

Timaru District Council

Submission on the Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Bill

To the Governance and Administration Select Committee

Introduction

1. The Timaru District Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Bill.
2. This submission is made by the Timaru District Council, 2 King George Place, Timaru. The contact person is Damon Odey, Mayor of the Timaru District. I can be contacted at Timaru District Council, phone (03) 687 7200 or PO Box 522, Timaru 7940.
3. We do not wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.
4. The Timaru District Council is a local authority in the South Island serving over 46,000 people in South Canterbury. The main settlement is Timaru, with other smaller settlements of Geraldine, Pleasant Point and Temuka. The economy of the district is strongly agriculturally based.
5. The Council is made up of a Mayor and nine Councillors serving three wards. Three Community Boards also exist in the District.

General

6. The Council notes the main objectives of the Bill are:

"to restore the purpose of local government to be "to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities";

to restore territorial authorities' power to collect development contributions for any public amenities needed as a consequence of development;

*and to make a minor modification to the development contributions power."*¹

7. The Bill represents a further change in a long history of changes to the purpose and role of local government. Despite this constant political tuning, Council's focus has always been on making the Timaru District the best it can be. Council has previously submitted that it believes some form of cross-party agreement to the purpose of local government would be of benefit, rather than kicking the political football backward and forward.

¹ Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Bill

8. The Council supports submissions to the Bill presented by Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ), the Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM) and the Canterbury Mayoral Forum.
9. The Council supports the Bill in its entirety.

Community Well-being

10. The Council supports a focus on Community Well-being as the most appropriate purpose of local government. The changes proposed will ensure a coherent, clear and consistent broad empowering role and purpose of local government.
11. Council does not subscribe to the view that the reinstated purpose will lead to its involvement in a myriad of new activities. Reports including the Joint Central/Local Government Funding Project team (2006), Independent Inquiry into local government rates (2007) and Local Government Commission review of the Local Government Act (2008) found no evidence of significant amounts of new activity. These reports were released prior to the original 2010 legislative change to the purpose of local government.

Council believes sufficient checks and balances are woven into local government legislation to ensure a Council remains fully accountable to its community for all of its activities.

12. The essence of local government is to provide services that help build communities, in partnership with central government and other agencies. Council recognises it cannot do everything, and that a partnership approach may often be required, particularly in areas which have not traditionally been a role for Council.
13. Council's involvement as a leader in its local community assumes it should be involved in activities that support or enhance the community's well-being. This is entirely appropriate. The proximity of local government to its users enables good understanding and the tailoring of services to meet local needs and preferences. The existing purpose statement has called into question some of these activities. For example, Council's currently play an important role in supporting local economic development, yet the existing purpose is silent on this vital activity.
14. Many community debates and discussions involve aspects of environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being. Council's role does not always have to involve money. It can provide advice, expertise, support or other resources that will help enhance its contribution to the community's well-being.
15. Council would support further work to enable a clear, objective and robust monitoring pathway for measuring a community's well-being, both drawn from the activities it is directly involved with and those that central government and other agencies provide within our communities. We do measure various elements such as quality of life via our Community Survey. We would value some guidance in this area from government going forward, perhaps via some of the work happening through the Treasury Living Standards Framework.

Development Contributions

16. The Council also supports proposals to widen the definition of community infrastructure that can be considered in assessing development contributions and other minor amendments to the Development Contributions framework.
17. Council outlined our original opposition to this measure in our 2014 submission on the Local Government 2002 Amendment Bill (No. 3). Libraries, museums, reserves and other recreational and community facilities are a critical part of the services provided by local authorities that contribute to a community's well-being. Growth contributes to a need for more or changes to the levels of service provided by these activities. It is entirely appropriate that developers contribute towards a portion of these costs where their activities are contributing to their use.
18. Otherwise, the total costs will fall to existing ratepayers resulting in some subsidisation of the costs of development. A development contribution will help reduce the risk that some community facilities are not built or are built or upgraded at a significant reduction in scale. There is only an expectation that developers will pay a fair proportion of these costs to help ensure communities remain vibrant and exciting places to live.