



Summary

Long-term plans: Our audits of councils' consultation documents

By law, councils have to produce consultation documents for their long-term plans. Auditors have to audit them. We form an opinion about whether the document is an effective basis for consultation and we give assurance about the reasonableness of the information in them.

Consultation documents have to concisely and clearly present the significant issues, plans, and projects that councils intend to include in their long-term plans. This needs to be done in a way that is easy for people to understand and respond to.

Clear and effective design can aid a consultation document's readability, but this will be of limited use if groups within the community cannot access, understand, or respond to it.

All the 2018-28 consultation documents were fit for purpose. However, many of the opportunities for improvement we outlined in our 2015 report have not been realised. In our view, there are still opportunities for councils to improve the content, structure, and presentation of their consultation documents and we encourage councils to do so.

How to improve

The more effective consultation documents used clear language and thoughtful formatting. It was easy to see which issues were being consulted on and when content was there as background or context.

Consultation documents must be simple and concise. They should present only the most important issues for the community to consider.

It is important that councils clearly state what underlying information is available and how members of the community can access it.

That said, the success of a consultation document does not depend on how short it is. It is about the clarity of the messages and the ability of the community to engage with it.

Communities are diverse, with different needs and interests. It is important for each council to understand the different groups in their community so they can present their consultation documents in a way that all can understand and respond to.



August 2018



Some councils used innovative ways to involve their communities when consulting on their long-term plans. Some councils started that work before the consultation process began, so people knew when and how to contribute and were already familiar with the issues.

Some effective consultation documents

We saw four consultation documents that were written in plain English and had an effective presentation style. We're not saying that these councils' consultation documents were perfect. Our focus here is on overall impact and effectiveness.

Other councils could usefully look at the consultation documents produced by:

- Hauraki District Council;
- Waimate District Council;
- Horowhenua District Council; and
- Gisborne District Council.



Examples from Hauraki District Council's consultation document for 2018-28



Examples from Horowhenua District Council's consultation document for 2018-2038