

COMET



WORKING TOGETHER FOR EDUCATION

**SOCIAL POLICY FORUM –**

**A response to the Discussion Document  
from the Minister of Social Development**

Prepared by

COMET

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## About Us

COMET welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper for the establishment of the Auckland Social Policy Forum. COMET is the City of Manukau Education Trust, a Council-Controlled Charitable Trust established in 1999 to provide leadership and advocacy for education in the city. Base funding is received from the Manukau City Council for services in “Analysis, Advocacy and Leadership in education; Facilitation and Co-ordination of education projects”.

COMET has developed a strong theoretical underpinning for its work in supporting education outcomes in the city. Our model (“Community Engagement in Education: Local government as a champion for learning”) is described in a paper available from our website. We adopt an innovative local government approach to social issues. As a charitable trust registered with the Charities Commission, COMET is able to access philanthropic funding and sector support in ways that the council may not. COMET is governed by up to twelve trustees appointed by the Mayor.

The Trust functions as a visible expression of partnership between the major tertiary education provider in the city (Manukau Institute of Technology) and the Council. The MIT provides the Trust with accommodation and computing and support services.

COMET does not speak on behalf of the Manukau City Council. This paper has been prepared by the Chief Executive of COMET and solely represents the views of the trustees and staff of the Trust.



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Paper 032 /10

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## Executive Summary

1. COMET applauds the establishment of the Social Policy Forum as the first step in a fundamental shift in the relationship between central and local government on social issues.
2. There is a danger that the silos of central government will also prevail at the local level unless attention is paid to the inclusion of all government agencies that hold social portfolios. The Ministers of Health and Education need to be also represented alongside the Minister of Social Development at the Forum table. We recommend that these Ministers, and those holding Maori and Pacific portfolios, become members of the Forum.
3. The Forum is established as a governance mechanism over a relationship that will result in joint projects. To avoid the danger of becoming gripped by inertia over governance and management confusion, the role of the Ministers, the Mayor and Councillors needs to be differentiated from the role of officials.
4. Social issues are often complex and require long-term approaches requiring political and community commitment over time to implement decisions made at the Forum table. Decisions should be explicitly signed off as a reviewable and renewable Agreement, a formal mandate for both parties to proceed to allocate resources. We recommend that the Social Policy Forum be responsible for creating the **Auckland Social Action Agreement**.
5. COMET recommends the appointment of a Social Policy broker or manager to drive outcomes from the Forum. The manager could be jointly funded by both central and local government, be based in the office of the Mayor and be employed by the Council, have a work programme that is endorsed by the Forum Chair(s), and have sufficient rank to be able to exercise leadership within the team of officials and in the community. The skill set of the manager should include an understanding of public policy and management, connections into the NGO sector, understanding of local government, and ability to engage with diversity.
6. Activity in the first year does not need to be “new work”. There will be a number of multi-agency collaborative projects already in train in the seven terminating authorities. Among these, we would include the projects from the *Tomorrow’s Manukau: Manukau Apopo* Strategic Steering Group – e.g.
  - The **Increasing Participation in Early Childhood Education Project**
  - The **Manukau Youth Transitions Project**.

7. To provide commitment from the community and NGO sector, and evidence and input, there should be an opportunity for Agendas to be put together that enable “presentations” to take place for Forum members. In addition, a programme of Community hui should be put in place that provides direct feedback to Social Policy Forum members. These forums could be place-based, issues-based, or focused on particular ethnic communities.
8. The Social Policy Forum should
  - set aspirational targets
  - be a ‘sponsor’ of collaborative projects
  - be provided with sound analysis that allows members to fully understand and be in a position to advocate for social action projects and the allocation of resources to activity
  - give a strong steer – based on good evidence and analysis - about the kinds of projects that could be sponsored
  - Create a funding pool or pools targeted to social action priorities
  - track progress towards targets, monitor outcomes and check value for money<sup>2</sup>
  - focus on high need communities as a priority
  - support innovation and social entrepreneurship

## Objectives – What will the Forum achieve?

**COMET applauds the potential of the Forum to make a difference**

The Forum has the potential to mark a shift in the nature of partnership between local and central government in New Zealand, moving from a hierarchical relationship to a much more collaborative partnership. The Forum will legitimise local government responses to social issues in education, health, and social development. This is in the spirit of the recommendations from the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2009<sup>3</sup>.

As the Royal Commission has noted, central government has been limited in its ability to respond to community dysfunction, poverty, and economic underperformance in Auckland. Complex social problems are beyond the ability of any one agency to address alone. Central government has universal policies and support funding that underpins local action. Local government's knowledge of communities and levers for action has the potential to make an important contribution to sustainable and effective change. This shift to greater collaboration has been emerging since the passage of the Local Government Act 2002. There is good evidence to show that partnerships can be very productive in the Auckland context<sup>4</sup>.

The Social Policy Forum creates a new organisational structure and process to address the goals of Social Wellbeing in Auckland. COMET applauds this as the first step to a fundamentally different way of working together.

However, partnerships are challenging. Auckland has lost people potential because of a lack of investment in integrated social action that places local knowledge and city resources alongside central government responsibility and funding. The Auckland Social Policy Forum must trigger better quality social investment. Leadership on social issues in Auckland arises from the joint membership of the Ministers and the Mayor in the Forum. Both local government and central government leaders will need to be well-informed about the social dysfunction in particular localities of Auckland.

**The composition of the Forum must reflect a collaborative, whole-of-system approach to social development**

Since central government has one of the most powerful levers for social action – funding – it is inevitable that central government priorities will be a driver. There is a danger that the silos of central government will also prevail

**COMET recommends that the composition of the Forum includes all Ministers that hold a social portfolio; and includes political representation from Maori and Pacific People**

at the local level unless attention is paid to the inclusion at the table of all government agencies that hold social portfolios, not just the Minister of Social Development. COMET has a particular interest in education as a tool for social advancement. At the very least, the Minister of Education needs to be present at the Forum table, and this would also be relevant for the Minister of Health. If there is to be any improvement to the social future of Auckland, there must be active engagement with Maori and Pacific People at this table, so would see it as important that the Ministers of Maori Development and Pacific Island Affairs and political equivalents from the Council are also present.

The Forum should be chaired by either the Mayor or the Minister of Social Development. The Forum should include Councillors who chair relevant committees.

**There must be an enduring mechanism for commitment to goals and action – an Auckland Social Action Agreement.**

The Discussion Paper makes very clear that central government and local government will each retain control over their own budgets and distribution of resources. *More important will be the political will to align agreed strategic goals to implementation plans.* Because social issues are often complex and require long-term approaches, there is a risk that over time the political and community commitment to implementation of decisions made at the Forum will shift, undermining longer-term efforts. We recommend a fresh and innovative approach to the political relationship between Auckland and Wellington on social issues through the signing of an **Auckland Social Action Agreement**. It should be explicitly signed as a reviewable and renewable document, a formal mandate for both parties to allocate resources; and a mechanism for the Ministers and the Mayor to display leadership around that.

An **Auckland Social Action Agreement** will have both political and contractual importance. It could refer to the One Plan for Auckland as well as government strategic priorities.

- It will be able to outline a shared vision and specific targets.
- Like a Coalition Agreement, it is best if it is short.
- It should set out the resources of central government and local government that will be applied to action, and the desired outcomes.

This clarity about the contributions of each partner is the lynchpin for the success of the Forum.

- It must not contain the detail of actions, but offer a broad envelope of activity with scope for local input.
- It provides a rallying point for action, becoming the visible mechanism for leadership on social issues, setting clear strategic directions.
- It will offer other stakeholders (for example, NGOs, Community Trusts and philanthropists, business and other agencies) a guide to how they might wish to contribute to achievement of the priorities.

There are precedents for such contracts: the Ministry of Housing, for example, has an arrangement with Wellington City Council for an initiative that rejuvenates the housing portfolio of that city. In the UK, the government has since 2000 been working in “Local Strategic Partnerships” that tackle social problems in some of the most deprived urban areas in the country<sup>5</sup>. The most important function of the Social Policy Forum is to endorse and support a working partnership between Wellington and Auckland. The Forum itself will have completed its most important business in coming to a formal agreement and monitoring its impact and outcomes.

As the Discussion Document makes clear, there is no intention to override the Auckland Council or central government budget and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, genuine partnership will require a changed approach. There is no doubt that expenditure must accompany agreed actions, and the budget-setting processes of both parties must reflect agreements reached. In coming to priorities and project sponsorship decisions, members of the Forum will need to first assess the likely public responses to proposals.

While not everyone will agree with the proposed priorities, and the financial investments that they might involve, the public debate must come to be set in a larger context - how the city and the country addresses social disengagement and the large pockets of poverty in Auckland; and why Aucklanders should commit ratepayers money to social wellbeing when this has traditionally been funded from national taxes. Even a notional ‘facilitation’ spend on social wellbeing has been challenged in parts of Auckland, although is

already the practice in others. This precarious commitment to local government expenditure on social issues exists even though the international research literature<sup>6</sup> – including that related to social capital and economic growth – supports such collaborative practice and local empowerment.

**COMET recommends that an early task of the Social Policy Forum be to shape during 2011 an Auckland Social Action Agreement**

The Auckland Social Action Agreement, therefore, must be arrived at through a process that includes budget rounds for both the Government and the Auckland Council; and the agreement on the One Plan for Auckland. It cannot be a “first up” exercise - but will be the first test of the Leadership of the Mayor and Council and the Ministers holding social portfolios. COMET recommends that the first medium-term goal of the Social Policy Forum be to shape during 2011 an Auckland Social Action Agreement, arising from consultation conducted in accordance with local government legislation and Best Practice<sup>7</sup>.

We observe that if the One Plan for Auckland is to be inclusive of long-term commitment from the Council to collaborative social development, it must involve strong Social Leadership from Forum members, and effective backing from a support manager and officials.

## **Action – What will the Forum do to achieve its objectives?**

**Governance must not be confused with project management.**

The Discussion Document fudges governance and management. The Royal Commission on Auckland Governance concluded that Auckland needs a governance structure for social well-being. Governance and Management must not be confused. The Forum has to be about **governance of the relationship** between Wellington and Auckland on social action. Quite properly, those governing that relationship must be the political leaders of Auckland and government Ministers. COMET agrees that an important task for those in a governance role is to identify and prioritise issues for action.

**The Forum will lead and support the actions of others.**

Beyond this, however, it is not what the Forum does that is important – it is what everybody else does in response to the priorities that the Forum has set that will determine whether there is any improvement in the social and economic potential of Auckland.

### COMET recommends that the Forum

- set aspirational targets
- be a 'sponsor' of collaborative projects
- be provided with sound analysis that allows members to fully understand and be in a position to advocate for social action projects and the allocation of resources to activity
- give a strong steer – based on good evidence and analysis - about the kinds of projects that could be sponsored
- Create a funding pool or pools targeted to social action priorities
- track progress towards targets, monitor outcomes and check value for money<sup>8</sup>.

There needs to be a broad **management mechanism** that sits alongside the Forum and shoulders the responsibility for action. The Forum will get bogged down in impossible detail if it is required to consider and agree on the details of joint venture action plans and projects. It may also leave the Forum open to political grandstanding and corrupt practices. We explore this management concept later in this paper.

**There needs to be a management mechanism that supports the Forum's governance responsibilities**

The more important question here is not 'Is this the right balance of activities?' but how will activities get on the table?

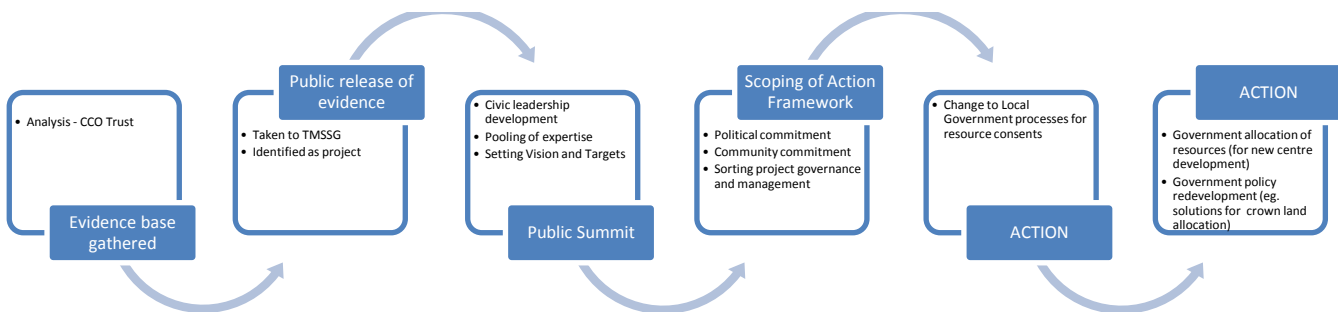
Leadership arises in a democratically functional community when there is a wide invitation to consider an issue and to determine action in response. The case study cited in the Discussion Paper reflects a multi-layered leadership approach. As a result of several highly-publicised violent deaths in South Auckland, a series of public meetings were held – led by Councillors and the mayor and local MPs - where a community response on youth gang culture was invited. Concurrently, the Ministry of Social Development provided analytical capability to ensure that there was an evidence base to any response. The actions recommended by the community, and endorsed by the government, were fed back into local government and community.

**COMET recommends a balance of leadership and responsiveness in determining priorities and projects.**

We can cite our own example of balancing leadership and responsiveness:

having identified low rates of participation in early childhood education in South Auckland, COMET facilitated a community Summit on early childhood issues under the sponsorship of the *Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo* Strategic Steering Group (TMSSG). This had not only an educative role for community leaders about the complexity of the issues – and their seriousness - it also mandated further action and the development of a collaborative project which has subsequently delivered some intermediate outcomes. The Summit was the public engagement, and the establishment of a Taskforce and a Project Implementation Group became the Action Framework. We illustrate this process below:

### PROJECT DEVELOPMENT EXAMPLE: Increasing Participation in Early Childhood Education



The above diagram illustrates only one possible path for identifying a social issue and rallying community and government action, and describes a process that is not yet complete: i.e. achievement of vision and targets and iterative evaluation.

In order to deliver both leadership and responsiveness, the Forum will need to be able to “commission” analysis and research. This is a more complex question than it looks on the surface. The existing capability for complex social issues analysis and policy management rests within very large policy shops in Wellington. Capability in Auckland does need careful development, but should avoid duplication of central government resources and add value to them. Currently, limited analytic capability rests within the amalgamating councils and universities and a few NGOs. There is every likelihood that the transition process to new governance in Auckland will result in some loss of expertise and ‘institutional memory’ from the councils. It will be important that policy analysis supports the leadership of the Mayor, the Councillors, and Local Boards, and is responsive to community issues as they arise. It is also

**COMET recommends that the Forum be resourced to commission analysis from either partner...**

important that there is some contestability in advice to the Social Policy Forum. For this reason, analytic capability in the Auckland Council and its CCOs will be important.

**... and is open to presentations from stakeholders.**

In order to be responsive, COMET also believes that it will be important that the Social Policy Forum is open to presentations from stakeholders about local and city issues, most especially from Local Boards as the “lead” Council structure for the design and implementation of local action. This might have to be carefully managed, but would be very useful in maintaining the relevance of the Forum to community action.

An effective social governance structure for Auckland will provide for multiple entry points into social action decision-making. The process by which an Auckland Social Action Agreement is implemented is itself a mechanism for achieving the desired multiple entry points.

## How will the Forum work?

**Central to the effective functioning of the forum will be a broker or manager able to engage with the key partners and stakeholders.**

The Forum will only need to formally meet three or four times per annum, although this may need to be more frequent in the establishment year.

Central to the effective functioning of the forum will be a broker who is able to engage with the key partners and stakeholders. COMET recommends the appointment of a manager with specific responsibility for driving outcomes from the Forum. This person would lead the “officials group” and ensure good stakeholder input. The manager should not head a separate “unit”, but should be focused on the brokerage role among government agencies and the different parts of the Auckland Council.

Ideally, the Forum manager would be jointly funded by both central and local government, be based in the office of the Mayor and be employed by the Council, have a work programme that is endorsed by the Forum Chair(s), and have sufficient rank to be able to exercise leadership within the officials team and in the community. The skill set of the manager should include an understanding of public policy and management, connections into the NGO sector, and understanding of local government. It will also be important for

the manager to engage with the Maori Advisory Board and mana whenua, and with other ethnic groups.

The “officials group” should be flexible in make-up. It should be supported by a management group that is Council-led, and includes officials from relevant key government agencies and from Council – to be determined once the new Council is elected, but possibly from the Mayor’s office, the Social Policy team of Council, and relevant CCOs. We would count COMET in this group.

### **What issues will the Forum consider in its first year?**

In the first year, the priority effort of the Social Policy Forum must be to build the foundations for all partners. Our experience is that this has to arise from collaborative *action*, and there must be some successful activity in the first year. Activity in the first year does not need to be “new work”. There will be a number of multi-agency collaborative projects already in train in the seven terminating authorities. It will be important to be visible in these areas – and to pick up on projects that are already under way that could sit readily within the Social Policy Forum. Among these, we would include -

**Activity in the first year does not need to be “new work”.**

- The **Increasing Participation in Early Childhood Education Project**
- The **Manukau Youth Transitions Project.**

Both of these projects are projects of the Tomorrow’s Manukau Strategic Steering Group, and COMET has had a key role in both of these projects.

We would also see that an important new project for the future could be a **Campaign on Skills, especially those of Literacy and Numeracy**. A integrated approach could embed literacy and numeracy learning in family health, community life, the workplace as well as involving schools. Such a project could deliver on improved settlement outcomes for new migrants<sup>9</sup> (implementation of the Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy); and support other actions, such as positive parenting and public health campaigns<sup>10</sup>.

Apart from picking up the sponsorship for existing projects, the establishment

**COMET recommends the sponsorship of projects**

- that are collaborative in principle and practice.
- focus on high social need
- that are innovative and offer value for money

phase of the Forum will be to develop and formalise the commitment to work together through a social action agreement, where new activities such as the above campaign could be initiated.

COMET recommends the sponsorship of projects that are collaborative in principle and practice.

Communities or locations to which we think the Forum could consider giving priority would be to focus on those high on the social deprivation index. In particular, Mangere-Otahuhu / Otara-Papatoetoe / Tamaki-Manungakiekie / Manurewa-Papakura and Henderson-Massey Local Boards.

Future projects should include those developed through the Maori or Pacific Island advisory boards of the Auckland Council; those related to child poverty / housing / teen health / youth unemployment / literacy and numeracy / early years / and whanau-family focused projects, perhaps on the Whanau Ora model.

Projects should be adopted that are innovative, support social entrepreneurship, and offer multiple outcomes – in other words, deliver value for money because they offset expenditures elsewhere.

## **How could the forum work with the NGO and community sector?**

**COMET recommends that the Social Policy Forum sponsor regular Community Forums which are both place-based and issues based.**

The expectations of the community about engagement with the Forum are large. It is not realistic that the members of the Forum will be able to engage directly with the wide range of organisations that may wish to present to it, or who may wish to have direct representation on it. Consistent with the view that the Forum is about political governance over the relationship between local and central government, we believe it would be inappropriate to have NGO representation around that table. It is important, however, that there is an NGO voice close to the table. The opportunity could be taken to identify a “representative” through an NGO peak body as a non-voting member.

To provide evidence and input, there should be an opportunity for Agendas to be put together that enable “presentations” to take place. In addition, a programme of Community hui should be put in place that provides direct feedback to Social Policy Forum members. These hui could be place-based, issues-based, or focused on particular ethnic communities. Feedback needs to be seen to be reaching the table, so the hui need to be public events and perhaps include the presence of one or more Social Policy Forum members.

## Conclusion

Social Action in Auckland is too important to allow the Forum to be a “player on the edge” rather than central to strategy for social development in the region. Partnership between central government and local government becomes real when the strategic plan for Auckland (LTCCP) and central government strategies align. The Social Policy Forum at its most effective will be an enabler of social action at the community level. Forum members should be high-level stewards and leaders. Their mandate should come from both the Cabinet and the Council. The ‘One Plan for Auckland’ provides the mandate for the Council. The mandate for government will be in the policy platforms on which the government is elected and the Cabinet agreements for action and expenditure.

The Social Policy Forum will be a success when the relationship delivers change to social outcomes indicators for Auckland.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Vester, Bernardine. (2009). COMET Model of Community Engagement in Education: Local government as a champion for learning. Paper 027/09. <http://www.comet.org.nz/afawcs0143740/CATID=11/Local-Government-and-Education.html>

<sup>2</sup> COMET recommends the development of Social Return on Investment tools for outcomes evaluation. More information about this can be found on [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org); [www.blendedvalue.org](http://www.blendedvalue.org) and in Peter Scholten, Jeremy Nicholls, Sara Olsen and Brett Galimidi, 2006: *Social Return on Investment: A Guide to SROI Analysis*. Lenthe Publishers, London.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Commission on Auckland Governance. (2009). *Report of the royal commission on Auckland governance*. Auckland. [www.royalcommission.org.nz](http://www.royalcommission.org.nz).

<sup>4</sup> David Craig and Megan Courtney, 2004: *The Potential of Partnership*. Waitakere City Council, Auckland. See also Emma Davies and Elizabeth Rowe (eds) 2009: *Making Links, Taking Action*, AUT Institute of Public Policy, Auckland. [www.ipp.org.nz/MakingLinksindex.html](http://www.ipp.org.nz/MakingLinksindex.html).

<sup>5</sup> The Be Birmingham partnership is an example of an Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) that is supported by a bilateral Local Area Agreement. [www.bebirmingham.org.uk/](http://www.bebirmingham.org.uk/)

<sup>6</sup> The research literature is built on social capital theory, and includes Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press, 1995; Clarke, M. and Stewart, J. (1997). ‘Handling the Wicked Issues—A Challenge for Government’. School of Public Policy Discussion Paper, University of Birmingham; and others. The call for greater collaboration and flexibility in local government in the UK was made by Sir Michael Lyons, who undertook the 2007 Lyons Inquiry into Local Government. [www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk](http://www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk) .

<sup>7</sup> The Good Practice Participate website supports agencies in the use of a range of tools and processes for consultation. [www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz/](http://www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz/)

<sup>8</sup> COMET recommends the development of Social Return on Investment tools for outcomes evaluation. More information about this can be found on [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org); [www.blendedvalue.org](http://www.blendedvalue.org) and in Peter Scholten, Jeremy Nicholls, Sara Olsen and Brett Galimidi, 2006: *Social Return on Investment: A Guide to SROI Analysis*. Lenthe Publishers, London.

<sup>9</sup> Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy, 2006. [www.sustainableauckland.govt.nz/settlement](http://www.sustainableauckland.govt.nz/settlement). [www.immigration.govt.nz/settlement](http://www.immigration.govt.nz/settlement). The strategy reflects a collaborative approach not yet fully realised.

<sup>10</sup>Ministry of Social Development, 2008: *The Social Landscape in Auckland Region. Information for the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance*. [www.royalcommission.org.nz](http://www.royalcommission.org.nz).

