



LGNZ four-monthly report for member councils

// December-March 2026





From the Chief Executive

Over the past six months, LGNZ has reset our leadership and relationship with the Government. In December, National Council confirmed Mayor Rehette Stoltz as President and Mayor Dan Gordon as Vice President. I was delighted to be appointed Chief Executive in March. During the period this report covers – December to March – National Council has reset LGNZ’s strategy for the triennium, with a stronger focus on influence. You can see that strategy on the next page.

We produce this report for member councils three times a year so that you can see our work in detail. It draws on reports produced for LGNZ’s National Council.

Highlights of this period include:

- Our rebuilt relationship with the Minister and Prime Minister, including an informal working lunch at Waitangi, formal meetings and commitments to keep local government in the loop. Some examples:
 - Minister Watts agreed to a regular zoom with members and we held the first in March.
 - We have worked with DIA to ensure that Ministers Willis and Watts keep Mayors, Chairs and Chief Executives in the loop on the fuel crisis via regular zooms.
- Developing and sharing with members numerous submissions on reform with tight feedback deadlines in early 2026.
- The positive reception for [LGNZ’s value of membership report](#), particularly the advocacy services we deliver that save councils money and reduce cost burdens for the sector.

Right now, the fuel crisis and its impact on local government are top of mind. We are advocating for local government and ensuring that Ministers keep Mayors, Chairs and CEs well briefed. We will also be commissioning economic analysis that members can use to put your local costs in context.

The step change in the Government’s engagement with LGNZ driven by our leadership reset has been obvious during conversations about the fuel supply, engagement on RAS and other meetings. The Government has asked us for support on the fuel crisis and dog attacks. We have worked quickly and closely with the Government on dogs – in collaboration with members – and been acknowledged in their comms. Our engagement with DIA is also much stronger, and we are part of LG Fuel Response Unit meetings.

I want to thank National Council for your confidence in me. It endorses the team’s approach to delivering on LGNZ’s leadership reset. Thank you to members for the conversations we are having – keep them coming.

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.

01.

LGNZ effectively influences central government.

02.

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

03.

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

04.

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 Ākonga 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:

01.

Financially sustainable and cost-effective local government

02.

Meeting current and future infrastructure needs

03.

Resilient communities, economies, and environments

04.

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.



Influence

Government relations

Once the new President and VP were confirmed at the December National Council meeting, Rehette and Dan personally reached out to all key Ministers and officials. This engagement has been well received, and the Government is welcoming the reset of LGNZ's leadership.

Minister Simon Watts and Minister Chris Bishop fronted a well-received zoom for members a couple of days before Christmas on the range of reforms facing local government. Minister Watts subsequently agreed to quarterly zooms with our membership, with the first one being held in March. We have had positive feedback from both the Government and members on this. We have also secured Minister Watts for the next Regional Sector meeting, which is something regional councils have been seeking since Simplifying Local Government was announced.

We met with the Prime Minister in late February. At his request, LGNZ developed recommendations for action around dog control, drawing on suggestions from members. This demonstrated to the Government that we can respond quickly and effectively. Local Government Minister Simon Watts then announced a review of the Dog Control Act on in late March, which we had advocated for, with our input acknowledged. LGNZ will continue to engage with the Government as it undertakes the review.

Recently we have established a good relationship with the Finance Minister's office given our initial work with DIA on fuel issues, including initiating zooms between the Finance Minister, Local Government Minister and Mayors, Chairs and CEs. Minister Willis has sent a personal note of appreciation to Rehette following this work.

During a general election year, we are prioritising direct member engagement with central government politicians. We secured a number of key Ministers for the All-of-local-government and sector meetings in February, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Local Government Minister.

We continue to meet with all political parties in the lead-up to the election. LGNZ's early draft of our pre-election "manifesto" will be socialised at the May sector meetings, while noting that behind-the-scenes work to influence political manifestos began last year.

Waitangi

Waitangi week signals the start of the political year, so was important for LGNZ to have a presence. We secured five political meetings, including a working lunch with Minister Simon Watts, Rehette, Dan and Scott. We took this opportunity to reiterate that LGNZ's new leadership wants to work differently with the Government.

We met with the Labour Party, Green Party, Te Pati Māori and local MP Grant McCallum. Topics included rates capping, electoral reform, infrastructure challenges facing our cities, severe weather events and cost shifting.



We also met with the Chair of Ngapuhi Mane Tahere and Ngāti Kahungunu Chair Bayden Barber as part of our National Iwi Chairs Forum engagement

Advocacy on Simplifying Local Government

As discussed below, our submission argues that Combined Territories Board should focus on developing reorganisation plans and regional councillors should stay till the end of their elected term (unless that region is ready to go sooner). We have advocated for this in multiple ways:

1. In our working lunch with Minister Watts at Waitangi. Minister Watts has been clear that he wants to work with LGNZ to improve reforms.
2. With the Prime Minister when we met in late February.
3. During the conversation Metro Sector had with Minister Bishop, who attended their meeting in person in February. Metro Sector expressed its support for this position.
4. In early March, we [wrote to Ministers Watts and Bishop](#) reinforcing our ask that the Government retains elected regional councillors in their governance role until either the end of this term or until reorganisation plans are finalised.
5. We've secured Minister Watts for the May Regional Sector meeting so that you can reiterate this message in person.
6. As well as these engagements, we've advocated at all levels of government, from the select committee to the Chief Executive of DIA and every other layer of management/official inside DIA working on the policy advice.
7. And we've engaged with media, using Chair Deon as a spokesperson, both proactively to specific journalists and at a press conference we set up.

Media

The story of LGNZ's leadership reset was covered by the NZ Herald and RNZ in December.

Severe weather events dominated headlines in January, unsurprisingly. LGNZ's research into the [increasing number of states of emergencies](#) drew significant media attention. President Rehette Stoltz spoke to [The Post](#), [RNZ](#), [RNZ Morning Report](#), Newstalk ZB and Mediaworks about how these weather emergencies can have a massive impact on a region's infrastructure and economy. LGNZ's comments were picked up by [The Press](#), [Waikato Times](#), [Evening Report](#) and [Insurance Business Magazine](#), with our media release prompting a reply from Local Government Minister Simon Watts. The Minister said that the proposed rates capping policy would allow for variations in "extreme circumstances" such as a major weather event.

The main issue currently is fuel shortages. We supported the Regional Sector's work to highlight the role that public transport can play to minimise disruption. Our [media release](#) was picked up by Mediaworks and RNZ. Regional Sector Chair Deon Swiggs was our spokesperson.

As part of our advocacy to unlock a range of funding and financing tools for councils, Rehette spoke in the [New Zealand Herald](#) about growing calls for the Government to pay rates on Crown properties, which was subsequently picked up by [Newstalk ZB](#). Most recently Scott spoke to [Nine to Noon on RNZ](#) about the Ratepayers' Assistance Scheme.



As discussed above, LGNZ has worked closely with central government around its announcement to review dog control laws and this engagement was reflected in the [Minister's press release](#). Comments from Rehette featured in coverage by [Stuff](#), [Newstalk ZB](#), [The Northern Advocate](#), and RNZ National, including that "no one should have to feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods, and dog control rules as they currently stand are not sufficient".

Local government funding and financing

Rates capping

We submitted on the Government's proposal of a rates band of 2-4% and argued strongly for a different way to calculate the band.

We understand Cabinet is currently considering policy decisions that will inform the development of legislation. We expect this to be introduced before the House rises, with the intention of passing it early next term.

Ratepayer Assistance Scheme (RAS)

We continue to talk to Ministers and Ministerial staff about the Ratepayers Assistance Scheme to build understanding and answer any questions. This ensures that the Beehive is primed for advice they are due to receive from officials on the business case.

The Strategic Advisory Group, including its Chair Nick Smith, Cameron Bagrie and Stuart Henderson, wrote to the Minister to express their unreserved support.

We continue to have conversations with councils to seek support for the RAS, with the number of councils in support growing.

Infrastructure funding and financing

We submitted on the exposure draft and discussion paper on the proposed introduction of development levies. We support development levies; however, we also raised a number of improvements we would like to see in the final legislation when introduced. This largely concerned the increased risks councils would take on in this system, and the potential costs and impacts of the regulator on local government's autonomy.

Resource management reform

The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill, the two pieces of legislation that will eventually replace the Resource Management Act, were introduced to Parliament in December. The legislation was largely as signalled by the Government. We worked with Buddle Findlay to prepare our draft submission, which was circulated with members for their feedback and use. Buddle Findlay Partner David Allen also hosted a well-attended Āko hour in December covering these reforms for members.



In our submission we took a generally supportive approach, though expressed concerns about some features such as the regulatory relief provisions, timeframes for the transition, and the lack of resourcing for councils to implement the new regime. We spoke to these points further during our oral submission to the Environment Committee in mid-March, which was fronted by Rehette, Deon, and senior policy advisor Will Blackler.

We worked closely with Taituarā, Te Uru Kahika, and the Planning Institute during the development of our submission. The sharing of views and expertise was valuable and allowed, for example, the echoing of Taituarā's alternate timeline for the transition in our own submission, saving time and resources.

We are optimistic that the Government will be receptive to some changes to the two bills that would improve the legislation from a local government perspective. We will be monitoring progress closely. We will have input on the initial batch of national direction for the new system, which is expected to be consulted on mid-year.

Simplifying Local Government

In February, [LGNZ submitted on the Government's Simplifying Local Government proposal](#). This submission was developed by a National Council Working Group and went out for two weeks' consultation with members.

The submission says that CTBs will be most effective in delivering strong regional reorganisation plans if they have a single, clear purpose rather than also taking on regional council governance. We recommend retaining regional councillors' governance expertise over regional functions until either the end of this triennium or when the regional reorganisation plans are finalised. Our view is that the makeup of Combined Territories Boards could include Chairs (to ensure regional council functions are well understood), Mayors, and even external stakeholders. We also pushed for flexibility so that if regions are already well-advanced on a reorganisation proposal, they are not unnecessarily slowed down.

As well as writing a submission, we pitched a media story, advocated our position in a meeting with the Prime Minister, had a lengthy discussion with Minister Watts, and are currently working on an op-ed with Chair Deon. We are hopeful that there will be changes from the original proposal when the Government announces final policy decisions in the next few months. We are also developing a series of zoom meetings for members to support their conversations on future arrangements.

Regional deals

Concluding the first City Deal with Auckland was significant for the Government given regional and city deals were a key plank of the National Party's election platform.



The two remaining shortlisted candidates are still negotiating with officials. These are Western Bay of Plenty (Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District, Bay of Plenty Regional Council) and Otago Lakes (Queenstown Lakes District Council, Central Otago District Council, and Otago Regional Council).

The Government has committed to two further deals being made by the end of this year. It is unclear if there will be any further calls for proposals as part of this round.

Climate change

The Ministry for the Environment has signalled upcoming amendments to the Climate Change Response Act that will include new requirements for councils to undertake adaptation planning in high-priority areas. We will be actively engaging in this process and working closely with the sector to ensure these changes are clear and practicable for local government and that there is strong alignment with the new planning system.

Other policy issues

Seismic strengthening

The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill was introduced to Parliament late last year. This legislation implements the reform of the seismic strengthening regime announced by the Government last year, which will refocus the system on the highest-risk buildings in the highest-risk areas. We worked with our seismic strengthening reference group to develop our submission, which strongly supports this reform, while recommending some tweaks to improve it further, such as how 'priority' buildings are treated by the new regime.

This is an advocacy win for LGNZ, having advocated for a number of years for reform to the system due to the direct and indirect costs it places on local government, and with the issue being the subject of a 2024 remit by Manawatū District Council.

Our written submission was followed up with an oral submission to the Transport and Infrastructure Committee fronted by Manawatū Mayor Michael Ford and senior policy advisor Will Blackler.

Emergency management reform

In February we [submitted on the Emergency Management Bill](#). The bill as drafted clarifies responsibilities at national, regional and local levels, including around the declaration of emergencies, and introduces new requirements for councils including new standards that regional emergency management plans will be required to meet. We were broadly supportive of the changes though advocated for practical standards that are not just 'one-size-fits-all' box ticking exercises, and highlighted the need for additional funding tools, particularly in the context of rates capping, so that investment in resilience and risk reduction is not compromised.



Our written submission was followed up with an oral submission to the Governance and Administration Committee fronted by LGNZ President Rehette Stoltz and senior policy advisor Ainslee Brown.

We're expecting a report back to the Select Committee in June and anticipate the bill will be passed shortly after.

Dog control

In a recent meeting with the Prime Minister, we were asked to consider how the risk of dog attacks could be reduced following a number of horrific incidents. We spoke with a range of council officers on these issues to understand the challenges and gather suggested solutions to support dog control across the country. The key message was that updating the Dog Control Act 1996 would have the greatest impact.

We provided these insights to the Prime Minister and Minister for Local Government in early March. The Government has since announced a review of the Act, and has adopted other suggestions recommended by LGNZ, including increased SPCA funding for desexing and a renewed commitment from the Police Minister to support councils with dog control issues when needed.

LGNZ is participating in the development of enforcement guidelines with DIA and a number of council experts, and will engage with officials on the review of the Act and wider support measures for councils.



Connection

Keeping members up-to-date

With the relentless parade of reform announcements pre Christmas, we put out a significant volume of member comms to ensure that Mayors, Chairs and councillors were on top of the detail and implications. This included publishing explainers for each of the key reforms. We had strong engagement with those comms, which included designed email campaigns and outlook emails. Our first *Keeping it Local* email newsletter of 2026 had a 70% open rate.

In January we published draft submissions across multiple channels plus reminders of the resources we have available to support councils. We have continued to communicate on reforms, including sharing final submissions and oral submissions on a range of reforms.

LGNZ's leadership reset has informed our communication to members. After the February and April National Council meetings, Rehette and Dan have hosted well-attended zooms where they discussed key decisions, with a range of constructive questions asked.

Rehette has sent all members emails on National Council's strategy and fee decisions; announced LGNZ's new CEs and shared our member value report; and announced the decision to shift SuperLocal to October as well the opportunity for members to join advocacy priorities reference groups.

Scott has communicated with all Mayors, Chairs and CEs to provide updates on advocacy, including meetings with the Prime Minister and Ministers, the fuel crisis and the latest Infometrics Insights. He has also communicated directly with Regional sector Chairs, Mayors, elected members and CEs to share our letter to the Minister reinforcing our position on Simplifying Local Government.

As noted in the **Influence** section, we organised the first of our new, regular zooms with the Minister in mid March – this attracted more than 200 people.

Our fortnightly *Keeping it Local* email newsletter continues to record strong open rates. During this period we have also sent a targeted email to women elected members and our first Ākonga newsletter for 2026.

Zone meetings

We are taking a different approach to Zone meetings, with an LGNZ Leadership Team member assigned to each Zone, much like an account manager, to provide more consistent support and attendance. We are also working with Rehette and Dan to ensure National Council is represented at every zone meeting (in addition to that Zone's NC representative).



Zone 1 met on 19 March, with Mayor Craig attending (in place of President Rehette and Vice President Dan who were in CE interviews) along with Amanda, with Mayor Ken also speaking. We were reminded of the difference it makes to attend these meetings in person.

Zone 3 met on 27-28 March, hosted in Stratford by Mayor Neil Volzke, for a very positive meeting. The Zone was supportive of the LGNZ leadership reset and particularly appreciated the tangible savings highlighted in the value document. President Rehette and Ranjani delivered the LGNZ update to an engaged group. There were questions about whether LGNZ could support councils to progress some transport funding work, which is being looked into by the team. Once again, there was a huge amount of appreciation for LGNZ attending in person.

Zone 2 met on 28 March for an engaging day although a number of attendees were affected by severe weather. Mayor Faylene chaired the meeting, filling Cr Angela O’Leary’s boots well. Mayor Dan, Scott, and Simon presented the LGNZ update, which was well received and prompted a number of good questions, with a particular focus on the fuel crisis and impacts on local government. Liam Dann – Business Editor at Large for the New Zealand Herald – gave an interesting keynote on the current state of the economy and key economic issues. He (unprompted) cited the research we commissioned from BERL on the impact of local government on growing the economy.

Zone 5 and 6 will meet in late April, and Zone 4 will meet in May.

SuperLocal26

We are well into planning and securing sponsors for SuperLocal26 in Rotorua, which will be at the Energy Events Centre. As suggested at National Council’s December meeting, the theme for SuperLocal26 is “Reset. Refocus. Reimagine.”

We have stood up a Conference Advisory Committee to support our work on the programme. The members are Mayor Grant Smith, Mayor Tania Tapsell, Cr Stuart Crosby and Cr Bonita Bigham as the Te Maruata representative and Vice President Dan Gordon. The committee has met twice and provided helpful feedback.

National Council decided in April to shift SuperLocal from July to October given uncertainties around the fuel crisis, and we have had positive feedback on this decision. The programme and ticket sales will launch in June.

We have rejigged the SuperLocal awards to combine two awards where similar content was being entered. This will allow us to slightly shorten the awards part of the evening, responding to member feedback that they were too long.

We have worked hard to control costs despite increases by all vendors, which has meant extensive negotiation. As a result we have been able to hold the member early bird ticket price at the 2025 level and reduce the cost of standalone dinner tickets. Sponsorship and exhibitors are tracking well.



February All-of-local-government and sector meetings

Our February in-person meetings were extremely well attended.

Deputy Prime Minister David Seymour and Emergency Management Minister Mark Mitchell spoke at our **All-of-local-government meeting** on Thursday 26 February, which was being hosted at Parliament. AOLG had the theme “owning the change” and was focused on supporting councils to respond to the reform storm, with a strong programme of other speakers ranging from economists to former Ministers and the Commerce Commission.

Metro was very successful and had a focus on business and commercial property, with Minister Chris Bishop attending in person and taking a lot of questions. Minister Watts attended via Zoom and there were a range of speakers from the business community. The shift to Metro being on a separate day from R&P and Regional allowed the LGNZ LT to better cover the different sectors, and we will continue with this.

R&P was also very successful and focused on reform and localism vs scale, with Ross Copland a particularly well-received speaker.

Regional was well attended with good engagement on key reforms for the regional sector – resource management and simplifying local government. Both issues were addressed by senior officials from DIA and MfE. The Regional Sector workshopped LGNZ’s advocacy priorities, providing good input. The joint one-pager on LGNZ and Te Uru Kahika’s value proposition prompted good discussion.

May Sector meetings

At the February sector meetings, after disquiet at the previously announced cancellation of in-person May sector meetings, we surveyed members on whether they wanted to keep those meetings in person. A large majority did, which highlights the value members place on our in-person events, so we ‘uncancelled’ them as a result.

May sector meetings remain in person although if needed we can fully shift them online at short notice. We have had feedback that running hybrid for Rural & Provincial does not deliver a good experience so this will either be fully in person or fully online.

May sector meetings will have the following focuses:

- **R&P** – election advocacy and impact of fuel issues.
- **Metro** – fuel issues, election advocacy and tourism
- **Regional** – implementation of resource management reform, Simplifying Local Government, fuel issues and election advocacy.

Te Maruata

Te Maruata has met with the chair of the Iwi Chairs forum, Bayden Barber, to progress work on the Memorandum of Understanding.



LGNZ is currently working on a report that demonstrates Te Maruata’s contribution to local government.

Young Elected Members

The YEM committee met in February to develop their strategy. They will be discussing their draft strategy and Terms of Reference at their Committee meeting in late April.

Community Boards Executive Committee (CBEC)

The CBEC elections were completed in early March. The new executive members are:

Role	Name	Community Board
Zone 1 rep	Jane Hindle	Bay of Islands-Whangaroa Community Board
Zone 2 rep	Dianne Firth	Ngāruawāhia Community Board
Zone 3 rep	Celine Filbee (Co-chair)	Te Hāwera Community Board
Zone 4 rep	Jackie Elliott	Ōtaki Community Board
Zone 5 rep	Grant Knowles	Golden Bay Community Board
Zone 6 rep	Kathy Dedo	Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board
Young Elected Members’ rep	Jayden Cromb (Co-chair)	Vincent Community Board
Te Maruata rep	Irene Wakefield	Te Awahou Foxton Community Board

The board held its first meeting online on 20 March. Items considered included a 2027 community board conference, quarterly zoom meetings for community board members, the new community board/council accord, and community board member training. They are also drafting a survey to all community board members to gain insights on what members would like CBEC to advocate for and what work they would like delivered this triennium.

Women in Local Government

We have emailed all women elected members for the first time this triennium with an update on a range of issues, including our recent submission to the Petitions committee on increasing harassment of elected women. We have also relaunched our informal WhatsApp group for women for the new triennium.



On 27 March, we held a zoom for women elected members to promote Face Forward, which provides real-time protection from online abuse as part of a joint initiative between Areto (an AI moderation platform) and the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership (GIWL) at the Australian National University, which is gathering data for research purposes. More than 30 women attended this session, which was introduced by Mayor Tania Tapsell, and we’ve had positive feedback about the presentation and opportunity.

We are planning another breakfast for women who are Mayors, Chairs, councillors, community board members and CEs ahead of our SuperLocal conference in Rotorua.



Support

Ākona

Ākona now offers a comprehensive suite of learning tools and activities at a size and scale that has never been available to members before, with 23 catalogues of learning on different topics. All LGNZ guides and templates are available on Ākona (and we have transitioned these out of our public website so that they are not available to non-members).

Ākona content includes:

- **Baseline learning** about local government for people new to the sector.
- Learning associated with carrying out **your council role**, including: chairing meetings, asset management, financial governance, risk management, political acumen, managing the CE relationship, conflicts of interest, and decision making.
- Understand **the council environment**, including financial considerations for elected members, Long Term Plans, LGOIMA and government reforms.
- **Key skills** like delivering speeches, managing media, and community engagement
- **Te Reo Māori** modules, engagement with Māori, and tikanga.
- A dedicated section on **elected member safety** that pulls together recordings of all our zooms and resources.

We currently have 310 active users in Ākona. This represents 19% of all people loaded into the platform and 56% of the total number of people who attended induction sessions.

The most popular courses since the elections have been:

- Chairing meetings
- Asset management
- Financial governance
- Political acumen
- Risk management

Upcoming Ākona content will help elected members learn about the LTP process (including implications of reforms and fuel uncertainty), Simplifying Local Government, rates capping (including LTP implications), resource management, and changes resulting from the System Improvements Bill.

We are working with Victoria University to develop a recognised set of local government micro-credentials. This will give elected members a way to have their skills and experience recognised via a formal award backed by Victoria University. It means people can finish their time in local government with a tangible award reflecting their experience, achieved through submitting a portfolio of on-the-job work, which will be reviewed by assessors.



We are also developing a package of learning designed to prepare members for engaging in the long-term plan process. This will launch after the Ako Hour Academy finishes in May and will involve a recommended package of new and existing learning activities.

As well as the online platform, the Ākona team runs in-person workshops on request, charging roughly half the price of comparable commercial offerings.

We are currently setting up an Ākona Advisory Group for the new triennium. This group will provide ongoing advice and feedback as new content is developed and act as champions for professional development across their councils and sector networks.

Te Korowai – CouncilMARK

In 2026, Te Korowai will focus on selling the programme to the wider sector, having now delivered seven assessments. Engagement will prioritise councils experiencing leadership change and those seeking to build long-term organisational capability.

We have now completed all engagements with all councils that completed assessments in 2025, and have met with councils that have expressed interest in participating in Te Korowai this year. In parallel, we are preparing to actively promote the Integrity Survey as a standalone offering to support councils in strengthening organisational health.

To further strengthen the programme’s financial sustainability, we have also reviewed the operating model of the programme’s independent evaluation panel. In the early stages of the programme, panel oversight was structured around a more transactional delivery model. As the programme has evolved, engagements with participating councils have become more relationship-based and typically span longer timeframes.

Road Efficiency Group (REG)

Over the past 12 months we have seen significant increased activity in the REG programme and we remain a key REG partner. REG is a great example of cross-sector collaboration between RCA, local government and NZTA.. In February we reviewed the 2025 programme and looked at the planning and focus for 2026. Initial results show positive feedback from workshop participants, with a Net Promotor Score (NPI) indicating a shift from *good* in 2024 to *great* in 2025.

Executive support

Led by LGNZ People & Culture Manager Erica Thomas, we offer Chief Executive recruitment support services, remuneration review and annual/end of term performance reviews.



LGNZ has recently completed recruitment projects with Tararua District Council to appoint their new Chief Executive, and Queenstown-Lakes District Council to appoint their interim Chief Executive.

We are currently working with Central Hawke's Bay District Council to lead the recruitment process for their Chief Executive role. We are also working with a council to act as an independent advisor to their Chief Executive Performance Committee, leading the development of KPIs and the performance review process for their CE. We are also actively engaged with two other councils regarding executive support opportunities.

Zone Three Meeting Report

Dates: 26–27 March 2026

Host: Stratford District Council

Location: Stratford, Taranaki

1. Overview of Stratford District

Stratford Township has a population of approximately 6,000 people, supported by around 5,000 rateable properties.

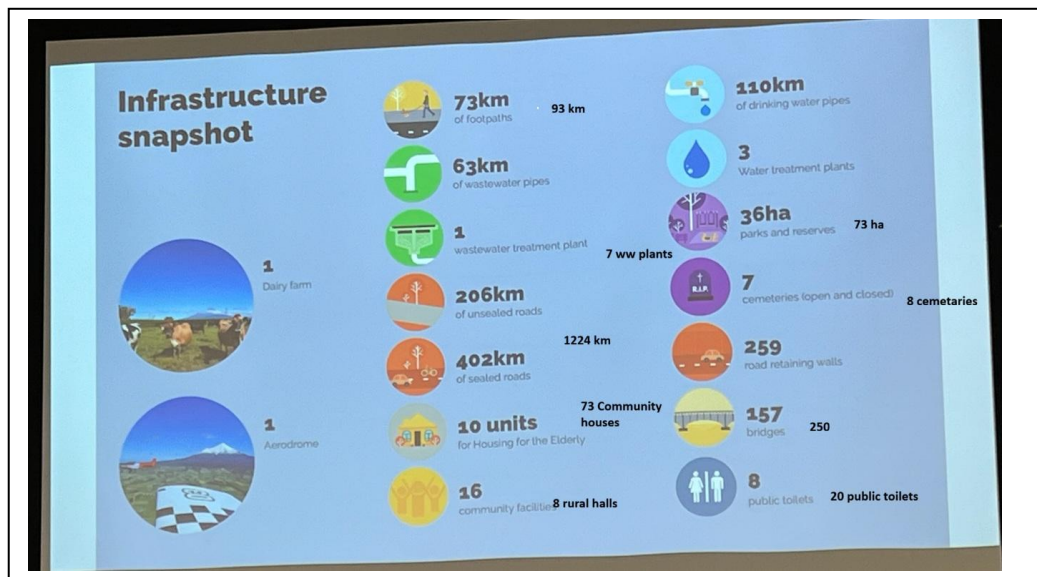
Population across the District is 10,500 (approx. 8000 rateable properties)

Key features of the district include:

- Victoria Stratford Bike Park
- Kings Theatre
- Percy Thomson Gallery
- Taranaki Electricity Trust (TET) / Aurora-related facilities
- Stratford Aquatic Centre



Approximately 50% of the population is employed by several major local industries, including Mainland.



I have added Rangitikei details for comparison.

2. Infrastructure and Local Government Challenges

2.1 Roothing and Transport

- Total of approximately 206 km of unsealed roads, largely forestry-related
- High maintenance costs, often serving very low populations (e.g., single households)
- Around 1,300 km of low-use roads (regionally), with two-thirds unsealed
- 14 km of special roads within the National Park

2.2 Bridges

- Ageing bridge infrastructure
- High replacement and maintenance costs
- Many structures serve minimal populations

2.3 Water and Environmental Pressures

- Ongoing issues with discharge into local rivers
- Need for improved environmental management and infrastructure investment

3. Economic Context

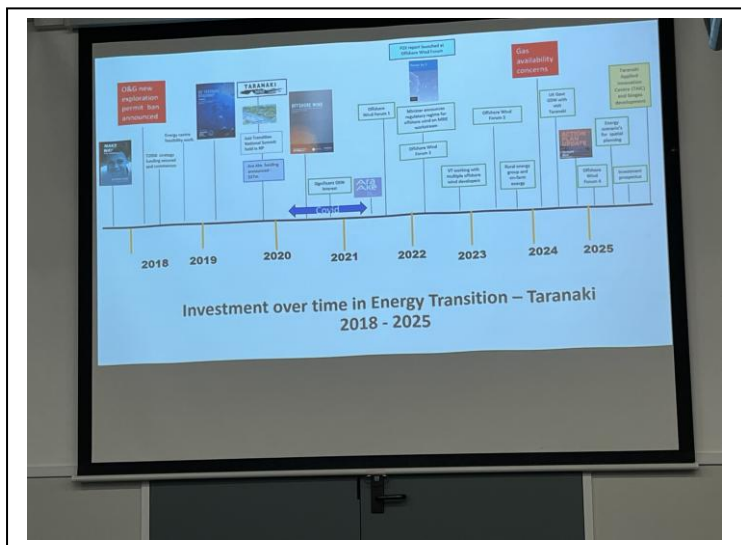
- Taranaki has historically had the highest GDP per capita in New Zealand
- Recent loss of approximately 5,500 jobs due to national policy decisions made without regional consultation

- Resulting impacts include:
 - Population decline pressures/ talent leaving
 - Empty retail premises
- District is considered relatively climate-resilient
- Importance of innovation in solving energy problems – vital for region

4. Energy and Innovation

4.1 Energy Sector Challenges

- High cost of energy infrastructure:
 - ~\$8 billion to establish a well
 - ~\$8 billion to operate over its lifetime
- Strong emphasis on the need for **policy stability** to support:
 - Oil and gas



- Wind energy development

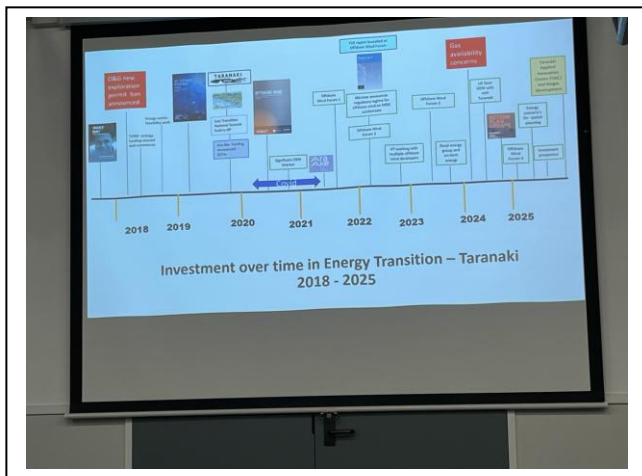
4.2 Renewable Energy Opportunities

- Offshore wind potential identified
- Importance of battery storage technology

4.3 Decommissioning Issues

- Significant costs associated with decommissioning assets (e.g., Maui gas field)
- Challenges include:
 - Requirement for heavy-lift crane ships
 - Disposal or reuse of large volumes of steel

5. Stratford Energy Transition



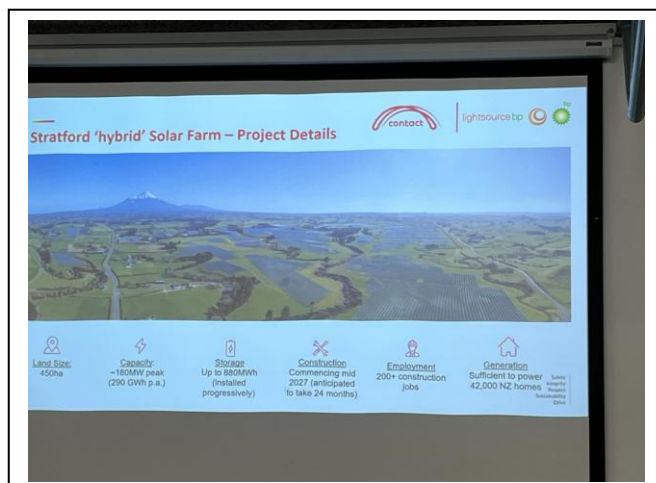
The district is positioning itself as a renewable energy hub based on four pillars:

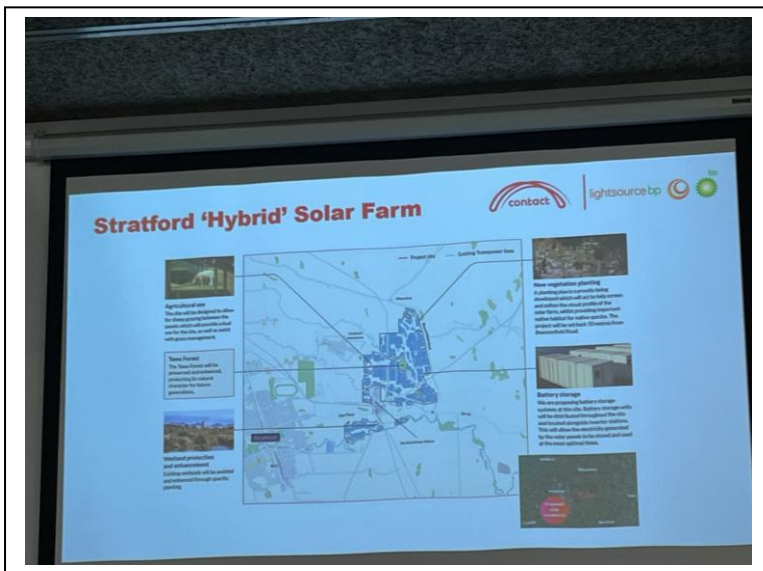
1. Geothermal
2. Battery storage
3. Wind
4. Solar

5.1 Solar Development Example

- Compare Large-scale solar development in Christchurch:
 - 250 hectares
 - Powers approximately 36,000 homes
 - Over \$300 million invested
- Enables dual land use (e.g., grazing, crops, honey production)
-

5.2 Stratford Energy Hub





Key advantages:

- Access to grid connections
- Battery storage capability
- Solar generation potential (fixed and tracking panels)
- Battery systems (including containerised solutions)

Asset lifespan:

- Batteries: 20–25 years
- Solar panels: up to 40 years

6. Tourism and Funding Pressures

- Region attracts approximately 1 million visitors annually (cycling, Great Walks)
- Small rating base (~8,000 ratepayers) limits funding capacity
- Need for:
 - Dedicated and consistent tourism funding
 - Support for both capital and operational costs

7. Regulatory and Community Issues

- Dog control challenges:
 - Aggressive dogs
 - Poor ownership practices
- Need for stronger enforcement and resources
- Increasing compliance and regulatory burden
- Rising infrastructure costs:
 - ~30% increase in piping costs (oil-based materials)

8. Local Government Reform and Key Themes

8.1 MANAWATU

Strong Support for Localism

- Local decision-making
- Local ownership and accountability
- Representation aligned to communities

8.2 Concerns Raised

- Unfunded mandates from central government
- Lack of genuine consultation
- GST impacts on council costs
- Rural transport service funding gaps

Localism


- Decisions should be made closest to communities
- Strong preference for local ownership and control
- 16 community + 9 marae committees
- Local government delivers better outcomes



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Rural Bus Services


- Loss of school transport affecting families
- Disproportionate impact on rural and village communities
- Impacts...
 - Parents leaving jobs
 - Increased household costs
 - Reduced school attendance



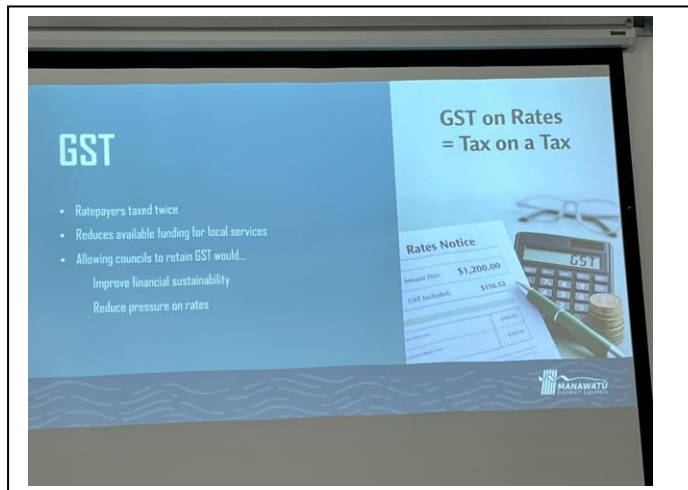
MANAWATU DISTRICT COUNCIL

Unfunded Mandates

- Stop cost shifting to Councils
- Increasing legislation without funding support
- Creates pressure on rates and service levels
- Limits ability to invest in local priorities



MANAWATU DISTRICT COUNCIL



HOROWHENUA

Developing a post election wishlist

Need genuine co-design – currently operating in a vacuum

What is the Vision for next 5 years esp given Future for Local Government got ignored – little respect

Need Social Sector Trials:

Proper funding, proper partnership, test before mandate

9. Other Regional Perspectives

9.1 Taranaki

- Emphasis on simplicity and “breathing space” from reform pressures
- Need for stability during transition

9.2 Central Hawke’s Bay

- Opposition to “one-size-fits-all” solutions
- Strong preference for local implementation
- Support for shared services to improve efficiency

9.3 Gisborne

- Population approximately 50% Māori
- Need for long-term (10–30 year) planning
- Concerns about:
 - Short-term policy thinking
 - Population-based funding disadvantaging smaller regions
- Strong call for genuine partnerships with central government

9.4 Tararua

- I. Cost reduction for low population Districts

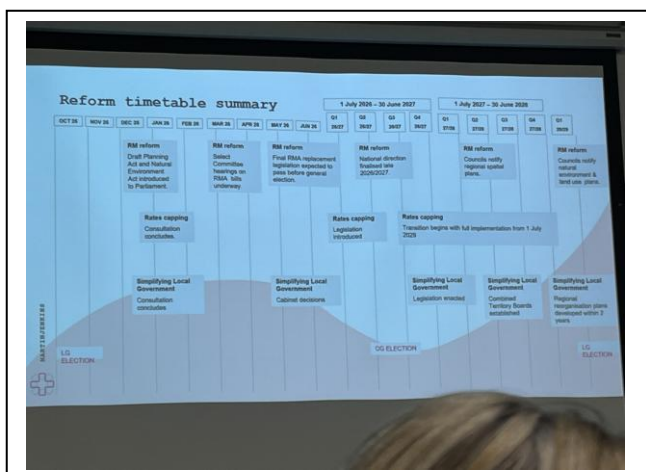
Eg Cost of Audit

LTP cost \$500k (1.32% of rates), Annual plan \$250k (0.66% of rates)

- II. Need local solutions ie bigger is not necessary better
- III. Communities of interest is very important
- IV. Model needs to be 'fit for purpose'
- V. Need good partnerships

10. Governance and Partnership Issues

- Need for co-design with central government
- Current perception of operating "in a vacuum"
- Limited recognition of local government input
- Importance of:
 - Social sector trials before mandates
 - Proper funding and partnership models



10.1 Representation and Engagement

- Low voter turnout (~30%)
- Need to improve democratic engagement
- Importance of understanding local context in decision-making

10.2 Reform Priorities

- Flexible rates capping
- Reduced compliance burden
- Simplified systems
- Greater efficiency through shared services (e.g., IT savings of ~\$6 million in one case)

11. Future Planning and Strategic Direction

- Call for long-term, generational thinking (10–30 years)
 - Focus on:
 - Legacy outcomes
 - Sustainable funding
 - Integrated partnerships
 - Avoid:
 - Short-term political cycles
 - Reactive decision-making
-

12. Three Waters / CTB Concerns

- Significant workload expected
 - High risk of implementation failure
 - Concern about:
 - National policy inconsistency
 - “Flip-flop” direction from central government
 - Strong message:
 - Pause
 - Engage meaningfully with communities
 - Co-design solutions
- If we continue there are going to have negative implications
-

13. Financial Pressures

- Audit and compliance costs are high:
 - Long Term Plan (LTP) audit: ~\$500,000 (~1.32% of rates)
 - Annual plan audit: ~\$250,000 (~0.66% of rates)
 - Concerns that:
 - CPI is not an appropriate measure for councils
 - Producer Price Index (PPI) better reflects actual cost pressures
-

14. Key Messages

- Local government requires:
 - Sustainable and predictable funding
 - Reduced compliance burden
 - Genuine partnership with central government
- Strong emphasis on:
 - Localism
 - Long-term thinking
 - Infrastructure resilience
 - Energy transition opportunities
- Urgent need to:
 - Stop deferring critical decisions
 - Align policy with on-the-ground realities

Please Karen Cowper for link to full set of slides.

Zone 3 Report – Stratford War Memorial Centre

Stratford named after Stratford on Avon, all streets named after Shakespeare. National Park now called Te Papatūānui-o-Taranaki

Venture Taranaki: current regional issues.

Front of mind is the energy sector. Following a political decision, this is winding down, leaving more scrap steel than Glenfield produces in years. The challenge is to transition the capacity into other industry, replace \$1.8m in GDP and replace 5500 skilled jobs.

Together with dairy production, the region delivers the highest GDP/capita in NZ. Their Philanthropy sector underpins many services. They identify their rainfall, soil, sunshine and deepwater port as their natural assets.

Kapuni was identified in the 1950s, and took 11 + years to deliver. For any project of this size, a similar timeframe would still apply. In today's terms, such project still cost \$8bn to establish production and a similar amount to run annually, which is similar to wind generation.

Kapuni electricity production peaked a 250 pJ, is now half that, and plummeting. 1 pJ services about 35,00 homes: NZ has 2.1 million homes. This does not include industrial usage.

The challenge is to transition away from gas (contributing at \$300m annually), possibly to renewable sources including solar and off shore wind. This impacts not only Taranaki but NZ energy needs and also food security.

This is not a surprise: multiple reports and studies document this, and the conclusions haven't materially changed in 10 years. The challenge for the next 6 months is: excuses or progress?

Venture Taranaki facilitated a Taranaki Alliance between heavy industry and advanced manufacturing. A coordinated co-competition process funded by industry has resulted in international projects of \$50-100M increase but are maintenance rather than capital projects. However, this could lead to projects in mining, defence, and various licences into the Auckland market.

Alternatives floated

Biogas: could produce 1.5 pJ, although production cost is \$35/gJ contrasting with \$25 for gas. It is most suited to production of electricity, high heat users, and urea for Balance/Methanex.

Food and fibre:

1. Hemp for construction which is experiencing growth in production and sales. It has no waste as all of the plant is utilised.
2. Functional botanicals
3. Kumara
4. Utilising the GIS land portal (capability of which is expanding) which includes climate and land use overlays to analyse crop and plant opportunities.

Powering the Future : Stratford's Renewable Energy Transformation on Solar Farming

by Rob Nicol, Shane Roberts & Amber Archer from Contact Energy and Sam Lawrie from Lightsource BP

A thought provoking presentation highlighting a huge solar farm adjacent to Christchurch Airport powering 76,000 homes with Stratford proposed farm sufficient to power 42,000 homes.¹

Visits to Stratford Bike Park, Kings Theatre, Percy Thomson Gallery and Wai o Rua Stratford Aquatic Centre.

There is an active and very financial regional charitable trust.

Of particular interest was the Aquatic centre build cost was \$22M with annual running costs of \$3.3m and an income of only \$660,000!

Around the regions

The theme that came through very strongly was LOCALISM. All regions stressed that Government changes were too much and too fast. Most Councils were against Amalgamation.

Gisborne Mayor Rehette Stoltz commented that following a helicopter ride over the district following Cyclone Gabrielle explaining challenges presented by roading (and its failures) for access to healthcare and life in general... for the PM to arrive back in Gisborne and state they are committed to population based funding: he left the district and locked the door behind him!! Gisborne is 50% Maori and working together is crucial, also very different from other regions especially concerning weather.

¹ If 120pJ is produced by Kapuni currently, 1pJ powers 35,000 homes, and 450 Ha will generate power for 42,000 homes in Stratford, then 450Ha potentially produces 1.2pJ and 4500Ha would be needed to replace Kapuni electricity generation alone. This does not account for Kapuni urea production for agriculture. Diana Baird back-of-the-envelope calculations.

Other common themes, included the need to:

- Identify how to include localism in any amalgamation process: participation not prescription
- Engage and consult with Regional Councils rather than getting rid of them (stressed greater clarity and direction required; poor understanding of iwi interactions)
- Affirm our longterm, intergenerational context: we don't live in soundbites
- Give greater recognition of rail, IWI relationships
- Identify rural sector concerns are different to urban needs
- Somehow hold central government to account/shine a light on for their performance/promises and interactions with local government
- Provide more clarity on Rates Capping, as individual councils had different cost drivers.
- Deliver power to:
 - Manage derelict buildings (e.g, the Chateau)
 - Fund infrastructure to and through non-rateable land e.g. Taranaki maunga road
 - Access tourism funds (e.g. via levies), especially where infrastructure is delivered from a small, low income ratepayer base.
 - Enable direct funding of low use roads and bridges by landowners
 - Manage dangerous/aggressive dogs
 - Manage crown imposed costs: one council cited their audit as .66% and LTP 1.32% and rates remission as another .49% of rates; GST

Thank you for the opportunity and support to participate in this meeting.