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Ministry of Social Development
Attn: Social cohesion team
PO Box 1556
Wellington 6140

Social_cohesion@msd.govt.nz

Christchurch City Council submission on Social Cohesion for everyone in New Zealand

Introduction

1. Christchurch City Council (the Council) thanks the Ministry of Social Development for the opportunity to provide comment to the Social Cohesion for everyone in New Zealand consultation.
2. We acknowledge the programme launched by the Ministry of Social Development as a welcome step in strengthening social cohesion and supporting communities and society to be safer, more accepting and inclusive.
3. We acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation document of New Zealand and its importance in developing this kaupapa.
4. Ōtautahi Christchurch has faced significant challenges over the last ten years, which have tested the city but also been a catalyst for creativity, innovation and collective action. The Council is refreshing its Community Resilience Strategy to build on this, which is based on building social capital and advancing social cohesion in partnership with our communities.
5. We have framed our response to your submission on the four key points presented in the questionnaire. The disappointing aspect of this consultation is the absence of the voice of local government in the analysis.

Submission

Social cohesion outcomes – what's important to you?

6. We believe that social cohesion is an outcome of the social capital that exists within strong and connected communities. Social capital includes features such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Developing this capital is where local government is strongest and is able to act directly, leading to improved social cohesion.

7. While the proposed social cohesion policy direction is being led from central government, we believe local government is better situated to act at the community and neighbourhood level. Local government organisations have robust and enduring connections to the communities and groups who are working closest to the grass roots. This includes geographical communities and communities of interest or identity. Local community networks and agencies, both formal and informal, can respond more directly and rapidly. Local government plays an active role in partnering with and supporting these communities.
8. The Council seeks to work in a partnership at all times. Any approach to enhancing social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand must be achieved through a genuine and close partnership between central and local government. A formal approach to partnering between central and local government, reflecting the concept of subsidiarity and localism would allow local Territorial Local Authorities to be a key delivery partner and facilitator, acting in concert with an overall national plan. If this partnership is not established early, any social cohesion efforts risk not meeting expectations and disrupting future programmes.
9. We believe it is important that any work focusing on social cohesion acknowledges the high level of diversity in our communities, and that social cohesion strategies must not focus on any single specific group. A cohesive society and associated government programmes must reflect the different identities, nationalities and backgrounds of our communities and have equity its core. The programmes must also be co-designed with those people the programmes are designed to support. We must also recognise that there are barriers to participation, which need to be factored into any engagement, design and implementation. Our Council launched its [Multicultural Strategy Our Future Together](#) , which seeks to address these challenges in collaboration with our communities.
10. Any implementation strategy must recognise that there are members of society who feel, or are at risk of, being disenfranchised. The findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry indicated that there are people who are isolated and disconnected from society or the community around them, and we believe that any social cohesion work must focus on these disenfranchised individuals and the societal drivers that have caused this situation, including poverty. Any strategies focusing on social cohesion must include this group or they will not address the individuals most at-risk of resisting attempts to build social cohesion.
11. We also note that structural exclusion currently inhibits a number of existing mechanisms that should support greater social cohesion. Inappropriate, misaligned or poorly targeted communication and resourcing means programmes do not reach those most in need. This results in individuals not being able to participate in civic society, risking further disengagement from those around them. Structural exclusion can exacerbate inequities due to cultural norms, language barriers or physical accessibility issues. Many of these issues are generational, and need closer and early engagement with youth and children at a community and school level.
12. The consultation does not expand on the issue of income inequality and the relationship with social capital and cohesion. We believe that it is important that the consultation process recognise the influence of income inequality and poverty, and that measures to address these

issues will need to be undertaken as part of the efforts and contribution towards greater social cohesion. Central government has a key role in addressing systematic inequality. For example, decisions to remove or reduce services in areas of high deprivation can exacerbate existing inequality, reducing the desire to support greater social cohesion. Maintaining or enhancing the delivery of core services will give citizens hope and dignity, and support their desire to engage in their community and enhance social cohesion.

How will we know if we're making progress?

13. Any social cohesion programme needs to deliver national benchmarks to highlight where disengagement is happening in society, allowing central government, local government and communities to target those most in need. We believe that the current mix of population based surveys, consultations and census data are either insufficient or are not timely to react to changing societal dynamics. Data collection needs to be consistent across Aotearoa New Zealand to allow comparison and analysis to support social cohesion. For example, there is an inconsistent capture of ethnicity statistics. We would support central government developing a more comprehensive approach to data collection, analysis and regular reporting across government agencies and non-government organisations. The Mayor of London's [London Countering Violent Extremism Programme Report](#) released in 2019 is a good example of authorities listening to and learning from their communities.
14. We believe any national benchmarking should also be aligned to the Living Standards Framework, reflecting the importance of social cohesion to national wellbeing and security.
15. There are a number of trusted institutions and community groups who are deeply involved with vulnerable and at-risk communities. We recommend that a closer working relationship between government and these organisations be developed. Engagement with these institutions and community groups should be an element of the national wellbeing benchmarks. It is important that local networks are empowered to take action and have more responsibility for their communities when supported to do so.
16. We note the relatively low numbers of people participating and voting in local body elections both in Aotearoa New Zealand and across the world in general. There are a number of reasons for this low level of participation, such as technology but we also note that the decline at the local level highlights a potential disconnect between government and the community, poor civic engagement, and a loss of trust in official institutions. As such, voter turnout should be used as an indicator of social cohesion, and future discussions around voting age and compulsion could be considered.

What the evidence says about building social cohesion

17. In relation to number one, "fostering common values and inclusive social norms", Aotearoa New Zealand is not a homogenous society with common values. We believe that rather than try to create a programme for social cohesion that makes our country have one society or set of cultural values, we should celebrate and embrace our diversity.
18. We note that some communities and individuals are wary of losing their identity as part of Aotearoa New Zealand becoming more diverse and cohesive. We believe that much of the resistance and antagonism against vulnerable and at-risk communities comes from a fear that their culture or identity is being left behind. This creates a natural blockade to progress,

acceptance and diversity. Social cohesion strategies must include these individuals in order to reduce their sense of disenfranchisement and be receptive to a more diverse community.

19. In order to address these issues there needs to be a focus on building social capital and trust in broader society to provide room to change and grow. Without that capital developed, change can seem radical and swift. Aotearoa New Zealand is built on a foundation of bicultural traditions and heritage, providing common ground to build from. This heritage builds social capital and should form the backbone of any approach to inclusion and social cohesion.
20. We are also concerned that there are recent or second generation migrants who can be left behind when they do not have positive settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand. This isolation can lead to people being within our communities but standing apart from society. Aotearoa New Zealand has an opportunity to learn from our international partners who have seen similar issues of isolation and disenfranchisement escalate.

Taking action to strengthen social cohesion

21. We believe that achieving social cohesion involves everyone, as this is a continual process rather than being an end-state. Instead of considering which specific groups should be involved, we see that a lack of social cohesion impacts all of society, from governmental organisations to individuals. Social cohesion is a collaboration and partnership of everyone involved in the community. It impacts where they live, work and play, and affects their sense of belonging and desire to contribute.
22. Noting Christchurch's experiences from 15 March 2019, we believe that significant impediments to achieving social cohesion can become issues for the security and safety of our residents. In an increasingly interconnected world, greater focus needs to be on the role and impact of mainstream media, social media, and other means of digital communication. Changes are needed in order to keep local communities safe and free from hatred and discrimination. Diversity and inclusion training needs to be mainstreamed in our education facilities to be embedded in our national qualifications framework.
23. We recognise the importance of acting intentionally in this space and as such, believe there may be value in Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) mandating that every council develop their own Social Cohesion Strategy, or least regularly report against agreed benchmarks or outcomes to our residents and at a national level. For example, Council maintains a Strengthening Communities Strategy that directly addresses social cohesion issues. However, appropriate national benchmarking and monitoring will require consistent data capture across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Conclusion

24. The findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry and this consultation are welcomed. Bringing our communities together without leaving members of our society isolated and

disenfranchised is an important step forward in the future of Aotearoa New Zealand. We believe that a close and formal partnership between central government, local government and our communities is key to delivering successful and resourced programmes of action.

25. We stress that any national programmes that develop from this social cohesion consultation must acknowledge the unique aspects of each region, and the existing relationships, networks, knowledge, and social capital that currently exists.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

For any clarification on points within this submission please contact Nicholas Adams, Policy and Project Advisor [Nick.Adams@ccc.govt.nz].

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lianne Dalziel", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Lianne Dalziel
Mayor of Christchurch