

25 February 2026

Committee Secretariat
Governance and Administration Committee
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6143

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission from the Manawātū District Council on the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections – Terms of Reference

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections.

Introduction

The Council supports the practice of undertaking a post-election inquiry and considers it an important mechanism for identifying system-wide improvements and strengthening public confidence in local democracy.

Our comments draw on our experience from the 2025 local elections, sector-level discussion at the post-election forum held 05 December 2025, and feedback received through Council-led engagement activities.

Matters Included in the Proposed Terms of Reference

Voting Processes

The Council supports the inclusion of voting processes within the Terms of Reference and agrees that these matters should be reviewed:

- **Removal of electors from the roll** – particularly where this occurs close to voting periods.
- **Disallowed special votes** – including the clarity of eligibility criteria.
- **Mailing of voting documents and orange bins** – noting that postal service variability and voter uncertainty about return options continue to pose risks to participation.
- **Telephone dictation voting** – including its accessibility, integrity, and public understanding.
- **The appropriateness of mobile voting booths** – particularly in terms of equity of access and Council capacity.

The Council considers that improvements in these areas would help reduce voter confusion, support participation, and enhance confidence in the electoral system.

Electoral Integrity – Disinformation and Misinformation

The Council supports the inclusion of electoral integrity within the Terms of Reference, particularly in relation to disinformation and misinformation.

Local elections are increasingly exposed to misleading information, and councils often have limited ability to correct misinformation once it is widely shared.

The Council considers that the Inquiry should explore:

- **The scale and impact of disinformation** – especially as it relates to electoral processes.
- **Response** – how the government, councils, and electoral providers can effectively correct information, in ways that maintain political neutrality.

Proactively addressing disinformation and misinformation would reduce harm to public confidence in local elections.

Voting Arrangements and Roles

The Council supports looking into:

- **The appropriate role of councils and staff in election delivery** – including boundaries between operational support, neutrality, and public information.
- **Relationships with electoral service providers** – including the consistency of practice and accountability mechanisms.

Clarifying these arrangements would assist councils to deliver elections consistently.

Additional Matters Recommended for Inclusion

Candidate Information and Availability

Candidate information is a significant factor influencing voter engagement and informed decision-making. Specific matters for consideration include:

- The length and format of candidate profile information.
- Low participation in candidate information platforms (e.g., only a minority of candidates providing information to Policy.nz).
- Whether councils can provide more direct, neutral support to candidates, to ensure voters have access to meaningful information.

Improving candidate information would support informed voting and potentially increase voter confidence and turnout.

Electronic Voting and Booth Voting Options

Electronic voting options are an opportunity to modernise New Zealand's local electoral system, massively improve participation, and meet voters where they already engage digitally:

- The feasibility, risks, and benefits of electronic voting.
- The potential role of in-person or booth-based voting, either as a supplement to postal voting or for specific voter groups.

While recognising the complexity and cost of such options, the Council considers that continued reliance on postal voting may limit future participation.

Uncontested Candidates in Candidate Profile Booklets

The Council recommends that the Inquiry examine the treatment of uncontested candidates within candidate profile booklets, including:

- Whether current practices support transparency and consistency for voters where candidates are elected unopposed.
- The extent to which voters expect to receive information about individuals running for election.
- Any impact on voter understanding and confidence.

From the Council's perspective, including uncontested candidates in candidate profile booklets would improve transparency by ensuring voters have access to information about all elected representatives.

The Inquiry may also wish to consider how the inclusion of uncontested candidates affects voter understanding, and whether it aligns with existing practices where voters already receive candidate information for positions outside their electorate.

Processes for Overseas Voters

Postal voting for overseas voters is hit or miss, with the feasibility of this depending on postal timeframes to the country in question (e.g., Australia is more feasible than the UK) and the willingness of voters to bear the cost of international postage. The Council recommends that the Inquiry examine the following processes:

- Timeliness of voting material.
- Accessibility of voting options.
- Public awareness of eligibility and deadlines.

Given increasing population mobility, improving overseas voting processes is necessary to ensure overseas voters have fair and equitable access to local elections.

Election Affordability

The Inquiry should consider election affordability, particularly in the context of:

- Rising costs of election delivery.
- Potential impacts of future local government and regional council reforms.
- The mandatory requirement to hold a bi-election if a vacancy is created more than 12 months prior to the next triennial election.

At a time of increasing rates, cost-of-living pressures, and a government policy focus on constraining council expenditure, it is important that election costs are examined to ensure they are fair and proportionate.

Council-Hosted Candidate Events

The Inquiry should consider the role of councils in hosting candidate events, including:

- Their effectiveness in supporting voter engagement.
- Equity of access for candidates.

- Appropriate safeguards to ensure political neutrality.
- Health and safety responsibilities and risk management, including how this compare with the risks and obligations present when candidate events are hosted by third-party organisations.

Clear guidance in this area would assist councils to support democratic participation while managing risk.

Conclusion

The Manawatū District Council supports the proposed Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections and considers that expanding them to include the additional matters outlined above would provide a more comprehensive review of the local electoral system.

Taken together, these issues affect voter participation, candidate experience, operational integrity, and public confidence. Addressing them at a national level would support continuous improvement and strengthen local democracy across New Zealand.

The Manawatū District Council does not wish to be heard in support of this submission.

Please feel free to contact our Governance and Assurance Manager (Ash.Garstang@mdc.govt.nz) if you have any questions or concerns about this submission.

Yours sincerely



Michael Ford

Mayor