

What do local government organisations do?

In Aotearoa we have two different scales of local government; a local scale (City or District Councils) and a regional scale (Regional Councils). In some circumstances, these are combined into one council called a unitary council - like Auckland Council.

The local councils are generally in charge of things like public pools, libraries, museums, waste collection and local parks. They look after local roads, footpaths and cycleways. They also play a role in economic and community development through a range of local projects and initiatives. Most councils will also have targeted funds for community projects that groups can apply for.

The regional Councils are generally in charge of things that affect the whole region like public transport, biodiversity, regional parks, emergency preparedness and flood protection.

Both local and regional Councils put on public events, create strategies, policies, plans and local laws (called by-laws).

Every council will have a website where you can find out more about what they do and what they're working on. Some websites are better than others, but it's worth having a look through to see what's important and getting attention in your local or regional council. If you're not sure what councils cover the areas where you live, work, and play, you can check here: <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/local-government-in-nz/new-zealands-councils/>

Councils are generally funded by rates and user charges (and in some cases by central government for large joint projects that have wider benefits). Rates are paid for by you—you pay directly if you own your home, and if you rent, you pay rates via your landlord—so it's worth knowing how your money is invested in delivering for your local area.

You might think that you have very little to do with what your local government organisations do—that could not be further from the truth. Whether you have your say or not, councils' work and their decisions impact on the lives of every person living, or spending time in, their area. Often, the work our local government organisations do becomes most visible when things go wrong, such as floods, waste not being collected or you get a parking fine! But they also provide essential services that keep our communities functioning every single day.

As you can see, councils provide many community amenities that are important for families. . They can undertake system level changes like allowing more houses close to public transport so that our rangatahi can travel independently and safely. They can install protected bike lanes, fund community projects and provide kerbside food waste collections - these are system changes that support people in the community to live vibrant and fulfilling lives. Some system changes can only be done by councils and therefore their role is crucial to Aotearoa successfully reaching our emissions reduction targets.

What can we, as parents, do about this? Well, this year, we can vote for who is making the big decisions for councils. Councils are made up of democratically elected representatives (mayors and councillors). These councillors are voted in to represent your community and local area. Voting in the local elections helps to ensure the big decisions are being made by

people who share your concerns and your vision for the world our tamariki will live in. Read up about your local candidates, check out their campaign promises and if you have the time contact them to ask what their position is on an issue that's on your mind or just share your hopes for how you'd like your local area or city to be in the future.

In order to vote at the local elections, you need to be enrolled, and your details need to be up to date. The deadline for enrolment is 12th August, so check your details now at www.vote.nz to make sure you're ready for voting. And if you have a teenager who has turned 18 since the last general election in 2020, it's worth making sure they're enrolled too! (If you miss the deadline, you will still be able to vote, but you will need to request special voting papers)

Follow on next week for a bit more about how local decision making works.