



New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Justice Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Ture

54th Parliament

August 2026

Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Tom Rutherford, Chairperson

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Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections

Summary of recommendations

The Justice Committee has conducted an inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections and makes the following recommendations to the Government:

Who runs local body elections

We recommend to the Government that it:

1. consider clarifying in the Local Electoral Act the role of private election service providers, including any independent oversight arrangements
2. encourage local government to investigate the relationship between private election service providers and council staff and determine which roles should sit with each organisation
3. reach a decision on whether the Electoral Commission should run local elections
4. consider whether the Electoral Commission should be given responsibility for promoting local elections.

Issues that arose at the last election

We recommend to the Government that it:

5. encourage the Electoral Commission to consider how it could improve the information provided in the enrolment update campaign
6. consider amending the Local Electoral Act to require candidate information booklets to include information about candidates who are elected unopposed
7. encourage local government to explore to what extent regional councils and territorial authorities within an area should try to ensure that the electoral systems for elections are the same.

Voting methods

We recommend to the Government that it:

8. consider working with local authorities that intend to use booth voting at the 2028 local elections to identify what would be needed to transition to booth-only voting
9. consider asking local government to work with NZ Post on any initiatives that could inform voters when their voting packs are received
10. encourage local government to consider asking election service providers to proactively respond to any statistical anomalies in voting trends.

If Auckland Council proceeds on 1 September to undertake booth voting at the next local body elections, we encourage local authorities to look at this as a pilot to potentially undertake booth voting in their regions.

Special votes

We recommend to the Government that it:

11. amend the Local Electoral Regulations to remove the requirement for “occupation” to be provided in a special vote declaration
12. consider how it could simplify the special vote process, including whether all the information that is required at present is necessary
13. consider only declaring two stages of the results, preliminary results and final official results.

Misinformation and disinformation

We recommend to the Government that it:

14. explore how it could work with councils and election service providers to effectively correct disinformation and misinformation in ways that maintain neutrality and are consistent across the country
15. work with the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, the National Cyber Security Centre, the Electoral Commission, and Local Government New Zealand to develop a tailored election security and foreign interference awareness programme for local authorities, including elected members, candidates and council staff.

Introduction

Terms of reference

On 11 December 2025, we initiated an inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections and sought public submissions. We issued the following terms of reference:

The inquiry will examine the law and administrative procedures for the conduct of the 2025 Local Elections with a particular focus on:

- voting processes, including:
 - reports of people being removed from rolls or switched between them
 - the number of disallowed special votes
 - outcomes of recent changes to the delivery of voting papers and returns, such as increased use of DX mail and orange bins in supermarkets
 - use of telephone dictation voting for voters who are blind, vision-impaired, or physically unable to mark their voting paper
 - the appropriateness of the use of mobile voting booths
- electoral integrity, including disinformation or misinformation
- consideration of the role of councils and their staff when determining voting arrangements, and their relationships with the electoral agencies responsible for conducting the voting.

Our approach to submissions and this report

We appointed the Department of Internal Affairs as advisers for the inquiry.¹ We received written submissions from 61 individuals and organisations² and heard oral submissions from 13 submitters. The written submissions were received from a mix of individuals, local authorities, local boards, organisations, an independent Crown entity, a state-owned enterprise, a political party, and a political party caucus.

Typically, the select committee that is responsible for electoral matters initiates an inquiry after each local election cycle is completed. Previous committees have made numerous recommendations over the years. Many of the issues covered in previous inquiries were also raised in submissions on our inquiry. We consider that a lot of those issues have been well canvassed. We have therefore chosen to focus on issues that are either unique to this inquiry or where we felt that recommendations could be made. Those topics are:

- who runs local body elections
- issues experienced at the last election

¹ The local government functions of the Department of Internal Affairs were subsequently transferred to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport, which was established on 1 July 2026.

² Auckland Council's submission also included feedback from 21 local boards.

- postal voting and in-person voting
- disallowed special votes
- disinformation and misinformation.

We thank submitters for their valuable contributions, which informed our consideration of this inquiry.³

About the structure of local government and elections

Under the Local Electoral Act 2001, elections of local authority members are held once every three years. Local government consists of 78 local authorities: 11 regional councils and 67 territorial authorities.

Regional councils are primarily responsible for environmental management in their region. They can also be responsible for public transport, regional reserves, and bulk water supply. Territorial authorities (district and city councils) are responsible for providing a range of services. They include infrastructure services, waste collection and disposal and recycling services, community facilities, and bylaw-making powers. There are five unitary authorities, which are territorial authorities that also have the power of a regional council.⁴

In some parts of New Zealand, elections are also held for local and community boards, licensing trusts, and some other organisations. At present, there are 110 community boards and 21 local boards. Community boards are bodies that can be established to advocate for their local community. Their territorial authority can also delegate some decision-making responsibilities on specific matters. Local boards are local government bodies that share decision-making about non-regulatory matters with the governing body of the unitary authority. The local boards are all located in Auckland.

Overview of the 2025 local elections

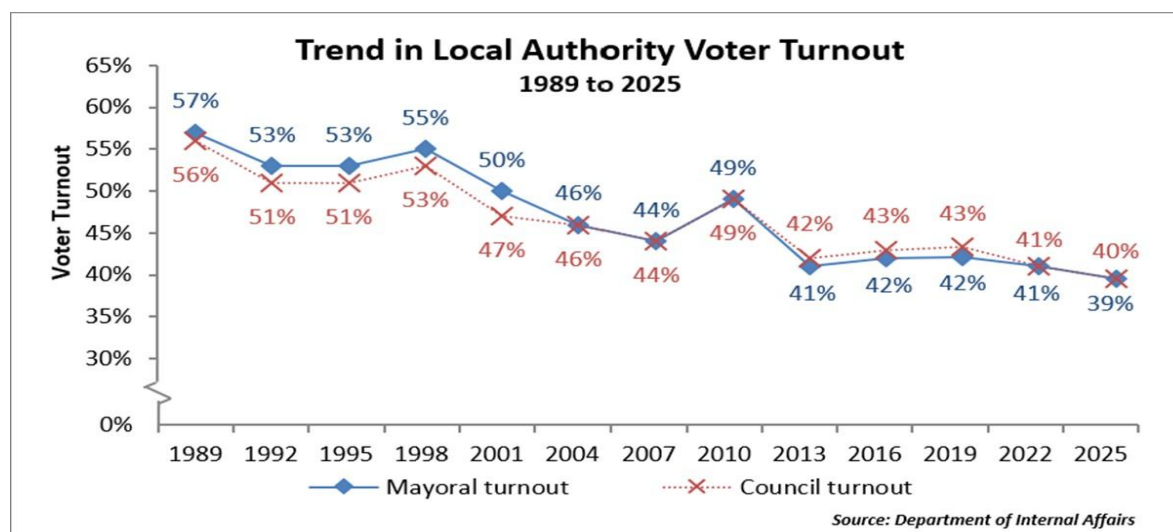
Voting for the 2025 local elections closed on Saturday 11 October 2025. The Local Electoral Act authorises two voting methods councils may use: postal voting and booth voting. All councils used postal voting as their voting method in 2025.

Since 2004, councils have been able to choose between two electoral systems: First Past the Post (FPP) and Single Transferable Vote (STV). In 2025, 15 councils used STV. They included a mix of regional, city, and district councils; two of them (Otago Regional Council and Whangarei District Council) used STV for the first time.

³ A summary of submissions is published on the [Parliament website](#).

⁴ The unitary authorities are Auckland Council, Gisborne District Council, Marlborough District Council, Nelson City Council, and Tasman District Council.

The trend in voter turnout for local authority elections from 1989 to 2025 is shown in the table below.⁵



Overall turnout in 2025 was 40 percent, slightly lower than turnout of 41 percent in 2022. Turnout has declined since 1989, when local government reform contributed to a peak of 56 percent, but has been relatively stable since 2013.

The table below compares the turnout for 2022 and 2025 based on council type. Unitary authorities are included in the relevant district and city council category. The results do not include Tauranga City Council. It held its local election in 2024, after the terms of the Crown-appointed Commissioners ended and it returned to elected members.

	2022	2025	Change
District councils	45%	47%	+2
City councils	39%	35%	-4
Regional councils	43%	44%	+1
All councils	42%	40%	-2

The downward trend in city council and overall turnout is driven by the low voter turnout for Auckland Council. Despite an increase in the number of eligible electors, turnout fell to 29.3 percent, which is the lowest since the council was established in 2010. The significant size of Auckland Council compared with other councils means that any decrease in turnout will have a larger influence on the overall statistics. If the Auckland Council results are excluded from the national figure, overall voter turnout increases to 45 percent (from 40 percent) and city council turnout to 43 percent (from 35 percent).

The data indicates a wide range of turnout among council types, and included the following:

- **District councils:** Turnout for district councils ranged from 61 percent (Kaikoura District and Mackenzie District) to 36 percent (Waikato District).

⁵ Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport, [2025 Local Authority Election Trends](#).

- **City councils:** Auckland Council (29 percent) and Hamilton City Council (34 percent) had the lowest turnout of all city councils. Wellington City Council and Upper Hutt City Council both had the highest turnout at 51 percent. However, this may have been influenced by two higher-profile mayoral races.
- **Regional councils:** The highest turnout was West Coast Regional Council at 51 percent, while the lowest was 35 percent for Bay of Plenty Regional Council. The lower turnout for the Bay of Plenty may reflect the fact that Tauranga City Council did not have an election, which could have contributed to a lack of awareness about the election.

Submitters' views about voter turnout

Some submitters expressed concern about low voter turnout in the 2025 local elections. Their concerns included that it creates a significant challenge for local democracy and undermines public confidence in local decision making. Submitters also commented that lower voter turnout is often seen in Māori, rural, young, and dispersed communities.

Submitters who commented on voter turnout provided many reasons why turnout might be low. They include postal voting, limited civics education, voter apathy and confusion, and lack of promotion. Some submitters made recommendations that they considered could improve voter turnout and reduce voter confusion about the voting process. They include:

- adopting alternative voting methods, including online or booth voting
- introducing compulsory civics education
- starting enrolment and engagement campaigns well in advance of the election period
- giving the Electoral Commission responsibility for operating local elections.

We share submitters' concerns about the low turnout. We discuss some of their suggestions to improve turnout in more detail later in our report. Some of us are also concerned that the larger the council, the lower the voter turnout in general.

Who runs local body elections

Private election service providers

The chief executive of each council is responsible for facilitating and fostering electoral participation. Local elections are run by local authorities with the help of two private election service providers. The providers, Electionz.com and Election Services, assist councils with the electoral processes required under the Local Electoral Act and the Local Electoral Regulations 2001. Some functions that the providers can perform are maintaining rolls, candidate oversight, mailing ballots, advertising, and counting votes.

In 2025, Election Services managed electoral services for 22 councils and 1.86 million electors. Electionz.com managed electoral services for 55 councils and 1.69 million electors.

The Local Electoral Act requires every local authority to appoint an electoral officer to exercise the powers and carry out the duties conferred on them by the Act. The electoral officer has overall responsibility for the statutory functions and conduct of the legislative processes. Electoral officials, such as council staff or employees of the election service providers, undertake specific tasks like receiving nominations and issuing special votes. Most councils choose to appoint a representative of a private election service provider as either their electoral officer or deputy electoral officer.

Role of council in determining voting arrangements

A topic of interest in our call for submissions was the role of councils and their staff when determining voting arrangements. We were also interested in councils' relationships with the electoral agencies responsible for conducting the voting.

Councils that submitted on this topic provided examples of how they maintain electoral integrity when planning and managing elections. Staff at Christchurch City Council use the *Code of Good Practice for the Management of Local Authority Elections and Polls* and resources published by Taituarā.⁶ At Dunedin City Council, elected members have limited input when setting voting arrangements. The deputy electoral officer or other electoral or communications staff oversee that function and maintain regular contact with contractors and electoral agencies. Porirua City Council considered that the current system works well and electoral staff are independent from the elected council and wider council organisations.

A submitter commented that councils have discretion for drop-off points for voting documents, mobile booths, and public information campaigns. This discretion leads to inconsistent voter experiences across the country. To reduce inequality and improve turnout, the submitter suggested that clearer national standards be set.

Howick Local Board supported a clear separation between governance and administration to ensure that staff are kept at a distance and are protected from political pressure. An

⁶ Taituarā is a membership network for professionals working in and for local government. It has about 1,020 members, drawn from chief executives, managers, and staff across all 78 local authorities.

individual submitter considered that allowing councils or their staff to determine voting arrangements creates structural proximity between political actors and process design. Even the perception of influence can undermine trust, they said, so there should be clear statutory separation between political entities and electoral administration. Another submitter proposed clarifying the delegation of authority, oversight responsibilities, and management of conflicts of interest.

Councils' relationships with private election service providers

Transparency International New Zealand noted that the Local Electoral Act does not recognise the significant role that private providers play in local government elections. A submitter expressed concern about private providers running local elections but acknowledged that they are professionally run.

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) observed that the relationship between electoral agencies and council staff is a matter for each chief executive. However, it suggested that the implications of contracting out the electoral officer role have never been fully considered and may need further investigation. Any investigation should determine which roles best sit with publicly accountable agencies and which are best suited to be contracted out to the private sector. Manawātū District Council also endorsed considering the appropriate roles for councils and staff when providing elections. This includes boundaries between operational support, neutrality, and public information. It considered that clarifying these arrangements would help councils provide elections consistently.

Several councils highlighted the limited depth in the market for providers, which limits innovation, responsiveness, and service quality. One submitter noted their understanding that the current providers are not subject to the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, and it is unclear what independent oversight occurs. We also note that private election service providers are not subject to that Act.

We acknowledge submitters' feedback. Although our inquiry has not highlighted any concerns about the conduct of private providers, we consider that there is benefit in providing clarity about the respective roles of councils and private providers.

Recommendations

We recommend to the Government that it:

1. consider clarifying in the Local Electoral Act the role of private election service providers, including any independent oversight arrangements
2. encourage local government to investigate the relationship between private election service providers and council staff and determine which roles should sit with each organisation.

Centralising the administration of election processes

Support for the Electoral Commission to administer local elections

Support for the Electoral Commission to take over the running of local elections was a common theme among submitters. The need for national consistency was one of the main reasons for this view. Christchurch City Council considered that having the Commission

assume responsibility would allow for stronger national consistency, efficiency, and higher standards. However, it stated that wide consultation would be needed on any changes. The high rejection rate of special votes for the Kaipara District Council election was the reason why one submitter supported the Commission taking over the administration of local elections.⁷ They maintained that the rejected votes were the predictable consequence of a system that delegates electoral responsibility to more than 60 territorial authorities. Further, the submitter stated that there are no enforceable national standards, minimum training requirements, or any mechanisms for the Commission to intervene when outcomes fall below acceptable thresholds.

The Electoral Commission's experience in running parliamentary elections was another reason why submitters supported it administering local elections. Disabled Persons Assembly NZ observed that the Commission has successfully worked with the disabled community, while Auckland Council acknowledged that the Commission has the operational capability and independence needed to manage large elections. Auckland Council recognised, however, that further consultation and detailed design work would need to be explored. The work should include determining cost-sharing arrangements and councils' role in supporting engagement, participation, and communication.

In principle, Taituarā also supported centralising some or all local electoral functions. It submitted that the case for centralisation would be strengthened by requiring councils to adopt in-person voting. This is because in-person voting would be less likely to succeed without national promotion and enhanced civics education. In Taituarā's view, three issues would need to be considered before moving to centralisation. Local government would need to be satisfied about how costs are recovered and that the costs are equitable, transparent, and efficient. The Electoral Commission would need to attract and retain capability needed to run local elections, and local government may need to retain certain aspects of the election process.

LGNZ suggested that the Electoral Act 1993 and the Local Electoral Act be amended to give the Electoral Commission responsibility for administering and promoting local elections. It considered that the Commission's new role should be funded by a combination of central government funding and a levy imposed on councils. The composition of the Commission's board should also be amended to require at least one member to have knowledge and experience of local government and local elections. Several submitters endorsed LGNZ's position, including Waikato District Council and Kāpiti Coast District Council.

Centralising the promotion of local body elections

Submitters cited lack of promotion as one reason why turnout in local elections may be low. They noted that each council is responsible for promoting their own election, and budgets vary across districts. Submitters suggested that promotion and communication for local elections should have prominence comparable to that for parliamentary elections. The Electoral Commission manages the promotion of those elections.

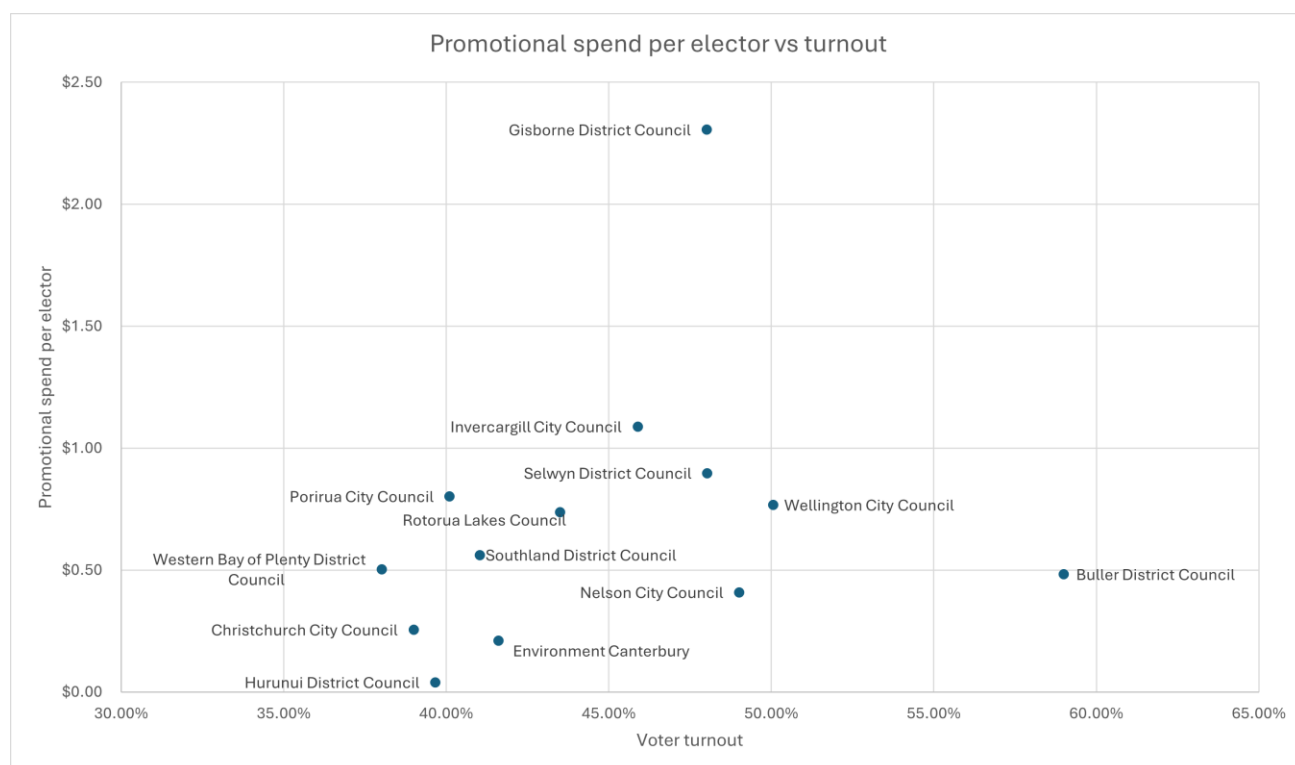
LGNZ suggested that one reason for low participation is that spending on promoting participation is a fifth of what the Electoral Commission spends per voter for parliamentary

⁷ We discuss this in more detail in our chapter on special votes.

elections. LGNZ said that local councils, on average, spend 50 cents per voter, while the Commission spends \$3.

We requested further information from a sample of councils about the promotional spending on local elections that could be readily quantified in monetary terms. It does not include any in-house time and resources that may have been used in promoting the local election in their region. The sample of 13 councils was selected using Taituarā's Electoral Reference Group members as a starting point. The group provides guidance and expertise about local government electoral matters and consists of people who work within local government. Other councils were then emailed to include a balance of rural, urban, large, and small councils.

The attached diagram shows a comparison between promotional expenditure per elector and voter turnout.



Comparison between promotional spending and voter turnout

No clear correlation between spending and turnout was evident from the sample. Of the 13 councils sampled, Gisborne District Council, a geographically large unitary authority, spent the most promoting its election (\$2.31 per elector), while Hurunui District Council (\$0.04 per elector) spent the least. The respective voter turnout for those regions was 48 percent and 40 percent. Christchurch City Council spent the second least amount and voter turnout was 39 percent. Invercargill City Council spent the second highest amount per elector (\$1.10 per elector). It told us it increased its promotional spending for the 2025 local election, but its turnout was lower than in 2022. Turnout was 53 percent in 2022 compared with 46 percent in 2025.

Buller District Council had the highest turnout of the sampled councils at 59 percent and spent \$0.48 per elector. Western Bay of Plenty District Council had the lowest turnout at 38 percent and spent \$0.50 per elector.

Support for the Electoral Commission to promote local elections

We heard that LGNZ thinks it is inefficient for each local authority to run its own campaign and more effective to run promotions at a national level. It supports using the Electoral Commission to promote local elections, including its well-recognised “orange man” branding.

We asked whether anything is stopping LGNZ from undertaking a national campaign on behalf of its members. This could involve advertising with the agreement of its members or contracting the Electoral Commission to run a marketing campaign. LGNZ explained that the Electoral Act does not allow the Commission to contract with local government. LGNZ acknowledged that it could collaborate with members on promotion but considers that, before going down that route, its bigger focus should be on supporting its base. It said that making sure that everybody pays their fair share could also be a challenge. LGNZ noted that a compromise option would be to enable local government, through LGNZ, to levy all councils for a promotional campaign. However, it added that this seems inefficient when the Commission could be used.

Previous recommendations to centralise local election administration

We note that the centralisation of local election administration has been well covered over the years. Since 2010, each of the Justice Committee’s reports on the inquiry into local elections has recommended that successive Governments consider centralising the provision of local elections within a central agency. The Electoral Commission is often the proposed agency due to its recognised expertise in running and promoting elections.

The previous Justice Committee, in its report on the *Inquiry into the 2022 Local Elections*, recommended that the Government consider the merits of making the Electoral Commission responsible for administering local elections.⁸ It also recommended that, as a minimum, the Government should make the Commission responsible for oversight of local elections, including regulating election service providers and managing the procedures for complaints. The Government’s response agreed to consider making the Commission responsible for administering local elections in the future, as work programme priorities allow.

⁸ A copy of the report is available on the [Parliament website](#).

In our November 2024 report on the *Inquiry into the 2023 General Election*, we recommended to the Government that it consider whether the Electoral Commission should be funded to run local elections.⁹ In its response in April 2025, the Government noted that this was 1 of 36 recommendations that would require policy consideration and significant legislative changes over a longer period to implement.¹⁰ The Government said it intends to consider the implications and complexity of the recommendations and may progress them as part of a future electoral work programme, as other priorities allow.

In July 2025, the LGNZ Electoral Reform Working Group published its report that investigated why people are disengaging from local government and what can be done about it.¹¹ The group was established by the National Council of LGNZ to lead efforts to strengthen local government's democratic mandate, with a focus on increasing participation in local elections. The report made 20 recommendations, including that the Government amend the Electoral Act and Local Electoral Act to put the Electoral Commission in charge of administering and promoting local elections.

The Minister of Local Government received advice during 2025 about reforming the local electoral system. Topics included booth voting, the Electoral Commission as a central administrator, and other administrative options. In March 2026, the Minister of Local Government wrote to the chair of the LGNZ Electoral Reform Working Group. In the letter, the Minister agreed that work is needed improve the local electoral system. He also agreed that the Electoral Commission is the obvious candidate for any future centralisation of local election administration. However, the Minister had decided not to progress immediate work on centralising local elections, including at a regional level. This was because significant reform of local government is under way. The Minister concluded that the reform of the local electoral system remains under consideration by officials as priorities allow.

Options to centralise the administration of elections

We recognise that shifting responsibility for local elections to the Electoral Commission would be a considerable undertaking. The scale of local elections across the country is significantly larger than parliamentary elections. For example, parliamentary elections involve contests for 72 electorate seats compared to contests for over 1,700 positions for local elections. Also, before a general election, the Commission recruits many temporary staff. In 2023, it recruited people in more than 24,000 temporary roles.

Accordingly, we explored three ways that local elections could be run that do not involve the status quo or the Electoral Commission taking full responsibility. The options are: negotiating a single, nationwide contract, creating a new entity, and giving the Commission responsibility for promoting elections. We considered these options with the principles of the Local Electoral Act in mind. The principles that the Act is designed to implement are:

- representative and substantial electoral participation in local elections and polls
- fair and effective representation for individuals and communities

⁹ A copy of the report is available on the [Parliament website](#).

¹⁰ A copy of the Government's response is available on the [Parliament website](#).

¹¹ A copy of the report *Refreshing our Grassroots Democracy: Final positions and recommendations* is available on the [LGNZ website](#).

- all qualified persons have a reasonable and equal opportunity to:
 - cast an informed vote
 - nominate 1 or more candidates
 - accept nomination as a candidate
- public confidence in, and public understanding of, local electoral processes through the provision of:
 - a regular electoral cycle
 - elections that are managed independently from the elected body
 - protection of the freedom of choice of voters and the secrecy of the vote
 - transparent electoral systems and voting methods and the adoption of procedures that produce certainty in electoral outcomes
 - impartial mechanisms for resolving disputed elections and polls.

Negotiating a single nationwide contract

Under this option, the Secretary of Local Government would negotiate a collective election services contract on behalf of all local authorities. One provider would be responsible for providing all elections. This option would shift responsibility for delivering key democratic processes from local government to central government, mediated through the private sector. Control over the provision of local elections would only be exercised through the contract terms.

Creating a new entity

This option involves creating a new entity that would be responsible for the centralised administration of local elections. The entity could contract services from one or more private sector providers. Possible structures for the new entity include a form of Crown agent or a statutory entity with a joint ownership structure shared between local councils (collective majority ownership) and the Crown (minority ownership). Under a joint ownership model, local government would continue to have a role in providing and paying for their own elections. This potential ownership structure is similar to the Local Government Funding Agency. That agency provides more efficient financing costs and diversified financing sources for local authorities and council-controlled organisations.

Giving the Electoral Commission responsibility for promoting local elections

Under this option, responsibility for delivering local electoral processes would remain with councils. However, the Electoral Commission would be responsible for promoting local elections. At present, the Commission is responsible for enrolling people to vote, and councils are responsible for promoting their own elections. Having the Electoral Commission promote local elections could provide national consistency and make use of its existing branding.

Our view on centralising the administration of local elections

We acknowledge the Minister of Local Government's 2026 response to the LGNZ Electoral Reform Working Group (see previous page). We note, however, that local government supports centralisation of local elections. We also continue to endorse the recommendation in our report on the inquiry into the 2023 General Election that the Electoral Commission be funded to run local elections.

We were interested to hear about other options to centralise all or part of local election processes. However, we do not consider that it is necessary to create a new entity responsible for administering elections. We also note that some submitters expressed concerns about the role of private election service providers and the limited oversight of them. We therefore do not consider that simply reducing the number of private providers would address the concerns raised by submitters.

We recognise that if our recommendation to have the Electoral Commission run local elections is accepted, it would take some time to implement. It would also be unlikely to be in place before the 2028 local elections. Consequently, as an interim measure, we recommend that the Government consider whether the Electoral Commission be given responsibility for promoting local elections. We note that the Commission is already involved in local elections through the enrolment update campaign and its orange branding is well recognised. We consider that this approach would ensure that promotional spending and messages about local elections are nationally consistent.

Recommendations

We recommend to the Government that it:

3. reach a decision on whether the Electoral Commission should run local elections
4. consider whether the Electoral Commission should be given responsibility for promoting local elections.

Issues that arose at the last election

Reports of people being removed from or switched between electoral rolls

We were concerned by reports of people being removed from the electoral roll or being switched between the Māori and general electoral rolls. We were interested to hear submitters' experiences of this. Most who submitted on the matter expressed concern about the reports and considered that it should be further investigated.

LGNZ told us it was concerned about people being moved to the dormant roll with no clear reason why. Councils reported mixed experiences of the issue. Kāpiti District Council reported numerous cases where people could not be found on the electoral roll or were on the dormant roll, particularly among Māori electors. Waikato District Council also witnessed a notable number of voters who believed they had been removed from the roll. Whanganui District Council received reports of people being removed from the roll. However, it acknowledged that maintaining accurate roll information is a voter's responsibility.

Submitters emphasised that an accurate roll is the foundation of voter confidence. They also noted that the issue caused a sense of frustration and disenfranchisement, and some voters lost the meaningful opportunity to vote. Other concerns raised about inaccurate roll information were that it undermines confidence in elections, contributes to an increase in special votes, and disproportionately affects certain groups. Those groups are renters, young people, Māori voters, and people who move more frequently. One submitter was concerned that enrolment issues may have affected people's ability to vote in the referendum on Māori wards.

Auckland Council had no significant reports of people being removed from electoral rolls, while Dunedin City Council stated that it is a recurring problem. However, when it investigated, it found that the removal was often triggered by a change in address, and a special vote was issued. Christchurch City Council, Central Hawke's Bay District Council, and Porirua City Council were all aware of issues but were unable to comment on the extent or the cause.

In LGNZ's view, the Electoral Commission should be required to provide more information to residents about the importance of updating their enrolment details. The Commission should also provide information on what is likely to occur if residents fail to update their details by the required deadline. Submitters suggested that more education is needed about the enrolment process and relevant deadlines, and that the Commission should strengthen its nationwide enrolment campaign. The campaign should provide more information to residents about updating their enrolment details, including providing clarity about switching between the Māori and general rolls. Submitters also considered that improved data matching and more transparency about roll changes are needed. Several local boards requested that more should be done to update electoral roll details when people cast special votes.

Response from the Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission provided a written submission that addressed concerns about people being removed from rolls or switched between them. It told us it does not remove people from the main roll for no reason. The Commission also does not switch people between the Māori roll and general rolls without people making the choice for themselves.

The Electoral Commission's responsibilities under the Electoral Act

The Electoral Commission is responsible for registering electors and maintaining the electoral rolls in accordance with Part 5 of the Electoral Act. The Act provides that eligible electors must enrol and are responsible for keeping their enrolment details up to date. The Commission's role in local elections is to support enrolment by administering an enrolment update campaign and giving councils up-to-date electoral information. The Act requires the Commission to write to all registered electors before a general election and the triennial local elections so electors can check that their details are up to date.

The Electoral Act sets out the dormant roll process, which acts as a "safety net". Electors are moved to the dormant roll when the Commission has been unable to contact them at their registered address. An elector's roll type (Māori or general) is unchanged when they are moved to the dormant roll. Anyone on the dormant roll who updates their details is returned to the main roll. If an elector on the dormant roll does not re-enrol within three years, the Act states that they must be removed from the dormant roll and they are ineligible to vote until they re-enrol.

The Commission noted that the number of people on the dormant rolls has been declining. This is because it uses alternative methods like texting to remind electors to update their details. At the October 2025 local elections, 116,990 electors were on the dormant roll compared with 192,566 at the October 2016 local elections.

The enrolment campaign

As previously noted, voting for the 2025 local elections closed on Saturday 11 October. Voting documents had been mailed to voters who were correctly enrolled by the close of business on Friday 1 August 2025. People who were not correctly enrolled by that time could still enrol but needed to contact their council's electoral officer to arrange a special vote. The last day to enrol to vote was Friday 10 October, the day before voting closed.

The Commission explained that it received many returned envelopes from NZ Post marked "gone no address" (GNA) during the enrolment campaign. In this situation, because the Commission does not always know an elector's current address, it is unable to inform them that they have been moved to the dormant roll. However, where the Commission had an elector's mobile number or email address, it contacted the elector to encourage them to update their details to avoid being put on the dormant roll.

The Commission provided a comparison between the number of GNAs and the number of electors placed on the dormant roll. In 2022, 133,022 GNAs were received and 67,949 electors were placed on the dormant roll. This compares with respective figures of 111,487 and 60,742 in 2025.

Concerns raised during the local election period

According to the Commission, concerns began circulating on social media in July 2025 that it was wrongfully removing electors from the electoral rolls. It told us that none of the enrolment processes that it previously followed had changed. The Commission was merely following the legislative process for the Māori electoral option and the enrolment update campaign conducted prior to local elections. Section 78B of the Electoral Act provides that that an elector may not exercise the Māori option (switch between the Māori and general electoral rolls) during a local government election period. That period is defined as 3 months before polling day for an election held under section 10(2) of the Local Electoral Act.

The Commission explained that the voting period for the Tāmaki Makaurau parliamentary by-election overlapped with the local elections.¹² The differences in the election rules between parliamentary and local elections caused confusion. For example, section 78C of the Electoral Act provides that the Māori option may not be exercised in a parliamentary by-election period. The deadline for Māori electors to change roll types in the Tāmaki Makaurau electorate was midnight on 8 July. This differed from the deadline for roll changes for the local elections, which was midnight on 10 July.

The Commission told us it received reports that people were unable to find their enrolment details on the *vote.nz* website (an Electoral Commission website). It acknowledged the frustration that people would have experienced when they could not find their record online. The Commission noted that the main reasons that people could not find their enrolment details were because they:

- were not enrolled
- were on the dormant roll
- were on the unpublished roll¹³
- had submitted an enrolment application that was still being processed.

The Commission pointed out that searches on the website must exactly match the information contained in the elector's record that the Commission has on file. This requirement is to maintain privacy. The website also has limits on the number and duration of searches that people can undertake.

The Commission's work to address electors' concerns

During the local election period, the Commission issued media releases and added tips on its website and social media to help people who had trouble finding their enrolment record. It also had a freephone number that people could call to ask for help.

Some helpful changes were made in the Electoral Amendment Act 2025, which received Royal assent in December 2025. The Act includes amendments that will allow the Electoral Commission to contact electors digitally rather than by post. The changes will also enable the Commission to use government data to update address information on electoral rolls.

¹² The voting period for the by-election closed on 6 September 2025.

¹³ The unpublished roll is used to protect electors whose personal circumstances are such that publication on an electoral roll may compromise their personal safety.

The Commission told us it is also committed to considering how it can improve electors' experience on the *vote.nz* website.

We acknowledge the Electoral Commission's comments that it does not remove people from the main roll for no reason and does not switch people between the Māori and general rolls without their consent. We also recognise that the Tāmaki Makaurau parliamentary by-election created additional confusion for voters. We were pleased to hear that some of submitters' concerns may be addressed by the changes to the Electoral Act that will enable automatic enrolment updates. However, we consider that submitters have highlighted that more needs to be done to ensure that electors understand their enrolment obligations under the Act and the dormant roll process.

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that it:

5. encourage the Electoral Commission to consider how it could improve the information provided in the enrolment update campaign.

Candidate information booklets

Section 61 of the Local Electoral Act enables a candidate to provide the electoral officer with a 150-word candidate profile statement. The statement must be confined to information about the candidate and their policies and intentions if elected to office.

Central Hawke's Bay Council and Manawatū District Council submitted that the profiles are not long enough. Taituarā noted that not knowing enough about candidates or their policies is one of the most common reasons potential electors give for not voting. We heard that the way people use their 150-word limit is inconsistent, and the profiles vary between policy and personal information.

Waikato District Council recognised the importance of candidate booklets but considered that there is room to improve the quality and clarity of candidate information. This would ensure that communities are better informed about the people, policies, and positions they are voting for.

Request for better information about candidates

We heard that LGNZ's research identified that the information available to voters about candidates is very poor. It referred to recommendations from the LGNZ Electoral Reform Working Group's report that would have the Commission providing basic information about candidates that is easily accessible on the internet. One specific recommendation is that the Local Electoral Act should require councils, or the Electoral Commission if it becomes administrator of local elections, to provide and maintain a website. The website could be provided directly or by contracting a third party. As part of the nomination process, each candidate would provide the following information for the website:

- A 150-word biography and current photograph.
- Answers to four standard questions about policy views and priorities (with a 600-word limit across all answers). These questions would be set by a neutral body, such as the Electoral Commission, or in primary legislation.

- Links to candidate websites.

For elections before the website is introduced, LGNZ requests that council electoral officers be encouraged to provide information supplied by candidates to neutral third-party websites. The purpose would be to improve understanding of candidates. LGNZ also requests that the Local Electoral Act retain the provision for a printed booklet with a 150-word candidate statement. However, this should be reviewed after two elections following the introduction of the website.

Missing candidate profile statements

At the 2025 local elections, candidate profile statements for Māori ward candidates for three councils were omitted from the candidate profile books. The councils were Whanganui District Council, South Wairarapa District Council, and Ōpōtiki District Council.

Kaipātiki Local Board expressed concern about the errors, and Whanganui District Council said the omission was a serious administrative failure. Te Pāti Māori suggested that all voters were denied complete information that would enable them to cast an informed vote on the Māori ward referendums. An individual submitter suggested that the omission created inequality, particularly when voting on whether to keep Māori wards. Two submitters maintained that the error highlighted weaknesses with the current model of outsourcing the provision of elections. The error reinforced one submitter's view that the Electoral Commission should be responsible for administering local elections.

We were concerned to hear about candidates being excluded from candidate information booklets. We requested more information about how the situation in the Whanganui district was addressed. We were told that electoral officers took swift action to resolve the issue when the errors were identified. The actions included:

- contacting affected candidates to inform them of the issue and apologise
- issuing media statements apologising for the error
- providing letters to affected voters, which included the missing candidate profile statements
- checking across other serviced councils for other instances of the same issue.

All eligible voters for the affected Māori wards received the candidate profile statements. Sending the missing information to all electors in the Whanganui district would have cost an additional \$70,000. A decision was therefore made to only send the missing information to those eligible to vote in the Māori ward.

Comments from the election service providers

Electionz.com was contracted by Whanganui District Council and South Wairarapa District Council to provide election services, and Ōpōtiki District Council contracted Election Services. We asked both providers why three contested candidates' information was omitted from the candidate information booklets.

Electionz.com explained that compiling council voting documents is a complex task. To create voting papers and profile booklets, all councils use an online application tool provided by NZ Post, called Votext. The electoral officer works with staff from the council and the

election service provider to undertake the checking and signoff process for the production work. The process is a manual one.

Electionz.com attributed the Whanganui and South Wairarapa omissions to human error. For many councils, Māori wards were a new addition and setting them up was done manually in Votext. Although the Māori ward candidates were entered into Votext and added to the voting papers correctly, they were not added to the candidate information booklets. Electionz.com acknowledged that this highlighted a gap in the cross-checking process that it had not previously identified.

Electionz.com told us it is working with NZ Post to correct the issue in time for the 2028 local elections. They are modifying Votext to automatically cross reference voting papers and candidate information booklets to confirm all candidates are in both documents.

Human error was also the reason given by Election Services for omitting the profiles of three Ōpōtiki Māori ward candidates from the candidate information booklets. Election Services told us the error was exacerbated by the limitation in the Votext software. In its view, the incident demonstrated the need for automated cross-checks between voting documents and candidate booklets. This would allow any discrepancies to be flagged before publication. Election Services said that the issue is being addressed for 2028.

Candidate profile statements when elected unopposed

Under the Local Electoral Act, there is no requirement to include candidates' information in the candidate information booklet if they are elected unopposed. The Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Act 2024 reinstated the ability for councils to hold binding polls about whether to establish Māori wards and Māori constituencies. In 2025, Māori ward polls were held at 45 councils. We understand from media reports that some unopposed candidates would have liked to use their candidate profile statements to express their views on the Māori wards poll. For some candidates, the results of the poll could have had implications for their future role.

Manawatū District Council was the only submitter to comment on whether unopposed candidates should be included in information booklets. It suggested that we consider:

- whether current practices support transparency and consistency for voters
- the extent to which voters expect to receive information about individuals running for election
- any effect on voter understanding and confidence.

Manawatū District Council considered that including uncontested candidates in profile booklets would improve transparency. It would do so by ensuring that voters have access to information about all elected representatives.

Since candidate profile booklets were introduced in 2001, unopposed candidates have not been included because they are elected without a vote. We asked whether the election service providers support including information about unopposed candidates in the information booklets. Election Services told us it had no firm view, other than that including the information might confuse electors, who may expect to be able to vote for a candidate if their name is in the booklet. Election Services pointed out that councils already publish

information about candidates elected unopposed on their websites. Including their details would increase the cost of candidate information booklets, and possibly postage, without clear benefit. Electionz.com observed that the purpose of profile booklets is to inform electors about candidates for whom they can vote. Electionz.com suggested that council websites could publish the profile statements of unopposed candidates, which is the current practice of many councils.

Our view about candidate information

We sought advice on whether unopposed candidates should be included in the candidate information booklets. We note that future polls could be held that are similar to the Māori wards question. Candidates who are elected unopposed may wish to share their views on that poll as part of their candidate profile statement. We acknowledge that including profile statements for unopposed candidates could be confusing because their name would not be an option on the voting paper. We consider that this could be mitigated by:

- headings on the page explaining that a candidate has already been elected unopposed
- a watermark through the profile that states “elected”
- putting profiles for candidates who are elected unopposed at the back of the booklet, upside down.

We acknowledge that printing additional candidate statements would increase the costs, which ratepayers may not consider justified given that the candidate is being elected unopposed. We also acknowledge that one private election service provider does not support including unopposed candidates. However, we think that there are benefits to including information in the booklet about candidates who have been elected unopposed. They include prompting voters to think about the potential composition of the full council when they vote for remaining positions, and inspiring candidates to stand in the next election. We therefore recommend amending the Local Electoral Act to require candidate information booklets to include information about candidates who are elected unopposed.

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that it:

6. consider amending the Local Electoral Act to require candidate information booklets to include information about candidates who are elected unopposed.

Elections for Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board

Elections for Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board were held during the 2025 local elections. A total of 35,253 electors cast their vote and the top four candidates for the Papatoetoe subdivision secured board positions. Those positions were all won by candidates from a newly formed Papatoetoe-Ōtara Action Team. None of the incumbents were re-elected. In this section, we discuss a petition for a District Court inquiry into the election and a judicial review of the District Court decision. As the matter relates to postal voting, we set out our views in this report’s section on postal voting.

Manukau District Court decision

On 7 November 2025, the fifth-placed candidate, Lehopoame Vi Hausia, filed a petition of inquiry into the conduct of candidates in the election of local board members for the Papatoetoe subdivision.¹⁴ Section 93 of the Local Electoral Act provides that any candidate or any 10 electors with a complaint about the conduct of an election or poll may file a petition in the District Court.

The petitioner alleged that the election had irregularities that materially affected the result. He requested that the election be declared void so a new one could be held. The specific grounds on which the complaint was based were:

- statistical and turnout anomalies inconsistent with historic and current voting patterns in Papatoetoe
- the non-delivery, misuse, misallocation, or unauthorised possession of ballot papers
- irregularities in the handling and verification of special and duplicate votes, and an unprecedented surge in special voting
- discrepancies and inaccuracies in the list of people from whom voting documents were received
- unlawful campaign activities and interference with the voting process
- systemic weaknesses in the administration of the postal-voting system compromising election integrity.

The petitioner noted that voter turnout in the Papatoetoe subdivision increased by 7.5 percent compared to the 2022 local elections, equating to 3,239 additional votes. He described this as an unusual increase and considered that the election's voting patterns were irregular. The petitioner observed that the increase diverged significantly from the downward trend in turnout across other Auckland local boards, including neighbouring boards with historically similar turnout patterns.

The respondent told the court he received 16 complaints relating to the Papatoetoe subdivision between 8 October 2025 and 5 November 2025. The complaints, which were referred to the Police to investigate, were about:

- non-receipt of voting documents where the complainant was recorded as having already voted and they also cast a special vote (7 complaints)
- non-receipt of voting documents where the complainant was reported as having already voted and they did not cast a special vote (4)
- non-receipt of voting documents where the complainant was recorded as having already voted and they made a declaration regarding the non-receipt (3)
- non-receipt of voting documents (1)
- voter interference at the Sikh Temple in Papatoetoe and organised theft of voting documents by young people in Papatoetoe (1).

Judge R J McIlraith decided that the petitioner had established that irregularities occurred in the election and that those irregularities materially affected the result. In reaching this

¹⁴ *Hausia v Ofsoske* [2025] NZDC 29372. The respondent in the inquiry was Dale Ofsoske, the Electoral Officer for Auckland Council and the Managing Director of Independent Election Services Limited.

decision, the Judge inferred that the result of the election would have been different if fraudulent voting had not occurred. He made this inference based on seven proven facts:

- The irregularity in the election (the casting of fraudulent votes) is proven at a level of 79 votes, some of which were cured by special votes. This irregularity is unprecedented.
- There is additional evidence of voters not receiving voting papers in circumstances where they did not take steps to cast a special vote.
- The Electoral Officer has referred 16 complaints to the Police for investigation.
- All candidates other than those who were successful in the election have expressed the same concerns about it.
- The large increase in voter turnout was contrary to the trend in Auckland city.
- In a spatial map, correlation is shown between the location of greater turnout and the location of electors making special votes, or not receiving voting papers and who did not vote yet were recorded as having voted.

The Judge noted that there was no suggestion that the respondent or others carrying out the electoral officer duties and powers under the Act had not done their job well and in accordance with all requirements. Rather, the assertion was that an unknown person or persons had acted wrongly such that irregularities occurred. The Judge also pointed out that the irregularities highlighted a significant fragility in the voting system.

The Judge concluded that the petitioner had established that irregularities occurred in the election and decided that those irregularities materially affected the result. He declared as void the election of local board members for the Papatoetoe subdivision of Ōtara-Papatoetoe. A new election would therefore have to be held.

New elections were held between 9 March and 9 April 2026. In its written submission, Auckland Council noted that the cost of rerunning the election was estimated at \$200,000.

High Court decision

Following the District Court decision, the four highest-polling candidates, Kunal Bhalla, Sandeep Saini, Kushmangaran Nair, and Paramjeet Singh, sought a judicial review of the District Court decision.¹⁵ The review was sought because of four alleged failures by the Judge. They were:

- failure to apply the correct standard of proof of “beyond reasonable doubt”
- failure to apply the criteria as to what a petitioner must prove to the requisite standard
- misconstruction of the petition jurisdiction by relying on broader claims by the petitioner than are available in an inquiry sought other than by the Electoral Officer
- failure to comply with obligations of procedural fairness.

Alternatively, the applicants sought declarations to this effect under the Declaratory Judgments Act 1908.

In her judgment, Judge J Anderson declined the orders sought by the applicants. She noted that the following were factors that the District Court decision was not about:

¹⁵ *Bhalla v District Court* [2026] NZHC 472.

Some social media comments portrayed the Decision as demonstrating “immigrant corruption” and as concluding that the “Indian candidates masterminded fraudulent votes.”

This is a misleading and improper report of the Decision. Mr Hausia does not allege – nor did the Judge find – that the applicants had any involvement in the misuse of voting papers identified in the Decision. The applicants have strongly condemned that conduct, whether it arose through a misguided attempt to assist them or through other mischief. Police enquiries are continuing into the electoral fraud.

The applicants’ conduct is not impugned at all by the Decision. Nor is there any comment on the identity of those who may be associated with the misuse of voting papers. The Decision emphasises that this is by persons unknown.

Manurewa Local Board election

We note that, in August 2026, it was reported that allegations of vote rigging for the Manurewa Local Board election were made to Auckland Council and the Serious Fraud Office. Both organisations were approached by a whistleblower who had provided photographs that purport to show bundles of stolen voting papers. The papers were allegedly stolen from letterboxes at night, returned to a Manurewa office, opened, completed, resealed, and returned to Election Services. We understand that Auckland Council has received a formal complaint and has informed the Police.

Confusion about electoral systems

As noted earlier in our report, councils have been able to choose between the First Past the Post and Single Transferable Vote electoral systems since 2004. Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) and the Green Party Local Government Caucus commented on the confusion caused in regions that have different electoral systems for elections for territorial authorities and regional councils.

For electoral purposes, GWRC consists of seven constituencies (six general and one Māori). Of those, three cover areas where the related territorial authorities conduct their elections under STV and three cover areas where elections are conducted under FPP. Te Upoko o te Ika a Māui Māori Constituency covers the whole Wellington region so elections are conducted under both systems. Elections to GWRC use STV in all constituencies.

To reduce voter confusion and enable effective elector participation, GWRC suggested that a single electoral system for local elections be introduced. This view was based on analysis that showed a higher number of invalid recorded votes when the electoral system differs for regional councils and territorial authorities. According to GWRC, the problem appears to be that electors mistakenly apply the rules of one system to the other. One example is ticking multiple candidates for STV rather than giving them a numerical ranking.

The Green Party Local Government Caucus expressed similar concerns. It noted that Otago Regional Council and Dunedin City Council use STV while the other councils in the region use FPP. Consequently, some voters had two electoral systems to contend with in the same set of voting papers. The caucus said that robust data across numerous triennial elections

shows that more invalid votes are cast when electors must apply different electoral systems. It considers that having different electoral systems creates additional barriers for people and requests that the Local Electoral Act be amended to provide for one system.

We recognise that decisions about electoral systems are a matter for each council to decide. However, we also acknowledge submitters' concerns about confusion for voters when regional councils and territorial authorities have different electoral systems. Some of us consider that STV should be used for all local council elections.

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that it:

7. encourage local government to explore to what extent regional councils and territorial authorities within an area should try to ensure that the electoral systems for elections are the same.
-

Voting methods

Voting method for elections and polls

The Local Electoral Act provides that a local authority election or poll must be conducted using 1 or more voting methods adopted by a local authority resolution. Section 5 of the Act defines “voting method” as any of the following methods of voting that are prescribed for use at an election or poll:

- the method of voting commonly known as booth voting
- the method of voting commonly known as postal voting
- any form of electronic voting
- any method of voting involving a combination of a choice between more than 1 of the methods of voting referred to in the above paragraphs
- any other method of voting however described.¹⁶

In his March 2026 letter to the chair of the LGNZ Electoral Reform Working Group, the Minister of Local Government agreed that core components of the local electoral system, like postal voting, are dated. They are also out of step with how New Zealanders interact with government, democracy, and daily life. However, the Minister had decided not to proceed with work around a national pilot programme for booth voting. He pointed out that councils can choose booth voting as an option instead of postal voting.

Postal voting

All councils used postal voting as their voting method for the 2025 local elections. NZ Post has predominantly provided the postal voting service for the past 30 years. In 2025, Electionz.com chose to use DX Mail as its postal operator; only one council had used DX Mail to deliver voting papers in 2022. NZ Post acted as a secondary postal operator for any items that DX Mail could not deliver. This is provided for in the access operator requirements under the Postal Services Act 1998 and Deed of Understanding.

NZ Post noted that it and Datam (its mail house and customer communications business) created and assembled more than 3.5 million voting packs involving over 1,000 document versions and over 100 candidate profile book versions.

NZ Post explained that its submissions on previous inquiries identified one of its biggest challenges as meeting the statutory deadline to deliver voting packs. It was previously required to deliver voting packs within a 6-day window. In 2024, the Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Act extended the delivery period for voting papers from 6 days to 14 days. The voting period was extended

¹⁶ Voting methods need to be authorised via regulations and currently there are only regulations for booth and postal voting.

by 10 days to 32.5 days. NZ Post told us that these changes helped it meet its statutory obligations.

Increased use of DX Mail

In 2025, DX Mail delivered about 800,000 voting papers (around 22 percent of the total) for more than 40 councils. Christchurch City Council, Dunedin City Council, and Palmerston North City Council all used DX Mail in some form and reported no significant issues. Whanganui District Council had some issues with using DX Mail to empty voting bins, but this was resolved early in the election process. Submitters suggested that using DX Mail supplements inconsistent local systems and NZ Post's declining capacity, and will need to continue while postal voting remains.

Long-term sustainability of postal voting

NZ Post noted that mail volumes through its postal network have reduced substantially over the years. Over 20 years ago, it processed more than a billion letters compared with fewer than 160 million in 2025. NZ Post recognises that letter volumes will continue to fall, and that this challenge is not unique to New Zealand. It submitted that any government investigation into alternative voting methods should consider the role of postal services in implementing those methods.

Submitters who commented on voter turnout suggested that postal voting was one reason for the low turnout. They submitted that returning ballots or finding time to return special votes was difficult. This is particularly true given the reductions in the number of post boxes and days that NZ Post delivers mail. Submitters also raised concerns about the reliability of the postal system.

Some submitters suggested that postal voting is well past its use-by date, with one describing it as being on "life support". We heard from several candidates who submitted and shared their experiences of campaigning that supported this view. The Green Party Local Government Caucus submitted that, in North Dunedin, the majority of electors they had talked to, had not received their voting papers. The Green Party submitted that it was because they had moved and not updated their address or they were enrolled at their parents' address. A submitter recalled walking past many letterboxes that contained damaged and uncollected voting papers. They described these images as symbolising a voting system that is becoming increasingly disconnected from the realities of modern life.

Another submitter suggested that the conditions that made postal voting practical and trusted for many years are changing. People now move more frequently between rentals, family homes, and care settings. At the same time, the postal system is becoming less central to everyday life. Many New Zealanders, particularly younger people, do not use their letterboxes as much as previous generations, and an increasing number of people do not do any business by mail.

We heard from Auckland Council, which had voter turnout of only 29 percent. It attributed this to a range of factors, of which postal voting was one. Auckland Council referred to its post-election survey that asked people why they did not vote. Of the respondents who did not vote, about 38 percent said they filled out some or all of the voting form but did not return it.

Integrity and security of postal voting

Several submitters raised concerns about the integrity and security of postal voting. Their concerns included that votes cannot be guaranteed to be delivered, and that voting papers can be removed from letter boxes or completed on another person's behalf. LGNZ stated that there is now clear evidence that postal voting is not as secure as many have historically believed. It considers that trust in the postal voting system will decline as evidence of fraudulent behaviour associated with postal voting grows. Transparency International NZ described the court case as "unprecedented", dealing with matters that were much more serious than in any New Zealand case law.

Some submitters, including Auckland Council, suggested that postal voting be removed as a voting method. Other submitters proposed introducing more checks, including identity verification, when returning voting papers. Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board requested that election service providers be required to proactively respond to any statistical anomalies in voting trends. It and Puketāpapa Local Board also requested that Auckland Council work with NZ Post on an initiative to ensure that voters are actively informed when their voting packs are received.

Booth voting

A number of submitters recommended that a requirement for booth voting be introduced. Some submitters proposed this because of the issues with postal voting in the 2025 local elections. Many submitters referred to the model used for parliamentary elections and the ease with which people can vote. Auckland Council supported transitioning local elections to a booth-based voting model administered by the Electoral Commission. It said the model should be supported by advance voting and other accessible voting options to improve consistency, independence, and public confidence in the electoral system. Several local boards also supported this shift. LGNZ requested that all local elections in 2028 shift to a nationally consistent system of in-person voting, which should be as similar as possible to parliamentary elections.

Several submitters pointed out that the cost of booth voting is likely to be substantially higher than postal voting. Taituarā observed that the costs of in-person voting should not be underestimated. It noted that Auckland Council estimated in 2024 that in-person voting would cost \$19.95 million, which includes needing to hire 3,000 people to administer the election. Election Services also referred to the significant cost increase and suggested that a move to booth voting would likely result in reduced voter turnout. We understand that, since 2024, Auckland Council has carried out more work on costs for booth voting. It now estimates that booth voting would cost between \$25.1 million and \$39.7 million for a 10 or 20-day election period.

Taituarā highlighted other matters that would need to be considered because of the differences between local and parliamentary elections. They include having more voting choices in local elections, party politics not being as prevalent, and candidate numbers varying considerably.

Our view about postal voting and booth voting

We acknowledge the constant theme from submitters that postal voting is failing and has reached the end of its life for local elections. We also note that the Minister of Local Government has acknowledged that postal voting is dated. We heard multiple reports from submitters about their experiences of seeing uncollected voting papers languishing in mailboxes. We consider that postal voting no longer reflects the way that people are living their lives and interacting with services. We were also concerned to hear about cases of fraudulent voting and concerns about the integrity and security of postal voting. We consider that these factors, along with reductions in postal volumes and available services, mean that postal voting is no longer fit for purpose.

We note that the Local Electoral Act already enables booth voting. However, we consider that there is merit in exploring whether to amend the legislation to require local elections to be conducted using booth voting. We acknowledge that some matters would need to be worked through, including the increased cost and the additional workforce that would be needed. We understand that several councils, including Auckland Council, are exploring using booth voting for the 2028 local elections.¹⁷ In our view, this provides an opportunity for those councils to test what would be needed to transition to booth-only voting for the 2031 local elections.

In the meantime, we think that consideration should be given to whether any improvements could be made to the integrity and security of postal voting processes.

Recommendations

We recommend to the Government that it:

8. consider working with local authorities that intend to use booth voting at the 2028 local elections to identify what would be needed to transition to booth-only voting
9. consider asking local government to work with NZ Post on any initiatives that could inform voters when their voting packs are received
10. encourage local government to consider asking election service providers to proactively respond to any statistical anomalies in voting trends.

If Auckland Council proceeds on 1 September to undertake booth voting at the next local body elections, we encourage local authorities to look at this as a pilot to potentially undertake booth voting in their regions.

¹⁷ Auckland Council is expected to make a decision on booth voting on 1 September 2026.

Special votes

About special votes

A person who is eligible to cast a vote but cannot access their voting paper may qualify for a special vote. Special votes may be used in cases where the voting pack is not received or is lost or damaged, the voter does not enrol in time for the election, or they are travelling during the voting period. Special votes can also help people with disabilities receive assistance when filling in their voting papers.

Election Services noted that a special vote must meet several criteria to be valid. It must be received before voting closes and the special declaration form must be completed, signed, dated, and witnessed. The special voter must also be enrolled on the relevant electoral or ratepayer roll. Reasons that a special vote may be disallowed include the following:

- The declaration form is not included or not in order (for example, it is not signed or witnessed correctly).
- The voter has already voted.
- The voter is not enrolled or is not enrolled correctly.

Increase in the number of special votes

Some councils reported an increase in the number of special votes in the 2025 local elections. For example, Central Hawke's Bay District Council issued 190 special votes in 2025 compared with 20 in 2022, and Kāpiti Coast District Council issued twice as many in 2025. Electionz.com, which provided services to 44 territorial councils, 8 regional councils, and 12 other organisations, reported a 77 percent increase in issued special votes compared with 2022.

Disallowed special votes

We note that there were media reports of large numbers of disallowed special votes, particularly on the last day of voting, and for Kaipara District Council.

We asked whether the election service providers had any information about the number of people who attempted to cast a special vote on the last morning of voting. Electionz.com noted that, on that morning, 3,445 special votes were issued across the 55 councils it supports and 3,212 were returned. Of those returned special votes, a total of 2,562 were allowed and 650 were disallowed. Of the disallowed special votes, 592 were because the voter was not on the electoral roll.

The table below shows the number of special votes for Kaipara District Council.

Special Vote category	Number	Percent
On roll special votes – allowed	120	24.7
Not on roll – allowed	78	16.0
Not on roll – disallowed (decision of Electoral Commission)	197	40.5
Declaration not in order – disallowed	82	16.9
Already voted – disallowed	9	1.9
Total	486	100

We were told that about 40 percent of special votes were submitted by voters who were not enrolled or were not enrolled correctly. A further 16.9 percent of voters had not completed the declaration properly, so their votes were disallowed.

We also invited submitters to provide feedback on their experiences. Submitters expressed concern about the number of disallowed votes, particularly in tight races. Their concerns related to the potential for voters to lose trust in democratic processes and the fact that no central agency reviews trends or details of disallowed special votes. A submitter suggested that the high number of special votes indicated systemic issues rather than voter error.

The Department of Internal Affairs advised us that local election statistics indicated that 70 percent of issued special votes were allowed. The following councils provided the total percentage of special votes that were disallowed in their areas:

- Auckland Council: 37 percent.
- Central Hawke’s Bay District Council: 30 percent
- Christchurch City Council: 18 percent
- Dunedin City Council: 14 percent
- Wellington City Council: 17 percent.

Auckland Council observed that 49 percent of the disallowed special votes were because the declaration was not in order. The main reason for this was that the “occupation” field was not completed. Electionz.com told us about the two most common reasons for special votes being disallowed. Two-thirds were because the applicants had not updated their enrolment details with the Electoral Commission to match the address used on the special vote declaration. The second most common reason was that the special voter did not return the declaration form with their special vote. Election Services submitted that the common reasons for disallowance were incomplete or improperly witnessed declarations, duplicate voting, and incorrect or absent enrolment details.

Removing the “occupation” requirement from the special vote declaration

Several submitters suggested that the “occupation” requirement be removed from the special vote declaration form. This was because of the large number of special votes that were disallowed because an occupation was not included.

We discussed disallowed special votes with Election Services. It told us it must follow strict legislative requirements as an electoral officer. These requirements mean that many special votes are invalidated because of a technicality. A declaration must accompany a special vote so it must be signed and dated and witnessed. Election Services said that one of the biggest issues at the 2025 local elections related to the “occupation” field. It pointed out that the Electoral Commission has removed “occupation” from its special vote declaration for parliamentary elections, and requested that the requirement for local elections also be removed.

We note that the Electoral Amendment Act 2025 removed the requirement for a person’s occupation to be collected as part of enrolment information. As a result of this amendment, the local electoral system no longer aligns with the general election regulations. We support submitters’ requests to remove this requirement.

Submitters’ suggestions to improve the special vote process

Options proposed by submitters to improve the special vote process include:

- not disallowing special votes for administrative imperfections unless fraud is clearly established
- providing better training, which should include guidance in plain and different languages
- simplifying the information required for a special vote declaration
- improving public guidance about enrolment requirements
- improving roll accuracy and accessibility, including clearer communication about unpublished rolls and non-resident ratepayer entitlements
- introducing additional verification steps when a special vote is issued to reduce processing time and disallowed special votes
- amending the Local Electoral Act to require electoral officers to make reasonable efforts to inform residents whose special votes are classified as invalid that their votes did not count.

We were concerned to hear about the number of disallowed special votes across the country and acknowledge that these might have had implications for tight races. We note that many of the disallowed votes were because electors were not on the electoral roll or had not updated their details. We consider that this indicates that improvements are needed to the Electoral Commission’s enrolment update campaign. In our section about issues reported at the last elections, we recommended that the Government encourage the Commission to consider how it could improve the information provided in the enrolment update campaign.

We note that submitters provided some useful suggestions for improving the special vote process. We encourage the Government to take these into account when considering whether the special vote process could be simplified.

We note that some councils had progress results. This led to some premature conclusions around who had been elected. We consider that preliminary results should be released once all ordinary votes are counted by the statutory deadline, with a clear disclaimer that special votes remain to be included. The final results should be declared only after all ballot votes are counted and all required electoral processes are completed.

Recommendations

We recommend to the Government that it:

11. amend the Local Electoral Regulations to remove the requirement for “occupation” to be provided in a special vote declaration
 12. consider how it could simplify the special vote process, including whether all the information that is required at present is necessary
 13. consider only declaring two stages of the results, preliminary results and final official results.
-

Misinformation and disinformation

In New Zealand, the difference between misinformation and disinformation depends on the intent. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet defines them this way:

Misinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is shared accidentally without the intention of causing harm.

Disinformation is false or manipulated information that is deliberately created and knowingly spread to deceive, cause harm, or achieve broader political, financial, or ideological goals.

Councils told us about the role that disinformation and misinformation continue to play in local elections, with online forums contributing to an increase in reported cases. The dis/misinformation is targeted at both the election process in general and at particular candidates. Taituarā also submitted that dis/misinformation was most obvious in the material circulating about the polls for Māori wards. A specific example was the inaccurate message that Māori wards violate the principle of “one person, one vote”. However, Taituarā was unable to determine whether these claims swayed the result of a poll or any individual voter.

Some councils considered that they should play a better role in combatting dis/misinformation. However, they highlighted the tension between wanting to correct inaccurate information while needing to maintain neutrality. Some submitters also consider that communication across councils is inconsistent, which contributes to public confusion and increases the risk of dis/misinformation.

Submitters proposed various options to address dis/misinformation, including requests for better enforcement. Options to provide consistent messaging were: implementing a national communications campaign, instituting national standards, and developing a nationally coordinated election information portal. The portal would be led by central government and would serve as the single authoritative source of process-related information for all local elections. One council suggested that central government has a role to play in strengthening mainstream media capacity and capability. It considered that this would improve knowledge about the local government sector, which would help safeguard against dis/misinformation.

Conversely, several submitters cautioned against responding to dis/misinformation. They submitted that, in a free society, dis/misinformation should not be a concern, nor should it be policed because this can be arbitrary. Further, the state should not be both a participant in political debate and the referee of acceptable speech. A submitter suggested that any proposed regulation should be strictly limited, transparently defined, and independently reviewed.

We acknowledge submitters’ concerns about disinformation and misinformation and note that submitters had differing views about the extent to which councils should intervene.

Misinformation or disinformation that is amplified by foreign interference

We note the findings in the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) *Security Threat Environment 2026* report¹⁸ that foreign states have sought to influence local government and community organisations within New Zealand. We consider that local government plays a critical role in New Zealand's democratic system and that councils, candidates, elected members, and council staff should be supported to identify and respond to foreign interference, cyber security risks, and coordinated disinformation activity.

Recommendations

We recommend to the Government that it:

14. explore how it could work with councils and election service providers to effectively correct disinformation and misinformation in ways that maintain neutrality and are consistent across the country
15. work with the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, the National Cyber Security Centre, the Electoral Commission, and Local Government New Zealand to develop a tailored election security and foreign interference awareness programme for local authorities, including elected members, candidates and council staff.

¹⁸ A copy of the report is available on the [NZSIS website](#).

Appendix A

Committee procedure

We met between 11 December 2025 and 27 August 2026 to consider the inquiry. We called for public submissions with a closing date of 27 February 2026. We received submissions from the organisations and individuals listed in Appendix B and heard oral evidence from 13 submitters. We heard evidence by videoconference and in Wellington.

We received advice from the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport (formerly the Department of Internal Affairs).

Committee members

Tom Rutherford (Chairperson from 2 July 2026)
Hon Andrew Bayly (Chairperson and member until 1 July 2026)
Hon Ginny Andersen (until 25 March 2026)
Jamie Arbuckle
Carl Bates
Camilla Belich (from 25 March 2026)
Tākuta Ferris
Paulo Garcia (from 1 July 2026)
Rima Nakhle
Dan Rosewarne (from 25 March 2026)
Todd Stephenson
Vanushi Walters (until 25 March 2026)
Hon Dr Duncan Webb

Celia Wade-Brown also participated in this inquiry.

Related resources

The documents we received as advice and evidence for this inquiry are available on the [Parliament website](#), along with [recordings of our meetings held on 2 and 30 April 2026](#).

Appendix B

List of submitters

a ram	Kathryn Ennis-Carter
Aaron Livingston	Kay Jones
Auckland Council	Lance D. Lavery
Brendyn Ford	Local Government New Zealand
C V R Shastri	Manawanui Tuhoro
Central Hawke's Bay District Council	Manawatu District Council
Charlotte Melser	Mandy Harris
Christchurch City Council	Martine Abel-Williamson
Dallas Christy	Michael Avenell
Diana Bird	Moana Murray-McCaul
Disabled Persons Assembly	Moana-Lee Raihania
Dunedin City Council	New Zealand Electoral Commission
Election Services	Nick Smith
electionz.com	Noa Doyle
Eliza Subritzky	Northern Action Group Inc.
Graeme Mead	NZ Post
Greater Wellington Regional Council	NZCCSS
Green Party Local Government Caucus	Palmerston North City Council
It's in the Ballot Productions	Porirua City Council
Jaime McCafferty	Robert Davis
Jette de Jong	Rochelle Eynon
John Cruden	Rohini Gurung
John McDonald-Wharry	Taituarā - Local Government
Kapiti Coast District Council	Professionals Aotearoa
Kate Tioke	Tamati Warmington
Kathryn Avenell	Te Pati Māori

Toni Stanaway	Vanessa Pomare
Tony Dixon	Veleta Tawhai - Valletta
Transparency International New Zealand Inc	Waikato District Council
Tuatahi Nightingale-Pene	West Auckland Licensing Trusts Action Group
Ukes Baha	Whanganui District Council

Local boards

The following local boards also provided feedback as part of Auckland Council's submission:

Albert-Eden Local Board

Manurewa Local Board

Aotea/ Great Barrier Local Board

Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board

Ōrākei Local Board

Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board

Devonport-Takapuna Local Board

Papakura Local Board

Franklin Local Board

Puketāpapa Local Board

Rodney Local Board

Henderson-Massey Local Board

Upper Harbour Local Board

Hibiscus and Bays Local Board

Waiheke Local Board

Howick Local Board

Kaipātiki Local Board

Waitākere Ranges Local Board

Waitematā Local Board

Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board

Whau Local Board