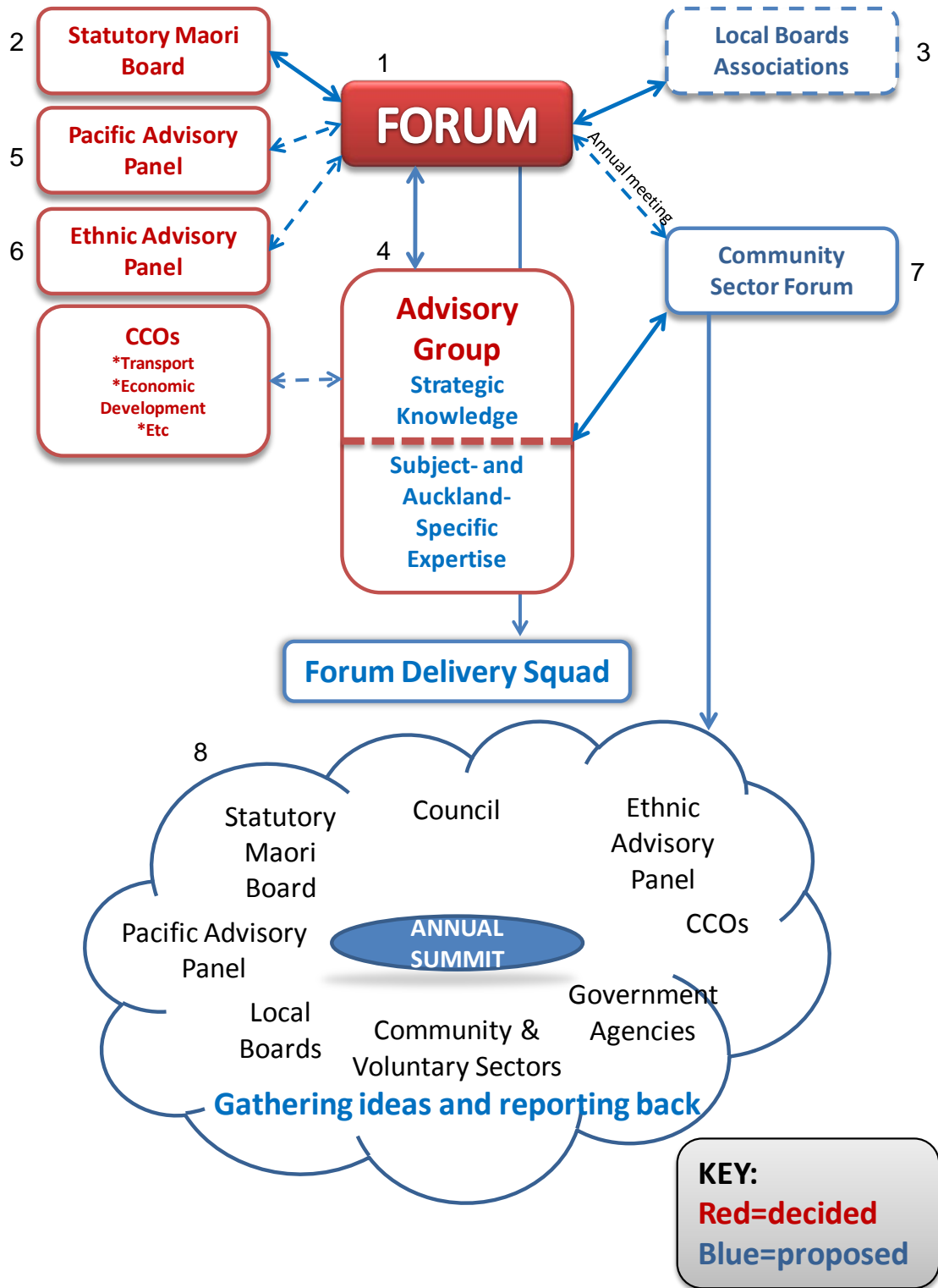


## **Good social outcomes in Auckland: The Role of the Social Policy Forum**

**Elizabeth Rowe and Emma Davies**

The Social Policy Forum will be a new entity. The Government's discussion document released in 2010 outlines the proposed forum membership, high level objectives on what the forum hopes to achieve and how the forum might work.

We have mapped out overleaf the key additions and linkages that we believe are the minimum that should be added to the proposals in the discussion document to make sure the Forum works as well as possible with the other new structures being established in Auckland.



## Executive summary

### 1 The Social Policy Forum

We support the high-level objectives the Government has agreed for the Forum, and we strongly support the intention to set long term social goals. The Forum gives us the opportunity to combine local authority powers to decide on land use, make provision for affordable housing, and manage public transport with central government's powers to deliver social services such as health, education, police and family support services. It is a powerful combination. The relationships around the Forum table are fundamental to effective action. The success of the Forum will depend on leaders deciding together what will be done.

We would like to see the Minister of Social Development and Employment supported at the Forum by her colleagues the Ministers of Health, Education, Housing and Police. These portfolios are all necessary if we are to tackle the challenges that face Auckland. Other ministers, particularly the Minister of Finance, ought to also be closely linked to the Forum.

We need to move past the old view of collaboration, where organisations looked at their existing work plans to find areas in which they could co-operate, to leaders deciding together what will be done.

We agree the activities described in the discussion document are the right mix of activities for the Forum, as long as these activities give as much weight to preventing social problems as they do curing them; build on community and individual strengths ;and create opportunities for families and people to do well – get qualifications and paid work, raise children and take part in their communities. As the Forum gets to work members will need to make sure it is clear who is doing what, the timeframe in which it is to be done, and how it is to be measured. This information should be publically available.

The Forum, and everyone else involved with social issues, needs good information and evidence for their work. We think there needs to be an independent team to make sense of all the data and information we have sitting in silos about Auckland and its people, so informed choices and priority areas for action are based on strong evidence. And once decisions are made and action taken, we need to capture what is being done that really works to solve complex problems, and have the information and the courage to know when to stop doing what isn't working.

### 2 Māori statutory board

We strongly support the Board's establishment. We believe the *statutory board for Māori should have representation on the Forum*. The ways the Forum interacts with Māori in Auckland should build on and not overturn the mechanisms and relationships that have already been established.

### 3 Local Boards Association

We believe it is highly likely local boards will form an association to represent their interests in a wide range of settings in the new Auckland. If that is the case, we believe *the local boards association will be best placed to decide the most appropriate representation at the Forum, and their collective priorities for social policy*.

#### 4 Advisory Group

The Advisory Group will need two quite separate skill sets. It will need senior members who combine strategic thinking and the power to act. Such members will need sufficient breadth of experience to understand each other's business and to see the potential for combined action. They must be able to commit their organisations to action. They will need to be backed up with other members with content expertise across sectors and Auckland -specific knowledge. These members are likely to change over time as the Forum's agenda changes.

We suggest the Advisory Group draws its members from:

- central government (MSD, Education, Health, HNZA, Police, Justice, Transport, Labour, Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the Ministry for Economic Development, Statistics New Zealand, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Treasury);
- Auckland Council (Operations, Planning, and Finance, at second and third tier); and
- The community and voluntary sector.

#### 5 & 6 Pacific and Ethnic Advisory Panels

We support the establishment of the Panels. We are strongly of the view that these Panels should build on, and not override, the significant relationships some current Auckland councils have already established with these communities. We suggest the Panels be invited to Identify their priorities for the Forum's work; comment on the Forum's priorities and action plans as they are developed; and discuss both sets of priorities with the Forum annually

#### 7 & 8 Community and voluntary sector, and annual summit

There is a regional body being established at present in Auckland for the community and voluntary sector (ACDA). This could become 'an agreed point of contact for the sharing of information and engagement with the Social Policy Forum', as envisaged by the discussion paper, if its membership is representative of the sector.

We see three major ways the community and voluntary sector can work with the Forum:

- Annual *meetings* between the Social Policy Forum and this regional body;
- As members of both tiers of the Forum's *Advisory Group (ie strategic and content-specific knowledge)*, so advice to the Forum is robust and well-grounded in the knowledge of the sector; and
- The sector's regional body organising an annual *summit* on getting good social outcomes in the region, timed to coincide with the Forum's annual look back/look forward public reporting on progress.

## Introduction

The proposed Social Policy Forum is a welcome addition to the new local governance structures being set up for Auckland. The Forum gives Auckland's political leaders, at the local and national level, a place to agree on their goals for Auckland's future social well being, and agree on the actions they can take to achieve that future.

It is encouraging to see the Minister for Social Development and Employment seeking feedback on the Government's proposal. We agree that building good connections with the community and voluntary sector, as described in the discussion document, is essential to get the good social outcomes we are all looking for.

We strongly support the emphasis on the Forum setting a clear strategic direction, identifying long term goals and priorities for action and measuring progress. While everyone agrees that Auckland has some pressing social problems that need to be fixed, a focus on fixing problems without dealing with the causes of those problems would not be effective. Resolving the causes of the problems we face will need coordinated effort over years.

We also agree that it is important to maintain and build on the many good relationships that already exist in the field in Auckland – structures and formal processes by themselves will not be enough. It's the connections among committed, passionate, knowledgeable people, in communities, in organisations in the public, community, philanthropic and private sectors, and at the political level, that will truly make a difference. That is why our suggestions below put so much emphasis on ways to bring people together.

We need to build much better connections across all the data and information that already exists about life in Auckland – from the knowledge local groups have about what works in their area and who can help make things happen, to the administrative information held by local and central government agencies, and the research that's already been done here and overseas about how to deal with difficult social issues and give people a better life. We need to make sure that everyone who can use this information can get it. We know that there's already work going on to improve information-sharing, and we have added our suggestions below.

The most important things that affect people's lives, and the lives of their families, often happens when we are pursuing other goals, especially economic, but also cultural and environmental goals. The new Auckland Council has the chance to keep social goals "front of mind" in everything it does. The Forum will help that happen, with its inclusion of the Mayor, local board representatives, and the chairs of Council committees as Forum members. They will carry their experience at the Forum into all the other spheres of their work for Auckland. In essence the Forum should drive social matters into all aspects of the Council's activities, rather than contain them within the Forum itself.

Finally, we don't think that every social problem (or opportunity) needs to go through the Forum. Central and local government, and the community and voluntary sector, already work well together on many local social activities. We think the Forum is the place to act on the "game-changing" topics – the complicated social issues, the really deprived places or the big opportunities that need every

resource we can bring to bear to create change. Auckland has never had the chance to do this before, and we want it to work.

We have also deliberately *not* included every area of Council activity that has a social impact in our suggestions for how the Forum can work. We think it is far better to build connections across the different “spheres of influence” of council activity. So, for example, we have not included the Transport Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) in our structures, even though transport decisions have a profound effect on whether Auckland achieves its social goals. We have opted instead to build strong connections at senior levels, and good links among officials.

## Response to the major proposals in the discussion document

We have set out below our suggestions for some key changes to the major proposals in the discussion document. Rather than commenting on everything, we have limited our comments to what we think will give the Forum the best chance of success. There are comments below on:

- The objectives of the Forum;
- The activities of the Forum;
- Forum membership;
- Supporting the work of the Forum;
- Connecting the Forum; and
- Helping the Forum to achieve its objectives.

## Objectives of the Forum

We support the high-level objectives the Government has agreed, and we strongly support the intention to set long term social goals. This will give the Forum the chance to work on priorities to prevent future problems, as well as taking action to fix current problems. We suggest two additions to the current objectives:

- Expand the objective “identifying the roles and responsibilities of Government and the Auckland Council...” to read “identifying the roles and responsibilities of Government, the Auckland Council *and the community and voluntary sector* in responding to critical social issues”. The sector knows Auckland and its people well – community workers and volunteers help in thousands of families and communities across the region, and manage large programmes and significant resources.
- Amend the objective “driving the alignment of thinking and action on social issues” so it reinforces the way of working that will get results: “driving the alignment of thinking and *partnerships for action on social issues.*”

## Activities of the Forum

We support the activities described in the discussion document. We believe this is the right mix of activities for the Forum, as long as these activities:

- give as much weight to preventing social problems as they do curing them, and
- build on community and individual strengths, and
- create opportunities for families and people to do well – get qualifications and paid work, raise children and take part in their communities.

The Forum gives us the opportunity to combine local authority powers to regulate land use, make provision for affordable housing, and determine public transport with central government's powers to decide on the distribution of social services such as health, education, police and family support services. It is a powerful combination. The new spatial plan will be a good place to put those long term social goals into effect. It's also a good place to think about what can be done to help the poorest communities – what would happen if we put employment, tertiary education, health facilities, early childhood education and libraries and swimming pools and playgrounds into the poorest suburbs? And the best public transport?

We support the Forum identifying where gaps exist in current services (such as insufficient good quality early childhood education centres in poorer neighbourhoods) and where services are duplicated. Many of the gaps are already well known to the government sector agencies who work at the local level, and to the community and voluntary sector. We expect Forum members will work together to make trade-offs where services are duplicated, and to shift resources to fill the gaps.

We suggest two amendments to the current activities:

- Add a new activity that makes it plain that the relationships around the Forum table are fundamental to effective action. We need to move past organisations looking at their existing work plans to find areas in which they could co-operate, to a new way of working, where Forum members decide together what will be done :  
  
“forge alliances among Forum members , through setting new shared goals, priorities and action plans to drive social improvements in Auckland.”
- Amplify the current monitoring and reporting objective (“monitoring and reporting on agreed Government and Council actions”) so it is clear who is doing what; the timeframe in which it is to be done; how it is to be measured and how we capture what is being learnt along the way:  
  
“Set up clear public accountabilities, with timeframes and ways to measure progress, for each central Government agency and Council division which is contributing to joint venture actions”

We believe it is useful for the Social Policy Forum to decide on the focus of its activity as it begins its work. It would be preferable for the Forum to focus first on improving the wellbeing of infants and young children in a set number of deprived areas; areas known to be a drain on Auckland's economy. The importance of getting it right from the start of life for long-term human development is well rehearsed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The evidence from longitudinal studies and neurobiological research is now incontrovertible. If we want to prevent crime, mental illness and other expensive and preventable conditions throughout our communities, we need to focus on the building blocks of human development. Auckland's economy will likely reap the best long-term rewards by focusing social policy on the best ways to promote healthy early child development in deprived areas.

## Forum membership

We applaud the Government's decision to bring together key political leaders from Auckland Council and Government.

We suggest two changes to what has been proposed about Forum membership: some additions to consolidate the Forum's leadership function; and a change in the way local board representation is chosen.

### Ministers

We would like to see the Minister of Social Development and Employment supported at the Forum meetings by her colleagues the Ministers of Health, Education, Housing and Police. These portfolios are all necessary if we are to tackle the challenges that face Auckland, especially at a time when so many children experience the preventable diseases of poverty, almost a fifth of young people don't have jobs, and one in six people in Auckland live in overcrowded houses. There are other Ministers – the Ministers of Finance, Economic Development, Labour and Transport - who we think we should be closely connected to the Forum, because of their significant influence on Auckland's development. This can be achieved through the channels Ministers regularly use.

### Statutory Māori Board

The Government has decided to establish a statutory independent board to promote issues of significance to Māori. We are mindful that work is currently underway to make this work well, and we strongly support the Board's establishment.

The statutory board will have responsibilities that range across all of the four well beings – social, economic, environmental and cultural. Such a broad brief is well aligned with kaupapa Maori, which integrates all aspects of well being. The board will bring the richness of that integrated approach to the work of the Forum.

We believe the *statutory board for Māori should be a member of the Forum*. We are of the view Māori should be in the centre of decisions about Auckland's future: because of their status as

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<sup>1</sup> see [www.brainwave.org.nz](http://www.brainwave.org.nz)



tangata whenua; because of the disadvantages faced by many Māori; and because of the increasing economic power of Māori.

That said, we think the ways the Forum interacts with Māori in Auckland should build on and not overturn the mechanisms and relationships that have already been established by various local authorities and government agencies. This will be a delicate process, and time should be taken to get it right.

### Local Boards

The discussion paper suggests final decisions about local board representation will be the responsibility of Auckland Council in consultation with local boards. We believe it is highly likely local boards will form an association to represent their interests in a wide range of settings in the new Auckland. If that is the case, we believe a *local boards 'association' will be best placed to decide the most appropriate representation at the Forum, and their collective priorities for social policy.*

Local board representatives will be experts about their own communities; they will be able to bring true local knowledge to the Forum's discussions. They won't, however, have access to the enormous information resources held by central government agencies, nor are they likely to have sufficient resources of their own to scan local and international research to know what is likely to work best to achieve their social priorities. They are likely to need help to access the right information at the right time, and to think through what their options are, so they can make up their own minds about the best way forward. They are likely to want to discuss what options they have with people who know the field. This is a quite different approach from being advised by council officials about action.

## Supporting the Forum

### Advisory Group

If the Advisory Group is going to work well as the source of integrated advice to the Forum, and the major mechanism for keeping up the pace of work on the Forum's action plans, it is going to need two quite separate skill sets. It will need senior members who combine strategic thinking and the power to act. Such members will need sufficient breadth of experience to understand each other's business and to see the potential for combined action. They must be able to commit their organisations to action. We are talking about people at Deputy Secretary/ Deputy Chief Executive level in government agencies, and second (and/or third) tier managers in the Auckland Council.

The individuals in the top tier of the advisory group (with strategic knowledge) need to be constant, so members get to know each other well, and the group functions effectively. We have all seen groups where there's little common history among members, and membership has been delegated down through organisations over time until no-one can make a decision.

We suggest these members meet collectively on a regular basis with other senior managers of organisations which have an impact in similar areas – the Transport and Economic Development CCOs; major tertiary education institutions; District Health Boards and major employer and business associations.

The “strategic actors“ of the Advisory Group won’t have close knowledge of all the policy areas or local communities the Forum will be interested in. They need to be backed up with other members with content expertise across sectors and Auckland -specific knowledge. These members are likely to change over time as the Forum’s agenda changes.

We suggest the Advisory Group draws its members from:

- Central government (MSD, Education, Health, HNZC, Police, Justice, Transport, Labour, Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the Ministry for Economic Development, Statistics New Zealand, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Treasury);
- Auckland Council (Operations, Planning, and Finance, at second and third tier);
- The community and voluntary sector

## Connecting the Forum

We have set out below our suggestions for connecting up the Forum with the community and voluntary sector, and some brief comments on connecting it with the new Pacific and ethnic advisory panels. There are some challenges in getting this connection right, which will be familiar to everyone who has struggled with how to get these structures to work well.

For the most part, policy agencies find it difficult to translate their research and policy knowledge so grass-roots organisations can set it alongside their local knowledge and come to their own view about what will work best for the people they work with. Instead, policy agencies tend to take the local knowledge their advisory panels (or community organisations) offer as supplementary, probably less “evidence-based” input into their own decision-making. We believe joint problem solving will yield the best results for Auckland. Getting there will not be easy. We think the independent team we have suggested that would make sense of central and local government data, evidence about what works, and local knowledge, would be a very useful way to bring the Forum and advisory panels together in joint problem solving.

### Community and voluntary sector

There is a regional body being established at present in Auckland for the community and voluntary sector (ACDA). This could become ‘an agreed point of contact for the sharing of information and engagement with the Social Policy Forum’, as envisaged by the discussion paper.

We see three major ways the community and voluntary sector can work with the Forum:

- *Meetings* between the Social Policy Forum and this regional body. This would increase the chances of a serious sharing of knowledge and ideas among the Council, the community and voluntary sector, and the government, on a regular basis;

- As members of both tiers of the Forum’s *Advisory Group*, so advice to the Forum is robust and well-grounded in the knowledge of the sector. Sector representatives need to be paid for the cost of preparing for and attending meetings. Good preparation will take time – representatives will have to make sure they are well aware of the different views and voices of the many organisations in the sector. Mandate from the member organisations is hard to gain and it is easily lost.
- The sector’s regional body organising an annual *summit* on getting good social outcomes in the region, timed to coincide with the Forum’s annual look back/look forward public reporting on progress. We envisage this event bringing together people from all sectors to share ideas, showcase success, and learn from what hasn’t worked. It would be funded by Social Policy Forum member agencies.

### **Pacific and Ethnic Advisory Panels**

The Government has legislated for a Pacific advisory panel and an ethnic advisory panel to be set up for the first term of the new Council. We support the establishment of the Panels: Pacific communities are a well-established part of Auckland life, and there are now more than 190 different ethnic groups in Auckland.

We are strongly of the view that these Panels should build on, and not override, the significant relationships some current Auckland councils have already established with these communities.

We suggest the panels be invited to:

- Identify their priorities for the Forum’s work;
- Comment on the Forum’s priorities and action plans as they are developed; and
- Discuss both sets of priorities with the Forum annually

### **Spheres of Influences**

We have already said that we don’t think every social issue needs to go through the Forum. Even more than that, we think that putting all social issues through the Forum would mean they remained in a silo, remote from the rest of the work of the Council. We think it is far better to build connections across the different “spheres of influence” of council activity. So, for example, we have not included the Transport Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) in our structures, even though transport decisions have a profound effect on whether Auckland achieves its social goals. Instead we think there must be a strong connection between senior members of the Social Policy Forum Advisory Group and senior managers in CCOs. Working groups for the Forum and the CCOs will also need strong links.

We are not suggesting these connections should be built into formal structures. As the Auckland Council starts its work, it will need to integrate the “four well beings” it is responsible for. We expect the Council will value and encourage joined up ways of working.

## Helping the Forum reach its goals

### Making sense of information and research

We believe Auckland needs a team that makes sense of data (from central and local government), evidence about what works, and local knowledge so decision-makers inside and outside Council, including Social Policy Forum members, have a clear evidence base. We think this team should be independent, sitting outside Council, and funded jointly by central government and the Council. If the team is appropriately funded it would be able to commission a thorough look at what could make fundamental improvements to the lives of Auckland's people.

Some Forum members, such as local board representatives, will benefit greatly from access to up to date research and information. The benefit will not be all be one way – central government agencies will find their decisions are greatly enriched by a flow of information that integrates the local “soft” knowledge which local board representatives will have at their fingertips with their own administrative data and research.

### Making sure change happens on the ground.

The Forum needs the capability to act, so the strategic decisions the Forum makes can actually translate into action on the ground. A Forum delivery squad of a small core team of development staff could work with communities to make sure change happens. It could bring in the resources in central government, the private sector and others, to build on community strengths so residents can take decisions for action.

### Creating a system that works

We know that getting the structures and processes right for the Social Policy Forum will not automatically improve social outcomes. What matters most is the willingness of everyone involved with the Forum to be committed to working together without “patch protection”; and for us all to be ready to think and act differently from business as usual.

The Forum is unique. We think two core questions should drive it:

- *What can this group do better than the other groups that Forum members sit on?*
- *What are the opportunities here for really making a difference?*

*Finally, thank you for the opportunity to comment.*