



## What does your council do for you?

Regional, district and city councils support local communities in many ways.

Your regional council manages broad environmental and other large-scale issues.

District or city council provide services that are mostly focused on land use, urban and community development. These services can include local road and pipe networks (water supply and sewage disposal), rubbish collection,

street lighting, public libraries, swimming pools and playgrounds.

The ability to provide for local needs is one of the strengths of local government. This means services can differ from place to place. For instance, some councils may provide more public sports grounds and community halls, while others provide art galleries and other public places. In Wellington and Auckland, the regional council run regional parks.

## How do regional, district and city councils differ?

All councils play an important role in the wider social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being of their communities.

In addition, the chart on the next page outlines the range of activities councils often undertake and how the district or city council work differs from that of a regional council.

Activities	District/city council	Regional council
Environmental consents and policy (RMA)	Land use and development	Air, water and coastal management
Community facilities	Funds and operates	Funds
Parks and Reserves	Local reserves, playgrounds	Regional parks and tracks
Libraries, museums and galleries	Funds and operates	Funds
Drinking water	Pipes, reservoirs, treatment stations	Bulk water supply in Wellington
Sewage and stormwater	Pipes, pumps, treatment stations	Monitoring environmental effects
Roading and transport	Local roads, footpaths, street lighting	Planning and funding public transport
Transport planning	Local planning, road safety works and parking services	Regional land transport strategies, harbour master functions
Environmental functions and regulations	Animal control, building control, environmental health, liquor licensing	River control and management, water use, air and water quality
Biodiversity	Reserve management	Pest control and management
Community development	Fosters community development and provides grants and advice	Some community grants
Civil defence	Civil defence planning and rural fires	Regional emergency management
Community housing	Provides	–
Solid waste management	Collection, recycling, disposal	Monitors environmental effects
Economic development	May provide local economic development and tourism promotion	May provide regional economic development
Cemeteries and crematoria	Provides and maintains	–
City/town improvements	Designs and funds amenities	–
Local democracy	Support for elections and elected members	Support for elections and elected members

New Zealand has five 'unitary authorities', which have the combined responsibilities of both regional and district/city councils. They are the

Tasman District Council, Nelson City Council, Marlborough District Council, Gisborne District Council and the Chatham Islands Council.

## How do councils plan for the future?

Councils' forward planning for their communities usually focuses on:

- **Community Outcomes** – councils need to work with their communities and other agencies to identify desired outcomes for the future or things the community considers important, such as 'promoting a safe and healthy community'. LTCCPs identify how councils will contribute to those outcomes.
- **Environmental planning** – a role of council is to implement the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The RMA governs how communities will use and develop natural and urban environment. All councils have either a regional plan (air, water and coastal management) or a district plan (combined land use and urban development) that clearly shows how they consider resources should be used and developed.
- **Asset planning** – councils have significant physical assets such as pipes, roads, libraries and parks. Councils must have asset management plans to show how they will maintain current levels of services as their assets get older, such as when water or sewerage pipes wear out. These plans should also show the new assets councils will provide to service growth in their communities.
- **Policy development** – many councils have different policies and strategies to guide the development of their areas.

## What sort of services do councils contract?

Councils sometimes contract specialist activities and services to provide more efficient service to ratepayers. These may include:

- maintenance of major infrastructure, such as roading
- rubbish and recycling pick-up
- bulk water supply and sewage disposal
- management of sports complexes
- some regulatory services such as animal control.

## What are bylaws?

Councils have the power to make bylaws. There are laws that apply only in the area involved and may require something to be done in a particular way, in a particular time frame, or involve licence fees.

City and district councils have the power to make bylaws to:

- protect the public from nuisance
- protect, promote and maintain public health and safety
- minimise the potential for offensive behaviour in public places
- regulate activities such as waste management.

## Who holds councils to account?

Each council, first and foremost, is accountable to its local community. Elected members monitor performance of council organisations on behalf of the community.

Opportunities for communities to hold the council to account include:

- voting in the local government elections for

the individuals they want to represent them in the council for the next three years

- attending ward meetings and council committees
- monitoring the year's activities, which are reported in annual reports, and making submissions on the next annual plan or LTCCP.

## Who else has an interest in local councils?

### Office of the Controller and Auditor General

The Controller and Auditor-General monitors the financial performance of local government through the Office of the Auditor-General and Audit New Zealand. There is a focus on efficient and effective performance, authority to act, waste, probity (appropriate behaviour) and accountability. For more information see: [www.oag.govt.nz](http://www.oag.govt.nz)

### Local Government Commission

The Local Government Commission is an independent statutory body that makes decisions on the structure of local government. This includes determining appeals about council boundary changes and ward or constituency boundaries, where these are not decided locally. For more information see: [www.lgc.govt.nz](http://www.lgc.govt.nz)

### The Ombudsmen

New Zealand has two Ombudsmen appointed by Parliament as independent review authorities. Their primary purpose is to inquire into complaints against central and local government organisations or agencies, particularly where there is a question of legality or reasonableness. For more information see: [www.ombudsmen.govt.nz](http://www.ombudsmen.govt.nz)

### Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

Complaints about council decisions on environmental issues can be made to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. For more information see: [www.pce.govt.nz](http://www.pce.govt.nz)

### Can the Minister of Local Government hold councils to account?

The Minister of Local Government is responsible for policy issues relating to the constitution, structure, accountability and funding of local government. The Minister is not responsible for, and cannot intervene in, local council decisions. The Department of Internal Affairs assists the Minister with local council work.

The Minister is also the territorial authority for parts of New Zealand not included in a district council (this involves some offshore islands). Additionally, the Minister may appoint a committee to review the council, if the local authority is not considered to be performing.



#### More information:

See the other info sheets in this series.

Visit the following websites:

Local Councils:  
[www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz)

The Department of Internal Affairs:  
[www.dia.govt.nz](http://www.dia.govt.nz)

Government Online:  
[www.newzealand.govt.nz](http://www.newzealand.govt.nz)

Local Government New Zealand:  
[www.lgnz.co.nz](http://www.lgnz.co.nz)

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