



**WHANGAREI**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

'this place – our places'

**Whangarei District Council's  
Community Halls Strategy**

September 2007



*Creating the ultimate living environment*

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## Terms of Reference

### This Strategy sets out to:

- provide a clear definition of what constitutes a 'Community Hall' for this purpose compared to/or including other facilities such as 'Recreation Centres' and 'Sports Clubs'
- clarify council roles and responsibilities to fund, manage and support the provision of community halls in the district, both directly and indirectly
- develop a prioritization framework for council funding for community halls in the district, taking into account what constitutes a 'necessary' community hall
- develop a comprehensive database on community halls for which Council has responsibility
- recommend procedures in the event of disestablishment of a Community Hall



## Introduction

Communities have a range of needs - social, cultural, recreational and informational. Strong and healthy communities are built on their capacity to meet these needs through encouraging participation, forming relationships and imbuing a sense of belonging.

Traditionally one way of meeting these needs has been to provide a base, from which to deliver services, that also acts as a focal point for community activities. The spaces themselves can become concrete symbols of community cohesion.

Thus community facilities are not just about buildings and space – they are the arena for a range of services that provide opportunities for people to come together to meet, play, learn, share information and help each other. They are venues for arts, cultural, educational, recreational, and leisure activities, provide accommodation for voluntary groups, and are important gathering points in civil defence emergencies.

Access to community facilities is vital as they play a critical part in strengthening districts by bringing people together.

## Local Authorities and Community Facilities

Councils play a role by providing physical spaces for activities to occur that help to build strong communities. They provide resources and meeting places that are available to the general community.

Community facilities are therefore one of the ways that the Councils meet their strategic outcomes, namely participation, access to resources, quality of life and recreation opportunities.

Community facilities need people to make them work – not only to use them, but also to manage them. Councils recognise the important contribution that community and volunteer groups make. Without the dedication, work and support of volunteers, most of the services provided in the facilities would not be available. Community facilities are a good example of the way in which Councils and communities work together to provide for the needs of local citizens.

## Local Government Act

The Local Government Act (2002) gave councils a generalised power relating to the performance of their role, which is:

- to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their communities

These four well beings - social, economic, environmental and cultural – now underpin all local government work.

The Act is based on the premise that local government exists for the benefit of members of communities, who elect councils, provide the funding and use the services that councils provide.

The Act gives scope for different communities to identify their own priorities, and to develop and pursue different visions of their futures, rather than the “one size fits all” approach implicit in the traditional design of local government law.

The emphasis has moved away from local authorities as autonomous and discrete deliverers of services, to local authorities as responsive and collaborative facilitators of community outcomes.

However, the Act makes it clear that it is not the responsibility of local authorities to deliver everything, on all outcomes. Its level of influence and contribution will vary depending on the issue in question.



Council's role may be that of:

- investor: the lead body, directly involved in contributing to the outcome, and largely responsible for action in a particular outcome
- partner: joint leader, managing action in conjunction with other organisations and/or the community
- supporter: providing support to leading agencies
- broker: looking to oversee, guide and influence other agencies

Equally, Council's level of involvement may vary from that of a:

- provider: builds, resources, maintains and has an ongoing role in managing infrastructure or services required by the community
- funder: pays for the infrastructure or service, which may be managed by another organisation
- regulator: controls the actions that may/may not occur (e.g. building controls)
- facilitator: helps the community and/or other organisations to make decisions that everyone is comfortable with
- advocate: lobbies for change on behalf of the community (e.g. approaches central government agencies)

## **Relationship to Whangarei District Council's Strategic Direction**

The Council's mission is *creating the ultimate living environment*

and its vision for Whangarei is:

to be a vibrant, attractive and thriving district by delivering sustainable lifestyles based around our unique environment; the envy of New Zealand and recognised world-wide

The Whangarei District Council Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) outlines that which people in the District have identified as their priorities for the Council, and Council's plans to achieve those priorities.

The LTCCP process identified five community outcomes:

- a community which enjoys and treasures its natural and cultural values
- a district that is safe and crime free
- a district with growing business and employment opportunities
- a community that is healthy and educated
- a district with lots of community facilities and programmes for all ages

Council's support for district halls is part of its response to these outcomes, most particularly the last outcome. As the territorial local authority, Council also has a role to play through its strategic and annual planning processes:

- facilitating solutions to local needs
- advocating on behalf of the local community to central government, other local authorities and other agencies
- developing local resources
- managing local infrastructure including both physical and community infrastructure
- environmental management
- planning for the future needs of the local district



Thus, as well as the District Plan, Whangarei District Council has developed a range of plans and strategies that relate to specific areas of responsibility, including the following:

- open space strategy - management of parks and recreation
- emergency management plan
- district sports facilities plan
- urban growth strategy

Council also recognizes its responsibilities for specific community sectors, for instance the consideration of youth initiatives. Other recent developments include a disability sector reference group and Positive Ageing Strategy for the district, and a Heritage, Culture, Arts and Creative Industries sector strategy. Council playing a role with regard to community halls fits clearly within its mandate of care for its citizens and requirement to provide for community wellbeing:

## Definitions

Creating the ultimate living environment . . . by supporting community facilities that:

- are open to all community members to use for recreational and social purposes
- enable communities to meet together
- help meet the leisure needs of the district's communities

There are many types of community facilities that clearly fulfil 'community building' roles. Past investigations by Council staff indicate that Whangarei is rich in these human made resources - there are some 85 community facilities in the district that are available for community use at any given time. This Strategy has been developed to assist Council to determine policy about community hall facilities. These are predominantly, though not exclusively, located in rural areas.

In so doing, it will also assist in clarifying Council's role with regard to other facilities.

It is useful to define the range of community facilities, in order to differentiate between the types of facilities that exist. This will then assist in determining a starting point for the community halls strategy.

## Recreation Centres / Sports Complexes

These centres run a variety of programmes mainly focused on physical sport, recreation and leisure activities. As well as running formalized programmes, recreation centres and sports complexes (or parts thereof) are also available to groups and individuals for hire.

These facilities play an important role in meeting the recreational interests, as distinct from the social needs, of the Whangarei community. They may have higher resource needs than other facilities both in terms of specialist staff requirements, and also because they generally incorporate sports fields.

## Special interest-based facilities (group and/or activity specific)

These include facilities established, maintained and developed by single focus groups e.g. Scouts, Lodges, the RSA, pipe band society, and includes sports clubrooms e.g. rowing club. While they may be available for hire by the public, they are used primarily by the particular club or organization and are not run under community management as such.

## Other halls

There are a number of halls and meeting places in the district that are owned and managed by other 'institutions' such as schools and churches, etc. Increasingly they may run programmes in their own right (for example elderly care programmes, community education). Both school and church halls are usually also available for hire to the public.



There is an emerging trend for school halls, in particular, to promote their availability as a general community resource rather than purely as an education based facility; in fact the Ministry of Education actively encourages this as part of ensuring schools are integrated into their local communities.

In at least three cases in the district, school halls are community halls, either implicitly or explicitly.

The Maunu Hall, for example, was gifted to the local primary school and then sold (into private use) with the proceeds being used to support the development of a new school-based hall. At Titoki, the Mangakahia Area School hall has, with community support, taken the place of the district hall, while in Tauraroa, the Area School hall also acts as the community's local meeting place.

## **Marae**

Marae are multi-functional facilities that are also used on occasion for specific purposes (e.g. Te Kohanga Reo) and as a base for outreach facilities (e.g. community health centres). Some marae also have housing for Kaumatua and Kuia.

Primarily, they are used for family/whanau and hapu events of significance (tangi/funerals, birthdays, anniversaries etc). As such they are places where people can meet, discuss issues of the day, make decisions, celebrate, mourn those who have passed on, learn their heritage, cultural values, whakapapa, work and play.

There are old non-Maori identities living in rural districts that have developed a relationship with local Maori. They are recognized as part of local Maori society to the extent that they have requested that their loved ones lay in state on the marae. This has been the practice over a long period of time.

Marae are increasingly used (including by the Whangarei District Council) for events such as welcoming new people of significance to jobs in the district; public consultation meetings, etc.

There are 25 marae in the Whangarei district, all of which are smoke free.

Any member of the public can book marae - ethnic identity has no relevance as all people are accorded the same mutual rights - although tangihanga will always hold precedence over other activities.

## **Purpose built community facilities**

While there are no examples of such facilities in Whangarei as yet, it is likely that future developments will be multi-purpose facilities, possibly built through partnership joint funding / sponsorship arrangements. Council's new Ruakaka customer service centre, for example, will include a library with potential for other activities to be incorporated into the design of the building.

## **Community Centres / Houses**

These centres serve local urban communities and are often located near local or suburban shopping centres. 155 Community House and the Onerahi Community House are local examples. Some community centres also focus on and are designed specifically around the needs of particular groups – youth centres such as the Whangarei Youth Centre (The Church), Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Centre and the Pulse are local versions of this model.

Community centres are distinct from other facilities in that, generally, the management committee itself initiates and often runs, usually with the help of a paid co-coordinator, a range of programmes, activities and events in response to localized (neighbourhood) community needs. They also tend to offer a range of social services e.g. community information, health, playgroups, or after-school activities for children.



As Whangarei's population grows, community centres are likely to become an emerging feature as they have in other larger provincial cities.

The facility known as Smeatons Drive Community House (which is actually a hall) could potentially become a 'community centre' in the future, due to its volunteers being proactive and innovative in meeting local needs, providing opportunities for social interaction, activities, and programmes that benefit the local community.

The Kamo hall in contrast, functions with usage from city wide groups, rather than offering activities specifically related to that suburb.

## **Community halls**

Community halls are defined as:

- based on a community of locality rather than of interest or sector
- primarily rural
- facilities run solely by volunteer management committees, usually from the surrounding district
- able to be used through hireage for meetings and social events e.g. anniversaries, 21sts, farewells
- foci for a wide range of cultural, recreational and educational activities





## Whangarei's community halls – the current situation

Council's database suggests that there are 36 facilities that fall into the community hall category in the Whangarei District (see Appendix One).

Many halls were originally schools in small districts in the first half of last century. In some areas, descendants of those first school children are still active in maintaining the facilities as community halls.

In rural areas, halls have been central to the development of their respective communities.

Many of them in the past provided a focal point for their districts. Inherited from past generations, the halls therefore have historic and/or memorial value as well as providing places for the community to gather together.

Local volunteers largely drove the planning and construction of Whangarei's community halls, with assistance from district fundraising and donations. Although community involvement in some halls has waned over the years, they remain a vital part of the district's social fabric, and the management and maintenance of the halls still relies heavily on the energy of volunteers.

Services provided vary significantly from building to building, depending on the nature of the facility, and the needs, interests and 'stages' of local communities.

A constantly changing society has meant changing needs for some district facilities. Greater mobility, changes in population and changing leisure needs has had significant impacts on some district communities.

### Management and Ownership

At present, all community halls (apart from Kamo) are managed by volunteer hall committees, generally legally constituted as Incorporated Societies or Trusts. Without the unpaid work of these volunteers, community hall facilities would not be available for use by the general public.

Ownership of Whangarei's community halls - the facilities and the land on which the facilities are situated - is however both varied and complex, due in part to historic circumstances.

Some ex-school buildings were passed from the Crown (Department/Ministry of Education) into Council ownership many years ago and developed naturally into community hall facilities.

Other halls on Crown owned land over the years have come under the authority of the Department of Conservation. More recently these have started passing into Council ownership e.g. Ngunguru, Tamaterau.

In other cases hall facilities – both land and buildings – have passed from the Crown (DOC) into community ownership.

Of the 36 community hall facilities:

- 19 are community owned buildings on community owned land: Glenbervie, Kara/Kokopu, Kauri, McLeods Bay, Marua, Mata, Matapouri, Opuawhanga, Parakao, Parua Bay, Purua, Riponui, Ruatangata, Waiotira, Waipu, Whakapara, Whananaki, Whareora, Whatitiri
- 7 are Council owned buildings on Council owned land: Hikurangi, Kamo, Maungatapere, Ngunguru, Onerahi community hall (and house), Smeatons Drive and Tamaterau. Of these, all apart from Kamo currently are managed by community based /local management committees
- 5 are community owned buildings on either Council (Hukerenui, Otaika, Portland) or Crown-owned (DOC) land (Maungakamea, Waikiekie)
- 5 are Crown owned buildings on either Council (Oakura, Taurikura) or Crown land (Mangapai, Ruakaka, Springfield)

Some community owned halls are also a base for other related public facilities such as joint benefit public/local community toilets e.g. Whatitiri.



## Council's current role and responsibilities

In the past, Council's contribution to community halls has been both direct and indirect:

- the external maintenance of Council-owned buildings has been the responsibility of the Property Division, with costs met through the Division's operational budget.
- grounds maintenance (primarily mowing and weed eradication) of community halls located on Council-owned (reserve) land is now the responsibility of the Parks Division. Previously management committees would get the lawns mowed and then apply for and receive a half reimbursement paid out of community grants funding. In the future Parks may arrange for contractors already working in the district to include hall grounds mowing as part of their standard work round; at present transitional arrangements are in place, depending on the particular circumstances.
- Council has also occasionally assisted hall committees with plantings, landscaping and beautification (Parks), car parking (Roading), drainage and lighting. This has tended to happen in a relatively informal fashion; for example, if roading work is taking place nearby, a hall car park may receive some metal.
- Administration grants for maintenance and operating costs have been made available to a few council owned community managed halls.
- last year provision was made for a Community Hall Maintenance Fund to which hall management committees could apply for some financial assistance.

Community hall committees have also been able to be assisted by Council in less direct ways, as per other community and recreation groups. For example:

- Community hall committees were able to apply to the Community Grants Fund for funding for small internal maintenance type projects. Funding was limited, particularly for groups with a specific focus such as hall committees, with most funding focused on supporting Whangarei-wide services.
- Small administration grants are available to Resident and Ratepayer Associations, some of whom also operate as a hall committee (e.g. Ruatangata). The Associations must be active and provide a summary of the last 6 months activity and their plans for the next 6 months, along with their most recent financial accounts.
- Community halls are exempted from paying rates as of right (see Appendix Two).
- all community and recreation organisations are eligible for eight-year-long interest free loans from either the reserve or recreation development fund. Council is prepared to assist in this way if it has confidence that the community group meets the loan criteria and has the ability to repay the loan. Loans are generally for larger projects, and often Council's contribution can help groups to apply successfully for matching funding from other funding sources e.g. the ASB Trust.

Council also provides advisory services to hall committees. These services include advice on planting, landscaping and ground layout plans, the provision of amenities such as car parks and tennis courts (McLeod's Bay and Tamaterau), information on developing a constitution, meeting procedures, funding options, activity development and so on. These services are important 'non-financial' contributions that Council can make through its human resource expertise to community hall maintenance and development.



## Issues

Last year Council staff held two meetings with hall management committee representatives to update information on the District's rural community halls, determine levels of community interest and usage, and discuss issues.

Hall management committee representatives were invited to a further two meetings held in May 2006 during the preparation of this document.

Both these meetings were extremely well attended, with 20 - 30 people at each meeting, representing all but 11 of the 36 halls.

A number of common themes emerged from these meetings.

Hall committees identified that:

- Council has a responsibility to assist with the provision of community halls in districts
- Council needs to ensure that all community halls receive the same information about the direct and indirect financial support available from Council
- Volunteer input is a key component to community hall operations, and locals' unpaid work is a significant community resource. It is increasingly difficult to attract and retain volunteers.
- Council needs to be aware of the financial impact that compliance costs and basic running costs (security, insurance) have on community hall funds. These costs make maintaining the facility even harder. For example, OSH requirements make it impracticable to use volunteers to paint the facilities.
- Council has expertise in property maintenance and management and this is the main area with which hall committees need assistance. Hall committees are prepared to apply to sources other than Council (e.g. Lotteries) for contributions towards maintenance costs.
- Communities wax and wane and any disestablishment of a hall should be a community rather than a Council decision. Council should have a supportive role of the community asset in times when a local hall committee goes into decline /recess and if there is no other appropriate local group to play that role; and
- Council should facilitate an informal meeting of hall committee representatives annually to share and update information (e.g. about compliance standards, funding sources, hall hire charges etc)



## The future

As per its LTCCP community outcomes, Council has an ongoing commitment to the continuing provision of community halls in Whangarei.

Equally, Council sees volunteer community input as essential not only to the physical administration of district halls, but also their maintenance and promotion as valuable meeting places in local districts and communities.

In acknowledging an ongoing involvement with community hall facilities, Council wishes to develop a policy that will help Council to meet the needs of the range of communities in the Whangarei District and to balance various needs in a transparent and systematic way.

This will ensure:

- a consistent approach to community halls by Council
- the clear identification of responsibilities and allocation of roles vis a vis Council and hall committees
- the creation and maintenance of clear, open and regular communication channels
- an increased sense of purpose of community ownership of district halls
- the setting up of transparent processes for dealing with the disestablishment of existing halls and the development of future community facilities

## Ownership

The national trend within local authorities is towards district halls being both owned and managed by local communities, with Councils' primary contributions being to the maintenance of the facilities. This is also the approach being proposed in this strategy, because it acknowledges halls as part of the fabric of local communities and embeds them as community assets, with ongoing availability to local districts. It also means all community hall facilities are supported consistently by Councils, with no distinction based on ownership.

Council has a role to play in both facilitating the transfer of halls – land and/or buildings – from the Crown to community ownership.

Over time, Council in agreement with Hall Societies would also like to see the seven Council owned hall facilities devolved into community ownership.

Community ownership opens up increased options for the funding of community hall facilities. It would allow partnership approaches to hall facility maintenance and development.

Following the partnership principle, there are a number of practical ways that Council and hall management committees can fairly share responsibility for these community assets.

## Maintenance

Council has the expertise and resources to assist community halls with their property maintenance requirements.

Council can take responsibility for ensuring that, firstly, a comprehensive facility inspection is carried out on all 36 community hall facilities.

This inspection, done in conjunction with hall committee representatives, will establish an agreed baseline of information on maintenance needs.



Consequently, a medium to long term (five to ten years) work plan of community hall maintenance can be developed and budgeted for.

A prioritization framework will be developed using a Building Assessment record template. Council will use this to help assess requests for community hall maintenance in terms of the support for, usage, and ongoing viability of the community hall facility. Maintenance to meet health and safety requirements will be considered a priority.

Hall committees will also be able to apply for extra funding for any other specific projects or one-off hall renovations at this time.

A schedule of community hall maintenance projects can then be submitted for inclusion in Council's annual budget process.

Projects will be paid for in two ways:

- through the Property Divisions operational budget, as is currently the case for Council owned facilities
- supplemented by an annual community hall facility maintenance funding stream, allocated under the Social Wellbeing Category in the District Development Funding (see Appendix Three)

Council assistance will provide all community hall committees with the opportunity to more easily lever additional funding for community hall maintenance from other sources.

Hall committees will continue to be responsible for

- all maintenance required for the day-to-day use of the hall, for example, minor interior and exterior repairs (leaking taps, broken windows), electricity, cleaning, internal and external rubbish removal, water rates and other general expenses
- internal repairs, maintenance and improvements to the building, for example, internal repainting, carpet and lino replacement
- replacement and/or improvement of building content, for example, chairs and tables, crockery and cutlery
- Council division's standard cost recovery charges, for example, the Building WOF charge, environmental health inspection charge, consent fees where appropriate

## **Other related services**

### **Insurance**

Council's Property division can also assist community halls with other building related requirements, for example, facilitating more equitable and reasonable insurance charges on hall facilities.

Some hall management committees pay up to \$4,000 p.a. in insurance costs. This can be a heavy financial burden for volunteers, as well as discouraging new volunteer involvement.

Council will take a lead in investigating more cost effective insurance options for district halls. This may take the form of some negotiation with the insurers of Council's own (Council owned) property, to include halls under the Council's insurance schedule.

Alternatively it may mean Council brokering an arrangement on behalf of a group of halls. Hall committees may continue to be responsible for meeting other insurance costs (e.g. for contents and non-fixed items such as pianos, other furniture, memorabilia, sporting equipment etc).

Some halls also contain valuable memorabilia and these will continue to be the responsibility of hall committees to protect and maintain for the community.



## **Auditing**

While less of an issue than insurance costs, the auditing of annual hall accounts can also be a significant financial burden for management committees. Increasingly, audited accounts are required by funding bodies, especially those allocating larger amounts of money.

While some hall committees already have systems in place that adequately meet their needs, there is a role for Council Community Development staff to explore ways in which the auditing of community hall committee accounts can be undertaken in a more cost effective way. This may be through a group scheme, where a number of halls' accounts are handled by one 'audit provider'.

## **Fire Safety**

Council Property staff can also play a facilitative role in relation to the responsibilities of hall management committees for fire safety provisions. Some hall committees have initiated discussions with the Fire Service regarding this, but have found that applying Fire Service requirements, given the particular circumstances of community halls, is practically very difficult.

It will be worthwhile for Council to discuss the issues impacting on community halls with the NZ Fire Service to see what solutions can be found, and also to ensure that hall committees are clear about their responsibilities in terms of fire safety (community halls' fire systems will also need to be taken into account in relation to insurance cover).

## **Civil Defence**

In order to provide comprehensive Civil Defence Emergency Management within the district, Council is currently working with local communities to develop Community Response Plans. These will identify places in the community that can be utilized in an emergency and will include detailed information on the facilities including access, toilets, kitchen facilities and capacity.

Community halls are likely to become civil defence centres in an emergency, providing a space where people who have been evacuated from their homes can stay. Local hall committees are the logical community bodies to be actively involved in the local Civil Defence response within their area.

## **Advice and information**

### **To hall committees**

Council staff already provides hall committees with updates and details about their administrative responsibilities (for example, the Building Act, liquor licensing, health and safety requirements) by way of mail-outs to hall committees. Feedback from hall committee representatives suggests that this information is a useful starting point.

As hall committees move increasingly into applying for funding for facility maintenance to supplement more consistent Council financial support, they will require initial assistance at least with the funding process. Volunteer committees unfamiliar with funding applications can be overwhelmed by what appears to be a complex process requiring a level of expertise that they may feel they lack.

Council can play a useful role in demystifying the funding process; for example by providing management committees with a funding calendar which is a compilation of the funding sources available. Committees can then decide what sources they will follow up on, and request further information as appropriate.

Hall committee representatives have also expressed interest in being provided with a list of local contractors used by Council who can be called upon by hall committees for day-to-day repairs and maintenance.



## **To the public**

Council is keen to help promote the use of community halls in agreement with the respective community hall committees. As well, from a district asset basis, it would be valuable to catalogue community facilities.

Council's website can be augmented to share information about community halls with the public. Photos of the facilities, information about hall size, cost and booking details would serve to demonstrate to Whangarei people the scope of the amenities in the district. Small runs of hard copy directories could be available at customer services desks, libraries etc, as well as being a useful resource for Council's front line telephonists.

## **Between Council / hall committees**

Community hall representatives were unanimously supportive of Council continuing to arrange and facilitate annual Council / hall committee meetings.

These meetings will be an opportunity for management committees to engage with staff and resource people from Council and other organisations (e.g. Fire Service, liquor licensing, funding bodies etc). Council can then follow up on specific issues in more detail on behalf of the community hall committees collectively.

These meetings also give community hall representatives an opportunity to share information on common topics e.g. hall utilisation, fees etc.

## **Within Council**

Hall management committees will be expected to first utilise the relevant Council division depending on the issue. However, community hall liaison will continue to be allocated as a portfolio responsibility to a Community Development team member. This is in recognition of the Community Development unit's role as a conduit to a range of Council advisory services that can assist community hall committees.

Hall committees will continue to be responsible for:

- applying for funding to sources apart from Council to assist with building maintenance and redevelopment
- meeting general and volunteer costs (for example volunteer expenses, fees, training, strategic planning, administrative costs, advertising hall meetings, printing etc).
- promotion of and all bookings of their facilities
- user satisfaction surveys / feedback
- providing an Annual Report to Council



## Winding up / disestablishment

A number of sometimes conflicting variables impact on district community halls. These include:

- changes in population and the population structure
- changing social and recreational patterns
- closure of rural schools versus the development of enhanced school facilities in some rural communities
- increased mobility and disconnection with local 'place' versus community pride and a growing desire to value local heritage and assets

Some community halls around Whangarei are experiencing a resurgence of interest as community focal points. Years of rural depopulation and decline are being reversed by changes in land use and demographics which are occurring in a number of areas.

Other halls are still in a period of community downturn and are not being well utilized. There may be insufficient numbers of people with the energy to sustain what can appear to be a facility past its use-by date.

Winding up, disestablishing, or removing a community asset such as a hall is not something to be done lightly. Nor is it possible to put a timeframe around hall usage to determine whether it is no longer needed. There are examples in the Whangarei district of halls have lying dormant and practically unused for many (five - ten) years, and then when the population changes in communities have consolidated, significant activity has built up again, and the local hall has become a central focus of the district's new lease of life.

In the event of a lack of community interest, Council is the logical and appropriate body to support the physical asset in some way, until such time as the 'community' is re-energised and able again to take on some level of community management of the facility.

If, over time, no community organization or committee can be formed within the community, it would be appropriate for the facility to be vested in Council as the overall steward of the district's assets, and this be stated in any 'winding up' clause in a hall's Incorporated Society documentation or similar.





## New community facility development

As can be seen when looking at the history of community halls in the Whangarei district, communities and their needs change over time.

The provision of community facilities must take account of changing trends in community and leisure activities, and cater to the District's increasingly diverse communities. In order to be able to meet these changing requirements, Council will be exploring flexible and adaptable consideration of the nature of community facilities and the means by which such facilities will be provided.

The provision of community facilities requires considerable resources both for their establishment and for their operation. Council will need to make sure that it is most effectively using limited resources in the best possible way to meet community needs.

Council will in the first instance look to local communities to signal a need for new facilities, and will collaborate with other organisations in the location of facilities and community programmes.

This collaboration will lead to the formulation of new models of configuration and funding, including through community / government partnerships to make the best use of all available resources.

When planning major changes or new facilities Council will therefore look firstly at the potential to meet community requirements in different ways. This could be through:

- new types of facilities such as multipurpose and purpose-built facilities co-located with other Council, government or voluntary services, or as part of commercial, retail or residential developments;
- new ways of resourcing such as co-location or partnerships with other providers
- new ways of providing services traditionally delivered through community halls, for example outreach programmes, use of new technologies to link facilities or to provide services by other means such as electronic access

Council's support of communities to achieve their goals with regard to new facilities may initially take the form of provision of expertise, for example, advice about funding sources and support to establish a Community Trust, with a view to the ownership of new facilities remaining with the community.

A current example of how Council's support can work is at Bland Bay, where the local community is hoping to raise funds, with Council's assistance, for a new hall on land purchased by council a few years ago for that purpose. The Parks Division has undertaken to assist with the development of the site and outdoor recreation facilities, such as parking, tennis/hard courts, fencing and planting.

Using Development contributions to fund community / recreation facilities is a possibility that needs to be explored. There is a strong view in some local communities that are undergoing growth (subdivision of land into lifestyle blocks etc) that the contributions being made by developers should be channelled back into the same local community that is being impacted upon and used to build new community halls or cover the costs of extensions to existing community halls.

New community facility development (or substantial redevelopment) needs to be included in asset management plans and consulted upon through the Long Term Council Community Plan process.

Evidence of the need for new or extended community facilities / halls as a result of the new development will be required, and clear criteria developed for Council's use in making decisions about future developments.



Factors that will need to be taken into account include:

- population/demographic changes (including age, cultural background, income, socio-economic status);
- settlement patterns;
- community identified needs; and
- proximity and usage rates of existing facilities.

Integrating consideration of community facilities into asset management planning as part of the Long Term Council Community Plan process is an effective way for Council to take a planned approach to future developments.



## Related issues: other community facilities

It is important to acknowledge the value that the existence of other community facilities apart from community halls adds to the district as a whole. These facilities together make up a District-wide network of community meeting places.

Having considered and clarified its role with community halls, Council next needs to consider its involvement in and overall relationship with some of the other community facilities identified earlier in this document.

Council needs to explore issues that are specific to recreation centres / sports complexes and marae, as well as some issues that affect community facilities in general.

### Recreation Centres / Sports Complexes

These facilities e.g. Ruakaka Recreation Centre, Mangakahia Sports Complex have enjoyed differing support from Council over the years.

Some have received funding through the annual budgeting process in their own right (Ruakaka). Others have been seen alongside and included within funding provided to community halls in some districts (e.g. Mangakahia Sports Complex which accessed the now historic Mangakahia ward 'recreational rate', along with a number of Mangakahia halls). Still others have received little financial or other support from Council.

Because these facilities often incorporate sports fields and paid professional staff, they need to be considered in their own right. There is a need for policy to be developed regarding Council's role with recreation centres / sports complexes that takes account of their particular circumstances.

### Marae

Marae in the district are used by a significant proportion of the population, primarily but not exclusively by Maori, who constitute approximately 30% of Whangarei's population.

Contrary to the general view, marae have limited access to funding and support. The Maori Reservation Regulations 1994 denies marae the ability to borrow money. Koha has been the basis of marae survival, supplemented by grants where possible to assist with maintenance and growth.

In recognition of the limited access to funding, some councils have instituted grants that are available specifically for marae. The Hastings and New Plymouth District Councils, for example, both have marae maintenance funds.

Some Councils also acknowledge that marae committees are often intensely interested in Council development projects, especially as they impact on areas of significance to Maori, environmental issues etc, and that they can have particular difficulties in accessing resources (e.g. professional services) to comment on Council related issues.

The New Plymouth District Council, for example, also provides some assistance to iwi/hapu/marae towards subsidizing the purchase of such professional services. This may be to facilitate participation in resource consent applications or for independent planning advice and professional reports relating to the preparation of and changes to the District Plan including e.g. legal; engineering; cultural; valuation services; monitoring and scientific services.

Given the central role that these facilities play in the life of many communities in the Whangarei District, Council should explore further how it can assist marae with maintenance and other needs.



## General

In the case of many community facilities, particularly special-interest-based facilities (group and/or activity specific), the building is owned by a community organisation, but is located on Council-owned (reserve) land under a lease arrangement.

These include facilities established, maintained and developed by sports groups, community groups, and 'not for profit' organisations. Some marae e.g. Otangarei are also on Council reserve land.

While these facilities are, unlike community halls, used mainly by one organisation with a specific purpose, they have similar needs in terms of building maintenance and facility costs, grounds planting and landscaping, funding and voluntary management issues.

In recognition of this, and the wide range of groups in the community providing local services and activities on a voluntary or 'not for profit' basis, some Councils provide support to non-Council owned facilities in the form of a small contestable 'community accommodation assistance' grant fund. This fund can help these groups meet rates and /or lease rental payments.

In other cases these groups are eligible to apply for Council assistance with planting and landscaping or minor building maintenance.

Within the Whangarei District, it appears that ad hoc decisions over the years have led to a diversity of arrangements with groups who own facilities located on Council (reserve) owned land. As with community halls, a clear policy framework that outlines consistent principles to guide Council decisions is required.

For this reason, Council should initiate a stock-take and overall review of its approach to community facilities on Council (reserve) owned land to help determine its future role and responsibilities.



## Conclusion

Council recognises the importance of Whangarei residents having access to a variety of spaces, and is committed to ensuring that there is a network of community facilities across the District so people can meet together and participate in the life of their communities.

Council's reasons for being involved with community halls include:

- meeting public expectation about local government's role in the provision of services
- providing assets to enhance the social fabric of district communities
- ensuring provision of services and facilities to meet people's leisure and recreation needs
- recognition that collective provision of services and facilities is more viable than individual provision

Council acknowledges that its role up until now has been to ensure that Council-owned facilities such as halls and other related public facilities (for example, public toilets attached to community owned halls) are maintained.

With the development of this strategy, Council will move to more consistently support the maintenance of community halls regardless of ownership. This signals that Council believes these facilities play a critical community building role in the district and that the ownership of the facilities is secondary to their existence and function.

In developing this policy, Council is also acknowledging that rural community halls will continue to play a vital role in district communities in the future. As the District grows, there is evidence of a resurgence of interest in these facilities. Existing halls, for example, are likely to play an important role as part of an enhanced civil defence infrastructure for the District in the future.

There will also be a need for new community facilities that will meet the current and future needs of newly emerging communities. Council is keen to work on partnership approaches to such developments, supporting local community initiatives and facilitating joint ventures where possible. This will include exploring the inclusion of new and future community facilities in Council's asset management plans, with a view to utilizing development contributions to help resource the provision of community facilities in developing areas.

## Final comment

Whangarei is positioning itself as the cultural capital and heritage hub of the region. There is a rich history of 'this place' encapsulated in the stories associated with 'our places' – the District's rural community halls.

In 2003, the Rotorua District Council produced 'Over the Years – a history of the rural community halls in the Rotorua District'. This booklet is an example of the role Councils can play to retain and protect local heritage by ensuring that the stories of a District's past are preserved and recorded before they are lost.

In due course, Council, in conjunction with other interested parties, will capture and share the history of our rural halls as a practical commitment to enhancing Whangarei as a place to live and visit. This is not, however, an immediate priority for the delivery of support to community hall committees and will be explored following the administration, allocation and distribution of the Community Halls Fund.



## Recommendations

### Roles and Responsibilities with existing community halls

- That Council acknowledges district halls as important community assets and recognises its role in ensuring their ongoing viability
- That Council supports a Council/community partnership approach to the community halls. Hall committees will be responsible for other maintenance and operations. Council will assist with exterior and internal health and safety related maintenance that has been identified in the Council initiated building reviews.
- That a comprehensive inspection be carried out on all 36 community hall facilities by Council Property division staff in conjunction with hall committee representatives
- That this information be used to develop a five – ten year work plan for community hall maintenance that will include any actions required by Council (e.g. frequency of inspections etc)
- That this work plan be applied equitably across council and non-council owned halls
- That Council owned halls continue to be maintained through the Property Division's annual operating budget unless they transfer to community ownership.
- That a community hall maintenance fund be established to assist community hall committees with exterior and internal health and safety related maintenance that has been identified in the Council initiated building review.
- That the current community hall maintenance fund (\$75,000) be reviewed once the inspection and work plans are developed
- That Council staff investigate more cost effective insurance and auditing options for district halls
- That Council staff initiate discussions with the NZ Fire Service as to what can reasonably be expected of community hall management committees, given the particular circumstances of district halls
- That council staff liaise with DoC to bring issues related to Crown-owned halls to council for further consideration
- That public information about community halls be added to Council's website and that a limited run of hardcopy directories be produced
- That Council maintains a detailed database on community halls for Civil Defence purposes
- That Council develops a resource booklet for hall committees e.g. A Guide for Community Hall Committees

### Winding up / Disestablishment of community halls

- That Council will consider a stewardship role of a community hall, in the event of any incorporated society or trust winding up, with due regard to the constitution of that particular Hall Society

### New community facility development

- That Council develop criteria based on the factors noted in this document from which to assess and prioritise the future development of new community facilities
- That new and future community facilities be included in Council asset management plans, with a view to utilising development contributions to help resource the provision of community facilities in developing areas



### Other community facilities

- That Council develop consistent policy with regard to its roles and responsibilities for recreation centres / sports complexes
- That Council's role and responsibilities with regard to marae facilities be referred to the iwi liaison committee for advice and further comment
- That a community facilities strategy be developed that aligns with the Community Halls strategy to systematize Council's approach to all community facilities on Council (reserve) owned land

### General

- That Council work with other interested parties to initiate a history of the Whangarei District's rural halls following the administration, allocation and distribution of the Community Halls Fund.
- That the key points in this document be summarised and sent to community all committees along with a full copy, for comment prior to the finalisation of the strategy.



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## Appendix One: Community Halls in the Whangarei District

### Bream Bay Ward

Maungakaramea  
Otaika  
Portland  
Mangapai  
Mata  
Springfield  
Waiotira  
Waikiekie  
Ruakaka  
Waipu

### Okara Ward

Smeatons Drive  
Onerahi

### Denby Ward

Kamo

### Whangarei Heads

Ngunguru  
Glenbervie  
Whareora  
Parua Bay  
Taurikura  
Tamaterau

### Mangakahia/Maungatapere Ward

Parakao  
Kara/Kokopu  
Maungatapere  
Whatatiri



### Hikurangi - Coastal Ward

Oakura  
Opuawhanga  
Whananaki  
Marua  
Matapouri  
Hikurangi  
Hukerenui  
Whakapara  
Riponui  
Purua  
Kaurihohore  
Ruatangata



## Appendix Two: Remission of Rates for Community, Sporting and Other Organisations (Whangarei District Council Rates Remission Policy No. 9)

### Objectives of the Policy

- To facilitate the ongoing provision of non-commercial (non-business) community services and/or recreational opportunities that meet the needs of Whangarei residents.
- To facilitate the ongoing provision of non-commercial (non-business) recreational opportunities for Whangarei residents.
- To assist the organisation's survival; and
- To make membership of the organisation more accessible to the general public, particularly disadvantaged groups. These include children, youth, young families, aged people, and economically disadvantaged people.

### Conditions and Criteria

The Council may remit rates where the application meets the following criteria:

- 1 The policy will apply to land owned by the Council or owned and occupied by a charitable or non-profit organisation, which is used exclusively or principally for sporting, recreation, or community purposes.
- 2 The policy will not apply to organisations operated for private pecuniary profit, or which charge tuition fees.
- 3 The policy will not apply to groups or organisations whose primary purpose is to address the needs of adult members (over 18 years) for entertainment or social interaction, or who engage in recreational, sporting, or community services as a secondary purpose only.
- 4 The application for rate remission must be made to the Council prior to the commencement of the rating year; applications received during a rating year will be applicable from the commencement of the following rating year. No applications will be backdated.
5. Organisations making application should include the following documents in support of their application:
  - (a) Statement of objectives;
  - (b) Full financial accounts;
  - (c) Information on activities and programmes;
  - (d) Details of membership or clients.
6. The policy shall apply to such organisations as approved by the Manager Community Enterprises and the Corporate Services Manager as meeting the relevant criteria.
7. Remission will also be granted in respect of rates referred to in section 9 of the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002 (that is, targeted rates for sewage disposal or waste collection).

Remission will be 50% of property rates and 50% of service charges (as in 7 above). The exception will be public community halls that will receive 100% remission of rates and charges.



## **Appendix Three: Proposed Community Hall Facility Maintenance Fund**

Funded from general rates, the fund will be designed to assist community hall management committees with the external maintenance of the District's community hall facilities.

The Community Hall Facility Maintenance fund will be allocated in accordance with Council's District Development Funding Administration Policy. Community Hall management committees will apply in writing and applications will be considered annually.

The Fund will be available for community operated, not for profit community halls available for public use and/or hireage (as identified by Council in the community hall strategy).

This fund is not available to special-interest-based facilities (group and/or activity-specific) such as sports clubs, Scouts, community groups, and 'not for profit' organizations. Contact the Community Development team at Whangarei District Council for information on other funding schemes that are able to assist.

This fund is not intended to provide funding for capital works or acquisitions, the costs of facility activities, or operational/running costs. Contact the Community Development team at Whangarei District Council for information on other funding schemes that are able to assist with these items.

