

Waitakere Ranges Local Board

Member Ken Turner

December 2021 Board Member Report

Introduction:

With our personal movements having been restricted for so much of this year, most of my council work and meetings have taken place online, although this has limited my practical involvement with people and issues, it has allowed me more time to improve my navigation and understanding of council's bureaucratic processes. In this Report I convey my thoughts on the unprecedented amount of change being put upon our communities at present, and why I believe Council is failing to deliver improvements to Core Services.

Preamble:

During the turbulence of the last 12 months, it's been easy to get blown off course, and I've constantly had to remind myself to stay grounded in the practical.



It's important to remember that despite another back-on-back year of extraordinarily challenging circumstances we still awoke each day to water flowing from our taps. Our toilets still flushed, our rubbish bins still got emptied and intersection lights still controlled traffic. It's easy to pick fault with our public infrastructure because there is much to improve, but it's the fact core services like these exist that underpins our society's ability to triumph over life's big challenges. It's called a 'first world standard of living' and was built by generations of hard work driving improvements in small incremental steps.



In contrast to this, the last 12 months has seen giant leaps of change some of which is being forced upon Council by central government objectives, like the 'COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting Act 2020)' and the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020, with Three Waters and parliaments Local Government Review still in the pipeline. Subsequently Council pulls huge resources of bureaucratic manpower and funding away from core purpose and services.

On top of this local government politicians and bureaucrats develop and apply their own objectives. I worry that we elected members lose sight of the basics, in exchange for the rhetoric of the super slogan. As admirable as the ultimate objective may be, if it's conveyed through an unrealistic Slogan then in the long run this is counterproductive. It's my observation that when unrealistic aspirations become the Objectives and Outcomes of council planning, it often leads to the quickly obtainable, small, and simple improvements getting overlooked.

There is an old proverb Do the little things to the best of your ability, and the big things will take care of themselves.



In all this policy process I have seen little that will improve councils' delivery of effective cost-efficient core services, because what needs fixing is the triangular managerial relationship between Council - councils Preferred Supplier - and Subcontractors (to the preferred supplier).

It's my view that Council also needs an old-fashioned 'Department of Works' to stop specialist departments (eg. engineering, heritage, environmental, etc.) all vying for supremacy within a single project context.

My years highlight is really an 'accumulated effect' rather than one single thing, and it is the astonishing speed at which communication technology has advanced in just the last 12 months.

Thirty-five years ago, my father's first mobile phone weighed 5 kg, at the time commonly called a "brick". It is now in the Huia Museum.

Today I can be walking the street or almost anywhere and participate in virtual face-to-face meetings and workshops. The first Covid lockdown in 2020 forced me into a somewhat clunky virtual world, although many of my problems were self-induced. I along with many others have got better with practice, but at the same time and at twice the speed this communication technology has adapted to me. It is now simpler to navigate has more functionality and connectivity. The commercial competition between platform providers has seen exponential improvement in videoconferencing. Skype, Zoom and now Microsoft Teams have all taken prime place on my taskbar in that order. Recently I had my first experience with Google Meeting, and it too was astonishingly easy and good. I don't see this technology replacing the need for meeting each other in the real, but they will certainly play a big part of future life.



This illustrates what drives good and long-lasting change. It's not forced upon people they embrace its advantages.

Business update:

Twelve months ago in my last report, I explained why I was confident that Waitakere would regain the economic activity lost to the first Covid lockdown fairly quickly. I had made this assumption because our economic activity is primarily locally based. Certainly, we (and the rest the country) got through that situation far quicker than I had dared hope. Life for most of us carried on virtually as normal within three or four months. But the second Covid lockdown is a different story. Firstly, most people didn't expect it, me included, suddenly business realised economic continuity was not assured. The drop in business confidence was further compounded when supply-chain issues started affecting stock levels of construction materials. This is adding expense of time delays to projects and further reducing people's earning ability. I feel for the hospitality and retail industries as they have borne the brunt of the decline in our domestic economy.

I know our communities will get through this latest challenge, but it's going to be a longer process than I had envisaged. We in Auckland Council can best lead this recovery by keeping focused on the basics and delivering core services effectively and efficiently.

I'm also hoping that the internal impacts on New Zealand from external Covid issues will prompt us to rethink our policies on 'Globalisation', another one of those super slogans that isn't living up to its name. To improve the resilience of our communities, we need to regain some self-sufficiency by making our own things again.

Roading Infrastructure:

In my last report, I pointed out how critical good transport infrastructure is to the financial viability of local businesses and the day-to-day convenience of residents and ratepayers. I pointed out the problems with insufficient parking in our community centres like Titirangi Village and Swanson and at Public Transport hubs.



I acknowledged that our coastal communities like Huia, Piha and Bethel's Beach /Te Henga were experiencing huge parking problems particularly on weekends.



Unfortunately, I can only report that these problems are getting worse. Many of the causes are outside our local boards control, but board members are proactively pursuing any actions that may help reduce the problems and improve outcomes for everybody.

Unfortunately, it's not a one fix problem, 'parking' requirements are as diverse as the destinations and activities people wish to travel too.

It's my observation that simple proactive controls of parking, through physical policing and management by trained staff brings huge improvements. You only need look at traffic management controls around road works to see how effective this type of intervention is.



It's my opinion, that at a different level Auckland Council and its CCO Auckland Transport are anti-car. I base this opinion on the copious times that I hear it verbally stated, "roads are not all about cars" and "Auckland must remove 500,000 cars from its roads by 2030 if we are to meet our carbon reduction targets". There is truth in the first statement, and some necessity in the latter, but the way in which this is driving decision-making to transport network needs careful consideration. I agree that roads are not all about cars but equally they are not all about any single type of user group.

Auckland Transport's reasoning for less cars is confusing the goal to reduce carbon emissions with the design needs for well-functioning road transport networks. I believe a reduction in cars on Auckland's roads over the next nine years will be minimal, in part because reduction in fossil fuel powered vehicles will be offset by uptake of electric vehicles and due to recharging requirements for EV's parking needs will increase, not decrease.

Auckland Transport's slogan 'Vision Zero' calls for zero road deaths or serious injuries on our transport system by 2050. The policy language states this will be delivered through an ethics-based transport safety approach which puts people first by incorporating high-quality roads, safe vehicle technology and safe speeds. Putting people first is admirable. So, what do people want?

People want more footpaths, proven by the fact Auckland Transport receives 5 to 8 requests for new footpaths per month. Footpaths are an ethical contribution to human safety. Auckland Transport presently has a list containing 800 requests for new footpaths, but at the present funding levels (\$4million per annum) this will take 100+ years to deliver. And that's providing no more requests are added to the list.

This is half a century beyond the mission statements target.

Meanwhile hundreds of millions are being spent on restricting traffic flows and making traffic move more slowly. All in the name of Vision Zero.

Roads and traffic are inherently dangerous, ever slower traffic speeds does not mitigate the need for well-designed and constructed roads with footpaths.

In some cases, Governance objectives of Auckland Council and Auckland Transport are directed or constrained by government legislation, but I know of no external reason that Auckland Transport should prioritize such limited budget to new foot paths. I strongly advocate for a doubling of AT's footpath budget annually.

For decades ***Auckland Council stipulated car parking requirements within building consents***, this worked to provide adequate levels of parking, and was a mathematical calculation based on the number of occupants in a dwelling, or projected customer/visitor levels at commercial and recreational facilities.



Today, Council Planning actively incentivises housing developments which under deliver parking facilities. Auckland Transport and Auckland Councils refresh of their 2015 Auckland Transport Parking Strategy will further flip our historic approach to parking on its head. All in what I see as a forlorn hope that this will make cars go away. We will be unsuccessful in getting people out of cars, while the alternatives are so limited and inconvenient. Auckland's public transport system has grown around delivering working-week commuters to and from the city and satellite centres. Except for the Harbour Fairies, there exists no public transport for day-trippers to locations for many of those iconic Kiwi weekend activities. Aucklanders need a car, and we must eliminate that need by supplying alternative forms and systems of transport, before removing residential off-street parking requirements for dwellings. Otherwise, people will just be forced to park on our suburban streets which will deliver more problems than it removes.

Solid Waste:

From the very first people in Tāmaki Makaurau, to the 1.6 million Aucklanders of today, we have been creating waste and disposing of it in a hole in the ground. As our numbers grow and our way of life changed this has become ever more problematic. But the reality of waste and the necessity to deal with it has forced landfill methodology and technology to improve hugely over recent decades, and the landfill of today is a very sophisticated process for the long-term disposal of waste and I'm sure there is more improvements to come.

The basic needs of society, the physical necessities of our communities, must be taken seriously and I do not believe this is properly conveyed when unrealistic slogans/mission-statements are put in place. Auckland Councils Waste Management Minimisation Plan establishes "Zero Waste as a long-term aspirational goal and a key driver of Council services".



Zero Waste is a fantasy. Waste is a result of all life on earth no matter how sophisticated. Waste is so important personally, that after inception our anus is one of our first body parts, forming before our mouth.

At the other extreme of human existence NASA's new generation of space shuttle called Dream Catcher boasts amongst its advancements the ability to bring a 3700KG module of garbage back to earth, releasing it on reentry to be incinerated in the upper atmosphere.

Recycling is essential and we're continuously getting better at it, but few things can be recycled endlessly. Waste exists, and for Auckland Council to use their proclamation of 'Zero Waste' to justify removing public rubbish bins from parks is ridiculous. This slogan invokes the pretense that landfills are not needed when nothing could be further from the truth.

What's worse, is mission statements that are strong on philosophy and light on specification (like Zero Waste) give opportunity for council bureaucrats to spend money on risky fringe enterprises rather than the laborious task of improving the basics.

An example of this is **Councils Food Scraps Collection Service:**

Although waste cannot be eliminated there is a huge portion which can be diverted from landfill. The food scraps component can be recycled into compost.



Food scraps make up 45% of the average Aucklanders rubbish and so keeping this out of landfill through a composting process hugely increases standard landfill capacity. Composting is a fundamental process which people have been doing for millennia and our modern technology has allowed us to do this simple operation in several ways and on an industrial scale.



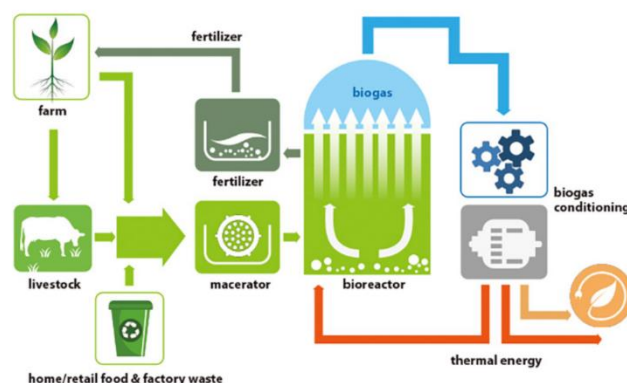
It's a simple change to a core service. We just need to collect the food scraps separately to general waste, which we already do with recyclable hard products.

Of course, the logistics to separately collecting food scraps on a citywide scale is where the complication lies, but I commend Auckland Council for adapting and incorporating this basic principle into their waste strategy.

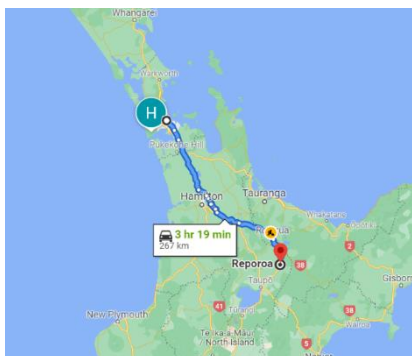
Food scraps are already being composted on a moderate scale all around the country and some small operations in Auckland. Large scale In Vessel Composting (IVC) Is already being done by Christchurch City Council. However, rather than Auckland Council just simply using this proven system (which others have paid the costs of ironing out any problems) and focusing their energy on the complexities of collection.

Auckland Council has chosen to sideline composting and instead start a whole new process with anaerobic digestion and have invested \$150M into a public/private partnership to digest Auckland's food scraps into methane and fertilizer. Like composting, this is a fundamental process of nature which people have been utilizing for centuries.

But it adds several more layers of complexity and cost to what could be done far more simply by composting.



The end-products from anaerobic digestion of food scraps (methane and fertilizer) are seen as more valuable than mere compost and therefore can better offset the capital and operational costs of the food scraps collection service (It's important to remember that landfills also produce methane and these days it is caught and use to run electrical generators. Redvale landfill already produces enough electricity to power 18000 homes). If you don't want to produce electricity (and thankfully Auckland Council doesn't) then you must have buyers for these products and the infrastructure to deliver it to them. For these reasons the Digester Plant has been located beside a huge horticultural glass house complex so the methane it produces can be sold to this facility for commercial heating. However, this facility is in Reparoa (Central North Island).



So, now after collecting Auckland's food scraps they must travel a further 250+km to be processed.

According to a recent Report this adds an additional 2,734,175kg of CO₂-eq per year to net Green House Emissions.

Result summary

High-level WRATE modelling was used to compare the life-cycle greenhouse gas emission impact of different treatment options for separately collected food waste from Auckland. The results include both transport and processing and are presented in terms of annual net CO₂ equivalent emissions in the below table and summarised as follows:

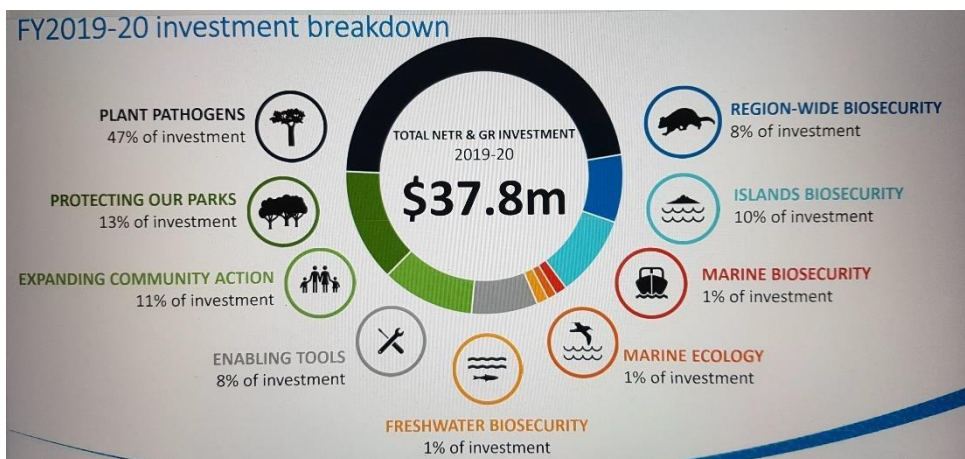
- Living Earth IVC solution, with a facility based in the Auckland region and local use of organic products: Net GHG **reduction** of 207,887 kg CO₂-eq per year
- AD facility in Reporoa solution, with open windrow composting of digestate and local use of organic products: Net GHG **increase** of 2,734,174 kg CO₂-eq per year
- This presents an overall reduction in emissions of 2,942,061 kg CO₂-eq per year when comparing the IVC solution to the AD solution.

This flies in the face of another super slogan 'Zero Net Carbon 2050'.

Targeted Rates:

A 'targeted rate' is in addition to 'general rates' and is for the purpose of achieving a special outcome which is outside councils' normal scope of works, this can include unforeseen circumstances.

Ask any Aucklander what councils 'Natural Environment Targeted Rate' is for, and those that have



heard of it will almost certainly answer "to fight Kauri Dieback disease". But the fact is only a portion of the \$31 million collected by the NETR annually goes to fighting kauri dieback.

The two subcategories that always interest me are **Expanding Community Action 11%** and **Enabling Tools 8%** of investment. The combined budget of these two subcategories is more than Auckland Transport's annual new footpath budget.

Theoretically a Targeted Rate must:

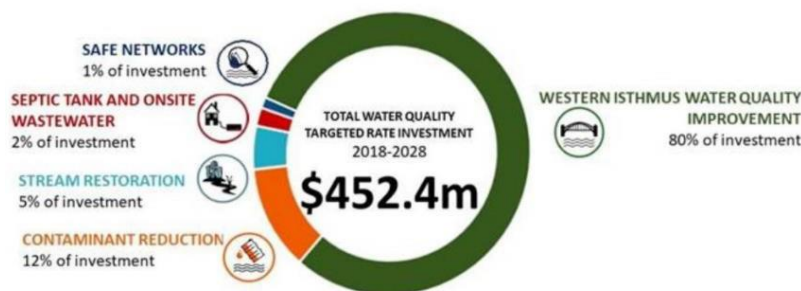
- Be ring-fenced for the stated project/activity it was raised to achieve.
- Everyone paying the rate must be receiving benefit from it. Or said differently, if you are not a beneficiary of what the targeted rate is achieving, you don't have to pay it.
- Monies collected by the targeted rate must be spent within the duration of the targeted rate. Again, said differently, when the targeted rate stops there must be no spare money leftover.

So, **the name of a targeted rate is all important**. It must be as expansive and inclusive as possible. Because the more people that it can be argued receive benefit from it, means a larger sum of money that can be collected whilst keeping individual payments relatively small.

Auckland Councils Water Quality Targeted Rate is a good example of this.

Water Quality Targeted Rate

The graph below gives an overview of how the targeted rate is being used. The Western Isthmus Water Quality Improvement programme is a joint programme with Watercare to separate stormwater from wastewater to reduce overflows into the Waitemata Harbour.



The rate was set to collect \$450M over 10 years off all Aucklanders, and whilst it's paying for numerous smaller projects to improve water quality across the whole of Auckland the vast majority (80%) is being spent on separating wastewater and stormwater infrastructure in the Westmere and surrounding areas of central Auckland.

Auckland Council never hid this fact, it's just that the slogan rhetoric obscured it.

Climate Change Targeted Rate:

And it is for the above reasons that I do not support a Climate Change Targeted Rate. In my view there needs to be more specificity so ratepayers can judge where the money is going and what tangible achievements are being gained.

I do support smaller and more specifically targeted rates designed to contribute to reducing our dependency on fossil fuels and improving our cities climate resilience.

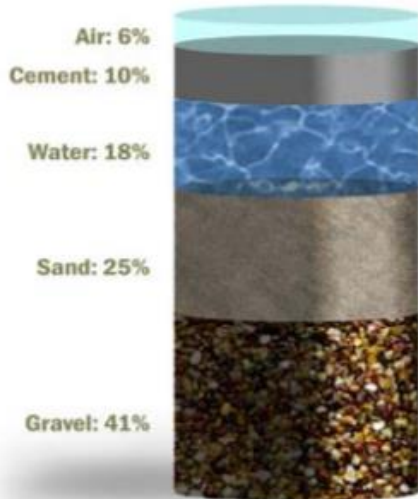
Balancing council's climate change response:

Auckland Council must be very transparent and pragmatic in the development and implementation of climate policy. Resulting rules and regulations must be holistically developed and all factors included in balance decision-making.

For example, Auckland Council is developing a policy which will determine a 'carbon budget' for every project.

This will form part of every building consent application, and if Council considers that the building methodology delivers an excessively large carbon footprint a different building approach may be requested.

The Mix in Ready Mixed Concrete



It's my observation that cement is at the top of councils hit list.

Of course, cement = concrete the most used product in our city's infrastructure.

Manufacturing cement releases a lot of CO₂, approximately .85 kg of CO₂ for 1 kg of cement produced.

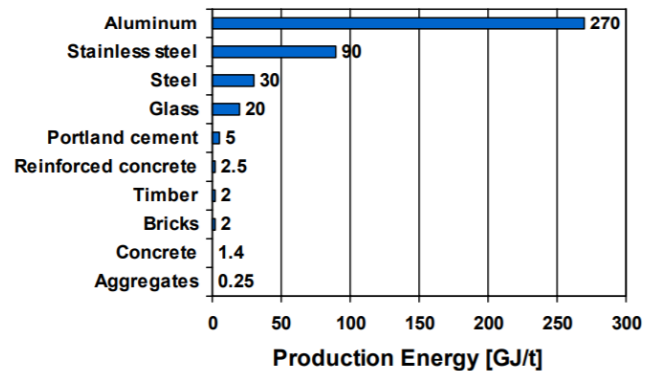
However, as cement is only a fraction of the consistency of concrete, manufacturing one cubic meter of concrete (approximately 2400 kg) emits between 100 to 300 kg of CO₂ depending on the strength of the concrete mix

It's also important that council's calculations recognize a significant portion of the CO₂ produced during manufacturing of cement is reabsorbed into the concrete during the product life cycle through a process called carbonization.

Research has estimated that as much as 50% of the CO₂ emitted from the production of concrete will be reabsorbed through carbonization of the concrete surfaces over a 100-year life cycle.



Many modern building products have a far higher carbon footprint than concrete.



Energy of production for common building materials.

These considerations have huge relevance to council's delivery of core infrastructure, even the simpler things like footpaths.

On the surface, bare aggregate with wooden edging may seem like a trendy new way of making sustainable foot paths, but as our forefathers found out, they don't last. Possibly leading to higher overall costs and carbon emissions, but equally possibly not.

We cannot allow the language of all-encompassing super slogans make us blind to all the facts.

What I'm calling for is transparency in councils fact checking, and cost reporting, and doing this will galvanize our communities.

Three Waters:

The name 'Three Waters' infers a trifecta of equal participants running a close first, second and third. But in the Three Waters race third place is taken by Storm Water which is so hobbled by circumstance I'm betting it will drop dead on leaving the starting gate.

While Drinking-water and Wastewater services are delivered directly to users and benefit versus cost is easily discernible. The delivery of Stormwater services is fundamentally different. The 'public benefit' of Stormwater infrastructure is far less obvious to the individual. Additionally, Stormwater infrastructure often includes and utilizes natural features like streams, rivers, and wetlands. Moreover, publicly owned motorways and roads, privately owned shopping mall car parks and commercial storage yards etc, affect Stormwater hugely. That stormwater systems are integrated with these various landowners and infrastructure providers and that stormwater effects can cascade across multiples of these boundaries; makes establishing fair and equitable charges for Stormwater services virtually impossible.

For this and several other reasons the government intends implementing a second half to their Three Waters strategy in the form of a Price Regulator and have released a discussion paper, "Economic Regulation and Consumer Protection for Three Waters Services in New Zealand" which local board members can comment on. I find this a worrying read because it poses more questions than answers.

According to central government this economic regulator is critical to driving the efficiency required to keep water services affordable especially considering Three Waters will be a super monopoly.

There are several types of regulation – price-quality, information disclosure, and quality-only. The proposal is for a price-quality only regulator. I don't like this, why can't the regulator be multidisciplinary and include information disclosure?

The discussion document suggests that the regulator needs to consider other areas of consumer protection beyond the standard roll of an economic regulator, because the current domestic consultation, and governance mechanisms that are provided for in the Local Government Act 2002 will not apply to the proposed new Water Services Entities. In addition, the Ombudsman's current role in dealing with complaints about local government agencies will cease. WHY, why are we reinventing-the-wheel?

More concerning, is the removal of limitation to the amount of profit Three Waters can make. Recently in New Zealand, regulatory regimes are set to achieve four goals:

- a) there must be incentives to innovate and invest
- b) there should be incentives to improve efficiencies
- c) that the efficiency gains must be shared with consumers

and lastly, d) suppliers are limited in their ability to turn profits (but the discussion document states this point is irrelevant to the Three Waters reform scenario).

I will advocate at every opportunity to pushback against this Three Waters legislation.

Glen Eden Playhouse Theater update:



Like every other venue, the Playhouse has had an on-again-off-again year, having recovered well from the first covid lockdown and with forward bookings filling fast only to have to close and refund deposits.

Despite this the Trustees have kept the operation in the black (just) and are moving forward with their goals to modernize governance structures.

The building additions to house the Wurlitzer Organ is finished but covid restrictions are still stopping the organ itself from being reassembled. However, it is now proposed to have the local team that dismantled the organ start the reassembling process hoping that the Australian specialists will be able to arrive in time to finish final commissioning.

Rural Advisory Panel meeting:

My representation of our local board at Councils Rural Advisory Panel has been uneventful. This Panel used to meet every two months but at the beginning of this year this was changed to quarterly. These meetings too have been interrupted by COVID, with the last one held online. Most of the presentation that council departments presented to the Panel this year have also been delivered to our local board.

Most debate amongst Panel Members has been around central government policy and its relation to and/or affect upon Auckland Council, similar to my discussions above.

Greater Local Board Decision Making:

I understand that for several years some within Council have seen merit in giving Local Boards increased decision-making over community services within their board area. How this would work has been the focus of a council administration team for as long as I have been a Board member. The underlying premise is that funding decision regarding community services (primarily, operation in maintenance) are best made closest to the activity.

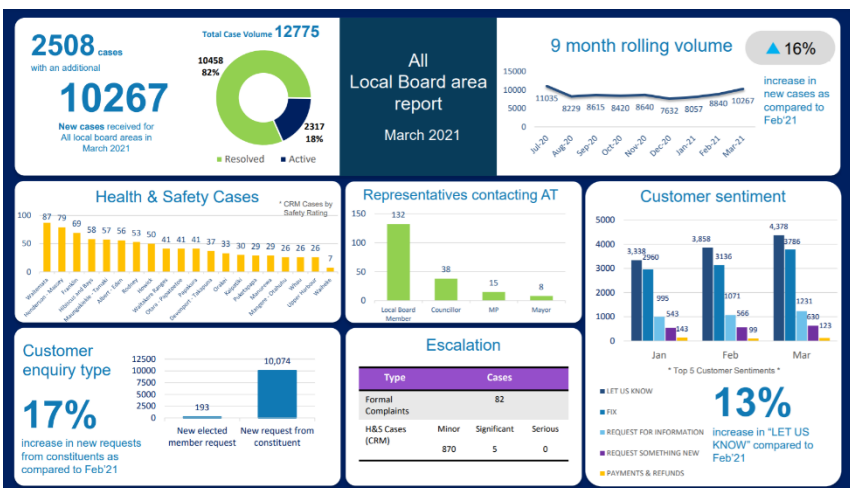


I have always held the opinion that the people at the workplace have a lot to contribute to decision-making that would improve performance and outcomes.

Now I have view of council's internal processes I am further convinced that Local Boards should be in control of their areas operational budget.

Auckland Councilors recently passed a Resolution which has brought increased local board decision-making over local community services a big step closer.

There is a lot of policy to be worked through yet and it's not all roses, the way funding allocations are proposed to be calculated for each LB show no increase in budget for the WRLB. But nevertheless I feel more Local board control will bring overall improvements to how our area is run.



I would not be so bold as to predict what next year holds, but I look forward to tackling all issues on behalf of the community I represent at the Waitakere Ranges Local Board table.

