



COMMUNITY PANEL REPRESENTATION REVIEW REPORT

Dated: 1 July 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The Community Panel is made up of Evelyn Cook, Anna Ford, Adity Raj, Michael Skerrett, David Pottinger and Councillor Becs Amundsen. Since April this group has canvassed the community in a range of ways to understand their views on the issues required through the representation review. This included attending some of the Long Term Plan consultation events where representation review issues were discussed. The panel has already fed back to Council on the issue of the Maori ward and supports the direction Council is taking.

One thing that is clear for the panel in their discussions with the community on the representation issues is that there is a lack of understanding and knowledge in the community about the local body process, what the role of councillor is and involves, and how the community can engage with Council. The panel raises this here as something Council should consider for the upcoming 2022 elections and beyond.

Elections - At Large or Wards?

While people were curious about the ward system (often because of a lack of knowledge but also a desire to improve the current Council), once the system was explained to them many rejected the option.

Reasons for this were:

- Invercargill is a small city with no clear geographical boundaries between communities
- There was a preference for councillors representing the whole city not just parts of it
- Concern that the public would be limited as to who they could speak to on Council (only their representative)
- There was concern about an us and them culture developing
- Concern this might reinforce stereotypes such as the south of Tairāwhiti
- The at large system is thought to attract better quality candidates.

The panel therefore supports the election remaining as at large.

Number of Councillors

There was varied feedback on this issue and a lot of that was informed by recent issues at Council around the DIA letter and subsequent consequences. In some cases people said 'get rid of the whole lot of them'.

Many people felt that less councillors would be better because the remuneration pool stays the same size and would be divided by fewer people. This would mean better paid councillors and as a consequence better quality. However, the community acknowledged that this is unlikely to be the consequence for a variety of reasons.

In discussion with the community it seemed that the things which would actually make a better Council were:

- Ensuring there is a better mix of people on Council (more representative of the community)
- Improving how Council interacts with the community

- Undoing the diminishing engagement the community has with the democratic process eg low voter turn out
- Improving the community's understanding of good governance and the skills required to be an effective councillor and what they should expect from their councillors
- Improving candidate's understanding of good governance and the skills required to be an effective councillor
- Helping the community understand the services council provides – often seen as taken for granted by many people and examples of people buying a house and not knowing what rates are
- Understanding that people who are well known are not necessarily going to be effective councillors.

We would like to ask the Council to consider if there is a role they can play in addressing some or all of the above areas and would welcome that being included in your resolutions.

There was also some discussion as part of this question about the voting system which we understand has already been approved to be First Past the Post. There seems to be a growing acknowledgement in the community that a different system such as STV could deliver a more diverse and representative council. The panel would like to suggest the Council consider this in future discussions on this issue.

The final issue that was raised as part of this discussion was the consequences of the 3 Waters being removed from Council's control. The panel considers that a smaller area of responsibility should mean a reduction in councillor numbers.

Overall, while the panel received mixed feedback on this issue, the recommendation is that the status quo of 12 councillors remain until some of the above areas are improved.

Community Boards

Overall feedback is that the Bluff Community Board is valued and important to that community because it is a distinct community of interest, quite different to Invercargill city. It is also acknowledged that the ward system would not be a suitable means of representation for the Bluff community because the ward would include a much larger area than just Bluff because of numbers. There was a desire from the current board to be able to play a stronger role in advocating for and getting things done for Bluff.

Discussion with the wider community on other areas where a community board might be desired was limited. There was some feedback from Otatara residents that a community board for their community was desirable, however this was mixed especially when it was realised that a community board comes at a cost through a targeted rate.

However, recent activity such as the Gostelow bequest and rating changes through the Long Term Plan have left some residents asking if they need a stronger voice at Council through a community board.

The panel recommends that the Bluff Community Board remains and encourages the Council to invite submissions from Otatara residents if they would like a community board there. As part of this we ask information is provided on the costs etc of a community board so residents can make an informed submission.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude the panel recommends:

- Remaining at an at large election
- Remaining at 12 councillors
- Maintaining the Bluff Community Board and inviting the residents of Otatara to make submissions if they feel strongly they would like to have a community board (with comprehensive information available to submitters so they can make an informed submission).

3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Finally, the panel would also make the following recommendations given the feedback from the community was clear, to have a more representative and diverse council, more needs to be done.

- A possible move to an STV voting system
- Council to run workshops (or similar) to encourage more people to participate and stand as a councillor
- Encourage more people to vote through a wider campaign
- Council to have a more educative focus to the voting public on what the Council actually does and has control over
- Engagement needs to continue to improve - so many people still have no idea what the LTP is, let alone what the Representation Review was.

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this panel and process. This method of engagement goes a long way to improving the level of engagement Council has with its community and should be considered in future as an effective means to gain insight into community views on a range of topics.