



Evaluation of the Expanded Welcoming Communities Programme

Final report

20 December 2024

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Executive summary

This report presents findings of an evaluation of the expanded Welcoming Communities programme. Welcoming Communities - Te Waharoa ki ngā Hapori brings together local government councils (Councils) and their communities to make places more welcoming and inclusive for newcomers (recent migrants, former refugees and international students). The programme aims to create intentionally welcoming and inclusive communities where newcomers and local residents can participate fully in the social, civic, cultural and economic life of the community.

The programme was piloted from 2017 to 2019. Due to the success of the and positive evaluation findings, Cabinet approved the expansion and ongoing implementation of the programme to up to 30 more councils over four years (2020/21-2023/24). As at June 2024 the programme has a total of 35 member Councils including 5 Local Boards. A total of 26 new councils (including 5 Local Boards) joined during the expansion phase.

The purpose of the evaluation is to understand how effectively the expanded programme has been implemented and the extent to which it is on track to deliver its intended outcomes.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, including qualitative engagement with Welcoming Communities stakeholders, and quantitative analysis of survey and monitoring data. It involved three cycles of data collection and analysis, conducted from March 2022 to June 2024. This report provides a synthesis of the findings from across all data collection cycles, to provide an overall evaluative assessment of the programme.

Key findings

Programme establishment and delivery

Member Councils are adapting to the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of their communities due to increased immigration. Councils were motivated to join the Welcoming Communities programme as a way to respond to increasing diversity within their communities, and foster community cohesion. Councils are also attracted to the economic benefits of retaining skilled migrants in their community.

The programme is led by Immigration NZ (INZ), which supports the implementation of the programme in local Councils by providing resources including the 'Welcoming Communities Standard' and 'Putting out the Welcoming Mat'. These resources help Councils understand the programme's objectives, and provide guidance to help Councils establish the programme in their area, although some of the material could be updated. INZ also facilitates useful networking and learning opportunities for Coordinators, enhancing their ability to establish and implement the programme.

The evaluation findings across all three cycles of evaluation show that the Coordinator role is pivotal to the success of the programme. Coordinators often start by connecting with newcomers to understand their needs, and identify gaps in current activities and support for newcomers in the area. As programmes become established, Coordinators expand their network to the receiving community including social services, schools, and businesses.

Cultural competence, empathy, and strong communication skills are key attributes for Coordinators. While personal experience as a newcomer is beneficial, the right attributes, such as approachability and strong communication skills, are more critical. Coordinators are best placed to drive the programme when their role in the programme is full-time. Part-time Coordinators often need to compromise on the activities they are able to deliver, and programme establishment tends to be slower in Councils which do not have a full-time (or close to full-time) Coordinator position.

The Advisory Group plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting the delivery of Welcoming Communities programme in the local area. Establishing a successful Advisory Group requires ensuring that diverse perspectives are included amongst the membership, including representatives from newcomer groups, NGOs and elected members. The Advisory Group fosters connections between members, and drives programme awareness in the community by acting as a conduit for communications between the programme and the broader groups that members represent.

The stocktake of existing Council and community policies, services, programmes and activities (primarily those related to newcomers) is crucial for understanding the community context in which the programme operates. It informs the development of the Welcoming Plan by identifying existing activities targeting inclusion and diversity, ensuring the programme builds on these and addresses any gaps. The stocktake is resource-intensive and time-consuming, and Coordinators working part-time on Welcoming Communities reported requiring long timeframes to complete it.

The development of the Welcoming Plan is a central focus during the establishment stage of the programme, taking between one and two years to develop (including the time taken to complete the stocktake). Evidence from the stocktake informs the development of the Welcoming Plan, which outlines actions and welcoming activities tailored to each community's context. The Welcoming Plan works well when it builds on the existing strengths and initiatives of the Council and the community, such as existing multicultural strategies and newcomer settlement support activities.

The programme is implemented through the delivery of Welcoming Activities, which are intended to engage newcomers and the receiving community in a range of activities to make their area more inclusive and welcoming. The Welcoming Activities are mapped against the eight elements of the Welcoming Communities Standard. Initially, activities often focus on addressing newcomers' information and support needs and barriers, as identified through the stocktake. This includes information activities such as providing translated information packages to newcomers on local services, and local events like expos and information days to raise awareness and provide essential information about local services and activities. Another key activity is creating opportunities for cultural exchange, awareness and community connection through cultural festivals and events, such as Diwali, Eid, and Chinese New Year celebrations. These events help newcomers share their culture, connect with others, and increase the visibility of diverse populations. Many of these events were run prior to the Council joining Welcoming Communities, but bringing these events under the programme has boosted support, organisation, and attendance.

As the programme matures in member Councils that have been part of the programme longer, Welcoming Activities become more specialised to meet unique community needs. Councils develop tailored activities based on identified needs, such as supporting migrant workers and businesses.

Adaptation and Innovation

Councils have been supported by INZ to adapt the programme to local contexts and respond to local needs. The format of the programme is flexible, with Councils and communities able to align their actions and activities to the eight elements of the Welcoming Communities Standard, in the way that best suits the strengths and address the gaps in services and/or activities for newcomers in their community.

Innovation is encouraged, but Councils often start with core social cohesion activities, such as cultural events and community connections. Councils that joined the programme in the pilot or early in the expansion phase have begun to incorporate more innovative initiatives such as hosting breakfasts for receiving community and newcomer business leaders, a programme to make schools more welcoming to newcomers, and changing the format of Council consultation processes (such as Long-Term Plan discussions) to encourage more participation and input from newcomers.

Reach

Delivery of the programme in member Councils initially focuses on outreach to newcomer communities, including organisations and services that support them. This helps understand who the newcomers are, their needs, and the demographics in the region, so that the implementation of the programme can be tailored accordingly.

Member Councils that have been part of the programme since the pilot and early expansion, have broadened reach of the programme to wider stakeholder entities within the receiving community that were often not heavily involved in its early stages, such as businesses and schools. Coordinators use various methods to promote the programme, such as stakeholder mapping, engagement plans, and both traditional and digital communication strategies. Creative approaches, like social media videos, help broaden the programme's reach. Most member Councils are successful in reaching newcomer groups, but newcomers considered that there is still work to be done to reach the receiving community, beyond attendance at festivals and events. In addition, many member councils have not yet been able to engage mana whenua in the programme in a leadership role.

Outcomes

The Welcoming Communities Standard is a benchmark for what a successful "Welcoming Community" looks like. The programme has made progress toward the outcomes under the eight elements of the Standard, as follows:

- **Inclusive Leadership:** The programme has fostered collaboration between Councils and newcomer community leaders. However, engagement with mana whenua has been limited in most Councils.

- **Welcoming Communications:** Efforts have been made to make information about local services and activities accessible to newcomers, through translating materials, using newcomer community networks to disseminate information and through social media. As a result, there has been improved communication and engagement from newcomers to Councils, with Coordinators building relationships and encouraging input from newcomers into Council consultation processes on policies that affect newcomers and submissions to the Long-Term Plan processes.
- **Equitable Access:** The programme identifies and addresses barriers newcomers face in accessing services and activities in the local community. Coordinators use multilingual resources and run community presentations to ensure that newcomers are aware of the service and activities available to them. Coordinators also work with local services to take into account newcomer needs, such as by offering women's only swimming lessons and driver training programmes targeting newcomer groups. The Welcoming Schools programme has helped to overcome equity barriers in access to education.
- **Connected and Inclusive Communities:** All member Councils had a strong focus on supporting and hosting community celebratory events that shared cultures and diversity with the receiving community. Discussion with newcomers found that for the most part they felt welcomed and included in their community, and comfortable to express their culture. While there are positive shifts in local perceptions of newcomers, some challenges with newcomers experiencing discrimination remain.
- **Economic Development, Business, and Employment:** This has seen less emphasis than other outcome areas. In Councils that have been with the programme since the pilot and early expansion, progress has been made in supporting employment and business ownership for newcomers, encouraging newcomers and their families to remain in the area, which can support longer-term economic benefits.
- **Civic Engagement and Participation:** Member Councils facilitate newcomer engagement in civic life, particularly getting them involved in contributing to the Long-Term Plan, and working with the Electoral Commission to support newcomers to engage in local and national elections. Strategies include holding public consultations and sessions to introduce newcomers to local election candidates in venues which newcomers frequent and feel comfortable in.
- **Welcoming Public Spaces:** The programme has made public spaces more welcoming and inclusive, with newcomers feeling safe and welcome in their community. Initiatives include erecting multilingual signage in libraries and other council venues, and community gardens that reflect and celebrate cultural diversity in the community. These efforts provide a visible and tangible signal that newcomers and their culture are valued and part of the community.
- **Culture and Identity:** The programme has enriched communities by supporting events that showcase newcomer cultures, such as multicultural festivals. These events enhance the visibility of diversity and provide opportunities for cultural exchange. Public celebrations of cultural and religious events like Diwali, Eid, and Lunar New Year

help normalise cultural diversity. However, some newcomers still face challenges expressing their identity.

Sustainability

The evaluation found that Councils that were part of the pilot and early expansion phase continue to provide operational funding to the programme beyond the three-year seed funding period. However, the evaluation team was told during Coordinator focus groups that at least one Council is intending to discontinue funding the Coordinator role after the seed funding period. Economic challenges and public pressure to limit rate increases threaten the programme's sustainability, as social cohesion initiatives may be deprioritised.

The programme's sustainability is strengthened by securing buy-in from Councillors, staff, and the community, aligning the programme with Council goals, embedding the principles of the programme into the Council's strategies and plans.

Securing ongoing funding through the Council's Long-Term Plan is vital for programme sustainability. Several of the Councils that joined in the pilot and early expansion phase had achieved this by developing a formal business case for continued investment. This included details on the return on investment (either through a formal calculation, or a summary of costs and benefits) to help to clarify the benefits of the programme.

1 Background and context

Welcoming Communities/Te Waharoa ki ngā Hapori¹ brings together local government (Councils) and communities to make places more welcoming for newcomers (former refugees, migrants and international students). It involves local residents in developing, delivering and participating in welcoming activities. This aims to create communities where everyone can belong, participate, contribute and thrive. The programme helps increase social engagement, build social connections and grow social inclusion. This is intended to generate economic, social, civic and cultural benefits for the community. The programme is led by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) in collaboration with the Ministry of Ethnic Communities and the Human Rights Commission.

Welcoming Communities supports the participation and inclusion outcome area of the New Zealand Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy and the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy.

The Welcoming Communities programme was piloted in Aotearoa New Zealand from July 2017 to June 2019 with ten Councils across five regions. Based on positive evaluation findings and the success of the pilot programme, in August 2019 Cabinet approved the post-pilot expansion of the programme to 30 more sites around the country over four years (2020/21 to 2023/24). As at June 2024, the Welcoming Communities programme has 35 member Councils, including 5 Local Boards. The expansion of the programme is intended to build on progress towards making communities more welcoming, resilient and inclusive. It also supports wider government work on social inclusion.

2 The evaluation

MBIE has commissioned *Allen + Clarke* (an evaluation, research and policy consultancy) to evaluate the expanded Welcoming Communities programme.

2.1 Evaluation purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to understand how effectively the programme has been implemented and the extent to which it is on track to deliver its intended outcomes.

Findings from this evaluation will be used to inform Ministers about the programme's effectiveness, and to inform the ongoing operation and delivery of the programme to ensure its continued success and to maximise its impact.

¹ Translates as "The Gateway to Communities"

2.2 Key evaluation questions

The evaluation is framed around six key criteria (or themes) that represent aspects of interest to be explored through the evaluation. Each criterion is underpinned by key evaluation questions (KEQs) that have framed the evaluation. These are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria and KEQs

Criterion	KEQs
Programme establishment and delivery	1 How effectively is the programme being established and delivered?
Adaptation and innovation	2.1 How well has the programme been adapted to the needs and context of the communities it is delivered in? 2.2 To what extent is innovative practice part of the programme implementation?
Reach	3. To what extent is the programme reaching its intended participants/target groups?
Outcomes	4.1 To what extent have the outcomes described in the Welcoming Communities Standard been achieved? 4.2 For whom, and to what extent, and in what circumstances have these outcomes been achieved?
Sustainability	5.1 To what extent is the programme sustainable after the three-year seed funding period? 5.2 What factors influence the sustainability of the programme?
Learning and improvement	6.1 What has worked well regarding the Welcoming Communities programme and what could be improved? 6.2 What changes could be made to enhance the effectiveness of the programme?

2.3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation was conducted through a mixed methods approach, including qualitative engagement with Welcoming Communities stakeholders, and quantitative analysis of survey and monitoring data.

The evaluation data collection was conducted throughout the expansion phase of the programme. Councils were at different stages of programme establishment during the evaluation data collection period. Those that joined early in the expansion phase (from March 2021 to December 2022) typically completed establishment activities over the course of the evaluation data collection period, such as hiring a Coordinator, undertaking the stocktake, and developing their Welcoming Plan. Councils that joined later in the expansion phase (from January 2023 to January 2024) were mostly in the establishment phase during the evaluation data collection period.

Data collection cycles

The evaluation was carried out over three annual cycles of data collection, conducted from March 2022 to June 2024. The focus of each data collection cycle evolved over time. Data collection cycle 1 (March – August 2022) focused on the establishment of the programme in Councils that joined early in the expansion phase. Data collection cycle 2 (June – December 2023) aimed to identify the barriers and enablers to success. The final data collection cycle (February – June 2024) focused on exploring the extent to which the expected outcomes articulated in the Welcoming Standard are observable in the communities served by member Councils.

The data collection cycles were sequenced so that the initial findings gathered through each cycle highlighted areas of interest to explore through the subsequent data collection cycles. Findings from all three data collection cycles have been synthesised in this evaluation report.

The specific data collection methods that have informed the evaluation findings are described below.

Document review

INZ provided a range of documents which were included in a contextual document review. These included Cabinet Papers and Aide Memoires related to the pilot phase and the post-pilot expansion of the programme, the evaluation report on the pilot phase, INZ project planning documentation, and programme documents such as the Welcoming Communities Standard, Putting Out The Welcoming Mat and the accreditation manual.

These documents were reviewed and summarised by the evaluators. The main purpose of this review was for the evaluation team to establish sufficient background on the Welcoming Communities programme to appropriately design the evaluation, and to understand its policy intent.

The evaluation team also reviewed documents related to the delivery of the programme. This was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the three data collection cycles, and included completed Welcoming Plans, Councils' Long-Term Plans, accreditation application documents, and Council strategies and plans that are relevant to the programme. This was used to support the evaluation's assessment of how the programme is delivered in each member Council, contextualise the findings related to programme establishment and delivery, and fact check information where relevant.

National stakeholder interviews

The evaluation data collection commenced with 10 key informant interviews with national stakeholders. The interview sample included representatives of INZ, MBIE, and the Human Rights Commission. Interviewees were nominated by INZ and selected due to their national role in relation to the programme.

The interviews provided context on the programme and its development over the pilot and expansion phases. Topics discussed included the rationale for the programme, and its intended policy objectives from a central government perspective.

The interviews also sought national-level perspectives on the effectiveness of the programme establishment and delivery, and what outcomes national stakeholders had observed through the pilot programme. This helped the evaluation team to shape the survey instruments and interview guides.

The interviews took around 60 minutes, and took place using Zoom or Microsoft Teams videoconferencing software. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Site visits to member Councils

A key data collection method across all three cycles of the evaluation was 15 site visits to member Councils (5 site visits per cycle). The evaluation team developed a selection framework for the sites, aiming for a mix of attributes across the following selection criteria:

- length of time in the programme: pilot or expansion.
- geographic (north/south; urban/rural/mixed)
- demographic profile of the community (percent Māori population, percent born outside Aotearoa New Zealand)
- points of interest in relation to the demographics of newcomers in the community such as having migrant workers, being a refugee resettlement location, or having a university/polytechnic with international students.

Three of the Councils included in the sample were visited twice. This enabled the evaluation to observe and to track the progress of the implementation of the programme in the community.

Two evaluators attended each site visit, which took up to four days. During this time, the evaluation team undertook a series of interviews with Council personnel (including elected members and staff) and local stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other stakeholder organisations (some of whom were Advisory Group members), and newcomers and newcomer community leaders. In total, we engaged with 284 people. Table 2 shows the breakdown of participants by type across each evaluation cycle.

Table 2: Evaluation participants in site visits

Evaluation cycle	NGOs and local stakeholder organisations	Council personnel	Newcomer community leaders	Newcomers	TOTAL
Cycle 1	19	33	29	16	97
Cycle 2	22	36	21	20	99
Cycle 3	35	23	13	17	88
TOTAL	76	92	63	53	284

Coordinator focus groups

The evaluation team conducted focus groups with Welcoming Communities Coordinators during each of the three cycles of data collection. The focus groups enabled the evaluation team to understand the Coordinator role, the activities they undertook to establish and deliver the programme, and their perceptions of what worked well and what could be improved with the programme.

The focus groups conducted during each data collection cycle covered different topics, which changed as the evaluation progressed:

- Cycle 1 addressed establishment support from INZ, learning and improvement, and enablers to programme success
- Cycle 2 addressed stakeholder engagement practices and progress towards short-term outcomes
- Cycle 3 addressed the achievement of short and medium-term outcomes, and progress towards longer-term outcomes, as well as programme sustainability.

During evaluation cycle 2 we also conducted one-on-one interviews with former Coordinators from two member councils, to capture their experiences of working as a Welcoming Communities Coordinator before they left the role.

Across the three cycles of evaluation we conducted a total of 11 Coordinator focus groups. In each cycle, about 80 percent of the total Coordinator cohort attended the focus groups. Member Councils that had very recently joined during the time of the focus groups, or which had not yet appointed a Coordinator were unable to participate. Each focus group ran for approximately 90 minutes.

The focus groups were conducted both in-person as part of the site visits, and over the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing platform. Each focus group hui was attended by two members of the evaluation team (one in the lead facilitator role and one as support facilitator). As with the interviews, the focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

Surveys

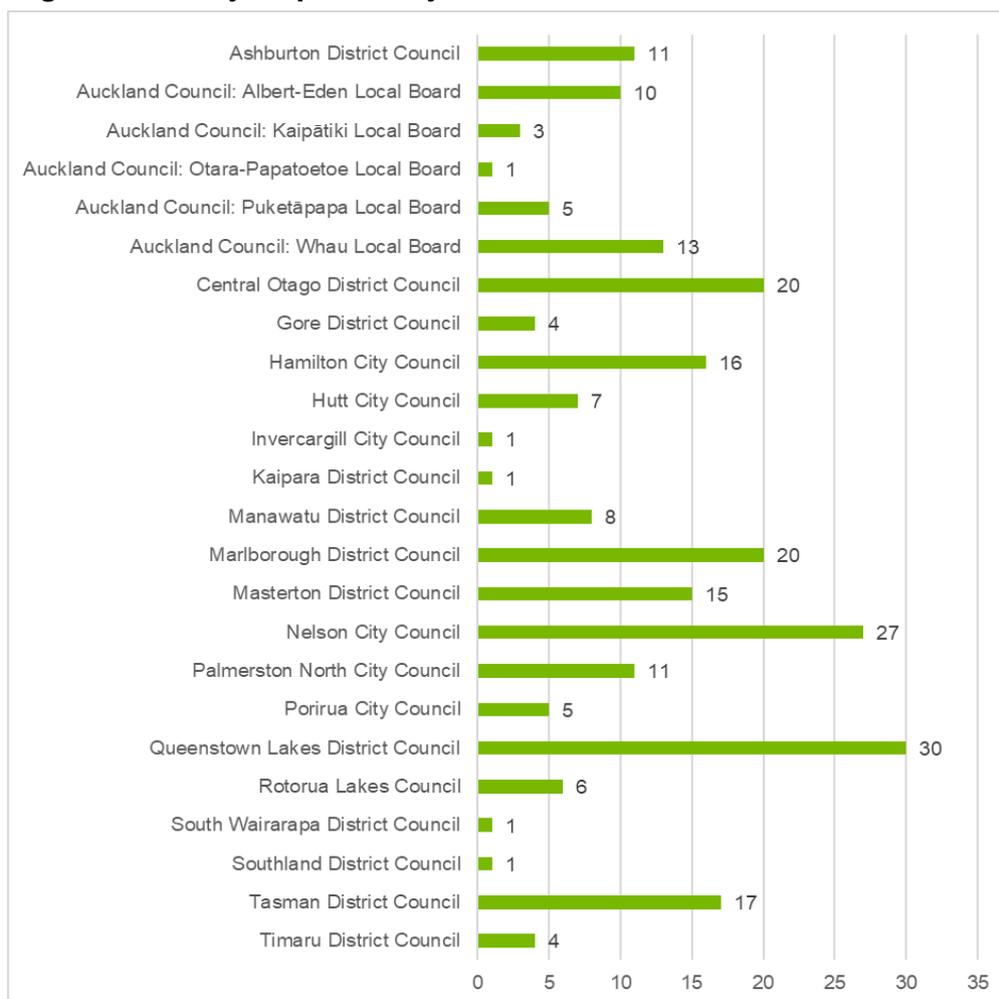
The evaluation included two online surveys with Welcoming Communities local stakeholders. The surveys allowed for the collection of quantifiable data to understand the views, perceptions and experiences of people who are involved with the programme.

The first survey was undertaken in August 2022, during evaluation cycle 1. The survey was distributed to six Councils that had joined the programme during the expansion and had appointed a Coordinator and developed a stakeholder list. This survey included questions that investigated awareness, attitudes and perceptions of diversity and newcomer needs, and perceptions about the effectiveness of programme implementation and Welcoming Activities in their community. The survey received 65 responses. The findings of this initial survey were reported in an interim evaluation report (released in February 2023) but are not included in this report, given the time passed since the data was collected means its relevance is now limited.

A second online survey was conducted during evaluation data collection cycle 3. The survey sought respondents' views on the extent to which they agreed with statements related to Welcoming Communities programme outcomes. A link to the survey was sent to Coordinators, who were asked to distribute the survey through their contact lists. A small number of Coordinators sent contact lists directly to the evaluators, who then sent individual survey links to people on the contact lists. The survey was in the field from 16 April to 10 May 2024.

The survey was sent to all Welcoming Communities member Councils, except for the five Councils that participated in the cycle 3 site visits.² A further two Councils requested to be excluded due to reasons such as their Coordinator role being disestablished. A breakdown of responses by Council is displayed in Figure 1. As shown, responses were received from 19 Councils and 5 Local Boards.

Figure 1: Survey responses by Council

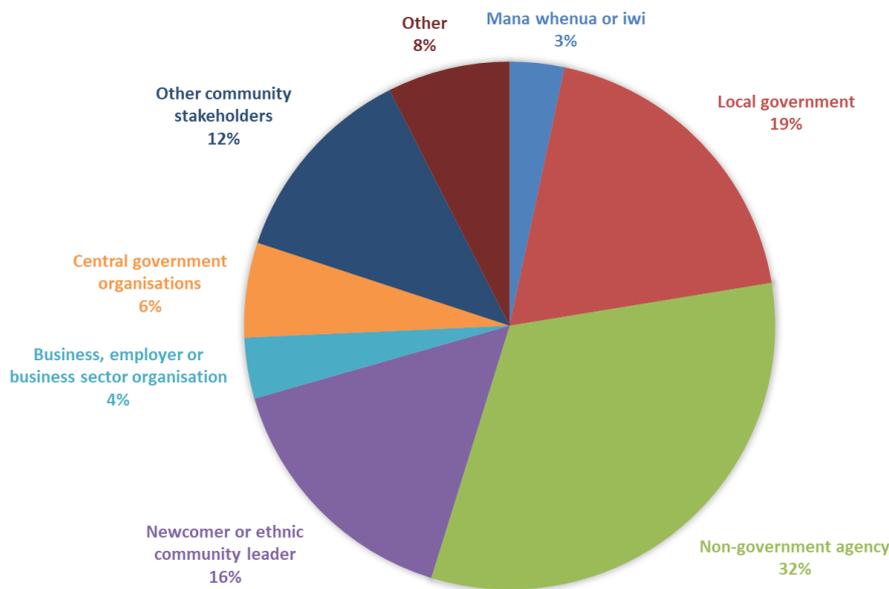


The second survey received a total of 317 responses. The evaluators undertook a process of data cleaning which removed responses from those who had completed less than half of the survey questions, those who took less than three minutes to complete the survey, and those

² It was agreed with MBIE and INZ that stakeholders from these Councils would not be asked to participate in the survey, given they had already provided feedback during the recent site visits. This was to minimise participation burden on these stakeholders.

who gave the same answer to all questions. This left a total of 214 valid responses, which has formed the basis of our survey data analysis. A breakdown of responses by stakeholder organisation type is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Type of organisation that survey respondents represent



Data monitoring

A data monitoring framework was developed in consultation with MBIE and involves regular collation and analysis of information provided to the evaluation team by MBIE. The evaluation has drawn on monitoring data from the six-monthly Coordinator reports to INZ.

These reports provide narrative information on the delivery of the programme, including descriptions of: activities delivered under the programme, stakeholder engagement activities, work to understand newcomers' needs, knowledge sharing activities, progress towards outcomes under the eight elements of the Welcoming Standard, and issues, risks and challenges.

The evaluation team undertook an analysis exercise to categorise narrative data in the monitoring reports against the key evaluation questions, and to quantify the range of Welcoming Activities reported under each element of the standard. Where relevant, this information is included in the outcomes section of this report.

Ethical considerations

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with standard ethical protocols. This included providing all potential participants with an information sheet about the evaluation, and giving them time to ask questions about the evaluation, and raise any concerns they may have. Informed consent was obtained for participants prior to the start of each interview.

Participants did not have to answer any question that they did not want to, and could withdraw or amend their data any time prior to the start of the analysis process. Participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcript and any notes taken during the interview, and could amend or correct the data. All participants that took part in the interview in their personal time were provided with a supermarket voucher to acknowledge their contribution to the evaluation.

Data analysis and synthesis

Survey data analysis

Descriptive analysis of the survey responses was undertaken using Microsoft Excel. The evaluation team then conducted subgroup analysis to assess whether there were statistically significant differences in views regarding outcomes of the programme between respondents that indicated that they were from central or local government, and respondents that represented community stakeholders. This enabled us to assess whether there are any difference in perception between government (as the programme host) and community (as those intended to benefit from the programme).

Interview and focus group data analysis

The recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and the transcripts were uploaded to NVivo software for coding and analysis. The data was deductively coded against the key evaluation questions to identify themes and sub-themes, using the constant comparative method.³ The raw data was coded using an open coding approach to sort the data into broad thematic categories. As the evaluation team coded the transcripts, each new piece of data was compared to the previously coded data, looking for similarities and differences between the experiences of each participant group. The evaluation team then reviewed the viability of each theme, until agreement was reached on the key insights.

The findings of the qualitative data analysis were then triangulated against and compared to the survey findings, monitoring data and document review to identify recurring and divergent themes for each of the key areas of investigation. This enabled cross-referencing, integration, and synthesis of information from all data sources to inform the development of findings.

Limitations

There are some limitations related to the use of online surveys. The distribution method relied on the stakeholder contact lists of Coordinators and therefore the survey may not have reached all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, online surveys are more likely to be completed by those who are digitally literate and who have access to the internet, including some newcomer groups.

³ Constantinou, C. S., Georgiou, M., & Perdikogianni, M. (2017). A comparative method for themes saturation (CoMeTS) in qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 17(5), 571-588. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116686650>

The evaluation relies heavily on self-reported data from participants, which is vulnerable to biases such as social desirability bias.

Those involved in the design and delivery of the programme (particularly Coordinators, Council staff and elected members), as captured by the qualitative interviews, are likely to have an interest in presenting the programme in a positive way. Whilst their perspective is valuable, and critical for the evaluation, it is not neutral, and should be interpreted with caution.

The findings from the qualitative interviews and the surveys provide data only on the perspectives of those that participated in the evaluation. The findings are not necessarily generalisable to all Welcoming Communities stakeholders.

Evaluation findings



3 Programme establishment and delivery

KEQ1: How effective are Welcoming Communities programme establishment and delivery processes?

This section discusses the ‘journey’ of establishing the Welcoming Communities programme, including why Councils are motivated to join the programme, the resources and support provided by INZ, how the Coordinator role is configured and how programme governance works through the Advisory Group. The section then discusses programme activities including delivering the stocktake and developing the Welcoming Plan. It then moves into focusing on the delivery of Welcoming Activities, and the process of working towards accreditation, before providing an overview of ‘what works’ in terms of ongoing programme delivery.

3.1 Drivers for joining the Welcoming Communities programme

Councils were motivated to join the programme to support increased diversity with their community

A driver for Councils to join the programme was to respond to the changing demographics of their communities. Many areas (particularly Councils with large, urban communities) had experienced increased population diversity, especially as immigration resumed when the border re-opened post COVID-19, which had increased cultural and ethnic diversity in the area.

Conditions were forming where we had a lot of newcomers – so attention on creating community cohesion is important for us. The programme was a chance to foster newcomers to feel more connected and see a community more reflective of their own identity. (Elected member)

The arrival (or pending arrival) of refugee families in a community that was a refugee resettlement location was a driver for one Council. This was a small rural Council, that saw the programme as a way to help former refugees to feel safe and settled in their new community.

Attracting skilled and talented people to the region and retaining them was an important driver

In smaller, rural communities that were experiencing lack of population growth (or even population decline), Councils discussed how the opportunity to attract and retain skilled migrants was a driver to join the programme. A lack of population growth meant some communities were struggling to retain essential services such as schools and medical centres, and wanted to encourage people to settle in the district to ensure that the community remained viable.

One elected member discussed how their Council had developed a strategy to enhance population growth, and recognised that in order to grow, they needed to embrace diversity. The Council joined Welcoming Communities to support their strategic aim to attract migrants to boost population growth. They recognised that the programme's focus on inclusion would help to 'take the existing community with us' as the area adapted to population growth through migration.

Other Councils covering rural areas described how they had seen the economic benefits that migrants brought through participation in the agricultural and horticultural sectors, and wanted to encourage a perception of the district as a welcoming place for migrant workers in these sectors, noting strong competition with other regions for skilled migrants.

Because of the nature of our economy, we have a lot of migrants who work in agricultural and horticulture. We want them to come back each year, and see that they are a valued part of our region. (Elected member)

Councils with a large population of international students, especially postgraduate students, discussed the value of retaining these New Zealand-educated graduates in their community, noting that these migrants on student visas who complete NZQA level 7 qualifications can transition to a post-study work visa and stay longer in New Zealand.

Aspirations for a more inclusive environment have motivated newcomer and community groups to connect with the programme

In some areas, the momentum to join the programme was led by grassroots community networks, and who championed the programme and advocated for the Council to join. This typically occurred in communities that have large groups of newcomer residents. For example, in one area the local Multicultural Council learned about the programme through other members of the New Zealand Federation of Multicultural Councils and approached the Community Development Team in their local Council and advocated to join.

Nearly all of the newcomer community leaders that participated in the evaluation saw Welcoming Communities as an opportunity to build on and extend their existing work to create an inclusive community. Many of the organisations that represent or work with newcomers are long-standing entities that have been delivering activities such as supporting migrant settlement and organising cultural events for a long time. The leaders of these groups saw the programme as a chance to connect with others doing similar work in the community, and to take a strategic approach to making their community welcoming and cohesive.

I love the idea that there is a group of us who can come up with some solutions to better welcome people to our amazing community, to live here and thrive here. (Newcomer community leader)

The fact that the programme is led by Councils was seen by many newcomer leaders as important; this "gives the programme mana in the [receiving] community" and enables the programme to draw on existing Council connections, expertise and resources. In addition, having the Council endorse and role model inclusive practices is important, and newcomers hoped this would encourage the receiving community to also work towards being more inclusive.

Welcoming Communities provides a strategic umbrella to unite groups that are working to support newcomers

An attractive point of difference of the programme is that it focuses not only on supporting newcomers to settle but also supports the receiving community to actively welcome newcomers and see the value of increased diversity. Several newcomer leaders and NGO staff noted that they had previously been involved in initiatives that provided practical support to newcomers, but little to prepare the broader community to receive and welcome newcomers. Welcoming Communities was seen to fill this gap.

Prior to the programme, settlement had mostly been about the migrant, like [providing information on] what day the bins go out. But they're actually coming to a community – and is the community ready, welcoming, cohesive? That's where Welcoming Communities is great. (NGO representative)

The programme was also attractive to Councils and stakeholder organisations because it offers a way to provide a strategic framing to Welcoming Activities. Many Councils, particularly those with large newcomer communities, had been doing work in this space for years – often under the Community Development Team. In these communities, there were a range of longstanding ethnic and cultural organisations and NGOs working with newcomers and organising events. However, in most regions these activities had been occurring in isolation, and the groups were not connected or networked. The structured nature of Welcoming Communities gives a strategic framing for activities that were in many cases already happening, and formalised these activities through a recognised programme.

Having a framework is useful because it allows you to tie funding projects and those things into a structure...a programme like Welcoming Communities allows us to build capability within the community itself to respond to their own needs and wants. (Council staff)

In addition, the ability to join a programme that is part of a broader international welcoming network and as a 'brand' offered the ability for Councils to promote their community as being endorsed as welcoming of newcomers.

Several elected members stated that it is easy to 'sell' Welcoming Communities to their Councillor colleagues due to the availability of seed funding and programme support from INZ. This is an important drawcard for Councils to join the programme; several Council staff and elected members noted that their Council would have been unlikely to join if the seed funding had not been available.

3.2 Establishment resources and support from INZ

The programme is led by INZ, an agency within the MBIE. INZ's role includes providing resources, support and opportunities for members to network and learn from each other.

To support the establishment of the programme, Councils can seek advice from INZ advisors, and draw on resources including a starter toolkit, the Welcoming Communities Standard⁴ and Putting out the Welcoming Mat⁵.

The Welcoming Communities Standard helps Coordinators and other Council staff understand the programme, its objectives and what a welcoming community looks like

The Welcoming Communities Standard (the Standard) is the primary document that Councils draw on when they first join the programme. It provides a clear description of what the programme is intended to achieve, and outlines the elements of a welcoming community. Coordinators stated that the resource is particularly useful when they are new in their role; the eight elements offer a clear benchmark to guide their work in establishing and running the programme.

Nearly all of the Coordinators that participated in the evaluation appreciated the outcomes-based format of the Standard. This provides guidance for the programme to work towards, but the Standard is not prescriptive. Councils and communities have autonomy to determine how the outcomes will be achieved in their area and deliver Welcoming Activities tailored to their specific context.

The eight elements and the outcome descriptions make sense and I love that we can do what works for our community, and kind of adapt them to suit our needs. (Council staff)

Most Coordinators and Council staff noted that the Standard was useful for guiding them in programme establishment and delivery, but was not something that they typically shared with the community or external stakeholders. During programme establishment activities, such as workshops with community stakeholders, Coordinators often structured the discussion around the eight elements, but amended the language to resonate with community stakeholders.

We had feedback at the Advisory Group workshop that some elements are a bit confusing...at our next hui we tweaked the language to make it accessible and turned them into questions. (Coordinator)

A minority of Coordinators felt the outcomes-based format was too prescriptive. In one Council, the Coordinator took a 'bottom up' approach, holding a series of workshops to

⁴<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/what-we-do/welcoming-communities/resources-welcoming-communities/welcoming-communities-standard.pdf>

⁵<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/what-we-do/welcoming-communities/resources-welcoming-communities/putting-out-the-welcome-mat.pdf>

understand community priorities and needs for the programme, and then retrospectively arranging these under the eight elements. This worked well, with the majority of community priorities naturally fitting within the elements and outcomes articulated in the Standard.

While the core components of the Standard (the principles, elements and outcome statements) all remain relevant, some Council interviewees and national stakeholders noted that the document was developed in 2017 and some of the content is timebound and now outdated. For example, the introductory material describes the programme as being a pilot, states that nine Councils are involved, and provides data from the 2013 national Census. This could benefit in a 'light touch' update to remove outdated statements.

Putting out the Welcoming Mat offers practical guidance to support the development of the Welcoming Plan

The Putting out the Welcoming Mat resource is useful for guiding programme establishment, particularly the development of the Welcoming Plan. Most Coordinators, Council staff and Advisory Group members described it as an accessible, practical guide which offers concrete ideas that help Councils and communities to understand what should go in the Plan, as well as examples and case studies which demonstrate what a welcoming activity could 'look like'. All Coordinators stated that this resource had been very helpful, particularly when they first started their role.

The Welcoming Mat is incredibly useful. After we signed up, having a nuts-and-bolts resource at the front end was invaluable. The Welcoming Mat document really helped us frame what the programme would look like. (Coordinator)

Whereas the Standard is mostly used internally by Council staff and elected members, Putting out the Welcoming Mat functions as a community-facing resource that is often shared with community stakeholders during the development of the Welcoming Plan. Its plain language style helps community stakeholders to understand what should be considered when developing the plan.

However, some Coordinators and other Council staff stated that this resource is also becoming outdated. The majority of the written guidance remains relevant, but the case studies and examples date from 2018, and often refer to initiatives that were in place prior to the establishment of the programme in Aotearoa New Zealand. The programme has expanded substantially since this date, and there are a range of good practice examples that are being delivered directly through the programme. In addition, some of the links in the document direct to webpages that are no longer live.

Several Council staff and newcomer community leaders stated that the resource would resonate more if they could see themselves and the programme more directly in the document. The Putting out the Welcoming Mat resource would therefore benefit from a refresh to include more recent and relevant examples and case studies, to tell the story of the Welcoming Communities programme in Aotearoa New Zealand.

INZ has adapted Coordinator support to the changing needs of the programme

The evaluation found that the INZ team has been successful in adapting its support activities to respond to the changing circumstances of the programme as it expanded. During evaluation data collection cycle 1 in 2022, early in the expansion phase, INZ developed a 'toolkit' which includes a selection of resources to help Coordinators with programme establishment. This includes materials such as a stakeholder mapping tool, and templates and examples to guide the stocktake. The toolkit resources were drawn on by Coordinators who were new to the programme, who described the kit as practical and useful, particularly the exemplar stocktake reports.

A key mechanism of support for the programme are the regular virtual hui that the INZ Welcoming Communities team organise for Coordinators. This was initially a monthly hui that was attended by all Coordinators, but as the cohort expanded it became clear that new Coordinators require deeper support, so an additional monthly hui was added specifically for those who had joined the programme more recently.

The hui targeting new Coordinators was described as valuable to help them settle into the role, providing a safe environment for Coordinators to seek advice without feeling like they are burdening a wider group. One Coordinator discussed how they rarely spoke in the full hui, but felt comfortable asking questions and sharing their ideas at the forum with their newer peers.

It's a great touch point when you get stuck, connecting us as Coordinators who are all new and all in the same boat. (Coordinator)

Coordinators that had been in the programme since the pilot or early expansion phase emphasised that they still get value out of the online hui for the full Coordinator cohort, and saw this as a strength of the programme. The format of the meetings has adapted over time from discussion-based meetings to delivering presentations and at times having invited external speakers. While some Coordinators missed the less formal structure of the previous format, the majority stated that through the meetings they identified new practices and ideas to incorporate into their programme.

You do get inspired by other people, there's always something new from the other Coordinators that we could apply and do in our own regions. (Coordinator)

Coordinators also praised INZ's commitment to arranging formal training workshops, which provided training on core skills, such as how to monitor and evaluate their welcoming activities, undertaking the stocktake and developing a theory of change. These were helpful as they offered directly relevant skills that could then be incorporated into programme delivery.

Another recent adaptation, introduced in March 2023, is the 'buddy system' under which new Coordinators are assigned to a more experienced Coordinator (who has usually been involved since the pilot or early expansion phase). The experienced Coordinator provides advice and support on an iterative basis. How this works in practice depends on the needs of both parties; one Coordinator described how they contact their buddy several times a week for assistance with developing their programme, whereas others have less frequent catch ups. The buddy system's flexibility enables it to be tailored to Coordinator need, and has received positive feedback from new Coordinators, as well as those in the mentoring role.

INZ support structures have been leveraged into independent peer support mechanisms

The annual in-person Welcoming Communities hui was described as particularly important as a support and learning opportunity for Coordinators. All Coordinators valued the chance to take time out of the operational delivery of the programme, and discuss strategic issues. Several attendees commended the INZ team for setting an agenda that covered topical challenges, and sourcing relevant speakers.

It's incredibly valuable. Being able to make personal connections, have in-depth discussions. I make sure I attend every year. (Coordinator)

The opportunity to meet in person also enables Coordinators to make or strengthen connections. These relationships have been built on to establish individual and regional-level support structures. For example, the Coordinators of several neighbouring Councils have established regional level networks, holding periodic in-person catch ups and social events. Others made personal connections with Coordinator peers, whom they now felt comfortable to call or email for advice. These informal mechanisms are providing positive collegial support amongst the Coordinators.

By creating connections between the Coordinators you're creating strong connections across New Zealand, to regularly connect around these topics. (Coordinator)

INZ advisors are helpful and responsive

As well as formal hui, INZ advisors are available for one-on-one support and advice to assist in-programme establishment and delivery. The INZ team (including both current advisors and those who have previously held Welcoming Communities advisory roles) were described as responsive and helpful throughout the programme establishment process. Council personnel stated that they had received assistance with practical tasks such as shaping the Expression of Interest⁶ and Coordinators expressed gratitude for INZ assistance in developing their Welcoming Plan. Some Coordinator and Council staff also received more strategic advice such as communicating the benefits of the programme to elected officials.

I have received heaps of support from INZ. Contacts in INZ are only a call or email away, they are very responsive. (Coordinator)

[INZ advisor] made themselves available to help, support conversations at a strategic level, and gave advice on the funding piece because we were struggling with some of our Councillors. (Coordinator)

Some Coordinators and Council staff noted that there had been a number of changes in the INZ Advisory Team, and that each change of team members required a further investment in

⁶ Councils that wished to join the programme submitted an Expression of Interest to INZ, which was reviewed by a panel which made decisions regarding Council acceptance into the programme.

relationship building. However, they emphasised that all of the INZ Advisory Team members had been helpful and supportive.

The extent to which programmes access INZ support is dependent on Coordinator capacity

The Coordinator is the main conduit for receiving INZ support. The Coordinator typically drives the establishment of the programme, the development of the Welcoming Plan, and delivery of Welcoming Activities, and requires support and professional development to do this well. Participation in the ongoing support activities from INZ, including the monthly virtual hui and workshops is encouraged but not mandatory. These events tend to be attended by Coordinators whose roles are full time (or close to it). Coordinators who are working less than full time on the programme described how they need to be selective about which hui and workshops they attend.

If I attended all the training and all the Zooms it would crunch up too much of my available time, and it's hard enough to fit everything anyway. So I don't attend them all, even though I would like to. (Coordinator)

Those Coordinators who are not able to regularly attend Coordinator meetings and training were less likely to consider that they have enough support to run the programme, and were more likely to report feeling isolated. This may compromise programme delivery in these areas. Other challenges associated with working less than full time in the Coordinator role are discussed in section 3.3.

It was also noted that there appeared to be a gap in the active involvement of other government departments in the programme. While programme materials suggest that the programme partners include agencies such as the Ministry for Ethnic Communities and the Human Rights Commission, evaluation participants stated that they were unsure what role these entities were intended to play within the programme. This could be clarified.

3.3 The Coordinator role

The Welcoming Communities Coordinator leads the programme within their Council. They are INZ's main point of contact within the Council, managing all requirements for participation in the programme including reporting, applying for accreditation and contributing to the network. They are responsible for guiding the Council and the community to become a Welcoming Community.⁷

The Coordinator is vital in building and maintaining networks to drive the programme

The evaluation findings across all three cycles of evaluation show that the Coordinator role is pivotal to the success of the programme. Newcomer community leaders, community stakeholders and Council staff emphasised the central role Coordinator plays in driving the

⁷ Taken from the *Welcoming Communities Coordinators Toolkit*.

establishment of the programme, ensuring it is delivered in a way that meets the needs of the community, and gaining stakeholder buy-in to the programme.

The ability of the programme to gain traction depends on key stakeholder groups seeing the value of the programme, and offering their expertise, time and other resources to support it. The Coordinator is vital in ensuring that the right groups are aware of the programme and are 'at the table' during its implementation and delivery. This process is effective when Coordinators start by connecting with newcomers within their community to understand who they are and what they need.

You can't get anywhere unless you understand who the newcomers are. Get in and roll up your sleeves and connect. Where are they? Where do they congregate? You really need to have a good understanding of your newcomer community as the first step. (Coordinator)

Key attributes of the Coordinator to set the programme up for success include the ability to build and maintain networks with key groups within the newcomer and receiving communities. The evaluation found that nearly all Coordinators in Councils that joined during the pilot and early in the expansion phase had been successful in establishing these networks. The exception was two Councils in which the originally employed Coordinators had left, and had not been replaced for several months. In these areas, the networks and connections made by the original Coordinators lapsed, and when a new Coordinator began they had to re-establish these connections. These Councils were behind in their programme establishment, compared to others that has joined at a similar time. Most Coordinators in Councils that joined during the later part of the expansion were still identifying relevant stakeholders and in the process of building relationships.

Many Coordinators already had established relationships with at least some newcomer groups and community stakeholders prior to commencing in the Coordinator role. This helped with the process of building networks, as the Coordinator was already a known and trusted person.

Building networks requires a high level of visibility within the newcomer community. Successful Coordinators tend to spend a substantial amount of time attending community events and meetings, following up on contacts, and in some cases 'cold calling' newcomer community leaders. The evaluation found that nearly all Coordinators are doing this successfully. Most of the Coordinators took a proactive approach to outreach, which was appreciated by newcomer groups who stated how they had previously felt that the onus was on them to make efforts to engage with Council.

I got a call from [Coordinator]. She asked to come to our meeting, talked to us about the programme, and asked what we thought was needed in our area. We appreciated her reaching out to us; usually it was us trying to knock on their [Council's] door. (Newcomer community leader)

Once connections with newcomer groups have been established, Coordinators then identify and connect with wider stakeholders such as social services, schools, businesses, NGOs, economic development agencies and other community stakeholders. This was apparent in Councils that had joined the programme in the pilot and early in the expansion phase. Councils

that joined later in the expansion typically had not yet focused on extending connections to wider stakeholders.

In Councils that joined in the pilot and early in the expansion phase, these broader connections are beneficial to the programme, as well as the wider Council. Some Council staff described drawing on the connections made by the Coordinator as a conduit for newcomer engagement in broader Council processes.

[The Coordinator] has made strides in connecting us with ethnic community leaders. We've been trying to encourage more participation in our consultations and decision making, and it's only through [Coordinator] that we've finally got some momentum. (Council staff)

Cultural competence, empathy and strong communication skills are key Coordinator attributes

Coordinators need to have the skills to identify and connect with a wide range of groups and individuals. This requires being able to effectively engage at a range of levels, from delivering a formal presentation to Councillors or the Chamber of Commerce, to attending religious or community celebrations. As such, Coordinators need to be effective communicators and listeners, able to tailor their messaging appropriately to their audience. The evaluation found that newcomer community leaders, newcomers, Council staff and elected members nearly always considered that their Coordinator demonstrated these attributes.

Newcomer community leaders emphasised the importance of Coordinators being culturally aware and empathetic. Following the tikanga or protocols of the community they are engaging with – such as making an effort to wear appropriate clothing, joining in karakia or prayer, or sharing a cup of tea before formal business – was appreciated by newcomer communities and helps to build trust. The evaluation heard that all Coordinators acted in culturally appropriate ways.

Before [Coordinator] attended our celebration she asked if there was anything she should wear or bring. We appreciated that so much, it showed she was interested in knowing about our culture. (Newcomer community leader)

Many of the Coordinators have personal experience as a newcomer. This was considered useful, as it assists the Coordinator to understand the challenges that newcomers may experience; but is not a necessary condition for success. Having the right attributes, such as being approachable and having strong communication skills, are more important. In particular, newcomer community leaders valued two-way communication, in which the Coordinator offers support as well as draws on the experience and expertise of newcomers.

It goes both ways. She can ask us questions. And we've been here a bit longer too so sometimes that local knowledge is key as well. To me, it's communication both ways. (Newcomer community leader)

The resource allocation for Coordinators is an enabler of programme success

The evaluation findings, across the pilot evaluation and the three cycles of data collection, confirm the vital role of the Coordinator in the effective delivery of the programme. The Coordinator is central to Welcoming Communities, undertaking core functions such as facilitating Advisory Group meetings, establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships and communications, driving the development of the Welcoming Plan, and supporting the delivery of Welcoming Activities.

Evidence from this evaluation confirms that the programme is functioning effectively in areas in which the Coordinator role is full time (or close to it). In these areas, the Coordinator is able to devote adequate time to engagement and relationship building activities, as well as delivering outputs such as the stocktake, the Welcoming Plan and working towards accreditation. Coordinators, Council staff, and newcomers consider that both of these aspects are vital to programme functioning and need to be resourced as a full-time position.

Even at 1 FTE, it's tight – a lot of that time is maintaining relationships, meeting stakeholders, turning up to AGMs or festivals, and also meeting expectations to actually deliver the programme requirements. (Coordinator)

Some Councils have committed substantial resource to the programme. Many have topped up the seed funding for the Coordinator position, and some have dedicated additional resource for the programme. For example, a district Council that covers a large geographical area has appointed a second Coordinator, partially funded through a community grant, who is based in a secondary town within the district. Other Councils have contributed resources from internal departments such as marketing, communications and policy teams. Some have provided discretionary funding to the Coordinator to enable them to offer hospitality and koha, as required, to programme stakeholders. These activities demonstrate recognition of the importance of the role of the Coordinator.

However, in other Councils the Coordinator works on Welcoming Communities part-time, such as working for 20 hours in total per week. In others, Welcoming Communities work is undertaken as a proportion of a broader community development role. For example, in one Council the Coordinator spends two days a week on the programme and the other three days on other community development work. The evaluation found that Councils with a part-time Coordinator often had to prioritise and compromise regarding the delivery of the programme. Some member Councils with a part-time Coordinator have decided not to pursue accreditation, whereas others have limited the amount of stakeholder engagement the Coordinators are able to undertake, or reduced participation in Coordinator professional development activities.

My main struggle is how you provide meaningful support to countless different groups with countless different needs, on limited hours. And then trying to write the Plan, it's difficult to deliver actions. (Coordinator)

It's hard with limited capacity. We were looking at the Council action plan around employment, and one of the actions is that Welcoming Communities will support employment for recent migrants. 'WC can do this, WC can do that'; but where is the capacity and resourcing? (Council staff)

Where programmes are delivering well with a part-time Coordinator, this is because the Council provides support and resources from other departments, such as members of the communications team undertaking much of the stakeholder engagement.

Coordinators in part-time or contract positions also reported feeling uncertain about their role going forward, and uncertain about the long-term commitment of their Council to the programme. In at least one member Council, the Coordinator position has been disestablished after the seed funding period, with the programme activities being de-prioritised or subsumed into other Council functions (such as community development or libraries). In other Councils, Coordinators have resigned, citing burn out and high workload. When Coordinators resign, there is frequently a considerable gap before they are replaced, effectively stalling the ongoing delivery of the programme.

The evaluation data analysis did not find any clear patterns regarding whether the Coordinator was full or part-time, related to Council size, location, or when they joined the programme.

A range of interviewees suggested that INZ provide information to Councils to assist them with decision-making around the capacity and resourcing required for the Coordinator role, including guidance on a realistic FTE allocation for Coordinators.

3.4 Advisory Groups

The Welcoming Communities Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) in each member Council provides guidance and expertise, ensuring diverse perspectives are reflected, supporting and representing the interests of the programme, and both socialising the programme and 'doing the doing'.⁸ The Advisory Group is comprised of representatives of the community including mana whenua and in particular those that work with newcomers, and members are expected to draw on their networks and relationships to drive the programme forward.

Diverse stakeholder representation on the Welcoming Communities Advisory Group is important for programme success

The Advisory Group is a key component of the programme, providing guidance to support programme development, delivery and acting as a conduit between newcomer communities, Council and community stakeholders.

The groups were usually established after the Coordinator had been recruited, who then established the Advisory Group as one of the first tasks of their role. Councils took different approaches to establishing their Advisory Groups. Some used a 'shoulder tapping' approach, identifying individuals representing mana whenua, newcomers, or NGOs and inviting them to be part of the group. Others called for expressions of interest, and selected group members from amongst those that indicated interest.

It is vital to ensure that there is diverse representation on the Advisory Group. Successful groups have diverse membership including: representatives of the newcomer and receiving communities; Council staff and elected members; people who represent a range of

⁸ Welcoming Communities Coordinators Toolkit.

demographic and population groups (age, gender, ethnicity); mana whenua representatives; and representatives of relevant local organisations or entities that support or work with newcomers (such as Citizens Advice Bureau, and the local Chamber of Commerce).

The evaluation findings show that most Councils have a well-functioning Advisory Group. Council, community stakeholder and newcomer community leader interviewees typically described their Advisory Group as including the 'right people' with an appropriate set of skills and experience.

It felt like a good mixture of people and organisations, and we all aligned with the values of the programme. We have different world viewpoints, but all want to make the community more welcoming. (Advisory Group member)

A key finding from the evaluation is the importance of having elected members as part of the Advisory Group, as this provides a direct conduit between the programme and the Council. This supports programme success and sustainability through having elected members 'buy-in' to the programme.

We have two Councillors as part of the Advisory Group and I think that has helped us a lot. They've become advocates for Welcoming Communities in the Council chamber. (Coordinator)

However, the evaluation identified that some programmes have struggled to engage with mana whenua as part of the Advisory Group. This is often due to limited capacity of iwi and hapū representatives, who receive multiple requests for their time and contribution. In other areas, a history of fractured relationships between the Council and local iwi is a barrier.

We are very aware that we need tangata whenua representation on the Advisory Group [but] Council is not currently motivated to work on this relationship, which puts me in an awkward position. (Coordinator)

Where programmes have been successful in engaging mana whenua in the Advisory Group, this is enabled through pre-established formal relationship agreements between Council and mana whenua representatives. Mana whenua representatives on Advisory Groups that were interviewed for the evaluation saw strong alignment with their iwi values and the aims of the programme.

As mana whenua we want to manaaki newcomers. It's a collective space for all of us. (Mana whenua representative and Advisory Group member)

Mana whenua engagement in the programme more broadly is discussed in section 5.

The mana and influence of Advisory Groups is a key enabler for the programme

Evidence from the evaluation shows that well-functioning Advisory Groups are an important enabler of success for the programme. The group was described as an 'engine room' of Welcoming Communities, with members working together to identify priorities for the programme in their community, oversee the development of the Welcoming Plan, and advocate for and disseminate information about the programme and the delivery and implementation of welcoming activities.

Group members are selected because they are leaders within the Council, their organisation or their community. As such, the collective group has mana and influence, and their advice is taken seriously by elected members and other stakeholders.

The Advisory Group has a lot of credibility – it's a strong group, very effective, it gets stuff done. It resolves issues. (Council staff)

Coordinators and newcomer community leaders stated that group members were often able to draw on their connections to seek community input and navigate challenges. For example, one Council had struggled to establish links with an established migrant organisation in the community, which initially viewed the programme as a competitor. This issue was resolved by inviting a representative of the organisation to become an Advisory Group member, which resulted in a collaborative, rather than competitive, approach.

The majority of Advisory Group members that were interviewed for the evaluation considered that their group functions effectively. Several interviewees commented on the honesty and sense of trust within their Advisory Group, stating that diverse viewpoints are respected. Others commented that the programme was willing to hear what was going well in their community, but also what needed to change for the community to become more inclusive. This view was shared by newcomer community leaders, Council staff, and elected members.

The evaluation findings show that skilled meeting facilitation is important to ensure that the Advisory Group functions well. In some programmes, the Coordinator facilitates the meetings, while in other areas the group is chaired by an elected member or a newcomer community leader. The groups are often large, with up to 30 members, and careful facilitation is required to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute.

It can be a tricky space, trying to capture the collective voice rather than the loud voices of one or two. [Coordinator] manages the group really well, so everyone gets a chance to speak. It's a nice opportunity for different groups to meet up, see each other in one room, take turns, and discuss what they want to see happen. (Advisory Group member)

Connections between Advisory Group members avoids duplication of activities and services

The Advisory Groups established through Welcoming Communities have led to deepened connections between members. This is particularly occurring in Councils which joined the programme in the pilot and early in the expansion phase. In these areas, Advisory Groups have been working together for several years and trust has formed. The groups were viewed as a way to build connections between individuals and entities that represent newcomers, and local services that are available. Members saw the chance to network and build relationships as a key benefit of the groups.

As individuals and organisations, we can't do everything at once. The Advisory Group has a clearinghouse role – that's the place to go to and see what's going on and how we can all work together. It's a great navigator. (Advisory Group member)

I find out about people I didn't know about, and then they're more likely to send their people to me. It's a great way of networking, and it's a great way to see who does actually care. It's a great way to join forces. (Advisory Group member)

Knowing what other organisations and individuals are supporting newcomers has benefits in terms of minimisation of duplication in services and activities. For example, one migrant support organisation had been compiling a directory of local services that support newcomers, but through the Advisory Group made connections with the Citizens Advice Bureau and realised that the organisation offered a similar service, which they now draw on. Other Advisory Group members discussed referring people they worked with to each other's events and services.

The group is engaging community leaders and sector leaders, they are all working with migrant and refugees, so we discuss how can we avoid doubling up. It's not a competing space it's a co-space. (Advisory Group member)

In some cases, these connections have been drawn on to undertake activities outside of the direct remit of the programme, which have spillover benefits that can contribute to its intended outcomes. For example, in one Advisory Group, several members identified that they were working in minimising migrant employment exploitation in their community. Through the connections made via the Advisory Group, they developed a partnership to advocate and take action to address this issue in their community.

Advisory Group members are often volunteers who have competing demands on their time

Sustained engagement of Advisory Group members can be a challenge. The majority of Advisory Groups are comprised of volunteers who are highly active members of their communities and have many competing demands on their time. This means that some are not as fully engaged, which results in Coordinators sometimes struggling to receive timely input or feedback, low meeting attendance, or high turnover amongst group members. This makes it difficult to get traction for the programme establishment and delivery.

We have struggled to keep membership as this is volunteer work, and we want to make sure members are actively involved. Most of us are very busy and don't have time. (Advisory Group member)

Coordinators described attempts to overcome these challenges, such as by holding meetings online. However, this has not always been successful as members sometimes did not have reliable internet access, and whanaungatanga/relationship building processes are more difficult in an online format.

Some member Councils include a maximum period for membership, aimed to ensure a flow of fresh ideas and to mitigate against the risk of volunteer burnout.

The evaluation findings indicate that having a clear Terms of Reference is important so that Advisory Group members are clear about what functions they are expected to perform, frequency of meetings and the time commitment required. While all Councils have a Terms of

Reference for their Advisory Group, some do not include clear guidance about member expectations, and this could be strengthened.

3.5 Stocktake

The stocktake is an important part of understanding the context of the community in which the programme is being delivered

The stocktake of existing community activities that target inclusion and diversity is an important input to the development of the Welcoming Plan. Coordinators, Council staff and newcomer community leaders agreed that the stocktake is an important part of programme establishment. It helps to ensure that the programme builds on activities that currently exist, and identifies and fills gaps where newcomer needs are not able to be addressed by existing services.

Consultation conducted as part of the stocktake offers a mechanism for developing community buy-in to the programme. Coordinators report a variety of engagements and activities to conduct a needs assessment and stocktake to ensure the programme fits their local community. These include surveys of stakeholder organisations, discussions and group hui with representatives of the newcomer and receiving community.

Coordinators found it productive when they work with other Council staff to support the stocktake. For example, Research Analysts have helped with survey development, and Communications Advisors assisted with promotion of consultation opportunities through Council communication channels. Some Councils also drew on existing data, such as annual community surveys which include data on social wellbeing and connectedness. This was seen as useful baseline data, with subsequent survey results expected to be useful to track progress toward increased community connectivity.

There was agreement amongst stakeholders that the stocktake provides a chance for an “unvarnished exploration” of the current state of community cohesion and needs and aspirations for the community.

*There's good things that come up, and things that aren't working. But also we learned what other key partners have been doing, and where there are gaps.
(Newcomer community leader)*

In all Councils that participated in the site visits, the stocktake had fulfilled its intended function to identify needs that had subsequently informed the development of the Welcoming Plan. For example, in one member Council, the stocktake included engagement with international students, which identified that there was a gap in leadership opportunities for these students in the community. This led to the development of the Global Ambassador programme, which offers young people in the community (including international students) a platform to engage with local businesses, non-governmental organisations and governmental departments. This is now operating in two Councils. Further discussion about Welcoming Activities, as identified through the stocktake, are provided in section 3.7.

The stocktake process is resource-heavy

While a valuable and important component of programme establishment, the stocktake is time-consuming to complete. It requires a substantial amount of community engagement and the collection and collation of a range of information. This is typically led by the Coordinator, and Coordinators stated that the effort required to undertake the stocktake took the bulk of their time for several months.

Several Coordinators described making trade-offs to develop the stocktake, such as pushing back the timeline for its completion. This is particularly prevalent in Councils where the Coordinator is working part-time in the role. For example, at one Council the stocktake was temporarily put aside so that the Coordinator could focus on supporting newcomers groups to plan a festival event. In Councils where the Coordinator role is full-time and the person appointed has well-established links to newcomer communities, the stocktake was considerably quicker.

One Council employed an external consultant to lead the stocktake. This was considered to have benefits in allowing the Coordinator to focus on engagement and relationship building, and also providing a more independent perspective which may enable stakeholders to be more honest about the current state. The timeframe for the stocktake was relatively quick but it did incur an extra cost to the Council.

3.6 Development of the Welcoming Plan

The Welcoming Plan functions as a platform to articulate community goals for the programme

The development of the Welcoming Plan is a key focus of the programme during the establishment stage. The development of the Plan is intensive, typically taking between one and two years to develop. It builds on the work undertaken during the stocktake, articulating a series of actions and activities to support the goals of the programme in the specific context of each community.

Member Councils are at different stages in the process of developing their Welcoming Plan. All of the Councils that participated in the pilot and those that joined early in the expansion phase have completed the plan, and some of these Councils have reviewed and revised their plan after two years. Councils that joined later in the expansion phase are typically still developing their Welcoming Plan.

Council staff and newcomer community leaders considered that a strength of the programme lies in its community-driven and grassroots approach, emphasising the active involvement of the community in the development of the Welcoming Plan. Most Councils undertook extensive community consultation to seek ideas and input from key groups to inform the development of the Plan. Coordinators and Council staff emphasised the need for a strategic approach to seeking community input into the development of the Plan. The process often began with the Advisory Group, who used the results of the stocktake and their knowledge of their communities to commence the Welcoming Plan design, which was then followed by broader consultation with key stakeholder groups.

You can't talk to everyone or know everything, the time going into making the Plan is huge... we started with the Advisory Group, because they are representatives of their communities and were already familiar with the programme. (Coordinator)

Broader consultation was often held via workshops and hui with stakeholder groups including elected members, Council staff, mana whenua, newcomer community groups, and NGOs. These sessions were considered essential to drawing out the needs of different newcomer communities to inform the subsequent Welcoming Plan. Newcomers and newcomer community leaders that attended the consultation sessions particularly valued their voice and opinions being sought, and then seeing these converted to actions in the Plan.

They were asking for ideas on how to welcome [newcomers] and make them feel settled in the region. I think it's a good idea, the ideas are coming from grass roots and the programme itself is helping the people to implement what they wanted. (Newcomer community leader)

The ideas and key points arising from the consultation were then developed into a written plan. All Welcoming Plans sighted by the evaluation team are structured around the eight elements described in the Welcoming Standard. However, as was noted in section 3.2 Councils took different approaches to align the Plan to the Standard. Some arranged the consultation process around the eight standards, seeking ideas from stakeholders around how these could be achieved in their community.

They broke up into different groups and we talked about an element. We brainstormed the element based on the outline they gave us and the ideas that came out, we presented to the whole group. (Newcomer)

Others took a 'ground up' approach, taking a fairly open approach to seeking community needs and then fitting the resultant activities around the eight elements.

When we formed the action plan it was a very grassroots process. Top down doesn't work for small communities like ours. It was about the needs of individuals, they bring their lived experience. (Council staff)

Both approaches work well to identify the needs and priorities of the communities, seeking rich community input that formed the basis on which to develop the Plan.

Stakeholders that contributed to the Welcoming Plan development mostly included newcomer groups and organisations within the receiving community that work with or support newcomers. While most Councils included consultation and engagement with elected members and Council staff, the majority of consultation tended to be with community members. In the case of elected members, the Plan was generally presented to relevant Council committees for signoff, but elected members may not have had substantial input into its development.

This means that the focus of the work programme articulated within the Plan is largely driven by needs identified by newcomers and community stakeholders (which generally focus on social inclusion), with Council objectives (such as economic development) less prominent.

While this is vital to get community buy-in to the programme, it does mean that Welcoming Plans have generally included more activities under elements such as 'Connected and Inclusive Communities' and fewer activities that support the 'Economic Development, Business and Employment' element (despite this being a key driver for many Councils to join the programme). Welcoming Plan refreshes may benefit from greater inclusion of input from Council staff and elected members, to ensure the balance of priorities is retained.

The Welcoming Plan provides a way to build on and strengthen existing Council and community initiatives

The evaluation found that the development of Welcoming Plans is most successful when it builds on the existing strengths and initiatives of Council and the community. For example, one Council had an existing multicultural strategy, which included goals and actions intended to make the district welcoming and inclusive. This provided a foundation for the development of the Plan. Another Council built on work that had been started by a cross-agency group of local government and NGOs that had been established before they joined Welcoming Communities, using the strategies and initiatives that this group had been running as a starting point to develop the Welcoming Plan.

*We have a long history with our multicultural strategy and our work with communities. We were able to use this to leap forward on the Welcoming Plan.
(Coordinator)*

Other areas had multicultural associations, grassroots newcomer support groups and NGOs delivering a range of activities such as cultural festivals and support services, which provided a starting point for planning.

*We don't want to reinvent the wheel with our Welcoming Plan, we're happy to help others within our community to enhance what they are already doing.
(Coordinator)*

However, prior to the Welcoming Communities programme, many of these activities had been 'siloed'. Councils, NGOs and community organisations were not always aware of what others in the community were doing. The value of the Welcoming Plan is that it provides a mechanism to unite these activities and organisations under a strategic approach. This creates efficiencies, as each group and event is part of a cohesive plan, limiting duplication and working together towards the shared objectives.

Our Council didn't have dedicated portfolio for supporting migrants, this was done ad hoc through strategy documents or through our Community Development Team. When Welcoming Communities came along it gave us a strategic direction and key outcome areas to invest in. (Council staff)

Our district had lots of groups contributing into this space, but the Welcoming Plan was able to give this a strategic foundation. (Newcomer community leader)

To ensure that Council priorities are included in the Plan, incorporating and leveraging existing Council strategies, such as Community Development and Economic Development strategies,

is important. Aligning the Plan with existing Council work helps to gain elected member buy-in and embed it within Council processes, supporting sustainability of the programme.

Our Welcoming Plan crosses over into other [Council] workspaces ... so there are some nice synergies and integration. (Council staff)

Welcoming Plans are effective when they focus on a limited number of actions that are likely to make a big difference

Several of the Councils that had joined the programme during the pilot or early in the expansion had been through more than one planning cycle for the Plan. In most of these Councils, the Plan had been reviewed after three years. Councils that had completed a refresh of their existing Welcoming Plan noted the importance of first undertaking a review or evaluation of the previous one. Some Councils had employed an external consultant to undertake this, but most completed the review internally, led by the Coordinator or other Council staff. For example, one Council undertook a review that looked at the current status of each action in the Plan (i.e. whether it was complete, in progress, or not yet commenced). They then held workshops with the Advisory Group to discuss priorities for the next version of the Plan, what activities were relevant, and what amendments needed to be made. Another Council sent a survey to key stakeholders to seek their views on what had gone well with the programme, and what changes they would like to see in the updated Plan.

Several Councils found that their initial version of the Welcoming Plan had been ambitious, including a large number of activities. However, capacity constraints, particularly in Councils where the Coordinator is part-time, meant that it was not always feasible to achieve all the planned actions. Councils discussed how effective Plans tended to contain a limited number of actions that stakeholders considered were likely to make the biggest difference.

We needed to refine it and bring it back a little. Our first plan had 100 actions and we just couldn't do all that. We focused on the big ticket things that would make the most difference this time around. (Council staff)

3.7 Delivery of Welcoming Activities

Welcoming Activities delivered in the early stages of the programme are often centred around opportunities to connect with others and share cultures

The delivery of Welcoming Activities is the most 'visible' component of the programme. While the activities delivered through the programme vary across member Councils, the evaluation found that Councils go through a similar progression as the programme is established and then becomes more mature.

The starting point is typically activities to address the information needs and barriers of newcomers. This includes putting together packages of information on local services, and translating materials and resources in multiple ethnic languages. Some member Councils held expos or information days for newcomers. These events had the dual purpose of raising awareness of the programme as well as providing newcomers with information on local services, settlement support and awareness of New Zealand's laws and systems.

We organised a welcoming information day with speakers from our Council, a Police Ethnic Officer, we had someone to talk about financials. Just to give them an overview on what to expect in settling into New Zealand. (Council staff)

Another key focus is providing opportunities to connect with others in the community and share cultures. In particular, festivals and events are an important activity for communities in the early stages of the programme. This includes multicultural festivals, as well as public celebrations of occasions such as Diwali, Eid, and Chinese New Year.

Newcomers saw festivals and events as a way to share their culture, connect with other newcomer groups, and keep cultural traditions alive. The high profile of these events also helped to increase the visibility of culturally diverse populations within the receiving community, and is a chance to invite members of the receiving community to participate in cultural celebrations.

It has become a part of the normal Kiwi culture to celebrate diverse cultural events and celebrations. Now the community are able to be aware of what is going on, and how they can be a part of it. (Newcomer)

In some Councils, these activities had been run prior to the establishment of the Welcoming Communities programme, but newcomers and Council staff emphasised that bringing these events within the programme had provided a substantial boost in terms of support to organise the event, venues, promotion, and sometimes funding. Newcomers and Council staff stated that the size and scale of events had increased as a result, with higher levels of attendance from members of the receiving community.

In terms of the celebrations and events we've made huge progress. Before, cultural festivals weren't in public spaces; they were celebrated within the communities privately, or inside the community hall. Now we have big events in public spaces and the community are well engaged. (Council staff)

The opportunity to share and connect with others was a key focus for Welcoming Activities such as a buddy programme which paired up newcomers with people who had been living in the community for some time. Other Welcoming Activities delivered by Councils in the early stages of the programme to promote connection include holding sports events. One programme organised a multicultural football tournament after realising that their suite of Welcoming Activities did not offer much of interest to young people. The success of this activity had spurred further sporting events, including a sporting event between Police and newcomers, and planning was underway for a future volleyball event. Several other programmes had developed initiatives to mitigate barriers to participation in sports, such as women's only swimming and tennis events.

The events to provide connection and information were perceived to help newcomers feel a sense of belonging in their new communities, and help receiving communities become more welcoming. However, several interviewees, particularly community stakeholders but also some Council staff, cautioned that attendance at events by members of the receiving community should not be conflated with developing an understanding of ethnic differences that will reduce racism. To this end, Welcoming Week was seen as a key opportunity to promote receiving community involvement in the programme. This is a national annual week

of activities that are aimed at the receiving community, demonstrating to the community the benefits of having newcomers in the region. The specific activities varied by region, but often included pōwhiri, tours, youth events, cultural nights with performances from community groups, and food festivals.

As programmes mature, Welcoming Activities become more specialised to meet unique needs within the community

As programmes have become more established and embedded, Councils have become more familiar with the needs of different newcomer subgroups in the community, and have developed Welcoming Activities tailored for these groups. These tend to be tailored activities that are developed as needs are identified through the connections made through the programme. This is then discussed and refined with the Advisory Group, and if feasible will be adapted as part of the programme.

We look at what's in the Plan and focus on those actions, but it's important we're not limited by that. Communities can come to us with ideas and we're responsive. (Coordinator)

Some activities required the Coordinator to undertake sustained engagement with some groups, to build and trust recognition of the programme and what it can offer. For example, one Council identified a need to provide support for migrant workers and the businesses that recruit and employ migrants. It took time to build trust with both employers and workers, and to identify what was needed to support them. Once this was established, the programme delivered a suite of activities including arranging support for businesses to enhance their cultural competency, providing workers with access to information on New Zealand employment law and employee rights, and identifying English language classes for employees.

Some Councils have expanded the focus of Welcoming Activities to support local services and agencies to better meet the needs of newcomers. This includes working with health and social services that engage with newcomers to offer support regarding how the services can meet cultural, language or access needs. In other Councils, there is a focus on supporting schools. This includes engaging schools in activities to welcome newcomers, such as creating murals and holding language week or cultural celebrations. Some Councils also delivered activities to support schools to meet the needs of newcomers. For example, one Council is delivering the Welcoming Schools initiative, which is linked to the Welcoming Communities programme. This was developed in response to a survey which found that newcomers experience barriers to education participation, such as parents struggling to communicate with the school due to limited English, or students being reluctant to participate in mixed gender swimming events. The programme delivers activities such as translating enrolment information and supporting schools to hold workshops with newcomer families. Several stakeholders, including Council staff and newcomers, described the changes that they had seen through this initiative. This included changes to school activities to support student participation, such as offering halal options at school sausage sizzles; as well as increased confidence amongst newcomer families to connect with their child's school.

The outcomes have been marvellous. Families feel more connected, and the home to school partnership is stronger. (Council staff)

Welcoming Activities are successful when led by the community, with the Council providing support

The evaluation found that, as the programme becomes embedded into communities, Welcoming Activities are most effectively delivered if they are led by the community, with the Council playing a supporting and connecting role. This is mostly happening in member Councils that joined in the pilot and early expansion phases. Newcomers and Council staff emphasised that they valued the programme's ability to help them build and grow activities and events. Council support, through the programme, includes promotion, access to venues and sometimes access to funding. This was appreciated by newcomer community leaders, who emphasised the importance of leading events themselves with support from the programme.

Council's involvement in this is promoting visibility and helping with funding, and then we did it on our own. We looked for speakers, venue, we invited people. We do have people from the community making the decisions, we are having the power. (Newcomer community leader)

Supporting newcomer groups to access funding was a valued activity in the programme. Two Councils offered a specific Welcoming Communities funding grant. This was not new funding, but had been secured through ring fencing a portion of an existing community funding contestable grant pool, making it available specifically for Welcoming Communities activities and events. Staff in one of these Councils noted that an elected member who acted as a champion for the programme had played a key role in securing the support of Councillors to endorse the reallocation of this funding.

Most other Councils supported newcomers to understand and navigate Council and philanthropic funding processes. For example, one Council delivered a workshop intended to 'demystify' how decisions are made around funding, which was reported to have increased the quality of grant applications from newcomer organisations and lifted the number of successful applications.

The evaluation identified examples in which support from the Welcoming Communities programme had enabled increased reach of Welcoming Activities, both to newcomers and the receiving community. For example, one newcomer organisation had been attempting to grow a cultural festival, but had not been able to secure the required funding until the Coordinator assisted the entity to navigate a grant application process. This enabled the festival to move to a larger venue, and attendance numbers increased substantially.

Welcoming Communities made it possible. Now we are flourishing. They helped us to get this investment, and even though it's small money, it had a big impact for us to develop our event. (Newcomer community leader)

In another area, a community organisation had started a football tournament that was initially attended by newcomers. The Welcoming Communities Coordinator assisted with promoting the tournament, which had helped it to grow entries from teams representing both the receiving and newcomer communities.

3.8 Accreditation

Accreditation is attractive because it provides validation of the Council and community as welcoming of newcomers

The Welcoming Communities accreditation model is voluntary, with member Councils eligible to apply to progress through four stages: Stage 1: Committed; Stage 2: Established; Stage 3: Advanced; and Stage 4: Excelling. As at June 2024, sixteen member Councils had achieved Stage 1 accreditation, and eight member Councils had achieved Stage 2 accreditation.

Councils saw a range of benefits to being accredited as a Welcoming Community. Having an official accreditation was seen as a 'stamp of approval' for the community. In some areas, stakeholder organisations had incorporated the fact that the area was formally accredited as a Welcoming Community in their communications materials. For example, accreditation credentials had been used in a promotional campaign by an international education entity to attract students to an area, and an economic development agency had used it in their communication materials to promote investment in their region.

It's helpful to be able to say we're accredited, we're a Welcoming Community, this is a place to invest in that's capable and willing and accepting of newcomers. (Council staff)

Accreditation was also useful for Coordinators to 'tell the story around the value of the programme' to internal stakeholders such as elected members. One Coordinator described the challenges they had in gaining mayoral support for Welcoming Communities, and stated that accreditation had been instrumental in getting buy-in by showing tangible and external validation of their programme.

Councils had varying views about the value of progressing through accreditation stages

The evaluation findings show that applying for Stage 1 accreditation is relatively straightforward, and all Councils that participated in the site visits had either achieved this, or were planning to do so.

Several Councils had also undertaken the process of gaining Stage 2 accreditation. Coordinators that had done so commented that they had used the Welcoming Communities Toolkit extensively and followed the timelines and milestones, leading to the completion of accreditation.

The accreditation manual was really good. In the manual there were examples of what type of evidence to provide - manual was clear and helpful. (Coordinator)

However, progressing through the accreditation stages was not a priority for some Councils. This is due to the amount of work required to undertake the accreditation application, which was described as substantial. The effort was largely related to compiling the evidence folder of hard copy materials: "it's a big job, pulling it all together" (Council). A full-time Coordinator

estimated that achieving Stage 2 took about six months' work, and needed to be balanced with other duties.

Councils generally viewed community-facing responsibilities, such as strengthening networks and supporting the delivery of Welcoming Activities, as the priority for the Coordinator's work. Particularly in Councils where the Coordinator role is less than full time, the longer-term advantages of achieving further stages of accreditation were considered to be a lower priority than core community work.

Getting the higher levels of accreditation isn't really a goal. Based on the capacity we have, trying to expand and improve what we are actually doing in our community is more important. (Council staff)

Council interviewees suggested that small changes could be made to make the accreditation process simpler. In particular, changing the format through which evidence is provided to a digital format, rather than requiring hard copies, would help to reduce the effort required. Another suggestion was to support flexibility in how Councils could show evidence for accreditation, such as a video or presentation rather than written documentation.

3.9 Mechanisms to support ongoing programme delivery

The evaluation has synthesised the data collected across the three cycles of evaluation and had identified that the following features are enablers of effective ongoing programme delivery.

Capacity and capability of the Coordinator

The Coordinator roles are critical to guiding the ongoing delivery of the programme. The type of activities undertaken in the programme depends on what stakeholders and newcomer and community groups the Coordinator connects with, the relationships they build and their level of expertise in community development.

The evaluation found that the capacity of the Coordinator varied between Councils, because some Coordinators were funded to deliver the programme full time, and some worked part time. Coordinator capacity has a major influence on the number and type of activities that are able to be delivered by the programme. In turn, this influences the type and level of progress that can be made towards achieving the outcomes.

Programme champions

The evaluation findings have highlighted the importance of having an elected member 'champion' for the programme; someone who strongly believes in the programme and acts as an advocate for it within their Council. Staff and elected members from several different Councils discussed how they had been aware of the programme since the pilot phase, but had not joined the programme until it had been championed by a Councillor who had a particular interest in the programme.

About half of the Councils that participated in the evaluation stated that they had at least one elected member who championed the programme. For example, one Council had an elected

member whose motivation for running for Council was to advocate for migrant ethnic communities, and to enhance diversity and inclusion in their constituency. After discussing this with Council staff, they were alerted to the opportunity to join the programme, which they advocated for with their Councillor colleagues. Another elected member championed the programme because they saw community cohesion as a core part of Council business.

I came on board with Council and was keen to do more than roads, rubbish and rates. Community cohesion is important to me, and I managed to get unanimous support for Welcoming Communities when it came to table. (Elected member)

Having an elected member act as champion and advocate for the programme amongst their colleagues was identified as important for programme success. It is important that there is active participation of the elected member 'champion' in the programme, such as being a member of the Advisory Group and attending welcoming events. This provides an ongoing link between the programme and the elected members, offering an ongoing mechanism to keep them up to date on the programme's progress and achievements, and reinforcing the value of the programme to their area.

Ongoing investment in relationships

The successful ongoing delivery of the programme requires a continual focus on building and strengthening stakeholder relationships. The evaluation has found a key feature of successful relationship building is recognising the mana of organisations that have been working in migrant settlement and newcomer support prior to the establishment of the Welcoming Communities programme. Many areas have existing entities such as Multicultural Councils, cultural associations and newcomer-focused NGOs. The ongoing delivery of the programme is successful in areas where it connects with and builds on these existing networks and services, and less successful where existing stakeholders perceive a sense of competition.

Those in the Multicultural Association have relationships already established and can provide much needed information to the Welcoming Communities Coordinator on how best to move forward with forming these relationships themselves. (Newcomer community leader)

The approach to relationship building needs to evolve over time, as the demographic make-up of the newcomer and receiving community changes. Coordinators in established programmes that joined during the pilot and early expansion phase emphasised the importance of regularly refreshing their networks to ensure that they were engaging with all relevant groups and individuals.

Provision of financial and in-kind resources to support programme delivery

The level of resourcing and support provided by Councils influences ongoing effectiveness of the programme. Apart from the Coordinator role, the programme is largely run by community groups and volunteers. Nearly all of the stakeholders that participated in the evaluation considered that this is appropriate, and did not expect to be paid for their contribution to the programme.

However, there are costs associated with activities such as transport and time to attend the Advisory Group hui, or offering refreshments to manaaki community groups during stakeholder workshops. Only a small proportion of member Councils have a budget for providing financial recognition to community organisations that are delivering Welcoming Activities or providing governance through the Advisory Group. There is some evidence that Councils that are able to offer koha to Advisory Group members and cover the costs of group participation have higher attendance and engagement in their Advisory Groups.

Coordinators that had access to such a budget were also more likely to state that their Council offered in-kind support of the programme, such as access to the skillsets and time of Council colleagues in other departments and use of Council venues for the programme to run events.

The provision of financial resources and in-kind support was associated with reduced turnover amongst Advisory Group members and Coordinators, supporting the stability of the programme during its delivery.

Building in accountability mechanisms

Newcomer community leaders and NGOs that participated in the evaluation considered that programme delivery was successful when it included the regular and systematic provision of performance information back to its stakeholders. While all programmes are expected to provide six monthly monitoring reports to INZ, community-facing reporting and feedback is also associated with programme success, as it builds in accountability to its community stakeholders.

This does not have to be formal written monitoring reports, but establishing a process to systematically update programme stakeholders on programme actions and progress towards goals helps to strengthen community buy-in.

We really value structure and expectations of the programme as it keeps [us] on track. There is accountability everywhere. (Advisory Group member)

4 Adaptation and innovation

KEQ 2.1: How well has the programme been adapted to the needs and context of the communities it is delivered in?

KEQ 2.2: To what extent is innovative practice part of the programme implementation?

The programme has been adapted to respond to different contexts and meet local needs

The evaluation found that a strength of the programme lies in its flexible and non-prescriptive nature. While the objectives of the programme are clearly set out in materials such as the Welcoming Standard, Councils and their communities have a high degree of autonomy in how to design and deliver the programme to meet these objectives. Interviews with Coordinators,

other Council staff, elected representatives and members of the Advisory Group found that these stakeholders felt a high degree of ownership of the programme, and appreciated that ability to localise its delivery to their area.

While there is a general scaffolding, there's been willingness to be a little bit flexible and a little bit agile to account for our own communities and knowing what's important to them. (Council staff)

The evaluation found strong evidence that the programme has been adapted to local needs and contexts. For programmes that are becoming established, the starting point for most Coordinators is to undertake in-depth consultation with their communities to understand the existing strengths of the area, where there are gaps and what aspirations the community has for the programme. These discussions are formalised through the stocktake process, and then flow into the Welcoming Plan, providing for the development of a bespoke plan that is grounded in the local context.

This means that the delivery of the programme looks different in different areas of Aotearoa New Zealand. Some regions have a high number of international education institutions, and are seeing high numbers of international students return post-COVID. Stakeholders in these areas described initiatives targeting this group of newcomers such as hosting information sessions on local accommodation options, health services and social opportunities to meet other international students. A member Council with a refugee resettlement location had partnered with an NGO to support former refugees to navigate government services. Member Councils in locations which hosted Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers in agriculture and horticulture offered activities to ensure employers and employees' rights and responsibilities are upheld, as well as inviting community members to participate in local events. These differing focuses of the programme have been implemented in response to needs that were identified by the community.

Councils are supported to incorporate innovation into programme delivery

Not all Councils have focused on innovation. For Councils that have joined the programme later in the expansion phase, innovation is less of a priority than getting core activities established. In these Councils, programme delivery focuses on tried-and-tested practices such as supporting existing cultural events and festivals, and establishing links between newcomer communities and the receiving community. Evaluation participants from these new member Councils considered that establishing a solid foundation for the programme was more important than being innovative, at least in the early stages of the programme.

In our first couple of years we have focused on the basics. We've taken ideas that I've learned about from other Coordinators and adapted them to our area. Nothing too fancy yet, we don't want to run before we can walk. (Coordinator).

Councils that joined during the pilot and early expansion phases stated that they now have a better understanding of their community's demographics and community needs. These Councils are delivering more innovative activities intended to target newcomer groups that are more difficult to reach, and/or work towards the elements in the Welcoming Standard that require a longer-term focus. For example, some Councils have begun to develop and test ideas to strengthen connections with the business sector to progress towards the Economic

Development, Business and Employment outcome. Councils have tried innovations such as hosting Business Breakfasts, providing a forum for receiving community and newcomer business leaders to meet informally to establish connections, with guest speakers and Q&A sessions with key stakeholders such as the Mayor.

Other Councils have undertaken activities to work towards the Equitable Access outcome. The Welcoming Schools programme, as discussed in section 3.7, is an innovative programme that seeks to promote cultural diversity in schools and enhance equity of access to educational opportunities by making school activities more accessible to newcomers.

In another member council, changes have been made to encourage newcomer participation in Council consultation processes like Long Term Plan discussions, moving from requiring people to make written submissions to seeking verbal input through consultation at community venues.

We have learnt that if you take the traditional consultation approach, that won't hear from the communities that matter the most to us in terms of getting good feedback. We're physically going out to engage with multicultural communities. We weren't really doing that before. (Council staff)

Generally, INZ was seen as supportive of innovation; one participant stated that “I can't think of any ideas that [INZ] has said 'no' to as a part of Welcoming Communities”. Coordinators have the opportunity to hear about innovative ideas through the regular INZ-led hui and regional Coordinator catch-ups. The INZ Welcoming Communities webpage and the websites of other Councils are also a useful source of ideas and inspiration for Coordinators.

For Welcoming Week, I grabbed some ideas from the website. ... We will be doing a 'Human Library' where people from diverse ethnicities share their stories and journeys to New Zealand. It will be hosted at the library. (Coordinator)

5 Reach

KEQ3: To what extent is the programme reaching its intended participants and target groups?

Outreach activities start with newcomers, then build out to community stakeholders

The evaluation found that new member councils generally focus initial outreach and relationship building activities on newcomer communities, the organisations that represent newcomers, services and entities that support newcomers to settle in the area, and mana whenua. Reaching these groups was viewed as an important first step, in order to understand the needs and aspirations of newcomers and tailor the programme establishment to meet these needs. Representatives of these core stakeholder groups were generally approached to be in the Advisory Group, to ensure close, ongoing connection to the programme.

At the beginning the relationships with the newcomer communities were very important to establish and create trust and understand the needs. It's not something you can go in and out with, it's ongoing. (Coordinator)

To make the community more welcoming, it is also necessary to reach and engage with the receiving community. In member Councils that joined during the pilot and early expansion phase, Coordinators have extended their outreach activities to identify and build relationships with wider stakeholder entities within the receiving community, such as businesses, schools and educational institutions, and community services.

Coordinators use a range of mechanisms to promote the programme and increase its reach

All Coordinators spoke of the importance of regular, meaningful connection with local stakeholder groups, and of tailoring the mode and frequency of outreach activities. An effective method employed by some Coordinators is to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify who are the key groups, their interest and involvement in the programme, and the approach to engagement and communication (such as which stakeholders need to be kept informed, and which need to be actively engaged). Another Coordinator worked with their Council's communications team to develop an engagement plan that it set out tactics to reach internal audience, newcomers, community stakeholders and the general public. These methods were an effective way to 'triage' stakeholders, and tailor the extent and type of communications to suit different groups.

The whole community is a stakeholder. But then you've got to know who can move the programme forward, and really focus on those groups. But on the side have a list of who should be kept informed. (Coordinator)

Coordinators also emphasised the need to be multi-faceted in their communications approach. Most Councils used both traditional and digital communications methods. This included developing hard copy brochures, working with local print media, printing banners to be displayed at community events, developing webpages, and using social media to reach younger audiences. Some Councils used creative approaches to promote Welcoming Communities, with the design team of one Council making and posting a video on social media showcasing the area as a welcoming community. This was intended to spread the word about the programme and showcase the diversity of the Council. Importantly, these initiatives targeted not just newcomers but are intended to broaden reach into the receiving community.

There's a lot of work underway to get the community up to speed on what the programme is and to let them know we're not just targeting migrants. (Council staff)

The programme is doing well at reaching newcomer groups, and is building reach to the receiving community

Despite these efforts, the evaluation found that most member Councils are successful in reaching newcomer groups, but newcomers considered that there is still work to be done to reach the receiving community. Cultural or ethnic festivals, celebrations and events are the main vehicle through which the programme aims to reach and engage members of the

receiving community. These events are viewed by programme stakeholders as a 'low pressure' way to introduce members of the receiving community to diverse cultures in a fun and celebratory environment.

Cultural festivals shine a light on our migrant community and shows how valuable they are. Without these celebrations, I don't think they would be very visible. And that might be the stepping stone for community members to find out more, or start to see the value of diversity. (Elected member)

As was discussed in section 3.7, the involvement of the programme in supporting festivals and events has precipitated the growth and expansion of these events. The monitoring reports for the programme show that some events have several thousand attendees. Other events have evolved from small events held at community centres and mostly attended by newcomers, to large festivals that take place in public parks and are well attended by the general public.

Despite these positive steps, evaluation participants noted that the majority of activities in the Welcoming Plan are designed, delivered and attended by newcomers. There was a desire to increase the involvement or participation of the receiving community in the programme, in a way that is broader than attending festivals and events.

Most of the programme, the activities, we participate as migrant people but we wish we could see more of the local people involved. All the initiatives are run by migrants for migrants. (Newcomer)

As the programme matures in Councils that joined during the pilot and early expansion phase, Coordinators are taking steps to enhance reach to the receiving community. Some Councils have supported sports events with participant teams from the newcomer and receiving communities. Another Council is reigniting a buddy programme, in which newcomers are paired with a buddy from the community who helps them to navigate their new community and connect to local activities. In another area, newcomers are encouraged to sign up as volunteers for community events such as the Rural Games. These activities encourage connection between newcomers and the receiving community, and newcomers perceived this to be beneficial in terms of increasing the reach of the programme to the boarder community.

Many member councils have not been able to engage mana whenua in the programme in a leadership role

There is strong alignment between kaupapa Māori values of manaakitanga and the programme's objective of creating welcoming and inclusive communities.

Mana whenua take our obligation very seriously to show manaaki to everyone whether it be newcomers or visitors. (Mana whenua representative)

Mana whenua involvement in most areas is focused on hosting or contributing to welcoming events. This includes marae visits, pōwhiri at citizenship ceremonies and contribution at community events. This is valued by the programme:

Having tangata whenua at different events – there is a sense of honour having that involvement. We can feel that from those hosting the events. (Coordinator)

However, as mentioned in section 3.4, mana whenua are considerably less engaged with the programme than the Welcoming Standard suggests, which is at the leadership and strategic level. This is generally due to a lack of capacity, with mana whenua typically receiving requests to contribute to a range of kaupapa in the community. Councils with a strong historical connection to mana whenua, such as a formal partnership or iwi engagement team, are well placed to secure iwi involvement in the programme, as the Coordinator can build on existing relationships rather than starting from scratch.

The expectation that mana whenua will contribute on a volunteer basis was also a barrier. This has been addressed in some Councils through the INZ pilot scheme to provide a funding grant to assist mana whenua to engage with the Welcoming Communities programme. This has been mutually beneficial; in these areas, iwi representatives spoke of a strengthened relationship with Council through participation in the programme.

Efforts are being made to increase business sector engagement

Involvement of the business sector in the programme has varied between member Councils. Most programmes have forged links with organisations such as the local Chamber of Commerce and economic development agencies, but with mixed levels of active engagement in the programme. Some Coordinators stated that they struggled to get business sector entities to see the value of involvement with the programme, receiving feedback that employers preferring to engage with central and local government on issues such as housing and immigration settings rather than 'soft' issues such as inclusivity.

Where programmes had been successful in securing business sector involvement in the programme, the incentive for engagement was generally the potential economic benefits from attracting and retaining skilled migrants to the community.

6 Outcomes

KEQ 4.1: To what extent have the outcomes described in the Welcoming Communities Standard been achieved?

KEQ 4.2: For whom, to what extent, and in what circumstances have these outcomes been achieved?

6.1 Progress against the outcomes in the Welcoming Communities Standard

6.1.1 Inclusive Leadership

The programme has offered a vehicle for local council and community leaders to work together

The Inclusive Leadership outcome is progressing well in member Councils where the leadership team (including Council managers and elected representatives) have strong buy-in to the programme: they are enthusiastic about becoming a more welcoming community, they encourage and support the Welcoming Communities Coordinator, and they advocate for the programme with other Council staff and elected members. About 80 percent of the Councils that participated in the evaluation had strong leadership buy-in. In these Councils, elected members and senior staff, stakeholder organisations, and newcomer groups worked together on implementing the Welcoming Activities. The Welcoming Communities framework and emphasis on collaboration has supported the use of the programme as a vehicle for leaders to work together on broader initiatives, such as the development of a Council multicultural strategy.

We worked with the Welcoming Communities programme to develop our multicultural strategy, drawing on those existing relationships between leaders to come together to create a strategy that all agree with. (Council staff)

There are examples of the programme supporting leadership opportunities for newcomers. Coordinators have supported newcomer representatives on groups such as Council advisory boards and community liaison teams, Youth Councils and groups that have facilitated newcomer input to Long-Term Plans. The evaluation found that the work undertaken by the programme enabled serious and meaningful consideration of newcomer and migrant perspectives by Councils and other community organisations.

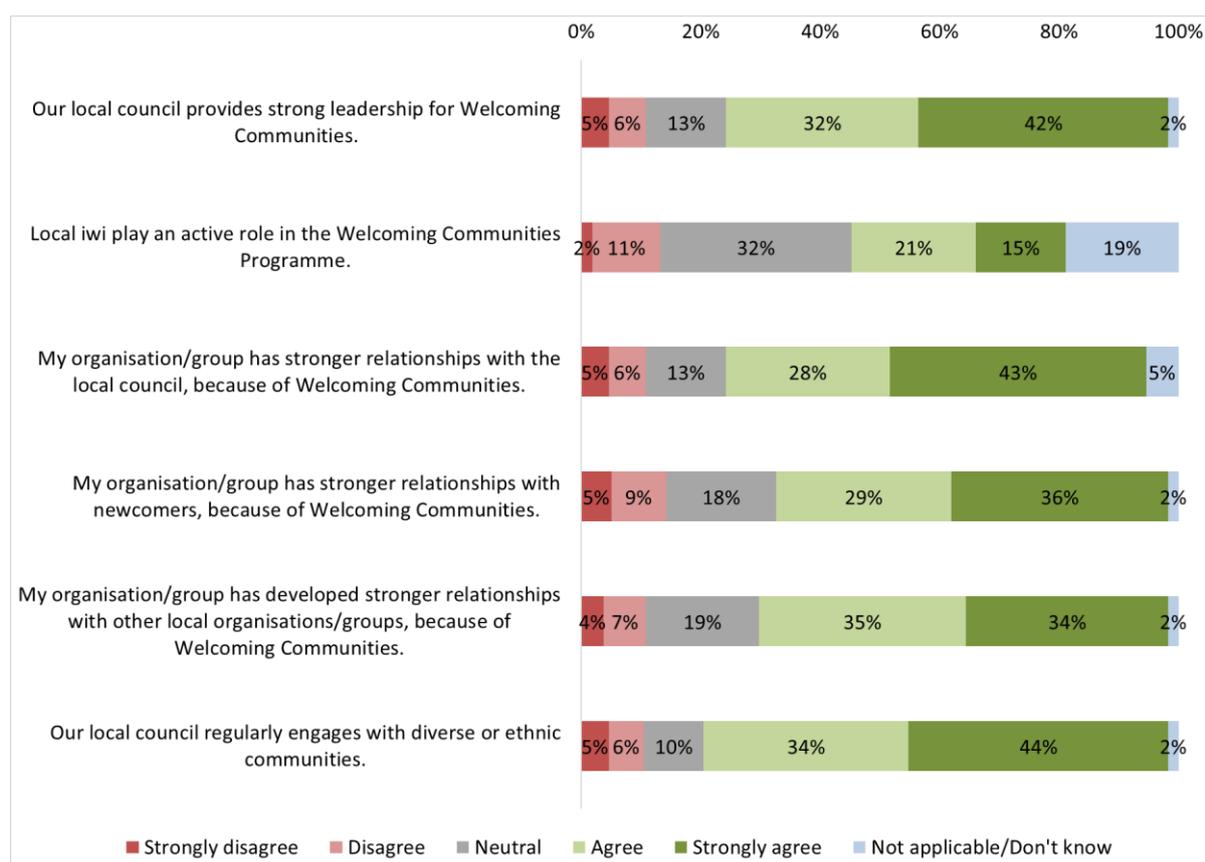
We've made efforts to tap into the connections made by Welcoming Communities to come into other Council processes. It gives them recognition that their leadership role in the community is valued. (Council staff)

Prior to joining the programme, most areas had a range of community organisations that supported newcomers (such as multicultural Councils and NGOs), and Council-led programmes and initiatives (such as cultural festivals). However, these organisations' activities were often not joined up. The programme has provided a formalised structure for leaders to connect – primarily through the Advisory Group – and has prompted the development of a formalised and strategic approach to creating a more inclusive community.

However, in the remaining twenty percent of member Councils, there were challenges in gaining leadership commitment to the programme. In some of these Councils, the programme was at risk of being wound up, and at least one Council was planning to exit after the seed funding period. There were no patterns related to when the Councils joined, or location or size of the Council; in areas where the programme was at risk, this was typically because elected members that had previously championed the programme were no longer Councillors, and newer elected members did not always see the value of the programme.

The survey findings show that, overall, respondents consider the programme is performing well on the Inclusive Leadership outcome, except regarding local iwi involvement in the programme.

Figure 3: Survey results related to Inclusive Leadership



The survey analysis also explored whether there were any differences in perspectives between government respondents (mostly those from Council) and community stakeholders. Most of the government (83%) and community (72%) respondents agreed that their local Council provides strong leadership for Welcoming Communities.

Similarly, the majority of survey respondents (70%) agreed that their organisation or group has developed stronger relationships with the local Council, because of Welcoming Communities, as well as developing stronger relationships with other organisations or groups (69% agreed or strongly agreed). Government respondents had a significantly higher mean level of agreement with these last two statements than community respondents, indicating that government and Council personnel particularly valued the opportunities the programme provided for collaboration.

Mana whenua engagement has been less than anticipated

As was discussed above in this report, the programme has not achieved the intended level of engagement with mana whenua in many of the member Councils. The evaluation consistently heard that barriers to greater mana whenua leadership and participation included lack of capacity, and historic challenges Councils have experienced engaging with iwi and mana whenua representatives or groups.

Iwi are time and resource-poor and we receive a lot of requests from government departments, schools and others in the community. We support

Welcoming Communities but have limited resources to fully be involved. (Iwi representative)

The quality of existing Council relationships with mana whenua influenced the level of engagement with Welcoming Communities. These relationships may have been formed through liaison roles, a history of collaboration, or through having established formal relationships and agreements at executive level. Regardless of the status of existing relationships, Coordinators also identified the importance of investing time in relationships to achieve participation and progress in this area. The INZ pilot scheme to provide a funding grant to assist mana whenua to engage with the Welcoming Communities programme has been successful in supporting iwi to actively engage in the programme. This has been mutually beneficial, and iwi representatives spoke of a strengthened relationship with Council in the pilot region.

6.1.2 Welcoming Communications

The programme has focused on ensuring welcoming information is available to newcomers in an accessible way

In most member Councils, Coordinators have developed Welcome Guides and packages of information for newcomers that help them orient to life in their new community. This has been a major strategy for Coordinators to support progress towards more connected and inclusive communities and towards more equitable access to services.

We've created Welcoming Packs and we send these out and make them available at libraries, schools, Council offices, and medical centres. It's updated annually to keep it current. (Council staff)

Having limited English is a barrier for some newcomers to understanding information, and subsequently to participate in community activities and services. While many Coordinators have ensured some translated materials are available as part of the programme's activities, this is expensive and there is a limit on the amount of material that can be translated. This limits the ability of the programme to reach and include all newcomers, and was a gap which Councils were motivated to address by focusing on using plain English in communications as well as using visual forms of communication.

Council recognises we need to do better in terms of communications. We're hearing from the multi-ethnic community that they need to have resources available in their language. We're looking at using pictograms. (Council staff)

Some Coordinators with strong relationships with newcomer communities have found that an effective communication method has been the use of community networks to disseminate information. For example, one Council has built a relationship with a local radio station, resulting in weekly radio programmes hosted by people from ethnic minorities in their own language. This was particularly apparent in Councils that joined during the pilot phase and early in the expansion, as Coordinators had built trust over time.

Coordinators have also made progress in communicating stories about newcomers and the Welcoming Communities programme. Examples include sharing stories in community

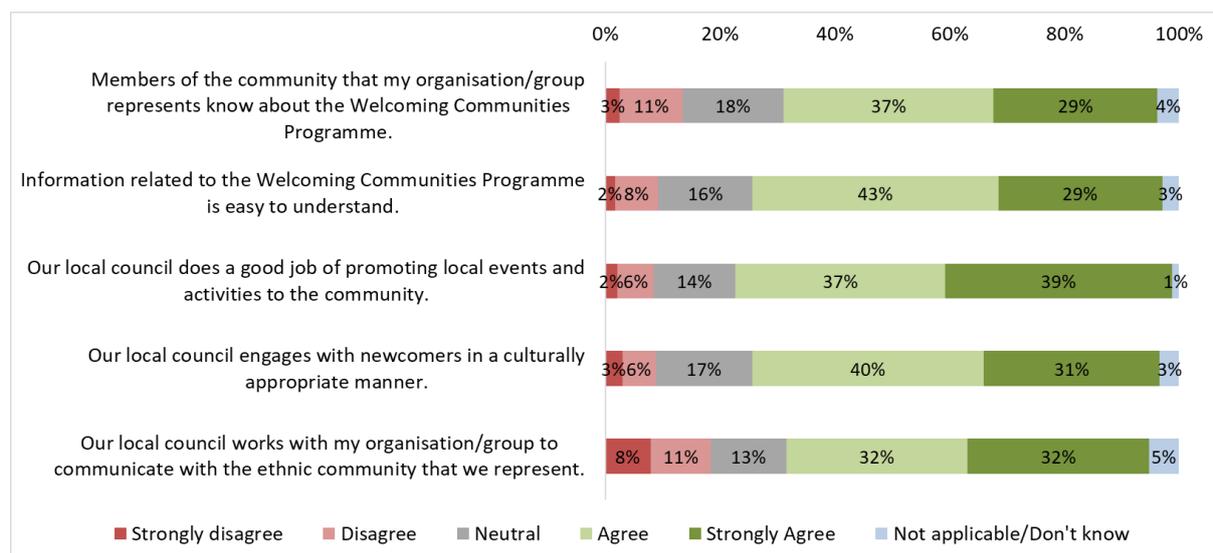
newspapers and social media during Welcoming Week, and posting information on Council websites.

There was a campaign run for Welcoming Week – lots of stories on social media of successful migrants working here, contributing to the community. It received a lot of positive engagement. Lots of people liking and commenting. (Council staff)

Council networks established through the programme have also been used to communicate and organise support for the community especially during major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather events. This has been an important practical outcome achieved through the programme.

There was a high level of agreement from survey respondents that, overall, the Council has performed well in communicating with newcomers. However, community respondents were significantly less likely than government stakeholders to agree that information about the programme is easy to understand, and that members of their community know about the programme. The biggest difference between the respondent groups was for the statement ‘our local Council does a good job of promoting local events and activities to the community’. This indicates that there is a gap in how well Council considers it is communicating, compared to the views of the intended audience for communications about the programme.

Figure 4: Survey results related to Welcoming Communications



Welcoming Communities programmes have made efforts to enhance communication and input from newcomer communities to Council

Many newcomer community leaders talked about how the Coordinator had worked with them to strengthen the flow of information from newcomers to Council, to ensure that their views are heard and considered in Council decisions. This was more apparent in member Councils that joined during the pilot phase and early in the expansion. The Coordinator is key to this process, having built relationships with newcomer groups in the programme establishment

phase, and then using these connections to encourage communication with Council and input into Council processes.

[Coordinator] has built that personal connection with our migrant communities, and it's helped bridge the gap between Council and migrants. We now get much more submissions from migrant groups when we see community feedback on various issues. (Council staff)

Coordinators in Councils with more established programmes have also worked with various departments to support and encourage newcomers to communicate and engage with Council. This includes working with customer service teams to provide advice on communicating with various migrant groups, and arranging for teams running public consultations to hold meetings in venues frequently used by newcomers. Councils in the pilot and early expansion cohort reported seeing higher levels of engagement of newcomer communities in consultation processes, which they attributed to the relationships built through the programme.

The Advisory Group is also important as a way for newcomers to communicate with Council. All Advisory Groups include representatives of newcomer communities, and have functioned as a conduit to provide feedback to the Council on key issues facing newcomers.

6.1.3 Equitable Access

Member Councils are working to identify barriers to newcomers accessing services and participate in the community

Much of the activity reported by Coordinators in this outcome area is related to overcoming the barriers of lack of information and limited proficiency in the English language. Coordinators in all member Councils have made substantial efforts to understand the barriers experienced by newcomers, primarily through the input of the Advisory Group and consultation with communities during the process of developing and refreshing the Welcoming Plan.

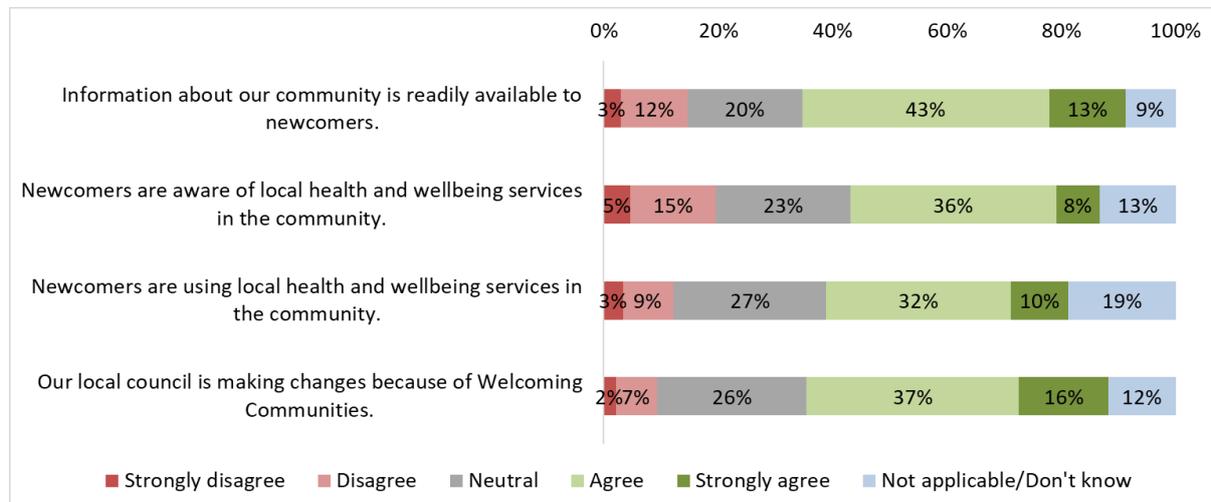
These efforts have identified that it is challenging for some newcomers, particularly those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, to navigate local services. Newcomer community leaders particularly noted that some newcomers find that accessing income support and healthcare is complex and difficult. This is partially due to language barriers, but also lack of awareness of what services are available, eligibility criteria, and practical steps such as how to make appointments.

It is a challenge for former refugees and some new migrants to access and navigate services. How does MSD work? How does Police work? Understanding the process is the biggest challenge to us. (Newcomer community leader)

Figuring out how it works is hard. Making an appointment with MSD or with a GP, you need to telephone the service, then have to press the appropriate button. Systems in NZ are different than overseas and there is no guidebook to help navigate these spaces. (Newcomer)

The survey results show there are opportunities to improve in this outcome. Only around half of the survey respondents agreed that information about the community is readily available to newcomers, and less than half agree that newcomers are aware of and using local health and wellbeing services. This may reflect the complexity and level of need in the community, rather than directly reflect the progress and success of the programme.

Figure 5: Survey results related to Equitable Access



Member councils are undertaking activities to enhance newcomer access

A first step for most Coordinators is to ensure that information on available services, and how they can assist, is readily available to newcomers. This includes providing written information such as multilingual posters or guides on what services are available and how they work, which are displayed in areas that newcomers frequent and disseminated in public spaces such as libraries and community centres. Most Councils that joined later in the expansion were undertaking these activities.

As well as providing information, some member Councils offer a community orientation session to newcomer groups, which include speakers from key local services. This provides a discussion forum in which newcomers can ask questions and provide feedback on how the services can meet their needs.

In some areas (particularly those in which the programme had been running since the pilot or early expansion), the programme has linked newcomers to people that can support them to engage with services. For example, in one area the Coordinator arranged a hui between local newcomer support organisations and health and social services, so that newcomer organisations had better awareness of support services in the region.

The importance of the Coordinator as a connector of people and services across their community was highlighted in this outcome area. Most Coordinators put a substantial amount of their time into building networks with local NGOs and services. They first work with newcomer representatives to understand what the access issues are. They then develop and provide information and support to ensure newcomers know what is available in the community. Working collaboratively and building trust has meant Coordinators can connect

local services to the newcomers – and newcomers to local services – enabling progress towards this outcome.

There is some evidence of the member councils working with local services to take into account newcomer needs

The evaluation found several examples where local services had offered activities targeted to meet the needs of newcomer groups, including women’s only swimming lessons and driver training programmes targeting newcomer groups. The Welcoming Schools programme, discussed in section 3.7, is an example of a Welcoming Communities initiative that have helped to overcome equity barriers in access to education.

Member councils also delivered activities to support newcomers to understand what services Council offers and how it can help them. In some Councils that had joined during the pilot and early expansion, Council staff had completed cultural competency training, learning more about themselves and newcomers, and changing the way they communicated about their services and facilities in an effort to enhance accessibility. For example, one Council discussed the efforts they had made at their combined library/Council satellite office more accessible to newcomers. This included hiring culturally diverse frontline staff who speak a range of languages, and are trained to provide information on local services and information to support and encourage participation in activities such as voting in local and national elections.

Our staff are diverse and tend to be the community connectors. This is intentional to have a diverse frontline staff who can engage with the community that come into their space and able break down those access barriers. (Council staff)

The Welcoming Communities programme has also seen efforts made to enhance equity of access to Council community grant funding. In most Councils, this is not a funding grant that is specific to Welcoming Communities – instead, it is an existing Council funding pool available to community groups, that newcomer organisations and entities are eligible to apply for. Several Councils have run workshops for newcomer groups that have provided information on the funding grant process, and advice on how to make an effective application. This was intended to address inequities in access to funding, which some newcomer groups had previously struggled with due to lack of familiarity with grant application processes.

6.1.4 Connected and Inclusive Communities

The programme has enhanced newcomer connections with the local community and has contributed to more inclusive communities

The collective effort of Council and community stakeholders and newcomer groups in creating a more inclusive community has been seen in the number of community events delivered as part of the programme. The data monitoring evidence showed that in both 2022 and 2023, there was a considerable effort delivering activities that support the connected and inclusive communities outcome. All member Councils had a strong focus on supporting and hosting community celebratory events that shared cultures and diversity with the receiving community. These events not only contribute to improving the outcome of connected communities; they

also help build relationships between newcomers and other groups in the community that support the success of the programme.

The evaluation has heard from newcomers that they have experienced things they haven't been able to before, because of support from the programme. This included going to women's only sessions at local pools, accessing Council rooms and facilities, engaging confidently and safely with agencies such as Police, and visiting a marae. These activities have provided opportunities for newcomers and locals to learn from each other, share stories and traditions, celebrate diversity and enhance connections. For example, one Council arranged newcomer groups to participate in a noho marae, which helped to create connections between newcomers and mana whenua.

There was a sincere welcome and connection between the learners and the hosts. It was no tick-box exercise, it was a sincere connection. It was fun, we were well fed, we felt included. It's a profound thing. (Newcomer)

There were also examples in which established programmes that joined during the pilot or early expansion identified specific newcomer groups that were at risk of experiencing limited social inclusion, and made efforts to enhance connection. Several Coordinators in areas which had high numbers of RSE workers discussed efforts to include this group in community activities. For example, one Council invited a group of RSE workers to perform at a local Waitangi Day event. Another connected RSE workers to English language classes, and made a point of inviting RSE workers to community events to make them feel part of the community. Newcomers who were RSE workers told the evaluators that they had enjoyed these events and felt better connected to their receiving community.

The role of the programme in achieving this outcome has often been that of connector and supporter rather than driving inclusive activities. This reflects the intention of the programme; that is, supporting communities to lead activities and intentionally partnering with other organisations.

The evaluation found some evidence of shifts in perceptions about newcomers in local communities

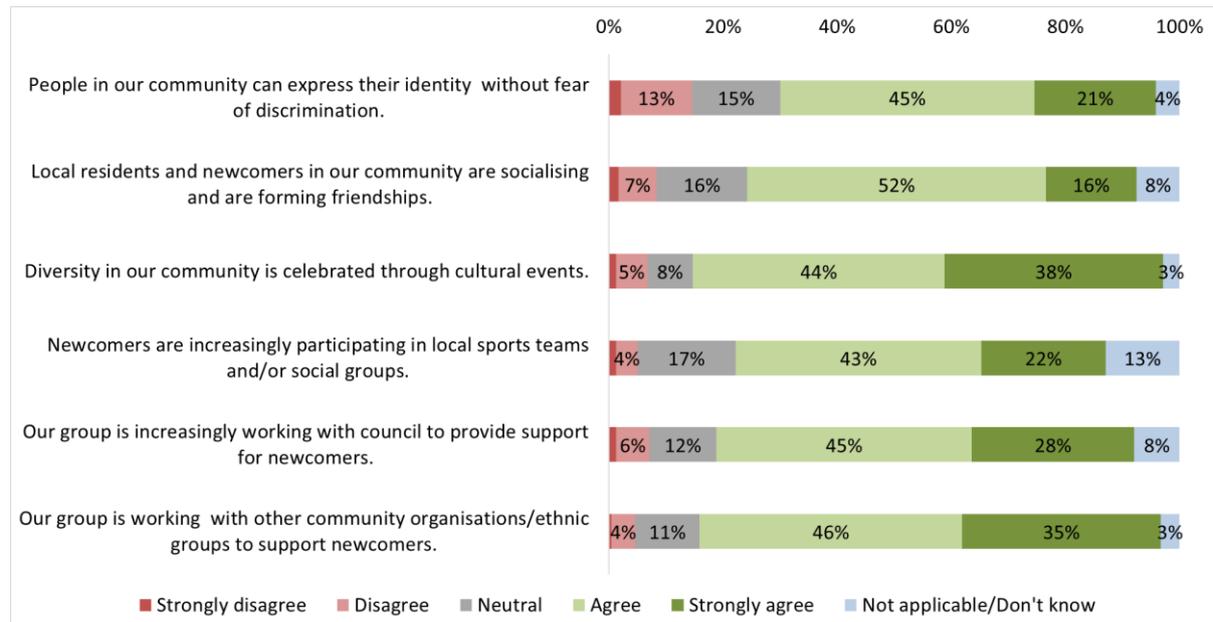
Discussion with newcomers found that for the most part they felt welcomed and included in their community, and comfortable to express their culture.

I've been here for three years now and have seen change. When I wear clothes from my culture, people will ask me about it and they are polite and interested. It's a chance to share a bit about my home country. (Newcomer)

Staff from member Councils that joined the programme in the pilot or early expansion reported that since the programme has been operating in their area, they have observed more connection between newcomers and Council, as measured by the number of enquiries from newcomers for support, and participation in Council consultations. Councils have also made efforts to increase inclusion through the visible celebration of diversity in Council spaces, such as through murals and displays.

The success of the programme in celebrating diversity is reflected in survey results where the majority of survey respondents agreed that diversity is celebrated in their community through cultural events.

Figure 6: Survey results related to Connected and Inclusive Communities



It is worthwhile to note that the benefits of the programme have not necessarily reached all newcomers, and that the evaluation heard a small number of reports of racism and discrimination towards newcomers in interviews.

6.1.5 Economic Development, Business and Employment

Member councils have placed less emphasis on economic development while in the early stages of programme delivery

Overall, monitoring information from Councils in the programme reported fewer Welcoming Activities aimed at economic development, business and employment than the other outcomes. While there is evidence of some early progress, there are opportunities to strengthen activity in this outcome.

Despite some Councils reporting that achieving economic benefits was an important driver for choosing to participate in the programme, this does not appear to have always translated into the Welcoming Plan or Welcoming Activities. Rather, the focus on community consultation and on identifying newcomer needs to inform the development of the Plan has resulted in activities that have primarily focused on the social and inclusion aspects of the programme. Activity in the economic and business outcome area has been slower to develop.

This outcome is our weakest area. We have had some opportunity to work in this space, but our focus has been on other areas like social cohesion, where work has naturally bubbled up. (Coordinator)

There are several reasons that may explain why activity in this area has been slower. An initial priority of most Councils has been to ensure that newcomers, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, have their social needs met.

The nature of economic development activities is also influenced by the relationships and connections that the Coordinator has been able to make across the community, and the extent to which the business community has interest in engaging with the programme. While some programmes have representatives of the Chamber of Commerce or economic development agencies on their Advisory Group, other Coordinators report struggling to gain active involvement from the business community in the programme.

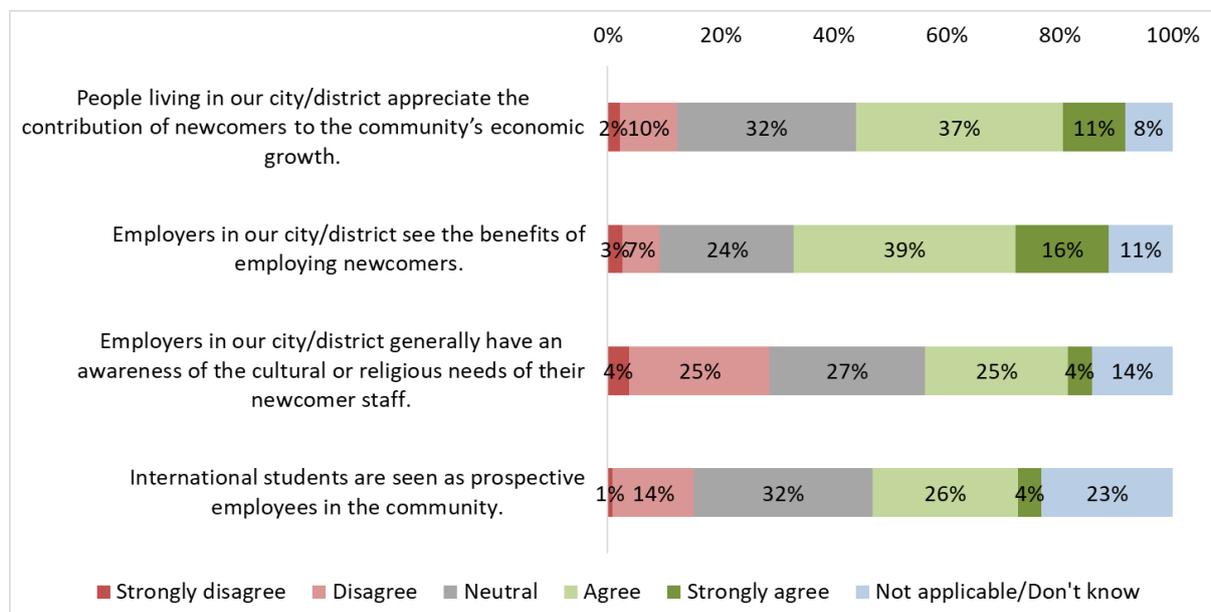
I think where there's a gap is the connection with business. There's lots of players in this space who have a role in helping people navigate when they come into the country. But there's probably not always that strong connection into industry. (NGO representative)

We visited Chamber of Commerce to present the WC programme to them, trying to get them engaged. The Chamber was more focused on other issues they want the Council to fix and we haven't really been able to get them engaged in the programme. (Newcomer community leader)

There was evidence that some Council staff and elected members were unaware that economic development was one of the programme's objectives. Coordinators also reported varying degrees of interest from Council colleagues, particularly economic development teams, in working together to pursue this outcome.

The survey results align with this finding, with generally lower levels of agreement with statements related to economic development than with other outcome areas.

Figure 7: Survey results related to Economic Development, Business and Employment



There has been some progress on supporting newcomers with employment and business ownership

Despite these challenges, the programme has made some progress in supporting newcomers to successfully access local employment or be a business owner. This includes working with employment entities within the receiving community to support newcomer employment; there are numerous examples of Coordinators working with organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce or individual businesses to support cultural competency training and raise awareness of newcomer skills and needs. For example, a newcomer community leader talked about the changes they had observed as employers adapt to newcomer needs.

The diversity of workforce has changed. Employers are needing to cater for different cultural beliefs e.g. enabling people to do prayers etc. A lot more smaller businesses were moving away from Friday drinks towards a food-based sharing culture. (Newcomer community leader)

In some areas, the programme has acted as a connector to organisations that support newcomers to adapt their CVs to the local context, practice interview skills and hold workshops with employers as guest speakers to discuss their employment practices and what they are looking for in employees. Similarly, there are examples of member Councils working with newcomers to support their entry into business, facilitating connections to organisations that offer business mentoring and ongoing support to navigate the New Zealand work environment. Coordinators emphasised that the role of the programme is not to directly provide these services, but to connect to other organisations that can provide the needed support.

At times I'll be at a community event and people ask how to open a new business – we help them navigate to the right place. We're a conduit to the business mentors programme, or might link them to others in the sector. (Coordinator)

The programme is helping newcomers and their families to settle and stay in the area

Drivers for Councils adopting the programme included attracting working-age migrants to the community to fill job shortages and boost school rolls. The evaluation has found that the programme has played a role in supporting newcomers and their families to remain in the area, through the social and connection support it offers. Newcomers discussed how they had participated in activities that had been run or supported by Welcoming Communities, that had helped them to adapt to life in the community. This included social and sporting events, English language classes, and cultural events. Newcomers stated that these events helped them feel connected to their new community, and likely to stay in the area. This can support longer-term economic benefits by retaining skilled migrants in the region.

People that come in as skilled migrants are now bringing their families into the area. The programme provides support for those family members like teaching driving, and pairing people with buddies to offer socialisation as well. (Council staff)

There is an opportunity for sustained focus on this outcome, and measuring progress

As the programme becomes embedded within communities, there is an opportunity for the member Councils to increase their focus on the Economic Development, Business and Employment outcome. Several evaluation participants commented on the success of the programme in developing networks and connections between newcomers and health and social services. They considered that similar effort could be applied to connections with the business community.

Throughout the evaluation, no Coordinator or Council staff reported that Councils collected or used information to inform performance against this outcome, such as data on newcomers and employment. In addition, no datasets were identified that would enable the Council or the programme to understand whether progress towards economic development, business and employment objectives was occurring or not. This is a gap. It would be beneficial for the programme to track indicators such as migration patterns and employment trends.

6.1.6 Civic Engagement and Participation

Welcoming Communities programmes focused on facilitating engagement in civic life in terms of contributing to Council decision-making processes and consultations

Activities that were commonly undertaken towards this outcome included facilitating newcomer participation in the Council consultation processes, such as contributing to the Long-Term Plan, and working with the Electoral Commission to support newcomers to engage in local body elections. Like some of the other outcomes, success in this area has built on work by the Coordinator to build relationships. The programme can act as a 'bridge' between the Council and newcomer communities, which supports participation in Council activities and civic life. Engaging with newcomer communities through the Advisory Group and Welcoming Activities builds networks that can be drawn upon to support participation in Council processes.

Several Councils which had delivered the programme for several years stated that they had discussed with the Coordinator how best to reach newcomer communities. They had also made efforts to ensure they participated in public consultation processes and local and national elections. For example, during public consultation on its Youth Development Strategy, a Coordinator worked with their Council's policy team to hold consultation events in venues that newcomers use and feel comfortable to be in. Another Coordinator had worked with newcomer leaders during local body elections to arrange 'meet the candidates' sessions at ethnic and cultural associations.

In these processes, demonstrating that newcomer input in public consultations is taken seriously and valued helps to increase participation over time. Several Councils described observing greater input from newcomers into Council consultations as the programme became embedded in the area, and input from newcomers was actively sought in consultation processes.

For many years during annual submissions on the budget and Long-Term Plan, we heard from the Multicultural Council but that was it. But in the last few years

we've started to get submissions from ethnic groups about the plan and what they care about. It's been great to see their engagement. (Council staff)

A small number of Councils also reported changes in the make-up of the elected representatives over time. One newcomer community leader discussed the changes they had seen in the ten years they had been in the area, from elected members being predominantly older and Pākehā to being much more diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. While this could not be attributed directly to the programme, it was viewed as an indication of changing community views towards to diverse participation in local body elections.

However, activities to encourage greater participation in Council processes are generally taking place in programmes that have been running for several years. While all member Councils have activities that align with this outcome, in newer or less established programmes this outcome was less of a focus than outcomes related to social cohesion and inclusion.

There is a need to raise awareness amongst newcomers that civic participation is encouraged

Newcomer community leaders noted that some newcomers come from backgrounds with less opportunity for civic participation. Coordinators again identified the importance of time and relationships for these groups to become settled and understand the structures and processes in place in their local community before they participated.

Facilitating Council engagement with communities at events and other activities was considered to be useful for Councils to gain an understanding of the newcomer communities, for communication, and for gaining support for their participation in civic life. The presence of elected representatives at welcoming events and as members of the Advisory Group helped newcomers to build trust in the Council and encouraged greater engagement.

I have made connections through the programme, and it makes me more approachable and accessible as a member of Council. They know that I'm passionate about it so there's a level of trust there. They now feel able to approach Council - they can send me an email if there is an issue about something. (Elected member)

While elected member visibility at Welcoming Activities such as festivals and events was a good start, several newcomer community leaders considered that many newcomers remained unsure of how to engage with Council processes, or not confident to do so.

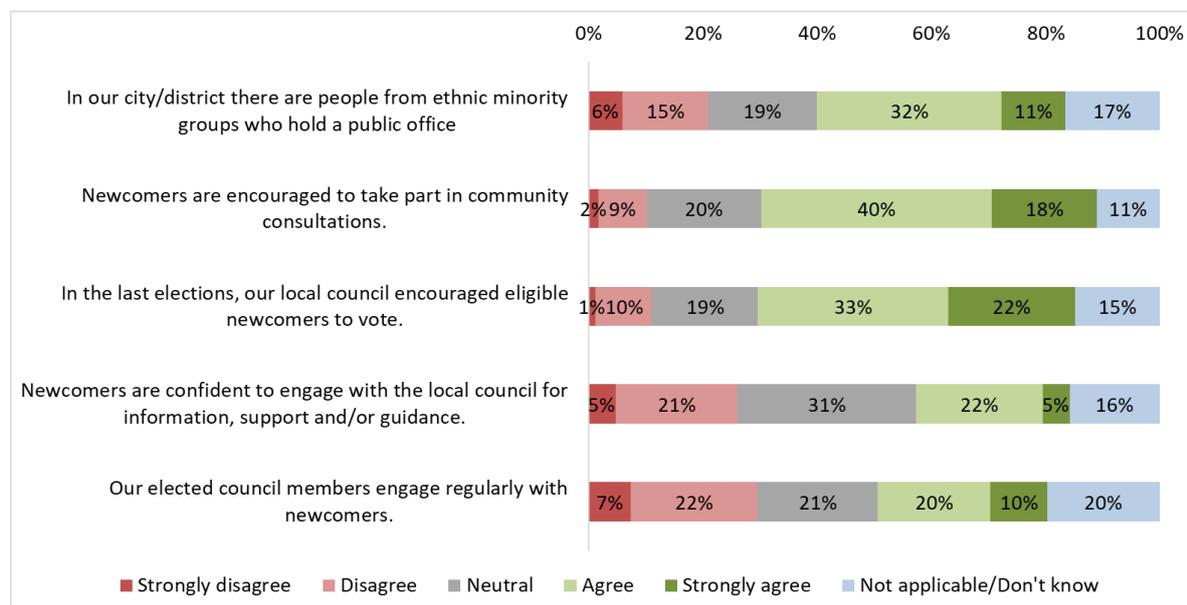
Council is only visible to many people through events. We don't even know what services are available through the Council. We need to be more connected so people know about the Council services. Many people don't know where to go to access the services they need and rely on their community leaders to tell them. (Newcomer community leader)

There are a lot of newcomer community members who don't feel welcome, as they have not seen a lot from Council that fosters that. This is a case of not being aware that they can participate into this space. (Newcomer community leader)

It was suggested that more Councils could adopt a targeted approach to engaging with newcomer communities, building on the relationships developed through the Welcoming Communities programme.

Survey results for this outcome align with this finding. While respondents broadly agree that newcomers are encouraged to take part in community consultations and to vote, but there is lower agreement that newcomers are confident to engage with Council and that elected members regularly engage with newcomers.

Figure 8: Survey results related to Civic Engagement and Participation



The programme encourages participation in community governance activities

A small number of Councils have undertaken initiatives aimed at increasing newcomer participation in the governance of community organisations, such as being on school Boards of Trustees or involved in governance committee of community organisations. An NGO representative noted the value that having a diverse range of perspectives brings to governance structures.

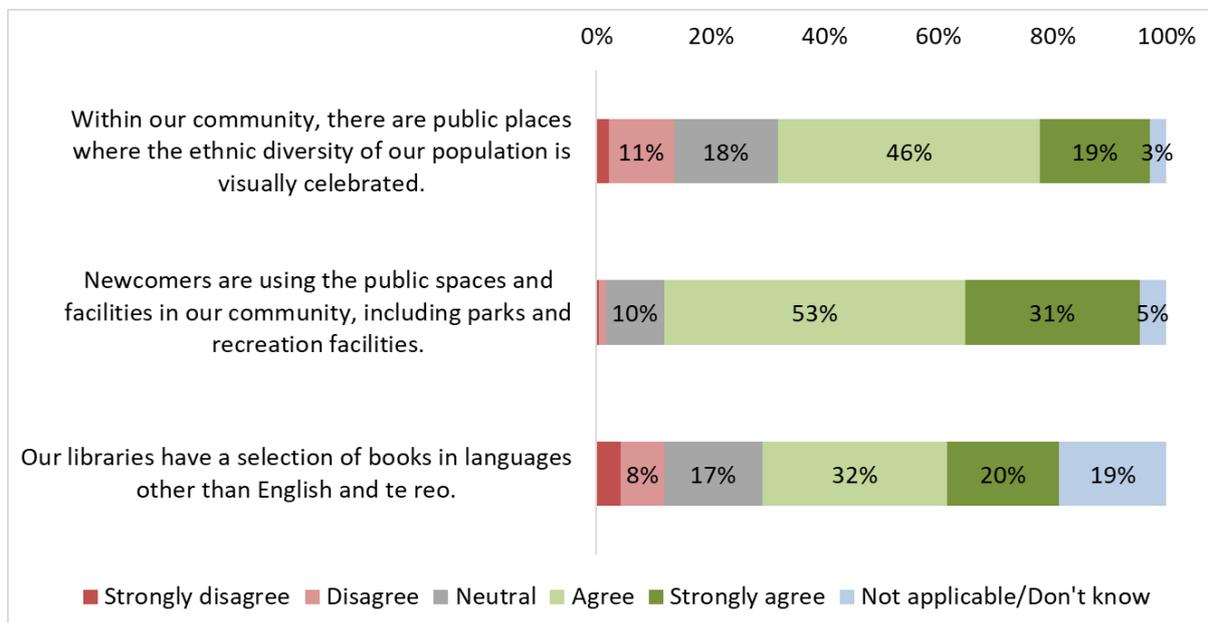
Like lots of Board of Directors, we are wanting to increase our diversity. We want our board to reflect the community we serve and have the community voice in the development of our kaupapa. (NGO representative)

An Advisory Group had developed a work programme to increase participation of people from ethnic minorities on governance entities. This included both increasing public awareness of the value of having diversity on boards of directors, as well as upskilling newcomers in governance skills. The work programme engaged with local newcomer groups to encourage nominations for the boards of community entities. It has also supported newcomers to undertake training such as the Community Networks Aotearoa’s ‘Tick for Governance’ programme. This was a relatively new work programme, and at the time of the evaluation data collection the initiative was in the early stages and had not yet seen an increase in newcomer participation in governance.

6.1.7 Welcoming Public Spaces

The evaluation found that most newcomers consider public spaces to be safe and welcoming and that they are confident using them. A high proportion of survey respondents agreed that newcomers are using the public spaces and facilities in the community, and that there are public spaces where the ethnic diversity is visually celebrated.

Figure 9: Survey results related to Welcoming Public Spaces



This outcome was often a priority for Councils during the early stages of programme delivery. Coordinator activities that contributed to this outcome focused on physical spaces and Council facilities. This included erecting inclusive designs and artwork on community buildings and Council premises, public art installations, and planting community gardens. Councils demonstrated a willingness to use public spaces for these projects, which they considered important to ensure all members of the community can see themselves represented in the area.

Council has invested a lot into public places. We want to promote community ownership of public places, and make them more inviting to people of all cultures. (Council staff)

Council personnel and newcomer community leaders discussed the value of reflecting different cultures within the community in public spaces. The presence of multilingual signage and/or signage with visual depictions was described as a small but important step to making public spaces more inclusive, as it both removes language barriers and makes people for whom English is not their first language feel welcome. Similarly, murals and public artwork that reflect a range of cultures is important to newcomers. Murals, artwork and signage provide a visible and tangible signal that newcomers and their culture are valued and part of the community.

There has been a mural created that features Māori wāhine and a Muslim woman. It's good to come into [location] and see ourselves reflected in the community like this. (Newcomer)

Ensuring that public libraries are welcoming and used by all has been a focus of the programme due to libraries' role as a community hub

There were also examples of libraries reconfiguring spaces to be more welcoming overall, with the result that these have become used more like community hubs. Through the Welcoming Communities programme, many member Councils undertook several initiatives to make public libraries more welcoming. One Council identified that their library space was not being well used by the Pacific peoples community, despite a recent increase in population from this particular ethnic group. The Coordinator worked with the library's staff and representatives of the Pacific peoples community to develop a strategy to make the library more welcoming. Activities included commissioning a Pasifika-influenced mural, a dedicated Pasifika space in the library and efforts to increase the diversity of library staff. While initial progress was slow, Council staff stated that there has now been a marked increase in the Pacific peoples community's use of library spaces.

Other programmes had worked with libraries to expand their collections of books in different languages, and display these in more prominent places. One library had made substantial efforts to increase its activity offerings to ensure it was appealing to a range of community members. Activities included a games trailer, a 'living stories' project in which people shared stories of their culture, and children's story time events in a range of languages. Newcomers that participated in the evaluation appreciate this commitment to ensuring public spaces meet the needs of diverse groups.

The function of libraries as a community hub was also leveraged to support information sharing with newcomers. One Coordinator described making efforts to ensure that libraries were welcoming to women from newcomer communities. Once more women began using the library space, the programme worked with local services such as Citizens Advice Bureau to hold events to talk about different services in the community. This was described as a successful way to support newcomer women to connect and feel welcomed.

Through holding these events we used our library spaces to help newcomers build networks to connect with others and feel settled. (Newcomer community leader)

6.1.8 Culture and identity

The programme has helped to grow local events that showcase newcomer cultures

There is strong evidence that the Welcoming Communities programme has contributed to culturally rich and vibrant communities, primarily through events that enhance the visibility of diversity within communities and that provide opportunities for people to learn about each other's cultures.

In most member Councils there was a considerable amount of focus on this outcome. The data monitoring shows that in the January – June 2023 reporting period, 8 member Councils reported on 48 Welcoming Activities that aligned with this overarching outcome statement.

There are many examples of events that demonstrate cultural richness and celebrate ethnic and cultural traditions. Most programmes support community organisations to run events such as multicultural festivals at which newcomers can share their culture through performance, food, language and dress. The programme often functions as an accelerator for these events; providing support for promotion, venues and organisation. There were many examples in which the reach of festivals and events has grown substantially, including much higher participation of the receiving community over time.

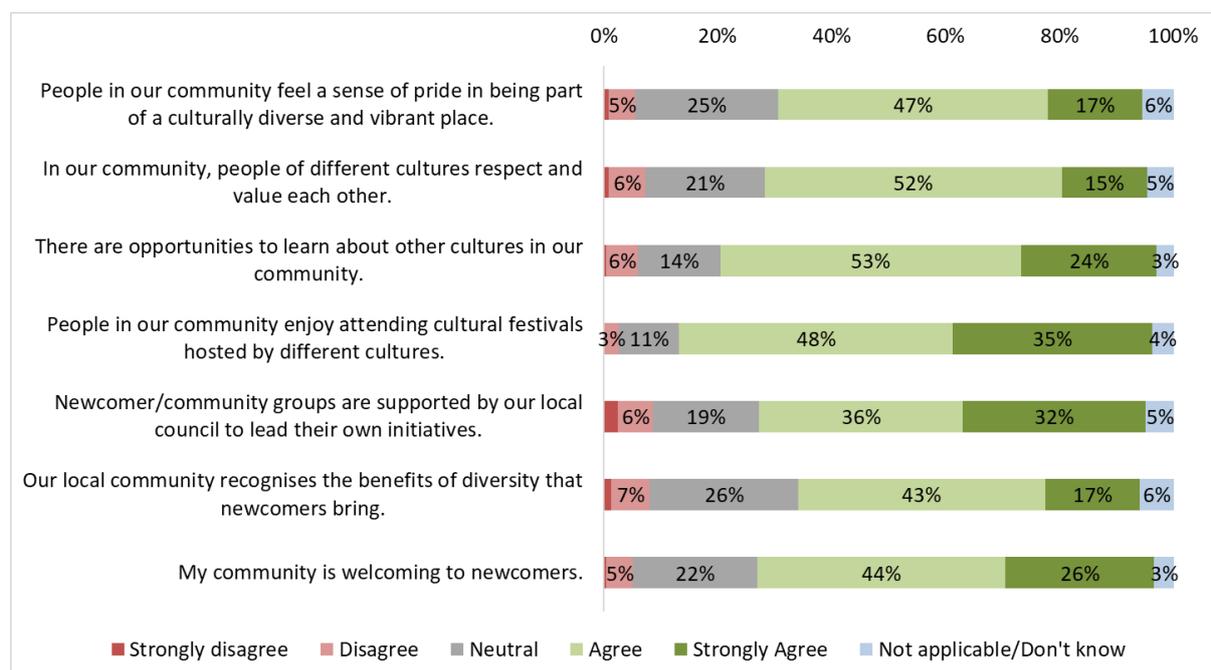
The Diwali event started small and has grown significantly because they have the support and feel comfortable and reinforced [which] gives them the confidence to be proud of who they are and to celebrate that. (Council staff)

While these festivals and events are intended to be fun and enjoyable, several evaluation participants noted that public celebrations of a range of cultural and religious events (such as Diwali, Eid and Lunar New Year, as well as Christmas) contributes to normalising cultural diversity within the community.

With the number of events put on in [location], this has become the norm in the area. Significant change there – recognising vibrancy and diversity, respecting the differences and applauding the benefits. (Council staff)

The survey results show that respondents reported high levels of agreement with the statements related to this outcome. They were particularly in agreement that community members enjoy attending cultural festivals.

Figure 10: Survey responses related to Culture and Identity



There is more work to be done before newcomers feel safe to fully express their identity

The evaluation also found examples of newcomers who described occasions when they or a member of their household had experienced feeling unwelcome, or not able to fully express their culture and identity in public. Several newcomers discussed how they did not feel comfortable to freely share their identity with the receiving community.

For ethnic communities, things such as [the] different way we look, speak, cook, will always be there. This is a silent part of us and we keep it to ourselves. This is a real shame. (Newcomer community leader)

Some Welcoming Communities programmes have developed actions to respond to incidents of racism or harassment. For example, one programme has established a relationship with local Police, who notify the Council, via the Welcoming Communities Coordinator, about incidents (and vice-versa). Depending on the type of incident, Police and Council representatives will discuss (either in person or via email) what has happened, this is how we are dealing with it, and future preventative actions that will be taken.

6.2 Contextual factors that influence outcomes

The expected outcomes will take time to achieve

The evaluation has consistently found that a critical part of delivering the programme is building and maintaining relationships within Council, with mana whenua, social and other community stakeholders, and across newcomer and receiving communities. These relationships take time and skill to develop. Often, trust needs to be built and benefits demonstrated before further or more meaningful activities can be undertaken.

The intended outcomes articulated in the Standard can be expected to take time. Some will only be seen in the medium- to long-term and rely in part on the collective action of multiple stakeholders involved in supporting inclusion, connectedness and access to services and employment opportunities in receiving communities. Therefore, the length of time a Council has been involved in the programme and the quality of the relationships it has been able to build with stakeholders will determine much of the level and type of progress made across the programme.

Changes in the wider context interact with the programme delivery and outcomes

Over the duration of the Welcoming Communities pilot and expanded programme, the cultural, political and economic context has changed. New Zealand saw the Christchurch mosque attacks, COVID-19, national and local body elections, strong levels of attention to immigration policies and economic challenges. These factors influence the type of outcomes the programmes choose to focus on and the level of progress towards these. For example, during the mosque attacks and COVID-19 pandemic, many programmes focused on connection and cohesion in response to rifts that had been exposed through these events.

More recently there has been a greater interest from Councils to demonstrate the economic value of the investment in Welcoming Communities, particularly as the programme moves from establishment to delivery. However, as was noted above, many programmes have

focused less on activity towards the Economic Development, Business and Employment element than other outcomes. Some Coordinators have reported that newly elected Council representative are unlikely to prioritise operational funding for community-based programmes, leaving uncertainty over the level of progress that can be made towards outcomes.

Other community cohesion programmes being delivered will also have influenced the progress towards outcomes

Interviews with Coordinators showed there was a strong interest in ensuring the Welcoming Plan activities filled gaps rather than duplicate activities that are already being run in the community. As such, there is a strong focus on supporting existing work programmes of community groups and organisations. The consultative approach to developing the Welcoming Plan means that it means the focus for the programme in Councils will differ according to local context and existing strengths and gaps, and so it would be expected that progress to outcomes will differ.

7 Sustainability

KEQ 5.1: To what extent is the programme sustainable after the three-year seed funding period?

KEQ 5.2: What factors influence the sustainability of the programme?

Most Councils continued support for the programme beyond the seed funding period

Most member Councils that joined the programme during the expansion are still under the seed funding agreement. However, the evaluation included site visits to four Councils that joined during the pilot phase and four that joined early in the expansion phase; in these Councils the seed funding period has finished or is close to completion. All these Councils have continued to support the ongoing running of the programme. The strategies used by these Councils to ensure programme sustainability after the seed funding period are discussed below.

However, some Councils have experienced a change in leadership which had reduced support for Welcoming Communities. The evaluation team was told during Coordinator focus groups that at least one Council is intending to discontinue funding the Coordinator role after the seed funding period. In this Council, the provision of information about local services was being handed over to librarians and some other functions (such as support for events) was being taken up by the Community Development team. Another Council had not made a firm decision, but interviews with Council staff found a view that the programme was likely to be discontinued.

After the seed funding ends, Council will most likely not continue with funding. We are losing staff at Council, so anything that is not core business is viewed as not worth looking at, at this stage. The Welcoming Communities programme will still continue and would be absorbed into other strategies, but the work would slow down. (Council staff)

The recessionary economic environment and changing government priorities are threats to sustainability

While most Councils that participated in the evaluation declared their intent to remain in the programme, and continue to contribute financial and operational resources, a range of Council personnel and elected officials raised concerns that contextual factors present a risk to continued programme sustainability. These factors include the recessionary economic environment and changing government priorities at the local and national levels.

In particular, Council staff considered that inflationary pressures, increasing local government costs and public pressure to keep rates rises to a minimum had created an environment in which Council operational budgets were being carefully scrutinised. Some interviewees expressed concerns that social cohesion programmes like Welcoming Communities can be perceived as ‘soft’ initiatives, and therefore at risk of funding cuts. This is a threat to the sustainability of the programme.

It is unfortunate that community services tend to be cut back. Many of us in [Council] want to continue to commit to this programme, but the Councillors may see it as a “nice to have”, not a vital need. (Council staff)

The district is spending money on where it is desperately needed. We want to maintain the support for Welcoming Communities, and are starting the conversation, but we can’t commit at this stage. We can only push ratepayers so far. (Elected member)

Enhancing Council and the community’s awareness and buy-in to the programme enhances sustainability

The evaluation found that the sustainability of the programme is enhanced when it achieves buy-in from two key stakeholder groups. Firstly, it is vital that the host Council, particularly the elected members, sees the value of the programme and are committed to it. The second key stakeholder is the local community, including ratepayers and voters. These groups are the key stakeholders of Councils, and when buy-in from these groups is achieved it helps programme sustainability.

Achieving buy-in from these two key stakeholder groups requires that the benefits of the programme to the community (and its projected benefits in the short, medium and long-term) are highly visible. In areas where the programme is fully embedded and sustainable (particularly in the pilot programmes and some that joined in the early expansion phase), elected members are kept regularly appraised of the programme’s delivery and its achievements. Coordinators in these Councils identified that this can be achieved through having elected members as part of the Advisory Group and acting as champions of the programme during Council meetings. It is also important that interim programme updates (such as presentations and reports) are provided to the whole Council, such as through attendance at meetings of subcommittees related to community development.

We try to get in front of the Councillors as often as possible to explain the work being done on the ground level, and the effect it has in terms of community cohesion. (Council staff)

We didn't do a hard sell, we just had to go through the right channels. We ended up with two Councillors on the Advisory Group, both spoke really positively about it to their colleagues. (Coordinator)

Awareness of broader Council staff of the programme is also associated with sustainability of the programme. This was achieved through mechanisms such as delivering presentations about the programme to staff, including details of what it is intended to achieve, its progress, key achievements, and progress towards outcomes. Some Coordinators also provide information to staff on the demographic make-up of the region, newcomer populations and training on how Council can engage appropriately with newcomers.

Within the community, Coordinators in Councils in which the programme is fully embedded similarly provide updates on progress, achievements, and progress towards outcomes. Coordinators in the pilot and early expansion programmes emphasised the importance of using a variety of communication mechanisms, including social media, email or newsletter communications, and in-person attendance at stakeholder group meetings and events.

Embedding the programme into Council plans and strategies supports sustainability

The sustainability of the programme is supported by the extent to which it is embedded into the strategy and plans of its host Council. This includes building the programme to align with existing Council programmes and initiatives (as discussed in section 3.6), such as existing newcomer settlement support initiatives. As the programme becomes established, embedding it across key Council work programmes is vital. Within Councils that participated in the evaluation, the programme appeared to be sustainable where it has been integrated into plans and strategies such as the Council Community Strategy or Multicultural Strategy.

Sustainability is a challenge when sole responsibility for the programme sits with the Coordinator, whose work is sometimes 'siloed' from other Council colleagues. The programme is most sustainable where the Coordinator contributes to other work within the Council, such as supporting the policy team to undertake consultations on policies that affect newcomers, and where people from a variety of Council departments (such as communications, research, libraries) contribute ideas and time to the implementation of the programme.

In particular, the sustainability of the programme is secured through the provision of ongoing operational funding, generally through its inclusion in the Council's Long-Term Plan. This had been achieved in the pilot and early expansion phase Councils that had continued the programme beyond the seed funding. Coordinators, Council staff and elected members in these Councils described preparations for the Long-Term Plan deliberations, including careful consideration of the business case for the programme (see below). The process of gaining inclusion in the Long-Term Plan is contingent on elected members seeing the value of the programme, and highlights the value of having an elected member act as champion of the programme. For example, one Councillor described their efforts to act as an advocate for the programme during budget deliberations:

Every Long-Term Plan I will think far in advance of deliberations, and the reality is that programme would fall apart without resource. My argument is that it's a small component of budget, doesn't have large rates impact, but the value is significant. (Elected member)

Demonstrating the value of the programme to Council supports sustainability

As noted above, Councillors are the key decision makers regarding whether the programme will continue to be financially supported, post the seed funding period. It is therefore important for Coordinators to put forward a robust business case for ongoing funding. A key aspect of the business case to elected members is to tell the story of the specific value that the programme brings, as well as concrete examples of its achievements. For example, the value of the programme in making connections has been apparent in disruptive events including the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme weather events in early 2023. The relationships that had been formed through the programme were able to be drawn upon to provide support in response to these events, with the programme aware of newcomer communities in the area and able to draw on connections and relationships to offer support.

During COVID we used those relationships in ways we never necessarily planned, making sure we got messages about isolation requirements out in a range of languages. (Elected member)

We saw an amazing show of unity amongst the community during Cyclone Gabrielle. We used those Welcoming Communities connections to provide support through cooking and supplying meals, checking in on impacted communities. (Newcomer community leader)

Councils that had secured funding beyond the seed funding period stated that being able to demonstrate these concrete and specific benefits, that were directly related to the programme, is important. Several of the Councils that joined in the pilot and early expansion phase had developed a formal business case for continued investment. This included details on the return on investment (either through a formal calculation, or a summary of costs and benefits) to help to clarify the benefits of the programme. For example, one Council that joined in the early expansion phase had commissioned a social return on investment report for the programme, and used this to assure elected members that there is a strong business case for continued investment in the programme.

If you quantify the social return in terms of volunteer hours and the amount of money – if you're doing it on sheer economics, the amount that gets fed back into the community, you get far more out than you put in. (Council staff)

Several Councils in which the programme had secured continued operational funding had emphasised the changing demographics of the community in their messaging to Councillors. The business case for the programme noted the increasing proportion of community members who have been born overseas which means that the programme is “*not just a nice to have that you can put on the shelf*” (Elected member).

8 Conclusion and recommendations

KEQ 6.1 What has worked well regarding the Welcoming Communities programme and what could be improved?

KEQ 6.2 What changes could be made to enhance the effectiveness of the programme?

This section presents overall conclusions against each of the KEQs, focusing on what is working well and what could be improved. It then presents recommendations for INZ to consider, to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

How effectively is the programme being established and delivered?

Drivers for joining

The programme offers Councils a strong value proposition in that it extends existing newcomer settlement initiatives by focusing on both supporting newcomers as well as increasing the capacity of the receiving community to see the value of increased diversity. While most Councils and communities had a range of cultural and ethnic associations and newcomer support services already in existence prior to joining the programme, Welcoming Communities provides a framework to unite these activities and organisations under a strategic approach. This creates efficiencies, limiting duplication and promoting collaboration on shared objectives.

Support from INZ

The evaluation found that INZ provides resources, support, and networking opportunities to help Councils establish and run the programme effectively. Regular virtual meetings and the annual in-person Welcoming Communities hui are valued by Coordinators. These hui offer a platform for new Coordinators to seek advice and share ideas in a supportive environment, while experienced Coordinators can mentor and share ideas and continue to gain new ideas from their peers.

INZ also provides resources to support programme establishment. 'The Welcoming Communities Standard' is particularly useful for new Coordinators. The eight elements in the Standard serve as benchmarks for what a welcoming community looks like, helping to guide planning for the programme. The Standard is outcomes-based, allowing Councils to tailor activities to their specific contexts while working towards common goals. 'Putting out the Welcoming Mat' provides practical guidance for developing the Welcoming Plan, including concrete ideas, examples, and case studies. This is valued by Coordinators, especially when starting their roles, for its accessible and practical advice. However, both resources are becoming outdated and would benefit from updates to include more recent examples and case studies.

Coordinator role

The Coordinator's role is pivotal to the success of the programme. Their ability to engage stakeholders and secure their support is essential for the programme's traction. However, resource allocation for Coordinators substantially impacts programme success. Full-time Coordinators can devote adequate time to engagement, relationship building, and delivering programme outputs like the Welcoming Plan and applying for accreditation. Some member Councils have committed substantial resources, including additional funding and support from internal departments, recognising the Coordinator's importance. These Councils are mostly (but not only) those that joined during the pilot or early expansion phase. On the other hand, part-time Coordinators are more likely to face challenges due to limited capacity, requiring prioritisation and compromise in programme delivery. Some Councils with part-time Coordinators have opted not to pursue accreditation or have reduced stakeholder engagement or Coordinator professional development activities. This can lead to struggles with retaining programme momentum, with Councils with a part-time Coordinator generally taking longer to establish and embed the programme in their areas.

Advisory Groups

Effective Advisory Groups are described as the "engine room" of the programme, with members working collaboratively to set priorities, develop plans, deliver welcoming activities, and disseminate information. The group's influence is significant, with members' advice being highly valued by the Coordinator and driving programme planning. Diverse stakeholder representation is essential for the Advisory Group's success, including newcomers, local government Council staff and elected members, mana whenua and representation from a range of demographic groups. This diversity ensures the programme addresses the needs of all community segments. The evaluation findings highlight the importance of having elected members in the group to support Council buy-in to the programme, which is associated with its sustainability.

Securing sustained engagement can be challenging due to members' competing demands. Having a clear Terms of Reference is important so that Advisory Group members are clear about what functions they are expected to perform, frequency of meetings and the time commitment required.

Stocktake

All member Councils complete a stocktake of existing Council and community policies, services, programmes and activities related to newcomers. This identifies existing activities targeting inclusion and diversity, ensuring the programme builds on these and addresses any gaps. The stocktake is resource-intensive and time-consuming, but provides an important benchmark of how the area is currently performing against the Welcoming Communities Standard, which informs the development of the Welcoming Plan.

Welcoming Plan

Stakeholders involved in developing the Welcoming Plan mainly include newcomer community leaders and organisations that support newcomers. While elected members and Council staff are consulted, the focus of the Plan is primarily on the needs and aspirations of

community members. This community-driven approach ensures buy-in but may result in less emphasis on Council drivers for joining the programme, such as economic development. The Welcoming Plan aims to build on and strengthen existing Council and community initiatives especially relating to cultural diversity and settlement. It unites previously siloed activities under a strategic approach, creating efficiencies and fostering collaboration. Incorporating existing Council strategies, like Community Development and Economic Development, helps align the Plan with Council priorities and gain elected member support.

Effective Welcoming Plans focus on a limited number of impactful actions. Councils that joined the programme in the pilot and early in the establishment phase have refreshed their Plans, generally after three years. These Councils emphasised the importance of reviewing previous Plans to identify successful actions and areas for improvement. This ensures that the Plan remains relevant and achievable, focusing on activities that make the most significant difference.

Welcoming Activities

A strength of the programme lies in its community-driven and grassroots approach, emphasising the active involvement and support of the community as a key asset. The programme unifies diverse community groups to collaborate and work towards common goals outlined in their Welcoming Plan.

Successful Welcoming Activities are community-led, with Council support in promotion, venue access, and supporting newcomer groups to apply for community and philanthropic funding grants. This approach empowers newcomer groups to lead events and access necessary resources, fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability of the programme within the community.

Ongoing programme delivery

The evaluation identified several key enablers for effective ongoing delivery of the Welcoming Communities programme. The capacity and capability of the Coordinator are crucial, as their connections, relationships, and expertise in community development significantly influence the programme's activities and outcomes.

Programme champions, particularly elected members who advocate for the programme, play a vital role in its success. Their active participation and advocacy help secure support within the Council and maintain the programme's visibility and importance.

Ongoing investment in relationships is essential. Successful programmes build on existing networks and services, such as Multicultural Councils and cultural associations, avoiding competition and fostering collaboration. Regularly refreshing these networks ensures continued engagement with relevant groups.

Financial and in-kind resources from Councils support programme delivery. Providing a budget to support relationship building activities and offering in-kind support, like access to venues, enhances engagement and reduces turnover among Advisory Group members and Coordinators.

Building accountability mechanisms, such as regular performance updates to stakeholders, strengthens community buy-in and ensures transparency in programme delivery.

How well has the programme been adapted to the needs and context of the communities it is delivered in?

Councils have been effective in adapting programme delivery to the needs and contexts of the communities in which it is being delivered. Its flexible and non-prescriptive framework allows Councils and their communities to tailor Welcoming Plan activities to local priorities. This adaptability is evident in the varied implementation across different regions, as Councils respond to needs that were identified by the community. Examples include providing targeted information sessions to international students returning post-COVID, or connecting RSE workers with organisations that can help ensure employers and employees' rights and responsibilities are upheld.

The programme's success in meeting local needs is grounded in its community-driven approach. Coordinators conduct in-depth consultations to understand community strengths, gaps, and aspirations, which are then integrated into bespoke Welcoming Plans. This ensures that the programme is responsive to community-specific challenges and opportunities.

Innovation is encouraged but not always prioritised initially. Newer member Councils focus on establishing core activities, like cultural events and developing community networks. Those Councils that joined in the pilot and early expansion phase have progressed to more innovative practices, such as events aiming to connect newcomer and receiving community business owners, and the Welcoming Schools programme that aims to make school activities more accessible to newcomers. INZ supports innovation, sharing ideas through regular meetings and online resources, fostering a collaborative and adaptive approach.

To what extent is the programme reaching its intended participants/target groups?

While the programme effectively reaches newcomers, it is still building awareness among the receiving community. Festivals and events are key to engaging the receiving community, showcasing diverse cultures in a celebratory environment. However, there is a desire to involve the receiving community beyond these events. Efforts to engage mana whenua in leadership roles face challenges due to capacity issues and the expectation of voluntary contributions.

Business sector engagement varies, with some Councils successfully linking with local Chambers of Commerce and economic development agencies. The main incentive for business involvement is the potential economic benefits of attracting and retaining skilled migrants.

To what extent have the outcomes described in the Welcoming Communities Standard been achieved?

The evaluation found the programme generally starts with focusing on outcomes related to social cohesion, such as making public spaces look and feel more welcoming and celebrating culture and diversity through festivals. As the programme matures, the focus shifts to civic participation, equity of access, and economic benefits. The evaluation did not find any

significant differences in progress towards outcomes that were related to rurality, population size, or ethnic make up of communities. The two factors that influenced the extent to which outcomes have been achieved are:

1. Length of time in the programme. As would be expected, Councils that joined during the pilot and early in the expansion phase are further advanced in progress towards the expected outcomes than Councils that have joined later. In particular, Councils that joined earlier in the programme reported trends of newcomers (including migrants in relevant regions, international students and former refugees) feeling more connected to the community, and reporting an intent to remain in the area. This bodes well for achieving longer-term outcomes such as the economic benefits associated with population growth.
2. Whether the Coordinator is working full-time on Welcoming Communities. Councils in which the Coordinator works at or close to 1FTE were, on average, further advanced across all outcome areas than Councils in which the Coordinator works on the programme part-time. Councils with part-time Coordinator typically took more time to undertake the stocktake and complete the Welcoming Plan, and programmes in these areas were generally slower to become established and embedded in the community.

A summary of overall programme progress towards the intended outcomes follows.

The Welcoming Communities programme has made progress in fostering **inclusive leadership**. The programme's collaborative approach has strengthened relationships between Council and community leaders, providing leadership opportunities for newcomers. However, engagement with mana whenua at the leadership level remains limited, highlighting the need for continued efforts and support.

Member Councils have made **welcoming communications** accessible to newcomers through developing information materials available in multiple languages for newcomers like the 'Welcome Guides', fostering community networks, and enhanced communication channels. This has facilitated better engagement between newcomers and Councils, with Advisory Groups playing a crucial role in feedback and consultation processes.

Efforts to overcome barriers to **equitable access** to services have been a key focus, with Coordinators ensuring information for newcomers on local services and activities in the community is readily available and accessible. Targeted activities, such as women's only swimming lessons and the Welcoming Schools programme, have addressed specific needs.

Community events celebrating cultural diversity have significantly contributed to more **connected and inclusive communities**. These events have fostered relationships between newcomers and receiving communities, and promoted mutual learning. However, challenges such as racism and discrimination persist, indicating the need for ongoing efforts to ensure all newcomers feel welcome.

Economic development, business and employment has seen slower progress, with initial efforts focused on social cohesion. Despite this, the programme has supported newcomer employment and business ownership through connections with employment entities and business mentoring. In Councils in which the programme is more embedded (mostly those

that joined during the pilot and early in the expansion phase) newcomers were more likely to indicate an interest in remaining in the region. The ability of these areas to retain skilled migrants provides economic benefits when newcomers establish businesses, use local services, and create employment.

The programme has focused on facilitating newcomer **civic engagement and participation**, particularly in Council decision-making and consultations. Activities include encouraging newcomers to participate in Council consultations, such as the Long-Term Plan, and working with the Electoral Commission to encourage eligible migrants to vote in local elections. Success in this area relies on the Coordinator building relationships and acting as a bridge between the Council and newcomer communities. The evaluation found that Councils in which the programme had been established for several years, newcomer submissions to Council policy consultations and applications for community funding grants had increased. Newcomers also emphasised that they felt more confident about participating in civic processes such as elections.

Public spaces have become more welcoming, with initiatives like erecting multilingual signage around the community, murals, and community gardens reflecting cultural diversity. Some libraries have transformed into community hubs, offering culturally dedicated spaces and diverse events, fostering a sense of belonging among newcomers.

The programme has contributed to creating culturally rich and vibrant communities, primarily through events that celebrate and enhance the visibility of **culture and identity** that newcomers bring. However, the evaluation also found examples of newcomers who had experienced feeling unwelcome in their community which indicates that there is more work to be done so newcomers feel safe and confident to fully express their culture and identity.

To what extent is the programme sustainable after the three-year seed funding period?

The evaluation found a generally positive trend of continued support for the programme from most Councils that had joined during the pilot or early expansion, beyond the seed funding period. However, discussion with Coordinators and Council staff that joined later indicated concerns that their Council may no longer provide operational funding for the Coordinator's salary post-seed funding due to pressures to reduce Council spending. These Councils have typically experienced leadership changes, with new elected members and/or senior Council staff not as supportive of the programme.

Economic challenges and shifting government priorities pose threats to the programme's sustainability. Inflation, rising local government costs, and public pressure to limit rate increases have led to scrutiny of Councils, with social cohesion initiatives like the programme at risk of being perceived as less of a priority.

The programme's sustainability is strengthened by achieving buy-in from local Councillors, the Mayor, local Council staff and the community. Visibility and relationship-building are crucial, with Coordinators playing a key role in maintaining stakeholder engagement and providing regular updates to Council and the community. Aligning reporting on the programme to the goals and interests of the Council, embedding the programme principles into Council strategies and plans, and securing ongoing operational funding through the Council's Long-Term Plan enhances sustainability. While community sponsorship offers another avenue for

funding, the evaluation did not find examples of Councils that had secured sustainable funding from community or philanthropic sources.

Those Councils that have been successful in securing ongoing operational funding for the programme had put forward a robust business case that clearly demonstrated the specific value that the programme brings, as well as concrete examples of its achievements. Effective business cases provide an articulation of the return on investment that Council leaders can expect from the programme, either through a formal calculation mechanism such as Social Return on Investment, or a clear summary of the costs of the programme and benefits it has brought to the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings described above, the evaluation makes the following recommendations:

1. It is important that INZ information that is provided to Councils reinforces the capacity and resourcing required for the Coordinator role, including guidance on a realistic FTE allocation for Coordinators.
2. The core components of the Welcoming Communities Standard and Putting out the Welcome Mat are still relevant and should be retained, but the case studies, examples, and links to external resources could be updated.
3. Welcoming Plans are most effective when the plan is succinct. Welcoming Plans should focus on a limited number of priority activities and actions, based on those that the stocktake has identified as most important for the community.
4. Programme sustainability is contingent on elected members and Council leadership seeing the value of the Programme. Ensure that all Councils have at least one elected member act as champion for the programme. This involves participating in the Advisory Group, and advocating for the programme at Council meetings and with elected member colleagues.
5. In Councils where the programme is fully embedded and sustainable, elected members are kept regularly appraised of the programme's delivery and its achievements. Regular updates on the programme's delivery and achievement need to be provided to the whole Council, such as through Coordinator attendance at meetings of subcommittees related to community development.
6. Securing adequate and ongoing funding for the programme can be supported through a business case process. This needs to provide detail of the return on investment for the programme, clearly demonstrating how the resource inputs (funding and in-kind support) create benefit for the community in terms of outcomes achieved. Social Return on Investment approaches provide a method to undertake this calculation.
7. Provide guidance to member Councils on how the economic impacts of the programme can be measured, including developing indicators to track the contribution that newcomers make to the region's economy. This could include indicators related to

migration patterns, migrant employment, and undertaking return on investment calculations.



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