

Nelson City Council

# Stakeholder Survey Results

Report

March 2010

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# 1 OVERVIEW

## Executive Summary

During April 2008 representatives from a small sample of eighteen Nelson City Council (NCC) stakeholder organisations were interviewed to determine areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement. The process was also intended to inform the CE selection process.

During February 2010, the process was repeated using the same question set, and where possible we interviewed the same participants. Previous participants accounted for 45% of this year's interview group.

The objective for the 2010 survey was primarily to ascertain progress over the past 22 months. This report provides an analysis of data collected during February, 2010. It includes a comparison between the 2008 and 2010 results.

The survey questions are linked to five broad areas:

- › **Overall Stakeholder Perceptions**
- › **Staff Accessibility**
- › **Decision Making**
- › **Communication**
- › **Leadership and Performance**

Stakeholders interviewed were from a range of organisations including:

- › **Government Department or publically Funded Organisation**
- › **Commercial Enterprise**
- › **Group, Sports or Body Spokesperson**
- › **Planning, Architecture and Engineering**
- › **Other**

Stakeholders were assured that their comments would remain confidential. Results from individual respondents have been grouped with others, and this report shows the numerical averages of all responses, and the general themes of comments only.

From a possible 26 interviewees, 19 were available and agreed to participate. One organisation included four participants, so together 23 people participated.

A preliminary letter was sent to all participants outlining the intent, process and the types of questions. The majority of participants welcomed the opportunity to participate, although one group expressed disappointment that they were unable to obtain a copy or summary of the previous report. A number of participants expressed an interest in having feedback about the 2010 results.

Sixteen face-to-face and three telephone interviews were conducted over a two week period. We received one questionnaire which was completed prior to our interview; a copy of a letter from NCC to the Nelson Residents' Association dated 3 November 2009; and page of text commenting on the survey process, Councillors, NCC Executive and Management.

The survey included thirteen quantitative questions and the results from 2010 are compared to 2008. These are shown in Bar Charts within the report, along with themed comments.

Without exception an improvement in perceptions is clearly demonstrated, and in some cases improvements are significant (up to a 75% improved rating).

The majority of qualitative comments are also positive and there is a strong perception that significant improvements have been achieved, especially over the last 12 months. The majority of those interviewed said that they saw positive changes in cohesion, planning, culture and communication at council, management, and organisational levels. The CE and Mayor were consistently singled out as having provided the catalyst for improvement in stakeholder relationships. They were also cited for positively taking Nelson and its community forward with a clear vision and direction, an improved organisational culture, and alignment across councillors.

There were a number of specific suggestions made by individual stakeholders and these will be discussed as appropriate with NCC Chief Executive.

Responses to the questionnaire are shown in Section 4, Deeper Analysis



## 2 SURVEY APPROACH

### 2.1 Background

Nelson City Council (NCC) commissioned Concordia to undertake an independent survey of a representative group of key Stakeholders. The purpose was to determine progress since a similar survey during 2008, identify current areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement.

NCC provided relevant names of people and organisations. Concordia designed and managed the survey, the survey process, facilitated face-to-face and telephone interviews, analysed results and prepared this report.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were facilitated during February 2010.

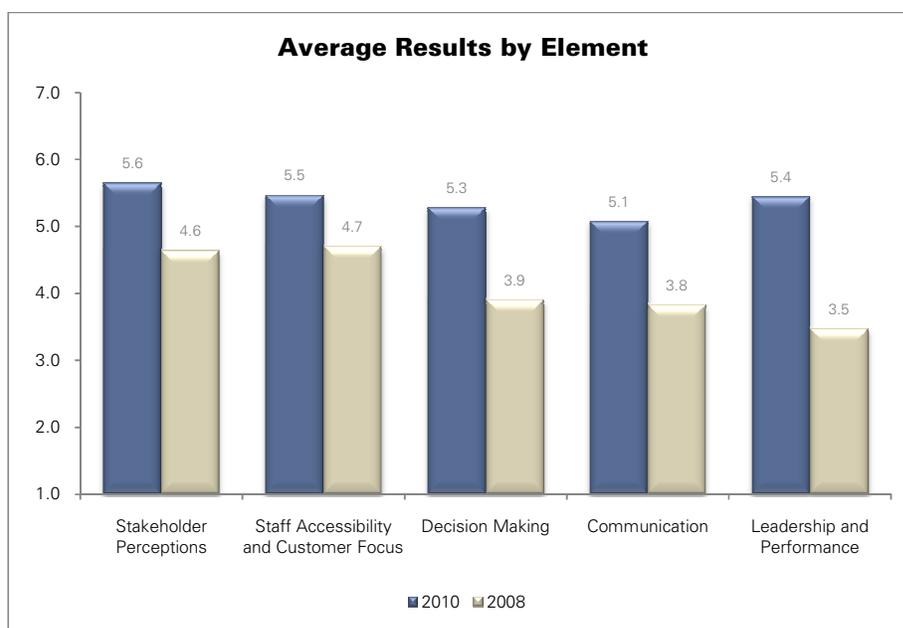


# 3 FINDINGS

## 3.1 Overview

The survey questions were broadly categorised under five headings. The overall result for each is shown below.

**Chart 1**





# 4 DEEPER ANALYSIS

## 4.1 Rating Criteria

All statements in the questionnaire are rated on a scale from 1 to 7 where respondees agree:

To a great extent 7

To some extent 4

Not at all 1



## 4.2 Results by Statement

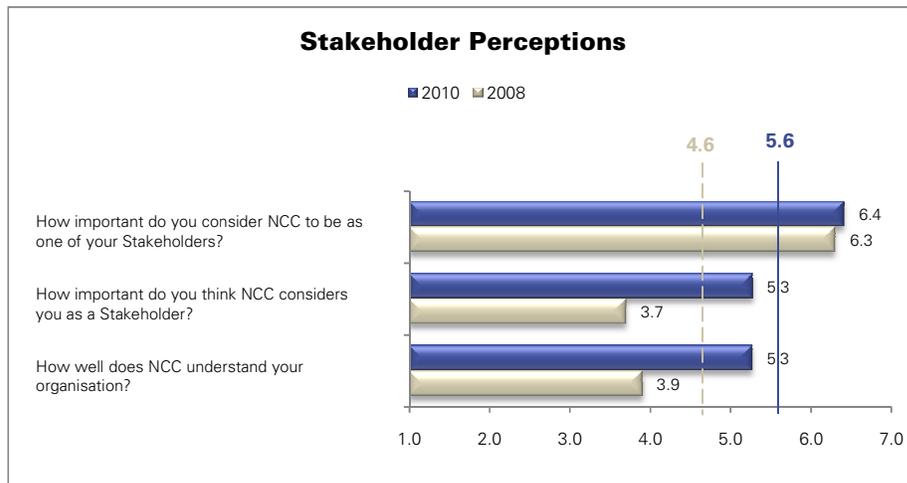
This section provides details of the responses for each question included within each of the five headings and compares the scores for 2010 with 2008:

- › **Overall Stakeholder Perceptions**
- › **Staff Accessibility**
- › **Decision Making**
- › **Communication**
- › **Leadership and Performance**

The scores are the average of all responses. Comments reflect overall themes and are not intended to be specific to any one individual or organisation.

### Element One - Stakeholder Perceptions

Chart 2



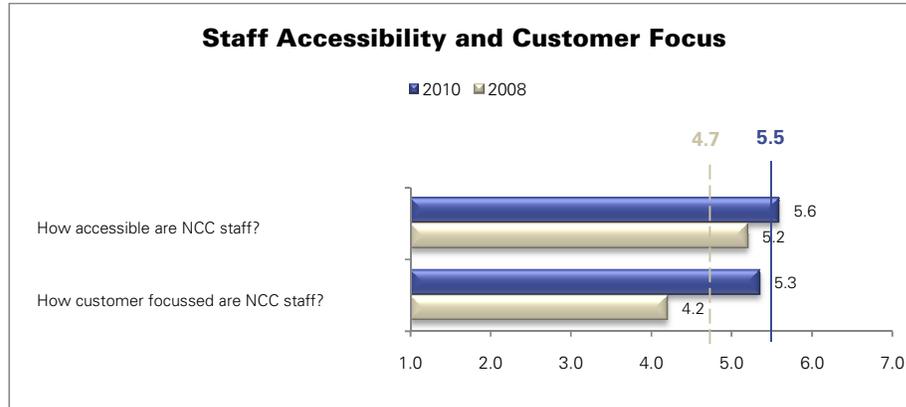
### Comments

All respondents viewed NCC as an important stakeholder. Standard Deviation (Std Dev) 0.88, and overall most believed NCC considered their organisations as an important stakeholder. About 20% of respondees would like to improve their relationship and/or experience a closer working relationship.

The most repeated comment throughout interviews was that there has been considerable improvement, especially during the last 12 months.

A number of stakeholders valued the visits and attendance at events by members of the executive team, particularly the CE, and valued their relationship with the Mayor and his team of Councillors.

Responses to the question "How well does NCC understand your organisation?" were mixed. On the whole an improved score compared to 2008, but there were concerns about how well NCC managers at Levels 2 and 3 understood stakeholder needs, and in fact whether they were interested in doing so. Answers to further questioning suggest a significant variation between managers. The range of scores reflected the different perceptions and experiences. Std Dev 1.60.

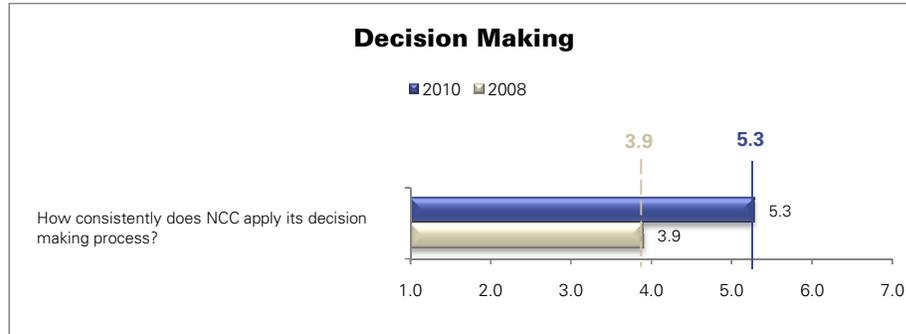
**Element Two - Staff Accessibility and Customer Focus****Chart 3****Comments**

Overall the scores represent better than a 25% improvement from 2008. Respondents spoke about the value of regular meetings with the CE and Mayor, the helpfulness of some staff, a shift from internal bureaucracy to more customer focused attitudes, and the improvements the new Customer Service Centre has made. There were some negative comments about needing to queue at the Customer Service Centre to attend previously arranged appointments.

We recorded more positive comments about responses to requests, the sharing of data, and a sense that information was being shared across NCC functions, which meant a reduction from a previous 'silo mentality'.

### Element Three - Decision Making

Chart 4

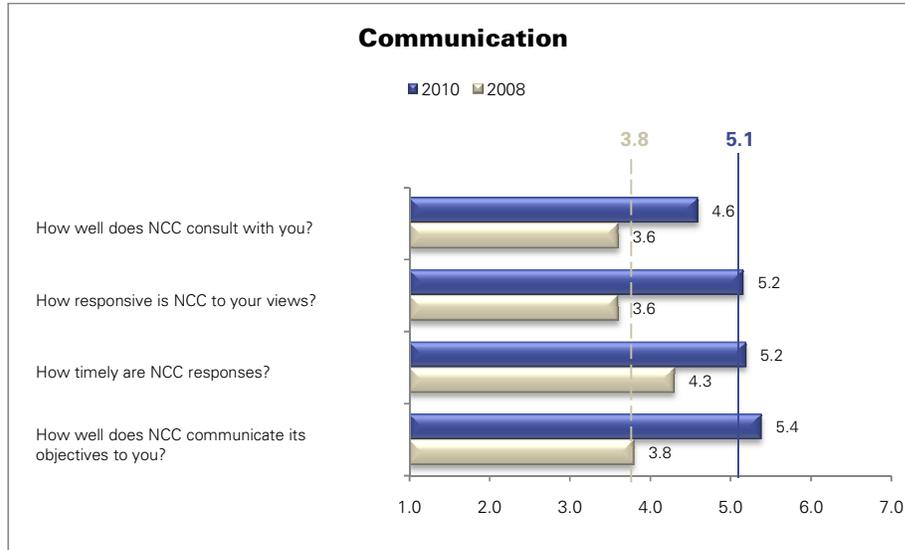


#### Comments

While a very small number of those interviewed gave low ratings in their response to this question, the majority felt that as an organisation there was clarity and follow-through in the application of the decision making process. The reality of the 'political' need to adjust decisions at times was commented on, but did not stand out as an issue.

## Element Four - Communication

Chart 5



### Comments

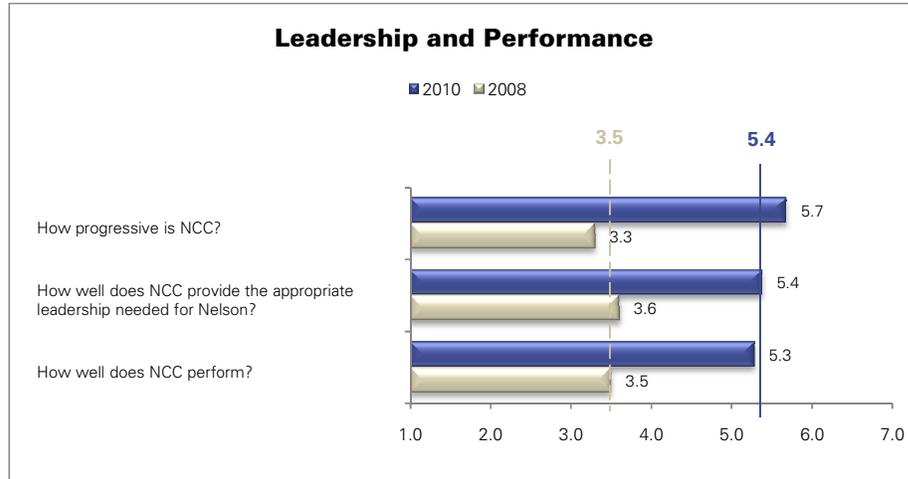
While the result was a significant improvement compared to 2008, some of those interviewed are still looking for improvement, and consistently scored '4' or less.

Communication about the Strategic Plan and NCC objectives were, on the whole, very well received. Stakeholders were pleased that there seemed to be a genuine desire to engage with the community, listen to alternative view points, and respond to community ideas. They talked about an improvement in the consultation process, from a position of "Here is what we are doing", to a "Here is what we are looking at doing", and felt there has been a recognition of the need to bring stakeholders together. Meeting of cluster groups and development of a feedback loop from meetings were seen as beneficial when they happened. A significant number of positive comments referred to communication around the planning process, and the information newsletters available and regularly sent out. There was a sense that the Nelson Community was being listened to, their thoughts acknowledged, decisions communicated and rationale explained.

For those who were looking for improvements, these mostly centred around the need for communication to be a bit more proactive, some did not want to have to 'push' to receive more than just the information available via the Live Nelson newsletter.

## Element Five - Leadership and Performance

Chart 6



### Comments

A 54% improvement across the three questions was typified by the following comments:

- ...clearer vision and direction
- ...increased 'team' and consultative approach
- ...a 'united' council
- ...much more visibility in terms of networking and attending meetings/events
- ...not being frightened to take risks and take a leadership role
- ...being progressive and always looking for ways to lift their game
- ...a sense that the council and senior staff have made real progress over the last 12 months

Most of the comments that identified areas for improvement related to issues around the Performing Arts Centre, transport and arterial routes into the city, regionalisation, and differing perspectives about what NCC's core business should be.

# 5 ADDITIONAL QUALITATIVE COMMENTS

## 5.1 Other Comments from Interviews

### Planning consents process

We heard many positive comments about the Urban Design Panel and the Heart of Nelson Strategy. Generally the processes are working well and we had favourable comments about sound processes and 'pretty good' relationships.

Some stakeholders were unable to make specific comments, or provide examples but their perceptions ranged from a "hope that processes have improved" to some reservations about how well the planning consents process was working. We were provided with a specific example of what was considered "nit picking, lumbering and bureaucratic behaviour which led to excessive time and costs to get a consent".

## Infrastructure Services

Comments ranged from negative views about the range of 'non-infrastructure' activities NCC was involved in and the consequences of those activities. For example providing 'entertainment' at ratepayers expense and delaying essential replacement/development of infrastructure (water pipes and improved sewage facilities, waste minimisation). The Southern Link remains an issue, but on the whole comments were positive and typified by the following:

Not hugely in debt - doing well

Rate them highly

Rate them 7/10

Great - they are trying to make all the hard bits work

Brave decision with water which will stand us in good stead

Infrastructure services very good - we're lucky!

Functional and NCC responds to needs

## Areas of Strength

Many of the stakeholders interviewed commented on the positive differences they'd noticed at NCC and in particular referred to innovative leadership, a more holistic and 'joined-up' approach by the management team, an improved organisational culture, improved communication and progressive thinking around planning, and the planning process. Other responses referred to:

Ease of accessibility to key people

Willingness to listen to diverse views, have debate about vexing issues, and take risks to 'test the water'

Ability to balance the needs of people verses business

The beneficial work that has been done to enhance the positive attitudes of Nelson, provide great sports facilities, support worthy causes, respond to health and social needs, and a strong focus on the people of Nelson

Positive initiatives around the inclusion of Iwi, and preparation relating to Treaty Settlements

The professional manner and dignified behaviours demonstrated by NCC leadership

## Opportunities for Improvement

When asked "What could NCC do to improve its performance?" The most frequent responses referred to what was working well. When pressed three themes emerged.

The first theme related to issues and concerns about infrastructure:

- Public transport and alternative transport options, an improved cycle network, and the need to improve mobility around Nelson (footpaths) for the elderly and very young
- Performing Arts (centre)
- Alcohol issues, noise and traffic issues, quality of water in the Maitai
- Ensuring the future needs of the community are met, and making sure development of housing in the city is matched by appropriate provision of infrastructure, particularly around hilly suburbs and nearby schools
- Inner city not safe late at night
- The Southern Link, water pipeline, sewage outfall, port noise, parking constraints, and waterfront upgrade were all raised as issues that need resolving

The second theme focused on communication:

- A need to ensure community engagement at an early stage, and be more proactive in seeking consultation
- Re-institute or take a leading role in pulling stakeholders together to share ideas and link up activities - for example giving stakeholders a role (or KPIs) in relation to 'Heart of Inner City', Rugby World Cup, Performing Arts Centre, environmental and sustainability plans
- Continue to develop relationships with senior leadership
- Work together to ensure NCC employees are 'Nelson Ambassadors', and ensure Nelson is a great feeling/looking tourist destination
- Ensure Nelson's needs (community needs) are well represented in Wellington

- Use the experience and best ideas from other councils and apply them to Nelson
- Take a lead to resolve rivalry with TDC, link up strategic plans and find ways to work collaboratively

Thirdly, there were comments that related to NCC as an organisation. Mostly there was a sense that there have been significant changes within NCC and that this was manifesting as a faster, more communicative and joined up organisation that was more externally orientated.

Conversely, we received comments that referred to a "massive variation" of skills, capabilities and behaviours that some stakeholders had experienced, and that led to significant frustration. When probed, responses lead us to conclude that these issues are more and more frequently the exception, rather than the norm.

# 6 CONTACT DETAILS

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