

YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL



shaping our communities together

What does local government do?

Do you like to . . .

- play at a neighbourhood playground,
- swim in a community pool,
- test your skills at a local skate park, or
- check-out books from your local library?

If you do any of these things then you are enjoying some of the services that local government typically provides.



What is local government?

Local government and local authority(ies) are terms used to describe any or all of New Zealand's regional, district, city or unitary councils.

While central government is concerned with the broader issues of importance to all New Zealanders, local government manages the issues that are specific to local communities.



Regional councils

The main responsibility of a regional council is to manage environmental, resource and transport planning issues for the whole region. A region may include a number of territorial authorities.

A regional council manages:

- the sustainable use of land, air and water
- rivers, flood control and mitigation of soil erosion
- animal and plant pest control
- land transport planning and contracting passenger services
- harbour navigation, safe boating, managing oil spills and other issues related to marine pollution.

Territorial authorities (city and district councils)

There are two types of territorial authorities. City councils represent a population of more than 50,000 that is predominantly urban-based. District councils have a smaller and more widely dispersed population.

Territorial authorities typically manage the following services for their communities:

- water supply
- roading and public transport services
- solid waste collection and disposal
- the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards
- regulatory services (e.g. dog control, liquor licensing)
- libraries, museums, reserves, recreational facilities, and other community infrastructure.

Unitary authorities

A unitary authority is a territorial authority that also has the powers and responsibilities of a regional council. There are six unitary authorities in New Zealand, these are:

- Auckland Council
- Gisborne District Council
- Chatham Islands Council
- Marlborough District Council
- Nelson City Council
- Tasman District Council

All councils also carry out a range of other activities in consultation with their communities. These include support for community and economic development.

How many councils make up New Zealand Local Government?

There are 78 councils, also known as local authorities, representing all areas of New Zealand, these include:

- 11 Regional Councils;
- 12 City Councils;
- 54 District Councils (including Chatham Islands territorial council); and
- the Auckland Council (a unitary authority).

The Auckland Council, together with the city and district councils, are collectively referred to as “territorial authorities” – there are 67 in total.

How are councils formed and governed?

Councils are governed by elected members. Councillors and mayors are elected to make decisions and represent the needs and interests of their community.

The voting population within each council area elects councillors for their territorial authority and regional council. In territorial authorities, a mayor is directly elected by the local community to lead the council. In regional councils, the leader of the council is the Chair. The Chair is an elected member who is selected by the councillors.

The situation in Auckland is slightly different. Auckland has a governing body of 21 members that are responsible for the overall direction of the council. This body shares its governance responsibility with an additional 21 local boards that represent the interests of smaller local areas within the greater Auckland region.

Council operations are managed by a chief executive, appointed by the elected members for a five-year term. Staff carry out the day-to-day work of a council under the chief executive's direction.



Community Boards

Many territorial authorities have community boards. These help represent community views and provide advice to the council. Community board members are elected at the same time as councillors.

The powers of a community board are given to it by the council. These powers may differ between councils. Community boards are not the same as the local boards in Auckland.

Contracting Services

Councils sometimes contract with an external specialist to provide more efficient services to ratepayers. These services may include:

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



What powers do local authorities have?

Everything a local authority does is governed by a legislative framework. This framework is established by Parliament.

Some of the key laws that govern and empower the system of local government are the:



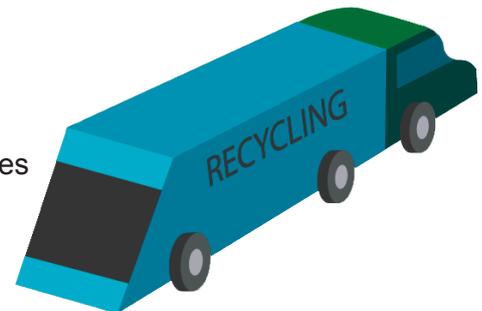
- Local Government Act 2002 (sets out the general powers of councils, planning and accountability requirements)
- Local Government (Rating) Act 2002 (sets out the methods by which councils raise revenue through rates)
- Local Electoral Act 2001 (sets out the process for council elections)
- Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 (sets out the governance structure for the Auckland Council).

In addition, many local government activities are governed by separate Acts of Parliament, such as the Resource Management Act 1991, the Building Act 2004 and the Biosecurity Act 1993.

Local bylaws

A local authority has the power to make local bylaws. These enable the council to enforce local rules that help 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.



Funding Local Government

Local authorities raise most of the funds they need from their communities. The sources include rates on property, returns from investments, and money raised from fees and charges for the services provided. Councils can also raise funds for major projects by borrowing. How much funding is raised from the various income streams is agreed to and included in the council's long-term plan or annual plan.

Central government also provides some funding or subsidies toward particular activities. This is most commonly given to help councils provide for roading and public transport services.

How are decisions made?

Councils may consult with their community and call for feedback submissions at any time and for any subject. In addition, councils are required to consult with their local communities over their financial planning and decision-making.

All councils are required to publish a long-term plan (LTP) once every three years. The LTP describes the council's activities, priorities and work programmes for the next 10 years. It is a key planning tool that outlines everything a council intends to do, how it will fit together and what it will cost. All major projects need to be included in the LTP.

Councils need to distribute a summary of the draft LTP so that everyone in the community is aware of what is proposed and have the opportunity to make submissions. Submissions provide the council with important feedback on its future direction and priorities.

In the two years when an LTP does not need to be produced, councils produce an annual plan. The annual plan sets out what the council plans to do in the next 12 months and how this relates to the most recent LTP. Like the LTP, the draft annual plan is open for public submissions.

Councils are also required to produce an annual report. This tells the community how the council performed in relation to the LTP and annual plan.

Both the LTP and annual plan are adopted before the start of the financial year in July. Annual reports must be adopted by 31 October each year. All LTP and annual report documents are audited.

All of these draft and final documents may be viewed on your council's website or you can contact them for a copy.

How can I participate in local government?



There are numerous ways to be involved in local government activities and decision-making.

If you are 18 years old or older, you may:

- vote in council elections
- be elected as a councillor or community board member

At any age, you may:

- make a feedback submission on the council's annual plan, LTP or any other consultation process the council might run
- attend and speak at council meetings (a schedule of meetings is published in the public notices of local newspapers and/or the council's website).

Elections

Local authority elections take place every three years on the second Saturday in October.

You can find out about candidates standing in your area from your council's website, local newspapers and voting pack that is sent to all eligible local electors prior to the election.

Voting

To vote in a local election you must be:

- 18 years of age or over
- enrolled as a parliamentary elector at the address where you live, or
- enrolled as a ratepayer elector for a property you own in a different district or city from where you live (more information can be received from your local council).

Standing for election

You can stand for a mayoralty or membership of a council or community board if you are:

- a New Zealand citizen
- at least 18 years old
- on the electoral roll.

To stand as a candidate in the local elections you need to have two electors from that area nominate you. Public notices are given for when nominations must be received. Becoming a candidate costs \$200. This may be refunded, depending on how many votes you receive.



If you would like to learn more about local government in New Zealand, visit the www.localcouncils.govt.nz website for links to: council profiles and maps, policy news, research reports or download local government financial data.