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Title: Success in Sustainability – a case study on the Auckland Sustainable Cities Programme

Abstract

The Auckland Sustainable Cities Programme (ASCP) was a three-year multi-agency pilot programme conducted between 2003 and June 2006. It achieved a number of sustainable development and partnership outcomes over its duration.

The ASCP emerged out of the New Zealand Sustainable Development Programme of Action, the government's response to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, and was developed in partnership with the Auckland region's seven territorial authorities, the Auckland Regional Council and twelve central government agencies.

The ASCP developed 14 sustainable development demonstration projects in six workstrand areas. It was overseen by a combined steering group of central and local government senior officials, who reported to their respective agencies and councils.

An evaluation framework was developed and independent, professional evaluation contractors undertook a full evaluation. This framework had a double focus:

- a) sustainable development outcomes:** sustainable development practice, results and impacts; and
- b) partnership:** engagement, collaboration and learning

The full evaluation report concluded that the ASCP achieved a number of sustainable development outcomes as well as increased capability of the local and central government sectors to work together in the Auckland region. The resulting rise in collaboration and partnership marks an important step forward in the relationship between central government and local government in the Auckland region.

The report also concluded that both local and central government benefited from the ASCP and that sustainable development was a key component in the programme. In addition, ASCP provided a springboard for other joint work, including a long-term framework, now known as START.

The paper presented will outline the ASCP workstrand and project sustainable development achievements and summarise the partnership achievements, key lessons and benefits to both local and central government.

1. Introduction

The New Zealand Sustainable Development Programme of Action (NZSDPOA) was launched by the Government in January 2003, following the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002.

Within the NZSDPOA were four key initiatives, of which “Sustainable Cities” was one. This initiative aimed to improve sustainability in cities. Its overarching goal was “our cities are healthy, safe and attractive places where business, social and cultural life can flourish.

Government ministers approached the Auckland region’s councils to run a pilot programme under this initiative and the Auckland Sustainable Cities Programme (ASCP) was born. This was a three-year multi-agency pilot programme conducted between 2003 and June 2006.

ASCP’s objectives included advancing methods for co-operative work between central and local government, and advancing understanding of sustainability concepts and opportunities for the Auckland region’s and New Zealand’s urban areas.

The programme involved over 25 agencies, and developed six workstrands, responsible for 14 projects. A combined steering group of senior local and central government officials oversaw the ASCP at officer level.

An evaluation framework was developed and independent, professional evaluation contractors undertook a full evaluation. Methodology included interviewing 23 central and local government leads, and conducting 14 telephone surveys of those involved in ASCP. ASCP workstrand and project information, results and evaluations; local and central government evaluations, and two agency debriefs were also considered.

The evaluation process had a double focus:

- a) sustainable development outcomes:** sustainable development practice, results and impacts; and
- b) partnership:** engagement, collaboration and learning between the partners

The findings from the evaluation highlighted a number of achievements and benefits from the programme.

2. Achievements

The six workstrands and 14 projects in the ASCP resulted in a range of project outputs, outcomes and achievements. For some projects, the outcomes and benefits of ASCP are still emerging and two workstrands have projects continuing until June 2007. In other cases, the work started by the ASCP has been continued by local authorities and some government agencies.

Fuller details on the achievements are included in Appendix 1 and also in the booklet “Success in Sustainability”, which can be downloaded from the website www.sustainableauckland.govt.nz

In summary, the ASCP achievements consisted of:

2.1.1 Sustainable Communities (SC)

Two projects supporting local communities to engage more fully with community planning processes. The workstrand focused on adding sustainable development value to two existing projects, which included testing sustainable development models and framework.

2.1.2 Transport and Urban Form (TUF)

Three projects to accelerate school travel plans to reduce traffic congestion, monitor diesel bus emissions to evaluate options for reducing particle emissions, and the development of draft consultation document on passenger transport procurement.

2.1.3 Regional Child and Youth Development (RCYD)

The Northcote child and youth development project successfully demonstrated how local and central government, with local communities, could collaborate on the long-term development of children and youth. Two other projects provided opportunities to share and develop this knowledge between local government and central government agencies.

2.1.4 Urban Form Design and Development (UFDD)

This workstrand undertook work in four project areas, acting as a ginger group and catalyst for other work. The workstrand provided space for sharing information and learning about agencies’ priorities through meetings, presentations and field trips. The workstrand co-ordinated central and local government activities in this area, improved information flows, and increased the engagement between researchers and government.

2.1.5 Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy (RSS)

A co-ordinated regional approach, upward from the community, was used to develop a regional settlement strategy. This strategy aims to improve the ability of migrants and refugees to settle successfully in the Auckland region and will have alignment with the National Settlement Strategy.

2.1.6 Urban Centres and Economic Performance (UCEP)

An economic performance stocktake was completed, which identified areas where both opportunities and challenges lie for the Auckland region and which will guide further work on economic development.

2.2 The ASCP partnership achievements

Greater collaboration and partnership was a significant achievement of the ASCP and marks an important step forward in the relationship between central government and local government in the Auckland region. ASCP has positively influenced other central government regional initiatives. It has also contributed to positive developments in local government's operating environment, given the need to "take a sustainable development approach" under the Local Government Act 2002.

Fuller details on the ASCP partnership achievements are included in Appendix 2. The key partnership achievements were:

- a) Greater political engagement between the two sectors
- b) Increased capability for the two sectors to work together in Auckland
- c) Sustainable development: a motivating, unifying, stretching factor
- d) Significantly improved integration within central government
- e) Improved central government understanding of Auckland region
- f) Central government changes becoming new 'business as usual'
- g) Improving local government understanding of central government
- h) Increased awareness and collaboration within the Auckland region
- i) ASCP: A springboard for other work in the Auckland region
- j) ASCP provides a model for engagement in other regions

3. The Benefits of working together

ASCP has had a number of impacts on the two government sectors including increased understanding and integration *between* the two sectors, and increased understanding and integration *within* each sector, particularly for central government. The ASCP-related benefits and issues for the two sectors were:

3.1 Benefits for Auckland local government

Those interviewed from local government, as part of the evaluation process, saw three key benefits from working with central government in ASCP:

- "The Programme has forced central government to deal with Auckland and Auckland issues. There's central government recognition."
- "Increased knowledge of central government processes"
- funding support for projects

3.2 Benefits within central government

The ASCP pilot provided important benefits for the central government sector as a whole:

- increased understanding and capability regarding Auckland’s issues and urban systems generally
- increased understanding within some central government agencies about how they work, and the implications of this, leading to
- improved integration within some central government agencies
- significantly improved integration across the central government sector, increasing its potential capability to relate to and focus on Auckland

Integration of agencies was a key theme with central government interviewees. The most important developments supporting integration within the sector, and increasing central government’s capability to work with Auckland include the establishment of a deputy secretaries group to oversee urban and Auckland work, and the establishment of the Government Economic and Urban Development Office (GEUDO) in Auckland. These were widely mentioned by ASCP leaders, with many seeing ASCP as either the trigger or very influential in their development.

3.3 Cross sector benefits for local government

There were also benefits *within* each sector from their involvement in ASCP. The local government evaluation saw four benefits for the Auckland local government sector arising from ASCP. These include:

- “increased local government collaboration, particularly at officer level
- separate local authorities across the region did learn to work together on some issues across the region
- increased knowledge on differing local government processes across the region, and
- increased knowledge on how to present a united view across the region and on
- leveraging from the Auckland region position.”

These benefits are important, and provide an indication of how local government in the region has been strengthened. The evaluation showed that the region has shifted a significant distance from the paradigm of “the Auckland region is too hard” or “Auckland Region LA’s can’t work together.” This change in attitude enabled the ASCP to morph into the long-term framework, now known as START.

3.4 Cross sector benefits for central government

Central government officials saw a range of benefits from working with local government in ASCP, including:

- the opportunity to learn about Auckland and urban systems, and to be able to engage with Auckland
- the opportunity to engage with all of the region’s councils in one forum, and at quite a high level
- the opportunity to engage with one or more of the region’s councils where an agency previously either did not have a relationship, or not a strong one.

- [as one government official put it] “A trusting environment has assisted the ASCP process. Central and Auckland local government have had to learn about each other’s processes, which has enhanced trust between them.”

4. Lessons Learned

The following key lessons for further work between local and central government have emerged from the evaluation of the ASCP:

There are inevitable tensions in central and local government partnerships that need careful management. Councils are separate entities and regional partnerships require that they work collegially together. This required long lead times when providing ASCP update reports through all of the councils. The fact that council committee meetings are open to the public resulted in risk management concerns within some central government agencies.

Central government needed to build the partnership at the regional level, to ensure an efficient use of its resources, which are spread across many agencies and the whole of the country. Both central and local government needed to constructively manage their partnership expectations, value the contributions made by both sectors and accept, with time, that the different ways of operating can be managed.

Complex multi-agency work requires strong leadership at a range of levels. Vital strategic leadership was provided at the early stages of the ASCP, and throughout, which helped ensure its success.

It took time to build relationships and trust and the understanding of sustainable development needed to undertake this work. The right agencies need to be involved along with committed staff at senior levels, and for the FULL duration of any programme. Changes in personnel are inevitable over a longer programme, but care is needed to ensure that the knowledge and commitment are fully transitioned with these changes.

Funding was needed to build relationships upfront, along with recognition that benefits occur in the longer term. It was helpful having money sitting behind the partnership at both programme and project level. The ASCP experience suggests that central government has a greater ability to fund programmes such as ASCP and that having contracted project/workstrand co-ordinators within councils and/or central government agencies was a very efficient way to progress the work.

More flexible accountability and greater understanding was required when managing multi-agency funded contracts.

Communicating the achievements of multi-agency programmes is important and needed to have been planned for, from the start. Different sectors and agencies had

different communication needs and central government agencies require appropriate risk management.

Support and training was needed to help partners understand more about each other's ways of working. Field trips in the region were offered, but short-term secondments in Wellington, mentoring or coaching by those with a working knowledge of both sectors, may have helped to speed up the understanding.

5. Conclusion

The Auckland Sustainable Cities Programme (ASCP) was a three-year multi-agency pilot project between central and Auckland regional local government. It achieved a number of sustainable development and partnership outcomes over its duration.

The resulting increase in collaboration and partnership marks an important step forward in the relationship between central government and local government in the Auckland region.

The ASCP has increased the capability of the two sectors to work together in Auckland region. Both sectors have built networks and relationships that are vital for cross-sector work and have learned about the processes and priorities of the other sector. Central government understands much more about Auckland region and urban issues; local government understands more about central government issues and processes.

Sustainable development was a key component in ASCP, providing the mandate to bring agencies together. Sustainable development principles and working cross-sectorally required people to look at issues from new perspectives. The broader focus resulted in opportunities for connections on and solutions to other work and future joint work. The sustainable development approach added value to projects and workstrands and engaged sectors and agencies that had not engaged before.

Both local and central government have benefited from ASCP. Central government has significantly improved horizontal and vertical integration within the sector. Auckland regional local government has strengthened its ability to work together. ASCP has provided a springboard for other joint work, including a long-term framework, now known as START.

The ASCP pilot will also provide a successful model for other regions. The lessons learned and the tools that have been developed may provide a useful starting point.

Appendix 1: (Extract from the Evaluation Report)

The ASCP sustainable development outcomes and achievements:

1. Sustainable Communities (SC)

The workstrand focused on adding sustainable development-related value to two existing projects. Sustainable development (SD) models and framework were tested out for use in other areas and a literature review on evaluating local SD projects was commissioned. The workstrand ran learning forums about SD learning and brought together key staff from agencies around common aims, resulted in aligned strategies and work plans. The two projects were:

- *SC² Sustainable Communities, Sustainable Catchment, Waitakere*, which built on Project Twin streams, a multi faceted project aimed at achieving long term sustainable management of the Huruuru and Henderson Creek catchments. This resulted in arts and youth at risk related activities, funding being aligned to Maori economic development and a workshop on SD
- *Progress Papakura/ Sustainable Communities (PPSC)*, the focus was on local authority statutory planning process, (the development and implementation of a Community Outcomes Process), a vehicle for local SD. Achievements included community activities to raise the visibility of the council, creating opportunities for local people to have a say in the community planning process, contributing to an increased level of youth participation in the community planning process and the leveraging of funding for Maori initiatives.

2. Transport and Urban Form (TUF)

The workstrand led to greater understanding of roles and issues between central and local government and provided a mandate to engage with other agencies and transport operators. There were three projects:

- Developing *school travel plans (STP)* to reduce car trips to schools across the region. These were particularly successful with more than 90 schools creating walking bus plans and over 50 creating full travel plans. Data from 20 schools shows an increase in walking and car sharing to school and a resultant reduction in car trips to schools.
- Investigate and evaluate options for *reducing particle emissions* from diesel buses and other work related to emissions reduction, air quality and bus emissions monitoring. The air emissions work has led to trials of catalytic converters, testing of 1000 buses and submissions on related legislation and policy.
- *Passenger transport procurement* work, focusing on the legislation and regulatory framework. This work has led to the development of a draft consultation document on commercial ferry and bus services, which is under discussion.

3. Regional Child and Youth Development (RCYD)

The workstrand was seen to support community development in local sustainable development (SD), bringing with it a mandate and funding and aligning the work of all agencies. The workstrand was able to leverage funding for project co-ordination and evaluation. There were three projects:

- The *Northcote Child and Youth Development project* sought to promote evidence based approaches to child and youth service development, to identify models that would be useful elsewhere and to encourage young people to participate in community decision making.
 - NYDP developed a statistical profile of Northcote and commissioned a methodological report explaining the process, to enable other areas to use the approach.
 - The project also developed a database of all services available to young people and families in the area.
 - A group of youth leaders was also established, that undertook innovative multimedia work to research and document issues from the perspective of local children and young people.
 - The issues identified by children and young people traversed all four well beings and became the catalyst for the development of five community vision statements and action plans setting out a whole of government response.
- *Forums* for agencies to share information and learning about child and youth development. Six best practice forums were run, involving more than 100 participants from a wide range of central and local government agencies, academics, NGOs and the community.
- *Regional child and youth engagement* that would establish an SD learning framework and consider how to provide opportunities for young people to participate in local government processes. The focus initially was on local government officials sharing ideas on effective engagement, resulting in a report *Child and Youth Engagement in Decision-Making Opportunities*. As the project progressed this group consolidated into an ongoing regional youth engagement network. This in turn became the regional reference group when the new regional hub of the Ministry of Youth Development was established.

4. Urban Form Design and Development (UFDD)

This workstrand undertook work in four thematic areas, acting as a ginger group and catalyst for other work. The workstrand provided space for sharing information and learning about agency priorities etc through meetings, presentations and field trips. The workstrand co-ordinated central and local government activities in this area, improved information flows: and increased the engagement between researchers and government. The themes included:

- *Sustainable standards* focusing on promoting incorporation of sustainability elements in legislation and supporting the development of a voluntary sustainable building index. This project provided Input to the Building Code

Review and supported the development of the TUSC tool (a sustainable building index).

- *Sustainable practice* to demonstrate sustainable development (SD) and secure a commitment to sustainable public buildings by 2007. This area published case studies of local sustainable public buildings, developed a policy paper and hosted a ‘Sustainable Buildings Day’.
- *Applying research to promote links between research and practice*. To achieve this, the project ran workshops on sustainable urban form, commissioned a report and played an active role in linking current and planned sustainable cities research.
- *Encouraging uptake of the sustainability message* by infusing sustainability messages into relevant programmes. This area provided regular updates on progress with the LG (A)AA review of the Regional Policy Statement, co-ordinated regional responses to the Unit Titles Act review, held regional workshops on Urban Design Action Plans and encouraged councils and other agencies to sign up to the Urban Design Protocol.

5. Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy (RSS)

This workstrand had an ambitious objective - to develop a long term agreed plan for achieving sustainable settlement outcomes in the Auckland region. The strategy was aligned to the National Settlement Strategy. The workstrand took a grass roots approach, starting with an extensive high quality community consultation process to engage new settler communities. The draft strategy, currently waiting for signoff and release by Cabinet, is a comprehensive resource that describes and analyses settlement issues, identifies gaps and overlaps in service and opportunities for improving settlement support to migrant and refugee communities.

6. Urban Centres and Economic Performance (UCEP)

For a variety of reasons this workstrand began later than the others did. The workstrand’s objective was to better understand the nature of the Auckland region economy, and its drivers, and to provide a better understanding of the role of cities and urban areas to economic development. A report *Urban Centre and Economic Performance: Auckland Stocktake* was completed in June 2006. The stocktake identified areas where both opportunities and challenges lie for the region and these findings will guide further work on urban centres

Appendix 2: Extract from the Evaluation Report

The ASCP partnership achievements:

a) Greater political engagement between the two sectors

ASCP has been a key driver of greater central and Auckland region local government political engagement. The first meeting in recent decades between the Prime Minister and other ministers with the Auckland region's mayors and Chief Executive Officers occurred in October 2003 and ASCP was a key item on the agenda. By 2006 each of the first three Auckland Region Mayoral Forum¹ meetings of the year included meetings with ministers – “due to the increased central government engagement around the ASCP”. The Prime Minister's post 2006 budget speech included reference to ASCP and the Metro project. These suggest moves towards political engagement as part of business as usual.

b) Increased capability for the two sectors to work together in Auckland

ASCP has created a platform for the two sectors to move forward confidently and work in partnership together in the Auckland region. This platform or ‘soft infrastructure’ includes the networks and relationships created between the sectors particularly at senior levels, increased sector understandings about both sectors, and what it takes for partnerships to work. This marks a significant shift in the relationship between, and the capability of, the two sectors, and is only possible because of the investment that ASCP provided. It has taken considerable time and effort to achieve this shift.

Two new initiatives reflect the increased awareness of the region's long term issues in both sectors and the willingness to work on these. ASCP was a catalyst for the establishment of the new Government Economic and Urban Development Office (GEUDO) in Auckland. Also, Auckland regional local government is now developing a major new project on the long-term framework for the region, now called Sustaining the Auckland Region Together or START, in combination with central government.

c) Sustainable development: a motivating, unifying, stretching factor

The sustainable development (SD) context was a key to attracting a range of people and agencies, both within central and local government, to work together. Local government's interest was heightened by the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA), while some central government agencies saw ASCP as a strategic opportunity to engage with both central and local government agencies. “SD has provided a mandate and an excuse to talk across agencies.”

The SD context changed the way some projects were done, with projects being informed by a broader awareness of the issues involved and the four well beings (economic, environment, social and cultural). The broader focus has resulted in opportunities for connections on and solutions to other work, where agencies or individuals were well placed to do this.

¹ Which includes the Chair of the Auckland Regional Council

ASCP has increased the SD capability of the sectors and some of the agencies involved. The emerging SD awareness varies between agencies and projects, and is likely to benefit from improved integration within and between the sectors, and increasing expectations around SD capability. Some agencies are still coming to grips with the need to communicate and work across sectors, agencies and disciplines - or at least in broader groupings than previously - and still prefer to focus on those with similar expertise and perspectives.

Change occurred for individuals also. A number of those involved in ASCP reported how they had grown through their involvement in ASCP and SD. "I think far bigger than I did a year ago."

d) Significantly improved integration within central government

The central government sector has significantly increased its potential for integration within the sector in at least three ways. The first is improved horizontal integration, through the establishment of the deputy secretaries group across the sector. ASCP was one of the catalysts for this "It's about getting Auckland stuff dealt with in Wellington and Wellington stuff dealt with in Auckland and is a conduit to CEO's and the Mayoral Forums." If that occurs and an SD approach is taken, there is considerable potential to deal with more challenging cross cutting urban issues, both nationally and in the Auckland region.

Secondly, there is improved vertical integration between central government head offices and regional offices in Auckland. ASCP highlighted the difficulties some projects faced because of disjuncts between Wellington and Auckland offices. It helped drive changes to improve vertical integration. Restructuring has also occurred and has made a significant difference to at least one agency's ability to ensure that a challenging, ambitious project will be delivered.

The third change is the establishment of the GEUDO in Auckland. GEUDO has the potential to support vertical and horizontal integration with the sector, and strengthens central government's potential capability to engage with Auckland.

e) Improved central government understanding of Auckland region

The central government sector is now far more knowledgeable about the Auckland region and urban issues and systems than it was when ASCP began. Its understanding of Auckland was limited, both in terms of breadth and depth of understanding about urban and Auckland systems and how they perform, and in the numbers of senior central government people aware of the region, and its local government culture and style. In that sense ASCP represents something of a sea change for central government. The 'learning by doing' approach, and connecting with what is happening on the ground, complements the analytical approaches of policy agencies in particular. Central government's involvement has been targeted, and there have been gaps and limitations given capability, capacity and other issues.

f) Central government changes becoming new 'business as usual'

Moves to integrate SD and new ways of working into 'business as usual' are already making a difference in the sector's engagement with Auckland region. The political engagement between central and local government politicians is reflected in the engagement between senior management. In the past there may have been one off meetings with individual councils. What is now emerging is a more coherent, consistent approach to engaging with all the councils in the region together. The sector is now far better placed to engage with the region on some of its key issues. This is because of the political and agency sector leadership that has been shown, the sector's improved integration and its increasing Auckland and urban capability.

g) Improving local government understanding of central government

The Auckland region's local government now has an increased understanding of central government. This was demonstrated in the comments by a range of officers about the differences between the sectors, and the greater sensitivities and requirements, including risk management, of central government. Given the focus of many of the ASCP projects, however, and the complexity of the central government sector, local government's exposure to central government requirements has been somewhat limited. Some issues may only arise in the context of a project and may be difficult to plan for.

h) Increased awareness and collaboration within the Auckland region

ASCP has highlighted for local government that it can and does work together. It has provided a "focus point for engagement with the Auckland Region CEO Forum", and strengthened regional engagement. It has increased understanding and collaboration within the Auckland region, through officers learning more about different councils' processes, and on how to "present a united view across the region and on leveraging from the Auckland region position." The collaborative approach is being bedded in "for local government ASCP is moving to a "business as usual" model, although a managed migration will be required for some projects." ASCP has raised expectations about regional collaboration, given the potential for and possible requirements of future collaboration with central government.

i) ASCP: A springboard for other work in the Auckland region

ASCP has improved integration across the sectors by being a springboard for other work, and by providing a space where those involved can make connections with others on non ASCP work, both within and across the sectors. ASCP "was a very good forum to engage regionally... and very useful positioning of engagement." One example of leveraging from ASCP is when the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) developed a regional hub in Auckland. The ASCP regional local government network focused on child and youth development was already established and was able to provide MYD with immediate links into local government in the region

j) ASCP provides a model for engagement in other regions

ASCP provides a useful model for future programmes with other regions. The lessons learnt from ASCP provide a significantly different starting point for other programmes. It means that one sector partner, that is, central government, can tap into its own institutional knowledge and apply its learnings with the new local government, and potentially other partners. Other regions have the benefit of ASCP's lessons, even while needing to find their own way. Such programmes may be easier, given the size of the population, the number of councils, and the scale of the issues to be faced. It may be useful to include a formative evaluation alongside programmes set up elsewhere, to help guide initial thinking and action.

Growing the individual and agency relationships and networks, building trust and a constructive group dynamic is likely to differ from programme to programme and region to region – and will require both time and effort.

ASCP's central achievement has been to build the platform for a durable, long-term partnership between central government and regional local government in the Auckland region. The relationship has changed significantly. As one person said, the clock cannot be turned back even if there are changes at the margins. Bringing the sectors together has meant changes within each sector, and created a new business as usual. The extent to which the potential collaboration and partnership is realised will depend on the partners. Indeed some are looking to widen the partnership to include other stakeholders.