practice to release resources directly to communities to support community self - help and asset building. This includes the need for accessible, proportionate methods of allocation and performance monitoring.
- Culture change at Government level and in local services to acknowledge the value of ‘inside out’ responses to wellbeing challenges, and to shift away from any notion of paternalist, ‘permission giving’ relationships with local communities.
- A ‘whole of Government’ commitment to the value of community self – help and how this is supported from the Centre via Local Authorities and other public services. This is fundamental to enable grass roots solutions to address highly joined up issues (see below).

Practical examples

From a **policy** point of view the New Labour Government in the UK produced in 2000 a Policy Action Team report with 33 recommendations to promote Community Self Help. These were then positioned as a central element of the UK National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. This was followed up by high profile Cabinet Office Audits of progress in delivery of the recommendations¹. (See later point on whole of Government response for further detail on the UK Policy Action Team reports and National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal)

From a **front - line delivery** point of view, Leeds City Council in West Yorkshire, UK has successfully delivered a whole system response to introduce a strengths - based approach, with a main focus on health and social care. This has been carefully nurtured over time and has gone to the heart of practice, for example in reforming how social work is carried out. More information is provided in this link to a Local Government Association good practice case study.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/leeds-city-council-strengths-based-working>

¹ https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/9947/1/National_strategy_for_neighbourhood_renewal_-_Policy_Action_Team_audit.pdf

2. Central – Local Relationships, and Local Partnerships – looking beyond the mechanics of government

We are clear that a key part of the collective focus on wellbeing should be on how public services can work together alongside people where there is a need to provide support for a set of complex and interdependent issues where needs are more acute than a self - help approach can fully resolve.

For example, this might include working with struggling families locked in a cycle of connected concerns about some or all of mental and physical health, education, skills, employment, incomes, offending behaviour etc. This also includes how services work together in neighbourhoods where there are concentrations of people and families in these circumstances. These are places where the usual compartmentalised (siloed) public service delivery approach is highly unsuited to the scale and nature of the challenge. A different approach is needed.

These situations need a reliable approach that brings the right skills and resources together to work alongside people and communities (i.e. not 'doing to' or 'for') in a way that is complementary and supportive of self - help efforts outlined in above. This approach also needs to be proportionate, flexible and contingent, i.e. enabling more intensive joining up to support wellbeing in places and situations where that is needed most.

Our perspective is that a mechanistic approach to a central – local relationship that typically encourages or mandates local partnership structures, aligns incentives through the delivery system and introduces partnership performance frameworks focused on wellbeing (similar to UK examples of Local Strategic Partnerships², Local Area Agreements³ and Comprehensive Area Assessments⁴) are necessary as a 'base layer' of central - local delivery relationship, but they are not sufficient to deliver what is really needed in practice at community level.

Our experience is that at the central - local level these partnerships can be weakened by a lack of engagement and ownership of wider Government Departments than the Department tasked with setting them up with Local Authorities (see later note on whole of Government response). This in turn impacts on the urgency to engage felt at local level by, for example, health, education or criminal justice agencies.

² Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have existed in the UK from 2002 in nearly all local authority areas in England. They bring together representatives from the local statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to address local problems, allocate funding, and discuss strategies and initiatives. Most areas retain some form of this partnership still, though they are no longer mandatory or tied to resources allocation.

³ Local Area Agreements were used in the UK from 2004-2012 that set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Authority Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the local level. For info <https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/No.-53-New-Local-Area-Agreements.pdf>

⁴ Comprehensive Area Assessment, or CAA, is a way of assessing local public services in England that was introduced by the UK Government in April 2009. It examined how well councils and other public bodies work together to meet the needs of the people they serve. Abolished in 2012 by incoming UK Coalition Government.

At the local level these strategic partnership arrangements can vary greatly in quality and impact. They are highly reliant on 'coalitions of the willing' and on leadership styles and consequently they can be fragile, needing constant reinvigoration. They can also be 'gamed' (i.e. data and inspections can often present strong average performance and partner relationships but nothing is significantly changing in pockets of disadvantage and in the nature of support and work with communities at neighbourhood level).

We are generally supportive of the mantra 'partnerships develop at the speed of Trust' and of course we see relationships as key to a successful approach throughout the whole system. However, we would offer the challenge that people in disadvantaged communities may be justified in asking "how long are you going to take?" and can be hostages to fortune in terms of how strong, bold and well - developed and dependable partnership working is in their place. This is a form of 'postcode lottery', dependent on relationships, levels of ambition, resources and capability.

To make the leap it wants to make on wellbeing we suggest Aotearoa New Zealand should seek out approaches to delivery that are more secure, progressive and designed to work from 'community outwards'. These should focus on creating agency and empowerment at local level and on the practical task of enabling the joining up of a range of resources with the voice and role of individuals, families and communities at the centre.

3. Whānau Ora as a guiding light

The Whānau Ora culturally-based and whānau-centred approach to wellbeing in Maori communities across Aotearoa New Zealand can provide a guiding light to the art of the possible here. We see potential for this to effectively blend the suggestions we have made above on self - help and partnerships.

We can conceive a 'community outwards' model which also brings the powers, skills and responsibilities of public services to bear in a locally integrated joint effort that can also be adapted to other communities requiring similarly joined up support, for example Pacifica communities and also other neighbourhoods where there are concentrations of people living in poverty and disadvantage – where the wellbeing gap is wide.

The model has the hallmarks of what is needed. A focus on the family group as a whole as the decision-makers who determine their goals and aspirations, building on the strengths and capabilities of whānau and wrapping the necessary services and support around them to get better outcomes and create positive changes in areas such as health, education, housing, employment, improved standards of living and cultural identity. The self-help/self-determination factor is central, as whānau are supported to fully realise the confidence, mana and the belief in self, family and community. <https://whanauora.nz/what-we-do/about/>

The path to developing Whānau Ora could be through a joint commissioning approach, supporting local organisations (for example social enterprises) to play this role at local level, with the right mandate and resources.

We would also suggest that a more progressive approach here could be to consider creating an enabling framework for a form of 'joint venture' model for a Whanau Ora style approach in all communities that need it (i.e. in Māori and non - Māori communities). This could pool the powers, resources and skills of a range of Government agencies together in a single community led delivery (possibly social enterprise) model at community level, embracing schools, health services and other social welfare support.

Such a model could provide the flexibility and coherence of approach needed to.

This approach could also be rooted in a public health perspective, targeting the causes and effects of the determinants of wellbeing and emphasising prevention. This would acknowledge how important and visible public health has become to us all in the last 2 years of Covid 19 pandemic.

In the places that need such an intensive approach, this model would make a significant leap from the complex and fragile partnerships outlined above and put the tools for the complex job together by design where they are needed.

We would suggest further joint exploration on how an approach along these lines could be enabled through the mainstream public service delivery model – i.e. happening because of the system rather than in spite of it, or in parallel to it.

Practical examples UK Urban Regeneration Companies

We see broad parallels between this thinking about 'joint venture' with the concept of Urban Regeneration Companies in the UK. These were organisations developed to deliver at a local level, pooling powers and resources from Local Authorities, Regional Development Agencies and National Level Land and Property Agencies (English Partnerships).

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060420183657/http://www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/urcs.htm>

Though URC's were focused mainly on economic and physical regeneration, the principle of pooling powers and resources to deal with a market failure that none of the organisations could address alone is worth further exploration in an Aotearoa New Zealand wellbeing context – with an added focus on a community led approach.

We believe this could be an exciting element of the reforms and demonstrate action that holds in a wellbeing context to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Practical Example – New York City

Harlem Children's Zones

We see parallels with the community out proposals we are making (and with the principles of Whanau Ora) with the ground - breaking Harlem Children's Zone initiative in New York City.

This started with one audacious mission: to end intergenerational poverty in Central Harlem and lead the way for other long-distressed communities nationwide and around the world to do the same.

Harlem Children's Zone works to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty with on-the-ground, all-around programming that builds up opportunities for children and families to thrive in school, work, and life. From early childhood, education, and career programs to community outreach and wellness initiatives, HCZ opens pathways to mobility and prosperity.

HCZ mission centres around the belief that the most powerful way to fight poverty is to invest in every opportunity for people to rise above it. From education and employment to housing and healthy living, we'll do whatever it takes so that our children, families, and communities can live up to their promising futures.

<https://hcz.org/our-purpose/our-mission-values/>

4. Unleashing the energy and skills of front - line workers

A further suggestion we would make comes specifically from a Taituara perspective. This is focused on the role of Local Government staff, and indeed other local public service workers, including those in the community and voluntary sector.

We see the case for the reforms to specifically acknowledge and value their knowledge, skills, passions and insights into communities. The reforms should take steps to ensure the conditions are in place to enable these to be released to support the delivery of well - being at a community and neighbourhood level. This can include:

- Ensuring bureaucracy does not get in the way of delivery at front line level
- Encouragement for front line workers to work alongside communities and their peers in other public services to work in a joined - up way
- Workforce development and training programmes to support Local Authority managers, staff and staff from other public services to work in integrated way and teams to deliver wellbeing
- The development of integrated, empowered multi - disciplinary teams (see below).

Practical Example

Buurtzorg Neighbourhood Care – Netherlands

The Buurtzorg Neighbourhood Care model is an impressive example of highly autonomous, independent self - organising teams of professionals from across health disciplines, working together at neighbourhood level.

Buurtzorg is a pioneering healthcare organisation established in 2006 with a nurse – led model of holistic care that has revolutionised community care in the Netherlands.

This model (not unlike Whānau Ora) initially grew ‘outside’ the formal public service system. Buurtzorg scaled very quickly across the Netherlands from 1 to 850 local teams, and also grew into other areas of care such as mental health, children and families and also supported other Dutch international care organisations to take on the Buurtzorg model.

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/jos-de-blok-buurtzorg-home-healthcare-nov13.pdf>

5. An explicit ‘Place Leadership’ role for Local Authorities - ‘with clout’

A core assumption we make in the above proposals is that at the local level there must be a credible ‘convenor’ to provide the engagement, make the connections and brokerage, to bring together work across the wide spectrum of wellbeing activity across sectors and organisations.

We believe that Local Authorities are the natural suitor to this role owing to their democratic mandate, their local knowledge and the relationships they have on the ground across organisations. To be clear, this is not about primacy, control or status, but about the performance of a vital role in the delivery of wellbeing designed to secure focus, coherence and effective action on the ground.

It will greatly support delivery of impact for communities if the future of Local Government reforms could explicitly confirm a mandate for Local Authorities of Leaders of Place. This should also be communicated, emphasised and embedded in policy across Government as a key factor in the delivery arrangements for wellbeing.

With this mandate should come clear explanation of what the Place Leadership role means in practice – this should be clearly embedded within the new mandate for Local Authorities arising from the reform process and widely communicated across Government and its agencies. It should also come with real authority – the access to the tools and accountability levers needed to provide legitimate leadership locally, and also to secure redress and action across Government if that is required – i.e. the clout to get things done.

We can see how the development of a form of ‘single conversation’ with Government would support this (relates to point 2 above on mechanics) and this would need to meaningfully engage all key Government departments in a mature conversation about the delivery of wellbeing at a local level.

6. A whole of Government approach – and a long - term commitment to coherence in policy, strategy and delivery of wellbeing

It is clear that Aotearoa New Zealand’s wellbeing challenge is one that has implications for policy across the whole of Government. We are aware that the review Panel is also tracking developments in particular in Health and Education policy.

Think piece – Not Taituarā official policy. Endorsed as a contribution to the debate 11/02/22

It is clearly vital that there is coherence and alignment between the policy direction emerging here, and in other fundamentally important areas such as welfare and justice and that these enable a supportive and permissive environment to underpin the local and 'community outwards' approach to wellbeing outlined in this paper.

This will require a tight grip on policy coordination at the centre of Government at this crucial stage – not least to ensure that the emerging wellbeing role for Local Government is enhanced by complementary and connected policy and programmes across other Government Departments.

We would also suggest that this emphasis on policy coherence should be a constant feature of the wellbeing focus going forward. We see potential for a Centre of Government 'Wellbeing Unit' that focuses on and connects research, policy, strategy and delivery of impact on wellbeing across the whole of Government.

This should also create an inclusive environment that brings together people from central government departments, Local Government and also community organisations and others with the skills and perspectives to effectively inform and support the delivery of wellbeing for New Zealanders.

Good Practice examples

In terms of broad functions and practice, the development of a Centre of Government Wellbeing Unit could be informed by international best practice approaches including for example:

Finland's 'Sitra' – an arm's length Government research agency providing expert research and evaluation expertise to Government <https://www.sitra.fi/en/>

France Strategie autonomously informing Strategy across French Government <https://www.strategie.gouv.fr>

The UK Strategy Unit and Delivery Unit model, now replicated worldwide, including in Australia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister%27s_Strategy_Unit

<https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/prime-ministers-delivery-unit-uk>

A more direct comparison is provided by the example of the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) which was set up by the New Labour Government to conceptualise and help convert to reality the New Labour Government's 'New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal' – a flagship election policy. The Social Exclusion Unit was in its time a powerful force at the Centre of Government, very close to the Prime Minister and afforded his Authority and mandate.

The work the SEU carried out across a range of social policy areas was at the time groundbreaking and in fact still informs a lot of current UK social policy, over 20 years later.

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The staffing of the Unit itself and the model of development of policy was also highly inclusive – reaching way beyond Government for understanding and solutions. This was illustrated in the work of Policy Action Teams, featured below which provided the rich content from which the seminal National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was crafted.

Later on, the same principles were used in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, where a highly inclusive and multi sector, multi skilled team supported delivery of the Governments flagship New Deal for Communities Programme (the NDC Support Unit).

Practical Example

UK Social Exclusion Unit - Policy Action Teams

The 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) were set up by the Social Exclusion Unit created by the New Labour Government led by Prime Minister Rt Hon Tony Blair at the end of 1998. The aim was to provide essential building blocks for the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Billed as the biggest example to date of joined-up Government, they represented a significant departure from the usual policy making models.

Rather than being made up entirely of Whitehall officials, the PATs brought together civil servants from a range of departments and outside experts – including residents – with practical experience of living and working in deprived neighbourhoods. And beyond the PATs themselves, each Team adopted an open approach and consulted widely, particularly with people living in deprived neighbourhoods. This made for a unique experience and helped ensure that the recommendations made were outward-focused and reality-tested.

The Policy Action Team reports were each published in their own right as well as in a compendium (link below). They were cleverly crafted together to form the basis National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and the delivery programmes that support its implementation at local level and across the whole of Government.

https://www.artshealthresources.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2000-Policy-Action-Team-summaries_compedium.pdf

We believe that this in itself could be crucial to driving the cultural change and the mutual understanding between central and local government that the review diagnostic identified – over time bridging ‘the trust gap’. This is also an area where Taituarā could play a direct brokerage role, in working with the Centre and whole of Government to provide access and connection to people in Local Authorities with the skills and energy to make such a unit work.

Conclusion

This note has provided an initial contribution to support the development of the Taituarā response to the review process. The suggestions made are designed to come from a practical perspective, and to encourage thinking that is focused on how the energy of local communities and of local public services and their staff can be released to support delivery of the wellbeing objectives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

End of Note

Chris Marsh 28 02 2022

In a UK context Chris Marsh's experience includes a role in the Prime Minister's (Rt Hon Tony Blair) Cabinet Office Strategy Unit review of policy in deprived areas, which led the development of Local Area Agreements between Central and Local Government.