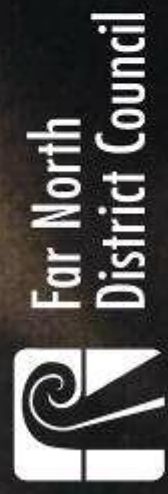


# Making Democracy Work . . . .



The 2005 New Zealand Post Management Excellence Awards: People Management Award Entry

*The need for and expected benefits of the project and how it furthers the Council's vision and strategic direction . . .*

## **Making Democracy Work . . .**

One of the most significant changes in local government in New Zealand was the passing of the Local Government Act (LGA 2002). This new Act provides greater flexibility for local authorities to develop their own unique and appropriate systems of governance.

The next major change for the Far North District Council was a representation review in 2004, resulting in a 44% reduction in elected members. These two changes, plus the 2004 Elections, provided an ideal opportunity for managed change designed to deliver substantial value to both Council and its communities.

The needs created by these changes increased the workloads of staff and elected members, particularly with their limited resources for the required tasks. This situation highlighted challenges for the existing governance structure and created an opportunity for staff to develop a governance model that would meet the needs of this entirely new environment.

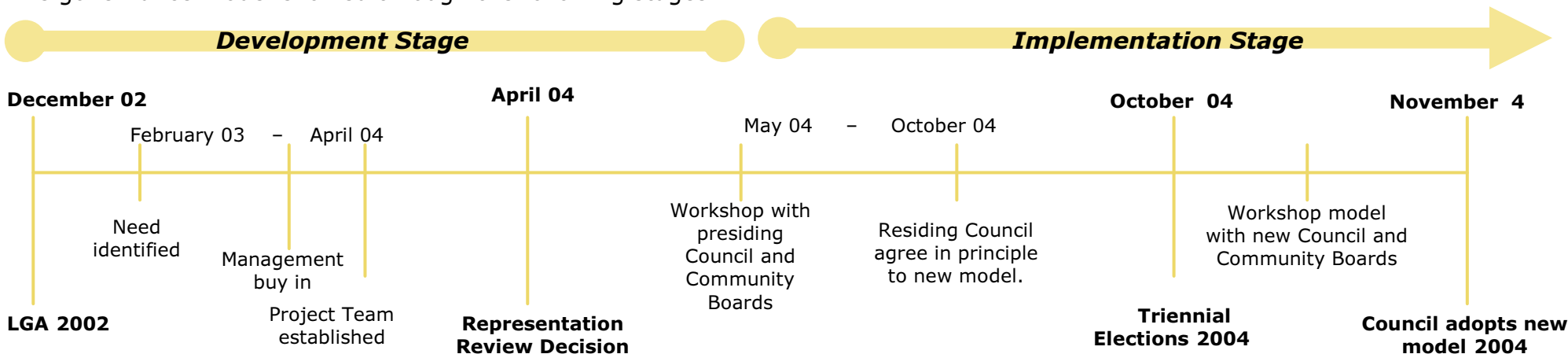
The expected benefits of a new governance model were to:

- enable elected members to be effective community representatives;
- empower citizens to engage with local government, and
- improve the capacity of Council to deliver the aspirations of its communities.

The new governance model aligns with Council's strategic direction by building confidence between staff and politicians, as well as instilling trust and wellbeing throughout the community. This links directly with Council's mission "To provide effective leadership and responsible affordable services and "To build trust within stronger and safer communities." The changes noted earlier, plus the 2004 triennial election, created a strategic opportunity for significant organisational transformation. This opportunity was seized and the changes that followed now allow for improved participatory engagement between staff, elected members and the community.

*Effective project management techniques . . .*

The governance model evolved through the following stages:



The project team - comprising the Chief Executive, District Secretary, Community Services Manager and other staff skilled in the workings of local government - sought a solution to the need for a new governance model. They understood that:

- ◆ legal compliance would be a key vehicle for achieving beneficial outcomes for elected members and communities, and
- ◆ they needed to create a model that staff would buy into, to ensure elected members received the support, information and advice related to those outcomes.

### How?

- Ensuring staff understood the need and agreed that this was an opportune time to make a change;
- Communicating the steps to staff by way of regular briefings and workshops. These are ongoing and provide a way for further staff input.

### Why?

- Staff take ownership of the model, they become comfortable in the new environment and are encouraged to develop their capabilities.

Preliminary investigation of the new governance model by staff occurred from February 2003 to May 2004. Final development of the model took place with elected members between May and October 2004. The model was supported in principle by Council and Community Boards in July/August 2004 and presented to Council for fine tuning October 2004. Council adopted the model in November 2004.

### *Buy in and communication . . . a participatory approach.*

A key focus of the new governance model is open, multi-level communication with all stakeholders. This has occurred during both the development and implementation of the project . . .

Stakeholders	Governance Model Buy-in
26 FNDC Elected Members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor &amp; Council</li> <li>• Community Board Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project team was tasked with educating elected members on how the governance model would work.</li> <li>• Extensive workshops were conducted with all elected members as it was vital they understood the model as a holistic and collaborative approach to delivering community outcomes and a way of improving their decision making.</li> <li>• Elected members now recognise the model as a genuine attempt to maximise the effectiveness of information flow - up, down and across the various Council committees and Community Boards.</li> </ul>
190 FNDC Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Management Team (GMT)</li> <li>• New Staff</li> <li>• Existing Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing workloads were a challenge and staff could see the new model would significantly improve workflows.</li> <li>• The project team was tasked with educating the organisation on how the model works operationally.</li> <li>• Departmental briefings occurred throughout the entire organisation.</li> <li>• Staff workshops were conducted for those that work directly with elected members and the various Council committees and Community Boards.</li> </ul>

## Innovation and originality . . .

### Innovative governance

Simplicity and culture change were at the heart of this project. The idea was to use Council's most important business asset, its people to develop a simple governance model that would catch all levels and layers of the organisation. It also took advantage of Council's fostered culture of encouraging enquiry, innovative ideas and constructive debate. In this context, with staff working together, creative solutions were achieved that enabled effective decision making to achieve organisational and community goals.

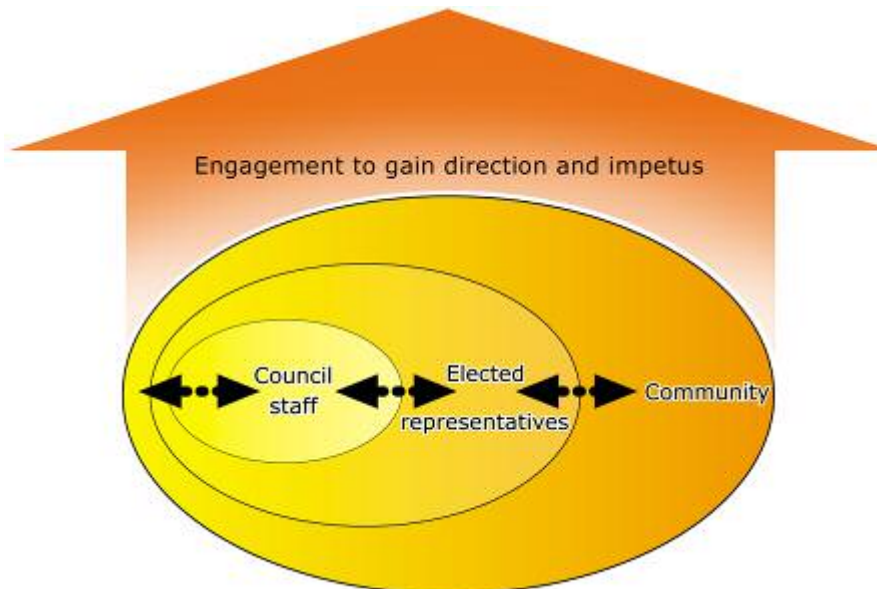
The approach wasn't just about finding a system that was easy to administer or cheaper. It was a genuine attempt to look at all the factors that were affecting Local Government and asking: "how do we meet these challenges?" and "how do we take advantage of the opportunities they present?".

A noteworthy facet of the project is that **Council staff were the key project initiators and drivers.** This contrasts with the generally conventional practice of councils' hiring consultants when changes are needed or contemplated. This project was created by staff based on their collective knowledge and experience of elected member interaction and legislative compliance. The foundation built on philosophical discussions between staff on engagement, communication and the quadruple bottom line with the following simple objectives:

- ◆ Simplification of Council systems, processes and responsibilities;
- ◆ Quality improvement and effectiveness of information flow;
- ◆ Ensuring consultation occurs at the most appropriate levels of governance;
- ◆ Engaging a broader base of community in consultation.

***"Within the new structure we have organised ourselves to ensure that the actions we are required to make are of benefit to the communities that Council represents. Successfully using the structures has required a fair amount of culture change for both our organization and politicians, and this will need to be ongoing."***

Community Development Manager

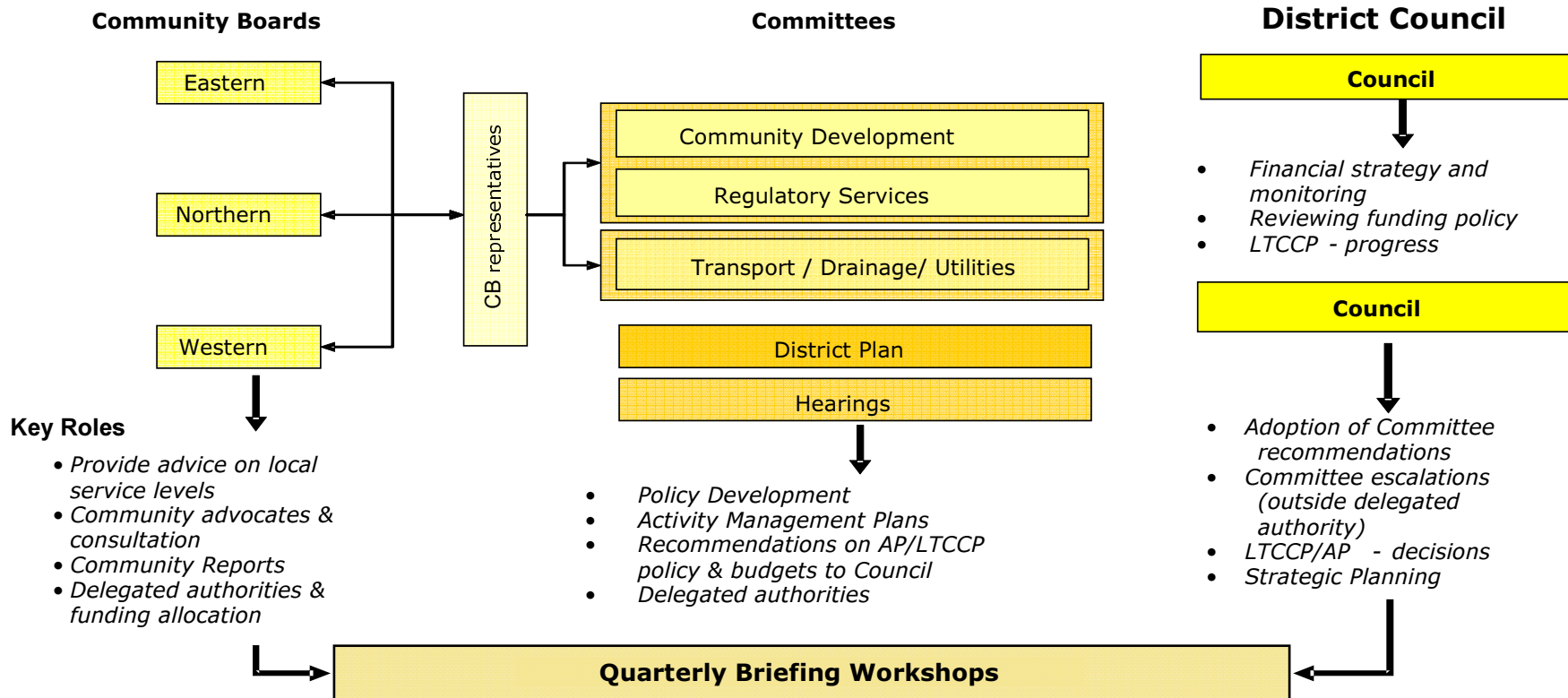


There are four key elements that are also innovative and original within the new governance model itself:

- 1 Membership of each of Council's activity committees now includes a representative from each of the three community boards. These representatives are full members of the committee with full voting rights.
- 2 A new quarterly elected members' workshop is now in place. This is a forum where all elected members receive a staff briefing on the key, imminent issues over the next three months.
- 3 Introduction of a monthly 'community report' where staff who attend meetings work with activity managers to ensure that responses to all issues raised by elected members are responded to within a month.
- 4 Specific forums occur at the beginning of formal meetings. These are designed to assist each level of governance to increase its level of external engagement, i.e.:
  - Community Forum – a place for community groups to discuss their visions and aspirations
  - Activity Forum – where Council's activity committees can engage with agencies related to their area of responsibility
  - District Forum – provides Council with an opportunity to engage at a regional and National agency level.

This allows for decision making that integrates the contributions of all involved as effectively as possible.

## Governance Model Overview



## Successful Results. . .

The project set out to identify how Council could best adapt, given significant events that would have a profound impact on the organisation and communities it serves. The result is the development of a simple governance model which staff, Council and Community Boards have embraced and are making good progress with. It also allows a broader consideration of development opportunities related to Council's activities within the community.

Using the Community and Activity Forums, staff have encouraged Committees and Boards to meet formally with agencies within their areas to develop relationships and identify partnership opportunities. More recently, Committee and Board members have seen the benefit of these meetings and are now initiating them.

**As an example of the model working as was intended, the Northern Community Board embraced key concepts of the model by consulting extensively with groups in its community prior to the development of Council's draft Annual Plan. Through a series of meetings and field trips, the Board sought community views about their vision for the future, priorities and costs. The Board was then able to demonstrate to the Council there was support for an increased rate for Northern Ward which was acceptable to the community. This rate has just been approved in Council's adopted Annual Plan 2005/06 to improve a range of amenities.**

A further outcome is the intention for the LTCCP team to go to the Boards much sooner than previously. This will enable Boards to be advocates for their communities when priorities for Council activities are set. Council and its Community Boards will soon be working solidly with its constituencies on developing community priorities. These will be carefully balanced with what can be afforded.

The community have been empowered to engage, resulting in an increase of submitters from 256 in 2004 to 809 today.

## Good, Sensible and Right thing to do. . .

**The new Local Government Act, the 2004 elections and the representation review determination provided a crossroads when timing and needs coincided. This situation presented an excellent opportunity for organizational change aimed at delivering significant value to both Council and its constituent communities.**

**The majority of staff and elected members have now worked in both the pre and post change environment. All clearly believe the new model is an appropriate means to effect change throughout the entire organisation.**

*"My experience with Council's first transitional LTCCP highlighted the real need for all facets of local governance to be working together. My new role now involves managing the flow of information between elected members and staff, and between the tiers of governance. I've now seen how the governance model is strengthening Council's relationships with communities and improving decision-making. Improvements are ongoing but we're on the right track!"*

Governance Liaison Officer

*"The model definitely works, but will require a change in thinking from politicians to assist. The model is in line with the LGA 2002, in fact it complements it".*

Sue Shepherd, Chairperson,  
Community Development Committee.



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