

2004 NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

APPLICANT: PLANNING GUIDANCE UNIT OF HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL
PROJECT: HAMILTON CITY DISTRICT PLAN TRAINING MODULE

This report outlines the innovative approaches taken by the Planning Guidance Unit of Hamilton City Council to effectively train new planners to fast track their knowledge of the District Plan and to improve their decision-making and problem-solving skills in their day-to-day work. Internal processes and strategies have been re-thought and re-engineered to add value and to provide speed, quality, and service levels far in excess of customers' expectations.

1.0 **CRITERION ONE**

Demonstrate the need for and expected benefits of a project and its relationship to furthering the Council's vision and strategic direction.

1.1 **VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

The vision of Council is to make a difference in our communities by being focused on the customer, and creating a strong motivated workforce. This vision supports the quality policy which is to provide quality services for the people of Hamilton

The Planning Guidance Unit operates within the framework of Hamilton's Strategic Plan. This plan embodies the community's vision for Hamilton, the strategic goals, overview, desired outcomes, and Council's response (including the Long-Term Financial Strategy 2002/03). Hamilton City's first strategic plan was adopted in February 1997 and then revised in 1999. The plan was further revised in 2002 to cover the period 2002–2012. Although the plan was intended to be revised every three years and reviewed every six years, the introduction of the new Local Government Act 2002 will see the strategic plan replaced by Council's first Long-Term Council Community Plan, which came into force on 1 July 2004.

1.2 **ENABLING OUR STAFF TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Council is a large and diverse organisation supported by a corporate structure led by the chief executive. The organisation is divided into six operational groups. The groups' roles are twofold:

- providing services to ratepayers and residents, and
- providing quality policy advice to the mayor and councillors.

The Corporate Plan provides direction for how the organisation operates and how staff continually improve the way things are done. This is programmed mainly through organisational development, quality management and other improvement strategies. It outlines the vision and values of management and staff, the five major goals of the organisation, (as well as providing a blueprint for the next five years), thus helping the organisation become a world-class leader in local government. To achieve this, management is working on the following areas identified in an organisational gap analysis: leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, information analysis, human resources, process management and business results. Becoming a world-class organisation means we can be confident that our excellence in process performance and service delivery to the city's ratepayers, residents and customers is equal to or better than any organisation in the world.

The elected members and Council staff work together to decide what should be done, and to work out how it can be undertaken to achieve the community's vision and goals. This takes place within a framework of competing priorities, timeframes, resources, the decisions of Council, and within the overall goal of growing and developing the city in a sustainable social, economic and environmental context.

1.3 **BUSINESS FUNCTION**

Council has six standing committees and five sub-committees to set policy and guide Council in the fulfilment of its responsibilities.

The Statutory Management Committee is responsible for animal control policy, **district plan administration**, environmental matters (state of the environment, air, water and land contamination), hearings of submissions to district plan changes and district plan review, **hearing of all notified consent applications, hearing of all objections concerning decisions made by staff relating to non-notified applications**, and hearing of all applications and objections/appeals relating to: Sale of Liquor Act, Health Act, Building Act, Local Government Act, **Resource Management Act**, Reserves Act, parking and traffic regulation enforcement, and public safety.

Unit Plans are produced annually and identify the priorities of each of Council's 23 units. These plans provide the point in the organisation where corporate objectives (how) and annual plan and strategic plan objectives (what) are integrated.

The Planning Guidance Unit operates under the Unit Plan (Management Plan) which sets current strategic directions for the Unit. The Unit Plan is based both on statutory standards and identified customer needs, and is the main tool for performance. It provides the framework for the Unit's core function (land use and subdivision), a means of implementing a range of land uses together with measures to mitigate effects prescribed in the District Plan.

1.4 NEED AND BENEFIT

The present business climate is one of high performance expectations, where stakeholders are looking for world-class performance characterised by time guarantees and customised service. There is also a concern that procedures under the Act may result in excessive compliance costs. Therefore there is a clear need to improve procedures to reduce transaction costs and delays that can raise the cost of compliance. The time taken for developers to obtain approval is important because delays impose holding costs, lost opportunities, interest charges, and lost sales. Unforeseen or extra costs inevitably get passed on to the end purchaser. Consequently, the performance of local authorities is critical to the viability of projects, and can lead to wider impacts on the regional and national economy.

Consent activity is directly related to confidence in the economy and the city. Current research indicates that businesses and development will be attracted by fair and clear application of rules, and a helpful regulatory environment. For this reason, performance targets have been set substantially above minimum legal requirements.

We are confident that achievement of these performance targets will make city development more attractive and yet still meet the objectives of the Resource Management Act and Council's District Plan. Additional incentive is provided by the competitive environment now in place for the issuing of consents — if we are to stay in this business we must react to and meet or beat any competition.

The Project will effectively train new planners to fast track their knowledge of the District Plan and to improve their decision making and problem-solving skills in their day-to-day work.

2.0 CRITERION TWO

Demonstrate effective project management techniques to achieve results.

2.1 IMPROVEMENT TECHNIQUES

Regulatory processes under the Resource Management Act cover more than just resource consents: they include permitted activities, compliance monitoring, and enforcement activities. The time taken to process resource consents is only one performance indicator, albeit one that is relatively easy to measure. There are many less easily measurable indicators that also provide useful information for assessing performance under the Act. Techniques used here include:

- **Best Practice:**
Best practice can be defined as the use of superior methods and innovative practices that contribute to improved performance (i.e. doing the right thing in the most effective way within resource limitations).
- **Benchmarking:**
Benchmarking can be defined as the process of systematically comparing and measuring products, services, and work processes with successful organisations to achieve continuous improvement and best practice.
- **Quality assurance:**
Quality assurance systems are designed and implemented to provide confidence to stakeholders on procedures and outputs. All organisations have procedures, but this method seeks to proactively identify the most appropriate procedures, document them, ensure that they are implemented, and then periodically review them to identify possible improvement.
- **Performance Indicators:**
Timeliness of Service Delivery
It is a statutory requirement that all applications have to be assessed within the time-frame as set out in the Resource Management Act 1991.

Customer Satisfaction

With the performance of local government under increasing scrutiny, it is important that we aim to satisfy our customers and actively monitor their perception of our service. A customer focus also assists in maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the resource management consent process. Improvement and innovation are supported at the Unit level by being open to feedback and suggestions from our customers and at the corporate level. Council has provided tools to develop customer responsiveness, continuous improvement of processes, products and services, and supports team involvement and opportunities for reward, recognition, and fun.

Staff Satisfaction

Council carries out an Organisational Climate Survey annually to measure and monitor employee perceptions and changes over time.

Cost of Service

Council determined that the benefits of expenditure on the Planning Guidance Unit service were mainly public (i.e. it is a private good with a mainly public benefit component). Council concluded that, where possible, it should endeavour to achieve 50% cost recovery over three years, by way of application charges, hearings charges, monitoring fees, and fines.

Quality of Service

Quality control systems are used to maintain, improve, and monitor Unit systems. A variety of tasks have been carried out to improve the applications processing system, and to provide staff with opportunities to contribute to improving working conditions and outputs. Initiatives

have included quality improvement to effectively train new planners to fast track their knowledge of the District Plan, and to improve their decision making and problem-solving skills in their day-to-day work. (internal unit review, consent process re-engineering, service level agreement with the General Manager and redesign of the Unit workspace).

3.0 CRITERION THREE

Demonstrate a thorough participatory approach to communication with and buy-in by key stakeholders involved or party to the project.

3.1 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

During staff performance review it was discovered that new staff were finding it difficult to grasp with the way-around of the District Plan. Therefore a performance objective was identified for the Planning Guidance Manager to investigate a training method to overcome the concerns raised by new staff.

3.2 CONSULTATION

To address these issues, key stakeholders were identified: other Council staff, unit management, and customers. A range of consultation and communication initiatives with these stakeholders have been established to assist in achieving performance improvements, including:

Staff of Planning Guidance Unit: new staff are benefiting from this proposal.

Planning School of University of Waikato: all other Councils would be able to send their staff to this course, also this initiative is a new response but simple to a problem every TA has of bringing new planners up to speed on the plan.

Staff of Building Unit: building review officers will benefit from this who would be able to assess Project Information Memorandum (PIM).

Key Customer Firms of Surveyors, Planners and Architects: all other related professionals could train themselves on the District Plans.

4.0 CRITERION FOUR

Demonstrate innovation and originality in category area: People Management.

4.1 THE MODULES

There are nine modules in the District Plan Training Programme. Each module relates to a main rule section in the District Plan. The modules will follow the same basic format (as summarised below). The new planners are required to read carefully through the rule section and then complete a workbook for each module. Each workbook includes a summary of the content and intent of the rule section. There are also exercises which they must complete. These exercises are designed to fast track their knowledge of the rule section. When they have finished the workbook, they will be required to complete certain assessment tasks.

The planner will be required to follow the same routine with every module:

Reading:

- To read the relevant Rule Section of the District Plan. The Policy sections are also cross-referenced and should be referred to as part of their reading.

Complete Module Workbook:

- Includes a summary of the intent of each rule section in the District Plan.
- To complete the exercises relevant to the rule section.

Complete Assessment Book:

- Assignments and exercises are based on key learning areas in the rule section. The Assessor will mark their assessments and ensure that the new planners have completed the work to the required standard.

4.2 LEARNING EXERCISES AND ASSESSMENTS

During each module, the planners will be required to complete both learning exercises and assessment tasks. These will be used as a means of establishing and reinforcing knowledge of the District Plan within key learning areas.

Learning Exercises and Assessments may take different forms including but not limited to:

- **On-site assessment:** the participant will be required to demonstrate specific competencies at the worksite and will be assessed by the Assessor against a checklist of requirements.
- **Practical experience exercises:** participants will be taken to a specific area and given a problem-solving activity with a follow-up report to be completed.

- **Written exercises:** including short answer tests or a multi-choice format.
- **Completion of tables** containing technical data including the identification and resolution of anomalies or errors within the tables.
- **Scenario exercises:** the participant will be given a scenario and requested to identify problematic elements within the scenario and to identify suitable solutions.
- **“Mix and match”** exercises in which the participant is required to sort complex technical information into logical and correct sequences and tables as per the District Plan rules.
- **Case studies:** the participant will be given scenarios or problems which are based on actual case studies. The participant will be required to resolve the problem and to describe appropriate advice for the client.

5.0 **CRITERION FIVE**

Demonstrate success/improved business results/performance created by the project.

Performance indicators for the unit allow for meaningful trends to be determined and comparisons made. The following sections set out the five key indicators used to measure the unit's performance against objectives.

5.1 **TIMELINESS OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

The staff performance review identified a number of factors affecting timeliness and significant improvements are likely in this area from the implementation of the improved process. Performance against time is now charted and displayed monthly. Monthly charts show strong improvements in the timing of processing applications.

5.2 **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

To identify customer needs and perceptions, questionnaires have been used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The results helped establish priorities for improving service, and also identified areas of poorest and best performance. The unit has focused on improving in those areas where customers gave the lowest ratings. Overall, key customers are well satisfied with improvements in the subdivision process.

5.3 **STAFF SATISFACTION**

Louise says “that the training programme has so far been a challenge, due to time constraints between resource consents and building consents. Overall it has been beneficial. The areas that it has helped me in have been the modules that I have done resource consents for. For example the zone module has been beneficial for me, in particular the Residential Zone, Industrial Zone, City Signs and City Wide Standards. The tests that I have sat have been similar to a test that I would do at university. The training programme even includes site visit tests, which shall prove to be quite amusing. Overall I think the training programme will be beneficial to many trainees to come”.

Kylie says “I think the training manual is very beneficial. It is easy to follow and definitely makes you remember more details of the district plan than simply reading through it. I do think it would be better to work through the training modules whilst processing resource consent applications (or checking applications for building consent) as there would be less information to take in at once, and the sections learnt could be immediately applied. I'm not sure if the intention of the manual was to combine the modules with other work, the timeframes for the modules suggest this to be the case and I have found I have got through them much quicker than the manual stipulates. I have also found some sections of the modules are difficult to memorise in as much detail as the manual suggests (eg the planting and screening requirements for the various zones). On the whole though its a great training tool and definitely worthwhile doing.”

5.4 **COST OF SERVICE**

Costs to clients are in the medium-to-low end of the local authority scale. To meet staff levels and Council's financial policy, some increases to fees and charges are required. Other cost items are at present going through the Annual Plan process.

5.5 **QUALITY OF SERVICE**

The performance of the unit has been commendable in many ways, with good control of processes and increasing customer satisfaction. Costs are similar to other local authorities, and performance against legal time limits is satisfactory. The unit's systems are meeting best practice in local government, as recognised by the Ministry of Environment for best practice and by the participation of the unit in the Environmental Services Group winning the 1996 Best Practice in Customer Service Award and the 1997 National Quality Award.

In regard to the Quality Management, the overall quality of processes is satisfactory: however, a number of improvements have been actioned, including updating of all SOP's and access via intranet, increased internal checking using peer review, setting clear quality structural objectives, participation in quality management and review mechanisms, benchmarking against best practice increased monitoring of effect of decision, customer research by survey, and a proposed customer service system.

Quality Surveys have included a FIT Subdivision Team, and use of the OFI (Opportunity for Improvement) system.

6.0 **CRITERION SIX**

Demonstrate that the project was a “good, sensible and right thing to do”.

6.1 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The staff that participated in the project have demonstrated the benefit from the project. One members says that “*On the whole though its a great training tool and definitely worthwhile doing*”.

6.2 UNIVERSITY

The proposal was discussed with the Waikato University and the Senior Lecturer of the *Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning*, Ms Mairi Jay says that they have passed the first hurdle on the path to a programme of training for resource consents – Robyn Longhurst, Department Chairperson has agreed that the idea is worth pursuing, and asked her to write a proposal that they can put to other staff and the University.

In order to get this far, Mairi Jay had to convince Robyn Longhurst that the new course could be done within their existing staff capacity. Robyn also agrees that it would fill a gap in their planning offerings and make the planning programme stronger. So as long as they can do it within their existing resources, and provided Mairi can get the support of other departments (such as the Law School, Management, and the School of Science) they can put up a good argument for it.

Mairi Jay is proposing to introduce a new 15-point (i.e. half unit) graduate Planning Paper.

The background to the proposal comes from two directions. Firstly, the content is something which was formerly taught by Dorothy Wakeling as part of the PGDipREP, and is currently an important gap in thei planning programme. Secondly, Mairi was approached by Hamilton City Council to provide a block course in plan interpretation and resource consent processing for new staff. She saw an opportunity to combine the Hamilton City proposal with the need for an addition to our existing graduate programme.