



AGENDA

Late Report

Ordinary Council meeting

Thursday, 6 August 2026

Date: Thursday, 6 August 2026

**Time: 9:30 am - Joint Extraordinary Council
Meeting - TCC/WBOPDC**

**Location: WBOPDC Chambers
1484 Cameron Road
Tauranga**

**Marty Grenfell
Chief Executive**

Order of Business

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11.1 Local government reform - participation in Simplifying Local Government Head
Start Pathway..... 4

11 BUSINESS

11.1 Local government reform - participation in Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway

File Number: A20795023

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. For Council to formally consider its participation in the Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway.
2. To highlight to the Council any opportunities and/or risk, and any significant changes since the last report on 23 June 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council:

- (a) Receives the report "Local government reform - participation in Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway".
- (b) Receives the minutes of the joint TCC/WBOPDC workshops held between 24 June – 30 July (provided as Attachment 3 to this report).
- (c) Receives the feedback noted below (and as set out in Attachment 2 to this report) including the community survey report and other feedback received since the council's community engagement period closed, and gives consideration to community views as part of its decision-making.
 - (i) Tauranga City Council's Simplifying local government community survey report 14 July 2026
 - (ii) Letter from Ngati Ranginui
 - (iii) Letter from Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority
 - (iv) Letter from Ngati Pukenga
 - (v) Letter from Priority One
 - (vi) Letter from Urban Task Force
- (d) Resolves its preferred pathway as Pathway A or Pathway B:
Pathway A – subregional unitary authority through Head Start
 - (i) That Council directs the Chief Executive to jointly lodge a Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway outline proposal (provided as Attachment 1 to this report) with the Western Bay of Plenty District Council Chief Executive by no later than 9 August 2026, proposing a subregional unitary authority covering the existing combined territorial authority areas of Tauranga City and the Western Bay of Plenty District, subject to Western Bay of Plenty District Council resolving the same.
 - (ii) That Council notes the Mayor's intention to sign a letter jointly prepared by the Mayors of the Bay of Plenty region, promoting a suite of three sub-regional proposals for the Bay of Plenty region being the East (Kawerau, Whakatane and

OR

Pathway B – Wait for the backstop

- (iii) That Council resolves not to lodge a Head Start Proposal, instead choosing to participate in the Back Stop process, and notes that Government intends to pass legislation in mid-2027 prescribing the Back Stop process form and requirements.
- (iv) That Council notes by resolving to participate in the Back Stop process, it compromises the position that other councils in the Bay of Plenty plan to progress (based on their respective community feedback), which enables a consistent wider regional view for three sub-regional proposals with an aligned approach to determining wider service delivery options.
- (v) That Council signals its desire to develop a joint letter of intent with Western Bay of Plenty District Council to send to the Minister, generally outlining its desire to progress amalgamation work in the sub-region.
- (e) Supports a consistent wider regional view for three sub-regional unitary councils including Eastern Bay, Rotorua-Central and Western Bay (including TCC) configurations, and supports Head Start proposals and long-term aspiration of other councils on this basis.
- (f) Agrees to work with the other councils, and the current Bay of Plenty Regional Council, in implementation planning and delivery should the Head Start proposals be approved.
- (g) Agrees to work with other councils to consider wider regional and cross boundary function delivery and shared services where appropriate in future unitary delivery models.
- (h) Acknowledges Government's detailed design phase as the next step if the outline proposal is accepted and notes that this will require collaborative working with potential partner councils and the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT).
- (i) Authorises the Chief Executive to make any minor editorial changes to the Head Start outline proposal document or its supporting information prior to lodgement, subject to agreement by the Western Bay of Plenty District Council Chief Executive.
- (j) Authorises the Chief Executive to liaise with MCERT staff to answer questions of clarification about the outline proposal as part of the assessment phase, in collaboration with the Tauranga City Council Chief Executive as appropriate.
- (k) Directs the Chief Executive to work alongside the Western Bay of Plenty District Council Chief Executive to draft Terms of Reference for a Joint Committee (as contemplated by the Head Start outline proposal), and to bring a report to the next practicable Council meeting with the intention of establishing the Joint Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. The Government announced its Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway on 5 May 2026. The Head Start Pathway provides an option for two or more territorial authorities to propose to establish a unitary authority for implementation at the October 2028 local government elections, with all territorial authorities that did not take up this option being subject to the Back Stop option where the Government will implement its preferred unitary model.

4. A Head Start Pathway outline proposal for a sub-regional unitary authority has been jointly developed between Western Bay of Plenty District Council and Tauranga City Council. If both councils decide to approve the proposal, it must be lodged with central government by no later than 9 August 2026. The draft outline proposal is provided as **Attachment 1** to this report.
5. Councils across the Bay of Plenty have also agreed to make common resolutions to acknowledge and support each other's sub-regional proposals. The alignment of approaches across the Bay of Plenty, and collective endorsement, is expected to add substantial weight to each of the individual proposals.
6. The recommendations of this report will guide the next steps for Council as to whether it wishes to lodge an outline proposal for the Head Start Pathway or participate in the Back Stop process in 2027.

BACKGROUND

Head Start Pathway and guidance for outline proposals

7. As outlined in the Western Bay of Plenty District Council (WBOPDC) report of 30 June 2026, and the Tauranga City Council report of 23 June 2026, Government announced its Simplifying Local Government Head Start Pathway on 5 May 2026. This includes:
 - (a) A voluntary **Head Start Pathway** – intended for councils that are willing and able to reorganise quickly. It allows territorial authorities to submit an outline proposal to establish one or more new unitary authorities (a council that performs both regional council and territorial authority functions within the same geographic area). Outline proposals must be submitted by 9 August 2026.
 - (b) A compulsory **Back Stop** process – would apply to councils that do not progress through the Head Start Pathway. The Government has indicated that detail on the backstop approach will be developed in 2027 and that it is likely to include a standard approach to local government reorganisation.
8. The Government's overarching intent is to simplify local government through creation of unitary councils to simplify governance, reduce duplication and improve regional coordination. The intention is that regional council governance will be disestablished from the 2028 local elections.
9. Head Start outline proposals can be submitted by groupings of two or more territorial authorities that represent a majority of either: the directly affected territorial authorities, or the population across directly affected districts.
10. The Government has signalled a preference for all territorial authorities in a region to combine to form a single unitary authority, and that more than one unitary authority in a region is only likely to be approved if:
 - (a) the region is geographically large, contains a large number of territorial authorities and has significantly complex issues; and
 - (b) the proposal clearly meets the criteria and doesn't lead to the fragmentation of service delivery for key regional functions where collaboration or integration is required.
11. The Government's [Guidance for Head Start outline proposals](#) outlines the specific information sought from each outline proposal to enable assessment against five broadly inclusive criteria, being: support for the new planning system, simplified local governance, economies of scale, maintaining local voice, and deliverability. A final section on Treaty settlements is also required.
12. The Government has signalled it will consider outline proposals and notify successful applicants that they have approval to proceed to a detailed design phase in late September 2026.
13. Next steps, for outline proposals approved to proceed in September 2026:

- (a) The detailed design phase would include comprehensive community engagement and would require a final proposal to be submitted by late March 2027, for final approval by the new Government.
- (b) The Government would provide input and support to the detailed design phase, as well as developing legislation required to implement each of the successful proposals.
- (c) The detailed design phase would also commence a process similar to a council representation review, to determine a new unitary council's governance structure for the 2028 council elections. This process would be likely to continue past the final proposal approval date in March 2027 and would run alongside transition planning and, if approved, transition implementation for the new entity.

Bay of Plenty councils' responses

- 14. Since the Government's 5 May announcement, the Bay of Plenty Mayoral Forum (the Mayoral Forum) has met frequently to consider how councils in this region might work together to respond to the Head Start Pathway. While favoured by the Government, a region-wide unitary council did not achieve majority support and has not been progressed. The Mayoral Forum agreed to support three sub-regional unitary councils for the east, west, and central areas of the region, with regional functions being incorporated into the new unitary authorities and delivered by any joint arrangements the new councils agree.
- 15. The TCC and WBOPDC mayors and councillors have worked together to jointly develop an outline proposal for a western Bay of Plenty sub-regional unitary council, comprising both councils' geographic areas. The draft joint outline proposal is provided to both council meetings today for consideration and a decision on whether it should be submitted for receipt by 9 August 2026 (refer to Attachment 1 to this report).
- 16. Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC) has expressed interest in potentially joining a Head Start outline proposal with TCC and WBOPDC, to create a larger unitary council across the three districts potentially plus a small coastal strip from the Hauraki District Council area. Several TCDC Councillors have attended and participated in recent joint TCC/WBOPDC informal discussions, with no firm commitment having been made on this matter prior to TCDC's decision meeting scheduled for 4 August 2026. The TCC and WBOPDC Mayors and Councillors have continued to 'leave the door open' to TCDC joining at a later date but have continued with the sub-regional proposal at this stage.
- 17. Kawerau District Council, Opotiki District Council and Whakatāne District Council have worked together to develop a draft outline proposal for an eastern Bay of Plenty unitary authority. The three councils will consider this proposal for formal approval in early August, to enable an approved proposal to meet the submission receipt deadline of 9 August.
- 18. Rotorua District Council will submit a draft outline proposal for a central Bay of Plenty unitary authority, completing the suite of three sub-regional unitary authority outline proposals covering the Bay of Plenty region.
- 19. The Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC) has signalled a strong preference for a Bay of Plenty region-wide unitary council with three elected sub-regional bodies providing local voice, representation and services. BOPRC is aware that this model has not been supported by the territorial authorities in the region and has committed to continuing to work with its council partners to support transition planning should the sub-regional unitary proposals be approved to proceed.
- 20. The TCC and WBOPDC mayors and councillors value the councils' existing relationships and arrangements with iwi/hapū/Māori that have been built up over many years. There is a strong commitment to continued partnership to build on these relationships and arrangements as this process develops.

Draft outline proposal – key aspects

- 21. The outline proposal seeks the establishment of a new sub-regional unitary authority created across the existing Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty District areas, taking on the

majority of the functions of Bay of Plenty Regional Council that are delivered for this sub-region.

- Establishment of a regional service delivery vehicle that would take on those functions best delivered at a scale beyond the sub-region.
- A proposed two-tier representation structure, with a governing body (Council) focused more primarily on strategic matters, with a second tier of local representation that enables local voice and decision-making.
- Māori representation to be determined through the detailed design phase.
- A strong focus on innovation and cost efficiencies and removing confusion and duplication from our existing local government system.
- Leveraging our strong sub-regional foundations, working in partnership with our neighbouring councils within the Bay of Plenty and beyond to implement the new planning system, deliver functions at the most appropriate level regardless of structure, progress and deliver on the Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal, support our strong local economy and enable our communities to thrive.
- A substantive detailed design phase, inclusive of community engagement across the sub-region on key aspects of the transition such as representation, delivery of functions and services, cost efficiencies and approach to legacy issues.
- Strategic vision and outcomes to be developed during the transition and establishment phase.
- A commitment to working in partnership with tangata whenua, our communities, local government partners and the government to ensure our new entity is well positioned for the future.

22. There are a number of matters that the two councils have identified as being fundamental to the success of this outline proposal but have not yet been considered in sufficient detail to develop an agreed approach. This outline proposal is conditional on both councils agreeing the approach on the following matters during the detailed design phase of this process:

- Ring-fencing of existing debt, and reaching agreement on how the debt and asset principles are applied to sub-regional facilities (including identification of what these are, and how they are treated in terms of rates, remaining rates-funded debt and income allocation)
- Long Term Plan 2027-2037 (years 1-3) – ensuring projects important to communities are not deprioritised as a result of the pending amalgamation.
- Local representation – agreement on the approach to a second tier of representation, and the communities that would be represented in this way.

23. In the event that agreement cannot be reached between the councils on one or more of these matters during the detailed design phase, the councils will first seek support from the Government. This may include consideration of independent facilitation or mediation to seek a resolution of the issues. The councils would develop a mediation plan for approval by Government's delegated representative that clearly outlines the process for mediation, as well as the scope of the issues and the practicable options available. If this is deemed to be unsuccessful by both of the councils following the mediation process, the councils will both formally withdraw support for the proposal and further work on it will cease.

Engagement, consultation and communication

24. The short timeframes set out in the Head Start Pathway process are not adequate to robustly frame up scenarios and associated implications. Both councils considered that better understanding community views was important, given the significance of the decisions to be made in relation to the future of the district and city. Advice to the sector from Simpson

Grierson also noted that councils should consider undertaking targeted, time-limited forms of public engagement to mitigate legal risk.

25. Western Bay of Plenty District Council undertook community engagement between 25 May - 14 June. This was based around five high level scenarios which the community were asked to provide feedback on. 262 responses were received, with community feedback showing the sub-regional scenario had the most support out of the 5 scenarios presented (equal with a standalone unitary authority for the district, not contemplated by the Head Start Pathway) at 27.4% of respondents.
26. The key concerns from Western Bay communities emerging from this engagement period related to maintaining a strong local voice and concerns around affordability and debt. There was majority support overall for council to merge with other councils under a new structure. Council formally received feedback from this community engagement at its meeting on 30 June 2026 (with a summary document included as pages 78 to 96 of Attachment 2 to this report). It was also resolved to focus on the regional unitary authority and subregional unitary authority scenarios, noting that Thames Coromandel District Council could be considered in either scenario.
27. Tauranga City Council undertook community engagement by way of a survey from 15 June – 1 July, with 1,338 responses received. Over 79% of respondents prefer council to design a future structure, rather than Government, with Western Bay of Plenty being the preferred merger partner (69%). Key themes were keeping rates low and efficient delivery of council functions and infrastructure ranked top priorities for any future structure. The [TCC survey report](#) is provided as supporting information on pages 5 to 77 of Attachment 2 to this report.
28. Bay of Plenty Regional Council undertook engagement with communities from 29 June - 12 July through a regional voice survey. 278 responses were received from across the Bay of Plenty with environmental protection ranked as the top priority. The one regional unitary authority model received the most positive feedback and there was a preference to keep regional services joined up.
29. Thames Coromandel District Council sought feedback from its communities to support decision making from 24 June – 15 July. 46% of respondents supported an Eastern Waikato option, 29% supported a Northern Bay of Plenty option and 10% supported a greater Waikato option. Key themes gathered included local representation, no rates increase, alignment with similar communities and concern on metro dominance and debt.

STATUTORY CONTEXT

30. The recommendations of this report comply with existing Local Government Act 2002 provisions for Council decision-making and community engagement principles. They also maintain compliance with Government's Head Start pathway policy provisions.
31. The Simplifying Local Government – Head Start Pathway process does not currently have a legislative basis, however the policy framework presumes that “bespoke legislation” will be progressed for Councils that are part of this process.
32. A subsequent legislative process will be required after the 2028 local government elections to mandate any changes required as part of the Backstop process.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

33. This contributes to the promotion or achievement of the following strategic community outcome(s):

	Contributes
We are an inclusive city	✓
We value, protect and enhance the environment	✓
We are a well-planned city that is easy to move around	✓
We are a city that supports business and education	✓

We are a vibrant city that embraces events



34. Local Government form and function is critical to local democracy, and as such will impact on all community outcomes for the city.

OPTIONS ANALYSIS

35. The fundamental issue addressed by the recommendations of this report is whether Council wishes to participate in the Simplifying Local Government Head Start pathway and lodge an outline proposal by 9 August 2026. The recommendations of this report cover the practicable options for Council to consider, being to lodge a Head Start proposal with Western Bay of Plenty District Council or to opt for the Back Stop process.

36. Option A - Regional Unitary Authority

All Councils in the Bay of Plenty region (Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Tauranga City, Rotorua, Kawerau, Whakatāne, Ōpōtiki) plus Bay of Plenty Regional Council functions. Thames Coromandel District Council could have also been considered within this option.

Advantages	Disadvantages
It could work more efficiently by planning across the whole region and enable delivery of some shared services.	This is not the preferred approach of other councils in the Bay of Plenty with Whakatāne District Council, Kawerau District Council and Ōpōtiki District Council agreeing to progress work on developing a proposal for an Eastern Bay of Plenty unitary council.
Supports implementation of the new proposed planning system, centred around a regional spatial plan.	Large unitary authority may not adequately reflect different communities, land uses, growth patterns across the various sub-regions.
Simplifies local governance arrangements with one council replacing two separate layers of local government.	Concern around financial implications to smaller councils.
More effectively aligns with catchment management and other activities better delivered at a greater scale.	More complex amalgamation process to merge a large number of councils.
A larger scale unitary authority can help mitigate concerns that a larger urban population could dominate the rural areas.	There is a potential loss of local voice in decision making.
One large council could result in greater efficiencies, as well as more efficient decision-making and communications.	Decision making may become less responsive to local issues and priorities.
Potential alignment with other boundaries for sports, service provision and catchments.	Does not align with the existing geographic boundaries of the joint water organisation or regional deal.
Māori representation options – for example alignment with three waka, regional council constituencies.	Broader focus than the existing sub-regional growth planning partnership (SmartGrowth).
Cross-boundary infrastructure funding issues and requests for boundary changes would not be an ongoing issue.	Potential for sunk costs if Council is unable to reach agreement with partnering councils, or if not approved to proceed by Cabinet.
	Uncertain future costs to (or known savings for) our communities at this time.

37. Option B – Sub-regional Unitary Authority

Western Bay of Plenty District Council and Tauranga City Council plus Bay of Plenty Regional Council functions

Advantages	Disadvantages
Aligns with the way this area already plans for growth together through SmartGrowth.	Potential loss of local voice and decision making. Representation arrangements reflecting a second tier of representation is included in the outline proposal to address this.
It could work more efficiently by planning across the sub-region and enable delivery of some shared services while some functions remaining at a regional or national level.	Decision making may become less responsive to local issues and priorities.
Partially supports implementation of the new proposed planning system, centred around a regional spatial plan.	Potential transfer of debt to other areas, and how this might affect rates under a new entity. Ringfencing of some debt is built into the outline proposal to address this.
Simplifies local governance arrangements with one council replacing two separate layers of local government.	Concerns that rural areas and natural assets may be used for urban growth of the city.
Lines up with the current boundaries used for shared water organisation and Regional Deal.	Concern that sufficient scale would not be achieved to achieve greater economies across service provision.
Cross-boundary infrastructure funding issues and requests for boundary changes would not be an ongoing issue.	Potential for sunk costs if Council is unable to reach agreement with partnering councils, or if not approved to proceed by Cabinet.
Efficiencies for people who deal with both TCC and WBOPDC regularly.	Uncertain future costs to (or known savings for) our communities at this time.
Significant level of connections already exists between the two areas – many people travel across boundaries for work, school etc.	
Geographic alignment – acknowledging that the city is surrounded by WBOP with limited room for growth. Also reflective of the Tauranga Moana catchment.	

38. Option C – Sub-regional + TCDC Unitary Authority

Western Bay of Plenty District Council, Tauranga City Council, Thames Coromandel District Council plus Bay of Plenty and Waikato Regional Council functions

Advantages	Disadvantages
May provide provincial ratepayer population to balance larger urban ratepayer base in Tauranga.	This is not the preferred option for TCDC who have a recommended preferred option for a Headstart Proposal in partnership with Hauraki District Council and Matamata-Piako District Council for decision on 4 August.

Advantages	Disadvantages
There would be more ratepayers overall to spread the cost.	Tangata Whenua feedback to date does not support amalgamation with TCDC.
There is some alignment with coastal communities of interest in West of the sub-region.	Would require an inter-regional arrangement which adds complexity in respect to regional functions, with both Waikato and Bay of Plenty Regional Councils requiring involvement.
	Specific arrangement has not been consulted on with Western Bay or Tauranga City communities.
	There is no alignment with TCDC under the new planning system (regional spatial planning).
	Would require a boundary adjustment in order for boundary to be contiguous. This is not supported by Hauraki District Council and may impact relationships with this council.
	There are potential reputational risks for council initiating a 'hostile boundary adjustment'.
	There has been no engagement with the communities within the boundary adjustment area.
	This option did not receive majority support from the TCDC community (29%) with the preferred option being for an East Waikato option (46%).
	Potential for sunk costs if Council is unable to reach agreement with partnering councils, or if not approved to proceed by Cabinet.
	Uncertain future costs to (or known savings for) our communities at this time.

39. Option D – Back Stop option

Do not participate in the Simplifying Local Government Head Start process and wait for back stop.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows more time for options analysis and engagement with potential partner councils as well as community.	We may lose the opportunity for local determination and will be required to give effect to the new Back Stop legislation.
Enables learning from councils that have pursued Head Start to be understood.	There is a risk that we could be pulled into another Head Start proposal as a non-consenting authority, initiated by other councils.
Resources can remain focused on current work programme priorities.	Transition to new arrangements may take longer than pursuing a Head Start, which

Advantages	Disadvantages
	prolongs the amount of time that our communities, councillors and organisation will be in a state of uncertainty.
May be able to have some level of influence on preferred scenario prior to Back Stop legislation.	There is potential reputational risk with other councils who may have expectation that alternative option is agreed.
	While short term costs to pursue a Head Start proposal may not be incurred, it's highly likely that Council may wish to undertake further modelling/analysis to inform future arrangements.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

40. Lodgement of outline proposal (Options B) – delivery against the recommendations of this report relating to option B will require additional resourcing and/or reprioritisation of existing work programmes to stand up a transition team and achieve future phases of the reorganisation process.
41. Backstop option (Option D) – delivery against the recommendations of this report relating to option D can be accommodated within existing staff resources and operational budgets.

RISKS AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

42. There is a risk that the council may be accepted into a Head Start Pathway process, only for the process to subsequently change after the general election in November 2026.
43. Any change brings uncertainty, which can result in increased staff turnover and an impact on current services.

TE AO MĀORI APPROACH

44. Tauranga City Council commenced engagement with Tangata Whenua in regards to the Head Start Pathway, and ongoing engagement is anticipated should the sub-regional Head Start outline proposal proceed further. This will include engagement with Iwi Chairs to enable the council to understand Tangata Whenua views as to the future governance arrangements for Tauranga city.
45. Letters of support for a western Bay of Plenty sub-regional unitary authority have been received from Ngāti Pukenga and Ngati Ranginui and are included as supporting information to the draft outline proposal (provided as pages 108 to 125 of Attachment 2 to this report). A letter has also been received from Te Maru o Kaituna in relation to its position and expectations for local government reform (also provided in Attachment 2, pages 106 and 107).

CLIMATE IMPACT

46. This matter has negligible impact on council's climate responsibilities in planning and delivering the functions it is responsible for.
47. Should the proposal be successful, implementation will see a new sub-regional unitary authority for the western Bay of Plenty area which will include a greater focus on protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a result of incorporating relevant formerly regional council functions into its range of responsibilities.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT

48. Consultation and engagement to date regarding the Head Start Pathway is covered in the background section of this report.

SIGNIFICANCE

49. The Local Government Act 2002 requires an assessment of the significance of matters, issues, proposals and decisions in this report against Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. Council acknowledges that in some instances a matter, issue, proposal or decision may have a high degree of importance to individuals, groups, or agencies affected by the report.
50. In making this assessment, consideration has been given to the likely impact, and likely consequences for:
- (a) the current and future social, economic, environmental, or cultural well-being of the district or region
 - (b) any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the decision.
 - (c) the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so.
51. In accordance with the considerations above, criteria and thresholds in the policy, it is considered that the **decision** is of **high** significance because of the implications for the future of the city and wider western Bay of Plenty district and its communities and known community views obtained through recent community engagement. Keeping rates low and efficient delivery of council's functions and infrastructure have been identified as key concerns for our communities. The recommendations of this report seek Council's substantive decision on whether to formally commence the Head Start Pathway, or opt to wait for the Back Stop. Both pathways are expected to result in significant re-organisation of local government of the sub-region.

ENGAGEMENT

52. Taking into consideration the above assessment, that the decision is of high significance, officers are of the opinion that no further engagement is required prior to Council making a decision. Community engagement and additional feedback received to date has contributed to the recommendations provided in this report

NEXT STEPS

53. The next steps are outlined in the recommendations section of this report, and are dependent on the decisions Council takes at this meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Head Start draft outline proposal - [!\[\]\(e6ddc77b791299d975007937cebef274_img.jpg\)](#) 
2. Supporting information to outline proposal - [!\[\]\(62325268b83c539c826661482098edc3_img.jpg\)](#) 
3. TCC/WBOPDC Joint Workshop Notes - [!\[\]\(433d19d9bdeac46075af10d8acb0c69a_img.jpg\)](#) 

Simplifying Local Government – Head Start Pathway

Outline proposal for a Western Bay of Plenty Unitary Authority

from
Tauranga City Council
and
Western Bay of Plenty District Council



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1. Introduction

This Head Start Pathway outline proposal is made by Tauranga City Council (TCC) and Western Bay of Plenty District Council (WBOPDC), intending to create a new sub-regional unitary authority covering the existing combined territorial authority areas of Tauranga City and the Western Bay of Plenty District, and most of the services currently provided by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC).

Our sub-regional outline proposal is made as part of a suite of regionally endorsed sub-regional proposals for the Bay of plenty region. Please see the attached letter from the Mayors of the Bay of Plenty region in section 10 of this outline proposal for supporting information.

As a sub-regional unitary authority, it's intended that the majority of functions carried out by BOPRC would be delivered by, or on behalf of, the new sub-regional unitary authority. While this process will greatly simplify governance and reduce duplication by creating one new entity, it will also be critical that current regional council functions and responsibilities are well understood and appropriately resourced by the new entity. This is particularly important to ensure local government continues to provide a 'voice for the environment' and continues to build on existing iwi partnerships.

Through the detailed design phase, we intend to undertake detailed function modelling (in collaboration with the other territorial authorities in the region as well as BOPRC) to determine which functions would be most effectively delivered at a regional scale. It is noted that the Head Start Pathway guidance document identifies transport, planning and catchment management as functions requiring consideration. The detailed design phase would also include determining the most appropriate method for delivering regional functions, such as a shared services arrangement or joint committee of the three new sub-regional unitary authorities. This is an agreed position across all territorial authorities in the Bay of Plenty region.*[This statement to be confirmed prior to lodgement, based on other councils' resolutions at meetings this week]*

A new sub-regional unitary authority will bring the services of two Territorial Authorities (TCC and WBOPDC), and the functions of the BOPRC together. Many people believe that the current model of local government could be delivered more efficiently if we are prepared to change. We cannot keep doing the same thing, and expect a different outcome. We need to deliver the services we do for our community faster, cheaper and better. As such, a conscious decision by both territorial authorities has been made to ensure that this process take the opportunity to design how services and functions are delivered to ensure the best value for money, customer outcome and efficiency, rather than simply "lifting and shifting" existing arrangements into the new sub-regional

unitary authority. This is seen as an opportunity to design something new, that removes existing regulatory and process impediments to growth. Further, a new organisation can create a “can do” attitude in order to get the best outcome for our people, and improve the reputation of local government in the Western Bay sub-region.

2. Our proposal at a glance

A new sub-regional unitary authority created across the existing Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty District areas, taking on the majority of the functions of Bay of Plenty Regional Council that are delivered for this sub-region.

- Establishment of an appropriate method for delivering regional functions, that would deliver those functions best delivered at a scale beyond the sub-region.
- A proposed two-tier representation structure, with a governing body (Council) focused more primarily on strategic matters, with a second tier of local representation that enables local voice and decision-making.
- Māori representation to be determined through the detailed design phase.
- A strong focus on innovation and cost efficiencies and removing confusion and duplication from our existing local government system.
- Leveraging our strong sub-regional foundations, working in partnership with our neighbouring councils within the Bay of Plenty and beyond to implement the new planning system, deliver functions at the most appropriate level regardless of structure, progress and deliver on the Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal, support our strong local economy and enable our communities to thrive.
- A substantive detailed design phase, inclusive of community engagement across the sub-region on key aspects of the transition such as representation, delivery of functions and services, cost efficiencies and approach to legacy issues.
- Strategic vision and outcomes to be developed during the transition and establishment phase.
- A commitment to working in partnership with tangata whenua, our communities, local government partners and the government to ensure our new entity is well positioned for the future.

Conditional matters for this outline proposal

There are a number of matters that the two councils have identified as being fundamental to the success of this outline proposal but have not yet been considered in sufficient detail to develop an agreed approach. This outline proposal is conditional on both councils agreeing the approach on the following matters during the detailed design phase of this process:

1. Ring-fencing of existing debt (for the remaining term of the loan), and reaching agreement on how the debt and asset principles are applied to sub-regional facilities (including identification of what these are, and how they are treated in terms of rates, remaining rates-funded debt and income allocation)
2. Long Term Plan 2027-2037 (years 1-3) – ensuring projects important to communities are not deprioritised as a result of the pending amalgamation.
3. Local representation – agreement on the approach to a second tier of representation, and the communities that would be represented in this way.

In the event that agreement cannot be reached between the councils on one or more of these matters during the detailed design phase, the councils will first seek support from the Government. This may include consideration of independent facilitation or mediation to seek a resolution of the issues. The councils would develop a mediation plan for approval by Government's delegated representative that clearly outlines the process for mediation, as well as the scope of the issues and the practicable options available. If this is deemed to be unsuccessful by both of the councils following the mediation process, the councils will both formally withdraw support for the proposal and further work on it will cease.

Confirmation of eligibility to submit

This proposal is made by two territorial authorities (being TCC and WBOPDC). Together, our existing jurisdictional areas form a contiguous area across our existing sub-region and have a combined population of approximately 221,000 people (30 June 2025). As a sub-region, we are expected to grow to 286,880 by 2053.

Both of the affected territorial authorities have jointly developed this outline proposal, through a series of joint workshops and culminating with council meetings on 6 August 2026 *[TBC prior to lodging - where both councils resolved to lodge this outline proposal (plus any further key details from the resolutions)]*. As part of the process to develop a proposal, Thames Coromandel District Council also engaged in the majority of our joint workshops.

All territorial authorities in the region support the three sub-region model, as demonstrated by the attached letter from the Bay of Plenty Mayors.

It is acknowledged that this application is not the preferred outcome for BOPRC. BOPRC has been consistent that it believes that a single unitary authority following the current boundaries of the Bay of Plenty region is the optimal outcome. BOPRC has provided details of an alternative proposal where services are provided at the current regional level, with some decisions being made at a local level.

The position of BOPRC differs from that of the territorial authorities of the current Bay of Plenty region, who believe that a three sub-regional unitary model with shared services is the better option. This position is largely consistent with the views of the communities of interest located throughout the respective sub-regions.

For completeness, it is noted that there is some support within the councils for a wider, whole of Bay unitary. However, it is recognised that this is not shared by the other territorial authorities in the Bay of Plenty area. Therefore, a three sub-regional model is seen as the best “practicable” option, and it is considered that this model (with shared services) can achieve most of the same outcomes, if designed well. As noted later in this document, the “door is left open” for the other parts of the Bay to come together at a later date.

3. Sub-regional proposal

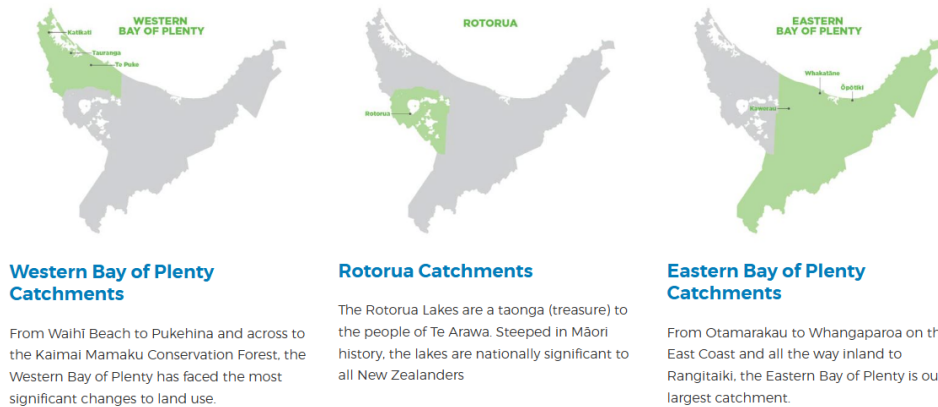
How does the proposal benefit the region as a whole?

Whilst this is a sub-regional application, it forms part of a coordinated and coherent approach for the entirety of the Bay of Plenty Region, that reflects in many instances how the Bay of Plenty already coordinates and collaborates its efforts.

The existing Bay of Plenty Region very neatly falls into three distinct communities of interest, being the East (Kawerau, Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki,), Central (Rotorua) and the West (Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty). This is also aligned to the three sub-region model that forms the basis for our regional spatial plan under the new planning legislation. Additionally, the three sub-regions also reflect the three integrated catchment management areas of the Bay of Plenty (as outlined in the diagram below), providing as strong foundation for future natural environment planning for the sub-region and beyond.

BOPRC integrated catchment management boundaries

(ref: <https://www.boprc.govt.nz/environment/our-catchments/>)



The participating councils recognise that local Government reform cannot occur in isolation and that future governance arrangements should contribute positively to both local outcomes and the wider existing Bay of Plenty region. Discussions across the Bay of Plenty have explored how future governance arrangements can collectively support an effective and coherent regional structure across the wider Bay of Plenty.

This application looks to leverage the advantages of the sub-regional identity, whilst having an appropriate method for delivering regional functions for the three unitary shareholder councils, to perform those functions best undertaken at a regional scale.

It is considered that this provides the best opportunity for “the best of both worlds” - local voice to be preserved, distinct communities of interest to be recognised, alignment with the new planning system, Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal, and LWDW water organisation, whilst providing benefits of scale for efficiency and for cross boundary issues of a regional scale.

A model with sub-regions was preferred over a single region-wide unitary authority, as it was considered more aligned with communities of interest, existing integrated catchment management areas, and existing relationships within the Bay of Plenty. These are aligned to local labour markets and local economic activities that have a strong sub-regional focus. In a larger regional authority, there is an increased risk for loss of local voice and decision-making, and that decision making may become less responsive to local issues and priorities. Given the number of communities dispersed across a large geographical area, it is expected that the local representation structure required to address these concerns would likely be cumbersome and difficult to gain efficiencies.

A region-wide unitary authority may not adequately reflect different land uses and growth patterns across the various sub regions. For the western Bay of Plenty sub-region, a region-wide unitary authority does not align with the existing geographic boundaries of the joint Water Organisation or Regional Deal. It would also have broader focus than the existing sub-regional growth planning partnership (SmartGrowth). As demonstrated in our sub-regional cross boundary arrangements and initiatives document (attached as supporting information, refer section 10), we already have close alignment and a range of existing services and relationships at the sub-regional level. We believe that there are significant opportunities for simplification and transformation within our sub-region. It would also be a more complex amalgamation process to merge a larger number of councils, for limited additional benefit.

The Western Bay of Plenty sub-region is a standalone labour market and economic area, with its own employment catchment, housing market, freight gateway and business ecosystem. There is high internal commuting integration between centres in the sub-region, with people moving across local authority boundaries for employment, education, recreation, healthcare and services. Tauranga acts as the metropolitan employment hub for the wider sub-region, concentrating professional services, logistics, health, education, construction and industrial employment. The sub-region has a labour market profile that differs from Rotorua, Eastern Bay of Plenty and the Waikato, with stronger links to logistics, export industries, construction, business services and population-driven services. From a functional economic geography perspective, the Western Bay resembles a medium sized metropolitan economy rather than a provincial district. The Government has recognised this difference through the recently signed Regional Deal covering the Western Bay sub-region.

A sub-regional approach is also aligned with what we've heard so far from our communities and engagement with tangata whenua.

- 273 responses were received for WBOPDC, with community feedback showing the sub-regional scenario had the most support out of the 5 scenarios presented (equal with a standalone unitary authority for the district, not contemplated by the Head Start Pathway) at 27.4% of respondents. A region-wide unitary authority was the third most preferred at 19.7% of respondents.
- 1338 responses were made to a statistically valid survey of TCC residents showed that 89% of people supported a single combined council, so long as it contained efficiencies. When asked which Councils specifically to partner with, 69% of respondents identified WBOPDC as one of their preferences. 25% of people supported whichever combination of councils made sense to achieve efficiency of services.

- High level engagement with tangata whenua is generally supportive of a sub-regional approach, with TCC and WBOPDC having relationships with some of the same iwi and hapū. A wider grouping of councils (and therefore iwi) was generally not supported. Emphasis was placed on the importance of local voice and existing relationships, partnerships and working arrangements, with a clear expectation that these would be carried forward into a new sub-regional unitary authority. Letters of support and/or expectation are included in section 10 – supporting information.
- Feedback from the business community of the sub-region showed significant support for a sub-regional unitary authority, with the majority of respondents favouring this, if it was to simplify business interactions with local government. A letter of support outlining this is attached at section 10. For completeness, it is noted that BOPRC undertook its own survey across the region, and of the 267 responses from the current Bay of Plenty region 59% favoured a single regional unitary authority. Letters of support for a sub-regional proposal are included in section 10 – supporting information,

What is the impact on councils not included in the proposal?

Through the detailed design phase, we intend to undertake detailed function modelling (in collaboration with the other territorial authorities in the region as well BOPRC) to determine which functions would be most effectively delivered at a regional scale. This will provide the opportunity to understand the preferred approach for each sub-regional unitary authority and alignment of those functions that will continue to be delivered at a regional scale.

All councils of the Bay of Plenty are included and involved in the regional service provision aspects of this application, and so all councils will be covered by the solutions provided. Joint functions analysis is proposed to be worked through at the detailed design phase (including looking at existing funding mechanisms for current regional service provision) to determine the best way forward. As this work is intended to be progressed collaboratively, it will enable a consistent approach across the region. It is noted that existing funding arrangements (such as for flood protection infrastructure) already provide for a mix of government, region-wide cross-subsidised council funding and user pays funding sources.

The proposal has been designed so that no community will be significantly negatively impacted by the proposal.

This proposal is made on the basis that participating councils would be willing to consider options for further change, at a later date (noting that this must make sense for the foundation councils). One of the design principles is also to have services provided at the most efficient level, regardless of unitary authority boundaries.

In particular, it is noted that the door has been left open for the potential for expansion of this proposal to a single unitary authority over the entire Bay of Plenty region at some stage in the future, should those communities desire that. It is recognised that a regional unitary authority is not aligned to community views in any of the sub-regions currently. However, this proposal does not preclude future decisions to be made to further align to achieve additional benefit.

What is the proposed structure and governance arrangements?

It is anticipated that representation arrangements for the sub-regional unitary authority will be based on a two-tier representation model. The first tier being Council made up of the Mayor and Elected Members. The second tier being local representation made up of a Chair and members. Our initial thinking is outlined under the ‘simplifies local governance’ and ‘maintains local voice’ sections of this document. Specific details of these representation arrangements including identification of communities of interest, specific boundaries and numbers of members will be worked through during the detailed design phase. This will be guided by public consultation, and this is a matter subject to the need for agreement by both Councils to proceed.

A HeadStart Pathway for a new sub-regional unitary authority would align closely with the existing approach to planning in the sub-region and wider region. Spatial planning is one of the functions that we have indicated is likely to be considered as part of a regional service delivery option, which also aligns with the current work being led by BOPRC to facilitate the regional spatial plan in partnership with each of the three sub-regions.

Work is progressing prior to the enactment of the planning legislation through interim governance arrangements, facilitated by our Bay of Plenty Mayoral Forum. Work has progressed on preparing the process agreement to enable the Spatial Planning Committee to be established as soon as practicable following enactment of the new planning legislation. Further detail can be found in section 4 – supports the new planning system.

This proposal contemplates the establishment of an appropriate method for dealing with regional functions to enable effective delivery of functions that sit at a regional level. Its specific type, governance arrangements and responsibilities is a key focus through the detailed design phase, alongside the Head Start work occurring in the East, and Central parts of the region.

As noted above, this work is intended to be supported by detailed functions analysis across all functions currently delivered by both territorial and regional councils, and in partnership with other councils in the existing Bay of Plenty region. This will ensure there is agreement as to the appropriate geographic area that any function is delivered across, and the most appropriate way to do that. The sub-region has a strong

foundation of working together in a range of different ways (please see attached Sub-regional cross boundary arrangements and initiatives document as supporting information in section 10).

Some of these structures will remain in place, whilst others may evolve within the context of the new sub-regional unitary authority. This could include extending the scope of existing shared services arrangements or creating new approaches to suit requirements.

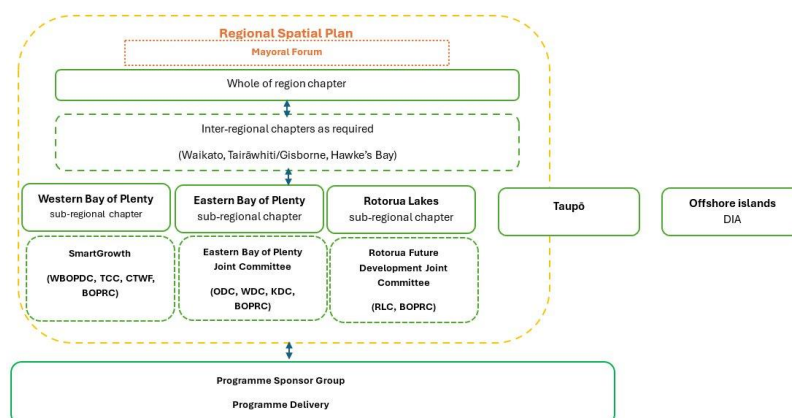
4. Assessment criteria – Supports the new planning system

How does it support delivery of a stable regional spatial planning process?

TCC and WBOPDC are both partners of SmartGrowth, our sub-regional growth planning partnership between BOPRC, tangata whenua and central government agencies. Initiated in 2000, it has provided the basis for collaborative and robust planning across the sub-region. [The SmartGrowth Strategy 2024-74](#) is the current spatial plan for the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region, and provides our sub-regional foundation for the new regional spatial plan. It has built upon previous iterations of spatial plans and has used robust community engagement, governance and technical processes in its development. It's also the basis upon which the Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal was developed.

The Bay of Plenty region is uniquely positioned for the development of a regional spatial plan, given that we have three sub-regional growth partnerships (aligning with the proposed three sub-regional unitary authorities jointly proposed for HeadStart Pathway) and each sub-region has an existing spatial plan or Future Development Strategy that forms the critical foundations of the new regional spatial plan. Facilitated by our Bay of Plenty Mayoral Forum, we have progressed significant work prior to the enactment of the new planning legislation to ensure we are ready to move to delivery mode as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

The diagram below shows how this could work from both a governance and deliverables perspective (noting that the diagram is based on current state, so includes reference to BOPRC):



The current proposed approach outlined above integrates ‘whole of region’ with ‘sub-regional’ priorities, while also providing for inter-regional alignment as required (e.g., with adjoining Waikato and Tairāwhiti regions). Local priorities and detailed direction

would be addressed through sub-regional chapters, which would incorporate relevant content from existing spatial plans whilst aligning with the new legislative requirements. Taupō is shown as partially within the BOP RSP scope, given that it currently has part of its district within the Bay of Plenty region. The diagram also reflects the role that DIA/MCERT has on behalf of the Minister of Local Government to act as the territorial authority for offshore islands that aren't within the boundaries of a territorial authority. Significant progress has been made to date on developing the required process agreement and programme plan for the regional spatial plan.

A HeadStart Pathway for a new sub-regional unitary authority would align closely with the existing approach to planning in the sub-region and wider region. Spatial planning is one of the functions that we have indicated is likely to be considered as part of a regional service delivery option, which also aligns with the current work being led by BOPRC to facilitate the regional spatial plan in partnership with each of the three sub-regions. Development of a process agreement is required by the new planning legislation, which includes setting out the arrangements for the regional Spatial Planning Committee.

***Does it make coordination easier (e.g. fewer plans, fewer layers of governance)?
What are the trade-offs and risks?***

Our HeadStart proposal aligns with our currently proposed approach, but it depends on the timing for regional spatial plans to be notified and completed as to the direct effect that this Head Start Proposal will have.

It will result in fewer plans for the region, as our existing plans are aggregated and give effect to the new planning legislation. It will reduce layers of governance locally as we would simplify our sub-regional governance to one unitary authority - as compared to the current TCC, WBOPDC and BOPRC involvement in SmartGrowth and the individual council meetings that sit under the sub-regional approach. We have had joint sub-regional plans in keys areas of land use planning and transport prioritisation for some time. This provides the opportunity to streamline and address some of the implementation challenges that exist currently, taking the next catalyst step to achieving alignment and efficiency for our communities.

Depending on where the functions analysis lands and timeframes to stand up a potential regional service delivery option, there could be some level of disruption. However, it is noted that the Planning Bill contemplates the creation of a potential secretariat to support the regional Spatial Planning Committee, so arguably some of this disruption may occur in any event. A cursory glance at the anticipated functions of the secretariat within the Planning Bill suggests these may reasonably align with the intended regional service delivery option.

There will also have to be consideration for timeframes for regional entities setting environmental limits for the regions and undertaking state of the environment monitoring. BOPRC has already begun a comprehensive process of mapping existing regional plan and existing regional policy statement provisions across to a new combined regional plan.

It's important to note that Head Start Pathway outline proposals are being prepared in advance of the enactment of the planning legislation, so there may be relevant changes to the planning legislation once enacted that are not known at this point in time.

One of the key benefits of the sub-regional unitary authority is that it will enable simplification and removal of complex cross boundary issues between TCC and WBOPDC, where development occurs at boundary between the two areas and may require cross boundary infrastructure and service provision. This can result in complex consenting processes, that require agreement on infrastructure service provision and funding, as well as apportionment of rating income.

Could this disrupt or complicate delivery of the new planning system?

As outlined above, there is limited anticipated disruption and complication to deliver the new planning system. It is primarily driven by the interfacing timeframes of the Head Start and planning legislation deliverables, as well as there being a level of uncertainty on any changes to the provisions relating to the development of a regional spatial plan. There will be existing regional council planning functions that will need to be transferred to the new sub-regional unitary authority and/or an appropriate method for dealing with regional functions. Working collaboratively through the detailed design phase with BOPRC (and other councils in the region) on approach and timing will enable a smooth transition.

How will these risks be managed?

Through the pre-enactment work to date, we have prepared as a region and sub-region to be well placed to respond to the planning legislation once enacted. This will be a key consideration through the detailed design phase, which will be undertaken following the enactment of the planning legislation – thus having greater clarity on regional spatial plan approach and milestones.

Explain how your proposal reflects integrated catchment management. If an existing catchment is split, in your proposal describe the implications, risks, and potential mitigations.

The three sub-regions reflect the three integrated catchment management areas of the Bay of Plenty, providing as strong foundation for future natural environment planning for the sub-region and beyond.

Our sub-regional unitary authority will enable integrated catchment management of Tauranga Harbour. It would not cover the whole catchment of the Kaituna River, but this is in part mitigated by the Post-Settlement Governance Entity Te Maru o Kaituna (TMOK), which would be a critical governance entity that must be upheld through the Head Start process. Te Tini a Tuna is a catchment wide 10-year action plan already adopted by TMOK. It should be noted that the Kaituna River catchment is already split between the existing WBOPDC and Rotorua Lakes Council (RLC) districts. WBOPDC, TCC, BOPRC and RLC are all members of TMOK alongside iwi representatives under current arrangements.

Integrated catchment management is one of the functions that has been identified as being likely most effectively delivered at a current regional scale – through the detailed design phase and functional analysis the three unitary authorities will work together (alongside BOPRC) to determine an appropriate method for dealing with regional functions.

What still needs to be resolved in your detailed design phase?

Finalisation of the process agreement and programme plan for the Regional Spatial Plan will be required once enactment of the planning legislation has occurred. Detailed work will be required on the interface between the Spatial Planning Committee and the secretariat with any potential regional delivery for spatial planning, as well as consideration for implementation approach and timeframes to minimise disruption.

The detailed design phase will also need to carefully map the transition of the broader implications from the new planning legislation. This will be both in relation to the organisational transition (establishment of the new sub-regional unitary authority and the secretariat for the Spatial Planning Committee), and also in terms of consolidation of existing regional plans and policy statements with existing district plans into the new combined regional plan, as well as changes to consenting, compliance and monitoring functions. It's also noted that there is still uncertainty as to whether there will be a national delivery model for some compliance and monitoring functions.

We will also need to consider any interim changes that might be useful in the period prior to 2028 from a local governance perspective.

5. Assessment criteria – Simplifies local governance

How does the proposal demonstrate simpler governance arrangements compared to the status quo

Current governance arrangements have been in place for more than 35 years and are now overly complex for how our communities operate within the sub-region. Many people now regularly cross the TCC and WBOPDC boundaries to move between where they live, work, go to school and participate in recreation & leisure activities. The regional council layer, while understandable to those within local government, also tends to add confusion for our communities when they want or need to engage with their council.

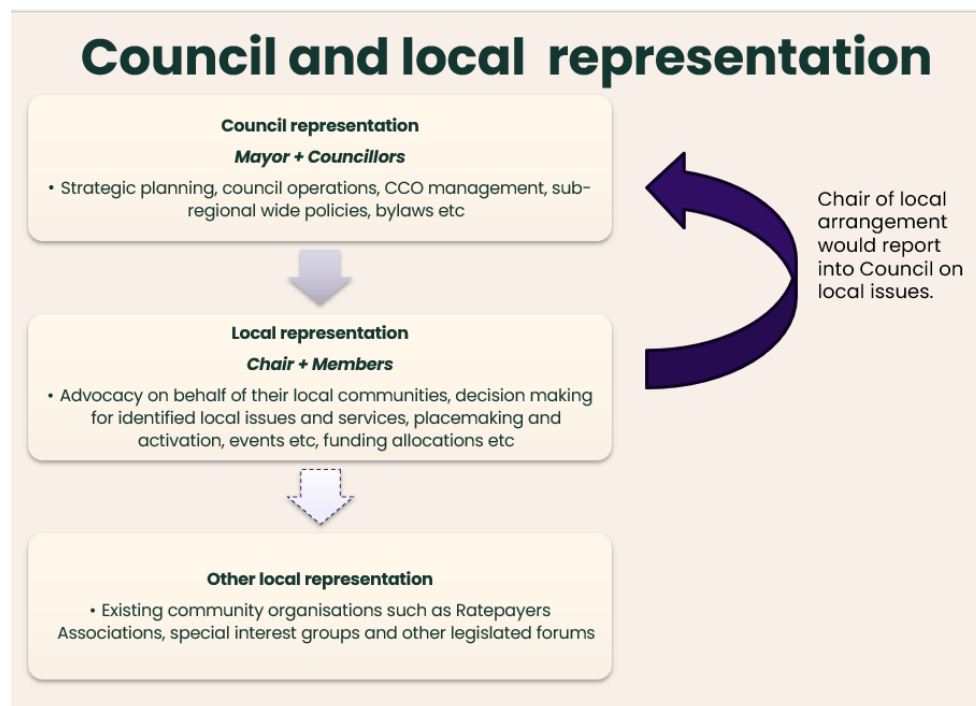
We recently sought feedback from our communities on what matters most to them when considering changes to current council structures. Not taking on another council's debt and ensuring local voice and representation were most important for WBOPDC communities, and more efficient and effective services were most important for TCC communities. While much more community engagement and consultation will be undertaken during detailed design phase, this feedback has helped shape our outline proposal.

Both councils have agreed to a set of principles relating to representation for further exploration during the detailed design phase. These are set out below:

- **Democratic legitimacy** - Representation should reflect democratic principles while recognising the diversity of communities within the sub-regional unitary authority.
- **Effective local representation** - Communities should have meaningful access to elected representatives who understand and advocate for local issues.
- **Protection of community interests** - The governance model should ensure that no community's long-term interests can be unreasonably overridden solely because of population differences.
- **Local decision-making and subsidiarity** - Decisions should be made as close as practicable to the communities they affect, with only genuinely regional matters determined at the governing body level.
- **Fair and equitable influence** - Representation should provide all communities with a meaningful opportunity to influence decisions that materially affect them.
- **Recognition of communities of interest** - Representation arrangements should recognise distinct communities of interest, including rural, urban, coastal, growth, and Māori communities.

- **Transparency and accountability** - Communities should clearly understand who represents them, who makes decisions and who is accountable for those decisions.
- **Future resilience** - Representation arrangements should remain effective as populations change over time and should be capable of accommodating future growth without disadvantaging existing communities.

These representation principles will be applied to further develop the proposed two-tier-representation model outlined in the diagram below.



At this stage a governing council is envisaged, probably with some sort of statutory local representation bodies (provisionally titled 'local representation').

Further work will be undertaken on the council voting approach during the detailed design stage, to arrive at the best balance between structural simplicity and application of our representation principles.

The proposed sub-regional unitary council will better meet the needs of our current and future communities by simplifying the governance arrangements while enabling more effective local representation and decision-making at the lowest practical level.

The new sub-regional unitary authority will also enable consolidation or cessation of joint governance entities currently in place for joint initiatives, such as:

- Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal – includes central government, councils, private sector and Iwi. The deal oversight board would be simplified with one council representative rather than the current three, as would the governance/decision layer with a single mayor rather than the current two mayors and regional council chair.
- SmartGrowth Partnership – growth management for the sub-region, partnership of councils, tangata whenua and central government. A range of governance and management level structures are in place for SmartGrowth.
- Council Committees, e.g. Water Organisation Joint Committee (sub-regional), Western Bay of Plenty Transport Committee (sub-regional)
- Post-Settlement Governance Entity e.g. Te Maru o Kaituna
- Advisory groups, e.g. Tauranga Moana Advisory Group, Waiāri Kaitiaki Advisory Group
- Iwi/hapū relationship arrangements (refer to the local voice section for more detail)
- Regional bodies e.g. Regional Transport Committee, BOP Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group, BOP Mayoral Forum
- CDEM would also be simplified with fewer local authorities feeding into it. This would lead to more focussed decision-making and risk assessments to ensure response approaches are targeted more efficiently.
- Removes duplication of CCO planning and monitoring approvals (such as for joint CCO of Tourism BOP).

Is there a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities allocated or delegated to local representative bodies, including local boards and community boards?

The councils are applying a principles-based approach to determining where roles and responsibilities best sit within the proposed new arrangements, based on these draft functions principles:

- **Deliver functions at the most appropriate manner and scale** – functions should be delivered at the local, sub-regional, regional, or national level that provides the greatest overall benefit, not be constrained by existing organisational boundaries.
- **Provide sound environmental stewardship** – ensuring the health of the natural environment is protected and enhanced, providing a balancing ‘voice for the natural environment’ alongside growth and development considerations.
- **Make decisions at the most optimal and practical level** – where local circumstances, community preferences, or place-based outcomes are important, decision-making should remain close to the community.

- **Maximise value for ratepayers and communities** – delivery arrangements should seek to maximise long-term value for ratepayers through an appropriate balance of cost, service quality, capability, and risk.
- **Strengthen capability, resilience, and future readiness** – the delivery of functions should be capable of responding to future growth, environmental challenges, workforce pressures, legislative change, and system reform.
- **Retain local voice, identity and representation** – changes to service delivery should support effective local representation and ensure communities retain influence over matters that are important to them.

Are there innovative approaches to new forms of local representative bodies (i.e. not constrained by current Local Government Act 2002 options)?

While our thinking needs to be tested by way of community consultation and refined during the detailed design stage, our current thinking is that:

- Bespoke legislation could be required to fully enable the local representation bodies envisaged for the proposed sub-regional unitary authority.
- The local representative body will be drawn around communities of interest, each with a Chair and members elected at triennial elections. Local representative bodies could have specific funding allocations and potentially also some council staff support.
- Responsibilities of the local representative bodies will be determined through the detailed design phase (including community engagement) and may include:
 - Advocacy on behalf of their local communities (to the governing council and others) about the needs of their communities
 - Decision-making for identified local issues and services, e.g. anything that only affects their local area such as road names, use of council land
 - Decision-making on levels of service and ability to have targeted rates for local services over and above the sub-regional council standard set by the governing council
 - Local placemaking and activation, events etc
 - Input into relevant sub-regional matters such as planning processes.

A significant advantage of empowered local representative bodies is that the unitary council governance body will be freed up to focus on council-wide matters and strategic decision-making, including contributing to joint-council regional decision-making and relevant national considerations that affect local government.

Is the proposed governance structure easy to understand for communities? Is it clear to communities who is accountable for what?

With clear communication of where roles and responsibilities lie for all council functions and only one council for the area, the proposed sub-regional unitary authority structure will be significantly easier for our communities to understand than the current structures with overlapping roles and responsibilities.

We will test our thinking with our communities through the detailed design phase to ensure the final proposed model is understandable and that we know how best to communicate it – to our communities and stakeholders, and also to our own staff.

Does the proposed governance structure support decision-makers to consider competing objectives and trade-offs and make effective decisions?

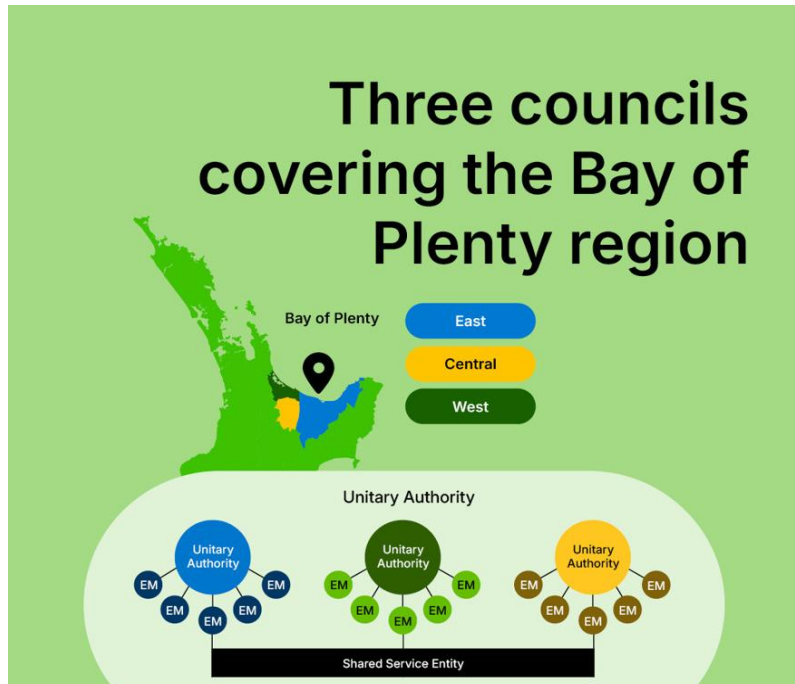
The two-tier representation model enables trade-offs to be considered at both a strategic and local level. The governing body would be balancing competing objectives at more strategic level across the sub-region, whilst some form of local representation arrangement will enable local issues to be considered and factored into decision-making. For example, local preferences for enhanced levels of service may be considered in line with local community views and preparedness to pay.

The proposed ward structure enables governing body members (Councillors) to maintain a stronger connection with priorities in their area and ensures representation of the geographic spread of the sub-region, whilst balancing their obligation to act for the sub-region as a whole.

For subregional proposals, how will the proposed governance arrangements for the delivery of key regional services be designed to minimise complexity and duplication?

The Mayors of the Bay of Plenty region have agreed to three sub-regional unitary councils with shared delivery of functions at a regional level, as determined by the draft principles outlined in the ‘local roles and responsibilities’ section above.

The governance arrangements will be determined during the detailed design phase, building on current thinking of a regional service delivery. An example of the current thinking is outlined in the diagram below:



What are the trade-offs and risks?

Loss of local voice remains a significant risk as a result of increased scale, particularly for some of the smaller communities further away from Tauranga City. Specifically, ensuring local voice for communities such as Waihi Beach, Katikati, Ōmokoroa, Te Puke and Maketū is a priority. The focus on local voice and local representation should not be lost through the detailed design stage and subject to community consultation.

Another significant risk is the potential loss of the mechanisms for providing for Māori to contribute to Council decision-making that were developed by and for Māori. Refer to the 'maintain local voice' section of this document for an outline of these. This risk must remain a focus through the detailed design stage and beyond. It is noted under current representation arrangements that both TCC and WBOPDC have Māori wards in effect, alongside the three Māori constituencies legislated for BOPRC (operational since 2004, with boundaries generally aligning with the three sub-regions contemplated by the Head Start proposals).

What still needs to be worked through?

The detailed design phase poses an important opportunity to work through key details relating to simplifying local governance for the new sub-regional unitary authority. This includes but is not limited to the following matters:

- Māori representation will be considered through the detailed design phase. If the Joint Committee decides to propose Māori wards within the wider representation proposal, then a binding poll will be undertaken over the new unitary authority's area.
- Representation arrangements based around SmartGrowth growth corridors, relating to precise ward boundaries and the specific number of councillors based on these.
- Local representation arrangements based on the above and specific number of members.

6. Assessment criteria – Economies of scale

How will functions be effectively delivered?

A new sub-regional unitary authority will bring the services of two Territorial Authorities (TCC and WBOPDC), and the functions of the BOPRC together. Many people believe that the current model of local government could be delivered more efficiently if we are prepared to change. We cannot keep doing the same thing, and expect a different outcome. We need to deliver the services we do for our community faster, cheaper and better. As such, a conscious decision by both territorial authorities has been made to ensure that this process take the opportunity to design how services and functions are delivered to ensure the best value for money, customer outcome and efficiency, rather than simply “lifting and shifting” existing arrangements into the new sub-regional unitary authority. This is seen as an opportunity to design something new, that removes existing regulatory and process impediments to growth. Further, a new organisation can create a “can do” attitude in order to get the best outcome for our people, and improve the reputation of local government in the Western Bay sub-region.

This is an opportunity for us to remove duplication (the same functions being delivered to the same ratepayers, slightly differently each time), utilise increase scale to gain efficiencies, and respond to customer expectations, as well as delivering services where it best makes sense to do so, as opposed to being constrained by geographic boundaries. Importantly, having a single unitary authority for the sub-region will remove many cross-boundary issues that currently exist between the two territorial authorities. This will lead to more integrated growth planning and infrastructure delivery, making it more efficient for both councils, but importantly faster and cheaper for the development community.

How does your proposal support the effective delivery of regional and territorial transport functions?

A majority of transport functions are currently managed independently by both territorial authorities (capital delivery, operations and maintenance of the roading network), coordinated via a Regional Transport Committee, administered by the BOPRC. Public transport is managed by the BOPRC, in consultation with the territorial authorities.

This proposal would see the majority of transportation functions for the sub-region being managed by the new sub-regional unitary authority, effectively simplifying the system. In practice, planning, capital projects and public transport will all be governed and managed by a single entity, resulting in increased alignment and simplification, and the ability to coordinate with NZTA in a more coordinated way. This will lead to efficiencies in delivery of these services for both the Council, and NZTA.

The exception to the above will be the very few public transport services which operate between the sub-regions of the current regional boundaries. It is proposed that these functions will be governed at a regional scale through a joint committee or similar, funded by the new unitary authorities based on benefit. This regional entity may also provide some benefits of scale in the areas of procurement, to be further explored over time.

How will functions that require regional integration be delivered in a more effective way? Specifically, consider how catchment management and transport responsibilities would be managed effectively. How will increased economies of scale add benefits?

Being a distinct community of interest and economic group, it is considered that most services of a regional scale will be able to be delivered at the sub-regional basis for the same, or lower cost of effectiveness as current (for example, harbourmaster activities and most transport activities).

However, there will be some functions that make sense to manage at a larger scale because they cross sub-regional boundaries (for example, catchment management of the Kaituna River, which spans into the Eastern Bay of Plenty and Rotorua areas, or inter-regional public transport). It is proposed that these services would be managed through the creation of a region-wide governance and delivery vehicle across the existing Bay of Plenty region, to ensure coordinated management and funding.

Similarly, there are some administrative functions where a regional scale may bring benefits. There is currently a CCO (Bay of Plenty Local Authority Shared Services Limited) in existence, which is jointly owned by all councils in the Bay of Plenty region. This vehicle has primarily been used for procurement and insurance, but could easily be “scaled up” to progressively include more services such as IT systems, rating and finance, or alternatively these services could be delivered by the above mentioned new regional service delivery vehicle. Likewise, some services may benefit from a wider delivery vehicle with adjacent unitary authorities, and this will be encouraged and investigated as the proposals progress. There may also be functions that are most effectively delivered on an interregional basis.

The councils have agreed a set of draft principles to be considered when determining what level services should be delivered at for the new entity (local, sub-regional, regional, multi-regional or national). These draft functions principles are:

- **Deliver functions at the most appropriate manner and scale** – functions should be delivered at the local, sub-regional, regional, or national level that provides the greatest overall benefit, not be constrained by existing organisational boundaries.

- **Provide sound environmental stewardship** – ensuring the health of the natural environment is protected and enhanced, providing a balancing ‘voice for the natural environment’ alongside growth and development considerations.
- **Make decisions at the most optimal and practical level** – where local circumstances, community preferences, or place-based outcomes are important, decision-making should remain close to the community.
- **Maximise value for ratepayers and communities** – delivery arrangements should seek to maximise long-term value for ratepayers through an appropriate balance of cost, service quality, capability, and risk.
- **Strengthen capability, resilience, and future readiness** – the delivery of functions should be capable of responding to future growth, environmental challenges, workforce pressures, legislative change, and system reform.
- **Retain local voice, identity and representation** – changes to service delivery should support effective local representation and ensure communities retain influence over matters that are important to them.

Explain potential impacts on rates and financial sustainability. For example, through changes in population or businesses paying for services, or geographical coverage.

Both councils currently have different rating systems, and different financial positions (debt levels, rate levels etc).

The councils have agreed the fundamentals of an approach to harmonising rates as follows:

1. Avoid material ratepayer and customer price shocks.
2. Communities should initially fund the costs and risks they bring.
3. Transparency should be maintained so that communities have visibility of the extent to which they are funding their own infrastructure requirements.
4. Rates harmonisation should be supported by comparable service outcomes with full harmonisation reflecting circumstances when customers receive broadly comparable levels of service.

The councils would also work towards maintaining and enhancing existing assets across the region by:

- Applying agreed asset management principles.
- Being transparent regarding material differences in asset condition so that any potential historic underinvestment is not unfairly transferred from one community to another.
- Prioritising future investment based on risk, service outcomes and long-term value.

The councils propose to develop a new Revenue and Financing Policy having regard to:

- a. Who benefits from the expenditure.
- b. Who creates the need for the expenditure.
- c. Fairness and equity
- d. Affordability.
- e. Efficiency.
- f. Transparency.
- g. Intergenerational equity.
- h. Growth pays for growth.
- i. Evidence based.

It is acknowledged by both councils that there will need to be “ring fencing” of existing debt, to be serviced by a targeted rate for the geographic area that generated that debt. New debt taken by the new sub-regional unitary authority would be equalised across the new boundary, having regard to the agreed principles above for the new Revenue and Financing Policy.

Work will need to be undertaken during the design phase to identify those facilities that serve a sub-regional purpose, and for the debt for those facilities to be fairly apportioned to those who benefit from those facilities. Both councils commit to working through these on a case by case basis, utilising the agreed set of principles to ensure fairness is achieved. This will be a decision ringfenced so that a majority of both councils will be required.

Future debt arrangements will be designed to protect equity between existing communities while allowing the new authority to borrow collectively for future sub-regional investment.

It is thought that the regional council functions can be delivered, at worst, on a cost neutral basis to status quo. The funding approach for each function will be a key consideration as part of the regional functions analysis, which will look at the most appropriate geographic area to deliver each function and the appropriate method for dealing with regional functions. By creating a council with a larger ratepayer base, there will be an increased ability for affordability of the services that the community wants. Efficient service delivery will be a primary focus for the new sub-regional entity.

There are currently different levels of service, and different cost recovery structures between both councils. In designing a new combined service, a single consistent fee will be charged across the sub-region for the service provided. It will also provide an opportunity for potential consolidation of targeted rates into a more simplified rating

system. WBOPDC in particular has more than 130 targeted rates within its current rating system.

Highlight potential for improved service delivery, economic development opportunities, opportunities for innovation, etc.

The Western Bay of Plenty sub-region is a discrete economic compartment, dominated by horticulture, the Port of Tauranga and supported by the metro area of Tauranga City.

Consultation with the economic development agency for the sub-region – Priority One, as well as the Tauranga Chamber of Commerce and the Urban Taskforce shows that they (and the businesses that they work with) have a strong preference for a sub-regional unitary authority. They see benefits of having fewer authorities to work with, opportunities for more efficient delivery of services (particularly regulatory services), and more coordination of investment across the sub-region.

Creating a single unitary authority for the sub-region will better enable the coordination of services across the sub-region. Examples are delivery of growth planning (removal of cross boundary issues), and emergency management (less duplication of function and effort). Scale will allow the delivery of some services more efficiently across the sub-region, where better expertise, equipment or processes could be acquired to assist in more efficient and effective delivery (such as, sub-regional infrastructure network planning, delivery including parks and reserves, waste and community facilities, regulatory services and unified brand/identity initiatives for the subregion).

There is the potential that the increased scale that would come from the larger population would allow for more affordable provision of infrastructure and services for smaller communities.

What are the expected financial impacts of reorganisation? Set out at a high level whether the reorganisation will promote:

- ***improvements in asset management/stewardship***

The sub-region provides sufficient scale to enable continued investment in expertise, systems and renewals in order to maintain or increase good asset management.

Asset management will be joined up across the sub-region, which will be more efficient and effective from an investment point of view as well as from an operational cost perspective. This will create better value for the ratepayer.

The sub-region area aligns with the new joint Water Service Delivery CCO and so enables simplification of shareholder arrangements.

- ***infrastructure investment***

The sub-region provides adequate scale to be able to support infrastructure investment across the sub-region. The increased scale will enable faster investment in infrastructure needed for communities, or to enable growth and give effect to the Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal.

- ***enhanced effectiveness, efficiency, and financial sustainability of services***

By creating a new unitary authority with the scale of the Western Bay sub-region, there is a real opportunity to design and deliver the service that the communities want in a more efficient and effective manner. A deliberate decision has been made that in the design of the new entity, the most efficient and effective method of delivering those services will become the new operating model. This may be adoption of one of the legacy councils' systems or processes, a combination of multiple, or the creation of something new. These decisions will be taken through the transition arrangements.

- ***assurance that the entities proposed will have the resources necessary to enable them to effectively perform or exercise their responsibilities, duties, and powers***

The new sub-regional unitary authority will have a combined population of approximately 221,000 people (30 June 2025), making it one of the larger councils in New Zealand. All three legacy councils, i.e. including BOPRC, are in a positive position in terms of financial sustainability, and enjoy being able to attract high-quality staff to undertake their roles.

• ***plans for managing debt for the unitary***

It is acknowledged by both councils that there will need to be some “ring fencing” of existing debt, to be serviced by a targeted rate for the geographic area that generated that debt. New debt taken by the new sub-regional unitary authority would be equalised across the new boundary, having regard to the agreed principles above for the new Revenue and Financing Policy.

Work will need to be undertaken during the design phase to identify those facilities that serve a sub-regional purpose, and for the debt for those facilities to be fairly apportioned to those who benefit from those facilities. Both councils commit to working through these on a case by case basis, utilising the agreed set of principles to ensure fairness is achieved.

Future debt arrangements will be designed to protect equity between existing communities while allowing the new authority to borrow collectively for future sub-regional investment.

Both Councils note that debt (and in particular the identification of any sub-regional debt) will be a decision that requires a majority of both Councils to proceed.

• ***plans for any council-controlled organisations***

There are a number of existing council-controlled organisations across the sub-region. As part of the transition to the new unitary authority, these will all be reviewed to consolidate shareholdings or consider whether they are still required. Current CCOs include:

- WBOPDC and TCC have agreed to establish a water services CCO for the delivery of drinking water, wastewater and stormwater. Work is currently underway to establish this CCO, with its full operational date being 1 July 2027. Given the ownership of this CCO would be the same as the unitary authority boundaries, this would simply result in the new unitary being the single shareholder, which would in turn reduce reporting and compliance costs for that organisation.
- Bay Venues Limited (BVL) is a CCO wholly owned by TCC. BVL currently operates the city’s aquatic facilities, stadium and community halls, as well as undertaking associated event and hospitality activities. BVL operates aquatic centres in Te Puke and Katikati for WBOPDC.
- The Tauranga Art Gallery Trust is a CCO wholly owned by TCC.
- Tourism Bay of Plenty – this is a CCO jointly owned (and funded) by WBOPDC and TCC and operates as a regional tourism organisation, managing sustainable growth of the visitor economy and promoting the region to increase visitation. It is likely that this CCO would continue in its current form, with the ownership changing to the new

sub-regional unitary authority (which will reduce reporting and compliance costs for that organisation).

- Bay of Plenty Shared Services Limited (BOPLASS). This is a CCO jointly owned by all six Bay of Plenty councils as well as Taupo and Gisborne District. The purpose of this CCO is to promote shared services, particularly around procurement and insurance. The new unitary authority would simply replace the ownership shares of TCC, WBOPDC, and BOPRC. Over time, the functions of BOPLASS could be extended to include more support services that can be provided at a regional (plus) scale.
- WBOPDC and TCC are both significant shareholders in the Local Government Funding Authority. It is seen that this situation would continue, with the consolidation of ownership.
- WBOPDC is a shareholder in Co-Lab, a Shared Service CCO based in the Waikato. Future decisions could be made about this shareholding.

In addition, both WBOPDC and TCC currently part fund the sub-regional economic development agency – Priority One. This would continue in the current state (funded by the sub-regional unitary authority) until and unless alternative decisions are made at some point in the future.

BOPRC is the sole shareholder of Quayside Holdings Limited, an investment company that manages a regional commercial fund on behalf of the people of the Bay of Plenty region. As noted below, it is believed that this fund should be protected in perpetuity, potentially via the Head Start legislation, with decisions to be made as to how the proceeds of the investments are shared across the region and democratic decisions as to how such income is spent.

• ***projected costs of implementing the proposed reorganisation; and***

There will be implementation costs, however the quantum of these is largely unknown at the current time. Experience from the waters transition and from the Auckland supercity merger is that these costs are likely significant and best funded by short term loans to be paid back by the new entity. Of course, the opportunity to financially partner with Government will also be useful to be able to create foundational documents and processes that can inform future Back Stop processes elsewhere in New Zealand.

- ***improved appetite for risk and innovation.***

It is expected that the sub-regional new unitary authority would follow best practice risk management (including governance arrangements via an active Risk and Assurance Committee). However, increased scale may increase the appetite for managed risk.

Innovation will be encouraged through the design of the new entity across the full spectrum of local government. This includes, but is not limited to, measurable community outcomes related to procurement and social value, environmental outcomes related to biodiversity and climate, and more innovative ways to engage with communities.

Where will efficiencies come from?

Efficiencies will come as a result of economies of scale, and the reduction of duplication across the existing organisations. There will be some consolidation of staff numbers across the two territorial authorities and regional council. This will be based on the review of functions through the detailed design phase and refined as the new entity defines levels of service.

Having a single, coherent governance structure for the sub-region will result in a reduction of duplication of decision making, and more coordination of services across the sub-region. Local decisions will be made close to the communities that they serve, and replacing the city council, district council and regional council governance functions with a single governance body will create efficiencies in decision-making.

Governance of key bodies such as the new Water Organisation and Tourism Bay of Plenty will be streamlined, due to having a single shareholder of the major CCO's (reducing reporting requirements).

Creating a single unitary authority over the high growth area of the sub-region will eliminate a number of cross boundary issues that currently add cost, complexity and time to development that occurs on the margins of the Tauranga metro area. Having a single unitary authority will resolve uncertainty around provision of infrastructure and services, provide a consistent level of service and rating across key development areas, and avoid costly boundary adjustment processes as the sub-region grows over time. This will help give effect to the recently signed Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal.

Some regulatory functions will be undertaken at the local level (for example, building inspections), however many will be raised to the sub-regional level (e.g. liquor and health licencing and dog control), and some to the regional (or even national) level (such as the management of the dog registration system, or compliance and enforcement functions as signalled through resource management reform). These decisions will be made through the detailed design phase, with the principle of the

service being delivered at the most cost-effective level, while still providing the service and familiarity needed in distinct locations across the sub-region.

One leadership structure and management organisation will be created for the new entity, taking the opportunity to take the best from the legacy organisations, and to create new to ensure value for money, customer service and an enabling culture is developed. This will result in fewer leaders and managers across the sub-region, as well as the ability to consolidate the existing three offices, plant and equipment.

Having a larger entity will enable procurement to occur at a larger and more strategic scale, which will likely result in savings and the ability to deliver projects and services cheaper than currently. This scale will enable the consideration of the best method of delivering services – for example – TCC currently provides city operations (parks and reserve maintenance etc) via an in-house business unit, whilst the WBOPDC predominantly contracts these services to third party providers. In forming this new entity, assessments will be undertaken to determine how to best deliver these services to our communities (considering cost, service levels etc) leveraging on the greater scale of the new sub-regional unitary authority, and a transition to occur combining these services.

It is proposed that some science and data functions will be best served at a regional scale (to achieve efficiencies). There may also be opportunities for broader collaboration and potential shared services beyond the existing region.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Local voice remains the most significant risk from increased scale, particularly for some of the smaller communities further away from Tauranga City. Specifically, ensuring local voice for communities such as Waihi Beach, Katikati, Ōmokoroa, Te Puke and Maketū is a priority.

The mitigation of this risk is the creation of fit for purpose local representative body ensuring that those communities are represented. While this is subject to community consultation, following the concept of subsidiarity, our intention is that these Local representative body could be delegated all decision making that relates specifically to their geographic area – for example, decisions around use of reserve land, street naming or other local decisions.

In any change process, there is a risk that the cost of the transition (both in financial terms and productivity/service levels through the change process) outweighs the benefits. This will be mitigated through strong governance of the transition process, and the creation of a dedicated transition team to lead the change process.

What still needs to be worked through?

As outlined above, specific work around the ringfencing of debt, existing levels of service and capital programmes (giving effect to the agreed principles) will need more work as part of the detailed design.

An assessment of what services are best delivered within the new sub-regional unitary authority, and what is delivered via an appropriate method for delivering regional functions will need to be worked through. For example, Bay Venues Limited currently manages aquatic facilities across much of the sub-region, and decisions will need to be made as to whether this continues, what their functions are, and how it is funded, or if those services are better provided directly by the new sub-regional unitary authority.

Funding of the Regional Council functions will need further assessment. It is acknowledged that some of these functions would be best delivered across the existing Bay of Plenty region, and how these are funded across the wider region will need to be considered.

Importantly, the future of the regional investment fund currently managed by Quayside Holdings on behalf of the BOPRC will need to be worked through. This asset exists for the benefit of the entire Bay of Plenty region, and while there is strong agreement that the fund needs to be protected in perpetuity, how this is achieved, and how the earnings are distributed (and for what purpose) needs to be agreed. It would be useful for legislative protection of this fund to form part of the bespoke legislation (similar to the Auckland Futures Fund, or New Plymouth Perpetual Investment Fund), to protect it for the future.

7. Assessment criteria – Maintains local voice

How will people elect representatives?

Electoral system

Both territorial authorities currently have different electoral systems. TCC uses the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system and WBOPDC uses the First Past the Post (FPP) system. Under the Local Electoral Act 2001, Council/s can resolve to change the electoral system to be used two years before a triennial election. Work to align these systems and the timings for this will need to be worked through prior to the 2028 election, noting that under current legislation any proposal to change from the current electoral system must be made by mid-September 2026.

Representation principles

Both councils have agreed to a set of principles relating to representation for further exploration during the detailed design phase. These are set out below:

- **Democratic legitimacy** - Representation should reflect democratic principles while recognising the diversity of communities within the sub-regional unitary authority.
- **Effective local representation** - Communities should have meaningful access to elected representatives who understand and advocate for local issues.
- **Protection of community interests** - The governance model should ensure that no community's long-term interests can be unreasonably overridden solely because of population differences.
- **Local decision-making and subsidiarity** - Decisions should be made as close as practicable to the communities they affect, with only genuinely regional matters determined at the governing body level.
- **Fair and equitable influence** - Representation should provide all communities with a meaningful opportunity to influence decisions that materially affect them.
- **Recognition of communities of interest** - Representation arrangements should recognise distinct communities of interest, including rural, urban, coastal, growth, and Māori communities.
- **Transparency and accountability** - Communities should clearly understand who represents them, who makes decisions and who is accountable for those decisions.
- **Future resilience** - Representation arrangements should remain effective as populations change over time and should be capable of accommodating future growth without disadvantaging existing communities.
- **Efficient decision-making** - Governance arrangements should enable timely and effective decision-making while ensuring that significant strategic decisions receive appropriate scrutiny.

Representation arrangements

To give effect to the above principles, it is proposed that the new sub-regional unitary authority will be made up of a two-tier representation model. The wider decisions around representation at both the governing body and local representation level will be determined through the detailed design phase and subject to community engagement. These decisions will require a majority support from both Councils.

The first tier of the governance model will be the Council, which could potentially include a mix of members elected at large and by wards, although current thinking is leaning towards ward-based electorates.

Council - Number of Elected Members

To enable effective representation, the specific number of members will be subject to the detailed design stage with specific GIS mapping of proposed ward areas, subdivisions and population estimates informing this process on balance with identification of known communities of interest.

Council – General Wards

At a high level, the wards will be based on the growth corridors of the sub-region including Northern (potentially Waihi Beach, Katikati, Aongatete, Ōmokoroa, Matakana Island, Whakamarama, Te Puna and Minden), Central (potentially including suburbs of Mount Maunganui, Arataki, city centre through to Greerton, Otūmoetai, Judea, Matua and Bethlehem), Western (potentially Tauriko, Omanawa, Lower Kaimai, Oropi, Ohauiti and Pyes Pa) and Eastern (potentially Welcome Bay, Pāpāmoa, Te Puke, Maketū, Pukehina, Paengaroa, Pongakawa and Otamarakau). There is opportunity through the detailed design phase for this to be shaped in more detail.

The growth corridor model provides the foundation for representation arrangements and has been chosen due to its nexus with sub-regional growth planning set out in the Smart Growth Strategy. This approach will provide the flexibility to accommodate growth over time across the sub-region while maintaining alignment with state highway network. It will work to remove boundaries between councils while retaining a level of familiarity and alignment already established through the Smart Growth partnership.



Council - Māori Wards

Both territorial authorities currently have Māori wards in place. WBOPDC held a binding poll with its community, which resulted in the removal of the ward following this triennium. TCC is required to undertake a poll by March 2027, and it is expected that TCC will carry this out in accordance with its legislative requirements. In addition to this, BOPRC has three Māori constituencies (including one specifically for this sub-region) established under bespoke legislation. Māori representation will be considered through the detailed design phase. If the Joint Committee decides to propose Māori wards within the wider representation proposal, then a binding poll will be undertaken over the new unitary authority's area.

Rural interests

There is a need to balance urban and rural interests under the new sub-regional unitary authority. There is intent to do this at both tiers of the proposed governance model. Details around these including specific ward boundaries and any electoral subdivisions will need to be worked through further in consultation with communities of interest. The aim will be to provide representation for both rural and urban communities of interest within each corridor (excluding central). Maintaining a balance of the rural voice in decision-making was a key theme of feedback received through community engagement for WBOPDC.

How will communities be represented?

Local representation

As set out above, the new sub-regional unitary authority is proposed to have a two-tier representation model. It is recognised that local voice is very important and this second tier could consist of something like a community board or a local board subject to community consultation.

Local representation is a key component of the representation arrangements for the new sub-regional unitary authority. Although subject to further investigation and community engagement during the detailed design stage, our current thinking is that arrangements will include local representation based around the principle of subsidiarity in that the local representative body could be delegated decision making relating to their specific geographic area. The division of a local representation areas into electoral subdivisions may be appropriate given the local board area will be made up of a number of distinct communities of interest, providing effective representation for these communities of interest.

By applying the principles above, the detailed design phase will consider all options in relation to:

- local representation model (community boards or local boards)
- the communities of interest they would represent
- the number of members and the election process for members and chair
- the relationship between the local representation and the governing body
- the specific role and delegations that would apply

This would all be determined jointly between the councils and subject to consultation with our communities.

How will iwi/Māori participate in decision-making?

TCC and WBOPDC both recognise the importance of strong, meaningful and genuine relationships with iwi and Māori. While there are statutory requirements to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making, the approach of our respective councils has been based on relationships which have been developed over many years, across many kaupapa that we have worked alongside iwi and Māori on. It has allowed councils to understand the aspirations and expectations of iwi and Māori and to establish ways of working together and providing for Māori contributions to our decision making that iwi and Māori have shaped themselves.

This approach has seen benefits both for their communities and the community as a whole, and our intention is to enable a similar relationship-based approach, working together over time to develop the most appropriate mechanisms to provide for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making within the proposed new council structures.

For our respective councils, existing mechanisms developed in partnership over many years, include:

Tauranga City Council

- Te Rangapū Mana Whenua o Tauranga Moana (a forum for Tangata Whenua to discuss and debate local government concerns and ways to implement initiatives to advance and protect the interests of Tangata Whenua)
- Tangata Whenua Standing Committee (a standing committee of Council with the Mayor and selected councillors together with iwi and hapū)
- Hapū protocols (relationship agreements)

Western Bay of Plenty District Council

- Te Ihu o te Waka o Te Arawa and Te Kāhui Mana Whenua o Tauranga Moana (forums for Tangata Whenua and the Mayor and councillors to discuss and debate local government concerns and ways to implement initiatives to advance and protect the interests of Tangata Whenua).

Sub-regional (both councils)

- Te Maru o Kaituna (Statutory co-governance entity established under the Tapuika Iwi Settlement for the management of the Kaituna River – includes BOPRC and Rotorua Lakes Council).
- Tauranga Moana Advisory Group (Statutory co-governance entity provided for under the Tauranga Moana Iwi Collective Settlement for the management of the Tauranga Harbour – includes BOPRC).
- SmartGrowth Combined Tangata Whenua Forum (similar to the respective forums of the two separate councils from which membership is derived, however it is established to help progress the Tangata Whenua actions in the SmartGrowth Strategy).
- Te Kauae a Roopu (a partnerships group made up of hapū with links to Tauriko West), established in 2017 to incorporate Māori knowledge, perspectives, and values in decision-making processes for Tauriko for Tomorrow.

Consent based groups

- Waiari Kaitiaki Advisory Group (established under the consent to take water for supply from the Waiari river and includes iwi, hapū and Elected Members. It

provides an advisory role to the consent holder and the Regional Council in relation to Part 2 and, in particular, to sections 6(e) and 7(a) of the Resource Management Act, as they relate to this consent. This includes monitoring the water take consent, the health of the river and implementing Mātauranga Māori within the operation of the consent).

- Te Ohu Waiora (established under the consent to discharge wastewater from the Katikati Wastewater Treatment Plant and includes iwi, hapū and Elected Members. Established to monitor the operation of the wastewater treatment plant, the health of the harbour environment around the harbour discharge point, implement Mātauranga Māori within the operation of the consent and to look at alternative discharge options).
- Te Ohu Parawai (established under the consent to discharge wastewater from the Te Puke Wastewater Treatment Plant and includes iwi, hapū and Elected Members. Established to monitor the operation of the wastewater treatment plant, the health of the environment around the river discharge point, implement Mātauranga Māori within the operation of the consent and to look at alternative discharge options).
- TCC's Wastewater Management Review Committee (established under the BOPRC Coastal Permit #62878, to ensure wastewater operations are in accordance with the Wastewater Management Review Committee Management Plan. Comprises TCC elected members and Tangata Whenua representatives).

Engagement guidelines and protocols

- Both councils have protocols that guide the way that council staff engage with iwi and hapū on our capital works projects and policy and plan development. These protocols require early engagement with relevant iwi and hapū to ensure their aspirations and perspectives are captured within our work from the beginning.

Māori wards and constituencies

- Both TCC and WBOPDC have a Māori ward established under the provisions of section 19Z of the Local Electoral Act. BOPRC has three Māori constituencies established under bespoke legislation, the boundaries of which generally align with the three sub-regions proposed under Head Start.

The new sub-regional unitary authority

Our understanding is that Tangata Whenua expect these arrangements to at least continue into the future local government entity in the way they provide for iwi and hapū to contribute to decision-making, and that the potential is there to agree on new approaches that suit the make-up and operation of the new entity.

Arrangements provided through Treaty settlement redress are discussed further in the 'Treaty settlements' section below.

What are the trade-offs and risks?

Loss of local voice remains a significant risk as a result of increased scale, particularly for some of the smaller communities further away from Tauranga City. Specifically, ensuring local voice for communities such as Waihi Beach, Katikati, Ōmokoroa, Te Puke and Maketū is a priority. The focus on local voice and local representation should not be lost through the detailed design stage and subject to community consultation.

Another significant risk is the loss of the mechanisms for providing for Māori to contribute to Council decision-making that were developed by and for Māori. An outline of these is set out in the section above and must remain a focus through the detailed design stage and beyond.

What still needs to be worked through?

TCC has a statutory obligation to hold a poll on Māori wards in 2027. WBOPDC has already held a poll, which determined that no Māori Ward will be provided for the 2028 or 2031 local elections. BOPRC has Māori representation provided for in existing legislation. Māori representation will be considered through the detailed design phase. If the Joint Committee decides to propose Māori wards within the wider representation proposal, then a binding poll will be undertaken over the new unitary authority's area.

The detailed design phase poses an important opportunity to work through key details relating to representation arrangements and local voice for the new sub-regional unitary authority. This includes but is not limited to the following matters:

- Māori representation arrangements.
- Alignment of Electoral systems (STV vs FPP).

- Representation arrangements based around growth corridors for general ward structure (with more specific boundaries to be determined) and the specific number of councillors based on these.
- Local representation arrangements based on the above and specific number of members.

8. Assessment criteria – Deliverability

This is a significant work programme, but with the long history of cooperation of the affected councils (see the sub-regional cross boundary arrangements and initiatives document as supporting information), it is believed that this governance transformation can be delivered in time for the 2028 local government elections. Organisational amalgamation is envisaged to have a defined timeline with phased transition that would span the new governance arrangements.

How would you implement the proposal?

The transition would be governed by a joint committee consisting of all members of both TCC and WBOPDC. For most decisions, this Joint Committee will have the power to make decisions, by a simple majority. However, the parties acknowledge that decisions specifically relating to the determination of debt and revenue from sub-regional assets (other than debt being ringfenced to where it was generated), and representation issues (including governance arrangements), will require a majority vote of both Councils.

Operationally, a Transitional Team will be established, funded by a loan that will be attributed to the new entity. This Transition Team will report to the Joint Committee, and will be lean so as to be efficient, whilst having the capacity to be able to deliver the transformation and to be able to capture the benefits of being able to design a new organisation (and service delivery) from the ground up. As a learning from our LWDW process, we expect that this will require different skillsets at different points in the transition process – moving from planning and design towards delivery and implementation.

Following agreement of the outline proposal, operational transition arrangements would begin as soon as practicable. This would enable implementation of planning, sequencing, and any necessary workforce, systems, process, and governance changes to commence early, supporting a smooth transition and allowing anticipated efficiencies to be delivered as quickly as possible.

How would changes be timed?

In line with our commitment to achieving the outcomes sought by this outline proposal, the Joint Committee and Transition Team will be established as soon as practicable. A detailed work programme will then be developed, with a view of working with Government to design legislation and make key decisions before March 2027, and then for implementation to commence to enable the new governance arrangements to be stood up with day one being the day of the 2028 local government elections.

It is acknowledged that this is a tight timeframe, however given the already close working relationships and various joint initiatives both councils are engaged in, and with

appropriate focus and resourcing it is believed to be achievable. Speed is seen as important to reduce the timeframe of uncertainty for communities and staff, and to enable the realisation of the benefits as soon as practicable.

It is understood that some services may take longer to combine, given existing contractual and financial commitments. Each function will have its own timeframe, but we will seek to maintain the principle of transition occurring at the earliest effective time.

What still needs to be worked through?

There are a number of elements that will need to be further developed as we progress through the detailed design phase. However, the principles that the councils have developed for the key elements of the proposal (representation, financial and function provision) provide the framework for this to occur.

Are there interactions with other local government programmes?

One of the most significant benefits of this proposal is the close alignment with existing work programmes.

Both TCC and WBOPDC have committed to a joint water services CCO under the Local Waters Done Well framework, with this work underway currently, and full implementation expected on 1 July 2027.

The Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal has the same geographic area and partner councils as this proposal, and therefore this will simplify the implementation of that deal.

Importantly, this proposal includes the same local government partners to SmartGrowth, and the future planning system, which will result in a simpler, faster and cheaper planning system for the sub-region.

What do you need from the Government?

Bespoke legislation may be required to give effect to the proposal, including the governance arrangements (both local representation and governing body). The councils are committed to working with Central Government to enable this to occur.

Given the sub-region's importance to the New Zealand economy, and its ability to be used as a "template" for further changes under the Simplifying Local Government process, financial support from Government towards the creation of this entity would be necessary.

Current legislation imposes concurrent statutory requirements for representation review and (for TCC) a Māori ward decision binding poll. Both of these requirements are to take effect from the 2028 local elections, but require specific steps to be taken next

year, including a Māori ward binding referendum by 27 March 2027. Māori representation will be considered through the detailed design phase. If the Joint Committee decides to propose Māori wards within the wider representation proposal, then a binding poll will be undertaken over the new unitary authority's area. This would not have an impact on the date of implementation of the outcome of the poll, which would remain the 2028 local body elections.

There are statutory requirements to review Long Term Plans, bylaws and policies etc in certain timeframes. Through the detailed design phase, we would seek to understand which specific review processes we would seek dispensation from, to avoid expending resources on something that will need to be updated post the establishment of the new entity.

9. Treaty settlements

Explain how existing Treaty settlement arrangements could transfer to new unitary authorities with equivalent effect

Te Maru o Kaituna (Statutory co-governance entity)

- Established under the Tapuika Iwi Settlement for the management of the Kaituna River – includes BOPRC and Rotorua Lakes Council).
- Any transition would need to acknowledge that BOPRC will no longer exist. TCC and WBOPDC are already parties to Te Maru o Kaituna, so any transition could acknowledge those separate interests are now joined, there should be no practical effect on the operation of the entity if all of the existing local government partners carry through without adding others not currently around the table.

Tauranga Moana Advisory Group (Statutory co-governance entity)

- Provided for under the Tauranga Moana Iwi Collective Settlement for the management of the Tauranga Harbour – includes BOPRC.
- As this entity has not been formally established (as the Tauranga Moana Iwi Collective Settlement has not yet been passed into legislation), there is scope to reflect the new local government entity/entities within the final legislation subject to the practical approach that is taken in advance of legislation being enacted.

Statutory acknowledgments

- Both councils have statutory acknowledgments for iwi and hapū over land parcels identified in settlement legislation. Each council has a process for identifying those sites and how they should be dealt with. It should be relatively straight forward to transition these arrangements into the new entity.

OR propose a plan to work with affected Post Settlement Governance Entities (PSGEs) to determine how existing Treaty settlement arrangements can be given equivalent effect in the new unitary authority.

Both councils continue to develop their relationships with PSGEs particularly acknowledging that the new framework around water services, planning and now local government reform, have a particular focus on relationships with settled iwi. In the statement around providing for Māori participation in the section on maintaining local voices, the two councils have established relationships at forums and through consent groups and hapū protocols rather than PSGEs. This is an area that both councils need to strengthen and should be reflected in the arrangements for the new entity.

10. Any other supporting information

- Letter from Mayors of the Bay of Plenty region *[to be added prior to lodgement]*
- Resolutions from 6 August joint Council meeting *[to be added prior to lodgement]*
- Sub-regional cross boundary arrangements and initiatives
- Statistically valid survey report (TCC)
- Engagement outcomes doc (WBOPDC)
- Letter of support from Priority One (sub-regional economic development agency)
- Letter of support from Tauranga's Urban Taskforce (property industry group)
- Letter from Te Maru o Kaituna
- Letter from Ngāti Pūkenga
- Letter from Ngāti Ranginui

Attachment 2 - Supporting information to outline proposal

Sub-regional cross boundary arrangements and initiatives – July 2026

The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level overview of where there are cross boundary services and funding agreements in place between WBOPDC and TCC.

Agreements have historically been funded in a range of different ways across the sub region.

Current arrangements are set out in this document and are intended to be a point in time reference for: sub-regional service delivery, other joint initiatives, and current and historical growth matters.

District populations @ 30 Jun 2025 (Stats NZ): TCC = 160,000 (72%), WBOPDC = 61,000 (28%), Total sub-region = 221,000

Sub-regional water services organisation

- Established 2026.
- Implementation planning underway.
- Required to be operational from 1 July 2027.

Sub-regional Economic Development

- Tourism BOP (TBOP) is a joint TCC/WBOPDC council-controlled organisation.
- Priority One (P1) holds a joint service delivery contract with TCC and WBOPDC.
- TCC funds both TBOP and P1 by way of a targeted commercial and industrial rate only (no residential), WBOPDC funds by general rate.
- The cost sharing arrangements for P1 and TBOP are reflective of the requirement for specific deliverables from each council:
 - P1 joint service delivery contract includes specific TCC deliverables:
 - City Centre Blueprint plus additional references to city centre work.
 - Sister City work (Yantai etc)
 - Mount Industrial work
 - Tauranga Moana Futures Pathways work (internship within TCC)
 - University of Waikato workThe P1 funding split is 89% TCC and 11% WBOPDC (Contract 2026/27)
- TBOP statement of intent includes specific TCC deliverables:
 - Visitor services and in-destination support (iSITE visitor services)
 - Cruise sector facilitation
- Visitor spend is 13% in WBOPDC and 87% in TCC as set out in TBOP's Annual Report 2025-26. This aligns with the TBOP funding split, which is 14% WBOPDC and 86% TCC for 2026/27 (TBOP SOI 2025-2028).
- Both WBOPDC and TCC fund local economic development initiatives in their respective areas, in addition to TBOP and Priority One.

Libraries

- WBOPDC, TCC, Rotorua Lakes, Hauraki and Whakatane district councils are members of a national public libraries' consortium which provides for reduced library software costs and book buying fees.
- There is a reciprocal membership arrangement in place between all BOP councils, enabling residents from other council areas to borrow books as if they were residents.
- Approximately 10% of Western Bay of Plenty District library members are Tauranga residents.
- There is no cross-boundary council contribution to capital or operational costs of facilities (other than standard user fees which are charged to all users).

Sub-regional Community Facilities

- Both TCC and WBOPDC provide indoor and outdoor community facilities for recreation purposes, and have ongoing maintenance and upgrade works across their respective networks.
- TCC and WBOPDC are both members of the Spaces and Places Steering Group which is a regional partnership to guide the approach to regional planning for play, active recreation and sport spaces and places (facilities) across the region.
- As part of the Spaces and Places Steering Group both TCC and WBOPDC undertake sportsfield supply and demand studies applying the same methodology for this across districts.
- WBOPDC and TCC adopted the Sub-regional Community Facilities Funding Evaluation Policy in 2007, which has been valuable as a guiding document but is now well overdue for a joint councils' review.
- WBOPDC contributes to TCC owned sub-regional facilities, e.g.
 - 2006: \$855k contribution towards Baywave.
 - 2019: \$50k contribution to hockey facilities at Mount Maunganui (Blake Park).
 - Annual contribution of approximately \$35k for Mercury Arena (indoor sports facility).

Sub-Regional Service Delivery

Tauranga Airport

- Tauranga Airport owned and operated by TCC.
- WBOPDC owns 14.45% interest in five land titles at airport (residual historical ownership).

McLaren Falls and Omanawa Falls

- TCC owned, funded and operated.
- Located in Western Bay of Plenty District.

Sub-regional Parks – TECT and Huharua

- TECT Park and Huharua Park – jointly owned by WBOPDC and TCC.
- Both TECT Park and Huharua Park are operated by WBOPDC.
- Capital and operational expenditure for both sub-regional parks is shared 50:50 pursuant to Joint TCC/WBOPDC Sub-Regional Parks Relationship Agreement. This Agreement is currently being reviewed, with an updated draft developed by both councils' staff in Feb 2026.
- Joint TCC/WBOPDC Policy on Sub-Regional Parks 2012 in place which sets out the strategic vision of Councils in establishing the sub-regional park. This Policy is now well overdue for a joint councils' review.
- TECT Park Strategic Plan 2024 developed and agreed by both WBOPDC and TCC.
- An average breakdown of club membership at TECT Park (some clubs being almost exclusively Tauranga and others predominantly WBOP) is:
 - Tauranga 65%
 - WBOP 25%
 - Rotorua & elsewhere 10%.

Bay of Plenty Civil Defence Emergency Management Group

- WBOPDC and TCC are both members of the Bay of Plenty Civil Defence Emergency Management Group which was established under section 12 of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 (CDEM Act).
- The WBOP emergency response fund has been set up to support communities in both Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty.

BOPLASS

- All Bay of Plenty Councils including TCC and WBOPDC are shareholders of BOPLASS, the company established to promote shared services between local authorities in the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Gisborne regions.
- WBOPDC is also a member of COLAB (the Waikato shared service delivery CCO).

New Zealand Local Government Funding Agency (LGFA)

- WBOPDC and TCC are both shareholders of the LGFA (alongside 28 other councils).
- The LGFA is a Council-Controlled Organisation (CCO) operating under the Local Government Act 2002.

SmartGrowth Partnership

- TCC and WBOPDC are members of The SmartGrowth Partnership which is made up of representatives from the three partner councils (TCC, WBOPDC and BOPRC), Tāngata Whenua and central government.
- Cost sharing agreement, funding and implementation plan in place.

Regional Deal

- Partnership between WBOPDC, TCC, BOPRC, Tāngata Whenua and the Crown, signed 14 May 2026.
- Enabling infrastructure investment to support the development of 12,000 homes and 3,000 infill across sub-region over the next 10 years.

Service delivery contracts

- Both WBOPDC and TCC fund cross-boundary organisations by way of separate service delivery contracts.
- These include: Envirohub, The Incubator, Social Link, Creative BOP, Sport BOP, Tauranga Art Gallery and Film BOP.

Contracted council services

- Bay Venues operates both Katikati and Te Puke swimming pools.
- All WBOPDC routine wastewater testing is done through the TCC Chapel Street Laboratory.
- WBOPDC after-hours calls through TCC call centre.

Event Funding

- The Tauranga Western Bay Community Event Fund is a collaboration between WBOPDC, TCC, Acorn Foundation, Bay Trust, and TECT to provide a streamlined approach to the support of community events taking place in the region.
- The fund provides financial support to events that are community-led, deliver positive social and economic outcomes, and enrich our communities.

Omokoroa to Tauranga Cycleway

- WBOPDC/NZTA funded bridge extension to bring cycleway across Wairoa River.
- TCC/NZTA funded Wairoa Bridge to Bethlehem section.

Wairoa River Valley Strategy

- WBOPDC and TCC developed the joint Wairoa River Valley Strategy alongside Tāngata Whenua partners in 2005 and was updated via a desktop review in 2013.
- In 2023, a wider review was signalled for 2026.

Solid Waste

- Guided by our Waste Management and Minimisation Plans, WBOPDC and TCC continue to work together on the sub-regional waste infrastructure network.
- This includes future waste drop-off facilities, waste processing infrastructure (e.g. organics, recycling) and safe disposal (e.g. landfill).

Other joint initiatives

Transportation

Regional Land Transport Plan

- Sets the Bay of Plenty's strategic direction for land transport over the next 30 years and includes TCC, WBOPDC, BOPRC and NZTA.

The Western Bay of Plenty Transport System Plan (TSP)

- Through SmartGrowth, WBOPDC and TCC are both part of the TSP which focuses on our region's future transport needs.

Tauranga Transport Model (TTM)

- Developed in 2006 with subsequent updates, the TTM is used to plan transport network changes, manage congestion, and inform transport planning and investments in the western bay of plenty (noting that it only extends to Te Puna in the Northwest and Te Puke in the East).
- A collaborative, shared resource that is jointly owned, funded and managed by a partnership between TCC, WBOPDC, BOPRC and NZTA, with funding shares of 17.2%, 9.8%, 4.9% and 68.2% respectively.

Boundary Roads Agreement

- Agreement between WBOPDC and TCC which sets out how roads on council boundaries will be managed. It also sets out a capital investment/improvements funding split and agreement regarding the funding of maintenance costs.

Tauranga Transport Operations Centre (TTOC)

- TCC owns and operates the TTOC 24/7, managing traffic signals, CCTV, and network operations across the western BOP sub-region, Rotorua, and parts of the wider regional/state highway network.
- Partner councils (TCC, WBOPDC, RDC, BOPRC) and NZTA pay for their own assets plus a share of operations services, normally through service agreements.

Travel Safe

- A joint initiative between TCC, WBOPDC, NZ Police, and NZTA.
- Operated by TCC with a funding contribution of \$60-70k from WBOPDC. The Travel Safe team partner with and work alongside communities, schools, parents, caregivers, volunteers, and students, to deliver programmes and initiatives to reduce accidents and improve road safety.

SmartGrowth implementation

Future Growth Areas

- As part of the SmartGrowth Strategy 2024-2074 the Future Development Strategy (FDS) sets out future urban growth areas, and the infrastructure needed to support them, across the sub-region for the next 30 years.
- Development of the urban growth areas is subject to technical investigations and feasibility studies and will require significant investment in infrastructure, including transport and three waters, to provide growth that will meet sub-regional demands.

Western Corridor

- TCC is currently leading work in partnership with WBOPDC to investigate the potential of Upper Belk Road for urbanisation.
- Merrick Road, Joyce Road and other potential development areas will be subject to similar future investigations in due course.
- Boundary alterations would be required to facilitate future urbanisation for each of these three areas.

Eastern Corridor

- Rangiuru Business Park (RBP) – provides critical sub-regional business land. Ongoing work into detailed infrastructure design and construction. Delivery of the redesigned Te Puke WWTP is critical to support both the RBP and housing intensification in Te Puke. RBP primarily relies on assets to be owned and operated by WBOPDC or State Highways.
- NB: there was an earlier informal agreement between WBOPDC and TCC to support both Pyes Pa / Tauriko urbanisation and Rangiuru becoming industrial.

Sub-regional Commercial Centres Strategy

- WBOPDC and TCC are working in partnership to develop a Commercial Centres Strategy, which is an action from the SmartGrowth Strategy 2024-2074 Implementation Plan.
- This strategy will identify roles and functions for the sub-region's higher order commercial centres over a 30-50 year period, and is anticipated to inform preparation of the Regional Spatial Plan.

Omokoroa Wastewater (Southern Pipeline)

- Agreement in place between WBOPDC and TCC since 2003.
- TCC and WBOPDC have differing views on methodology, attribution of benefits and assumptions used.

Regional Spatial Planning (NEW – UNDER DEVELOPMENT)

- Subject to new planning legislation.
- Sub-regional approach proposed between BOPRC, WBOPDC and TCC, within the wider regional spatial plan.

Sub Regional Growth Funding (AREA OF CURRENT CHANGE)

- This area is evolving driven by legislative changes from development/financial contributions models to potential development levies system by 2030.

FUTURE: potential developments requiring cross boundary infrastructure discussions

- Bell Road/Wairakei South development (fast track – infrastructure impacts)
- Waikite Road, Welcome Bay (water, wastewater, roading, reserves & community infrastructure)

With no current legislative power to apply growth charges across boundaries under LGA (DCs) or RMA (FinCon), there are limited systems in place to resolve ongoing discussions re: fair apportionment of development contributions and collection of rates; and requirement for developer agreement on infrastructure delivery and funding.

Sub-regional growth benefit is currently being partially recognised through funding from third parties e.g. TECT, NZTA, FAR and a range of other central government agencies.

Current and historical growth-related matters

Waiari water take consent

- TCC and WBOP have a joint water take consent for Waiari. Implementation is subject to current discussions at political level in respect to future development proposed in WBOPDC district.

Carrus Hickson land (171ha, Te Tumu)

- Joint purchase of this land in 2007 (WBOPDC \$5m, TCC \$10m).
- TCC has entered into an agreement to buy WBOPDC out of their share with payment due 15 Dec 2026.
- The option with Totara Farms Joint Venture (developer) has been extended to 15 Dec 2036.

Takitimu Drive (Route K)

- WBOPDC contributed \$257k to Takitimu Drive (Route K) on agreement it would be repaid.
- TCC repaid \$106k July 2003, no record explaining difference to agreement.

Previous boundary alterations to enable urbanisation

Western Corridor (Tauriko West)

- The Tauriko West boundary alteration was undertaken in 2020, transferring 189 hectares from WBOPDC to TCC.
- Belk Road, Keenan Road, and Tara Road boundary alterations were undertaken in 2020-2021, transferring 467 ha from WBOPDC to TCC. There was also a boundary alteration to move a property owned by the Hurst's from TCC to WBOPDC.
- The Lakes boundary alteration was undertaken in 2009, transferring land from WBOPDC to TCC.

NB: with urbanisation and boundary changes, council rates for existing landholdings normally change due to a change in land use and being under a different council.



Tauranga City

2026



Tauranga City Council – Simplifying Local Government: Community Survey Report

Prepared For :
Tauranga City Council

Prepared By :
PublicVoice



Prepared by PublicVoice Limited

This report was produced by PublicVoice Limited, in partnership with Tauranga City Council. It draws together the three Simplifying Local Government survey channels (a controlled online panel, the Council's contact list, and an open public consultation) to set out community views on the future structure of local government in the Bay of Plenty.

About PublicVoice

PublicVoice Limited is a research and engagement consultancy headquartered in Wellington, New Zealand. We specialise in public policy research and consultation, providing services to local and central government agencies throughout New Zealand. To learn more, please visit www.publicvoice.co.nz.

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1 Executive summary

This report presents the results of Tauranga City Council’s Simplifying Local Government engagement on the future structure of local government in the Bay of Plenty. It drew 1,338 responses across three channels: a demographically controlled online panel (250), the Council’s contact list (815), and an open public consultation (273). The headline **Representative sample** figures combine the panel and contact list channels (n=1,065), weighted by age and gender to the Tauranga City 2023 Census; the public consultation is self-selected, reported unweighted and alongside for comparison, and never pooled into the headline figure. Weighted results carry a margin of error of approximately ± 4.2 percentage points. Alongside the closed questions, 1,168 respondents left at least one substantive open-text comment across the five open questions, coded against a common theme framework. The findings from those comments are woven through the sections below and reported in full in the body of the report.

Support for structural change

A large majority of respondents would rather the Council design a new structure with its neighbours than wait for the Government to do it. A similar majority support councils merging to have fewer councils, and support is higher again for a single combined council where that delivers service efficiencies and simpler governance. All three channels point the same way.

The comments most often set out what people expect a change to deliver: demonstrated savings reflected in rates, transparent and accountable spending, and guaranteed fair representation for every area. Scepticism that mergers deliver the savings promised recurs throughout the comments, with Auckland’s amalgamation the most cited example. Consistent with the closed results, when asked what should stay the same, the largest single group of commenters said little or nothing should.

Question	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Public consultation (n=273)
Council to design the change (vs wait for the Government)	79%	80%
Support councils merging to have fewer councils	78%	81%
Support a single combined council (with efficiencies)	89%	85%

Share supporting each proposition: the design question shows the share choosing Council-led design; the two support questions show Strongly support + Support combined. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined, weighted (age x gender, Tauranga City 2023 Census); Public consultation unweighted. The tables in this summary show headline figures only - full distributions and stream breakdowns are in the body of the report.

Table 1: Support for structural change - headline shares

Which councils to join with

Of those who supported a single combined council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council was named as the best fit ahead of any other council, in all three channels. The remaining options were each named by around a quarter of those who answered or fewer. The comments follow the same pattern: Tauranga and Western Bay are described as a single community of interest, while the inclusion of Rotorua and the Eastern Bay is opposed on grounds of distance and differing rural character. A smaller group of commenters argued for a single Bay-wide unitary authority matched to regional or catchment boundaries.

Council	Representative sample (n=853)	Public consultation (n=220)
Western Bay of Plenty District Council	69%	82%
Any combination that creates efficiencies	25%	15%
Whakatāne District Council	25%	33%

Council	Representative sample (n=853)	Public consultation (n=220)
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This question was shown only to respondents who supported a single combined council; percentages are based on those who answered. Multi-select question: respondents could name any number of councils, so shares can sum to more than 100%. Top three shown; the full list is in the body of the report.

Table 2: Best-fit councils to join with - top three

What people prioritise

Three priorities sit almost level at the top of the ranking, and all three concern cost and delivery: keeping rates low, efficient delivery of council functions and services, and efficient delivery of infrastructure. The two groups order them differently, however: keeping rates as low as possible tops the ranking for the representative sample, while public consultation respondents ranked the two efficient-delivery items ahead of rates. Local representation and regional growth were ranked highly by fewer respondents in both groups. The comments carry the same emphasis: focus on core services and infrastructure ahead of discretionary projects, curb wasteful spending, and keep rates affordable. A smaller group of commenters linked this to lower trust in council spending and to the view that councils exist to serve ratepayers.

Priority	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Public consultation (n=273)
Keeping rates as low as possible	53%	38%
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	52%	58%
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	50%	53%

Share placing each item in their top three of eight (all respondents form the base, so shares do not sum to 100%). The three leaders are close together; the full ranking is in the body of the report.

Table 3: What people prioritise - top three (share ranking in top three)

How services should be delivered

For each council service, respondents were asked how they would prefer it delivered under a new structure: the same way across the whole region, tailored to their local area, or somewhere in between. Preferences differ by service. Region-wide delivery drew the most support for regulatory and environmental functions - permits and licensing, consenting, civil defence, natural resource management and environmental protection - while services people use close to home, such as public transport, community facilities and sport and recreation, drew as much or more support for local tailoring. The comments add three related asks: retain the regional council's current environmental and catchment functions at regional scale rather than losing them in a restructure, standardise consenting and back-office systems to reduce cost and duplication, and keep local offices, service centres and current service levels, with libraries, parks and community facilities the specific services most often named as worth keeping.

Service	Representative sample (up to n=1,050)	Public consultation (up to n=270)
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	68%	72%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	62%	64%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	62%	70%

Share preferring each service delivered the same across the region. Bases vary by service (not every respondent answered every row). Top three shown; the full grid, including the services where local tailoring led, is in the body of the report.

Table 4: Services with the strongest preference for region-wide delivery - top three

Summary

Drawing the closed and open questions together, the results point the same way. Majorities of respondents support structural change designed locally rather than imposed, name Western Bay of Plenty as the best-fit partner, and support a single combined council where it delivers efficiencies. The comments attach recurring expectations to that support: savings that are demonstrated and reflected in rates, fair representation for every area in the new structure, current service levels maintained, the regional environmental functions retained, and a transparent process. The most common concerns are rates rising or being used to subsidise other areas, loss of local voice for smaller and rural communities, and a merger adding bureaucracy rather than removing it.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the survey

Tauranga City Council commissioned this survey to hear from the community about the future structure of local government in the Bay of Plenty. In May 2026 the Government announced a pathway called “Head Start”, which gives councils the chance to work together and propose how they could be reorganised into fewer, larger councils. Councils that put forward a proposal and have it accepted by the Government get to shape how the new structure looks; those that do not will have one decided for them later. Before Council settles its position, it wanted to understand where the community stands.

2.2 Coverage

The survey was delivered through three channels, which are reported side by side throughout:

- **Panel:** a controlled online panel sample.
- **Contact list:** invitations to the Council’s contact list.
- **Public consultation:** an open channel anyone could respond to.

The panel and contact list are *controlled samples* and together form the representative spine of the reporting. The public consultation is an *open channel*, shown alongside the controlled samples for comparison rather than pooled in as if it were representative.

2.3 How to read this report

Each chart shows the headline **Representative sample** figure alongside the **public consultation**. The Representative sample is the panel and contact list combined (n=1,065), **weighted** by age and gender to the Tauranga City 2023 Census adult population, so it estimates the views of the community rather than only the respondents who took part. The public consultation is the open channel, and its percentages are unweighted because no population claim is made for it. The table beneath each chart breaks the combined figure down into its component streams (panel and contact list, shown in grey italics as they are not charted) so differences between them remain visible. Base counts (n=) are unweighted throughout. Key demographic cross-tabulations are in Appendix C, and the fuller breakdowns sit in the supporting workbook (TCC_Crosstabs.xlsx).

2.4 Project background

Changes to how councils are structured across New Zealand are coming. If Council does not promote structural change through the Head Start process, the Government has signalled it will impose a structure later. The survey gave the community an opportunity to weigh in early on whether and how Tauranga should reorganise with neighbouring councils, including which partners would be the best fit, whether a single combined council would be acceptable if it delivered efficiencies, and how individual services should be delivered across a larger area.

2.5 Questions the survey was designed to answer

The survey was built around a small number of structural questions:

- **Who should design the change?** Whether the community would prefer Council to design a new structure alongside neighbouring councils, or wait for the Government to do it.
- **Is there support for merging?** Support for councils merging to have fewer councils, and for a single combined council if it delivered service efficiencies and simpler governance.
- **Which councils would be the best fit to join with?**
- **What do people prioritise** about how councils are structured and operated.

- **How should services be delivered:** the same across the wider region, tailored to the local area, or somewhere in between.

Open-text questions then asked what changes would be needed to address concerns, what should stay the same, what would build confidence in a decision, people's major concerns, and anything else to consider.

2.6 Guide to the rest of the report

The **Methodology** section sets out how the survey was fielded across the three channels and how the analysis was done, and the **Respondent profile** describes who answered in each stream. The survey's closed questions come first, in the order they were asked: **Support for structural change, Which councils to join with, What people prioritise, and How services should be delivered**. A **Qualitative themes overview** then introduces the open-text material and the cross-cutting theme categories, followed by a chapter on each open question: **Changes needed to address concerns, What should stay the same, What would build confidence, Major concerns about the changes, and Anything else to consider**. Appendix A contains the questionnaire, Appendix B is a glossary of the qualitative themes, and Appendix C reports the key results by demographic group.

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview

The Simplifying Local Government survey was fielded across three channels and analysed as a single combined dataset, with results reported separately for each channel (stream) so differences between them are visible.

3.2 The three streams

Stream	Role	n
Panel (controlled online panel)	Controlled sample (spine)	250
Contact list (invited list supplied by Council)	Controlled sample (spine)	815
Public consultation (open channel)	Open channel (comparison)	273
Total		1,338

Table 5: Responses by stream (unweighted)

Base counts are unweighted. Fieldwork ran from 15 June to 1 July 2026.

3.3 Controlled samples versus the open channel

The panel and contact list are controlled samples: the people invited are known, and the achieved samples can be weighted to the population. Together they form the representative spine of the reporting, and headline figures combine them into a single weighted **Representative sample** estimate; the tables break that estimate down into its component streams. The public consultation is an open channel: anyone could respond, and self-selection means it is not always representative of the wider community. It is reported alongside the combined figure for comparison, and is never blended into it. That distinction is why the open channel always appears as its own series.

A note on the contact list: invitations could be passed on to family members, but a passed-on link could not itself be passed on again.

3.4 Weighting

Percentages for the controlled samples (panel and contact list) are weighted to the Stats NZ 2023 Census usually resident population of Tauranga City aged 18 and over, on the joint distribution of age band (18-34, 35-44, 45-64, 65+) and gender. Weights are constructed with iterative proportional fitting (rake weighting) using the R survey package, with the two controlled channels raked together as a single spine. The public consultation stream is an open channel and is not weighted, so no population claim is made for it.

Age and gender were chosen because they are the strongest demographic correlates of views on local government, and both targets come from a single Stats NZ release at the Tauranga City geography, keeping the marginal distributions internally consistent. Ethnicity is published by Stats NZ as total response (categories sum to more than 100%), which does not rake cleanly; the ethnic composition of the sample is disclosed in the respondent profile rather than corrected by weighting.

Weights are trimmed at 5 times the mean weight to prevent any single respondent dominating weighted estimates, then rescaled so the weights sum to the raked sample size. Respondents who declined to give their age or gender are retained in all analyses with a weight of one, since no census target applies to them. Of the 1,065 controlled-sample respondents, 1,017 were eligible for raking; the remaining 48 (4.5% of the spine) did not state their age or gender and are included in weighted figures at face value with a weight of one.

Younger residents were under-represented in the achieved sample, as is typical for surveys of this kind, so the weighting applies a corresponding correction. This costs precision: the effective sample size (Kish) of

the weighted spine is 547, 54% of the raked n, giving a maximum margin of error of approximately ± 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for weighted spine estimates. Weighted results for the youngest age band rest on relatively few respondents and should be read with that in mind.

3.5 Analysis

Closed questions are reported as distributions, top-box shares, or rankings as appropriate to the question type, computed within each stream. Ranking questions report the share placing each item in their top three. The service-delivery grid reports the share choosing each delivery model for each service. The best-fit councils question was shown only to respondents who supported a single combined council, so its percentages are based on those who answered it; this is noted beneath the relevant chart and tables. Key demographic cross-tabulations for the closed questions (by channel, age band and gender) are reported in Appendix C. The fuller breakdowns (full age bands, ratepayer status, and per-option detail with significance tests) are in the accompanying workbook (TCC_Crosstabs.xlsx).

3.6 Qualitative coding

The open-text responses are coded with a large language model against a single framework generated from the responses themselves (categories emerge from the data rather than a fixed list). Each comment is tagged with one or more themes carrying a sentiment prefix (Support, Concern, Oppose, or Consider). Theme frequencies are then reported by stream. The qualitative chapter is produced once coding is complete.

3.7 Things to keep in mind

The panel sample (n=250) is smaller than the contact list, so panel percentages carry wider margins and stream-level differences of a few points should not be over-read. The public consultation reflects those motivated to respond, not the community as a whole. Where streams disagree, the controlled samples (panel + list) carry the representative weight.

4 Respondent profile

This section describes who responded in each stream, so the attitudes that follow can be read in context. It is an unweighted description of the achieved samples. It characterises the respondents themselves, which is why it stays unweighted even though the attitude chapters are weighted.

4.1 Age

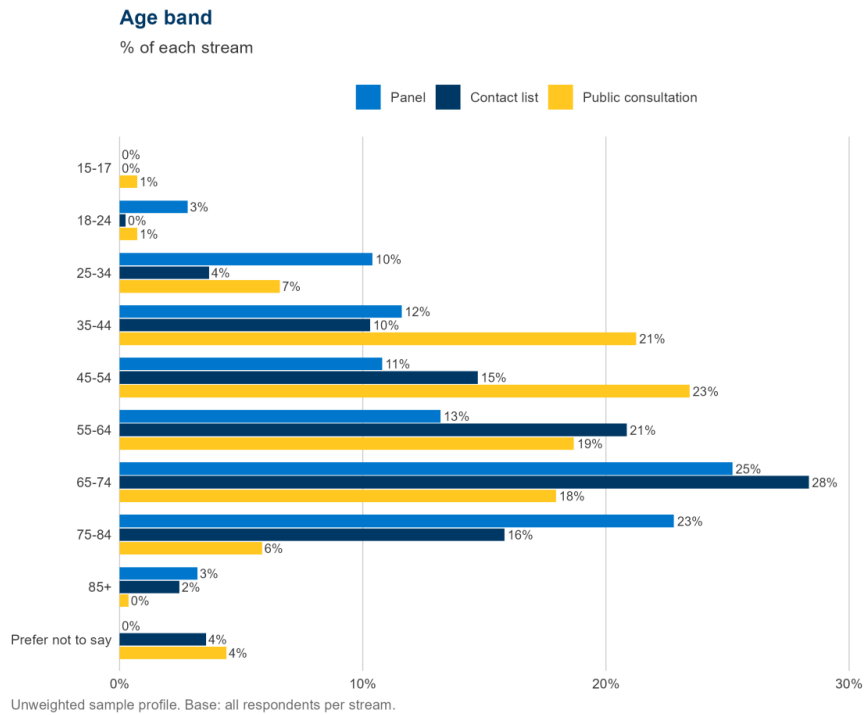


Figure 1: Age band, by stream

Response	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
15-17	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	1% (n=2)
18-24	3% (n=7)	0% (n=2)	1% (n=2)
25-34	10% (n=26)	4% (n=30)	7% (n=18)
35-44	12% (n=29)	10% (n=84)	21% (n=58)
45-54	11% (n=27)	15% (n=120)	23% (n=64)
55-64	13% (n=33)	21% (n=170)	19% (n=51)
65-74	25% (n=63)	28% (n=231)	18% (n=49)
75-84	23% (n=57)	16% (n=129)	6% (n=16)
85+	3% (n=8)	2% (n=20)	0% (n=1)
Prefer not to say	0% (n=0)	4% (n=29)	4% (n=12)

UNWEIGHTED results: percentages describe the achieved samples (no weighting applied). Sample profile (unweighted). Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273.

Table 6: Age band by stream

4.2 Gender

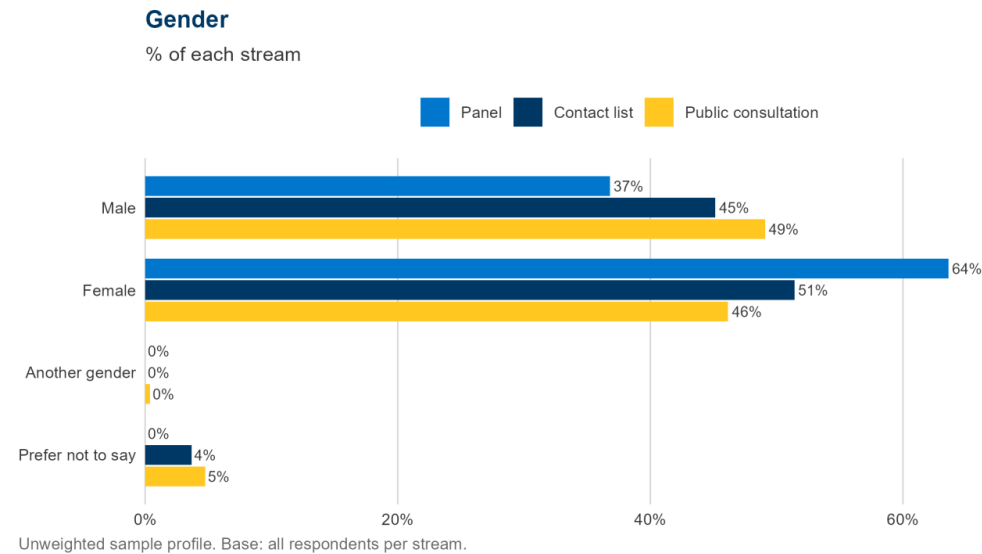


Figure 2: Gender, by stream

Response	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Male	37% (n=92)	45% (n=368)	49% (n=134)
Female	64% (n=159)	51% (n=419)	46% (n=126)
Another gender	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=1)
Prefer not to say	0% (n=0)	4% (n=30)	5% (n=13)

UNWEIGHTED results: percentages describe the achieved samples (no weighting applied). Sample profile (unweighted). Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273.

The gender question allowed more than one selection; one Panel respondent selected two options, so Panel counts sum to one more than the stream base and percentages can total just over 100%.

Table 7: Gender by stream

4.3 Ratepayer status

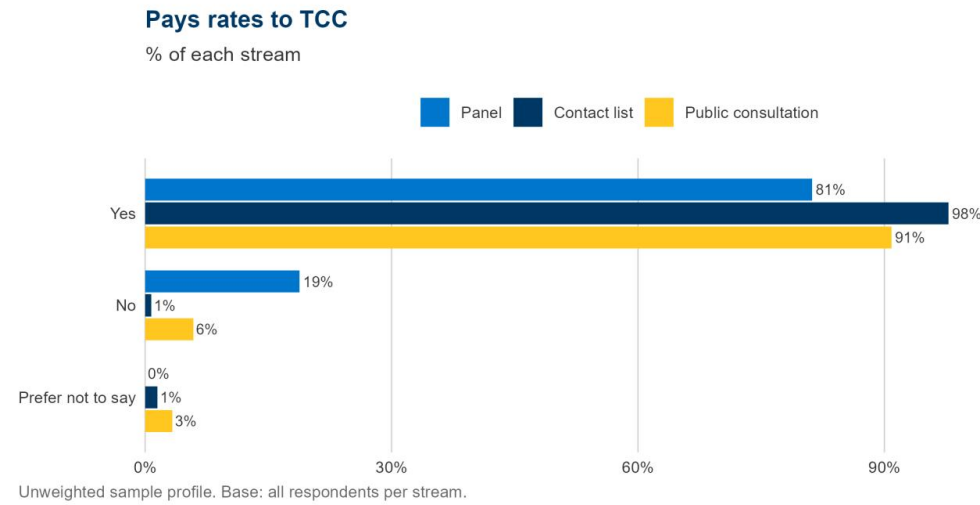


Figure 3: Pays rates to TCC, by stream

Response	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Yes	81% (n=203)	98% (n=797)	91% (n=248)
No	19% (n=47)	1% (n=6)	6% (n=16)
Prefer not to say	0% (n=0)	1% (n=12)	3% (n=9)

UNWEIGHTED results: percentages describe the achieved samples (no weighting applied). Sample profile (unweighted). Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273.

Table 8: Ratepayer status by stream

4.4 Household size

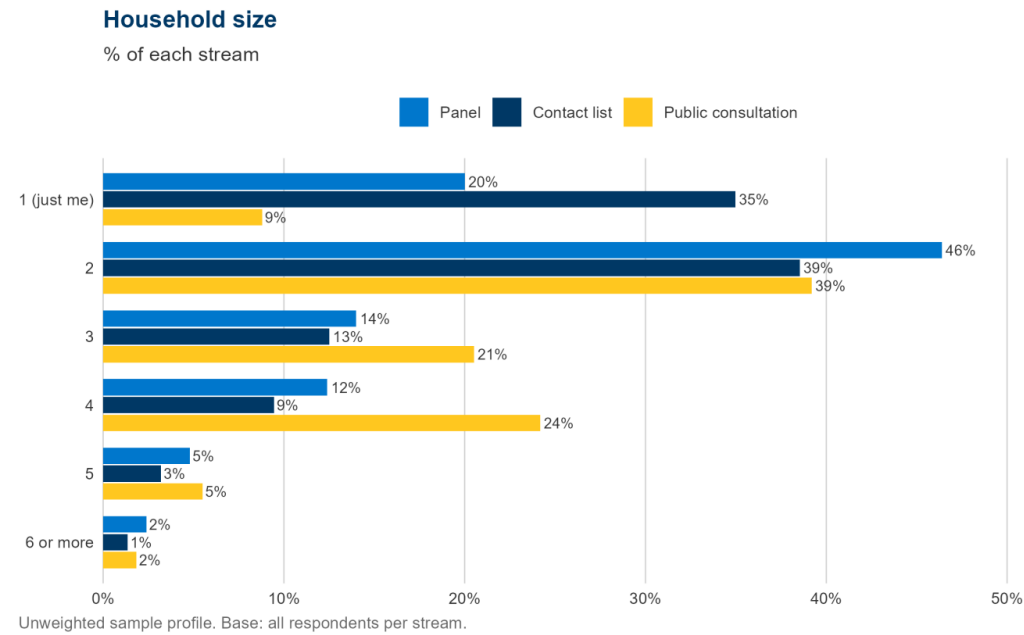


Figure 4: Household size, by stream

Response	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
1 (just me)	20% (n=50)	35% (n=285)	9% (n=24)
2	46% (n=116)	39% (n=314)	39% (n=107)
3	14% (n=35)	13% (n=102)	21% (n=56)
4	12% (n=31)	9% (n=77)	24% (n=66)
5	5% (n=12)	3% (n=26)	5% (n=15)
6 or more	2% (n=6)	1% (n=11)	2% (n=5)

UNWEIGHTED results: percentages describe the achieved samples (no weighting applied). Sample profile (unweighted). Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273.

Table 9: Household size by stream

5 Support for structural change

This section covers the community’s appetite for structural change: who should design it, support for councils merging, and support for a single combined council. Each chart shows the headline **Representative sample** figure, the panel and contact list combined and weighted to the census, alongside the public consultation as the open-channel comparison. The table beneath each chart breaks the combined figure down into its component streams.

Across all three streams a majority preferred Council to design a new structure with neighbouring councils rather than wait for the Government (around four in five of the representative sample). Support for councils merging was also a majority (close to four in five of the representative sample, with just over one in five opposed), and it was higher again for a single combined council where that delivered efficiencies and simpler governance: close to nine in ten supported it, with just over one in ten opposed. The panel, contact list and public consultation point the same way. Panel and contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age by gender); public consultation is unweighted.

5.1 Who should design the change

Respondents were asked whether they would prefer Council to design a new structure alongside neighbouring councils, or wait for the Government to do it.

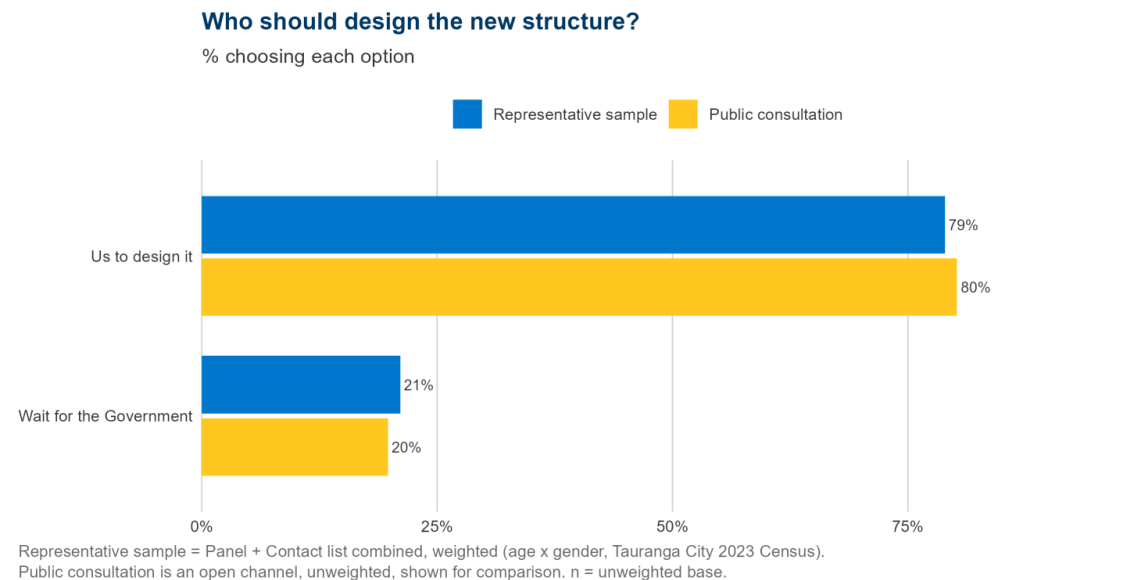


Figure 5: Who should design the new structure

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Us to design it	79% (n=867)	81% (n=207)	78% (n=660)	80% (n=219)
Wait for the Government	21% (n=198)	19% (n=43)	22% (n=155)	20% (n=54)

WEIGHTED results: Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age x gender). Public consultation percentages are unweighted. Single-choice question. Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Representative sample 1065 | Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

Table 10: Who should design the new structure (combined and by stream)

5.2 Support for councils merging

Support for the idea of councils merging to have fewer councils, shown as the full distribution from strong support to strong opposition.

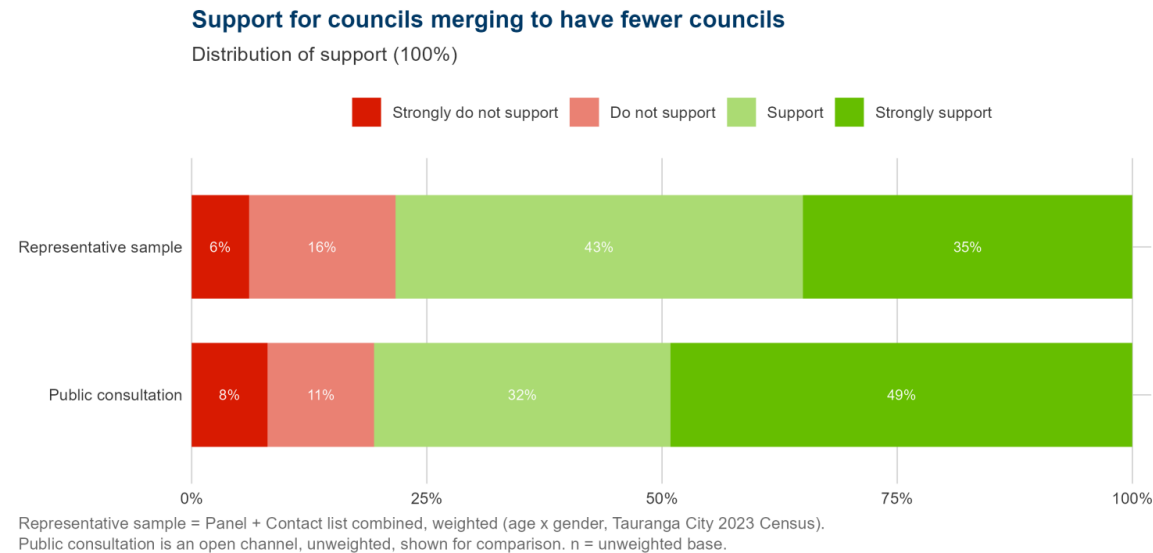


Figure 6: Support for councils merging

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Strongly support	35% (n=414)	23% (n=66)	40% (n=348)	49% (n=134)
Support	43% (n=439)	49% (n=114)	41% (n=325)	32% (n=86)
Do not support	16% (n=150)	22% (n=54)	13% (n=96)	11% (n=31)
Strongly do not support	6% (n=62)	6% (n=16)	6% (n=46)	8% (n=22)

WEIGHTED results: Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age x gender). Public consultation percentages are unweighted. Single-choice question. Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Representative sample 1065 | Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

Table 11: Support for councils merging (combined and by stream)

5.3 Support for a single combined council

Support for a single combined council, if it delivered service efficiencies and simpler governance.

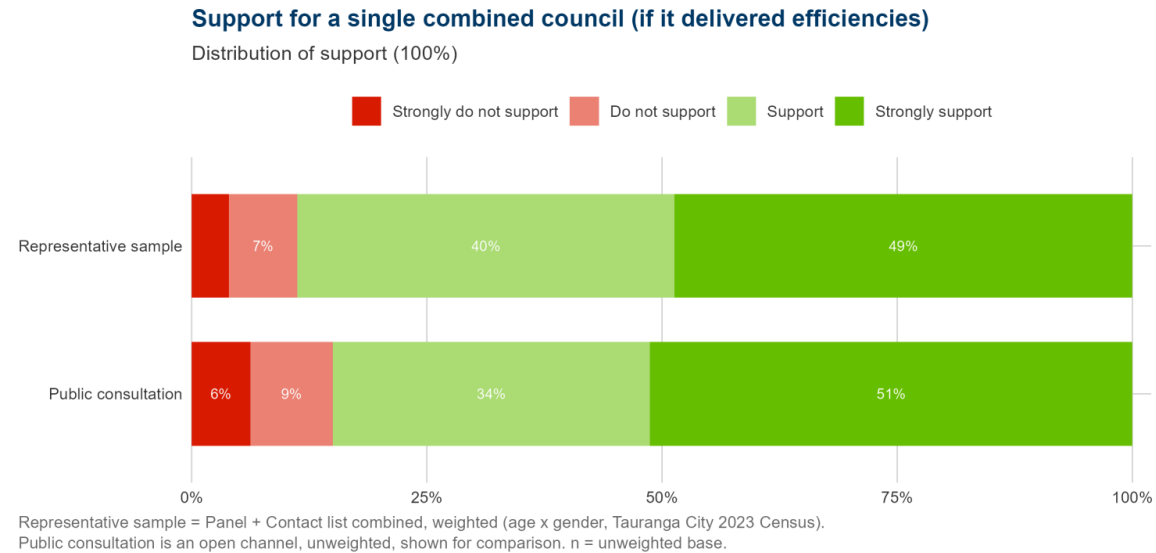


Figure 7: Support for a single combined council

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Strongly support	49% (n=532)	32% (n=88)	55% (n=444)	51% (n=140)
Support	40% (n=410)	56% (n=130)	34% (n=280)	34% (n=92)
Do not support	7% (n=79)	10% (n=24)	6% (n=55)	9% (n=24)
Strongly do not support	4% (n=44)	3% (n=8)	4% (n=36)	6% (n=17)

WEIGHTED results: Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age x gender). Public consultation percentages are unweighted. Single-choice question. Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Representative sample 1065 | Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

Table 12: Support for a single combined council (combined and by stream)

6 Which councils to join with

This question was asked of respondents who supported a single combined council. Those respondents could select any number of neighbouring councils they saw as the best fit for Tauranga to join with (a multi-select question, so percentages can sum to more than 100%), and percentages are based on those who answered. The chart shows the combined weighted **Representative sample** figure alongside the public consultation; the table breaks this down by stream.

Of those who supported a single combined council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council was the most named, by around seven in ten of the representative sample and just over four in five of the public consultation, well ahead of any other council. The next most named (Whakatāne, Rotorua, and the option of any combination that creates efficiencies) each sat at around one in four or fewer. All streams point the same way.

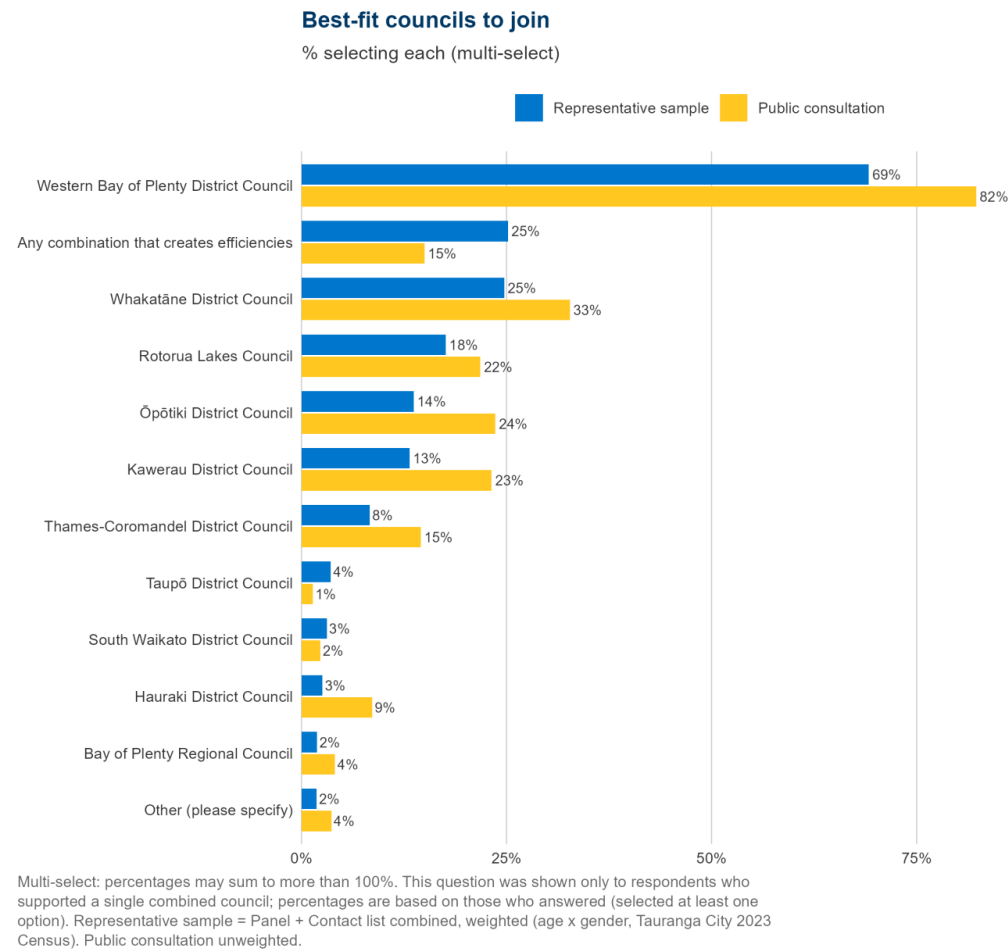


Figure 8: Best-fit councils to join with

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Western Bay of Plenty District Council	69% (n=615)	63% (n=126)	71% (n=489)	82% (n=181)
Any combination that creates efficiencies	25% (n=206)	26% (n=44)	25% (n=162)	15% (n=33)
Whakatāne District Council	25% (n=232)	19% (n=34)	27% (n=198)	33% (n=72)
Rotorua Lakes Council	18% (n=161)	11% (n=23)	20% (n=138)	22% (n=48)
Ōpōtiki District Council	14% (n=137)	6% (n=14)	16% (n=123)	24% (n=52)
Kawerau District Council	13% (n=142)	4% (n=13)	16% (n=129)	23% (n=51)
Thames-Coromandel District Council	8% (n=73)	8% (n=17)	9% (n=56)	15% (n=32)
Taupō District Council	4% (n=23)	3% (n=5)	4% (n=18)	1% (n=3)
South Waikato District Council	3% (n=24)	2% (n=6)	3% (n=18)	2% (n=5)
Hauraki District Council	3% (n=27)	2% (n=6)	3% (n=21)	9% (n=19)
Bay of Plenty Regional Council	2% (n=16)	1% (n=3)	2% (n=13)	4% (n=9)
Other (please specify)	2% (n=18)	0% (n=1)	2% (n=17)	4% (n=8)

WEIGHTED results: Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age x gender). Public consultation percentages are unweighted. Multi-select question. Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Representative sample 853 | Panel 180 | Contact list 673 | Public consultation 220. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

This question was shown only to respondents who supported a single combined council; percentages are based on those who answered (selected at least one option).

Table 13: Best-fit councils to join with (combined and by stream)

Respondents who chose “Other (please specify)” left 52 free-text responses. Of these, 25 named the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and were back-coded into the dedicated row above, and one “unsure” was excluded. Responses that instead argued for abolishing the regional council are kept in the list below, since they are not a request to join it. The remaining 26 group as follows (unweighted, across all three streams).

Response	Mentions
Alternative regional structures: a Bay of Plenty-wide unitary authority, or sub-regional / coastal groupings (e.g. an Eastern Bay grouping of Whakatāne, Kawerau and Ōpōtiki)	8
Abolish or disestablish the regional council	3
Keep the current councils, or none	3
A specific council: Katikati, Taupō, or Tauranga City alone	3
Any combination that reduces cost and duplication	2
General comments, with no specific council named	7

Table 14: Other councils or combinations named in free text (Bay of Plenty Regional Council back-coded and shown above)

7 What people prioritise

Respondents ranked eight things about how councils could be structured and operated. The chart below shows the share placing each item in their top three: the headline **Representative sample** figure (panel + contact list combined, weighted) alongside the public consultation. The table breaks this down by stream. The average rank given to each item (where 1 = most important) is reported in the Average rank section below.

Three items lead the ranking. Keeping rates as low as possible, efficient delivery of council functions and services, and efficient delivery of infrastructure were each placed in the top three by half or slightly more of the representative sample (50% to 53%). The ordering differs by channel: keeping rates as low as possible leads for the representative sample, while public consultation respondents placed the two efficient-delivery items ahead of rates. The remaining items, including value for money, local representation and regional growth, sat lower, at around a quarter to a third. Because respondents ranked their top three, they could flag several priorities, so the shares do not sum to 100%.

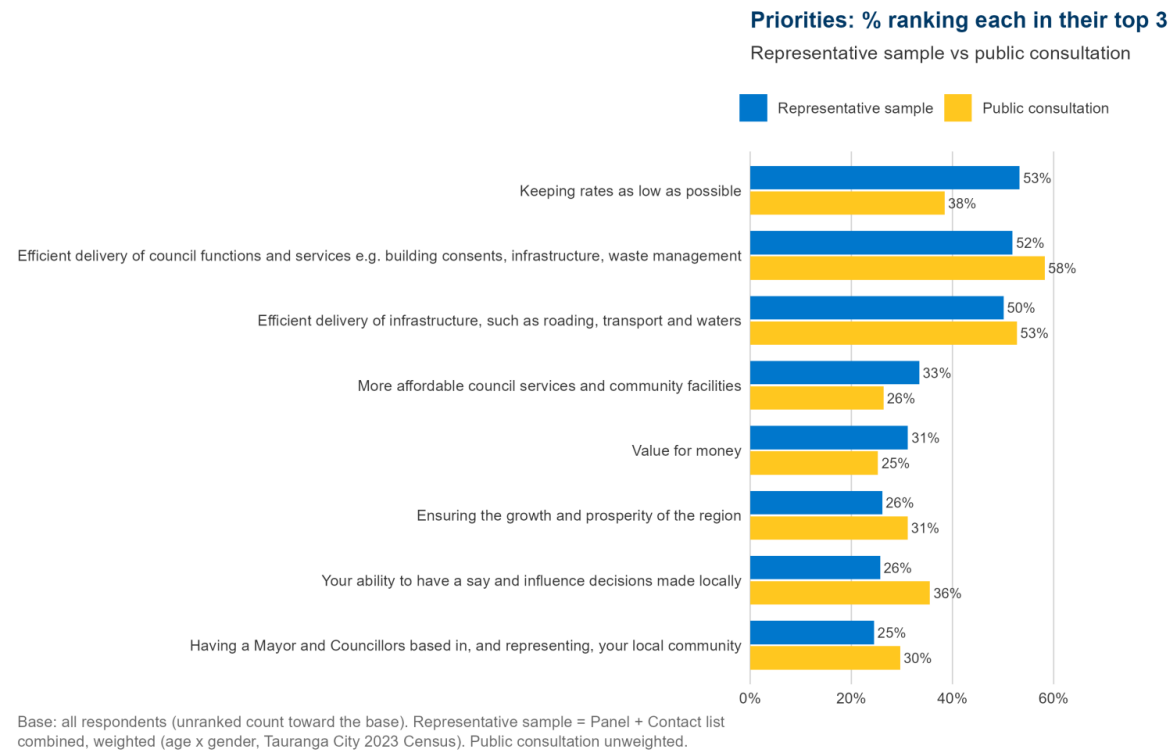


Figure 9: Priorities: share ranking each in their top three

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Keeping rates as low as possible	53%	57%	52%	38%
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	52%	42%	56%	58%
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	50%	36%	56%	53%
More affordable council services and community facilities	33%	49%	27%	26%

Response	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Value for money	31%	24%	34%	25%
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	26%	26%	26%	31%
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	26%	35%	22%	36%
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	25%	28%	23%	30%

WEIGHTED results: Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list percentages are weighted to the Tauranga City 2023 Census (age x gender). Public consultation percentages are unweighted. Ranking question (top-3 share). Base n (always the unweighted respondent count): Representative sample 1065 | Panel 250 | Contact list 815 | Public consultation 273. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

Table 15: Priorities: top-three share (combined and by stream)

7.1 Average rank

Priority item	Representative sample	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation
Keeping rates as low as possible	3.5	3.4	3.5	4.4
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	3.5	4.1	3.3	3.2
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	3.6	4.3	3.3	3.5
More affordable council services and community facilities	4.4	4.0	4.6	4.6
Value for money	4.6	5.1	4.3	4.6
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	4.8	4.5	4.9	4.3
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	4.9	5.2	4.8	4.7
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	5.3	5.3	5.2	4.9

Average rank (1 = most important, 8 = least), based on respondents who ranked the item, ordered by the Representative sample average rank. Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined), Panel and Contact list weighted; Public consultation unweighted. Panel and Contact list (grey italics) are the components of the Representative sample and are not charted.

Table 16: Priorities: average rank (combined and by stream, 1 = most important)

7.2 Detailed ranking

Each item's **Overall rank** is set by its **Score** (rank points, where rank 1 scores highest), with the **Rank distribution** strip showing where the item's ranks cluster (darker = a greater share gave that rank, 1 = highest) and **n** the unweighted number who ranked it. The combined Representative sample table leads; the individual streams follow.

Representative sample (combined)

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Keeping rates as low as possible	1									5,555	980
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	2									5,551	1,004
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	3									5,345	987
More affordable council services and community facilities	4									4,385	936
Value for money	5									4,188	928
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	6									3,908	899
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	7									3,836	908
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	8									3,457	892

Score = rank points (rank 1 = 8 ... rank 8 = 1) summed over respondents who ranked the item; Overall rank orders by Score. Rank distribution: each cell is a rank position (1 = highest); darker = a greater share placed the item at that rank. n = unweighted respondents who ranked it. Representative sample (Panel + Contact list combined); weighted.

Table 17: Priorities ranking detail: Representative sample (combined, weighted)

Panel

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Keeping rates as low as possible	1									1,685	249
More affordable council services and community facilities	2									1,484	248
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	3									1,439	247
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	4									1,359	246
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	5									1,339	248
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	6									1,133	247
Value for money	7									1,130	243

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	8									1,080	247

Score = rank points (rank 1 = 8 ... rank 8 = 1) summed over respondents who ranked the item; Overall rank orders by Score. Rank distribution: each cell is a rank position (1 = highest); darker = a greater share placed the item at that rank. n = unweighted respondents who ranked it. Panel stream; weighted.

Table 18: Priorities ranking detail: Panel

Contact list

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	1									4,113	757
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	2									3,986	741
Keeping rates as low as possible	3									3,869	731
Value for money	4									3,057	685
More affordable council services and community facilities	5									2,902	688
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	6									2,703	661
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	7									2,568	651
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	8									2,376	645

Score = rank points (rank 1 = 8 ... rank 8 = 1) summed over respondents who ranked the item; Overall rank orders by Score. Rank distribution: each cell is a rank position (1 = highest); darker = a greater share placed the item at that rank. n = unweighted respondents who ranked it. Contact list stream; weighted.

Table 19: Priorities ranking detail: Contact list

Public consultation

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	1									1,495	259
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	2									1,401	253
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	3									1,133	239
Keeping rates as low as possible	4									1,103	241

Item	Overall rank	Rank distribution (1 = highest)								Score	No. of rankings
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Value for money	5									1,066	245
More affordable council services and community facilities	6									1,047	240
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	7									1,014	235
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	8									971	234

Score = rank points (rank 1 = 8 ... rank 8 = 1) summed over respondents who ranked the item; Overall rank orders by Score. Rank distribution: each cell is a rank position (1 = highest); darker = a greater share placed the item at that rank. n = unweighted respondents who ranked it. Public consultation stream; unweighted.

Table 20: Priorities ranking detail: Public consultation

8 How services should be delivered

For each council service, respondents were asked how they would prefer it delivered: the same across the wider Bay of Plenty region, tailored to their region or local area, somewhere in between, or unsure. The headline figure shows the share preferring region-wide delivery for each service: the combined weighted **Representative sample** figure alongside the public consultation. The full distribution follows: combined first, then each stream. All charts and tables in this section are ordered by the Representative sample's share choosing "Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region", largest first.

Region-wide delivery drew the most support for regulatory and environmental services: among the representative sample, around three in five or more preferred it for permits and licensing, building and resource consenting, civil defence, management of natural resources, and environmental protection. Preferences were more mixed for services people use close to home: public transport, community facilities and sport and recreation drew as much or more support for delivery tailored to the local area.

8.1 Preference for region-wide delivery

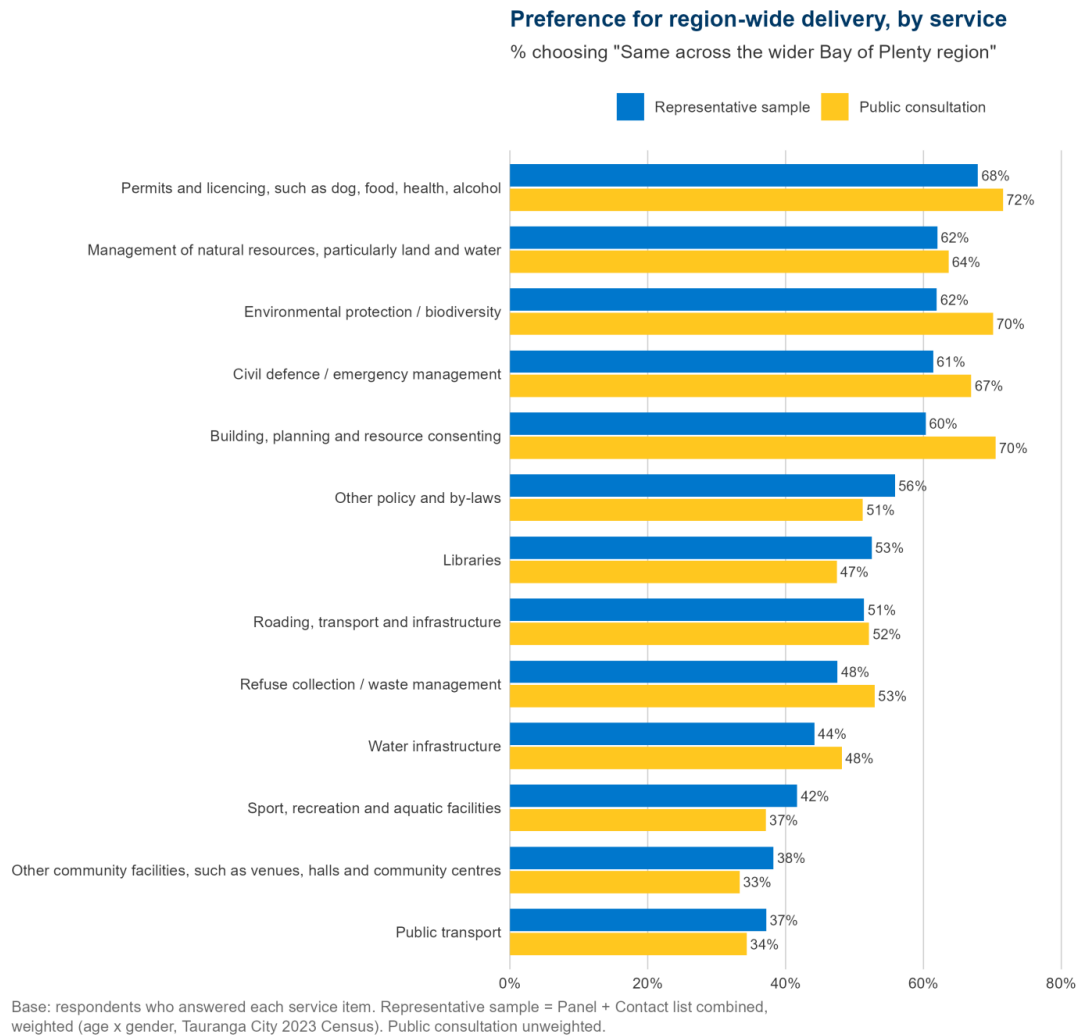


Figure 10: Share preferring region-wide delivery, by service

8.2 Full distribution

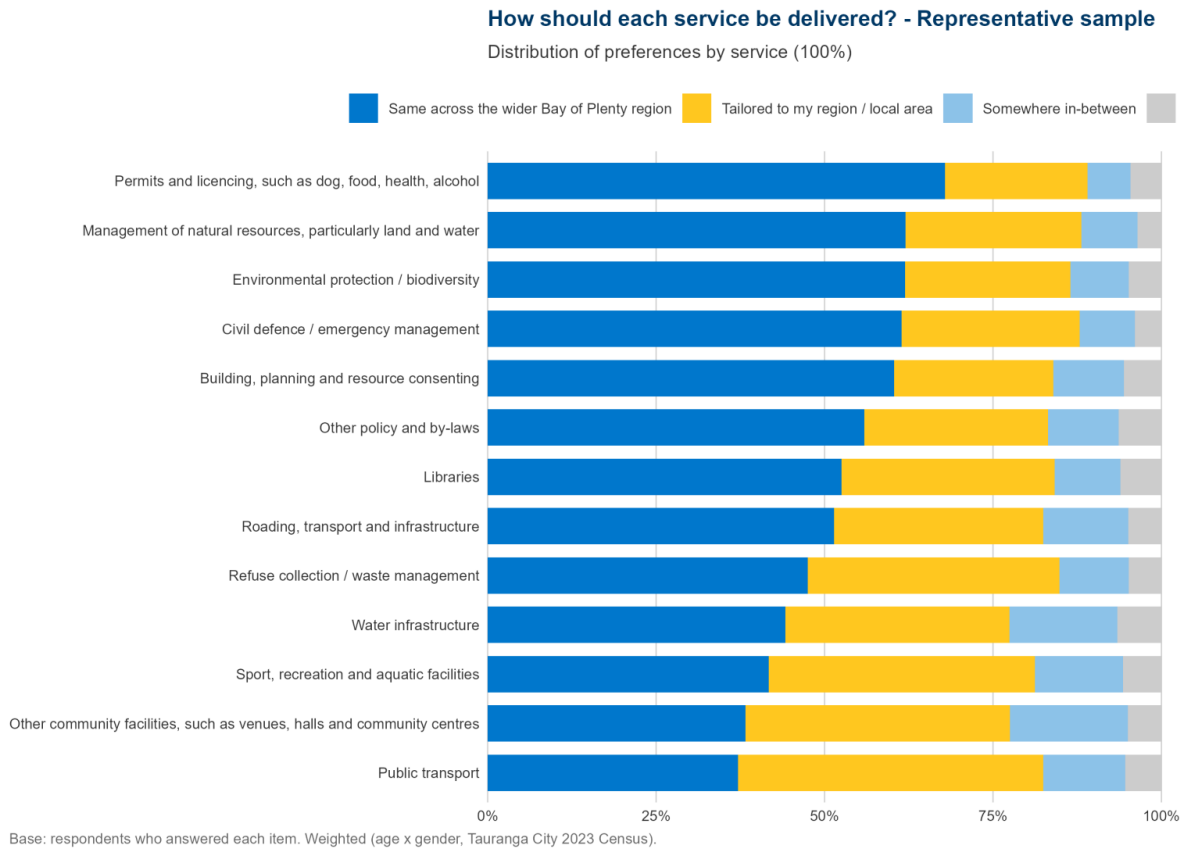


Figure 11: Preferred delivery model by service: Representative sample (combined, weighted)

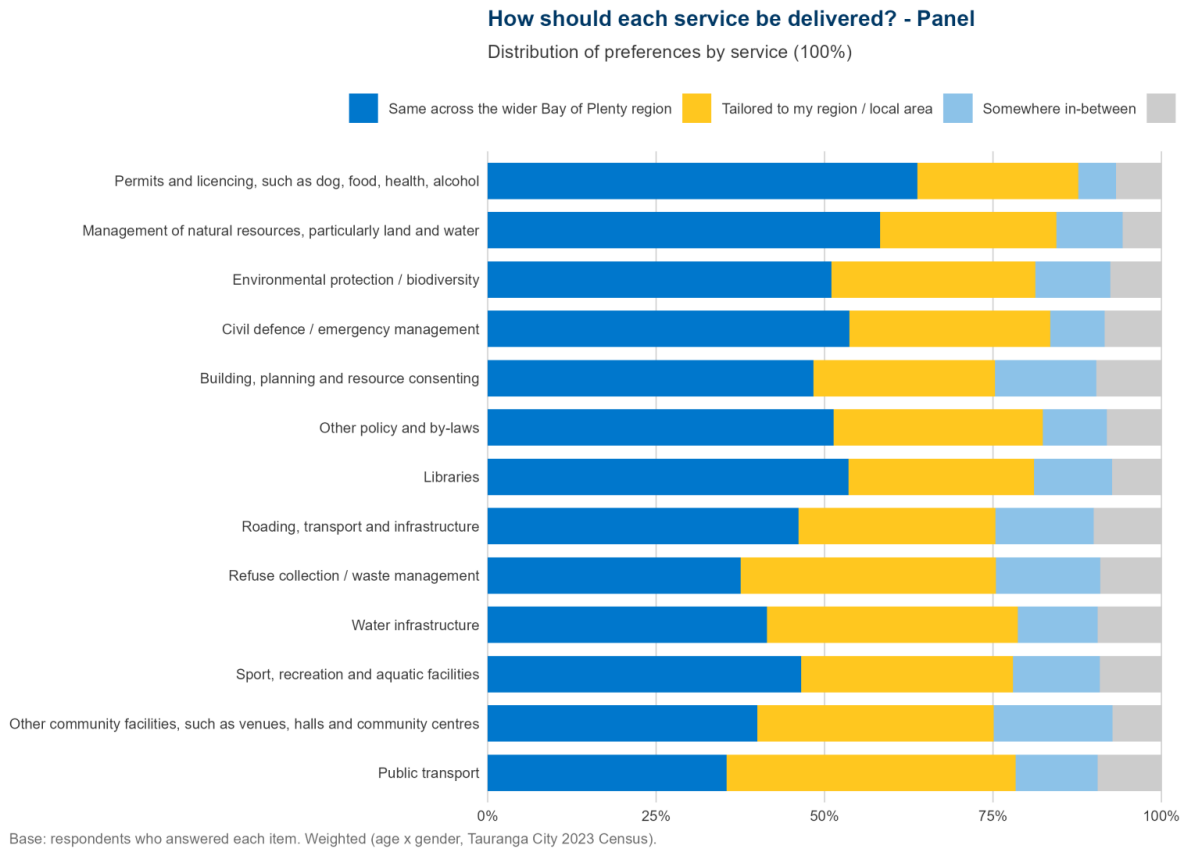


Figure 12: Preferred delivery model by service: Panel

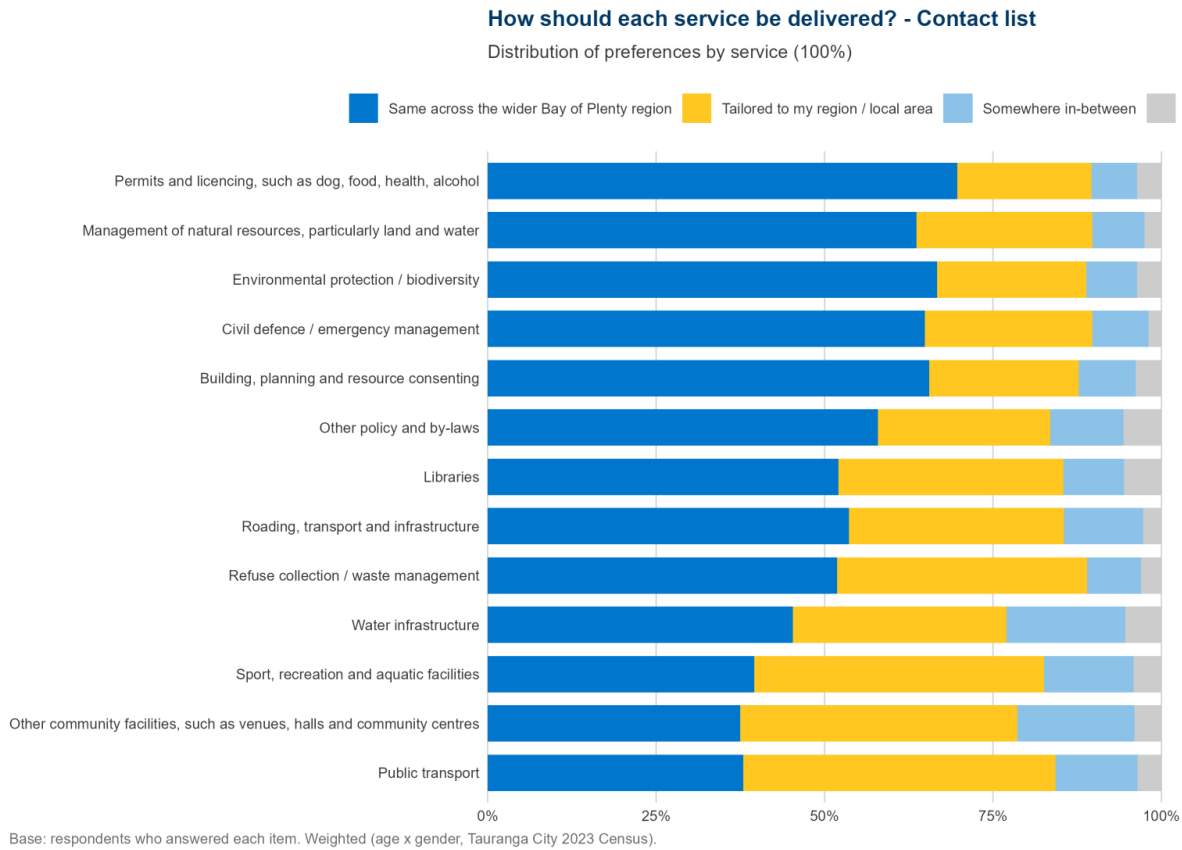


Figure 13: Preferred delivery model by service: Contact list

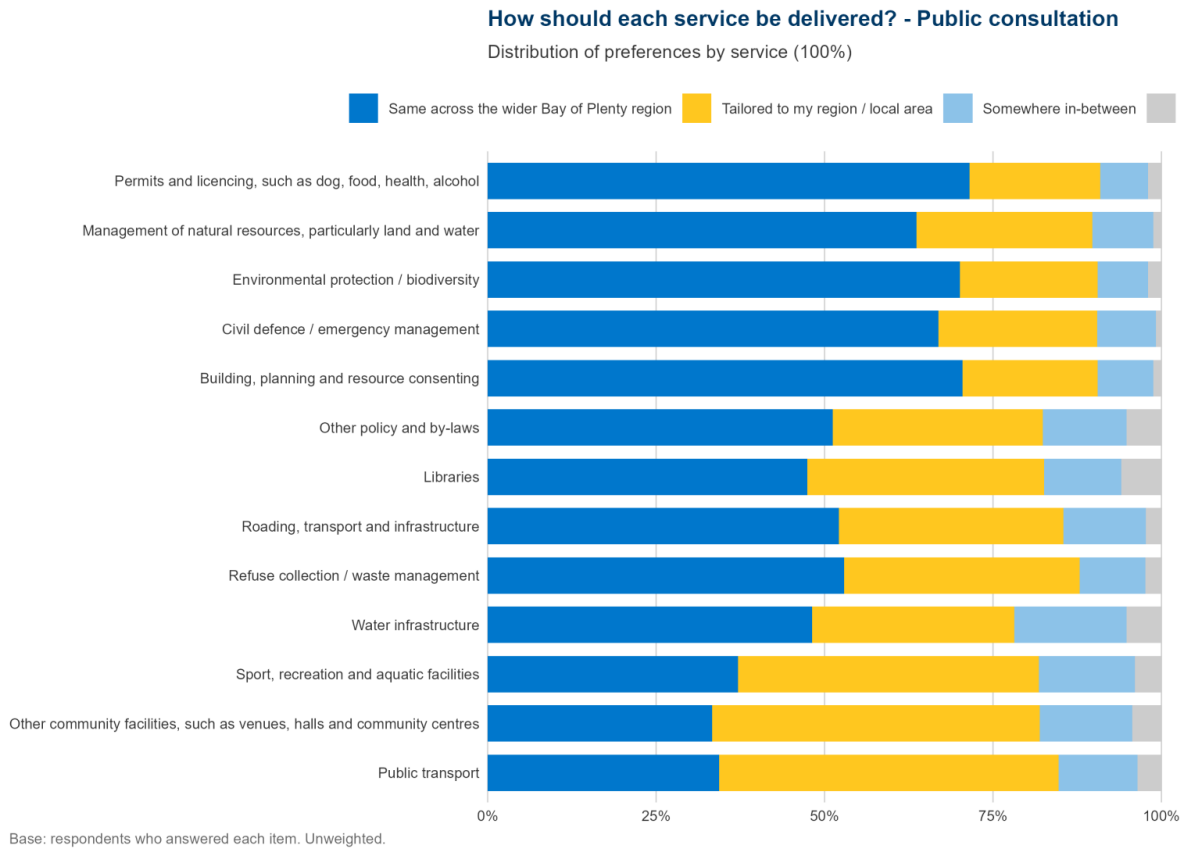


Figure 14: Preferred delivery model by service: Public consultation

8.3 Detail tables

Representative sample (combined)

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	68%	21%	6%	5%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	62%	26%	8%	4%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	62%	25%	9%	5%
Civil defence / emergency management	61%	26%	8%	4%
Building, planning and resource consenting	60%	24%	10%	6%
Other policy and by-laws	56%	27%	10%	6%
Libraries	53%	32%	10%	6%
Roading, transport and infrastructure	51%	31%	13%	5%
Refuse collection / waste management	48%	37%	10%	5%
Water infrastructure	44%	33%	16%	7%
Sport, recreation and aquatic facilities	42%	40%	13%	6%
Other community facilities, such as venues, halls and community centres	38%	39%	17%	5%
Public transport	37%	45%	12%	5%

Representative sample stream. Row percentages across delivery preferences (sum to 100%, subject to rounding). Services ordered by the Representative sample share choosing "Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region", largest first. Base up to n=1050 per item (unweighted). Weighted.

Table 21: Service delivery preference: Representative sample (combined, weighted)

Panel

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	64%	24%	6%	7%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	58%	26%	10%	6%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	51%	30%	11%	8%
Civil defence / emergency management	54%	30%	8%	8%
Building, planning and resource consenting	48%	27%	15%	10%
Other policy and by-laws	51%	31%	10%	8%
Libraries	54%	27%	12%	7%
Roading, transport and infrastructure	46%	29%	15%	10%
Refuse collection / waste management	38%	38%	15%	9%
Water infrastructure	41%	37%	12%	9%
Sport, recreation and aquatic facilities	47%	31%	13%	9%

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Other community facilities, such as venues, halls and community centres	40%	35%	18%	7%
Public transport	35%	43%	12%	9%
<i>Panel stream. Row percentages across delivery preferences (sum to 100%, subject to rounding). Services ordered by the Representative sample share choosing "Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region", largest first. Base up to n=250 per item (unweighted). Weighted.</i>				

Table 22: Service delivery preference: Panel

Contact list

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	70%	20%	7%	4%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	64%	26%	8%	3%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	67%	22%	8%	4%
Civil defence / emergency management	65%	25%	8%	2%
Building, planning and resource consenting	66%	22%	8%	4%
Other policy and by-laws	58%	26%	11%	6%
Libraries	52%	33%	9%	6%
Roading, transport and infrastructure	54%	32%	12%	3%
Refuse collection / waste management	52%	37%	8%	3%
Water infrastructure	45%	32%	18%	5%
Sport, recreation and aquatic facilities	40%	43%	13%	4%
Other community facilities, such as venues, halls and community centres	37%	41%	17%	4%
Public transport	38%	46%	12%	4%
<i>Contact list stream. Row percentages across delivery preferences (sum to 100%, subject to rounding). Services ordered by the Representative sample share choosing "Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region", largest first. Base up to n=800 per item (unweighted). Weighted.</i>				

Table 23: Service delivery preference: Contact list

Public consultation

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	72%	19%	7%	2%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	64%	26%	9%	1%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	70%	20%	7%	2%
Civil defence / emergency management	67%	24%	9%	1%
Building, planning and resource consenting	70%	20%	8%	1%
Other policy and by-laws	51%	31%	12%	5%

Service	Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region	Tailored to my region / local area	Somewhere in-between	Unsure / don't know
Libraries	47%	35%	11%	6%
Roading, transport and infrastructure	52%	33%	12%	2%
Refuse collection / waste management	53%	35%	10%	2%
Water infrastructure	48%	30%	17%	5%
Sport, recreation and aquatic facilities	37%	45%	14%	4%
Other community facilities, such as venues, halls and community centres	33%	49%	14%	4%
Public transport	34%	50%	12%	4%

Public consultation stream. Row percentages across delivery preferences (sum to 100%, subject to rounding). Services ordered by the Representative sample share choosing "Same across the wider Bay of Plenty region", largest first. Base up to n=270 per item (unweighted). Unweighted.

Table 24: Service delivery preference: Public consultation

9 Qualitative themes overview

The survey included five open-text questions, spread through the questionnaire between the rating questions; 1,168 respondents across the three channels provided at least one substantive comment. The responses are coded against a framework generated from the responses themselves, styled to each question and grouped under categories. Themes carry a sentiment prefix (Support, Concern, Oppose or Consider) where a comment runs with or against the question's frame. Each table reports the count of distinct respondents raising each theme, split by channel; because a respondent can raise more than one theme, counts do not sum to the number of respondents, and the qualitative counts are unweighted throughout. Themes raised by fewer than two respondents overall are omitted from the tables.

This chapter summarises the themes across the whole engagement. The detail for each open-text question is reported in its own chapter, in the order the questions appeared in the survey.

The categories below recur across all five open-text questions. The same framework codes every comment, so a category like RATES, COST AND DEBT can surface in a concern about a combined council and in a view on what should stay the same. Each summary describes what respondents raising that category were talking about, across the whole engagement and all three survey channels. Categories are ordered by the number of distinct respondents raising them; a glossary of the individual themes within each category is in Appendix B.

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (*raised by 632 respondents*). Respondents emphasised the importance of retaining local voice and fair representation, expressing concern that smaller and rural communities such as Ōpōtiki, Kawerau, Rotorua and the Eastern Bay of Plenty would be dominated or overlooked by larger urban centres like Tauranga. Many called for equitable distribution of services and resources, continued local democratic accountability, the retention and strengthening of Māori and iwi partnership arrangements, and governance structures such as local or community boards that keep decision-making close to the people who understand each area's distinct needs. A minority questioned the reform process itself as rushed and government-driven, while others suggested practical measures such as consolidating duplicated services, ensuring elected councillors live locally, or exploring alternative representation models.

EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION (*raised by 628 respondents*). Respondents focused on the potential for reorganisation to reduce duplication, cut costs and deliver efficiencies through shared services (such as finance, IT and HR), fewer councillors and management staff, streamlined roles and reduced administrative burden, with many emphasising the need to lower rates and control spending on consultants, salaries and "pet projects". A recurring theme was scepticism that promised savings would materialise, with respondents wanting proof of genuine cost reductions, with some suggesting a phased approach, business cases or a binding referendum before any merger. A minority raised concerns that amalgamation could instead create a bloated, bureaucratic entity with more red tape, infighting, and larger areas subsidising the infrastructure of smaller regions.

CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES (*raised by 550 respondents*). Respondents commonly called for councils to focus on core services (water, roads, rubbish, libraries, parks and recreational facilities) while cutting back on what many described as wasteful spending, vanity projects and "nice to haves" such as new museums, art galleries and council buildings. Many emphasised delivering consistent service levels across the region, greater efficiency and transparency, keeping rates affordable, and ensuring smaller and rural communities are not disadvantaged or left with reduced access to services. A minority raised specific concerns, including retaining local decision-making and representation, protecting community identity, maintaining environmental and biodiversity work, and ensuring any savings come from back-office and management roles rather than frontline services.

RATES, COST AND DEBT (*raised by 548 respondents*). Respondents in this category were primarily concerned with keeping rates low and ensuring any reorganisation delivers genuine cost savings, efficiency

gains and reduced duplication rather than simply creating a larger, more expensive bureaucracy. A recurring theme was that rates should be spent locally and fairly, with many calling for existing council debt to be ring-fenced to current ratepayers so one area does not subsidise another's projects or infrastructure. While a minority supported amalgamation as a way to reduce costs and improve efficiency, others were sceptical that promised savings would materialise, and several raised worries about the rising cost of living, loss of local representation, and councils needing to focus on core infrastructure rather than "wants" or luxury projects.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY (*raised by 528 respondents*). Respondents commonly called for greater transparency and accountability in council spending and decision-making, frequently criticising perceived waste, overuse of expensive consultants, excessive staff and management layers, and rising rates. Many wanted genuine community consultation rather than "lip service", with several advocating for binding referendums, fair local and Māori representation, and evidence-based decisions supported by measurable KPIs and independent comparisons before any reorganisation proceeds. A recurring minority theme expressed distrust that the decision was already predetermined and that community feedback would be ignored, while others emphasised streamlining processes, keeping decisions locally led, and ensuring elected members remain fiscally responsible and answerable to ratepayers.

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (*raised by 414 respondents*). Respondents most commonly called for fewer, better-qualified councillors with genuine governance and business skills, alongside greater transparency, accountability and restraint on rates and wasteful spending. Many stressed the importance of retaining local representation, democratic accountability and local knowledge, with some warning that a larger amalgamated council could dilute local voice and lead to job losses or lost technical expertise. A minority raised concerns about senior staff and CEO roles, while views on Māori wards and co-governance were split between those wanting existing arrangements strengthened and those calling for the removal of unelected voting rights.

IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE (*raised by 331 respondents*). Respondents prioritised infrastructure delivery, roading improvements and public transport, with many advocating for utilising the existing rail network as an alternative to buses and calling for reduced spending on cycle lanes and "frills". They frequently emphasised the need to plan for growth with long-term, whole-of-region strategic thinking, control rates and costs, and improve efficiency through economies of scale, while a minority stressed retaining local identity and representation and warned that amalgamation could overlook rural or smaller communities. Some also raised environmental concerns, including climate adaptation, freshwater enhancement and catchment-based management, alongside specific local issues such as Pāpāmoa traffic congestion.

GENERAL (*raised by 311 respondents*). Respondents expressed mixed views on local government reorganisation, with many supporting change and amalgamation on the grounds of improved efficiency, reduced duplication and economies of scale, and a unified approach across the Bay of Plenty. Several urged decision-makers to be bold and visionary, thinking 10-20 years ahead rather than merely merging organisations to save money, while a minority opposed councils merging altogether, citing concerns about reduced local representation, larger bureaucracy, the Auckland "super city" as a failed example, and loss of responsiveness to individual communities. A number of respondents indicated they had no major concerns, and some expressed satisfaction with the current council's performance while others felt the existing system needed a complete overhaul.

TRUST IN COUNCIL (*raised by 290 respondents*). Respondents in this category expressed distrust of the current council, most often citing rates increases, spending decisions and a perceived failure to listen to ratepayers. Many called for greater transparency, accountability and value for money, urging the council to be run like a professional business with qualified people. A minority offered more measured views, noting the current council had not had much time to prove itself or that Tauranga was generally well run, and some cautioned that a merger could worsen existing problems rather than fix them.

PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION (*raised by 241 respondents*). Respondents most frequently raised concerns about the government-imposed timeline, which many described as rushed and unreasonable, risking poor decisions and undermining democracy. They repeatedly called for evidence-based decision-making, transparency around costs and rates, and proof of genuine savings and efficiency before proceeding, with many citing the Auckland super city amalgamation as a cautionary example where promised benefits failed to materialise. A recurring theme was the need to protect local representation, identity and voice (particularly for smaller communities and iwi), while a minority urged bold, forward-thinking restructuring rather than a simple merger, and some rejected the reorganisation outright in favour of retaining the status quo.

WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (*raised by 145 respondents*). Respondents most commonly favoured combining Tauranga City Council with Western Bay of Plenty, viewing the two areas as intertwined communities of interest, while frequently opposing the inclusion of Rotorua, Whakatāne, the Eastern Bay, Taupō or the Waikato on the grounds of distance, differing rural character and a lack of shared interest. A minority supported a single Bay-wide unitary authority (often with local boards or wards) for greater efficiency and whole-of-catchment planning, while others proposed a three-council model, favoured keeping councils as they are, or wanted the regional council abolished with its functions absorbed.

REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT (*raised by 139 respondents*). Respondents expressed concern that the environmental protection, monitoring, flood management and catchment functions currently delivered by Bay of Plenty Regional Council would be weakened, sidelined or lost if merged into a growth-focused unitary authority, with many stressing that these regional functions must be maintained. Common related themes included fair representation for rural and smaller communities, protecting Māori representation and Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments, retaining institutional knowledge and staff expertise, and prioritising climate resilience, water quality and long-term strategic planning over short-term cost savings. A minority took the opposite view, calling for regional councils to be abolished or merged into the new entity.

MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP (*raised by 124 respondents*). Respondents were divided on Māori representation in a combined council, with one group calling for guaranteed or mandated Māori, iwi, hapū and mana whenua representation, the upholding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the retention and strengthening of existing co-governance and Māori ward arrangements. An opposing group argued for “one law for all” and equal treatment regardless of race, calling for the abolition of Māori wards and an end to co-governance and unelected voting rights. Alongside these views, respondents raised concerns that smaller and rural districts would be dominated by Tauranga, and stressed the importance of local democratic accountability and genuine consultation.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND SYSTEMS (*raised by 94 respondents*). Respondents commonly called for standardised, consistent rules, rates and service delivery across the region, with many wanting a single consolidated rates bill and one point of contact rather than paying and dealing with multiple councils. They frequently sought simpler, faster and cheaper consenting and building processes, reduced red tape and duplication, shared systems and back-office services, and greater efficiency and cost savings, though several stressed the need to retain local offices and representation so smaller communities are not disadvantaged. A minority questioned whether amalgamation was the right solution at all, warning it could add bureaucracy and distance decision-making from locals.

ACCESS AND LOCAL PRESENCE (*raised by 47 respondents*). Respondents emphasised the importance of retaining local offices, service centres and staff throughout the region, stressing that a council based solely in Tauranga would lose the local knowledge and relationships needed to serve smaller areas. They valued accessibility to council representatives and staff by phone or face-to-face, quick response times, personal customer service, and continued local representation and accountability, with several praising TCC’s current responsiveness. A minority supported Tauranga as the headquarters or main centre provided regional and satellite offices remained.

10 Changes needed to address concerns

Survey question: “What changes would need to be made to address any issues or concerns you have about councils across the Bay of Plenty creating a new combined council?”

Overview

This was the most answered open question in the survey (n=1,015), and most responses set out conditions for a merger rather than positions for or against one. Local voice and representation is the largest category (298 respondents): guaranteed fair representation for each area (110), fair allocation of funding and resources (75), and recognition that rural and urban communities need different things (57). Efficiency and duplication (239), rates, cost and debt (232) and transparency and accountability (230) sit close behind. Governance themes (182) centre on fewer, better-qualified elected members. Because a comment can raise several themes, the categories below overlap.

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (298 respondents)

The change most asked for is a structure that guarantees each area representation. Fair representation for each area (110) leads, followed by fair and equitable allocation of funding and resources (75) and tailoring services to differing rural and urban needs (57). The same category carries the related concerns: loss of local voice (53) and smaller communities dominated by Tauranga (45).

“Ensure local voice is maintained” - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

“Fair representation and fair share of resources” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION (239 respondents)

The leading themes are reducing staff numbers and management layers (94) and consolidating duplicated back-office services (94), with economies of scale and better resourcing (56) the benefit most often named. A smaller group was sceptical, expecting a merger to create more bureaucracy, not less (34).

“Less staff and less bureaucracy” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

“Less duplication of roles” - Panel respondent, 45-54

RATES, COST AND DEBT (232 respondents)

Lower rates through combining (89) is the most-raised theme, accompanied by conditions: caps on rate increases (39) and rates raised in an area spent in that area (32). The most common concern is that rates will instead rise or subsidise other districts (48).

“cheaper...cheaper...cheaper rates” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“A guarantee that rates wouldn’t increase, but would reduce.” - Panel respondent, 45-54

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY (230 respondents)

Two themes account for most of this category: greater transparency and accountability for spending (169) and consultation that genuinely listens to ratepayers (81).

“Financial books being open to the public” - Panel respondent, 25-34

“That they listen to the people first” - Panel respondent, 55-64

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (182 respondents)

Governance themes centre on who runs the new entity: skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives (60), fewer councillors under one mayor (44), a change of current senior leadership (36), and voting rights reserved for elected members (32).

“A review of elected members and how they operate” - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

“No unelected members on any Board” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES (161 respondents)

Focus on core services and infrastructure rather than vanity projects (106) is the single most-raised theme in this question, alongside maintaining or improving current service levels (46).

“Provide the same/better service not worse.” - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

“stop the pretty stuff. worry about roading” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE (104 respondents)

The constructive case for scale: coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport (79), where rail links and congestion relief recur, and financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale (20), balanced by concern about losing local identity (15).

“Better transport Efficient road network Rail Link to Hamilton and Auckland” - Panel respondent, 75-84

“Areas identities not being lost to larger super city council.” - Public consultation respondent, 35-44

TRUST IN COUNCIL (102 respondents)

A single theme: distrust of the current council’s leadership and spending (102). For these respondents the change needed is less about structure than about how decisions are made and how money is spent.

“Trust in council, councilors and council spending.” - Panel respondent, 35-44

“Our current council does not listen to the ratepayers, maybe a combined council will haul them in line.” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

SERVICE DELIVERY AND SYSTEMS (94 respondents)

The practical wiring of a merger: standardise bylaws, consents and systems across councils (44), make consenting faster, simpler and cheaper (28), and give ratepayers one rates bill and a single point of contact (23).

“The wait times for building consent !” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

“Ratepayers not paying two different councils.” - Panel respondent, 45-54

GENERAL (78 respondents)

Position statements split evenly: 34 opposed to amalgamation or preferring the status quo, 34 offering general support for change, and 10 comfortable either way.

“Merge em . Cut the wasted money.” - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

“No changes, i disagree with combining” - Public consultation respondent, 75-84

PROCESS, TIMEFRAME & DIRECTION (60 respondents) and REGIONAL COUNCIL & ENVIRONMENT (56 respondents)

Process asks centre on an evidence-based business case before change (25), with Auckland’s super city cited as the cautionary precedent (22). On the regional council, views run both ways: retain its

environmental functions at regional scale (29) against folding it into the new entity (17) or disbanding it (10).

“look at auckland super city what a shambles” - Public consultation respondent

“Merge the Regional Council with the Local Body Council.” - Panel respondent, 65-74

MĀORI REPRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIP (51 respondents) and WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (46 respondents)

Views divide on Māori representation: guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership (29) against opposition to Māori wards and unelected representation (22). On membership, boundaries should follow the region or catchment (19), a single Bay-wide unitary authority (19), or Tauranga City with Western Bay (13).

“Power sharing with Iwi over decision making” - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

“The Tauranga City Council and Western Bay Of Plenty to combine into one, with all shared services.” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES	31	106	24	161
Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects	21	70	15	106
Consider: Maintain or improve service levels and delivery	9	30	7	46
Consider: Stop spending on cultural, DEI and 'woke' initiatives	1	11	2	14
Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation	3	7	2	12
EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION	43	150	46	239
Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers	20	53	21	94
Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services	15	62	17	94
Support: Economies of scale and better resourcing	8	37	11	56
Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less	6	24	4	34
Consider: Share services first or instead of full merger	2	4	3	9
GENERAL	18	45	15	78
Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change	9	17	8	34
Support: General support for change or reorganisation	5	22	7	34
Support: No concerns / comfortable with change	4	6	0	10
GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS	23	111	48	182
Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives	3	41	16	60
Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor	11	25	8	44
Consider: Replace the current mayor and CEO / senior leadership	4	20	12	36
Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights	3	23	6	32
Consider: Reduce councillor and executive salaries and perks	2	20	6	28
Concern: Job losses and loss of staff expertise and knowledge	1	4	4	9

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE	15	65	24	104
Consider: Coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport	13	50	16	79
Support: Improve financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale	2	11	7	20
Concern: Loss of local identity and character	1	12	2	15
LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION	49	181	68	298
Consider: Guarantee fair representation for each area	17	71	22	110
Consider: Fair and equitable allocation of funding and resources across areas	13	49	13	75
Consider: Recognise differing rural and urban needs and tailor services	11	30	16	57
Concern: Loss of local voice and representation	8	28	17	53
Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga	7	33	5	45
Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority	4	25	13	42
Concern: Decisions made by people without local knowledge	7	14	1	22
Consider: Councillors and representatives must live in the area they represent	3	4	2	9
MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP	2	33	16	51
Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership	1	19	9	29
Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation	1	14	7	22
NULL	9	5	0	14
Null: Off topic	5	4	0	9
Null: No response	3	0	0	3
Null: Survey feedback	1	1	0	2
PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION	10	36	14	60
Consider: Demonstrate a clear evidence-based business case before changing	4	12	9	25
Concern: Auckland super city shows mergers don't deliver savings	2	17	3	22
Consider: Manage the transition carefully and phase it in	2	7	3	12
Consider: Change should be locally led, not imposed by central government	4	3	2	9
Concern: Government timeframe is too short and change is rushed	1	2	0	3
RATES, COST AND DEBT	41	151	40	232
Support: Lower rates and costs through combining councils	20	56	13	89

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas	9	35	4	48
Consider: Cap or limit rate increases (e.g. to inflation)	5	29	5	39
Concern: Promised savings won't be delivered or passed on	7	24	7	38
Consider: Rates raised in an area should be spent in that area	5	19	7	31
Consider: Ring-fence existing debt and assets to current ratepayers	1	13	7	21
Concern: Tauranga's debt being pooled or shared across districts	1	5	7	13
REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT	5	29	22	56
Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale	1	14	14	29
Support: Merge regional and city/district councils into one entity	1	8	8	17
Concern: Loss of environmental protection if regional council is disbanded	3	4	3	10
Support: Disband or abolish the regional council	1	8	1	10
SERVICE DELIVERY AND SYSTEMS	13	65	16	94
Consider: Standardise bylaws, consents, systems and processes across councils	5	32	7	44
Consider: Faster, simpler and cheaper consenting and regulatory processes	4	17	7	28
Consider: One rates bill and single point of contact for ratepayers	2	20	1	23
Consider: Maintain local service centres or hubs in each area	2	5	5	12
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	53	139	38	230
Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending	32	105	32	169
Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers	26	45	10	81
Consider: Hold a binding community referendum or public vote on changes	0	6	1	7
TRUST IN COUNCIL	14	62	26	102
Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending	14	62	26	102
WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE	6	22	18	46
Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries	4	9	6	19
Support: A single Bay of Plenty unitary authority	0	7	12	19
Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty	3	7	3	13
Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council	1	7	2	10

Count of distinct respondents raising each theme, by stream. Topics raised by fewer than 2 respondents overall are omitted. Open-text question; respondents may raise more than one theme.

Table 25: Changes needed to address concerns - themes by channel

11 What should stay the same

Survey question: “And what would you want to stay the same?”

Overview

What respondents most often want kept (n=740) is the services they use and the local representation that delivers them. Core services and spending priorities is the largest category (194 respondents): keep service levels where they are (92), and keep the libraries, parks, pools and community facilities (59). Identity themes follow (111) - each area keeping its unique character - alongside local voice (122) and governance themes (90). A large group took the opposite view: 143 respondents in the General category said little or nothing should stay the same, most of them because they want change to go further. Because a comment can raise several themes, the categories below overlap.

CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES (194 respondents)

The leading themes are maintaining or improving current service levels (92), retaining libraries, parks, pools and community facilities (59), and keeping the focus on core services rather than extras (39).

“All services that we have now.” - Panel respondent, 75-84

“Library, rubbish collection etc” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

GENERAL (143 respondents)

This question’s largest single theme is the wish for nothing to stay the same: 116 respondents gave general support for change or reorganisation, against 23 preferring things as they are and 4 comfortable either way.

“Nothing change needs to happen” - Public consultation respondent, 35-44

“Everything should stay the same.” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (122 respondents)

The leading themes are fair representation for each area (44), community engagement and advisory groups (24), and the local knowledge behind decisions, with loss of local voice (33) the most-raised concern.

“Local knowledge of areas/issues” - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

“Representation from all areas including iwi” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE (111 respondents)

Each area’s unique identity and character (47) is the most-named thing to protect, alongside continued investment in city growth, amenities and infrastructure (37).

“Each place to maintain its uniqueness” - Panel respondent, 75-84

“Tauranga still having its own identity” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (90 respondents)

The leading themes are retaining elections and the ability to vote for local representatives (48), and keeping good frontline staff and their expertise (23).

“Elected, representative governance” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

“1 Mayor and several local boards” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY (73 respondents) and TRUST IN COUNCIL (71 respondents)

Accountability themes also appear in this question: transparency for spending (49) and genuine consultation (31) are named as things to keep or to establish, while 71 respondents used the question to express distrust of the current council's leadership and spending.

"Systems for citizen input and accountability" - Contact list respondent, 65-74

"Status Quo though TCC needs a shake up." - Contact list respondent, 55-64

RATES, COST AND DEBT (66 respondents)

The leading themes concern rates stability: caps or limits on increases (43) and local rates spent locally (16), with a smaller group noting that what should not stay the same is the current trajectory of rates rises.

"No more rates increase would nice." - Contact list respondent, 35-44

"Nothing. Rates are rising too fast." - Contact list respondent, 55-64

WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (59 respondents) and ACCESS & LOCAL PRESENCE (47 respondents)

For 36 respondents the thing to keep is the current set of councils, separate and locally run. Access themes cover day-to-day contact with the council: responsive, easy-to-contact council service (29) and local offices and service centres in each town (14).

"TCC and WBOPDC to stay separate" - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

"Customer service on the phones is outstanding." - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

REGIONAL COUNCIL & ENVIRONMENT (46 respondents), EFFICIENCY & DUPLICATION (39 respondents) and MĀORI REPRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIP (29 respondents)

The remaining keeps: the natural environment and its protection (28) and the regional council's environmental functions (21); back-office savings that leave frontline delivery untouched (25); and existing Māori and iwi representation arrangements carried forward (26).

"The level of environmental protection" - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

"Māori representation from both councils/areas." - Contact list respondent, 65-74

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
ACCESS AND LOCAL PRESENCE	10	28	9	47
Consider: Retain responsive, accessible and easy-to-contact council service	7	20	2	29
Consider: Keep local offices and service centres in each town and district	3	6	5	14
Consider: Keep the council headquarters and base in Tauranga	0	6	3	9
CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES	44	119	31	194
Consider: Maintain or improve service levels and delivery	25	53	14	92
Consider: Retain libraries, parks, pools and community facilities	11	38	10	59
Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects	7	24	8	39
Consider: Retain kerbside rubbish, recycling and waste collection	5	16	3	24
Consider: Retain high-quality local water supply and services	4	9	6	19

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Continue support for community, cultural and sporting events	3	9	2	14
Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation	1	1	1	3
EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION	4	26	9	39
Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services	2	16	7	25
Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers	2	10	2	14
Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less	0	3	1	4
GENERAL	32	80	31	143
Support: General support for change or reorganisation	24	69	23	116
Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change	6	10	7	23
Support: No concerns / comfortable with change	2	1	1	4
GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS	19	53	18	90
Consider: Retain democratic elections and ability to vote for local representatives	12	29	7	48
Consider: Retain good frontline staff and their expertise	4	10	9	23
Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor	2	6	2	10
Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives	1	7	1	9
Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights	1	4	0	5
IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE	18	67	26	111
Consider: Retain each area's unique local identity and character	9	27	11	47
Support: Continue investment in city growth, amenities and infrastructure	4	27	6	37
Consider: Coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport	6	12	4	22
Consider: Retain local ownership of public assets like Port of Tauranga	1	3	6	10
LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION	22	74	26	122
Consider: Guarantee fair representation for each area	9	23	12	44
Concern: Loss of local voice and representation	6	21	6	33
Consider: Maintain community engagement and advisory groups	5	15	4	24
Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority	2	12	4	18
Concern: Decisions made by people without local knowledge	1	9	2	12
Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga	1	8	2	11
Consider: Councillors and representatives must live in the area they represent	2	6	3	11
MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP	5	17	7	29

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership	4	17	5	26
Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation	1	0	2	3
NULL	7	3	0	10
Null: No response	4	1	0	5
Null: Off topic	3	2	0	5
RATES, COST AND DEBT	20	38	8	66
Consider: Cap or limit rate increases (e.g. to inflation)	17	22	4	43
Consider: Rates raised in an area should be spent in that area	2	12	2	16
Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas	3	4	1	8
Consider: Ring-fence existing debt and assets to current ratepayers	1	2	1	4
REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT	6	21	19	46
Consider: Protect natural environment, beauty and high environmental standards	5	11	12	28
Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale	2	9	10	21
Support: Merge regional and city/district councils into one entity	0	2	2	4
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	9	47	17	73
Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending	1	35	13	49
Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers	8	16	7	31
TRUST IN COUNCIL	10	46	15	71
Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending	10	46	15	71
WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE	7	35	17	59
Oppose: Keep councils separate and locally run	6	18	12	36
Consider: Tauranga should remain dominant and focus on its own city	0	8	2	10
Support: A single Bay of Plenty unitary authority	0	5	1	6
Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries	0	4	1	5
Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council	0	3	1	4
Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty	1	2	1	4

Count of distinct respondents raising each theme, by stream. Topics raised by fewer than 2 respondents overall are omitted. Open-text question; respondents may raise more than one theme.

Table 26: What should stay the same - themes by channel

12 What would build confidence

Survey question: “What are the key things you think we should consider - the things that would give you confidence in a decision to change how local councils are structured?”

Overview

Asked what would give them confidence (n=1,001), respondents most often asked for evidence. Efficiency and duplication is the largest category (372 respondents), led by demonstrated, measurable cost savings and value for money (183) and an end to wasteful spending (110). Transparency and accountability follows (271) - transparency about spending (130) and consultation that genuinely listens (126) - with local voice (255) and service-level themes (190) close behind. Because a comment can raise several themes, the categories below overlap.

EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION (372 respondents)

The leading themes are financial: demonstrate genuine, measurable cost savings (183), stop wasteful spending (110), consolidate duplicated back-office services (59) and reduce staff numbers and management layers (54). Respondents asked for savings to be demonstrated rather than promised.

“Cut out duplicatooon of services” - Panel respondent, 65-74

“management of council expenses” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY (271 respondents)

The leading themes are transparency and accountability for spending (130), genuine consultation (126), clear communication explaining the changes and their benefits (36), and measurable KPIs publicly reported (23).

“Transparency in decisions made” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“Keep those in power accountable” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (255 respondents)

The representation safeguards reappear as confidence conditions: fair representation for each area (101), recognition of each community’s unique needs (84), fair distribution of resources (68), and local boards with real authority (30).

“Elect our own local representatives” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

“Every resident to be treated equally” - Panel respondent, 75-84

CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES (190 respondents)

Service guarantees: maintain or improve service levels (86), focus on core services and infrastructure over vanity projects (83), and deliver consistent services and systems across the whole region (36).

“Do the basics well and keeping the costs down” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

“Efficiency and standardisation.” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (135 respondents)

Governance themes: skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives (58), fewer councillors under one mayor (27), and an independent, unbiased body designing and running the change (27).

“Having expert leaders and staff.” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

“Keeping staff jobs. No job cuts.” - Public consultation respondent, 35-44

RATES, COST AND DEBT (131 respondents)

Rates themes: lower rates through combining (48), caps or limits on increases (34), and local rates spent locally (18), set against the concern that rates will rise or subsidise other areas (28).

“Keep the rates as low as possible.” - Panel respondent, 45-54

“Rates are cheaper, water is cheaper” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE (108 respondents)

Planning themes: coordinated long-term regional planning for growth, roading and transport (86) and financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale (25).

“Keeping infrastructure up with growth.” - Public consultation respondent, 65-74

“Relief for Tauranga traffic congestion” - Panel respondent, 75-84

PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION (77 respondents)

Process themes: an evidence-based business case before changing (44), a well-planned, phased transition with minimal disruption (16), and change that is locally led rather than imposed by central government (14).

“Proof of efficiency with current resources” - Contact list respondent, 45-54

“That it runs smoothly without affecting people” - Panel respondent, 25-34

MĀORI REPRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIP (54 respondents) and TRUST IN COUNCIL (46 respondents)

Views divide on Māori representation: guaranteed Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership (34) against opposition to Māori wards and unelected representation (20). For 46 respondents, distrust of the current council limits their confidence in any change.

“Local representation that includes tangata whenua.” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“I’m not sure, I don’t have confidence in the council so it’s hard to say.” - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

REGIONAL COUNCIL & ENVIRONMENT (45 respondents), GENERAL (37 respondents) and WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (27 respondents)

The remaining conditions: prioritise environmental protection and sustainability (35); general positions for (20) and against (14) change, with 3 comfortable either way; and boundary logic, matching the combined council to the region or catchment (13), or keeping the eastern and western Bay separate.

“Maintain protection of the environment” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

“Rotorua, Kawerau, Whakatane, Opoitiki should combine and be separate from Tauranga and Western Bay.” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES	45	114	31	190
Consider: Maintain or improve service levels and delivery	21	51	14	86
Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects	21	49	13	83
Consider: Deliver consistent services and systems across the whole region	8	24	4	36
Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation	2	3	0	5
EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION	59	244	69	372
Consider: Demonstrate genuine, measurable cost savings and value for money	32	112	39	183
Consider: Stop wasteful spending and demonstrate fiscal prudence	17	78	15	110
Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services	9	45	5	59
Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers	7	35	12	54
Consider: Reduce bureaucracy, red tape and simplify processes	5	38	9	52
Support: Economies of scale and better resourcing	6	20	11	37
Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less	0	5	0	5
GENERAL	7	20	10	37
Support: General support for change or reorganisation	3	11	6	20
Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change	2	8	4	14
Support: No concerns / comfortable with change	2	1	0	3
GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS	15	87	33	135
Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives	6	38	14	58
Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor	4	19	4	27
Consider: Use independent experts and an unbiased body to design and run the change	2	14	11	27
Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights	1	14	5	20
Concern: Job losses and loss of staff expertise and knowledge	2	9	4	15
IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE	22	68	18	108
Consider: Coordinated long-term regional planning for growth, roading and transport	16	57	13	86
Support: Improve financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale	6	13	6	25
Concern: Loss of local identity and character	1	2	0	3
LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION	45	150	60	255
Consider: Guarantee fair representation for each area	24	54	23	101
Consider: Recognise and cater for the unique needs of each community	14	51	19	84
Consider: Fair and equitable distribution of resources across all areas	12	39	17	68
Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority	1	17	12	30

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Concern: Loss of local voice and representation	2	15	3	20
Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga	4	9	5	18
Consider: Councillors and representatives must live in the area they represent	2	11	4	17
Concern: Decisions made by people without local knowledge	1	5	2	8
MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP	5	33	16	54
Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership	3	21	10	34
Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation	2	12	6	20
NULL	6	10	0	16
Null: Off topic	4	7	0	11
Null: No response	2	1	0	3
Null: Refers to previous	0	2	0	2
PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION	11	45	21	77
Consider: Demonstrate a clear evidence-based business case before changing	5	28	11	44
Consider: A well-planned, phased transition with minimal service disruption	3	9	4	16
Consider: Change should be locally led, not imposed by central government	3	6	5	14
Concern: Auckland super city shows mergers don't deliver savings	0	4	2	6
Concern: Government timeframe is too short and change is rushed	0	3	1	4
RATES, COST AND DEBT	31	81	19	131
Support: Lower rates and costs through combining councils	10	32	6	48
Consider: Cap or limit rate increases (e.g. to inflation)	13	19	2	34
Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas	7	18	3	28
Consider: Rates raised in an area should be spent in that area	2	14	2	18
Concern: Promised savings won't be delivered or passed on	1	6	2	9
Consider: Ring-fence existing debt and assets to current ratepayers	1	1	5	7
REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT	5	23	17	45
Consider: Prioritise protection of the environment and sustainability	4	21	10	35
Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale	1	3	9	13
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	53	157	61	271
Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending	23	82	25	130
Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers	32	62	32	126

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Clear communication explaining the changes and their benefits	9	17	10	36
Consider: Set measurable KPIs and publicly report on progress	3	15	5	23
Consider: Transparent, competitive tendering and tighter contractor management	4	16	0	20
Consider: Hold a binding community referendum or public vote on changes	2	8	5	15
TRUST IN COUNCIL	7	25	14	46
Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending	7	25	14	46
WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE	2	15	10	27
Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries	2	7	4	13
Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty	0	4	4	8
Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council	0	4	3	7
Support: A single Bay of Plenty unitary authority	0	3	4	7

Count of distinct respondents raising each theme, by stream. Topics raised by fewer than 2 respondents overall are omitted. Open-text question; respondents may raise more than one theme.

Table 27: What would build confidence - themes by channel

13 Major concerns about the changes

Survey question: “What would be your major concerns if the changes to local councils were to go ahead?”

Overview

The concerns question (n=1,009) raises the same themes as the confidence question, from the opposite direction. Local voice and representation leads (351 respondents): losing local voice (158), smaller and rural communities dominated by Tauranga (124), and one-size-fits-all decisions that ignore local needs (92). Rates, cost and debt follows (306), led by the single most-raised theme in the engagement - that rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas (188). Efficiency and duplication (235) is the third-largest category: more bureaucracy, not less (108), a top-heavy entity slow to decide (77), and infighting between merged councils (60). Because a comment can raise several themes, the categories below overlap.

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (351 respondents)

The leading themes are loss of local voice and representation (158), smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga (124), one-size-fits-all decisions (92), and decisions made by people without local knowledge (36).

“Urban concerns dominating rural” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“Smaller communities may lose voice.” - Panel respondent, 35-44

RATES, COST AND DEBT (306 respondents)

Rates rising or subsidising other areas (188) is the engagement’s single most-raised theme, alongside doubt that promised savings will be delivered or passed on (72) and the upfront cost of the transition itself (42). Tauranga’s debt being pooled across districts (13) was also raised.

“How much more things would cost” - Panel respondent, 75-84

“Blow out of costs” - Contact list respondent, 45-54

EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION (235 respondents)

The leading themes are that the merger creates more bureaucracy, not less (108), that the new entity becomes top-heavy and slow to decide (77), and that infighting between merged councils stalls decisions (60).

“More beurocracy higher costs” - Public consultation respondent, 45-54

“Infighting for seats on the council” - Contact list respondent, 85+

CORE SERVICES & SPENDING PRIORITIES (117 respondents) and TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY (116 respondents)

The leading themes are reduction or loss of services after amalgamation (78), reduced accountability and unclear responsibility in a larger body (64), and the cost of consultants (12).

“That services could get reduced.” - Panel respondent, 75-84

“Council being held accountable” - Panel respondent, 45-54

PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION (99 respondents)

Process concerns: change that turns out cosmetic with nothing really changing (36), a rushed government-driven process, and the Auckland super city precedent (17).

“That they are being rushed” - Panel respondent, 25-34

"It would fail like Auckland's super city" - Contact list respondent, 55-64

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (95 respondents)

Governance concerns: the same leadership remaining in charge after the change (26), job losses and lost expertise (28), and whether the new council attracts people with the right skills (30).

"That the same people stay in charge" - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

"Having the right people running it!" - Contact list respondent, 35-44

GENERAL (77 respondents) and TRUST IN COUNCIL (68 respondents)

Not all responses raised concerns: 29 respondents had none, 42 restated support for change and 10 restated their general opposition (a few raised more than one of these). Some supported change out of dissatisfaction with the status quo - the same dissatisfaction expressed by the 68 who raised distrust of the current council.

"Don't have any major concerns." - Contact list respondent, 75-84

"Poor management, rate increases, poor infrastructure." - Panel respondent, 55-64

IDENTITY, GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE (53 respondents) and REGIONAL COUNCIL & ENVIRONMENT (34 respondents)

Infrastructure neglected or continuing to degrade (27) and loss of local identity (19), alongside the environmental worry: losing the regional council's protection functions if it is disbanded (31).

"That infrastructure will continue to degrade." - Contact list respondent, 45-54

"Loss of the Regional Council's environmental protection function." - Public consultation respondent, 75-84

MĀORI REPRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIP (38 respondents) and WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (16 respondents)

Both directions of the representation divide appear as concerns: losing Māori and iwi representation (21) and, from the other side, any continuation of co-governance (17), along with opposition to including Rotorua or the Eastern Bay in a combined council (11).

"Mana whenua are not respected." - Contact list respondent, 35-44

"Any sign of co governance with iwi." - Contact list respondent, 55-64

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES	26	67	24	117
Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation	21	42	15	78
Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects	6	23	9	38
Consider: Maintain or improve service levels and delivery	2	6	1	9
EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION	41	145	49	235
Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less	18	66	24	108
Concern: New entity becomes top-heavy and slow to make decisions	19	45	13	77
Concern: Infighting and egos between merged councils stall decisions	12	35	13	60
Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers	1	15	1	17
Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services	0	9	2	11
Support: Economies of scale and better resourcing	1	6	3	10
GENERAL	17	49	11	77
Support: General support for change or reorganisation	3	31	8	42
Support: No concerns / comfortable with change	11	16	2	29
Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change	3	5	2	10
GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS	14	63	18	95
Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives	5	24	1	30
Concern: Job losses and loss of staff expertise and knowledge	4	18	6	28
Concern: Same leadership, mayor and councillors remaining in charge	4	14	8	26
Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor	1	9	3	13
Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights	1	1	0	2
IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE	8	37	8	53
Concern: Infrastructure neglected or continuing to degrade	5	18	4	27
Concern: Loss of local identity and character	3	14	2	19
Consider: Coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport	1	5	2	8
LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION	68	212	71	351
Concern: Loss of local voice and representation	27	98	33	158
Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga	27	67	30	124
Concern: One-size-fits-all decisions ignore different local needs	17	63	12	92
Concern: Decisions made by people without local knowledge	7	22	7	36
Concern: Loss of democracy and unelected decision-makers	3	22	5	30
Consider: Guarantee fair representation for each area	4	14	6	24

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority	0	1	1	2
MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP	5	24	9	38
Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership	3	14	4	21
Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation	2	10	5	17
NULL	4	4	0	8
Null: Off topic	4	2	0	6
Null: Refers to previous	0	2	0	2
PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION	17	64	18	99
Concern: Change will be cosmetic with nothing really changing	5	26	5	36
Consider: Change should be locally led, not imposed by central government	1	15	3	19
Concern: Auckland super city shows mergers don't deliver savings	3	11	3	17
Consider: Demonstrate a clear evidence-based business case before changing	4	6	5	15
Concern: Government timeframe is too short and change is rushed	4	7	3	14
RATES, COST AND DEBT	72	170	64	306
Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas	54	93	41	188
Concern: Promised savings won't be delivered or passed on	9	46	17	72
Concern: Upfront cost of the transition itself falls on ratepayers	10	25	7	42
Concern: Tauranga's debt being pooled or shared across districts	3	3	7	13
Support: Lower rates and costs through combining councils	0	11	1	12
Consider: Rates raised in an area should be spent in that area	0	5	4	9
Consider: Ring-fence existing debt and assets to current ratepayers	0	3	3	6
Consider: Cap or limit rate increases (e.g. to inflation)	0	2	0	2
REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT	4	15	15	34
Concern: Loss of environmental protection if regional council is disbanded	4	15	12	31
Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale	0	1	7	8
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	18	74	24	116
Concern: Reduced accountability and unclear responsibility	10	40	14	64
Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers	7	17	4	28
Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending	1	15	3	19
Concern: Cost of consultants and external advisors	1	8	3	12

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
TRUST IN COUNCIL	10	34	24	68
Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending	10	34	24	68
WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE	4	7	5	16
Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council	3	5	3	11
Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty	1	2	2	5
Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries	0	1	1	2

Count of distinct respondents raising each theme, by stream. Topics raised by fewer than 2 respondents overall are omitted. Open-text question; respondents may raise more than one theme.

Table 28: Major concerns about the changes - themes by channel

14 Anything else to consider

Survey question: “Is there anything else you’d like us to think about when it comes to the future of how councils are structured in the Bay of Plenty and how they serve you?”

Overview

The final open question (n=672) drew general messages to the council more than new topics. Transparency and accountability leads (166 respondents) - transparency about spending (97) and genuine consultation (81) - with trust themes (145) close behind, led by the view that councils exist to serve ratepayers, not themselves (98). Efficiency (122), core services (109) and local voice (105) repeat the themes raised across the engagement. Because a comment can raise several themes, the categories below overlap.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY (166 respondents)

The leading themes are greater transparency and accountability for spending (97), consultation that genuinely listens (81), and, for a few, a binding referendum before any change (8).

“Being open and honest with us.” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“More collaboration with us voters” - Public consultation respondent, 55-64

TRUST IN COUNCIL (145 respondents)

The view that councils exist to serve ratepayers, not themselves (98) is this question’s most-raised theme, alongside distrust of the current council’s leadership and spending (57).

“That they are here to serve us.” - Contact list respondent, 45-54

“Think about the rate payers needs more!” - Contact list respondent, 45-54

EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION (122 respondents)

The efficiency message restated: consolidate duplicated back-office services (41), run councils like a commercial business focused on outcomes (40), and reduce staff numbers and management layers (33).

“Simpler governance to reduce overlap” - Panel respondent, 35-44

“Efficiency, transparency, accountability” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES (109 respondents)

Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects (76), and cut the red tape that slows consenting and processing (22).

“no frills, just need the basics” - Panel respondent, 55-64

“sole focus on water, roads and rubbish” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION (105 respondents)

Recognise different areas have different needs and ensure fair representation (72), along with loss of local voice (17) and rural communities dominated by the city (17).

“Fair division of representatives” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

“That the city does not take over the rural areas.” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS (96 respondents)

Skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives (47) leads again, with reduced councillor and staff remuneration (20) and voting rights for elected members only (12).

“Qualified people making decisions” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

“get the best people for the job” - Contact list respondent, 75-84

RATES, COST AND DEBT (91 respondents)

The leading themes are that rates are already unaffordable (46) and that combining councils should lower rates (30).

“Lower rates and council related costs” - Contact list respondent, 25-34

“Be more green and keep the cost down.” - Panel respondent, 45-54

GENERAL (76 respondents) and IDENTITY, GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE (67 respondents)

General support for change (56) outweighs opposition (13) in this final question, with 7 comfortable either way, alongside the constructive infrastructure agenda: coordinated regional planning (41) and roading, traffic flow and public transport ahead of cycleways (23).

“Reduce number of Councils throughout New Zealand” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

“Less bureaucracy. Better economies of scale. Local voices remain heard.” - Contact list respondent, 65-74

PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION (66 respondents)

An evidence-based business case (28) and locally led change (20), with 14 respondents restating that no change is needed at all.

“Keep central government out as much as possible” - Contact list respondent, 55-64

“Resisting Central Government ideological interference.” - Public consultation respondent, 75-84

REGIONAL COUNCIL & ENVIRONMENT (36 respondents), MĀORI REPRESENTATION & PARTNERSHIP (28 respondents) and WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE (28 respondents)

The remaining considerations: protect the environment and build climate resilience (22) and keep the regional council’s functions somewhere (9); the two sides of the Māori representation divide (15 for guarantees, 13 opposed); and a single Bay-wide unitary authority (14) as the preferred shape.

“Not losing the function of Regional councils” - Contact list respondent, 45-54

“If we share a coastline and waterways, we should be working together” - Contact list respondent, 35-44

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
CORE SERVICES AND SPENDING PRIORITIES	22	66	21	109
Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects	16	43	17	76
Consider: Reduce red tape and speed up consenting and processing	3	16	3	22
Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation	3	7	2	12
EFFICIENCY AND DUPLICATION	22	73	27	122
Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services	10	21	10	41
Consider: Run councils like a commercial business focused on outcomes	8	26	6	40
Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers	3	19	11	33
Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less	2	7	3	12
Consider: Share services first or instead of full merger	3	5	3	11
GENERAL	12	48	16	76
Support: General support for change or reorganisation	8	34	14	56
Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change	2	9	2	13
Support: No concerns / comfortable with change	2	5	0	7
GOVERNANCE, STAFF AND ELECTED MEMBERS	15	61	20	96
Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives	5	34	8	47
Consider: Reduce councillor and staff salaries and excessive remuneration	4	13	3	20
Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights	2	6	4	12
Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor	3	6	3	12
Concern: Job losses and loss of staff expertise and knowledge	1	6	2	9
IDENTITY, GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE	5	51	11	67
Consider: Coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport	3	32	6	41
Consider: Improve roading, traffic flow and public transport over cycleways	1	20	2	23
Support: Improve financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale	3	13	5	21
LOCAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION	26	57	22	105
Consider: Recognise different areas have different needs and ensure fair representation	19	37	16	72
Concern: Loss of local voice and representation	4	10	3	17
Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga	3	12	2	17
Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority	1	4	5	10
Consider: Councillors and representatives must live in the area they represent	1	6	0	7
MĀORI REPRESENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP	1	18	9	28

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership	0	9	6	15
Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation	1	9	3	13
NULL	8	12	1	21
Null: Off topic	4	5	0	9
Null: No response	4	2	0	6
Null: Survey feedback	0	5	1	6
PROCESS, TIMEFRAME AND DIRECTION	17	34	15	66
Consider: Demonstrate a clear evidence-based business case before changing	6	17	5	28
Consider: Change should be locally led, not imposed by central government	4	12	4	20
Oppose: Keep councils as they are - no change needed	4	6	4	14
Concern: Auckland super city shows mergers don't deliver savings	2	3	3	8
Concern: Government timeframe is too short and change is rushed	3	3	2	8
RATES, COST AND DEBT	24	59	8	91
Concern: Rates are already unaffordable and ratepayers treated as a cash machine	10	30	6	46
Support: Lower rates and costs through combining councils	12	18	0	30
Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas	1	11	1	13
Consider: Provide rates relief or fairer rates for pensioners and asset-rich cash-poor ratepayers	1	5	1	7
Concern: Tauranga's debt being pooled or shared across districts	0	2	2	4
REGIONAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENT	4	20	12	36
Consider: Protect the environment and build climate resilience	2	14	6	22
Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale	1	4	4	9
Support: Abolish the regional council and fold its functions into the councils	1	3	2	6
TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	35	88	43	166
Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending	19	58	20	97
Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers	20	40	21	81
Consider: Hold a binding community referendum or public vote on changes	0	2	6	8
TRUST IN COUNCIL	23	86	36	145
Consider: Remember councils exist to serve ratepayers, not themselves	18	56	24	98
Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending	9	34	14	57
Concern: Corruption, cronyism and fraud within the council	3	7	6	16
WHICH COUNCILS TO COMBINE	2	19	7	28
Support: A single Bay of Plenty unitary authority	1	10	3	14

Theme	Panel	Contact list	Public consultation	Total
Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries	1	5	2	8
Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council	0	3	2	5
Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty	0	4	0	4

Count of distinct respondents raising each theme, by stream. Topics raised by fewer than 2 respondents overall are omitted. Open-text question; respondents may raise more than one theme.

Table 29: Anything else to consider - themes by channel

Appendix A: Full questionnaire

The survey instrument is summarised below. The authoritative version is the survey schema held with the project, and a page-by-page PDF of the survey as respondents saw it onscreen is available on request.

Structural questions

- **Who should design the change:** Would you prefer us to design a new structure alongside neighbouring councils, or wait for the Government to do it? (Us to design it / Wait for the Government)
- **Support for merging:** Do you support the idea of councils merging to have fewer councils? (Strongly support / Support / Do not support / Strongly do not support)
- **Support for a single combined council:** If it resulted in service-delivery efficiencies and simpler governance, would you support a single combined council? (same four-point scale)
- **Which councils:** Which council(s) would be the best fit for our Council to join with? (multi-select across neighbouring councils, plus “any combination that creates efficiencies” and an “other” option)
- **Priorities:** Ranking of eight things about how councils could be structured and operated (1 = most important).
- **Service delivery:** For each of ~13 council services: should it be delivered the same across the wider Bay of Plenty region, tailored to my region / local area, somewhere in between, or unsure?

Open-text questions

- What changes would need to be made to address any issues or concerns about creating a new combined council?
- And what would you want to stay the same?
- What are the key things we should consider - the things that would give you confidence in a decision to change?
- What would be your major concerns if the changes went ahead?
- Is there anything else you’d like us to think about?

Demographics

Ratepayer status, age band, where you live, household size, and gender.

Appendix B: Glossary of qualitative themes

This appendix is a glossary of the qualitative coding framework: every theme (topic) used in the theme tables, grouped under its category, with a short definition of what the theme covers. Themes carry a sentiment prefix - Support, Concern, Oppose or Consider - where a comment runs with or against the question's frame. Categories are ordered by the number of distinct respondents raising them across all five open-text questions; n is the number of distinct respondents raising the theme across all questions.

Local voice & representation (n = 632)

Consider: Guarantee fair representation for each area (n = 229) - Condition that every area, district or ward has guaranteed, equitable representation and a say in the new council's decisions.

Concern: Loss of local voice and representation (n = 218) - Worry that combining councils moves decision-making further from communities and silences or dilutes the local voice.

Concern: Smaller and rural communities overlooked or dominated by Tauranga (n = 179) - Worry that larger centres, especially Tauranga, will dominate decisions and resources, leaving smaller, rural or poorer areas swamped or neglected.

Concern: One-size-fits-all decisions ignore different local needs (n = 92) - Worry that blanket, standardised decisions fail to reflect the distinct needs of different towns and communities.

Consider: Establish local boards or community boards with real authority (n = 86) - Suggestion to retain meaningful local boards/community committees with genuine delegated powers and budgets, not just an advisory role.

Consider: Recognise and cater for the unique needs of each community (n = 84) - One size does not fit all; the distinct needs of urban, coastal and rural areas must be tailored for.

Consider: Fair and equitable allocation of funding and resources across areas (n = 75) - Requests for transparent, equitable distribution of funding and resources so no community is left out or disproportionately funded.

Consider: Recognise different areas have different needs and ensure fair representation (n = 72) - View that one size doesn't fit all - structures should be tailored to distinct local areas (coastal vs inland, urban vs rural) and guarantee fair, balanced representation for each.

Concern: Decisions made by people without local knowledge (n = 70) - Worry that distant decision-makers won't understand local area dynamics, needs and priorities, leading to poor outcomes.

Consider: Fair and equitable distribution of resources across all areas (n = 68) - Resources, services and investment must be shared equitably so no area dominates or misses out.

Consider: Recognise differing rural and urban needs and tailor services (n = 57) - Calls to recognise that rural and urban areas have different needs and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Consider: Councillors and representatives must live in the area they represent (n = 42) - Condition that elected members reside in and have genuine local knowledge of the communities they govern.

Concern: Loss of democracy and unelected decision-makers (n = 30) - Concern about erosion of democratic process, being governed by people not voted in, or unelected members on boards.

Consider: Maintain community engagement and advisory groups (n = 24) - Retain genuine community engagement, citizens'/iwi advisory groups, forums and collaborative input.

Efficiency & duplication (n = 628)

Support: Reduce duplication and consolidate back-office services (n = 195) - Support for eliminating duplicated administration, systems, buildings and fleets, and consolidating functions like IT, HR and finance.

Consider: Demonstrate genuine, measurable cost savings and value for money ($n = 183$) - Confidence requires proven, tangible savings and value for money, not change for change's sake.

Consider: Reduce staff numbers and management layers ($n = 181$) - Condition that amalgamation cut excess staff, middle management and bureaucracy to create a leaner, more efficient organisation.

Concern: Merger will create more bureaucracy not less ($n = 143$) - Worry that a bigger council adds administrative layers, slows decision-making and grows bureaucracy rather than streamlining it.

Consider: Stop wasteful spending and demonstrate fiscal prudence ($n = 110$) - Curb wasteful expenditure, treat ratepayer money with respect and demonstrate prudence.

Support: Economies of scale and better resourcing ($n = 96$) - Support for larger scale to gain efficiency, attract better skilled staff, improve borrowing capacity and resource larger projects.

Concern: New entity becomes top-heavy and slow to make decisions ($n = 77$) - Worry the combined council is too big and cumbersome, making decision-making slow, laborious and process-driven.

Concern: Infighting and egos between merged councils stall decisions ($n = 60$) - Concern about political infighting, jockeying for position and councillor egos delaying decisions and wasting money.

Consider: Reduce bureaucracy, red tape and simplify processes ($n = 52$) - Cut red tape, simplify consents and reduce slow, duplicated processes.

Consider: Run councils like a commercial business focused on outcomes ($n = 40$) - Suggestion that councils be operated like a well-run, accountable business delivering value and outcomes, not as a self-serving bureaucracy or hobby.

Consider: Share services first or instead of full merger ($n = 18$) - Suggestion to pursue shared services and collaboration between councils before, or rather than, full amalgamation.

Core services & spending priorities ($n = 550$)

Consider: Focus on core services and infrastructure, not vanity projects ($n = 282$) - Condition that council return to basics (roads, water, waste, parks) and stop spending on vanity, beautification or 'nice-to-have' projects.

Consider: Maintain or improve service levels and delivery ($n = 192$) - Condition that essential services are protected and ideally improved, with local service centres and front-line staff retained.

Concern: Reduction or loss of services after amalgamation ($n = 101$) - Worry that merging will reduce service levels, access or quality, especially for smaller areas or those in greatest need.

Consider: Retain libraries, parks, pools and community facilities ($n = 59$) - Keep libraries, parks, reserves, pools, green spaces and community facilities.

Consider: Deliver consistent services and systems across the whole region ($n = 36$) - Want streamlined, consistent services, systems and bylaws across the combined area.

Consider: Retain kerbside rubbish, recycling and waste collection ($n = 24$) - Keep rubbish, recycling and green-waste collection as is.

Consider: Reduce red tape and speed up consenting and processing ($n = 22$) - Calls to cut excessive compliance and bureaucracy, simplify and speed up consents, applications and decision-making.

Consider: Retain high-quality local water supply and services ($n = 19$) - Keep the existing good local water supply, stormwater and three-waters services local.

Consider: Continue support for community, cultural and sporting events ($n = 14$) - Keep support for community spaces, cultural/public events and sporting events like Aims Games.

Consider: Stop spending on cultural, DEI and ‘woke’ initiatives (*n* = 14) - Calls to cut spending on cultural, DEI, climate and ‘woke’ programmes and focus strictly on core service delivery.

Rates, cost & debt (*n* = 548)

Concern: Rates will rise or be used to subsidise other areas (*n* = 249) - Worry that combining councils will push rates up, or that one area’s ratepayers will end up funding infrastructure, services or projects in other (often poorer or rural) districts.

Support: Lower rates and costs through combining councils (*n* = 145) - Support for reorganisation on the basis it should reduce rates, water charges and other costs to ratepayers, including one rates bill instead of two.

Concern: Promised savings won’t be delivered or passed on (*n* = 109) - Scepticism that cost savings will materialise or reach ratepayers, citing that past mergers raised costs and savings were never passed on.

Consider: Cap or limit rate increases (e.g. to inflation) (*n* = 108) - Request for firm limits on rates increases, keeping them affordable and aligned to CPI or inflation rather than rising above it each year.

Consider: Rates raised in an area should be spent in that area (*n* = 65) - Condition that revenue collected locally is reinvested locally and not redistributed to fund projects elsewhere in the region.

Concern: Rates are already unaffordable and ratepayers treated as a cash machine (*n* = 46) - Strong sentiment that rates are too high, rising faster than incomes, and that ratepayers are treated as a bottomless funding source / ATM, especially amid cost of living pressure.

Concern: Upfront cost of the transition itself falls on ratepayers (*n* = 42) - Worry about the cost of restructuring, rebranding, redundancies and system changes being borne by ratepayers with no offsetting benefit.

Consider: Ring-fence existing debt and assets to current ratepayers (*n* = 32) - Condition that each council’s existing debt, liabilities and assets remain tied to its current area so no community inherits another’s legacy debt.

Concern: Tauranga’s debt being pooled or shared across districts (*n* = 27) - Worry that TCC’s high debt becomes a burden on other councils, or that merging exposes ratepayers to the debt and liabilities of other councils.

Consider: Provide rates relief or fairer rates for pensioners and asset-rich cash-poor ratepayers (*n* = 7) - Suggestions for rates deferral schemes, pensioner discounts, equal/flat rates rather than property-value based rating, so people aren’t forced to leave or reverse-mortgage homes.

Transparency & accountability (*n* = 528)

Consider: Greater transparency and accountability for spending (*n* = 343) - Condition for open books, clear financial reporting and accountability so ratepayers can see where money goes and who is responsible.

Consider: Genuine consultation that actually listens to ratepayers (*n* = 266) - Request for real, ongoing community consultation where feedback is acted on rather than decisions made and announced afterward.

Concern: Reduced accountability and unclear responsibility (*n* = 64) - Fear that a larger council means less accountability and confusion over who is responsible for decisions.

Consider: Clear communication explaining the changes and their benefits (*n* = 36) - Confidence built through clear, well-resourced communication of what changes, the real costs and the benefits.

Consider: Hold a binding community referendum or public vote on changes (*n* = 26) - Condition that any reorganisation be decided or confirmed by a binding public referendum rather than council approval alone.

Consider: Set measurable KPIs and publicly report on progress (*n* = 23) - Clear KPIs, ROI metrics and regular public reporting to prove benefits are delivered.

Consider: Transparent, competitive tendering and tighter contractor management (*n* = 20) - Open tenders, multiple quotes, penalties for overruns and tighter control of contractors over-charging council.

Concern: Cost of consultants and external advisors (*n* = 12) - Worry about spending on consultants, advisors and contracts without clear deliverables or accountability.

Governance, staff & elected members (*n* = 414)

Consider: Elect skilled, qualified, business-minded representatives (*n* = 159) - Request for councillors and leaders with governance, financial and professional expertise who run council like a competent business.

Consider: Reduce number of councillors and have one mayor (*n* = 90) - Suggestion for fewer councillors, one mayor and a streamlined elected structure to cut cost and duplication.

Consider: Only elected members should have voting rights (*n* = 61) - Condition that only democratically elected councillors can vote and that consultants or appointees have no voting power.

Consider: Retain democratic elections and ability to vote for local representatives (*n* = 48) - Keep normal elections, ward/councillor representation and the ability to vote for mayor and local reps.

Concern: Job losses and loss of staff expertise and knowledge (*n* = 46) - Worry about redundancies, instability for staff and loss of valuable institutional and local knowledge through restructuring.

Consider: Replace the current mayor and CEO / senior leadership (*n* = 36) - Demands to remove the current mayor, deputy, CEO and senior management before or as part of any new council.

Consider: Reduce councillor and executive salaries and perks (*n* = 28) - Calls to cut councillor/executive salaries, perks and self-awarded pay rises, with performance-based remuneration and reapplication for roles.

Consider: Use independent experts and an unbiased body to design and run the change (*n* = 27) - Use professionals, productivity specialists and an independent/external transition body free of bias to drive the change.

Concern: Same leadership, mayor and councillors remaining in charge (*n* = 26) - Fear the same incumbent mayor, councillors or executives stay in power, repackaged, with no real change of culture.

Consider: Retain good frontline staff and their expertise (*n* = 23) - Keep competent/good staff, frontline workers and their local knowledge and conditions.

Consider: Reduce councillor and staff salaries and excessive remuneration (*n* = 20) - Calls to cut what councillors, mayors and senior staff are paid, seen as too high relative to the work and to struggling ratepayers.

Identity, growth & infrastructure (*n* = 331)

Consider: Coordinated regional planning for growth, roading and transport (*n* = 129) - Suggestion for joined-up region-wide planning of infrastructure, roading, public transport and growth, including rail.

Consider: Coordinated long-term regional planning for growth, roading and transport (*n* = 86) - Want joined-up, future-proofed regional planning for infrastructure, roading, public transport and growth.

Support: Improve financial sustainability and infrastructure delivery at scale (*n* = 61) - Support for reorganisation to lift borrowing capacity, resilience and capability to deliver the infrastructure the region needs.

Consider: Retain each area's unique local identity and character (*n* = 47) - Keep each area's distinct identity, character and sense of belonging within a larger council.

Support: Continue investment in city growth, amenities and infrastructure (*n* = 37) - Wants ongoing investment in city growth, amenities, beautification, cycleways and infrastructure to continue.

Concern: Loss of local identity and character (*n* = 33) - Worry that towns and communities lose their distinct identity, character and sense of belonging when absorbed into a larger council.

Concern: Infrastructure neglected or continuing to degrade (*n* = 27) - Worry that local infrastructure (water, roading, amenities) is neglected, degrades or is underfunded under the new structure.

Consider: Improve roading, traffic flow and public transport over cycleways (*n* = 23) - Calls to fix traffic congestion, future-proof roading and invest in public transport/rail; includes opposition to spending on cycle lanes and removing local tolls.

Consider: Retain local ownership of public assets like Port of Tauranga (*n* = 10) - Keep public assets such as the Port of Tauranga and Quayside locally owned to benefit ratepayers.

General (*n* = 311)

Support: General support for change or reorganisation (*n* = 219) - Broad, non-specific approval of the direction to combine or reform councils.

Oppose: General opposition to amalgamation or change (*n* = 71) - Broad, non-specific rejection of combining councils or of structural change.

Support: No concerns / comfortable with change (*n* = 42) - Respondent has no concerns, is comfortable with the proposal, or trusts council to manage it - an absence-of-concern / no-change-needed answer (especially to the concerns question).

Trust in council (*n* = 290)

Concern: Distrust of TCC's current leadership, culture and spending (*n* = 230) - Worry rooted in dissatisfaction with the current mayor, councillors, CEO and wasteful spending, fearing this culture spreads to a larger entity.

Consider: Remember councils exist to serve ratepayers, not themselves (*n* = 98) - Recurring demand that councils remember their purpose is to serve the people/ratepayers who pay their wages, putting community first rather than egos, agendas or self-interest.

Concern: Corruption, cronyism and fraud within the council (*n* = 16) - Concerns about corruption, backroom deals, cronyism, conflicts of interest and the need for anti-corruption safeguards and removal of those acting fraudulently.

Process, timeframe & direction (*n* = 241)

Consider: Demonstrate a clear evidence-based business case before changing (*n* = 91) - Condition that change proceed only with proven, costed benefits, measurable savings and clarity on functions before structure.

Consider: Change should be locally led, not imposed by central government (*n* = 51) - Preference that the region shapes its own proposal and resists top-down imposition, while some want central government to decide.

Concern: Auckland super city shows mergers don't deliver savings (*n* = 48) - Worry citing Auckland and other amalgamations where promised savings and efficiencies failed and costs and rates rose.

Concern: Change will be cosmetic with nothing really changing (*n* = 36) - Fear the exercise just reshuffles seats, rebrands and renames offices while nothing structurally improves.

Concern: Government timeframe is too short and change is rushed (*n* = 23) - Worry that the central-government deadline is unrealistic and forces rushed decisions without proper costing or consultation.

Consider: A well-planned, phased transition with minimal service disruption ($n = 16$) - Want a credible, phased and supported transition that guarantees no disruption to everyday services.

Oppose: Keep councils as they are - no change needed ($n = 14$) - Outright rejection of restructuring; prefers the status quo or only minimal change, arguing if it isn't broken don't fix it and the real problem is people not structure.

Consider: Manage the transition carefully and phase it in ($n = 12$) - Calls to plan and phase the transition, lock in principles early, learn from past mergers and avoid disruption costs.

Which councils to combine ($n = 145$)

Consider: Match the combined council to regional / catchment boundaries ($n = 43$) - Condition that boundaries follow the existing Regional Council area, water/CCO boundaries or natural catchments, kept intact rather than split.

Support: A single Bay of Plenty unitary authority ($n = 41$) - Support for one combined Bay of Plenty council/unitary authority covering both regional and city/district functions across the region.

Oppose: Keep councils separate and locally run ($n = 36$) - Wants existing councils kept separate/individual and locally run rather than amalgamated.

Oppose: Including Rotorua or Eastern Bay in a combined council ($n = 29$) - Rejection of a council that joins Tauranga with Rotorua, Whakatāne, Ōpōtiki or Kawerau on the grounds of different identity, economies and needs.

Support: Merge Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty ($n = 29$) - Support for combining TCC with Western Bay of Plenty (plus the relevant regional council functions) as a natural, intertwined sub-region.

Consider: Tauranga should remain dominant and focus on its own city ($n = 10$) - Tauranga should stay the lead/dominant body and concentrate on its own city's needs.

Regional council & environment ($n = 139$)

Consider: Retain regional council environmental functions at regional scale ($n = 54$) - Condition that regional functions (environmental protection, catchment/flood management, biosecurity, civil defence, climate) continue region-wide and are not split or diminished.

Concern: Loss of environmental protection if regional council is disbanded ($n = 36$) - Worry that disbanding the regional council weakens independent environmental regulation, science and stewardship of land, water and coast.

Consider: Prioritise protection of the environment and sustainability ($n = 35$) - Confidence requires strong, consistent environmental protection, clean water and climate resilience.

Consider: Protect natural environment, beauty and high environmental standards ($n = 28$) - Keep care for the environment, natural features, clean/swimmable water and high standards.

Consider: Protect the environment and build climate resilience ($n = 22$) - Suggestions to safeguard the environment, waterways, air quality, sand dunes/sea-level rise and build resilience to natural disasters and climate change.

Support: Merge regional and city/district councils into one entity ($n = 21$) - Support for combining the regional council with the city/district council to remove paying two councils and to simplify consenting.

Support: Disband or abolish the regional council ($n = 10$) - View that the regional council is unnecessary or ineffective and should be abolished with functions folded into local councils.

Support: Abolish the regional council and fold its functions into the councils ($n = 6$) - Support for getting rid of BOPRC / integrating its functions into one council to remove double work, double cost and the need to seek BOPRC permission.

Māori representation & partnership (n = 124)

Consider: Guarantee Māori and iwi representation and Te Tiriti partnership (n = 68) - Condition that the new structure retains or strengthens Māori wards, iwi/hapū voice, co-governance and Treaty partnership from the outset.

Oppose: Māori wards, co-governance and unelected Māori representation (n = 57) - Rejection of Māori wards, co-governance and any non-elected or race-based representation, insisting all members be democratically elected.

Service delivery & systems (n = 94)

Consider: Standardise bylaws, consents, systems and processes across councils (n = 44) - Calls to align bylaws, regulations, corporate systems and processes so there is one consistent approach region-wide.

Consider: Faster, simpler and cheaper consenting and regulatory processes (n = 28) - Calls for a unified, faster, cheaper consenting/regulatory pathway with clear timeframes, so reorganisation reduces delay and cost.

Consider: One rates bill and single point of contact for ratepayers (n = 23) - Requests for a single rates bill, single payment portal and one point of contact instead of paying/dealing with two councils.

Consider: Maintain local service centres or hubs in each area (n = 12) - Requests to keep staffed local hubs, offices or service centres in each area so residents can still access help.

Access & local presence (n = 47)

Consider: Retain responsive, accessible and easy-to-contact council service (n = 29) - Keep quick, helpful, human customer service and easy access to council by phone or in person.

Consider: Keep local offices and service centres in each town and district (n = 14) - Retain physical service centres/offices and locally based staff across districts so ratepayers can call in.

Consider: Keep the council headquarters and base in Tauranga (n = 9) - Wants the main office/HQ centred in Tauranga, not relocated (e.g. to Hamilton).

Appendix C: Key results by demographic group

This appendix breaks the report's key closed questions down by demographic group: response channel, age band and gender, side by side. The **Representative sample** column is the panel and contact list combined and weighted - the same headline figure reported in the body of this report - and the age and gender columns are computed on that same base. The Public consultation channel appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled into the combined figure. Cells show weighted percentages under the same conventions as the report body; group bases (unweighted n) are shown in each column header. Cells are shaded from white to light blue, scaled within each table, so relative patterns can be read at a glance.

Age is reported in four bands; the gender columns show Male and Female (other responses and non-answers are too few to form a column). The which-councils table follows the same convention as the body: the question was shown only to respondents who supported a single combined council, and its percentages are based on those who answered. Further breakdowns (full age bands, ratepayer status and per-option detail with significance tests) are available in the accompanying cross-tabs workbook (Data_Output/TCC_Crosstabs.xlsx). As with the report body, differences between groups should be read with each group's base size in mind.

Who should design the change

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Panel (n=250)	Contact list (n=815)	Public consultation (n=273)	18-34 (n= 65)	35-44 (n=113)	45-64 (n=350)	65+ (n=508)	Male (n=459)	Female (n=577)
Us to design it	79%	81%	78%	80%	78%	79%	73%	88%	74%	84%
Wait for the Government	21%	19%	22%	20%	22%	21%	27%	12%	26%	16%

Cells: share choosing each option (weighted), full base. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 30: Who should design the change - by channel, age and gender

Support for merging councils

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Panel (n=250)	Contact list (n=815)	Public consultation (n=273)	18-34 (n= 65)	35-44 (n=113)	45-64 (n=350)	65+ (n=508)	Male (n=459)	Female (n=577)
Strongly support	35%	23%	40%	49%	20%	36%	42%	41%	43%	28%
Support	43%	49%	41%	32%	55%	41%	37%	42%	36%	50%
Do not support	16%	22%	13%	11%	22%	11%	15%	13%	15%	16%
Strongly do not support	6%	6%	6%	8%	3%	12%	6%	4%	6%	6%

Cells: share choosing each option (weighted), full base. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 31: Support for merging councils - by channel, age and gender

Support for a single combined council

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Panel (n=250)	Contact list (n=815)	Public consultation (n=273)	18-34 (n= 65)	35-44 (n=113)	45-64 (n=350)	65+ (n=508)	Male (n=459)	Female (n=577)
Strongly support	49%	32%	55%	51%	41%	49%	57%	48%	56%	43%
Support	40%	56%	34%	34%	50%	38%	32%	41%	34%	45%
Do not support	7%	10%	6%	9%	9%	4%	7%	8%	5%	9%
Strongly do not support	4%	3%	4%	6%	0%	9%	5%	3%	4%	3%

Cells: share choosing each option (weighted), full base. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 32: Support for a single combined council - by channel, age and gender

What people prioritise

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Panel (n=250)	Contact list (n=815)	Public consultation (n=273)	18-34 (n= 65)	35-44 (n=113)	45-64 (n=350)	65+ (n=508)	Male (n=459)	Female (n=577)
Keeping rates as low as possible	53%	57%	52%	38%	52%	54%	55%	51%	53%	53%
Efficient delivery of council functions and services e.g. building consents, infrastructure, waste management	52%	42%	56%	58%	47%	43%	56%	60%	54%	50%
Efficient delivery of infrastructure, such as roading, transport and waters	50%	36%	56%	53%	45%	49%	52%	54%	48%	53%
More affordable council services and community facilities	33%	49%	27%	26%	41%	33%	28%	32%	32%	35%
Value for money	31%	24%	34%	25%	27%	35%	38%	25%	36%	26%
Ensuring the growth and prosperity of the region	26%	26%	26%	31%	30%	29%	24%	23%	27%	25%
Your ability to have a say and influence decisions made locally	26%	35%	22%	36%	35%	29%	23%	17%	23%	29%
Having a Mayor and Councillors based in, and representing, your local community	25%	28%	23%	30%	22%	20%	22%	33%	23%	25%

Cells: share placing each item in their top three (weighted), full base. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 33: What people prioritise (top three) - by channel, age and gender

How services should be delivered

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=1,065)	Panel (n=250)	Contact list (n=815)	Public consultation (n=273)	18-34 (n= 65)	35-44 (n=113)	45-64 (n=350)	65+ (n=508)	Male (n=459)	Female (n=577)
Permits and licencing, such as dog, food, health, alcohol	68%	64%	70%	72%	65%	61%	72%	72%	70%	66%
Management of natural resources, particularly land and water	62%	58%	64%	64%	59%	58%	63%	67%	69%	56%
Environmental protection / biodiversity	62%	51%	67%	70%	52%	56%	68%	70%	67%	58%
Civil defence / emergency management	61%	54%	65%	67%	57%	52%	64%	70%	68%	56%
Building, planning and resource consenting	60%	48%	66%	70%	52%	59%	64%	65%	67%	55%
Other policy and by-laws	56%	51%	58%	51%	59%	51%	56%	56%	62%	51%
Libraries	53%	54%	52%	47%	57%	60%	49%	47%	52%	54%
Roading, transport and infrastructure	51%	46%	54%	52%	45%	52%	55%	54%	62%	43%
Refuse collection / waste management	48%	38%	52%	53%	37%	52%	55%	48%	49%	47%
Water infrastructure	44%	41%	45%	48%	40%	49%	50%	39%	50%	40%
Sport, recreation and aquatic facilities	42%	47%	40%	37%	49%	41%	38%	38%	46%	39%
Other community facilities, such as venues, halls and community centres	38%	40%	37%	33%	40%	48%	38%	28%	38%	39%
Public transport	37%	35%	38%	34%	38%	41%	36%	34%	41%	35%

Cells: share choosing "Same across the region" for each service (weighted). Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 34: Services chosen as 'Same across the region' - by channel, age and gender

Which councils to join with

	Channel				Age				Gender	
	Representative sample (n=853)	Panel (n=180)	Contact list (n=673)	Public consultation (n=220)	18-34 (n= 49)	35-44 (n= 86)	45-64 (n=274)	65+ (n=422)	Male (n=380)	Female (n=453)
Western Bay of Plenty District Council	69%	63%	71%	82%	61%	72%	68%	77%	70%	69%
Any combination that creates efficiencies	25%	26%	25%	15%	29%	21%	28%	21%	25%	26%
Whakatāne District Council	25%	19%	27%	33%	17%	27%	25%	30%	26%	22%
Rotorua Lakes Council	18%	11%	20%	22%	12%	21%	18%	20%	17%	18%
Ōpōtiki District Council	14%	6%	16%	24%	7%	11%	17%	18%	16%	11%
Kawerau District Council	13%	4%	16%	23%	2%	13%	17%	19%	14%	12%
Thames-Coromandel District Council	8%	8%	9%	15%	8%	8%	7%	10%	9%	8%
Taupō District Council	4%	3%	4%	1%	7%	0%	4%	2%	2%	5%
South Waikato District Council	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	6%	4%	2%	4%	3%
Hauraki District Council	3%	2%	3%	9%	0%	5%	2%	4%	3%	2%
Bay of Plenty Regional Council	2%	1%	2%	4%	2%	0%	3%	2%	3%	1%
Other (please specify)	2%	0%	2%	4%	0%	4%	1%	2%	1%	2%

Cells: share selecting each council (weighted); question shown only to supporters of a single combined council, based on those who answered. Representative sample = Panel + Contact list combined and weighted (the report body's headline series); the Age and Gender columns are computed on the same base. Public consultation appears only in its own column, unweighted, and is never pooled. Group n's are unweighted. Shading is scaled within this table - darker blue = higher.

Table 35: Which councils to join with - by channel, age and gender

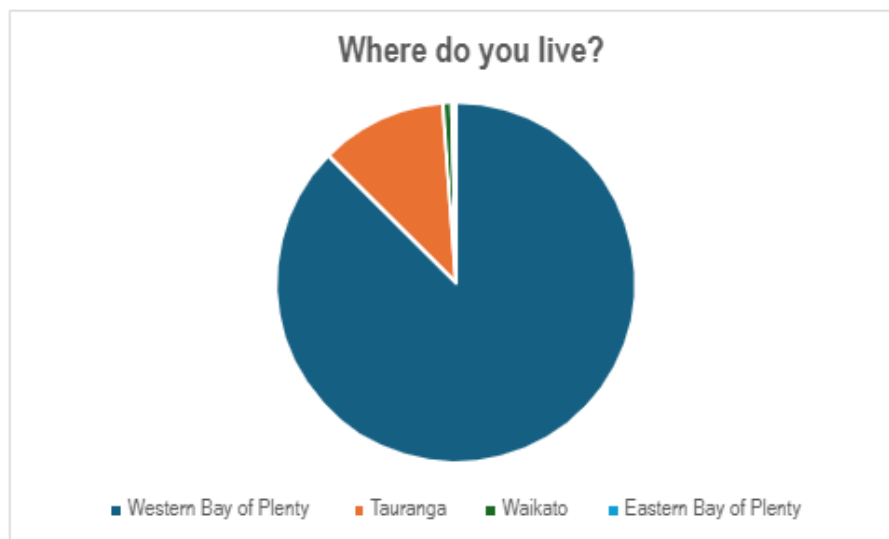
Local government reform engagement analysis – May/June 2026

Headline information:

- 262 submissions received (online, hardcopy and email)
- 193 attendees across six events
- 2,500 pieces of feedback received overall (survey responses, online and in person comments received)
- Majority support for Council to merge with other Councils under a new structure.
- Top priorities across all feedback are affordability and local voice.
- Both scenario B and scenario E were the preferred option from the online survey.

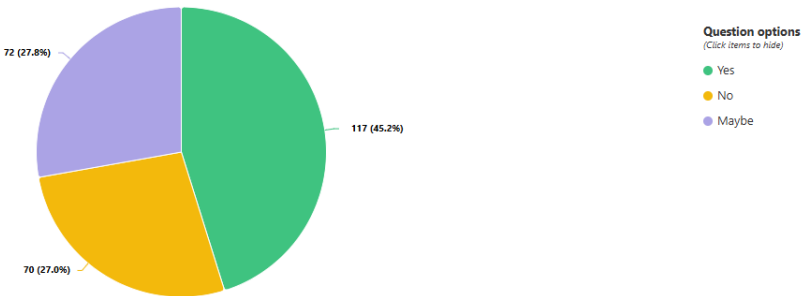
Community survey feedback summary (online, hardcopy and email)

This section of the report analyses feedback received via our online platform, emails, and written feedback forms.



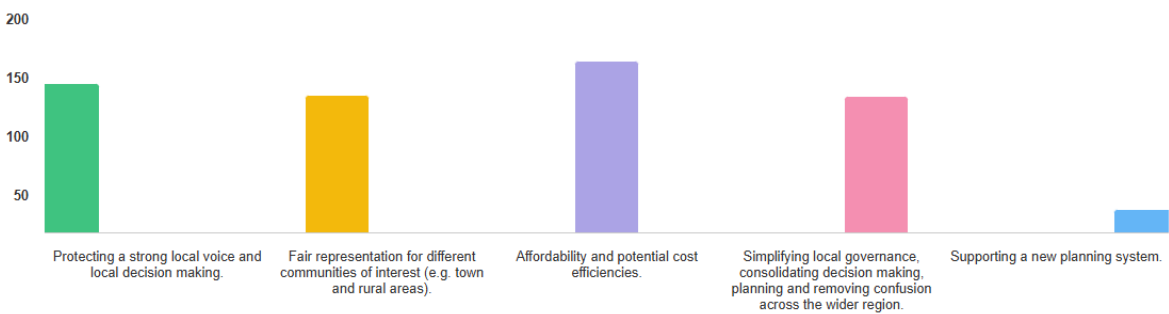
Where do you live?	Western Bay of Plenty	230
	Tauranga	30
	Waikato	2
	Eastern Bay of Plenty	1
	Total	263

Do you support Council merging with other Councils under a new structure?



Do you support Council merging with other Councils under a new structure?	Yes	117 (45.2%)
	No	70 (27%)
	Maybe	72 (27.8%)
	Total	259

Select TOP TWO priorities If local government is reorganised, what matters most to you?



Select TOP TWO priorities If local government is reorganised, what matters most to you?	Affordability and potential cost efficiencies	146 (27.8)
	Protecting a strong local voice and local decision making	127 (24.1%)
	Fair representation for different communities of interest (e.g. town and rural areas)	117 (22.2%)
	Simplifying local governance consolidating decision making, planning and removing confusion across the wider region	116 (22.1%)
	Supporting a new planning system	20 (3.8%)
	Total	526

Are there any other priorities that are important to you?

In total, 414 pieces of feedback were received in relation to the topic of priorities. From these 15 sub-topics emerged for which a high-level overview is provided below:

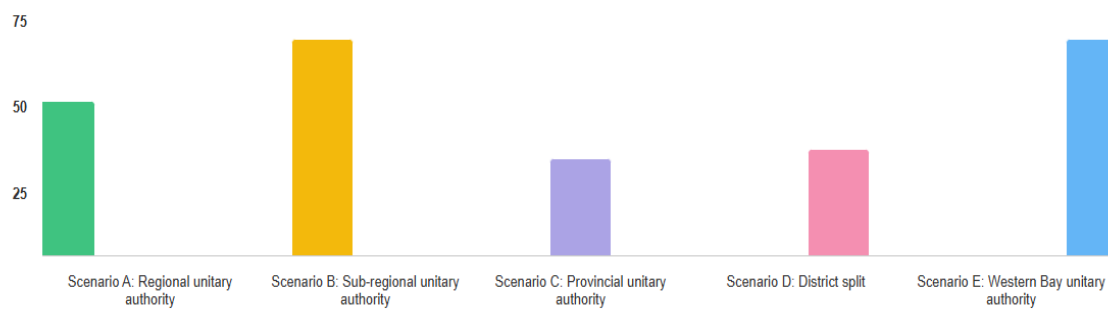
Priorities

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Affordability	103 comments related to affordability, primarily concerns with the debt of other councils.
	Local Voice	80 comments related to local voice, with clear support for retaining local representation in any new model.
	Fair representation	50 comments related to fair representation, citing concerns with larger areas having more representation based on population.
	Tangata Whenua	50 comments related to Tangata Whenua. Some comments

		supported consultation with Tangata Whenua in this process while some submitters preferring only what is required through legislation.
	Efficiencies	44 comments related to efficiencies, with some submitters believing economies of scale and staffing efficiencies will emerge as an output of this process.
	Environmental management	27 comments generally supported environmental management being retained as a priority.
	Simplified governance	18 comments related to simplified governance and the removal of unnecessary bureaucracy being a priority for this process.
	Rural urban	14 comment cited support for rural and urban areas requiring different focus.
	Infrastructure	8 comments related to infrastructure and ensuing this remains a priority in any new model.
	Consultation/engagement	7 comments related to consultation and engagement on this process.
	Support for the new planning system	4 comments related to the new planning system and general support for alignment with this.
	Organisational culture	3 comments related to organisational culture and ensuring this is retained.
	Education and healthcare	2 comments related to education and healthcare.

	Existing work programmes/ community projects	One comment supported existing work programmes continuing.
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Do you have a preferred scenario?



Do you have a preferred scenario?	Scenario A: Regional unitary authority	45 (19.6%)
	Scenario B: Sub-regional unitary authority	63 (27.4%)
	Scenario C: Provincial unitary authority	28 (12.2%)
	Scenario D: District split	31 (13.5%)
	Scenario E: Western Bay unitary authority	63 (27.4%)
	Total	230

Do you want to give us any feedback on any of these scenarios or are there any other scenarios that you would prefer?

In total, 161 pieces of feedback were received in relation to the topic of scenarios. From these, 8 sub-topics emerged for which a high-level overview is provided below:

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Scenarios	Scenario A (Regional unitary authority)	17 comments related to Scenario A. Most comments cited general support for this option, with some concern that it does not reflect the growth pattern of the various sub-regions.
	Scenario B (Sub-regional unitary authority)	54 comments related to Scenario B. 32 comments expressly did not support merging with Tauranga City Council, with other comments supporting the new model.
	Scenario C (Provincial unitary authority)	6 comments related to scenario C. Comments in support liked the idea of similar rural districts councils aligning.
	Scenario D District split	14 comments related to support for Scenario D.
	Scenario E (Western Bay unitary authority)	6 comments related to scenario E with a mix of views in support and not in support of this option.
	Status quo	7 comments supported keeping the status quo.
	Other	22 comments supported an alternative scenario. This includes several submissions to the Local Government Commission, and the Proposal for a Coromandel Hauraki Coastal Unitary Authority with

		decentralised local delivery authorities.
	Inter-regional	35 comments related to various inter-regional/ district arrangements with the majority citing alignment with Waikato.

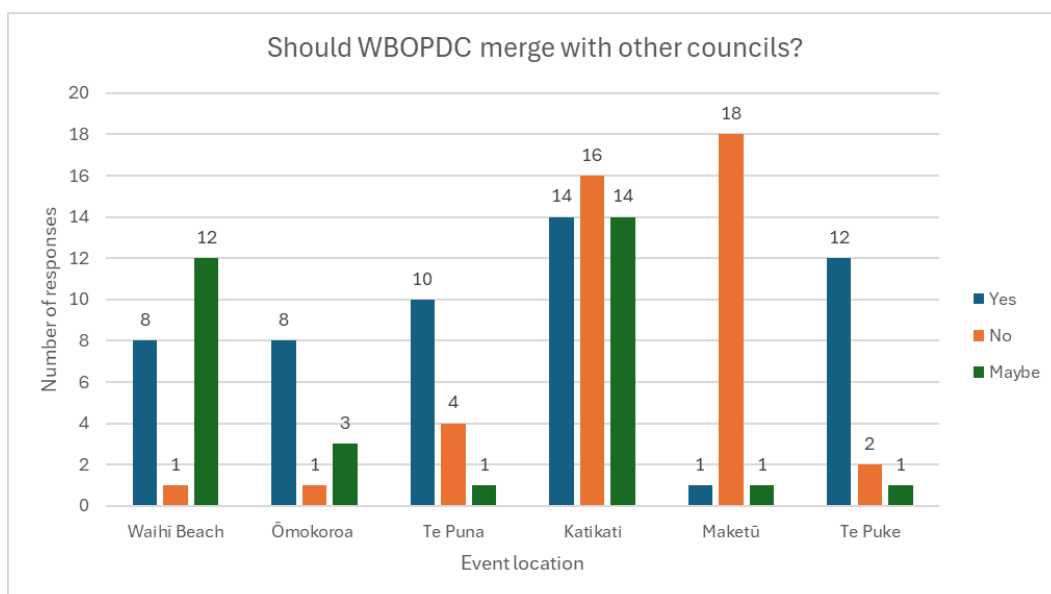
Would you like to add any other comments?

In total, 88 pieces of feedback were received in relation to other comments. From these, 6 sub-topics emerged for which a high-level overview is provided below:

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
General comment	More information and time needed	20 comments related to needing more information and/or time for this topic.
	Central government	12 comments related to concern with the central government having the final decision.
	Bay of Plenty Regional Council	12 comments reference the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, largely supporting amalgamation while emphasising retention of regional functions, public transport alignment with local planning, and protection of key shared assets.
	Auckland Council	17 comments related to Auckland Council amalgamation, suggesting looking for lessons from this process.
	Staff impact	4 comments related to the staff impact during this process.
	Other	23 comments were of a general nature.

Community engagement events feedback summary

This section of the report analyses the feedback received across the six community events.



Waihi Beach event feedback

28 people attended this event, with 120 pieces of feedback received. At the Waihi Beach event, 8 attendees supported a merger, 1 opposed it and 12 were unsure.

The key themes from this feedback are set out below:

A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Local voice	There were 36 comments relating to local voice citing the importance of keep representation local.

	Affordability	There were 17 comments relating to affordability, mainly citing concerns with taking on debt from other councils.
	Efficiencies	There were 14 comments relating to efficiencies citing potential savings from economies of scale.
	Fair representation	There were 7 comments relating to fair representation supporting equitable representation across the region.
Preferred scenarios	Scenarios A – E	There was a mix of support for various scenarios.
Inter-regional	Waikato	There were 12 comments relating to a potential merge with Waikato councils, including Hauraki and TCDC.
Amalgamation	Agree	There was one comment stating that there is an understanding that something has to change.
General comments	Regional Council	There were five comments relating to the Regional Council and their functions and representatives.
	Other	There were several general statements not related to priorities or scenarios
	Central government	There were several comments made relating to central government, including in relation to the timeframes and Head Start process.

Katikati event feedback

50 people attended this event, with 189 pieces of feedback received. At the Katikati event, 14 attendees supported a merger, 16 opposed it, and 14 were unsure. A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topics	Analysis
Priorities	Affordability	46 comments related to affordability including rate and concerns with taking on the debt of other councils.
	Local voice	30 comments related to local voice with the majority supporting retaining of community boards and enhancing their role/delegations.
	Consultation/engagement	2 comments related to engagement with the community and other councils.
	Healthcare/education	One comment cited the need to access Tauranga for Hospital services
	Efficiencies	5 comments focused on improving efficiency by reducing duplication.
	Fair representation	5 comments related to fair representation citing some concern with representation based on population.
	Infrastructure	7 comments related to the funding of infrastructure projects in the region.

	Rural urban	3 comments related to rural and urban interests being different.
	Organisational culture	3 comments cited concern with the reputation of TCC.
	Tangata Whenua	3 comments related to Tangata Whenua and their interests being considered.
Amalgamation	Disagree	There were several comments supporting pushing back on government's proposal.
Inter regional	Waikato	16 comments related to potential alignment with Councils in the Waikato.
Preferred scenarios	Scenarios A - E	There was a mix of support for various scenarios.
General comment	More time and information needed	Several comments cited the need for more information and time.
	Central Government	Several comments related to Central Government direction. Inclusion of the DOC functions in this process was also suggested.
	Regional Council	There were 3 comments relating to the Regional Council and their functions and representatives.
	Staff impact	One comment referenced personnel involved in this process.

Ōmokoroa event feedback

20 people attended this event, with 167 pieces of feedback received. At the Ōmokoroa event, 8 attendees supported a merger, 1 opposed it, and 3 were unsure.

A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Local voice	44 comments related to local voice, supporting local representation through local boards and/or community boards.
	Affordability	22 comments related to affordability, primarily concerned with taking on the debt of other councils.
	Support for new planning system	8 comments related to the planning system and consent processes.
	Tangata Whenua	One comment referred to iwi groups in a particular scenario.
	Fair representation	12 comments cited fair representation as a priority.
	Infrastructure	2 comments cited infrastructure as a priority.
	Existing work programme/community projects	Several comments asked how existing volunteer organisations would continue to be supported e.g. Te Puna Quarry Park
	Efficiencies	6 comments related to efficiencies being an outcome of the process.

Inter-regional	Waikato	3 comments suggested alignment with Waikato councils.
Preferred scenarios	Scenarios A - E	There was a mix of support for various scenarios. Scenario 4 (District split) wasn't supported by several attendees. There was general support for greater efficiencies to be achieved through amalgamation.
General comment	Auckland Council	Several comments referenced Auckland Council and learning from the experience of that amalgamation.
	Central Government	Several comments related to Central Government direction.
	Regional Council	There were three comments relating to the Regional Council and their functions and representatives.

Te Puna event feedback

25 people attended this event and in total, 160 pieces of feedback were received. At the Te Puna event, 10 attendees supported a merger, 4 opposed it, and 1 was unsure.

A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Affordability	25 comments related to affordability including concerns around debt from other councils.
	Local voice	23 comments related to local voice and the protection of this in any new organisation.
	Tangata Whenua	6 comments related to Tangata Whenua supporting Iwi/Hapū having a say in this process.
	Support for new planning system	Four comments related to the planning system, supporting the preservation of natural environment and heritage and rural zoning.
Inter-regional	Waikato Whakatane	There are several comments suggesting alignment or misalignment with neighbouring districts/regions.
Amalgamation	Agree	There are several comments agreeing with reorganisation, with one suggesting it needs to be done before central government do it to us.
Preferred scenarios	Scenarios A – E	There was a mix of support for various scenarios with some attendees preferring the status quo, not supporting a merge with TCC

Te Puke event feedback

28 people attended this event, with 152 pieces of feedback being received. At the Te Puke event, 12 attendees supported a merger, 2 opposed it, and 1 was unsure.

A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Affordability	31 comments related to affordability, citing other council debts as an issue.
	Local voice	18 comments related to local voice, citing the importance of retaining this.
	Fair representation	22 comments related to fair representation and concerns smaller communities won't have effective representation against larger populations.
	Environmental management	5 comments related to environmental management, citing that catchment management should be the key driver.
	Tangata Whenua	6 comments related to Tangata Whenua including representation in the new model.
	Efficiencies	Several comments supported greater efficiencies achieved through this process.

	Simplified governance	3 comments related to simplified governance and streamlining.
	Rural urban	3 comments related to rural and urban interests being different.
Preferred scenarios	Scenarios A – E	There was a mix of support for various scenarios.
Inter regional/Other Districts	Whakatane Waikato Rotorua	7 comments suggested alignment with areas outside of our district including Rotorua and Whakatane.
Amalgamation	Agree Disagree Do it before government do it to us	9 comments provided mixed views of amalgamation, with one citing the risk that it will be done to us if action is not taken.
General comment	Auckland Council	One comment references Auckland amalgamation.
	More information/time needed	10 comments cited that further information or time is required.
	Staff impact	Four comments cited staff remuneration.
	Central Government	Several comments related to Central Government direction.
	Regional Council	There were several comments relating to the Regional Council and their functions and representatives.

Maketu event feedback

42 people attended this event, with 111 pieces of feedback being received. At the Maketu event, 1 attendee supported a merger, 18 opposed it, and 1 was unsure.

A high-level analysis of the feedback received has been set out below categorised by topic and sub-topics.

Topic	Sub-topic	Analysis
Priorities	Local voice	15 comments related to local voice, supporting retaining of local decision making.
	Fair representation	5 comments related to fair representation, citing concerns with how smaller communities will be effectively represented against larger urban communities.
	Affordability	9 comments related to affordability citing concerns with taking on the debt of other councils.
	Simplified governance	One comment supported the reduction of duplication
	Tangata Whenua	10 comments related to Tangata Whenua, citing support for an Iwi voice in this process

	Rural urban	6 comments related to rural and urban interests being different.
	Existing work programmes/community projects	2 comments related to existing work such as the regional deal, spatial planning and the Water CCO and these being a factor.
	Environmental management	3 comments supported environmental management being important.
Inter-regional	Rotorua Whakatane	7 comments cited support for alignment with Rotorua and/or Whakatane to the East.
Scenario 2 (sub-regional UA)	Do not support merging with Tauranga City Council	12 comments cited concerns with merging with Tauranga City Council.
Amalgamation	Agree	One comment supported reorganisation, with Māori having equal say.
General comment	Auckland Council	Several comments referenced Auckland Council and learning from the experience of that amalgamation.
	More information/time needed	Several comments cited that there was not enough

		information or time provided.
	Staff impact	2 comments focused on reducing duplication, seeking clarity on staffing, governance, and cross-council alignment.
	Central Government	2 comments raised concerns about how a change in government could impact or reverse reorganisation plans.
	Regional Council	There were several comments relating to the Regional Council and their functions and representatives.

SUBMISSION TO TAURANGA CITY COUNCIL AND WESTERN BAY OF PLENTY DISTRICT COUNCIL ON THE SIMPLIFYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROCESS

Executive Summary

This submission reflects a cross-section of business perspectives from Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty on the outcomes Priority One members would want from the Simplifying Local Government process.

The views are not uniform on every detail of reform or the final preferred structure. However, there is strong alignment on the problems any reform must seek to solve and the principles that should guide future decision-making.

The consistent message from members is that local government reform should not be treated as an institutional exercise or simply a process of redrawing boundaries.

Instead, it must focus on creating a system that is simpler, faster, more accountable and better able to plan, fund and deliver the infrastructure and services required to support long-term growth.

Members consistently identified fragmented decision-making, duplication across council functions, inconsistent planning and consenting processes, rising costs, unclear accountability and slow infrastructure delivery as barriers to business confidence, investment and productivity. As one member put it:

“The Western Bay of Plenty does not have a growth problem – it has a governance and delivery problem. Reform must create a single, accountable system capable of planning and delivering at pace.”

Priority One members encourage both councils to approach the Head Start process constructively and with ambition.

The test should not be which existing institution is protected. The test should be what structure best enables housing, infrastructure, jobs, productivity, environmental stewardship, strong local voice and long-term regional resilience.

Done well, reform can give our region the scale, clarity and confidence required to be what it should be: New Zealand’s most productive, investable and well-governed region.

That should be the ambition guiding this process.

Submission

From member feedback, four problems stand out that any proposed programme of change should seek to solve. What came through most clearly is that members want reform to focus first on the practical barriers businesses face every day.

First, the current system is too fragmented for the scale of the region's growth challenges. Growth, transport, housing, water, industrial land, energy, environmental management and economic development do not stop at council boundaries. Yet businesses are often required to work through different planning rules, consenting processes, engineering standards, fees, priorities and timeframes depending on where they operate. That creates cost, delay and uncertainty. It also makes it harder for the region to present a clear, coordinated proposition to central government and private investors: that this is a region they should view with confidence and back with belief and capital.

Second, infrastructure delivery has not kept pace with growth. Members pointed to congestion, uncertainty around infrastructure sequencing, limited industrial land supply, consenting delays, energy constraints and a lack of clarity around when key enabling infrastructure will be delivered. The Western Bay has strong fundamentals: population growth, export strength, port access, horticulture, logistics, professional services and an evolving city centre. But those strengths are being constrained by delivery systems that are too slow and too complex. The recently signed Regional Deal is regarded as a positive step forward, bringing greater certainty to several key infrastructure projects and demonstrating that local government can work together, and with foresight, to achieve positive outcomes.

Third, there is too much duplication and not enough clear accountability. Members identified overlapping council functions, repeated processes, multiple approval pathways and duplicated capability across city, district and regional structures. Businesses do not always know who is responsible for decisions, who is accountable for delays, or how priorities are being traded off. This weakens confidence and affects investment, development feasibility, hiring decisions and business expansion.

Fourth, value for money must improve. This does not mean simply cutting cost. Businesses understand that a growing region must invest. Many members are prepared to support investment where it is disciplined, transparent and clearly linked to outcomes. What they are less willing to accept is rising rates, development contributions and compliance costs without a corresponding improvement in infrastructure delivery, service quality, speed, certainty and economic impact.

Structural options

One member's comment was a pithy summary of business sentiment on the approach to thinking about future local government structure:

"Look outward to the opportunity, not inward to protect current thinking and institutions."

That sentiment reflects the spirit in which Priority One believes this process should be approached. The Head Start process should start from first principles: what governance model will best enable the Western Bay and wider Bay of Plenty to plan, fund and deliver for the next 20 to 30 years?

Member feedback shows support for simplification, consolidation and better alignment. Some members favour a Tauranga and Western Bay sub-regional unitary authority because it would align the fastest-growing urban and rural parts of the sub-region with infrastructure, housing, transport and land-use decisions.

Others favour a wider Bay of Plenty unitary authority because the regional economy operates well beyond Tauranga and Western Bay boundaries, particularly through the port, horticulture, forestry, freight, logistics, tourism, geothermal opportunities, energy and the wider primary sector.

The common thread across all comments was that the status quo is not fit for the future, and that any reform must create a system that is simpler, faster, more accountable and more capable of delivering growth-enabling infrastructure.

All options should be tested against a practical business question: will this make the region more investable, more productive and better able to deliver?

Some members noted that there is an important balance to be struck between the benefits of scale and the importance of representation.

If a sub-regional model is pursued, it must have enough scale, financial strength, capability and regional alignment to avoid simply recreating fragmentation at a new boundary. If a wider Bay of Plenty model is pursued, it must protect local responsiveness and avoid becoming too distant from the communities and businesses it serves.

Design principles

The final structure matters, but the design principles that inform that structure matter more. Based on the summarised member views, Priority One believes any Head Start proposal should be built around the following principles:

1. Integrated growth and infrastructure planning

Land use, transport, water, housing, industrial land, energy, environmental

management and economic development should be planned together, with clear sequencing and delivery accountability, and with business recognised as having relevant expertise to contribute constructively to better outcomes if given the chance to participate in planning forums.

2. Faster and more predictable consenting

Businesses need consistent rules, transparent timeframes, fewer duplicated approval pathways and a stronger customer focus.

3. Clear accountability for outcomes

Responsibility for infrastructure delivery, planning decisions and regional growth outcomes must be visible, measurable and understood.

4. Protection of local and iwi voice

Reform must achieve scale without losing connection. Iwi and urban, rural and coastal communities must have fair representation in any new model. Without that, the ability to move forward will be constrained by a weak mandate.

5. Financial transparency and discipline

Ratepayers and businesses need to understand where money is spent, what outcomes are delivered, and how debt, assets and liabilities will be managed fairly.

6. A stronger partnership with central government

The Western Bay Regional Deal shows the value of a coordinated regional approach with the Government. Future local government structures should strengthen the region's ability to speak clearly and credibly to Wellington.

7. A focus on outcomes, not institutional protection

The test should be what structure best enables housing, infrastructure, jobs, productivity, environmental stewardship and long-term resilience.

Conclusion

The Western Bay does not lack opportunity. It has growth, capital, talent, export strength, growing iwi enterprise and economic strength, and national significance.

What the region needs is a governance and delivery system that amplifies that opportunity, gives businesses confidence to invest, and gives communities confidence that growth can be well planned and well delivered.

Done well, reform can give our region the scale, clarity and confidence required to be what it should be: New Zealand's most productive, investable and well-governed region.

That should be the ambition guiding this process.



29 July 2026

Submission to Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council and Bay of Plenty Regional Council

Local Government Reform / Head Start Process

Submission position: UTF supports full amalgamation of Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council into a single Western Bay of Plenty unitary authority, with relevant regional functions integrated for the sub-region. UTF also submits that building consenting should sit within that same authority, rather than being pulled into a wider, separately drawn BCA grouping extending beyond the Western Bay sub-region.

1. Executive Summary

Urban Task Force for Tauranga (UTF) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into local government reform and the Head Start process. UTF represents a cross-section of property, development, construction, planning, professional services and business interests across Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty.

UTF's submission is informed by member survey feedback and by the practical experience of members who work daily across council boundaries, planning rules, infrastructure requirements and consenting pathways.

- **The current system is too fragmented:** growth, infrastructure, housing, transport, water, industrial land and environmental management do not stop at council boundaries, but governance and delivery still do.
- **Members strongly support reform:** 92% of members support amalgamation and 84% favour full amalgamation into one council.
- **The purpose of reform should be delivery:** the test is not which existing institution is protected; the test is what structure best enables housing, infrastructure, jobs, productivity, environmental stewardship, local voice and long-term regional resilience.
- **UTF supports a single unitary authority:** a single authority is the clearest pathway to integrated planning, reduced duplication, better infrastructure sequencing and stronger accountability.
- **Risks must be managed, not ignored:** transition costs, urban/rural balance and bureaucracy risk are real; they should be addressed through design, representation, implementation discipline and transparent reporting.
- **Local government reform and BCA reform should stay aligned but distinct:** UTF supports amalgamation into a single Western Bay unitary authority, but does not support shifting building consenting into a broader BCA grouping beyond the sub-region.

2. What problem reform must solve

UTF does not view local government reform as a boundary-drawing exercise. The issue is practical: the Western Bay needs a governance and delivery system capable of supporting growth at pace and with discipline.

Problem	Current impact	What reform should deliver
Fragmented decision-making	Businesses and developers face multiple rules, priorities, fees, timeframes and approval pathways.	One accountable system for land use, transport, water, growth and infrastructure sequencing.
Slow infrastructure delivery	Growth is constrained by uncertainty around when enabling infrastructure will be funded and delivered.	Clear infrastructure priorities, sequencing, funding responsibility and delivery accountability.
Duplication and inconsistent rules	Members identify multiple district plans, infrastructure codes and consenting processes as increasing cost and delay.	Consistent planning rules, single district planning framework and standardised development codes.
Unclear accountability	Businesses cannot always tell who owns the decision, who is responsible for delay, or how priorities are traded off.	Visible, measurable accountability for growth outcomes and service performance.
Value for money	Members accept investment is required, but not rising cost without faster delivery or better outcomes.	Financial transparency, disciplined spend and evidence of improved outcomes.

3. Member feedback

UTF surveyed members on local government amalgamation and reform. The results provide a clear mandate for UTF's position.

Survey finding	Result
Support for amalgamation	92% support or strongly support amalgamation.
Confidence in view	100% of respondents were either very confident or moderately confident in their view.
Preferred model	84% favour full amalgamation into one council.
Regional Council role	65% favour BOPRC functions being integrated into a single governance structure.
Urgency	59% say reform is an immediate priority within 0–3 years.
Infrastructure planning and delivery	88% identify this as an area where amalgamation could improve outcomes.
Transport, water and growth investment	90% identify this as an area where amalgamation could improve outcomes.
Risks can be managed	63% believe amalgamation risks can be effectively managed.

4. UTF's preferred structural option

UTF supports full amalgamation into a single Western Bay of Plenty unitary authority. This should combine the relevant local and regional government functions currently undertaken by Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council and Bay of Plenty Regional Council for the sub-region.

The reason is straightforward: the Western Bay already operates as an integrated economic and growth system. The region's governance model should reflect that reality.

UTF's position is that Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council should be fully amalgamated into a single unitary authority, with the relevant Bay of Plenty Regional Council functions integrated for the Western Bay sub-region. However, UTF distinguishes this local government reform from the separate Building Consent Authority reform work stream. Building consenting should sit within the same Western Bay unitary authority, not be transferred into a wider BCA grouping drawn beyond the sub-region.

5. Design principles for reform

- **Integrated growth and infrastructure planning:** Land use, transport, water, housing, industrial land, energy, environmental management and economic development should be planned together.
- **Faster and more predictable consenting:** Businesses need consistent rules, transparent timeframes, fewer duplicated approval pathways and a stronger customer focus.
- **Building consenting retained within the sub-region:** BCA reform should not separate the building consenting function from the proposed Western Bay unitary authority or move it into a larger grouping that extends beyond the local growth area it serves.
- **Clear accountability:** Responsibility for decisions, delivery and trade-offs must be visible, measurable and understood.
- **Protection of local and iwi voice:** Reform must achieve scale without losing connection to urban, rural, coastal and iwi communities.
- **Financial transparency and discipline:** Ratepayers and businesses need clarity on costs, savings, debt, assets, liabilities and service outcomes.
- **Central government partnership:** The structure should strengthen the region's ability to speak clearly and credibly to Wellington.
- **Outcome focus:** The test must be delivery and regional performance, not institutional preservation.

6. Transition risks and required safeguards

UTF's support for amalgamation is not a blank cheque. Members identified real risks and expect councils to manage them properly.

Risk	Required safeguard
Transition cost and disruption	Publish a transition plan with cost estimates, milestones, service-continuity commitments and independent reporting.

Urban/rural imbalance	Design representation to protect rural, urban, coastal and iwi voices; consider wards, local boards or strong community committees.
Larger bureaucracy	Set service-level targets and efficiency metrics; measure consenting speed, infrastructure delivery milestones and customer experience.
Loss of local responsiveness	Keep local service channels and community-facing decision pathways; centralise strategy, not every interaction.
Unproven savings	Avoid relying on promised rates savings. Focus on reduced duplication, better delivery, investment confidence and transparent value for money.

7. If full amalgamation does not proceed

If the councils do not progress full amalgamation, UTF submits that a weaker “business as usual with better coordination” model will not be enough. Members identified the following as the next-best reform package:

- A shared infrastructure delivery agency across the sub-region.
- A single district plan across the sub-region.
- Joint consenting or one-stop-shop approvals across the sub-region, with building consenting retained within the Western Bay governance structure rather than shifted to a wider BCA grouping.
- Standardised infrastructure development codes.
- A stronger SmartGrowth governance and delivery mandate.

8. Requested council response

UTF asks the councils to approach the Head Start process constructively and with ambition. The assessment should start from first principles: what structure best enables the Western Bay to plan, fund and deliver for the next 20 to 30 years?

- Acknowledge that the status quo is not fit for the future growth task.
- Progress a high-level Head Start proposal for a single unitary authority for the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region.
- Treat local government reform and Building Consent Authority reform as separate but related work streams, ensuring building consenting remains within the proposed Western Bay unitary authority and is not absorbed into a wider BCA grouping beyond the sub-region.
- Test options against feasibility, infrastructure delivery, housing supply, productivity, accountability, environmental stewardship and local voice.
- Engage directly with business, property, development, iwi and community stakeholders during option design.
- Publish a clear pathway for transition, representation, financial treatment and delivery accountability.

9. Conclusion

The Western Bay does not lack opportunity. It has growth, capital, talent, productive industry, a nationally significant port, strong iwi enterprise and increasing private-sector confidence. What it lacks is a governance and delivery system that consistently matches the scale and pace of the region's opportunity.

Done well, reform can give the region the scale, clarity and confidence required to become one of New Zealand's most productive, investable and well-governed sub-regions.

Ngā mihi,



Scott Adams
Chairman

8 July 2026

Mayor James Denyer
Western Bay of Plenty District Council



Tēnā koe Mayor Denyer

Local Government Reform and the Kaituna River Framework

I write on behalf of Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority following our recent meeting, where members discussed local government reform and the need to ensure the Kaituna River Framework is properly recognised and upheld through any reform or reorganisation process.

Our purpose in writing is simple. We want to ensure that any local government reform or reorganisation proposal clearly recognises who Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority is, why the Kaituna River Framework matters, and what is required to preserve its intent, integrity and effect.

As you will be aware, Western Bay of Plenty District Council is a member organisation of Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority. Through that role, the Council shares responsibility with iwi and other council members to uphold the Kaituna River Framework.

I am writing to formally record the position agreed by Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority and to insist that this position is carried into any local government reform or reorganisation discussions involving your Council.

KAITUNA RIVER FRAMEWORK

The Kaituna River Framework was negotiated and legislated as part of the Tapuika Claims Settlement Act 2014, forming part of their Treaty settlement redress. It is made up of two connected parts: Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority and the Kaituna River Document, Kaituna, he taonga tuku iho – a treasure handed down. These parts were intended to work together. Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority is the collective statutory body established for the river. The Kaituna River Document sets the vision, objectives and desired outcomes for the Kaituna River and its tributaries.

For this reason, the Kaituna River Framework should not be reduced to isolated references to Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority or the Kaituna River Document. It is Treaty settlement redress and must be upheld as such.

POSITION AGREED BY TE MARU O KAITUNA RIVER AUTHORITY

Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority agreed in principle that any local government reform or reorganisation must:

- preserve the intent, integrity and effect of the Kaituna River Framework;
- recognise the statutory role of Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority and the status of the Kaituna River Document; and
- actively involve Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority members.

Local government reform may change council structures, functions and decision-making arrangements. However, it must not weaken the commitments already made to the Kaituna River, to Tapuika, to river iwi and hapū, or to the communities that rely on the awa.

OUR EXPECTATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority expects that any reform or reorganisation proposal involving your Council will clearly show how the Kaituna River Framework will continue to operate in practice.

This means that your Council should ensure:

- Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority is recognised as a statutory co-governance body, not a general stakeholder;
- the statutory role of Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority is preserved;
- the Kaituna River Document remains visible and influential in future planning, investment and decision-making;
- functions affecting the Kaituna River remain connected to the Kaituna River Document, including freshwater, stormwater, wastewater, biosecurity, biodiversity, monitoring, compliance, flood risk, catchment management, planning and long-term investment; and
- Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority members are actively involved in reform or reorganisation proposals.

At a minimum, Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority seeks:

1. early engagement with Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority members on any Head Start Pathway proposals involving your Council approved by Cabinet;
2. direct input into the detailed design phase between September 2026 and May 2027 of any Head Start Pathway proposals involving your Council;
3. clear identification of any implications for Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority and the Kaituna River Document; and
4. written confirmation of how the intent, integrity and effect of the Kaituna River Framework will be preserved in any local government reform.

Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority welcomes the opportunity to meet with you and relevant council staff to discuss how the Kaituna River Framework can be upheld through local government reform and reorganisation processes.

Nāku noa, nā



Jo'el Komene
Chair
Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority

Cc: Matt Potton, Chief Executive, Western Bay of Plenty District Council

HEAD START PATHWAY

Simplifying Local Government Submission

to

Tauranga City Council

and

Western Bay of Plenty District Council

on behalf of

Ngāti Pūkenga Iwi ki Tauranga Trust

21 July 2026

Introduction

1. This submission is made on behalf of Ngāti Pūkenga Iwi ki Tauranga Trust (the Trust, or the Rūnanga).
2. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are one of the three iwi of Tauranga Moana, alongside Ngāti Ranginui and Ngāi Te Rangi. We are also one of the four kāinga of Ngāti Pūkenga, and we hold strong and enduring connections to Manaia and the wider Coromandel Peninsula as a fellow Ngāti Pūkenga kāinga. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga is established as mana whenua within Tauranga Moana, with hapū, a marae and whenua within the rohe. That connection — to our fellow kāinga at Manaia, and to our turangawaewae here in Tauranga Moana — is a defining feature of our identity, and it informs the position we set out below.
3. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga seek to be meaningfully engaged on the Head Start reforms currently being considered by Tauranga City Council (TCC) and Western Bay of Plenty District Council (WBOPDC). We understand that both Councils will be making decisions in the week commencing 20 July 2026 on their preferred approach to amalgamation.
4. The Board of the Rūnanga has met and resolved our position on these reforms. We set that position out below for your consideration prior to your determinations being made.

Summary of Position

5. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga:
 - (a) support a sub-regional approach to amalgamation encompassing TCC and WBOPDC;
 - (b) oppose the inclusion of Thames-Coromandel District Council in any Tauranga Moana sub-regional amalgamation, notwithstanding Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga's enduring whakapapa connections to the Coromandel Peninsula — connections we consider are properly upheld through iwi-specific and cross-boundary relationship arrangements, rather than through shared council structures poorly suited to either territory;
 - (c) oppose a regional unitary authority spanning the wider Bay of Plenty, which we consider unnecessarily complex and unlikely to deliver for communities or for te taiao;
 - (d) consider that the differing financial positions of TCC and WBOPDC, including the debt levels of TCC, must be addressed transparently in the design of any amalgamation, and that rating and debt settings must neither fall inequitably on Māori land nor be used to defer settlement or partnership commitments;
 - (e) require that Māori representation through Māori councillors, as currently provided across both Councils, transfers to any new council as a floor and not a ceiling, and that Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga hold seats on any transition body established to progress amalgamation;
 - (f) expect that ownership and control of the sub-region's strategic investment assets, including Quayside Holdings Limited and its majority shareholding in Port of Tauranga Limited, remain held locally and are not transferred to or assumed by central government; and

- (g) require that a principled, constitutionally grounded approach is taken to any amalgamation, under which: Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are engaged as a Te Tiriti partner in all current and future decisions, including through representation at the decision-making table; Te Tiriti o Waitangi is embedded in the reforms; Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga's rangatiratanga over our own affairs, assets and taonga is respected and given practical effect; Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are represented in any future council arrangements in a mana ōrite configuration; te taiao is central to decision making; and the design of any new governance architecture reflects the distinct and overlapping spheres of Māori and Crown authority, so that this reorganisation is treated as the constitutional matter it is, and not merely an exercise in administrative efficiency.

Engagement with Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga

6. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga have been informed of the Head Start reforms by TCC. We have had no engagement with WBOPDC to date, despite decisions on the Councils' preferred amalgamation options being taken this week. This is a significant shortcoming that must be remedied in the next phase of the reform process.

7. As a Te Tiriti partner within the Tauranga Moana rohe, Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect our views to form part of the Councils' decision-making processes and to be given appropriate weight.

8. Local government touches every part of the daily lives of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga whānau, hapū and marae. The configuration of any future amalgamated council will directly affect the Rūnanga's own functions as Mandated Iwi Organisation under the Māori Fisheries Act 2004 and Iwi Aquaculture Organisation under the Māori Commercial Aquaculture Claims Settlement Act 2004, and the arrangements through which Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga participates as mana whenua in Tauranga Moana governance and settlement-related processes. The amalgamation will substantively affect the interests of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga. The Crown's obligations under Te Tiriti do not diminish because local government structures change. If anything, they are heightened where institutional reform has the potential to alter existing relationships, representation and settlement arrangements. Early engagement with mana whenua is therefore not simply good practice but an essential component of durable local governance design.

9. Accordingly, Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect to be engaged in all future decisions on these reforms, and in particular in the establishment of any formal or informal forums, working groups or committees convened to consider future council amalgamation. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect representation within those bodies and not consultation after the fact.

Sub-Regional Unitary Authority

10. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are of the express view that there is a natural alignment between TCC and WBOPDC.

11. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, together with our neighbouring iwi Ngāti Ranginui and Ngāi Te Rangi, are the three iwi of Tauranga Moana. The existing footprint of TCC and WBOPDC largely encompasses the rohe of all three Tauranga Moana iwi, with the exception of Tapuika, Waitaha and Ngāti Whakaue ki Maketū in the eastern coastal part of the WBOPDC boundaries.

12. The alignment between the two councils exists in practical, everyday ways. Tauranga and the Western Bay already function as a single economic and social region. Residents commute daily across the current boundary, housing growth spans both jurisdictions, businesses recruit across the sub-region, and freight, port and transport networks are integrated.

13. The recent Regional Growth Deal and the Local Water Done Well reforms are further examples of shared economic and infrastructure design across the sub-region, demonstrating that joint arrangements between these councils are already established and workable.

14. By contrast, Thames-Coromandel District Council sits outside the economic, social and governance geography that TCC and WBOPDC share. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga's own history illustrates why this matters: our whakapapa connections to Manaia and the Coromandel Peninsula are real and enduring, but they are iwi-specific relationships properly managed through direct engagement between Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, and Ngāti Pūkenga ki Manaia — not through folding an entire district with a distinct economic and social geography into the Tauranga Moana sub-region. Including Thames-Coromandel District Council would extend the amalgamated council beyond Tauranga Moana, dilute the coherence of the sub-region, and complicate iwi and hapū relationships without corresponding benefit.

15. The preference of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga is therefore that TCC and WBOPDC are amalgamated as a sub-regional unitary authority, and that Thames-Coromandel District Council is not included.

Regional Unitary Authority

16. A regional unitary authority would require the amalgamation of six councils across a territory spanning some 12,000 square kilometres, from Waihi Beach in the west to Whangaparāoa in the east, and inland to include Rotorua, the Kaingaroa Plateau and Murupara. The population base would be approximately 334,000, of whom 220,000 reside within the current TCC and WBOPDC areas.

17. A regional authority would also bring together some 36 iwi and approximately 260 hapū within a single council structure. This would create one of the most complex local government and Māori partnership environments in New Zealand, with a real risk that the depth of relationship required with each iwi and hapū — including with a comparatively smaller iwi such as Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga — is lost in scale.

18. While Tauranga Moana would retain a demographic stronghold within a regional unitary authority, it is unclear how the broader regional interests would be fairly reflected given the diversity of locations, populations and iwi groupings across such a territory.

19. On a catchment, geographic, population and iwi basis, Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga consider that a regional unitary authority would be unnecessarily complex and would fail to deliver the necessary outcomes for the communities it is intended to serve, or for te taiao.

Functions of a Unitary Authority

20. A sub-regional unitary authority would assume, within its boundaries, the functions currently exercised by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, including resource management planning,

catchment and harbour management, biosecurity, public transport and civil defence. The reorganisation is therefore not simply a merger of two territorial authorities; it is a redesign of the full local government architecture of Tauranga Moana. The success of any amalgamation will ultimately depend not just on organisational efficiency but also on public legitimacy. Governance arrangements that recognise Treaty relationships from the outset will provide greater certainty for infrastructure planning, resource management, investment, and long-term community confidence.

21. A number of settlement and co-governance arrangements currently sit with, or operate through, the Regional Council, including arrangements in respect of Tauranga Moana and its catchments. The reorganisation must expressly identify every such arrangement and provide for its transfer to the new council at an equivalent or better standard. If the objective of the Head Start reforms is to simplify local government, then existing Treaty settlements, co-governance arrangements and statutory obligations should transfer automatically into the new authority. Requiring iwi to renegotiate rights and relationships already settled with existing councils would not simplify governance; it would recreate uncertainty and complexity precisely where the reforms seek to remove it – no one wants to open up years of litigation on these issues, so do it once and do it right.

22. The reorganisation must also address the future of the Regional Council's investment assets, most significantly Quayside Holdings Limited and its majority shareholding in Port of Tauranga Limited. These assets were built from the resources of this region, and their income supports the communities of this region. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect that ownership and control of Quayside Holdings and the port shareholding remain held locally, within governance arrangements accountable to the communities and mana whenua of the region, and are not transferred to, or assumed by, central government through the reorganisation process. The port sits within Te Awanui Tauranga Moana, and Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga have enduring interests in its operation and in the stewardship of the harbour it occupies. Any transition of these assets must be settled with mana whenua at the table.

Financial Considerations

23. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga recognise that the differing financial positions of the two Councils will feature prominently in the amalgamation decisions. We consider these matters should be confronted directly and transparently, rather than treated as an unspoken obstacle.

24. TCC is among the most indebted councils in New Zealand. Its Annual Plan for 2026/27 forecasts debt rising from approximately \$1.51 billion to \$1.74 billion over the year, supporting a capital programme of approximately \$432 million. The Local Government Funding Agency has lifted TCC's borrowing covenant from 2.8 times revenue to 3.5 times revenue, a bespoke limit held by few councils, and TCC currently carries the highest interest cost per household of any council in the country. WBOPDC, by contrast, carries materially lower debt and operates comfortably within the standard covenant.

25. This disparity must be understood in context. A substantial portion of TCC's borrowing funds growth infrastructure, in transport, water and community facilities, that serves the whole functional sub-region, including Western Bay residents who commute daily into the city and businesses that operate across the boundary. In the view of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, debt levels are not a reason to reject amalgamation but they must be managed openly. Established tools are available, including

the ring-fencing of legacy debt, differentiated or targeted rating, and staged rates harmonisation over a defined transition period, and the financial workstream of any amalgamation should address these matters early.

26. For Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, two requirements follow. First, the rating and debt settings of any amalgamated council must not fall inequitably on Māori freehold land or on whenua returned through Treaty settlement or redress processes. Second, financial pressure arising from consolidated debt must not be used to defer, dilute or underfund settlement commitments, partnership arrangements or investment in te taiao.

Māori Representation and Existing Arrangements

27. Both Councils have established Māori representation at the council table, with Māori councillors elected through the Te Awanui Māori ward at TCC and the Waka Kai Uru Māori ward at WBOPDC. Māori councillors must be a floor and not a ceiling in any new council. Amalgamation must build on this representation and cannot be permitted to reset or diminish it.

28. Māori representation must be secured in the reorganisation scheme itself, and not left to a subsequent representation review, where such arrangements are exposed to disestablishment and polling risk. The design of representation should be settled with iwi before the new council is established.

29. The Auckland amalgamation demonstrates that durable Māori representation is workable in an amalgamated environment. The Independent Māori Statutory Board, established through the Auckland Council legislation, appoints members with full voting rights to council committees and has operated continuously since amalgamation. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect the reorganisation to provide for representative structures of at least equivalent effect in Tauranga Moana, designed in partnership with Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, alongside the mana ōrite arrangements described in the principles below.

30. The sub-region already has working precedents of its own. SmartGrowth, the established partnership between TCC, WBOPDC, the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and iwi representatives, demonstrates that joint strategic arrangements including iwi representation operate successfully in Tauranga Moana, and its arrangements ensuring iwi are at the table should be carried into the new council's architecture.

31. The Councils are also jointly establishing a new water services organisation under the Local Water Done Well reforms, with foundation documents that include specific arrangements for tangata whenua engagement developed with iwi. When approving that partnership, both Councils resolved that iwi must be involved and that current engagement arrangements should be retained or enhanced. Amalgamation must carry those arrangements forward intact, and nothing in the reorganisation should reopen or diminish them. That standard, retained or enhanced, is the appropriate baseline for every arrangement addressed in this section.

Transition Arrangements

32. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga seats on any transition body, board or committee established to design and implement amalgamation, from the point of its establishment. The decisions taken during transition, on structure, representation, rating, debt and the treatment of existing arrangements, will shape the new council for decades. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga must be present when those decisions are made, not consulted after they are taken.

Principles to be Applied to Amalgamation

33. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga consider that the following principles must be applied and upheld in any future amalgamation. Each is expanded upon below.

(a) The Councils and Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are bound together by Te Tiriti o Waitangi

34. Local government exercises functions and powers that derive from the Crown, and the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi travel with those functions. Any reorganisation of councils in Tauranga Moana is therefore not a merely administrative exercise; it reshapes the institution through which the Crown's Te Tiriti relationship with Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga is given daily effect. Te Tiriti must be embedded expressly in the foundations of any new council, including in its establishment documentation, governance statements, standing orders and strategic planning frameworks, so that the partnership endures beyond individual personalities and electoral cycles. Good constitutional design is not an obstacle to efficient local government; it is the foundation of efficient local government because institutions that reflect the realities of place, people and Treaty relationships are more stable, more legitimate and more capable of making durable decisions.

(b) Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are represented as a partner in all current and future decisions on amalgamation

35. Partnership means presence at the table where decisions are made and not consultation once the substantive choices have been settled. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expects representation on any transition body, joint committee, working group or governance forum established to progress amalgamation, from the design phase through to implementation. Engagement to date has been uneven, and the absence of any engagement by WBOPDC illustrates the risk of proceeding without a structured partnership arrangement. That must be corrected before further decisions are taken.

(c) Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga's rangatiratanga, redress and existing arrangements are upheld to an equivalent or better standard

36. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga's standing as Mandated Iwi Organisation under the Māori Fisheries Act 2004 and Iwi Aquaculture Organisation under the Māori Commercial Aquaculture Claims Settlement Act 2004, together with the Rūnanga's other relationship and co-governance arrangements in respect of Tauranga Moana, were hard-won and are intended to endure in perpetuity. This standing sits alongside redress secured under the Ngāti Pūkenga Claims Settlement Act 2017, which includes a statutory acknowledgement over Tauranga Moana, an amendment to the Resource Management Act 1991 requiring that acknowledgement to be had regard to by consent authorities exercising functions within the harbour, and a right of first refusal over Crown-owned land within the Tauranga and Maketū Kāinga Area of Interest, lasting 174 years from settlement date. Amalgamation must not diminish, dilute or complicate any element of that standing or redress. Every relevant obligation currently held by, or operating through, TCC, WBOPDC or the Bay of Plenty

Regional Council — including the duty to have regard to the statutory acknowledgement in resource management decision-making, and any right of first refusal obligations affecting land within the sub-region — must transfer to the new council at an equivalent or better standard, and this must be secured expressly in the reorganisation documentation rather than left to be worked out after establishment.

(d) *Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga are represented in any future council arrangements in a mana ōrite configuration*

37. Mana ōrite means representation of equal standing. In the context of a future council, this requires governance arrangements in which mana whenua sit alongside elected members with genuine decision-making authority, rather than in advisory or observer roles. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga expect the design of the new council to include mana ōrite arrangements at the governance level, appropriate representation on committees exercising significant delegations, and resourcing that enables that representation to be effective. Existing precedents for shared decision making in Tauranga Moana demonstrate that such arrangements are practical and improve the quality of decisions.

(e) *Te taiao is a guiding cornerstone in amalgamation decisions*

38. The health of te taiao, including Tauranga Moana and the catchments, ranges and coastal environments within our rohe, is inseparable from the wellbeing of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga. Council boundaries, structures and priorities determine how catchments are managed, how growth is directed and how the harbour is protected. Amalgamation decisions should follow the logic of catchments and the natural environment rather than cut across them, and the new council's purpose and planning frameworks should place the restoration and protection of te taiao at the centre of its mandate, including in the face of a changing climate.

(f) *The future economic base reflects the interests of Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga as well as the broader sub-region*

39. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga, through the Trust and Fish Holdings, hold fisheries, aquaculture and other settlement assets and are a growing economic actor in the sub-region, with long-term intergenerational interests reflected in our Strategic Plan 2050. The economic strategy of any amalgamated council, including its approach to the port, growth planning, investment and procurement, must reflect those interests alongside the interests of the broader community. A council whose economic settings enable Māori economic development will strengthen the prosperity of the whole sub-region.

(g) *The reorganisation should be treated as a constitutional question, not merely an administrative one*

40. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga consider that the current framing of the Head Start reforms as primarily an exercise in organisational efficiency is incomplete. The territories being reorganised are not simply administrative districts; they are rohe shaped by generations of whakapapa, kaitiakitanga and Treaty relationships. Any reorganisation that overlooks those realities risks entrenching institutional arrangements that are less durable, less representative and less capable of giving practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. 41. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga consider that Matike Mai Aotearoa's three-sphere model of constitutional transformation — a rangatiratanga sphere in which

Māori govern Māori affairs, a kāwanatanga sphere in which the Crown governs its own, and a relational sphere of co-equal authority over matters of shared consequence such as harbours, rivers, coastal environments and biodiversity — offers the most rigorous framework available for thinking through the governance architecture of any new council. We do not consider the current reorganisation process capable of delivering a full iwi unitary authority; that would require dedicated legislation. But the model should inform how mana ōrite, co-governance and joint decision-making arrangements are designed within the new council, and Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga will engage with TCC, WBOPDC and neighbouring iwi on how it can practically be given effect.

42. Consistent with this principle, Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga also consider that rohe should be recognised as functionally coherent ecological units — catchments, ridgelines and harbours shaped by generations of occupation and kaitiakitanga — and that this knowledge should inform the design of any new council's internal structures, ward boundaries and planning frameworks, rather than being treated as incidental to them.

Conclusion

43. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga support the amalgamation of TCC and WBOPDC as a sub-regional unitary authority, without the inclusion of Thames-Coromandel District Council, and oppose a wider regional unitary authority. Any amalgamation must proceed on the principled basis set out in this submission.

44. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga request confirmation of how the Councils will engage with Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga following this week's decisions, and expect Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga seats on any transition body and representation in all subsequent forums and processes established to progress the Head Start reforms.

45. Local government structures endure for generations. Decisions taken through this Head Start process will shape not only how services are delivered but how Te Tiriti o Waitangi is given practical effect across Tauranga Moana for decades to come. Ngāti Pūkenga ki Tauranga therefore encourage the Councils to approach this reorganisation not just as an exercise in administrative efficiency, but as an opportunity to establish governance arrangements that are more enduring, more representative, and more reflective of the constitutional relationship between mana whenua and the Crown.

46. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission.

Nāku noa, nā



Kylie Smallman

Chair

Ngāti Pūkenga Iwi ki Tauranga Trust



HEAD START PATHWAY

Simplifying Local Government

Submission

to

Tauranga City Council

and

Western Bay of Plenty District Council

on behalf of

Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Ranginui Settlement Trust

Ngāti Ranginui Fisheries Trust

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Ranginui

(Ngāti Ranginui)

20 July 2026



Introduction

1. This submission is made on behalf of Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Ranginui Settlement Trust, Ngāti Ranginui Fisheries Trust and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Ranginui (collectively, **Ngāti Ranginui**).
2. Ngāti Ranginui are mana whenua in Tauranga Moana. Our rohe extends from Ngākuriāwhare to the north of Tauranga, inland to the summit of Mount Te Aroha, follows the Kaimai Range south-east to Puwhenua, and continues south to the Mangorewa River. Within this landscape sit the harbour of Tauranga Moana, the Wairoa and Ōmanawa river catchments, the Kaimai and Mamaku ranges, and the numerous wāhi tapu and ancestral sites that sustain Ngāti Ranginui.
3. Ngāti Ranginui seek to be meaningfully engaged on the Head Start reforms currently being considered by Tauranga City Council (**TCC**) and Western Bay of Plenty District Council (**WBDC**). We understand that both Councils will be making decisions in the week commencing 20 July 2026 on their preferred approach to amalgamation.
4. Ngāti Ranginui have met and resolved our position on these reforms. We set that position out below for your consideration prior to your determinations being made.

Summary of Position

5. Ngāti Ranginui:
 - (a) support a sub-regional approach to amalgamation encompassing TCC and WBDC;
 - (b) oppose the inclusion of Thames-Coromandel District Council in any sub-regional council amalgamation;
 - (c) oppose a regional unitary authority spanning the wider Bay of Plenty, which we consider unnecessarily complex and unlikely to deliver for communities or for te taiao;
 - (d) consider that the differing financial positions of TCC and WBDC, including the debt levels of TCC, must be addressed transparently in the design of any amalgamation, and that rating and debt settings must neither fall inequitably on Māori land nor be used to defer settlement commitments;
 - (e) require that Māori representation through Māori councillors, as currently provided across both Councils, transfers to any new council as a floor and not a ceiling, and that Ngāti Ranginui hold seats on any transition body established to progress amalgamation;
 - (f) expect that ownership and control of the sub-region's strategic investment assets, including Quayside Holdings Limited and its majority shareholding in Port of Tauranga Limited, remain held locally and are not transferred to or assumed by central government; and



- (g) require that a principled approach is taken to any amalgamation, under which: Ngāti Ranginui are engaged as a Te Tiriti partner in all current and future decisions, including through representation at the decision-making table; Te Tiriti o Waitangī is embedded in the reforms; Treaty Settlements are not undermined, with equivalency or better as the minimum standard for all settlement obligations; Ngāti Ranginui are represented in any future council arrangements in a mana ōrite configuration; te taiao is central to decision making; and the future economic base reflects the interests of Ngāti Ranginui alongside those of the broader sub-region.

Engagement with Ngāti Ranginui

- 6. Ngāti Ranginui have been informed of the Head Start reforms by TCC. We have had no engagement with WBDC to date, despite decisions on the Councils' preferred amalgamation options being taken this week. This is a significant shortcoming that must be remedied in the next phase of the reform process.
- 7. As a Te Tiriti partner within the Tauranga Moana rohe, Ngāti Ranginui expect our views to form part of the Councils' decision-making processes and to be given appropriate weight.
- 8. Local government touches every part of the daily lives of Ngāti Ranginui whānau, hapū and marae. The configuration of any future amalgamated council will directly affect the operation of the Ngāti Ranginui Treaty Settlements (the Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Ranginui Settlement, the Ngāti Ranginui Fisheries Settlement and the Tauranga Moana Iwi Collective Settlement). The amalgamation will substantively affect the interests of Ngāti Ranginui.
- 9. Accordingly, Ngāti Ranginui expect to be engaged in all future decisions on these reforms, and in particular in the establishment of any formal or informal forums, working groups or committees convened to consider future council amalgamation. Ngāti Ranginui expect representation within those bodies and not consultation after the fact.

Sub-Regional Unitary Authority

- 10. Ngāti Ranginui are of the express view that there is a natural alignment between TCC and WBDC.
- 11. Ngāti Ranginui, together with our neighbouring iwi Ngāi Te Rangī and Ngāti Pūkenga, are the three iwi of Tauranga Moana. The existing footprint of TCC and WBDC largely encompasses the rohe of all three Tauranga Moana iwi, with the exception of Tapuika, Waitaha and Ngāti Whakaue ki Maketū in the eastern coastal part of the WBDC boundaries.
- 12. The alignment between the two councils exists in practical, everyday ways. Tauranga and the Western Bay already function as a single economic and social region. Residents commute daily

across the current boundary, housing growth spans both jurisdictions, businesses recruit across the sub-region, and freight, port and transport networks are integrated.

13. The recent Regional Growth Deal and the Local Water Done Well reforms are further examples of shared economic and infrastructure design across the sub-region, demonstrating that joint arrangements between these councils are already established and workable.
14. By contrast, Thames-Coromandel District Council sits outside this economic, social and cultural geography. Its inclusion would extend the amalgamated council beyond Tauranga Moana, dilute the coherence of the sub-region and complicate iwi and hapū relationships without corresponding benefit.
15. The preference of Ngāti Ranginui is therefore that TCC and WBDC are amalgamated as a sub-regional unitary authority, and that Thames-Coromandel District Council is not included.

Regional Unitary Authority

16. A regional unitary authority would require the amalgamation of six councils across a territory spanning some 12,000 square kilometres, from Waihi Beach in the west to Whangaparāoa in the east, and inland to include Rotorua, the Kaingaroa Plateau and Murupara. The population base would be approximately 334,000, of whom 220,000 reside within the current TCC and WBDC areas.
17. A regional authority would also bring together some 36 iwi and approximately 260 hapū within a single council structure. This would create one of the most complex local government and Māori partnership environments in New Zealand, with a real risk that the depth of relationship required with each iwi and hapū is lost in scale.
18. While Tauranga Moana would retain a demographic stronghold within a regional unitary authority, it is unclear how the broader regional interests would be fairly reflected given the diversity of locations, populations and iwi groupings across such a territory.
19. On a catchment, geographic, population and iwi basis, Ngāti Ranginui consider that a regional unitary authority would be unnecessarily complex and would fail to deliver the necessary outcomes for the communities it is intended to serve, or for te taiao.

Functions of a Unitary Authority

20. A sub-regional unitary authority would assume, within its boundaries, the functions currently exercised by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, including resource management planning, catchment and harbour management, biosecurity, public transport and civil defence. The reorganisation is therefore not simply a merger of two territorial authorities; it is a redesign of the full local government architecture of Tauranga Moana.

21. A number of settlement and co-governance arrangements currently sit with, or operate through, the Regional Council, including arrangements in respect of Tauranga Moana and its catchments. The reorganisation must expressly identify every such arrangement and provide for its transfer to the new council at an equivalent or better standard.
22. The reorganisation must also address the future of the Regional Council's investment assets, most significantly Quayside Holdings Limited and its majority shareholding in Port of Tauranga Limited. These assets were built from the resources of this region, and their income supports the communities of this region. Ngāti Ranginui expect that ownership and control of Quayside Holdings and the port shareholding remain held locally, within governance arrangements accountable to the communities and mana whenua of the region, and are not transferred to, or assumed by, central government through the reorganisation process. The port sits within Te Awanui Tauranga Moana, and Ngāti Ranginui have enduring interests in its operation and in the stewardship of the harbour it occupies. Any transition of these assets must be settled with mana whenua at the table.

Financial Considerations

23. Ngāti Ranginui recognise that the differing financial positions of the two Councils will feature prominently in the amalgamation decisions. We consider these matters should be confronted directly and transparently, rather than treated as an unspoken obstacle.
24. TCC is among the most indebted councils in New Zealand. Its Annual Plan for 2026/27 forecasts debt rising from approximately \$1.51 billion to \$1.74 billion over the year, supporting a capital programme of approximately \$432 million. The Local Government Funding Agency has lifted TCC's borrowing covenant from 2.8 times revenue to 3.5 times revenue, a bespoke limit held by few councils, and TCC currently carries the highest interest cost per household of any council in the country. WBDC, by contrast, carries materially lower debt and operates comfortably within the standard covenant.
25. This disparity must be understood in context. A substantial portion of TCC's borrowing funds growth infrastructure, in transport, water and community facilities, that serves the whole functional sub-region, including Western Bay residents who commute daily into the city and businesses that operate across the boundary. In the view of Ngāti Ranginui, debt levels are not a reason to reject amalgamation but they must be managed openly. Established tools are available, including the ring-fencing of legacy debt, differentiated or targeted rating, and staged rates harmonisation over a defined transition period, and the financial workstream of any amalgamation should address these matters early.
26. For Ngāti Ranginui, two requirements follow. First, the rating and debt settings of any amalgamated council must not fall inequitably on Māori freehold land or on whenua returned through Treaty settlement. Second, financial pressure arising from consolidated debt must not

be used to defer, dilute or underfund settlement commitments, partnership arrangements or investment in te taiao.

Māori Representation and Existing Arrangements

27. Both Councils have established Māori representation at the council table, with Māori councillors elected through the Te Awanui Māori ward at TCC and the Waka Kai Uru Māori ward at WBDC. Māori councillors must be a floor and not a ceiling in any new council. Amalgamation must build on this representation and cannot be permitted to reset or diminish it.
28. Māori representation must be secured in the reorganisation scheme itself, and not left to a subsequent representation review, where such arrangements are exposed to disestablishment and polling risk. The design of representation should be settled with iwi before the new council is established.
29. The Auckland amalgamation demonstrates that durable Māori representation is workable in an amalgamated environment. The Independent Māori Statutory Board, established through the Auckland Council legislation, appoints members with full voting rights to council committees and has operated continuously since amalgamation. Ngāti Ranginui expect the reorganisation to provide for representative structures of at least equivalent effect in Tauranga Moana, designed in partnership with Ngāti Ranginui, alongside the mana ōrite arrangements described in the principles below.
30. The sub-region already has working precedents of its own. SmartGrowth, the established partnership between TCC, WBDC, the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and iwi representatives, demonstrates that joint strategic arrangements including iwi representation operate successfully in Tauranga Moana, and its arrangements ensuring iwi are at the table should be carried into the new council's architecture.
31. The Councils are also jointly establishing a new water services organisation under the Local Water Done Well reforms, with foundation documents that include specific arrangements for tangata whenua engagement developed with iwi. When approving that partnership, both Councils resolved that iwi must be involved and that current engagement arrangements should be retained or enhanced. Amalgamation must carry those arrangements forward intact, and nothing in the reorganisation should reopen or diminish them. That standard, retained or enhanced, is the appropriate baseline for every arrangement addressed in this section.

Transition Arrangements

32. Ngāti Ranginui expect Ngāti Ranginui seats on any transition body, board or committee established to design and implement amalgamation, from the point of its establishment. The decisions taken during transition, on structure, representation, rating, debt and the treatment of

existing arrangements, will shape the new council for decades. Ngāti Ranginui must be present when those decisions are made, not consulted after they are taken.

Principles to be Applied to Amalgamation

33. Ngāti Ranginui consider that the following principles must be applied and upheld in any future amalgamation. Each is expanded upon below.

(a) The Councils and Ngāti Ranginui are bound together by Te Tiriti o Waitangi

34. Local government exercises functions and powers that derive from the Crown, and the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi travel with those functions. Any reorganisation of councils in Tauranga Moana is therefore not a merely administrative exercise; it reshapes the institution through which the Crown's Te Tiriti relationship with Ngāti Ranginui is given daily effect. Te Tiriti must be embedded expressly in the foundations of any new council, including in its establishment documentation, governance statements, standing orders and strategic planning frameworks, so that the partnership endures beyond individual personalities and electoral cycles.

(b) Ngāti Ranginui are represented as a partner in all current and future decisions on amalgamation

35. Partnership means presence at the table where decisions are made and not consultation once the substantive choices have been settled. Ngāti Ranginui expect representation on any transition body, joint committee, working group or governance forum established to progress amalgamation, from the design phase through to implementation. Engagement to date has been uneven, and the absence of any engagement by WBDC illustrates the risk of proceeding without a structured partnership arrangement. That must be corrected before further decisions are taken.

(c) Ngāti Ranginui Treaty Settlements are upheld to an equivalent or better standard

36. The Ngāti Ranginui settlements were hard-won and are intended to endure in perpetuity. They include redress and arrangements that operate through, or alongside, local government, including statutory acknowledgements, co-governance and co-management arrangements, relationship agreements and commitments in respect of Tauranga Moana. Amalgamation must not diminish, dilute or complicate any element of settlement redress. Every settlement obligation currently held by TCC or WBDC must transfer to the new council at an equivalent or better standard, and this must be secured expressly in the reorganisation documentation rather than left to be worked out after establishment.

(d) Ngāti Ranginui are represented in any future council arrangements in a mana ōrite configuration

37. Mana ōrite means representation of equal standing. In the context of a future council, this requires governance arrangements in which mana whenua sit alongside elected members with genuine decision-making authority, rather than in advisory or observer roles. Ngāti Ranginui expect the design of the new council to include mana ōrite arrangements at the governance level, appropriate representation on committees exercising significant delegations, and resourcing that enables that representation to be effective. Existing precedents for shared decision making in Tauranga Moana demonstrate that such arrangements are practical and improve the quality of decisions.

(e) Te taiao is a guiding cornerstone in amalgamation decisions

38. The health of te taiao, including Tauranga Moana, the Wairoa and Ōmanawa catchments and the Kaimai and Mamaku ranges, is inseparable from the wellbeing of Ngāti Ranginui. Council boundaries, structures and priorities determine how catchments are managed, how growth is directed and how the harbour is protected. Amalgamation decisions should follow the logic of catchments and the natural environment rather than cut across them, and the new council's purpose and planning frameworks should place the restoration and protection of te taiao at the centre of its mandate, including in the face of a changing climate.

(f) The future economic base reflects the interests of Ngāti Ranginui as well as the broader sub-region

39. Ngāti Ranginui, through our settlement entities, are a significant and growing economic actor in the sub-region, with long-term intergenerational interests in land, fisheries, housing and infrastructure. The economic strategy of any amalgamated council, including its approach to the port, growth planning, investment and procurement, must reflect those interests alongside the interests of the broader community. A council whose economic settings enable Māori economic development will strengthen the prosperity of the whole sub-region.

Conclusion

40. Ngāti Ranginui support the amalgamation of TCC and WBDC as a sub-regional unitary authority, without the inclusion of Thames-Coromandel District Council, and oppose a wider regional unitary authority. Any amalgamation must proceed on the principled basis set out in this submission.
41. Ngāti Ranginui request confirmation of how the Councils will engage with Ngāti Ranginui following this week's decisions, and expect Ngāti Ranginui seats on any transition body and representation in all subsequent forums and processes established to progress the Head Start reforms.
42. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission.



Nāku noa, nā

Charlie Rahiri
Chair, Ngāti Ranginui

Attachment 3 - TCC WBOPDC Joint Workshop Notes

24 June 2026 – 2,30pm – 5.30

Simplifying Local Government - Joint WBOP and TCC Workshop

Lyall Thurston (Independent Chair) – provided quick intro and health and safety briefing

Apologies; Cr Morris (TCC), Cr Coxhead (WBOPDC) , Cr Rae (WBOPDC), Cr Dinsdale (WBOPDC)

Mayor James provided an opening statement - recognised the likelihood of BOP and TCC working together is pretty high, and we already do in many areas. Today is about sharing concerns. Not necessarily about finding solutions. This is about hearing where everyone is at, their concerns, and how we can work together.

Mayor Mahe provided an opening statement - opportunity to be in the same room and understand what the opportunities and challenges are. Work we do together now will not be wasted, regardless of if we end up in a Head Start or Backstop process. We need to work together. TCC keen to lead rather than be led. Consultation – so far 80% support for leading reform after 800ish responses. We asked who we should work with, and people have said WBOP.

Discussion/understanding

- Change is coming regardless.
- Regional Councils are being disestablished 2028.
- There will be fewer, larger unitary authorities.
- RMA reform is happening.
- We are best to lead change ourselves.

Mayoral Forum update

Mayor James and Mayor Mahe provided an update of discussions at Mayoral Forum and from around the region. Key points;

- Appears most Councils wish to lead the change (Head Start).
- No appetite in the Bay of Plenty for a region wide unitary.
- Sub-regional picture (two or three sub-regions) has support.
- Chief Executives had been tasked to progress workstreams and report back.
- Functions should be delivered where optimal.
- There will be some services that need to be delivered at a regional level.
- Mayoral Forum preference is one application for Head Start from the Bay, but including three unitary councils, reflecting the three communities of interest (east, central, west).

General conversation/questions

What functions should be delivered nationally? Or even that are currently done nationally that should be done locally?

Kaituna catchment – without the regional council, how do we manage catchments such as that – interrelationship between Rotorua and WBOP?

Spatial planning, Transport, Catchment – need to be sorted.

Opportunity to build our new house. Let's create the best, new entity that we can.

Start the Head Start with the two of us, and then if something like catchment management should be done bigger, lets work on that.

Representation – the numbers of Councillors around the table and who they represent. Numbers of Councillors. Wards. Community boards. Local people need a voice, but don't want too many people around the table.

Head Start application. Principles based, make sure we meet the criteria but do not try to overdesign it and keep flexibility. Then the rest gets done over time to get the best outcome.

Offramps may not exist, so proposal needs to be enough as we don't have a chance to change our minds.

Bottom lines become the off-ramps.

Local voice came across as being important. Local representation. What that looks like?

Draw ward lines carefully. Community boards – where and how.

Don't want to argue about what we are losing. Can't think of existing ward boundaries.

Take the current boundary between the two Councils away, and then do the representation review of what it can look like.

Time to start thinking as a subregion now

Early numbers on the economics. What are the "wins" that we can deliver to our community?

Minimal viable proposition. Less is more. High level summary. Principles. Commitment to work through the issues.

Funding is critical.

How do we work with the other subregions of the Bay to ensure that they can continue to do what they need to be able to do. How do we manage the regional functions and where the benefits are

Change is expensive. Need to make sure that the benefits outweigh the costs (financial and opportunity cost).

Concerns/Considerations/Bottom-lines

Western Bay District Council

1. *Representation* – how do we ensure fair representation, given population differences, and distinct communities of interest. We need to design something where our people can feel heard, and see themselves in the structure.
2. *Financials* – particularly around debt. What are the numbers, and how do we overcome the disparity of debt from legacy councils. Is it ringfenced, with a targeted rate to pay it off over time?

Acknowledgement that we don't need to sort all of the details before 9 August. We have over 2 years to deliver it. We can work through details, but we do need to sort the basis of the above two points. "we need a pre-nup agreement".

Whatever we come to, we need to be able to clearly communicate what the benefits to our community are

Tauranga City Council

1. *Efficiency and effectiveness of Local Government* – we need to create a council that is easier to deal with
2. *Financial savings* – We need to design a cheaper model
3. *Fair and equitable* – for current and future ratepayers and residents in both legacy areas.

Q: Maori representation and Maori voice (not necessarily wards), but relationships

Requirement. Existing relationships and settlements etc should continue – can also address through bespoke legislation

Where to from here?

Councillors want to be most involved at the earliest opportunity – particularly around representation, finances and tangata whenua partnerships.

We will set another meeting up for within the next couple of weeks. To focus on the above. **Action to arrange**

TCDC – not against including TCDC, but it cannot slow our course. They would need to sort the Hauraki and tangata whenua issues.

Head Start Workshop 2 – Workshop Minutes

Date: 8 July 2026

Venue: Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui

Attendance

Apologies: Cllr Beech, Cllr Elvin, Cllr Baker, Cllr Scoular, Cllr Curach.

Present: Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Schuler, Cllr Taylor, Mayor Drysdale, Cllr Crowther, Cllr Morris, Cllr Murray-Benge, Mayor Denyer, Cllr Dally, Cllr Rae, Cllr Dinsdale, Cllr Joyce, Cllr Coxhead, Cllr Sole, Cllr Rolleston (arrived part way through).

Staff: Marty Grenfell, Matt Potton, Gareth Green, Anne Payne, Emily Watton, Katy McGinity, Craig Rice.

Actions

Action	Lead
Send letter from TCDC to WBOPDC and TCC councillors.	Emily/Katy; Gareth/Anne
Bring representation arrangement models back to the 15 July workshop.	Emily/Katy; Gareth/Anne
Circulate AI research on representation arrangements.	Grant Dally

1. TCDC perspective

- TCDC noted its low debt position, approximately 30,000 rateable properties, and the importance of continuity across coastal catchment communities.
- There was reasonably strong support for the Northern Bay of Plenty option.
- Iwi feedback indicated that the Waikato-wide option was not supported; the remaining options were viewed as matters for council decision-making.
- TCDC remains open and willing to participate in broader options that are in the interests of ratepayers.

2. Revenue, financing and rating principles

Participants were generally comfortable with the proposed core principles as a basis for further discussion. Views on differentials were mixed, reflecting different rating philosophies, asset use, and cost drivers across the councils.

Proposed core principles

- Who benefits from the expenditure?
- Who creates the need for the expenditure?
- Fairness and equity.
- Affordability.
- Efficiency.
- Transparency.
- Inter-generational equity and fairness.
- Growth pays for growth.
- Evidenced base.

The aim is to identify the best option for the sub-region. The preferred approach should be fair, efficient, affordable, transparent, and sufficiently flexible to support local voice, representation, and future decision-making.

Key discussion points

3. Harmonisation period and levels of service

- The harmonisation approach should avoid shocks to ratepayers.
- A period of up to three years was suggested for rates harmonisation, while waters may require a different approach because they sit within a separate organisation.
- Questions were raised about why the waters harmonisation period has been discussed as six years, noting this has not been finalised.
- The numbers will determine the appropriate glide path for implementing the principles.
- Quartile comparisons between councils were requested, rather than relying only on medians.

- Participants discussed whether a standard level of service should apply across the new council, with local additions or adjustments where communities seek a higher or lower standard. Local representation and delegations were seen as important tools for setting area-specific levels of service.

4. Debt

- Historic debt was identified as one of the most significant public concerns.
- There was discussion about ring-fencing historic debt and using targeted rates to pay it off over time.
- New debt should be considered and funded on a sub-regional basis where there is sub-regional benefit.
- Further work is needed to assess assets and the extent to which some assets have sub-regional benefit or use.
- Relevant debt could potentially be weighted or discounted for specific assets or facilities.

Examples discussed included Baypark, Baywave, and Waiari. These highlighted concerns about benefit, usage, decision-making input, consultation, operating expenditure, and representation in decisions about scale and scope.

5. Representation arrangements

- Views were mixed on at-large representation, single-member wards, multi-member wards, and hybrid models.
- Rural representation was identified as important, including the need to address rural underrepresentation and ensure adequate representation for WBOP communities.
- Participants discussed whether community boards could support local voice, representation, and a smaller council.
- Māori representation and any statutory requirements need further consideration.
- Consideration should be given to whether the +/- 10% rule requires bespoke legislative amendment, including whether a broader tolerance, similar to the Southland example should be explored.
- The discussion emphasised the need to move beyond a WBOP/TCC framing and focus on the problems the

representation model needs to solve. Participants noted that ratepayers' expectations for representation will require community engagement, and that options should be principles-driven.

6. Points of agreement and further work

- The proposed principles provide a useful starting point and should inform the outline proposal.
- The approach needs to remain sufficiently flexible to account for different communities, assets, service levels, rating tools, and local representation arrangements.
- Further work is required on rating philosophy, harmonisation, debt treatment, representation models, community boards, and the evidence base for future decisions.
- The team will prepare wording for approval and bring representation arrangement models back to the 15 July workshop.

Head Start Workshop #3, 15 July 2026 – meeting notes

Purpose

- The workshop focused on representation, governance structure, local representation, and whether TCDC should be included in the Head Start proposal.

TCDC involvement

- TCDC representatives attended and made a case for inclusion, describing themselves as a strategic fit rather than a complication.
- They proposed a contiguous coastal boundary change, including a coastal strip currently associated with Hauraki, but not Waihi/mine.
- TCDC argued that a three-council proposal better meets government criteria than a two-council Western Bay/Tauranga option.

Minister/DIA advice

- DIA feedback was described as informal and not binding on Ministers.
- There is concern that, due to the election timetable, Government may prioritise “easy” or less complex proposals.
- A meeting with the Minister was identified as important to test appetite for including TCDC.

Representation model

- Officers presented draft representation options, including corridors/wards and possible council size.
- There was broad discussion about whether the model fairly balances urban, rural, coastal, Māori, and local communities of interest.
- Several members cautioned against locking in current boundaries too early and encouraged a “clean slate” approach.

Māori wards

- Māori ward arrangements were raised as a key unresolved issue, including differing mandates across councils and timing of polls.
- Further legal/policy clarification required.

Local boards/community boards

- A stronger local representation model was discussed, potentially with delegated functions, budgets, staff support, and possibly rating ability.
- There was mixed feedback: some supported stronger local boards, while others were cautious about cost, complexity, and Auckland comparisons.

Regional council functions

- Multiple councillors raised concern that regional council functions and governance have not been sufficiently addressed.
- There was a strong steer that the next draft must explain how regional functions would be assessed and governed in any future unitary arrangement.

Timing pressure

- The group repeatedly noted the tight timeframe, with an outline proposal due for 9 August.
- Officers emphasised the Head Start proposal only needs to be conceptual/minimum viable at this stage, with detail to follow later.

Actions

1. Mayors to meet with the Minister
 - o Purpose: seek direction/indication on whether including TCDC is viable within the Head Start process and government timetable.
2. Prepare two outline proposal versions
 - o Officers to prepare:
 - Option 1A: likely TCC/WBOPDC-focused option.
 - Option 1B: option including TCDC.
 - o This is to allow progress while Ministerial feedback is pending.
3. Include TCDC in next workshop
 - o TCDC representatives and staff should attend the Monday 20 July workshop.
 - o TCDC indicated they would try to expedite the Minister meeting.
4. Extend Monday 20 July workshop
 - o The next workshop at WBOPDC should be lengthened if possible.
 - o Main focus: functions, delegations, and local/regional governance arrangements.
 - o Mayor Denyer specifically requested that the next workshop material includes:
 - TCDC; and
 - regional council functions.
5. Officers to seek DIA (MCERT) feedback
 - o WBOPDC officers are meeting DIA on Friday and will report back on Monday.
 - o Matters likely include representation assumptions, electoral population, Māori ward/legal settings, and Head Start expectations.
6. TCDC to share supporting material
 - o TCDC offered to share a paper on local board functions/delegations.
 - o Councillors also suggested TCDC share community engagement results and outcomes from discussions with Hauraki District Council.
7. Clarify regional-function governance
 - o Further work needed on how any regional/shared-services/unitary layer would be governed, especially if multiple councils are involved.
8. Further refinement needed on:
 - o ward/corridor structure;
 - o council size;
 - o urban/rural balance;
 - o local boards;

- Māori representation;
- electoral population vs general population;
- treatment of absentee ratepayers; and
- whether at-large representation remains in scope.

Forward programme

- **Monday 20 July:** workshop on functions.
 - **Wednesday 22 July:** go through outline draft together.
 - **Week beginning 27 July:** councils review draft separately.
 - **9 August:** Head Start proposal deadline.
-

Head Start Workshop 4 – Workshop Minutes

Date: 20 July 2026

Venue: WBOPDC, Barkes Corner

Attendance

Present—Cllr Elvin, Cllr Beech, Cllr Rae, Cllr Dally, Cllr Coxhead, Cllr Dinsdale, Cllr Mayor Denyer, Cllr Joyce (online), Cllr Crowther, Cllr Schuler, Cllr Rolleston, Cllr Curach, Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Taylor, Cllr Baker (online), Mayor Drysdale, Cllr Morris, Cllr Scoular

Apologies – Cllr MMB, Cllr Sole

Staff – Katy, Emily, Matt, Gareth, Anne, Marty

This document records the minutes of the fourth joint TCC/WBOPDC Head Start workshop. The workshop focused on whether Thames-Coromandel District Council (TCDC) should be included in the outline proposal, and on the principles that would guide future decisions about local government functions.

Summary of discussion

- **TCDC inclusion was the central issue.** Members discussed whether TCDC should be included in the Head Start proposal, noting both potential strategic fit and significant concerns about timing, mandate, community preference, governance, financial risk, Treaty/iwi considerations and added complexity.
- **Community feedback from TCDC was mixed but leaned toward eastern Waikato.** TCDC representatives reported more than 1,500 pieces of feedback, with 54% favouring an eastern Waikato option and 34% favouring a western Bay of Plenty option. TCDC could not commit before its council decisions scheduled for late July and early August.
- **There was broad concern about process and pace.** Several members raised concern that the 90-day timeframe was forcing complex decisions too quickly, that workshops were being treated as decision-making forums, and that elected

members needed clearer options, notes, financial information and governance principles before formal decisions.

- **Principles for functions were discussed but not settled.** Officers presented a principles-based approach for assessing which functions should be delivered locally, sub-regionally or regionally. Members supported flexibility but sought more clarity on legacy debt, rating harmonisation, representation, transport, local decision-making, independence, and whether functions could operate at different levels.
- **The emerging direction was to focus on TCC/WBOPDC first.** There were mixed views on the inclusion of TCDC, noting that they had a consultant team that could do the “heavy lifting” to create a first draft of an outline proposal.

Discussion

- Mayor Denyer reported that the Minister was comfortable with exploring TCDC’s involvement and requested mapping options, including potential boundary scenarios with and without Waihi. It was confirmed that contiguous boundaries are not a requirement.
- There was discussion on the bottom line from TCDC for the waters organisation to be part of the picture.
- Several members argued that TCDC could broaden the opportunity and help design a new system, while others considered it a distraction from the core TCC/WBOPDC relationship and the wider Bay of Plenty regional context. There were also some concerns raised that including TCDC would result in other scenarios for Waikato councils not being viable.
- TCDC representatives emphasised their interest in western Bay discussions, their desire for fair representation for non-resident ratepayers, and the need for any future arrangement to address rating-unit representation, accountability and two-tier governance.
- TCDC were asked about their bottom lines and in particular their desire for representation to be based on rateable units. There were mixed views on this with TCDC confirming they see reform as an opportunity to implement change. It was confirmed that the perceived imbalance around rateable units v population isn’t currently addressed by TCDC.

- Members questioned whether TCDC could credibly commit to the western Bay option given community feedback, iwi views, eastern Waikato discussions, and TCDC's own pending council decisions.
- Financial and legacy issues remained unresolved, including debt, ringfencing, growth funding, rating harmonisation, infrastructure liabilities and whether benefits or risks had been sufficiently quantified.
- There was a request for previous workshop notes, financial numbers, actual options and clearer process advice before formal council decisions.

Outcomes and next steps

- Staff were directed to prepare the outline Head Start proposal on a TCC/WBOPDC basis.
- TCDC would be provided the draft sub-regional outline proposal and could draft amendments to cover a wider proposal inclusive of TCDC. TCDC meeting on 28 July was expected to determine a preferred approach in principle.
- Mayor Denyer would contact the TCDC Mayor and report back to the group. The message was to be characterised as being on a "knife edge" rather than a definitive no.
- A draft proposal would be circulated for further discussion, with the report to councils expected to focus on whether to submit a Head Start proposal (with or without TCDC) or wait for the Back Stop.
- Further work was required on decision-making process, financial analysis, representation, legacy debt, rating principles, and how regional and local functions would be assessed in the next phase.

Head Start Workshop 5 – Workshop Minutes

Date: 22 July 2026

Venue: WBOPDC, Barkes Corner

Attendance

Present—Cllr Elvin, Cllr Beech, Cllr Rae, Cllr Dally, Cllr Coxhead, Mayor Denyer, Cllr Joyce, Cllr Crowther, Cllr Schuler, Cllr Rolleston (online), Cllr Curach (online), Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Taylor, Cllr Baker, Mayor Drysdale, Cllr Morris, Cllr Scoular, Cllr Murray-Benge (online), Cllr Sole (online), Cllr Rodley (TCDC), Cllr Sinclair (TCDC) Cllr Freer (TCDC) Cllr Grant (TCDC)

Staff – Katy, Emily, Matt, Gareth, Anne, Chris (end of day)

Key changes to outline proposal

Section	Wording
Introductory section	Potentially add some wording around engagement with TCDC for context
Introductory section	Include a high level overview of proposal (“at a glance”) to have a succinct description of key aspects
Simplifies local governance/maintains local voice	Amend wording around local voice – local voice is important and could consist of something like a community board or local board subject to community consultation.
Simplifies local governance	Amend working at page 30 and 40 around chair being directly elected by local community – this will be subject to community consultation.
Economies of scale	Add clarity that regional vehicle will be required (not necessarily a CCO) but governance will remain with unitary authorities
Economies of scale/regulatory relief section	Signal at high level the desire for innovation/alternative measures through the detailed design phase.

Economies of scale	Strengthen wording from 'the need for more efficient' to 'we've got to reduce cost' etc
Economies of scale	Add paragraph around staff numbers and the potential reduction in these.
Economies of scale/ various	Apply consistent wording about debt throughout document. Use wording at pages 21 and 22.

Actions

Action	Lead
Letters from Minister to TCC re regulatory relief for binding poll to be shared with all councillors	Gareth
Schedule additional joint workshop week beginning 27 July.	Gareth/Emily

Introductory section

There was a range of discussion –

- Suggested that further work needs to be done on regional functions.
- Confirmation that Mayoral forum letter on regional position is being drafted at the moment.
- Suggested that simplifying TCC governance would not be adding a second tier.

The discussion then focussed on representation:

- Suggested that they had not landed on local boards or community boards and the potential inclusion of TCDC would change this again. Some members suggested that we need to be more prescriptive in the outline proposal while others suggested this needs to be subject to community consultation and not tie us down.
- Fundamental to have second tier on governance, not necessarily local board, but cannot be the community board arrangements WBOP have now given the broader scope and function anticipated.

- Support from communities for representation arrangements is crucial. TCC urban probably wouldn't worry about second tier, but this decision needs to be subject to consultation and evidence base.
- Amalgamation should improve situation and fundamentally be better for future generations. Need to be innovative.
- Agreed that wording in outline proposal would be amended to reflect the importance of local voice and that it could consist of local board or community boards, but this would be subject to community consultation.
- Noted that the proposal focuses on elected representation, and doesn't cover all the different community groups, ratepayer organisations and innovative community engagement driven structures that already exist in our communities. This can also be a space for innovative delivery and support enhanced community voice.

There was some discussion around debt

- Suggested that debt could be looked at in two ways and that while TCC have large amount of debt, they may be inheriting deferred maintenance costs from WBOP.

Supports the new planning system

No questions

Simplifies local governance

- General level of comfort with this section but suggest more emphasis is placed on reducing cost and complexity of council services.
- Suggested to soften working around chair being directly elected by local community to subject to consultation with community.

Economies of scale

- There was broad agreement on this. Suggested that there is greater consistency across document in talking about debt. Page 22 wording is preferred.

- Some members suggested that a regional CCO is not suitable, with clarity provided from staff that it is a suggestion of a regional vehicle (not necessarily a CCO) and decisions would stay at a governance level. Will ensure consistent description of regional service delivery vehicle is used throughout document.
- Suggested that innovation needs to be signposted in document and could be included in several different areas of the document (including funding and additional regulatory relief).
- Catchment management and the potential catchment board needs more dialogue at a central government level.
- Reference to shared services and opportunities for improved service delivery. Important that this is flexible to bring others in (i.e. the east) when they're ready.
- A paragraph on staff numbers would be included in the outline proposal.

Maintains local voice

- Number one issue for western bay community is local voice and there needs to be a second tier of representation. Urban areas don't have to, but it is important for the rural areas.
- View expressed that Pāpāmoa and Te Puke need to be separate wards.
- Some discussion on Māori wards
- Confirmation that the growth corridor based model does not prevent the second tier of governance.
- Suggested there needs to be agreement on key issues before the outline proposal is agreed, these are:
 - Representation and local voice; and
 - Debt.

[Breakout sessions – Councillors from the respective councils met and discussed key issues]

Representation and local voice

Mayor Denyer and Cllr Morris set out the outcomes of the breakout session from WBOP –

- WBOPDC need comfort that there will be an elected second tier of local governance.
- TCC suggested that a sub-region wide referendum be undertaken on both local representation and Māori representation, on the basis that only the Māori representation aspect would be binding (to meet

current legislative requirements for TCC this would need to be undertaken by end March 2027).

- WBOPC stated there was a preference for the model to form part of a detailed design phase.
- TCC meeting halfway with two tiers of local governance and inclusion of Māori ward needs to be in outline proposal.
- Suggested everything will be subject to an electoral review and everything will be on the plate for the community to provide feedback on.

Debt

- WBOPDC expressed concern around sub-regional assets and what this includes. Need to specify which assets are perceived to have sub-regional benefit and what the remaining debt is against these. Need to understand the scale before agreeing that the detail can be worked through in the detailed design phase – conscious that there's no off-ramp once an outline proposal is submitted.
- Some discussion around sunset date for rate harmonisation but suggested details need to be kept high level for outline proposal.
- WBOPDC suggested a 75% majority in existing LTP decisions – to not be overridden by TCC majority – suggested Year 1 would be starting point and then a governance decision over time.
- Debt ringfencing needs more conversation. Best intent that TCC area will pay off debt for life of debt.

Head Start Workshop #6 Workshop Minutes

Date: 27 July 2026

Venue: TCC Council Chambers

Attendance

WBOPDC – Mayor Denyer, Cllr Elvin, Cllr Beech, Cllr Rae, Cllr Dally, Cllr Coxhead, Cllr Dinsdale, Cllr Joyce, Cllr Murray-Benge, Cllr Sole, Matt Potton, Emily Watton, Katy McGinity

BOPRC – Cllr Crosby, Cllr Shirley, Fiona McTavish, Karen Aspey

TCC – Deputy Mayor Scoular, Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Crowther, Cllr Rolleston, Cllr Taylor, Cllr Baker, Cllr Morris, Cllr Schuler (online), Marty Grenfell, Gareth Green, Anne Payne
Apologies from Mayor Drysdale and Cllr Curach

TCDC – Cllr Rodley, Cllr Rasmussen, Cllr Brljevich, Ian Morton. Apologies from Acting Mayor John Grant.

Mayors welcome

Mayor James and Deputy Mayor Scoular welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Chief executives scene setting

- There appears to be consensus growing between councils in the Bay of Plenty, and sub-regional harmony compared to a lot of fractures in other metro areas.
- Confirmed by MCERT representatives that there will be offramps during this process.
- Encouragement to work through issues not necessarily close everything off in detail.
- Members were reminded that this is an opportunity to work together for the benefit of communities and the wider sub-region.

Focus for today

- Attendees were stepped through the key focus for today's workshop and reminded of the following:
 - We are in this together
 - There is recognition that there are off ramps and the outline proposal can be contingent on certain things.
 - There is a strong subregional foundation
 - Head Start is a ticket to table for negotiation
 - We need to strike the right balance between now and detailed design phase
 - Close the gaps
 - We don't have all the answers
 - This is new and we are creating a new organisation, structure and region.
 - We don't need to wait and can begin moving forward now.
 - We will focus on efficiency and service.

BOPRC presentation – Karen Aspey

- BOPRC presented on the following –
 - Thinking that council did going back to late last year following announcements from central government around reform.
 - Early insights focused on long term needs of community of BOP region and what are those interests over the next 30 years.
 - How reform can support this to be an opportunity for our region.
 - Functions such as catchments can be achieved at scale
 - Concept of subsidiarity and local voice important.
- Proposed model – one BOP Unitary model with three local leadership authorities
- There was a range of discussion
 - Encouragement that regional services be part of design not just an add on.
 - Confirmed that RM reform factor in proposed model over keeping TCC and WBOP separate – natural catchments a driver for this too.

- Question around wider inclusion of councils outside of BOP – model has been designed as concept and can be adapted to fit other communities of interest.
- Confirmed that several sets of financial modelling had been completed, with initial indications that there would be detrimental impact to the RLC and the East.

Functions analysis – some worked examples

Envisioned that principles would guide decision making around functions.

- Confirmed that intent is to go through every single function of both city/district councils and regional council during detailed design phase.
- Suggested that an additional principle is added to assess whether a function needs to be carried out.
- Suggested that this type of model would need to be entrenched in legislation.
- A question was raised about breaking down silos and focusing on more holistic outcomes. The design phase and transitional arrangements provide an opportunity to establish guardrails for 2028 onwards.

Local representation

Members encouraged to build some consensus around these issues.

- Mayor Denyer shared WBOP position that local representation arrangements should include community boards, local boards or equivalent structures, in areas where they currently exist or where communities seek them subject to community engagement.
- There was a question around delegation of local representation – some desire for more teeth than current arrangements subject to representation review. It was suggested that local representation doesn't need rating power, but looking at new system that will strengthen their role.
- Confirmed that existing community boards are funded by communities they serve.
- Outline proposal wording inoffensive and should reflect two tiers of representation.

Māori representation

- A concern was raised that Māori representation had not been clearly considered in a genuinely effective and recognisable way. Both councils were encouraged to reconsider this. It was noted that TLAs can ensure this level of participation is maintained locally.
- Treaty obligations are carried out by councils – councils encouraged not to jeopardise what you've got.
- Binding referendum for sub-region has mixed support from WBOP.
- Suggested that it is a matter that needs to be worked through during detailed design phase.
- Principle of retaining local voice, identity and representation extend to Māori representation too.
- Is it going to be better having Māori representation in the whare? Signal intentions now to go forward. Don't agree with kicking it down the road.
- Supportive sub-region wide survey that encourages our community to think sub-regionally. We need to transform our thinking. Easy to revert our thinking – context of best way to create future for the sub-region. If we rely on referendum – is that the best way of thinking?
- Several members stated that they have a mandate from WBOPDC community not to have a Māori ward and they were acting for all community. Legislation requires us to hold a referendum on two occasions – don't want a division or be separate. Community in our area has spoken.
- Regardless of what we think, legislation is written in passed in Wellington. Opportunity to create new unitary authority – need to make runway as wide as possible. Suggest not to get too demanding and/or restrictive. Allow for possibilities. Keep language broad.
- The meeting was reminded that in the BOP context there are 37 iwi, 265 hapū, 1200 Māori land trust and PSGE's.
- Suggested that there are mechanisms other than Māori wards to engage with Māori.

- Suggested that legislation guides us through this and to a point where a representation review for new unitary authority will be required inclusive of considering Māori representation.

AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

Local / Māori representation continued

- The group discussed the need for a more detailed representation review as part of the Head Start process. There was agreement that the current proposal should remain high level and avoid locking in detailed second-tier governance arrangements too early. Further work, including community engagement, will be required in the next phase.
- The discussion also covered Māori representation and the potential requirement for a referendum under current legislation. The preferred approach was to keep the wording broad and note that a representation review (or equivalent process), including consideration of Māori wards, would need to be completed before the new unitary authority is established in 2028.

TCDC involvement in the proposal

- TCDC's possible inclusion in the proposal was discussed at several points.
- TCDC representatives indicated that they had not yet made a final decision and were considering their options, including the greater Waikato option. They also noted concern that the current materials did not clearly include TCDC as an equal potential partner.
- It was confirmed that the subregional outline proposal was provided to the TCDC CE on 20 July, and as previously agreed, TCDC had consultants that would work through amendments required to develop the alternative outline proposal that would cover TCC, WBOPDC and TCDC.
- There was no firm consensus during the joint discussion. Some members supported keeping the door open to TCDC, while others expressed concern about uncertainty, identity,

boundaries, liability, and whether TCDC was sufficiently committed to the process.

- After TCDC left the meeting, the remaining councils discussed whether to provide a clearer signal. The overall direction appeared to be to keep options open and continue engaging with TCDC, while recognising unresolved questions around boundaries and commitment.

3. LTP projects

- Mayor Denyer confirmed that WBOPDC would withdraw this matter from further discussion, but noted that Significance and Engagement Policy considerations would apply to any decisions made by the new entity on changes to the LTPs developed in 2027 by the respective councils.

Governance arrangements during the transition period

- The group discussed proposed governance arrangements for the transition period before establishment of any new council.
- A model involving equal council representation on a joint committee, potentially with three members from each council and a Crown Facilitator, was discussed.
- There was support in principle for equal decision making, but some members noted that their councils had not yet had the opportunity to consider or commit to the model.
- Questions were raised about the role and definition of a Crown Facilitator, whether regional council or tangata whenua representatives should be included, and whether the model should follow lessons from the water's governance process. There was also discussion about the need for a high-level workplan to support the transition.
- It was agreed to defer final discussion on this matter to the next joint workshop.

Detailed design and ward/community language

- The group discussed whether the proposal should refer to a growth corridor model, communities of interest, or ward areas.

The corridor model was described as a conceptual idea that could be developed further in the detailed design phase and aligned with the existing growth planning approach for the subregion.

- There was agreement that suburb names should be used instead of ward names where possible, to keep the proposal clearer and avoid implying that detailed representation arrangements had already been determined.

Head Start Workshop 7 – Workshop Minutes

Date: 29 July 2026

Venue: WBOPDC, Barkes Corner

Attendance

Present – Cllr Elvin, Cllr Beech, Cllr Rae, Cllr Dally, Cllr Coxhead, Cllr Mayor Denyer, Cllr Joyce, Cllr Crowther, Cllr Schuler (online), Cllr Rolleston, Cllr Curach, Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Taylor, Cllr Baker (until 2.30pm), Cllr Murray Bengé, Cllr Sole Cllr Graeme, Cllr Crosby, Cllr Shirley

Apologies – Mayor Drysdale, Cllr Scoular

Staff – Katy, Emily, Matt, Gareth, Anne, Craig, Suzanne, Kathryn, Brad

Mayors update

- An update was provided that TCDC has indicated that the Eastern Waikato option appears to be the preferred option at this time.

Governance arrangements – transition period

- It was suggested by TCC that the transition period should be governed by two full councils (20 elected members) with the option of an independent administrator. This is different to the current 3 member per council sub-committee approach reflected in the outline proposal. There would be no casting vote.
- There was a range of discussion on this matter –
 - It was suggested that consideration of some issues need a majority vote of councils. Mixed views on this.
 - There was clarification sought on what decisions this would apply to? It was confirmed decisions in respect to amalgamation only.
 - There was clarification sought on whether decisions would then need to go back to the respective councils and suggested that it is appropriate to do this.
 - Some members saw merit in the idea and having a combined team of 20 would mitigate risk of contrasting

decisions when taken back to individual councils with one person having one vote accepted as general approach.

- It was confirmed that each council can determine to set up a joint committee and give the joint body legitimacy under the LGA – TOR and scope decided by Council – body created under LGA has legitimacy.
- There was clarification sought on the following matters:
 - what role will BOPRC play in the transition period
 - Proposed to have one member sit on decision making panel along with Tangata whenua.
 - Suggested that additional layer may be needed with government and iwi involvement.
 - Whether Committee could have invited guests on subject basis. Joint decision of committee to involve these groups.
 - It was suggested that the inclusion of BOPRC needs to be considered in the transition period.

Breakout between councils.

Following break out, the following was discussed:

- WBOP – happy to go with joint committee of both councils but for a resolution to be passed it needs a majority of both councils.
- TCC – Option raised by WBOP – once we agree to become a new entity, all decisions are around what's best for the region going forward.
- Did you look at majority would be required for every decision? Or just issues of higher significance?
- Agreed that matter is placed on hold for TCC to go back to their wider group for discussion.

Debt and sub-regional assets

TCC staff presented information on assets deemed sub-regional and the associated debt and rating information relating to these assets. There was a range of conversation on this.

- Clarification was sought on where WBOP sub-regional assets were as part of this. Confirmed that these will be bought into the picture.

- There was a suggestion that BOPRC assets also need to be included in this as well as Quayside assets.
- There was concern from WBOP councillors of the classing of some assets as sub-regional assets. E.g. Mount College pool
- TCC aiming to be transparent and share what they view as sub-regional assets.
- Confirmation that assets on Bay Oval are owned by Bay Oval Trust. TCC owns the land.
- There were two comments made relating to spending at McLaren Falls and TCC's role in Marine Precinct Wharves
- It was suggested that we need to investigate road user charges for the Papamoa East Interchange (PEI) and confirmed that any growth funding relating to this asset has been considered.

Following the presentation, there was further discussion

- Suggested that we could approach this matter on a proportional population basis
- The inclusion of some items on the list was not agreed and that it would need to be reviewed.
- Confirmed that LGFA uplift of rating has been achieved by TCC.
- Suggested that level of service lens missing from conversation.
- Confirmed that the business case for library included numbers coming into the CBD from the wider sub-region. However, this assumption did not involve input from WBOP.
- Confirmed that WBOP assets deemed sub-regional would be incorporated not this discussion.

Next steps

- Confirmation that Hemi Smiler from MCERT will be attending tomorrows workshop from 1pm – 2pm.
- Paper for 6 August may be published on Friday – with upload of outline proposal on Monday.
- Questions from Hemi Smiler to be circulated to councillors.
 - would like to know what other regions are doing with debt
 - Confirmation of off ramp opportunities

- Suggested that we need to be prescriptive in respect to off ramps in the outline proposal. It must demonstrate that preceding of the decision would provide a material impact on affected communities.
- Requested full sharing of information from mayors/CEOs. Needs to be total transparency including outcomes of conversation.
- There were mixed views on off ramps.
- Suggested that we invite BOPRC and Iwi to participate in meeting on 6 August.

Head Start Workshop 8 — Workshop Minutes

Date: 30 July 2026

Venue: WBOPDC, Barkes Corner

Attendance

Present: Cllr Elvin, Cllr Beech, Cllr Dally, Cllr Coxhead, Mayor Denyer, Cllr Joyce, Cllr Crowther, Cllr Schuler (online), Cllr Rolleston, Cllr Curach, Cllr Rozeboom, Cllr Taylor, Cllr Baker, Cllr Scoular, Cllr Murray-Benge, Cllr Sole, Cllr Graeme, Cllr Crosby, and Hemi Smiler (MCERT).

Staff: Katy, Emily, Matt, Gareth, Anne, Karen Aspey, and Brad Singh

Hemi Smiler from MCERT attended the workshop and provided further information on the Head Start process.

Can you please give us some more insight into how the off-ramp process works through the detailed design phase? How would you recommend we address this in our outline proposal – in relation to specific issues or more broadly? Would this relate to the decision to adopt the detailed proposal for submission in March? Likewise, if we wanted our application to be “conditional” on any particular issue?

If councils progress through Head Start and later wish to withdraw, there is currently an “off-ramp” available. A council could resolve to step away from the process; however, central government would still retain discretion to decide whether the proposal should continue.

Councils should therefore be clear in the outline proposal about the purpose, importance, and design of any proposed off-ramps, including the circumstances in which they could be accessed during the detailed design phase. For example, financial viability could be identified as an off-ramp trigger if the proposal would result in materially higher costs for ratepayers or become unsustainable over time. The proposal should clearly set out any bottom lines, the process for accessing an off-ramp, and the role central government would

play, including whether negotiation with Ministers would be required before decisions are made.

If the proposal is intended to be conditional on specific matters, those conditions should be clearly identified and realistic. For example, conditions that rely on support from central government should distinguish between matters government may be able to address and matters that are unlikely to be within its control. A large or broad set of conditions may be difficult for government to meet. After proposals are submitted, MCERT is expected to engage with applicants over a short period, primarily through partnership directors, to discuss these matters.

Further clarification was given:

- If councils are unable to agree on a key issue and both seek to access an off-ramp, the process should first provide an opportunity for the councils and the Crown to work together to resolve the issue. Any proposed off-ramp should also demonstrate why the status quo, or an alternative approach, would be preferable in the circumstances.

Have other councils requested an extension beyond the 9 August deadline?

Kaikōura and Marlborough have requested extensions due to the recent weather event, with an extension granted to 28 August. They are expected to provide a draft by the original deadline date. The Wellington region has also requested an extension, signalling an intention to continue engaging with officials closer to the deadline. Councils seeking an extension should clearly demonstrate an intent to make decisions and explain whether the delay is primarily administrative rather than substantive.

How are other areas considering the management and ring-fencing of debt?

MCERT indicated that the approach to debt management is for councils to propose. It does not currently have a fixed view on debt harmonisation. Managing legacy debt is an important consideration, particularly where there are concerns about transition costs, timing,

and the need for a well-managed transition over a longer horizon, such as a 10-year period. These matters go to the core of deliverability and should be addressed through realistic transition arrangements. Northland was noted as an example of a region considering transition issues, including Māori representation, LTP exemptions, and different approaches to balancing budgets. Their transition to a single unitary authority may require interim steps, such as establishing a transitional arrangement in 2028 before full implementation by 2033.

Cabinet decision-making in September

Ministers are currently receiving advice. Three possible outcomes were identified: approval; approval with conditions or subject to further work, which may require negotiation; or decline, for example where eligibility criteria are not met or the proposal scores low across the assessment criteria. Decisions remain subject to ministerial discretion and Cabinet process.

Where two councils are considering joining together but hold different views, the proposal should present one clear headline position while also identifying any unresolved areas of disagreement. It was acknowledged that not all matters will be resolved at the outline proposal stage. Where disagreement remains, the proposal should explain how those matters will be worked through during detailed design, including any transitional arrangements and the process for negotiation between councils and the Crown. Government is not intending to act as a tiebreaker in every case, although Ministers may need to play a more active role where unresolved issues are central to the proposal. The Auckland transition process was noted as an example of attempting to reach resolution first, with escalation if agreement cannot be reached.

What are Ministers' expectations about the number of applications, and how can councils be satisfied proposals will be assessed in a principled way given the looming election?

MCERT advised that there is no fixed expectation about the number of proposals. Ministers are interested in genuine, locally led proposals, while recognising that some councils may not be ready to enter Head

Start. The indicative number discussed was approximately five to ten proposals.

Assessment and decision-making are being prioritised ahead of the election to provide greater certainty for local government. Teams have been established within the new ministry to assess proposals against the criteria, supported by independent advisers with local government expertise.

For councils that are collaborating but are not yet ready to submit a Head Start proposal, a letter of intent could signal to government that work is underway and seek consideration when the backstop process is designed. Ministers have been clear that councils will either proceed through Head Start or the backstop; there is not expected to be a formal category in between. Councils should be clear about whether they are seeking to progress before the 2028 elections and should narrow the options on the table as much as possible.

How much detail does the proposal need to include on the vehicle for regional decisions? At the moment we've kept it non-specific deliberately to enable it to be responsive to what comes out of our functions analysis (to be done collaboratively with our regional partners).

MCERT advised that proposals should explain how catchment management and transport would operate at a regional level. For a sub-regional proposal involving two or three unitary authorities, councils should describe how regional functions would be managed collectively. The outline proposal should set out the intended direction, with further detail to be developed during the detailed design phase. If one sub-regional proposal proceeds but the rest of the region does not progress through Head Start, transitional arrangements may be needed. For example, BOPRC could continue to perform some functions during transition, or unitary authorities could take over particular functions. Governance arrangements will need to be clearly addressed.

Regulatory relief: are there any interim options that could be considered prior to March next year? Particularly in relation to representation reviews.

MCERT noted that there is limited opportunity to provide interim regulatory relief for representation reviews or LTP requirements without legislative change. Councils will need to consider the extent to which current processes are required under the Local Government Act and what would be useful going forward. There is no immediate legislative opportunity for broader regulatory relief for local government, with priority currently being given to the Local Government Systems Improvement Bill. There may be openness in a future term of government to consider regulatory relief to support early stages of reform.

Can you give us an update on where things are sitting across the sector? Are you aware of any whole of region unitary authorities being proposed? Are you aware of many interregional proposals? How are interregional authorities dealing with regional functions?

Northland may include regional functions in its proposal. Kaipara has resolved not to support the current direction. A potential all-of-region proposal with a transitional model was noted.

The West Coast is considering a regional proposal with general support and alignment across the region.

In Wellington, thinking appears to be focused on a single unitary authority, although Upper Hutt does not support either a metropolitan or wider regional unitary model. Kāpiti is considering whether to align north or south. Lower Hutt, Porirua, and Wellington represent a population majority and may support either a metropolitan model or a wider Greater Wellington regional model.

Hawkes Bay – Napier, central and Hastings – single Unitary Authority.
Wairoa intends to be a standalone Unitary Authority.

No inter regional proposals in head start – interest in exploring them in back stop – Kapiti looking to partner with Horowhenua.

Government will have to consider any scenarios that result in an “orphaned” district – is it in their best interests to remain like that?

Transitional governance

MCERT is seeking preference from regions on how this could be managed. Some regions will still be councils that make decisions, and intend to consult on what their governance arrangements look like. Or putting together transitional authority to do that on your behalf. Central government role – crown facilitator to support process? May be valuable/necessary.

MCERT will be available to play role and support councils – want to know where this will best be tailored for you. Opportunity to design and support for reform programmes.

Regional functions

Bottom line – catchment management transport and planning system. Very clear vision on how these things might be managed. Need consistency across region. Need to test with region. What’s regional and what’s local.

What have you heard Southland, Hawkes Bay, Canterbury – urban populations dominating rural.

Representation needs to be tailored to the region. Some design to reflect context. What does second tier look like. What powers does second tier have – ‘community councils’ like a local board plus +/- powers. Matters being considered include independent budget allocation through a fixed methodology, ability to set target rates and local bylaws. Need to have clear dispute resolution between unitary and sub-unitary layer. Bespoke legislation could be considered around this – to provide new tools to successful applicants to do the job. Creating second tier through legislation is the intention.

Backstop – do you propose taking the best of head start legislation.

Models could be made available, but decisions made on that in May.

Transport and catchment management – Definition of catchment management can be small or quite large – is there a definition around what this means.

Guidance document released – things we will look for in proposals. Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment has been influential through this process to understand context of regional councils.

Functions going from regional to national – is there any more clarity on what functions might become national?

Rapid review of regional council functions – number of functions under reforms progressing under existing work programmes and would be inappropriate rapid review. They didn't think it was appropriate for RM and biosecurity on side. Conclusion wasn't a clear case for centralisation at this point in time. Reimagination of what should be done locally/regionally. Will be a work programme stood up by MCERT that looks at national regulator for RM system. Could include some TLA functions.

What are regions doing around debt?

Doesn't need to be resolved at outline proposal stage.

Local politicians' biggest barrier to proposal – could CEs be used?

Ministers clear – Head Start need to be locally led – initially were going to set up board of mayors but given no mandate to do that. Councils are the ones to make decisions – true to spirit of that intention, that is a clear signal. Central government is likely to have a stronger role in the Back Stop.

Boundary adjustments – increase – Rotorua + Maketu – if council wanted boundary adjustment and other council didn't?

Enabled through this process. Want to know what the rationale is – catchment, community of interest, labour market. Boundary changes are secondary to amalgamation. Needs to be really well justified – need to be able to understand impact on community subject to boundary change.

Legislation on referendum for Māori ward

May be scenarios where new legislation has new intent compared to LGA – need to set out how those things work together. Could be that one take primacy over the other.

Māori representation – need to be worked through in detailed design phase.

If you amalgamate you are creating a new legal entity under LGA you could go to referendum for new entity in context of new sub-region

- Cons – just asked communities and asking very quickly again.
- Transitional arrangement – could honour outcomes of referendum. Over next 2 electoral arrangements. Go to a vote later so that those referendums are on.
- Statutory basis for Māori representation – could be in primary legislation.

Advice given to councils saying they need more time –

- If you're not in the Head Start, you're in the Back Stop – take decision knowingly.
- Just because you're in the Back Stop doesn't mean you can't signal the intention to central government – but there are no guarantees.

Governance arrangements – transition period

- There was discussion on the governance arrangements for the transition period. There were mixed views on what these arrangements could look like.
- Councils broke out into a breakout session to discuss these.
- Councillors returned with no agreement being reached and the meeting ended.