



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT – HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Local government provides for community well-being and enables democratic local decision-making and action on behalf of communities.

It is important people have their say on local government because its work touches many aspects of our daily lives. The more people participate in local government, the more likely council's decisions and actions will help achieve short and long term objectives of the community.

There are numerous ways to be involved in council decision-making processes. These include:

- Voting in local authority elections
- Being elected as a councillor or community board member
- Making a submission or participating in planning and decision-making processes
- Attending council meetings
- Council interaction with Māori, and community and ethnic groups.



## VOTING AND BECOMING A COUNCILLOR

Local authority elections are held every three years, on the second Saturday in October. The next elections are on 13 October 2007. By-elections are held when a vacancy occurs.

### Voting

Councils are governed by elected members. By voting in a local government election you help choose the people who will make decisions on your behalf for the future of your community.

To vote you must be:

- Over 18 years of age and enrolled as a parliamentary elector, at an address in the district or city where you live (to find out more contact [www.elections.govt.nz](http://www.elections.govt.nz)).
- Enrolled as a ratepayer elector for a property you own in a different area from where you live (for more information on this process contact the electoral officer in the council where you own the property).

### Being elected

Being elected to a council or community board means you can help make decisions affecting your community.

To stand for election to a council you must be a New Zealand citizen enrolled as a parliamentary elector. Candidates must also be nominated and seconded by electors from that district or region.

Representing your community can be time consuming.

If elected you will be representing and leading the community, setting policies, making regulatory decisions, and reviewing council performance.

Council members attend regular full council meetings, and may be on one or more committees. They are paid a salary and meeting fee, depending on their role (eg. chairperson or committee member) and the number of committees they are on.

## **MAKING A SUBMISSION AND PARTICIPATING IN PLANNING PROCESSES**

Participating in council planning and consultation processes gives you an opportunity to influence decisions made by the council.

Councils provide various ways for you to be involved in local decision-making.

The law specifies some circumstances when councils must consult with their communities and other interested parties, and take their feedback into account.

However, councils also provide many other opportunities for community engagement to assist with the decision-making process. These range from consultation over draft policies and management strategies for reserves, to development of community facilities.

### **Formal consultation**

A special consultative procedure must be used for some decisions. These may include adopting a long-term council community plan or annual plan, making bylaws, or changes to how significant activities are delivered.

### **The community outcomes process**

Community outcomes are the desired state of affairs each community has identified as important. Councils are required to lead their communities in the development of community outcomes.

The community outcomes process is collaborative, with councils likely to provide opportunities for you to help identify these outcomes. In addition, councils are required to facilitate organisations and groups to identify and promote community outcomes.

Once the desired outcomes are determined by the community, the council develops a long-term council community plan (LTCCP). The LTCCP describes the activities of the council and provides long-term focus for its decision-making. Councils are required to monitor and report on the achievements of the LTCCP at least once every three years.

### **Council planning documents**

The LTCCP is a key planning tool for councils, setting out priorities and work programmes for the following 10-year period. They outline everything a council does, how it fits together and what it costs.

The plans are reviewed every three years. This is an important opportunity for you to make a submission on what the council plans to do in your community over the next 10 years.

The council is required to widely distribute a summary draft LTCCP. Full drafts are often available on the council website or can be obtained from the council.

Making a submission on the draft LTCCP provides the council with important feedback on its future direction and priorities. After considering these submissions, the final LTCCP is adopted by the full council at the start of the financial year (1 July).

In the two years when an LTCCP does not need to be produced, the council produces an Annual Plan.

This document should highlight any changes from the LTCCP for the coming year. If the council plans to make a major change from that already signalled, it may also need to amend the LTCCP.

You can make a submission on the Annual Plan in the same way as the LTCCP.

Each council will publish details on how and when you can make submissions. These are usually available both at councils' offices and on their websites.



## ATTENDING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Anyone can attend public meetings of the council or its committees. In some cases a member of the public may also seek permission to address the council or a committee.

A monthly schedule of meetings is published in the public notices of local newspapers and/or the council's website.

Extraordinary meetings may also be held, with three working days or 24 hours' notice.

In certain circumstances, the public can be excluded from parts of public meetings. The reasons for these exclusions are governed by legislation.



## REPRESENTATION REVIEWS

Councils must consult with the public at least every six years over their representation arrangements.

A Representation Review usually includes:

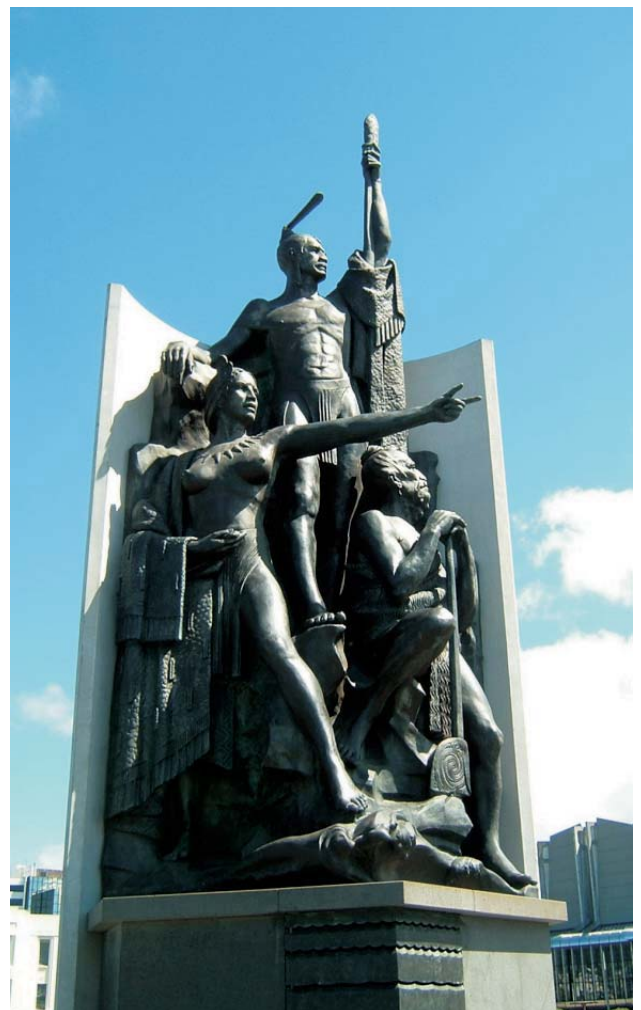
- Whether council members should be elected from the whole district, wards, or a mixture of both
- The areas of wards and constituencies, and their boundaries
- The number of members to be elected from each ward and constituency
- Whether there should be community boards.

You can make a submission on this process, which the council will consider before making a final decision. Submitters may appeal against this decision.

## COUNCIL INTERACTION WITH MĀORI

When councils make important decisions involving land or a body of water, they must take into account the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga.

Councils should provide opportunities for Māori to be involved in council planning and decision-making. Councils may encourage Māori participation in various ways, including establishing Māori wards or constituencies, working groups, sub-committees, liaison staff, and, more formally, a Memorandum of Understanding.



## GETTING INVOLVED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEANS BEING PART OF:

- Local democracy – local people electing local people to make important decisions on local issues
- Diversity – councils face very different circumstances due to geographic, financial and social differences. Local government allows these differences to be identified and addressed more effectively
- Local choice – promoting public participation in the future direction of their community
- Local accountability – local authorities are primarily accountable to their communities for decisions taken and outcomes achieved.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
IN NEW ZEALAND, AND FOR INFORMATION ABOUT  
INDIVIDUAL COUNCILS, VISIT  
[WWW.LOCALCOUNCILS.GOV.T.NZ](http://WWW.LOCALCOUNCILS.GOV.T.NZ)

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS



Te Tari Taiwhenua

Local Government and Community Branch  
Department of Internal Affairs  
PO Box 805  
46 Waring Taylor St  
WELLINGTON  
Phone: 0800 824 824  
Fax: (04) 460 2247

July 2006