



Local Government Commission

Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe

Determination
of representation arrangements to apply for the election
of the Hutt City Council
to be held on 11 October 2025

Introduction

1. All territorial authorities are required under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 to review their representation arrangements at least every six years. Under Section 19R of the Act, the Commission, in addition to consideration of the appeals and objections against a council's final representation proposal, is required to determine all the matters set out in sections 19H and 19J which relate to the representation arrangements for territorial authorities.
2. Having completed its considerations, the Commission's determination differs from the Hutt City Council's final representation proposal as set out below.

Commission's determination¹

3. In accordance with section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act), the Local Government Commission determines that for at least the triennial general election of the Hutt City Council to be held on 11 October 2025, the following representation arrangements will apply:
 - a. Lower Hutt City, as delineated on Plan LG-046-2025-W-1 will be divided into wards and will be represented by a Council comprising the mayor and 13 councillors, being 5 councillors elected by the electors of the district as a whole and 8 councillors elected as follows:

Ward	Councillors	Plan delineating area
Mana Kairangi ki Tai Māori Ward	1	LG-046-2025-W-2
Western General Ward	1	LG-046-2025-W-3
Northern General Ward	2	LG-046-2025-W-4
Central General Ward	2	LG-046-2025-W-5

¹ All plans referred to in this determination are deposited with the Local Government Commission

Harbour General Ward	1	LG-046-2025-W-6
Wainuiomata General Ward	1	LG-046-2025-W-7

b. There will be two communities with community boards as follows:

Community/ Community Board	Area	Members*	Appointed members
Eastbourne Community	Part of the Harbour General Ward as delineated on Plan LG-046-2025-Com-1	5	1, representing Harbour General Ward
Wainuiomata Community	The Wainuiomata General Ward	6	2 members, being 1 member representing the Wainuiomata General Ward and 1 member representing the Mana Kairangi ki Tai Māori Ward

*number of members elected by the electors of the community

4. The ratio of population to elected members for each ward will be as follows:

Wards	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Western General Ward	13,950	1	13,950	-514	-3.56
Northern General Ward	27,500	2	13,750	-714	-4.94
Central General Ward	27,500	2	13,750	-714	-4.94
Harbour General Ward	15,700	1	15,700	1,236	+8.54
Wainuiomata General Ward	16,600	1	16,600	2,136	+14.77
Total general wards	101,250	7	14,464		
Mana Kairangi ki Tai Maori Ward	12,700	1			
At large members		5			
Total	113,950	13			

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

5. The community boards will not be subdivided for electoral purposes. The population they each represent will be as follows:

Community board	Population*	Number of members^
Eastbourne Community Board	4,940	5
Wainuiomata Community Board	20,500	6

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

6. Under section 19V(6) of the Act, the Commission upholds the decision of the Council not to comply with section 19V(2) in respect of the Wainuiomata General Ward. Compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing the Wainuiomata community of interest, which is separated from the rest of the City by hills and has distinct demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, across ward boundaries.
7. As required by section 19T(1)(b) and 19W(c) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the boundaries of the above wards and communities coincide with the boundaries of current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for Parliamentary electoral purposes.

Background

8. Under sections 19H and 19J of the Act territorial authority representation reviews are to determine the number of councillors to be elected, the basis of election for councillors and, if this includes wards, the boundaries and names of those wards. Reviews also include whether there are to be community boards and, if so, arrangements for those boards. Representation arrangements are to be determined to provide fair and effective representation.
9. The Council last reviewed its representation arrangements prior to the 2019 local authority elections. Accordingly, it was required to undertake a review prior to the next elections in October 2025.
10. In November 2023 the Council resolved to establish Māori wards. On 6 September 2024 the Council voted to affirm its decision to establish Māori wards.

Current representation arrangements

11. The Commission last made a determination in relation to Hutt City Council's representation in 2019. The 2019 determination endorsed the Council's proposal to retain its three community boards and altered the proposed ward-based representation to a combination of wards and at-large representation. The Council's current representation arrangements have been in place since and comprise a mayor elected at large and 12 councillors. Six councillors are elected by the district as a whole and six are elected from six wards.
12. The Council's arrangements include three community boards as follows:
 - Petone Community Board (6 elected members, 1 appointed member)
 - Eastbourne Community Board (5 elected members, 1 appointed member)
 - Wainuiomata Community Board (6 elected members, 1 appointed member)

Current review

Preliminary consultation

13. The Council established an independent review panel (the panel) to undertake preliminary community engagement and recommend an initial representation proposal for the Council's consideration.
14. Between October 2023 and April 2024, the panel, supported by Council officers, undertook in-person engagements with a wide range of communities, groups and interests, mana whenua and mātāwaka, and conducted an online survey generating over 900 responses. The panel also considered an independent desktop analysis of communities of interest, and findings from the Council's Residents' Satisfaction Survey 2023 and the nationwide Quality of Life Survey 2022.
15. As a result of its engagement, the panel identified communities of interest at the sub-district level that often align to suburbs, and multiple city-wide communities.
16. Online survey results showed that 56% of respondents identify most strongly with the City as a whole, but this varied widely between wards. Residents of the Harbour and Wainuiomata Wards identified more strongly with their local community, at 79% and 70% respectively.
17. The panel noted that there was support for the concept of community boards across the City during its preliminary engagement, but a low understanding of what community boards actually do. The online survey showed 64% support for community boards either across the City or in the current three areas, as "a mechanism that could enhance local democracy". The panel's report questions the appropriateness of community boards in the current local government context, highlighting the following factors:
 - the inability of community boards to improve the Council's engagement with its city-wide communities of interest;
 - a perceived lack of equity in having community boards in some areas and not others;
 - the increased mobility and inter-connectedness of residents with other parts of the City since community boards were established in 1989.
18. Following its preliminary engagement, the panel recommended one option to the Council for its initial proposal. The option was for a mixed wards/district wide model of representation and the disestablishment of the three existing community boards.

The Council's initial proposal

19. On 27 June 2024 the Council resolved its initial representation proposal for a council comprising the mayor and 13 councillors; five councillors elected at large, one member elected from one Māori ward, and seven members elected from five general wards. The proposal abolished the Petone, Eastbourne, and Wainuiomata community boards.
20. The initial proposed ward arrangements were as set out at paragraph 4 above.

Submissions

21. The Council notified its initial representation proposal on 1 July 2024 and received 370 submissions that were within the scope of the representation review. With some variation, submissions were relatively evenly split between those who supported the main aspects of the Council's initial proposal, those who opposed, and those who were neutral/did not respond.
22. A majority of submissions (72%) opposed the Council's proposal for no community boards.
23. Key themes in the submissions were:
 - a. Mixed views on the proposed increase in councillor numbers, the number of councillors elected to each ward, and the mixed wards/at large system.
 - b. Opposition to the establishment of Māori wards.
 - c. The area south of Burdan's Gate to Pencarrow Lighthouse should be transferred from the Wainuiomata General Ward into the Harbour General Ward.
 - d. Korokoro should be transferred from the Harbour General Ward into the Western General Ward.
 - e. Opposition to the proposed disestablishment of the existing community boards and/or support for establishing community boards city-wide.
 - f. Support for establishing a community board aligned to the Harbour General Ward boundaries.
24. On 26 August 2024 the Council met to hear submissions. At a meeting on 10 September 2024 the Council deliberated on the submissions and resolved its final representation proposal.
25. As a result of submissions, the Council agreed to extend the boundary of the proposed Harbour General Ward in its final proposal to incorporate the area south of Burdan's Gate to Pencarrow Lighthouse.
26. The Council rejected the remaining matters raised in submissions for the following reasons:
 - a. The proposed number of councillors strikes the right balance for fair and effective representation. Decreasing or increasing the number of councillors elected by specific wards would not meet the fair representation requirements of the Act (the +/- 10% rule) or would not comply with the statutory formula for determining the number of Māori ward members.
 - b. The mixed ward/at large system provides for more fair and effective representation of communities of interest in the City.
 - c. The proposed general ward boundaries better reflect identified communities of interest.
 - d. The proposal to disestablish community boards provides for more fair and effective representation than having some wards with community boards, and there was insufficient evidence to support establishing community boards city-wide.

- e. A subdivided community board covering the proposed Harbour General Ward area would result in significantly larger number of representatives for Petone than for Eastbourne.
 - f. Submissions received on the principle of Māori wards were out of the scope of the representation review process.
27. The Council amended its initial proposal to a final representation proposal that incorporated the extension of the Harbour General Ward to include the area south of Burdan's Gate. As there are no electors in this area there was no change to the population details set out in the initial proposal.

The Council's final proposal

28. The Council publicly notified its final proposal on 11 September 2024, including advice that to avoid separating communities of interest or uniting within one ward communities of interest with few commonalities, the Wainuiomata General Ward did not comply with the fair representation requirement of section 19V(2) of the Act (the +/-10% rule).
29. Due to the non-compliance of the proposed Wainuiomata General Ward, the Council was required by section 19V(4) of the Act to refer its proposal to the Commission for determination. In addition, 14 appeals and four objections against the Council's proposal were received.

Appeals/objections against the Council's final proposal

30. The Council referred the appeals and objections to the Commission, in accordance with section 19Q of the Act.
31. 13 Appeals and four objections against the Council's final proposal were wholly or partially within the Commission's scope of powers to consider. These appeals and objections were therefore considered valid or partially valid and raised the following matters:
- a. Opposition to the disestablishment of community boards.
 - b. Alternative representation arrangements that would keep and/or combine existing community boards and extend community boards to other areas of the City.

Hearing

32. For the purpose of making a determination, the Commission may make such enquiries as it considers appropriate and may hold meetings with the interested parties.
33. In the case of Hutt City Council's final proposal, the Commission considered it appropriate to further explore the matters to be determined. Accordingly, the Commission decided that a hearing was required.
34. The Commission met with the Council and the 13 appellants and objectors who wished to be heard at a hearing held online on 26 November 2024. The Council was represented at the hearing by Mayor Campbell Barry, Chief Executive Jo Miller, and Head of Strategy and Policy Richard Hardie. Paul Swain, Chair of the Council's independent review panel, was also in attendance.

35. The following appellants and objectors appeared at the hearing:
- a. Ross Jamieson
 - b. Linda Olsen
 - c. Wainuiomata Community Board, represented by Daniel Chrisp (community board member)
 - d. Daniel Chrisp
 - e. Eastbourne Community Board, represented by Belinda Moss (Chair), Emily Keddell (Deputy Chair), Bruce Spedding, Murray Gibbons, and Frank Vickers.
 - f. Petone Community Board, represented by Mike Fisher (Chair)
 - g. Kaz Yung
 - h. Liz Palmer
 - i. Sally Selwood
 - j. Jeremy Winter
 - k. David Smith
 - l. Bruce Spedding
 - m. Derek Wilshere

Matters raised at the hearing

36. Mayor Barry and panel Chair Paul Swain explained the process the Council had followed in carrying out its representation review and reaching its final proposal. They emphasised the following points:
- a. The City's localised and city-wide communities of interest informed the proposal for a mixed wards/at large model and proposed general ward boundaries.
 - b. The main reasons for the panel's recommendation and the Council's decision to disestablish community boards were:
 - The political imperatives that applied at the time of establishing community boards in 1989 no longer apply. Residents are now more mobile and connected and tend to identify with the City as a whole.
 - Relationships between the Council and the community boards are not as effective as they could be and are unlikely to change.
 - Community preferences for ways of engaging have changed. There is an opportunity for a new approach to engagement with the City's flexible and changing community whose preferences are not well met by the formal structure of community boards.
 - Community boards are not effective in representing the views of City-wide communities.
 - The current arrangement whereby some wards do not have community boards is not equitable or fair.
 - c. The Council is planning to lift its engagement capability, improve civic participation, and develop a more deliberative approach to engagement with all communities in the City.

- d. While it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of community boards, a community board structure is not an effective way to engage and work with every community.
 - e. For the City's growing ethnic populations, engagement at places of work, education or worship are often preferred over place of residence.
 - f. The mixed representation model works well, with City-wide councillors supporting ward councillors and engaging across the City.
37. The appellants and objectors appearing at the hearing raised the following points in opposition to the Council's proposal:
- a. Eastbourne's location between the harbour and hills with single road access to the rest of the City underpins unique climate change issues and is a strong defining factor for the Eastbourne community of interest.
 - b. Eastbourne benefits from having a representative body active in addressing the environmental risks associated with climate change.
 - c. The lack of community boards in some wards is not an appropriate justification for disestablishing the existing community boards.
 - d. A lack of support and resourcing for community boards impacts their ability to fulfil their statutory role or take on greater delegated responsibilities, particularly for members with employment and family commitments.
 - e. Community boards should be retained until the Council has worked with the communities to develop appropriate structures to replace them.
 - f. Wainuiomata is a clear community of interest which identifies strongly at the local level, has geographic separation from the rest of the City, population growth, and only one general ward councillor.
 - g. Many Wainuiomata residents prefer raising local issues with their community board rather than directly with the Council, as it is more informal and accessible due to proximity, operating hours, and local awareness.
 - h. Greater mobility reduces in-person connection at the local level, and the focus on local issues. Community boards build trust between the Council and the community, and provide a 'hyper-local', unifying focus.
 - i. High deprivation communities are not necessarily more mobile. Community boards help these communities remain connected.
 - j. Eastbourne Community Board provides effective representation by fostering a good working relationship between residents and the Council, providing a source of local knowledge, implementing multiple local amenity and facility projects, and taking a key role in climate resilience and emergency response and preparedness.
 - k. Petone and Eastbourne are two distinctly different communities within the proposed Harbour General Ward.
 - l. Petone is a microcosm of Lower Hutt City, with most issues affecting the City reflected in the local context in Petone. The Petone Community Board adds to the capacity of the single ward councillor to represent Petone.

- m. As elected members, community board members have a democratic mandate to represent their community. Alternative structures may not.
- n. Wainuiomata Community Board provides an important connection to the Council for the Wainuiomata Marae and wider Wainuiomata mana whenua. This is particularly important for working class whanau and young families.
- o. Community boards should be strengthened to provide the improved engagement and representation the Council is aiming for and expanded to the whole city to ensure local solutions to local issues.
- p. The decision to disestablish or retain community boards should be based on equity rather than equality, i.e. whether a community board is appropriate for a particular area due to the community's unique interests and geographic situation.
- q. Residents with experience of community boards in their area are more engaged with local government than those without community boards.
- r. The panel's engagement did not identify the affected communities' views on the effectiveness of their community boards.

Matters for determination by the Commission

- 38. Section 19R of the Act makes it clear that the Commission, in addition to consideration of the appeals and objections against a council's final representation proposal, is required to determine all the matters set out in sections 19H and 19J, which relate to the representation arrangements for territorial authorities. This interpretation was reinforced by a 2004 High Court decision which found that the Commission's role is not merely supervisory of a local authority's representation arrangements decision. The Commission is required to form its own view on all the matters which are in scope of the review.
- 39. The matters in the scope of the review are:
 - a. whether the council is to be elected from wards, the district as a whole, or a mixture of the two
 - b. the number of councillors
 - c. if there are to be wards, the area and boundaries of wards and the number of members to be elected from each ward
 - d. whether there are to be community boards
 - e. if there are to be community boards, the area and boundaries of their communities, and the membership arrangements for each board
 - f. whether wards may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with the +/-10% rule
- 40. The Council's review process is not one of the matters set out in sections 19H and 19J. Any concerns expressed by appellants and objectors relating to the Council's review process are not a basis for the Commission to overturn a council's proposal. The Commission may, however, comment on a council's process as part of its determination.
- 41. Appeals and objections to the Council's final proposal raise the following overarching issues for the Commission to resolve:

- a. non-compliance for the Wainuiomata General Ward (+14.77%)
- b. proposal for no community boards in the district, including disestablishment of the Petone, Eastbourne and Wainuiomata Community Boards
- c. proposal for extending community boards to other areas of the City

Key considerations

42. Based on the legislative requirements, the Commission's *Guidelines for local authorities undertaking representation reviews* (the Guidelines) identify the following three key factors when considering representation proposals:
 - communities of interest
 - effective representation of communities of interest
 - fair representation for electors.

Communities of interest

43. The Guidelines identify three dimensions for recognising communities of interest:
 - a. *perceptual*: a sense of identity and belonging to a defined area or locality as a result of factors such as distinctive geographical features, local history, demographics, economic and social activities
 - b. *functional*: ability of the area to meet the needs of communities for services such as local schools, shopping areas, community and recreational facilities, employment, transport and communication links
 - c. *political*: ability to represent the interests of local communities which includes non-council structures such as for local iwi and hapū, residents and ratepayer associations and the range of special interest groups.
44. All three dimensions are important and often interlinked. We note however, that there is often a focus on the perceptual dimension. That is, what councils, communities or individuals intuitively feel are communities of interest. It is not enough to simply state that a community of interest exists because it is felt that it exists; councils must provide evidence of how a sense of identity is reinforced, or how a community is distinct from neighbouring communities. Such evidence may be found by considering, for example:
 - how communities rely on different services and facilities to function as part of the wider district, city or region
 - demographic characteristics of an area (for example age, ethnicity or deprivation profiles) and how these differ from other areas
 - how particular communities organise themselves and interact with others as part of the wider district, city or region
45. Lower Hutt City was constituted in 1989 with the amalgamation of the existing Lower Hutt City (commonly referred to as 'old Lower Hutt'), Petone Borough, Eastbourne Borough and Wainuiomata District. The three areas joining the existing city were recognised as communities with each having a community board which still exist today.

46. In its 2019 determination for Hutt City, the Commission recognised the need for representation for city-wide communities of interest and accordingly, determined a mixed model of representation that included six councillors elected at large. The Commission recommended that in its next review, the Council carry out further work to clearly identify the more local communities of interest across the City and consider the appropriateness of the present six wards for representing and grouping those communities.
47. For the current review, the panel investigated city-wide and localised communities of interest at length. As well as highlighting the city-wide interests of tangata whenua and mātāwaka, the panel identified multiple city-wide communities based on functional dimensions. This included residents who travel across the City for work, shopping, schooling, and community facilities. The panel also identified city-wide communities with city-wide representative and advocacy structures, such as ethnic and migrant communities, Pacific people, youth, disabled people and the rainbow community.
48. At the sub-district level, the panel identified that local communities often align to suburbs, and are defined by shared demographic, socio-economic, and environmental characteristics, and connections for work, shopping, schools, and recreation. In the preliminary engagement survey, 56% of respondents identified most strongly with the City as a whole, but this varied widely between wards. Residents of Wainuiomata Ward and Harbour Ward, the two wards with community boards, identify more strongly with their local community at 70% and 79% respectively.
49. We are satisfied that the panel has identified communities of interest in the City based on an appropriate level of evidence.

Effective representation of communities of interest

50. Section 19T of the Act requires the Commission to ensure that:
 - a. the election of members of the council, in one of the ways specified in section 19H (i.e. at large, wards, or a combination of both) will provide effective representation of communities of interest within the district
 - b. ward boundaries coincide with the boundaries of the current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for parliamentary electoral purposes
 - c. so far as is practicable, ward boundaries coincide with community boundaries (where they exist).
51. As the Council has resolved to establish Māori wards, it must also establish at least one general ward.
52. 'Effective representation' is not defined in the Act, but the Commission sees this as requiring consideration of factors including an appropriate number of elected members and an appropriate basis of election of members for the district concerned (at large, wards, or a mix of both).
53. The Guidelines note that what constitutes effective representation will be specific to each local authority but that the following factors should be considered:

- a. avoiding arrangements that may create barriers to participation, such as at elections by not recognising residents' familiarity and identity with an area
 - b. not splitting recognised communities of interest between electoral subdivisions
 - c. not grouping together two or more communities of interest that share few commonalities of interest
 - d. accessibility, size and configuration of an area including access to elected members and vice versa.
54. The Guidelines suggest that local authorities consider the total number of members, or a range in the number of members, necessary to provide effective representation for the district as a whole. In other words, the total number of members should not be arrived at solely as the product of the number of members per ward, if there are to be wards.
55. Section 19A of the Act provides that a territorial authority shall consist of between 5 and 29 members, excluding the mayor. Hutt City Council has had a ward system of representation since 1989. The Harbour Ward encompassing Eastbourne and Petone, and the Wainuiomata Ward have been in place since that time with the remainder of the City being divided into three, then four wards.
56. In its 2019 determination, the Commission reduced the number of councillors elected from wards from 12 to six and added six district-wide councillors. The Commission considered this mixed model better reflected equally important city-wide and localised communities of interest.
57. In the current review, the existence of both city-wide and localised communities of interest is reflected in the Council's proposal to retain a mixed wards/at large model. The panel's work has resulted in a well-evidenced basis for the proposed general ward boundaries. We are satisfied that the general ward structure appropriately reflects the City's localised communities of interest and the key commonalities they share with adjacent communities.
58. We also consider that each general ward is reasonably compact and provides for reasonable access between elected members and electors, with one or two councillors per general ward.
59. The Act sets out the formula that councils and the Commission must apply in calculating the number of Māori ward members (Schedule 1A, clause 2). For Hutt City Council, the proposed total of eight councillors elected from wards provides for one of those councillors to be a Māori ward member. This means the proposed Mana Kairangi ki Tai Māori Ward must be a ward covering the whole district. We encourage the Council to consider how it can best support a single Māori ward councillor to provide effective representation for a Māori electoral population dispersed throughout the district.
60. The Commission is satisfied that the proposed ward arrangements appropriately balance the requirements for fair and effective representation of the Lower Hutt City at the ward level. The Commission upholds the general and Māori ward boundaries proposed by the Council.

Fair representation for electors

61. Section 19V of the Act sets out the requirement for the Commission to ensure that electors receive fair representation. Section 19V(2) establishes fair representation as a population per member ratio per ward type (i.e. general or Māori) and per community board subdivision that does not differ by more than 10% across the district or community. This is also referred to as 'the +/- 10% rule'.
62. Section 19V(3) of the Act provides that, despite subsection (2), if a territorial authority or the Commission considers one or more of certain prescribed conditions apply, wards and community board subdivisions may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with subsection (2). The prescribed conditions are:
 - a. non-compliance is required for effective representation of communities of interest within island or isolated communities situated within the district of the territorial authority
 - b. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing a community of interest between wards or community subdivisions
 - c. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by uniting within a ward or community subdivision two or more communities of interest with few commonalities of interest.
63. Section 19V(6) provides that on receiving a reference under subsection (4), the Commission must determine whether to:
 - a. uphold the decision of the council, or
 - b. alter that decision
64. The Council's proposal results in the Wainuiomata General Ward not complying with the +/-10% rule.

Proposed non-compliance of the Wainuiomata General Ward

65. The Council is proposing under-representation of the Wainuiomata General Ward of +14.77% to avoid separating communities of interest or uniting within one ward communities of interest with few commonalities. There were no appeals on this matter. In 2019, the Commission determined similar boundaries for the Wainuiomata Ward with an underrepresentation of +5.73%.
66. Wainuiomata is the most geographically distinct community in Lower Hutt, separated from the rest of the City by hills and single road access. Wainuiomata has one of the City's highest concentrations of social deprivation with five of its seven statistical areas at level 2 (SA2s) being decile 8. While many residents work outside the area, it has a reasonable range of local services and facilities including schools, emergency hubs, shops, a community hub, and a summer swimming pool. As noted earlier, Wainuiomata residents tend to identify more strongly with their local community than Lower Hutt as a whole. Wainuiomata is home to the Wainuiomata Marae and has an active community organisation, 'Love Wainuiomata'.
67. Relatively high population growth and a relatively high proportion of Māori electors in the area are probable factors in the underrepresentation of the proposed Wainuiomata General Ward. Since the 2019 review Wainuiomata has

experienced population growth of around 11% compared with almost 9% for the City as a whole, reaching an estimated resident population of 20,500 (based on Stats NZ 2017 and 2023 population estimates). Wainuiomata's 2023 estimated Māori electoral population (MEP) makes up 19% of Wainuiomata's population, compared with around 11% City-wide.

68. At our hearing the Council expressed confidence that its city-wide councillors will continue to engage well across the City, providing additional support for ward councillors. When establishing city-wide councillor positions in 2019, the Commission's primary concern was to reflect city-wide communities of interest defined by "different socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics; functional connections relating to employment, shopping and schools; and perceptions of the city as a whole reflecting its geography, history and the nature of development". We agree that many in Wainuiomata identify to some degree with these city-wide communities of interest. Wainuiomata electors can therefore expect councillors elected at-large to bring their perspectives to Council decision-making, particularly where they intersect.
69. To achieve compliance for the Wainuiomata General Ward would require transferring 690 people out of the ward. Because Wainuiomata forms part of the City's eastern and southern boundaries, the only option is to move the ward's western boundary to exclude part of the Wainuiomata community. Given the functional cohesion of Wainuiomata with its geographic features and range of community services and facilities, and the strong perceptual sense of residents' identity with the local community, we do not believe splitting Wainuiomata in this way would provide for effective representation of this well-defined community of interest.
70. We are satisfied that the proposed Wainuiomata General Ward arrangements appropriately balance the requirements for fair and effective representation of the Wainuiomata area. The Commission upholds the general ward boundaries proposed by the Council.

Community Boards

71. The Council's representation proposal includes disestablishing the City's three existing community boards, Petone, Eastbourne, and Wainuiomata.
72. The appeals and objections oppose the disestablishment of the Petone, Eastbourne, and/or Wainuiomata Community Boards. Some also propose establishing community boards across the City.
73. Section 19J of the Act requires every territorial authority, as part of its review of representation arrangements, to determine whether there should be community boards in the district and, if so, the nature of those communities and the structure of the community boards.
74. In recommending and resolving the removal of the existing community boards, the panel and the Council have repeatedly stated that the political imperative for establishing community boards in 1989 no longer applies. We consider that the original rationale for establishing community boards has been superseded by the reasoning provided in the Council's subsequent reviews for retaining community boards.

75. The territorial authority must make its determination on whether to retain community boards in light of the principle in section 4 of the Act relating to fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.

76. In rejecting submissions on the initial representation proposal opposing the disestablishment of community boards, the Council's public notice states:

Council considers the final proposal provides for more fair and effective representation than having some wards with Community Boards.

77. The concept of equitable community board representation across the City is a feature of the panel's report and the Council's considerations. The argument that if one ward has a community board then all wards should have a community board is not, in itself, a criteria for considering the constitution or abolition of community boards. While it might be seen to be "fair" within the broader meaning of the term, this is not the meaning provided under section 19V of the Act.

78. The particular matters the territorial authority, and where appropriate the Commission, must determine include the number of boards to be constituted, their names and boundaries, the number of elected and appointed members, and whether the boards are to be subdivided for electoral purposes.

79. Section 19W also requires regard to be given to such of the criteria as apply to reorganisation proposals in the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) as is considered appropriate. Applying these criteria for reviews relating to community boards means considering:

- Will the proposal promote good local government of the parent district, and the community area concerned?
- Will the district and the community have the resources necessary to enable them to carry out their respective responsibilities, duties and powers?
- Will the district and the community have areas that are appropriate for the efficient and effective performance of their role?
- Will the district and the community contain a sufficiently distinct community of interest or sufficiently distinct communities of interest?

80. In resolving an initial proposal for no community boards, the Council reflected the panel's recommendation, noting that:

... formal structures like community boards positioned between the community and the Council is not likely to be effective in the 21st century, based on the changing nature of the community's interests, needs and aspirations, and also the obligation on the Council to inform, consult, represent and make decisions on behalf of those communities.

81. The information provided by the Council, including the panel's report, lacks detailed discussion of the statutory criteria outlined above in relation to each of the existing community boards. It was therefore not clear to us how the change and obligation referred to in the Council's resolution have specifically impacted the effectiveness of the existing community boards.

82. We explored this further with the Council at the hearing. Mayor Barry summarised the overarching principles that had guided the Council's consideration of fair and effective representation across the City, as follows:
- increasing and improving effective engagement with all communities
 - fair and effective representation of communities across Lower Hutt through a deliberative approach
 - more people with a deeper understanding of the issues communities face
 - balanced perspectives in a diverse city
 - structures that are accountable, transparent and inclusive, and can engage people at place
 - improved trust and connection between communities and Council
83. The Mayor acknowledged that community boards have progressed important local issues over the years. He explained that the formal structure of community boards, the single locality focus, and the nature of community board meetings often did not reflect current-day community preferences for ways of engaging.
84. The statutory role of community boards is set out in section 52 of the LGA and includes to "represent, and act as an advocate for, the interests of its community". While community engagement is an important part of understanding local views, engagement alone is not a substitute for representation and advocacy. Representation involves the democratic mandate of elected members, including community boards, to bring the perspectives of local communities to the council's decision-making table.
85. Chief Executive Jo Miller explained the Council's goal of developing ways of engaging across the City that would move away from simply informing people to ensuring they were actively involved in decision making. Ms Miller noted that the mechanisms for achieving this would be based on deliberative and participative democracy principles and developed with stakeholder input, for adoption and recommendation to the incoming Council. We consider the deliberative and participative approach, if executed well, has the potential to provide a dynamic, direct form of representation and advocacy for local issues. However, as this approach is not yet fully implemented we cannot be certain of how embedded and ongoing it would be, or the degree to which it would be community or Council-led.
86. In the Council's view, these mechanisms would replace the role of the current community boards. It is clear to us that the Council's current elected members and officers are working together to deliver a powerful, future-focussed vision for the Council and its communities. We acknowledge the significant mahi that has gone into bringing this new approach forward and commend the Council's commitment to meeting a clearly identified need for change.
87. This determination comes into effect at the local body elections in October 2025. After the hearing we sought further clarification of the timeframe for establishing alternative engagement and participatory processes. The Council's response makes it clear that any new approach to engagement will be developed for adoption by the incoming Council in December 2025 at the earliest.
88. We also sought further information on the exact form of alternative mechanisms for engagement and representation. The Council's response indicates that while

it has identified the principles of the new approach, it has yet to identify the specific methods for implementing those principles.

89. The Council's proposal to disestablish community boards at this review therefore means removing a form of localised representation and advocacy before a replacement is implemented. It does not allow an opportunity for the Council or the affected communities to assess the viability of proposed alternatives in practice, nor is there any certainty the current council's proposals will endure under an incoming council.
90. It is within this context that we have considered the proposed disestablishment of each community board against the statutory criteria outlined above.

Petone Community Board

91. We consider that Petone's grouping with Eastbourne and the Eastern Bays in the Harbour General Ward appropriately reflects the perceptual connection of its shared harbour boundary and both communities' history as boroughs prior to 1989.
92. The Petone Community abuts the Central General Ward and shares significant interests with that ward. This includes a similarly wide variation in demographic and socio-economic characteristics, a valley floor location, and local business and shopping hubs that attract residents from across the City.
93. It is clear from appeals that the Petone Community Board members are committed to working in the interests of their community. The Board plays an active role in advocating for local impacts of city-wide policies and supports community efforts on local issues. We also heard of the nature of barriers to participation felt by residents in the most deprived areas within the community, including a lack of transport, health challenges, and relatively low access to technology.
94. The Council commented on the relatively low number of submissions and appeals from the Wainuiomata and Petone communities and suggested that this indicated a lack of awareness or support for those community boards. We urge caution in this interpretation. Low individual submission and appeal numbers may be an illustration of the barriers to participation described by the appellants. All community boards and a number of past and present members submitted and appealed on the Council's proposal, which might reasonably be considered evidence of community reliance on the advocacy role of their community board.
95. It is less clear to us the extent to which the community area is appropriate for community board representation, and whether the area contains a sufficiently distinct community or communities of interest.
96. At the hearing, we heard from appellants that in general, issues affecting the Petone Community are a 'microcosm' of those affecting the City as a whole, albeit with specific localised impacts.
97. Given the similarities between the Petone Community and the Central General Ward, we do not consider that the community is sufficiently distinct to warrant continued community board representation.
98. Having considered the Council's proposal and the views of appellants and objectors, we conclude that the Petone Community Board does not provide representation for a sufficiently distinct community of interest, and risks

inefficiencies through duplication of ward councillor responsibilities. We therefore uphold the Council's proposal to disestablish the Petone Community Board.

Eastbourne Community Board

99. The Eastbourne community area, including the Eastern Bays south of Point Howard, is distinguished by its clear vulnerabilities given its location on a narrow coastal strip in a seismic zone. The community itself is also distinguished by its somewhat homogeneous characteristics, with a relatively high median age range of 46.2-49.6 and a social deprivation index of 1.
100. At the hearing, we heard from the Council and appellants that the community board has worked successfully with the Council to implement multiple amenity projects for the community. Multiple appellants spoke to the value of these projects for the community.
101. The community board also takes a key role in encouraging community-wide emergency preparedness, and in responding to civil defence emergencies which may isolate the community from the rest of the City. In this respect, the Eastbourne community area is appropriate for the efficient and effective performance of the community board's role.
102. Should the Eastbourne Community Board be disestablished, the Council likely has several options for addressing Eastbourne's civil defence needs, although it has not identified these. The Council also acknowledged the value of the Board's contribution to the Council's emergency management responsibilities. We consider that, should the community board be disestablished before the Council's proposed alternatives for representation and engagement are implemented, the potential gap in representation poses a reasonably high risk that the community will lack cohesive on-the-ground leadership in the event of a severe weather event.
103. Given Eastbourne's distinct needs, disestablishing its community board before alternative representation, advocacy and engagement structures are in place is unlikely to contribute to good local government. Disestablishment would also remove a mechanism that supports the efficient identification of local issues and delivery of community-specific projects.
104. The Council stated its intention to engage with community boards about how their key roles might be incorporated into a new approach to representation and engagement. We see value in retaining the Eastbourne Community Board for at least the next triennium so it can continue working productively with the Council on this kaupapa, exploring how community needs might be effectively represented beyond the traditional community board structure.
105. We therefore determine that the Eastbourne Community Board is retained for at least the next triennium. The Eastbourne community area will comprise the area of the current Board plus the area south of Burdan's Gate to the lighthouse as added to the Harbour General Ward in the Council's final proposal. The community board will comprise five elected members plus one appointed member being the councillor for the Harbour General Ward.

Wainuiomata Community Board

106. In considering whether the Wainuiomata Community Board promotes good local government of the community area, a key theme in appeals and at the hearing relate to the resourcing and ability of the community board to effectively represent community views, and the nature of the Wainuiomata community of interest.
107. At the hearing, we heard that Wainuiomata Community Board members are representative of a community that, except in the Pencarrow SA2, is relatively young, with a median age ranging from 31.7-36.7 in the urban area. This means community board members are often balancing community board responsibilities with young families and work commitments. Wainuiomata's urban area also has universally high deprivation as discussed in our consideration of the general ward above.
108. Appellant Daniel Chrisp, speaking to his individual appeal and that of the Board, expressed the view that the pressures on community board members' time was compounded by a lack of adequate support from the council.
109. The degree to which the current Board can proactively connect with the wider Wainuiomata community outside of formal meetings may be limited. However, meetings do regularly hear from community groups and individuals on issues ranging from governance matters that are within the community board's role, to operational concerns that more appropriately sit with the Council's customer services team. This supports appellants' view that many residents find it easier to engage in the community board context than at the council level to raise their concerns and ideas.
110. We also heard that the community board is a vital link for the whanau of Wainuiomata Marae with the Council. Appellant Linda Olsen explained at the hearing and in her appeal on behalf of the Marae, that disestablishing the community board without alternative representative mechanisms in place risked isolating the whanau and communities of the Marae. She urged the Council to work together with the community board to identify a structure that would ensure appropriate representation and understanding of Council activities within the community.
111. Mayor Barry commented at the hearing on the work of other community organisations such as Love Wainuiomata and the comparative value they provide to the community by working with the Council to deliver significant operational projects. It appears that the community board is not as agile in delivering such operational projects.
112. However, we do not believe community boards must be the sole vehicle for community action, particularly where they do not have delegated responsibility and associated funding. We do expect an effective community board to take a stewardship role in facilitating connections with community groups to ensure a holistic community-wide approach to local government decision making. This appears to happen in an informal way in Wainuiomata, with some community board members who belong to other community groups fulfilling a linking role.
113. We have some sympathy for the Council's view and that of Mr Chrisp that the effectiveness of the Wainuiomata Community Board in engaging with and representing the local community is difficult to quantify. It remains unclear the

degree to which this is a result of the board structure set by the Council, an issue of community board capacity, or the nature of the Wainuiomata community itself.

114. It is clear that the community board does provide a level of representation and advocacy for a geographically defined community with distinct socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Should the Council's planned alternative engagement and representation approach not eventuate before October 2025, there is a potential for the Wainuiomata community to become isolated without some form of geographic representation beyond the General Ward.
115. We agree with appellants that members' lived experience in their community means they are an accessible and valued channel for residents to connect with local government when they may not otherwise do so. The sense of value for the community board expressed by appellants, while not well quantified, supports this view.
116. The Council stated its intention to engage with community boards about how their key roles might be incorporated into a new approach to representation and engagement. We note that lived experience is a key component of participative and deliberative democracy processes. We believe it is important that the Wainuiomata Community Board remains in place to progress this important kaupapa together with the Council.
117. In our view, disestablishing the Wainuiomata Community Board at the October 2025 local election leaves a gap in representation for the Wainuiomata community. This is exacerbated by the proposed underrepresentation for the Wainuiomata General Ward. We are not satisfied that the Council's proposal to disestablish the community board before alternative mechanisms for representation, advocacy and engagement have been accepted by the community, will contribute to good local government.
118. We therefore determine that the Wainuiomata Community Board is retained for at least the next triennium. The community area will coincide with the Wainuiomata General Ward boundaries. Membership of the Wainuiomata Community Board will be six elected members and two appointed members. Recognising the Wainuiomata community's relatively high proportion of MEP discussed earlier, the two appointed members will be the Wainuiomata General Ward councillor and the Mana Kairangi ki Tai Māori Ward councillor.

City-wide community boards

119. Five appeals (Petone Community Board, Daniel Chrisp, Liz Palmer, Sally Selwood, Derek Wilshere) propose establishing community boards either for all areas in the City, or all areas apart from the Central General Ward due to its proximity to Council offices. This reflects the Commission's 2019 recommendation that the Council seek community views on local representation, including the possible establishment of new community boards.
120. Written appeals and appellants speaking at the hearing emphasised the value of community boards as they had experienced them.
121. At the hearing, the Mayor explained that the formal structure of community boards and the nature of community board meetings did not reflect the ways many people and communities have shown they want to engage. In the Council's

view therefore, community boards were not appropriate structures for engagement with all communities in the City.

122. In order to determine the establishment of new community boards in Lower Hutt, we would need to see strong support from representative groups or individuals within those communities. Community support is essential for the effective functioning of community boards. None of the appeals proposing the establishment of new community boards came from individuals or groups in communities currently without community boards. We see little evidence to suggest an appetite among other communities for community board representation.
123. Establishing new community boards in Lower Hutt City would commit significant Council resource to the set up and support of those boards. The Council's plan for uplifting its engagement with communities and developing deliberative and participatory democracy processes is a significant undertaking which could provide a much-needed model of good local government for the sector. Establishing additional community boards now is likely to dilute the Council's focus and hamper its ability to transition to a new approach.
124. We are therefore not satisfied that the proposals for additional community boards will promote good local government for Lower Hutt City, or for the communities currently without community board representation.
125. Accordingly, we endorse the Council's proposal for no community boards in the City with the exception of the Eastbourne and Wainuiomata Community Boards as determined above.

Commission recommendations

126. While the City's territory is relatively compact, the single Mana Kairangi ki Tai Māori Ward councillor will be required to provide effective representation for a Māori electoral population dispersed throughout the district. We recommend the Council consider what support it can provide the councillor to ensure the population's access to their elected member and vice versa; and to support the Māori Ward councillor's capacity to represent diverse localised issues.
127. The Commission acknowledges the wider strategic context within which the Council has resolved its final proposal and the way this shaped the proposal in relation to community boards. While this context is important, we recommend that in its next representation review the Council considers its proposal for community boards with specific reference to the statutory criteria set out in the Act. This should include evidence that alternative mechanisms for representation and advocacy, not only engagement, meet the needs of geographically defined communities before the abolition of those communities is determined.
128. We recognise the changing nature of the City's communities and their preferences and needs for ways of engaging. Accordingly, we encourage the Wainuiomata and Eastbourne Community Boards to make genuine efforts to explore with the Council how community needs might be represented in new and effective ways beyond the traditional community board structure. At the same time, we recommend that the Council keeps in mind the ongoing importance of the needs of geographically defined communities.

Conclusion

129. We have made this determination pursuant to section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001 having considered the information before the Commission and the requirements of sections 19T, 19W and 19V of the Act.

Local Government Commission

Commissioner Brendan Duffy (Chair)

Commissioner Bonita Bigham

Commissioner Sue Bidrose

13 January 2025