



Evidence Snapshot

March 2016

Promoting Healthy Eating at the Local Government Level

Case Studies

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**NUTRITION
ACTION**

Ngā Takawaenga Hāpai Kai Hauora



Establishing a Local Food Policy Council

“With a collaborative response by both the community and local government, movement towards food security is possible” says Dana Thomson, Senior Health Improvement Advisor, Toi Te Ora.

The idea for establishing a food policy council in the Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty region came from a Toi Te Ora food security literature review in 2013. The review highlighted the need for intersectoral collaboration from all parts of the food system: production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste/recycling and sustainability in order to address the factors that impact our access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. Evidence suggested that the best way to get things started was by forming a food policy council to drive and advocate for work addressing food insecurity.



A food policy council is an organised representative group of people working collaboratively to build a healthy local food system. To thrive, this project requires strong community partnerships including stakeholders from across the food system and representation from a wide range of sectors including local government, health and environmental sustainability.

Toi Te Ora has a history of working with local government and has a dedicated healthy policies team. One representative from this team is tasked with addressing food security through local government engagement and healthy public policy work.

Toi Te Ora initiated the relationship with key council staff champions. They have a local government engagement strategy whereby Toi Te Ora’s healthy policies team have ongoing relationships with a key staff member (typically a policy analyst) within councils across our region. In this instance Toi Te Ora developed a collaborative relationship with a council staff member with responsibility for environmental sustainability as it was broad enough to include the food system.

This relationship and work with one council was then leveraged to seek buy-in from a key contact at the neighbouring council. The working relationships with each these councils was formalised when a report was put forward to the relevant council committees, which confirmed the councils were able to commit staff time towards participating in the food policy council.

The Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty region were selected because key indicators for the successful establishment of a food policy council were uncovered during a feasibility assessment across the broader region that Toi Te Ora serves.

Several key strategies were used to engage with different groups in the community:

- Developing a communications strategy – media, websites, resource development, public presentations.
- Targeted engagement and snowballing contacts (asking contacts to suggest other contacts) for key informant interviews, attendance/presentations/discussions held at various community food groups’ meetings.
- Facilitating three public kai hui brainstorming sessions, with results reported back to the community.
- Participating in council ‘Community Connections’ meetings in the local community.

This engagement was key in gaining a better understanding of the needs and objectives of different groups across the food system.



Local community gardens

Stakeholders and partners provided valuable support in different ways, and this project would never have gone as far as it has without input from: council staff, community food groups/collectives (e.g. ‘Good Neighbour’ food rescue, farmers’ markets, community garden groups, permaculture groups, organic farms groups), staff from the health sector, plus a range of others such as the Sustainable Business Network.

Establishing a Local Food Policy Council

Successes to date:

- A major milestone has been the councils formally agreeing for staff to be part of the food policy council.
- The kai hui brainstorming sessions attracted 50 people locally who wanted to part of the discussion. This has generated momentum in the community, with these people helping to spread the word of plans to form a food policy council.
- Recently the first Bay of Plenty kai hui was held and there was overwhelming support for the establishment of a local food policy council. The hui stimulated momentum, media attention and public awareness of the plan to address food issues through a food policy council.

Where to next:

As a result of the Bay of Plenty kai hui, the next step is to host a meeting for those who are committing to being part of the ongoing the group. This will effectively be the inaugural meeting of the food policy council. The purpose of the meeting will be to decide collectively the next course of action and the actions needed to get there.

Keys to success:

- Council representatives who are the champions for the food policy council (both at staff and councillor levels). Research indicates that having local government support for a food policy council is a key indicator for success.
- Positive media, particularly showing community is on board with the idea.
- Maintaining a focus on equity and engaging with Māori as a key stakeholder. This has been strengthened through engaging with local tangata whenua forums within council and also the DHB Māori health service.
- Getting some small quick wins on the board:
 - Tauranga City Council agreed to include promotion of edible planting through their Tree & Vegetation Management Policy.
 - When council were asked to play a role in the food policy council they remembered last time saying yes to the last request and how that had been a positive outcome with positive media.

Key learnings:

- Find a key champion whose role overlaps with what you're trying to achieve.
- Understand that council staff work in a political environment and that you need to work with them to ensure councillors see the benefit in any work they are doing with you.

- It's best to work in with your community and those who are willing to be involved – there is no one-size-fits-all model.
- Collectively there is a huge knowledge base in the community, and also great support for food system change.
- Not everyone has the same beliefs on what is the answer to our current food issues.
- When bringing people together it's important to focus on what they have in common – a shared desire to influence the food system.
- Once formed, the food policy council needs to have a very clearly defined decision making process.
- Things won't change fast – to date, this has been a slow process of engaging with the councils, community, and businesses to seek support for the idea of a food policy council.
- It helps to continually grow support by hosting numerous occasions for people to engage with the concept.
- Consider the sustainability of your efforts and a range of possible funding sources.
- We have shifted to talking about the concept as a strategic food alliance locally. Once formed, the group is likely to finalise its own creative name.
- Community engagement always takes time to develop the necessary relationships and reaching the right people.

“I keep meeting knowledgeable people who have been trying to address food system issues for years. They're always excited and appreciate that we're trying to help support a more coordinated approach”

Dana Thomson

Senior Health Improvement Advisor, Toi Te Ora.

For more information visit the Toi Te Ora [website](#).

Nelson City Council Sugar Sweetened Beverage Policy

The policy removed sugar sweetened beverages from council operated vending machines and from any council workplaces such as libraries or functions held at Civic House.

Back in 2013, Nelson Marlborough District Health Board (NMDHB) became the first health board in the country to ban sugar sweetened beverages from its premises. Following this move, NMDHB made a direct approach to the mayor of Nelson City Council about following the board's lead and introducing a similar ban at council facilities and events.

The approach was positively received. The main focus of interest from Nelson City Council was the opportunity to positively influence children and parents' behaviour, in light of research showing the negative impact that sugar sweetened beverages were having particular on the young people in their community.

Through an investigation of options it became clear that the logical first step in banning sugar sweetened beverages was an internal Nelson City Council policy which was approved by the chief executive on 16 July 2014. The policy removed sugar sweetened beverages from council operated vending machines and from any council workplaces such as libraries or functions held at Civic House. Council recognised how it could role model the implementation of a healthy beverage policy.

Following this, a report was put to council, outlining a number of options available for further action on sugar sweetened beverages sold or supplied at any council owned properties and council events. The options ranged from a status quo position where council would retain its internal policy while recognising the role of health promotion as being a government responsibility; to a full scale approach which would see all council owned properties becoming sugar free (this would impact upon commercial leases).

Council agreed to adopt a voluntary approach as the first step. This means that council staff work in negotiation with lease holders, concession holders, and contractors to seek voluntary compliance in removing sugar sweetened beverages from sale at council owned properties and council run events. Council wished to build community confidence in the policy and wished to take an encouraging rather than an enforcement approach to changing behaviour and helping people make better health choices.

As well as this policy approach council has also been involved in some further implementation working with community partners. This work was supported by councillors, particularly the mayor and deputy mayor, and council staff initiated discussions with community groups and agencies.

Council's first major community event after the adoption of the policy was the launch of the 2014 Arts Festival season with the Masked Parade. Staff worked with concession holders to encourage a sugar free approach. The Masked Parade is a community flagship event, attracting well over 3,000 participants and approximately 20,000 spectators. Many young people participate as mask makers and wearers, as well as being spectators. The aim was for this event to be the first major event where sugar sweetened beverages were not for sale which was successfully achieved.

To support the sugar sweetened beverage free initiative, Nelmac (provider of environmental management services) offered the provision of a water truck at council funded events which would provide quality drinking water free of charge in branded eco-cups.

Council has commissioned work on a modest branding/marketing campaign to support the policy and the water truck initiative. The costs of this work are being evenly shared with the Nelson Marlborough District Health Board and Sport Tasman. Nelmac is providing staff resources to bring the water truck to events and covering the cost of refitting and branding the truck. All four partners - Nelson Marlborough District Health Board, Nelson City Council, Sport Tasman and Nelmac will have their branding on materials relating to the water initiative.

The main focus of interest was the opportunity to positively influence children and parents' behaviour, in light of research showing the negative impact that sugar sweetened beverages were having particular on the young people in their community.

Nelson City Council Sugar Sweetened Beverage Policy

Some businesses decided early on to remove sugar sweetened beverages from sale at their premises, the first being Community Leisure Management (CLM) which manages the city's swimming pools. There has also been a number of positive responses from caterers and concession holders who are seeking information on how they could comply. Council is developing written material for use with concession holders, vendors and others about the intent of the policy and how they can support it.

Where to next:

While it is early days in the implementation of the policy, the voluntary approach is one which should see a number of organisations follow suit at a time, and in a way, most appropriate for their organisation.

Keys to success:

- The support of the mayor and councillors, with one or two as strong champions to lead the initiative, has made the difference in the policy becoming operational.
- The broad range of support, including co-funding of the initiative, from across the community: government agencies such as the district health board, community agencies such as Sport Tasman, and from businesses such as Nelmac.
- This broad and multi-dimensional support has meant that the initiative is a true community initiative rather than being driven only by council.
- Good communication with the public on the intent of the policy and how this will impact upon people directly.
- Having information available on local products which could be substituted for sugary drinks would be useful to help supportive vendors comply easily.
- Focusing on the message rather than taking away options from the community. In Nelson, this has been about providing a healthy and beneficial substitution that wasn't provided - accessible, free clean drinking water.

Key learnings:

- Given the relevant information, the majority of people are likely to understand the need to reduce sugar in the diets of young people.
- People may not understand what role council has in addressing the issue without good communication.



Enjoying free drinking water at a local community event

For more information and to see their policy visit the Nelson City Council [website](#).

Case Study 3

Healthy Auckland Together

EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT | March 2016

Vision: A social and physical environment that supports people living in Auckland to eat well, live physically active lives and maintain a healthy body weight within their communities.

Healthy Auckland Together started in 2014, after a request from the three Auckland DHBs to Auckland Regional Public Health Service for a regional response to obesity. Together, the 21 agencies (including Auckland Council and Auckland Transport) have agreed a vision, goals and a 65-point regional action plan for the next five years.



Green spaces encourage walking

Goals:

1. improving nutrition
2. increasing physical activity
3. reducing obesity

Healthy Auckland Together is a coalition of health, local government, iwi and non-government (NGO) organisations. Partners are committed to making changes in the Auckland region to improve health. They will do this by making it easier for Aucklanders to eat better, exercise more and maintain a healthy weight. The coalition is focusing on collaboration, profile raising and monitoring progress across five areas: streets, parks and places; food environments and marketing; schools and early childhood education services; workplaces; and community settings.

Auckland Regional Public Health Service is responsible for the 'backbone' function of the coalition as well as leading some of the actions. The 'backbone' function includes all the set-up, research, preparation, coordination, systems, process and monitoring involved in creating the case for change and keeping the coalition engaged, cohesive and working towards its goals.

Local government was identified at the outset as a key partner in order to truly influence the environments in which we live our lives. Healthy Auckland Together built on the good relationships with council that already existed at an operational level. This made it an easier sell when first approaching key staff about joining the coalition. The council could see alignment with the Auckland Plan and the benefits in helping achieve some of the ambitious goals it contains, similarly with the implementation of the Auckland Sport and Recreation Strategic Action Plan (ARSAP) and the Parks and Open Space Strategic Action Plan (POSSAP). The Auckland Council is a key player in the coalition, with representatives from transport, policy, urban design and community services. Support from the top was also sought, with the chief executive signing an intention to collaborate.

The focus is on influencing a range of organisations to change local food environments – such as workplaces, schools, community sports clubs, marae and also changing neighbourhoods. Some communities are saturated with fast food outlets, especially near schools, and Healthy Auckland Together will raise this issue with local boards and councillors to look at opportunities for improving access to healthy food options and limit access to unhealthy food options.

Healthy Auckland Together is also supporting council action in the provision of good quality water fountains, community gardens and fruit in parks. It backs council's strategy of adding nutrition policies into council contracts for facilities and into leases or licences for community organisations, sports clubs and potentially, for events.

Partners are also mapping and monitoring the food environment in high priority areas, so they can identify possible solutions.

“Reducing obesity won’t happen unless we work with local government to improve access to healthy food, particularly in low income neighbourhoods”

Dr Julia Peters

Healthy Auckland Together spokesperson.

Case Study 3

Healthy Auckland Together

EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT | March 2016

Successes to date:

At this early stage, the coalition has created a shared purpose and vision, agreed priorities, and a 65-point action plan. Partner agencies have agreed to lead and deliver on actions, and their chief executives have committed to collaborate on the action plan.

- Council has added research and evidence into the Auckland Design Manual to show the benefits of designing streets, parks and buildings that encourage physical activity.
- OneVoice Sport and Recreation Auckland (a coalition of central and local government, sport, health, education and recreation associations) has formally invited Healthy Auckland Together representation onto the group.
- Healthy Auckland Together actions that align and support the ASRSAP and POSSAP will be reported through the Auckland Plan.
- Auckland Council has reprioritised work programmes within the Parks, Sport and Recreation department and the Community Services - Service Strategy Unit to specifically support the Healthy Auckland Together plan.



Local food market

Where to next:

Healthy Auckland Together is moving from planning and coalition building to delivery. Its five-year plan focuses on changing infrastructure and policy in a range of settings – schools, workplaces, parks and streets, and communities – so it is easier to be physically active and choose healthier food.

This will be achieved through direct engagement with key decision makers and through creating public and community support for environmental change through the media and organisational networks.

As well as new initiatives, Healthy Auckland Together will also extend the impact of partners' existing programmes (for instance food guidelines) into the other organisations.

The next phase is to deliver on the 65 agreed projects over the next five years, and to engage with other stakeholders who can contribute to achieving Healthy Auckland Together's goals.

Keys to success:

- A strong coalition with agreed actions helps to build the case and to get support within their own organisation.
- Buy in from the top of all the partner organisations, with chief executives signing up to the coalition through signing an intention to collaborate.
- Sharing of responsibilities.
- Supporting strategic goals that can have a positive health impact.

Key learnings:

- Find the right person who will be a champion for the project within local government.
- Don't underestimate the human resource required for the backbone function.
- Find ways to maintain engagement and momentum.
- Keep open communication with a 'no surprises' policy.
- Any suggested changes to the food environment can result in negative publicity and accusations of 'nanny state' controls. Looking for positive stories, framing the issue to avoid negative reactions and getting support from others will be important.
- Some partners are focused on other priorities – active transport for instance. The coalition acknowledges there will be different priorities and that some partners can't and won't be involved in some profile raising or collaboration.
- There is no new money and budgets are shrinking – organisational commitment across teams contributes to its success, so everyone is doing their bit.
- The churn within organisations which means relationships can be built and then lost, and need to be rebuilt to maintain momentum.

For more information visit the [Healthy Auckland Together website](#).