

27 February 2025

Committee Secretariat  
Justice Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
WELLINGTON 6160

Tēnā koutou Justice Committee

### **Kāpiti Coast District Council: Submission to the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections**

1. Kāpiti Coast District Council (Council) appreciates this opportunity to submit on the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections.
2. Council, like the majority of councils in New Zealand engages the services of an external service provider for the conduct of local body elections. Consequently, this submission contains responses to certain points that the Committee has sought feedback on, as experienced by electoral officials directly employed by Council. Our feedback covers three areas:
  - 2.1. **Voter enrolment**, and the confusion and difficulties experienced by some voters caused by an inadequate process.
  - 2.2. **Postal voting**, its unreliability and the extra actions and expense incurred by Council to support voter access to somewhat counteract this.
  - 2.3. **Voting process**, voter confusion and increase in special votes numbers.
3. Overall, Council supports LGNZ's [electoral reform recommendations](#)<sup>1</sup> to address what are clearly system-wide issues that include reconsidering postal voting and shifting to nationally coordinated election run by the Electoral Commission (including in-person voting). This change would provide for clearer accountability, more consistent processes, economies of scale, and to ensure voters are enabled to cast ballots at any Electoral Commission voting location.
4. We note in regards to our three areas of concern:

---

<sup>1</sup> Council's submission to the reform review may be found [here](#).

#### 4.1. Voter enrolment

- Electoral officials reported numerous cases of electors who, despite confirming their enrolment and not changing address, could not be found on either the Māori or General rolls. These electors faced uncertainty about their enrolment status, particularly when roll checks were inconclusive. Because enrolment confirmation is issued only by post and cannot be verified immediately, neither voters nor officials could be confident that updates had been processed, an issue made more challenging for those enrolling at the same time they attempted to vote. Like the majority of Councils, this issue was also experienced in the Kapiti Coast District.
- Further inquiries with the Electoral Commission revealed that many affected electors had been incorrectly placed on the dormant roll, requiring them to re-enrol even though they had not moved. Some were defaulted to the General roll, preventing them from casting their preferred vote, and by the time the issue was identified it was too late to change rolls. These errors undermined voter confidence, particularly among Māori electors who were mistakenly shifted off the Māori roll, causing frustration, a sense of disenfranchisement, and in some cases, the loss of a meaningful opportunity to vote.

For voter enrolment, Council **recommends** that:

- The Electoral Commission strengthen and better resource its nationwide enrolment campaign to provide more information to residents about the importance of updating their enrolment details and what is likely to occur if a resident fails to update their details within the required time frame.
- The Electoral Commission review its internal processes for initial enrolment and updates, including the placement and removal of electors from the dormant roll, with a view to improving accuracy and ensuring that no electors are marginalised or disadvantaged when attempting to exercise their democratic right to vote.
- That the process for non-residential ratepayers to register on the roll and exercise their vote is streamlined by allowing the use of digital technology.

#### 4.2. Postal voting

- For voters in our district, postal voting continued to present significant challenges, even with recent extensions to delivery timeframes. Many voters did not receive their voting papers and/or spoilt their papers and/or could not locate a street receiver. This meant that a higher number of voters had to cast special votes at Council offices, including an entire street in Paraparaumu. Reduced street receivers further limited access, and overseas voters raised concerns about the requirement to return physical postal ballots, given unreliable international mail and, as travellers, uncertainty about exact locations to receive their voting documents.
- To improve access for voters present within the district, Council deployed mobile voting booths in areas with limited services, though this increased Council's costs and placed extra pressure on staff.
- However, these barriers meant some electors were unable or unwilling to cast a vote, particularly when special voting required travel to Council venues or mobile booths, and, as is the case for overseas voters, incurred extra international postage fees. Orange bins used elsewhere improved accessibility but created issues when out-of-area voting papers were deposited and became invalid due to logistics of timely delivery to the correct voting district.

For postal voting, Council **recommends**:

- Adopting the recommendations made by the Local Government Electoral Reform Working Group for implementing national-level reforms to postal voting and election administration.
- That the Electoral Commission develop alternative national initiatives and voting methods to better support voter participation (e.g., mobile voting booths or similar initiatives), including guidelines to guide the use of mobile voting booths to ensure communities have equitable opportunity to post or deliver their completed voting papers.
- Reconsidering or modernising the requirement for overseas voters to return physical postal ballots, as international mail is unreliable. The Local Electoral Act should be amended to enable overseas voters to use the same electronic voting approach as central government elections. It should also be easier for voters to have voting papers reissued if they do not arrive (see also the report of the Electoral Review Working Group).
- Simplifying voting processes (especially the special voting process), to increase participation and reduce barriers created by the need to physically visit Council offices or locate a mobile booth.
- That reforms overall, should see a move to a nationally consistent system of in-person voting for all local elections in 2028 that is as similar as possible to parliamentary elections, leveraging economies of scale that this move would support. This should include a two-week timeframe in which to vote, with polling booths in venues where people frequently visit (see the report of LGNZ's Electoral Review Working Group).

#### 4.3. Voting Process

- Council's relationship with Election Services (our electoral services provider) and our overall processes functioned well, but there was a clear rise in special votes. This election, Council processed almost double the number of special votes compared to the 2022 local elections. Many voters required assistance because their voting packs were missing or not received, and the special vote process itself carried a higher risk of incorrectly completed declarations. To minimise invalid votes, electoral staff completed declarations digitally and then printed them for electors to check and sign, which was extremely time-consuming.
- Confusion also arose because the local election process differs from the General Election process, leading some voters to arrive on Election Day expecting to vote at a booth. The special vote declaration process should be reviewed to make it easier and safer for voters, and clearer communication is needed to emphasise that voters should use the documents sent to them, as special voting, while available, poses a greater risk of errors that could invalidate a vote.

For the voting process, Council **recommends** that:

- the special voting process be reviewed with the aim to simplify and make it safer with a smaller margin of invalidated votes
- councils and the Electoral Commission work to better communicate the local body voting system to voters.

5. We thank the Justice Committee for considering our submission.

Nāku, nā



Darren Edwards  
**Chief Executive | Te Tumuaki Rangatira**  
**Kāpiti Coast District Council**