

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PALMERSTON NORTH AND THE PALMERSTON NORTH CITY COUNCIL

Focus group research conducted by National Research Bureau (NRB)

June 2016



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1. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Palmerston North is New Zealand's ninth most populous city and the second-to-largest land-bound city after Hamilton. The current population is around 85,500 (June 2015) and is gently growing – an average 0.7% per annum over the past 15 years. Palmerston North is sometimes considered a 'provincial city' or a 'service town' but is also an important centre for tertiary education. It is home to Massey University (including the Massey University Sport and Recreation Institute), the Universal College of Learning (UCOL), the International Pacific University, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and The Design School.

Palmerston North is adjacent to the Linton Military Camp, New Zealand's largest army base. There are also a number of national head offices located there including Toyota, New Zealand Pharmaceuticals and Motor Truck Distributors. These various organisations not only provide employment opportunities, but their presence also provides us with some context to view the makeup and direction of the city.

The Palmerston North City Council is charged with meeting the current and future needs of the city in terms of local infrastructure, local public services and performance of regulatory functions. After various consultative processes, it has developed a 10 year plan which is set out in the document "A Balanced Future For Your City - Palmerston North City Council 10 Year Plan 2015-25".

Early in 2016 Palmerston North City Council sought to conduct qualitative research with targeted groups or segments of residents. In particular, the views of young people and residents living in lower-income households were to be canvassed, as well as other demographic groups.

Along with the results and feedback obtained from the Council's regular Communitrak™ Survey, where a representative snapshot of resident opinion is obtained and then fed into the Council's 10 Year Plan, the feedback from these focus groups was intended to be considered for inclusion into refinement of the 10 Year Plan. The outcomes and results of this research could assist with Council's decision-making regarding the groups taking part. It is also intended that this research will form a part of Council's programme of community engagement, and would inform future community engagement strategies.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives fell broadly into two areas:

2.1 Citizenship ('Residents As Citizens')

Topics to be explored included residents' involvement in decision-making and the democratic process in the City. This would take into account consultation with residents, with a focus on how residents are consulted with, which issues are included for consultation, and how much consultation there should be for certain issues. Participants would be asked to offer suggestions for how they think the democratic process could be improved.

As part of this, there could be a future-focus to the discussion, for example, participants can be invited to put together a wish list for what they (ie, their group) would most like for the City (eg, changes, developments, projects, etc), and also what they would most like to see from the Council in the future.

As a part of this future focus, discussion could also centre around questions such as the most important thing their group thinks the Council should be focussing on, the most important thing the Council could do for them, and the most important issue(s) facing the City in the next few years.

2.2 Customers ('Residents As Council Customers')

This part of the research would gain feedback on Council's service delivery, and whether there are any particular issues that need to be investigated, or areas for improvement.

The focus for discussion here would concern Council's delivery of services and facilities, and participants' satisfaction with Council's efforts. Participants' expectations of, the importance that they attach, and their perceptions of value for money, for services and facilities could also be explored.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Focus Group Method

The focus group method is a semi-structured qualitative research method. It aims to investigate people's attitudes, opinions and knowledge in an in-depth manner. It is used to gather information about what people are thinking and what motivates them to think and act in the way they do. A strength of the focus group is its ability to generate group interactions to bring up issues that would not surface using more direct research techniques. Its flexibility allows the moderator to uncover and explore issues that may not have been anticipated.

The focus group method is excellent for discovering the range of responses of participants, and exposing dimensions or attributes relevant to the research issue. It does not measure the statistical incidence of responses in a population or target market. Caution should therefore be given to not directly infer findings from this kind of research without separate quantification or verification.

3.2 Sample

Six focus groups were specified for this research. The target composition for the groups was based on a 'lifestage segmentation' which is common for investigation into views about Council matters. An additional group of students was sampled as the student population is so important to the city of Palmerston North.

Within these groups we ensured a reasonable number of those on lower incomes (less than \$40,000 household income per annum) as this was a special interest to the Council. As it transpired, this was not a difficult request and for some groups (eg, students, empty nesters, parents with young families) this was more the norm than the exception. The income level of respondents was known throughout the focus groups allowing this influence to be examined during analysis.

RECRUITMENT CRITERIA

Group 1 - **Students**. Mix of ages 18-25. Attending Massey University or UCOL and have lived in Palmerston North for less than five years. Must be single or part of a couple and have no children.

Group 2 - **Young Family**. Parents with at least one child of pre-school or primary age. Must have lived in Palmerston North for a minimum of five years.

Group 3 - **Young Singles/Couples**. Mix of ages 18-25. Must not have children. Must have lived in Palmerston North for more than five years. Preferably not students.

Group 4 - **Mature Family**. Parents with at least one child at home who is attending a secondary school. Must have lived in Palmerston North for more than five years. Preferably not students.

Group 5 - **Empty Nesters**. Mix of ages over 50. Must have had family that have now left home. Must have lived in Palmerston North for more than five years. Mix of retirees and those working.

Group 6 - **Older Singles/Couples**. Mix of ages 26-49. Must not have children. Must have lived in Palmerston North for more than five years. Preferably not students.

The sample was obtained from within the Palmerston North area. Recruitment was conducted by approaching and screening people at shopping centres and places of business, supplemented with networking. Such recruitment yields 'fresh sample' as opposed to the less desirable method of using those on a panel who frequently attend groups.

Participants were recruited in a 'semi-blind' fashion - that is, they were not alerted to the fact that the topic was specifically for the Council. They were told the research would be about leisure and lifestyle issues. This procedure is intended to keep the subject matter vague and reduce the opportunity or motivation for participants to study the topic and alter their knowledge or opinion of the subject matter.

3.3 Discussion Guidelines

Focus groups are by their very nature semi-structured in order to allow for participants to bring up issues they see as important and to allow for group interactions.

It is the task of the moderator, to guide the group in a fashion that is not too intrusive and to ensure that the topics of interest are covered adequately in the available time. To aid this, a moderator's guide is prepared which acts as a rough guide to proceedings.

A summary of this guide follows:

Introductions. Moderator explains what will happen during the session and encourages all to contribute their own personal opinions. The subject is introduced as being about 'life in Palmerston North'. Participants asked to introduce and say something about themselves and how they came to live in Palmerston North, as a warm up exercise and to reduce anxiety.

What sort of city is Palmerston North? The moderator explores with participants, perceptions and attitudes to the city. Various projective techniques are used to determine participants' feelings about the city without too much chance to rationalise. Overall views can be determined and compared between groups.

Things people like or dislike about the city. An open ended exploration. Participants are able to bring up issues they see as most important. At this stage it is not constrained to things the Council can affect. The ideas expressed here would be useful to compare with, when the group later considers what an ideal city would be like.

Perceptions of an 'ideal city'. A discussion takes place that is intended to be used to help determine the kinds of things, or the kind of 'flavour' of a city that is desirable to participants.

Councils role in making Palmerston North a 'better' city, or closer to the ideal. Explores perceptions about what the Council actually does and what they think it does to improve the city. Is it a key role of the Council? Is it all in the Council's hands, or do others have a role?

Residents as citizens. Explores the participants' perceived role in determining where the city goes. Are they very engaged in what the Council does? Do they want to be? How do they participate in the democratic process?

Council consultation. A similar question to that posed in the Communitrak™ Survey, but approached in a qualitative manner allowing discussion and more explanation of the 'why'. How satisfied are they with the way the Council involves the public in the decisions it makes? Why do they feel this way? What affects their perceptions of the consultative process?

Information. Again, a similar question to that posed in the Communitrak™ Survey, but approached in a qualitative manner to gain insight. Do they think the information the Council supplies to the community is enough, too much, about right? Do they care? Why do they feel like that? What experience do they actually have of this?

Satisfaction with services and facilities. It is explained that the Council provides lots of day to day services which they as ratepayers, or residents, ultimately contribute to. Participants are presented with a list of some services and facilities, grouped into four domains, which they are asked to respond to. They are asked which of these work well for you, and which they feel, from their perspective, needs improvement. Group processes help inform reaction.

1. Roads, footpaths, street lights, cycleways and parking spaces.
2. Parks, sportsfields, swimming pools (Lido and Freyberg), the arena, walkways.
3. Water, stormwater, wastewater, rubbish and recycling.
4. Libraries, Te Manawa (Science Centre and Museum), The Regent, The Globe.

Wish list. A 'write down' task. As a result of their focus group experience participants are asked to write down the top six things they would do for the City if they were in charge "to improve the City for you and people like you". We use this to anchor response and ensure group processes have not restricted their ability to express their individual views.

As is common in focus group work, topics are introduced in a more general manner at the beginning of each session, then focusing down to more specific detail as each session progresses. This helps us understand more about why certain responses are made and can sometimes input into a useful conceptual framework to view responses.

3.4 Conducting The Focus Groups

The six focus were conducted at the Palmerston North Council premises over three evenings. In each case, participants were seated around a table in a quiet room. Food and drinks were provided. The intention was to create a relatively relaxed and comfortable environment in which to encourage open response.

Established focus group procedure was employed to ensure optimal depth of response from the participants, the avoidance of 'leading questions' and acquiescent response.

Focus groups were held in the early evening and lasted one and a half to two hours each. All of the groups were moderated by Jeremy Wynne-Jones (B. Social Science [Psychology], Grad Dip Marketing), of NRB.

Each focus group was video and audio recorded (with the participant's agreement) to enable a thorough analysis of the discussions by an experienced qualitative researcher.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to explore and better understand the views of a cross-section of Palmerston North residents on life in the city and the role of Council in bettering this. Consideration was given to examine the issues in terms of both 'residents as citizens' and 'residents as customers'. The research was intended to supplement other research such as the routine quantitative Communitrak™ surveys which principally measure resident's satisfaction with Council services.

Methodology

A qualitative focus group methodology was employed with six focus groups being conducted. Group composition was organised according to lifestage segments:

- Students.
- Young Singles/Couples.
- Older Singles/Couples.
- Young Family.
- Mature Family.
- Empty Nesters.

A total of 55 participants took part in the six focus groups, comprising 26 males and 29 females. With the exception of the students, all participants had lived in Palmerston North for at least five years. Recruiting procedures ensured attendance of some participants of lower socioeconomic level. There were 31 participants who reported their household income as lower than \$40,000 a year and six who stated their occupation as 'unemployed'. There was a mix of occupations among the other participants.

Topics of discussion included: What sort of city is Palmerston North, the Council's role in making Palmerston North a better city, residents as citizens, Council consultation, information preferences, satisfaction with Council services and facilities. Additionally, at the end of each focus group session each participant was asked to make a list with their suggestions as to what the Council could do to improve the city for people like them.

What Sort Of City Is Palmerston North

Predominant perceptions of Palmerston North were:

- Family friendly.
- Laid back.
- Provincial town.
- Good for education.
- Central (to the wider area).
- Easy to live in.

Other positive attributes that were discussed by participants included:

- Culturally diverse.
- Inexpensive.
- Growing art scene.
- Tree lined boulevards.
- Restaurants and cafes.
- Energy efficient.

A Few Negative Perceptions

Various participants raised what they perceived to be negative aspects of the city:

- City is a bit boring.
- Crime and drugs.
- The polluted river.
- Unemployment/underemployment.

Does Palmerston North Have A Reputation?

Many participants felt that Palmerston North had a negative reputation. They believed that others thought of Palmerston North as a bit boring, that it had nothing to do and even that it was "a bit of a hole".

Various participants, particularly the older ones, were quite defensive on this matter, saying that any such reputation was undeserved and that the city, although not the most exciting place in the world, was an excellent place for education and bringing up families - a 'good standard town'.

It was noted that the reputation (or perceived reputation) of Palmerston North is important because the issue is so related to civic pride, to mental wellbeing and people's desire to live in the area. It was suggested that combating, or improving negative views of Palmerston North, either by marketing or addressing the shortfalls, should be an essential part of the city's development.

Council's Role In Making Palmerston North A 'Better' City

Various opinions were expressed as to who would be responsible for making Palmerston North a better city. Some thought 'the people', but others felt the Council did/should play a larger part. There was some discussion about more community involvement, but after a time it appeared that for many, this might be ambitious. Many of these participants simply did not care enough about Council matters.

Do They Know What The Council Does?

It was apparent that there was a disparity in what participants knew about the Council. Most younger participants really only had a scant knowledge of Council matters. Generally the older the participants the more they seemed to know. Knowledge about the Council appeared not just related to age, but also to house ownership. People who have a more vested interest in the city and pay rates appeared to want to know more about Council matters and how the rates were spent.

Residents As Citizens

As a crude measure of citizenship, participants were asked if they knew the name of the current Mayor and about their voting habits. Only a minority of this audience actually knew. Older persons were more likely to know and also appeared to take more interest in community/Council matters in general. It was a very similar story for voting, with people being more likely to vote, the older they were. None of the students or young singles/couples voted in the last election.

Discussions took place on the value of voting and their voting intentions in the future. Some young people remarked that they probably wouldn't bother. Others thought that when they had a family they might take an interest. It was surmised that if being a good citizen can be measured by voting, then we see that generally this seems to improve with age (or era/generation).

Council Consultation And Community Involvement

The need for people to feel engaged with the Council also seemed to increase with age. But even with this, for many, as long as there was no pressing issue and things were ticking along nicely there was little need to pay attention to what the Council was up to. It appears that if the Council was thought to be doing a good job and not upsetting too many people, many residents would not particularly want to engage with the Council, except for things like basic information. Many residents aren't particularly proactive citizens until they are really wound up about something.

How Satisfied Are They With The Level Of Consultation?

There was a mixed response to how satisfied these participants were with the level, and types of consultation (that they knew about). Some seemed happy enough with the Council's attempts at consultation (whether or not they even wanted such engagement), some were more or less neutral, and even some willing to say they needed more consultation.

Within the variability of response there appeared a general pattern with older participants knowing more about the Council, wanting more consultation and getting more interested (sometimes critical) about the methods.

Information Quality And Delivery

Participants responded better to the concept of Council 'information' rather than 'consultation' - even some of those that said they knew little about the Council.

Based on these groups, younger people seemed more inclined to use electronic media and far less paper media. Older persons mainly appeared not only driven more to find out what the Council are up to, but prefer paper media and even, where possible, meetings. Probably this helps provide a feeling of community involvement, a strong need at this stage of life.

With the exception of those in the Empty Nest group, most people preferred to get their information about Council services and activities from the Council website. There was positive feedback from those with experience of the site.

Although few knew about the Council's Facebook page, this too was viewed favourably by many - excepting the older participants. The idea of a Council app was discussed and there also seemed to be interest in this by younger participants.

More in depth research was suggested for media preference, types of information, and the extent to which information should be 'pushed' or just available. For the purposes of effective marketing management, having a good understanding of which audience is being targeted and for what purpose was suggested as paramount as the discussions showed very differing needs according to different market segments.

Satisfaction With Council Services And Facilities

Participants were shown a list of services the Palmerston North Council provides in four domains:

1. Roads, footpaths, street lights, cycleways and parking spaces.
2. Parks, sportsfields, swimming pools (Lido and Freyberg), the arena, walkways.
3. Water, stormwater, wastewater, rubbish and recycling.
4. Libraries, Te Manawa (Science Centre and Museum), The Regent, The Globe.

Of the four domains, participants appear most satisfied with the last (libraries, Te Manawa, theatres). Most of the impressions and stories about these were related with pride.

The most problematic domain was the third. Stormwater was thought to be an issue, but it is noted that at the time of the focus groups there was torrential rain and flooding in Palmerston North. The biggest source of contention was the plastic rubbish bags. The cost of these was thought by many to be excessive, but there were other issues also, such as having to carry rubbish and that dogs and cats could get into bags.

Within the other domains, the cleanliness of the Lido swimming pool was brought up as an issue and with young mothers, runners and some elderly people, the unevenness of some of the footpaths.

Participant's Wish List

At the end of the focus group sessions participants were asked to prepare a short list of around six things they would like the Council to do.

The lists were remarkably well done and are shown in full in the appendix in their entirety in order to preserve the tone and intent of the wishes. Their various preferences according to lifestage can be observed in the suggestions.

5. GROUP COMPOSITION

A total of 55 participants took part in the six focus groups, comprising 26 males and 29 females. Group size varied from seven to 11 which is suitable in terms of group dynamics for such research. With the exception of the students, all participants had lived in Palmerston North for at least five years.

According to the intended methodology of this study, organisation of the groups primarily according to lifestage, but with a separate Students group as befits the social structure of the city, was successfully achieved by the recruiting process.

Those who were working were in a mix of occupations, the majority in the service industries. The screening procedure ensured a spread of ages across the groups and this provided a good range of perspectives in this regard.

It was a requirement of this research that at least some of the participants should come from lower socio-economic groups. This is difficult to measure with a short screening questionnaire but we note 31 participants said their household has an income of less than \$40,000 a year which is one commonly used indicator of low socio-economic level. Six participants with this income level were, however, students which is not unexpected.

| GROUP 1: Students | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 2 | M | 22-25 | > \$100,000 |
| 3 | M | 22-25 | < \$40,000 |
| 4 | M | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 5 | M | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 6 | M | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 7 | F | 26-29 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 8 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 9 | F | 18-21 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |

| GROUP 2: Young Family | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | M | 30-39 | \$70,000-\$100,000 |
| 2 | F | 40-49 | < \$40,000 |
| 3 | F | 40-49 | < \$40,000 |
| 4 | F | 30-39 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 5 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 6 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 7 | F | 30-39 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 8 | F | 40-49 | \$40,000-\$70,000 est |
| 9 | M | 30-39 | > \$100,000 |
| 10 | M | 50-59 | < \$40,000 |

| GROUP 3: Young Singles/Couples | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 2 | F | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |
| 3 | F | 22-25 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 4 | F | 22-25 | < \$40,000 |
| 5 | M | 25-25 | < \$40,000 |
| 6 | M | 18-21 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 7 | M | 22-25 | < \$40,000 |
| 8 | M | 18-21 | < \$40,000 |

| GROUP 4: Mature Family | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | M | 40-49 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 2 | M | 40-49 | < \$40,000 |
| 3 | M | 40-49 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 4 | M | 50-59 | \$70,000-\$100,000 |
| 5 | F | 50-59 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 6 | F | 30-39 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 7 | F | 50-59 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 8 | F | 50-59 | >\$100,000 |
| 9 | F | 40-49 | < \$40,000 |
| 10 | M | 50-59 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |

| GROUP 5: Empty Nesters | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | M | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |
| 2 | M | 70+ | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 3 | M | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |
| 4 | F | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |
| 5 | F | 50-59 | >\$100,000 |
| 6 | F | 70+ | < \$40,000 |
| 7 | M | 70+ | < \$40,000 |
| 8 | F | 50-59 | < \$40,000 |
| 9 | F | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |
| 10 | F | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |
| 11 | F | 60-69 | < \$40,000 |

| GROUP 6: Older Singles/Couples (no children) | | | |
|---|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Household Income</i> |
| 1 | M | 30-39 | < \$40,000 |
| 2 | F | 26-29 | \$40,000-\$70,000 |
| 3 | M | 26-29 | < \$40,000 |
| 4 | M | 40-49 | < \$40,000 |
| 5 | F | 26-29 | >\$100,000 |
| 6 | M | 30-39 | \$70,000-\$100,000 |
| 7 | M | 40-49 | \$70,000-\$100,000 |

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Reporting Style

The following sections presents results of the research in a descriptive (ie, as opposed to numerical) manner, as is usual in qualitative research. Where useful, interpretive comment is included.

Direct quotes "*in italics*" of the group participants are used to clarify and support observations and findings. These are used extensively in this report as they help convey the flavour of response on the various issues.

Some of the findings are presented based on responses across the six groups. However, where applicable the report draws out any relevant differences between groups, which appear related to their recruitment criteria (eg, students, empty nesters, young family, etc).

It should be borne in mind that the opinions represented in this research are those of participants recruited according to the stipulated criteria. The views expressed are a subsection of those that may be found in the more general population. Care should be taken when generalising small sample research, either with regard to the selected markets, or broader market segments.

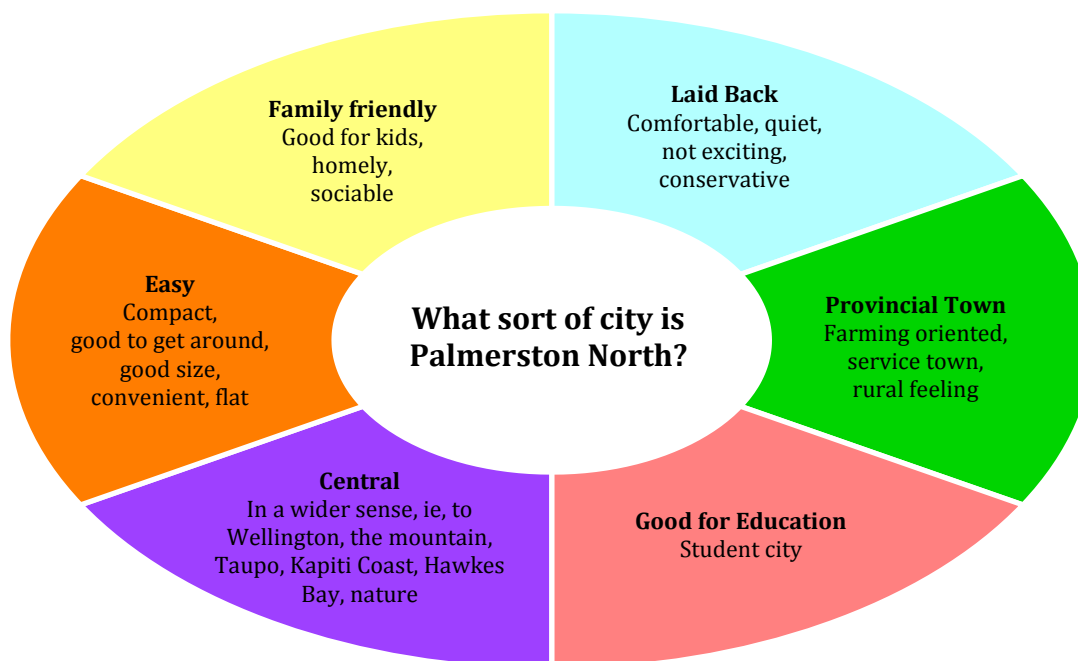
6.2 What Sort Of City Is Palmerston North?

An exploration into how the different participants perceived Palmerston North was carried out using qualitative techniques. Perceptions of a place, or the feeling it engenders are relevant to understanding what people want for the place and how to improve their lives there. It provides important context which allows us to frame their views and expectations.

From the responses we see that some views are relatively widely held, and others rather influenced by the person's background, life stage and circumstance (eg, whether employed or not, transient or long time resident etc).

6.2.1 Predominant Perceptions

The more common views of Palmerston North, expressed across all groups, are shown in the diagram. Though possibly not surprising, these residents' perceptions give a good idea of what residents feel are the essential attributes or 'flavour' of the city (they sometimes say 'town').



A selection of verbatims below, shows that not only were participants well able to articulate what they believed Palmerston North was about, but also the extent to which they embrace these characteristics.

"Yeah it is (easy). So like, it is so handy having everything so close. Like coming from Tauranga like everything was really spread out. You've got the supermarket, you've got the shops, you've got the square, everything is within like, 500 metres of each other." (F5, Students group)

"It's quite like young people when you walk around a plaza and stuff, the majority of people you see are either university students or like high school students or primary school students. It's just sort of a vibrant scene. It's got quite a young sort of feel to it." (M5, Students group)

"It's a good place to raise a family. Good schools." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I find it quite a friendly place to live. Having lived in big cities like London, Paris for a little bit and stuff they kind of lose their soul whereas Palmy is just the right size. I still feel like I can stop and talk to people in the street that you meet, if there is something interesting happening you just say hi, whereas if in London if you talk to a stranger you're a psychopath, so I really appreciate it." (M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"[It's quite a sleepy place] That can be a good thing too. You want to come back very relaxed, easy going, a good place. I know some people who moved down from Auckland, to do work at Massey for contracts and they say it's a much easier slow pace, you can get places quickly." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Central to other areas... it's easy to zoom up the coast. It's easy to zoom down to the Kapiti Coast or to Wellington if you need to do so... People a little bit keen on outdoor pursuits are not that far away from hunting or any form of adventure sport, skiing up the mountains." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

"[Little bit conservative] I put it down to being relatively calm... a few things happen, but by and large it's pretty stable, no big things happen, and everyone rocks on with what they're doing." (M2, Young Family group)

"But it's still not that far to even go to the mountain. You can do a day trip to the mountain. If you wanted to, like I just went for a car run up there just the other weekend, to Ohakune and back, in one day, quite happily." (F6, Young Family group)

"A good standard family city in my eyes." (M1, Mature Family group)

"Yes, you bring up the kids in a nice environment and you have just as good an education as anywhere else in the country." (F3, Mature Family group)

"Although it is a city, it has sort of got a rural feel to it, if you know what I mean." (M3, Mature Family group)

"I think it's one of the best kept secrets in New Zealand... it's a small city, a comfortable city to live in. It has anything you could virtually want in terms of medical care and hospitals and all that sort of thing it's very very easy to get around and there's... all sorts of shopping that's available and different areas it's very easy to live in." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

6.2.2 Other Positive Perceptions

There were also other positive perceptions/associations which were brought up by particular participants or groups:

- Culturally diverse.
- Inexpensive.
- Growing art scene.
- Tree lined boulevards.
- Restaurants and cafes.
- Energy efficient.

Though less dominant or even contentious themes, there is the idea some of these themes may indicate emerging perceptions of an evolving city, or attributes which have potential to be built upon or promoted to enhance positive imagery of the city. A few comments and quotations give more detail of these positive aspects of Palmerston North.

Culturally Diverse

Within the groups there were a few participants of Asian origin. In the group discussion context, the presence of such individuals seemed to elicit mention of Palmerston North as a place that was increasingly 'multicultural', 'international' or 'diverse' in flavour.

"[What sort of people live in Palmerston North]. Bit of everyone." (F7, Young Family group)

"Yeah, there's like a variety of different cultures." (F5, Young Family group)

"46 different ethnicities I think." (F3, Young Family group)

"Yeah, cause you're from Bhutan, so there's a lot of people from Bhutan, Nepal, got some Nepalese friends, so culturally it's getting richer, which is really cool." (F1, Young Family group)

And this from a lady from Vietnam...

"Since I arrived in New Zealand, I have found Palmy is just great, it has just got everything here basically and it is growing in the last 10 years and multi-national people coming to the city and it is getting more in terms of multi-cultural into the city... In the last few years in Palmy, because we have a lot of multi-ethnic cultures so we start having a lot of international days and cultural days and that sort of thing... [including the] Cherry Blossom thing that brings in lots of people from the surrounding areas." (F3, Mature Family group)

Inexpensive

Another relatively strong view put forward by some, was that Palmerston North was a comparatively inexpensive city to live in.

"I think that as a student, living costs are pretty cheap compared with other parts of the country." (F4, Students group)

"Public transport is pretty good here. It's great having free buses for students." (M5, Students group)

"I earn enough here, save enough and the cost of living is not too dear. So in London I was working arse over head or whatever and struggling to make enough money to just even exist. Here I've got enough money to do stuff, have fun, save up... I'm going to buy a house [then]." (M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Compared to other places where you study... the rent in Wellington is a lot more and even in Hamilton." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"My husband had an opportunity to move to Auckland when our kids were young but I chose not to go because I thought, we won't get anything much... [to live in] up there, (so) better to stay here." (F3, Mature Family group)

"The cost of living is not too bad, so now if I look at moving somewhere with work, you start looking at the dollars and cents of it all, and you go, well actually got a reasonably nice place and pretty close to work, doing alright, so yes, and it's nice here, like it's not just financial that you stay, but it helps." (M2, Young Family group)

"House prices haven't quite got to Auckland prices yet." (F6, Young Family group)

There was, however, some disagreement about this from the unemployed and those struggling financially, for instance mentioning the cost of restaurants and making ends meet. Still the idea of a relatively cheap city with less travel costs, housing costs, etc, is a positive for the area.

Growing Art Scene

The art scene was also mentioned as a growing concern in Palmerston North. It was acknowledged that you had to dig a little deeper to find it, and it was mentioned by those with more of an art or music bent as a positive for the city.

"There is a good little art scene here, there is some really good like fine art galleries, and Te Manawa is cool, it's got Frida Kahlo exhibition at the moment, which people are bussing in from Wellington to see that at the moment... Yeah, so there's been busloads of people from around the North Island coming to Palmerston North just to see that exhibition, and there's a real nice underground art scene here, there's a lot of artists, that you have to scratch surface for that... There's quite a thriving theatre scene too, like we've got the Regent, Centrepont and the Globe, so you know, you can see plays, musicals." (F1, Young Family group)

But others mentioned a paucity of major shows and events which is somewhat contradictory.

Tree Lined Boulevards

Again, although not universally mentioned, there was some positive mention of the tree lined streets and parks with trees. Though spontaneous mentions of this as something that describes Palmerston North were sparing, some very positive sentiments about the parks and trees later in the groups does show this as a positive for the city and potential drawcard for the area.

"Palmy's quite good with the square and that, trees around and everything. In Wellington it's not like that. That's why university is real nice, quite a green type [of city]." (M5, Students group)

"It's quite a pretty city - it's got lots of trees and it doesn't have heaps of high buildings." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I had some friends over from Australia not long ago and they commented on the tree lined streets. Their way of thinking was but it is going to block all the drains and split the concrete and I said, well it is better than dust and you can't grow trees anyhow... it is good having the tree lined streets. It is good for the environment. It is good for your mood and that." (M3, Mature Family group)

Restaurants And Cafes

Also mentioned not infrequently were the restaurants and cafes in Palmerston North.

"There are nice places to eat. There's a huge range of restaurants, cafes, different cultures - lots of eating [opportunities]." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"There are a lot of different restaurants that we can go to that have got that (multicultural) flavour with them." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

"I believe we actually have the highest per capita of eating places in Palmerston." (M3, Empty Nesters group)

In the discussions there was also mentioned the expense of eating out, however, and also the idea that many restaurants and night entertainment places were struggling.

Energy Efficient

The huge wind farms (not in but) near Palmerston North were proudly brought up by many participants. They were mentioned when asked 'what are the jewels in the crown of Palmerston North' and 'where would you take visitors to impress them'.

"It's one of the more impressive things around actually. The noise of it, is it going to stay up there?" (M2, Young Family group)

"There's a whole lot of little wind farms. Well different outfits have set them up, but huge. I think there's about 450 of them or something." (M4, Empty Nesters group)

"In the summertime they have buses go up to the wind farm... and they know that it implies that we are looking out for the environment because we have wind farms instead of nuclear power stations." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

Conversations about 'environmental sustainability' did not gain much traction in the focus groups. A usual counter was the state of the Manawatu River running through the centre of the city which was thought to be polluted.

"Unfortunately our river lets us down. It's known as one of the worse polluted rivers, unfortunately. It's a shame." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

"It used to be clean. Now it's one of the dirtiest rivers in New Zealand." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

The idea that the dirty river might be standing in the way of claims that Palmerston North is 'environmentally sustainable' would seem to merit more attention.

Discussion

A scattering of other attributes were brought up by participants, often related to their circumstance of interest. Some had specific sporting interests and mentioned whether or not the city was good for this. There were several participants involved with the universities that pressed the idea of the city as a knowledge centre, from their perspective. Likewise, research and development and activities of the army.

One aspect that should be mentioned with regard to views about the city is that there appeared to be a good deal of positivity not just from those who had made their lives in Palmerston North, but also those who had moved there from other provincial towns or rural areas. To them Palmerston North was a move up and their attitudes were quite contrasting to those originating from the larger centres such as Wellington, Auckland or overseas.

Student views came from a different perspective. Most saw themselves as transients and considered they were not so likely to remain in Palmerston North. Their views tended to be more oriented toward their life in the city as students, as opposed to 'life residents'. Most of the views were actually relatively positive - but it should be understood that they have less invested in a city they would be leaving, and less relative engagement.

A further observation here, is that there were a number of 'job seekers' within these focus groups, and some in a poor financial situation. To a degree, some negativity was expressed about Palmerston North and what it had to offer. In some ways this can be seen as their view of the world from their circumstance, rather than commonly held perceptions of Palmerston North as a city.

In reacting to various comments from other participants about the city being 'bland' or not very interesting, several participants put forward the view (perhaps defensively) that Palmerston North did have lots of things to do - it was just that they were not just delivered to you. You can make your own fun, or find activities to do. There were plenty of suggestions of the sorts of things that could be done if you had a mind to.

"You usually get asked the same thing. What do you think of Palmerston North? From my parents, they live up north. I think it is the sort of city where you have to make your own fun a bit. Need to go out and do what you want. I ride motor bikes so it's cool going up through the hills and that. You have to go searching a bit more than say Wellington where you can just pop down an alley and find two or three new places. So there is definitely you need a bit of motivation to find something or you will sit in your room bored all day." (M1, Students group)

"Palmerston North is what you want to make out of it. If you think you can't get a job, then mentally, you can't get a job but if you think positive and work hard you'll get whatever you want. But the mindset of Palmy is a bit small like a dot in the whole world - so I believe it's just the thinking of people in Palmerston North. Palmerston North is a nice place cause it's flat - we've got beaches but you've got to drive out to it like Foxton and Tangimoana. Take the family to the Esplanade or the Lido or go to Paihiatua - go for a drive over there or Ashhurst - take the family out there so it feels like a positive? Palmy but it's all up to the person and how they think - positive or negatively. But I was gonna say there are worse places out there in New Zealand." (M1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"People say oh there's nothing to do in Palmy - but there is stuff if you look for it." (M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

6.2.3 A Few Negative Perceptions

In talking about life in Palmerston North, apart from the widespread view that the city could be a bit boring for some (see next section), a few other negatives were raised by various focus group participants:

- Crime and Drugs.
- The polluted river.
- Unemployment/underemployment.

Crime And Drugs

The idea that Palmerston North had some crime and drugs issues was brought up in several of the focus groups. To be fair, one participant in the Young Family Group lived close to the Lundy incident and this seemed to have made her particularly concerned with such matters.

"I don't know how much the rest of the country knows about it, but I mean, we have, Palmy's on the news actually, probably more often than we should be for a small town... sometimes, it's the random Lundys, but every now and then it's gang related, or something like that, that always brings the name of the town down... Yeah, but no, it's a big shock, cause we also had Brett Garner in Ashhurst... [and] A couple of years ago, there was a major, major, drug bust, that kind of ran from, not quite Taupo, right down to Levin, but the main thing was in Palmy." (F6, Young Family group)

In this focus group, once this idea about crime was introduced, others echoed similar views - or perhaps fears.

"There's still a lot of violence, around the square at night-time, with the young ones... 16, 17 year olds, out there drinking, trying to get into pubs... [and] Yeah, now it's the army, now it's those army guys, who get those drugs." (F2, Young Family group)

"I worry for my boys, I've got my little girl, but I worry for my boys, as far as random violence goes, because that's still out there." (F1, Young Family group)

"I think in Palmy, also, we still do also have a gang presence." (F7, Young Family group)

The idea was proposed that this group was particularly concerned because they were parents of children about to turn into teenagers. However, the mentions in other groups shows perhaps the sentiment is more widespread.

"People just don't care what they wear or look like or whether they've showered or not and there's lots of fights and violence and pretty much a mini South Auckland - that's the way I see it." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

"No and it's like, I think there's like... I know you've grown up here and I know a lot of people, ah, get to a certain age in Palmy and just start hitting the drugs and the drinking because there's not a lot around here for young guys to do and vice versa for girls. And it is very good for families and young kids and all that." (M1, Mature Family group)

In the latter case a link was made with a lack of things for young people to do in Palmerston North. Not everyone agreed that Palmerston North was more dangerous than anywhere else though.

"It's a small town. There's drugs come round town but we're more safer than other cities." (M1, Young Singles/Couples group)

The Polluted River

The idea that the Manawatu River was polluted came up in multiple groups and at different stages in the discussions. In a number of mentions this issue was brought up in context that the river 'could' be a great attraction or activity, if only it was cleaner. Sometimes it just seemed to be mentioned as a kind of embarrassment or sore point.

"I think that is something people out of town know about. The brown gross polluted river that Palmerston has. I don't think that does us any good." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Yes, that's got the dire reputation of being um, pretty much being the second most polluted river in the world." (M1, Mature Family group)

"Coming from the coast I couldn't believe that people don't use the river quite as much as, like back home rivers are not as dirty." (M3, Mature Family group)

Cleaning the river, although not a simple matter, would appear to be a positive thing in terms of both civic pride and also to provide a useful amenity to those looking for more activities in the City.

Unemployment/Underemployment

The unique nature of Palmerston North was discussed in the various groups. The understanding seemed to be there that it was a student city and many students would be transient. Most students themselves indicated that, after their studies, they would move to places where they could find suitable employment.

However, in the group of Older Singles and Couples, people had decided to stay in Palmerston North, or they were from there originally. For this group the issue of gaining good employment was an issue.

"I don't know if there are a lot of job opportunities here." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I've applied for about two hundred, three hundred jobs in the last couple of years and not a single bite. They seem very happy to produce some graduates, much less happy to employ them." (M1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Even when I first finished my degree I found it hard to find a job straight away. Lucky enough I knew someone in IT at Massey and they put my name forward and I got a fixed term. That was my foot in the door, but if you don't have those sort of contacts then it would be a lot harder to get employment I presume." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Yeah, I think you are right about the job market. That's a little bit of a problem for me. I probably not get more than a couple of years because there isn't really anywhere to move up like there is in Wellington or Auckland or Christchurch." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

It is clear that a university city like Palmerston North could not conceivably employ all the students that went through there. But, by the same token, there are most likely many people who would stay and contribute to the development and life of the city, if reasonable employment were possible.

The low wages of those in the service industry (eg, restaurants) in Palmerston North was discussed at various times in the groups. This was mentioned in terms of not having enough money to 'go out' or to go to restaurants and how it made living harder in the city.

6.3 Does Palmerston North Have A Reputation?

It should be noted that the following comments from participants about a 'reputation' that Palmerston North may have, are really 'perceptions of perceptions'. In some ways this question acts as a 'projective' in that it allows people to voice their own thoughts by attributing them (with less recrimination) to others.

When asked if they thought Palmerston North had a reputation in most groups there was a strong 'yes' response.

"Like a Jaffa - if they came up to you and said 'Where are you from?' and you said 'Palmerston' [and they said] 'eeew'." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"Along with Hamilton, Palmerston North is the butt of a lot of jokes." (F2, Empty Nesters group)

There were stories of Palmerston North being 'a bit backward' or 'being stuck in the 80's, or 'conservative'. Younger participants in particular seem to believe others believed thought it was a "bit boring" or worse.

"Of being boring and like... yeah." (F3, Students group)

"They call it a bit of a hole." (F4, Students group)

"Pretty bland comparing to a lot of other towns. In fact when I was staying at a Back Packers in Auckland, a lot of the Back Packers heard 'don't ever go to Palmy'." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"It's not a place that you say 'Yeah! Come visit Palmy, it's really cool'. No one says that - ever." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"Nothing to do." (F7, Young Family group)

"It's a conservative area. The whole area has been conservative for decades." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

Others, generally older, tended to frame any idea of a negative reputation in a more defensive manner.

"[Does PN have a reputation?] I find that interesting because they can never really put their thumb on it. They bag the place and I've been one of them in the past admittedly, but when challenged you can never really put your thumb on why." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

"The weather. People reckon the weather is stink, it always rains. But we've had a good last twelve months so that's been the opposite this year, so... [it's not always true]." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I know that from, probably the last like ten years, either being asked where I'm from and saying Palmerston North or in the last couple of years saying 'I'm moving back there', the response is always, always sort of like a laugh and 'arhhh' and 'stink' and 'oh poor you' and 'why?' and like you said, the people don't really put their finger on what it is but it's, I think it is a reputation that is probably unearned because I think it's got a reputation of having nothing going on and everyone is sad or in gangs or drugged students and that's certainly not true." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"A lot of people who I know have been overseas say it's fine, but I guess it is what you make of it. A lot of people I do think view Palmy as a bit of a... I don't like to say it, but a bit of a hole... but it has got everything you need for a family. [Do you think it is a hole?] No, I don't think it is a hole, not at all. I mean I have lived here my whole life... but I wouldn't say it was the most exciting place in the World." (M1, Mature Family group)

In the Mature Family group there was some discussion about how different the town was according to the time of the year. When the students were away, the town was very quiet. The very presence of students was said to liven the place up for everyone.

Overall there were fewer stories from those in the Mature Family group and the Empty Nesters group about Palmerston North having any kind of negative reputation - perhaps because they had lived there longer and had more invested in the place.

There were a few in the Students group who were also somewhat resistant to the idea that any reputation as 'boring' was justified. This could be influenced by their being immersed in a relatively busy and interesting student life, or perhaps that they originated from another provincial town or rural area. There is also the possibility they are simply resolving 'cognitive dissonance' where a person rationalises decisions/actions (eg, to study at PN) because of an inconsistent belief/thought (eg, that the city might have a poor reputation). In the next remarks the defensiveness is expressed in terms of perceived progress the city was making.

"I've heard it's changed. Over time I've met people that said 'I used to live in Palmy, I flatted here, it was a real hole back then', but now-a-days you find someone else that may have been at some different point, that say it's not such boring town. It just depends on who you are talking to." (M3, Students group)

"Before I came here I had heard fairly good things about city development, like how before my time here the square was a lot different. They had hills and things in there and a lot of assaults and things going on and once that sort of dealt with as an issue it was fairly quickly turned into what it is now. It seems the sort of a city that takes a bit of initiative with that sort of thing. They bring in classical music, which led to a drop in crime. There are some initiatives to bring in some other bits and pieces around that. So it kind of seems like they are not scared to try new things." (M1, Students group)

In several groups there were of mentions of improvements to The Square specifically as an example of improving Palmerston North - and its reputation.

On the topic of reputation, it is interesting to note that the incident in 2008 when John Cleese mocked Palmerston North was still brought up.

"Well there is that John Cleese thing, remember that? He came and did a show at the Regent, and he had a bad time in Palmy, and he just spent the rest of his trip just bagging us out big time, and that kinda stuck a little bit." (F1, Young Family group)

One participant countered that, in retribution, there was now a section of rubbish dump in Palmerston North named Mt Cleese! They thought that perhaps Mr Cleese was unaware of this tribute.

Understanding any (supposed) reputation that Palmerston North has, is important, because this issue is so related to civic pride, to mental wellbeing and people's desire to live in the area. It could be argued that combating, or improving negative views of Palmerston North, either by marketing or addressing the shortfalls, should be an essential part of the city's development.

6.4 Perceptions Of An Ideal City

Participants discussed briefly what an ideal city to live in would be like.

The most common mention was of something Palmerston North would have some difficulty changing - that it wasn't on the coast. This was often alongside another idea, that of a bigger city, with its big city offerings (Auckland and Wellington the most cited).

"The location is bad. We need a mountain or a beach or something." (F4, Students group)

"I think it would be just having a beach like Wellington does. It has a waterfront and the city is centred around that... there's so much more diversity, people are used to it there. People are very judgmental here - uninformed." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"[An ideal city would be] probably something like Wellington. I dunno, there's just something about that place. You can do everything. You can walk along the pier, there's heaps of shit, so way better I reckon." (M2, Young Singles/Couples group)

"After living in Wellington and Auckland, I enjoy living closer to the water. And I'm also into my shopping - not good in Palmerston North." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"We haven't got a coastline - and Auckland's got a coastline, Wellington's got a coastline, Napier's got a coastline, even New Plymouth's got a coastline..." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

There was some talk about the merits of a lake and it was pointed out that Hamilton and Rotorua had lakes. One person the Empty Nesters group even spoke about a lake Palmerston North actually had - but indicated it was private and no one really knew about it.

Younger participants were also interested in a place with events and 'interesting cool stuff'.

"Need more events like... Wellington will have the Wearable Arts and Auckland will have all the concerts. They all have different things going on." (F1, Students group)

"I think culturally it could open up a little, have a bit more fringe stuff, like festivals, like it's a little bit conservative, like we have festival of cultures but it's, and it's great, great food, love that, but it can be a bit more, you know, when you go to Wellington and go to CubaDuba, and it's like, yup, they've brought people in from all over the world, just doing really interesting, cool stuff, we could have a bit more of that, a bit more culture, for me." (F1, Young Family group)

Some spoke of places where there were 'more touristy things to do' and even that Palmerston North didn't have a holiday park for families.

It has to be said that as well as those that lamented what another place, or an 'ideal city' might have, there were many who quickly leapt to the defence of Palmerston North, stressing the friendliness of the town, its family orientation, and other things the city had to offer.

"I think it is a very broad question (what is the ideal city), cause obviously everyone has a different point of view, my brother moved towards the Wellington, did that bigger city thing, but I don't like it, I like Palmy, I like the size of it, I like that I can drive from one side of the town to the other within 15 minutes, I like I can drive anywhere within two hours and get to the big cities, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, so it fits for me, and I think there are plenty of things to do for the kids, or even when you've got visitors around that are free, which is always big for you know, for this life stage when you're buying houses and things like that and you haven't got that cashflow like you get when you're a bit older, I think it's good." (F6, Young Family group)

"We are a provincial city and a service city and we have to recognise that instead of pushing ourselves as a tourist destination which we are not." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

The concept of an ideal city is also useful in terms of understanding what improvements people want for the area, and where they think effort should be made to improve things. It is also useful in understanding and embracing Palmerston North's unique positioning amongst other New Zealand cities.

6.5 Councils Role In Making Palmerston North A 'Better' City

Prior to this bringing up this topic, participants had been discussing life in Palmerston North in the general sense. That the direction of the group sessions was to be more about Council related matters has not been overtly stated. In this context discussion was steered towards the issue of whose job improving the city was, and where this fitted in with what the participants actually knew about Council activities.

Various opinions were expressed as to who would be responsible for making Palmerston North a better city. Some thought 'the people' but others felt the Council did/should play a larger part.

"The government wouldn't listen (so) maybe the Council would." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

"Your expectation is the Council has some role to play in that, you look at the likes of Massey, and I guess we benefit by having Massey here, so I'm not sure how much we really want to ask Massey to be doing, cause in a way getting people here, is bringing an income into town, and helping everybody else, I think really the Council is part of that." (M2, Young Family group)

"[The Council should] Market to those people to bring those events here. Without that, those events can't go ahead. So they've got to look at that." M3, Older Singles/Couples group)

"The people. Because unless the people push the Council, the Council won't do it. They will do what they want to do but which may not be what the people want." (M4, Mature Family group)

"Everybody's [responsibility] perhaps led by Council." (F2, Empty Nesters group)

"I think Council should, this is what we elected them for to promote the city, one of their things is to promote the city." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

Some of those in the Students group had the view that students should have a greater input into change for the city.

"I think students, it's a student city so I think you need student initiative." (F3, Students group)

"Like it's all well the Council making changes because obviously that's what they should be doing but a lot's changed. If this is a student city like they say a lot's changed since they've been students, so we need that sort of student contingency to have some sort of input." (M5, Students group)

A number of participants had the view that rather than just 'people' generally being instigators of change, it would more effective if people became involved on an issue by issue basis. There seems to be some idea that self-interested people (or lobbyists) might be important instigators of change.

"I think you needed great change, it probably would come from a new group emerging rather than a few sporadic people making requests." (M1, Students group)

"I think it should be issued based. It should issue friendly... It needs to be something more than that, so you can continue to grow. Enable more youth [to stay in PN], keep the young in town as well. [so we are] Like better off." (M3, Students group)

"What the people want, they actually have to do a lot more, be a lot more vocal, be like the French and the Belgian farmers. When they want something they get out there and they rattle the chain... Like I hear people saying about the river, yes, the river would be very good as a recreational facility, it was thought about a number of years ago, there was going to be a proposal done, a lake out front, but um, it failed to attract, but um, it never happened." (M4, Mature Family group)

However, it should be said that, as the discussion progressed, it did transpire that with many, the idea of people taking an active interest in the direction of the Council was, possibly... ambitious.

"It is all well and good saying that 'we' should as the people... but nobody is actually going to do that, unless you are a really one off, special person." (M1, Mature Family group)

6.6 Do They Know What The Council Does?

As the discussions focused more down onto the operations of the Council, it was soon apparent that there was a disparity in what participants knew about the Council.

Most younger participants really only had a scant knowledge of Council matters. Some knew virtually nothing. Others knew about a few specific matters such as parking or rubbish collection. A few who happened to have studied governance, etc, were more informed, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Some were frank about their lack of knowledge.

"I don't know much." (F1, Students group)

"I couldn't tell you." (F3, Students group)

"Not a lot to be honest. I don't know a lot about what the Council does. We are a politically apathetic generation as well, to be blunt" (M1, Students group)

"I don't know what's going on in the city. I don't know their proposal or plans to change things or things like that..." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

Generally, the older the participants the more they seemed to know. More in the family groups were able to state the activities of the Council and things the Council had been doing (stopbanks, planning a cycle bridge, the Linklater development), etc. Here is just a snippet of what some in the Mature Family group suggested the Council did.

"General infrastructure." (F4, Mature Family group)

"Rubbish pick up. Maintenance of all the parks and recreational areas." (F5, Mature Family group)

"Sportsgrounds." (F2, Mature Family group)

"Manage the money from the rates, they should be managing it in a good way, planning for the future, planning for unforeseen circumstances." (M1, Mature Family group)

"They approve the funding for the street operations that are around about in whatever street... They are managing the Lido, the Esplanade, um, they are actually managing the basic infrastructure of the city, some of the amenities available for the public, the library, the Lido, the Esplanade, Memorial Park." (M4, Mature Family group)

"Organise all the events like um, all the, international days and so on, they are all involved with that, cultural days, music bringing to the city, um, all those things. Um, you know, the Square is so vibrant, you know, quite often now with all the, City Council organise all of these activities for people coming and enjoying, having a good time with all the food and um, things like that." (F3, Mature Family group)

Many in the oldest group (Empty Nesters group) not only were able to list some functions of the Council but also regaled various stories of what the Council had or had not done over the years. Some knew when specific buildings or parks had been refurbished and such like. There was talk of how they actively read Council flyers, etc. Opinions were even offered about specific Councillors, the appropriate numbers of Councillors, the new STV voting system and such matters.

From the discussions and opinions expressed it became evident that not just age (or lifestage) was related to knowledge about the Council, but in all probability, house ownership status. It was quite noticeable that those renting generally knew less about the Council than those living in houses they were buying or owned. Perhaps paying rates gives people more of a vested interest in such matters? In the groups of Students, Young Singles/Couples, and Older Singles/Couples, most were renting. In the Young Family group half were renting and half buying. In the two oldest groups almost all had (or were buying) their own homes.

6.7 Residents As Citizens

It is an interesting question as to what extent can we expect a resident of an area to be a 'citizen', taking an interest in what the community is up, contributing to the community, and participating democratically in its governance. Various insights into this were garnered during these focus groups which are discussed here.

A first crude look at participant's engagement with the Palmerston Council was by simply asking if they knew the name of the current Mayor (indicated by a show of hands). Then whether they voted in the last Council election.

| GROUP | No. Participants | No. Who Knew Mayor's Name | Number Who Voted Last Election |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Students | 9 | 1 | 0 |
| Young Singles/Couples | 8 | 2 | 0 |
| Older Singles/Couples | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| Young Family | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| Mature Family | 10 | 4 | 5 |
| Empty Nesters | 11 | 7 | 11 |

We note that six of the students were probably not old enough to vote in the last elections (2013) and four of those in the Young Singles/Couples group. But even with this (and bearing in mind the small sample), it would appear that the older you get, the more likely you are to become more interested in, and more engaged in the Local Government democratic process. This appears to be a similar story in terms of the non-elected side of the Council (see previous section).

Further discussions took place on the need to vote and voting in the future. These comments from students explain more about the lack of relevance of the (elected) Council to them.

"Sometime ago I got some mails from the mailbox about the Councillors but I didn't read them." (F2, Students group)

"I don't know anything about who to vote for or why to vote for them." (F1, Students group)

"It does sound fairly distressing to hear this, but taking into account that a lot of people here study is the most important thing and I would say a lot of us don't really consider ourselves people that we will be here long term. This is really a transitional stage even myself I plan on staying here, I still feel it's very transitory, so it's not that we don't care, its low down on our spectrum compared to study, working, studylink for God's sake. It is way back on the back burner on what's on the forefront of our mind." (M1, Students group)

"And I don't know how to vote. No one told me where and how. Like for the national ones I got some mails. From the City Council here - nothing." (F2, Students group)

Remarks from those in the Young Singles/Couples group (who had lived in PN for at least five years and are presumably more likely to stay) were also not very encouraging.

"Often my Dad votes for me cause I don't pick up my mail and stuff." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I don't feel that we hear about it enough. I had no idea.... I didn't know who the Mayor was, I don't know when the Elections are, I don't see anything about it. I don't even read the paper." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"The information's probably out there but I don't have a need to look for it." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

Here they discuss if they would vote in the future:

"I could, in a different mindset. Could be thinking about settling down having a family and how the Council could help that." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"It'll probably still be pretty irrelevant to me eh. I don't really care about it." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"Yeah, I'm thinking about all the older generations that are keen to vote. All us young ones just ... our minds are occupied on other things in life. So that's why I think that's why we don't care as much about voting compared to the elders - it's just the generation." (M1, Young Singles/Couples group)

In contrast, these quotes from older participants who did vote show a more positive and informed view of voting.

"If you don't vote, you shouldn't really complain." (F7, Young Family group)

"[About campaigning] They go pretty hard in town. Like they work it in Palmy, with signs and stuff on the side of the road." (F1, Young Family group)

"Some people will in their bios do quite a bit of a blurb on themselves and other people have just got five lines and I think 'how am I going to vote for you'... [but] I just vote on the basis of 'how are you going to make a good Councillor' - that's all I know." (M3, Mature Family group)

"Yes (I did vote in the last election). You just number down, you know, 1 2 3 4, and whoever you want to vote, you can. You don't have to vote for them all." (M4, Empty Nesters group)

So if being a good citizen can be measured by voting, then we see that generally this seems to improve with age (or era/generation). But to what extent do people actually want to further engage with the Council?

6.8 Council Consultation And Community Involvement

6.8.1 How Badly Do They Want Consultation With The Council?

It could be argued that the level of satisfaction someone has with the Palmerston North City Council is related to their expectations. This begs the question - to what extent do residents of Palmerston North actually want consultation with the Council?

In these focus groups, there were certainly those who said they did, in the most general way, relish contact with the Council and were interested in what the Council were doing, or planned to do. These tended to be older participants, usually home owners and with a strong attachment (history) with the city.

"... You can approach them if you need to. I'm not involved in any of the Council things but I've been around town a long time usually, on the occasional time, I've had to ring somebody about something and they've said 'oh yes' you know, and they listen to you." (m3, Empty Nesters group)

"I'd like more consultation, and have a follow up on the consultation and let the ratepayers know what the result is with the consultation..." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

However, there were also those who, for various reasons, were less interested. Here some students explain their situations and outlook very well.

"My main focus is on study. Maybe not time for me to consider it [consultation with the Council] that much at this stage. I don't know, I am not paying rates..." (F2, Students group)

"I'm from Taranaki and that's where I see myself living. I take a lot of interest, like if I see a headline about things happening there, like debates where money is being spent I'll click onto that and read it but because I don't see myself living in Palmy I don't take as much interest." (F3, Students group)

"Most of us if you are from out of town, you're a tenant, none the less you're from home anyway. You kind of think a landlord will choose what he wants to do but the rates increases are going to affect him but it's not going to affect us, but it will but we're not directly the first link because he will raise his rent if he wants to regardless." (M3, Students group)

A strong theme, threaded through the groups, was that for many, as long as there was no pressing issue, so long as things were ticking along nicely there was no need to pay attention to what the Council was up to. Out of sight, out of mind.

"They tend to keep Palmy really clean... I always see them in the morning picking up rubbish and stuff (and) those walkways don't just pop out of nowhere... [but] they're kind of behind the scenes." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I haven't really thought about it. It's just something you don't think about everyday... It's not really my place to go along and say something. I don't feel like I should say something." (F2, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I only think about the Council when I get a parking ticket... or pay the rates." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"It's not part of my day. I'm not sitting all day thinking 'I wonder what the Council is up to?'" M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I suppose I would [find out what the Council are doing] if I put the effort in, but I don't really... [why is that] Just time really, quite busy with what I'm doing in my life and with my (baby) daughter." (F2, Young Family group)

"Nothing's come up, that I'm so unhappy with, or so happy with, that I feel like I need to tell people or investigate why, or why it's not going on." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I just feel that that's their job, that's what they are paid to do, look after our town and they should do it." (F5, Mature Family group)

There was some suggestion that people might be more interested in specific issues that affected them or their neighbourhood. This is different to wanting consultation more generally with Council matters, or regarding forward plans...

"They are usually targeted at a certain section of the community so if its only disability issues around the town or whatever, then I will go to those community groups and work with those people, you know, so able bodied people wouldn't find out about them, those meetings because they are not in that specific target group." (M3, Mature Family group)

"I listen up when they talk about the river, and they don't really do anything." (F1, Young Family group)

"The latest ones been, they've had consultation or wanted to see whether they're going to put a bridge across the river for a cycleway out to Linton, and I've got emails, and through work we got stuff about it, didn't ever get around to writing anything down, which bridge, where I thought it would be, where the bridge gets put, I can't really say that's a dumb place, I can but, yeah, I guess I probably don't engage as much as I probably should." (M2, Young Family group)

... or for a specific kind of person.

"I think that the thing about political consultation is only for people for very specific sorts of people. People with lots of time and people who are really opinionated and want to be involved." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"People with agendas." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Yeah, a lot of older retired people. So you get a really really small amount of population that is getting consulted." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Everyone else is just too bloody busy." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

So in summary, ironically it appears that if the Council is doing a good job and not upsetting too many people, many residents would not particularly be wanting to engage with the Council (except for basic things - see information section). A kind of passive approval. But if there was an issue, the opposite might occur. More people would start to seek information, consultation and an avenue to express their views. Many residents aren't particularly proactive citizens until they are really wound up about something.

6.8.2 How Satisfied Are They With The Level Of Consultation?

Given the context of a variable need of people to want to engage with the Council, how satisfied are they with the level and types of consultation that is available?

Overall, it can be said that there was a mixed response to how satisfied these participants were with the level and types of consultation (that they knew about). Some seemed happy enough with the Council's attempts at consultation (whether or not they even wanted such engagement), some were more or less neutral, and even some willing to say they needed more consultation.

It should be born in mind that when people are pressed on such matters, there is the possibility of them expressing socially appropriate comments rather than their true sentiment. For instance, some generally disinterested persons said they thought more/better consultation would be good and some even insinuated that the fact they knew so little about the Council was in some way attributed to the Council's poor consultation or communication - despite them barely having seen any communication already available.

Some of the subtleties of these participant's views on their satisfaction with consultation are best examined by looking at some representative verbatims.

Within the variability of response one can see a general pattern with older participants knowing more about the Council, wanting more consultation and getting more interested (sometimes critical) about the methods.

Students

"I've got no idea of how they consult, so I would say that they are bad, because we are not aware of... [that]." (F3, Students group)

"We're not owning a house here it's hard to say. On the one hand is it working so well that you never hear the squeaks or is it literally no one knows? Hard to put a finger on it I guess." (M1, Students group)

"Obviously too little because we are all a bit confused about what the Council does." (M5, Students group)

Young Singles/Couples

"I don't feel that we hear about it enough. I had no idea.... I didn't know who the Mayor was, I don't know when the Elections are, I don't see anything about it. I don't even read the paper... I don't think it would bother me [how much they consulted]. I'm sure they'd be doing things for the greater good - making the Square nicer - that kind of thing." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I don't know what's going on in the city. I don't know their proposal or plans to change things or things like that, so I guess I don't want to be consulted. I haven't been consulted." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

Older Singles/Couples

"I feel that if you don't seek or look at, when they look for consultation on their website you sometimes miss what they've put out there." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Isn't that everyone's own personal responsibility to look and take an interest in your community. You've got to meet them halfway." (M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"But also they could come in a little further. I was going to say that they probably do quite well to actually put it out there what they are working on in a way that it is very obvious to everybody." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

Young Family

"That stuff sort of concerns me, but I don't go out of my way to find out more about it... probably my big thing, I'd like to see changed or fixed, whatever, is the river. But so does so many other people in town and you just keep getting the same message, but nothing seems to happen and I don't have time or the resources to do anything, if I thought it could make any difference." (F7, Young Family group)

"I suppose I would (have enough say so), if I put the effort in, but I don't really put the effort in." (F2, Young Family group)

"I do find them quite, you can contact them if you need them, like if you need the dog ranger to come out and pick up a dog that's wandering." (F2, Young Family group)

Mature Family

"I think they do what they have to do [legally]." (M3, Mature Family group)

"You need to have time to go to meetings to do that, there is no other way of really doing it unless you go and find out about them." (M2, Mature Family group)

"I don't hide away in my house or hide from the world but I don't exactly hear about it." (M1, Mature Family group)

"Well it is, it is advertised, it is the wrong way of advertising in that, it is in The Tribune or The Guardian and that's the only way they are doing the advertising." (M2, Mature Family group)

"Every now and then you can write a submission, they give you a thing through The Tribune or The Guardian, that you post in, fill it out and post that." (F4, Mature Family group)

Empty Nesters

"You can approach them if you need to. I'm not involved in any of the Council things but I've been around town a long time and usually if I'm occasional time I've had to ring up somebody about something and they've said 'oh yes' you know. And they listen to me." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

"Well they just seem to do; they do things without really consulting us. You want something... you haven't sorta got time to protest... [like] sometimes... I take my dog for a walk down by the river and they tend to be chopping trees down and doing things and there's protests and it doesn't seem to make any difference, and there's a wall between the cyclists and the dog walkers." (F6, Empty Nesters group)

"Before actions though they always have the opportunity for anyone to come and listen to them and anybody is welcome to come in and ask questions, so there is opportunity there to come in and meet them." (F1, Empty Nesters group)

6.9 Information Quality And Delivery

Participants responded better to the concept of Council 'information' rather than 'consultation'- even some of those who said they knew little about the Council. Overall, the idea of 'residents as customers' seems to be a better fit than 'residents as citizens'.

When participants discussed their experiences and knowledge of Council communications, some very clear preferences became apparent according to their age or life stage. Essentially, younger people nowadays are more inclined to electronic media and far less to paper media, such as papers, pamphlets and the like. At the other end of the age spectrum, older persons mainly are not only driven more to find out what the Council are up to, but prefer paper media and even, where possible, meetings. Probably this helps provide a feeling of community involvement, a strong need at this stage of life.

6.9.1 Pamphlets, Letters And Newspapers

Paper methods of communicating can be great. People can find, keep and read the informative information about what the Council has done, or plans to do. In these groups this media was embraced mainly by those in the Mature Family group and the Empty Nesters group.

"Sometimes you get things in the mail if it specifically involves you, they'll send you something about an issue that they are having or a decision they are making and invite you to come along to a meeting." (F1, Mature Family group)

"A very nice pamphlet comes out once a month." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

"Yes [the pamphlet comes] in the Tribune... I always read it." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

"I always look at that Council one. Because we don't know what's going on otherwise." (F1, Empty Nesters group)

"The newspapers are good. They tend to follow what Council decisions have been made so we often find there's been a Council meeting..." (M3, Empty Nesters group)

Unfortunately, there was quite a lot of conversation about the shortcomings of such paper communication. For instance, that the brochure that came with the rates was just for ratepayers. Or that the delivered communications might not be noticed amongst the rest of the things that arrived in the letterbox. Some mentioned they either didn't get the Tribune, etc, which carried the information - or that they didn't even read newspapers and suchlike.

"I just chuck flyers out so..." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

"Do they send out flyers?" (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"[Have you seen the brochures] No, they mustn't be visual enough, I must just chuck them out." (M3, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I read the newspaper on line... so we're not even reading the newspaper" (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I only see the one on when to put your bins out." (M2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"[Brochures come] Once or twice a year. If you don't get the paper you'd probably miss it. Sometimes they put them in with the Guardian or the Property Press, but if you don't get the Evening Standard which is the local paper - you might miss it. [does that upset you greatly?] Not really." (M3, Young Family group)

From these comments we see that paper delivery methods are good for certain audiences - older and more community concerned people. But for younger people, paper is not a media of choice, even if they were interested (which mainly they were not).

6.9.2 Council Website

Of all the media, the Council website seemed to have the most universal appeal. There were some in every group (except the Empty Nesters) who had used the Council website for at least something. The main reason for this was simply that people nowadays use the internet for information searching and this would direct them to the website. Examples of the kind of information being sort, relevant to the Council included: Rubbish times, rates dates, walking tracks, bus timetables, dog control, dog registration, parking issues, noise control, liquor licensing, property information, building matters, fencing rules, and even events.

Even several students, despite their insistence they knew little about the Council actually had looked up something on the website.

"Actually I did, to check when there is the date for recycling for the rubbish bin." (F2, Students group)

"I looked up walking tracks the other day. I think that was through the Council." (F3, Students group)

There were some positive accounts of interaction with the website from mainly the mid-lifers (Older Singles/Couples, Family groups).

"I do go to the website quite often, because I look at properties and stuff, when I was looking for a property. They've just done a redesign in the last couple of months. [Did you like it?] It was better than the old one." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I sometimes sit there on the weekends, I think it's part of the same page, and I'll look for something to do and I'll go to the events [page]." (M1, Mature Family group)

"[On the website] There are quite a lot of things to do, quite a few things like outdoor activities, cinema, language centre... oh and arts and crafts, even film festivals, that sort thing." (F3, Mature Family group)

In this particular Empty Nesters group, although most seemed to have some interaction with computers, there seemed a degree of suspicion about accessing Council information using the website.

"No I haven't looked. [I'm] Not confident there's anything on it... Well I'm sure they don't publish the Council minutes on it." (F2, Empty Nesters group)

"I use my computer for business and I don't really look at any news." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

So those in the Empty Nesters group were perhaps most interested in the activities of the Council, but paradoxically don't use the ever present website to seek information. Paper media is more relevant to this market.

6.9.3 Facebook

With these participants, contact with the Council's Facebook was minimal with only two in the Young Family group having direct experience and one in the Mature Family group.

"Yeah I've liked them on Facebook." (F6, Young Family group)

"Every now and again they'll come up with what's going on... they don't update it all the time, but if there's something big, like I've seen the Linklater stuff there, I've seen the bridge stuff there." (F7, Young Family group)

"They did put on Facebook when we had a flood around here. I noticed someone from Council warning people, you know, what streets they shouldn't be going on because of the flood. It happened recently when we had the lagoon flood, ah when was that? Last year, wasn't it, that's when I saw it on Facebook, the Council." (F3, Mature Family group)

Despite this very light contact with Facebook, there were actually quite a few participants who expressed some potential interest, eg:

"[What's the best way to communicate with people like you] Social media platforms. Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram. 21st Century." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"[On being told the Council was on Facebook] I'd probably be into that... [and] a lot of mums like Facebook. I think it's the easiest way to contact everybody now." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"It's another one of those 'no work' things... it's one of those things you already do." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group)

Only one person in the Empty Nesters group thought she might be interested - the others looked blank or actively scoffed at the idea of Facebook. This older age group did not seem likely candidates for this media - as with the Council website.

6.9.4 Other Media

The merits of various other media the Council used (or could use) to communicate were discussed briefly with a few participants. By and large this confirmed the age related affinity for the different media types.

Those more interested in 'consultation' with the Council, mainly some in the Empty Nesters group, spoke about how good meetings were, and even face-to-face consults with the mayor.

"I've taken advantage of the Mayor's [meetings]... He has a Wednesday morning that he has available down in the Council chambers down here to go and talk to him. He'll give you 20 minutes perhaps to talk to him. Twice I've done that and it's been very valuable. I'm not sure anything happened, but I've had my say." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

There was mention too of hearing about Council matters on radio programmes by some in the Empty Nesters group. This was not explored in depth but it seems likely that the kinds of radio stations that would broadcast Council matters would typically be those targeting an older audience.

There was also a brief mention of invitations to answer questionnaires about Council issues. Online versions were mentioned by some in the family groups. Again, this was not explored in great depth but it would seem likely that the self-interested who had some affinity with the online world would be more attracted to this method of seeking opinions. Paper methods would be preferred for older persons and the very young (students, etc) might not pay any attention unless the topic matter was highly relevant.

The idea of an 'App' was briefly discussed in the Students group. One showed a university App which had certain information that students routinely accessed, such as timetables. It was mention that relevant Council information could also be integrated into this, again for information relevant to this age group, such as event marketing.

In this quote a student explains what would appeal to them in an app.

"I think an app would be really good. There's one called Neat Places that I used in Christchurch and that's setup for Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. I don't know if it is anywhere else yet. It's got, you go onto the app and it's got events, shops, places to eat. Like all these different categories you can click into and then it comes up with a map whereabouts they are so something like that for Palmerston would be really good." (F3, Students group)

6.9.5 Types Of Information

This is just a brief note as the subject of 'types of information' and 'media preference' is certainly worthy of separate more detailed research.

From the discussions there appeared to be a variable interest in the types of information the Council might produce by topic and satisfaction with 'information' in the general sense would depend on what exactly was being conveyed - and whether it actually 'reached' the target audience by the selected media. Younger persons seemed only really interested in Council matters if they were promoting events or giving details of activities they liked. In contrast some in the older groups were more interested about Council plans (eg, major projects, bridges, Linklater, cycleways).

There are issues here depending on whether information is 'pushed', whether by print media or otherwise, versus just information that is simply just available for those interested.

For the purposes of effective marketing management, having a good understanding of which audience is being targeted, and for what purpose, is paramount, as even these brief discussions show very differing needs according to different market segments.

6.10 Satisfaction With Services And Facilities

Participants were shown a list of services the Palmerston North Council provides in four 'sets' or domains.

1. Roads, footpaths, street lights, cycleways and parking spaces.
2. Parks, sportsfields, swimming pools (Lido and Freyberg), the arena, walkways.
3. Water, stormwater, wastewater, rubbish and recycling.
4. Libraries, Te Manawa (Science Centre and Museum), The Regent, The Globe.

For each set they were asked "which of these work well for you" and "which do the Council need to improve". This is not an empirical measure of satisfaction of these services, but their reactions and discussions about how well they believe these services are being delivered, did provide some interesting insights.

6.11 Roads, Footpaths, Street Lights, Cycleways And Parking Spaces

Overall the participants thought the Council was providing this array of services well for the residents of Palmerston North. Praise was given for all of these aspects - usually the words 'pretty good' or 'fine' were used.

An example of some of the positive comments:

*"The best part with the cycleways its ideal how, we live on the far side of town and you can kind of go on the footpaths, they're quite wide as well without having to be too close to the cars, they go through some parks. They link into the esplanade, you can have a free ride all the way to campus."
(M3, Students group)*

*"Roads tend to be really good and they're always updating roundabouts which is handy - like you hate going to a Stop sign and they make it into a roundabout. You tend to have smoother roads than a lot of other places - less potholes."
(F1, Young Singles/Couples group)*

"The streetlights are good because they've gone completely underground. Like they've got these fantastic light standards..." (M4, Empty Nesters group)

"I think there are lots of parking options." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I'd say they're fine [the footpaths]. Especially in the main centres." (M5, Students group)

There were a few issues raised which are worthy of mention. Perhaps the most negative reaction was the issue of uneven footpaths, in particular with the Young Family group, but also a few in the Empty Nest group and a few runners. For each of these users unevenness of the joins in the footpath were said to cause them trouble, from 'bumpiness' through to being a trip hazard.

"They're terrible, they're not even. They wake your baby up." (F1, Young Family group)

"... there's a lot of concrete footpaths so you get a gap about that big so it's all very well if you got a wheeled facility a wheelchair or pushchair or pram or if you are like I am at times slow on my feet, you can trip on it and there's a lot that are not repaired... just a lot of holes dug in and some dirt put in loose metal put into it so it still remains a hole." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

"Terrible footpaths. I've heard that from lots of people. My friend's a runner, and she comes to work at least three times a year with grazes all up her hands where she's tripped over the footpath and she's like it was the same spot but I was on the other side of the footpath." (F6, Young Family group)

The sentiment was not universal and some spoke out in defence of the footpath situation, saying "It's never going to be perfect" and this person explaining how the Council would fix a specific site if you complained.

"I have to say a few years ago, in our street, there was a bit of concrete, where it joins, and it was uneven and so many kids, it's the road that leads to school, on their scooters had come off, so I rang the Council and said something about it, and it was fixed." (F7, Young Family group)

There was mention that Palmerston North was a city with trees - and with trees you can get uneven footpaths with the root pressure. Having some footpath issues was thought to be a lesser evil with those that loved the tree-lined streets.

There was also a negative mention of street lighting that again was from a minority user - runners.

"I have one concern but it is just running at night. Along the river front there is no lighting there and I don't usually mind, cause I don't feel I'm pretty enough to be attacked but a lot of friends and other people I run with won't run along the river front at night just because there is no lighting at all. Even just solar lights or some low cost, it might be a little bit extra but it would be nice to have that option and feel safe taking it." (M1, Students group)

One young woman who said that some of her friends walking back from university were a bit worried about some dimly lit sections of path, but she didn't seem overly concerned and even mentioned that the Council wasn't to blame for such safety concerns.

Other concerns raised here include some issues with the phasing of traffic lights (not so much a road issue, nor lighting), and some cycleway issues. With the older age group, the concern was largely about having to share footpaths with cyclists and there was some discussion about how bicycle bells should be enforced! For actual cyclists, the concern was more about sharing areas of roads with cars, or places where cycle paths joined roads. It was said that recreational cycle paths were excellent, but that commuting by bicycle was still dangerous where travel on road was required.

When talking about parking, there was considerable praise for the 'Frog' (high tech) parking system that participants seemed proud of. Although they said this made cheating almost impossible, the general view was that this was fair enough. The only real negative of the system was about the machines where you put in money which some older participants claimed was confusing at first.

The specific concerns over cycle safety, uneven footpaths, and street lighting for joggers did not seem aggressively expressed and from that they might be viewed as 'areas for possible improvement' rather than outright dissatisfaction. With these groups, in the main, the report card for these services was good.

6.12 Parks, Sportsfields, Swimming Pools (Lido And Freyberg), The Arena, Walkways

If anything, the participants' reaction to this group of services was even better than the first, with participants giving lots of examples why they thought these services were provided and maintained very well.

"Going back to sports fields and the parks. They're always real good, like the fields are good. It's good for spectators, there is always enough room, the parking is usually pretty good." (F1, Students group)

"They've put a lot of money into the sports, like the sportsfield and the pools, a lot of soccer clubs, rugby clubs, rugby league clubs that train on the training fields, and play on the sportsfield so I think they've done well with that, it's not like you can put some more parks, unless Palmy gets bigger, for the future I guess." (M4, Young Singles/Couples group)

"And the Esplanade, always lots of people there. They're in pretty good nick... [and the Lido]... it's pretty well set up, with the indoor pool and the outdoor pool and the new slides." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I think that the pools themselves are quite good, I go to Freyberg pool my kids lessons, and there's certainly improvements I've told them about that they can do there, but that's more about the lessons and I guess the people running it and the quality of the pool. And the playgrounds are not too bad. I take my kids for what we call a park crawl, instead of a pub crawl, and from my house I can walk around five playgrounds with my children. And they range from little ones to the big pirate park." (F6, Young Family group)

"As we said in the beginning they did a very good job of upgrading that Memorial Park which is right at the front of, coming in from the outside of the city and it is so beautiful, beautifully done now and there is much more space for people now in the park because they cut down all the bushes and everything else, more open and um, yeah, very nice, very pleasant going around and they make a big clean up around the local area as well, beautiful." (F3, Mature Family group)

"I think the parks and sports fields are very well maintained." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

Of the items in this group, it was the swimming pools that caused the most discussion. The Young Family group spoke about how much fun the pools were for their children. One of the students voiced the opposite opinion saying it was "full of families and people mucking around". In several groups there was mention that they thought the Lido might have been not clean enough.

"I prefer Freyberg to the Lido to be honest. It's not big enough, but it's not as dirty. The Lido, sometimes it can be." (F1, Young Family group)

"I must say that I noticed the difference between the Lido and Freyberg when I go swimming. I find Freyberg better, a lot cleaner. Lido, I have been there once or twice and it put me off, quite dirty so I never went back but um, other than that it is good." (F3, Mature Family group)

There were also some discussions about the prices of going to the pools. Most thought they were reasonable, but some of those with families spoke about the high cost of the slides which put them off taking their kids there. The cost of the gym at the Lido was mentioned by one person in the Older Singles/Couples group, saying that this was too expensive for those that are unemployed.

Later in the Young Family focus group one participant did bring up a possible improvement for playgrounds which is mentioned here as a possibility for improvement - shade sails.

"I just thought of something that I didn't bring up before, about the whole playground thing, playgrounds are great, but a lot of them don't have any shade, that's something I'd do, what made me think about it, was that they did put some shade sails over the esplanade one, and you actually notice it, the amount of times I go to playgrounds and say to the kids, no, too hot today, let's go, not enough shade, not a tree, not a shade sail, anything like that." (F6, Young Family group)

In the group of Young Singles/Couples there was one avid skateboarder. He wasn't sure if the skatepark counted as a sports field or not, but did have this negative comment to make about it.

"[The skateboard park] it's sh%#t... It needs to be redone. Yeah, like majorly, say you're coming up like on a ramp or something, and you've got the ramp and you've got the top part of it, like the top corner is like just concrete chips, just like you can run into it and lose half your face, there's heaps of other parts, say you drop in on the bowl and there's a concrete crack, like this, so you know, you've got your full body weight sliding down a ramp and you go straight into a crack." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

He said at least it needed fixing.

"Give it some attention, at least repairs, and I'd definitely make it like, the top area just for like flat land, like rails and boxes and stuff." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

But preferably more facilities were also needed.

"It needs to get way bigger, like way bigger, those scooter kids man, you just skating along and then you almost take out someone's 12 year old, and then you've got mum screaming at you..." (M3, Young Singles/Couples group)

There was also a cricketer in the Students group who claimed the cricket pitches were too rough at times.

"I play quite a bit of cricket and I know this doesn't appeal to a lot of people but like at the start of our cricket season, I don't know maybe October through to about mid January our cricket pitches are absolutely dreadful. Like it is almost impossible to like to have a sound wicket but like it would be real hard for the grounds people to like specifically learn how to prepare pitches but like it doesn't seem like they're putting in much effort. As it all dries up it's actually a bit better. It doesn't really affect a lot of people but for the people it does affect it's a big deal." (M5, Students group)

Also in the Students group, the conversation about parks, etc, was diverted into a discussion about what event could be held there, with comparisons made to Taranaki's fee concerts and Tauranga's outdoor movies in the park. Such comments serve to show just how different market segments need different things to keep them happy.

Apart from these criticisms, where there would seem to be some 'room for improvement', this category of services was viewed highly positively.

6.13 Water, Stormwater, Wastewater, Rubbish And Recycling

Of the four domains the participants were asked to provide feedback on, this domain had the most adverse reaction.

On the more positive side, participants thought the drinking water was very good and there were comments made that at least Palmerston North didn't charge for water like some other cities. There were a few comments about water rationing in the summer (plant watering), but most were not too vehement about this. A few participants did note that tobies had been fitted to some properties and there was a suspicion that this might be a precursor to the Council charging for water.

"But the tobies have been put there and they are already to go. I'm just waiting for the time when they say 'hey we are running out of water so we are going to have to start charging to try and get you to use less'." (M2, Mature Family group)

Wastewater was not greatly commented on, with most not really giving it much thought.

"I think it is one of those things, that if you're not aware of it then it is going well. Yeah when it starts spitting back up the toilet, then you really worry about it." (M1, Students group)

Not many associated wastewater with the supposedly polluted Manawatu River. But in a few groups this did come up.

"The wastewater, that is part of the problem with the Manawatu... the Manawatu gets affected by wastewater." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"It's a contributing factor. The sewage is treated and then released into it. It's not raw sewage... [and] the wastewater plant is not the only suspect... there's a whole heap of people up and down the river contributing to it [pollution]." (M5, Older Singles/Couples group)

One of the participants noted that they knew there were possible plans being contemplated to improve the sewage treatment with costing options varying from 40 to 140 million dollars. This was mentioned as being a project well into the future and still undecided.

But by and large, the participants appeared relatively content with the provision of water and wastewater services.

In contrast there was quite a lot of discussion and negative commentary about stormwater and particularly rubbish issues.

Some of the comments were most likely aggravated by the coincidence that at the time the focus groups were held, Palmerston North happened to have a huge deluge and significant flooding on May 5!

"The drains are always so clogged up from leaves, from the storm, and people, the Council hardly ever comes down and cleans them out. It takes them about a week after the storm to clean it up... It floods quite often, like when I used to live down with my mum, down Havelock and Highbury. It used to just get full of water, like she'd struggle to actually get the car out of the driveway, because we used to have quite a steep one, so all the rain used to just run down there, it used to just be a huge puddle, so deep as well." (F2, Young Singles/Couples group – 4 May)

"When that rain started, the street that my kindergarten was on was completely flooded in about 10 minutes, so the drains there are obviously completely clogged." (F1, Older Singles/Couples group – 5 May)

"But they don't clean out under the driveway grates as much as they should and it blocks, you know, if you have got two or three houses every second one is blocked, man, it just backfills your stormwater drain and all your water from your guttering is just flowing onto the roof and there is a big drama... [then] I'm out there in the rain with my big piece of PVC tubing and trying to ram out all the leaves." M3, Mature Family group – 4 May)

"I think the storm water is not under control and today just coincidentally proved it the gutters are not cleaned out often enough it's all contracted out now and quite seriously I had almost in my front lawn and right across to the street which is a large area, and the whole street is like that because they had a street with trees either side but no one had been around the clear out the leaves from out of the gutter you know in recent times." (F3, Empty Nesters group – 5 May)

Comments were made that Palmerston North was pretty flat and rainy, and with the many trees, flooding was an ongoing issue, especially in autumn.

Several participants did note that perhaps it was not just the Council that could fix the issue. Here the idea is expressed that people could be good citizens, and with some small effort, remedy some of the drain issues themselves.

"I think as far as the waste water is concerned there is a good reticulation system in Palmerston North at this time of the year like today a lot of leaves lying around, grates drains get blocked up and I know in our particular street the Council haven't been down to clear them, so what do you do? You go out there with a hoe and you do it yourself... five minutes later the water's gone. Nothing wrong with the reticulation system." (M4, Empty Nesters group)

But the service that provoked the most response in these groups was in fact the rubbish and recycling.

On the most positive note, the arrangements for recycling seemed to be viewed the most positively.

"[We have] A big bin for the recycling and a black bin for the glass. That's pretty good because it makes it easy to recycle. Because otherwise you probably wouldn't bother." (M5, Students group)

"One of the things that is quite good is having one bin for glass. It's made it a lot easier... [the] recycling works really well for us." (M2, Mature Family group)

"We've got a really good recycling centre. Council owned and run. They recycle everything, you know. They even have a pile where you can put magazines there and help yourself if you want something to read." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

One criticism of the recycling system was from an older person who suggested that bins with wheels were superior to bins you had to carry.

"... they have like a tub for your glass and I suppose I'm older and I'm getting joint trouble, I have trouble at times lifting it out even if it's only got two or three bottles in it where I've seen in other places they've got wheels on them. It's fine with the with wheelie bins for your paper and cans and plastic... because you can wheel that out, but I think there should be some sort of wheeling system on the glass one because I find it difficult to lift up and carry it out." (F3, Empty Nesters group)

But the biggest point of contention was the system of having to buy official bags for rubbish. The main objection was the price...

"Because rubbish bags are so expensive, if you're on a fixed income, and you know it doesn't sound like much to some people, that's it's three bucks a rubbish bag, but if you've got a household with five people on low income, you can see why in developing countries, the streets are full of trash, because people can't afford to dispose of their rubbish, that's why clothing bins are surrounded by TVs because they cost 80 bucks to dispose of now." (F1, Young Family group)

"It would be nice if the rubbish wasn't in rubbish bags, if it was in a tiny bin that was free." (F2, Older Singles/Couples group)

"The thing is that I didn't like is they increased the rates but then they cut down, we used to have the rubbish bags delivered to the door free but for a few years now we have to pay for them separately. It used to be included in the rates, we got free rubbish bags for every household but for the last few years, rates keep increasing but the rubbish bags we have to buy extra and the bag is really expensive, it is not cheap." (F3, Mature Family group)

"They're terrible. I mean it's alright if it's just me but what about a family of say five kids and a couple of adults. Very expensive I think it'd be about \$15 a week for rubbish bags." (F5, Empty Nesters group)

But issues with cats and dogs getting into the bags was also a big mention.

"I hate rubbish bags. Cats get in them, and they're too dear" (F5, Empty Nesters group)

"I swapped to wheelie bins, cause I had obviously a dog that used to come almost every week, or a cat or something, this was years and years ago, and I was just so sick of putting my bag out at 7 in the morning, and then get home from work and my rubbish was just everywhere, so somewhere between me going off to work or whatever, and coming home, there was something getting into it, every week, and that's why I got my wheelie bin. Cause there's nothing worse than rubbish strewn everywhere." (F6, Young Family group)

In the discussions quite a few participants did grasp the idea that the bags were deliberately expensive to try to encourage recycling.

"I think they put the price of the bags up so people would be more careful about recycling and they would put less rubbish out and recycle more." (F1, Mature Family group)

Unfortunately, there were also stories about how people got around paying for bags by putting rubbish in with the recycling, putting rubbish in public bins, and even dumping rubbish on the side of the road.

"That's why in lower income areas the rubbish bins in the playgrounds often are spewing out with household rubbish or have electronic thing." (F1, Young Family group)

"What happens though, is everyone puts their rubbish in the recycling and these poor workers have to sift through it. It's disgusting... Because they can't afford to pay for the rubbish." (F1, Young Singles/Couples group)

"When I was flatting, the flatmates would just chuck it in the recycling bin, because they couldn't afford it, I didn't know they were doing it for quite a while, but I didn't have much of a say because they had been doing it for quite a while, but I know it's, you've got to pay weekly for a bin, or you're got to pay \$30 for a trailer load out to the dump, whereas recycling's free." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

That the rubbish dump was expensive was also mentioned.

"[The rubbish dump] I think the price needs to drop for the rubbish dump. It's a little bit expensive just to go and take your rubbish down there, whereas people will just dump it in the street, or in a ditch somewhere for free. They may as well make it cheaper so everyone can afford it." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I think the price needs to drop for the rubbish dump. It's a little bit too expensive, just to go and take your rubbish down there, whereas people will just dump it in the street, or in a ditch somewhere for free, may as well make it cheaper so everyone can afford do it." (F4, Young Singles/Couples group)

Of all the services discussed in these focus groups, rubbish was the largest source of contention.

6.14 Libraries, Te Manawa (Science Centre And Museum), The Regent, The Globe

Overall, the participants' reaction to this set of facilities was very favourable. The main sentiment expressed was pride in these facilities. A few quotes edify.

"I think they're all great. Used every one of them. I'm really happy with them every time." (M1, Students group)

"The amenities in Palmerston North are good in that respect because of the Universities." (F4, Mature Family group)

"I think the library's great, very new and seems like it's been upgraded." (F3, Young Singles/Couples group)

"I subscribe to their email list to find out anything about the Regent so I've seen a few things they're really good productions. They get quality people. They had the Russian ballet come through and do Swan Lake and another Russian ballet do Chess the production. They had a local one for Phantom of the Opera. They've got Sweeney Todd... [and the Globe] Yeah, they've sort of got more smaller local acts do things there like they've got a sort of Burlesque thing going on. They've got multiple acts, Douglas Jared who's our pole dancer, he won Mr Pole Dance a few times. He's teamed together with a few other people who are doing some acts and do some drag things. It's just fun, whimsical acts." (M1, Students group)

"We have got a great library. And the Regent's good to have somewhere to go, when there's a big event, or graduations and stuff, or certain theatre things, it's really good." (M4, Older Singles/Couples group)

"I've always thought that we've got an ace library, and there's little subsidiary libraries, like this beautiful little one in Roslyn, Awapuni, and the library bus rules, my mum's a pensioner, she can access the library, great library...[and] The Regent's beautiful, they redid it several years ago, a jewel in our crown." (F1, Young Family group)

"I think the Regent's beautiful. We had like our school prize giving there and things like that, my daughter does ballet, and she did her big ballet production, and it's pretty cool for a, at the time, four year old to be up on a huge stage." (F7, Young Family group)

"The libraries are brilliant, Te Manawa's really raised the profile of Palmerston North, TV news and everything, people are coming from out of town to that art exhibition... the Frida Kahlo exhibit." (M1, Older Singles/Couples group)

"Another thing with the library is that the technology department has got these 3D printers there, so they are actually keeping up with technology." (M2, Mature Family group)

"I'd like to commend the Council on the Regent because they've set that up very well and they've made it so that at certain times in a month there's always a low cost performance on of some sort. Like it might be local dance theatre or whatever but they seem to be able to get a balance of ballet or whatever it is and some of the local people get it at a reasonable rate..." (M2, Empty Nesters group)

There were a few criticisms of the Globe and the Regent by a few participants. One thought the Regent looked a bit tired - but others countered that it had a lovely antique look. One person who had actually performed at the Globe thought the lighting could be improved, but still appreciated the venue.

In the Empty Nesters group there was also the suggestion that the Te Manawa could be promoted better, but this also shows that they in fact had a positive view of this venue. Overall, the provision and upkeep of these facilities was seen very positively.

6.15 Participant's Wish List

At the end of the focus group sessions participants were asked to prepare a short list of around six things they would like the Council to do. Readers should bear in mind that these lists were made after the focus group sessions, so each participant had gone through the experience of considering the various topics and hearing what others had to say on the various issues. They should therefore be viewed as considered responses.

The lists are shown in the following appendix in their entirety in order to preserve the tone and intent of the wishes (please refer to the Appendix).

7. APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT'S WISH LISTS

STUDENT GROUP

M1 (Students Group)

Greater involvement with community - student and military liaisons.
Advertisement, community noticeboard at Massey university campus.
A city phone app with things like: upcoming events, road/traffic reports, weather, important notices (water restrictions, dog bans, etc).
Local business promotion, locally owned and operated businesses should be better represented and protected by Council influence.

M2 (Students Group)

Frequent buses later in the day/night.
Larger skatepark.
More accessible events promotion.
More black recycling bins for glass.
Cheaper rubbish bags.
Orientation week: music events.

M3 (Students Group)

Easier access between town and Uni.
Youth (18 - 25) designated planning and consultation.
Enhanced public transport.
Establish an entertainment hub - museum/theatres/bars.
Clean up the river - Horizon's responsibility.
Access to green space.

M4 (Students Group)

Start adding more future big trees now, everywhere.
Add lights on the riverside footpath.
Develop the riverside footpath; food shops, lights, decks.
Improve roads.
Express culture of city in town better.
Take glass each week with recycling.

M5 (Students Group)

Maintain sportsfields. Perhaps have a place that they charge for that is really nice for people to have a kick around in.
Let the community know their plans for future.
Advertise events more, things to do for free.
Involve university students with event planning as they are a big part of the city.
Advertise the arts more, bring in cool acts, let people know about it.
More social sports leagues around town that are advertised a lot better.

F1 (Students Group)

Art, craft, food (gourmet and 'cheap') markets, monthly/weekly/fortnightly.
Cultural events in square, concerts, Holi festival, Mexican festival, kite day, etc.
Advertise better on Facebook, 'what's going on in our city' directed at our age group.
Better student discounts.
Better advertisement of activities/things to do - walks, parks, petting zoo, etc.
More emphasis on community activities and groups.

F2 (Students Group)

Provide up-to-date messages, such as new policies, new facilities, or public services available.
Advertise or promote more about public services on campus - such as Te Manawa, library, etc.
Bus tours to sightseeing.

F3 (Students Group)

Communication between the University and the Council - use the university to reach students.
A student input, have a presentation day at Massey to get students involved - get their suggestions and tell them more about what the Council does.
A what's-on Facebook page or app; have events, shops, places to eat, exhibition, etc.
More music events.
Free entertainment at the park or square, a concert or more where you can bring a picnic and something to drink.

F4 (Students Group)

Outdoor movies.
Outdoor concerts.
Free rubbish.
An app to show what is on.
Palmerston North city runs - timed each week.
More freedom camping spots.

YOUNG FAMILY GROUP

(NB one person did not complete a wish list)

M1 (Young Family Group)

Cyclist friendly, road rules and designs.
Water meter, water-saving initiative.
Footpath more friendly to wheels.
Waste recycling more flexible.
More activities arrangement for students and newcomers.
More involvement with people living in the city.

M2 (Young Family Group)

Free events to bring people together.
Cover Central Energy stadium.
Look at opening land on south side of Palmy for development.
New up-to-date children's play areas with science/nature themes.

M3 (Young Family Group)

Cycleways.
Rubbish disposal.
Parks and reserves.
The Square.
Public consultation on projects.
Footpaths.

F1 (Young Family Group)

The water quality of the river.
Footpaths.
More planting in 'poor areas'.
Nicer playgrounds in 'poor areas'.
More diverse cultural events.
Revamp Broadway.

F2 (Young Family Group)

Footpaths
Clearing rubbish bins that have overflowed with household rubbish.
Freyberg pool needs more pools fit for toddlers.
Clearing rubbish around clothing bins.
Improve Memorial park, bigger pools and more playing areas.

F4 (Young Family Group)

Clean up the river.
Even footpaths.
More gardens, eg, flowers.
More space for cyclist on the road.
More notifications from the Councils.
Free parking/more available parking.

F5 (Young Family Group)

More rubbish bins.
Fix footpaths.
Shade at playgrounds.
Clean Manawatu rivers.
Cheaper bins/bags.

F6 (Young Family Group)

Fix footpaths.
Shade at more playgrounds.

F7 (Young Family Group)

Beautiful river with attractions on it.
Better cycling lanes in city centre/intersections.
More skateparks.
Public toilets on every playfield, and open on weekends.
Playgrounds/areas for pre-teens.

YOUNG SINGLES/COUPLES GROUP

M1 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Health & Safety improvements for City Council workers.
More bus stop shelters.
More street lights in Awapuni.
New buildings or businesses in King St and Queen St.
Cheaper prices at Lido.
More focus groups.

M2 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Really needs a skid pad or something to stop people from doing burnouts on the street.
Better skatepark.
More free parking in town.

M3 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Fix skatepark.
Build free skid pad for boy racers so no more congested roads or antisocial behaviour.
Try make more jobs for everyone.

M4 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Music clothing shop (board shorts 90's style ripped jeans, etc).
Another swimming place and have winter stuff in there like spas, etc.
More music studios (like The Stomach aka Creative Sounds).

F1 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Fixing the red lights that never change around CBD and Rangitikei St.
Improve the Regent - needs to be dressed up (eg, carpets, etc).
Events at Te Manawa being promoted.
Homelessness is an issue. Not just moved off the streets but given help and food.

F2 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

More activities to do when it comes to school holidays.
Not waste money on unnecessary roadworks.
Make streetlights brighter, making people more secure when walking at night.
More frequent public rubbish disposal, ie, outside dairy's, etc.
Cheaper rubbish dumps/bags.

F3 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Make it safer to walk around at night.
Cheaper rubbish bags.
More awareness of the Council to the public - perhaps younger people.
More communication of proposed ideas or projects.

F4 (Young Singles/Couples Group)

Drinking culture - security step up.
Cheaper parking/longer time frame.
Give the 'homeless/beggars' options of things to do.
Man-made beach.
More opportunities for things to do in Palmy.

MATURE FAMILY GROUP

M1 (Mature Family Group)

New blood up the top end of decision making.
More activities for teenage kids.
Tap into the cultural side more.
Think outside the box with some of the dead areas around town - look to other examples.
Spend more time in the rough areas around town.
Make it easier for people to be involved with the decision making around the city.

M2 (Mature Family Group)

Lower rates.
Fix footpaths in smaller streets not just the major streets.
Have cheaper or free green waste dumping to help clear sections making it nicer.
Use other media (social) more, newspaper is a lost media to inform.
More things for youth to do to get away from computers, school holidays hard to find things for them to do which do not cost a lot.
When cats been a pain in neighbourhood something can be done about it (eg, coming in and stealing my food).

M3 (Mature Family Group)

Evaluate: the exact resources we have and access their meeting the needs of the community.
Inform: have a local television channel dedicated to the region.
Express: find out what the 'real world' changes that are affecting other communities our size.
Inclusive: bring the younger 17 - 25 age groups into Council feedback.
Plan big for the future.
Innovate: make the most of what we have and yell about it (we are too quiet).

M4 (Mature Family Group)

Improve community communication.
Improve cycle access within the city.
Improve waste management to encourage waste recycling without extra cost.
Increase amenities for young teenagers to encourage them off the sofa.
Ease access across river.
Improve use of river amenity.
A place for teenage motorists to let off steam and improve driver skill.

M5 (Mature Family Group)

Improving rates - dropping them.
Looking after rubbish - waste.
Looking for something for the secondary school kids to do.

F1 (Mature Family Group)

More free/reasonably priced events for under-20's (and others).
Utilise the river recreationally.
Improve storm waterways.
Involve social media in communications/adverts regarding Council activities and decisions.
Encourage local industry especially in retail by making parking cheaper and building rentals, especially those buildings sitting empty.

F2 (Mature Family Group)

No dog registration fee.
Teenage youth group held by City Council.
Few more late nights open at library.

F3 (Mature Family Group)

Create more activities for young people (teenagers to early 20's).
Keep the rates down.
Free parking in the CBD.
Keep Lido swimming pool clean.
Do not move Saturday flea market to Broadway.

F4 (Mature Family Group)

Improve traffic flows and synchronise traffic lights.
Fix all footpaths.
Make dump fees cheaper.
Remove paid parking.
Make private swimming pool rules more simple and user friendly.
Improve safety for cyclists within city.

F5 (Mature Family Group)

Build a man made lake for recreation.
Make PNCC rubbish bags free.
Please stop increasing the rates *please please please*.
Lower dog registration.
Make cycleways for school children safer.
Clean up the Manawatu River so it can be used for recreation.
Take more of an interest in the poverty in this city and make an action plan to help these people.
Support community provided meals and increase number of facilities available around the suburbs so people can attend.
Make buses free.

EMPTY NESTERS GROUP

M1 (Empty Nesters)

Rates rising keep minimum please.

Associate rates: eg, recycling bag, old TV. Keep as lots as the Council can.

Tell people if PNCC have an app for smartphone.

Facebook renewals generally are good, could you do it quicker.

Inform property owners if their pathway can renew by the Council (free?).

Inform people what things are going on, eg, the Kiln site has a big construction neighbours do not know.

M2 (Empty Nesters)

Restore Destination Manawatu and develop a 'Vision' Manawatu. Promotion of Palmerston North must be integral with the whole region including Fielding, Foxton and Ashhurst.

Develop the HUB concept and get freight planes into the airport with direct access to say Sydney for produce, etc, from the central region.

Look more closely at Manawatu as a destination - talk to people in the travel industry/bus services, etc, and get some package deals into PN or the Manawatu - co-operate with local motels.

PN is a comfortable place to live and bring up a family - education/sport/music/culture.

The bus centre needs vitalising. Information centre needs coffee/sandwiches.

Utilise The Square more for days such as the Ethnic day. The concerts have been great, and the ice rink novel.

Welcome signs on roads to Palmerston North.

M3 (Empty Nesters)

Easier/cheaper venues for activities (eg, table tennis) that could be made available for the likes of those on low incomes to utilise often - such as the Levin library, where their youth centre equipment is open to any age.

The intercity Bus Terminal needs a system to notify passengers as to the bus to catch. Currently people are left perplexed as to the bay in which to wait, what destination, times of arrival/departure, etc.

M4 (Empty Nesters)

Beef up the bus transport system - timetable publicity, etc.

Co-ordinate traffic light operations in busy traffic periods.

More publicity about Museum activities and displays.

More outdoor musical events in the likes of the Esplanade (weather permitting).

Sort out the operation of the parking meter mechanisms. More clearer instructions on how to operate.

F1 (Empty Nesters)

Have another bridge across the River. It is ridiculous having only one bridge.

Everyone should have a bin for glass - wheelie bin rather than a plastic tub - so it could be wheeled to the gate.

Have less Councillors so less Council money is spent on paying Councillors and more is available for improving the city!

Have more publicity and activities at Te Manawa. The Library is used well for concerts, activities, market, etc, but Te Manawa does not seem used to the same extent.

Have some publicity about cyclists needing to use bells on cycleways to let walkers know they are coming up behind them. Walkers feel threatened by cyclists on some cycleways!

F2 (Empty Nesters)

Have a frequent survey of footpaths for damage.
Get on with building the second bridge.
Be pro-active about filling empty shops on Broadway.
Improve river water quality.
Change steps by downstairs seating in Globe Theatre to ramp for disability access.
Simplify bus timetables.
Make the parking meters easier to understand for first time users.

F3 (Empty Nesters)

Publish more information on facilities/services, eg, bus timetables, bus routes, parking hours and costs. Sportsground availabilities.
Please keep footpath gutters cleared.
More information about Te Manawa Museum.
More amalgamation of administrative services for Council owned or administered facilities, thus hopefully reducing some costs.
Who to approach on Council if any matters wish to be discussed.
More openness about Council spending - budgets are announced but eventual spending figures are not.

F4 (Empty Nesters)

Clear leaves in drains in autumn.
Uneven footpaths.
Clearer bus schedule.
Library a fantastic facility.
Bells on bikes on footpaths.
Gardens are kept well.

F5 (Empty Nesters)

Get rid of the rubbish bags (too expensive, cats rip them to bits) plastic container needed.
Nothing for kids to do (low cost).
Repair footpaths.
Better communication between Council and people.
Keep Tribune & Guardian going free of charge - this is where you get your information from.
More carparks. Make machines you pay easier to understand.
'What's on' - advertise several places so the community can get involved.

F6 (Empty Nesters)

CCL could combine the Information Centre and the Library.
Bus timetables should be more clear.
Need a separate track for cyclists on the Bridal path/river walkway so walkers/dog walkers are safer and free from abuse from cyclists, some of whom try to run dogs over.
More inorganic rubbish collection and green waste too.
Te Manawa needs to be publicised better.

F7 (Empty Nesters)

Improve footpaths.
Rubbish bin for garden waste.
Better bus stop timetable so people can understand; better printing, etc.
Continue to improve roading.
Preserve our trees if they can.
Just generally to continue improving our city for the future.
If able to bring back international air travel 'Australia'.

OLDER SINGLES/COUPLES GROUP

M1 (Older Singles/Couples)

Fix Broadway - stuff the bird plop on car complaints.
Rebirth 'Student City' identity.
Lobby Government to improve student funding.
Employ graduates! Don't give the jobs to the Mayor's kids or his masonic lodge pals or middle aged people.
Fix drains.
Clean up the town centre!
Promote Palmerston North's cultural and ethnic diversity.

M2 (Older Singles/Couples)

Don't be so hard on homeless people/beggars - I hear you're trying to get rid of them.....but they are people too and have to exist somewhere - lets do more to help them.
Maybe consider helping/supporting the store 'Just Zilch'. They give away food to people in need - food collected from cafés that would otherwise go to waste. I know that Rebecca works tirelessly to keep this scheme going, but could really use support.

M3 (Older Singles/Couples)

Round table of my demographic on Council (Reach more type of people).
More events (stage, etc) music, comedy, etc.
Youth centre (permanent).
Drive-in movies (outdoor). Sound on car radio. (Big screen).
Take care of the homeless - graffiti - rubbish, etc.
More trees - murals - rubbish tins.
Facebook - Palmy Army (maybe).

M4 (Older Singles/Couples)

More family events.
More places to take kids.
Free parking.
Second car bridge over the river.
Develop the Broadway to be more upmarket.
Make the street look better.
Less traffic lights.
Support Massey and Science Centres.

M5 (Older Singles/Couples)

Connect the city with outlying areas
- walk and cycleways
- Community Events... in winter... (indoor venues).
Re-invigorate areas that are an eyesore
- parts of Broadway
- the old Fitz pub.
Connect people with Council activities... good to see Facebook page. Need more people to know about it.
Continue to work with other groups to improve the quality of the Manawatu River.

F1 (Older Singles/Couples)

Regular events (eg, every Saturday) in a public space (the square, Esplanade, etc) where people would know there would be something to see - music, short plays, etc.

Look at what people who drive through PN - or come to visit short-term - see of the city. Do they drive past broken-down buildings, etc? Consider making these areas more visually welcoming.

Actively promote Council happenings and priorities - 'what's on top this week' to invite input from community. Most people won't seek this info out. A lot of people don't look at newspapers, pamphlets, Council website.

More sculptures, murals, etc. Area around library and Te Manawa is really visually appealing for this reason.

Pave Broadway.

F2 (Older Singles/Couples)

Clean river for swimming.

Attract more concerts/shows/gigs/sports games.

Free tidy cart rubbish collection.

Tidy up Broadway Ave between Princess St and the Square.

More women's clothing/fashion shops.