



SHALE CHAMBERS: WAITEMATA LOCAL BOARD REPORT

Clarity of role and more power to local boards; key to improved community engagement

It is three months until the local body elections, and the issues and people offering themselves in Waitemata to address the important challenges facing us all are becoming clearer.

The councillor position is between two ticket-aligned independents; the incumbent, experienced long-term Councillor, Mike Lee and the high-profile challenger, Bill Ralston. Local Board member Rob Thomas is also a declared independent candidate for a third time. It will be the contest to watch this election.

Two teams are vying for your support for the local board; the incumbent centre-left City Vision ticket of which I am a part, and the new centre-right ticket of Auckland Future. The issues that divide are never as clear at the local level as they are at the council table. City Vision will stand on its record of progressive achievement and strong community voice. It is yet to be seen how Auckland Future's message of rates restraint, and resulting focus on core council services; established and aimed at capturing a majority of like-minded councillors around the governing body table, will translate to the population-based, bulk funded, local board level.

Auckland Council as a Super City is nearly six years old. The Royal Commission on Auckland Governance that preceded the Super City highlighted two issues: regional governance was weak and fragmented, and community engagement was poor. Public support and confidence in council is currently at an all-time low with only 15% satisfied with its performance. Auckland Council's strengths and successes (and there are many) and weaknesses and shortcomings (of which there are many examples, mostly failures to address community engagement) will inevitably become part of the campaign, too.

Oddly, Rodney Hide's experiment in local government for Auckland, with its executive mayor, regional decision-making governing body, 21 local boards to address the local, and Independent Maori Statutory Board; a world first in terms of structure for local government contained no requirement for any review of its effectiveness.

Council is nevertheless conducting its own 'Governance Framework Review' at present. It will report shortly. The purpose of the review is to assess 'how the Auckland governance model is meeting the aim of strong regional decision-making complemented by decisions that meet diverse local needs and interests'. That is where we come in as local boards. A lot of it is inward looking, but it is importantly charged with looking at the level of funding of local boards, and the delegations to meet those local needs. There is growing acknowledgement that there is a lack of recognition of the governance model, that decision making is not shared between governing body and local boards, and that local boards lack sufficient power, profile and respect to meet their potential.

Coincidentally, the Committee for Auckland recently commissioned and released a report on 'The Governance of Auckland: 5 years on'. You may never have heard of the Committee for Auckland. It is secretive, its influence on Auckland obscure, and in nearly six years your central local board has never heard from them, but the report is rather good.

Local boards are said to lack power and potency. Most residents don't feel they can participate in local board decision making. The lines between local decisions and regional decisions are blurred. The local board model needs to be stronger for




Completed pathways renewals in Moira Reserve, Ponsonby

regional governance to deliver. Here, here, is what we say, although we try very hard with engagement.

Council Controlled Organisations also feature prominently. Whilst CCOs are said to facilitate commercial, professional and politically unimpeded delivery of crucial services, they also operate as functional silos, where assets and services operate independently from the rest of council. Auckland Transport's detached nature in particular was highlighted.

We believe Auckland Transport is simply too large. Its core capabilities do not include town centre and streetscape placemaking and improvements. These functions should transfer back to council and elected members to oversee. Maintenance of greenspaces and street toilets have already come back to council in part recognition of this Auckland Transport weakness. The community needs a far greater say in the development of our streets as places; from town centre and street furniture improvements to street banners and trading management.

Let's hope that any outcome of the latest reports and council review can help unlock community engagement and confidence in council. Strengthening the role and powers of local boards is an important part of achieving this goal. Your local board will continue to be a strong local voice, but a larger budget and clarified responsibilities certainly will assist. (SHALE CHAMBERS) 

Contact me: shale.chambers@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz