

20 August 2021

Productivity Commission
<https://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all/>

Feedback to terms of Reference for the Productivity Commission's Inquiry *A Fair Chance For All*

The Hauraki District Council thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide feedback on its Terms of Reference for its Inquiry *A Fair Chance For All*. We applaud the Government for asking for an inquiry into persistent disadvantage in New Zealand. Our feedback is outlined below.

1. What are the main dimensions of persistent disadvantage that should be included in the Terms of Reference as areas to be investigated?

We agree with the Commission's proposal to use the He Ara Waiora approach to wellbeing. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to thrive.

To achieve a healthy standard of living people need access to essential resources such as good quality food, transport, healthcare, and secure, warm housing. To access these resources without ongoing government assistance people need to be educated and skilled so they have a higher chance to gain employment and receive sufficient income. That is why we believe being educated and skilled is a main dimension that needs to be investigated.

For people to have quality of life it is important to feel connected to people and connected to place. We need a strong sense of identity and belonging. We should feel safe and secure in our communities and have the opportunity to participate in arts and cultural activities and join groups. We need leisure time and good health and should also have the opportunity to participate in government. These things can add meaning to life and create a sense of identity and community. This in turn makes a community more attractive to visit or move to, creating economic activity. For this reason we believe mental health is a key dimension to investigate, along with how society may also need to change to support people's mental health more effectively.

Linked to the mental wellbeing of our children is the importance of a stable living arrangement and social inclusion, therefore we believe housing supply needs to be included as a key dimension of persistent disadvantage.

2. Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

We would like to hear local stories from people in our district. We want to hear from people that are in persistent disadvantage and those that have improved their circumstances. It would be good to hear more about what people believe they need to achieve their aspirations. We want to know what barriers need to be removed and how we can help. As the Commission mentioned, it would be beneficial to track this information over time.

We also believe research needs to be undertaken into the various agencies/groups delivering social outcomes and where they overlap in the delivery of these services. We need to use our resources more effectively.

3. Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

We believe it is essential to focus on support for parents with children and young adults. Whether it be the first 1,000 days of a child's life, or the first 5 years, society is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of wellbeing in early childhood for the overall trajectory of our lives. However, parents still need more education about the importance of a child's early years. When parents are expecting a baby they can join an antenatal group to learn about the birth and the very basics of physically caring for a baby, but this does not extend into the mental wellbeing of a baby or young child.

Our local forum of social services and community groups called *Better Futures Hauraki* has told us mental health issues are becoming prevalent in early childhood education and primary schools. We need solutions for our education system so it can support learning differences such as dyslexia, but it also needs to be able to understand and assist the growing number of children with mental distress, anxiety and depressive symptoms. We also need to better address bullying. Our youth suicide rates are shocking. Our children deserve more funding allocated to these issues and we need to be more agile. Our communities need more equity. Some people need more assistance so they can remove the barriers they might face when trying to thrive.

Linked to the mental wellbeing of our children is the importance of a stable living arrangement and the ability to participate in after school activities. This is influenced by the ability of a child's caregivers to earn a decent wage and have enough money left over each week to pay for after school activities. We think the Commission should investigate a change in the living wage and maternity leave. There is a need to look at the allocation of funding.

Lastly, there is an opportunity to truly partner with local government and achieve better outcomes. We know our people and our communities and we believe a true partnership with us will have more impact than the Ministry of Social Development working on its own. We need local solutions for local people and the success of this approach has been demonstrated by the Mayor's Taskforce for Jobs.

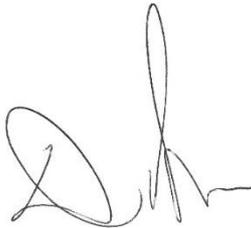
4. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the Terms of Reference for this inquiry?

We would like to see a local government representative formally included on the group that is undertaking the review. Ministerial reports should be shared with local government.

We would prefer if the review panel was not full of academia, but people with lived experience. It is also essential to include representatives from the regions. This is not a metropolitan issue, but a nationwide issue.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Adams', with a large loop at the start and a horizontal stroke at the end.

Toby Adams
Mayor Hauraki District Council