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**Participation Through Communication: An Investigation Of
Communication Tools Used By Stakeholders When Participating In Local
Democracy.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Business Studies
in Communication Management
at Massey University, Palmerston North

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ABSTRACT

In the face of declining interest in democratic matters, calls for greater participation have resulted in the global implementation of varying degrees of teledemocracy. The changing face of telecommunications, a tool of teledemocracy, has also resulted in a hope that participation will be encouraged among groups, such as youth, who traditionally have not participated in democratic matters.

A total of 383 stakeholders from four lower North Island districts, who had made submissions to their local council regarding its 2004 Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP), participated in a survey. Additionally, three prominent community members from Palmerston North, three Palmerston North City Councillors, one Horizons Regional Councillor, and four council staff from Auckland City Council, Tararua District Council, Rangitikei District Council, and Wanganui District Council participated in qualitative in-depth interviews. The Auckland City Council also piloted a project for receiving text message submissions. This was later abandoned because of public and political pressure.

The purpose of this research is to investigate which communication tools are considered the most convenient and effective to use when participating in the submission process. Opinions regarding the communication tools currently offered by councils were gathered and compared. Key informants also commented on their attitude to consultation and the effectiveness of communication tools used in making submissions. Further, public and political opinions towards the possible introduction of text messaging to the submission process were also explored.

The results indicate that the communication methods used to make submissions can influence how the submissions are judged, with some tools being regarded by most participants in the research as being more effective. Submitters who were surveyed were positive regarding the current communication tools provided by councils for making submissions. However, the majority also showed high levels of prejudice against the use of text messaging, which is often considered a 'young' communication tool. Submission receivers interviewed showed a clear preference for formally written and oral submissions, demonstrating that some submissions are automatically attributed more value than others according to how they are presented.

Consistent with previous research, political participants who took part in the survey

were not representative of the wider community. This research showed current participants were more likely to be older, have had tertiary education, and to be either in full-time employment or retired. Despite the widespread call by researchers and academics for greater participation in local democracy, it appeared that the majority of current political participants, as represented by those taking part in the research, are not willing to relinquish their perceived power in the consultation and decision-making process to 'minority' participants, particularly young people

The findings of this research indicate although each communication tool or method has its own inherent access barriers, the variety of tools available for use allows current stakeholders to choose one or more that best suits their needs. However, the bias in favour of written submissions supported by an oral presentation means that some submissions are automatically given more weight in the decision-making process than others.

One conclusion that may be drawn from this finding is that it is not the communication tools themselves that act as a barrier to wider participation. It is, however, the attitudes of existing stakeholders and politicians, as revealed in the research, that form a barrier to wider participation by discouraging the involvement of younger citizens and those less able or willing to write formal submissions and present them orally in the traditional manner.

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	(ii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
List of Figures and Tables	(xi)
List of Abbreviations	(xii)
Authors Note	(xii)
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Public Participation	6
2.2.1 Participation in Theory	8
2.2.2 Benefits of Public Participation	10
2.2.3 Criticism of Public Participation	11
2.2.4 Barriers to Participation	13
2.2.5 Does Public Participation Work?	14
2.3 Communication and Local Government Decision Making	15
2.3.1 Historical Communication Models	16
2.3.2 The Two-way Communication Model	17
2.3.3 Trust and Ethics in Communication	18
2.3.4 Monologic versus Dialogic Communication	18
2.3.5 Communication in Consultation	20
2.4 Consultation and Local Government	21
2.4.1 The Political 'Ivory Tower'	22
2.4.2 1989 Local Government Reforms	23
2.4.3 Local Government Act (LGA) 2002	24
2.5 Telecommunication Technology	26
2.5.1 Technology Adoption	28
2.5.2 Internet and Text Statistics	29
2.5.3 Who is Using Text and Internet?	31
2.5.4 The Future of Telecommunications	32
2.6 Teledemocracy	33
2.6.1 Teledemocracy in Principle	33
2.6.2 Forms of Teledemocracy	36
2.6.3 Benefits of Teledemocracy	36
2.6.4 Disadvantages of Teledemocracy	38
2.6.5 Teledemocracy in Local Democracy	39
2.7 Conclusion	40

Chapter Three: Research Methodology	<i>Page</i>
3.1 Introduction	42
3.2 Research Questions	43
3.3 Justification of Methodologies Used	44
3.4 Survey	45
3.4.1 Choosing Survey Delivery	46
3.4.2 Mail Survey	46
3.4.3 Telephone Surveys	46
3.4.4 Web-based Surveys	47
3.4.5 Sampling and Response Rates	48
3.4.6 Types of Populations	50
3.4.7 Length of Time for Data Collection	51
3.4.8 Question Form	51
3.4.9 Palmerston North Questionnaire	51
3.4.10 Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei Questionnaire	52
3.4.11 Survey Limitations	52
3.5 Qualitative Interviews	55
3.5.1 Number and Length of Interviews	55
3.5.2 Purpose	56
3.5.3 Interview Questions	57
3.5.4 Steps in the Interview Process	58
3.5.5 Interview Limitations	59
3.6 Ethical Considerations	60
3.7 Summary	60
Chapter Four: A Case Study in Introducing New Technology	
4.1 Background	62
4.2 Inviting Public Submissions	62
4.3 Text Message Submissions	64
4.4 Results of the Combined Consultation	65
4.5 The Outcome of the Text Message Submission Experiment	66
4.6 Conclusion	67
Chapter Five: Submitter Survey Results And Interviews	
5.1 Introduction	69
5.2 Survey Results	69
5.2.1 Response Rates	69
5.2.2 Prior Experience in Making Submissions	71
5.2.3 Use of Communication Tools in Previous Submissions	72
5.2.4 Changing Communication Tools of Choice	73
5.2.5 Alternative Communication Tools	73
5.2.6 Communication Tool Convenience	75
5.2.7 Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Tool	77

	<i>Page</i>	
5.2.8	Introducing a New Communication Tool	79
5.2.9	Survey Participants' Demographic Details	80
5.3	Survey Results By Demographic	82
5.3.1	Gender	82
5.3.1.1	Use of Communication Tools in Previous Submissions	83
5.3.1.2	Alternative Communication Tool	83
5.3.1.3	Communication Tool Convenience	84
5.3.1.4	Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Tools	84
5.3.1.5	Introducing a New Communication Tool	85
5.3.2	Age	86
5.3.2.1	Use of Communication Tools in Previous Submissions	86
5.3.2.2	Alternative Communication Tool	87
5.3.2.3	Communication Tool Convenience	87
5.3.2.4	Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Tools	89
5.3.2.5	Introducing a New Communication Tool	89
5.3.3	Educational Attainment	90
5.3.3.1	Use of Communication Tools in Previous Submissions	90
5.3.3.2	Alternative Communication Tool	90
5.3.3.3	Communication Tool Convenience	91
5.3.3.4	Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Tools	93
5.3.3.5	Introducing a New Communication Tool	93
5.3.4	Employment Status	94
5.3.4.1	Use of Communication Tools in Previous Submissions	95
5.3.4.2	Alternative Communication Tool	95
5.3.4.3	Communication Tool Convenience	96
5.3.4.4	Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Tools	97
5.3.4.5	Introducing a New Communication Tool	98
5.4	Feelings Toward Current and Future Communication Tools	98

	<i>Page</i>	
5.5	Summary of Survey Findings	101
5.6	Interviews: The Professional Submission Perspective	106
	5.6.1 Paula Allan	106
	5.6.1.1 Personal Definition of Consultation	107
	5.6.1.2 The Current Political Environment	107
	5.6.1.3 Communication Tools	107
	5.6.1.4 Parting Words	108
	5.6.2 David Forrest	108
	5.6.2.1 Personal Definition of Consultation	108
	5.6.2.2 The Current Political Environment	108
	5.6.2.3 Perceived Value Council Places on Public Input	109
	5.6.2.4 Communication Tools	109
	5.6.2.5 Encouraging Public Participation	110
	5.6.2.6 Parting Words	111
	5.6.3 Evan Natrass	111
	5.6.3.1 Personal Definition of Consultation	112
	5.6.3.2 The Current Political Environment	112
	5.6.3.3 Perceived Value Council Places on Public Input	112
	5.6.3.4 Conduct of PNCC's LTCCP	113
	5.6.3.5 Communication Tools	113
	5.6.3.6 Parting Words	114
5.7	Conclusion	114
 Chapter Six: Results of Interviews With Councillors and Administrators		
6.1	Introduction	116
6.2	The City and Regional Councillors	117
	6.2.1 Cr Heather Tanguay	117
	6.2.1.1 Person Definition of Consultation	117
	6.2.1.2 PNCC's LTCCP	118
	6.2.1.3 Consultation and Public Input	119
	6.2.1.4 Example of a Positive Consultation Process	119
	6.2.1.5 Communication Tools	120
	6.2.1.6 Parting Words	120
	6.2.2 Cr Lynne Pope	120
	6.2.2.1 Person Definition of Consultation	121
	6.2.2.2 PNCC's LTCCP	121
	6.2.2.3 Consultation and Public Input	122

	<i>Page</i>
6.2.2.4 Example of a Positive Consultation Process	122
6.2.2.5 Communication Tools	123
6.2.2.6 Encouraging Public Participation	124
6.2.2.7 Parting Words	125
6.2.3 Cr Paul Rieger	125
6.2.3.1 Person Definition of Consultation	125
6.2.3.2 PNCC's LTCCP	126
6.2.3.3 Consultation and Public Input	126
6.2.3.4 Communication Tools	127
6.2.3.5 Encouraging Public Participation	127
6.2.3.6 Parting Words	128
6.2.4 Cr Marilyn Brown	128
6.2.4.1 Person Definition of Consultation	128
6.2.4.2 PNCC's LTCCP	129
6.2.4.3 Consultation and Public Input	129
6.2.4.4 Example of a Positive Consultation Process	130
6.2.4.5 Communication Tools	130
6.2.4.6 Encouraging Public Participation	131
6.2.4.7 Parting Words	131
6.3 The Council Administrators	132
6.3.1 Andrew Stevenson	132
6.3.1.1 Perceived Council Value on Public Input	132
6.3.1.2 Communication Tools	133
6.3.1.3 Encouraging Public Participation	134
6.3.2 Charlotte Hume	134
6.3.2.1 Perceived Council Value on Public Input	135
6.3.2.2 Communication Tools	135
6.3.2.3 Encouraging Public Participation	136
6.3.3 Michelle Bisset	136
6.3.3.1 Perceived Council Value on Public Input	137
6.3.3.2 Communication Tools	138
6.3.3.3 Encouraging Public Participation	139
6.3.4 John Walker	139

	<i>Page</i>
6.3.4.1 Perceived Council Value on Public Input	139
6.3.4.2 Communication Tools	140
6.3.4.3 Encouraging Public Participation	140
6.4 Conclusion	141
Chapter Seven: Discussion	
7.1 Introduction	143
7.2 Case Study	145
7.3 Attitudes Towards Communication Tools	147
7.4 Participation, Communication, and Teledemocracy	150
7.5 Participants' Demographic Characteristics	154
7.6 Encouraging Participation	157
7.7 Conclusion	159
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	161
Appendices	
Appendix A: Principles of Consultation	167
Appendix B: Local Authority Area Map	169
Appendix C: Survey Questionnaires	171
References	177

List Of Figures And Tables.

	<i>page</i>
Figure 1	8
Figure 2	9
Figure 3	129
Table 1	65
Table 2	66
Table 3	71
Table 4	72
Table 5	72
Table 6	73
Table 7	74
Table 8	76
Table 9	76
Table 10	78
Table 11	78
Table 12	79
Table 13	80
Table 14	80
Table 15	81
Table 16	82
Table 17	83
Table 18	84
Table 19	84
Table 20	85
Table 21	86
Table 22	86
Table 23	87
Table 24	88
Table 25	88
Table 26	89
Table 27	90
Table 28	91
Table 29	92
Table 30	92
Table 31	93
Table 32	94
Table 33	95
Table 34	96

Table 35	Number of Participants With No Access To Communication Tools % (Employment)	96
Table 36	Attitudes To Communication Tool Effectiveness % (Employment)	97
Table 37	Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging? (Employment)	98
Table 38	Submission Receiver Interview Schedule	116

List Of Abbreviations

Cr	Councillor
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LGA	Local Government Act
LGNZ	Local Government New Zealand
PNCC	Palmerston North City Council
RDC	Rangitikei District Council
TDC	Tararua District Council
WDC	Wanganui District Council
MDC	Manawatu District Council
HDC	Horowhenua District Council

Authors Note

At the time of undertaking this research, it was also the year of local body elections. Palmerston North's Mayor at the beginning of this study was Mark Bell-Booth. The interview with Cr Tanguay was undertaken, and therefore written in context, before her October election to the Mayoralty.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Technological developments over the last two decades, especially in telecommunications, have altered the way people communicate with each other all over the world (Barnes & Cumby, 2002; Perry, Berryman, Yardley, Ingham, & Dale, 2001; Kalugdan, 2003). In response to these improvements, public organisations are incorporating various technologies to enhance their communication with citizens. However, despite such additions and the ongoing interest in teledemocracy, there has been little research both in New Zealand and internationally concerning the use and impact of communication tools in local democracy. In response to the lack of research in this area, this study explores the various media used by participating citizens in a recent submission process in one city and three district councils in the lower North Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand's local authorities have been significantly restructured in recent years, from the reforms of 1989 right through to the introduction of the 2002 Local Government Act (LGA). Under the LGA, councils are now required to "place greater emphasis on forward strategic planning and consultation with the community" (Christie, 2003, p.1). One of the most significant changes resulting from the new legislation is the introduction of the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP), a new requirement legally prescribing individual councils to consult with their stakeholders in producing a ten-year plan. For stakeholders to participate in this process, they must make a submission using communication tools that councils designate as suitable for use.

Changes in telecommunication technologies, have allowed an increase in the use of teledemocratic processes by local governments (Kearns, 2001; Becker 1993). Known by many names, including 'cyberdemocracy', 'technopolitics', 'e-gov', and 'digital democracy', teledemocracy has been defined by Kinder (2002) as:

The use by those with power over resources or those seeking such power, of ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) supported or enabled ways of influencing political processes and outcomes, situated in concrete social space and relating to particular choices (elections or services and their associated opportunity costs) (p.559).

Grönlund (2001) says that teledemocracy uses, "Information and communications

technologies (ICTs) to connect politicians and citizens by means of information, voting, polling, or discussion” (p.23).

In the face of declining voter turnout and perceived public apathy, authorities all over the world have increasingly implemented elements of teledemocracy as part of an attempt to re-engage public interest and participation in local matters (Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998; Kearns, 2001; Becker, 1993). This attempt to make the political process more accessible to the general population has produced varying results. During the course of his research, Kinder (2002) discovered evidence suggesting that teledemocracy may encourage participation where it is lacking. This finding has been supported by Robertson (2002) who reported a 6.93% increase in voter turnout during one local election with the introduction of Internet voting. However, the resulting participation rate in this election was only a small victory for those who regard technology as the answer to increasing participation.

New communication tools, such as websites and online submissions, are slowly being utilised by various New Zealand local authorities, allowing more options for stakeholders to submit their opinions to their local bodies. Some councils have reported success with specific tools, while others have not had a positive experience. For example, in 2004 the introduction of telephone submissions at Hurunui District Council was so successful a dedicated freephone was set up specifically for this purpose, while Christchurch City Council experienced such rudeness during submissions to their draft annual plan for 1994/95 they ceased to accept phone and anonymous submissions. Tararua District Council, while still accepting phone submissions, also found cases of abuse on occasion¹. Auckland City Council’s experiment in text messaging of submissions, conducted as part of this research, also received some negative reactions from the public. The results of this project are described in Chapter Four.

While there has been some research overseas investigating the implementation of specific technologies, such as electronic voting, and whether the use of these was considered ‘successful’ or not (for example, Becker, 2001), most, if not all, of the available literature is presented from the perspective of city administrators and officials. There has been little exploration of how citizens perceive the communication tools being made available to them.

¹ J. Julian (PNCC), personal communication, 1 April, 2004

This research looked at the use of various communication methods by citizens in the Palmerston North, Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei districts who participated in the 2004 LTCCP consultation process. It examined submitters' opinions regarding the communication tools available and investigated potential trends in their use. Those who made submissions were also asked for their opinion on the possible introduction and use of text messaging, a relatively new communication technology, in communications with their councils. To obtain a balanced view regarding the use of communication tools currently made available by New Zealand local authorities, opinions from the 'other side' of the public participation process - council members and administrators - were also included. Additionally, a description of the Auckland City Council texting experiment has been included as a case study. The project itself monitored the introduction of text messaging to the submission making process in Auckland City.

The following research questions underpinned this research:

1. What is the most used communication tool in the local body submission process?
2. Which communication tools do submitters regard as (a) the most convenient, and (b) the most effective to use when communicating with their local council?
3. What do councillors and council staff regard as the most effective communication tool for those making submissions?
4. Is there a place for text messaging as a communication tool in the submission process in the opinion of submitters and those receiving submissions?
5. Does a link exist between specific demographics, such as age or gender, and the communication tool used to make submissions?

This research concerned itself primarily with the stakeholders who used communication tools to make their submissions to the relevant LTCCP during the consultation process. This process was of particular interest because the changes required by the Local Government Act 2002 were to be put into practice for the first time. Additionally, the LTCCP produced an excellent opportunity to provide a 'population' for research and the requirements for councils to make details of submissions and their submitters publicly available allowed for relatively easy access to potential participants.

In summary, this project explored whether constituents are being provided with appropriate communication media (both traditional and new technologies) when participating in selected local projects and plans. It also presented a chance to ask key public figures what they think are the most effective communication tools and why. It is hoped that through research such as this teledemocracy may be better understood, both by governing bodies and the publics that communicate with them. In obtaining a deeper understanding of teledemocratic tools, local governments will be able to answer questions such as: Which communication tools should we use? Are these tools appropriate? Are they what our constituents want to use when communicating with us? Ultimately, councils will be able to offer communication media that best suit their publics and which encourage participation in the political process.

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter Two, the literature review, describes the various elements, such as communication, participation, and technology, which affect the use of teledemocracy in local government. Specifically, this chapter takes a brief look at the New Zealand laws and changes that have affected and shaped local government requirements regarding consultation with their publics. Public participation and consultation are defined and explained in terms of purpose and practice. The development of telecommunication technology is also examined as is the theory and use of teledemocracy in the changing face of consultation.

Chapter Three describes the methodologies employed in this research: Face-to-face, email, and telephone interviews were combined with mail, telephone, and email/Internet surveys. Interviews with key informants from both sides of the submission process were undertaken to help provide a more balanced view about the use and value of different communication tools. These methodologies are described and discussed in terms of the rationale for their use and the limitations associated with them. Ethical considerations are also addressed.

Chapter Four presents, in case study form, the Auckland City Council pilot study that introduced text messaging as an additional communication tool in the submission process. It was intended that this experiment would be repeated in later submission processes. However, the research project was abandoned because of public and political pressure. The chapter looks at the results from this project and briefly discusses the response to the

experiment.

Chapter Five presents the attitudes of the submitters toward communication tools. First, it summarises the results gathered from the surveys conducted in Palmerston North, Rangitikei, Tararua, and Wanganui in table format and briefly describes their findings. Interviews from three local advocates who make submissions on behalf of various organisations are also included here, providing a professional perspective to the submitters' side of the research.

Chapter Six contains information gained from qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with four local body councillors and four council staff who receive public submissions. These interviews allowed for further explanation of local democratic practices while also providing a balance of views regarding communication tools in public participation.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings from the surveys, case study, and interviews. In particular, this chapter considers what the findings mean in relation to theories and practice of participatory democracy in local government. Finally, Chapter Eight draws conclusions from the results of this research. Potential for further research in this area is identified here as well.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This review attempts to show the range of diverse issues that can affect public participation in local democracy when politics, communication, and technology converge. Although much of the literature referenced stems from overseas studies, particularly European and American, many of their findings are relevant to the New Zealand setting and have been discussed accordingly.

The topic of communication tools in local democracy draws on a number of areas of theory. This review examines the broad topics of communication, democracy, and to a lesser extent technology and access to power.

The communication theory referred to here includes not only encompassing theories of communication, but also communication tools or technologies. Democracy is examined with particular reference to local government participation, the challenge to increase participation, effective means of consultation and the development and increasing use of teledemocracy.

The review outlines the speed with which new technologies are being adopted globally and their potential for democracy, while also outlining some advantages, disadvantages, and inherent biases associated with them.

This chapter presents a summary discussion on all of these areas to place the research in context with the literature. The discussion is organised under the following topic headings:

- Public participation,
- Communication and local government decision-making,
- Consultation and local government,
- Telecommunication technology, and
- Teledemocracy.

2.2 Public Participation

Bishop and Davis (2002) suggest that, "Participation is the expectation that citizens have a voice in policy choices" (p.16) and that in practice, while participation is encouraged, there is the basic understanding that the government will make the final decision. This does not make participation redundant. The public is still able to influence the form the outcomes

will take but the responsibility for them will remain that of the decision-makers (ibid). Although widely espoused as being important to the democratic process, the concept of participation is not without its critics. According to Munro-Clark (1992), "Participation implies an interactive process between government and citizens but does not specify the nature or bounds of the exchange" (cited in Bishop and Davis, 2002, p.16). In Munro-Clark's view, public participation itself is an ideology. This assertion is at least partially supported by Habermas's communicative action theory, which describes public participation as being based on the principles of fairness and competence. "Fairness" Habermas claims, "is achieved through broad representation and equalisation of participants' power, while competence often involves the use of scientific information and technical analysis to settle factual claims" (cited in Beierle, 2002, pp. 740-741).

Overdevest (2000) states that from a participatory democracy perspective, the goals of public participation are to democratise nature, re-create society through social movements and community action groups, and to implement participation to prevent "further erosion of civic-mindedness and community self-efficacy" (p. 686). This perspective is partially supported by Weeks (2000) who suggests that the goals of a deliberative democracy include the revitalising of culture, improvement of public discourse, and generation of political will. Catt and Murphy (2003) simplify the aim as being a means to increase information and perspectives available to decision-makers.

There are varying degrees of public participation that can be visualised as a continuum that ranges from less intensive processes to more intensive processes which Beierle (2002) describes as being the difference between participants making submissions for consideration and being able to make the decisions themselves. Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) suggest that the primary role of public administrators is to help stakeholders achieve overall satisfaction in the process rather than to control or steer society.

Halvorsen (2001) identifies two factors driving the recent call for participation – legality and effective decision-making. Laws such as New Zealand's Local Government Act 2002, have increasingly required officials to involve their publics in matters that directly affect them. However, law alone is not enough to ensure effective outcomes. According to Halvorsen, traditional decision-making modes often stand in the way of effective decision-making. It is the desire for effective decision-making that is the second driving factor behind

the need for more public participation.

Essentially, public participation and consultation is desirable to ensure that those who govern are actually doing what the people want them to. Regardless of the variety of identified goals, and the means used to achieve them, the basic underlying principle of participation is a sharing of power between elected officials and administrators, and the people they represent (Bishop & Davis, 2002).

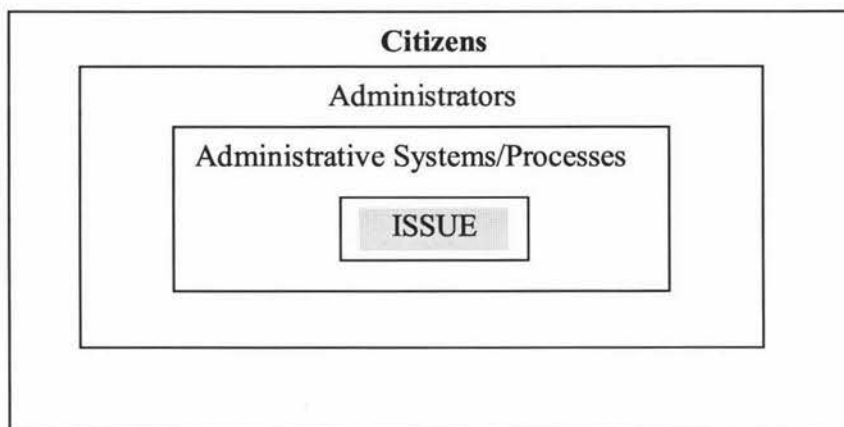
2.2.1 Participation in theory.

King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) discuss two models of public participation: conventional participation (the current framing of participation), and authentic participation (the desired framing of participation). Conventional participation is made up of four different parts:

1. The issue or situation;
2. The administrative structures, systems, and processes within which participation takes place;
3. The administrators; and,
4. The citizens (p.319).

According to these researchers, under the processes of conventional participation, everything revolves around the issue at hand and the citizens are distanced from this issue (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Context of Conventional Participation



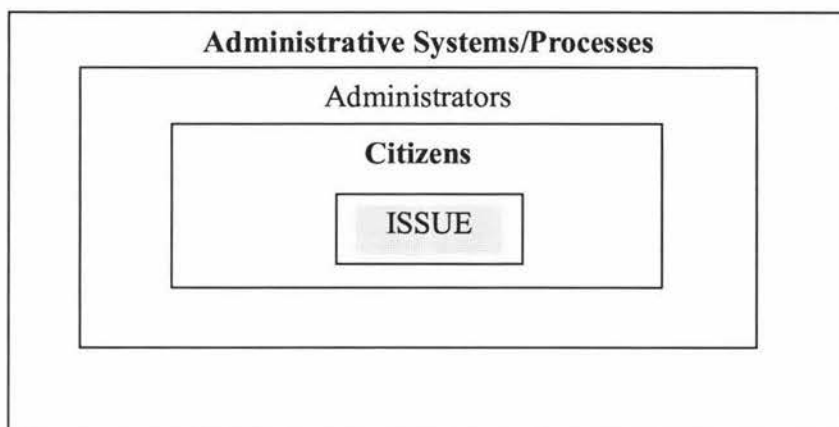
(Source: King et al., 1998, p.320)

The processes (being the pre-determined frameworks the administrator works within) are the closest, and the administrator acts as a mediator between the two. In this view, the

administrator has little flexibility in issue definition and process and the public has only as much influence on the issue as the administrator allows them. King et al. suggest, therefore, that conventional participation is ineffectual and full of conflict.

To redress this power struggle, King et al. propose a reframing of participation processes (see figure 2). Instead of operating in the current reactive environment, they believe that authentic participation is a more productive alternative.

Figure 2: Context of Authentic Participation



(Source: King et al., 1998, p.321)

In King et al's. view, by moving the citizen closer to the issue and moving the systems and processes further away, authentic participation provides both the public and the administrator the opportunity to communicate with each other and both to have an impact on the decision making process. Four elements are identified as being key to the authentic participation model: focus, commitment, trust, and open and honest discussion. The focus shifts to both the processes used and the outcomes, which, King et al. say, make participation "an integral part of administration, rather than an add-on to existing practices" (p.320).

While contextually the authentic model differs from the conventional one, in that the public become much closer to the issue, the administrator still acts as an intermediary between them. By reframing current practices to the authentic model, the participation becomes more meaningful and less reactive (ibid).

Another public participation model for consideration is the participatory democracy approach. This approach works much in the same way as the authentic model where a range

of interests are put forward and participants are fully involved in the process. Information is freely shared between the parties involved, which allows for open dialogue and resolution of conflicts during the planning stage as opposed to the reactionary approach of waiting until the end and dealing with unhappy publics through petitions and arbitration (Moote, McClaran, & Chickering, 1997).

Writing from a citizen activist's point of view, Arnstein (1969, cited in Bishop & Davis, 2002) proposes a 'ladder of participation' that begins at manipulation on its lowest rung and ends with citizen control on its highest. The eight individual rungs are placed into three groups: non-participation, degrees of tokenism, and degrees of citizen power. In her opinion, citizen participation is the same as citizen power and unless direct democracy is being used, nothing meaningful has happened (Bishop & Davis, 2002). In reference to Arnstein's ladder, Martin & Boaz (2000), unlike most researchers and authors who generally advocate one form of participation over all others, suggest that there is no 'superior' form of engagement and that all three forms of participation and the graduations between are equally important in achieving the end goal.

2.2.2 Benefits of public participation

Rises in demand for more direct participation from the general citizenry have highlighted various issues of trust and message filtering in the participation process (Bishop & Davis, 2002). Bishop and Davis suggest that by participating in the political process, people are able to speak for themselves instead of relying on interest groups to present their points of view. In addition to directly communicating their positions, they also receive relevant information, first hand, without having the message filtered through third parties such as journalists and editors.

In their study of ways of improving public participation processes, King et al. (1998) interviewed five public participation 'experts' and conducted seven focus groups, containing three sub-groups of participants: non-elected local government administrators, political activists, and citizens who had participated in local democracy. In the course of their research, King et al. found support for public input from all three sub-groups within their focus groups who believed participation was not just necessary but also desirable. Additionally, King et al. found participation filled an individual need for citizens to be a part

of something bigger and that administrators did not just desire the input, they also acknowledged their decision making limitations without it, concluding that participation can lead to much better decisions.

An additional prominent benefit to be gained from participation lies within the individual members of the public. People inherently bring with them local knowledge as well as a variety of perspectives that may not have been previously considered (Burby, 2003; Carr & Halvorsen, 2001). Such participation can lead to:

1. Better plans and proposals
2. A deeper understanding of each others interests and the interests of society as a whole
3. A positive impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviours
4. Better informed judgments
5. Wider political knowledge, higher political efficacy
6. A better relationship with elected officials and their representatives, and an increase in political action (Burby, 2003; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Gastil, 2000; Moote et al., 1997).

However, Gastil (2000) warns that although individual political efficacy may be increased, group efficacy could decrease as scepticism of group decisions develops. To explain, Gastil suggested that, "Participants might leave a challenging forum more confident in their own ability to take effective individual action but more skeptical of the efficacy of group-based political action" (p.358).

2.2.3 Criticism of public participation

One of the major criticisms aimed at public participation programmes is that governing bodies wish to be seen as going through the motions and, usually, are only looking for validation and support for a decision that had already been made (Gwin, 1984; King et al., 1998; Konisky & Beierle, 2001; Moote et al., 1997; Burby, 2003). In addition, many citizens carry an element of mistrust toward elected officials and city administrators (King et al., 1998; Weeks, 2000)

A common criticism reported by researchers is that various processes used in participation, such as public hearings, are unrepresentative of the general population. Solicited public opinions are usually dominated by specific interest groups who tend to be

passionate about their cause and non-representative of general public views (Weeks, 2000; McComas, 2001; Moote et al., 1997; Forgie, 2002). This view is supported by Burby (2003) who found specific groups he referred to as the “iron triangle” (business, neighbourhood groups, and government officials) dominated local planning meetings. Weeks (2000) goes on to say that over-representation of special interest opinion can also lead to the public belief that minority groups dominate matters of policy.

In addition, many administrators are not happy to solicit public input and some even find it problematic. These administrators believe that greater citizen participation increases inefficiency because participation creates delays and increases red tape (King et al., 1998). Such an opinion supports Konisky and Beierle’s (2001) assertion that many processes involve very little listening to the facts and not nearly enough deliberation.

Further criticisms of public participation originate from local government officials and administrators who have suggested that the public do not make use of appropriate scientific and technical tools and concluded that the public is less informed, making its decisions based on a lack of relevant information (Yosie & Herbst, 1998; Overdevest, 2000; Moote et al., 1997). Beierle (2002), who conducted a meta-analysis of 239 published case studies regarding the quality of stakeholder involvement in environmental planning decisions, does not support this position. Beierle found that overall there was little cause for concern over low-quality decisions due to stakeholder processes. In Beierle’s opinion the majority of cases showed improvements in the decision-making process due to new information, ideas, and analysis being introduced by stakeholders who had acquainted themselves with the issues at hand and had adequate access to technical and scientific resources.

Perceived government apathy toward public participation leads many citizens to believe they will only be noticed if they join groups and engage in angry protest against decisions (For example, Wheeler, 2004, King et al., 1998). “Citizens involved in these protest groups are confrontational in their participatory efforts because they believe administrators operate within a ‘context of self-interest’ and are not connected to the citizens” (Kettering Foundation, 1991, p.7. cited in King et al., 1998, p.319).

For the genuine officials and members of the public who believe in the participation process, there are still more hurdles to be encountered (Cheyne, 2004). King et al. (1998) tell

us that while many people from all sides want to increase public participation, the means being used for encouragement are not effective.

2.2.4 Barriers to participation

Several barriers exist that still divide the people from the political process. While some authors have blamed specific technologies such as television for the decline in public participation (for example Gans, 1993), King et al. (1998) identified three categories of barriers through their research: the nature of life in contemporary society, administrative processes, and current practices and techniques of participation (p.322).

The first life barrier identified by King et al. includes the reality of daily life, social class, transport, time, family, and income. For some, holding down two jobs or lack of child-care were the barriers between them and fuller participation. Education, or lack thereof, and the fall of the 'tight-knit community' where neighbourhoods have changed dramatically, were also identified as reasons for a lack of participation. Additionally, there are always people who just are not interested in participating no matter what their circumstances. The nature of life barriers also finds support among other writers such as Halvorsen (2001) and Moote et al. (1997).

The second identified barrier is the 'administrative processes barrier'. According to King et al. (1998), this barrier is paradoxical. Public participation is not only desirable but also encouraged. However, anything that potentially challenges the administrative status quo is discouraged or even blocked. The government itself becomes the barrier to public participation through one-way communication systems.

The third and final identified barrier is the 'current practices and techniques barrier', identified as being the most problematic to participation. Public hearings, in particular, are considered to be the most ineffective technique commonly used. What is sometimes mistaken for public apathy is often reaction to issues such as structure and timing. Bias in social class with regards to panels and councils² and interpreting survey results rigidly also limit the meaningful interactions needed from participation. Many of these barriers are confirmed in the writings of both Burby (2003) and Halvorsen (2001).

² Researchers suggest that community members from the higher social classes, generally higher educated and from more prestigious professions, are the most likely to sit on panels and stand for council seats.

A number of researchers and politicians have cited public apathy as a possible barrier to participation (for example, Burby, 2003; Hyde, 2004). However, in a case study using document analysis, direct observation, questionnaires, and interviews, Moote et al. (1997) found nothing to support such a belief. In their view, people were simply weighing up their opportunity cost in relation to the benefit of participation in processes that used traditional decision-making methods.

Not all barriers are seen to be disadvantaging public participants alone. McComas (2001) points out that even when officials are attempting to engage in dialogue, the audience can be notably distrustful and as a result disregard the information given to them.

2.2.5 Does public participation work?

Since success in relation to public participation is a relative term, it depends entirely on how it is defined and measured. In a review of public participation literature, Chess and Purcell (1999), while warning of the diversity of perspectives when attempting to develop a single definition of success, identify two general means for doing so: Outcome goals and process goals.

According to Chess and Purcell, outcome goals are judged on the results of the participation. Unfortunately, there remains the issue of interpretation as to what positive results are. Process goals instead consider the participatory processes used. Therefore, it is the means that become important to success rather than results. Again, perception of positive processes is also open to interpretation.

Halvorsen (2001) suggests that one measure of success is representation. That is to say, public participation may be considered successful if the participants themselves are, for instance, demographically representative of the general population.

Although Chess and Purcell (1999) found evidence of participation being representative of general societal opinions, many of the studies they cite originated in the 1970's and early 1980's. Consequently, the changing face of society is not taken into account when drawing these conclusions. As one American administrator lamented, "People do not talk to each other anymore...the neighborhoods aren't neighborhoods...they used to be real tight-knit communities. Isolation from others is detrimental to participation" (cited in King et al., 1998, p.322). If participation is limited, so too may be the representation of

public opinion.

While it is widely believed that democracy benefits greatly from citizen involvement in the decision-making process (Catt & Murphy, 2003, Weeks, 2000), Moote et al. (1997) found that participation in public matters sometimes results in a never-ending saga with no hope of resolution. Such a finding suggests that participation can in fact defeat the purpose of engaging public opinion in the first place.

The answer to this problem identified by Moote et al. may lie in the skills and understanding of the participants themselves. Weeks (2000) suggests there is a difference between public opinion and public judgement. According to Weeks, opinion is not a reliable basis for policy, as it tends to be uninformed, superficial, and transient. Judgement, on the other hand, is about being informed on the issues, weighing them up, and understanding basic principles, such as the need to accept tradeoffs. Therefore, it depends entirely on whether participants are exercising their opinions or judgements during the decision-making process as to whether a conclusion may be reached.

Despite the inability to find blanket agreement as to whether participation works successfully, public contributions to the decision-making process are essential in making policy makers aware of the publics they serve. Further, it is equally important to consistently and persistently examine the methods used to invite participation to ensure that the goals of the government and the expectations of the public are being met (Konisky & Beierle, 2001). However, the goals of government and expectations of the public can never be met without timely and effective communication.

2.3 Communication and local government decision-making

In order for local government and its constituents to engage in mutually beneficial decision-making processes, they must first learn to communicate with each other. Kelly and Moles (2002) tell us, "To be effective at local and regional levels, sustainability indicators must reflect community values, concerns and hopes for the future. Meaningful interactive participation in the development of a set of indicators demands enduring and effective communication between researchers, policy makers and 'user groups'" (p.889). This goal in itself may be problematic. Comrie (2000) states that,

Consultation, dialogue, or symmetrical communication is not easy, even when it is

the clear and official goal of the organisation. First, it is hard to get total buy-in from all elements of the organisation. Conflicting aims and agendas are more common than not. Second, sound communication and relationship building requires scarce time and resources for uncertain ends. Third, the process is not always clear; there is no “best method” (p.32).

According to Tymson and Lazar and Lazar (2002), “To be effective communicators, we need to know how to develop and design communication campaigns that will work, that will be noticed among the many competing messages, and that will lead to the desired response. Communication theory provides us with many clues about how to do this” (p.2).

2.3.1 Historical communication models

Earlier communication theories, such as the domino model described by Grunig and Hunt (1984), suggest that communication begins with a message and moves sequentially through a series of stages finally ending in a behavioural change. However, communication is not that simple. As Grunig and Hunt state, “The dominos may fall, but only rarely do they fall in a line and topple each other” (p.125). Additional communication theories have also suggested a difference in communication styles according to personal traits such as gender (Tannen, 1990). Though subsequent research did not find support for this claim (Oxley, Dzindolet, & Miller, 2002).

Further theorising produced the identification of four models of communication used by organisations when interacting with their publics: press agency/publicity model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical model, and the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). For the participative decision-making process required by legislation in New Zealand, the two-way symmetrical model seems most applicable. According to Karlberg (1996), the two-way symmetrical model entails organisations and their publics engaging in dialogue in an effort to achieve mutual understanding and change. This in itself is a significant tenet of the LGA 2002. Although the two-way symmetrical model has been identified as the best form of organisational communication, it is believed that many organisations do not engage in it due to a perceived threat to existing power structures (Grunig, 1992).

Two fundamental premises that remain unchallenged in two-way symmetrical communication research, according to Karlberg (1996), are the economic and political

premises. According to Karlberg, the role of public relations is first and foremost a commercial tool followed secondly as a tool of government. Karlberg contends that the research into two-way symmetrical theory is being applied within an asymmetrical research agenda. Therefore, he argues, is not enough for organisations to engage in symmetrical communication as symmetry assumes that everyone has the skills and resources to speak for themselves in public discourse. Clearly, this assumption produces limitations. For example, telephone communications are limited to those who have access to a phone (Bourque & Fielder, 2003). Additionally, if face-to-face interactions lend more weight to written communications (Cockburn, 2001) then those who are unable to physically attend in the times given, or are not comfortable with public speaking, are at a disadvantage to those who do not have these barriers (King et al., 1998). Online communications are limited to those with computer literacy and access (Schonlau, Fricker Jr, & Elliott, 2002), and so on. As such, the appropriate skills and resources must be made available to the whole community to ensure effective two-way communication (Karlberg, 1996).

2.3.2 The two-way communication model

More recent communication studies carried out by Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) suggest an evolution of the two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical theories previously explored by communication researchers. In the new two-way communication model, Dozier et al. suggest that organisations and external publics hold independent, sometimes contradictory, interests. Through the middle ground, known as the win-win zone, opposing sides can negotiate and sometimes compromise in order to find a mutually beneficial solution. According to this theory, one group dominates the left side of the win-win zone and the other group dominates the right. Any outcome from the dominant position's perspective results in unsatisfactory and 'one-sided' decisions. The job of the communicator is to bring both sides into the win-win zone for successful communication and outcomes. However, Dozier et al. warn of asymmetrical tactics being used to create ambiguity with the possible outcome being a win-lose game.

To minimise conflicting communication styles, Sanchez (1999) proposes the need for the recruitment of internal publics to make communication strategies successful. This sentiment is echoed in the writings of Comrie (2000) and De Bussy, Ewing, and Pitt (2003).

The need for senior management support and involvement is paramount to ensuring effective communication between an organisation and its publics (Sanchez, 1999). Further, successful organisational communication is challenged because of the demographic diversity found within their publics (Woodward, 2000).

2.3.3 Trust and ethics in communication

Ruppel and Harrington (2000) state that, "Regular communication allows the exchange of information about each party's preferences, values and approaches to problems, thereby leading to the development of knowledge-based trust" (p.315). This, they say, guarantees the development of mutual understanding, promoting commonality, trust and learning. However, Karlberg (1996) suggests that public communications are plagued by practitioners who see their role as solely to manipulate public perceptions. This in turn leads to practitioners behaving in a completely unethical manner. This understanding of their role may explain Botan's (1997) assertion that many professional communicators prefer to engage in monologic communications as opposed to using the dialogic approach.

2.3.4 Monologic versus dialogic communication

The monologic approach, according to Botan (1997), is the use of manipulation, coercion, deception, and possibly exploitation in public communications. Such an approach disregards individuals' views and their importance and seeks only to fulfill the communicator's pre-determined purpose. The focus within this approach is on the message being conveyed to the public rather than the publics' needs or requirements and the public are unable to influence any eventual outcomes. Feedback is only sought to justify and further the communicator's own end. From this position, communicators believe they must coerce the public as they impose their own values and beliefs on that public. According to Botan, this form of communication exhibits a defensive attitude of self-justification.

Tuler (2000) further explains the monologic communicator as someone who makes use of authoritative utterances. Such an individual would make claims or extend justifications and expect others to just accept them without question or dialogue. Discussion is not encouraged as it may highlight discrepancies and contradictions throughout the monologic communication.

The monologic style can be seen in various communications from both council representatives and submitters. For example, public mistrust stems from the belief that representatives are only seeking to find support for their pre-determined outcomes thereby supporting the perception that the public has no real influence in the decision-making process (for example, Gwin, 1984; Konisky & Beierle, 2001; Burby, 2003). Additionally, some submitters believe that the fact that they and their interest group oppose an idea should be all the proof a council needs to believe it is not in the community's best interest to proceed (for example, Yosie & Herbst, 1998; Overdeest, 2000; Moote et al., 1997). Tuler (2000) considers monologic communication to be adversarial as opposed to dialogic communication, which is collaborative.

Botan (1997) describes dialogic communication as the polar opposite of the monologic approach bearing with it higher levels of ethical conduct. The fundamental basis for this approach is in the mutually respectful relationship that is encouraged, where both parties consider each other as well as themselves. Information is shared honestly and openly between both parties and the facilitation of informed and free decision-making is engaged in. However, there are some drawbacks to the use of dialogic communication. According to Botan, issues such as short-term goals, cost of consultation, and the wishes of mass audiences may stand in the way of implementing the use of dialogic forums. Nonetheless, Botan maintains that the possible drawbacks are not significant enough to justify the use of monologic communication. Increasingly, this opinion is being expressed by local government administrators who believe public input can lead to better decisions through combined skills, ideas, and knowledge that would not have been possible without genuine communicative consultation (for example, Burby, 2003; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Gastil, 2000).

While some researchers emphasize the need for effective communication strategies (for example, Duncan and Moriarty, 1998), others overlook the importance of the procedures being used in the communication process. According to Comrie (2000), there exists the need to pay careful attention to the tactics employed in public communications. Comrie stresses the importance of "investigating assumptions, clear needs analyses, taking time to explain, making the message suitable for the audience, using tactics to enthruse target publics, listening carefully, paying attention to all the details, and being courteous as all

times” (p.32). All of these things are what Comrie refers to as the “vital keys” to successful strategic communication. While many local authorities practise some of these principles, it is apparent that they do not practise all of them.

2.3.5 Communication in consultation

Supporting Botan’s (1997) theory of monologic communication, Comrie (1999) suggests the term consultation is commonly misused by local government to describe other actions such as the sending out information, fulfilment of legal obligation though a decision has already been made, or conducting market research for a pending decision or persuasive plan. Councils, who use consultation in the full meaning of the term, do so in the hope that at the very least it will minimise litigation and in its most positive scenario it will improve decision-making (*ibid*).

According to Comrie (1999), consultation should be undertaken as early as possible. For her, early consultation means input can be heard and considered sooner resulting in fewer unpleasant surprises at the other end of the process. To do this, Comrie identifies several factors for successful public consultation including the need for support for consultation from politicians and staff, clarity and honesty of council’s project objectives and clear communication to the public, a process that is appropriate to the interested parties involved and inviting their participation in a way that will be effective to the topic at hand, and creative and appropriate communication channels.

Thought must also be given to the resources needed to undertake consultation. Specifically, the consultation process is extremely expensive. Comrie (1999) suggests that, “Councils recognise that properly conducted consultation can save enormous costs in terms of delayed or failed developments. It is harder for them to translate that recognition into sufficient resourcing for consultation projects where an outcome can seem nebulous” (p.14). The key here is to ensure appropriate funding as to not over burden already stretched resources and energy levels among staff.

Despite the financial cost of consultation, Catt and Murphy (2003) tell us that, “The perceived value of consultative practices in a well-ordered democracy lies not in the fact that the public has any direct involvement in, or control over, decision making, for this is clearly not the case. Their potential lies instead in features such as the information they provide to

decision makers, the legitimacy they add to policy outcomes, and the positive effect they have on civil society and the development of a more informed and civil democratic culture” (p.420). It is this fundamental belief that underlies the need for greater participation in New Zealand democracy.

2.4 Consultation and local government

Local government in New Zealand is currently made up of 12 regional councils and 74 territorial authorities. Of the 74 territorial authorities, 16 are city councils and the remaining 58 are district councils. Each of these local authorities is governed by legislation set through New Zealand’s central government. Amendments and new introductions to local government legislation in New Zealand, as set out by central government, have resulted in several dramatic changes to the way city, district, and regional councils are required to consult with their stakeholders on community matters.

Local governments, nationally and internationally, have traditionally been the source of much dissatisfaction regarding their consultation practices (for example, Kay, 1998; Forgie, Cheyne, & McDermott, 1999). However, there has been no clear evidence as to whether the dissatisfaction stems from the methods, or the processes being used (Audit New Zealand, 2002).

The OECD (2001) defines consultation as a:

...two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to government. Consultation is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens’ views are being sought and requires the provision of information. Governments define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions. (p.12, cited in Audit New Zealand, 2002, p.9).

Put more simply, “Consulting involves the statement of a proposal not yet finally decided upon, listening to what others have to say, considering their responses and then deciding what will be done” (McGechan, 1992, p.8). During the landmark New Zealand High Court case, *Air New Zealand Ltd v Wellington International Airport Ltd* that upheld the public’s right to ‘proper’ consultation, Justice McGechan not only offered the above definition of consultation, but also noted some guidelines to follow when considering whether the process itself had been appropriately undertaken. For example, Justice McGechan said that

consultation should be genuine rather than a charade, although there is no legal requirements as to what form it should take. Nonetheless, Justice McGechan found that genuine consultation should include the following elements: sufficient information, sufficient time for participation and consideration of the participation, and genuine consideration given to the resulting advice with openness to change. However, regardless of the guidelines that have been created to strengthen relations between local government and their constituents, public dissatisfaction still continues to act as a barrier to participatory democracy (for example, Varn 1993; Burby 2003). These barriers are discussed further in the following sections.

2.4.1 The political 'ivory tower'

According to Gwin (1984), one of the greatest issues elected officials face is the perception that politicians are not 'in touch' with their constituencies. This view, supported by LDW (2004), suggests that governments exist in a whole other world where politicians and their representatives make decisions that affect everyone without actually considering how those decisions will impact on them.

New Zealand's traditional and current style of democracy is one of representation where an elected few make decisions on behalf of the electing majority (Forgie et al., 1999; Bush, 2002). However, if, as Gwin (1984) asserts, the elected few are out of touch with the people they serve, then the decisions they make will be of little value and practicality. This opinion contributes to explaining the general feeling of mistrust directed at politicians and the political process documented by authors such as Morgan (2002).

Mistrust of the political environment has been identified by several authors as one of the many reasons for the consistent decrease in public participation, particularly in regards to voting (for example, Varn, 1993). Forgie et al. (1999) suggest that a feeling of alienation from decision-making leads the public to believe they have little influence in governmental decision-making. In an attempt to address concerns over lack of political accountability between elections and of management of publicly owned resources, New Zealand's local government underwent significant reforms in 1989 (Cheyne, 2002; Forgie et al., 1999; Drage, 2002).

2.4.2 1989 local government reforms

Before 1989, many individual organisations managed local matters in New Zealand, such as local and regional authorities, catchment boards, pest control boards, and tussock boards. This form of sub-national government was considered fragmented and full of mismanagement and inefficiencies (Forgie et al., 1999). Cheyne (2002) identified the 1989 reforms objectives as being to increase accountability and transparency. The reforms also aimed at increasing governmental efficiency and avoiding conflicts of interest.

The 1989 reforms were based on six principles:

1. Citizen information and influence over political management.
2. Citizens' right to be involved in decision-making processes.
3. Collaboration on community issues.
4. Performance orientated management techniques.
5. Regulatory and functional responsibility separation
6. Reduction of the cost of being in office Forgie et al. (1999).

In order to achieve these objectives, local authorities were now expected to produce a publicly available annual plan and report. Further amendments in the 1990's introduced the requirement of financial management to be included in these two publications (Cheyne, 2002).

Cheyne (2002) also contends that prior to the 1989 reforms, public participation was minimal, being relegated to merely voting in local elections, reorganisations, and loan polls. The government of the time addressed some of these concerns by amending the existing legislation, the Local Government Act (LGA) 1974, to include statutory annual planning processes as a legal requirement of government. The Local Government Amendment Act (No.2) 1989 set out further requirements for local authorities to follow specific consultation procedures during the development of their annual plans (ibid). All of these requirements have led to many New Zealand Councils producing a formal consultation policy containing the principles of the process (For example, see Appendix A).

According to the Far North District Council (2003), in 2002 and 2003 even more dramatic reforms were introduced to local governance leading to the claim that:

Local Government in New Zealand has undergone the most significant change in more than 100 years with significant legislative changes in the following areas:

- Local Government Rating Act 2002
- Local Government Act 2002

- The Local Electoral Act 2001
- Resource Management Act 1991
- New Zealand Waste Strategy
- New Zealand Transport Strategy
- Programme of Action for sustainable development
- National Walkways and Cycling Strategy

(<http://www.fndc.govt.nz/misc>, 2004)

Such extreme change has now put local bodies in a position of changing many of the ways they interact with their publics as they come to terms with the new laws and requirements (Plimmer, 2004). One piece of legislation that has had a major impact on communication between Councils and their citizens is the Local Government Act 2002. This Act builds on previous legislation seeking to further define the responsibilities of local government, allowing more flexibility in process, and promoting the concept of community participation (Christie, 2003).

2.4.3 Local Government Act (LGA) 2002

The LGA 2002 was developed by central government to build further on the objectives of the LGA 1974 and 1989 amendments. Explaining the purpose of the Act, Plimmer (2004) states that it sets out the principle of local government, provides a framework of powers and decision-making processes, promotes accountability, and provides for local authorities to advance the well being of their communities taking a sustainable development approach (<http://www.conferenz.co.nz/2004/>, 2004). Additionally, Plimmer suggests that the Act brings the purpose of local government down to the level of individual authorities acknowledging their roles and responsibilities that make them separate from central government.

According to Christie (2003), the LGA 2002 brought two significant changes to the way local governments were required to govern:

1. Local authorities are granted the power of “general competence”, i.e. they are able to do everything a private individual can do. By contrast, under the present law they can do only what the Act says they can do.
2. The new Act requires councils to place greater emphasis on forward strategic planning and consultation with the community (p.1).

ACT (2002), a small right wing political party in New Zealand, expressed serious

concerns regarding the new 'powers' of local government. In its view, granting local government the power of general competence would almost certainly result in increased rates and reduced services as councils chose to spend money on what they termed as 'more exciting things'.

Further, ACT claimed that in addition to inappropriate spending on grandiose projects, councils tended to possess a predatory approach to setting rating differentials, a reluctance to divest assets, and are often able to exercise dictatorial powers. It also claimed councils have a lack of technical competence, engage in processes without clear objectives, still possess conflicting roles and responsibilities, and have a general disregard for ratepayers when spending their money (<http://www.act.org.nz/action>, 2002). If these claims have substance then there is considerable potential for conflict in communication and consultation processes.

However, the purpose of the LGA 2002 was not to encourage negative behaviour among councils. Essentially, the LGA 2002 intends to encourage and achieve "democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities" (Plimmer, 2004). This is the primary purpose of the Act.

Fundamentally, the LGA 2002 represents central government's belief that the community knows what is best for itself and therefore should be given the power to take care of itself within a legal framework (Christie, 2003). Part of that legal framework is the requirement for councils to adopt a Long-Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP), which, essentially consists of a mixture of public input with individual councils' annual and strategic plans (Hamilton City Council, 2004). Additionally, councils are now required to make a commitment to sustainable development, address the social, economic, environmental and cultural implications associated with their actions and decisions, promote the community's well-being, increase accountability, and encourage a greater level of consultation and participation in the decision-making process (Far North District Council, 2003).

At the very least, the LGA 2002 focuses local authorities' attention on their constituents. By encouraging public consultation, councils are put under public scrutiny, fostering a sense of 'openness' in community planning and service provision. Constituents may still choose not to participate. However, it is important to have the processes in place if

and when they change their minds (Drage, 2002). An important component of having effective participation processes in place is the communication tools available to individuals and groups for use when engaging each other in dialogue. It is through these media that participatory democracy can be facilitated.

2.5 Telecommunication Technology

New Zealand local governments face dramatic legislative imperatives to improve the quality of interaction with stakeholders. At the same time, rapidly evolving telecommunication technology has presented decision makers with several new tools to choose from when deciding what to use to support and encourage public participation. In order to better understand communication tools in local democracy, a closer look needs to be taken at the technologies themselves.

Telephones

The interconnectivity of telephones, the internet, email, cellular phones and fax machines speed up communication and create possibilities that did not exist twenty years ago. Fundamental to access to the new technologies is wired-based telephone technology. While telephones have allowed speech between individuals since the 1870s (Bellis, 2004), it was not until the 1990's that the traditionally academic Internet became publicly available and widespread (Wikipedia, 2005). It is the telephone that allows connection to the Internet, the sending and receiving of emails, and the use of facsimile machines. As these tools emerge, local governments are constantly making decisions as to whether each tool should be included as a means of communicating with their constituents.

Internet

According to Barnes and Cumby (2002), the Internet has had the biggest impact on consumer and business behaviour. The Internet crosses boundaries of time and distance, which significantly alter personal expectations regarding cost, service, convenience, and information in general (Hamel and Sampler, 1998). The Internet is not just limited to information gathering out in the virtual world of web, it also has a very personal application because, through Internet connections, people are now able to use email.

Email

Email is a form of virtual letter writing that is generally not so formal in style and

can be sent around the world in seconds. In its Nielsen//NetRatings First Quarter 2002 Global Internet Trends report, ACNielsen (2002b) listed email as being the most dominant form of communication in over twelve countries, particularly in Australia, during the previous six-month period. The reason for the popularity of email, ACNielsen said, was it did not need high connection speeds and it was a cheap means of communicating long distance.

Text messaging (SMS)

The common cellphone, a mobile telephone that uses radio frequencies instead of wires to carry speech over physical distances between people, was first conceptualised in 1947 (Cell Phone World, 2005). New Zealand's first text capable cellphone³ appeared in 1994, two years after the first text message (SMS) was sent and received overseas (Vodafone New Zealand, 2003). Originally unable to text between cellphone providers Vodafone and Telecom, New Zealanders are now able to not only text each other but also surf the Internet, receive emails, take photos, engage in banking, make online purchases, and listen to music all through their mobiles (Perry et al, 2001; Telecom, 2001b; Telecom, 2002b).

More recent research is now showing SMS (short message services) surpassing email and becoming the communication tool most favoured because it is instantaneous, more personal, and it reaches far more people (Kalugdan, 2003). In New Zealand alone, it is estimated there are more than 2.3 million cellphones in use (Telecom, 2002b). Although a small percentage of those are not text capable at present, over half the current population owns a mobile. According to Micheal Pousti, CEO of SMS.ac, the global mobile data market will surpass \$100 billion in five years. This figure is based on the increasing consumption of mobile data, number of mobile users and the ability to leverage the billing systems of mobile operators on a grand scale (Wilfahrt, 2004).

Fax machines

Not to be outdone by newer telecommunication technologies, the traditional fax machine is still more popular than ever according to Rubens (2003). In 2002 it was estimated that 40% more pages were faxed than in 2001. However, it was also found that the

³ Users type short messages on their cellular phone keypads which double as keyboards as well as numerical diallers.

number of fax machines actually being used did not change. Rubens credits the fax's steady popularity to its age. Currently, a faxed copy of a signed document is admissible in court, while other telecommunications such as email and text messaging are not. The second reason Rubens gives for the fax machine still remaining a popular communication tool is that it is now possible to send and receive faxes with only one party actually having a fax machine. This is achieved through specific websites that provide web-to-fax gateways. Effectively, the message may be sent through a computer and the website converts it into facsimile format allowing someone else's machine to receive it and vice versa.

Technology cross-overs

Such innovation, like many telecommunication innovations, crosses the technology boundaries allowing the many communication tools to interact with each other. The cellphone is no longer simply used for talking and texting, now it allows people to surf the Internet and receive their emails (Telecom, 2002b). Tomorrow's technologies are likely to provide even more choices for individuals and organisations to communicate with each other. The question is will people like and accept the new telecommunication technologies presented to them?

2.5.1 Technology adoption

Technology has evolved significantly in the past twenty years, particularly with the widespread introduction of the Internet and the concept of globalisation (for example, Cerf, 2001; Barnes & Cumby, 2002). For some, change is to be welcomed, tried, tested, and if complementary to an individual's existence – adopted. For others, change is painful and to be avoided at all costs (Barnes & Cumby, 2002; Torgas, 2001). Advances in technology mean many changes in many areas of life. To make these changes successful, marketers rely on the concept of early adoption (ACNielsen, 2004).

It is believed that identifying early adopters and tailoring new products and marketing to entice them to buy and try telecommunication innovations is the key to the successful introduction of new technology (Frank, Sundqvist, Puumalainen, & Taalikka, 2001; ACNielsen, 2004). Rogers (1983, cited in Beaudoin, Lachance, & Robitaille, 2003; Frank et al., 2001) suggests individuals and groups try new products in five different stages, innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

ACNielsen (2004) simplifies these five groups into two: early and later adopters. With an extremely high risk of product failure (approximately 80%), the success or failure can rest on what ACNielsen refers to as those eager to try unknown products and those who want to wait and see what happens before they try it out.

Early adopters, ACNielsen says, seek out new products, communicate their likes and dislikes providing valuable feedback quickly, and are the most likely to indicate a new technologies chance for success. This group hold the belief that they tend to find out and try new products before their friends and family. They want enticements, to be encouraged to try new merchandise. They also tend to commit significant amounts of resources to trying their new product. ACNielsen found that specific demographics, such as gender and socio-economic status, were not a determining factor between early and later adopters.

Through the course of their research, Frank et al. (2001) found that,

Demographic characteristics differentiate adopters according to their adoption behavior as:

1. Innovators are heavy users, and that innovative attitudes are associated with early adoption.
2. Age has an effect on the attitudes, but not on the timing of adoption, whereas income affects the timing but not attitudes (p.6).

In making these assertions, Frank et al. suggest that there is an implication that there are potential adopters who are affected by their incomes and the prices attached to the technologies available. They also found that age and socioeconomic status were not a factor in deciding adoption behaviour but employment and culture were.

2.5.2 Internet and text statistics

Due to the interest that technology generates among academic researchers and marketers alike, much research has been undertaken to track its use in various key markets. Two telecommunication innovations that are continually under investigation are the Internet and text messaging.

The Internet took the world by storm when it was introduced in the 1980's and it has seen a steady increase in those who are connected to it (Cerf, 2001; ACNielsen, 2002b). According to ACNielsen (2002b), the number of people worldwide who had access to the Internet from a personal computer rose from 498.2 million in 2001 to 531.3 million in 2002.

During the same year they estimated three quarters of New Zealand's population over ten years old had online access, which showed a significant increase from less than 16% in 1996. That is to say approximately 2,469,000 kiwis enjoyed access to the Internet from any location. Of this number, approximately 1.8 million people were estimated to be regular users. Australian Internet usage is also estimated to be high. Approximately 57% of people over the age of two have access to the Internet from a personal computer. Further, 73% over the age of 16 are able to access the Internet from any location.

In the New Zealand rural context, a 2001 study involving 425 Otago and Southland farmers, telecommunication usage was broken down as follows: 84% of participants used a fax machine, 81% of respondents owned a computer and 91% of these respondents were connected to the Internet. Around 79% of the farms surveyed used a cellphone with an average of twelve calls or text messages being sent per week. Approximately eighteen emails were also sent per week and, according to participants, research and surfing were the most common uses of their Internet time (Otago Southland Broadband Communications Committee, 2001).

The use of text messaging has seen a dramatic increase over the past four years. According to Vodafone New Zealand (2003), one of New Zealand's major cellphone network providers, the number of customers using text prior to November 1999 was less than 30,000. By December 2000, with the aid of an intensive campaign to make consumers aware of the technology, this number increased to over 350,000 users. Broken down per day, text messages averaged less than 60,000 in 1999 and are now recording around 2.4 million today with a massive 4.8 million texts being sent on Christmas Day 2003 and 4.2 million New Years Day 2004. These figures are significantly higher than previous years (L. Hall, personal communication, 26 March, 2004).

During 2003, nearly two thirds of Telecom New Zealand's customers on the 027 network were using text messaging as a means of communication with some consumers being known to send 1,000 texts a month (Telecom, 2003b). During the America's Cup \$250,000+ Text Challenge promotion more than one million texts were sent during a seventy-seven day period (Telecom, 2002a).

United Kingdom statistics showed a total of 1.73 billion texts were sent during September 2003 alone (Stringer, 2003). Mobile Data Association (2004a) recorded a

significant increase in chargeable person-to-person texting in February 2004 totalling over 2 billion. The figures released for 2003 totalled over 20 billion in the UK (Mobile Data Association, 2004b).

Global researcher, SMS.ac (2003), found that 88.5% of the 56,734 SMS.ac members who participated in their study, kept their mobile phones with them twenty-four hours a day and among these respondents, 79.6% claimed text messaging as the primary reason for this occurrence. In a separate study involving 42,400 participants, 65.6% said they would be more likely to vote in an election if they could do so by using text messaging.

Although, for reasons of commercial sensitivity, there is a lack of information available to the public, many statistics are still accessible for comparison and consideration. Additionally, those that do provide an insight into user behaviour also go further by providing some very interesting demographics.

2.5.3 Who is using text and Internet?

Vodafone New Zealand (2003) currently places the majority of text message users in the under thirty-age group. Females aged between eleven to twenty years old using pre-paid cellphones are reported as sending more messages than males of the same age. Over twenty years of age there is little difference between the genders up to the age of thirty-six. Females aged between thirty-six and sixty are reported to send slightly more texts than males in the same age bracket.

While text messaging is predominantly a communication tool for younger members of society, there is evidence to suggest that this demographic is slowly changing and in fact, growing older as it becomes more widely used in the business world (L. Hall, personal communication, 26 March 2004). One international telecommunication provider is reporting around 30% of its users as being in the thirty-plus age group which parallels another report that sees usage growing strongly among middle age consumers (Woods, 2002).

The Internet is also enjoying an increase in use by the older demographic. According to ACNielsen (2002a), 60,000 New Zealanders over the age of sixty-five were online in 2001 as compared to 38,000 in the previous year. In addition to older users increasing, women are now spending more time on the net. In the USA, women made up approximately 52% of the domestic online population, a trend followed closely by New Zealand women

who made up approximately 46% of Internet users (*ibid*).

2.5.4 The future of telecommunications

“Communication technology is changing at the speed of light” (Reese, 2003, p. 30). As demand for more products and services increases so to does the call for improvements to them. This call, according to Reese, may be answered in the form of fibre optics to the premises (FTTP), an advanced system that could connect personal and professional locations to telecommunication networks directly. The result would be unlimited bandwidth for home and business Internet. This technological advance provides potential access to “photo sharing, PC backup, telecommuting, video conferencing, interactive gaming and premises surveillance on demand and in high definition” (*ibid*, p.30). However, this claim is not fully supported by other ISP’s as there is no such thing as unlimited bandwidth due to the fibre possessing some limitations in how much data it can currently transfer (Inspire. Net, personal communication, 19 October, 2004). Nonetheless, fibre optics is used extensively around New Zealand, particularly in central business districts. Additionally, numerous New Zealanders already have access to many if not all of these services through their existing service providers and networks.

Interaction between the general public and service providers through telecommunication tools is already common in various sectors in New Zealand. In 2001, Telecom customers were able choose a movie title from a predetermined selection and register their votes through their cellphones for the first time. The film with the most votes was then screened on TV2 the following Saturday (Telecom, 2001 a). Telecommunication interactions can be witnessed in the current screenings of New Zealand Idol, much the same as American and Australian Idol, where contestants sing and the audience members have a chance to text in their choice of who they think should win the competition.

However, technology is being used for more than just entertainment. From online voting in local government matters to the proposed capability of mPayment, individuals are making the most of having many communication tools to use (Robertson, 2002; Telecom, 2004). The changing rate and face of technology in the 21st Century ensures new tools will be continually added and new and innovative ways for people to communicate will be developed.

2.6 Teledemocracy

While communication technology attracts higher and higher levels of public participation as it evolves and changes, local democracy in contrast suffers from declining voter turnout and perceived public apathy. Here, democracy and technology meet in the newly coined term 'teledemocracy'.

In spite of the various telecommunication enticements that have been offered over the past forty years, local and national elections are still reporting record low numbers, even in New Zealand, despite perceptions to the contrary (for example, Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002). Politics is hampered by more than just simple low voter turnout; it is also marred by the personal perceptions of the general population (Matthews, 2004; Cook, 2004; McHarry, 2001; Scottish Parliament, 2002). Further, Morgan (2002) writes "Recent proposals to increase citizen participation in the democratic process through electronic methods will not overcome the perception that politics is boring, divisive and dominated by middle-aged men in suits" (p.18).

In addition to the run-of-the-mill political scepticism, there remains the issue of teledemocracy itself. It is no longer a question of if we have the technologies to support teledemocracy, but which ones should we use? Once local authorities have made their selections that best fit their own and their constituents' needs, there is then the matter of how the technologies will be used. Westen (2000) suggests that teledemocracy is challenged by issues of control in its implementation and use and how to put "checks" and "balances" on it to maintain the original goals of democracy, which, in her opinion, include fairness, truth, and trust.

Despite the amount of interest and research that has been generated by technological advances and their use in politics, there are still many areas that need to be investigated. It is through such research that teledemocracy may be better understood both by governing bodies and the publics that use them.

2.6.1 Teledemocracy in principle

Kakabadse, Kakabadse, and Kouzmin (2003) suggest that of the many teledemocratic models proposed so far, there are four of particular note: electronic bureaucracy, information management, populist, and civil society (p.47). Several of these

models are used, at least in part, in New Zealand democracy.

The electronic bureaucracy model, according to Kakabadse et al., concerns all of the government's services delivered online. This model is based on the efficiency principle where providing online services enables their provision to be more economical, faster, and convenient while reducing the amount of hours normally required for employees to perform such tasks manually. However, one of the concerns with this form of bureaucracy is that it potentially discriminates against those in society who do not have access and/or the 'know-how' to work the technology (for example, Information Policy Research Programme, 2004). Many New Zealand councils now maintain their own websites providing links to specific departmental services, email addresses of city administrators and elected officials, background information on upcoming submission processes, and electronic submission forms. However, the number of services provided online remain limited.

The information management model refers to the use of telecommunication technologies as a means for more interactive and direct communication through personal computers and publicly located touch-screen kiosks. This is partially practiced in New Zealand through the use of email and website contact, where members of the public can engage in dialogue directly with their elected representatives and administrators through the available technology. With this model, and the public availability of online service providers through Internet cafes in New Zealand, the concerns regarding access are overcome. However, the ability to actually work the technology remains difficult for some.

The third model, practiced overseas but not yet in New Zealand, is the populist model. This is the ability to engage in live interaction using current technology through means such as electronic town meetings (ETMs). This model allows participants to communicate directly without any third party, such as the media, distorting the message as it comes through. The advantages of this model include instant feedback, interactive participation, and information distribution. The disadvantages of this model include the potential for manipulation by interest groups and failure of the technology itself, such as overloading the phone lines.

The last model, and a goal of New Zealand local democracy, is the civil society model. This particular model is all about political cultural transformation which, according to Kakabadse et al., "Can be appreciated only within the context of the broader

transformations brought about by communication technology. Its goal is to strengthen connections between citizens and promote a robust and autonomous site for public debate” (p.48). The disadvantages of this model include concerns of privacy and ‘electronic tyranny’ as citizens can perceive technology as an invasion of privacy and an intrusion into their lives.

In order for governments to become teledemocratic in all aspects of their public dealings, there exists a need to transform the current environment into one that can accommodate the changes. Watson and Mundy (2001) propose a three-stage strategy for its implementation: initiation, infusion, and customisation.

The first stage, initiation, provides the public with single point access to government information and the ability to make all monetary transactions online. The single point access allows the public to inform themselves of governmental policies, decisions, and actions. It also helps constituents to know who is making decisions on their behalf. The additional ability to pay all monetary transactions online is simply a matter of convenience. New Zealand local bodies have begun this process by making websites available to their stakeholders. The process of Internet banking also allows for online payments such as rates.

Infusion is the stage in the process where governments accept they are going to become e-governments and adopt the value system that goes with that. At this stage, citizens have also accepted the new environment and are using the two initiatives from the initiation stage. This is the efficiency stage. However, not everyone will accept this as a matter of course, choosing instead to continue to interact with their local council in more traditional ways. Public access to and knowledge of technology will directly impact the success of this stage in the process (Kinder, 2002).

In the customisation stage, Watson and Mundy (2001) suggest, “e-democracy implements a one-to-one relationship between citizen and government” (p.29). For this to be achieved, citizens are given an electronic profile where any changes they make, such as change of address, would be updated on all government systems. The trade-off for this is a detailed breakdown of their payments so they can see where things such as their taxes, or local government rates, are spent. However, this stage is likely to be rejected by various New Zealand democratic participants for a variety of reasons including resistance to change (Larsen, 1999; Watson, Akselsen, Evjemo, & Aarsaether, 1999; Pratchett, 1999).

Watson and Mundy's (2001) model clearly describes a very functional, business perspective. The belief that the state can, and really should, be run in a business-like manner is one that can be found in several writings (for example, Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). One of the many pitfalls of becoming too business-like is that the business perspective often fails to take into account social concerns such as issues of privacy, access to technology, and individual willingness to use the technology (for example, Federal Voting Assistance Program, 2004; Pratchett, 1999).

2.6.2 Forms of teledemocracy

The face of teledemocracy can take many shapes. Kinder (2002) tells us "Tele as a prefix refers to all forms of ICT- based platforms, including the Internet (and portals), interactive kiosks, computer integrated call centres, digital TV and mobiles (including short message systems and WAP)" (p. 559). In addition to these communication media, Becker (1993) lists telephones, radio, personal computers (including email), satellites, video, and computer conferencing as being a part of the hardware and software needed for teledemocracy. The facsimile is notably absent from this list but is still very much a tool of teledemocracy.

The existence of so many technological choices has seen a shift in the way local and national politicians communicate with their stakeholders. Pilot studies in the United Kingdom and United States of America have included the use of websites, CD ROMs, text messaging, information points, multimedia kiosks that allow the public free access to organisational websites, videos, road-shows, electronic town meetings (ETMs) directories, and exhibitions (For example, Martin & Boaz, 2000; Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002; Elgin, 1993).

While many of the above communication tools have been successfully used and well received by the public (for example, Elgin, 1993), others have not proved as popular or efficient in their role (Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002; D.S. 1993). One of the many benefits of having so much technology at our disposal is the ability to be very flexible particularly in the way elected officials and their constituents can communicate with each other.

2.6.3 Benefits of teledemocracy

The benefits various technologies bring to modern society can be far reaching. The

benefit of harnessing specific telecommunication technologies for the purpose of elected representative consultation opens a world of communication possibilities.

According to Kangas and Store (2003) elected officials and city administrators face many problems when attempting to engage the public in the democratic process. These problems include low public participation, conflicting schedules both for officials and the public, a lack of resources, public perceptions that their input will not be valued, conflicts that inevitably arise when opinions differ, a lack of representative opinions from those that take the time to make submissions, and mismanagement of feedback. In Kangas and Store's view, the solution is for new communication channels to be created and managed paving the way for new participants to be involved.

In an empirical survey of thirty-one European Cities that spanned fourteen states, Kinder (2002) found European administrations to be early adopters of teledemocracy that claim they now "...enjoy richer ICT (information and communication technology) supported communications with their citizens than national governments because of the use of technology when delivering their services" (p.558). Kinder also writes, "Local public administrations use ICT to engage wider parts of society in debate and improve citizen access to decision makers" (p.558). These city administrators also use teledemocracy to help in improving the access and quality of city services.

Convenience is another of the benefits extolled by teledemocracy advocates. Email is easier than letter writing (Watson et al., 1999). The use of computers eliminates geographical barriers allowing for greater participation rates (Becker, 2001; Kangas & Store, 2003). Teledemocracy also allows for direct communication between governments and their citizens. Accountability is enhanced through this clearer, more accessible communication (Kakabadse et al., 2003). Despite occasional glitches in technological systems, the general citizenry report satisfaction with the new communication environment (Becker, 1993).

Teledemocracy opens the door to participation for various members of the public. However, Varn (1993) is sceptical, not so much about the technology per se, but whether it really will encourage more people to take part in democratic matters. Varn suggests that while technology produces more opportunities for ordinary people to be involved in the political process, it is their perception or their attitude toward politics that hampers participation, and not the tools used to do so, a view expressed earlier by Morgan (2002).

2.6.4 Disadvantages of teledemocracy

In addition to the difficulty local government already faces with current public opinion about the political environment, there are a few more barriers that need to be overcome when trying to implement teledemocracy. First, there is the important matter of access. Not everyone has access to information and communication technologies. Whether this is by choice or not, Kinder (2002) warns that councils should be mindful of people who do not have technological access either at home or work. Second, every day inequalities such as knowledge, ICT access and wealth can lead to disparity in political voice, power, and position (Kakabadse et al., 2003; Kearns, 2001). Such inequalities defeat the purpose of introducing teledemocracy as a means to invite wider participation from the community at large (for example, Kearns, 2001).

One of the most important drawbacks to introducing teledemocracy is resistance to change both by politicians and individual members of the public. Stakeholder groups and individual politicians frequently know how to position themselves within the current system to further their own ends. The perspective that teledemocracy is a potential danger to key players who know how to 'play the game' is held by both Larsen (1999) and Watson et al. (1999) who attribute threats to current power holders as a reason for resistance to teledemocratic changes.

In the event that power balance and access are addressed, the technology behind teledemocracy may still fail. Concerns regarding security and privacy were highlighted in various researches, particularly regarding the use of the online resources (Kakabadse et al., 2003; Kearns, 2001). It was technological security concerns that led to the temporary abandonment of the electronic voting experiment conducted in America. Initially the experiment intended to 'pave the way' of a new electronic voting system to be used in the 2004 American elections. This experiment was not considered successful (Federal Voting Assistance Program, 2004).

In addition to the fundamental issues of security and privacy, the actual hardware and software employed to facilitate teledemocratic programmes is open to failure. This event was evident when America tried using electronic voting in Florida. The results were less than satisfactory with a computer crash erasing some of the records (CBSNews.com, 2004). As in Florida, when this event occurs it does so publicly making it near impossible to "cover

up” (Larsen, 1999; D.S, 1994; Kinder, 2002). This may not be seen as undesirable if transparency and accountability are the driving forces behind the push for greater participation. However, if teledemocracy is employed to encourage participation, and that participation is shown to be ineffective due to a breakdown in the technology, this can discourage its adoption.

Malfunctions aside, there is always the possibility of misuse and manipulation (Elgin, 1993). According to Elgin (1993), the technology is neither good nor bad; it is the way it is designed and used that may influence the results. Elgin warns of the potential of interest groups exploiting any design weakness to further their own agenda. Varn (1993) supports this view, suggesting it would be just as easy to ‘stack’ electronic democracy, as it would be to monopolise public hearings.

In extreme cases there are some who fear that too much public participation may lead to the rights of minorities being ignored, particularly by politicians who strive to be crowd pleasers as opposed to independent decision makers (ibid). This is further expressed by Elmer-Dewitt (1992) who, writing on the findings of social scientists Lee Sproull and Sara Kiesler, says, “But strange things happen when people communicate electronically, some of which do not bode well for teledemocracy” (p.45). Elmer-Dewitt goes on to say:

When you cannot see the facial expressions that tell you when you're hurting someone's feelings, it's easy to drive a point too far. Without countervailing opinions, it's easy to take extreme, exaggerated positions to "flame," in the jargon of the hacker. Lines get drawn. Sides get taken. Individuals and sometimes whole groups get ostracized. You have to allow time for information to penetrate the social fabric (p.45).

2.6.5 Teledemocracy in local democracy

In Elgin’s (1993) opinion, “Each generation must renew its contract with democracy in ways that respond to the changing needs of the times” (p.6). Local and national governments worldwide are attempting to do just this by introducing telecommunication technologies as a means of communicating with their publics. For the United Kingdom, providing the public with a web-based facility known as ‘citizen space’ so the electorate may engage in live consultations regarding policies is just one step of many in utilising teledemocratic technology. Further, e-voting pilots for local elections have been trialled with the aim of total e voting in the 2006 general elections (Carter, 2002).

Technology is changing the world of politics. Varn (1993) states that “With eyes open, one can see that electronic democracy offers great promise for making our government better, a lifetime of challenges for policy-makers and a bumper crop of headaches and rewards for administrators” (p.25). Varn goes on to say, “The most critical variable that will affect our ability to meet this challenge is whether the various levels and parts of government will work together to make electronic democracy work” (p.25).

However, Morgan (2002) points out that regardless of any government’s commitment, teledemocracy will not by itself bring the voters back. The key is in finding out what really will motivate the public and basically ‘holding their hands’ while they do it. Pratchett (1999) suggests, “There is significant social capital to be gained from engaging citizens in the governance of their own communities” (p.734).

Finding the balance between participation and technological support will not be an easy road. Kangas and Store (2003) advocate the use of teledemocracy as a supplement to other participatory forms but not as a replacement. The real challenge in this teledemocratic era is to use telecommunication technology to enhance the current political process and not destabilize it (Elmer-Dewitt, 1992).

2.7 Conclusion

This review has looked at the underlying principles of sharing power between those elected to government and the people they represent. It has presented models of democratic participation and relevant communication theory. Changes to NZ local body law and new requirements for local government to communicate exhaustively with its stakeholders have also been outlined. In addition, developments of new communication technologies and how these are changing the way individuals and communities interact in a general sense has been examined. Finally, this review addressed the specifics of teledemocracy, how it is being used, its potential, and its limitations.

As can be seen in the literature, communities are struggling to improve participation in local government worldwide. Issues of suspicion and lack of trust in individual, organisational, and group abilities create an unfavourable backdrop for democratic participation on the whole. However, regardless of extensive research and speculation, no one clear explanation for non-participation has emerged. Further, consensus on approaches

to improve matters also cannot be reached.

Teledemocracy describes new modes and models of communication rapidly being adopted by governments, nationally and internationally, in their battle against voter apathy. Belief that using 'younger' or faster technologies will stimulate participation from groups that traditionally do not engage has yet to produce a mass interest in democratic processes. Additionally, the use of teledemocracy is directly affected by issues of communication and further highlights resistance from existing power structures surrounding participation.

The research described in the thesis attempts to shed some light on an area of participation that has not been extensively studied – individual communication tools in local democracy. Chapter Three, following, presents the theoretical and practical steps of the methodology used to undertake this study.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This project consisted of a case study, a survey of citizens who had recently made submissions to their local authorities, and a series of in-depth interviews with key informants.

First, in order to look at communication tools in local democracy, a pilot study was undertaken through the Auckland City Council. The purpose of this study was to explore the introduction of text submissions to a small consultation project and evaluate the results. Additionally, a survey of attitudes towards communication tools in the submission process was conducted with those who had made a submission to their local LTCCP in four central North Island territorial local bodies (see Appendix B). As described in Chapter Two, the LTCCP is a mixture of individual councils' annual and strategic plans that creates a ten-year plan, setting out a framework for long-term community development. The surveys were then followed by eleven in-depth interviews to provide additional perspectives from councillors and council officers (those on the receiving end of submissions), and a chair of a local authority ward committee and two people who are employed on behalf of organisations to prepare submissions (those who make submissions professionally).

The introduction of text messaging to telecommunication options presented an excellent opportunity to explore constituents' opinions toward the relatively new communication tool and its possible introduction and use as a means of communicating with local government. The text messaging pilot study in Auckland resulted from an agreement with Andrew Stevenson, Manager of Research and Consultation at the Auckland City Council, to allow text messages to be used as part of a consultation on the proposed Windmill Skate Park. This is thought to have been a 'first' for New Zealand. Permission was given at both administration and Auckland City Council levels to include this tool before it was advertised to the public. However, during the course of the research, the administrator who oversaw the project came under fire from individual members of council and lobbyists who objected to the use of text messaging, which is considered to be a tool for young people. The backlash was so severe from that administrator's point of view that the research was abandoned before any questions could be asked of those who had used texting to submit

their views. Nonetheless, the initial submissions remained and as such, this attempt to introduce new technology to Auckland City Council's collection of communication tools is included as a case study in Chapter Four.

The information obtained from the individually geographically administered surveys and interviews are presented and discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. This chapter describes the survey and interview methods employed in the study. The following chapter (Chapter Four) describes the experiment in texting submissions to the Auckland City Council.

3.2 Research Questions

A series of interviews, a text message pilot study, one survey containing eight questions, and three surveys containing ten questions, were undertaken to answer the five research questions previously referred to in Chapter One:

1. What is the most used communication tool⁴ in the local body submission process?
2. Which communication tools do submitters regard as (a) the most convenient, and (b) the most effective to use when communicating with their local council?
3. What do councillors and council staff regard as the most effective communication tool for those making submissions?
4. Is there a place for text messaging as a communication tool in the submission process in the opinion of submitters and those receiving submissions?
5. Does a link exist between specific demographics, such as age or gender, and the communication tool used to make submissions?

To answer the research questions posed, three methodologies were employed: Interviews, surveys, and a case study. The surveys and interviews are described in the following sections.

⁴ NB: Communication tools are defined as communication media, for example faxes, email, telephones, written submissions, web-submissions, and public meetings, offered by local government and used by stakeholders when making submissions.

3.3 Justification of methodologies used

The combination of a largely quantitative survey with some in-depth qualitative interviews was chosen for two reasons:

1. To cast a wide net to gather as much information from as many stakeholders as possible while working within a budget.
2. To lend strength to the study itself by using complementary methodologies.

The research combined interviews and surveys in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions concerning the attitudes toward communication tools and the communication processes employed by local territorial authorities in gathering and assessing submissions. Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000), defines qualitative research as gathering data that uses symbols or words, and quantitative research as gathering data in the form of numbers. Further, Priest (1996) suggests researchers "...can avoid the trap of assuming that only one type of method is valid or useful by simply recognising that some things...are most easily expressed in numbers and some most easily expressed in words" and that "much depends on the nature of the question being asked" (p.8).

As stated earlier, combinations of three methods of survey delivery were employed: mail, telephone, and Internet/email. According to Dillman, Sangster, Tamai, and Rockwood (1996), each method has strengths and weaknesses. For example, telephone surveys are dependent on aural communication only. This can be confusing for respondents who need to see something in front of them while they participate. Conversely, the telephone is excellent for those who find writing difficult. Online and mail surveys are dependent on visual communication only, which can stop them from seeking clarification when they do not understand a question. During a telephone survey both the interviewer or respondent can control the pace and the interviewer controls the sequence the information is processed. During an online or mail survey the respondent controls all of these aspects (ibid).

The personal interviews allowed for greater depth of information and for additional perspectives to this research. One ward chair and two "professional submitters" were interviewed. These three participants specialise in writing submissions on behalf of local organisations. In addition, four councillors and four council staff were also interviewed. This enabled some assessment of attitudes of those who receive submissions to communication

tools employed by submitters. This allowed the project to look at both sides of the submission process.

3.4 Survey

A questionnaire was used to ask constituents of four councils in the lower North Island what they thought of the communication tools being employed in the public participation process. Additionally, they were also asked how they felt about the possible inclusion of texting as a new communication tool.

Used specifically to measure public feeling and actions, surveys are a popular and widely used form of research (Wagenaar & Babbie, 2001). Henry (1996) tells us, "Political and social surveys cut across lines of race, class and social status that most of us seldom cross in daily life. They give us a broader sense of public opinion than we can develop from our own experience" (p. 3). The geographical placement of the potential participants, and the relatively cheap cost of distributing the survey, made this research method suitable for the project.

Given the potential sensitivity of surveys, Krosnick, Narayan, and Smith (1996) say,

Questionnaire designers have recognised that a structured interview can impose a significant cognitive burden on respondents. As a result, even the earliest text books on survey methods (e.g. Parten 1950) encouraged researchers to minimise the time and effort required to complete a questionnaire by using short, simple words with clear meanings in as few and as concise questions as possible (p.29).

Bearing this in mind, no more than ten questions were employed in each survey.

Ultimately, to ensure the best possible use of participant and researcher's time, Wagenaar and Babbie (2001) suggest that questions should reflect the purpose of the study.

"Generally, the only way researchers can get information about people's attitudes, opinions, and knowledge, as well as their past, present, and anticipated behaviour, is by using questionnaires. But researchers can successfully gather data using questionnaires only when respondents are available and willing to participate as research subjects" (Bourque & Fielder, 2003, p.38). Fortunately, councils made access to participants easy and the response rates in three of the four areas being surveyed showed willingness to participate.

3.4.1 Choosing survey delivery

There are many forms of surveys available to researchers. However, they all share the same function, "...to learn about people – their behaviours, their attitudes, and other aspects of their lives" (Braverman, 1996, p.17). Frey et al. (2000) suggest that the methodology chosen should 'fit the topic' thereby making sure that it is suitable to best address the questions being asked. As this research is about communication tools, all forms of methodology chosen for this project fit this criterion. Hocking, Stacks, and McDermott, (2003) tell us that, along with new techniques that have emerged with the use of computers, there are three traditional ways to make contact with people and conduct a survey: in person, by mail, or by phone. After weighing the various means of survey delivery with the information and resources available, three options were chosen: mail, telephone, and email/Internet. Their use reflected the contact details given by participants in the geographically dispersed areas.

3.4.2 Mail Surveys

Mail surveys are the sending and receiving of questionnaires through the post (Frey et al., 2000). This form of survey enjoys several advantages, such as being reasonably free of interviewer effects, being relatively cheaper in terms of cost and time, and allows the anonymity of respondents (Hocking et al., 2003).

Mangione (1995) suggests that mail surveys are good for accessing people who are geographically dispersed, where the research budget is modest, when there is limited person-power to conduct the study, and when the participants have a reasonably high investment in the subject being studied. All of these factors were present in this research making surveys an appropriate choice.

3.4.3 Telephone Surveys

According to Hocking et al. (2003), the practice of conducting a survey by telephone minimises some interviewer effects. This method is also inexpensive locally, and does not consume time waiting for mail surveys to be returned. Further, telephones, "Sometimes enhance willingness to give socially disapproved answers and yield greater control when several interviewers are employed. They also alleviate personal safety concerns" (Wagenaar

& Babbie, 2001, p.139).

One of the greatest limitations to a telephone survey is that it relies on all participants having access to a telephone. Bourque and Fielder (2003) state,

Surveyors must evaluate three kinds of information in assessing whether or not they should attempt to collect data through telephone surveys: the availability of telephones in the targeted population, the motivation level of the targeted population, and the amenability of the research questions to data collected by phone (p.32).

Addressing these three areas: participants were only invited to participate by telephone if they had supplied their landline numbers to the PNCC through the LTCCP submission process; the topic was of interest to participants due to the specific population being researched; and all questions were pre-tested as able to be asked and answered via the telephone. Even Likert scale rating questions were able to be used as the researcher followed professional practice by repeating all category choices each time a question was asked.

3.4.4 Web-based Surveys

Web-based surveys are still a relatively new and unexplored form of delivery. However, much like the other forms of survey delivery, this involves asking questions about individual opinions and behaviours. The real difference from any other form of survey is that it is conducted in cyberspace and is accessed through personal computers.

Schonlau et al. (2002) suggest the advantages of using web-based surveys include convenience, geographical access, the ability to access and complete the survey in one's own time at any time, and speed. They also identify the disadvantages as including the possibility of convenience samples arising from uncontrolled distribution, possible hacker interference, the ability of some researchers to 'track' respondents without their knowledge, and the fact that not everyone has, or wants, access to a personal computer with an Internet connection. Additionally, Schonlau et al. (2002) tell us the cost savings of using a web-based survey only seem to exist if an email can be sent to potential respondents first.

For the purpose of this study, email/Internet survey delivery was a cost-effective means of accessing many people. It was also time saving. Because of the information provided by some submitters, an initial email to potential participants containing the Internet link to the survey was possible. As witnessed by the participation rate, the specific nature of the topic did not encourage random participation from non-submitters.

3.4.5 Sampling and response rates

In this study, a census of those who had recently made submissions to the LTCCP was attempted as opposed to merely taking a sample from the population. This was made possible because the contact details of submitters to individual Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP) were available in most regions. The following councils were contacted and asked if they would a) participate in the interviews, and b) make the contact details of all submitters to their LTCCP available to the researcher:

- Palmerston North City Council (PNCC)
- Manawatu District Council (MDC)
- Wanganui District Council (WDC)
- Rangitikei District Council (RDC)
- Horowhenua District Council (HDC)
- Tararua District Council. (TDC)

Officials from MDC and HDC initially replied. However, no further contact was received despite attempts by the researcher to rectify this through subsequent emails. Full copies of RDC's and TDC's LTCCP, which also contained submitters' names and contact information, were made available to the researcher. PNCC's LTCCP was made available to the public both at the PNCC Customer Centre and the Palmerston North Public Library. WDC declined to give the researcher submitters' details directly for privacy reasons. However, an administrator for WDC included a copy of the cover letter containing the invitation to participate and the questionnaire in the Council's letters of reply to submitters. This allowed the researcher access, albeit indirectly.

Because participants already came from a restricted group, the 'convenience sample' that emerged from the returned surveys is not representative of the overall population of citizens. Additionally, the four councils used in the project are relatively small in population in comparison to the rest of New Zealand, thereby limiting the ability to generalise the results to other councils in this country. Nonetheless, the inclusion of both rural and urban areas was an attempt to overcome at least some of these issues. Since the data set did not arise from random sampling, the calculation of statistical errors was inappropriate. However, because this research attempted a census, other errors, such as coverage, may have affected the quality of the data collected and these are addressed below.

There are two specific sets of errors in research identified in the writings of

Braverman (1996): errors of non-observation and errors of observation. “The first category includes errors due to coverage, non-response, and sampling. The second category includes errors due to interviewers, respondents, instruments, and modes” (p.19). Coverage errors (from the non-observation category) occur when members from a population that should be eligible for the survey have not been included. In this research, cellphone numbers were excluded because of the cost involved in using them. Non-response errors become a factor when potential participants are excluded from the data set because they choose not to participate or are unable to be reached (ibid). This is further addressed in the section on response rates (see section 5.2.1).

PNCC submitters were surveyed through the months of May and June. The researcher identified 424 potential participants from the 481 submissions made to PNCC after excluding multiple submissions and submitters who only gave their cellphone numbers as a contact. Of these, 333 supplied their phone numbers, 63 their email addresses, and 28 their postal addresses. As the researcher lived locally, it was considered appropriate and within research resources to invite submitters to participate via these three communication media. Cover letters, a copy of the survey (see Appendix C), and a return envelope were mailed to those who supplied a postal address. Those who supplied an email address received a cover email containing a link to the online survey (an exact copy of the paper-based survey). Using SurveyMonkey.com, eight survey questions were posted on the World Wide Web for individuals to complete. The majority of submitters supplied telephone numbers and were telephoned by the researcher inviting them to participate, which they either accepted or rejected. The ones that accepted were then asked the same eight questions that were used in the postal and online surveys. During the Palmerston North survey it became clear to the researcher that two questions needed to be added. The questionnaire was modified slightly for the remaining participants.

TDC submitters were surveyed during July. The researcher identified 106 potential participants from 112 submissions. These submitters were contacted through their postal addresses, as these were the only details that were provided. A cover letter and copy of the survey along with a return envelope was sent to each individual inviting their participation in the research. The survey contained ten questions (see Appendix C). The Tararua district yielded the second highest response rate.

WDC became the third district to participate also during July. The method of contact was also by post (due to privacy issues as explained above). A cover letter and copy of the survey (the same as Tararua's) was sent to 157 submitters. An officer of the WDC sent the letters and surveys as part of the Council's response to submitters. However, because the researcher was not given participants' contact details, the cover letter was not signed personally, nor was a return envelope included. The Wanganui district generated the lowest response rate of all the participating councils.

RDC submitters were the final group to participate during October. The researcher identified 183 potential participants from the submissions provided. Of these, 180 supplied postal addresses and three supplied email addresses. Those that supplied postal addresses received a cover letter, copy of the questionnaire, and a return envelope. Those who supplied an email address received a cover email and a copy of the questionnaire as a word attachment. The small number of potential email participants did not warrant making the survey available through the Internet. However, using word attachments allowed the opportunity to participate through email. Rangitikei yielded the highest response rate of all four geographical areas.

To maximise response rates, Hocking et al (2003) suggest, "You should always make the survey convenient and pleasant for the respondent (time contacted, topic of interest)" (p.250). Further, Henry (1996) also suggests that specific types of cover letters and a postage paid return envelope may contribute to encouraging participation. By only contacting individuals who had made submissions to their respective LTCCPs, interest in the topic likely to be higher than among the wider population and this would also boost the response rate. Follow up contact with non-respondents was only made with email/Internet and telephone participants. The researcher found that these follow up contacts generally did not result in raising the response rate.

Participation rates in this research, with the exception of the Wanganui district, were higher than 35%, which, according to Barker and Barker (1989), is an acceptable level from which to draw conclusions. The results from these districts are presented in Chapter Five.

3.4.6 Types of population

Availability of potential participants' contact information, time, and cost were the

three main considerations behind the decision to choose four smaller councils close to the researcher's home base, rather than a purposive sample of all councils in NZ. These were also a consideration when choosing the modes of distributing the questionnaire. Submitters to the respective LTCCPs chose which contact details they would supply to their councils. Contact with them had to be made through the communication tools they had elected for themselves. The geographical spread of participants in the Rangitikei, Tararua, and Wanganui districts also made the use of postal surveys cost effective and convenient

3.4.7 Length of time for data collection

For people to participate in research they must be given time (for example, Frey et al., 2000). Mail and online surveys take more time to complete than telephone surveys (Dillman et al., 1996; Schonlau et al., 2002). However, as time was not considered to be limited during this study, participants were given a full calendar month after receiving their letters or contact emails to participate.

3.4.8 Question form

To gain as much information as possible within a tight format, this study employed both open and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions can be presented in a short "write your age in this space" form or a longer "explain your opinion on this topic" form. The longer form is generally used to be polite or at the end of a survey as an 'anything else we have not covered' question (Mangione, 1995). Closed-ended questions are usually presented with "yes/no" or "true/false" answers; however, they run the risk of not including all possible responses (Wagenaar & Babbie, 2001; Mangione, 1995).

3.4.9 Palmerston North questionnaire

As stated previously, Palmerston North's questionnaire (see Appendix C) differed from the other districts. In Palmerston North, participants were asked to answer eight questions; the other districts answered ten. Questions one and two were introductory questions to get participants thinking about the submission process and their involvement in it. Question three asked what forms of communication tools respondents had traditionally used in their submissions. Question four asked what their next best preference of

communication tool would be. Question five began asking about participants' attitudes towards the convenience of communication tools currently available to them. Questions six and seven asked participants' opinions towards text messaging and whether it should be introduced as another form of communication in the submission process. Question eight collected demographic information to provide insights into potential links between gender, age, education, and employment status, and attitudes toward individual communication tools.

3.4.10 Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei questionnaire

The questionnaire for the Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei regions (see Appendix C), differed slightly to the one presented to Palmerston North participants. As can be expected in a study of this nature, the process became refined as lessons were learned.

Question one remained the same, asking if the participant had made a submission previous to the LTCCP consultation. Questions two, three, and four explored the use of communication tools in previous submissions and the possibility of submitters having changed the tool they used for their latest submission. Question five asked participants their next best-preferred option allowing them a chance to express any preferences for another tool. Question six addressed the issue of convenience with the addition of Question seven, the perception of effectiveness. Question eight asked participants' opinion on the possible inclusion of text messaging as a tool. Question nine allowed for further comments on anything participants' wished to add. This resulted from the comments received from the Palmerston North participants. Finally, Question ten addressed demographics.

3.4.11 Survey limitations

There are various limitations that must be considered when engaging in survey research. According to the literature, a low response rate is a significant factor in causing error, which affects the quality of the results (Wright, 1986; Braverman, 1996). However, there are some steps a researcher may take to encourage higher response rates, including, but not limited to, "repeated contacts (preliminary notification and follow-ups), monetary incentives, inclusion of a postage paid return envelope, certain types of cover letter appeals, and a questionnaire length of four pages or less" (Henry, 1996, p.6). To address these, the

researcher engaged in repeated contacts with email and telephone participants. Email participants were sent the initial invitation with the Internet link, a follow up email, and an email one week prior to the Internet survey being closed. All telephone numbers were rung up to three times each on different days of the week (for example one day through the week and the two weekend days) at different times of the day (morning, afternoon, and early evening). These repeated contacts were not considered successful as they only added two more respondents for email and three for telephone. Personalised cover letters and pre-paid return envelopes were employed in three of the four geographical areas: Palmerston North, Tararua, and Rangitikei. As explained earlier, this was not possible for Wanganui. Each questionnaire required no more than ten questions to be answered, thereby limiting the cognitive pressure put on respondents.

There are, however, other factors that may also impact on the quality of the results. For example, the public's knowledge of the issue being surveyed may be either lacking or misinformed. Additionally, respondents are known to answer questions they do not understand or which may be ambiguous in some way (Henry, 1996). This was evident when one respondent from Wanganui wrote beside question three, "This question seems to be incomplete", and yet still answered it. Further, it has been suggested that some forms of visual presentations, such as mail surveys, may encourage a primacy effect, that is, the choosing of the first answer from a list (Dillman et al., 1996). This, however, was not evident in this research. The question of communication tool convenience and the question of communication effectiveness yielded different responses from the same participants showing that they (the participants) read their options carefully and selected their responses appropriately. Further, the question of text messaging yielded people's opinions, which were backed up by some adding further comments on the following question. Again, this showed that respondents chose the answer they wanted, not the first answer on the list.

Couper and Groves (1996) suggest that people may participate for personal reasons, for example, for psychological factors, such as perceived civic duty. Additionally, individual characteristics, such as the preferred method of survey being used or factors to do with the topic or survey design, may also encourage or discourage participation (ibid). By using people who had participated in the submission process, the topic of communication tools and local democracy was of interest to many of the participants. Some went as far as to send

personal notes expressing their approval that this topic was “finally being explored”.

Personal demographics such as education and age have been found to directly impact on the response rate received (Green, 1996). In this study, those over the age of 55 dominated the survey returns and presumably the submission process overall. As such there is no way to know what kind of influence this form of limitation has had on this research.

The standardisation that a survey provides may overlook other appropriate responses. According to Wagenaar and Babbie (2001), surveys often fail to take the context of a situation into account. They go further to suggest that survey research is weak on validity and strong on reliability. The freedom to add comments to participants' surveys attempted to overcome this weakness.

Several researchers have identified differences in answers given via various survey collection means. Dillman et al. (1996) tell us,

Evidence is accumulating that the answers people provide to survey questions in telephone interviews are sometimes different than those registered in mail or self-administered surveys. Although a number of experiments have been conducted in which such differences have been identified, results and the explanations for these differences have not always been consistent (p.45).

Memory can also act as a limitation to the quality of the information being supplied to the researcher (Hoinville, Jowell, & Associates, 1989). Specifically in the Palmerston North survey, many telephone participants were unable to accurately recall how many submissions they had made to the Council before this year's LTCCP. Many chose to answer with an approximation.

And finally, the order of the questions in the survey may significantly affect the way a respondent answers them. Mangione (1995) explains this occurrence as, “Question order effects refer to the finding that the answers to a particular question may depend on its sequencing in the questionnaire. There are, however, research findings that show that this problem is not great when using mail survey strategies” (p.32). Mangione suggests the reason for mail surveys not experiencing this limitation as much as other forms of surveys is because respondents can look at all items before answering, going back and forward changing answers at any point.

To avoid these many pitfalls, the researcher attempted to pre-test the questionnaire. The first step to designing the questionnaire involved consulting the two supervisors.

Consensus was reached about what kinds of questions were important for answering the research questions and which formats were appropriate. Additionally, an application to the Massey University Ethics Committee also provided feedback on question wording. The uses of both categories of open-ended questions, closed-ended questions were employed, as well as the inclusion of two rating scales. When this process was complete, the survey was given to four members of the Palmerston North community who possessed an understanding of the submission process: a local business owner, a teacher, and two community workers. At this point no changes were made. However, this process was not 'fool-proof' as was to be demonstrated during the execution of the Palmerston North questionnaire. This process resulted in additions to the later surveys.

3.5 Qualitative Interviews

The use of qualitative interviews in this research was important to gaining a balanced view from both sides of the political divide. To ask people's opinions on communication tools as they use them is vital; to ask the people who receive the communications via the various tools is of equal significance. Further, it was also considered essential to gain the opinions from people who, while not currently working for a council, have experienced the submission process from a professional perspective. Of particular interest were the interviewees' opinions on the individual communication tools used in public participation, the perceived value of the submission made with each tool, and the possible use of text messaging in the submission process.

3.5.1 Number and length of interviews

Although it is recommended that in-depth interviews be no less than thirty minutes long, there is no recommended number of interviews to be conducted in a research project because of the individual nature of each study (Priest, 1996). For this project, eleven interviews were conducted. Five were conducted by email, five interviews were face-to-face, and one interview was completed by telephone. Each 'in person' interview took an average of forty-five minutes each.

3.5.2 Purpose

Interviews allow individuals to express their thoughts and feelings on specific topics (Patton, 2002), which in this case is crucial to understanding the value that is placed on communication technology in local democracy.

Generally interviews can provide more opportunity to probe and explore responses and provide a better quality of responses, though they contain less objective information. Also, in the right circumstances (where trust and anonymity are established) interviews are useful to collect more sensitive information that respondents may not wish to write down (The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership, 2002-2004, www.nonprofitbasics.org).

Wagenaar and Babbie (2001) suggest that interviews provide several advantages over self-administered surveys. For example, they suggest, interviews elicit higher response rates, decrease the number of 'don't know' and no answer responses, help correct confusing items, allow for the observation of participants in the social context, and allow flexibility in asking more questions.

It is important, when seeking to gather an insight into the workings of local democracy, to include the views of various key participants. The inclusion of four city and regional councillors and four city administrators sought to ensure voices from both sides of the political divide were heard. Further, the input from those who bring a professional perspective to making submissions was also sought for the balance they could bring.

Krosnick et al. (1996) suggest that although it seems to be a dying art, there is benefit to be gained by engaging in face-to-face interviewing. In their view, "Respondents presumably feel more genuine personal connection with interviewers in their homes, as opposed to interviewers with whom they interact more minimally via telephones. Consequently, respondent motivation to optimise may be significantly higher in face-to-face interviews, thus maximising data quality" (p.43).

The first in-person interview was conducted with Evan Natrass of Palmerston North. Evan is a long time mayoral candidate, ex-employee of PNCC, and the Papaioea Ward Chair. He was chosen for his in-depth understanding of local democracy. Heather Tanguay, long time PNCC councillor and mayoral candidate, was second. Her views were sought because she has consistently used telephone 'hotlines' for constituents to ring in with any concerns or opinions on specific topics, which she in turn uses in her personal decision-

making process. Paul Rieger, ex-Mayor of Palmerston North and current councillor for Horizons Regional Council, was interviewed next. As the only interviewee who had served as a mayor, he brought an additional perspective to the research. Marilyn Brown, long time PNCC councillor, was asked to participate as someone known to have a 'down to earth' perspective and also as one who understands the difficulties of participating in local government while also in full-time employment. David Forrest, ex-city planner and current environmental consultant was the last of the face-to-face interviews. Mr Forrest's experience from both inside and out of PNCC was invaluable. All face-to-face interviews for this research were conducted in the participants' homes creating a rapport that was not possible with the other methodologies.

Email interviews were undertaken with Lynne Pope (current PNCC Councillor), John Walker (TDC Business Manager), Charlotte Hume (WDC Senior Strategic Policy Analyst), Michelle Bisset (RDC Policy Analyst), and Paula Allen (Public Relations Consultant and community board member). One telephone interview was conducted with Andrew Stevenson (Auckland City Council Manager of Research and Consultation). Cr Pope was interviewed for her perspective as a current city councillor. Each council administrator was interviewed from the perspective of people who generate and invite submissions from the public. Ms Allen was interviewed as an active participant on several Palmerston North community boards and as one who is often employed to make submissions on behalf of organisations.

3.5.3 Interview questions

"The list of questions that guide an interview is referred to as the interview schedule, or protocol" (Frey et al., 2000, p.101). Depending on the structure chosen by the interviewer, set questions may be asked in sequence without variation (structured interview), from a basic set of questions with the ability to ask follow-up questions (semi-structured interview). Or the interviewer may use a range of topics but vary the focus, the order that the questions are delivered, or even choose the phrasing to be used (unstructured interview) (ibid).

A semi-structured interview format was chosen for the relative flexibility that is inherent in this form of interviewing. Although many of the questions used were identical,

discretion was used in questioning individual interviewees depending on circumstances such as information already known by the interviewer, for example knowledge of a participants' job title.

Each interviewee was asked as series of questions including:

- Length of experience in public participation
- Their understanding of what consultation meant
- What value they personally placed on consultation
- How much impact they thought public input had in councils' decision-making process
- If they valued a submission made by one communication tool more than another
- Which communication tool they believed to be the most effective
- Which communication tool they believed to be the least effective
- What they thought about the possible inclusion of text messaging as a communication tool
- What they thought needed to happen to encourage more people to participate

Palmerston North interviewees were asked for additional thoughts on the consultation process undertaken by the Palmerston North City Council during the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). Paula Allen and David Forrest were asked the same general questions, however, as consultants who work on behalf of organisations to make submissions to the Palmerston North City Council, their views were sought as a balance between being part of the public but with past experience of working for and within the political system. Evan Nattrass, Papaioea chair, was asked to further elaborate on the role of Ward Committees in Council communications.

3.5.4 Steps in the interview process

Six interviewees were interviewed in person. The contact details of the councillors and administrators were gained through individual council websites where either their direct email addresses were published, or a 'contact us' email address existed. In the case of the 'contact us' email addresses, an introductory email was sent and this was subsequently passed on to the appropriate officials, most of whom returned the contact. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Palmerston North, at the time of conducting this research, The Manawatu Regional Council, and the Horowhenua District Council were invited to participate, however, without success. The Papaioea Ward Chair and one of the two consultants were known to the researcher and therefore contacted in person. The second consultant was

located through word of mouth and also contacted by email.

All emails contained:

- A cover letter introducing the researcher
- An outline of the research
- An invitation to participate
- An outline of ethical considerations important to the participant
- The option to participate in person (local participants only), via telephone, or via email
- A word attachment containing the questions to be asked in the interview.

Prior to the face-to-face interviews, the questions and the consent form were emailed to each participant, with the exception of the Papaioea Ward Chair. He received his copy through the post. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher read the purpose of the research and the ethical considerations to each participant before beginning the questions. The interviewees then signed a consent form. The questions covered aspects such as the individual's position (for example city councillor, or city administrator), their experience in local democracy, and their opinion of various communication tools. The researcher took notes throughout the interviews.

The researcher typed up the interviews and sent them to each interviewee to be approved. The purpose was to ensure that the information taken from the interview was correct and to ensure that no one would suffer adverse affects to their employment, particularly during an election year.

3.5.5 Interview Limitations

As with all methods of research, interviews have inherent limitations that, without interviewer vigilance, can damage the quality of the information gathered. According to Braverman (1996), there are two main types of errors that can occur in interviews, interviewer error and respondent error. Braverman suggests several reasons for these errors occurring including:

- Interviewer carelessness or negligence regarding directions and protocols
- Personal characteristics of the interviewer that may affect a respondent's willingness to participate
- Respondents may give answers that they think are more desirable either socially or to the interviewer
- Respondents may not have a very clear memory when recalling events or choices.

The interviewer followed protocols to the letter and, as all interviewees were experienced in their various fields, it is unlikely that biases such as deliberate misleading answers and memory recall are an issue in this case. Although, perceived social desirability may have affected some politician's answers.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The nature of this study allowed for full disclosure of purpose and intent of the research prior to participants answering any questions about their opinions regarding communication tools in the submission process and, for interviewees, their views surrounding council attitudes to consultation and public input. The self-selection of research subjects into this study allowed individuals to choose whether to participate or not in the surveys and interviews. The ability to edit the interview script by interviewees ensured that all information used was written the way it was intended by the individual participant.

While there has been much written on ethical considerations by researchers such as Frey et al. (2000), the most primary ethical position must be one of due care: due care to the participants and due care to the researcher. The researcher followed the protocols of the Massey University Ethics Committee with regard to consent and confidentiality.

The storage and destruction of the raw data collected from questionnaires and interviews must also be treated with care to ensure the ongoing confidentiality and anonymity of participants is preserved (Frey et al., 2000). All information collected throughout this research was transferred to and stored on the researcher's personal computer. As surveys were not returned with names on them, confidentiality of participants was not an issue during this stage. All interviewees gave permission for their names to be used once their scripts were approved. The scripts were adjusted via email by the interviewees and subsequently replaced any original scripts that had existed.

3.7 Summary

The theory and procedures concerning the methodologies chosen to undertake this research have been fully discussed in this chapter. Chapter Five contains the data gathered from the surveys and the information gained from the interviews conducted with those who make

submissions. Chapter Six contains the results gathered from the interviews with those who receive submissions. The following chapter presents the Auckland City Council case study.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CASE STUDY IN INTRODUCING NEW TECHNOLOGY

4.1 Background

In 2001, the Auckland City Council began an intensive consultation process for a project known as the Eden/Epsom Recreation Precinct. This ongoing consultation was designed to develop a concept plan for this precinct that would provide a framework for development over the next five to ten years. The three parks being considered for redevelopment were Melville Park, Windmill Reserve, and Nicholson Park. The consultation for developing the concept spanned over two and a half years, resulting in a recommended plan presented to the Auckland City Council at the end of July 2004.

Andrew Stevenson, Auckland City Council's Manager of Research and Consultation, defined the recreation precinct as, "A community hub that enables a diverse range of people to enjoy a wide variety of activities, both casual and organised" (personal communication, 4 February, 2004). The interest in developing the existing parks into a comprehensive precinct followed the suggestion that a multi-sport complex should be developed in Nicholson North Park. This concept was widened to include the surrounding parks and possible developments for various interested sporting organisations such as netball and soccer.

Additionally, as part of one of the development choices, it was suggested a skate park could be built in Windmill Park. It is this section of the submission process that is of interest to this research.

4.2 Inviting public submissions

In order to gain an insight into how the public thought the precinct should be developed, three development options were produced by the Auckland City Council and then provided to the public to view and 'vote' for their preference. Although the precinct project began in 2001, the public consultation referred to below was undertaken between October 2003 and April 2004.

The following gives a basic summary of each option:

- Option 1 provided for a general upgrade of the parks while maintaining the 'status quo'
- Option 2 provided for a new multi sport facility at Nicholson North Park

- Option 3 provided for a dual sport facility and a skate park at Windmill Park

The Auckland City Council proceeded to take a three-strand consultation approach:

1. Stakeholders: residents, interested sports groups, existing sports groups (some clubrooms are already in existence) were contacted by mail and asked for their input on the project.
2. Random Survey: This included a selection from households in the area and homeowners who do not live in the area but own properties there,
3. General Consultation: an opportunity for people to make submissions on the project.

In support of this consultation process, during the 2003/04 periods, an education and publicity campaign was undertaken. Methods of communication included:

- The distribution of 10,000 flyers in the immediate neighbourhood with the *City Scene* on the weekend of 6/7 March.
- Articles in the *City Scene*, and advertisements in the *Aucklander* and *Central Leader*.
- Media releases to all media in the Auckland area.
- Notices on the 3 local community notice boards.
- Posters at local venues, the local supermarket, and library.
- Letters to 130 local stakeholders.

(No Doubt Research, 2004, p.4)

Public consultation was carried out over the months of November 2003 and March / April 2004 as part of the overall consultation associated with the development of the concept plan. These included:

- Two random surveys carried out in the months of November 2003 and March 2004
- A resident's survey in April 2004
- The opportunity to text message submissions in March 2004
- Open Days at the Melville Pavilion held in March 2004
- Written submissions accepted throughout March 2004
- Submissions through the Auckland City Council's website also in March 2004.

Throughout this consultation process, the public were invited to submit their opinions using the following communication tools. Note that in this consultation surveys were considered by the Auckland City Council to be submissions:

- Email
- Council website
- Written
- Face-to-face
- Text messaging
- Surveys both telephone and mail out
- Fax.

4.3 Text messaging submissions

In support of research into communication tools in local democracy, and at this researcher's request, Mr Stevenson agreed to trial text messaging as a new tool in the submission process. It was believed that texting had not been used in this manner before in New Zealand and the aim of this project was to create a pilot study for further exploration on the topic. For the first time in Auckland City Council history, a text message poll was conducted concerning the option to develop a skate park in Windmill Park. This form of submission (texting) was used only for the skate park consultation.

The concept of 'Skate' and 'No Skate' was advertised in order for the public to either support the building of a skate park by texting the word 'Skate' or reject the building of a skate park by texting the words 'No Skate' to the researcher's private cellphone. Texts containing these submissions were received, given an identifying number beginning at one, and recorded into a spreadsheet under the following headings: Answer, Phone Number, and Date. A text was then sent back to participants containing the following message:

Thanx 4 yr sk8 park submission. May we contact u about it at a l8r d8? Y/N?

Participants sent a further text containing Y or N. Their answers to this question were recorded in a fourth column in the spreadsheet under the heading OK 2 Contact? The purpose of this was to identify potential research participants and ask them a series of questions regarding their use of text messaging as a communication option.

Three times throughout this process another spreadsheet was opened and a copy of the phone numbers pasted into it. This was then sorted in descending order using the sort function in Microsoft tools. This further step was performed to check for multiple text-ins. Cellphone numbers that showed more than one submission were recorded. However, only the original texts were given an identification number. This process ensured there was only one submission counted per individual cellphone.

Text messaging was used in this part of the consultation process because it was believed by Auckland City Council officers that the use of texting was an appropriate form of communication as it was more likely to encourage participation from a younger demographic group, traditionally known to not participate in conventional consultation (No Doubt Research, 2004). Submissions were received up to the 29th of March. At the end of

the submission period a copy of the completed spreadsheet containing the submissions was sent to Andrew Stevenson at the Auckland City Council.

4.4 Results of the combined consultation

Table 1: Consultation Methods and Responses

Date	Method	Number Received
November 2003	• Random Survey	255
March 2004	• Random Survey	166
April 2004	• Residents' Survey	393
March 2004	• Text Submissions	98
March 2004	• Open Days at Melville Pavilion • Written submissions • Submissions through Auckland City's website	581
	Total	1493

(No Doubt Research, 2004, p.3)

The results received by the Auckland City Council, and presented by No Doubt Research (2004), can be summarised as follows. A total of 1493 responses were received from the combined communication methods. However, these submissions were not received from 1493 individuals participating in the process. A number of people from the Eden Epsom community made submissions through multiple consultation channels. A specific question included in the April 2004 survey revealed that 217 people made their submissions through more than one communication channel, for example they made both a website submission and a written submission.

The submissions regarding the skate park itself were as follows: The March Random Survey received 166 responses out of the 1500 that were invited. Of these, 70 expressed their opposition to the skate park being built, 46 expressed support, and 32 said they did not mind. The April Residents Survey of 3200 households and owners in the area yielded the

following results: 393 participated, 177 opposed the skate park, 98 supported the skate park, and 90 said they did not mind. No Doubt Research concluded by saying when the “fors” and the “do not mind” responses were added together, there was no clear community view on whether a skate park should be built or not (This finding is briefly discussed in the conclusion to this chapter). Specific figures for the proposed skate park from the November 2003 random survey were not available. However, concerns about its construction were recorded, although not in detail.

Table 2: Text Message Support For Skate Park In Windmill Park

Answer	Numbers
Yes	81
No	17
Total	98

The March 2004 text message submission process received 98 individual submissions, of which 81 were in favour of a skate park being built in Windmill Park and 17 were opposed. The process of sorting the cellphone numbers to identify multiple submissions meant that multiple responses from the same mobile phone were excluded.

4.5 The outcome of the text message submission experiment

The introduction of text messages as an option for making submissions was not well received in some parts of the community. Political pressure and media interest in the wider project made the topic too contentious for the council and scuttled any further research on texting. Although Mr Stevenson was pleased with the results from the text messages, saying he had not expected so many, he also said he did not expect the reaction that erupted against the use of texting.

Mr Stevenson said,

Texting is biased towards young people (just as the usual submission process is biased against young people) and so residents did not like the idea of young people being involved in the process. If we did not consult with young people I think it would be illegal – under the Local Government Act 2002, part 6, section 82 1 (b) – ‘persons who...have an interest in should be encouraged...to present their views’

(personal communication, April 6, 2004).

Mr Stevenson went on to say that one resident contacted him saying that as youth were not of voting age, they should not be able to participate in the political process.

Hobson Community Board member and Epsom resident, Julie Chambers, said she wanted the consultation on the skate park stopped on the basis that texting had been included in the process. In her view, texting was not consultation. Instead Mrs Chambers viewed text messaging as a petition that would support a skate park and 'steamroll' residents who were opposed to the addition of this facility in their neighbourhood (Council invites txt consultations, 2004). Mrs Chamber's reaction was a direct result of a fear there would be an excessive number of submissions from youths supporting their own perspective (ibid).

Mr Stevenson summed up the entire skate park consultation by saying, "They (the Auckland City Council) did not build the skate park in the end. We had approximately 80% in favour of doing it, from the text submissions, but because the other forms of submissions did not want it they did not do it."

4.6 Conclusion

No Doubt Research's (2004) judgment that there was no clear community view on the construction of the proposed skate park was erroneous⁵. At the time of reaching this conclusion, 225 submitters supported the skate park, 122 submitters did not mind the skate park being built, and 264 submitters opposed the skate park. Clearly, when the 'fors' and the 'do not minds' were tallied, the total was 347 in favour of the skate park and 264 opposed. It is only when participant's from the text message submission process were excluded that the numbers became 266 in favour and 264 opposed.

Fears that text messages were going to 'stack' the submission process, through multiple texting or excessive amounts of youth participating, were unfounded and consequently were not supported by the results. Instead, the results showed that over-representation only occurred when submitters combined the more traditional methods, such as written submissions and web-based submissions, to make multiple submissions. In the April survey, 217 submitters disclosed they had made multiple submissions skewing the 1493 submissions received in this consultation. Of the 217 multiple submitters, 77 used a

⁵ NB: No Doubt Research had the results of all the consultation methods at the time of making this assertion.

survey and one other method, 62 used a survey and two other methods, 42 used a survey and three other methods, 21 used a survey and four other methods, 3 used a survey and five other methods, and 12 used a survey and six or more other methods (No Doubt Research, 2004). In contrast, the process employed to collect text submissions ensured that only one submission was accepted per cellphone. In addition, the assumed age of those that used text to make their submissions also meant they were unlikely to have been surveyed. However, because of the negative controversy aroused by this project, the plan of using texting in a more sophisticated way in future consultations at the Auckland City Council had to be abandoned, at least for the time being.

The results of this consultation and the reactions of stakeholder groups and politicians will be discussed along with the results of the surveys and interviews in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS OF SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS WITH SUBMITTERS

5.1 Introduction

The implementation of teledemocracy and e-government has been the topic of many research reports (for example, Martin & Boaz, 2000; Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002).

However, as each teledemocratic tool is accepted or rejected by governments, both local and central, on the basis of 'failure' and 'success', the opinions of the people who must choose which communication tool to use when corresponding with their officials are noticeably missing.

Further, as changes to New Zealand's local government laws require more intensive consultation with the communities affected by council decisions, it becomes important to ask stakeholders how they feel and what they think of the tools that are currently made available to them to enter into such consultations. This research seeks to fill the gap that currently exists in the available research by directly gathering information from people who already participate in the local democratic process in order to determine their opinions of the tools available to them.

Additionally, the popularity of text messaging among youth (Vodafone New Zealand, 2003) and the increasing popularity of text messaging among middle aged consumers (Woods, 2002), presents an excellent opportunity to gauge public feeling about the possible introduction of this tool as an additional method of submitting opinions to local decision-makers.

The following information is presented in two parts: surveys with participants who made submissions to their respective councils' LTCCPs in 2004, and interviews with professionals who make submissions on behalf of community and business groups. The survey section is sub-divided further: first by individual district and then by demographic information collected from all survey participants.

5.2 Submitter Survey Results

5.2.1 Response rates

Palmerston North city, Tararua district, Wanganui district, and Rangitikei district

participated in the attempted census of the research population – people who had made a submission to their local LTCCP. The four geographical areas were surveyed using submission lists from the respective councils. A total of 383 surveys were returned and able to be used out of a possible 870 creating a 44.1% return rate overall.

- Palmerston North participants returned 169 surveys out of 377 contacts made,
- Tararua participants returned 58 surveys out of 106 contacts made,
- Wanganui participants returned 53 surveys out of 157 contacts made, and
- Rangitikei participants returned 103 surveys out of 179 contacts made.

In Palmerston North, 481 submissions were presented to the city council. Of these, 424 potential participants were identified. 333 supplied their phone numbers, 63 their email addresses, and 28 their postal addresses. It is through this information that they were contacted, and invited to participate in the research. Of the 424, 47 were unable to be contacted throughout the research period giving a non-contact rate of 11.1%. The response rate was 44.8%

The Tararua District Council received 113 submissions from 106 individuals, all of whom supplied a postal address. A survey was mailed to each submitter. As no returned envelopes were received it is assumed there was a zero non-contact rate and a survey response rate of 54.7%.

Participation from submitters in the Wanganui district was lower than that in the other three areas. Due to privacy issues, the Wanganui District Council contact list was unavailable to the researcher. However, to ensure that stakeholders were given the opportunity to participate, Wanganui's Senior Strategic Policy Analyst included a copy of the survey in WDC's reply letters to submitters. This meant a non-contact rate could not be calculated. Nonetheless, of the 157 submissions received by the WDC, 53 submitters chose to participate giving a return rate of 33.8% for this district.

The Rangitikei District Council received submissions from 183 individuals. Of these submissions, 180 supplied postal addresses and 3 supplied email addresses. Participants received a copy of the survey via the contact information they chose to supply. Four envelopes were returned unopened, producing a non-contact rate of 2.3%. The response rate was 56.3%, making this region the highest participating rate of all four geographical areas.

As stated in Chapter Three, submitters from Palmerston North completed a survey containing eight questions and submitters from Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei

completed a survey containing ten questions. Where the same questions were used on more than one survey, the results are shown in the same tables under each geographical heading. Individual questions that deviate from other surveys are presented separately. Note that due to rounding, percentage totals may range between 99 and 101% instead of 100% exactly.

5.2.2 Prior experience in making submissions

The first question in each survey asked respondents if they had made a submission to their respective council prior to the one they made for this year's LTCCP. For some LTCCP submissions, many PNCC telephone survey participants said they had signed their name to a pre-printed form without realising they were making an official submission to their local council while others presented in-depth submissions several pages long. Note: the category 'non response' refers to the number of participants who: A. did not answer the question in a manner that was useable in this research, or B. chose not to answer the question or a section within the question.

Table 3: Number of Respondents Who Had Made Previous Submissions

Answer	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	113	66.9	43	74	39	73.6	66	64.1	261	68
No	54	32	15	26	14	26.4	37	35.9	120	32
Non response	2	1.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1

For all four geographical area, the majority of respondents had made a previous submission to their council: 66.9% Palmerston North, 74% Tararua, 73.6% Wanganui, and 64.1% Rangitikei. The average for all districts totalled together was 68%. Tararua and Wanganui had an above average number of repeat submission makers, while Palmerston North and Rangitikei sat just below it. Each district saw a considerable number of new submission makers to their plans, ranging from 26-36%.

Palmerston North respondents were additionally asked how many times they had made a submission to the PNCC to gauge their prior experience in this area. As can be seen

in Table 4 below, nearly a third of PNCC submission makers had made two submissions prior to this year's LTCCP. A further third of participants had made more than five submissions in previous years (32%) with two respondents claiming to have made as many as twenty submissions prior to this year's consultation process.

Table 4: Number Of Submissions Made To PNCC.

Answer	Number	Percentage (%)
1	16	14
2	34	30
3	15	13
4	10	8
5	5	4
>5	36	32

5.2.3 Use of communication tools in previous submissions

To gain an insight into which communication tools were most used by submitters, respondents were asked to indicate which tool they had utilised the most in their previous submissions to local plans. Participants who had answered 'No' to question one were asked to skip this question, as it did not apply to them.

Table 5: Most Used Tool In Previous Submissions

Answer	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Email	2	1.8	1	2.3	1	2.6	3	4.5	7	2.7
Telephone	2	1.8	0	0	1	2.6	1	1.5	4	1.5
Fax	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	1	1.5	2	0.7
Paper & Post	81	72.3	36	83.7	32	82.1	53	80.3	202	77.7
Oral	20	17.9	4	9.3	5	12.8	5	7.6	34	13.1
Other	7	6.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	2.7
Non response	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	3	4.5	4	1.5

As can be seen in table 5, paper and post (which included all forms of delivery including delivering it to the council in person and 'posting' it in the box that is available at the reception) was the most used submission tool. The average use of paper and post for all

four areas was 77.7%. Notably, the two rural areas (Tararua and Rangitikei) and the smaller provincial city (Wanganui) had an above average use of this tool (ranging between 80 and 84%), while the larger provincial city (Palmerston North) was below the combined average at 72.3%.

5.2.4 Changing communication tools of choice

Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei respondents were then asked if they had used a different tool this year to the ones they had used in previous years.

Table 6: Respondents Who Used The Same Communication Tool.

Answer	Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	40	93.0	34	87.2	60	90.9	134	90.5
No	2	4.7	5	12.8	6	9.1	13	8.8
Non response	1	2.3	0	0	0	0	1	0.6

The vast majority of respondents continued to use their tool of choice to make their submission to the LTCCP. An average of 90.5% participants from the Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei Districts chose to use the same tool with Tararua being above the district average (93%), while Wanganui was below it (87.2%). One Tararua respondent eligible to answer this question chose not to.

Respondents who answered 'No' to this question were asked a further question about why they chose to change tools for this submission. The two reasons given by all 13 respondents were convenience and/or speed. Twelve respondents changed their tool from paper and post to email. The 13th participant changed their use of tool from paper and post to fax.

5.2.5 Alternative communication tools

There are several tools offered by individual councils for use in making submissions. It was of interest to ask participants which tool they would have used if the one they chose had not been available to them. The purpose of such a question was to avoid the assumption

that by using one tool, all others were rejected for negative reasons, such as not being well liked by participants. Additionally, this question sought to identify other communication tools that would be considered just as good in the submission process.

Table 7 (below) shows a noteworthy number of participants identified email as their most popular alternative communication tool of choice in all geographical areas. Of particular interest, Tararua district, where one council officer and a survey participant wrote of the lack of reliable telecommunication infrastructure, still chose email as a suitable alternative (41.4%, 7.7% above the overall average for all areas), while respondents in the Rangitikei District, which also contained a participant that noted a lack of reliable telecommunication infrastructure in their rural area, noted email as their most popular alternative (28.2%, 5.5% below the overall average for all areas) but not proportionally as highly as survey participants in other districts. The overall average for email as an alternative communication tool was 33.7%.

Table 7: Alternative Communication Tool Choices

Answer	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fax	23	13.6	10	17.2	5	9.4	24	23.3	62	16.2
Phone	26	15.4	7	12.1	3	5.7	9	8.7	45	11.7
Email	51	30.2	24	41.4	25	47.2	29	28.2	129	33.7
Paper & Post	33	19.5	8	13.8	13	24.5	17	16.5	71	18.5
Oral	14	8.3	3	5.2	2	3.8	7	6.8	26	6.8
I would not have submitted	20	11.8	3	5.2	5	9.4	11	10.7	39	10.2
Other	2	1.2	1	1.7	0	0	1	0.9	4	1
Non response	0	0	2	3.4	0	0	5	4.9	7	1.8

Paper and post also ranked high as an alternative: 19.5% Palmerston North, 13.8% Tararua, 24.5% Wanganui, and 16.5 % Rangitikei. Some participants suggested that if their chosen form of paper and post was not be available they would find another alternative that would also be considered paper and post by definition of this study. For example, a pre-printed slip was considered paper and post as was writing the submission out in full and

delivering it to their council. Interestingly, an overall average of 10.2% of participants noted that they would not have participated in the submission process had they not been able to use their first communication tool of choice. A smaller number of participants (6.8% overall average) identified oral submissions as a suitable alternative to their communication tool of choice, showing a lack of understanding for the submission process⁶.

5.2.6 Communication tool convenience

It appears that some communication tools are more convenient to use when making a submission to a Council plan than others. For this reason, participants were asked to identify how convenient they considered each communication tool currently available to them. Five categories were offered for respondents to choose from: 'Most convenient', 'reasonably convenient', 'not very convenient', 'takes too much time and effort', and 'I do not have access to this'.

The totals shown are a result of combining the two positive categories, 'most convenient' and 'reasonably convenient', and the two negative categories, 'not very convenient' and 'take too much time and effort'. The results for the 'I do not have access to this' category are shown in a separate table (Table 9). It should also be noted that participants might have rated the convenience of a communication tool whether they had access to it or not. Therefore, the 'I do not have access to this' category may not be indicative of the true result of how many people have access to each tool. Additionally, the numbers of those recorded as not having access to specific tools vary from the numbers recorded for the same category in question 7 (communication tool effectiveness) for Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei, presumably for the same reason that participants chose to rate an individual tools effectiveness as opposed to stating they did not have access to the tool in question.

Further, in questions where Palmerston North participants have not been asked their opinion of public meetings, the number of replies gathered from the three remaining districts are added together and then divided by the total number of participants from those three districts to produce the overall average for that particular tool.

⁶ All four participating councils noted that submitters could only make an oral submission after they had first submitted something tangible by using one of the other communication tools available.

Table 8: Attitudes To Convenience of Communication Tools (%)

NB: C = convenient: NC = not convenient: N/A = Figures not available

Convenience % Tools	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
Paper & Post	86.4	10.6	96.5	3.4	94.3	3.8	87.4	5.8	89.3	7.3
Fax	36.7	17.1	53.5	20.7	49	15.1	58.3	4.9	46.7	14.1
Email	66.8	9.5	70.7	8.6	79.3	0	50.5	11.7	64.8	8.6
Telephone	58.5	32.6	48.3	41.4	54.8	28.3	41.7	36.9	52	34.5
Oral submission	39.6	51.5	41.4	50	45.3	45.3	34	53.4	39.2	50.9
Public Meeting	N/A	N/A	20.7	63.8	13.2	73.5	22.3	55.3	19.6	62.1

Table 9: Number of Participants Who Do Not Have Access To Communication Tools

No Access Tools	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Paper & Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.9	1	0.3
Fax	62	36.7	13	22.4	13	24.5	26	25.2	114	29.8
Email	30	17.8	10	17.2	8	15.1	27	26.2	75	19.6
Telephone	0	0	1	1.7	0	0	1	0.9	2	0.5
Oral submission	3	1.8	1	1.7	0	0	2	1.9	6	1.6
Public Meeting	N/A	N/A	3	5.2	1	1.9	4	3.9	8	3.7

As can be seen in Table 8, paper and post are regarded by a large majority of the participants as being a convenient communication tool: 86.4% Palmerston North, 96.5% Tararua, 94.3% Wanganui, and 87.4% Rangitikei. The overall average was 89.3%. A noteworthy number of participants reported not having access to fax machines (see Table 9) in three locations: 36.7% Palmerston North, 22.4% Tararua, and 24.5% Wanganui. Of particular note, 58.3% of Rangitikei respondents recorded fax as being convenient. This was 11.6% higher than the overall average of 46.7%. Email also rated extremely high on the convenience scale at: 66.8% Palmerston North, 70.7% Tararua, 79.3% Wanganui, and 50.5% Rangitikei. Telephones rated favourably as being convenient: 58.5% Palmerston North, 48.3% Tararua, 54.8% Wanganui, and 41.7% Rangitikei.

Oral submissions ranked a lot lower in the convenience scales with reasonably high figures being recorded in the 'not very convenient' and 'takes too much time and effort' categories: 51.5% Palmerston North, 50% Tararua, and 53.4% Rangitikei. The overall average was 50.9%. Interestingly, Wanganui recorded an even tie (45.3%) in both the 'convenient' and 'not convenient' categories for oral submissions. Public meetings were held in the lowest regard in terms of being 'not very convenient' or 'taking too much time and effort': 63.8% Tararua, 73.5% Wanganui, and 55.3% Rangitikei.

In total, 3.1% of all participants chose not to rate paper and post, 9.4% of all participants chose not to rate fax machines, 7% of all participants chose not to rate email, 13.1% of all participants chose not to rate telephones, 8.4% of all participants chose not to rate oral submissions, and 14.5% of all participants chose not to rate public meetings.⁷

5.2.7 Perceived effectiveness of communication tools

During the course of the Palmerston North survey, several participants stated that convenience of a tool was one thing, but effectiveness of a tool was an entirely different matter. Therefore, a question about perceived effectiveness was added to the Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei surveys. The concept of 'effectiveness' was not defined for participants. Respondents were asked to rate the communication tools on a scale of 'Most effective' through to 'I do not have access to this'. As with the question of convenience, although there were five categories to choose from, the only way for participants to not offer a definite 'yes' or 'no' opinion was to not answer the question.

Table 10 (below) shows that when combining totals from the two positive and two negative response categories, paper and post are rated as being highly effective by the majority of respondents: 91.4% Tararua, 86.8% Wanganui, and 87.4 % Rangitikei. In spite of the considerable number of participants who noted that they did not have access to faxes (see table 9), these were perceived as an effective means of making a submission: 67.2% Tararua, 50.9% Wanganui, and 48.5% Rangitikei. Even though it was noted that rural areas are often limited by the reliability and coverage of telecommunication systems, email was also highly regarded as an effective tool: 67.2% Tararua and 62.2% Wanganui. Rangitikei

⁷ NB: public meetings were not included in the Palmerston North list of communication tools offered.

was well below the overall average by 8.5% although, arguably, email still rated highly (48.5%) compared to ‘not effective’ responses for this area (10.7%). Oral submissions, while not being considered convenient, were considered by participants to be an effective communication tool: 62.1% Tararua, 79.3% Wanganui, and 60.2% Rangitikei. The overall average for this tool was 65.4%.

Table 10: Attitudes To Communication Tool Effectiveness (%)

NB: E = effective: NE = not effective

Effectiveness %	Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Tools								
Paper & Post	91.4	3.4	86.8	11.3	87.4	7.8	88.3	7.5
Fax	67.2	6.9	50.9	9.4	48.5	13.6	54.2	10.7
Email	67.2	10.3	62.2	13.2	48.5	10.7	57	11.2
Telephone	24.2	58.6	20.8	56.6	24.3	56.3	23.4	57
Oral submission	62.1	27.8	79.3	16.9	60.2	29.1	65.4	25.7
Public Meeting	44.8	36.2	39.6	39.7	28.2	53.4	35.5	45.3

Table 11: Number of Participants Who Do Not Have Access To Communication Tools

No Access	Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Tools								
Paper & Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fax	9	15.5	10	18.9	23	22.3	42	19.6
Email	7	12.1	6	11.3	22	21.3	35	16.4
Telephone	1	1.7	0	0	1	1	2	0.9
Oral submission	1	1.7	0	0	1	1	2	0.9
Public Meeting	2	3.4	2	3.8	4	3.9	8	3.7

Telephones were not as well regarded as other communication methods. Although convenient, telephone submissions were not considered effective, featuring strongly in both the ‘not very effective’ and ‘waste of time using this’ categories. The combined totals from these two categories were: 58.6% Tararua, 56.6% Wanganui, and 56.3% Rangitikei. These three districts clustered around the overall average of 57%. Public meetings also rated

poorly as being effective communication tools with an overall ‘not effective’ average of 45.3%. Although public meetings were regarded more highly in the Tararua District than the Rangitikei District.

In total, 3.7% of all participants chose not to rate paper and post, 15.4% of all participants chose not to rate fax machines, 15.4% of all participants chose not to rate email, 18.7% of all participants chose not to rate telephones, 7.9% of all participants chose not to rate oral submissions, and 15.4% of all participants chose not to rate public meetings.

5.2.8 Introducing a new communication tool

Participants were next asked about the possible introduction of a new communication tool – text messaging. Respondents were asked if text messaging should be offered as an additional option for sending submissions to their council and were given four answers to choose from: ‘Yes’, ‘no’, ‘maybe on a project by project basis’ (noted in Table 12 as PBPB), and ‘I would like more information before I make up my mind’.

Table 12: Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging?

Answers	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	20	11.8	3	5.2	4	7.5	13	12.6	40	10.4
No	94	55.6	36	62.1	28	52.8	77	74.8	235	61.4
PBPB	26	15.4	9	15.5	9	17	1	0.9	45	11.7
More information.	27	16	9	15.5	10	18.9	5	4.9	51	13.3
Non response	2	1.2	1	1.7	2	3.8	7	6.8	12	3.1

The majority of participants were not in favour of introducing text messaging: 55.6% of those surveyed in Palmerston North, 62.1% in Tararua, 52.8% in Wanganui, and 77% in Rangitikei stated outright that they did not want the option of texting. Notably, the city areas were not as high in their objections towards the introduction of new technology; it was the more rural areas that seemed to be more strongly opposed, with Rangitikei being the most clearly opposed to texting (13.4% higher than the overall average). In contrast to the opposition, 43.2% in Palmerston North, 36.2% in Tararua, 43.4% in Wanganui, and 19 % in Rangitikei were open to the possibility of its addition.

5.2.9 Survey participants' demographic details

The last question on the survey asked respondents for their demographic information. Data on participant's gender, age, educational attainment, and employment status were gathered in an effort to compare individual characteristics with responses given. Research participants' demographics are summarised below.

Table 13: Participants' Gender

	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	72	42.6	34	58.6	29	54.7	50	48.5	185	48.3
Female	97	57.4	23	39.7	23	43.4	50	48.5	193	50.4
Non response	0	0	1	1.7	1	1.9	3	2.9	5	1.3

In Palmerston North, the majority of participants were female (57.4 %, 7% higher than the overall average), with 42.6 % being male. However, in Tararua and Wanganui, the majority of participants were male (58.6% and 54.7% respectively) deviating from the overall average of 48.3%. Rangitikei had an equal number of male and female participants.

Table 14: Age of Participants

Age	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
16-24	8	4.7	0	0	1	1.9	1	0.9	10	2.6
25-34	8	4.7	2	3.4	2	3.8	3	2.9	15	3.9
35-44	25	14.8	8	13.8	7	13.2	10	9.7	50	13.1
45-54	31	18.3	18	31	17	32.1	20	19.4	86	22.5
55-64	40	23.7	9	15.5	11	20.8	18	17.5	78	20.1
65+	52	30.8	13	22.4	13	24.5	35	34	113	29.5
Non response	5	3	8	13.8	2	3.8	16	15.5	31	8

Older community members dominated the research, and presumably the submission process. More respondents in Palmerston North and Rangitikei recorded their age as 55 and over (54.5% and 51.5%). Tararua and Wanganui respondents were predominantly over the age of 45. Noticeably, the under 45 age groups were absent in this research. A total of 31

participants chose not to supply their age.

Table 15: Participants' Highest Educational Attainment

NB: NFQ = no formal qualifications; SSQ = secondary school qualification; TQ = tertiary qualification; TC = trade certificate

Education	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
NFQ	19	11.2	9	15.5	3	5.7	8	7.8	39	10.2
SSQ	23	13.6	9	15.5	10	18.9	19	18.4	61	15.9
TQ	114	67.5	26	44.8	28	52.8	39	37.9	207	54
TC	5	3	2	3.4	5	9.4	10	9.7	22	5.7
Non response	8	4.7	12	20.7	7	13.2	27	26.2	54	14.1

Participants were asked to note their highest qualification gained. In all four geographical areas, tertiary qualifications dominated: 67.5% Palmerston North, 44.8% Tararua, 52.8% Wanganui, and 37.9% Rangitikei. Interestingly, the city centres, Wanganui and Palmerston North, were close to or above the overall average in the sample for the tertiary education demographic while Rangitikei was 16.1% below it. The second highest educational attainments were found in the secondary school qualifications category: 13.6% Palmerston North, 15.5% Tararua, 18.9 Wanganui, and 18.4 % Rangitikei. A total of 54 participants chose not to supply their educational attainment information, making this the highest number of 'no answers' in the demographic categories, although one claimed to have a "degree in common sense!!"

The last demographic asked for was employment status. Participants were given some examples of categories they could choose from, but ultimately it was up to them to decide how they wished to be recorded. Approximately one third of Palmerston North participants identified themselves as in full-time employment and nearly a third more identified themselves as retired (32% and 30.8% respectively). For the survey, the number of retired participants in Palmerston North was 5% higher than the overall average. Rangitikei followed Palmerston North's lead with the majority of their participants in full-time employment (31.1%) and retired (24.3%). This trend was only partially found in the other two geographical areas. Tararua reported being predominantly full-time employed (34.5%) and self-employed (29.3%, 17.3% higher than the overall average). Wanganui

reported being predominately full-time employed (8.1% higher than the overall average) with an even number of respondents being part-time (18.9%, 6.9% higher than the overall average) and retired (18.9%, 6.9% lower than the overall average). A total of 21 people chose not to record their employment status.

Table 16: Participants' Employment Status

Employment status	Palmerston North		Tararua		Wanganui		Rangitikei		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Employed P/T	25	14.8	2	3.4	10	18.9	9	8.7	46	12
Employed F/T	54	32	20	34.5	22	41.5	32	31.1	128	33.4
Unpaid in home or unemployed	6	3.6	3	5.2	0	0	7	6.8	16	4.2
Community volunteer	2	1.2	0	0	3	5.7	0	0	5	1.3
Self employed	6	3.6	17	29.3	6	11.3	17	16.5	46	12
Student	13	7.7	1	1.7	0	0	0	0	14	3.7
Retired	52	30.8	12	20.7	10	18.9	25	24.3	99	25.8
Semi-retired	6	3.6	0	0	0	0	2	1.9	8	2.1
Non response	5	3	3	5.2	2	3.8	11	10.7	21	5.5

5.3 Survey Results by Demographic

This section examines survey responses in relation to the four demographics that were pre-selected for this research: Gender, age, educational attainment, and employment status. Only the answers to the questions that related directly to communication tool use are examined here.

5.3.1 Gender

Five respondents chose not to give their gender when they participated in this research. Therefore, the results of 378 participants are shown in this demographic section.

5.3.1.1 Use of communication tools in previous submissions

As referred to in the previous results section, only participants who had answered 'yes' to the question of "Have you ever sent a submission to the (name of individual's council) regarding other projects or plans before this Community Plan (LTCCP) Draft?" were eligible to answer the question of 'most used tool in the submission process.'

Table 17: Most Used Tool In Previous Submissions (Gender)

Tool	Male		Female		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Email	4	2.9	3	2.5	7	2.7
Telephone	1	0.7	3	2.5	4	1.5
Fax	2	1.5	0	0	2	0.8
Paper & Post	106	77.9	96	80	202	76.8
Oral	20	14.7	14	11.7	34	12.9
Other	2	1.5	3	2.5	5	1.9
Non response	1	0.7	1	0.8	2	0.8

Table 17 shows minimal difference between the genders in the communication tools used in previous submissions. Females used paper and post and the telephone more often than males, while males noted they used fax machines and oral submissions more often than females. However, clearly, paper and post was the most used tool for both groups and any differences between the genders ranged between 0.1 and 3% showing very little variation in preference of communication tools.

5.3.1.2 Alternative communication tools

The majority of participants of both females and males chose email as their next best alternative communication tool (36% and 31.4% respectively). However, underlying the initial majority's preference for email, a higher number of males chose fax machines and paper and post as their alternative communication tools than females. Alternatively, a higher proportion of females chose phone and oral submissions than males as their alternative communication tool. Of particular note, more females than males said they would not have made a submission if their communication tools of choice were not available to them.

Table 18: Alternative Communication Tool Choices (Gender)

Tool	Male		Female		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fax	42	22.7	20	10.4	62	16.4
Phone	18	9.7	25	13	43	11.4
Email	58	31.4	69	36	127	33.6
Paper & Post	38	20.5	33	17.1	71	18.8
Oral	9	4.9	15	7.8	24	6.3
I would not have submitted	18	9.7	22	11.4	40	10.6
Other	1	0.5	3	1.6	4	1.1
Non response	1	0.5	6	3.1	7	1.9

5.3.1.3 Communication tool convenience

Table 19: Attitudes To Convenience of Communication Tools % (Gender)

NB: C = convenient: NC = not convenient: NA = no access

Tools	Male			Female			Overall Total		
	C	NC	NA	C	NC	NA	C	NC	NA
Paper & Post	89.2	7.6	0.5	89.6	6.7	0	89.4	7.1	0.3
Fax	58.9	15.1	19.5	29.5	17.6	40.4	43.9	16.4	30.2
Email	65.4	9.7	17.3	62.7	8.3	22.3	64	9	19.8
Telephone	48.6	35.7	1.1	53.4	34.7	0	51.1	35.2	0.5
Oral submission	42.7	47.6	2.2	36.3	54.4	4.1	39.4	51.1	2.4
Public Meeting	15.9	67.3	4.4	22.9	57.3	7.3	10.6	34.7	3.2

Table 19 (above) shows a clear disparity between male and female access to specific forms of communication. A 21% difference was found between male and female access to fax machines. However, the difference was much smaller for male and female access to email (5% difference). Interestingly, public meetings were considered more convenient by females than males.

5.3.1.4 Perceived effectiveness of communication tools

Palmerston North participants were not asked their opinion regarding communication tool effectiveness. Therefore, only 113 males and 96 females from the whole survey were eligible to participate.

Additionally, as the issue of access has been addressed earlier, it will not be addressed here. Further, the number of participants who chose not to respond, either to the whole question or parts of this question, is also not addressed here.

Table 20: Communication Tool Effectiveness % (Gender)

NB: E = effective: NE = not effective

Tools	Male		Female		Overall Total	
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Paper & Post	87.6	8	88.5	7.3	88	7.7
Fax	55.8	11.5	53.1	10.4	54.5	11
Email	54.9	15.9	60.4	6.2	57.4	11.5
Telephone	20.4	58.4	27.1	56.3	23.4	57.4
Oral submission	61.9	29.2	67.7	22.9	64.6	26.3
Public Meeting	28.3	51.3	42.7	39.6	34.9	45.9

More females than males considered email, oral submissions, and public meetings to be effective communication tools (5.5%, 5.8%, and 14.4% differences respectively). However, while the figures showed these differences, the trends amongst the genders were the same for most tools, with paper and post, fax, email, and oral submissions being rated as effective and telephones rated as not effective. The exception to this rule was public meetings. Here there was a significant difference of opinion. Males clearly did not consider public meetings to be effective; females, on the other hand, were more evenly split in their collective opinion, however, a slim majority rated these as effective.

5.3.1.5 Introducing a new communication tool

While table 21 (below) shows a majority opposition to the introduction of text messaging, it also highlights that females were more open than males to the possibility of its use in the democratic process. Additionally, when the numbers are totalled for all answers that were either a 'yes', 'maybe', or a request for 'more information', the figures show a section of the community's willingness to further explore the use of texting as an additional communication tool in local democracy.

Table 21: Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging? (Gender)

Answer	Male		Female		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	17	9.2	22	11.4	39	10.4
No	121	65.4	111	57.5	232	61.7
PBPB	19	10.3	26	13.5	45	12
More information.	21	11.4	30	15.5	51	13.6
Non response	7	3.8	4	2.1	11	2.9

5.3.2 Age

Thirty-one respondents chose not to give their age to this research. Therefore, a total of 352 respondents' answers are presented in the age demographic section. Additionally, of the 261 participants originally eligible to answer the question of 'most used tool in previous submissions' (see table 3), 234 respondents' results are displayed in tables 25 and 26.

Further, although six age groups were originally identified (16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+), the first three categories were amalgamated due to a lack of participant numbers. The new category is labelled 44 and under.

5.3.2.1 Use of communication tools in previous submissions

Table 22: Most Used Tool In Previous Submissions (Age)

Tools	44 & Under		45-54		55-64		65+		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Email	3	7.1	1	1.8	2	3.4	0	0	6	2.6
Phone	1	2.4	0	0	2	3.4	0	0	3	1.3
Fax	2	4.8	1	1.8	0	0	0	0	3	1.3
Paper & Post	22	52.4	45	78.9	47	81	65	84.4	179	76.5
Oral	10	23.8	7	12.3	4	6.9	12	15.6	33	14.1
Other	4	9.5	1	1.8	1	1.7	0	0	6	2.6
Non response	0	0	2	3.5	2	3.4	0	0	4	1.7

Table 22 (above) shows that although the majority of the 44 and under participants predominately used paper and post in their previous submissions (52.4%), they

also tended to use a more diverse selection of communication tools than older survey participants. The three older age groups contained a clear majority (ranging from 78%-85%) who preferred to use the more traditional tools for past submissions.

5.3.2.2 Alternative communication tools

Table 23: Alternative Communication Tool Choices (Age)

Tools	44 & Under		45-54		55-64		65+		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fax	8	10.7	15	17.4	16	20.5	18	15.9	57	16.2
Phone	6	8	4	4.7	8	10.3	24	21.2	42	11.9
Email	32	42.7	37	43	20	25.6	23	20.4	112	31.8
Paper & Post	14	18.7	20	23.3	17	21.8	19	16.8	70	19.9
Oral	5	6.7	4	4.7	3	3.8	11	9.7	23	6.5
I would not have submitted	9	12	5	5.8	10	12.8	14	12.4	38	10.8
Other	1	1.3	0	0	1	1.3	1	0.9	3	0.9
Non response	0	0	1	1.7	3	3.8	3	2.7	7	2

All 352 participants were eligible to answer this question. The three older age brackets (45-54, 55-64, and 65+) were more likely to choose fax as their alternative communication tool than their younger counterparts (44 and under). The 65+ age group were more likely than the younger three age groups to choose the telephone as an alternative tool option (9.3% higher than the overall average). Email was a more popular alternative among the 44 and under and the 45-54 age groups than the two older groups. Paper and post submissions were rated reasonably well through the four groups (16-24%). Oral submissions were rated higher in the 44 and under and the 65+ age groups as an alternative. Interestingly, the 45-54 age group were more likely to find an alternative communication tool to use than the other three groups who ranged between 12 and 12.8% in the 'I would not have submitted my opinion' category.

5.3.2.3 Communication tool convenience

Palmerston North participants were not asked their opinion on the convenience of public meetings. Accordingly, a total of 168 respondents' results are shown for this

individual communication tool. All other tools include responses from 352 participants.

Table 24: Attitudes To Convenience of Communication Tools % (Age)

NB: C = convenient: NC = not convenient

Convenience % Tools	44 & Under		45-54		55-64		65+		Overall Total	
	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
Paper & Post	90.7	9.3	90.7	7	85.9	6.4	88.5	8	88.9	7.7
Fax	65.3	17.3	60.5	16.3	44.9	12.8	34.5	8	49.7	13.1
Email	81.3	9.3	79.1	5.8	66.7	6.4	37.2	10.6	63.4	8.2
Telephone	57.3	38.7	44.2	39.5	44.9	35.9	59.3	26.5	52	34.4
Oral submission	30.7	62.7	45.3	44.2	41	43.6	41.6	47.8	40.1	49.1
Public Meeting	20.5	73.5	14.5	72.7	23.7	57.9	23	54.1	20.2	63.8

Table 25: Number of Participants With No Access To Communication Tools % (Age)

Note: NA = no access

	44 & Under	45-54	55-64	65+	Overall Total
Tools	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Paper & Post	0	0	0	0	0
Fax	17.3	23.3	23.1	45.1	29
Email	9.3	10.5	7.7	45.1	20.7
Telephone	0	0	0	0	0
Oral submission	1.3	0	2.6	2.7	1.7
Public Meeting	2.9	1.8	10.5	3.3	4.3

Table 24 (above) shows that the two younger age groups (44 and under and 45-54) rate the convenience of faxes much higher than the two older age groups (55-64 and 65+). While the trend in all age groups is to rate faxes as more convenient than not convenient, table 25 (above) shows that the 65+ age group does not have the same access to ‘younger’ technologies (fax machines and email) as the younger age groups (44 and under, 45-54, and 55-64). Additionally, the 44 and under age group finds oral submissions far more inconvenient than the three older age groups. However, it was the 55-64 age group that has the most limited access to public meetings (see table 25). Non-responses are not addressed here.

5.3.2.4 Perceived effectiveness of communication tools

The question of effectiveness was only asked of Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei participants. 168 respondents were eligible for inclusion in this section.

Table 26: Attitudes To Communication Tool Effectiveness (Age)

NB: effectiveness is not defined for participants. E = effective: NE = not effective

Effectiveness %	44 & Under		45-54		55-64		65+		Overall Total	
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Paper & Post	88.2	11.8	90.9	7.3	94.7	5.3	82	6.6	88.3	7.4
Fax	73.5	17.6	67.3	7.3	57.9	7.9	34.4	11.5	55.9	10.6
Email	73.5	14.7	67.3	16.4	71.1	5.3	29.5	9.8	56.9	11.7
Telephone	23.5	73.5	21.8	52.7	23.7	65.8	29.5	44.3	25	56.4
Oral submission	76.5	14.7	78.2	16.4	60.5	34.2	50.8	31.1	65.4	24.5
Public Meeting	47.1	44.1	36.4	49.1	39.5	44.7	31.1	42.6	37.2	45.2

A higher proportion of 44 and under participants rated faxes as an effective communication tool than the older age groups. Interestingly, the older the age group, the lower the perceived effectiveness of this tool. A 44% difference was found between the 65+ group (29.5%) and the 44 and under group (73.5%) for the rating for email effectiveness. Additionally, a slightly higher proportion of 65+ participants rated telephones as more effective than the three younger age groups. However, this still rated poorly overall as an effective tool. Further, oral submissions were rated higher in effectiveness by the two younger age groups (44 and under and 45-54) than the two older age groups (55-65 and 65+). As issues of access have been addressed earlier, these are not presented here. Additionally, non-responses are also not addressed in this section.

5.3.2.5 Introducing a new communication tool

As can be seen in table 27 (below), the 44 and under group are more open than the older age groups to the possibility of text messaging being included as an additional communication tool in the submission process. However, surprisingly, the 55-64 group is also more open to this possibility than the 45-54 and 65+ groups.

Table 27: Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging? (Age)

Answer	44 & Under		45-54		55-64		65+		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	13	17.3	9	10.5	10	12.8	8	7.1	40	11.4
No	38	50.7	57	66.3	43	55.1	75	66.4	213	60.5
PBPB	16	21.3	10	11.6	8	10.3	5	4.4	39	11.1
More information	7	9.3	9	10.5	15	19.2	17	15	48	13.6
Non response	1	1.3	1	1.2	2	2.6	8	7.1	12	3.4

5.3.3 Educational Attainment

Fifty-four participants chose not to give their educational information to this research. Therefore, a total of 329 respondents’ answers are presented in the educational attainment demographic section. The following categories are as follows: NQF (no formal qualification), SSQ (secondary school qualification), TQ (tertiary qualification), and TC (trade certificate). The results produced by these categories show a disproportionate number of participants as tertiary educated.

5.3.3.1 Use of communication tools in previous submissions

Of the 261 participants originally eligible to answer the question of ‘most used tool in previous submissions’ (see table 3), only 237 respondents gave their educational information.

A table regarding the ‘most used tool in previous submissions’ has not been presented here, as there were very few differences to note between the qualification categories for this section. Secondary and tertiary educated participants used a wider variety of communication tools. However, this difference in use was still very minimal. The most used tool for all four education groups remained paper and post followed by oral submissions.

5.3.3.2 Alternative communication tools

The majority of ‘trade certificate’, ‘secondary’ and ‘tertiary’ educated participants

identified email as their best alternative communication tool in the submission process, while the majority of ‘no formal qualification’ participants identified the phone as their next best alternative tool. Interestingly, ‘no formal qualification’ participants were proportionally the least likely of the four groups to use paper and post as their next best alternative tool. However, it was ‘trade certificate’ participants that were most likely to not submit their opinion if their communication tool of choice was unavailable for any reason.

Table 28: Alternative Communication Tool Choices (Education)

Tools	NFQ		SSQ		TQ		TC		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fax	6	15.4	4	6.6	35	16.9	3	13.6	48	14.6
Phone	10	25.6	10	16.4	14	6.8	2	9	36	10.9
Email	8	20.5	24	39.3	77	37.2	5	22.7	114	34.7
Paper & Post	5	12.8	13	21.3	42	20.3	4	18.2	64	19.5
Oral	2	5.1	7	11.5	12	5.8	2	9	23	7
I would not have submitted	5	12.8	3	4.9	21	10.1	5	22.7	34	10.3
Other	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	4.5	3	0.9
Non response	3	7.7	0	0	4	1.9	0	0	7	2.1

5.3.3.3 Communication tool convenience

Palmerston North participants were not asked their opinion on the convenience of public meetings. Accordingly, a total of 168 respondents’ results are shown for this individual communication tool. All other tools include responses from 329 participants.

Proportionally, participants from the ‘secondary school qualification’, ‘tertiary qualification’, and ‘trade certificate’ groups rated fax and email as more convenient than ‘no formal qualification’ respondents (see table 29). However, the telephone was rated as more convenient for ‘no formal qualification’ and ‘secondary school qualification’ participants than ‘tertiary qualification’ and ‘trade certificate’ participants. ‘Trade certificate’ respondents found oral submissions less convenient than the other three groups. However, they also rated public meetings as more convenient than ‘no formal qualification’,

'secondary school qualification' and 'tertiary qualification' respondents.

Table 29: Attitudes To Convenience of Communication Tools % (Education)

NB: C = convenient: NC = not convenient

Convenience % Tools	NFQ		SSQ		TQ		TC		Overall Total	
	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
Paper & Post	87.2	5.1	91.8	8.2	86.5	9.2	90.9	4.5	87.8	8.2
Fax	35.9	12.8	60.7	6.6	47.3	18.4	40.9	4.5	48	14.6
Email	46.2	10.3	68.9	6.6	72.5	8.7	59.1	4.5	67.8	8.2
Telephone	53.8	30.8	62.3	24.6	49.3	42	40.9	40.9	51.7	37.4
Oral submission	35.9	43.6	41	54.1	40.1	52.2	22.7	63.6	38.6	52.3
Public Meeting	20	60	18.4	52.6	17.2	62.4	29.4	41.2	19.6	57.1

Table 30: Number of Participants With No Access To Communication Tools % (Education)

Note: NA = no access

Tools	NFQ	SSQ	TQ	TC	Overall Total
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Paper & Post	2.6	0	0	0	0.3
Fax	35.9	18	26.6	50	27.7
Email	20.5	4.9	13	18.2	12.8
Telephone	0	1.6	0	0	0.3
Oral submission	2.6	1.6	1.4	4.5	1.8
Public Meeting	20	5.3	1.1	5.9	4.8

As can be seen in table 30, participants from the 'no formal qualification' and 'trade certificate' groups were less likely to have access to fax and email than the 'secondary school qualification' and 'tertiary qualification' groups. Further, a slightly higher proportion of respondents from the 'trade certificate' group said they had no access to oral submissions. However, a higher proportion of participants from the 'secondary school qualification', 'tertiary qualification', and 'trade certificate' groups said they had greater access to public meetings than participants from the 'no formal qualification' group. Non-responses are not addressed here.

5.3.3.4 Perceived effectiveness of communication tools

The following information is taken from the 168 Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei respondents who supplied their education information. Palmerston North participants were not asked to rate communication tool effectiveness.

Table 31: Attitudes To Communication Tool Effectiveness % (Education)

NB: E = effective: NE = not effective

Effectiveness %	NFQ		SSQ		TQ		TC		Overall Total	
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Paper & Post	90	5	94.7	2.6	84.9	10.8	76.5	23.5	86.9	9.5
Fax	55	0	71.1	7.9	55.9	18.3	47.1	11.8	58.3	13.1
Email	45	5	65.8	13.2	64.5	17.2	52.9	17.6	61.3	14.9
Telephone	35	35	26.3	52.6	17.2	65.6	17.6	76.5	21.4	60.1
Oral submission	50	35	65.8	28.9	69.9	23.7	52.9	47.1	64.9	28.6
Public Meeting	35	40	42.1	44.7	32.3	52.7	35.3	41.2	35.1	48.2

As can be seen in table 31 (above), an equal number of ‘no formal qualification’ respondents rated telephones as being both effective and not effective as a communication tool. Conversely, a clear majority of participants in the other three groups (secondary school qualification, tertiary qualification, and trade certificate) rated the telephone as being not very effective in the submission process. Although the majority of participants in all groups rated oral submissions as more effective than not, more ‘no formal qualification’ and ‘trade certificate’ participants rated oral submissions as not effective than ‘secondary school qualification’ and ‘tertiary qualification’ participants. Further, A much higher proportion of ‘tertiary qualification’ participants rated public meetings as not effective than the other three groups and, with the exception of public meetings. Issues of access have been previously referred to and are not addressed here. Non-responses are also not addressed here.

5.3.3.5 Introducing a new communication tool

Table 32 (below) clearly shows that ‘tertiary qualification’ participants were more open to the introduction of text messaging than the other three education groups, although proportionally more ‘secondary school qualification’ participants said ‘yes’ than any other

group (no formal qualification, tertiary qualification, and trade certificate). ‘Trade certificate’ participants were particularly opposed to the use of texting (77.3%) while more ‘tertiary qualification’ and ‘no formal qualification’ respondents suggested that texting could be used on a project-by-project basis than ‘trade certificate’ and ‘secondary school qualification’ respondents. Interestingly, the higher the educational attainment recorded, the higher the percentage of participants that said they would need more information before committing to a definitive yes/no answer.

Table 32: Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging? (Education)

Answers	NFQ		SSQ		TQ		TC		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	3	7.7	9	14.8	22	10.6	2	9.1	36	10.9
No	24	61.5	39	63.9	114	55.1	17	77.3	194	59
PBPB	5	12.8	6	9.8	30	14.5	1	4.5	42	12.8
More information	3	7.7	7	11.5	34	16.4	1	4.5	45	13.7
Non response	4	10.3	0	0	7	3.4	1	4.5	12	3.6

5.3.4 Employment Status

In this section, although eight employment status groups were originally identified (part-time employed, full-time employed, unpaid in the home/unemployed, community volunteer, self-employed, student, semi-retired, and retired), several categories were amalgamated due to a lack of participant numbers.

‘Semi-retired’ participant figures have been placed into the ‘part-time employed’ demographic group; ‘unpaid in the home/unemployed’, ‘student’, and ‘community volunteer’ participant figures have been placed into ‘not in paid employment’ demographic groups; and ‘self-employed’ participant figures have been placed into the ‘full-time employed’ demographic group. The categories used to present the research results are as follows: ‘part-time employed’, ‘full-time employed’, ‘not in paid employment’ (NIPE), and ‘retired’.

5.3.4.1 Use of communication tools in previous submissions

Of the 261 participants originally eligible to answer this question, 17 did not supply their employment information. Therefore, 244 participants' responses are included in this section.

'Full-time employed' and 'retired' participants recorded the most participants that used a variety of communication tools when sending in submissions to their local councils. However, clearly, there was little difference between the four employment groups regarding their most used communication tools in previous submission processes. As a result, a table regarding the 'most used tool in previous submissions' has not been presented here.

5.3.4.2 Alternative communication tools

Table 33: Alternative Communication Tool Choices (Employment)

Answer	P/Time		F/Time		NIPE		Retired		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fax	7	13	36	20.7	4	11.4	11	11.1	58	16
Phone	7	13	11	6.3	4	11.4	21	21.2	43	11.9
Email	18	33.3	71	40.8	12	34.3	20	20.2	121	33.4
Paper & Post	9	16.7	36	20.7	4	11.4	20	20.2	69	19.1
Oral	5	9.3	7	4	3	8.6	10	10.1	25	6.9
I would not have submitted	8	14.8	13	7.5	8	22.9	10	10.1	39	10.8
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.3
Non response	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6.1	6	1.7

All 362 participants were eligible to answer this question. Notably, in table 33 (above), 'full-time employed' respondents were more likely to use a fax machine as an alternative submission communication tool than respondents in the other three groups (part-time employed, not in paid employment, and retired). Additionally, 'retired' respondents noted the telephone as their next best alternative communication tool more often than the other three groups. However, 'not in paid employment' participants had the highest occurrence of 'I would not have submitted my opinion' responses.

5.3.4.3 Communication tool convenience

Table 34: Attitudes To Convenience of Communication Tools % (Employment)

NB: C = convenient: NC = not convenient: N/A = Figures not available

Convenience %	P/Time		F/Time		NIPE		Retired		Overall Total	
	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C	NC
Paper & Post	88.9	11.1	90.8	8	91.4	5.7	86.9	7.1	89.5	8
Fax	33.3	9.3	66.1	19	31.4	17.1	26.3	8.1	47	14.4
Email	70.4	3.7	78.2	10.3	54.3	5.7	40.4	10.1	64.4	8.8
Telephone	53.7	35.2	48.3	42.5	57.1	31.4	56.6	27.3	52.2	36.2
Oral submission	31.5	59.3	40.8	52.9	31.4	62.9	47.5	41.4	40.3	51.7
Public Meeting	8.7	73.9	17.5	68.4	28.6	57.1	21.3	53.2	18.2	64.6

Table 35: Number of Participants With No Access To Communication Tools % (Employment)

Tools	P/Time		F/Time		NIPE		Retired		Overall Total	
	SK	NA	SK	NA	SK	NA	SK	NA	SK	NA
Paper & Post	0	0	1.1	0	2.9	0	5.1	1	2.2	0.3
Fax	0	57.4	4.6	10.3	5.7	45.7	21.1	44.4	8.6	30.1
Email	5.6	20.4	7.5	4	5.7	34.3	9.1	40.4	7.5	19.3
Telephone	11.1	0	9.2	0	11.4	0	16.2	0	11.6	0
Oral submission	7.4	1.9	5.7	0.6	5.7	0	7.1	4	6.4	1.7
Public Meeting	17.4	0	11.4	2.6	14.3	0	14.9	10.6	13.1	4

While the majority of participants recorded oral submissions as 'not convenient', 'retired' participants disagreed with this opinion (see table 34). Instead, they (retired) recorded this communication tool as more convenient than not. However, the 'retired' group also recorded a higher number of participants as not having access to oral submissions and public meetings than 'full-time employed', 'part-time employed', and 'not in paid employment' participants (see table 35 above).

Additionally, table 35 clearly shows that 'full-time employed' participants have much better access to electronic communications, such as faxes and email, than 'part-time employed',

‘not in paid employment’, and ‘retired’ participants. Further, ‘part-time employed’ participants have more access to email than ‘not in paid employment’ and ‘retired’ participants.

5.3.4.4 Perceived effectiveness of communication tools

The question of effectiveness was not asked of Palmerston North participants. Therefore, 198 participants’ responses from Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei are presented below.

Table 36: Attitudes To Communication Tool Effectiveness % (Employment)

NB: E = effective: NE = not effective

Effectiveness %	P/Time		F/Time		NIPE		Retired		Overall Total	
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Tools										
Paper & Post	91.3	8.7	90.4	8.8	100	0	78.7	6.4	88.4	7.6
Fax	60.9	13	68.4	14	42.9	7.1	19.1	6.4	54	11.6
Email	73.9	8.7	66.7	14.9	35.7	7.1	34	8.5	57.6	12.1
Telephone	30.4	56.5	20.2	61.4	28.6	71.4	27.7	42.6	23.7	57.1
Oral submission	82.6	13	69.3	24.6	57.1	35.7	48.9	31.9	65.2	25.8
Public Meeting	47.8	30.4	32.5	53.5	50	42.9	27.7	42.6	34.3	47.5

As can be seen in table 36 (above), the two paid employment groups (part-time and full-time employed) considered faxed and emailed submissions more effective than the two unpaid groups (not in paid employment and retired). Further, less ‘full-time employed’ respondents recorded telephones as ‘effective’ than the other three groups. Although all four groups rated oral submissions as more effective than not, ‘part-time employed’ respondents showed a much larger majority in favour of oral submissions than other respondents. However, while the majority of ‘part-time employed’ and ‘not in paid employment’ respondents rated public meetings as effective, the majority of ‘full-time employed’ and ‘retired’ respondents disagreed rating it ‘not effective’ as a communication tool.

The figures for participants who do not have access to specific communication tools have been addressed previously and will not be discussed here. Non-responses are also not addressed here.

5.3.4.5 Introducing a new communication tool

Table 37: Do Stakeholders Want Text Messaging? (Employment)

Answer	P/Time		F/Time		NIPE		Retired		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	3	5.6	22	12.6	5	14.3	8	8.1	38	10.5
No	32	59.3	111	63.8	20	57.1	59	59.6	222	61.3
PBPB	8	14.8	23	13.2	5	14.3	6	6.1	42	11.6
More information.	11	20.4	18	10.3	4	11.4	16	16.2	49	13.5
Non response	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	10	10.1	11	3

Noticeably, in table 37 above, ‘full-time employed’ participants are the most opposed to the introduction of text messaging in the submission process. ‘Not in paid employment’ participants were the most open to the use of texting, recording the most ‘yes’ and the least ‘no’ answers. Interestingly, a larger percentage of ‘part-time employed’ and ‘retired’ respondents required ‘more information’ before making a ‘yes/no’ decision than ‘full-time employed’ and ‘not in paid employment’ respondents.

5.4 Feelings toward current and future communication tools

Research participants were given the option of adding comments regarding the survey. Palmerston North participants were asked to make further comments on their answer to the text-messaging question while research participants from other areas were asked, “Do you have any further comments to add to any of your answers on the previous questions?” Many Tararua, Wanganui, and Rangitikei respondents chose to comment specifically on texting, while others made more general observations regarding communication tools the submission process itself. In Palmerston North 60.9% of respondents chose to add comments. 46.7% of Rangitikei respondents chose to comment. 58.6% of Tararua respondents chose to comment and 30.2% of Wanganui respondents made comments.

Regarding the use of text messaging, some participants believed text messaging would be good for engaging youth in public participation as the comments below show:

This is a good way to get young people involved in the decision making process as this is how they communicate.

Texting may be important in getting a more youthful response or involvement.

If the council wants responses from young people then texts should be included.

Text messaging would be good way of accessing info from young people. Good way of increasing youth participation.

The idea texting was too informal for the submission process was raised by a number of participants, who mentioned abbreviated language as inappropriate and easily misinterpreted:

Spelling is an issue. A lot of people's texts could be misconstrued because of spelling so the message may not get through correctly.

It is really anonymous - there are some accountability issues. A submission is a semi-quasi legal document. Text language can lead to misunderstanding and it is hard to keep a record of texts.

On the positive side of texting were comments such as:

It is easy to think of texting as a teenage thing but it is not really. Teens are the prime users but on the other hand others are using it for convenience. While this is in an informal way - there is no reason why it couldn't be used - no reason why it couldn't be developed to be used.

I have suggested that the city council use text messaging to receive "complaints" about glass and other hazards on city streets e.g. glass on cycle lanes.

There is text messaging for text polls, music requests. Why not submissions?

For other participants, however, the use of texting was seen to trivialise the process:

There are enough other avenues for making submissions. Texting is a bit instant gratification. Submissions should take more time and thought.

I do not think it is appropriate...Short hand messages are not appropriate if you are serious about something.

Submissions are intended to convey justifications for views; text messaging would downgrade the process for no real gain, and could be used by Council to distort the process.

Text messaging is trivialising issues and those in authority are less likely to take any notice of a text message. It is too easy to send.

Several participants also raised the issue of security surrounding the use of texting:

While texting should be offered as an option I have concerns about people putting

their names to their submissions, as they wouldn't necessarily be identifiable.

Might appeal to young people. Particularly good for yes no answers but could be subject to fraud.

You cannot audit the details of texting. There are very poor records and it would be very hard to trace back where they came from. These cannot be used as a reference.

Additionally, issues of access and the ability to use technology in the submissions process were raised:

I am sadly poor and unable to afford a phone or fax or email so post is the only immediate tool available to me.

Only young people use text and very few would be bothered to send in submissions. People under the age of 50 make very few submissions.

I tend to miss out on electronic forms of communication - with the exception of phoning. I get left off email lists and electronic newsletters etc - as organisations gradually only use these forms, eventually those that do not have technology will miss out.

It [texting] would be a biased way of collecting data as not everyone has access to a txt phone.

I am an old fogey and have no access to electronics apart from the phone

The lack of appropriate infrastructure in rural areas, in particular, was of concern to some participants from Rangitikei and Taranaki:

The reason email is rated so poorly [in this participant's survey] is the abysmal speed of connection in our area...also a large portion of the TDC area has no cell phone coverage.

Text - considering we cannot get cell-phone cover in our local area [RDC], text messages to the council is simply not an option. You need to be aware of the limitations of cell-phone cover within a council's region.

In comments made about other aspects of the submission process, access to other forms of communication tools, oral submissions and public meetings, were identified by some participants as a barrier to their full participation:

Difficult to make oral submissions as I live in Wellington - an opportunity to make my submission during a weekend would be very useful.

Meetings are not held at a suitable time - also too early in the day – why not 7pm evenings.

Approximately two thirds of participants who made comments suggested using more than one communication tool to support a submission thereby making it more effective:

I consider speaking to my submission is the only way to enforce my submission. This way I can sway the group and answer their questions. Face to face suits me and them.

If I feel strongly about a particular submission I will attend public meetings, write and submit orally. The written or emailed version is good as it allows time to consolidate your thoughts.

In an attempt to explain an effective submission process, one participant wrote:

...Several communication tools need to be employed. First, the council places an item out for comment and consultation. Second, the person making the submission needs to have very cogent reasons for doing so and this needs to be clearly stated if it is to get council attention and support from other submitters. After using telephone calls to the Planning Department to ensure all the facts, a written submission from each supporter is necessary. Then, all supporters must make an oral submission. During this process, it is important to contact individual Councillors. At the end of the day, if a submission is to be effective, residents must be prepared to go to these lengths otherwise it is a waste of everyone's time including their own.

One Wanganui participant cited changes in procedures, and the new accountability demanded from the LGA 2002, as being the reason for their concerns being "heard at last."

Two participants cited positive responses from their councils:

Happy with Council's response – quick and positive.

I have had replies from the Council on both occasions when I have sent them a submission by letter.

Overall, participants seemed happy with the current choices of communication tools available to them with comments such as the following being submitted:

There are already 5 options available for the average person to make a submission. Is not that enough ???

5.5 Summary of survey findings

Distinct trends were found surrounding the use of communication tools among the four

geographical areas surveyed. First, the majority of survey respondents in each area had made previous submissions to their local councils. Additionally, all four districts saw a large number of new submission makers to the political process for the 2004 LTCCPs.

Paper and post was the most used tool in the submission process followed by oral submissions. While the majority of participants used the same tool this year as they had in previous years, those that changed their communication tool to make this year's submission, cited speed and/or convenience as their reasons for doing so. Additionally, they changed their tools from paper and post to email and fax.

Despite telecommunication restrictions in rural areas, email was the most recorded alternative communication tool in all districts. However, Rangitikei rated fax almost as highly.

Survey respondents rated most communication tools as convenient to use with the exception of oral submissions and public meetings. Even though a large number of respondents noted they did not have access to fax machines, these were also considered convenient.

Ratings of communication tools changed slightly when participants were asked to record the effectiveness of each tool in the submission process. Paper and post, fax, email, and oral submissions were rated well as effective submission tools. The majority of participants rated telephones and public meetings as not effective.

The majority of participants from all four districts did not want text messaging to be introduced as an additional submission tool. However, the city areas (Palmerston North and Wanganui) were less opposed to the possibility than the rural areas.

In each demographic category, the majority of participants were female, over 55 years old, tertiary educated, and in full-time employment⁸. Interestingly, in this section of the survey, participants were more sensitive about giving their education attainments than their age, gender, or employment status. On the surface, there initially seemed to be very little difference in attitude toward communication tools between individuals within the demographic groups. However, once the more obvious trends were identified, closer inspection showed some underlying variations.

⁸ Note: this does not mean the majority of participants were tertiary educated females who were 55 years or older and working in full time employment.

Gender

Females used paper and post and the phone more than males, while males used fax and oral submissions more than females. In addition, males were more likely to use a different tool than females. Although males and females chose email as their next best alternative, males also identified fax and paper and post, while females identified oral submissions and phones as suitable substitutes. Incidentally, more females would not have made a submission if their preferred communication tool were not available. Fewer females had access to fax (21% difference between male and female access) and email (5% difference).

Gender trends were generally the same for rating convenience and effectiveness of communication tools. However, there was one slight difference, females rated public meetings as effective while males did not. Females were also slightly more open to the use of text messaging for submissions than males.

Age

Participants aged 44 and under followed the majority's trend for using paper and post the most often. Nonetheless, the majority in this group was much smaller than in the other three age groups, showing more diversity in the communication tools 44 and under respondents used to make submissions.

Participants aged 65+ were more likely to use a telephone as an alternative means of making a submission, while the three younger groups (44 and under, 45-54, and 55-64) noted email as their most preferred alternative. The 45-54 participants were more likely to find an alternative communication tool than the other three age groups. Further, it soon became clear that the 65+ age group did not have the same access to newer technologies, namely faxes and email, as the three younger age groups.

The three older age groups (45-54, 55-64, and 65+) found oral submissions more convenient than the 44 and under age group. However, this contrasted strongly with the higher 'effective' rating that participants aged 44 and under gave to oral submissions. Interestingly, the older the group, the lower the rating of effectiveness given for fax machines in the submission process. Participants in the 44 and under group also rated email effectiveness much higher than the 65+ group and participants in the 65+ group rated telephones as more effective than the other age groups. However, telephones were still rated

poorly as an effective means of making a submission compared with other tools. The two younger age groups (44 and under and 45-54) rated oral submissions as more effective than the two older age groups (55-64 and 65+).

There was no clear age pattern regarding the introduction of text messaging. Participants from the 44 and under and 55-64 groups were more open to the possibility of texting submissions than participants in the 45-54 and 65+ groups.

Educational attainment

Participants with secondary school and tertiary qualifications used a wider variety of tools in previous submissions than those with no formal qualifications or trade certificates. However, this difference was still very minimal with the more traditional tools (paper and post and oral submissions) being used more often.

Participants with no formal qualifications identified the telephone as their next best alternative communication tool while the other three groups chose email as an acceptable substitute. Those with no formal qualifications were also the least likely to use paper and post as an alternative to their chosen tool. However, it was respondents with trade certificates that were the least likely to submit their opinion if their communication tool of choice was unavailable.

Proportionally, those with no formal qualifications rated fax and email as much less convenient for no formal qualification respondents than those with a formal qualification. The telephone was also rated as more convenient for participants with no formal qualifications or a secondary school qualification. Trade certificate respondents found oral submissions much less convenient but public meetings more convenient than the other three groups.

Participants with no formal qualifications or a trade certificate were less likely to have access to fax and email than the other two groups. A slightly higher proportion of those with a trade certificate said they had no access to oral submissions, but it was participants with no formal qualifications that said they had 'no access' to public meetings more than the other respondents.

Respondents with no formal qualifications rated email as less effective than the other three groups. They also gave a more even 'effective/not effective' rating to telephones while participants with a formal qualification were more likely to rate the telephone as not very

effective. Although the majority of participants in all groups rated oral submissions as more effective than not, more participants with no formal qualifications or a trade certificate rated oral submissions as 'not effective' than those with a secondary school or tertiary qualification. Additionally, a higher proportion of tertiary educated participants rated public meetings as not effective than the other three groups.

Tertiary educated participants were more open to the introduction of text messaging. Proportionally, participants with a secondary school qualification said 'yes' to text messaging more often than the other respondents. Participants with a trade certificate were particularly opposed to the use of texting. Further, the higher the educational attainment, the greater the percentage of participants who asked for more information before committing to a definitive yes/no answer.

Employment status

There was a tendency for more, more full-time employed and retired participants to use a greater variety of communication tools when sending in their submissions to their local councils. Additionally, respondents employed full-time noted fax machines as an alternative communication tool more often than the other three employment groups. Retired respondents, on the other hand, noted the telephone as their next best communication tool alternative. This suggests that the older the respondent, the less 'technological' the tool used. Respondents who were not in paid employment were the least likely of the four groups to find an alternative tool; instead they said they would not submit their opinions.

Interestingly, respondents employed full-time reported that they had better access to email and faxes than the other three groups. However, part-time employed reported that they had better access to email than those not in paid employment and retired participants. Furthermore, although the majority of retired participants recorded having access to oral submissions, this group also recorded having less access to oral submissions and public meetings than the other three employment groups.

Retired participants rated oral submissions as more convenient than not, which was in direct contrast to the majority of respondents. The two paid employment groups (part-time and full-time employed) considered fax and email submissions more effective than the two unpaid groups (not in paid employment and retired). Less full-time respondents recorded the telephone as effective than those in part-time employment, not in paid work,

and retired respondents. All four groups recorded oral submissions as the most effective tool. However, more part-time employed respondents gave this response than the other participants. Participants that were not in paid employment and those who were part-time employed recorded public meetings as effective. By contrast, full-time employed and retired participants were more likely to record this communication tool as ineffective.

Full-time employed participants were the most opposed to the idea of text messaging being introduced to the submission process. However, it was respondents who were not in paid employment that recorded the most 'yes' and the least 'no' answers to text messaging. A larger percentage of part-time employed and retired respondents required more information before making up their minds about the possible introduction of texting as an additional communication tool.

The next section of this chapter presents the interviews with professionals who make submissions to local councils on behalf of professional and community organisations.

5.6 Interviews: The Professional Submission Perspective

Two professional consultants from Palmerston North and a member of a Palmerston North Ward Committee were interviewed to provide views from the perspective of people who frequently make submissions on behalf of others. Paula Allen, a public relations consultant and member of various community boards, and David Forrest, a consultant on environmental issues and former employee of PNCC, both provide the viewpoint of professionals who have long been involved in local democracy and are familiar not only with the processes themselves but also the communication tools used. Evan Nattrass, chair of the Papaioea Ward Committee and former employee of the PNCC, is also experienced with the submission process. However, he comes from a different perspective, as a member of a Ward Committee one of the instruments set up by PNCC to represent and make submissions on behalf of community stakeholders.

5.6.1 Paula Allen

Paula Allen works as a Communications Advisor in her own public relations company, Communication Unlimited, while also serving as a board member for Vision Manawatu and the Manawatu Promotional Trust. Ms Allen's experience is extensive, with over 20 years in

roles such as Civic Reporter or Chief Reporter in Radio New Zealand covering local government in Wellington, Taranaki, and Nelson. She has been a consultant advisor to Palmerston North City Council, running six major public consultations under the LGA. Additionally, Ms Allen has made submissions on behalf of Green Corridors, Environment Manawatu, and Palmerston North City.

5.6.1.1 Personal definition of consultation

When asked for her definition of consultation, Ms Allen said:

Consultation is not a form of decision-making. It is an effective aid to wise decision-making if used well. Consultation is used when decision-makers need the input, from a wider group of people. It also increases the degree of support for carrying out any actions. The most important quality required for effective consultation is mutual trust, and that can only be built with integrity, patience and commitment.

According to Ms Allen, public consultation is a powerful democratic tool as it allowed community leaders to become involved in civic matters for short, specific issues. “It gives voice to disparate views; it allows for powerful, timely public debate. Done well, consultation builds social capital, connectedness, and social contribution.”

5.6.1.2 The current political environment

In Ms Allen’s view, the current PNCC administration did not have a strong consultative style. She said the process developed by PNCC for the LTCCP was not in the spirit of the new legislation (LGA 2002). In her opinion, the public stance of the Mayor (at the time of the interview) was that leaders were elected to lead. However, Ms Allen also said that even in this political climate, consultation could, and had in the past, change the course of decisions. She added that PNCC has had ‘numerous’ consultations that have resulted in healthy public debate.

5.6.1.3 Communication tools

When asked which tool she felt was the most effective in the consultation process, Ms Allen said that all public consultations required an investment in ‘multiple messaging’. This means that attention-getting newspaper and radio ads, in depth brochures and websites, phone surveys and letters were all needed. However, she listed public meetings as being the least

effective communication tool because of poor attendance. This made reliance on electronic messages, such as popular media and websites, necessary. Pre-printed submission forms, Ms Allen said, are valid as they make it easy for people to participate. Although Ms Allen is not opposed to the possible introduction of text messaging, she also identified the need for condensed questions for it to work. She said it could be excellent for yes/no votes targeted at under 25s but 'terrible' for complex infrastructure questions.

5.6.1.4 Parting words

Ms Allen said that for consultation to be effective, it takes money, positive intentions, and skill. She added that it needed to be continuous, creative, and innovative and be "owned by the community itself." She also said that one of the most effective ways to achieve this is to create community guardian groups to support each consultation. Ms Allen then concluded by quoting the 18th Century philosopher, Edmund Burke, "Your representatives owe you not only their industry but their judgment. They do not serve you well if they sacrifice their judgment to your opinion."

5.6.2 David Forrest

David Forrest is currently the principal planner for Good Earth Matters Consulting Ltd. With 25 years experience in local democracy, David has spent 23 years as a planner in or for local authorities as clients. He has also been involved in local community groups particularly for environmental matters.

5.6.2.1 Personal Definition Of Consultation

Defining consultation, David said the courts defined public consultation in the Air NZ case (referred to in Chapter Two) and that he took his definition from that.

Consultation is a two-way process. If it is genuine it is a process that seeks a response from the public, which will be taken into consideration in the decision-making process. It also engages people, enabling them to understand the issues under consideration. So it is a two-way street as opposed to just presenting information, which is one-way.

5.6.2.2 The current political environment

When asked how much value PNCC places on consultation, Mr Forrest explained

there are two elements to local government, the corporate side of the council, where the administration is taken care of, and the political side of the council, the Mayor and councillors. Sometimes there can be differences between them, for instance, different opinions on when and who to consult and how it will be carried out. Some consultations are what he referred to as ‘Claytons consultation’, where there are pre-determined outcomes before any consultation has taken place.

Mr Forrest also believed the PNCC did not consult correctly with its stakeholders. In his opinion, PNCC’s consultation process is often prescriptive. In Mr Forrest’s experience, people do not respond to open-ended questions.

They respond to ‘here’s the issue and here’s the solutions as we see it – pick one’. However, with the LTCCP, a preliminary step asking ‘what are the issues?’ was necessary. PNCC did not do this. They relied on information they’d collected two years previously.

5.6.2.3 Perceived value council places on public input

Mr Forrest said the different forms of consultation councils enter into often reflect the resources, level of understanding, and information available to them at the time. “A lot of times councils confuse consultation with consensus. This gives consultation a bad name.” The problem, he believed, is not with consultation but usually with how the Council goes about it. Consultation is a tool to assist and make better decisions. Mr Forrest said that some staff and councillors do not understand that consensus is not always needed. “They just need to consult to bring public opinion to the decision-making, but they are the ones that need to make the decision.”

Nonetheless, Mr Forrest said he believed consultation could have a huge impact when it is a genuinely two-way process. “If council genuinely wants to hear what people think, it will almost always result in a better decision. If it is not genuine, or it is misguided in terms of how it is done, it can have an adverse impact on the end result.”

5.6.2.4 Communication tools

According to Mr Forrest there are two aspects of communicating back to the council. Assuming it is a two-way consultation, he said it depended on whether the council was after quantitative or qualitative data. “Sometimes it is not numbers but ‘substance’ the council

wants. Other times, the numbers can influence a political decision. The value of the tools used will vary depending on the required outcome of the issue being debated.”

Mr Forrest said that individually, fax, email, and paper and post were much the same as they were all written submissions. It was just a matter of how the public put their words together. Also, he said, successful consultation is about following up on submissions with submitters to allow them to make their position clear and clarify their concerns. Generally he believed public meetings were not very effective. Their value lay in their being a good vehicle for the council to impart some information. Despite this, Mr Forrest said he had just been to a public meeting that was effective in terms of consultation, but that was very rare. Generally, Mr Forrest considered that meetings were good if people just wanted to vent their feelings, but that they rarely went to the next level of two-way conversation.

They can also give a skewed view of what the public is thinking because a meeting is rarely representative of the general population. It is also hard to stand up and go against the status quo if your view is different to what is being said. A public meeting is not always a good indication for politicians as to what the majority view may be.

Like Ms Allen, Mr Forrest was not opposed to the possible use of text messaging in public participation. “It would be useful if decision makers want a ‘weight of numbers’ gauge, on a black and white issue or a yes/no situation. It would probably be a good guide, assuming that the population that has access to cellphones is representative of the population at large.” Mr Forrest also warned that texting would be less effective, and quite restrictive, for qualitative information. However, as text could be followed by oral clarification if necessary, he considered that it did have real possibilities. Mr Forrest also supported the use of random sample phone surveys. He believed that phone surveys are an effective means of obtaining an indication of what the non-participating public was thinking.

5.6.2.5 Encouraging public participation

Mr Forrest said he could not see how more people can be encouraged to participate in local democracy. He said that maybe in the future, as resources like oil become scarce, people would stop being so mobile. This in turn would produce a greater sense of community as individuals become more attached to their living environments.

Additionally, Mr Forrest observed, civics is rarely taught in the current curriculum at

high school. “By and large the majority of the population is ignorant about government, full stop, never mind local government. I think we need to tackle it at a primary and secondary level by having a fundamental component in the curriculum.”

5.6.2.6 Parting words

In Mr Forrest’s opinion, a lot of people think the council is ‘out there’. “They do not realise that it is all around them in leisure, rents, and rates etc. They are all directly and/or indirectly paying for the spaces they use but they do not understand that they are a fundamental part of it.” Further, he said, there is an old saying “People do not want to know about anything till a bulldozer is coming through their backyard.” In some cases, he added, people do not have enough time, so they do not get involved unless they absolutely have to. Mr Forrest believed that consultation needed to become an integral part of decision-making. “It has to be done on a case-by-case basis, as there is no ‘one size fits all’”. He observed that there was a tendency to consult without thinking about what it was really needed in any particular situation.

Mr Forrest concluded, “People might not like a decision that has been made but if they understand the process then they are likely to accept it. At present many do not seem to understand how the decisions are being made.”

5.6.3 Evan Natrass

Evan Natrass is the current Chair of the Papaioea Ward Committee and, with the exception of this year’s elections, was a regular Mayoral candidate for several years. At present, Papaioea is the largest ward in Palmerston North with approximately 20,000 electors who elect four councillors. He described the role of the ward committee as acting as an interface between the community and the PNCC. Effectively, he said, committees create a forum for councillors to meet with interested community members, answer questions, and let the public know what is planned for, or happening, within the community. Additionally, ward committees formulate submissions on matters such as the annual plan and, with the introduction of the Local Government Act 2002, the LTCCP. However, he said that ward committees were not often invited to make submissions.

5.6.3.1 Personal definition of consultation

Asked to elaborate on his understanding of consultation, Mr Natrass said:

Consultation to me is asking for input at the creative stage initially, gathering lots of ideas to formulate options then consulting on these. Asking the public “how do you like these options?” Asking for input gives an idea of where the people are at.

5.6.3.2 The current political environment

The PNCC restructured ward committees to make them into sub-committees of the Committee of Council. For plans or actions to proceed, committee reports must be adopted, but, Mr Natrass said, generally these reports were accepted and just noted. In his opinion, ward committees have no real power. Mr Natrass believed that ward committees, to some extent, exist to ‘sidetrack’ the public. Additionally, Mr Natrass said that the council did not make a full recording of the minutes from meetings. PNCC only recorded decision summaries. He said that this meant there was no documentation on how decisions have been reached. This, Mr Natrass said, to some degree, hid where councillors stand on certain issues. At present there was a certain degree of anonymity for the politicians.

5.6.3.3 Perceived value council places on public input

When asked how much value he believed PNCC placed on public input, Mr Natrass said, “They say they put a high value on it, but the community does not believe it. You do need to get reference from the public to let you know you’re heading in the right direction in decisions.” Referring to the claim by some councillors, including Paul Rieger and Lynne Pope (see Chapter Six) that, “The quality of submissions counts, not the quantity”, Mr Natrass said this is used to deflect the public when their opinions differ from the council’s.

Like Ms Allen, Mr Forrest, Heather Tanguay, and Marilyn Brown (see Chapter Six), Mr Natrass suggested that the council allowed public input to have very little impact. However, he added, “People do not realise that talking to them or consulting with them does not mean opinions must change. You invite consultation to improve on proposals or to catch anything missed or even improve on suggestions being made.”

Another aspect of council, Mr Natrass said, was that it enabled councillors to disregard ‘anti-submissions’, those submissions that might disagree with the outcomes a council desired. “By not making reports available to the public until after submissions have

closed and councillors have been given them, they [councillors] are told they can ignore submissions because the public did not have the full facts before hand when they were making their submissions to council.”

5.6.3.4 Conduct of PNCC’s LTCCP

When asked how Mr Natrass felt about the LTCCP consultation process specifically, Mr Natrass said the council did not do as well as it could have. He believed the council thought, because there was fewer submissions than normal, everyone was happy.

A lot of people who have previously been involved in submissions now think it is a waste of time, so they don’t bother. It’s mostly older people saying this, but as they are the biggest group who participate. If they stop then democracy itself is diminished.

Additionally, Mr Natrass said that he was disillusioned with the oral aspect of the LTCCP submissions. This, he said, related to the practice of council staff recording a summary of the submissions rather than taking a full record. According to Mr Natrass, this practice can distort the message being submitted to council, as only small numbers of councillors attend hearings. “Some of the things that were written down about my submission were a long way off what I actually said. A person speaks for several minutes and only half a dozen words are actually written.” Further, supporting Cr Tanguay’s opinion (see Chapter Six), Mr Natrass said that councillors sometimes showed impatience at hearings.

When putting together a public document like the LTCCP, the PNCC tended to use workshops. These, according to Mr Natrass, are closed sessions of brainstorming before putting anything out to the public. While workshops can streamline the process, there is no public input into the early stages. This process can result in the council having high ownership of the concepts and any disagreement can be taken as a personal slight, and aggressively opposed.

5.6.3.5 Communication tools

Mr Natrass suggested written forms of communication, supported by oral submissions, are the most effective way of making a submission. For him, written submissions provided the most detailed evidence in an unedited form. Oral submissions in support of written

submissions can 'bring the document to life' and are more effective than written submissions alone. Mr Natrass said that faxed and emailed submissions were same as written submissions. He also said he had no personal experience of using the telephone in the submission process but he believed there could be problems with editing where, again, summaries could distort the submission's message. The possibility of using text messaging had not previously occurred to Mr Natrass. "I do not know how easy it is to transcribe but it might be the same as telephone. A different bunch of people might use it, like young people, so it may be worth experimenting to see if new people participate, particularly from a group that traditionally does not."

5.6.3.6 Parting words

Mr Natrass concluded: "It is harder to get people to participate in council matters." Like Mr Forrest, Michelle Bisset, and John Walker (see Chapter Six), Mr Natrass believed that most people just did not see how councils directly affected them.

5.7 Conclusion

A total of 383 people in four geographical locations participated in the survey section of this research. Individual response rates varied depending on location with Wanganui recording the lowest rate of participation and Rangitikei recording the highest.

The results show that traditional tools such as paper and post and oral submissions are still the most used communication tools in the submission process despite the introduction of more modern communication media. Nonetheless, participants were not adverse to the use of email as an alternative submission-making tool. Paper and post, fax, and email were considered both convenient and effective in local political communications. However, although the majority of respondents rated the telephone as convenient, it was also rated as an ineffective submission tool. Conversely, the majority of participants rated oral submissions as 'not convenient' but it was also rated as an effective submission tool. Public meetings were consistently rated as both 'not convenient' and 'not effective'.

Further, the results also showed that the majority of current participants in the submission process do not want text messaging to be added to their communication options. However, some majorities in individual regions were slim showing an element of openness

to the possibility of eventually introducing texting as long as specific issues such as security were addressed first.

A full breakdown of participants' answers by demographic groups, gender, age, education attainment, and employment status, has also been presented in this chapter along with the key findings.

The three interviews produced several similarities in opinion from professionals who act on others' behalves, making submissions in the consultation process. There was a general consensus among the interviewees that the PNCC did not value public input as highly as it should. However, despite this limitation, the interviewees believed that consultation could still have an impact on the final decisions being made.

Mr Natrass noted a preference for written communication tools supported by oral submissions. Mr Forrest and Ms Allen did not identify a preference for any specific form of communication. However, they both said that public meetings were generally 'not very effective'. Although the three interviewees held reservations regarding the way text messaging could be used to make submissions, they also agreed that texting held possibilities as an additional communication tool. Mr Natrass and Ms Allen also suggested that text messaging might help to encourage participation from sections of society who currently do not participate.

The following chapter, Chapter Six, presents the results of interviews with a number of council officers and politicians who invite and receive submissions. A full discussion of the perspectives of submitters and those who receive submissions are presented in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX
RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH COUNCILLORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

6.1 Introduction

Qualitative interviews were used to provide further information that would help address several aspects of the research questions from a different perspective and allow the researcher to observe several interviewees in the relevant political setting (Wagenaar & Babbie, 2001). A semi-structured format was used in the face-to-face interviews with each one taking an average of forty-five minutes. Four of these interviews were carried out by email, three were conducted face-to-face and one was carried out by telephone.

Eight interviews were undertaken with the following key informants shown in table 38:

Table 38: Submission Receiver Interview Schedule

Name	Council	Position	2004 Date Interviewed	Method of Interview
Heather Tanguay	Palmerston North City Council	Councillor	2 July	Face-to-face
John Walker	Tararua District Council	Business Manager	12 July	Email
Paul Rieger	Horizons District Council	Councillor	14 July	Face-to-face
Charlotte Hume	Wanganui District Council	Senior Strategic Policy Analyst	26 July	Email
Andrew Stevenson	Auckland City Council	Manager of Research and Consultation	29 July	Telephone
Lynne Pope	Palmerston North City Council	Councillor	2 August	Email
Marilyn Brown	Palmerston North City Council	Councillor	11 August	Face-to-face
Michelle Bisset	Rangitikei District Council	Policy Analyst	30 September	Email

Interviewees were chosen for the different perspectives they were able to present of local government and the democratic process.

As the interviewees were not randomly selected, their views are not representative of

the wider professional community. However, their perspectives are important to this study, as they demonstrate how some individuals work within the political environment. More importantly, as these interviewees receive the communications sent in by local constituents, it was vital to gain some insight into how they regarded the different communication tools used by submitters.

6.2 The city and regional councillors

At the time of conducting these interviews, Heather Tanguay, Marilyn Brown, and Lynne Pope were Palmerston North City councillors and Paul Rieger, a former PNCC Mayor, was a councillor for the Horizons Regional Council. During the course of the 2004-year, Cr Brown chose not to stand in the October elections, Cr Pope was re-elected in the Papaioea Ward, and Cr Tanguay became Mayor of Palmerston North replacing Mark Bell-Booth. Cr Rieger was also re-elected to the Horizons Council.

6.2.1 Cr Heather Tanguay: Palmerston North City Council (PNCC)

At the time of undertaking this interview, Heather Tanguay was not only a current city councillor for PNCC; she was also campaigning to become Palmerston North City's next Mayor. This objective was achieved in the October 2004 elections.

Cr Tanguay's involvement in politics began with her successful central government lobbying campaign to bring minimum safety standard legislation to children's toys in New Zealand. Subsequently, she had served several terms as a councillor for PNCC, making her well acquainted with communication tools in democracy from 'both sides of the fence'.

6.2.1.1 Personal definition of consultation

Locally known for her commitment to public consultation, Cr Tanguay defined it as being:

Where all information, in a non-biased manner, is placed before a community to consider and provide their views back to the council. Where the community can say if they are for or against a proposal and if they wish to make alternative suggestions or even amendments to that proposal, they can. There should then be a non-threatening way in which citizens can approach council to provide results of consultations, which should be listened to in a respectful manner and considered.

When asked her opinion about PNCC's consultation policy, Cr Tanguay explained that there were different levels of consultation. She went on to say that under the LGA 2002, councils were now required to have a policy of significance. The significance policy is a list of items that a council had identified as being significant to community planning and development. Once significant items are agreed on, they must be put onto the significance list followed by an in-depth consultation. It is a proper full scale 'top' of the consultation process. Giving the example of community housing, Cr Tanguay explained that it was not always easy for a council to come to agreement on the topics that should be listed as significant.

There is nothing like housing to get people riled up, it is a very contentious issue. The far right believe that it is the individual's responsibility to provide their own housing and the far left believe it is the government or the council's responsibility to provide it. I thought it was very significant and should be on the significance list but the council [PNCC] saw it as more of an investment.

The next stage down in the consultation levels would be to notify the public that something specific is about to happen but the council would not receive proper submissions on it. However, people could still make comments to their respective councils.

6.2.1.2 PNCC's LTCCP

Cr Tanguay was critical of PNCC, saying the present council did not value constituents' input in the decision-making process. Specifically, referring to the LTCCP, Cr Tanguay commented that the document offered to the public did not reflect the true magnitude of the whole process. Information, such as the fact the plan was for 10 years, was not made obvious to submitters. Further, waste management, which Cr Tanguay believed should have had its own consultation, was buried "somewhere in the back" of the LTCCP. Additionally, when the full LTCCP document was made available, Cr Tanguay said, "It was so massive that people were terrified by it." A further problem identified by Cr Tanguay was that very few copies of the LTCCP were printed, severely limiting access to it.

The time and access limits, of one month, were just not enough. To add to the confusion, a public meeting was called to inform the public prior to the summary going out, so 99% of people had no idea what was happening and were surprised by some of the issues that were in it. By then, their community ward meetings had been held and it was too late.

Additionally, throughout the LTCCP process were the Easter holidays. In Cr Tanguay's opinion this further shortened the available time for submitters to make contact with council. Finally, the submissions were put to the councillors for consideration followed by the hearings. However, Cr Tanguay said a few councillors attended virtually none of the hearings and, of those that did attend, some "behaved in a very threatening manner if people raised issues, which they are absolutely entitled to do. Some were almost castigated."

6.2.1.3 Consultation and public input

In terms of final decision-making, Cr Tanguay felt consultation sometimes had very little impact on the outcomes. However, she did say that the large number submissions on one topic occasionally influenced councillors. For example, the proposal to cut Te Manawa's funding⁹ was affected by the magnitude of responses to it. Although in other cases, such as the Railway Land consultation¹⁰, Cr Tanguay said that thousands of submissions were totally ignored.

In her opinion, everyone should be given a sufficient amount of easily understood non-biased information. Simplicity, Cr Tanguay said, was the secret to good consultation. In her opinion some consultations were, "a bit too flash."

We have spent big amounts of money on glossy brochures for consultation, but they are so complex and glossy, like sales documents, I do not think the public had been able to assess them properly. You've got to have documents that everyone can read. Why bother wasting money on putting out documents that are too flossy and glossy that people can't understand?

6.2.1.4 Example of a positive consultation process

There have also been very positive consultations by the PNCC. According to Cr Tanguay, the best consultation was over the wastewater. The PNCC was forced to review the sewerage being put in the river. It was treated but it wasn't treated to a high enough level and an alternative had to be found. A community consultation group was formed consisting of a chairman and a group from the community. The same process was used for the

⁹ Te Manawa, Palmerston North's museum, is largely funded through the PNCC. At the time of the LTCCP consultation, the PNCC was proposing to reduce Te Manawa's funding severely. Public outcry resulted in much lower budget cuts to the museum than originally intended.

¹⁰ The Railway Land consultation refers to the proposed sale of publicly owned land for the development of the privately owned 'Mega' Warehouse, a large retail store.

development of the Lido swimming pool. The community consultation group worked with the wider community to come up with a list of options, which resulted in a very positive outcome. The wastewater consultation also won an award for consultation with Māori.

6.2.1.5 Communication tools

Cr Tanguay said that communication tools were essential to engaging in productive dialogue. As someone who received public submissions, Cr Tanguay said she paid equal attention to any kind of submission. Additionally, she said that she had always been upset by the way council has often viewed petitions and form submissions. In her opinion, if people took the time to sign something, it meant they felt strongly about the issue and had sufficient interest in the topic. However, she believed, the most effective tool was a community consultation group. This was because it is autonomous rather than driven by council and the group independently brings back the community's views on issues.

When asked about the possible introduction of text messaging, Cr Tanguay said that because of its popularity, texting must be investigated. She also said she would like to see it used on issues such as rates demands because this affects so many households. In her view, "Council should use more than one method of obtaining information, such as hotlines, texting, submissions and such. If they have to tick a, b, or c, it can get a lot more people talking about an issue."

6.2.1.6 Parting words

In her concluding comments, Cr Tanguay said,

Consultation is one of the most important parts of local body, if not the most important part. The Mayor and Councillors are mere servants of the people. Yes we make decisions on information received, but when faced with such opposition on a particular issue if you ignore the public, later on down the track you will face more problems.

6.2.2 Cr Lynne Pope: Palmerston North City Council

Lynne Pope is also a veteran PNCC Councillor who said her attempts to engage public participation have often been unfruitful. From the first Saturday of every month in 2004, Cr Pope held public "clinics" at Milson Community Centre. Paying for these clinics and the

surrounding advertising herself, Cr Pope set up drinks, biscuits, and PNCC customer services centre leaflets for the public to come and acquaint themselves with. Additionally, she made current consultation documentation available during these sessions. The response had been less than desirable for Cr Pope, with some people calling in to pick up information and leave without engaging in conversation and others calling in for a chat, or with a problem that needed addressing. However, more often than not, Cr Pope had sat waiting for two hours before going home, having had no members of the public use her clinic at all. As a result, Cr Pope has been left feeling frustrated by those who claim councillors do not make themselves available to the public, or that they are not interested in listening to them. At the time of this interview Cr Pope said that her clinics would continue through to October, simply because she had said she would. However, she believed that without public participation they really were “just a waste of time.”

Further attempts Cr Pope has made to connect with the public have included putting up a website over a year ago to provide a forum, email link, and a community directory. The website attracted a huge amount of interest, with over 10,000 unique visitors within the first few weeks. However, the site went down as a result of hacker activity and a new site replaced it. Although the site still attracted many visitors, and Cr Pope received emails from it, the forum and the community directory remained unused. In her opinion, her attempt to get the community talking online was a “dismal failure.”

6.2.2.1 Personal definition of consultation

Cr Pope defined public consultation as a “two-way information exchange between the city council and members of the wider public before decisions are made. It is an open and accountable process producing opportunities for civic dialogue/debate where individuals and groups can participate in decision-making processes and influence the outcomes of a policy or decision.”

6.2.2.2 PNCC’s LTCCP

In response to the criticism that PNCC did not consult properly over the LTCCP (for example, Wheeler, 2004), Cr Pope explained this was because the Local Government Act 2002 required the Council to develop an interim LTCCP by June 2004. That meant PNCC

was not required to produce a full LTCCP until June 2006. The biggest difference between the two was that the interim LTCCP could be based on PNCC's current knowledge of community outcomes. PNCC used the community outcomes, which were identified through the Strategic Plan process in 2001/02. These community outcomes were a result of public consultation over several years and were confirmed in 2003. "The LG Act came into force in July 2003. Quite simply, council did not have time in which to develop those key stakeholder and government agency contacts and to educate the public about the requirements of the LTCCP process."

Cr Pope said the LTCCP process meant the public had to change the way it thought of council planning. Instead of being told what council intended to do, and making submissions which, she said were "usually pointing out only what they disagree with", the public must now tell the council what communities think are important for their current and future social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. This creates a challenge to reach those members of the public who usually do not get involved in public consultation processes. Cr Pope said that it was imperative that the public is well informed about the LTCCP and what it means to the community, and how important it is that they take part. According to Cr Pope, an education programme is planned for the future.

6.2.2.3 Consultation and public input

Cr Pope's opinion of the value the PNCC placed on public participation differed from Cr Tanguay's. Cr Pope believed the present council placed "a high value, often consulting beyond what is required under law." Although she personally valued public consultation, she also felt that the results from it were not always useful.

The impact of consultation on decision-making can often vary. Cr Pope distinguished between two kinds of consultation, saying that general, open-to-all consultation tended to have little impact because few people really participated and it was usually the same few in every consultation process. Targeted consultation, she believed, had a much higher impact.

6.2.2.4 Example of a positive consultation process

For Cr Pope the most positive consultation undertaken by the PNCC was rezoning

the North-East Airport land to industrial. What made this process positive in Cr Pope's mind was that council officers attended ward committee meetings to listen and answer questions, and held an information day at a neutral location. The consultants who provided the independent report for council were in attendance to explain their findings and answer questions. All information and reports were provided to the public and the process for making submissions was simple. At this time Cr Pope was the Deputy Chair of the Papaioea Ward Committee and both she and the committee were opposed the rezoning. "We lost!" she said. "However, what made this a stand-out consultation process is that the public was fully informed and aware of what was going on."

6.2.2.5 Communication tools

The communication tools used to make a submission do make a difference to this councillor. While Cr Pope said she treated all submissions with equal value, regardless of the tool used, she did acknowledge having "some issues" with them. In her view, telephone submissions transcribed by a customer services representative may not be a complete record of what the submitter wanted to say. Faxed submissions generally did not photocopy well and handwritten submissions were often impossible to decipher, particularly after being photocopied.

As a personal preference, Cr Pope said she liked to receive typed submissions, because they are easier to read and to make quick reference to during debates. Pre-printed submission forms also warranted comment. Cr Pope liked this year's council submission form, but felt it should have been provided in an editable format as a download from the PNCC website. This, she said, was a personal bias as she spent many years making submissions to council before becoming a councillor, and her preferred method for writing submissions was on her computer.

Cr Pope considered other forms of pre-printed submissions, specifically the ones that only required people to fill in their name and address, to be a useful tool when a group is advocating a certain position. However, she warned that it was very easy to hand out such a form and ask people to sign it. In Cr Pope's opinion, what is difficult for councillors is guessing whether the submitter actually knew what he or she was asking for. Was it an informed submission? Did the organisation or group give all the information when they

distributed the leaflets or forms? For Cr Pope, anecdotal evidence suggested that this was sometimes not the case. As a result, she said she placed less weighting on this type of submission.

The most effective communication tool in Cr Pope's opinion was a public meeting. For her, these have the benefit of getting more than one opinion across; they usually attract media attention, and generally bring in a wide section of the community. Public meetings also give an opportunity for two-way discussion and the presentation of information more effectively than other media.

When deciding on which submission is more useful than another, Cr Pope said that all submissions should be equally as important and valid. However, submissions made where people actually explain reasons tend to have more weight as far as she was concerned. This was because they give her a better understanding of "where the person is coming from." When submitters make the point that they do not want something to happen, without saying why, Cr Pope said she is left knowing that they are opposed but this does not help with decision-making. For her, knowing why someone wants or does not want something is important. Therefore, she said she tended to give more weight to submissions that gave reasons, alternatives, or insight into issues council may not have thought of.

Unlike Cr Tanguay, Cr Pope was not in favour of adding text messaging to the range of communication tools currently used and accepted by council. She sees texting as being intrusive and ultimately annoying. Further, she said, text messaging in the manner of some polls, gives only a "yes" or "no" without explanations. Because understanding the reasons for a viewpoint is important to her, she did not see an affirmative/negative poll to be consultation.

6.2.2.6 Encouraging public participation

The lack of participation in local democracy was of concern to Cr Pope; one that she felt was best addressed with more New Zealand research into what made people participate. Further, she believed that a better understanding of the way councils function, and the roles of a councillor, might encourage people to participate. In her opinion, few people understand that local government is a multi-million dollar "business", for example, which had a significant impact on their lives. Few also understood the myriad of laws under which

councils operate.

Additionally, she believed there seemed a lack of understanding that individuals do not need formal consultations to express their opinions. Instead they could communicate their concerns or ideas at any time. Cr Pope thought this might be as much a fault of the New Zealand attitude as any shortage of publicity about local government's functions. "After having lived overseas for a number of years, I noticed on my return that New Zealanders seem to generally have little interest in politics. Most will only get involved with local government when an issue arises which had a direct impact on their home or life."

6.2.2.7 Parting words

Cr Pope made these concluding comments,

Public consultation is important, but the key to it is public participation. 'The punishment which the wise suffer, who refuse to take part in government, is to live under the government of worse men.' Plato. Perhaps if the general public thought about this, they may be more inclined to take part in the decision-making process!

6.2.3 Cr Paul Rieger: Horizons Regional Council (HRC)

Paul Rieger's involvement in local democracy is extensive, making him the most experienced interviewee to this research. With 33 years in local government, Cr Rieger had spent thirteen and a half years as a PNCC Councillor, thirteen and a half years as the Mayor of Palmerston North, and six years with the HRC.

6.2.3.1 Personal definition of consultation

Cr Rieger defined consultation as "a process by which you attempt to gain a view of what the majority might be thinking." Speaking generally from his experiences in two councils, Cr Rieger suggested there were various degrees of value placed on public input. Initially, Cr Rieger said,

Council is bound by statute as a body, but within the Council there are two divisions – staff and elected members who then embrace three positions. 1. 'We are professionals and know what we are doing'. 2. 'I am representative of the community and know what it wants', or 3. Those that seem like they do not know anything and have to consult the community on everything.

6.2.3.2 PNCC's LTCCP

Also commenting on the accusation that PNCC put together its LTCCP before going to the public (Wheeler, 2004), Cr Rieger stated that this was normal. He explained that a few councils will consult widely prior to a consultation, but a "teaser" document that encompasses issues must be developed, which can then be turned into a coherent plan. Then it can be put to the public but it is only a draft and is open to change. In Cr Rieger's experience, stakeholders rarely submit in support of issues.

Further, he said, there is a scale. "If two hundred and fifty people are opposed to something then you can probably say there's at least two and a half thousand who are opposed, but given Palmerston North's size it is still pretty small." In addition, he said, "In the end you can't be influenced by numbers. You've got to make a decision on technical and professional advice because if you make a wrong decision you will be stuck with it for a long time. So you have to take everything into account – particularly in regards to roading and planning."

6.2.3.3 Consultation and public input

When asked his opinion regarding the value of public consultation, Cr Rieger said he felt what he called "politically lucky." What this meant was that he believed he reflected the middle of the road in opinion. The benefit, he said, was that he would rely on his "gut instinct" to make decisions rather than engage in costly opinion gathering. However, he conceded that it was important to listen to the minority. In his view, very few people are ever totally opposed to an idea. It is usually an aspect of an idea that "has them up in arms." Cr Rieger said, "If you address these things, sometimes an objector can have just one point, which is both valuable and valid, and if you address it and fix it you can meet several objectives and make it work for you. It can be really helpful. It is an interesting process."

The impact of consultation on the end decision depends on the strength of a proposal. For Cr Rieger, if a decision to be made is fairly technical, "to a point that it is either right or wrong with no gray areas", consultation will have little impact on the decision made. Otherwise, if it is a matter of opinion leading to consensus as to which decision is best to make for the community, he said one submitter's input is as good as anyone else's.

6.2.3.4 Communication tools

Cr Rieger believed communication tools that appear in written form are the most effective way of getting public opinion across to council. He made the comment, though, that often hand written submissions could be “a bit hard to read.” He said the advantage of written submissions was that they could be classified into piles and read in a councillor’s own time. However, in Cr Rieger’s opinion, councils still do not receive very many submissions. Nonetheless, Cr Rieger suggested that it only took one person with a really good argument to make a difference. For him, the key thing was not the weight of the numbers; it is the weight of the submission. Cr Rieger considered emailed submissions to be no different to posted submissions saying that it was just a different way of sending them. However, given the volume of spam circulating, Cr Rieger believed e-mails could easily be lost. He also had reservations about pre-printed forms. Cr Rieger did not feel confident that all of the right questions would be asked or full information given to those who used pre-printed forms but he did concede that forms serve a purpose for participants who have difficulty getting their opinion across. There was potential for the results of consultation using pre-printed forms to become skewed, he said, particularly if the questions were not discussed carefully.

On the topic of introducing text messaging, Cr Rieger agreed with Cr Pope. Not “a fan of the new way of communicating”, Cr Rieger believed texting to be “a waste of space.” Further, he said he could not see text replacing email and if there was something serious to say, texting could do a consultation or a submission a serious disservice.

6.2.3.5 Encouraging public participation

As indicated in Chapter Two, there has been considerable discussion regarding encouraging participation in local matters with no single answer to how higher levels of citizen engagement may be achieved. However, Cr Rieger suggested that consideration needed to be given to a serious analysis of just how necessary greater participation is. He argued:

A reasonable cross-section of elected representatives will reflect public opinion anyway. If, as a result of that, proposed public policies are more or less in line with that overall view, then the public generally will not feel any desire to participate in something of which they approve. The distinction to make is whether the public actually have received a level of accurate information as the policy had developed, as

opposed to being completely in the dark and not knowing whether they should be opposing it or not!

In his opinion, effective public participation was going on all the time if the media were doing their jobs properly. The only caveat Cr Rieger said he had was that it was necessary to ensure that it is easy to participate and that the public know how and who to contact if they do want to have a say. Therefore, he said that all council publications needed contact names and phone numbers on them all the time. He said that nothing annoyed him more than being told to go and look at a web site.

6.2.3.6 Parting words

Cr Rieger's interview ended with these comments, "If you want to be a successful politician you have to be as objective as you can, take all the information on board that you can, and have the fortitude to stand up in public and speak in the face of opposition if you have to." Cr Rieger said he had a lot of respect for public opinion but not for weight of numbers. He also said he had no objection for any method that facilitates exploration of information and its delivery. In his experience the public is quick to say if it is unhappy. Cr Rieger said that some believe a lack of submissions means people are either happy or not interested. In his opinion a lack of submissions may not mean the people were uninterested. "It just means they are not outraged."

6.2.4 Cr Marilyn Brown: Palmerston North City Council (PNCC)

At the time of this interview, Marilyn Brown was not only a PNCC Councillor, she was also holding down a full time job. In this position, she was therefore highly aware of the various constraints that face those in employment who wish to participate in the democratic process. During Cr Brown's interview it became apparent that she possessed an unusual and refreshing perspective on local government.

6.2.4.1 Personal definition of consultation

To define consultation, Cr Brown drew a matrix:

Figure 3: Cr Brown’s Matrix

Public say	Council say
Public do	Council do

“What you need is a combination as you do not want everything from just the council or just the people – you want them from both. Although you consult the people, council has the final say.”

6.2.4.2 PNCC’s LTCCP

Cr Brown supported Cr Tanguay’s assertion that the PNCC did not consult properly on its LTCCP. Cr Brown said, “We didn’t go about it the right way.” Although she also agreed with Cr Rieger that some form of document needed to be drawn up first before the public could be asked what they thought. However, Cr Brown believed the council could have entered into more dialogue with stakeholders early on by asking them how they felt and what they would like to see put into the plan. Instead, she said, PNCC produced a prescriptive document with no room for the public to manoeuvre.

6.2.4.3 Consultation and public input

Cr Brown agreed with Cr Tanguay that PNCC placed little value on public input in the decision-making process. “It is all fine if the public fall into line with what I call the holy trinity – the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor Gordon.” She said, “They get together and make plans, then it hits the newspaper without going across the Council table. There’s lots of back room stuff. You need to have a general direction from the public. They are not consulting on a level playing field. They are just consulting on endorsing the mandate.”

When asked what value she personally placed on consultation, Cr Brown said that local government was getting more consultative because of the LGA 2002. As a result the public now expects more consultation and they also expect to be listened to. Cr Brown believed Palmerston North public is particularly outspoken. This she attributed to the presence of Massey University and “a lot of trendy lefties looking out for the less fortunate...They [the trendy lefties] want to keep rates down but they want the museum, library, rubbish bags, and so on. I do not think they realise the costs involved. It is a balancing act with a lot of competing interests.” When asked how much impact consultation

had on the end results, Cr Brown just smiled and said, “We will see that in the October elections.”

6.2.4.4 Example of a positive consultation process

Cr Brown said she had experienced a number of successful consultations. For her the most memorable was the New Bridge Working Party. Cr Brown chaired the working party and, with another PNCC employee, set about engaging in public consultation:

The consultants lined up 21 crossing sites, bearing in mind a bridge is a corridor from point A to point B, so if you enter it at one end it had to take you somewhere at the other end. It came down to four river crossings. We got about 1400 submissions and Maxwells Line was by far the best option...It was a good process where we took public say on board and had a good working party. I really enjoyed that process and we got a good result.

6.2.4.5 Communication tools

Believing that one submission should not be valued more than another, Cr Brown suggested that some submissions made by private citizens were just as powerful as those made by businesses.

On the topic of individual communication tools, Cr Brown said she did not hold a preference for how a submission was delivered to her. In her opinion, phoned submissions were taken down properly and passed on and, unlike the reservations held by Cr Pope and Cr Rieger, Cr Brown said that pre-printed forms were better than no submission at all. “I like the public to be involved and pre-printed forms make it easy to read and you know what you’re looking for as they are all the same.” However, Cr Brown said, “I feel a bit wheezy about texting as it’s too informal and I do not think it had as much weight as sitting down and thinking about it.” However, she did not rule out including texting in future consultations as she said she would rather receive a text than no communication at all. She did think, however, that text submissions would sometimes be a bit hard to understand and that something as formal as a submission should have a bit more effort put into it. In her view, text messaging “would be at the bottom of the communication tree.”

In contrast to Cr Pope but in agreement with Paula Allen and David Forrest (see Chapter Five), Cr Brown believed public meetings were the least effective of the

communication tools as they can lead to less confident members of the public being intimidated by stronger personalities. “It takes a lot of guts to get up in public and say something against the prevailing view.”

Cr Brown said that while she does not pre-decide individual submission values, she does think the points made within the submission are the most important. This position, to some extent, supported the opinions of Cr Pope and Cr Rieger who felt the information contained within a submission was more important than weight of numbers. Although Cr Brown said she did not have a problem with tick the box submissions, she also said, “If someone has taken the time to write something down then we should take the time to read them. Hellava lot of councillors do not read them. I don’t think the new crop of councillors realised how much was involved.”

6.2.4.6 Encouraging public participation

Cr Brown believed that the democratic process could benefit, and citizen participation could be increased, if there were more councillors’ meetings held outside of working hours. Failure to do this meant the pool of participants able to stand for council was narrowed to retired persons, unemployed persons, and self employed people whose businesses are so established they could take considerable time off.

You might say well that is OK. There is a variety there. But in truth the self-employed business people are not interested in the lowly council pay and come to hate the ponderous decision-making process. So that leaves retired/unemployed and they are not representative of the community. We need to encourage more ethnic, Māori, women, and professional people. These are the groups that are lacking on our council. Also we need a more consensus approach to governance.

According to Cr Brown, “councils used to be able to do as they wanted without consultation. This slowly started to change in 1989 with the reforms but it really changed dramatically with the LGA 2002.” In her view, the Resource Management Act also brought many changes, but it did not have as much impact on the consultation process as the 2002 Act.

6.2.4.7 Parting words

In her concluding comments Cr Brown said, “It is not smart for council to not listen

to the public. But it does have to happen within a budget. People do not seem to understand this. Everything had to be paid for from somewhere and they never want it to be from them.”

6.3 Council administrators

The following people interviewed, with the exception of Andrew Stevenson, were chosen because they were council administrators in each of the surveyed council areas and because they each were directly involved in their respective council’s LTCCP consultation process. Although Auckland was not included in the survey research, Andrew was chosen because of his position in the Auckland City Council and his endorsement of the text messaging experiment outlined in Chapter Four. All Council administrators wished it to be known that the following information reflects their personal views based on their experience and observations. Their councils do not necessarily hold the same views.

6.3.1 Andrew Stevenson: Auckland City Council

At the time of this interview, Auckland City Council had employed Andrew Stevenson for 18 months as its Manager of Research and Consultation. Previously, he worked in market research for over 10 years. Mr Stevenson defined consultation very simply: “Consultation is the two-way communication with interested and affected people before a decision is made.”

Mr Stevenson said many people think public participation and public consultation are the same. However, Mr Stevenson explained that there was a slight difference. He said that communication could be public participation but communication was not the same as consultation. “For example, in the case of re-cycling, the council wants the public to participate by listening to what they have to say and change their behaviour accordingly. This is not consultation (it’s communication) but they do have a part to play. They have something to participate in. That said, it is a fine line.”

6.3.1.1 Perceived council value on public input

Mr Stevenson believed that currently, Auckland Council places a “moderate to high” value on public consultation, but the amount and depth of consultation varies from project to project. This, Mr Stevenson said, depended on the technical nature of the problem and the level of public interest. For example, whether Auckland City Council leases or owns its

rental fleet had big financial implications, but the public had little interest so they probably would not consult very much on this issue. However, when doing some work in a local park the Council would consult “heavily” and pay close attention to what people said.

Personally, Mr Stevenson said he placed the “highest” value on consultation. “It is incredibly important and we have a responsibility to communicate well with people and help them give us their well-informed opinion.” According to Mr Stevenson, the more information people have on an issue, the more they can have informed opinions and the more weight the decision-makers can give their feedback.

Mr Stevenson said that consultation had a “moderate to high” impact on council decisions. “Some projects have been completely turned around by consultation. There have been instances where the planners and the politicians have a certain view of a project and then the results of the consultation comes in and it shows a completely different view – and the decision-makers change the plans and the course of the project.” For Mr Stevenson, consultation can “change everything”, which, he said, is “a great result for democracy.”

6.3.1.2 Communication tools

Regarding communication tools, Mr Stevenson, along with David Forrest (see Chapter Five), identified surveys as a very powerful tool. As a statistician, Mr Stevenson said that the view of the “silent majority” was very important. “In a survey you can ring or mail everyone involved and get his or her opinion. You can give them more information if you need to, or they can ring you or visit the website to answer any question they may have.”

Currently, Auckland City Council does not accept phone submissions. It does, however, accept text messaging but this submission method is still in its infancy and therefore being tested. According to Mr Stevenson, there were drawbacks with any medium and it was a case a balancing them out. For him written and faxed submissions carry equal weight with each other. Mr Stevenson considered pre-printed forms used to elicit mass support for a cause to be biased in some way because they did not give people choices of any kind. However, supporting Cr Rieger and Cr Pope’s opinion, he believed written submissions were the most effective communication tool, suggesting that paper usually carried more weight than verbal or emailed submissions. Mr Stevenson also agreed with Cr

Brown that the least effective communication tool was a public meeting. These, he said, “can degenerate into a chance for people to get up on their soap boxes about their pet issues, whether they were relevant to the topic or not.” Consequently, Mr Stevenson said, it would be hard to have a good debate with people trying to shout each other down.

On the question of introducing new technology to local democracy, Mr Stevenson advocated further exploration of text messaging. This opinion was shared by all of the administrators interviewed, but only one councillor, Cr Tanguay.

Most criticism applied to texting can be given to web-based surveys and paper-based surveys. ‘They can be done from any location’, ‘we do not know who sent it’ and ‘they could be sent multiple times.’ At least with texting you have the phone number it came from, which enables you to weed out the multiple entries as our first test confirmed.

6.3.1.3 Encouraging public participation

To further encourage people to participate in local matters, Mr Stevenson believed that the consultation process itself needed to become more transparent. “People sometimes think they are not listened to and we need to explain why.” In Mr Stevenson’s opinion, decision-makers were often “stuck between a rock and a hard place.” “Lots of people make submissions and they all have a different perspective. If a politician does A, the people who wanted B will complain. If a politician does B, the people who wanted A will complain.”

While the council “could do things better”, Mr Stevenson also thought the community had false expectations about consultation. “Consultation does not mean that we will do it their way. It cannot as there are so many, sometimes mutually exclusive, points of view.”

6.3.2 Charlotte Hume: Wanganui District Council (WDC)

Charlotte Hume is currently the Senior Strategic Policy Analyst and was the coordinator of this year’s LTCCP submission process for the WDC. Ms Hume has nine years experience as a planner and policy analyst for local government and contracted agencies. In her view, the prime purpose of consultation is to enable the effective participation of individuals and communities in the decision-making of their local authorities. She said the consultation continuum ranged from meeting with an individual through to traditional submission processes. Ms Hume summed up the consultation process as involving the statement of a proposal not yet finally decided upon, listening to what others have to say, considering their

responses, and then deciding what will be done.

6.3.2.1 Perceived council value on public input

At the time of this interview the WDC had not adopted a consultation policy, but Ms Hume said it did have recognised procedures and a commitment to consult and encourage meaningful participation in the decision-making process to enable local people and other stakeholders to present their views before decisions were made. Ms Hume believed the WDC placed great value on public consultation. According to her, officers and councillor's constantly referred to the "Community Outcomes" when they discussed issues.

Additionally, she said, the latest round of submissions for the LTCCP was very valuable and would result in new works and policies. Personally, Ms Hume believed public consultation was very important and said she constantly referred back to past consultation in addition to using additional consultations to inform her decision-making and work. "The work I do would be meaningless if it was not informed by community views."

Ms Hume believed the impact consultation had on decisions varied depending on the purpose of the consultation and the stage at which it was conducted. Consultation could occur, she said, at different stages: when defining or identifying the issue or problem; when setting out objectives/goals i.e. what do we want to achieve, when identifying the possible solutions or options; when comparing/assessing different solutions or options; or when the decision is made. Good practice would be to consult as early as possible and to continue throughout the decision making process. According to Ms Hume, the greater the level of participation the greater the level of public impact. The level of participation could range from informing; to asking; to involving; to collaborating; to empowering.

6.3.2.2 Communication tools

Currently, WDC uses the following communication tools for consultation: community surveys, public meetings, meetings with key stakeholders, focus groups, working parties, forums, hui, written submissions, telephone/hotline, fax, Internet/email, oral, and special consultative procedure. When considering which communication tools may be valued over the others, Ms Hume said she did not distinguish between forms of written submissions. Instead, she said the medium in which the written submission was transmitted

did not make a lot of difference to how well it would be received. She considered written submissions valuable as they could be referred to on many occasions. Further, Ms Hume felt that oral submissions, in support of written submissions, often provided greater clarity about the submission.

Supporting Cr Rieger, Cr Pope, and Mr Stevenson's reservations regarding standard 'fill in the blank' type submissions, Ms Hume believed they could be misleading and that it was sometimes difficult to judge how much weight these should be given. However, Ms Hume did not believe that one tool was more "effective" than another saying that consultation needed to be targeted differently to different groups/individuals and to reflect the information councils wanted to obtain. Ms Hume said that using a mix of media enabled a wider cross section of the community to be reached and subsequently to participate.

When considering the possibility of text messaging, Ms Hume thought the WDC needed to be aware of emerging trends and that text messaging was becoming a normal way of communicating for many, especially for young people. "As a Council we should be prepared to adjust our practices to those that best suit those of the community and text messaging may become a good way of communicating, especially if you wanted to target youth on a particular issue." Ms Hume said she was proud of council's communication processes, adding that the WDC also had Memorandums of Understanding with local Iwi and with the Police, and that consultation processes were based on the community relationships established and on the agreements reached with these groups.

6.3.2.3 Encouraging public participation

To encourage more participation in local democracy, Ms Hume suggested that there needed to be issues that the community felt strongly about and a belief that participation will be listened to and acted upon by the council. Further, she suggested that innovation in techniques for consultation was required to enable a wider cross section of the community to participate. Participation needed to be enjoyable and councils needed to be approachable.

6.3.3 Michelle Bisset: Rangitikei District Council (RDC)

Michelle Bisset's experience in participatory democracy, at the time of this interview, included ten months in her current employment with the RDC as a Policy Analyst. Ms

Bisset's position changed after this interview to acting Policy and Democracy Manager. She had also spent several years making submissions on a variety of issues, particularly to central government.

According to Ms Bisset, consultation is one method of engaging the public or eliciting public participation in policy development and planning. Ms Bisset said that consultation in New Zealand had grown to be understood in light of contemporary legislation such as the Resource Management Act 1991 and from engagement with Māori. The special consultative procedure with its emphasis on formal submissions had consolidated this legislative concept of consultation perhaps at the expense of a full spectrum of methods of public participation.

The RDC had adopted a comprehensive Public Participation Policy in January 2004. This policy expanded on previous council policy, which, according to Ms Bisset, sought a "best practice" approach by detailing a variety of approaches based on IAP2 (see abbreviations list) literature with an aim to facilitating different ways of eliciting public involvement.

6.3.3.1 Perceived council value on public input

When asked what value the RDC placed on consultation, Ms Bisset said that there continued to be a tension between the notion of representative democracy (elected members making decisions because that was what they were elected to do) and the more participatory direction signaled in the Local Government Act 2002. When asked what value she personally placed on consultation, she said,

I believe that there is often an over-zealous approach to consultation that is not entirely cognizant of the costs and benefits of the exercise. Although local authorities have discretion in the nature and extent of any consultation, the reality is (from experience in the Rangitikei at least) that public participation remains relatively low.

Ms Bisset said that although the individuals often perceived their contributions achieved little, for the RDC the value of differing perspectives on an issue could not be overlooked. More specifically, Ms Bisset believed the council appreciated the variety of perspectives from the community even though not everyone could have what they wanted as an outcome. In her view, it is the variety of opinions that added value to the process as a

whole.

6.3.3.2 Communication tools

Currently, the RDC accepts written submissions (usually on a set form, although anything is accepted), e-mail, fax, phone, RDC website submissions, and oral submissions. Ms Bisset believed that no one type of submission was given any more weight by council than another, although the physical management of some forms of communication could be more burdensome than others for staff to handle.

At present the most frequently used type of submission in the Rangitikei region is written submissions, either on the provided submission form or expanded from the form. Ms Bisset believed this is because it is the tool most familiar to people. Further, Ms Bisset believed that Internet usage was relatively low in the District at present although more people were viewing policies as they were put up on RDC's website, particularly those outside the District who have an interest in specific policy direction. She gave Transit and Federated Farmers as examples of this. Public meetings were generally not well attended in the Rangitikei district. Ms Bisset felt it would be difficult to say if meetings were effective as it was not easy to gauge how much information was taken away by attendees and subsequently disseminated and submitted on.

The least utilised communication tool in the submission process at RDC was the telephone, followed by fax. However, Ms Bisset said, there were more faxed submissions received at the end of a submission period as people realised that the closing date was looming and they had not put their submission in the post.

Regarding the possible introduction of texting to the Rangitikei submission process, Ms Bisset said that with the reliability of technologies, specifically telecommunication coverage in rural areas, she was unsure about the number of people who would take advantage of this opportunity. However, the RDC received very few submissions from younger members of their community, whom Ms Bisset believed are the group that are most likely to use text technology, so she did view the possibility of texting as positive. She also warned that the potential for bulk submissions from potentially unidentifiable sources might also be a problem with this option.

6.3.3.3 Encouraging public participation

In Ms Bisset's experience, a major barrier to greater public participation in any political arena is a lack of understanding in the general population about political processes in this country and how people can take part. Civics is not a part of the school curriculum and it was her observation that young people were largely unaware of their opportunities to participate in any political process from voting in elections to more direct methods of participation. Ms Bisset thought that people tended to become involved in issues that affected them directly in their lives (for instance when they buy a property and pay rates or utilise other Council provided services as independent adults).

Education, in her opinion, was one of the keys to greater public participation. Ms Bisset believed that there needed to be a breaking down of the 'mystery' of local government processes and making them more accessible to the public. In support of Cr Brown's opinion, Ms Bisset said that meetings, for both councillors and hearings, were usually held during the working week, denying access to those members of the community that were not free to attend at this time.

6.3.4 Mr John Walker: Tararua District Council (TDC)

John Walker came to this research with five years experience working for the TDC as its Business Manager. He was also the co-ordinator for the LTCCP. Mr Walker described consultation as something that happened when members of the public, either as individuals or groups were encouraged to discuss an issue or series of issues that may affect them. Although the TDC does not use all communication tools available, Mr Walker was aware of several methods of consultation, the more frequent being written submissions, public meetings, focus groups, forums, panels, surveys, and citizen juries.

6.3.4.1 Perceived council value on public input

Referring to TDC's Policy of Significance, Mr Walker stated the TDC consulted on all matters that were deemed by Council to be significant. He also believed that the council placed a high value on consultation because there had been some useful outcomes from the process. However, Mr Walker considered the council to be in what he called a "honeymoon" period for consultation, because it had not yet been in a position where it had consulted on

an issue and then decided against the wishes of the majority. Mr Walker believed consultation could affect end results citing the consultation on “toilet tax”¹¹ as an example.

6.3.4.2 Communication tools

As a personal preference, Mr Walker said he “almost insists on written submissions”. Written submissions, he said, ensured that the submitter thought about what had to be stated, would put it in a logical sequence, and would also realise the impact of the choice of words. Other forms of submissions were not as good. Pre-printed submission forms were akin to “Leading Questions” in a court case said Mr Walker. “They are easy to handle, easy to complete, easy to tabulate, but they do not force the submitter to think for him/herself. They do not allow for additional items.”

When asked about the most effective communication tool available to the TDC public, Mr Walker said that the newspaper and public meetings could open up an issue and present facts to the public for consideration. However, it was the written submission that bore the most effective weight. He also said that if he were a submitter he would insist on speaking to his submission. For him, an oral submission “really glues it all together and provides an opportunity to add the personal touch to the written words.” He believed, Councillors were moved by personal presentations, and regrettably were sometimes unmoved by genuine written submissions, despite the fact that they were from honest and well-meaning people. The least effective communication tool, Mr Walker said, were letters to the editor. They were easily ignored.

In contrast, Mr Walker viewed text messaging positively. “I am not a competent text message person myself, but it must be effective. It is quick, to the point, and it still complies with my criteria of making people think before they say something.”

6.3.4.3 Encouraging public participation

On the question of encouraging more people to participate in local matters Mr

¹¹ The toilet tax consultation, also known as pan tax, refers to the TDC proposal that would have seen commercial establishments such as businesses, blocks of flats, and schools charged a tax calculated on how many toilets were onsite. On consultation with the community, TDC decided on a scaling system that was quite different to the original approach of one full charge for each pan. Schools are exempt from this fee (P. Wimsett, personal communication, 29 November, 2004).

Walker said:

People are busy, and are basically not interested in anything unless it directly affects *THEM!* If Iraq was planning to invade NZ, we would not be interested unless and until we found out that they intended to come up the Manawatu river and land at Palmerston North. But the only people interested would be Palmerston North people - Aucklanders would carry on as before.

Mr Walker considered two main instances as motivating factors for participation: 1) items or services constituents have to pay extra for, and 2) situations that affected constituents at home (noise, pollution, wrong neighbours, barking dogs, rubbish). Alternatively, Mr Walker said there was the other extreme where some people thought they should be involved all of the time. "I saw a Council bulldozer damaged but have not read anything in the paper - What happened?" "There had been a broken beer bottle outside my house for 3 weeks - what are YOU going to do about it?" Mr Walker received a submission this year saying, "Why do not you read our submissions?" His answer to this was, "We do read them and consider them but others often express a contrary view."

In Mr Walker's opinion, "Local Government is seen as boring, dull, nothing changes, only 43% vote at elections, I can not make a difference so why try, the bureaucrats run everything, who cares. Besides I'm too busy." He said this attitude runs the risk of minorities dominating the process and exploiting the system for their own gains.

6.4 Conclusion

Eight of the eleven interviews undertaken for this research have been written and presented in this chapter. As a diverse group of people, some differences were inevitable but common themes also emerged.

Consultation was defined in each participant's own words. However, they all translated into a similar theme, a process of communication that is conducted between Councils and their stakeholders on matters that have not yet been decided. Although, varying degrees of value were placed on public participation in local matters by Councillors and administrators.

While some councillors said they did not value one communication tool over another, it was clear from the interviews that written submissions carried more weight than other forms of submissions. With the exception of Cr Tanguay, the councillors were less

open in the possible use of text messaging in the submission process with two being fully opposed. However, the administrators showed an interest in further exploring text messaging for possible use in the future; Mr Stevenson in Auckland had already begun this exploration.

Previously, Chapters Five presented the results and views of various stakeholders collected through their respective questionnaires and interviews. This chapter provides the views from the local government side of the submission process. The following chapter, Chapter Seven, now brings both sides of the submission process together and discusses the outcomes produced from both the surveys and interviews in context with the appropriate literature.

CHAPTER SEVEN DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

A case study of texting in a local body submission process, a questionnaire regarding the submission process for individual LTCCPs, and qualitative interviews addressing professional opinions toward communication tools and public participation were undertaken in this research to generate a cross-section of participants, from both a submitter and receiver position. The purpose of including such a wide range of participants was to answer the five research questions previously referred to in Chapters One and Three:

1. What is the most used communication tool in the local body submission process?
2. Which communication tools do submitters regard as a. the most convenient, and b. the most effective to use when communicating with their local council?
3. What do councillors and council staff regard as the most effective communication tool for those making submissions?
4. Is there a place for text messaging as a communication tool in the submission process in the opinion of submitters and those receiving submissions?
5. Does a link exist between specific demographics, such as age or gender, and the communication tool used to make submissions?

The case study, originally a pilot study using text messaging to make submissions until public outcry led to its abandonment, highlights the difficulty faced by council administrators when trying to introduce changes, even as subtle as an additional communication tool, to the submission process. The surveys were used as a means to understand more regarding communication tools themselves and interviews allowed for in-depth information to be gathered from a small selection of those who send and receive submissions. All of this information allows greater understanding of a relatively unexplored area in local democratic research.

Communication between councils and their constituents is often plagued by public misinformation (Matthews, 2004). While some citizens may have a legitimate complaint regarding their council, others succumb to ill feeling fuelled by information that simply is

not true (Cook, 2004). For example, during the 2004 LTCCP process, individual members of the public claimed the Palmerston North City Council did not act in a consultative manner. Instead, PNCC was accused of putting its draft LTCCP together “behind closed doors”, conducting secret meetings designed to keep the public out of the decision-making process. Further, angry members of the public raised questions over whether councillors actually read individual submissions (Wheeler, 2004). In response, contradictory claims also appeared refuting the suggestion that the public was left out of consultations. These stated that, “City residents were exhorted by councillors and council staff to take an interest in the council’s proposed plans and programmes for the next decade” (Cheyne, 2004). The contention surrounding PNCC’s LTCCP was briefly addressed through the qualitative interviews with the councillors from the Palmerston North City and Horizons Regional Councils, and is referred to later in this chapter.

In addition to dissent regarding communication in local democracy, the issue of teledemocracy, more specifically the tools used to engage in teledemocracy, and its use in modern society also produced varied responses from both sides of the political divide. The meaning of teledemocracy and what it is intended to do is often interpreted differently. According to Toregas (2001), “There does not seem to be a good, widely shared definition of what e-government (teledemocracy) is, or more important, what it can be” (p.235). Fear of the tools that lead to the implementation of teledemocracy is also a factor that affects whether it is accepted or rejected (Watson, Akselsen, Evjemo, & Aarsaether, 1999).

There appears to be wide discussion among scholars on what Toregas (2001) describes as “the service of delivery of e-government”. This includes the ability to vote electronically, gather information from individual government departments, and make payments online. However, there is little discussion surrounding the individual communication technologies used by constituents when participating in local democracy. More specifically, no one has asked New Zealand citizens if they like the communication tools, which are currently made available to them, that allow them to participate in the consultation process. That is what this research seeks to address.

It may never be known exactly how much consultation a council needs to do before the public is satisfied they have been consulted, or at least given the opportunity to participate. It also may never be agreed on exactly how much teledemocracy is necessary

and acceptable in local democracy. However, there are some questions that can be answered that may help to discover and eliminate various elements of the democratic process as being the source of non-participation from stakeholders in local affairs. To begin this process, the Auckland City Council made one consultation project available as a means of generating public participation from a relatively under-represented group in society. This process introduced text messaging as a new communication tool to send and receive submissions for a proposed skate park. The outcome of this project is discussed in the following section.

7.2 Case study

The perspective that teledemocracy is a potential danger to key players who know how to 'play the democratic game' and see it as a threat to their current position and perceived power has been suggested as one reason for resistance to its introduction in democratic processes (Larsen, 1999; Watson et al., 1999). This perceived threat was evident in the recent effort by the Auckland City Council to invite participation from younger residents through the use of text messaging for the first time.

It is clear that younger members of society do not participate in local government matters in great numbers (Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002). To combat this, Dr Christine Cheyne, local government expert and Massey University lecturer, suggests that campaigns need to be designed and targeted directly towards them and other minority groups in society (Matthews, 2004). The attempt by the Auckland City Council to target youth and encourage them to participate in a proposed project that would affect them directly saw the introduction of text messaging as a means to submit their opinions on the Windmill Skate Park (No Doubt Research, 2004).

However, while experts such as Dr Cheyne may welcome the encouragement of youth input in community matters, their inclusion is not as welcome among current democratic participants. Comrie (1999) writes,

A major challenge is using appropriate and creative communication channels. A tight money supply ensures most councils are unlikely to go overboard with expensive brochures or television advertising, but often attempts to upgrade communication result in censure by opponents who claim the council is using ratepayer's money to persuade people, possibly against their own best interest (p.11).

The censorship of communication channels was evident in the backlash that occurred

when the adult population became aware youth were being invited to participate using what is considered to be a 'youth tool' (Vodafone New Zealand, 2003). Hobson Community Board member and Epsom resident, Julie Chambers, strongly opposed the use of texting saying, "In reality this is not consultation — it's a council text message petition to support a new skate facility into Windmill Park. Concerned residents who do not usually use text messaging are at risk of being steamrolled" (Council invites txt consultations, 2004, <http://times.co.nz/>). Mrs Chambers believed that the council was attempting to generate support for the skate park and use it in an effort to persuade the local community that the facility was both desired and required. To support her position that the proposed skate park was an unnecessary project, Mrs Chambers claimed that young people were saying that they did not use some of the existing skate facilities because council had a poor track record of maintaining them. Further, afraid that youth would take the opportunity to participate and outnumber older community members, Mrs Chambers called for "the consultation to be abandoned" (ibid).

One barrier to youth participation is that many young people believe councils have very little power and that local democracy has no impact on them directly (LDW, 2004). However, a further barrier to youth participation is the exaggerated portrayal of youth attitudes and behaviour in the media, and the resulting perception by the public, that they are dangerous and irresponsible (Scottish Parliament, 2002). As a result, youth are repeatedly left out of the democratic process because of traditional attitudes toward the value of their input (McHarry, 2001). However, respect for individuals and their opinions, regardless of factors such as age and ethnicity, has been identified as fundamental to local democracy and participation and until that respect is realised, youth will continue to be under-represented in democratic matters (ibid).

The fear from Epsom/Eden residents that youth would participate in great numbers was unfounded and therefore not supported in the results. Instead, the small number of submissions¹² that were received through texting supports the findings of Robertson and Ofoske (2002) who, in their report on electronic and other voting initiatives trialled at the 2002 English local government elections¹³, found that there was little to sustain the

¹² 98 submissions were received through texting. An estimated 45,206 young people live in the Auckland region (Miller, 2005). This figure does not include youth from the wider districts often attributed to Auckland.

assumption that more modern forms of media would increase the numbers of youth participation in local democracy. Specifically, they concluded, this was because youth have less civic pride than older members of society. Additionally, they found that having knowledge of, and access to, communication media, did not equate to higher participation rates amongst this demographic.

Text messaging was introduced in the Auckland City Council submission process as an additional tool not a replacement one. Despite the traditional communication media still being available to the public for use, fear and misinformation regarding the use of the tool itself led to a political and public backlash, which ultimately resulted in the abandonment of the pilot study. Further study into who used the texting communication tool, and any questions surrounding participation in this particular submission process, could not be undertaken. This means that although 98 text submissions were received and intuitively assumptions can be made about the age demographic of the submitters, these could not be confirmed and therefore cannot be commented on with any certainty.

Comrie (1999) writes, “Successful communication is predicated on a respect for those you communicate with” (p.12). This can be scuttled at many levels – politicians, council officers, and even the public. Comrie’s assertion holds true in this project.

7.3 Attitudes toward communication tools

The purpose of using surveys was to directly ask submitters what they thought of the communication tools currently available to them when communicating with their local councils. The purpose of conducting qualitative interviews was to bring balance to this research from people who both send and receive submissions professionally.

Consistent with the findings of a previous submission participant study (Forgie, 2002), the majority of participants in this survey had made submissions previous to the process used in this study thereby suggesting a familiarity with the communication tools currently available. However, there were also significant numbers of first time participants in local democracy ranging between 26% and 36% in all four geographical areas (Palmerston North, Tararua, Rangitikei, and Wanganui).

The majority of participants listed paper and post as the most used communication

¹³ These trials included text messaging.

tool in the submission process with oral submissions being listed as the second most used tool. Interestingly, three out of four councillors interviewed (Lynne Pope, Paul Rieger, and Marilyn Brown) and Papaioea Ward Committee Chair, Evan Natrass, listed written submissions as their preferred form of communication in the democratic process. However, both Cr Rieger and Cr Pope, along with Andrew Stevenson (Auckland City Council), Charlotte Hume (Wanganui District Council), and John Walker (Tararua District Council), held reservations regarding pre-printed forms (one of several methods of written submissions) on the grounds that some forms may not explain the magnitude of the issue being consulted on.

Taking into account interviewees' comments that individual points made within a submission holds the most value for their decision-making, the submission receivers show a distinct preference for complex written submissions supported by oral submissions. These two communication tools, as part of the techniques used in public participation, act as a barrier to participation for those who are not as competent communicating their position with the written word, and those who are not confident with public speaking (King et al., 1998; Karlberg, 1996).

Survey participants from three areas¹⁴ were asked if they had used the same tool in this submission process as they had in previous submissions. The majority of submitters in the three districts answered 'yes' to this question (87%-93%). Participants were then asked what their second choice of tool would be if their first choice had not been available to them for any reason. This question was designed to highlight any unidentified communication tools that were also viewed positively by respondents. Interestingly, email, a tool of teledemocracy (Grönlund, 2001; Becker, 1993), was considered by the majority to be their next best communication tool option. Further, in the opinion of Cr Rieger, Charlotte Hume, and environmental consultant David Forrest, email was also considered to be a written submission as it could be printed out and read at a later date. The results from survey participants and the perception of email by the three interviewees is significant, as the arguments often made against the use of text messaging, regarding security and inability to assess or 'track' who is sending the submission, have been raised but not fully resolved for the use of online resources, including email (Elgin, 1993; Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002;

¹⁴ Tararua, Rangitikei, and Wanganui

Kakabadse et al., 2003; Kearns, 2001).

When asked about the convenience of each communication tool, participants gave positive ratings to most of them with the exception of oral submissions and public meetings. This is consistent with the writings of authors such as King et al. (1998), who suggest that issues such as lack of transport, work commitments, and family commitments act as a barrier to fuller participation. As a result, the capacity to attend council meetings, oral submissions, and public meetings is not always available to many people. Michelle Bisset (Rangitikei District Council) and Cr Brown, who identified work commitments as a barrier to political participation, supported this finding.

As with the convenience ratings, the majority of survey respondents believed most communication tools were effective. However, a slight variation occurred. While telephones were rated as convenient to use and oral submissions were rated as inconvenient, when participants were asked how effective they thought each tool was, telephones were considered ineffective and oral submissions were thought effective, particularly when they were combined with written submissions. Cockburn (2001) reinforces this position, suggesting that the most effective communication occurs in a face-to-face situation, particularly when it is supported by a tangible communication method such as written material. In addition, although the majority of survey participants considered telephones to be ineffective, Cr Brown disagreed with this belief saying that submissions made over the telephone were transcribed properly and passed on to councillors, effectively making it (the phoned submission) a written submission.

Among the interviewees, attitudes toward communication tools varied. Cr Brown, David Forrest, and public relations consultant Paula Allen agreed with the majority of survey participants that public meetings were not effective. These results are supported by researchers such as Burby (2003), Weeks (2000), McComas, (2001), and Moote et al. (1997) who suggest that public meetings are generally dominated by specific interest groups who do not represent public opinion. However, Cr Pope disagreed with these findings, saying she believed that public meetings were the most effective communication tool available. Interestingly, two interviewees, Mr Forrest and Mr Stevenson, identified surveys as an effective way to gather opinions from the wider community.

“The number of people who cling to the old ways vastly outnumbers those who want

to bring about change” (Toregas, 2001, p.238). This was true of the majority of survey participants, Cr Rieger, and Cr Pope, who were asked for their opinion on the possible introduction of text messaging as a new communication tool in the submission process. Results from the survey ranged between 52% and 75% majority rejection of the use of the new technology. Rural districts were more strongly opposed to texting than urban districts. Cr Rieger suggested texting was “a waste of space” while Cr Pope said it was “intrusive” and “ultimately annoying.” Interestingly, Cr Brown, Cr Heather Tanguay, John Walker (TDC), Charlotte Hume (WDC), Michelle Bisset (RDC), Andrew Stevenson (Auckland City Council), Paula Allen, David Forrest, and Evan Natrass were open to the further investigation and possible use of text messaging in the democratic process.

7.4 Participation, communication, and teledemocracy

The research survey included an ‘anything else’ question that invited participants in Palmerston North to make further comments on the issue of text messaging being used in submissions. As discussed in Chapter Three, Wanganui, Rangitikei, and Tararua participants were invited to submit comments on any of the question topics in the survey.

Palmerston North respondents’ concerns involving the use of text messaging were typical of the concerns surrounding teledemocracy and participation in the democratic process found in Chapter Two (for example Larsen, 1999). Further, the comments from the Wanganui, Rangitikei, and Tararua surveys also reflected common attitudes and concerns regarding consultation and teledemocracy found in Chapter Two (for example Varn, 1993). Not all respondents’ responses could be presented and addressed. However, there were many similarities that enabled the grouping of participants’ comments together:

- The potential for youth involvement in local democracy through using text.
- Restrictions on how much information can be sent via text at any one time.
- The informality of texting in such a formal process like submissions.
- Possible misinterpretation of text language (abbreviations).
- Personal dislike of texting and text spelling.
- Security issues such as anonymity and the ability to send one message many times from a single mobile.
- Suspicion of submission not being recorded properly if it was to be given over the phone.
- Issues with telecommunications coverage in rural areas.
- Many submitters like to have a ‘hard copy’ of their submission.

- The perception that councils do not listen to the public.
- The times of meetings (regarding oral presentations and public meetings) are not convenient for those who are employed and those who live out of town.
- Written submissions followed by oral presentations are the most appropriate and effective forms of communication with the council.
- Lack of knowledge surrounding communication options for making a submission.

As discussed earlier, while democratic experts and local councils try to encourage participation from under-represented stakeholders in local democracy, specific groups are still relatively unwelcome in the democratic process (Matthews, 2004; McHarry, 2001).

Fear of the introduction of ‘young technology’, coupled with fear that youth would use it to participate in a consultation process, underlay the resistance to the implementation of a new teledemocratic tool (texting) in Auckland. Arguably, it was this fear that prompted comments from survey participants such as, “There are enough other avenues for making submissions. Texting is a bit instant gratification. Submissions should take more time and thought.” This statement, and others like it, assumes that whoever participates using text messaging is impulsive, thoughtless, does not take community matters seriously, and has a short attention span. These attributes are often associated with youth and support a distorted public view that youth do not care about the well being of society and are not mature or intelligent enough to participate constructively in local democracy (Scottish Parliament, 2002).

According to Watson et al. (1999), teledemocracy, and the introduction of the communication technologies that enable it, can upset the existing power balance, particularly in situations where small groups or individuals hold all of the information. Therefore, communication barriers are more a construct of social and political environments rather than technologically induced. Further, the acceptability of communication media can be attributed to social status directly reflecting the values of those in power (ibid). Put more simply, councillors and community members accept or oppose communication technology as a means of controlling the political environment, participation, and community outcomes. The results of the Auckland case study and the survey responses highlighting fears that youth would influence community outcomes against the wishes of older community members supported this statement.

A major tenet of the LGA 2002 is that councils must engage their publics in

dialogue in an effort to achieve mutual understanding and change. This is two-way symmetrical communication (Karlberg, 1996). However, according to Grunig and Grunig (1992), many organisations do not employ two-way symmetrical communication because this can also threaten existing power structures. Additionally, Karlberg (1996) suggests that symmetrical communication assumes that everyone has the skills and resources to communicate their position clearly through the tools dictated for use. Naturally, this assumption produces limitations. In the same way that telephone communications are limited to those who have access to a phone (Bourque & Fielder, 2003), oral submissions limit those who cannot attend in the times given, or are not comfortable with public speaking (King et al., 1998).

Barriers to oral submissions and public meetings were identified by survey participants who noted they did not have access to these tools, two survey respondents who noted they live in another part of New Zealand, Cr Brown who works full-time in other employment, and Michelle Bisset (RDC) an employee of a rural district council. To address these issues, Karlberg (1996) suggests that the appropriate skills and resources must be made available to the whole community to ensure effective two-way communication. Both Cr Brown and Ms Bisset suggested scheduling meetings and hearings outside of work hours. The two survey participants also suggested holding hearings on weekends overcoming time as a barrier to participation (King et al., 1998).

Although, many councils make a variety of communication tools available to their stakeholders to participate in consultations, as the results show, individual councillors still have their preferences about how they like to receive submissions. As found in the course of this research, in the current political environment, written submissions supported by oral submissions, were considered the most effective, and most desirable, means of communicating with local councils. However, as stated earlier, written and oral submissions prejudice participation from community members who do not possess the skills to effectively use these tools.

Some support was identified from participants who believed that introducing text messaging would encourage youth participation. However, as was seen in the Auckland texting case study, the use of text messaging did not result in a large number of participating youths (in proportion to the number of youth in Auckland). Evidence from Robertson and

Ofsoske (2002) supports this finding. Further, the majority of current submission makers did not accept the idea of text messaging as an appropriate communication tool as it was seen by many to trivialise a very 'formal process'. This finding confirmed an earlier finding by Robertson and Ofsoske (2002) concerning adult attitudes towards texting in democracy.

Many participants, unable to understand that modern communication technologies were only being contemplated as additional tools to pre-existing ones used by their councils, expressed concern that the use of these technologies, specifically email and text messaging, would become a barrier to their participation. The fear of access and ability to use individual communication tools is consistent with concerns raised by Karlberg (1996).

According to Toregas (2001), even without the issue of a 'digital divide', the lack of appropriate infrastructure in rural areas, in particular, provides further barriers even to those who are educated and able to participate in e-democracy. Survey participants who identified a lack of reliable telecommunications infrastructures in their areas¹⁵ reflected Toregas's concern.

One of the most prominent themes gathered from all four geographical areas surveyed was that stakeholders did not feel their respective councils were listening to them. Instead, councils were accused of monologic communication (Botan, 1997), seeking only to be seen as 'going through the motions' without intending to allow public influence over LTCCP outcomes. The following remarks highlighted their frustrations: "Submission is one thing. Having the council actually listen is another"; "The requirement to draft a 10-year LTCCP in a restricted time frame led to the TDC faking its consultation. Few changes were made to the plan after consultation and major issues were ignored altogether"; and "Email, fax and phone responses encourage bureaucratic deceit and expedience."

Contrary to participants' belief, three of the four council staff interviewed, Charlotte Hume (WDC), Andrew Stevenson (Auckland City Council), and John Walker (TDC), said their respective councils placed moderate to high value on consultation. However, Michelle Bisset (RDC) also suggested there was possibly an over-zealous approach to consultation without thought to the costs versus the benefits. Interestingly, Cr Tanguay, Cr Brown, Paula Allen, and David Forrest supported the perception that PNCC did not value their stakeholders' input, particularly for the LTCCP. It would appear that the time allotted to the

¹⁵ Tararua and Rangitikei

PNCC's LTCCP consultation did not follow McGechan's (1992) definition of genuine consultation as discussed in Chapter Two. Additionally, Cr Brown and Cr Tanguay believed that public participation had little effect on (at that time) PNCC's decision-making processes in general, which, according to Forgie et al. (1999), acts as a barrier to people participating in local democracy. Conversely, Charlotte Hume, Andrew Stevenson, Cr Pope, and Cr Rieger said the value of public input varied depending on the consultation being undertaken.

Despite stakeholders' generally negative view about how councils undertake consultation, Ms Allen and Mr Forrest agreed that consultation could still have a significant impact on the end decision-making. This finding is reflected by Catt and Murphy (2003) who say:

The perceived value of consultative practices in a well-ordered democracy lies not in the fact that the public has any direct involvement in, or control over, decision making, for this is clearly not the case. Their potential lies instead in features such as the information they provide to decision makers, the legitimacy they add to policy outcomes, and the positive effect they have on civil society and the development of a more informed and civil democratic culture (p.420).

Only two respondents recorded being happy with the way their councils had responded to their communications and one respondent who expressed support for the RDC also expressed concern about the Council's ongoing ability to champion the district's position in regional matters.

7.5 Participants' demographic characteristics

Demographic information was collected from survey participants in an effort to investigate and possibly establish a link between submitters' personal traits and the communication tools being used. Gender, age, educational achievement, and employment status data was gathered and the answers regarding communication tools was compared accordingly. Previously, the survey results were separated only by district. In this form there were very definite patterns. For instance, the majority of participants noted paper and post as their most used tool, email as their next best alternative. All tools were judged as convenient with the exception of oral submissions and public meetings, all tools effective with the exception of telephones and public meetings. Further, the majority of participants did not want text

messaging to be introduced to the submission process as an additional communication tool. There were, however underlying differences between the demographic groups. To clarify, unless otherwise stated, it can be assumed that the general findings mentioned above hold true. For instance, the majority of participants noted email as their next best alternative tool. However, if there is a difference in how the rest of the participants rated their next best alternative tools (for example, the next highest rated tool was fax for males and phone for females), this is discussed below.

In regards to gender, the findings of this study were only partially consistent with Forgie's (2002) and Carr and Halvorsen's (2001) findings that submission participants were more likely to be men. Tararua and Wanganui recorded higher proportions of male participants (58.6% and 54.7% respectively). Palmerston North participants recorded their gender as being predominantly female (57.4%), while Rangitikei recorded an equal number of male and female participants (48.5%). Overall, when the four districts were combined, a higher number of females than males were recorded (193 and 185 respectively).

The claim that males are more detached in their communication styles and females are more interpersonal (Tannen, 1990) did not find a lot of support in this research. A small number of females were more likely to use the telephone to make their submission and a small number of males were more likely to use a fax machine to make their submission. Males identified fax and paper and post as their next best alternative communication tools, while females identified oral submissions and telephones as suitable substitute tools. More females than males said they would not have submitted their opinion to council if their communication tools of choice were not available. Females also rated public meeting effectiveness higher than males. However, the general findings, as mentioned above, still held true and these differences were among the remaining survey participants who did not give the same rating to the tools as the majority of respondents.

Disproportionate barriers to access of telecommunication technology, fax and email, were identified for females, supporting the belief that males have better access to technology (Information Policy Research Program, 2004). Females were slightly more open to the possible use of text message submissions than males. However, overall, variations in communication preferences were minimal at best, supporting the assertion by researchers Oxley et al. (2002) that there is very little difference between males and

females regarding communication styles.

The most significant finding in the age demographic, and consistent with the findings of previous research into demographic make-up of contributors in public participation (Carr & Halvorsen, 2001), was that the majority of research participants recorded their ages as being 55 and older. As a result, all outcomes from this research are skewed to the older members of the community and are clearly not representative of society at large. This is also consistent with other researchers' findings, such as Weeks (2000).

Nonetheless, participants in the 44 and under group were more likely to use a variety of communication tools to make their submission, but, it was the 55-64 group that was more likely to change submission tools. Although older community members are reported to be increasingly using new technology (Vodafone New Zealand, 2003; ACNielsen, 2002a), survey respondents in the 65+ group clearly did not have the same access to telecommunication technologies as younger respondents. Notably, this group was more likely to use the telephone as an alternative communication tool than the three younger age groups (44 and under, 45-54, and 55-64). This is of interest because 65+ participants rated the telephone very slightly over email (email was rated the best communication tool alternative in the general findings). Additionally, the telephone is not regarded positively by those making or receiving submissions. There were no clear patterns related to age regarding the possible use of text messaging in the submission process.

In all four regions, those surveyed were inclined to have higher levels of education than the population as a whole. This finding is supported in demographic research conducted by Carr and Halvorsen (2001). Survey respondents with no formal qualifications were more likely to use the telephone as their next best alternative communication tool. Again, like the age demographic, this is interesting because it did not follow the overall trend of identifying email as the next best alternative tool. Further, respondents with no formal qualifications had less access to technology than the higher educated respondents. This finding is consistent with the belief that lower educated members of society are slower adopters of technology (Frank et al., 2001) and have greater barriers to participation than other members in society (King et al., 1998).

Respondents, who recorded their employment status as retired, noted the telephone as their next best alternative submission communication tool. Retired respondents also noted

having less access to oral submissions and public meetings because of mobility. This is consistent with King et al's. (1998) 'nature of life in contemporary society' barrier. Contrary to the findings of researchers such as Burby (2003) and Weeks (2000), 'part-time employed' and 'not in paid employment' participants recorded public meetings as effective.

Overall, the differences between the individual demographic groups were very low. This lack of diversity showed a clear bias towards certain groups in society, for example participants were predominately 55 years and over (54.3 % of participants. The 45-54 age group represented a further 24.4% of participants), tertiary educated (62.9% of participants), and full-time employed (48% of participants) or retired (27.3% of participants). These findings are consistent with the findings of Carr and Halvorsen (2001).

7.6 Encouraging participation

Interviewees were asked what they thought needed to be done to encourage greater participation in local democracy. Although various ideas were put forward, each interviewee said there was no one answer that would increase community contribution to the political process.

In an attempt to explain non-participation, John Walker suggested that politics was seen as boring. Further, Charlotte Hume considered a lack of belief that people could influence decisions led to a shortage of interest in community matters. Researchers such as Gwin (1984) and Morgan (2002), support these explanations.

Consistent with the writings of Morgan (2002), Cr Pope suggested that more research needed to be undertaken to understand what makes people participate in an effort to encourage greater participation. Cr Pope also suggested that a better understanding of the way councils function, and the roles of a councillor, might help to encourage people to participate. This opinion is further supported by Catt and Murphy (2003). Cr Rieger agreed research should be undertaken. However, he questioned how much participation is really necessary. This position was partially supported by Michelle Bisset, who suggested there was possibly an over-zealous approach to consultation without thought to the costs versus the benefits. Moote et al. (1997) also questioned the value of participation suggesting that some consultations continued for too long without resolution due to the amount of participation taking place.

Both Cr Tanguay and Cr Brown agreed that it was not prudent to ignore public opinion, a position partially supported by Cr Rieger. Cr Tanguay went further to say, "When people don't feel they're being paid attention, they let you know at the next elections." Lack of respect for stakeholder input was also identified as one reason individuals choose not to participate (Forgie et al., 1999).

However, Paula Allen, Cr Brown, and Michelle Bisset said that consultation came with a price that needed to be considered when engaging it. This position is consistent with public consultation literature, for example Comrie (2000). Nonetheless, concentrated efforts by Cr Pope to engage the Palmerston North public in sharing their opinions have been largely ignored leaving her frustrated by criticisms that councillors are unavailable and uninterested in the public they serve. According to Hyde (2004), Cr Pope's experience is common among councillors looking to reach constituents on an issue.

Andrew Stevenson, David Forrest, and Michelle Bisset agreed that for more participation to occur, there existed a need for people to be told what processes were undertaken that led to a decision being made. By doing this, stakeholders may understand the outcomes even if they did not get the one they wanted. Ms Bisset further suggested that by giving stakeholders this information, it would help to side-step issues of "there's no point, they don't listen anyway." At present, it seems that few individuals understand the limitations and boundaries councils must work within (Matthews, 2004).

Michelle Bisset and David Forrest felt that there is a lack of civic education in schools. This, they said, may be at least partially the underlying cause as to why people, particularly youth, do not contribute. Mr Reid from Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) supported Ms Bisset and Mr Forrest's opinion, by saying:

Getting more people to vote will require a change in society's attitude. People need to understand that local government directly influences people's living spaces and quality of life in a way central government does not. Attitudes could only change through education – teaching the importance of local government at school and through realising people need the best councillors to control their patch (Matthews, 2004, p.1).

Finally, Evan Nattrass and David Forrest said that many people do not understand how the council affects them directly. Instead, Mr Nattrass and Mr Forrest felt that people thought the council existed 'out there' and that they could not see that everyday things such

as rates and rubbish collection impacted on their cost of living and level of services. Support for this view can be found in the writings of Gwin (1984).

It also appears that Cr Rieger, Cr Pope, John Walker and Michelle Bisset's opinion that people only get involved in matters that 'affect' or 'outrage' them may be true. This notion finds support from researchers into the participatory process such as McComas (2001).

7.7 Conclusion

The results from this research highlight current attitudes towards telecommunication technologies, which are tools of teledemocracy, and local democracy from both submitters and submission receiver perspectives. These have been presented and discussed in this chapter in relation to the literature that surrounds them.

As can be witnessed from both the case study and the comments from the surveys, there is a negative perception of what is perceived to be 'younger' telecommunication technology and a fear of younger people participating and influencing local democracy. As a result, moves by community members, groups, and politicians to hamper the introduction of text messaging sought to keep young people from being represented in the political process.

Research participants in the surveys demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards the current communication tools being made available to them for use in local matters. The majority of people interviewed and surveyed show a preference for written communication followed by an oral presentation of that submission showing a bias in the forms of communication that are considered 'acceptable' to a formal process. Further, three interviewees (Ms Allen, Mr Forrest, and Ms Hume) agreed with survey participants that a combination of communication tools were important to making effective submissions.

While there is an element of openness to introducing text messaging as an additional communication tool from the council administrators, there is a negative element to receiving them from the councillors themselves. Additionally, survey participants were not in favour of the use of text messaging to make submissions. Many of their comments echoed fear of new technology and the possibility that they may not be able to participate in community matters as a result. Further, demographic information gathered from this study showed that the community at large is not being represented in the submission process due to lack of

participation from all age, employment, and educational achievement groups in society. This chapter has attempted to present and discuss the implications of this research's findings on democracy and teledemocracy in New Zealand society. Chapter eight contains an overview of the research and presents the conclusions drawn from this study.

CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

There has been little research both in New Zealand and internationally concerning communication tools in local democracy despite the additions and uses of new technologies such as facsimile machines, email, and Internet websites in the submission process. The purpose of this research was to investigate constituents' attitudes towards communication tools that are currently made available to them by their respective councils and to explore councils' attitudes towards individual communication tools and the submissions that are delivered by them.

As discussed in Chapter Two, technology is both welcomed and shunned in public circles as people form opinions regarding the many issues surrounding its use in the democratic process. These issues include, but are not limited to, fear of new technology (Larsen, 1999; Watson et al., 1999), technical failures (Kakabadse et al., 2003; Kearns, 2001), and concerns over security (Federal Voting Assistance Program, 2004).

In addition to the perceptions surrounding technology, local democracy in New Zealand is continually plagued by low public participation rates in political matters (Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002). As academics and politicians around the world seek to find the reasons or cause of what is frequently assumed to be apathy toward the system (King et al., 1998), it was timely to use this occasion to ask the opinions of citizens who do take the time to participate in local government matters. The introduction of text messaging to telecommunication options also produced an excellent opportunity to explore constituents' opinions toward the relatively new arena of communication mediums and its possible introduction and use as a means of communicating with City, District, and Regional Councils. The need for a relatively wide sweep to gather exploratory data was the driving force behind the decision to use three methodologies: surveys, interviews, and a case study.

When choosing to use a new communication tool, councils must consider how cost effective it is and if there is any demand for it in the public arena. Even then, as a tool is selected for use, it may only be an additional tool as opposed to a replacement (Kangas & Store, 2003). This is because currently the telephone is the only tool with "near universal access" (Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002). As such, all other communication media are

dispersed disproportionately throughout the population resulting in unfair advantages most likely among the higher socio-economic demographic (ibid).

While there is no one answer to solving the issue of low participation in local democracy (Matthews, 2004), there are many things that can be done to mitigate the situation. By offering stakeholders a full range of communication tools to use when making submissions, submitters may then choose which tool best suits their circumstances and participate accordingly. This, according to Kangas and Store (2003), will help to overcome some of the barriers faced by local authorities when attempting to engage the public in local democracy while also enabling wider participation from the community.

However, communication tools alone will not encourage community members to become involved in local matters (Morgan, 2002). The belief that politics is boring and non-representative of the wider community stands as a large barrier between new participants and local government (Matthews, 2004; Morgan, 2002). Therefore, new and creative ways are needed to engage constituents. Text messaging is a new, youthful, approach to communicating with councils and that is why it is of interest to this study.

There are many advantages and disadvantages to engaging in teledemocratic processes. The advantages include greater access to councils and their staff and less time restrictions, while the disadvantages include resistance to change, security issues, and barriers to access of technology (Toregas, 2001; Elgin, 1993; Kakabadse et al., 2003). In order to overcome some of the disadvantages, constituents will need to be provided with reassurance from their officials and sufficient information to make an informed choice and offer informed opinions (Robertson & Ofsoske, 2002; Matthews, 2004). However, "The existing governmental system is not set up to manage the potential for conflict in this situation or to find ways to absorb the potential enthusiasm of an online citizenry. If there is conflict, the outcome could be a dampening of the positive forces that the new e-gov potential brings to our civic engagement landscape" (Toregas, 2001, p.236).

This research sought to answer five research questions. The first question, "What is the most used communication tool in the local body submission process?" produced the result that currently paper and post submissions followed by oral submissions are the most frequently used to communicate with councils in the consultation process.

The second research question, communication tool convenience and

effectiveness, with the exception of oral submissions and public meetings, participants found most communication tools to be convenient to use. However, not all tools that were deemed convenient were also thought effective and vice versa. Nonetheless, the majority of participants considered paper and post as the most convenient tool to use and, supported by an oral submission, paper and post also rated as the most effective communication tool to use when making them heard in the submission process. This study also found support for the assertion by previous researchers that public meetings were not considered effective communication tools (Burby, 2003; Weeks, 2000).

Question three, in the opinion of current councillors and council administrators, the most effective communication tool that submitters can use are the written forms of communication. Specifically, the majority of interviewed councillors regarded paper and post submissions with well-reasoned arguments as the most effective tool in gaining their attention and support in a consultation. Additionally, this form of communication is also more likely to change their mind and position on a matter if it is presented and reasoned well enough.

Addressing the fourth research question, no evidence could be found to suggest that individual demographic characteristics were linked to specific communication tools used to make submissions. Instead, this research found a distinct lack of diversity among local democracy participants leading to the conclusion that the majority of participants are most likely to be of either gender, 55+ years and above, tertiary educated, full-time employed or retired, using paper and post as a communication tool but would consider using email as an alternative if they thought it was necessary. This finding is supported in the works of previous researchers such as Forgie (2002) and Carr and Halvorsen (2001). Further, an attempt by the Auckland City Council to redress the issue of participant representativeness, and engage youth in a community consultation using a youth's communication tool, failed to generate high numbers of new participants in proportion to the number of youth living in Auckland. This is consistent with the finding by Robertson and Ofsoske (2002) that access to, and knowledge of, communication tools does not guarantee higher numbers of participation in democratic matters.

Finally, to answer the last research question "Is there a place for text messaging as a communication tool in the submission process in the opinion of submitters and those

receiving submissions?” it is clear from the results of this study that the majority of current submitters are not in favour of having text messaging included as an additional communication tool to communicate with their councils. Many submitters expressed the opinion that texting had too many issues of security and was open to misinterpretation because of the abbreviated language often used. Additionally, text messaging was seen as an ‘instant gratification’ tool of youth, that was too casual for the formal submission process. The outcome of the Auckland case study, and the work of Robertson and Ofsoske (2002) support this conclusion.

Further, while council administrators interviewed were open to exploring the use of text messaging in the submission process, there was a split in opinion as to whether councillors were ready to receive them. From the results of the interviews conducted with four current councillors, two were definite about their opposition to the use of texting, while one would prefer receiving a text as opposed to no submission at all but stated a preference for other forms of communication. Furthermore, despite the submissions received through text messaging in Auckland, the more traditional means of making a submission were used to make a final decision regarding the outcome of the proposed skate park. This would suggest that councils, more specifically the PNCC and Auckland City Council, are not ready to take text messaging seriously in relation to submissions. Therefore the findings indicate that in this current political environment, text messaging is not considered a suitable additional communication tool at this time.

Nonetheless, should councils become ready to implement the use of new telecommunication technology, texting will have its uses. For example, the recreation precinct consultation in Auckland (see Chapter Four) produced three options of redevelopment before asking the community which option they would like. In any consultation, the information surrounding a proposed project is sent out to households through existing council publications, media releases, and posted on council websites. In this instance, community members could choose to make a detailed submission, whereby they still had to choose one option over the other two, or they could make a small submission. Text messaging could have streamlined the submission process for thousands of people by sending to council ‘Option 1’, ‘Option 2’, or ‘Option 3’ through their mobile phones. This is just one way that texting may be used in community consultations.

While theorists suggest the need for greater participation from underrepresented minority groups, current democratic participants clearly do not want their inclusion. The biggest barrier to the use of texting, identified throughout the course of this investigation, was the attitude that young people are not welcome in community consultations and a fear that if a 'young' communication tool is added to the democratic process they (youth) will begin participating in local matters and will influence the outcomes. This would result in a power balance shift from older participants who currently dominate community consultations. The assertion youth are not welcome in democracy is not only confirmed through the Auckland case study, it dominated the comments in the qualitative question in the survey and is also consistent with the findings of previous researchers such as Larsen (1999) and Watson et al. (1999).

In short, although council staff and some councillors are showing a willingness to consider new technologies, the majority of current participants in local democracy are not open to new technologies seen to be youthful in nature. Instead, the majority of research participants showed a bias towards communication tools that favour the older, and more educated, members of the community (paper and post and oral submissions). As stated in Chapter Seven, "The number of people who cling to the old ways vastly outnumbers those who want to bring about change" (Toregas, 2001, p.238). Until change is taken seriously, participation rates are likely to remain low and unrepresentative of the wider population in New Zealand.

There are still many areas that require further exploration regarding the use of communication tools in local democracy. It is suggested that research into why people participate in local democracy could benefit from the continuation of the pilot study that was attempted in Auckland in 2004. As this was the first time text messaging had been used to collect citizens' opinions on a specific issue, it can be assumed that many, if not all, of the participants who chose to use this tool were first time participants in local democracy. Therefore, contacting these participants and asking them a series of questions such as why they used the tool they did to communicate with the council, why they participated in this particular consultation, and why they had not participated before may highlight some of the reasons why youth do not traditionally play a part in community decisions and what may motivate them to get involved.

Further, making contact with non-participants in local democracy and asking their opinions on the individual communication tools, especially text messaging, may produce a variation on the results found in this research due to the non-representative nature of current participants. Doing so may help to shed some light on how convenient specific tools really are to the whole community and not just the individuals who already participate.

Finally, it would be of interest to repeat this study in 5-10 years. This repetition would track any changes in opinions towards communication tools that may occur as younger members of society become the older members of society and begin to participate in local democracy using the tools that they are most comfortable with. Such a study would also uncover any potential changes in the attitudes of new and current Councillors towards receiving submissions through the various communication tools.

This study has attempted to shed some light on a relatively under-researched area of democratic research. As a result, this thesis finds that the communication tools currently being used by New Zealand councils already allow for individuals who make submissions to choose a form of participation that best suits their needs in terms of time and costs. It is acknowledged that individual tools, such as oral submissions and email, have some barriers to participation. However, other avenues exist for individuals to make their submissions. Unfortunately, as some councillors and council staff have shown a preference for specific forms of submissions, participants who do not submit their opinions through the preferred tools run the risk of being marginalized as other more acceptable forms of submissions are given precedence. Therefore, it is the finding of this thesis that although individual communication tools could benefit from some adjustments, such as organising oral hearings outside of work hours, in general they do not act as a barrier to public participation in local democracy. Instead, and consistent with King et al. (1998), Larsen (1999), and Watson et al. (1999), this research finds that it is the attitudes of the majority of community participants and councils towards changing the 'status quo', which acts as one of the greatest barriers to wider, more inclusive participation.

APPENDIX A
PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTATION

PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTATION



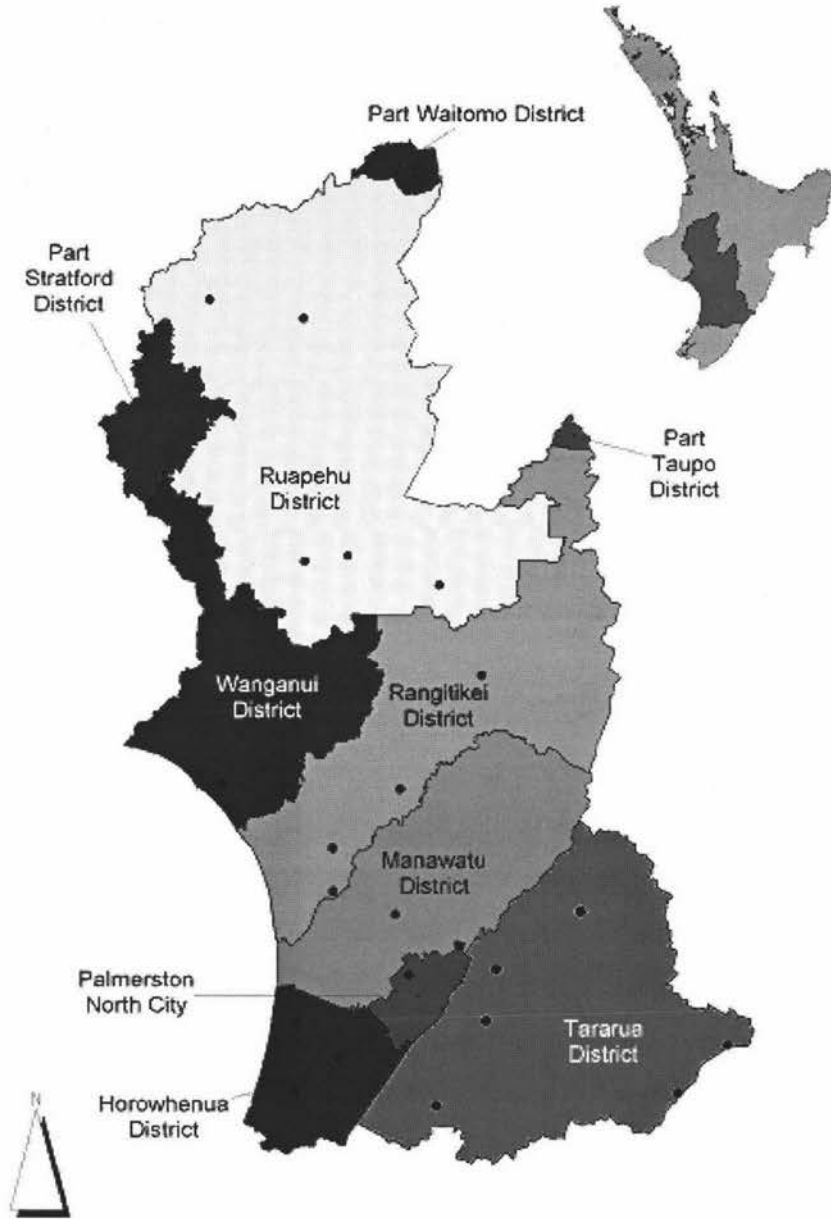
- ✓ Consultation is not to be equated with 'negotiation'. The word 'negotiation' implies a process that has as its objective arriving at agreement. However, 'consultation' may occur without those consulted agreeing with the outcome.
- ✓ Consultation includes listening to what others have to say and considering the responses.
- ✓ The consultation process must be genuine and not a sham.
- ✓ Sufficient time for consultation must be allowed.
- ✓ The party obliged to consult must provide enough information to enable the person consulted to be adequately informed so as to be able to make intelligent and useful responses.
- ✓ The party obliged to consult must keep an open mind and be ready to change and even start afresh although it is entitled to have a work plan already in mind.
- ✓ Consultation is the statement of a proposal not yet fully decided upon.

Source: Palmerston North City Council Consultation Policy
September 2000



APPENDIX B
LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA MAP

LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA MAP



Manawatu Regional Council
Date: 15/11/2001

SOURCE: HORIZONS REGIONAL COUNCIL

APPENDIX C
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES:

PALMERSTON NORTH
TARARUA/WANGANUI/RANGITIKEI

PALMERSTON NORTH SURVEY

The following questionnaire is an investigation and comparison of communication tools used by Palmerston North residents when communicating with the Palmerston North City Council in the submission process.

1. Have you ever sent a submission to the Palmerston North City Council regarding other city projects or plans before the LTCCP?

- Yes (go to question 2)
- No (go to question 4)

2. How many times have you sent in a submission to the Palmerston North City Council regarding city projects or plans?

- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

3. Which communication tool did you use the most for previous submissions?

- Email
 - Telephone
 - Fax
 - Paper & post (this includes the box at the council reception)
 - Oral submission
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

4. If you had not been able to use the communication tool you did to submit your opinion on the LTCCP (e.g. phone, fax, etc), which communication tool would you have used instead?

- Fax
- Phone
- Email
- Paper & post (this includes the box at the council reception)
- Oral submission
- I would not have submitted my opinion to the City Council
- Other (please specify)

5. Please rate the following communication tools according to how convenient they are to use when making submissions to the Palmerston North City Council (tick the appropriate boxes for your selection).

	Most convenient	Reasonably convenient	Not very convenient	Takes too much time & effort	I don't have access to this.
Paper & Post					
Fax					
Email					
Telephone					
Oral submission					

6. Currently, text messaging is not being used by New Zealand City Councils as a means of collecting public opinion on city projects and plans.

Do you think text messaging should be offered as an option for sending submissions to your local City Council?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe on a project-by-project basis
- I would like more information before I make up my mind

7. Do you have any further comments to add to your answer on question 6?

8. General Information

Gender (M/F): _____

Age: _____

Highest qualification (e.g. no formal qualification, bursary, etc): _____

Employment status (e.g. employed full time, full time unpaid in the home, full time student, part time employed, etc): _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

TARARUA/WANGANUI/RANGITIKEI SURVEY

The following questionnaire is an investigation and comparison of communication tools used by residents when communicating with their City/Regional Councils in the submission process.

1. Have you ever sent a submission to your Council regarding other projects or plans before the (name the process they were selected from)?

- Yes (go to question 2)
- No (go to question 5)

2. Which communication tool did you use the most for your previous submissions? Please select one only.

- Email
 - Telephone
 - Fax
 - Paper & post (this includes the box at the council reception)
 - Oral submission
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

3. Did you use the same communication tool that you chose for question 2?

- Yes (go to question 5)
- No (go to question 4)

4. Why did you use a new communication tool?

5. If you had not been able to use the communication tool you did to submit your opinion on the (name the process) (e.g. phone, fax, etc), which communication tool would you have used instead? This is your second choice of preferred communication tool. Please select one only.

- Fax
- Phone
- Email
- Paper & post (this includes the box at the council reception)
- Oral submission
- I would not have submitted my opinion to the City Council

Other (please specify)

6. Please rate the following communication tools according to how convenient they are to use when making submissions to your Council (tick the appropriate boxes for your selection).

	Most convenient	Reasonably convenient	Not very convenient	Takes too much time & effort	I don't have access to this.
Paper & Post					
Fax					
Email					
Telephone					
Oral submission					
Public Meeting					

7. Please rate the following communication tools according to how effective you think they are when making submissions to your Council (tick the appropriate boxes for your selection).

	Most effective	Reasonably effective	Not very effective	Waste of time using this	I don't have access to this.
Paper & Post					
Fax					
Email					
Telephone					
Oral submission					
Public Meeting					

8. Currently, text messaging is not being used by New Zealand City Councils as a means of collecting public opinion on city projects and plans.

Do you think text messaging should be offered as an additional option for sending submissions to your Council?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe on a project-by-project basis
- I would like more information before I make up my mind

9. Do you have any further comments to add to any of your answers on the previous questions?

10. General Information

Gender (M/F): _____

Age: _____

Highest qualification (e.g. no formal qualification, bursary, PhD etc): _____

Employment status (e.g. employed full time, full time unpaid in the home, full time student, part time employed, etc): _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY IN THE PRE-PAID
ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

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