LOCAL ELECTORAL REFORM POSITION PAPER:
FEEDBACK FORM

For copies of the position paper, please visit
https://www.lgnz.co.nz/policy-advocacy/key-issues-for-councils/local-electoral-reform/

Please email this completed form to electoralreform@lgnz.co.nz by **9am Monday 28 April 2025**

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Who are you making this submission on behalf of:

☐ Myself

☑ An organisation - please state

Manawatū District Council

ISSUE 1/ The public's understanding of local government and why it's important

ON A SCALE FROM 1 (STRONGLY SUPPORT) TO 5 (STRONGLY OPPOSE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE DRAFT POSITION FOR ISSUE 1?

2

WHY DID YOU GIVE THIS SCORE? WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT, AND WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE POSITION?

Civics education and awareness initiatives should extend beyond schools and be made accessible to the wider public.

We consider it essential that central government provides dedicated resourcing to promote youth engagement in local government. While councils may run their own initiatives in this space, funding is often constrained (particularly for smaller councils) and the quality of delivery can vary significantly.

We believe it's critical for young people to have positive early interactions with local authorities and to understand the role councils play in their communities. This is especially important in light of declining trust in democratic institutions and the often regulatory nature of council work, which can lead to a young person's first experience being negative or transactional - for example, through resource or building consents, or enforcement actions such as animal control fees.

We also recommend that NZQA explore the option of awarding NCEA credits to youth who participate in local authority Youth Councils. This would provide a valuable incentive for engagement and help to reinforce the civic value of these forums.

ISSUE 2/ Understanding candidates and their policies

ON A SCALE FROM 1 (STRONGLY SUPPORT) TO 5 (STRONGLY OPPOSE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE DRAFT POSITION FOR ISSUE 2?

2

WHY DID YOU GIVE THIS SCORE? WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT, AND WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE POSITION?

We support the Electoral Reference Working Group's view that improving public understanding of candidates would be beneficial.

That said, we recommend softening the emphasis on "candidate policies," as many individuals stand for council without fully developed policy platforms. Instead, we suggest that any initiative aimed at enhancing candidate visibility (such as a centralised website) adopt a broader, more flexible approach. This would enable candidates to share their values, background, motivations, perspectives, and any policy positions in a way that feels authentic to them.

We also acknowledge the diversity of views expressed regarding political party endorsements in local elections. Nonetheless, we believe that candidates who receive such endorsements should be fully transparent about any associated expectations or commitments. For example, any formal or informal agreements with the endorsing party should be disclosed, so that voters can make informed decisions and understand any potential for conflicts of interest or divided loyalties.

ISSUE 3/ Voting methods

ON A SCALE FROM 1 (STRONGLY SUPPORT) TO 5 (STRONGLY OPPOSE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE DRAFT POSITION FOR ISSUE 3?

4

WHY DID YOU GIVE THIS SCORE? WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT, AND WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE POSITION?

We support the continued and fuller use of orange ballot bins as a practical interim measure.

However, we do not support the Electoral Reference Working Group's recommendation to introduce in-person voting. This approach would impose substantial costs on local authorities without offering any clear advantage over the current method of depositing votes in orange bins.

We also challenge the view that online voting is too complex or risky to pursue further. While international trials have yielded mixed results, advancements in technology and audit processes may improve the feasibility and security of online voting over time. Naturally, we support the Group's position that online voting should be made available to overseas voters for local elections.

ISSUE 4/ Administration and promotion of elections

ON A SCALE FROM 1 (STRONGLY SUPPORT) TO 5 (STRONGLY OPPOSE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE DRAFT POSITION FOR ISSUE 4?

WHY DID YOU GIVE THIS SCORE? WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT, AND WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE POSITION?

No comment.

ISSUE 5/ Four-year terms (including transition and implementation)

ON A SCALE FROM 1 (STRONGLY SUPPORT) TO 5 (STRONGLY OPPOSE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE DRAFT POSITION FOR ISSUE 5?

3

WHY DID YOU GIVE THIS SCORE? WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT, AND WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE POSITION?

The Manawatū District Council holds a range of views on the advantages and disadvantages of a four-year local government term.

However, we believe greater attention should be given to the challenges of attracting a diverse pool of candidates to stand for local office. Remuneration for councillors (particularly in smaller councils) is often insufficient to meet basic living costs. This creates a barrier for many and results in an over-representation of certain demographics. For instance, elected members are more likely to be self-employed or retired, as these circumstances offer the flexibility to fulfil council responsibilities. In contrast, those in full-time employment or in the early to mid stages of their careers often lack the capacity to commit to such roles.

The issue of a lack of diversity would likely to be compounded by a move to a four-year term.

Finally, we recommend that Recommendation 19 be amended to establish an eight-year cycle for representation reviews, rather than the mentioned four-year cycle.

Additional feedback/

ARE THERE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ON THE DRAFT POSITION PAPER?