Community involvement in council decision-making

- Approximately 75% of residents in the eight largest cities are satisfied with the level of public involvement in council decision-making.
- Around half of those surveyed said they understood how councils made decisions and that they would like more of a say.
- The majority of residents surveyed felt the public has some influence on council decision-making.

WHAT THIS IS ABOUT

The Local Government Act (2002) focuses on ‘democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities.’

The purpose of local government as described in the Act is:
- to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of communities; and
- to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future.

Identification of community outcomes is one of the most significant changes in the planning area of the Act. The definition of outcomes must focus on engaging communities in planning for their community. Outcomes must also be developed with the community and not imposed by councils. In this new environment it is important to look at the nature of council decision-making, and in particular to measure resident satisfaction with decision-making and local authority consultation processes.

This indicator is composed of three measures using data from the Eight Cities Quality of Life Survey 2002. Survey respondents were asked their views on the following:
- Understanding of how councils make decisions
- Satisfaction with the level of public involvement in council decision-making
- Public influence on council decision-making.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Understanding of how councils make decisions

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about council decision-making. Responses were ranked on a five point scale of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ with the questions.

Overall, half (50%) of respondents said they understand how council makes decisions, with Dunedin residents (59%) being more likely than others to express this view. Respondents from Auckland (37%) were more likely, compared to others, to disagree.

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Continued...


Data source: Eight Cities Quality of Life Survey 2002. 'Don't know' responses are not shown in graph therefore figures might not add to 100 percent

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Dunedin and Christchurch residents were more likely to feel that decisions made by their councils were in the best interests of their city (58% and 55% respectively). Auckland respondents were polarised around this issue with 39% agreeing that this was the case and 37% disagreeing.  


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Slightly over half of the respondents across all cities (59%) said that the issues their council deals with affect them. Manukau (31%) and Waitakere (31%) residents were more likely to perceive that the issues their council deals with do not affect them compared to those in the other cities.

**Satisfaction with the level of public involvement in council decision-making**

Survey respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with public involvement in council decision-making. Responses were ranked on a five point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. They were also asked to provide reasons for any dissatisfaction.

The survey found that Dunedin (42%) and Wellington (41%) residents were most satisfied with public involvement in decision-making while Auckland (32%) and Manukau (30%) residents were most dissatisfied.

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175 Auckland City Council was deliberating on a highly publicised, contentious issue at the time of the survey which may help to explain this polarisation.
Community involvement in council decision-making

Continued...

There were large ethnic differences in terms of satisfaction. Pacific Islands (54%) and Asian/Indian (50%) respondents were more likely, compared to other ethnic groups (30%), to be satisfied or very satisfied with involvement in decision-making.

Across all cities, lack of consultation was the most frequent reason given for dissatisfaction with public involvement. There were some variations in reasons between individual cities. Wellington respondents (62%) stated that their council did not listen to public opinion. Christchurch respondents (57%) stated a lack of involvement of the public by council as their cause of dissatisfaction. In Auckland, respondents stated that the council was not doing enough for the people and placed too much emphasis on profit (11%).

European respondents were more likely to state that councils had their own agenda and did not listen to public opinion, compared to other ethnic groups. Maori respondents suggested the lack of information and publicity was a cause for dissatisfaction. It may therefore be necessary for councils to reconsider how information is disseminated and decisions publicised.

Public influence on council decision-making

Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the public is able to influence council decision-making on a four point scale from ‘large influence’ to ‘no influence’.

Overall, 53% of survey respondents felt that the public does have some influence on council decision-making. However, perception of the strength of that influence varies significantly.

Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch respondents (at 59%, 57% and 56% respectively), were more likely to state that the public has some or a large amount of influence on what their council does.

Compared to other cities, Auckland respondents were less likely to feel they had influence over their Council’s decisions. This view was also supported by European respondents. Across all eight cities, just over one third (37%) of respondents believed they had only a small influence over their council’s decisions.

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176 There was a highly publicised and contentious issue being considered by Wellington City Council at the time of the survey, which may have influenced this perception.
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Continued...

Over two-thirds of respondents believed that voting in council elections provided residents with a chance to influence decisions about their community. Europeans were much more likely to disagree (23%) that voting influenced council decisions. Pacific Islands and Asian/Indian respondents were much more positive about the role of voting (with 79% and 72% respectively).

The results suggest that Dunedin, Wellington and Christchurch residents appear to better understand how their councils make decisions and accordingly have a stronger belief that they can influence those decisions.

Overall, 56% of respondents stated that they would like to have more say in what councils do, particularly Auckland (62%) and Manukau (61%) residents. Europeans were more likely than other ethnic groups to disagree with this.