

Lessons Learnt from the SmartGrowth Strategy 2024

Background

1. The SmartGrowth Strategy was endorsed by the SmartGrowth Leadership Group in May 2024 and approved by all partners by July 2024.
2. The diagram below illustrates the process for the development of the Strategy:



3. There was engagement with key stakeholders throughout the development of the Strategy. In September 2023 the Draft SmartGrowth Strategy was notified for public consultation using the Special Consultative Procedure (SCP) under the Local Government Act 2002. Submissions were open for a month and concluded on 20 October 2023. Ninety submissions were received with 34 submitters wishing to be heard. The hearings took place on 4 and 5 December 2023 and the hearing panel deliberations were conducted on 29 February, 1 March, 19 March (reconvened) and 13 May (additional) 2024.
4. Submissions were received from a wide range of individuals and groups. This included tāngata whenua, community, developers, business and environmental organisations as well as Central Government agencies
5. The purpose of this report is to reflect on the Strategy development process, in particular the consultation, submissions and hearings. This will allow SmartGrowth to carry forward lessons

from the 2024 Strategy into any future reviews and may be a useful input into the proposed regional spatial plan as part of the resource management reforms.

Survey of Submitters

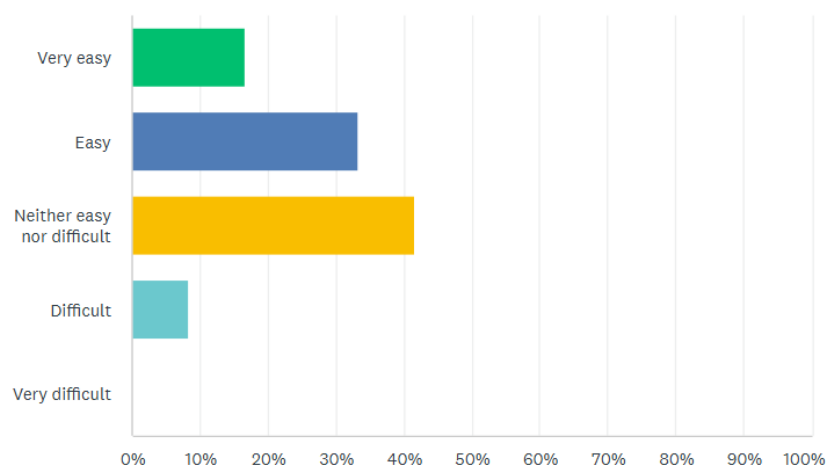
6. In order to inform this review of the SmartGrowth Strategy 2024 development and process, a survey was sent out to all of the submitters on the Strategy. Twelve responses were received back.
7. The questions asked were as follows:
 - How easy was it for you to submit on the SmartGrowth Strategy?
 - How easy was it for you to find the relevant documents and other information?
 - Is there any guidance or support during the submission process that would have been useful?
 - How did you find the hearings process?
 - Any other feedback you may have to help us in any future strategy reviews
8. The following is a summary of that feedback.

How Easy was it to Submit on the SmartGrowth Strategy?

9. Half of the respondents found it easy or very easy to submit on the Strategy.
10. Around 92% of respondents thought that it was neither easy nor difficult, or they found it easy or every easy to submit on the Strategy. Only 8% found it difficult.

How easy was it for you to submit on the SmartGrowth Strategy?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0

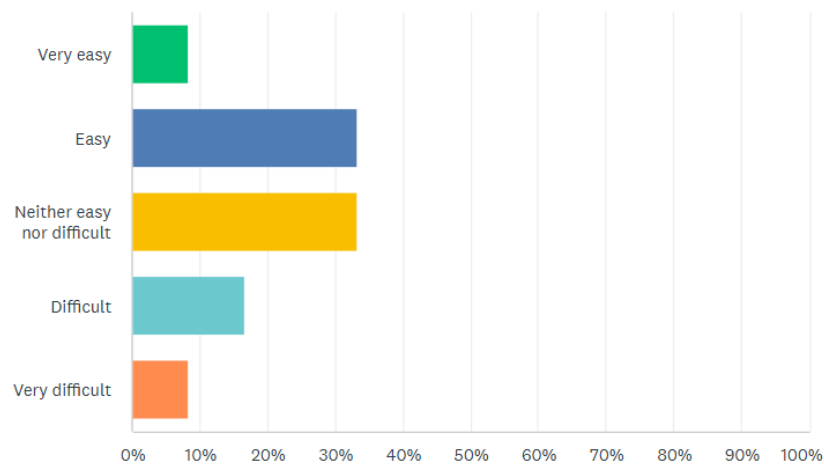


How Easy was it to Find Relevant Documents?

11. Around 75% found it neither easy nor difficult, or easy or very easy to find the relevant documents and other information on SmartGrowth.
12. There were around a quarter who found it difficult or very difficult to find information.

How easy was it to find the relevant documents and other information?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 0



Any guidance or support during the submission process that would have been useful?

13. In short, the feedback received on this point can be summarised as follows:

- Some guidance or support during the submission process may have been useful for some people or organisations.
- Being able to speak to a SmartGrowth advisor in person.
- The key documents should have been at the front end of the website, instead of wading through the website and StoryMap.
- More marginal analysis and costings to support the future development strategy.
- One negative view of how the SmartGrowth hearings process treated a submission.

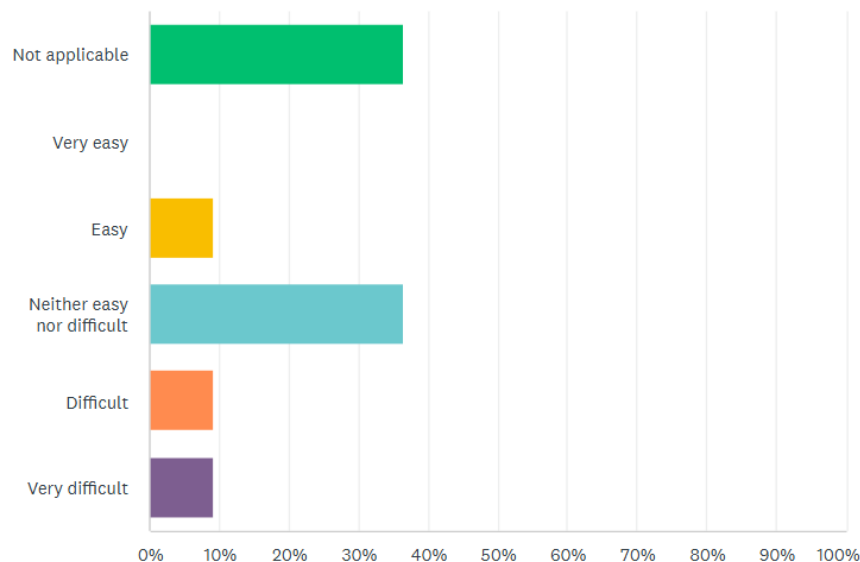
How did you find the Hearings Process?

14. Just over a third of respondents said that this was not applicable, which presumably means they did not attend the hearing in person.

15. Around 45% found it easy or neither easy nor difficult. 18% found the hearing process difficult or very difficult.

How did you find the hearings process?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 1



Any other feedback to Help us in any Future Strategy Reviews

- Need for engagement with the social and environmental sectors given what is arising at Central Government level.
- Greater administrative support at the hearings, eg someone telling people where to sit, asking for any tabled documents.
- More relevant questions from the hearing panel.
- Providing implementation updates.
- More face-to-face meetings.

16. The conclusion that can be drawn from the survey is that on the whole, submitters found the process relatively easy. Finding information was reasonable but could have been better. The majority of respondents sat in the middle in terms of how they experienced the hearing. There were no responses which indicated that SmartGrowth should not have used the SCP or held hearings.

Key Takeaways from Survey

- Ensuring documents and information is very easy to find on the website by keeping things simple.
- Provide general information on how to make a good submission and present at a hearing.

- Making advisors or key partner staff available prior to submissions and hearings.
- Consider drop-in sessions and face-to-face meetings.
- Explore idea of an annual SmartGrowth update for key stakeholders.

Interviews

17. Hearing panel members and advisors were also interviewed in terms of how they found the strategy development and the hearing process. Interviews were conducted with former Tauranga City Council Commissioner Bill Wasley, Deputy Mayor of Western Bay of Plenty District John Scrimgeour, CTWF co-chair and SLG representative Matire Duncan, Te Pio Kawe (Tu Pakari Advisor) and Craig Batchelar (Strategic Advisor).

18. A summary of the key points from those interviews is provided below.

What aspects of the hearing process worked well, and what contributed to that success?

- Having a Political Champions group that then morphed into the Hearings Panel.
- Having an independent chair.
- The hearing panel worked well together.
- Key operational aspects such as defined times for submissions which were adhered to, having recordings of each day's hearing.
- Using workshops prior to formal deliberations.
- The focused workshops on the strategy with tāngata whenua worked well - concentrating on what their priorities were.
- Preparation and presentation of information from staff was of a high quality.
- Site visits prior to the hearings were useful.
- Partner engagement and involvement in the process, eg the topic leads.
- Having one partner support the SCP and comms process.
- Advisory Team providing review, critique and alignment, including resolving any issues
- The time and energy invested in doing the groundwork which made sure people were engaged.
- The Issues and Options Papers (IOPs) gave the Panel confidence, as did the topic leads. The reports were of a high quality. This helped the panel navigate complex information.
- The hearings brought diverse community members to the table and enabled a wide range of voices to be heard including tāngata whenua.
- Participation from submitters added real value to the understanding of the issues.

Were there any challenges or issues that arose, and how could they be addressed in future hearings?

- At times the process felt overly bureaucratic.
- Issues need to be concise – need to focus on what the key matters are (see Future Proof example).

- Late or unclear information, such as supplementary reports. Not always easy to follow when you have an existing package of information then you have additional material.
- Time pressures for submitters – some things were a bit rushed.
- Issues being raised by some partners quite late in the process.
- Not having a clear enough policy approach around how to address out of sequence / unanticipated developments. Note: This matter has now been addressed through a SmartGrowth development opportunities process.
- Despite major efforts to socialise the Strategy with governance, in the end we didn't quite have the level of agreement that we thought we had. This resulted in late inputs which had not been discussed with other partners, and that added little value, but used a significant amount of time and resource. It also resulted in some matters being re-litigated.
- The Strategy is itself a large document – it left room for too much debate.
- Issues and Options papers – social and cultural infrastructure was a bit lacking.
- Deliberations took longer than necessary.
- Making the next engagement more visual and interactive (eg interactive mapping) – online and for workshops. Next time consider drop-in sessions.
- The prepping of hearing panel members by staff could have been better, eg with key questions, key issues.
- Could also consider a commissioner type approach for the next hearings, eg CTWF appoint an expert to be on the panel.

Do you have any suggestions for improving efficiency, fairness, or clarity in future hearings?

- Important for submitters to feel that they can have a conversation with the hearing panel
- Next time the Strategy should be more concise. More information should be included in background/technical documents.
- The partner responsible for the SCP could just look after administration rather than the technical aspects.
- The Issues and Options papers contained a lot of information, and they were variable. Some topic leads didn't collaborate with others which for some topics was important.
- Flexibility around timing allocated to speak at the hearing. Needs to be acknowledged that some submissions are complex and require more time.
- Central Government should be drawn more into the process next time, eg as a topic lead.
- We are set up well for the next review in terms of tāngata whenua engagement.
- More targeted prehearing briefings which highlight the key themes from submissions. A thematic summary of submissions would have been good.
- Too much material to read and there was a lot of cross over.
- A better document management system between the partners.

Any other general comments about the strategy development process

- Make sure there is sufficient time allowed for the panel reps to brief their council/partner organisation colleagues – acknowledge the importance of this.
- Ongoing engagement is important – not just engaging with stakeholders when we are doing the Strategy.

- Western Bay of Plenty District Council provided great support for the hearing panel.

Key Takeaways from Interviews

- Keep political champions that then turn into the hearings panel.
- Ensure there are site visits.
- Partner involvement in the process is key – ensure that all partners have a role next time.
- Simplified process – give greater consideration to how the key issues are drawn out and submissions addressed.
- Ensure that hearing panel members are well briefed.
- More upfront workshops on the big issues – highlight the significant matters to be addressed early and ensure there is clear agreement on the way forward.
- Greater flexibility around hearing times but within defined parameters.
- Interactive engagement, better mapping and more face-to-face meetings with stakeholders and submitters.
- A more concise and focused strategy.

SmartGrowth Senior Managers Group

19. The SmartGrowth Senior Managers Group (SMG) are responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the SmartGrowth Strategy. SMG were heavily involved in the development of the SmartGrowth Strategy and the consultation and submission process.

20. On 19 May 2025, a workshop was held with SMG to discuss the questions outlined below.

What worked well during the Strategy development process?

- The Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum felt well supported during the process. Individual workshops were held with those who requested one on one's. The Forum provided input into the Strategy, with 10 iwi submitting.
- There was a lot of collaboration and the SmartGrowth partnership worked well together. Everyone was willing to help.
- Resourcing is very important in terms of Mana Whenua and Tāngata Whenua layers. There was a lot of effort put into this.
- The contribution of the partners and showing clear ownership, for example Western Bay of Plenty District Council picking up responsibility for the SCP and Bay of Plenty Regional Council undertaking the mapping.
- Many had a level of involvement with the Urban Form and Transport Initiative and the Joint Spatial Plan, recognising and building on these documents as a foundation was important. Kept people on the same journey and helped identify where the key issues were.
- Using topic leads worked well. Having a smaller technical team was efficient. The balance was right.
- The constraints mapping in the Strategy was done well.

- There were some issues around the maps being static rather than live maps with the ability to turn layers off and on. Next time look at having more interactive mapping.
- The whole process was run well with good reporting and escalation points.
- The strategy development process worked well, and most partners felt involved, with good opportunity to provide input.
- Stakeholder engagement was undertaken well.

What were some of the challenges during the Strategy development?

- The inter-connection between the Issues and Options papers needs work – we need to avoid working in silos and take more opportunities to integrate.
- Topic Leads should collaborate early – some did this, others didn't.
- Better systems and document management across the partnership.
- Engagement with community stakeholders was challenged by the fact that the SmartGrowth Forums were disestablished. A good session was run with some of the previous forum members, but it ended up being in a small room with too many people and having to cover the breadth of the Strategy. Next time allow a bit more time and space within the sessions. Possibly look to have smaller sessions and more one-one-one's. More face-to-face meetings with stakeholders.
- Need to make sure sufficient time is allowed for the SCP process. Having it run over the Christmas period was not ideal.
- Importance of having comms advice all the way through.
- The Strategy adoption process felt very drawn out towards the end as there were a number of hurdles.
- Better engagement at key stages with all of SmartGrowth governance – Independent Chair needs to lead this.
- Strategy could have been clearer about the land supply issues and infrastructure funding constraints. For example, some key information is contained in footnotes. The subregion is an incredibly challenging place to grow well.
- The partnership struggles to have upfront conversations about long-term growth – this process was not able to force these conversations.
- Spatial plans and growth strategies are not always very good at saying whether or not the settlement pattern outlined is affordable. Should also be very clear around what infrastructure is essential to support certain growth areas and the wider settlement pattern. Identify what assumptions have been made. Work backwards from the dollars available.

What could be done better next time? Is there anything you would change?

- One partner didn't feel as involved as they should have been with the Issues and Options papers and recommendations. Recommendations were being made that should have had more discussion. Next time would like to be involved throughout the process.
- Working Group could be left in place to cover the Issues and Options papers and highlight any issues. This would ensure that everyone was involved throughout the process.
- There were some questions around who needs to be aware in each organisation and who can sign off. Next time we might need to be more direct about who has the authority to sign off.
- Better systems for sharing of documents.
- Whatever the process is next time, and the system used, early information, transparency and accountability are key.

Key Takeaways from SMG Workshop

- The partnership worked well together and there was a lot of collaboration.
- Resourcing is very important in terms of Mana Whenua and Tāngata Whenua.
- Stakeholder engagement was undertaken well.
- Using topic leads allowed for a proper analysis of the issues.
- The interconnection between the Issues and Options Papers needs work and there should be more collaboration between topic leads next time.
- Better engagement at key stages with all of SmartGrowth governance – Independent Chair needs to lead this.
- Better systems and document management across the partnership.
- Need to have the difficult conversations early and upfront.
- Working Group to remain in place throughout the process.
- Early information, transparency and accountability are key.

Conclusions

21. The survey, interviews and workshop conducted have provided key insights into the process used to develop and consult on the SmartGrowth Strategy 2024.

22. In terms of what worked well:

- Strong partnerships and collaboration – this is seen as a significant positive for the Strategy.
- Most submitters found the process relatively easy.
- Having political champions from the outset.
- The level of partner participation.
- The evidence base and information provided.
- Using workshops prior to formal deliberations.
- The hearing panel did a thorough job.
- The process brought diverse community members to the table.

23. Key learnings have emerged which include:

- Information availability and the importance of early information.
- Being transparent and keeping everyone informed.
- Having a more simplified process around how submissions are addressed.
- Some conversations are difficult to have but they need to happen, and this should occur early on in the process.
- Considering different methods of engagement, including more face-to-face conversations and having people available to answer questions.
- The importance of having good systems in place.
- Having a concise and focused strategy.

24. This information will feed into any future Strategy reviews, including updates to the Future Development Strategy, or the regional spatial plan process proposed under the resource management system reforms.