

Tracking progress: Our one year report



A year to the day since we first met as Christchurch's newly elected Council is a good time to report on progress – and what comes next.

Since taking office I am told I have attended 345 engagements, given 167 speeches, and been out on official business at some point on 41 of 50 weekends and 186 of 250 week-night evenings.

The pace has been, and will continue to be, relentless. And that's exactly what we would expect in a city recovering from a natural disaster of the scale we have experienced.

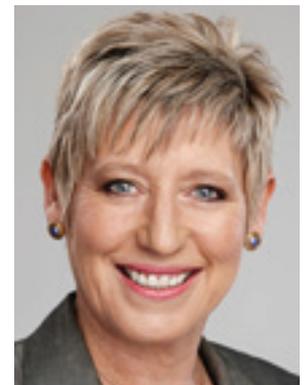
Of course the question that matters is whether any of this activity has made a difference? Are we as a Council on track to achieve what we set out to do 12 months ago?

It's a question I ask myself at the end of most days, and often in the small hours of the morning when my mind turns to the problems constituents face like flooding, intractable insurance problems and the chronic shortage of affordable housing.

You will have your own criteria against which to judge progress. The state of the roads, the look and feel of your neighbourhood, the length of time it takes to get a building consent or how you maybe affected by the proposed land use changes in the city's draft district plan.

But these issues will pale into insignificance for those who remain stuck because of unresolved earthquake-related issues.

Just last week the Chief Executive of the CDHB, David Meates, reminded recovery leaders that the effects of Canterbury Earthquake Sequence would continue to reverberate throughout our community for a decade or more. He told us that more people are presenting to mental health services than ever before. People have more severe social issues related to housing, financial and relationship problems as a consequence of the earthquakes and recovery issues, and increased depression.



This is why advocating on behalf of those who are stuck and helping to solve the city's housing crisis were both high on the list of priorities we drew up as new councillors this time last year. Those priorities fell into three broad categories:

- getting our own house in order;
- helping to get the city and its worst affected communities back on their feet; and
- strengthening the Council's relationships with our recovery partners.

Although much remains a "work in progress," enough has been achieved for me to feel confident we are on track.

Getting our own house in order

As promised, we "opened the books" and are now out in the community listening to what people have to say about the financial choices we will have to make to avoid a funding shortfall of up to \$900 million in 2017-2019 (share your views at www.yourvoice.ccc.govt.nz).

We also moved quickly to set up a new insurance subcommittee to provide governance and oversight of the complex and highly legalistic claims process. A final agreement on the Council's social housing insurance claim with EQC is imminent. We continue to work towards a negotiated settlement of the larger building and facilities claim with the reinsurers but, in a parallel process, are preparing for legal action if necessary.

We appointed a new Chief Executive, Dr Karleen Edwards, who is focused on driving down operational costs, improving the quality and efficiency of our processes and improving our organisational culture. After a major investment of resources and expertise we also hope to be reaccredited as a building consents authority.

Getting back on our feet

We are working hard to restore community facilities and help solve the housing issues. In September we ratified the Christchurch Housing Accord. This was the result of close collaboration between the Council and Housing Minister Dr Nick Smith. Under this agreement the Government committed \$75 million to build two temporary accommodation housing developments on Welles and Colombo Streets providing for up to 450 new homes.

Since October 2013

Mayor has:



Attended
345
engagements



Council and its
sub committees
have:



Staff have also completed a huge piece of work addressing the financial sustainability of the city's social housing portfolio. We will be investing \$50 million in a new not-for-profit company with other groups who have the same community objectives.

We have also approved around \$40 million worth of work to restore facilities including libraries and swimming pools to affected communities. In the Central City we have been working successfully alongside private developers and CCDU to help find solutions to the car parking challenge.

Relationships and leadership

But arguably the single most important thing we have had to do as a Council in our first 12 months was to restore confidence in the Council and its ability to lead.

This point was not lost on the editor of The Press who in an open letter 12 months ago challenged the new Council to stop the in-fighting, focus on the task in hand, and establish effective relationships with our recovery partners the Crown, Cera, Ngai Tahu and Environment Canterbury.

For me the surest sign of how far we have progressed was the Government's response to the release of the Cameron Partners Report when it expressed confidence in the Council's political leadership and ability to manage our financial challenges.

This marked a watershed in our relationship, not just because of what was said publicly but because of the unity and professionalism displayed by both the executive and governance arms of the Council in its interactions with the Crown in the lead up to the report's release. We felt like a team who shared a common goal and who were ready to engage with the whole of Government as we move closer to transition.

Interestingly, when I asked Councillors to comment on what had surprised them most about their first year, a significant number said they had not expected the sense of collegiality, respect and common purpose that exists around the Council table.

Maintaining that collegiality is going to be vital over the next 12 months as we face the big calls about the council's financial strategy and Long Term Plan. These are tough issues and will require us to focus on the long term future of greater Christchurch and the legacy we want to leave.

Almost all the major decisions we make about the physical rebuild of the city (including the scale, phasing and eventual ownership of the Anchor Projects) must be made jointly with the Crown.

Inevitably we will not always agree and nor will our priorities and decisions always align. But I am confident that we are in a position to work through all of these issues in a collaborative way.

So what are my priorities for the next year? Finances, of course. But a sound financial footing is only a means to an end. For me that "end" is all about making sure we seize the enormous opportunities created by the earthquakes to reinvent our city and define our own future. This means holding onto the best of what we had but letting go of the things that held us back.

There are a number of “transformational projects” with the potential to catalyse this step-change. They include the future use of the residential red zone, that great swathe of land in the east and which may provide a home for the Eden Project – based on the theme of “From the Mountains to the Sea” (Ki Uta Ki Tai) – that would showcase how water shapes our life and the interactions between land, water and human life. Another is the Antarctic Endeavour, a proposal to establish a joint research, education and visitor attraction facility that reinforces Christchurch’s role as an Antarctic gateway. Then there is the proposed Port Hills Mountain Bike Adventure Park.

But our long term future will depend less on the built environment than it does on the people who decide to make this place their home for the future: those of us who have decided to stay, those who have come here to work and decide to remain, and our children and grandchildren who decide that the new Christchurch is a place where it is now possible to enjoy the best of all possible worlds.

To make this a reality, we need to ensure that we have a diverse economy that generates quality jobs, housing that is affordable and an environment that is unbeatable.

Less tangible but of vital importance to me is ensuring that we hardwire into our city’s DNA the lessons we have learned about resilience. We know from our own hard won experience that the very best predictor of a community’s ability to adapt and thrive to adversity is its level of social cohesion. Without it the purpose of local government, which is “to enable democratic decision-making and action by and on behalf of community” cannot be fulfilled. Nor will our recovery be complete until that level of democracy has been restored to the people of this city. And we can do so much more than this. That is the legacy this Council will leave the city.