Empathy

MEMO

Community insight to inform and inspire Kāpiti Coast District's representation arrangements

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Executive summary

About this document

This document summarises findings from the community engagement and design research conducted to inform and inspire Kāpiti Coast's representation arrangements. It focuses on communities of interest and effective representation.

Approach to understanding the community

Empathy and council officers worked as one engagement and research team. We conducted five activities across three phases, involving more than 150 people in meaningful engagement. Further consultation will occur in a later phase.

Communities of interest

People believe the district is diverse, and they are part of many communities of interest. Some are related to geographic location of residency, and some are not.

People believe the suburbs are different from each other — different vibes, demographics, interests, socioeconomics, and types of businesses. Many travel to different suburbs as part of their day-to-day lives.

There are two dominant versions of geographic communities of interest — horizontal stripes that run from west to east, and vertical stripes that run north to south. They work together. The horizontal version seems most dominant.

Three geographic communities seem particularly distinct — Ōtaki, Paekākāriki, rural. Each has distinct contexts, ways of thinking and being, and political focuses. Functional factors — eg roads, road-works, water supply — are also at play.

Effective representation

The need for diversity in elected representatives was one of the most common and strongly-felt themes from the research. It was seen as important in three ways — diversity of thought and life experience, diversity in where councillors are from, and diversity of skillset.

People believe it is important for councillors to come from across the district. That helps the different people and issues of the district to be seen and championed.

Efficiency is desired by most people — to get across the information and issues, have robust discussions that result in action, swiftly make good decisions, and take opportunities. For most, efficiency should not come at the expense of diversity.

People want councillors to know the people and issues of the district. Most people stressed that councillors need to hear from the diversity of people in the district, not just the loudest voices, or those who have time or access.

Many believe it's currently hard for councillors to hear from the diverse range of people in the district. Barriers that prevent people from putting their views forward include lack of time, energy, communication ability, transportation, self-confidence, and confidence in council to really listen and care. Many note that, because barriers block engagement for some, council constantly only hears a subsection of voices and perspectives.

Community boards might be a good vehicle for people who already have the confidence and ability to engage with council, but not for those who don't. They might amplify the voices of those already heard, while others remain silent.

Most people want councillors to do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole. This desire was one of the most common and strongly-felt themes from the research. It was defined or achieved in two parts — doing what's best for those in need, and seeing the bigger picture rather than silos.

People want councillors to be capable — to be able to consider issues fully and wisely, debate rigorously and constructively, make good decisions, and take swift action.

Perceptions of what makes representation effective

People have thoughts about how representation arrangements might or might not achieve what they need and value. They are useful to know when shaping representation arrangements. Perceptions are as follows.

Electing councillors at-large helps ensure councillors are capable and do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole. But it also makes it hard to stay close to the people and see local issues.

Electing councillors to wards helps enable councillors to stay close to the needs of people and areas. But it risks parochialism and lack of a big vision for Kāpiti.

The mixed model gives the best of both worlds — ward councillors are able to stay close to the issues and the people, while at-large councillors can focus on the big picture and stave off parochialism.

Bigger councils allow diversity. Smaller councils help ensure efficiency.

Of those who knew about community boards, two viewpoints emerged — they are a great tool for representation but don't have the teeth they need; they represent a narrow subset of the community and issues and can be removed.

The upshot for representation arrangements

There is some tension in what the community seeks from effective representation. The district's communities of interest add another layer of complexity. But it will be possible to find a solution that, on balance, meets the community's requirements.

Introduction

Project context

Kāpiti Coast District Council (KCDC) is completing a legally required representation review in 2021. The review starts with a blank sheet and seeks to ensure arrangements provide for fair and effective representation that meet our community's needs and expectations.

The review begins with gathering community views and considering options for representation, before developing an initial proposal for consultation and then refining this based on submissions received, to determine a final proposal. If there are no appeals or objections, the proposed arrangements will come into effect for local authority elections in 2022 and 2025. If the final proposal is appealed, or does not comply with the guidelines, it will be referred to the Local Government Commission who will make a binding determination.

Empathy's role

Empathy was asked to help KCDC gather and analyse the community perspective, and to support KCDC to consider the community view alongside other important inputs.

We were asked to bring our knowledge and experience of:

- community engagement and design research methods
- understanding people's context, and how it shapes their behaviours, beliefs and attitudes
- understanding people's underlying needs and wants
- creating solutions that consider community needs and beliefs alongside other important inputs, and finding the best solution on balance.

Acknowledgements

Empathy recognises KCDC's desire to genuinely understand the community's perspective, and to find representation arrangements that are fair and effective given the community's context, behaviours, beliefs and needs.

We also acknowledge the people of Kāpiti who gave us their time, shared their experiences, and explained their points of view.

About this document

This memo summarises:

- the activities we undertook in order to understand the community perspective
- what we learned about the community's context, behaviours, beliefs and needs when it comes to two of the three considerations required in representation reviews — communities of interest, and effective representation
- what that means for representation arrangements.

We use double apostrophes / quote-marks ("like this") when sharing quotes from research participants, and singles ('like this') when we're using conversational language to label something or referring to a concept.

Typically, the singular form of 'community' refers to all the residents and non-resident homeowners of Kāpiti Coast District. Where that is not the case, context will suggest otherwise. For example, the district is made up of many communities of interest.

Our approach

One team, taking a people-centred approach

Empathy and KCDC worked as one engagement and research team, taking on different and complementary roles. We took a people-centred design approach, genuinely building empathy for people as we moved from broad empathy-gathering to narrow scenario-testing.

Our suite of engagement activities ensured we heard from more quiet or reluctant people, as well as those more confident and driven to reach out to council.

We prioritised quality of engagement and information, not quantity of people involved. This was not a tick-box exercise. We engaged enough people with different contexts to ensure a good understanding of community perspective, while remaining cost-effective.

Three phases of engagement and design research so far

Together, we moved through three phases of engagement and design research. The purpose of each phase differed, as follows:

Phase	Objective
Phase 1: Engage in engagement	Engage people in the engagement • Raise awareness of the representation review • Raise knowledge about representation • Get some early and broad thoughts on the topic • Build engagement and recruit some people for specific later activities
Phase 2: Get broad input	Understand what's broadly important to people • Increase engagement in the representation review • Get input into broad topics, to understand key principles for representation and fuel our thinking • Continue to gently educate
Phase 3: Get more specific input	Get input into some specific concepts • Get input into different ways the principles from the last phase could be applied • Test our understanding of the principles, and how they might play out in different specific scenarios • Continue to gently educate

Different activities and materials were developed to achieve the purpose of each phase, to ensure we heard from a wide mix of people, and to provide the robust and well-rounded understanding in a cost-effective way. We analysed what we heard at the end of each phase, and used it to shape what we did next.

This does not mark the end of community input. From here, elected councillors will put forward an initial proposal of representation arrangements for public consultation.

Five activities to engage different people and learn different things

As mentioned above, we used different activities and materials to achieve the purpose of each phase, to ensure we heard from a wide mix of people, and to provide the robust and well-rounded understanding in a cost-effective way.

Five activities were used across the phases, as follows:

- Street intercept interviews — Participants were not recruited or scheduled prior to meeting. Instead, we stopped people in public places, as they went about their lives. We asked them a few prepared questions, then asked follow-up questions to understand their responses accurately and/or more deeply. Interviews lasted up to 15 minutes. Interviews were conducted by Empathy personnel or council officers. Twenty-eight interviews were held, mainly in phase 1. Different questions and materials were used in each phase.

- Market pop-ups — We engaged people at the Paraparaumu and Waikanae markets, by way of a 'market stall'. In that way, participants were not recruited or scheduled prior to meeting. Instead, people randomly stopped at the stall as part of their market experience. We asked them a few prepared questions, using materials as a tool for conversation. Sometimes we had opportunity to ask follow-up questions to understand their responses accurately and/or more deeply. Engagement lasted up to 10 minutes. Stalls were staffed by council officers. This activity gave rise to over 80 meaningful engagements, in phase 1.

- Online survey — A survey was published on the council website in phase 1, and advertised through various council channels. The survey led with structured quantitative questions, then asked respondents for clarifying or additional comments. This activity was used in phase 1, and generated 19 responses.

- Community workshops — Participants in specific geographic catchments were invited to come to a workshop. We did not know how many would arrive, or any
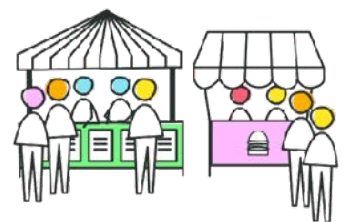
other demographics. We used activities as a tool for understanding, and asked follow-up questions to understand responses accurately and/or more deeply. Five workshops were conducted, in phase 2. Twenty-five people were involved in total. Workshop sizes ranged from two to 11 people. They were about 90 minutes in duration. Workshops were conducted by council officers.

- **Long semi-structured interviews** — Participants were recruited to match specific criteria and scheduled prior to meeting. We specifically targeted people unlikely to engage in the process otherwise. We sat in people's homes, and mainly spoke one-on-one. Sometimes family members were part of the conversation, eg a pēpē on a mum's lap, a husband bringing in a cup of tea and chipping in comments, a high-school daughter doing homework in the background but coming to the table when a topic sparked her interest. These were semi-structured interviews using social science research techniques. We explored different relevant topics, digging into their answers to understand accurately and deeply. Sometimes we used activities and materials as a tool for conversation. The majority of interviews lasted 90 minutes; sometimes we conducted follow-up interviews with people, which we capped at 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted by qualified Empathy personnel (PhD psychology, more than 15 years experience in design research and long-form semi-structured conversations). Sixteen people were engaged through a total of 18 interviews (we met with two people twice), occurring in phases 2 and 3. Different questions and materials were used in each phase.

Council officers also presented to meetings of the four community boards, and at a session open to all community board members. Council officers presented updates to Te Whakaminenga o Kāpiti (twice, at two stages of the project), the Accessibility Advisory Group, Older Persons Council and Youth Council. Any comments from those presentations fed into the analysis process. One submission was provided from a member of the public, unprompted. That also informed our understanding of the community view.

Our suite of activities and targeted recruitment or invitations ensured we heard from a wide range of people — different ages and life stages, levels of household income, educations and professions, ethnicities, and willingness to engage with council, and spread across the district.

This memo outlines findings from across the phases

The key findings from all phases and activities of community research are outlined below. We have focused on two of the considerations required by the Local Electoral Act 2001 — communities of interest, and effective representation.

Communities of interest

The Act requires us to consider geographic communities of interest

The Local Electoral Act 2001 requires that local authorities must provide for "effective representation of communities of interest" (ss19T and 19U). The Local Government Commission notes that:

> The term 'community of interest' is not defined in the Local Electoral Act 2001 and may mean different things to different people. Defining local communities of interest is an essential part of the representation review process and needs to be carried out before determining how to provide effective representation.

> One definition of 'community of interest' describes it as a three-dimensional concept:

> - perceptual — a sense of belonging to a clearly defined area or locality
> - functional — the ability to meet with reasonable economy the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services
> - political — the ability of the elected body to represent the interests and reconcile the conflicts of all its members.

The Commission also notes:

> During a representation review territorial authorities need to determine:

> - any identifiable communities of interest below the district level
> - whether these communities of interest are located in identifiable geographical areas, justifying the establishment of wards, or are spread across the district.

People believe the district is diverse, with many communities of interest

Our research found that most people believe Kāpiti Coast district is diverse. There are different ages and life stages, professions, income levels, ethnicities, house-hold make-up and more. This diversity gives rise to different communities of interest.

People believe they are part of many communities of interest. Some are related to geographic location of residency, and some are not. Prominent non-geographic communities of interest include those related to sporting activities, cultural

activities, dog ownership, and topics of interest (eg social justice, environmental regeneration). Many shared a sense of belonging to locations that were not where they live. For example, someone living in Paraparaumu near the old state highway felt strong affiliation with the coast, as she spends significant time walking her dog on the beach.

When researchers raised the idea of communities of interest based on geography, most people noted that where they live is only one of their communities. Some were almost offended to be referenced predominately by where they live. As one person said, "It doesn't work that way. My communities of interest aren't defined by geography."

People believe the suburbs are different from each other

Most people reflected on the different geographic hubs of Kāpiti Coast, which one participant referred to as "our villages" and another as "a string of pearls". It was a common and strongly stated belief that the different hubs and surrounding residences have different vibes, demographics, interests, socioeconomics, and types of businesses. Phrases used to describe some of the different hubs include:

- Ōtaki beach — A cultural hub. Māori strength. Friendly, warm. Some really low socioeconomic people. People look after each other. More Māori and Pacific people.
- Waikanae (town) — An older population. Heaps of retirement homes. Some families, but mainly couples with older children and money.
- Paraparaumu (town) — Lower household income. Single, flatting, younger families. Not as friendly. Sad looking. Retail and business.
- Raumati South — Young families, but with money. Professionals but community-minded, greenies, lefties. They're more likely to have chickens in their back-yard.

The perceived vibe of a hub seems mainly influenced by its residents and the businesses that operate there.

Many people use the whole district

Because people seem to enjoy the diversity of the district, and those with a car seem to find it accessible, many travel to different hubs as part of their day-to-day lives. As one person said, "all the places have a different personality. I go to different spots depending on what I feel like or need."

This theme was less prominent in people we spoke to from Ōtaki township and beach, who tended to stay in Ōtaki. Many Ōtaki residents said they also use the facilities in Levin.

Related, we noticed that, when we asked people where they live, people from Ōtaki tended to say "Ōtaki", and people from south of Ōtaki tended to say "Kāpiti".

There are two dominant versions of geographic communities of interest

Given how people describe their own communities, we noticed two dominant versions of geographic communities of interest:

- Horizontal — stripes that run from west to east, largely aligned to hubs.
- Vertical — stripes that run from north to south; rural (although note the comment in the next section), urban (or transport corridor), coastal.

We noticed that, when asked where they live specifically, people often used this grid as a reference. They typically led with the horizontal. For example, someone might say 'I'm from Raumati South, by the beach' or 'Paraparaumu, against the hill'. In that way, the horizontal version seems more dominant.

Three geographic communities seem particularly distinct

When it comes to residents of different locations, three location-based communities seem particularly distinct:

- Ōtaki
- Paekākāriki
- Rural.

We noticed residents in each of those areas had distinct contexts, ways of thinking and being, and political focuses. Functional factors — eg roads, road-works, water supply — also seem to contribute to these feeling like distinct communities. Some of the factors we noticed or heard about for each community are as follows.

Although Ōtaki beach and Ōtaki town were described differently, they were much more similar to each other than other parts of the district. Taken together, Ōtaki is a large and populated area. The shopping area on State Highway 1 and the roadworks to the south both contribute to traffic congestion, leading to a perception that it is harder for people to "zip up and back" (as one person put it). Many Ōtaki residents we spoke to noted they and their neighbours "whakapapa to the area" or "go back

generations". Many also spoke in ways that left us sensing unity within the community and disenfranchisement when it comes to local council. As one person said, "We look after each other here. We have to, because no-one else is looking out for us. We have to help each other, and we do." Many from around the district referred to Ōtaki as a cultural hub, and particularly strong in te ao Māori.

Paekākāriki is the district's most southern hub. It is not as easily connected by car as the other 'strings in the pearl'. Queen Elizabeth Park means people in cars access it only from State Highway 1. We noticed that many from Paekākāriki were very engaged with, or at least aware of, council matters. Many residents are passionate about a few key issues, such as the sea wall. Residents in this community seem more confident to pass their voice to council, and many are actively doing so.

Rural locations are loosely defined by property size and use, and limited supporting infrastructure such as water systems, bus services, refuse collection and street lights. In that way, rural locations include Reikorangi and parts of Te Horo and Peka Peka. Residents of rural locations presented different functional needs, which contributed to different focuses when it comes to council matters. For example, they were more likely to question the value they get from their rates. We also noticed rural residents were more likely to speak about the way local and central government's infrastructure plans will impact the environment and ecosystem. Many referred to themselves as guardians or caretakers of the land, rather than owners.

Effective representation

The Act requires us to consider effective representation of communities

The Local Electoral Act 2001 requires that local authorities must provide for "effective representation of communities of interest" (ss19T and 19U). The Local Government Commission notes that:

> Achieving effective representation first requires identifying communities of interest that are geographically distinct and, in the case of territorial authorities, those that may be spread across the district.

The Commission notes that, as far as practicable, local authorities need to consider factors such as:

- avoiding arrangements that may create barriers to participation
- supporting the population's reasonable access to its elected members and vice versa
- ensuring the elected members' ability to effectively represent the views of their electoral area.

To support KCDC's consideration of representation arrangements, we sought to uncover:

- what the community values in terms of effectiveness; what 'effective representation' means to them
- the enablers of, and barriers to, effective representation given our communities of interest
- the community's perception of how effective representation might be achieved through arrangements.

Key findings are summarised below.

People believe a diverse elected council is very important

Most people highly value diversity in their elected representatives. The need for diversity was one of the most common and strongly-felt themes from the research. It was seen as important in three ways.

People spoke about having diversity of thought and life experience at the council table. In their minds, it strengthens council's ability to see multiple sides of an issue,

and the different needs of different people. Many believe diversity reduces risk in council decisions, as people can bring different direct experience to situations and decisions. Ethnic diversity was often noted as part of ensuring different world views and life experiences.

People also spoke about needing to reflect the diversity of the district's community. It's important that councillors have empathy for people's lives and issues, and can speak accurately and passionately on their behalf. As one person said, "I think what that's about is fair representation. That the needs of all corners of our district are heard and have a voice."

Some people spoke about diversity of skillset, so that different councillors can take on different portfolios.

People want councillors to come from across the district

Because the suburbs are perceived to have different vibes and needs, a belief exists that it is important for councillors to come from across the district. That way, many believe, all the different people and issues across the district are seen and championed. The perception is that councillors intimately know the people and issues in their area, are often like the people so can easily see and speak from their viewpoint, and have an emotional attachment to the area. In that way, geographic spread of councillors was seen as an important way to represent the district's diversity.

This theme came through in many ways in the research, including overtly in statements such as the following:

> "You often get the same 'type' of people living in the same area. You need people from all walks of life to be represented. Assuming that your councillors understand their areas, it gives you a much fairer representation."

> "It's more than just an academic skillset. It's emotional ties to the community that's important. "

> "How can someone represent the rural block here if they don't know it. If you haven't lived rural, you won't know how rural people live, especially if you don't know anybody who lives rural. Hopefully they would be able to represent — with knowledge, that's the thing — what the people are experiencing."

"I have a strong belief that people need to have an affinity with the people they're serving. There are suburbs that have better resources, demographics, whatever, than others. Without local people understanding and representing them, you can't really represent them and their needs well. By having people from around Kāpiti, you'll have a more diverse council and better understanding of different people and areas and needs. That's my assumption, anyway."

Efficiency is desired, but not at the expense of diversity

Efficiency is also desired by most people. They want council to:

- get across all the relevant information and issues
- have robust discussions in a constructive way that results in action
- swiftly make good decisions
- take opportunities when they're available.

Action was a strong theme in conversations related to efficiency. One person reflected the theme nicely in this statement:

"To me, I think when you've got too many people on a council or board, things don't get done. Debating is good, but when there are too many people, it can take so long to debate that you miss the opportunity to get it done."

For some, the desire for efficiency led them to a bigger council. In their minds, that allows spreading of workload. For others, the desire for efficiency led them to a smaller council. In their minds, that allows for conversations that more quickly result in decisions and actions. But most recognised they don't actually know what makes council efficient. They just know they want efficiency.

Many people used a form of the phrase 'big enough, small enough' to weigh the two potentially conflicting desires. For example, one person wants elected council to be "Big enough that there is good representation of different communities and diversity of councillors, but not so big that it is ineffective and inefficient." As another person said, it's about "Walking that fine line between having the diversity to meet everyone's needs, but not having death by committee."

For most, efficiency must not come at the expense of diversity. Those people acknowledge that more councillors at the table, and councillors of different viewpoints, can mean it takes longer to discuss and reach a decision. They believe that's a reasonable price to pay. As one person said, "What's the point of being

efficient if that means you're driving hard towards an outcome that isn't right for lots of people?"

For a small but vocal minority, efficiency trumps the need for diversity. Those people tended to focus on the scope, mechanics and cost of council, and questioned the value they receive from their rates. One person said, "I reckon about four high-class businessmen would run the council. They need to know about business, because it is a business." Where this perspective came through in in-person research activities (ie not through the online survey), we noticed that this belief often correlated to a view that local government should focus on infrastructure and growth, not social services. We also noticed that people holding this belief seemed to come from a similar demographic — Pākehā men over about 55 years of age.

Councillors need to know the people and issues of the district

It was almost assumed by people engaged in the research that councillors need to know the people and issues of the district. This came up overtly and as an undercurrent.

When we had opportunity, eg in the long semi-structured conversations, researchers explored how this should happen. Overwhelmingly, people believe it is the job of councillors to reach out to understand the district, not the responsibility of people to make themselves known and heard. When we asked why that's the case, the research participants often seemed confused or exacerbated. They responded with comments like, "That's a big part of what they're paid to do!" and "How else will the councillor know what the community's needs are?!" We got the sense this was seen as one of the most important jobs of a councillor.

Most people stressed that councillors need to hear from the diversity of people in the district, not just the loudest voices, or those who have time or access. As one person said, "They just represent the same narrow minority."

Many people noted that it likely takes a lot of time to get across the people and issues. They felt it is important that councillors are not "stretched too thin". They want to ensure councillors have time to hear from the people and understand the viewpoints and issues. For example, one person said: "I worry about their workload. How can they stay across it all?" This often led to reflections on whether elected members are "full-time councillors", and the impact of other roles on their ability to perform well. Reflecting on her own energy levels, one person said: "If I were doing this after a full day of work, I'd be phoning it in."

When we probed as to whether other people could gather the information for councillors, responses were mixed. A few people seemed resentful of the councillors outsourcing this core aspect of their role. For example, one person said, "But why should they delegate it? They are the elected council. If they are paid to do a job, they should do it." Mainly, people didn't mind as long as the councillors hear the issues and clearly understand the people's point of view. Community panels, community boards, and council officers were all seen as possible channels for bringing the voice of the community to councillors.

That said, there were some concerns about accuracy and potency of message. For example, one person worried about whether council officers would feel pressured into putting a rosy tint on community comments. "They might be marched into the boss's office for a 'please explain' meeting." One person worried about councillors receiving mixed messages if multiple channels were used. Another felt that the messenger might not express the same passion as the community felt. "They don't feel it like we feel it." Some pointed out that the current research activity has them expressing their views to a third party, and they feel more 'heard' than in previous community consultations.

Most people noted that the outcome is more important than the channel. Although it would be best for councillors to hear from people directly, it's better to hear through intermediaries than not at all.

It's currently hard to hear from the diverse range of voices

Many spoke about how hard it can be for councillors to hear from the diverse range of people in the district. They spoke about the barriers that prevent people from putting their views forward. These include lack of time, energy, communication ability, transportation, self-confidence, and confidence in council to really listen and care.

This point was made by people who don't usually put their voices forward, and by people who do.

When reflecting on why they don't usually put their view to council, one person said, "When I come home, I'm tired, I've got house stuff to do, or I do stuff with the kids." Another spoke about a recent council meeting about the recent Gateway. She said, "I had something to say. But I didn't go. I don't like crowds. There's no way I could have coped with that." Another said, "Why would I put my view forward to council? They don't listen to us up here anyway." One Māori woman told us, "Our people find it very hard to put our voices forward, and for them to be heard."

Many pointed out that, because barriers block engagement for some, council constantly only hears a subsection of voices and perspectives. For example, one talked about "Retired people who have time to go to Council and have their voices heard vs people working two jobs who never have time."

Some noted the people who most needed to be heard by council were often those who experienced the most barriers to engaging. For example, one person explained:

> "Generally speaking, it's usually the marginalised communities who aren't engaging anyway. They don't have time or inclination. They're just putting one foot in front of the other. Instead of writing them off as not having an interest in their community, they are just focused on something else. That's where other methods of community engagement could be really good. The standard ways might not be at the time or place a lot of people can go to. Like council meetings. Suburbs and people who are struggling, they aren't working 9-5 jobs. They're working two jobs, cleaning, whatever. Single parents, who's going to look after the children? There's just lots of barriers. The people that need to be represented aren't the ones who would put their hand up for a group board."

Community boards might only amplify voices already heard

At least half of those involved in the research were not aware of Kāpiti Coast's existing community boards. A small minority could speak to direct experience of them. That minority provided two different viewpoints:

- They are a great tool for representation. They help bring the voice of the community to council. But they don't have the teeth they need. They are sometimes excluded from council conversations, and sometimes ignored. They could be even more effective for the community if given more responsibility and ability to contribute to council discussions. For example, one survey respondent said: "Our Community Board is a good opportunity to raise local issues. Board members are supportive of the local community. However, Council can ignore them with impunity. For example, in 2017 the PRCB made a submission in support of Raumati Village that was voted down. So there needs to be a little more power invested in the Boards so they can support their communities better."

- They become a vehicle for single topics and special interests. They are fuelled by, and deliver to, a narrow subset of the community. For example, one survey respondent said: "It would be better if they actually listened to the community

and not just do the projects they want to do." Another said: "I don't see community boards as adding any value. They can't make any meaningful decisions, and certainly don't represent the views of an entire community." Others made simple statements such as "Get rid of community boards" and "Ditch community boards".

In some of our research activities, particularly the long-form conversations, we were able to explore and gather perspectives on the concept of community boards without relying on knowledge of representation arrangements. Through those opportunities, we noticed that many of the barriers that prevent some people from engaging with council likely also prevent those people from engaging with community boards.

As noted in an earlier section, it is currently hard for councillors to hear from the district's diverse range of people. Some of the barriers that prevent people from putting their views forward include lack of time, energy, communication ability, transportation, self-confidence, and confidence in council to really listen and care. As a consequence, many people believe that council regularly hears only a subsection of voices and perspectives — those with time, flexible schedules, transportation and confidence, and who believe that putting their voice to council is a worthwhile endeavour.

Those barriers to engaging with elected council are likely also barriers to engaging with community boards. For example, if people were put off by elections and did not vote for elected council, they also did not vote for community board members for the same reason. If people didn't feel confident going to organised meetings or stepping into heated debates, they seemed only a little more likely to attend community board meetings as they were council meetings. If lack of transport, time or energy means they can't attend scheduled meetings, it can make showing up to community board fora difficult too. If they're disenfranchised from council as a Pākehā system, they seem similarly disenfranchised from community boards as another layer of the same system.

Some barriers might be bigger than for engagement with council, some might be smaller. But overall, we suspect that the same demographic of people who engage with council also have opportunity to engage with community boards, and the same demographic of people who do not engage with council also do not engage with community boards. That aligns with what we heard from some people who do attend community boards. For example, one person said, "You just see the same faces, banging on about the same things."

In that way, community boards might be a good vehicle for people who already have the confidence and ability to engage with council, but not for those who don't. They might amplify the voices of those already heard, while others remain silent.

It is also worth noting that some people felt the two layers of elected representatives added unhelpful complexity. One person spoke about being bounced between his ward councillor and community board, as each referred him back to the other. Another said, "Community Boards serve no useful purpose and just add another layer of delay and confusion and conflict."

Councillors should do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole; focus on need, no silos

Most people want councillors to do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole. This desire was one of the most common and strongly-felt themes from the research. It was defined or achieved in two parts — doing what's best for those in need, and seeing the bigger picture rather than silos.

For most people, doing what's best for Kāpiti as a whole means doing what's best for those in need. Many stressed that some people in the district are "doing it tough". People recognised those people need more of a boost. They spoke in a way that invoked the concept of equity more than equality. As one person explained, "We need to focus on those most in need in the suburbs and get them back on an even footing."

That desire wasn't just for the benefit of those people; it was for the benefit of everyone in the district. People saw a direct connection between helping lift those in-need, and the wellbeing and prosperity of the others. One person summed up the sentiment well: "They're interconnected because what's best for in-need suburbs is best for Kāpiti as a whole. If they're winning, everyone's winning. If they have access to services, they can thrive, and then local shops can thrive, and so on."

Alongside an equity lens, most people also want to councillors to see the bigger picture rather than silos. Most were strongly against parochialism and 'NIMBYism' (a 'not in my back yard' mentality). They also didn't want councillors to respond to 'squeaky wheels'; those making a loud fuss over something that isn't a big deal in the larger scheme of things. Those things were all seen to go against doing what's best for Kāpiti as a whole.

People noted that council decisions usually have local and district wide consequences, and some have big consequences for both. Taking only the local view, the benefit or harm to the district might be overlooked. "Issues like the airport

are important to the whole district, not just the ward it is in." People used different examples to illustrate this point. "For example, if they wanted to turn the reserve into a camping ground. It's a localised issue, but you need to think about the big benefits to the district too. NIMBYs say 'not in my back yard'. That would be the loudest voice, but not necessarily the best thing."

Most people wanted council to see local issues, focus on lifting up those in need, and think about the bigger picture rather than only local impact. They believe that will then provide good outcomes for each local area. As one person said, "If you do what's best for the greater, it will have a benefit for my suburb, for every suburb."

Councillor capability is very important

People want councillors to be capable — to be able to consider issues fully and wisely, debate rigorously and constructively, make good decisions, and take swift action. This was often phrased as a 'bottom line', or base upon which every other desire rests. For example, "Bottom line, it depends on the calibre of the people standing." "The bottom line is we need good people. It's about capability." "You need good people. Smart, highly capable people."

Perceptions of what makes representation effective

Some people have ideas of how arrangements impact representation

We concentrated on identifying communities of interest, and understanding what people need and value in effective representation. Along the way, we picked up on people's perception of how representation arrangements might or might not achieve what they need and value. We acknowledge, as did many of them, that their ideas about the effect of representation arrangements might not be correct. But, for the sake of sharing what we learned of the community's point of view, key points are as follows.

Electing councillors at-large brings pros and cons

Most people seem to believe that electing councillors at-large helps ensure capability because it provides a bigger pool from which to draw candidates. It also helps councillors consider and do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole, because they aren't answerable to a local area. But it is harder for at-large councillors to see local issues, as they have a big area to cover and a big population to understand. In that way, it makes it harder to stay close to the people.

Electing councillors to wards brings pros and cons

Conversely, most people seem to believe wards enable councillors to stay close to the needs of people and areas, because councillors do not have to cover a large area and population. But wards increase the risk of parochialism and lack of a big vision for Kāpiti, because councillors are answerable to a local area.

Some people noted that ward councillors are supposed to do what's best for the district, not just their ward. But those people noted that, in reality, ward councillors are closest to their local issues and answerable to their local voters. As one person said:

> "Even though all councillors are supposed to think about the whole district, they can't help but root for local issues and perspective. Ward councillors need to represent their ward. Those people wear two hats, really — the hat of their local ward first and foremost, before they consider the total need of the whole city or district. And I don't know how they'd get around that. Those two hats are problematic, they certainly are."

There was strong endorsement for a mixed model

Most people liked the idea of having some ward councillors and some at-large. They felt it gave them the best of both worlds — ward councillors are able to stay close to the issues and the people, while at-large councillors can focus on the big picture. In that way, a mixed model helps achieve what's best for Kāpiti as a whole. Council is able to focus on the most in-need suburbs, without falling into parochialism and silos.

Having surfaced this finding in phases 1 and 2 of the research, we wanted to explore it further in phase 3. In particular, we wondered whether people believed ward councillors focus on local issues because at-large councillors focus on the bigger picture for the district as a whole, thereby letting them focus more narrowly. In that case, it might be that an absence of at-large councillors might result in ward councillors widening their focus. Although a few people entertained the idea as a possibility, they felt it unlikely. Most outright disagreed. Rather, people thought ward councillors would still focus on their local issues because, in the minds of our research participants, that's who they're answerable to.

People also believe the mixed model balances the dual desires to ensure capability and geographic spread. Electing at-large means a bigger pool of candidates to draw from, which means voters "choose from the cream of the crop". Electing by ward means councillors are more likely to come from across the district, because they are likely to live where they stand.

Councils should be big enough, small enough

People seem to believe that bigger councils help ensure diversity at the council table — ethnicity, skillset, lived experience, local view — and thus lead to more rigorous debate. Those things are good, in people's eyes. Bigger councils also help to prevent councillors being spread too thin, as there are more people to share the workload. Finally, many people believe bigger councils help to protect against a less capable or "hobby-horse councillor", as there are more councillors to dilute that person's point of view or prop up their thinking.

On the other hand, people seem to believe that smaller councils can work more efficiently, make decisions more quickly, keep admin costs down, and jump on opportunities before they disappear. Another perceived benefit of a smaller council is that there is less room for factions and in-fighting.

People had different views about what size of council was big enough yet small enough. Most people who contributed to this topic settled on a council size around seven to 13, including the mayor.

Community boards are valuable, or not

As outlined earlier, a small minority of those involved in the research could speak to direct experience of community boards. That minority provided two different viewpoints:

- They are a great tool for representation. They help bring the voice of the community to council. But they don't have the teeth they need. They are sometimes excluded from council conversations, and sometimes ignored. They could be even more effective for the community if given more responsibility and ability to contribute to council discussions.

- They become a vehicle for single topics and special interests. They are fuelled by, and deliver to, a narrow subset of the community. The two layers of elected representatives adds unhelpful complexity.

The upshot for representation arrangements

Now that we have noted communities of interest and what people value in effective representation, it is useful to reflect on what that means for the representation arrangements. The design brief, and the prevailing perception on how that is achieved, can be summarised as follows.

Design principle	Prevailing perception
Reflect distinct geographic communities of interest.	Achieved through smaller wards, and careful placement of boundaries.
Help ensure high-calibre representatives.	Achieved through bigger wards, at-large.
Don't spread councillors too thin. Ensure they can get across the people and issues.	Achieved through small wards, more councillors.
Support councillors' responsibility to reach out and hear from the community.	Perception this is achieved through small wards. Some perception this could be achieved through community panels, community boards, Council officers. Some concerns with that too.
Ensure minority voices are heard, not overshadowed.	Achieved through careful boundary placement, and/or at-large and not spreading councillors too thin.
Support the likelihood of councillors coming from across the district.	Achieved through small wards.
Give more focus to in-need suburbs. Tackle inequity, foster equity.	Achieved through ward councillors who see local issues, and at-large councillors who look across the district.
Build barriers to parochialism. Support ability to look across the district. Make it easier to do what's best for Kāpiti as a whole.	Achieved through councillors coming from across the district yet not having to answer to their wards.
Ensure councillors hear from a diverse range of community voices, not just one type.	Majority perception this is not achieved through another layer of elected representatives. Minority perception this could be achieved by strengthening the role of community boards.

There is some tension within these design principles. The district's distinct communities of interest add another layer of complexity. Through the research activities, several people came to realise this is not an easy puzzle to solve. One said at the end of an interview, "Now that I think about it, it's tricky! Good luck!" But by using the representation tools available, we're confident it will be possible to find a solution that, on balance, meets the community's requirements.

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