



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT – WHAT DOES IT DO?

Local councils promote the well-being of local communities.

Wherever you live, your local authority is working with its community to enhance social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being now and for the future.

While Parliament is elected to deal with issues relevant to New Zealand and its people as a nation, local government enables democratic local decision-making.

This recognises that not all communities are the same, nor do they have the same issues.

You elect councillors as your representatives to make local decisions taking account of local issues, needs and priorities. This means councils may make different decisions on managing similar situations.

Flourishing communities need:

- Sustained economic development and new jobs
- A healthy and safe environment
- Supportive community networks
- A vibrant and developing culture and identity
- A stable political climate.

Local government has an important role in helping secure these outcomes.



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AFFECTS YOU DAILY

Many of your everyday activities are dependent on services provided by your local city, district or regional council.

These range from water flowing freely from your taps, applying for a building permit, finding a car park so you can borrow books from the library, taking your children to the park, putting out the rubbish for collection, to walking your dog at night along well-lit streets.

Other important local government activities include:

- Writing and managing plans for your area's development, including management of the natural and urban environment
- Making bylaws and enforcing them
- Participating in community partnerships and initiatives such as reducing crime, increasing jobs or access to housing
- Civil defence planning and emergency preparedness.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF COUNCILS

Local authorities include regional, city and district councils.

The 85 local authorities in New Zealand comprise:

- 12 regional councils
- 73 territorial authorities (four of these also undertake the role of a regional council and are sometimes called unitary authorities). Territorial authorities comprise:
  - 57 district councils
  - 16 city councils (generally with populations greater than 50,000).

These local authorities are led by more than 1,000 elected councillors and mayors, and are supported by some 700 community board members.

A key aim for all local authorities is sustainable well-being for their area. This means councils must work toward enhancing social, economic, environmental and cultural factors that contribute to a healthy community.

## REGIONAL COUNCILS

Responsibilities include:

- Managing the effects of using freshwater, land, air and coastal waters, by developing regional policy statements and the issuing of consents
- Managing rivers, mitigating soil erosion and flood control
- Regional land transport planning and contracting passenger services
- Harbour navigation and safety, oil spills and other issues related to marine pollution.

## TERRITORIAL AUTHORITIES (CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS)

The powers and responsibilities of city and district councils are the same. The difference is city councils generally represent a population of more than 50,000 who are predominantly urban-based.

Responsibilities include:

- Providing local infrastructure, including water, sewerage, stormwater, roads and footpaths
- Community infrastructure such as parks, museums, playgrounds, recreation centres, libraries etc
- Regulatory services including building control, liquor licensing, public health inspections and animal control
- Controlling the effects of land use through planning and resource consents (including natural hazards and indigenous biodiversity)
- Other functions including community and economic development, events such as summer programmes, and community grants and funding.



## COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Councils are made up of members of the public elected in local authority elections held every three years.

Each council decides how to structure itself to work on behalf of its community.

The council is led by the Mayor or a Chairperson, who provides leadership and direction to the council and community, and chairs meetings. They are often seen as the public face of the council.

Councils generally establish committees to look at areas of their work. These might include environmental planning and regulatory services, resource consents, finance, works and services, community development and well-being, or land transport.



These committees usually make recommendations for consideration and approval by council, but they are sometimes delegated the power to make decisions.

Councils may also convene sub-committees to examine specialist areas.

Some activities must be approved by the full council. These include:

- Setting rates
- Borrowing money
- Buying or selling some types of land
- Adopting major council documents such as the long-term council community plan or annual report.

## COMMUNITY BOARDS

Many territorial authorities have community boards to help represent and advise council on community views.

They sometimes carry out delegated council service delivery or regulatory responsibilities.

Community boards are elected at the same time as councils, but do not have the same powers.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT POWERS

Everything local authorities do is governed by the legislative framework established by Parliament.

Local government legislation gives local authorities quite wide autonomy, but the laws emphasise councils must show how and why decisions have been made, and must promote community well-being.

Key laws that govern and empower local government are the:

- Local Government Act 2002 (sets out the general powers of councils, the community outcomes process, and planning and accountability requirements)
- Local Government (Rating) Act 2002 (sets out powers councils have to raise revenue through rates)
- Local Electoral Act 2001 (sets out the process for council elections).

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

## WHO LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKS WITH

Local authorities often work closely with central government and other organisations, public bodies, businesses and citizens to help achieve community well-being.

The Department of Internal Affairs is responsible for administering the Local Government Act, and advising if the local government laws are working as intended. Various government departments are concerned with specific local government functions (eg. Ministry for the Environment for resource management).

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Local authorities raise much of their funding through rates, investments, fees and charges. The level these are set at is shown in the council's long-term council community plan, or annual plan.

Central government also provides some funding or subsidies toward particular activities, primarily roading.



## COUNCIL SERVICES CAN INCLUDE:

- Water supply and reticulation
- Drainage and stormwater pipes
- Waste water treatment
- Roads, footpaths, street lighting and parking services
- Public transport
- Public libraries, museums and art galleries
- Swimming pools
- Sports grounds, parks, gardens and reserves (including cemeteries)
- Recreation and convention centres, and community halls
- Rubbish collection, waste disposal and recycling
- Regulatory and planning services
- Community housing
- Grants and community development support
- Visitor information services
- Pest control and biodiversity
- River catchment and flood protection work
- Pollution management and control.

## STATISTICS

Local authorities make a significant contribution to New Zealand's economy. Councils altogether accounted for:

Net worth of combined councils – 2004	\$59.5 billion
Annual Operating Revenue - 2004/05	\$4,996 million
Annual Operating Expenditure - 2004/05	\$4,746 million
Annual Capital Expenditure - 2004	\$1.938 billion
Infrastructural Assets - 2003/04	\$56.1 billion, including owning 87% of the country's roads
Employs - 2003/04	25,250 people (1.2% of all people employed in New Zealand)
Contribution to New Zealand's GDP	2.8% of the total gross domestic product (as at June 2002)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
IN NEW ZEALAND, AND FOR INFORMATION ABOUT  
INDIVIDUAL COUNCILS, VISIT  
[WWW.LOCALCOUNCILS.GOV.T.NZ](http://WWW.LOCALCOUNCILS.GOV.T.NZ)

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS



Te Tari Taiwhenua

Local Government and Community Branch  
Department of Internal Affairs  
PO Box 805  
46 Waring Taylor St  
WELLINGTON  
Phone: 0800 824 824  
Fax: (04) 460 2247

July 2006