

Joint media release from the Councils of North Shore, Waitakere, Auckland, Manukau, Rodney, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, Hutt, Porirua, Christchurch and Dunedin.

EMBARGOED UNTIL THE OFFICIAL RELEASE OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT, 1PM, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2007

QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT 2007: GENERAL MEDIA RELEASE

People living in New Zealand cities have a high quality of life but local authorities must work together to ease the pressures of growth, a new report says.

The 2007 Quality of Life report, released by the Metropolitan Sector Group today, provides a comprehensive assessment of the quality of life in 12 New Zealand cities, as part of a multi-council initiative.

“This report shows that urban New Zealand is essentially a great place to live, work and play,” said Jim Harland, Chief Executive of Dunedin City Council and Quality of Life Project sponsor.

The report showed people living in New Zealand cities had a high quality of life, with growing populations and economies, and a high degree of social cohesion even with increasing diversity, he said. The vast majority of residents in the cities (90%) felt they had a positive overall quality of life.

“City residents feel that they enjoy a good quality of life, are happy and satisfied with their lives and report that they are in good health. On the whole, they have a sense of pride in their city and consider that their cities offer them a culturally rich and diverse arts scene.”

The Quality of Life project started with six councils in 1999 and has since expanded to 12 territorial local authorities, including: Rodney; North Shore; Waitakere; Auckland; Manukau; Hamilton; Tauranga; Porirua; Hutt; Wellington; Christchurch; and Dunedin.

The report provides data on people; knowledge and skills; health; safety; housing; social connectedness; civil and political rights; economic standard of living; economic development; the natural environment; and the built environment.

Mr Harland said the aim was to give decision-makers more information to improve the quality of life in major New Zealand urban areas.

“Monitoring across the cities helps councils develop a consistent set of indicators, identify major urban issues and develop comprehensive responses,” he said.

Since the last Quality of Life report in 2003, many improvements had been made in all four areas of well-being, including economic, environmental, cultural and social, said Mr Harland.

The 2007 report showed most residents in the 12 cities were generally satisfied with their lives, enjoyed clean air and water and had ready access to employment, housing and services such as health and education, he said.

The economy was strong, median personal and household incomes had increased in the cities, and there had been an increase in jobs and a drop in unemployment. The 12 cities accounted for nearly two-thirds of all economic activity in New Zealand and the city economies had grown, on average, by 4.3% per year over the five years to March 2006.

Aspects of safety in the cities had also improved, he said. The rate of serious and fatal road crashes fell, there was a decline in the rate of workplace accidents and the overall rate of crime declined.

However, the report also highlighted a number of challenges. The key issue for the cities was how to accommodate growth in a sustainable way, said Mr Harland.

“Our cities make up more than half of New Zealand’s population and are continuing to grow rapidly. Most of New Zealand’s total population growth in the next 20 years is projected to take place in the 12 cities.”

Such fast growth placed pressure on city infrastructure. Traffic congestion, some instances of poor air and water quality, graffiti, vandalism, litter and noise were all issues that needed to be addressed.

The local authorities also acknowledged that not everyone experienced all the positive aspects of New Zealand cities and the gap between those with a better or poorer quality of life was widening in some instances, Mr Harland said.

“Action is now needed to plan for long-term growth in our cities, to improve access to key services, and promote economic and environmental sustainability,” said Mr Harland.

The 12 cities would work together to identify the priority issues and which agencies needed to address them. It was essential that infrastructure and services supported the continued population growth in cities, and the increasing social and cultural diversity, he said.

“An even better quality of life for all city residents will come about only if local government, central government and our communities work together.”

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National Highlights

The report includes 68 key quality of life indicators and 186 measures across 11 areas. The data has been drawn from Quality of Life surveys undertaken in 2004 and 2006 (conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development) and from secondary data sources, such as government agencies and non-governmental organisations. The report looks at resident perceptions and objective measures of health and well-being, community, crime and safety, education and work, the environment, culture and identity.

Key results

Notable findings include:

- The vast majority of residents in New Zealand and in the 12 cities say they have a positive overall quality of life. The vast majority (90.0%) of residents felt they had a positive overall quality of life, rating it as good or extremely good.
- Life expectancy has increased across all 12 cities.
- Our cities are growing in population. Over the next 20 years, the majority of New Zealand's total population growth is projected to take place in the 12 cities. At present, our cities account for more than half of New Zealand's population and have grown at a faster rate than the national average.
- The pace of growth in our cities is placing considerable pressure on the environment, infrastructure and social fabric of our cities.
- Some cities are facing environmental issues such as traffic congestion, poor air quality, poor beach and stream quality, the management of waste and protecting the cities' biodiversity.
- Residents in our cities are more likely to rate issues associated with urban life, such as graffiti, vandalism, litter and noise, as concerns than those residing in the rest of New Zealand.
- Our cities are not just growing in population, they are becoming increasingly culturally diverse.
- Most of our residents have a sense of connection with others, although some city residents experience social isolation.
- Nationally, 88.0% of New Zealand residents felt they had a positive emotional well-being, responding with a rating of either 'very happy' (36.0%) or 'happy' (52.0%).
- There are continuing and, in some cases, increasing disparities between groups of people in our cities.
- The burden of socioeconomic disadvantage is borne largely by Maori and Pacific Islands people, teenage mothers and sole parent families.
- Home ownership in our cities has been declining, but is still the dominant form of tenure. Maori and Pacific Islands people are least likely to own their own homes.
- During the past five years, all 12 cities have experienced growing levels of estimated Gross Domestic Product, low unemployment levels and an overall

increase in inflation adjusted earnings. During the same period the total mortgage debt across the country has grown by \$59.8 billion.

- Over half of the nation's wealth is owned by just 10.0% of the population. Conversely, more than half the population owns only 5.0% of the nation's total net worth.
- There has been a decline in the rate of total recorded crime and recorded burglary, car and drugs and anti-social offences over the period 2002/2003 to 2005/2006.
- Attendance in Early Childhood Education is increasing, and those in our cities are comparatively well qualified. However, there has been an increase in the truancy rate and numbers of students receiving early leaving exemptions.
- All residents in the 12 cities have access to kerbside recycling, and energy efficiency projects are underway in most of the cities. Air and water pollution was perceived as a concern in some cities.
- More than half of the residents in most of the 12 cities consider their public transport as affordable, safe and convenient. However, the majority of residents use a motor vehicle to get to work.
- One third of residents in our cities believe that they have an understanding of how their council makes decisions, and more than half believe the public has some influence on those decisions.

POINTS FOR ACTION

To maintain and improve quality of life in our cities, coordinated and focused action is required to:

- Plan for long-term growth in our cities.
- Promote economic sustainability and plan for an inclusive, innovative economy that reduces poverty, deprivation, disparities and the effects of these on city residents.
- Make homes more affordable.
- Work to minimise the social and physical issues associated with living in urban environments such as noise, graffiti, air quality and beach and stream water quality.
- Improve access to key services, in particular General Practitioners, in the 12 cities and the rest of New Zealand.
- Focus on making sure people feel safe in their city centres, particularly at night.
- Promote actions that enhance and sustain the environment, such as increasing the use of alternatives to private motor vehicles.
- Improve the well-being and safety of our cities' children.
- Address the significant over-representation of Maori and Pacific Island students in school suspensions, stand-downs and exclusions.
- Work to raise public awareness of how councils make decisions and how people can be involved in decision-making.
- Continue to monitor progress towards achieving the quality of life outcomes for our 12 cities.