

Te Ngākau Kahukura Submission on Auckland Council Budget Proposal 23/24

Introduction

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to submit on Auckland Council's 2023/24 budget proposal. As a short introduction, this submission is being made on the behalf of [Te Ngākau Kahukura](#), a national initiative that works to make communities, environments and systems more safe and inclusive for rainbow people. This submission is intended to highlight some of the impacts that this budget (as proposed) will have on rainbow people and communities across Tāmaki Makaurau, however we posit that this analysis would also echo the experiences that would be felt across other communities and population groups in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Whilst it is understandable that some action need to be taken in order to address the \$295 million shortfall, it is our belief that this proposed budget will only serve to exacerbate disparities for Aucklanders who are already facing significant barriers and inequities as a result of social factors as well as the impacts of the pandemic and recent natural disasters. In general, while we agree that the suggested measures of reviewing the efficiency of Auckland Council's management structure, and "finding new ways to work with central government and other external partners" could be effective mechanisms for ensuring the efficacy and sustainability of Council, we are concerned that approximately 42% of the proposed budget cuts will have a direct impact on the social and economic wellbeing of rainbow communities across Tāmaki Makaurau. We note that in the analysis provided in the *Annual Budget 2023/34 Supporting Information* document that these risks have been alluded to, but we can only assume that they have been treated as risks that Council is willing to take. We, however, believe that this analysis has not gone far enough in assessing the impact that this approach can have on individuals and communities, especially in high-deprivation areas and communities. In relation to rainbow communities, as an example, the 2021 New Zealand Household Economic Survey reports that LGBT+ populations have a higher incidences of experiences of anxiety, depression, unemployment, and disability status in comparison to our non-LGBT+ counterparts, and that trans and non-binary populations earn an average of

\$32,172p/a of personal disposable income, \$10,439 less per year than that of cisgender populations, and \$9,243.70 less than New Zealand's Living Wage rates^{1,2}.

General social impacts

Social and community support services are already in a situation where they are desperately under-resourced and under-funded³. As such, many services are currently struggling to meet the needs expressed by communities. The reduction and/or elimination of services and schemes that directly provide or support social services and community development activities will have significant effects on the already stretched community services. Furthermore, given the current cost of living crisis⁴, it is likely that the need for embedded social supports will continue to increase, thus placing additional strain on an already overwhelmed system. Simply put, the need in communities is clear. The cuts to funding and service provision would only serve to fast-track the pressure put on the existing services and create a more severe bottleneck in accessing services, thus increasing disparities and deprivation.

The suggestion that community services and initiatives that are currently supported through Auckland Council will be supported to seek funding through central government or alternative funding sources is inherently unrealistic and unsustainable. Central government responsibility is certainly a core consideration for the funding for local-level organisations and initiatives. However, the withdrawal of support from local government suggests an absolution of the responsibility for the wellbeing of local communities that Auckland Council holds under section 3(d) of the Local Government Act 2002. Philanthropic organisations often seek to fund initiatives and projects that are funded through collaborative funding models to ensure feasibility and sustainability, and are often reluctant to fully fund core social services and projects that are seen as the responsibility of central or local government.

Whilst they might not look like a “traditional” social welfare system, arts, cultural and environmental events and initiatives often serve as useful mechanisms for individual and collective wellbeing, giving space for social cohesion and the affirmation of identity (which has been proven to be a significant feature in psycho-social wellbeing of individuals and communities)⁵. Defunding major arts and culture events would severely limit the ability of communities in Tāmaki Makaurau to gather, affirm a sense of belonging to both culture and place, and

¹Stats NZ. (2022). *LGBT+ population of Aotearoa: Year ended June 2021*.

² <https://www.livingwage.org.nz/>

³ SSPA (2019). *Social service system: The funding gap and how to bridge it*.

⁴ Newshub (Feb 2, 2023). *New data reveals true depth of New Zealand's cost of living crisis as household spending jumps*. Accessed at

<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/money/2023/02/new-data-reveals-true-depth-of-new-zealand-s-cost-of-living-crisis-as-household-spending-jumps.html>.

⁵ Treasury. (2022). *The living standards framework dashboard*.



support the growth of a localised economy. Social cohesion serves to grow not only collective social wellbeing, but also stimulates economic growth and innovation⁶, as such reducing reliance on social and community services (acknowledging that it is not the only factor impacting on the needs to access support services).

Impact on rainbow communities

In addition to the existing financial and service pressures that social and community services are currently experiencing (as outlined briefly above), groups and organisations that specifically serve to support rainbow communities have additional barriers, including the lack of targeted and sustainable funding for rainbow-specific service provision. As such, rainbow organisations and communities rely on philanthropic and grassroots funding mechanisms (such as contestable community grants and local board grants) in order to provide vital services and supports to the growing community needs across Tāmaki Makaurau. Furthermore, smaller rainbow groups and organisations would likely be incapacitated and unable to provide events and/or services to their localities and communities.

Many rainbow communities often don't have physical spaces easily available to them. Public spaces such as community halls, public libraries and other council-owned venues serve as key places for meeting and gathering. They can provide a more affordable alternative to privately-owned venues, and in some cases are able to offer a greater sense of safety in comparison to other public spaces. This would be severely limited if hireage cost was increased or opening hours were reduced. Additionally, Auckland Council initiatives like Proud Centres offer opportunities for communities to gather in local and decentralised spaces that have not previously been available to rainbow communities not based in Central Auckland. This includes creating visibility and a sense of belonging for young rainbow people, who often feel invisible or isolated in their local communities.

Auckland Council's own research has highlighted how rainbow communities face barriers to participate and contribute in Auckland's daily life⁷, and has highlighted Council's central role in ensuring a safer, more inclusive city⁸.

⁶ Borisov, I., Vinogradov, S. (2018) The Role of Social Cohesion in Social and Economic Processes, *Business and Management Sciences: New Challenges in Theory and Practice*, Godollo, pp. 521-539

⁷ Reid, A., Lysnar, P and Ennor, L (2017). Auckland's rainbow communities: challenges and opportunities. Auckland Council technical report, TR2017012
<https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/1142/tr2017-012-aucklands-rainbow-communities-challenges-and-opportunities.pdf>

⁸ 3 Questions report commissioned by Auckland Council's Rainbow Communities Advisory Panel
<https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/2042/3questions-auckland-rainbow-communities-advisory-panel-aug-2018.pdf>



Conclusion

“Increasing community resilience and connection, helping people feel welcome, safe and supported,” is an important key priority for Auckland Council. However, we believe that this budget does not adequately reflect this. As a whole, this proposed budget targets a range of Council initiatives and services that make Auckland a safer, more inclusive city for rainbow communities. As a solution, we support the budget proposal set out by the authors of *A Better Budget for Auckland*⁹, and strongly recommend that Auckland Council reconsider the proposed schedule of budget cuts. We hope that Auckland Council makes adequate adjustments to the budget proposal in order to truly centre on sustaining the wellbeing needs of the people and communities in Tāmaki Makaurau.

⁹ <https://betterbudgetauckland.co.nz/>

