

MARTIN JENKINS

Effective local government is critical to New Zealand's economic, cultural and social prosperity. Decisions made and services provided locally impact on all elements of wellbeing. They affect the vibrancy of our communities and impact on economic prosperity and social wellbeing. At its best, local government can be visionary and an enabler of beneficial growth and development. At its worst, it's a source of frustration and a barrier to development.

Now is an exciting and challenging time to be involved in the leadership of local government. It's a time of change, and change means opportunity. Drivers of change will vary from district to district but will include population change, increased pressure on land and natural resources, pent up demand for infrastructure investment and renewal, calls for increased transparency and scrutiny of public expenditure and expectations for productivity growth.

Some of the major changes and challenges for local government over the next few years include:

- the Auckland Governance Reforms, which will transform the way local government operates in Auckland and introduce novel structures into the system of local governance. These reforms will be watched closely by observers in other regions. The same drivers that lead to the reforms are also present, although perhaps less acutely, in other city-regions
- major regulatory reform is also expected, including forthcoming changes that will emerge from the reviews of the Building Act and the Resource Management Act. The trend is towards more streamlined regulation that enables development, whilst providing for a more targeted approach to risk. The changes are expected to have major implications for nearly every aspect of regulatory service delivery
- the Local Government 2002 Amendment Bill aims to improve the transparency, accountability, and financial management in local government. The bill will require that local authorities operate within a defined fiscal envelope, focus on a defined set of core activities, and improve the transparency of decision-making.

And, perhaps more fundamental than any of the above changes, the Minister of Local Government recently announced his intention to release next year a first-principles discussion document of the proper constitutional status of local government. This document will raise fundamental questions about the function and structure of local government.

The cumulative impact of these changes on the local government sector is significant, and the capacity of the sector to respond is under challenge. Local government leaders and managers have the opportunity to shape change. How they and their management teams influence and respond to change will be critical to the future role of local government. The way we see it, successful change will mean:

- defining the right objectives and outcomes
- identifying and focusing attention on the actions that will make the biggest difference
- developing and aligning organisational design, resources and capability towards delivering on the things that matter most
- implementing and delivering services and interventions in the right way – efficiently and cost-effectively
- assessing progress and learning about what actually works in practice, and using this knowledge to support decision-making.

MartinJenkins works with chief executives and senior managers across central and local government to successfully shape and deliver change. We do this by providing strategic advice and practical support in the following areas:

Organisational Performance – we help clients understand the functions and objectives of their organisations, examine what has been happening over time in relation to these objectives, and why, and identify the best points of leverage to shift performance.

Public Policy and Economic Analysis – we work with our clients to identify, design and implement the right mix of strategies and interventions needed to achieve important public policy outcomes or to address critical issues.

Evaluation & Research – we help clients achieve their outcomes by providing independent evaluations of organisations, programmes, projects, initiatives and strategies – so that our clients can focus on the right things, do the right things and make the most productive use they can of their limited resources.

We are sponsoring the SOLGM Annual Conference for the fourth consecutive year. We look forward to catching up with you at the conference. Alternatively, feel free to contact one of our Directors in Wellington on 04 499 6130.