



Summary of our report

Auckland Council: Working to provide customer-centred services online



The services provided by Auckland Council and its council-controlled organisations affect every Aucklander. These services include, for example, issuing resource and building consents, collecting rubbish and recycling, providing drinking water, and providing public transport. The Council intends to improve the services it provides to Aucklanders and make it easier for people to use those services.

In 2015, the Council began preparing an organisational strategy for 2017-19 to improve the way it delivers its services to Aucklanders. The organisational strategy provides the Council with a “roadmap” of 34 initiatives to improve the Council’s performance. These initiatives are organised into four focus areas.

As part of the “customer-friendly services” focus area, many services are being put online and being simplified. The Council called this programme of work the “Customer-centric Transformation programme”. For simplicity, we call it the online services programme. As part of our regular reviews of the Council’s service performance, this report looks at how the Council was managing the online services programme, and we looked closely at two projects in that programme.

The Council delivered the projects we looked at largely on time and to budget. We saw some good practice, including using an iterative approach to deliver projects, getting feedback from customers and staff before and during the project, and appropriate management of project risks and issues.

By June 2017, the online services programme had digitised 22% of the Council’s most common transactions, towards its target of 70% by the end of 2019. It is now easier for people to access services online. The Council has also achieved additional benefits and learned lessons from the programme.

However, there are risks to the online services programme’s continued progress. We found that the governance and accountability arrangements for the online services programme and the customer-friendly services focus area that it sits under had become confused. In our view, a lack of distinction between the two has caused this. This creates risks for the Council in maintaining effective governance and oversight, managing projects in the most effective and efficient way, and appropriately balancing the

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programme's emphasis on putting services online and the other objectives of the customer-friendly services focus area.

There are indications that customers and the Council are receiving benefits from the online services programme. However, not all of the objectives in the customer-friendly services focus area are being tracked and reported. This means that there is not a complete view of how the online services programme and other customer-focused initiatives are helping the Council to provide customer-friendly services.

The Council should improve its tracking of the benefits from projects to give it a better view of whether projects are achieving all of their expected benefits, including for customers. Although lessons from projects have been identified and applied to other projects, there is a risk that this will not happen consistently for every project.

The Council has acknowledged the areas for improvement that we identified and is making changes in response. Once the Council has addressed these matters, it will be in a strong position to achieve the objectives of its organisational strategy, including making its services more customer-friendly.

We encourage other agencies to consider this report when planning to invest in information and technology systems to improve how they deliver services. The report also has wider lessons for the public sector about governance and accountability arrangements for programmes and projects.

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