Mayoral Speech – Local Government New Zealand Conference welcome to delegates
Sunday, 24 July 2016

Welcome to you all to Dunedin for the Local Government New Zealand Conference and an especially warm welcome to those of you who have travelled far to be here.

Actually this place, Dunedin, has been a destination for quite a while – centuries in fact – Waitaha, Ngati Mamoe and Kai Tahu started coming, and settling, from about 1200, followed much more recently by Scots who founded the city.

Then people from all over the world came through for Central Otago gold rush – especially Chinese and Irish and then later Lebanese, Jewish, Polish, Pasifika, Dutch and many others.

The latest cultural group we have been proud to welcome are former refugees from the conflict in Syria.

So Dunedin is a city of diverse richness – a multi-stranded cultural tartan incorporating threads of flax, wool, silk, cotton, coir and even a bit of hemp from time to time.

We are a city of contrasts.

We are urban, but geographically the biggest city in New Zealand after Auckland...so most of our land is rural.

You can both surf and ski within the city limits.

Cutting edge IT and digital design businesses work out of old heritage buildings.

That, and the fact that we are the oldest city in the country, gives us something to offer in terms of experience.

And that’s what our local government conference is all about.

Learning from each other – all the councils around New Zealand – learning how to deal with challenges we all share, discovering how to identify opportunities. I certainly continue to learn invaluable lessons from other places.

Communities everywhere face unprecedented challenges. Several of those are explored in the recently released paper 'The 2050 Challenge' initiated by LGNZ’s Young Elected Members group.

A number of those challenges particularly affect regional New Zealand – those areas, towns and cities outside the Auckland area growth bubble.

How do we ensure those communities are sustainable – not just economically – but socially and environmentally as well? How to make even small communities with constrained resources, resilient in the face of rising costs, tougher central government requirements and emerging global challenges.
A couple of the remits brought to our AGM this afternoon – earthquake proofing heritage buildings and relocation of government services, addressed those.

And how to protect local control of the direction our communities travel in.

Dunedin started on a concerted effort to confront some of those big challenges five or six years back by building a set of overarching strategies that firstly identified where the city wanted and indeed needed to be in the future and secondly put some stratagems in place to get there.

We needed to. Dunedin had had a long period of economic and population decline over some 100 years. Our city’s population was the same in 1913 as it is now.

Our strategies are not restricted to the economy though. Indeed that was first and our most crucial understanding. We had to take a holistic approach.

Social well-being, the environment, our arts and culture sector, our transportation system, a spatial plan – they all had to be developed and optimised together for the city to turn things around and become more sustainable across the board.

A simplistic preoccupation with the economy doesn’t guarantee progress in those other areas – and anyway they reflect the wide range of activities and services that local government, and more importantly our communities are concerned with.

First we identified our strengths – and those strengths actually sprang from the values that had made Dunedin the most vibrant, cosmopolitan and progressive centre in New Zealand for its first 50 years.

Those values are the legacy of the various cultural groups that built the city in its earliest days – Maori, Jewish, Chinese, Scottish, Lebanese and so on.

Early Dunedin was a city that highly valued:

• education – the first university, arts school and girls high school in New Zealand
• commercial entrepreneurism – Union Steam ship/Hallenstiens
• social equity – think women’s suffrage and banning sweat shops
• artistic expression – have you checked out our galleries and museums?
• our natural environment
• and a very international outlook.

All that makes for a well-rounded city.

Those strengths informed our aspirations as we set about transforming Dunedin into one of the world’s great small cities.

And the Dunedin of 2016 is a city on the rise.

It hasn’t all been plain sailing. It never is. And we have made some mistakes along the way.

Those of you who took advantage of our tours this morning will have seen that the overall success of our strategic development has been leavened by some decisions we have had to recast. But the alternative is to not try, not to aspire at all and go backwards.

Now Dunedin is renowned as a confident, competitive knowledge centre.

We are the educational capital of New Zealand – with a reputation for high quality education, innovation and research.
We are reviving the largest collection of heritage buildings in the country which now house cutting edge fashion, IT and architectural designers.

We are also putting an increased emphasis on creative arts – building on our history of visual, performance and literary artistic endeavour.

That’s recognised internationally by our designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Literature. That showcases our storytellers to the world, and formally connects us with 115 cities like Edinburgh, Prague, Barcelona, Baghdad and Beijing. Heady company.

Becoming New Zealand’s first Gig City, with one gigabit per second broadband services, means visitors, residents and the city’s industries can learn, play and conduct business in ways only imagined before.

A fresh spirit of outward-looking, city-wide collaboration also benefits Dunedin and our strong civic relationships, for example with our sister city Shanghai, are attracting more international students and tourists to our city and many mutually productive interactions offshore.

Our natural environment with its unique wildlife remains one of our city’s great treasures. Our ecotourism has been hailed internationally.

However in developing our economy, including increasing tourist numbers, we are mindful that the most important imperative is to build the quality of life for the residents who choose to live, work or study here. That’s what it’s all about.

Dunedin has relatively economical housing, supportive communities, stunning natural landscapes, an abundance of recreational opportunities, a thriving arts and culture scene, and world-class facilities and venues the envy of much larger cities.

Of course we face the challenges confronting many local authorities across New Zealand – earthquake strengthening, housing quality, demographic change, environmental protection, climate change and sea level rise, and regional development ... the list goes on.

Dunedin, New Zealand, and the world, is currently experiencing an unprecedented rate of change.

Confronting that is what building community resilience is all about. Being able to cope with, and in partnership with our communities, adapt to whatever change and challenges are thrown our way – whether they be environmental, economic, cultural or social.

These challenges are by no means insurmountable – and we will be exploring some of these themes throughout the conference. We can learn from each other’s experience as we go.

So welcome again to Dunedin. Thank you to Local Government New Zealand for bringing this year’s conference to Dunedin, thank you to everyone who helped to bring this conference together and thank you for attending.

To make you feel especially welcome we have prepared a gift for each of you. So, a reminder to take the card in your satchel and present it at the DCC booth in the foyer. It’s a thank you for coming.

To all delegates, I trust Conference challenges you and provides you with the opportunity to learn, discuss and celebrate achievements.

No reira. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

**Dave Cull**  
**Mayor of Dunedin**