

Work colleague

Dave Foster, former Manukau City Council chief financial officer (CFO), who worked with Leigh Auton for five years.

"Leigh is very visionary and takes a long-term view over his decision-making.

"He's very thorough and determined

and has a huge capacity for networking and that's at all levels. His door would be as open to a corporate executive director as it would to a staff member or someone on a local community board.

"He is very much a people person and an open-door man. He takes the

time to talk to people and understand what's going on.

"He's very focused on community outcomes and community desires. At Manukau, he had a huge knowledge of what was going on across all levels, be that community, commercial or local governance."

Family member

Chris Smith, strategy and planning team leader at Auckland Transport, who is Leigh Auton's nephew.

"He's a planner and I'm a planner as well and he was a significant influence in my decision to choose that career path.

"I've worked indirectly for him when I was at Manukau City Council 10 years ago. He's been quite a strong mentor

for me and I have got a lot of respect and time for him.

"He's my uncle first and foremost but I always find him very approachable, very easy to talk and he tries to help you wherever he can but he'll also be honest with you as well. He's a friendly and amiable guy but he also lets people know if they're on the wrong tracks.

"It's not all fluff, he's a strong, solid leader.

"He's very good at building positive, professional relationships with people. Sometimes when you speak to people who are in senior management positions they speak to you in that way even outside that environment but he doesn't. He treats you as a person, an individual and with a lot of respect."

Friend

Jim Halland, regional director southern for the New Zealand Transport Agency NZTA, who has known Leigh Auton since 1979.

"Simply put, what you see is what you get with Leigh, he doesn't play games. He's just a good guy. He's genuinely committed to people and committed to the community.

"I met him in 1979 when we were doing our Masters of Planning part-time at the University of Auckland.

We've mentored each other in our careers as far as challenges we've faced and approaches we've taken. We've used each other as sounding boards.

"He's very community and people-oriented and has always had that strong community focus. He's good at finding out how people truly feel about different policy directions. He's also keenly aware of the implications for changes to the environment around

such policy decisions and doesn't take an autocrat's view. He looks at the evidence but he also gets the general feeling by going to meetings and listening to what the people have to say.

"Right the way through he's always had that ability to communicate and has been consistent in that regard. He's clear with his questioning when finding out information but he also listens respectfully."