

Telling Our Stories

Produced in association with:

FOREWORD

Welcome to the fifth of the products in the 2009 and Beyond suite of guidance. The others are:

- Living Through the LTCCP: A Guide to Managing a Long-Term Planning Process under the Local Government Act (released on 31 August, 2007)
- Piecing It Together - the SOLGM/NAMS Guide to Producing an Integrated LTCCP (released on 15 October, 2007)
- Performance Management Frameworks: Your Side of the Deal – the SOLGM/NAMS Guide to Performance Management in Local Government (released on 26 October, 2007)
- The 2009 and Beyond Seminars held in November 2007.

The 2009 and Beyond suite has been based on four key principles (which we refer to as the four cardinal virtues of long-term planning).

1. **The Right Debate** - *Getting the most from your long term planning is about creating and managing 'the right debate' with the public.*
2. **Integrated Decision Making** - *A competent long-term plan will contain information that tells a consistent, coherent story to the community, a great long-term plan serves as the basis for aligning the whole decision-making process towards promoting community well-being.*
3. **Plan your Plan** - *Successful long term planning requires the careful sequencing of the production of a number of sets of information and debating your local authority's future intentions.*
4. **The Continuous Plan** - *Long term planning is an ongoing process, not a just a triennial document.*

Your summary is a device for making the full LTCCP accessible to the whole of your community. Even the shortest of the 2006-16 LTCCPs was still well over 200 pages in length, and the content can easily overwhelm even the more knowledgeable and determined of our community.

Like the full LTCCP, the summary should be viewed not as an imposition, but as an opportunity to present the 'story' in your LTCCP in such a way as to get the maximum number of people to 'listen'. The summary is a tool for engaging people in whatever the right debate is in your community.

The Guide that follows provides you with tips and tricks for making your next LTCCP summaries something that gets the community involved in the process, as well as some suggestions for using the summary for the kinds of engagement that the Act had in mind. The web page that supports this guide also includes examples of the best LTCCP summaries from the 2006-16 collection of summaries, as judged by the sector itself.

I want to thank the following for their contributions to the Guide:

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- Penny Bloomberg, Communications Manager, Nelson City Council
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- Sarah Lineham, Sector Manager Local Government, Office of the Auditor-General
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I also want to thank:

- Ian Carson and the staff of ID Media for their assistance in turning the Guide into an attractive web based resource and
- Janice Nadew, Marketing and Communications Advisor, SOLGM, for proofreading.

I commend this Guide to you and hope it helps support your conduct of the right debate with your community.



Steve Parry
President
SOLGM
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Disclaimer

This Guide represents the collective wisdom of the local government sector with respect to the preparation of a summary long-term council community plan under the Local Government Act 2002.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this Guide is as accurate as possible, including review by representatives of the Office of the Auditor-General. The Guide is not intended to be a substitute for appropriate legal and policy advice.

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A Summaries Summary

While the preparation of a summary LTCCP is a legal requirement, it is best viewed as an opportunity to promote interest and engagement in the LTCCP process. A summary is not 'just another glossy', it's the key device for grabbing the public's attention and encouraging them to participate.

A good summary will succinctly describe the key issues from the LTCCP as well as making the key choices and implications of those choices clear to your community. Good summaries will point the readers to the place(s) where they can find more information on the issues that concern them. Great summaries will actually motivate the reader to get that information or get involved in the LTCCP process (or better still both).

Your summary LTCCP should present the key issues from the LTCCP rather than trying to cover everything equally. Presenting the key issues means the document has a ten year focus, rather than just being what the coming year is about.

The information in the summary will be a mix of financial and non-financial. With non-financial information, it is important to explain the issue, the council's preferred option or preliminary view if it has one, the other options, and implications. Financial information does not have to comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and can therefore be presented in as little as five lines. All information must be presented in a balanced politically neutral way.

Other key hints for preparing a good summary are:

- preparation of the summary is something that needs to be resourced
- identify the key issues early
- don't leave the summary until last, in fact if you have identified the key issues early you are probably able to start writing the 2009-19 summary 'about now'
- while a team is needed to help identify the key issues and peer review – the initial draft is a 'one-person job'
- start the summary from a clean sheet of paper – don't cut and paste bits in
- the document should be clearly branded as a council document – if only to distinguish it from other mail
- explain why the council is doing an LTCCP
- use an index
- write to satisfy a 12 year-old
- put signposts to further information in for the interested
- if you've followed the above advice, then the last weeks can be used to work on the look and user-friendliness of the summary. Layout is the key to catching peoples attention.

What is a Summary LTCCP?

"If I had another month to spend on the LTCCP, I would spend it on the summary"
Graeme Spargo, then of Dunedin City Council¹

"I note that many LTCCP Summaries were prepared late, almost as an afterthought, and without a focus on the important issues that needed to be addressed ..."
Kevin Brady, Auditor-General²

The term LTCCP summary (we'll use the term 'summary') is a shorthand description for a summary of the statement of proposal for a long-term council community plan under sections 89, 83 and 84 of the Local Government Act 2002 ('the Act').

The purposes of an LTCCP³ are to:

- (a) describe the activities of the local authority; and
- (b) describe the community outcomes of the local authority's district or region; and
- (c) provide integrated decision-making and co-ordination of the resources of the local authority; and
- (d) provide a long-term focus for the decisions and activities of the local authority; and
- (e) provide a basis for accountability of the local authority to the community; and
- (f) provide an opportunity for participation by the public in decision-making processes on activities to be undertaken by the local authority.

The summary should make the content of the LTCCP more accessible to the public (in terms of both the physical availability and promoting easy understanding of the issues in the LTCCP proper).

Like any of the other summaries required by the Act⁴ a summary LTCCP must⁵:

- (a) be a fair reflection of the major matters in the statement of proposal; and
- (b) be in a form determined by the local authority; and
- (c) be distributed as widely as reasonably practicable (in such a manner as is determined appropriate by the local authority, having regard to the matter to which the proposal relates) as a basis for general consultation; and
- (d) indicate where the statement of proposal may be inspected and how a copy may be obtained; and
- (e) state the period within which submissions on the proposal may be made to the local authority.
- (f) provide an opportunity for participation by the public in decision-making processes on activities to be undertaken by the local authority.

A good summary will succinctly describe the key issues from the LTCCP as well as making the key choices and implications clear to your community. By focussing the readers attention on the key issues that your community faces and your local authority's plans to address the issues, the summary is the key means for informing the right debate with your community.

¹ Presentation to the 2003 Community Planners Conference

² Office of the Auditor-General, 2007, Matters Arising from the 2006-16 Long-Term Council Community Plans, page 4.

³ Section 93(6), LGA.

⁴ Such as summaries of the Annual Plan and of the Annual Report

⁵ Section 89, LGA

Good summaries will point the readers to the place(s) where they can find more information on the issues that concern them. Great summaries will actually motivate the reader to get that information or get involved in the LTCCP process. In this way your summary may ensure a wider section of the public participate in the process (as envisaged by section 93(6)(f)) or at least know that the process is on, and what the issues are. The risk of 'nasty surprises' (such as unexpectedly large increase in the first post-LTCCP rates bill) is greatly reduced.

Content

The overall purpose of your summary is to encourage public participation in (and hopefully community 'buy-in' to) the LTCCP process. To achieve this objective your summary will need to, as a minimum:

- present the key issues from the plan clearly and in a balanced way
- provide information on the actual consultation process and the ways in which people can get involved in the process.

The Key Issues

The summary need only reflect the key issues from the full LTCCP. The summary need not (and probably should not) attempt to cover every aspect of the full LTCCP in detail. The implication of this is that you will need to make some 'judgement calls' on what topics need to go into the summary, and the extent that each should be covered.

Because this is a summary of the full LTCCP the summary should not be introducing issues that have not been covered in the LTCCP (if it does then that is an indication that the full LTCCP needs significant work!)

There are no hard and fast rules for determining what is and isn't a key issue. But some tests you might like to apply include:

- *is the issue covered in the front of your LTCCP* – many local authorities used the front 20 pages (give or take) for a strategic overview, description of significant matters etc
- *the section 97 test* – while section 97 applies for the purpose of determining amendments to an LTCCP the matters that trigger an amendment under this section⁶ signal some matters that could well be key issues (similarly section 16 may also provide a signal for regional councils that are proposing to undertake activities currently undertaken by their constituent territorial authorities⁷)
- *the size and scale test* - some things may be key issues simply because of their relative size and scale to the overall set of information
- *the 'hot button' test* – based on your knowledge of your community is this an issue where your community is likely to hold strong views (for example the issue may have been an election issue, or may be a current 'bone of contention' either in local media or in the correspondence/complaints your local authority is receiving)
- *what issues are you actually wanting feedback on* – this is not to say that the only things that go in the summary are the things that you want to hear about.

Examples of issues that could be key issues are:

- major changes in the community (be they social, economic, environmental or whatever) and the assumptions that the local authority has made such as large changes in the level, location, or age distribution of the population (dealing with the consequences of growth is quite a common key issue) or assessments of the key risks from climate change
- a major change in a level of service and/or a change in a level of service that carries a major implication for costs
- any shift in policy with major implications such as changes in the approach taken to meet the balanced budget requirement

⁶ Changes to financial policies as envisaged by section 102 may also be key issues – particularly if significant changes in the incidence of rates and charges are a result.

⁷ As a general rule the other issue that gives rise to amendment (section 141 – disposal of endowment land) is unlikely to be a key issue in and of itself.

- establishment of a council controlled organisation which is delivering on a key level of service and/or there are significant financial flows between the council and the organisation (for example a proposal to establish a Water/Wastewater CCO might well be a key issue in many territorial authorities)
- a change to the method of service delivery for significant activities
- a major change to one of the section 102 funding and financial policies and the consequences of such a change (such a change in the basis for setting the general rate or a major change in debt levels).

Your full LTCCP is a ten year document, and logically the summary would reflect the major matters over the ten year period. Few local authorities would be in a position where key issues are all resolved in the first year of the plan (if only for affordability reasons). This means that to fairly reflect major matters the summary will need to cover ten years worth of information⁸.

The Non-financials

If an LTCCP is a story to the community about how your council intends to make life better for the community, then your summary needs to present the key points of the council's plan. In presenting non-financial information the key points to keep in mind are:

- what is the issue the council is seeking views on
- what is the council's policy, preliminary view, or preferred option (if it has one)
- what are the implications (both financial and non-financial)
- what are the other choices (note that in some cases key issues may not actually have choices associated with them e.g. the drinking water standards that are key issues in some rural communities are a statutory minimum).

Your summary should briefly state what the community outcomes are (they are your community's definition of wellbeing). An LTCCP must state how council activities are contributing to outcomes, logically then these linkages should be reflected in the summary.

For each issue you may want to:

- explain how the council believes the issue contributes to wellbeing
- identify where Council is working on major initiatives with other parties (including local authorities, central government or private sector)
- outline key performance measures (where the issue involves a level of service)
- identify any major risks and uncertainties (for example, project ABC is likely to proceed if and only if the council's application for government funding is successful).

The Financials

Funding and financial needs can be both a key issue in their own right and an implication of a key issue. Some financial information will therefore be needed in the summary, but this need not be overly long or complex. Your summary should briefly identify and explain the key elements of your council's financial strategy (such as key financial policy decisions) and the implications of this (such as rates and debt levels, any non-balancing of the budget).

The summary does not have to comply with generally accepted accounting practice (such as FRS 43 Summary Financial Statements). Key LTCCP financials can be presented in as little as five lines (revenue, expenses, surplus/deficit, assets and liabilities) but some communities may want

⁸ In 2006, six local authorities received minor qualifications on their LTCCP for inadequate LTCCP summaries – generally because they presented only one year's financial or service information.

to separate rates and other revenue, and likewise separate public debt and other liabilities.

Other useful techniques for presenting financial information are:

- illustrate the breakdown of where your revenue comes from – it shows that rates are not the only funding source. A pie chart will usually show this well
- comparative information can be useful (also with some non-financials such as key levels of service)
- similarly illustrate where the money is spent – by group of activity not by cost type (it links the financials better to what the ratepayer actually gets – the value proposition). Again a pie chart will usually show this well
- discuss the current rates, changes to the rating system (if any) and consider some form of illustration of the proposed rates for the next ten years⁹. That illustration could also be used to compare with other common types of household expenditure (utilities, pay TV, newspaper etc). These kind of comparatives make the demonstration of value to the community more readily apparent
- you may want to display overall forecast spending for each of the next 10 years (a bar graph works well, and a double bar graph showing expenditure and rates may work even better)
- text bubbles can be used to define any financial terms (although these should be kept to a minimum) and any graphs to the layperson.

Processes

The other important component of your summary is the information about the consultative process.

Your summary must state:

- where the full statement of proposal can be inspected. It may be a good idea to link this to other issues covered in the full LTCCP that were not discussed in the summary (such as “The issues in this document are not the only ones your council is interested in. If you are interested in (list issues) then take a look at the full statement of proposal which can be found in (list places)”)
- where a copy can be obtained
- state the period within which submissions on the proposal can be made to your local authority.

But, with an eye to encouraging people to participate and making it easy to do so:

- your summary should have a submission form attached – remember that many people will only read and respond to the summary (even if one or more of the issues interests them)
- your summary could provide other details about the consultative process e.g. dates and venues of any meetings, details about the right to make an oral submission etc.

⁹ The extent to which you go into this in a summary will depend on the degree of complexity in your rating system – the number of variables in a local authority that has ward rating and/or large numbers of targeted rates will probably mean anything other than the hypothetical district median is too difficult to summarise graphically, a council that is 90 percent or more general rate funded might find this easier.

Neutrality Of Content

While the summary supports a political process, the summary must be an apolitical document. While the document should state matters where the council has a policy, it is not an opportunity for individual elected members to market themselves or their individual views. Care should be taken to ensure that the document is written in a politically neutral and factual way. Both the benefits and disadvantages of a proposal or option should be presented.

Assumptions

You might also consider setting out any key assumptions or scenarios that have informed the council's 'world view'. This does not mean setting out every forecasting assumption but some of the particularly key assumptions that have featured in the council's setting of service levels or are major drivers in cost. Some such as population trends might well qualify as major matters in their own right. The inclusion of this information helps your reader assess how robust the information in the plan might be.

Audit Opinion

The result of the audit opinion on the statement of proposal should be included in the summary, especially if the result is a non-standard opinion. This does not mean the full opinion need be disclosed. This will help the reader make a quick assessment about the likely degree of robustness of the overall plan or make them aware of particular areas of weakness.

Process

“Work on your LTCCP summary throughout the process – leaving it till last runs the risk that it will be approached from a compliance focus, rather than as the basis for mass consultation.”¹⁰

Piecing it Together

“If you identify the key issues early you can write as you go, and the last few weeks work on the summary should be for tweaking and working on the look and user-friendliness.”

Mike Reid, Local Government New Zealand¹¹

Hint #1 Preparation of the summary needs to be resourced

Some staff, elected members and members of the public will see the summary as ‘just another glossy’. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the summary is one of the key elements of a good LTCCP process. As such the summary is one of your local authority’s most important communications, and needs to be resourced to succeed. Just as preparing the LTCCP requires input from a number of sources, producing the summary also requires a number of different skill sets.

Input will be needed from across the local authority to identify the key issues and provide quality assurance (not for taking a group approach to the drafting).

Communications input (either internal or external) should be sought at some point in the process to help ensure that the message is clear and readily understandable to the general public.

Finally, don’t forget that the chances of the general public actually reading your summary will improve if the document is visually attractive, and clearly laid out. External publications/printing services may be able to help enhance the look of the document.

Hint #2 Don’t leave the summary until last

As strange as it sounds, one of the big ‘secrets’ to writing a good summary, is not to leave it until the last thing. As soon as your local authority has identified the key issues and the option or preliminary view that it wishes to engage on, then you will be able to begin preparing the summary.

Hint #3 Identify the key issues first

If your planning process has followed the advice in other 2009 and Beyond Guides and begun the LTCCP process with a strategic review, many of the key issues will already have been identified. It may be useful to quickly put together a group of people from the different perspectives to check that none of the key issues have been missed, and to help articulate what the local authority’s overall key “message” to the community is.

¹⁰ SOLGM et al, 2007, Piecing It Together, - the 2009 and Beyond Guide to Producing an Integrated LTCCP.

¹¹ Presentation to the 2009 and Beyond for Decision-Maker Seminars.

Hint #4 The initial draft is a one-person job

One person should be tasked with writing the initial draft of the summary – the old saying that a camel is a horse designed by committee is especially applicable to summaries! There is not necessarily a 'right place' in the organisation where this responsibility should sit, but whoever the final person is, that person should ideally:

- be skilled in plain English writing
- have a reasonable understanding of the range of content in the LTCCP without being overly focussed on the detail (the term 'helicopter view' is an accurate description of the sort of person you would be looking for)
- have a reasonable knowledge of the local community.

Hint #5 Start from a white sheet of paper

Don't try to cut and paste from the LTCCP. Once the group of key people have identified a set of major matters to cover, try writing the key information and messages from a blank page. If the designated writer finds themselves unable to do this it may be a signal either that there could be presentation issues (language, layout etc) or that the key issues or the local authority's underlying strategy have not been clearly articulated in the full LTCCP and may need further attention. Yet another reason for the need to start early so that these issues can be addressed.

Hint #6 The committees' role is at the peer review stage

The wider organisation should get to input into the summary after the first draft i.e. as peer review. The purpose of a peer review should not be to redraft or make editorials. Rather the purpose of a peer review is to identify any unaddressed issues, or any issues of consistency or clarity.

After making amendments from the peer review of the first draft, bring a sample group of people from outside the process together to view the final draft. This will provide a clear indication of how the plan will be perceived by the public and any major queries/issues they may have as a result. Address these issues, make amendments and review final draft.

Hint #7 The last weeks are mainly for working on the look and accessibility of the document

Assuming that you begin the task at an early point, and write as you go, the last weeks should be for checking the overall message, and turning a word processing file into something that's lively, eye-catching and easy to understand.

Presentation

Hint #8 Clearly brand your summary as a council document

If for no other reason than that will distinguish it from the pizza vouchers, Warehouse fliers and other material of that nature.

Hint #9 Explain why your local authority is doing an LTCCP

Describe what an LTCCP is and does, and why you are doing the LTCCP in terms that will mean something to the readers.

Never simply put in “the council is required to have an LTCCP under section 93 of the Local Government Act (or similar)” – as it sends a message that your local authority is doing the LTCCP simply out of compliance, and (potentially) that the document means little beyond that.

Hint #10 Use and index

Your summary should be easy to navigate and use. Provide an index with a plain English list of topics, so for example instead of ‘forecast financial statements’ you might try saying ‘the dollars’, ‘our rates and charges’ or similar.

Hint #11 Don’t write to satisfy the strategic planners or financial wonks, write for a 12 year old

Your main audience will be lay readers so the summary should be capable of being readily understood by these readers rather than informed readers such as analysts or professionals or specialists (in other words people who could understand the LTCCP), so:

- less is more – your summary is more akin to the teaser outside a restaurant whose purpose is to get people in the door, rather than the entrée that you have once you’re in
- keep the sentences short – ideally no more than ten words, and no more than one idea per sentence
- avoid the financial, policy and engineering ‘jargon’ – where it is necessary to use a term then use ‘satellite’ explanatory boxes (not footnotes) to explain the term
- use a an attractive, easily readable, and generous font (10 point is really the minimum size for documents like these).

Hint #12 Put signposts to further information for the interested

Part of the task of a summary is to get people interested in participating in the process, this interest can be held for longer if your summary makes it easy for the reader to find the relevant things from the full LTCCP. Don't just refer people 'to the LTCCP' give section or page references.

With the web versions of your summary you could use the power of technology and add links to the relevant portions of the LTCCP (this works best if your LTCCP is stored on your website in reasonable sized chunks as opposed to one or more large files). Readers who are interested can then quickly 'drill down' for more information on the subjects that are of interest to them without having to sift through 250+ pages of information.

Hint #13 Layout is a key to catching the public's attention

The reader's interest will be held by making the summary 'easy on the eye'. Try to avoid blocks of text dominating by:

- using lots of blank space (bullet points and section breaks work well for this)
- using relevant photos with short captions (try to avoid a predominance of posed 'cheesy grin' type photos)
- trying graphs rather than tables (this works especially well with financial information)
- using colour to catch attention.

This means some thought will be needed in terms of the overall design and layout. Once again, the last weeks are for these aspects of the summary not for writing the actual message.

Using the Summary: Some Tips

Note: This section contains suggestions for using the summary LTCCP as part of a process of engagement. These are not statutory requirements. You and your local authority should feel free to adopt, adapt, or ignore altogether.

Get Your Colleagues to Help 'Sell' the Message

Generally the staff involved in preparing an LTCCP and summary are a small subset of the overall staff (perhaps fewer than five percent in some of the larger local authorities). But all staff can (and do) have a role in dealing with the public and thus need to be reinforcing the key aspects of the LTCCP and summary. The summary provides them with a quick 'hit' on your local authority's priorities

Ideally you would:

- ensure staff and elected members have been told in advance what is contained in the summary and when it will be delivered to the public.
- ensure all staff have been sent a copy of the summary
- also ensure copies are kept in Council cars, offices, centres, and the like.

Prepare a Summary of the Summary

Even a 10-12 page summary can be an intimidating document for some lay readers. You might then provide people with a summarised version of the summary – such a document might be 1-2 sides of A4 paper with format and content that can be read in 5 minutes over a cup of coffee, on a bus or in some other very short timeframe.

In that space you aren't going to be able to have more than 5-6 key things to say, plus details on where to get the summary and the full LTCCP, the engagement process and any branding.

Personalise the Summary

If you have a handle on the actual content of the summary at an early enough point you can make the summary even more useful to groups of potential readers by adapting the message to target the interests of particular communities (either of geography or demography) such as the elderly, youth, particular townships or wards.

The purpose of these documents is to supplement the summary and the process of engagement, focus the attention of key groups on issues of concern to them, and further stimulate participation. These 'LTCCP for the (insert community name)' documents are not a substitute for a summary and should be prepared only after the generic summary is 'under control'.

The only limits on the use of these documents are the limits of your imagination!

For example, your local authority could:

- take them to meetings with particular sectors of the community
- leave them in places frequented by other sectors
- use them as 'pre-reading' for non-council people who are discussing particular issues with the council.

Consider Multi-Media as a Supplementary Means of Distribution

Although the written word represents the best option for distributing your summary widely amongst the community, and most capable of being used in a variety of different settings you need not be limited to this as your only means. Audio-visual techniques (such as web-based audio or audio-visual files) are techniques you might use to supplement a written summary.

Again while the only limits to this are the limits of your imagination, and budget – its important to get the message sorted first and not lose focus on the medium. You should only be looking to multi-media to supplement a written summary, not replace it.

Further Reading and Resources

Office of the Auditor-General, 2007, Matters Arising from the 2006-16 LTCCPs.

Office of the Auditor-General, 2008, 2009 Long-Term Council Community Plan – an initial public version of the Audit Methodology is available [here](#).

SOLGM et al, 2007, Piecing It Together – the 2009 and Beyond Guide to Producing an Integrated LTCCP.