

Innovative leaders still showing the way

This year's Local Government Conference in Dunedin saw several long-standing local government practitioners receive life membership of Local Government New Zealand

Two of the three recipients served the bulk of their careers with Manukau City Council – namely Sir Barry Curtis, Colin Dale and Sir Bob Harvey.

Sir Barry Curtis was a 24-year mayor who devoted 39 years to the city, Colin Dale spent 21 years as city manager and over four decades with Manukau and Sir Bob Harvey was a veteran mayor of Waitakere City in the west of Auckland.

I worked with and alongside Sir Barry and Colin Dale for over three decades and believe their stories are relevant to local government today, and profoundly into the future.

Sir Barry and Colin Dale embraced innovation, were unafraid of change and recognised that the norms of local government of their day would not necessarily deliver the outcomes for the growth and community demands of southern Auckland.

When the Auckland Council came into being in 2010, with the amalgamation of eight councils, Manukau City Council had one of the strongest balance sheets in local government throughout Auckland and New Zealand. It had the lowest average residential and business rates across the region, the lowest water and waste water tariffs, robust asset management plans fully funded and a modest net debt position.

It moved to an Annual Value Rating system in 2007 in alignment with the Auckland City Council. In its 48-year history, the council had established large industrial and employment zones, and accommodated very significant population growth over many decades.

Big ideas

Sir Barry brought big picture strategic thinking with an ability to deliver on the ground, so infrastructure to enable growth was provided. Transport corridors such as Puhinui Road to the Auckland Airport, Te Irirangi

Drive and Highbrook interchange and arterial route and the water pipeline from the Waikato River to serve Auckland were but some of his achievements. The Growth Strategy for Auckland of the 1970s era was developed when Sir Barry was chair of the ARA Planning Committee.

Colin Dale provided the community 'glue'. A proud community development practitioner prior to becoming city manager, Dale understood the need for communities to be empowered, with the council being a facilitator, supporter, funder and servant to

Controlled Organisations (CCO). It had developed, including under my watch as CEO, a CCO for water (Manukau Water), a leisure company (Manukau Leisure), a property company (Tomorrow's Manukau: Manukau Apopo), an investment company (Manukau Investments), and a building consent company (Manukau Building Consultants) which traded as a CCTO (Council Controlled Trading Organisation) as a taxable entity competing with two private providers.

This networked model is reflected in the organisational arrangement in today's Auckland Council. While the model has its critics, in my opinion it provides the city with enormous strength for managing its growth. Critically the model allows for innovation, within a governance context that allows the right incentives for making the correct decisions.

The key to the success of the Manukau model was that civic leaders were prepared to look at models that bridged the best of the public and private sectors. While this model may not fit everywhere, as each community and region needs to work out arrangements that suit their ability to shape place, I do think that leaders in public life need to challenge whether the status quo is always the best. CCOs are not the bogey that some may make of them. They are a tool that can be utilised in the armoury of local government.

I am proud to have worked under and alongside great local government servants Sir Barry Curtis and Colin Dale. They have played a huge part in contributing to the well-being of a city, region and nation.

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the diverse peoples that came to make up the city. Every community was provided with the physical and social infrastructure to support its needs and aspirations.

Neither was afraid to step outside the box of conventional norms. So council was the active developer of land and town centres, utilising public-private partnerships long before they became popular, building community facilities through shared responsibility schemes, walking alongside iwi and hapu to regain land that had been lost through confiscation, assisting in the re-establishment of marae, and building extensive infrastructure as an enabler to growth.

Manukau magic

When Manukau City Council was amalgamated, the organisation had well over a dozen Council

and well-being by enabling people to access beliefs and practices designed to bring comfort and strength in the midst of stressful events. Similarly, a sense of meaning and purpose can actually be critical for surviving and thriving in the face of stress and adversity.

Regardless of spiritual beliefs, it is important to strive for life balance by participating in a range of healthy activities outside one's professional life:

- physical activities – move your body differently than you may do at work
- making sure that you regularly do something that nourishes you emotionally and spiritually. It pays to remember:
- things will go wrong
- life will not always be a bed of roses
- mistakes will be made
- people will annoy people
- stuff happens.

Embracing the 'warm and fuzzy' side of working and living with people is likely to be more effective than wishing things would be different, or ignoring the fact that people may need active support to improve their resilience.

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