



What is local government?

New Zealand has a system of local democracy where elected representatives at local councils make decisions about local issues on our behalf. This system of local government works in tandem with central government. Parliament or central government is elected to deal with issues relevant to New Zealand as a nation, while local councils manage issues and services that affect local communities.

This system enables local councils to develop and implement local solutions to local problems, and to focus on the sustainable well-being of the local

community - in the present and for the future. This means a council in one community may have a different response to an issue than councils in different communities.

Councils work with other partners in central government agencies, community groups and business to build communities that flourish and are safe and healthy.



Did you know that New Zealand has:

- 12 regional councils
- 57 district councils
- 16 city councils (with more than 50,000 people)
- more than 1000 elected councillors and mayors
- about 700 community board members
- about 35,000 people employed at local councils.

Regional councils

The main responsibilities of regional councils are to manage environmental, resource and transport planning issues for the whole region.

The boundaries they are responsible for are usually based on river catchments (the area covering all the sources of water for a particular river).

Your regional council manages:

- the sustainable use of land, air and water (including the coast)
- rivers, soil erosion and flood control – including planting trees to control erosion and protecting communities against the effects of flooding

- animal and plant pest control – such as controlling possums and protecting native birds
- land transport planning and contracting passenger bus and train services
- harbour navigation, safe boating, managing oil spills and other marine pollution
- civil defence and regional emergencies in the case of a major earthquake or flood.

The Auckland and Wellington Regional Councils are also responsible for providing and maintaining regional parks and reserves.

Territorial authorities - our district and city councils

District and city councils' services focus on a range of services based around land use, urban and community planning and development. They also provide local infrastructure and facilities.

Your local district or city council manages:

- local roading and network utility services, such as water supply and sewage disposal
- community facilities such as playgrounds, reserves, museums and community housing
- resource consents, building permits, size of buildings in different parts of the city, environmental health and restaurant hygiene, animal control, licensing dog exercise zones and whether or not you can drink alcohol in a public place

- local emergency and civil defence and rural fire, earthquake or flood preparedness
- controlling the effects of land use and planning for integrated development, such as whether rural land can be turned into a new housing subdivision or retail commercial development
- delivering everyday services and activities, such as rubbish collection, street lighting, car parking, libraries and parks.

Four territorial authorities also have powers of a regional council. These are often called 'unitary' authorities. These are Tasman District Council, Nelson City Council, Marlborough District Council and Gisborne District Council. Chatham Islands Council is also a unitary authority.

How do councils deliver their responsibilities?

In order to deliver local regulations and services, councils:

- prepare policies and monitor 'community outcomes' – ie. things the community thinks are important for its well-being such as 'promoting a safe and healthy community'
- write and manage plans for developing the natural and urban environment
- participate in community partnerships to reduce crime or increasing jobs
- make bylaws (local laws) where they are needed, and enforce them, such as how public places may be used

All councils must also:

- help communities identify the outcomes they believe are important

- develop strategies for funding, borrowing and investment such as the Long-Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP)
- prepare annual plans and budgets
- consult with their communities on key issues including consulting appropriately with Māori and fostering Māori contribution to the decision-making processes
- value and manage assets
- prepare policies and plans around other functions, especially resource management, land transport and biosecurity
- report publicly on their performance through annual reports.

Who does this work?

Councils work is done by:

- elected members who determine the council's strategic direction and carry out decision-making on behalf of their communities. These elected members include the mayor (for district and city councils) or chairperson (of regional councils), and councillors.
- staff are employed by the council to carry out the various day-to-day functions and services, and to advise elected members in their policy-making work.

- many district and city council's also have elected community boards to represent particular communities. *(See info sheet 05 for more information.)*

Councils may contract some of the services they provide, such as road maintenance and rubbish collection. They may also set up organisations to manage ports and airports, on their behalf.



Did you know that:

- There are 85 local authorities – 12 regional councils and 73 territorial authorities (city and district councils).
- The largest regional council is the Auckland Region (population 1,303,068).
- The smallest regional council is the West Coast Region (population 31,326).
- The largest territorial authority is the Auckland City (population 382,539).

- The smallest territorial authority is the Chatham Islands district (population 609).
- The median population for territorial authorities is 30,678.
- All local authorities use postal voting.
- There are 17 (20 per cent) female Mayors and Regional Council Chairs.
- Local elections are held once every three years, on the second Saturday in October. The next local elections will be held on Saturday 13 October 2007.

Working together

All city and district councils in your region should work together. They must have a formal agreement, following each local election, outlining how they will communicate and coordinate their work together.

Some councils also work closely with their neighbouring councils.

For example:

- joint funding for stadiums and major facilities that benefit the whole region
- joint economic development strategies and other initiatives such as regional transport plans
- joint service provision such as waste management.



Did you know that councils in New Zealand:

- own assets with a combined value of \$79.4 billion
- receive nearly \$5.4 billion in income each year (56 per cent from rates, 13 per cent

from central government, 6 per cent from investments, 5 per cent from fees and fines, and 20 per cent from other sources)

- spend over \$5.3 billion each year (28 per cent on roads and passenger transport, 16 per cent on governance, and 17 per cent on culture, recreation and sport).

How do central and local government work together?

Some central government agencies are also directly concerned with local government functions.

The key ones are:

The Department of Internal Affairs is responsible for administering legislation that governs the system of local government as a whole. It encourages communities to be involved and work together towards long term decision-making for the future. The Department seeks to increase peoples' understanding of the role and value of local government and local democracy, and encourages local and central government to work together on community outcomes.

The Ministry for the Environment has a strong interest in environmental and resource management, and administers the Resource Management Act 1991.

Local Government Commission makes decisions on boundary, structure and representation issues for councils, where these are not decided locally.

Other government departments have an interest in local government. They include areas such as transport, economic development, culture, heritage and conservation.



More information:

See the other info sheets in this series.

Visit the following websites:

Local Councils:

www.localcouncils.govt.nz

The Department of Internal Affairs:

www.dia.govt.nz

Government Online:

www.newzealand.govt.nz

Local Government New Zealand:

www.lgnz.co.nz