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SocialLink Western Bay of Plenty is a registered charity based at The Kollektive in 17th Avenue, Tauranga. It is the umbrella peak body for the social and community sector in the Western Bay of Plenty.

Its vision is a resourced, skilled and cohesive for purpose sector enabling communities to flourish. Its purpose is to build the capability, confidence, sustainability and voice of community organisations in the Western Bay of Plenty.

SocialLink Submission on Local Government Review

SocialLink welcomes the opportunity to provide comment and feedback for the Panel and its Review into the Future for Local Government and its draft report ***He mata whāriki, he matawhānui***.

SocialLink is one of many organisations around Aotearoa New Zealand that have been established to support the development and interests of organisations working in the broad for purpose, not for profit social, voluntary and community sector. Our comments and suggestions draw on our experience and knowledge of working in this arena.

SocialLink also supports Comvoices and Inspiring Communities submissions.

We support the Panel's signalling of the need for five key shifts –strengthening local democracy; authentic relationships with hapū/iwi and Māori; a focus on wellbeing; genuine partnership between central and local government and more equitable funding.

However, we believe more attention needs to be paid to the role of the for purpose, not for profit sector in shaping the future of local government.

We don't think that that the Panel's draft report sufficiently emphasises or recognises the importance of the community and social sector in terms of its contribution to community wellbeing. Indeed the community, voluntary and social sector did not appear to be mentioned once in the entire report.

The future shape and functions of local government must acknowledge, enhance and draw on the value embodied in the for purpose, not for profit community sector for several reasons.

The sector covers iwi organisations, charities, incorporated societies, social enterprises, Māori land trusts, networks and alliances. Together, they provide significant warp and weft in the weaving of strong and supportive community fabric.

The sector delivers a large range of services and programmes to local communities through its organisational capabilities and the skills and knowledge of staff and volunteers. The sector's work covers a large range of community needs from community and marae development; support of whānau, children, young and older people; advice and expertise on reducing alcohol and drug related harm, family violence, and a broad range of health related concerns. Organisations and their staff and volunteers provide education related activities, cultural activities for people from many diverse cultures, provide religious and pastoral care, run services for people with disabilities, provide advice and options on income, mental health, food and housing security, run programmes on international aid, organise fun events and festivals, organise caring for wildlife, rescue pets or the environment or are focused on fostering participation in sport, recreation, local history and arts and crafts.

Volunteers provide daily help to many of these organisations from op shops to running websites or putting their hands up when emergencies arise as in the grounding of the container ship Rena off the coast of the Bay of Plenty or dealing with the major impact of weather events such as Cyclone Gabrielle.

All of this activity and engagement reflects the essence of doing good things for and with others, a foundation on which a cohesive, tolerant and supportive community and broader society grows. It is a manifestation of ordinary citizens wanting to help improve or embellish the lives of people, communities, animals or nature in some way.

The sector is a significant and essential contributor to the wellbeing of diverse people and communities throughout Aotearoa-New Zealand. Many are funded through government contracts (for example from the Ministry of Health, local health authorities, Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki) to provide essential local health and social services. Others are funded through local, regional and national philanthropic entities, local government grants and private donations as well as through social enterprise efforts.

In summary, the broad social community and voluntary sector is a vast source and store of knowledge, experience, expertise and insight into local contemporary issues, aspirations and needs.

It is dynamic, innovative and multi-faceted and contributes beyond measure to supporting social cohesion, wellbeing and people's sense of belonging to and being a part of something with other people. All of these elements contribute to people wanting to be engaged with and investing in their communities.

Local (and national government) should be engaging with the sector as an essential partner in building relationships with local communities, in understanding and working on local issues, problems and resolutions together. By doing so, local government will be close to the heart of communities and as a result will contribute to improving participation in local decision making and fostering local democracy.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Panel's final report acknowledges and includes the for purpose, not for profit sector as a vital element to community development and wellbeing and considers ways in which local government can partner with the sector.

We support the inclusion of all efforts and actions local government can take to be a better Te Tiriti partner.

We urge the Panel to incorporate community-led principles and approaches in which local government is a key anchor facilitating and enabling community self-determination.

We support taking a social procurement approach by Councils whereby they use their considerable purchasing power to generate social value beyond the value of a good or service being procured.

We support fostering innovation and investment through funding partnerships to develop entities like the Southern Initiative and South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board in Auckland. Similar initiatives need to be co-developed and designed with the not for profit sector and local communities, and not top heavy with local/national government input.