

Submission on the Draft Auckland Plan

LIFEWISE (www.lifewise.org.nz) is the social and community services part of the Methodist Mission in Auckland. For over 150 years our organisation in its various forms has contributed to meeting the changing needs of Aucklanders as the city has grown and developed.

Today we are still initiating new ways to solve challenging social issues and providing support to Aucklanders in need – families in need or facing violence, children in foster care, older persons, those living with disability, those who are sleeping rough in our city and in need of immediate support and accommodation, children in early childhood education, and disconnected neighbourhoods and communities.

Over the last few years we have begun to change our approach to how we help people in need – from charity to social development. This change in direction is based on our own experience and expertise, along with evidence that has shown that the traditional charitable service model of simply meeting immediate need does not provide sustainable solutions to serious social issues and can perpetuate long-term dependency.

This means providing the services and support needed for individuals and families to improve their future, as well as supporting communities who are developing their own ways to meet their social needs, and advocating for just and practical social policy at both central and local Government levels. We believe that this approach is crucial to successfully working for change and creating a better future for everyone.

Lifewise appreciates the opportunity to participate in the debate about Auckland's future and supports the aspiration for Auckland to be the 'world's most liveable city'. Our written submission below is based on the critical social issues we believe require addressing before that goal can be achieved.

We would like to take part in any oral hearings or workshops.

Appropriate and Affordable Housing

Auckland faces a housing crisis due to a severe shortage of affordable housing and a time of significant population growth, particularly among those reaching retirement age, families on low or fixed incomes, and those at the margins of our community – i.e. those without a roof. This has numerous negative spin-offs in terms of the well-being of children and adults, family and community stability, and the level of poverty in our city. Lifewise supports:

A long-term housing strategy. The Council's existing plan to end street homelessness in the Auckland CBD by 2020 that includes prevention, support and housing solutions needs to be extended to cover the Auckland region. Council should develop a long term Housing Strategy which is integrated with planning, and works with a range of related housing and social service organisations and which describes a spectrum of housing (from emergency to home ownership) and the development of mixed housing communities (by design, tenure and infrastructure). The strategy will include: increasing the supply of affordable housing, responding to homelessness, provision of a continuum of emergency housing, the quality of boarding houses, the standard of rental accommodation, and facilitating an increase in the provision of community housing by third sector providers. The strategy will also recognise that increased house construction could be used to increase the number of building apprenticeships and employment available for young people.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing. Increased provision of affordable and quality housing in the Auckland region could be achieved by:

- i. Configuring Council planning processes to support new housing in sufficient quantities to meet demand, and that this housing conforms to world class building and urban design practice.
- ii. Council partnering with community housing providers and Central Government to ensure an increase in the amount of social housing development including emergency housing.
- iii. Undertaking a regular Auckland-wide housing needs assessment to ensure the right kinds of housing are developed to better meet Auckland's diverse population requirements, and projected household formation.

Improving the private rental sector. Implementing and advocating to Central Government for policies that improve the standard, stability, and security of tenure of the private rental sector. Lifewise supports the introduction of a minimum set of housing standards and a Building Warrant of Fitness (WOF) for all rental houses in the region, whether existing or new, to be administered by Council to help to ensure compliance of all home owners/landlords to provide healthy, quality housing.

Increasing the numbers of quality social housing units through support for the Community Housing Sector. Council to recognise the growing importance and relevance of the community housing sector in addressing Auckland's housing crisis and to support a range of initiatives implemented by Council and/or by central Government to facilitate this. Examples of initiatives the Councils should take are: transferring a portion of Auckland Council-owned land for the provision of housing, including social housing, incentivising the provision of social housing through its consent processes, and removing or reducing development contributions from community housing provision.

Development of a new emergency accommodation response in the CBD. Over 100 people sleep rough on the streets of the CBD each night. The only emergency accommodation is through the Auckland Night Shelter which plans to close by mid-2013. Lifewise and Auckland City Mission are working on the development of a new, short-term centralised emergency accommodation service, linked to a continuum of accommodation and support services, that will respond to the needs of those in immediate need from across Auckland City. No central or Local Government support is received for the current work.

Council should support this new initiative as part of its Homelessness Strategy.

Improving the standard of emergency and boarding house accommodation. Appropriate accommodation (hostels, boarding houses with high standards along with appropriate support services) need to exist, particularly in the CBD, and be part of the housing strategy.

Council should immediately implement a minimum set of standards for boarding house accommodation, accompanied by an inspection and compliance regime.

Safe Families

Family Violence is corrosive to the well-being of families, children and communities. Because of its inter-generational impact, family violence, especially when linked to alcohol abuse, has enormous down-stream health, social and economic costs. Despite the best efforts of many agencies, family violence and alcohol-abuse within families continues to increase in Auckland. Persistent problems require determined, persistent and focussed solutions. Success in addressing violence in families is mostly linked to improved co-ordination between agencies, both Government and NGOs.

Lifewise would like to see Council establish a Mayoral-led Taskforce on Family Violence to oversee the co-ordination of all agencies working in this area across Auckland.

The proliferation of liquor outlets has led to an increase in the consumption of alcohol with significant detrimental impact on the lives of families nearby. Lifewise would also ask Council to develop an approach to reducing the number of liquor outlets in neighbourhoods.

Youth Transition to Employment

The impact of young people leaving education and not managing the transition to work is detrimental to those individuals and their well-being in the short-term and to Auckland's economy and social fabric in the longer term. There is evidence that a managed approach to this issue can be successful. Lifewise supports the development of a transition to employment strategy for Auckland youth, co-ordinated and overseen by Council with the participation of schools and employers at a local level.

Early Childhood Education

Over the last decade, despite increased investment by Central Government in the early Childhood Education (ECE) sector, this investment largely resulted in development of ECE Centres in higher-decile parts of Auckland, where ECE providers feel more assured of commercial success. Participation rates in low-decile areas of Auckland (mainly South and West Auckland) remain worrying low. Data shows that the gap in overall educational performance between Pacific Island and Maori children and the rest of the population is not closing. There is also a clear body of evidence that indicates early engagement in education is associated with significantly better educational outcomes in the longer term. As commercial gain is not our overall goal, Lifewise is able and committed to supporting communities in low-decile areas to establish and operate quality ECE centres.

Lifewise supports Council's desire for an increase in the number of ECE Centres in South Auckland and in other parts of town with low participation rates, and would like to see an increase in the amount of Council-owned land made available for the development of new Centres in these areas.

Economic Development

Lifewise recognises the need for a comprehensive economic development strategy for the region. However, it is sceptical about the reliance on GDP as the measure of growth for the growth of economic activity and asks Council to commit to adopting more contemporary models that include social and environmental factors, equally important in measuring progress towards the 'Most Liveable City' goal. In focusing on growth, Council should focus on improving the outcomes for those in poverty and at the margins of our community. Further, Lifewise recommends the goal of environmental sustainability be integrated throughout the whole of the Plan with regard to economic growth and activity and the development of urban and rural infrastructure.

Lifewise also supports the call from other organisations for the inclusion of Community Economic Development (CED) to be part of Auckland's Economic Development Strategy. CED is an important opportunity for the economic and social development of Auckland as a whole. CED is local people taking responsibility for their economic future, strengthening and stabilising local economies through the enhancement of business skills, financial sustainability and strengthening of community organisations. It creates jobs at a local level, removing the need for additional transport facilities. It also responds to the needs of those at the margins of the employment market those with few employment skills, high needs youth, and those unable to sustain full-time employment.

Neighbourhood and Community Connection and Leadership

The goal of making Auckland the 'World's Most Liveable City' will require the development of a comprehensive social infrastructure as well as infrastructure for transport, economic development etc. It will require 'software' as well as 'hardware'. There is increasing evidence internationally that communities which exhibit these qualities have improved social and economic outcomes (reduced crime, less transience, less poverty). Council can play a key role in facilitating the development of strong, connected and resilient neighbourhoods and communities through the development of a coherent Community Development policy and practice framework for Auckland that promotes community connection, engagement and local leadership, and which defines those relationships and develops specific targets for measuring the quality of those relationships.

Lifewise supports the call by other organisations for Council to establish a set of substantial and comprehensive targets and actions for strengthening communities, building community capacity and resilience, and creating a more inclusive Auckland.

In addition, Lifewise believes there is a significant and widening gap in the relationship between Council and community agencies. Lifewise adds its voice to the call for the establishment of strategic community-council partnerships in the Plan.

Summary of Recommendations

Council should:

Appropriate and Affordable Housing

1. Expand its existing strategy to end homelessness in the CBD by developing a long term Housing Strategy for the whole of Auckland
2. Ensure Council planning processes are configured to support new housing in sufficient quantities to meet demand.
3. Partner with community housing providers and Central Government to ensure an increase in the amount of social housing available across Auckland.
4. Undertake a regular Auckland-wide housing needs assessment
5. Develop and monitor a minimum set of housing standards and a Building Warrant of Fitness (WOF) process for all rental houses in the region.
6. Implement a range of initiatives to support the growth of the community housing sector in addressing Auckland's housing crisis.
7. Support the project to establish a new emergency accommodation option to replace the Night Shelter as part of its Homelessness Strategy.
8. Immediately implement a minimum set of standards for boarding house accommodation, accompanied by an inspection and compliance regime.

Safe Families

9. Establish a Mayoral-led Taskforce on Family Violence to oversee the co-ordination of all agencies working in this area across Auckland.
10. Develop an approach to reducing the number of liquor outlets in neighbourhoods.

Youth Transition to Employment

11. Facilitate the development of a transition to employment strategy for Auckland youth, co-ordinated and overseen by Council with the participation of schools and employers at a local level.

Early Childhood Education

12. Increase the amount of Council-owned land made available for the development of new Early Childhood Centres in low decile and low participation areas.

Economic Development

13. In focusing on growth, focus on improving the outcomes for those in poverty and at the margins of our community.
14. Integrate the goal of environmental sustainability throughout the whole of the Plan with regard to economic growth and activity and the development of urban and rural infrastructure.
15. Include of Community Economic Development (CED) to be part of Auckland's Economic Development Strategy.

Neighbourhood and Community Connection and Leadership

16. Develop a coherent Community Development policy and practice framework for Auckland that promotes community connection, engagement and local leadership.
17. Establish a set of substantial and comprehensive targets and actions for strengthening communities, building community capacity and resilience, and creating a more inclusive Auckland.
18. Establish strategic community-Council partnerships as a key component of the Plan.

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