

What is local government?



Regional and territorial authorities and their functions

Local government provides communities with a wide range of services and facilities which contribute significantly to quality of life. We often associate councils with the three “r’s” – roads, rates and rubbish – but councils play a vital role in enabling local communities to grow and develop.

Councils plan for the future of their communities, they determine what developments and activities are permissible and regulate activities such as subdivisions, housing developments, business activities, and animal and environmental protection.

Councils' primary source of funding comes from property taxes, or rates, as they are more commonly known. Rates fund around 60 percent of all council activities.

In New Zealand regional and territorial authorities have different functions and

responsibilities. New Zealand is divided into 12 regions. Each of these regions has a regional council which manages the natural resources of an area. This includes:

- Biosecurity control (including pest control and noxious plants)
- Resource management (quality of water, soil, coastal planning, etc)
- Flood and river management
- Civil defence (natural disasters, marine oil spill)
- Regional transport planning and passenger transport services.

New Zealand has 74 territorial authorities including 16 city councils and 58 district councils.

The functions of territorial authorities (district and city councils) include:

- Community well-being and development
- Environmental health and safety (including





- building control, civil defence, and environmental health matters)
- Infrastructure (roading and transport, sewerage, water/stormwater)
 - Recreation and culture
 - Resource management including land use planning and development control.

Four of the territorial authorities are known as 'unitary authorities', as they have the responsibilities of both territorial authorities and regional councils. The unitary councils are Nelson City Council, Tasman District Council, Marlborough District Council and Gisborne District Council.

The Local Government Act 2002 has given councils new flexibility to transfer functions between regional and territorial authorities. In the future these functions may vary.

Council responsibilities

Councils are required to make decisions and set directions for promoting the social, cultural,

environmental and economic well-being of their communities. They contribute to the good governance of their communities.

A council must:

- Provide directly or on behalf of central government, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community
- Ensure that provided services are managed efficiently and effectively
- Exercise community leadership
- Exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and actively promotes the principle of cultural diversity
- Manage, protect, develop, restore, enhance and conserve the environment
- Account for and manage assets for which it is responsible
- Facilitate involvement of councillors, members of public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government



- Raise funds for local purposes by way of rates, charges and fees and investments, loans and grants
- Keep the local community informed about its activities
- Ensure that in the exercise of its regulatory functions it acts without bias
- Act as a responsible employer.

What is governance?

Governance, in a council sense, is providing leadership for the good of the community. It is about balancing views, resources and needs and making decisions that are best for the community. It is not about implementing decisions, that is management's role and belongs to the staff.

Councils have two major governance roles:

- A law-making and regulatory role; and
- Being the governing body for the council organisation.

The key governance responsibilities of councils are to

- Connect with the community
- Set policies
- Monitor and review the performance of the organisation.

Council structures

The governing body in each local authority is the council, also known as the 'committee of the whole'.

A council has the discretion to appoint any standing committee, special committee or subcommittee it considers appropriate. Standing committees (or permanent committees) are responsible for much of the work of the council. They are responsible for a council's regulatory services, planning, recreation and safety, as well as promoting economic benefits, although some councils now operate without committees.

In addition, community boards can be set by cities or districts to make sure that community's





interests are represented and to bring decision-making closer to the community (depending on the functions and responsibilities delegated to them by the council).

Who is responsible for council functions?

Councillors are responsible for making policy decisions on matters such as the services the council will provide, the level of rates it will charge and what bylaws it will make. Councils have a chief executive and other staff to provide advice and implement these decisions.

Is the public entitled to attend council meetings?

Absolutely. The public is entitled to attend all meetings of council and council committees. Public meetings provide an opportunity for the council to make available detailed information on complex issues and to enable the public to provide feedback to the council.

Councils do have the right to discuss some matters in private such as matters of privacy or commercial sensitivity. Councils may also elect to hold workshops to debate and find out more about an issue and these are usually held in private.

Council roles

There are a number of clearly defined roles within council:

- Chairpersons and mayors
- Deputy chairpersons and deputy mayors
- Committee chairpersons
- Councillors
- Community board chairpersons
- Community board members.

