



LGNZ four-monthly report for member councils

// April-July 2026



From the Chief Executive

Since April, Head Start has been the headline for councils and for us. Our Head Start support has included a comprehensive series of zooms, guidance, legal advice, and think pieces, with sessions attracting more than 100 attendees. We've appreciated feedback from members that delivering this kind of support collectively has saved you money and time.

One thing I have been very conscious of during these four months is building a strong working relationship with the new Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport, which is doing the heavy lifting on Head Start. Chief Executive Jeremy Lightfoot has been a presence at our sector meetings and I have been meeting him regularly. LGNZ President Rehette Stoltz, Vice President Dan Gordon and I were interviewed by an independent panel providing guidance to the new Ministry ahead of it officially standing. MCERT combines many local government functions under the same roof, including the local government branch of DIA. We will be making sure MCERT officials understand your key issues and work wherever possible to inform their guidance.

I am conscious that councils have put a lot of energy into this process, potentially putting strain on goodwill and relationships given tight timeframes. Local government leaders are under considerable pressure and we have been talking to many people experiencing significant stress. LGNZ is here to support members: National Council has been clear that our role is as an honest broker rather than taking sides. We are gearing up to support councils through the next phase. A critical step will be engaging in a way that demonstrates the sector has communities at the heart of decisions.

For LGNZ, a major advocacy milestone during this period has been growing political traction for the Ratepayers Assistance Scheme. National's Home Energy Fund and Labour's SolarSaver policies both draw on the RAS, and the scheme has also attracted support from the Greens. This is a significant win for us and reflects perseverance and patient advocacy by LGNZ, Mayors, Chairs and others across the sector. While solar funding is one part of the proposed scheme, we continue to advocate for the full RAS package to be realised.

Our advocacy reference groups are now active and contributing directly to our work, as you can see in the dedicated section in this report. We are separating this reporting so you can more clearly see our effort – and progress – against each priority.

During this period, we also launched registrations for LGNZ's new micro-credentials in partnership with Victoria University. These micro-credentials are the first university-accredited pathway designed specifically for local government elected members in New Zealand. Registrations for the first two micro-credentials, which start in September, are already beyond our expectations.

LGNZ has completed membership renewal for this financial year, retaining 100% of member councils. Thank you to everyone who has given robust consideration to membership and understood the benefits and value we provide.



In closing, I want to again acknowledge the pressure on Mayors, Chairs, elected members and council staff as you respond to the scale and pace of reform. Please reach out to the team and to National Council when you need support.

Scott Necklen
Chief Executive

Elevator pitch >

Local Government New Zealand is the national peak body for councils and local democracy. We bring local voices into national policy, influence decisions early, and work with government to deliver practical solutions. Our legitimacy comes from a strong membership base.

Long-term goals >

Our long-term goals have been reset in 2026 by National Council. They drive LGNZ's work and are integrated into everything we do.

O1.

LGNZ effectively influences central government.

O2.

New Zealanders value councils. Local decisions matter and councils are financially sustainable.

O3.

Strong Te Tiriti partnerships deliver positive outcomes for people, place and the economy.

O4.

More people participate in local government

We deliver long-term goals through influence, connection and support



INFLUENCE/

- > Shape policy early, before it is developed, through relationships with officials, Ministers, all political parties.
- > Work with all political parties, key stakeholders and local government to advance our advocacy priorities (listed below) in the short and long term.
- > Improve policy through the legislative process.
- > Spearhead solutions to local government's intractable problems.
- > Use media to set the agenda and raise local government's voice.
- > Give members the right tools to boost local government's influence
- > Integrate a te ao Māori lens throughout our advocacy.



CONNECTION/

- > Bring members together at our sector, All-of-local-government and conference events to hear from key speakers and Ministers, share ideas and connect.
- > Use events as an opportunity for members to influence key decision makers and officials.
- > Make sure members are in the loop on everything LGNZ does, with input into decisions and submissions.
- > Support Te Maruata, Young Elected Members and the Community Boards Executive Committee to connect and equip elected members and progress their kaupapa.
- > Connect women in local government online and in-person pre-conference.



SUPPORT/

- > Build elected members' capability and knowledge through our Ākora professional development.
- > Launch a formal qualification for elected members in partnership with Victoria University.
- > Advocate to protect elected members' safety and security.
- > Deliver initiatives like Street Lights Profiles and the Road Efficiency Group that support best practice and generate efficiency and financial savings for councils.
- > Develop and update key guides and templates for councils.
- > Provide confidential support to councils in difficulty.
- > Develop and deliver value-add services, including shared services, that meet councils' needs.

Our advocacy priorities >

Members generated these priorities and then ranked them at our February All-of-local-government meeting:

O1.

Financially sustainable and cost-effective local government

O2.

Meeting current and future infrastructure needs

O3.

Resilient communities, economies, and environments

O4.

A responsive and accountable local government system

Each priority will be driven by a reference group.

Regional, Metro and Rural & Provincial sectors will each have the opportunity to create sector goals under each priority.

Our advocacy priorities

Members have set four priorities for LGNZ's advocacy work this triennium. This new section reports against each of those priorities. We have separated this reporting so progress against each priority is clear.

During this four-month period, our advocacy reference groups were stood up and are now providing advice and expertise across the four priorities. While National Council remains the decision-maker on major advocacy work, the reference groups act as advisors and experts on specific policy issues and ensure LGNZ's work is member-led. Members are drawn from Metro, Rural, Provincial and Regional sectors, and as well as Mayors and Chairs there are elected members, chief executives and technical experts. The members of each group are listed in Appendix 1.

LGNZ's long-term goals are set out on the previous page. Everything we do, including on the advocacy priorities, works towards them.

A responsive and accountable local government system

The Local government system reference group is chaired by Mayor Fran Wilde. Its early meetings focused on feedback on the proposed annual work programme and views on key current issues, particularly Simplifying Local Government. The group has also provided feedback on two members' Bills, the Better Regional Boundaries Bill and the Local Government (Management of Local Authorities) Amendment Bill.

Simplifying Local Government and Head Start

Simplifying Local Government has been one of the dominant issues for LGNZ and members during this reporting period. Following the Government's announcement of the Head Start pathway, LGNZ moved quickly to support member councils, while making clear that this is the Government's reform and that LGNZ's role is to help members navigate the process, identify risks and advocate for better outcomes.

In the early phase of Head Start, LGNZ produced a brief explainer for members, issued a media release, hosted a zoom with DIA, ran sessions at sector meetings, held a dedicated zoom series on issues such as unitary councils, regional council functions and lessons from Auckland amalgamation, procured legal advice from Simpson Grierson, and developed advice for members on structural options.

As the process progressed, LGNZ continued to press Ministers for more clarity, particularly for councils not part of the voluntary Head Start pathway. LGNZ wrote to Ministers Bishop and Watts setting out member concerns about the backstop process, unnecessary representation reviews and the proposed removal of voting rights for unelected members on committees. LGNZ's position is that any structural change needs to be locally led, transparent and give communities a genuine say.

LGNZ is now considering what support and advocacy it can provide to members in the next phase of Head Start and the wider Simplifying Local Government process. This follows a period of intensive member support and strong attendance at LGNZ's Head Start sessions, which were comprehensive and drew in an engaged audience from across the membership.

System Improvements Bill

The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill is awaiting Committee of the Whole House. On 2 June, the Government announced a planned amendment to remove voting rights from non-elected members on council committees. At the time of the advocacy priorities paper, the amendment paper had not yet been publicly released.

LGNZ has written to Ministers setting out concerns about both the proposed change and the process being used. Because the Bill has already been through select committee, there will be no opportunity for councils to submit on the proposed amendment. LGNZ has called for any change of this nature to go through a select committee process.

Te Maruata has also raised concerns about the proposed removal of voting rights for unelected members, particularly given the implications for Māori participation and representation in local government decision-making.

Electoral reform

Mayor Nick Smith was interviewed by RNZ about Auckland Council considering general-election style polling booths for local elections, drawing on his role as chair of LGNZ's Electoral Reform Working Group.

Financially sustainable and cost-effective local government

The Funding and cost-efficiency reference group is chaired by Mayor Mahé Drysdale. The group first met on 26 June, with its first meeting focused on the proposed annual work plan and terms of reference. Members were particularly interested in improving council efficiency through benchmarking and information sharing. Key upcoming issues discussed included rates capping, council profiles, the new incentives-for-housing-growth fund and relevant remits.

Ratepayers Assistance Scheme

The Ratepayers Assistance Scheme has gained significant political momentum. In late June, the National Party announced its intention, if re-elected, to establish a Home Energy Fund. While the announcement focused on electrification loans and did not mention rates postponement or deferred development contributions, the advocacy priorities paper notes that it was relatively clear the RAS is the vehicle being contemplated. National's accompanying release referenced a \$7 million equity investment, representing 20 per cent of equity, with the remaining 80 per cent provided by councils and LGFA.

In early July, the Labour Party announced its SolarSaver policy, which also includes RAS as part of a wider policy to support solar installation and references the same \$7 million equity

requirement. LGNZ welcomed both National's Home Energy Fund and Labour's SolarSaver policies through media releases and connected them back to LGNZ's long-running advocacy for the RAS.

The RAS has been covered in The Press, The Post, Waikato Times, Sunday Star Times and RNZ Checkpoint, alongside wider concerns about councils needing more funding tools if they are expected to keep rates affordable and fund growing responsibilities. The scheme has also attracted support from the Greens.

The growing cross-party support is a very positive development, but further work is needed to secure central government decisions to move forward with the RAS as proposed. LGNZ continues to advocate for all three proposed RAS products to be made available: rates postponement, deferred development contributions and IMPACT loans. Advice on the business case has been submitted by DIA, MHUD, MBIE, Treasury and Inland Revenue to the Ministers of Local Government, Finance, Energy and Housing.

LGNZ is also pushing for members of the RAS Steering Group and Strategic Advisory Group to meet Ministers to make the case for the full scheme. Hon Dr Nick Smith, Cameron Bagrie and Stuart Henderson have indicated they are available for that conversation.

Rates capping

There have been no significant developments on rates capping during this period, though we expect draft legislation is being developed. Based on public statements by Ministers, LGNZ expects legislation to be introduced into the House before 24 September.

The lack of final detail on the proposed cap is affecting councils as they make Long-term Plan assumptions.

Going for Housing Growth funding tools

If legislation for development levies is introduced this term, it is unlikely to pass before the election and may be carried over to the next term. Development levies are proposed to be able to be adopted from 1 July 2027.

LGNZ is still engaging with the Government and has offered to support final policy design on the Incentives for Housing Growth initiative announced in Budget 2026. This initiative would provide up to \$100 million a year for four years to councils based on consenting volumes. However, a 50% GST share on new builds would have given councils \$1.2 billion last year, while the new fund would have provided \$88 million.

City and regional deals

The second city and regional deal – for the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region – was agreed between the Government, Tauranga City Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council. Like the Auckland City Deal, that deal does not provide any direct funding from central government or access to funding tools.

The final deal in the first round will shortly be concluded with the signing of the Otago Lakes regional deal. It is unclear whether another round of city deals will open before the end of this parliamentary term.

Accommodation levies

LGNZ has continued making the case for an accommodation levy and a national register for short-term rental accommodation through meetings with key political staffers working on pre-election policies for Labour and National.

Meeting current and future infrastructure needs

The Infrastructure reference group is chaired by Mayor Andy Watson and first met on 19 June. Its first meeting focused on feedback on the proposed annual work programme and preparation for upcoming submission opportunities, including the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport.

Transport

LGNZ had expected a draft Government Policy Statement on Land Transport to be released for consultation, but Minister Bishop announced on 13 August that it had been delayed and would not now happen till 2027. In the meantime, LGNZ is looking at issues such as how low-volume rural transport infrastructure can be maintained affordably and how councils can provide transport infrastructure under new, more permissive planning settings.

Water

LGNZ is continuing to monitor implementation of Local Water Done Well reforms. As of 1 July, every mainland council has an approved water services delivery plan. LGNZ is now considering issues around the economic regulation of water entities and how water entities will align with new local government entities emerging from Simplifying Local Government reforms, noting that new council boundaries may not necessarily align with water entity boundaries.

Taumata Arowai has released its 2024/25 Network Environmental Performance Report. The report shows varying levels of asset management and data quality, high levels of leaks and overflows in parts of the network, and issues with consenting and environmental monitoring.

Resilient communities, economies and environments

The Resilience reference group is chaired by Chair Deon Swiggs and first met on 22 June. Its first meeting focused on feedback on the proposed annual work plan, resource management reform, emergency management reform and anticipated changes to the Climate Change Response Act.

Resource management reform

On 20 July, the Environment Select Committee reported back on the replacement legislation for the Resource Management Act. The committee largely retained the overall structure originally proposed but made a number of changes. These included extending the implementation period from 30 to 39 months, requiring spatial planning committees to include at least one member with knowledge, skills and experience in te ao Māori and Māori development, expanding ministerial powers regarding breaches of environmental limits and resolving conflicts between goals, clarifying requirements around permitted activity registration, and enabling councils to consider effects from external layouts of buildings where they extend beyond the boundary.

Some of these changes positively respond to issues LGNZ raised in its submission. The extension to implementation timeframes partially responds to LGNZ's concerns, while requirements around te ao Māori and Māori development expertise, and the ability to consider effects from external building layouts, were specifically requested in LGNZ's submission.

However, there have been no substantive changes to key areas of concern raised by LGNZ. LGNZ remains particularly concerned about the regulatory relief regime and the sequencing of plan preparation, with spatial plans still required before natural environment and land use plans.

Alongside the Select Committee report, Cabinet announced that existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements would not transfer into the new system. Instead, councils will have the option of entering into new, more narrowly scoped iwi participation agreements that record how iwi authorities will participate in statutory planning processes and processes required to give effect to Treaty settlement redress.

National Council agreed that LGNZ needed to challenge the Government's process because it doesn't allow for public consultation. This is the second time in recent months that material changes have been made at a late stage in a legislative process with no opportunity for iwi/Māori and public (or council) input. National Council also supported Te Maruata to take a strong public position on the substance of the issue, which is the removal of Mana Whakahono ā Rohe as a mechanism for iwi participation.

LGNZ will continue to analyse the Select Committee report and share further insights with members.

Climate change

The Government has introduced the Climate Change Response Amendment Bill, which will require territorial authorities to undertake adaptation planning in priority locations. These locations will be identified through Regional Spatial Plans, with Adaptation Plans required to set out relevant risks, how those risks will be managed and who will be expected to pay.

LGNZ has provided an initial overview of the implications for local government through Keeping it Local and released a media statement responding to the Bill's introduction. LGNZ has noted that clarity around planning roles is positive, but the fundamental question remains how the costs of adaptation will be funded.

Following the introduction of the Bill, Regional Sector Chair Deon Swiggs was interviewed by RNZ and Carbon News. He outlined the local government questions that still need to be answered, particularly who will fund climate adaptation.

LGNZ has also responded to Minister Watts' letter to councils on climate change assumptions. In its response, LGNZ made clear that councils are making complex planning and infrastructure decisions using technical advice, local circumstances and existing government guidance. LGNZ reiterated its call for a nationally consistent framework for climate risk assessment and adaptation planning, with clear roles, responsibilities and funding.

Emergency management

The Select Committee recommended several changes that respond in part to LGNZ's submission. Civil liability protections have been extended so councils and others are covered not only during a declared emergency but also when taking early, precautionary or preventative action in response to an imminent threat. The committee also made small but helpful changes to the definition of "disproportionately affected communities", providing additional clarity to help identify people who may be more affected or have specific needs during and after an emergency.

Several new provisions relevant to councils were also introduced. Emergency Management Committees will be able to appoint associate members with specialist skills, Mayor-elects will be able to declare a state of emergency in urgent situations, Long-term Plans will need to set out steps a local authority will take to implement or progress requirements imposed through Regional Emergency Management Plans, and "major transport incident" will be included as an emergency.

LGNZ will continue to keep members updated on the Bill and support the sector to understand new roles and responsibilities once the Bill becomes law.

Influence

Much of LGNZ's influence work now sits under the four **advocacy priorities** reported on above. Outside those priority areas, LGNZ has continued to focus on election-year advocacy, cross-party engagement, media visibility and policy issues that remain important for members.

Government relations

Since June, LGNZ's government relations work has focused on election-year advocacy. LGNZ developed our election-year manifesto to support conversations with candidates and parties. The manifesto sets out issues councils have consistently raised with LGNZ, including funding and financing, infrastructure, reform, climate resilience and strengthening local democracy. It also makes the case for the role local government plays in New Zealand's economic growth.

Cross-party engagement has continued. LGNZ met with Labour Leader Chris Hipkins, Local Government Spokesperson Tangi Utikere and Housing and Infrastructure Spokesperson Kieran McAnulty. The discussion covered Labour's public transport policy, Head Start and the backstop, Before the Deluge funding, and the regulatory takings provision in the Resource Management Act. Greater Wellington Chair and Te Uru Kahika Flood Resilience Sponsor Daran Ponter joined the meeting to speak to Before the Deluge.

In late July, LGNZ met with New Zealand First's Andy Foster and discussed a range of topics including rates capping, accommodation levies, Simplifying Local Government and potential reforms to the Local Government Act.

Earlier in the period, LGNZ's government relations activity centred on meetings with Local Government Minister Simon Watts, Opposition Leader Chris Hipkins and Green Party Local Government Spokesperson Mike Davidson, supported by wider engagement with political advisors and member zoom sessions with Minister Willis and Minister Watts on the fuel situation.

Working with Te Uru Kahika

LGNZ, with the support of Te Uru Kahika, has briefed the National Party caucus and, separately, the Labour leader and relevant spokespeople on Before the Deluge. This is the culmination of years of work by Te Uru Kahika, and LGNZ was pleased to support this work ahead of the election. The politicians who attended the briefing received a summary of Before the Deluge 3.0 and LGNZ also worked with Greater Wellington Chair Daran Ponter to support his briefing to the Green Party. Chair Deon Swiggs, the Chair of the Regional Sector, also attended the Green Party briefing.

Media

Media interest in local government has remained high, particularly around reform, climate adaptation, election settings, rates and funding tools. LGNZ's approach has been to stay visible as New Zealand moves into a period where general election stories will dominate.

Fuel remained an ongoing topic of media interest, especially at the start of this reporting period. Rehette was quoted by RNZ, and Regional Sector Chair Deon Swiggs spoke on morning radio bulletins, followed by an op-ed about the pressure diesel costs were placing on public transport and the important role regional councillors play in managing that pressure.

LGNZ's advocacy for new funding tools for councils has also received regular media coverage. The RAS and LGNZ's pre-Budget push for GST sharing both gained media attention, with the RAS covered online and on RNZ's Nine to Noon, and GST sharing set out in an op-ed by Selwyn Mayor Lydia Gliddon for The Press, developed with LGNZ.

As election policy announcements continue, media will remain a key part of LGNZ's advocacy. LGNZ's focus is to respond quickly where there is a local government angle and keep reinforcing manifesto priorities so the impact on communities and councils is not lost.

Other policy issues outside the advocacy priorities

Seismic strengthening

The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill was reported back to Parliament in July. LGNZ strongly supported the Bill, which refocuses the seismic strengthening regime on the highest-risk buildings.

While most of the changes recommended in LGNZ's submission were not implemented by the committee, several changes relevant to councils were made. These included more clearly defining "urban centre" for the purposes of the Bill, creating a transitional period for councils to reassess strategic transport routes, allowing extensions for seismic work on heritage grounds, and clarifying terminology such as "full retrofit" and "façade strengthening".

Dog control

MCERT has released guidance on dog control and enforcement to support councils using existing tools and powers under the Dog Control Act 1996. This is an interim measure while the Government undertakes a comprehensive review of the Act. The review will consider challenges councils face around powers and functions, enforcement penalties and the ability to impose desexing obligations.

The Government has announced that the review will be carried out before the end of 2026, with replacement legislation to be introduced and passed next year. LGNZ has discussed the review with officials, who have agreed LGNZ will be involved.

The guidance was developed by MCERT with a working group of council officials working in dog control, along with LGNZ and Taituarā representatives. LGNZ will continue to engage with MCERT officials as the review begins.

Building system reforms

The Building Amendment Bill has been introduced to Parliament. It changes building and construction settings, most notably moving away from joint and several liability, where councils could become a last resort for homeowners seeking compensation for building defects, towards a shared liability system. This has been an area of sustained advocacy by LGNZ over many years, and was the subject of a remit passed by the 2023 AGM. The Bill also simplifies the process for consolidating Building Consent Authority functions between councils, changes some processing times and makes changes to levy funding for building research.

LGNZ has picked up concerns about levy funding changes and the effect this could have on BRANZ's work. LGNZ will consider these issues further as it prepares its submission and will also make clear that quicker consent processing relies on high-quality applications from builders.

Progress on 2025 remits

We've made progress on each of the remits that were adopted at the 2025 AGM, though more on some than others. Several remits have been built into our broader advocacy and policy work programme. In some cases, we've worked together with the council/s that proposed the remit to make progress. We will continue to work on 2025 remits that we've not yet fully achieved or where we've only been able to make limited progress so far.

A change of government, and the change of priorities that comes with that, always has an impact on our ability to make progress on remits. With every change of government, we re-assess and re-prioritise what we're advocating for – so that the issues we're focused on align with the Government's priorities.

Remit subject	Progress update
Improving Joint Management Agreements	We engaged early with officials at the Ministry for the Environment who made it clear that there were no plans, and no likely capacity, to make changes to policy regarding Joint Management Agreements (JMAs) prior to the replacing of the Resource Management Act with the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. Given this, we concentrated our efforts on improving the standing of JMAs in the new legislation as the initial proposal would only allow for the carrying over of existing JMAs and would not give councils and iwi the ability to establish new ones. This was primarily through our submission on the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill, where we outlined the important role JMAs

	can play and, based on legal advice we received, recommended the legislation be amended to allow for new ones to be established. We have also included information on JMAs in advice on Head Start guidance to councils.
Alcohol licensing fees	In September 2025, we wrote to the Minister of Justice raising the issues covered by this remit and requesting that he urgently update the fees to reflect current costs (including inflation) and provide annual CPI adjustments, as well as enabling cost recovery for objection hearings. The Minister responded, raising concerns around the risk of imposing additional costs on businesses and noting that fees will be reviewed in 2027. We have engaged with the Ministry for Regulation during its hospitality sector review noting the challenges councils face in not being able to fully recover costs. As part of this, we submitted on the discussion document for local authorities calling for improvements that would deliver better cost recovery. Ensuring cost recovery tools are kept in line with real costs is specifically called for in our election year manifesto. We are also including it in our rates capping advocacy as one way to reduce pressure on rates.
Aligning public and school bus services	We engaged with Nelson City Council, which put forward the remit. At that time, negotiations were underway with the Ministry of Education to trial better alignment in the Nelson region. LGNZ agreed that its next step would be to engage after the trial to inform potential next steps for our advocacy. The initial proposal for a trial was taken further, and the Ministry of Education has been approached about alternative approaches by Nelson City Council. Our understanding is that Nelson is yet to hear back from the Ministry. We will engage after this happens, to determine if we can offer any further support in implementing this remit.
Review of local government arrangements to achieve better balance	The Government's announcement of its Simplifying Local Government programme and Head Start pathway superseded proactive work planned to implement this remit. The remit has informed the approach we have taken in responding to these processes, including that local government accepts change is needed but that councils and communities must be fully involved in this change alongside central government. LGNZ has rolled out an extensive programme of zooms, advice and think pieces in May-July 2026 to support members' engagement with the

	Head Start pathway. This has included legal advice, examination of previous amalgamations in New Zealand and overseas, the important of regional functions, the unitary model, and engaging with iwi through the process.
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Remits passed at our 2026 AGM

The AGM also ranked the successful remits in order of priority:

1. Financial support for government reform implementation costs
2. Improving LTP audit requirements
3. Removal of representation review requirements during Simplifying Local Government reform
4. Bulk funding of transport activities
5. Priorities for Dog Control Act reform
6. A fairer approach to uneconomic transport infrastructure funding
7. Improved regulation of vape retailers
8. Enhanced role for government in supporting subnational diplomacy
9. Devolution of place naming to territorial authorities

You can read more about each of these remits in [the paper that went to the AGM](#).

After weighing up the rankings and available resource, National Council has decided that the first five remits will be allocated the most resource, though actions will be taken for all remits.

Connection

Member communications

LGNZ has provided members with frequent updates and resources related to reforms, particularly Simplifying Local Government. This included multiple emails from Scott to Mayors, Chairs and Chief Executives, as well as personalised emails to members.

There have been strong turnouts to the large number of zooms LGNZ has organised, including the Simplifying Local Government series, legal advice sessions, Budget sessions and fuel crisis updates.

Zone meetings

LGNZ's new approach to zone meetings, with a Leadership Team member assigned to each zone and attendance by an out-of-zone National Council representative, is strengthening connections with members. The value of these in-person opportunities goes beyond formal LGNZ updates, helping build relationships and giving councillors the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions.

In early May, Scott, Simon and Fran attended Zone 4. The agenda focused on key regional partnerships, including CreativeHQ, WellingtonNZ and Chorus, and members toured the Riverlink project afterwards.

In mid-May, Rehette, Scott and Amanda attended Zone 5/6 in Christchurch, chaired by Dan and Tamah. The meeting included a range of expert and political speakers, visits to new infrastructure including the stadium and events centre, and positive feedback on the value LGNZ was delivering.

Rehette, Scott and Simon attended Zone 2 in late May, where the agenda was reworked to focus significant time on Simplifying Local Government and regional impacts, both with DIA and among zone members. Other presentations focused on climate adaptation and resilience.

In July, Rehette and Ranjani attended a Zone 3 meeting responding to Simplifying Local Government. The meeting featured several politicians, including strong representation from local MPs, which members found helpful.

Dan and Amanda attended Zone 1 on 21 July and provided a well-received update, taking a large number of questions.

Sector meetings

LGNZ held separate sector meetings in May. The programmes focused on Simplifying Local Government, which had been announced ten days earlier, and the fuel crisis. Metro was very successful, with good discussion and feedback. Rural and Provincial was also successful, although attendees were more concerned about the reform agenda. At Regional, discussion focused on the complexities of reform and the future of regional councils.

Because SuperLocal shifted to October, the November sector meetings were rescheduled for July and August. Metro met in Auckland on 24 July, with all member Metro councils represented. The Auckland Mayor attended online, and a range of Auckland-based businesses and member organisations shared their election-year advocacy priorities with the group. Minister Erica Stanford, Opportunities Party's Qiulae Wong and NZ First local government spokesperson Andy Foster had candid conversations with the room, which attendees appreciated so close to the Head Start deadline.

Rural and Provincial met for useful conversation and presentations on 6 and 7 August, immediately ahead of the Head Start deadline, which dominated discussion. Regional met on 14 August as this report was being finalised.

SuperLocal26

We replanned the SuperLocal26 programme to accommodate the shift of the conference to October. We launched ticket sales and the programme in mid-June. Ticket sales were very strong in the lead up to early-bird pricing closing on 14 August.

The SuperLocal Awards launched in late June. We have had good numbers of entries across all categories, particularly SuperCollab.

Te Maruata

LGNZ facilitated two whānau whānui monthly zoom hui with the wider rōpū, which were positively received by Te Maruata members.

The July Te Maruata hui in Rotorua provided an important opportunity for whakawhanaungatanga during a significant reform period. The hui included a ceremony to honour longstanding Rotorua Councillor and former Deputy Mayor Cr Trevor Maxwell, described in the August leadership report as a strong champion of Te Maruata and the work of the rōpū.

Te Maruata perspectives have been important in LGNZ's work on Simplifying Local Government and wider system changes, including the implications of structural reform for Māori elected members, iwi partnerships and community voice. Te Maruata has also raised concerns about the proposed removal of voting rights for unelected members on council committees, which LGNZ wrote to the Minister about.

Alongside Te Maruata, LGNZ commissioned Poipoia to provide advice on engagement with iwi Māori through the Head Start process. LGNZ shared that guidance with members, including through a zoom, alongside wider guidance on structural options and iwi Māori representation.

Work is progressing on the Te Maruata Impact Framework, which is intended to provide a clear, Te Maruata-owned way to tell the story of the network's contribution to LGNZ and the wider sector. LGNZ is also working this triennium to ensure Te Maruata and YEM's work is more integrated into LGNZ policy and advocacy.

Young Elected Members

At National Council's May meeting, National Council agreed to put forward a rule change that would allow networks to submit remits (subject to the normal remit endorsement requirements). This motion was subsequently passed by the AGM in July.

YEM's flagship hui was held in Rotorua on 30 and 31 July. The programme focused on leadership, local government reform and how young elected members can navigate change in a rapidly shifting environment. It included sessions on Simplifying Local Government and resource management reform, representation in governance, resilience and building collective influence.

Women in Local Government

LGNZ held a zoom for women on 12 June featuring the Ministry for Women, which launched its Long-term Insights Briefing into how online harm is affecting the pipeline of women leaders. The zoom also featured Areto, which is offering two free years of its social media moderation platform for elected women.

LGNZ has secured a keynote speaker for the Women in Local Government breakfast ahead of SuperLocal.

There continues to be steady traffic on the WhatsApp group for women elected members.

Support

Ākona

Ākona continues to support elected members and councils through online learning and curated resources. In May, the most popular courses were Baseline learning, Responsibilities of a chair, Creating your own meeting culture, Chairing diverse dynamics, and Intro to funding and finance.

Over June and July, there were 213 individual logins to the Ākona platform. The most popular learning catalogues during these two months were Simplifying Local Government, Long Term Planning, Chairing meetings, Baseline learning, Upcoming reforms, Keeping yourself safe, Conflicts of interest and Asset management.

In July, we launched a suite of recommended learning to guide elected members through the Long-term Plan process. The package was developed in response to demand from councils, with LGNZ working extensively with LTP leads to curate existing content and develop new content, including two new micro-learns focused on “Finance for decision-makers”.

Since the LTP learning package launched, there have been 138 individual logins. The most popular learning activities in the package are Key information in the Long Term Plan, Key roles in the Long Term Plan, Updating the Long Term Plan, Finance for decision-makers, and Responsibilities of the chair.

LGNZ has also created an Ākona page where members can find all Simplifying Local Government resources and recordings.

An Ākona advisory group has been established to ensure member feedback informs the user experience, content and planning. The group includes Mayors, Chairs, elected members and staff. It met for the first time online on 4 June and is due to meet again in early October.

Micro-credentials

LGNZ has launched a new micro-credential pathway in partnership with Victoria University. The pathway will offer two certified qualifications: Certified Local Governance Practitioner at Level 7, achieved through three micro-credentials, and Certified Local Governance Advanced Practitioner at Level 8, achieved through the full suite of six micro-credentials.

Official registrations opened in July and have been much stronger than expected.

The micro-credential project is supported by an advisory group that provides advice and feedback to ensure content is accurate, relevant, aligned with governance expectations and practically applicable to elected member roles.

Road Efficiency Group

The REG programme has completed the second year of its three-year programme, in line with NZTA's financial year end. The FY2025/26 REG Learning and Development workshops successfully engaged sector participants, with increased attendance, positive feedback on content relevance and strong facilitation quality.

Feedback from participants showed high satisfaction with both the Learning and Development and REG components. Delivery performance was strong, with workshops achieving a high proportion of stated objectives and continued improvement evident across the series.

Executive support

LGNZ offers a range of executive support services. During this period, we completed the Chief Executive recruitment process for several councils. We are also working with two councils as the independent advisor for their Chief Executive performance review programmes, supporting one council's Chief Executive with an organisational review, and are in early discussions with two other councils about executive support opportunities.

Appendix 1: Reference group members

Local government system reference group

- Mayor Fran Wilde (chair), South Wairarapa District Council
- Councillor Dinnie Moeahu (deputy chair), New Plymouth District Council
- Chair Craig Williamson, Taranaki Regional Council
- Mayor John Robertson, Waitomo District Council
- Chair Sophie Siers, Hawkes Bay Regional Council
- Councillor Neil Gillespie, Otago Regional Council
- Councillor John Verry, Selwyn District Council
- Councillor Darren Ludlow, Invercargill City Council
- Councillor Steven Botica, Kāpiti Coast District Council
- Councillor Felicity Foy, Far North District Council
- Community Board Chair Linda Bonne, Whakatāne District Council

Funding and cost-efficiency reference group

- Mayor Mahé Drysdale (chair), Tauranga City Council
- Mayor Tamah Alley (deputy chair), Central Otago District Council
- Chair Nikki Riley, Horizons Regional Council
- Mayor Will Foley, Central Hawke's Bay District Council
- Mayor Scott Gilmore, Tararua District Council
- Mayor Steve Cretney, Carterton District Council
- Mayor Andrew Tripe, Whanganui District Council
- Councillor Flemming Rasmussen, Thames-Coromandel District Council
- Councillor Dave Woods, Tasman District Council
- Councillor Prabha Ravi, Hutt City Council
- Chief Executive Steven Perdia, Whakatāne District Council

Infrastructure reference group

- Mayor Andy Watson (chair), Rangitikei District Council
- Mayor John Glover (deputy chair), Queenstown Lakes District Council
- Mayor Dan Gordon, Waimakariri District Council
- Mayor Nigel Bowen, Timaru District Council
- Councillor Alex Crackett, Invercargill City Council
- Chair Daran Ponter, Greater Wellington Regional Council
- Mayor Tim King, Tasman District Council
- Councillor Tom Davies, Hurunui District Council
- Councillor Geordie Rogers, Wellington City Council
- Councillor Sophie McInnes, Selwyn District Council
- Councillor EJ Barrett, New Plymouth District Council
- Chief Executive Stace Lewer, Ōpōtiki District Council

Resilience reference group

- Chair Deon Swiggs (chair), Environment Canterbury
- Mayor Faylene Tunui (deputy chair), Kawerau District Council
- Deputy Mayor Aubrey Ria, Gisborne District Council
- Chair Warren Maher, Waikato Regional Council
- Deputy Mayor Shayne Barry, Buller District Council
- Councillor Lisa Thomson, Waikato District Council
- Councillor Kat Macmillan, Bay of Plenty Regional Council
- Councillor Sophie McInnes, Selwyn District Council
- Councillor Liz Stolwyk, Waikato Regional Council
- Chief Executive Bob Penter, Chatham Islands Council
- Chief Executive Aileen Lawrie, Thames-Coromandel District Council