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Report to the Policy and Finance Committee
from Dr Jane Bradbury, Divisional Manager, Environment and Andrew Annakin,
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A Better Environment: An Education/Communication Strategy

1. Purpose

To present to Council an environment education/communication strategy. (A copy is enclosed separately).

2. Background

For some time staff have been developing an education strategy for the Council, otherwise referred to as an environmental education initiative.

The initiative was born in September 1997 when Council endorsed the idea in principle after receiving a report from Crs Buchanan and Gates (Report No. 97.356, copy attached). Working with those Councillors, staff moved to progress the issue further.

However, more in-depth investigation revealed the complexity of the issue. In December 1997, we presented another report saying that it was important that we *do this right* and that Council needed to take time if it was to develop a programme that was effective and a good use of resources. "Quality time and investment at this stage will, in our opinion, reap benefits at a later stage".

Since that time we have talked with a lot of people and visited other regional councils that are involved in education programmes. Councillors will remember, from the report they received as part of the annual plan preparation process, that some regional councils are investing significant resources in this area of work. We were interested in how these resources are being applied and to what effect.

Using the knowledge gained, we completed a draft strategy in August 1998. However, we had some niggling misgivings about our recommended approach. Up until this time we had been developing an environmental *education* initiative. Yet more and more we came to realise that what we were actually talking about was also an environmental *communication* initiative - hence the title of this report.

We also felt that “something important” was missing. We finally identified that “something” as the framework or context of the strategy. That context was the overall direction of the Council.

The Council, through its strategic planning process, is currently developing a direction for the Council. In our opinion, this education/communications strategy is inextricably linked with that direction because it impinges on marketing, imaging, political involvement and resource allocation.

3. **Our present approach**

3.1 **Our Aim**

Most New Zealanders care about and are proud of their environment. But all too often individuals lack the knowledge or the resources to care for the environment around their homes and in their communities. An education/communication programme should equip citizens, iwi and resource users to:

- Be proud of and take responsibility for the Region’s environment;
- Run their businesses successfully without damaging the environment unduly;
- Plant trees and shrubs alongside rivers and streams to clean the water and keep the ecosystem rich and vibrant;
- Keep the coast, dunes, estuaries and beaches clean and natural places for recreation, contemplation and enjoyment;
- Enhance or restore degraded habitats and get rid of plant and animal pests;
- Reduce the pollutants that go into the air, onto our land and into our water;
- See the possible economic benefits of a healthy environment.

3.2 **Community Involvement**

The Council is currently looking at how it can improve its relationship with the community. In December 1998, when the Regional Issues and Strategic Communications Working Group was set up, there were discussions on how the Council could enhance community involvement in its work and how we could strengthen our connections with the community. Ironically, this approach, called

community connections, was identified in the August 1998 draft education/communications strategy. It remains in the latest version.

We understand that there has been an expectation by some that the education initiative should be solely centred on schools, particularly primary schools. Councillors will see from the new strategy that environmental education in schools does form an important part of our proposed approach. Nevertheless, the initial report to Council from Crs Buchanan and Gates, recognised that schools were not the only means of improving understanding of environmental management. “*We are also strongly placed to initiate a wide community education initiative to complement and reinforce any schools based programme*”. It is fair to say that we have matured in our thinking and, in line with the Council’s current position, have moved more towards a community initiative, albeit with a strong schools component. Our research has shown us that a multi-pronged approach (we are proposing a three-pronged approach) is likely to be more successful than a single focus.

We are not alone in seeing the benefits of a wider community initiative. The General Manager, in his Position Paper (Councillors’ Information Bulletin 99/24) advocates community engagement, albeit in the context of information dissemination and community mandate for policy proposals.

The focus of this education/communication strategy, therefore, is *community involvement*. **If we are to have effective environmental policies we need to engage the hearts and minds of people** – and the way to achieve this is to involve. Instead of **selling by telling**, we are promoting **selling by doing**. Our approach can be encapsulated by the following community development saying:

- *If you tell me – I might hear*
- *If you show me - I might see*
- *If you do it with me – I’ll understand*

Helping people to understand the benefits of sustainable environmental management by involving them rather than preaching to them is the basic premise of this strategy.

3.3 **Individual Responsibility**

The environment is everyone’s responsibility. By enhancing the community’s understanding of environmental matters, we aim to promote individual responsibility and the idea that the future of the environment is in all our hands. We want to get people to move away from the idea that it is the responsibility of “someone else” - with that someone usually being a local authority - and help them realise that they as individuals can make a difference to our environment. The Council cannot do it alone. But we can give people the tools to turn their care and concern into action.

4. **The Time is Right**

At the present time this Council is poised to adopt this community involvement approach. It is finally getting to the end of a prolonged planning period. The Regional Policy Statement, pest management plans and both river and park management plans have been completed and are now being implemented. All regional plans, being prepared under the Resource Management Act 1991, are entering their final stages. In these we have always taken a non-regulatory approach where possible and advocate working with people rather than requiring certain behaviour.

This means that we are now ready to be “out there and doing”. Indeed, in many areas of the Council we are already “out there”- or are just starting. And in many cases there is good community involvement - for example, the land management sustainability plans, riparian planting, stream clean-ups, friends of the river, trees for survival etc. But we could do much more. Pressures on staff resources invariably mean that involving (and informing) the community is an add-on rather than a matter of course. We are advocating that it becomes central to this Council’s work.

5. **The Strategy**

5.1 **Target Groups**

The strategy that accompanies this report is directed at three sectors of the community:

- Community groups or individuals who have the ability to make a difference and who can get things done to resolve an environmental problem (*Community Connections*)
- The next generation, children and young people, who can learn how to care for the environment in the future (*Learnwell*)
- Businesses, small and medium, whose activities affect the environment (*Business Bridges*)

5.2 **Initial Focus**

Further, we suggest that the initial focus of the strategy’s work programmes (for the first two years) be on water. This is something that the community feels strongly about. Survey information tells us that water quality is the single most important environmental issue for the community. People want clean coastal waters and clean rivers and streams. It is also an issue that people associate the Regional Council with and one where we have a great deal of expertise. Clean water is also one of the end results of good land management and healthy ecosystems - all of which gives us a lot of scope. Water will provide a good focus for marketing and imaging the Council. Although we must take care not to spread

our efforts too thinly and to little effect, a water theme has the potential to capture the imagination of the community if we target our programmes appropriately.

However, the strategy identifies an approach rather than detailed programmes. If the Council accepts this approach, specific programmes and budgets will need be developed by Council staff with the assistance of the Environmental Education Co-ordinator. This activity is identified in this Council's proposed 1999/2000 annual plan with a \$100,000 provisional allocation.

The detailed programming can be done in time to be included when the Council confirms the new Long-term financial strategy, for the financial year beginning 2000/2001. Undoubtedly staff are keen to undertake environmental education work - indeed, a number of small community based programmes are already underway. However, few have the skills to communicate effectively their practical experience and knowledge. Bringing in a skilled Environmental Education Co-ordinator will allow a good mesh of skills.

6. **A Starting Point**

If the Council accepts the *community involvement* approach to its work and this strategy, it could consider extending the *Communications* section that is now to be added to Council reports to a *Communications/Community Involvement* section. That way staff would not only have to consider what message they are trying to get across, but also how they have involved or intend to involve the community in their work. Of course, in many cases it would not be possible or appropriate to do so. But even the exercise of thinking about whether it is possible can only be beneficial to the Council's work and image.

Further, in the strategy, marketing and careful branding is noted as the key to successful environmental/communication programmes. Clearly the work of the Regional Issues and Strategic Communications Group, reflecting the strategic direction of Council, will be central to achieving solid community involvement in our work programmes.

Finally, Councillors will note that in the Business Bridges section of the strategy, reference is made to a way of promoting business and the environment in the Region. The Environment Division has done some preliminary thinking on this issue and has prepared a preliminary paper. It may be appropriate that this be pursued further. If we can provide some economic advantages for business through sound environmental management in the Region, we would be making real headway.

7. **Conclusion**

The Council's logo *Caring about you and the environment* signals that the environment is central to this Council's work. All of its functions and responsibilities have major environmental implications. New roads have major

environmental effects through soil disturbance, stormwater run-off, carbon dioxide emissions etc. Water supply involves huge water takes from both our surface and groundwater resources. Flood protection works have major impacts on our river ecosystems and our plant pest and animal pest management practices impact on our natural habitats. Indeed, the Council's operational and regulatory responsibilities provide a unique opportunity to develop a more environmentally responsible community.

The Council cannot get away from its environmental responsibilities. But if it is to have any real positive and lasting impact on the quality of the environment, it needs to involve the community. As we have said earlier in this report, we need to engage people's hearts and minds if we are to have successful environmental policies. The environmental education/communication strategy aims to do this.

8. **Recommendation**

That the Committee recommends that the Council:

- (a) supports the approach of the environmental education/communication strategy;*
- (b) confirms the \$100,000 allocated in the proposed 1999/2000 annual plan for an environmental education co-ordinator;*
- (c) requests officers to prepare a detailed work programme and budgets to be considered as part of the wider Long Term Financial Strategy.*

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Attachment