

Mike Cohen Devonport-Takapuna Board Member's Report To The Devonport-Takapuna Local Board Meeting 20th February 2018

Council Squanders Potential Opportunity to Make a Difference on Community Charged Cheltenham Beach with Minimal Environmental Impact

Being a very local elected representative and walking on Cheltenham Beach daily (except Wednesday) I have had the benefit from all shades of opinion from the first storm and king tide on the 5th of January 2018 to now as to what Council needs to do tackle the aftermath and impact on Cheltenham Beach from these natural events.

In my 20 years in local community politics I do not succumb to the popular demands if the expert evidence both inside and outside (we are fortunate in Devonport to have a range of nationally and internationally recognised experts who live in our area) advise that this short term fix will result in adverse affects both in the medium and long term.

This advice in past has meant we have treated Cheltenham Beach as a living beach rather than a "sand pit" to be groomed, and as a result have only taken action when it has been assessed that nature is unlikely to address the situation, which generally means that the seaweed build-up from a storm etc is not going to be removed by nature from the beach.

The first storm combined with a king tide resulted in a massive shift of sand off the beach (conceivably 1 to 2 metres off the surface) from North Head end to around Balmain Reserve in a 11 hour period. Further there was a massive dump of seaweed particularly at both the Bath street and the North Head ends.

As an elected representative I have always shouldered the pressures at the "coal face" I am the person easily site accessible but I feel let down by the invisible Bureaucracy . I have sought expert guidance only had silence in order to formulate if practical and environmentally appropriate a plan should an opportunity arises.

During last week ending Friday the 9th of February as a lay person I perceived an opportunity given a relatively narrow but concentrated row of seaweed had

been pushed to the land edge of the beach from Macky Ave to the North Head end for Council to take some action.

It seem a win win situation where those who saw Cheltenham Beach as a living beach could probably live with it and those who were frustrated of Council inaction since early January (aside from that ill-advised attempt with equipment at near full tide) would welcome it.

Nothing happened the invisible system did not inter-act in any way or provide advice or a plan or actually took action. As an elected representative we were let down and unsupported.

That the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board:

- 1. Request an immediate briefing and possible courses of action while still environmentally protecting the beach to address the above normal amount of seaweed on Cheltenham Beach.**
- 2. How our Coastal experts can be more responsive in the future and recognise that they need to be inter-acting with the Board in a timely manner to best equip us when engaging with our local community**

Auckland Council's Call Centre

We are all required: elected representatives, Council staff and the public to use as the first point of all call is communicate with Auckland Council's Call Centre either by the internet or phone.

From the outset from my own experience and feedback from locals they have high praise for the staff that work at the Call Centre.

The issue is they complain that it can take up to 30 minutes to inter-act with a real person. Given we are less likely for staff to live and work in their own area as would of been the situation 50 years ago our system is even more reliant on feedback and input from local people as to what is happening or not at the "coal face".

If the call centre system is so understaffed that we all experience great difficulty in reaching a real person, this will lead to our local people giving up on even trying to input into our system. This would be a tragedy which Council ought to make all effort to reverse and avoid as the current situation

will ultimately lead to even lower service levels and greater mis-trust of and apathy towards Council.

On the other hand we do not want Council to reduce the highly appreciated service that we get when we eventually reach a call centre staff by requiring call centre staff to be less engaged with the public as Council's solution to the time delays in accessing our Call Centre.

That the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board:

- 1. Acknowledges the great work done by our Call Centre staff when they are inter-acting with the public.**
- 2. Recognises the importance of our Auckland Call Centre as the first point of call for the public, elected representatives and other Council staff and an inability to access in a timely manner ultimately leads to even lower service levels and greater mis-trust of and apathy towards Council by the public**
- 3. Request that the Relevant parts of Auckland Council address the apparent under-staffing of the Auckland Council Call Centre to markedly reduce the time it takes to reach Call Centre Staff, but not by reducing the quality of staff inter-action when the public finally reaches them.**

Project 17

We were sold by our Councillors and relevant staff that Project 17 was the great step forward.

I have shown patience from its inception on July 1st 2017, thereby giving the contractors and relevant staff plenty of opportunity to bed the system down. We highlighted the areas like rubbish collection from our Beaches, parks and reserves and which locations from past experience will prove challenging. The idea that the system would identify when a particular area was under pressure was attractive. The contractors to respond by having more collections through the day and or the addition of extra capacity.

The response has been slow to react if at all.

I take Balmain Reserve and the 2 rubbish bins abutting Cheltenham beach, because I walk through there most mornings between 6:45 and 7:20. With the amazing weather we enjoyed through December/January these rubbish bins (I have plenty of photos over the December/February period) are invariably overflowing, the situation is not helped by clever seagulls who pull stuff out of the bin (the more time they have the bigger the mess). What is impressive is the general public try valiantly to put their rubbish in the bin or if impossible stack next to it. Given the wonderful balmy evenings/nights plenty of people either by bringing take-aways from nearby establishments or picnic from home are enjoying being at the beach.

I noticed an extra bin had been added on Friday the 9th February in Balmain Reserve (why did it take over 2 months for a noticeable response). I noticed on Sunday (11th) that the rubbish pickup near the clock tower was around 9:00 or even thereafter, much later than our previous collection under the old contract which was closer to 6:45 to 7:30

Another wider issue occurred on the 26th December (Boxing Day) on Narrowneck/Woodall Reserve. At about 9:30 I drove past Narrowneck/Woodall Park in 20 years I have never seen such a mess in the carpark and nearby and at Narrowneck. I immediately rang our Call Centre that struggled to get an appropriate response from the contractor. I was concerned that within hours the beach would have hundreds of visitors and the carpark would be full. Our area looked like a rubbish tip. In the end it was agreed for me to ring our contract manager, I give the highest praise for his quick response contractors were there within the hour and Narrowneck was cleaned up. When I double checked Woodall had been missed a further call got an even quicker response to clean up.

The next day the system was working I therefore sent a text commending our contract manager. Why a complete meltdown occurred on Boxing Day I don't know.

On Friday (9th) morning I walk along Queens Parade there rubbish bins were overflowing. It was interesting that the meeting we had later with the RNZN they also made mention of the rubbish bins along Queens Parade. Local mention that the contractors don't always collect everyday or by collecting late miss out a collection during the day.

Sand obstructing path Windsor Reserve

From the first storm early in January sand from Windsor Beach was blown etc on to the path at the heritage lamp end of the path crossing the reserve.

When people started work again in January it was impossible for those with heels to use the path, they were force to go on the grass assuming it was not wet. I did send it through to our staff I wanted to learn how long the system would take to respond, which contractor the rubbish collector since this bins are only a metre away the grass cutter, the weed-eater, upshot no one reported it from the system if so no adequate response up to Friday the 9th February we still have the sand obstructing the use of the path across Windsor Reserve and the path on the outside abutting the beach is also covered with sand.

My concern who in the system is meant to trigger in a timely fashion and if we are totally relying on Board members and the public who have great difficulty accessing our Call Centre we have a problem.

Weedeating

A local who has lived here for decades noted week-ending the 9th of February a contractor weedeating along Queens Parade where he currently lives. As Members are aware the distance from the grass to the park cars is not great.

What amazed him as compared with the past and the legacy Council the contractor in question showed no concern or responsibility for the grass going over the car or the possibility of stones damaging the paintwork. This working in a vacuum and lack of empathy he found disturbing.

I think this is example to pick up with our contract manager and the head contractor.

That the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board:

- 1. Request that the relevant part of Council and our Governing Body take decisive action to ensure Project 17 is complying with the contract.**
- 2. That greater scope is given to our Council Staff to ensure the contractors are fulfilling their contract on a daily basis and that contractors actually respond in a timely fashion**

Stormwater runoff from properties into our Reserves

This was in my report for the Boards November Meeting given the Milford situation it is still relevant

That the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board:

- 1. Request Council Officers report back to the board on the current rules about private properties discharging stormwater runoff into public reserves**
- 2. Who is responsible for the damage caused by the drainage onto the reserve and the cost to mitigate and or address the flooding on public land**

I had in January a site meeting in Burns Reserve with the community. Aside from the Parks complete lack of support for our community planting (which I will cover under Parks) it feeds into issues around the stormwater. The overgrown nature of the creek is also causing the inability of the stormwater to run freely away (I have photos of the build up, sent to Council). Obviously locals are concern of flooding.

Parks

Local Board Funding wasted and the Community Goodwill Squandered

Last year we allocated thousands of dollars for environmental improvements. In Burn's Reserve we undertook with significant support from the community a planting program along the Burns Reserve Creek/stream. On the Saturday in question it was appalling weather conditions but locals wanted to continue the task with a high level of community spirits. With only a few to plant (which

locals promised to plant when the weather improved) we had to call a halt because of the rapidly rising water levels (feeds into the concerns about stormwater and flooding see under stormwater)

So when I was invited for a site meeting because the calls by the local community were being ignored by Council and there was apparently a high level of local frustration given their past efforts.

I was dismayed that most of our community planting funded by the DTLB was dead and/or overgrown by weeds and unwanted vegetation.

It was obvious that this park of the Reserve was not being maintained.

This neglect by Council Parks has resulted in the squandering of community goodwill in their volunteering for community planting and the funds we provided for this environmental initiative.

That the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board:

- 1. Demand reimbursement from Auckland Council Parks and or other relevant part of Council for the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board funds expended on the initiative at Burns Reserve.**
- 2. An apology from Auckland Council Parks to local residents for the situation created by not maintaining the area in question namely the banks of the stream.**

Reduced Service Levels and a Lack of a Timely Response

Rubbish Collection see under the heading Project 17

No replacement of net at Woodall Park beach volley ball court.

A request was made again in early November to replace the net. Urgency was requested in order that it was done before the summer holidays, so that the many visitors and locals could enjoy the valued facility. We are now mid-way through February and still nothing has been done?

It's amazing when I insisted on permanent nets on Milford Reserve about 6 years ago , rather than the previous system where a person who thought they might play beach volley ball on Saturday had to go to Takapuna to the Council service centre pay a \$50 bond to get a net which they got back if they returned it to Takapuna the following week.

Not surprising that very few people ever used the 2 beach volley ball courts on the Milford Reserve. Obviously it was pointed out to me the risks of vandalism etc. I prefer to take the chance so people could easily use the courts. We only had one net so it was agreed to use an old cricket net in storage for the other court. We managed this exercise within 2 days, and as an additional factor to the best of knowledge in the 6 years the 2 nets have not been vandalised.

I nearly got to the stage that the system was now so unresponsive of going out and buying the net myself so people in Narrowneck could play beach volley ball over summer with a reasonable net that reflects that Auckland Council cares about maintaining a reasonable standard and image.

Maunga Authority on MT Victoria/Takarunga

The letter dated 12 February written by the Maunga Authority of the action they are taking to ban vehicles from Takarunga/Mt Victoria that they sent out. I am concern with their behaviour given they scheduled a meeting with the DTLB for Friday the 16th February 2018, which one could conclude they are not interested in working in partnership and collaboratively with the local board and the Devonport Peninsula local community.

Obviously any action the Maunga Authority takes in isolation on Takarunga could have serious safety implications for children of Devonport Primary School and put further pressure on the availability of parking in the Devonport Village, to name but two examples.