

The super human—Auckland Super Mayor

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The Mayor of Auckland will be one of the busiest people in New Zealand. The role will be highly demanding. Delegations from China, Wellington, the CBD, and Northcote will seek regular meetings with the Mayor.

The role will also be highly political, stretching across not only 20 councillors and 140 or so local board members, all of whom will be collectively responsible for the decision-making of the Auckland Council, but also the 1.4 million people of Auckland.

Unlike the Prime Minister, the Mayor will not have the benefit of leading a united coalition of politicians, but will need to marshal the support of a majority of councillors; at times issue by issue.

But the Mayor will hold one of the most powerful elected offices in the country, at the very least, equal politically to a Senior Cabinet Minister—without the benefit of a specialised portfolio. The Mayor will need to be on top of all issues across the broad spectrum of Auckland Council business.

He or she must also reach across this Diverse City – or the diversity that is Auckland, engaging effectively with the people, be it generally or particularly across cultural, ethnic, geographic or other communities of interest (such as business).

Not only will the Mayor be the leader of a SuperCity, but will literally have to be super-human.

For the first time in New Zealand, the role of the Mayor has been set out in statute in the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009. But has the Act created a role, and granted powers equal to the job of the Auckland Super Mayor?

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Section 9 of the Act provides that the Mayor has the overall role of articulating and promoting a vision for Auckland and providing leadership to achieve objectives that contribute to that vision. As the Royal Commission said, the 'vision' should be the articulation of a 'nuts and bolts' manifesto and not just a public-relations exercise. The Commission argued that the Mayor should be voted in on a platform of well-understood principles that had a real mandate and would give a proper basis on which to exercise power.

Without limiting this vision, it will also be the job of the Mayor to lead the development of Council plans, policies, and budgets for consideration by the Auckland Council and to ensure there is effective engagement between the Auckland Council and the people of Auckland.

Unlike the Super Mayors of cities such as London, New York and Chicago, to carry out these roles, the Auckland Super Mayor has been given only very limited executive powers.

First, is to establish mechanisms for the Auckland Council to engage with the people of Auckland (for example, the people of a cultural, ethnic, geographic, or other community of interest). Second, is to appoint the Deputy Mayor, establish the committees of the Auckland Council and to appoint the chairperson of each committee. Third, to establish and maintain an appropriately staffed office.

The Act deliberately steers a middle road between a 'weak' and 'strong' mayor model, but it is fair to say that, with the Mayor only having one vote on the governing body of the Auckland Council, the Mayor's powers are still more weak than strong.

While the Mayor will be able to rely on his or her moral and political authority to lead the Council, and

will to some extent be able to point to the role and powers set out in the Act, there needs thought put to whether the Mayor's powers should be extended, or an obligation expressed in the Act, for councillors to support the leadership role of the Mayor. Perhaps, as a minimum, guidance should be provided, perhaps by the Office of the Auditor-General, on the mayoral powers and what the obligations of councillors should be with regard to the Mayor.