

Quality of Life Indicators

Introduction

There has been growing acceptance during the last two or three years of the need for public policymakers in New Zealand to embrace a model of community involvement in decision making (community governance). One reflection of this is the strategic direction of the current Government in recognising the importance of an effective partnership between themselves and local government throughout New Zealand.

The outcomes sought by central and local government are common. They relate to a vision for high quality social, economic and environmental outcomes in our communities both today and for future generations. Furthermore it is evident that the outcomes will only be achieved if each partner contributes those elements which it is best placed to contribute.

The importance of effective partnerships between central and local government, and also a wide range of groups in the not-for-profit and business sectors, is now widely accepted. There is less agreement as to the means of achieving this. It is clear, however, that more effective partnerships will require new ways for the spheres of government to discuss priority setting, programme design and programme implementation. This will involve the application of a battery of tools and techniques. One of the key tools will be the effective use of quality of life indicators.

This report presents for the first time a consistent set of quality of life indicators for the six largest cities in New Zealand. It does not cover the whole country (although it does cover around 40% of the New Zealand population). Some of the indicators used may prove to be less useful over time, and there are indicators not included that need to be developed to aid decision-making. Nonetheless, while recognising some deficiencies, the report is a milestone in putting forward a widely based set of quality of life indicators for a significant part of the country.

There has been a great deal of focus over the last two decades on measuring the success of particular programmes (output measurement). There has been considerably less focus on tracking the extent to which the quality of life in our society, which these outputs are aimed at improving, is itself getting better or worse.

In launching this report the six cities invite central government to work with them on the ongoing development of these indicators and their use for improving the impacts of the programmes which we deliver. This project provides an opportunity for looking jointly at the effects of the work of both central and local government on influencing the overall quality of life in New Zealand.

Background

A National Indicators Project was started in 1999 by the councils of the six largest cities in New Zealand and sponsored by their Chief Executives/City Managers. These are:

Auckland City Council
Bryan Taylor

Christchurch City Council
Mike Richardson

Manukau City Council
Colin Dale

North Shore City Council
Rob Hutchinson

Waitakere City Council
Harry O'Rourke (Acting)

Wellington City Council
Garry Poole

At the time, the initiative was a response to the growing pressures on urban communities, concern about the impacts of urbanisation and the effects of this on the wellbeing of citizens.

The project began with the objective of selecting a set of key indicators to measure changes in social conditions in New Zealand's six largest cities. Following a period of research to identify social indicators, it became clear that to really begin to understand what was happening in the urban environments of the six cities, whole quality of life must be assessed. To do this, it was necessary to also look at economic and environmental conditions.

A range of indicators was initially selected to help understand how strong these urban communities are, how they are changing and what pressures they are under. The indicators were assessed against a set of criteria* for best fit and were seen as 'Draft Indicators'.

* Criteria for indicator selection: relevant to project, scope, measurable now, cost effective to obtain, valid, understandable and available at a six-city level.

To check that the project was on course to assess conditions, a number of government departments, individuals and agencies were consulted. Many responded and these are listed in the final chapter of the report. This provided technical feedback on the suitability of certain data and proved invaluable as it helped consolidate the approach. As a result, the project's initial indicator set was refined. The set was also refined due to the considerable technical constraints in the selection of indicators e.g. data availability and comparability. Because of this, the most desirable or highest priority indicators, and therefore the information that they yield, are not necessarily included. Data issues related to this project have been previously documented and a summary is included in this report. It is intended to host a workshop for interested government departments on data and technical issues as a follow up to the publication of this report.

Identifying indicators that would provide relevant information on the six cities concerned has taken almost two years. The process involved research on similar work overseas and in New Zealand, identification of issues and areas of concern to cities to decide what would be monitored, selection of a set of appropriate indicators, collecting and analysing data based on these indicators, and finally, the writing of this report.

Issues and Indicators

The issues relating to the six cities are listed here along with underlying matters that make it a concern. These issues and concerns formed the basis of indicator selection and monitoring. The indicators are shown on the opposite page. The report begins with a demographic overview to provide a background on the basic make up of the six cities.

Health, Housing and Education

Health, housing and education are key social issues. The six cities are chiefly interested in the physical and mental health of the population, people's ability to meet their basic needs and their ability to be self-determining. Particular concerns are around the accessibility, affordability, quality and appropriateness of health care, housing and education.

Employment and the Economy

A healthy local economy contributes to employment. Secure employment and a reasonable income are fundamental for quality of life in urban communities. For members of society who might be marginalised, a basic factor in improving their situation is employment, and the associated sense of inclusion and self-worth.

Safety and the Urban Environment

Safety and perceptions of safety feature highly in people's view of their living environment. This includes consideration of crime levels, road safety and personal safety. The urban environment where we live is directly related to safety and quality of life. There are many concerns about the quality of urban environments but air and water quality, access to facilities, and the impacts of transport are key. Issues that informed the selection of indicators include pollution, mobility and the look and feel of the city.

Community Cohesion and Democracy

A sense of belonging and the ability to participate are important factors in the quality of life of individuals and communities; these are elements that help forge a cohesive community. Community cohesion is a difficult concept to define or measure directly, so indicators relating to citizens' perceptions and the existence of networks have been included as proxies. Councils also have a key role in building relationships with tangata whenua to enhance their role in governance of the city. The participation of community members in governance structures is acknowledged as a key factor in developing strong communities and improving quality of life.

QUALITY OF LIFE Indicators

HEALTH

Mental illness
Infant mortality
General practitioners
Meningococcal disease & TB
Physical activity
Immunisation
Birth weights
Suicide

HOUSING

Home ownership
Costs & affordability
Accommodation supplement
Central/local govt. housing
Crowded households
Intensification

EDUCATION

School decile ratings
Early childhood education
Suspensions & stand-downs
Community education
Qualification levels

DEMOGRAPHICS

Income
Migration
Population growth
Household composition
Children in low-income families
Social deprivation
Age structure
Ethnicity

DEMOCRACY

Representation
Councils & the Treaty of Waitangi
Involvement in decision making
Election turnout

COMMUNITY COHESION

Community strength
Contact with neighbours
Recognition of diversity
Unpaid work

URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Noise
Open space
City look & feel
Air / beach water quality
Mode of travel to work
Access to recreation
Public transport
Graffiti

SAFETY

Burglary
Juvenile offending
Unintentional child injuries
Notifications to CY&FS
Traffic fatalities
Feeling safe

EMPLOYMENT & ECONOMY

Unemployment
Jobs by industry
Food price & retail sales
Occupational structure
Regional economy
Hourly earnings