

The women and men who lead the teams that support our 21 local boards have always played valuable, often unseen roles in ensuring community-based democracy functions properly. With a lot of local knowledge and not a little wisdom, these governance gurus not only support elected members and guide council colleagues, they also help external stakeholders such as business associations on a range of issues. We spoke with Shore-based Eric Perry, one of eight Local Area Managers, to learn more about his role and responsibilities.



Local Area Managers – new name, renewed focus

We asked Eric four questions to discover what a recent change in job description and title really means.



1. What was behind the change?

I'm sure that there is a perception that the impetus for change is borne directly out of council's challenging financial situation, as many parts of council are facing budget pressures that will have an impact on a range of roles. However, we had been looking at the structure of Local Board Services for several months prior to the outbreak of COVID, as the roles and structures within our department have generally gone unchanged since the establishment of Auckland Council in late 2010.



In the past 10 years there has been not only a substantial amount of change in the broader structures of the council around us, but we've also acquired a lot of knowledge and experience in working within our governance model that could be applied to ensure we're working as efficiently and effectively as possible within the council family. Although the COVID situation may have escalated our timelines for change a bit, the need and desire to change was there prior to COVID and would have happened in due course regardless.



2. What are the main differences in the LAM and RM roles?

The main differences between the local area manager (LAM) and relationship manager (RM) roles are two-fold:

Under our new structure, LAMs have acquired a bit more organisational clout and cut-through to work with senior managers to resolve complex and contentious issues. Although LAMs still do not have direct line management responsibility for staff outside of Local Board Services, there is now an organisational recognition that LAMs have a range of skills and experience that can be better utilised to assist colleagues in identifying challenges and removing roadblocks to ensure positive outcomes – not only for council, but also for the community.





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The LAM role also has an increased focus on working with local board members and the ward councillors to ensure both arms of governance are working as effectively as possible for the benefit of our communities.

Although RMs have always had a good handle on local issues and the impact that regional decisions have on local communities, there hasn't always been a recognised and accepted mandate for us to get directly involved in ensuring our complex and unique governance model is working as effectively as possible.

The establishment of the LAM role now includes that expectation, and for me personally this is an area that I'm very keen to put some renewed effort towards.

3. In your (LAM) role, how do you typically engage with local stakeholder groups such as business associations?

Unfortunately, much of my direct involvement with stakeholder groups (such as business associations) generally arises as a result of an issue or situation that needs to be resolved. If something isn't working or if there are challenges in working within council's governance model, I have the ability to try and provide some advice around how to navigate and some grunt to try and help remove those barriers.

Much of the day to day or otherwise 'first port of call' support within Local Board Services for stakeholders is provided through other members of my team, such as my advisors and office managers. I am very lucky to have an excellent team around me that know their roles and understand how best to work with groups and organisations without me having to get involved in every emerging issue.

Admittedly it has been difficult to establish relationships with various stakeholder groups simply for the sake of the relationship given my workload, which is something I'm looking forward to doing more of as part of the shift in focus of my role. I know that we have very active, effective and engaged business associations here on the Shore (which is fantastic!) that are already doing great things in our communities. I believe my role is to find ways to support that in an organisational and political environment that this not only challenging, but is always changing.

4. Anything else you think might be useful for the likes of Murray, Terence, Shaulyn, Kae and Gary (BID managers) to know about how they could better work with your team and/or the Devonport-Takapuna and Kaipātiki LBs?

I know that all of our BID managers have good working relationships with my team, so I do hope that they know that they can come and talk to us about any issue in a free and frank manner. Although we do work in an environment that is obviously 'political', we are employees of Auckland Council first and pride ourselves on being apolitical and objective in our advice and management of relationships.



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Managers can expect that the advice and information that they receive from us will be clear, direct and honest. We can be trusted to provide advice and support that will help business associations navigate both the political and bureaucratic worlds we all move in.