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Via email: electoralreform@lgnz.co.nz

FEEDBACK TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW ZEALAND ON ITS LOCAL ELECTORAL REFORM ISSUES PAPER

Thank you for the opportunity to present this feedback on the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) local electoral reform issues paper.

The Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) is supportive of the development of a position paper on electoral reforms. The paper clearly outlines the current issues.

In providing this feedback, QLDC has canvassed the views of its elected members and outlines a range of views provided on key points, including:

- support for a four-year term, with a four-year planning and budget cycle
- councils continuing to administer and promote local elections
- postal votes for local elections continuing, but being made more accessible
- candidate information remaining the responsibility of candidates with support for more innovative approaches such as short-form videos
- no support for the formation of new institutions for stewardship or promoting elections.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,



Glyn Lewers
Mayor



Mike Theelen
Chief Executive

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1.0 Context of the Electoral Reforms Issues Paper in relation to QLDC

- 1.1 Queenstown-Lakes District (QLD or the district) is one of the fastest growing districts in New Zealand, with a resident population of 49,382¹.
- 1.2 In the 2022 local elections, there were 23 candidates with 11 elected. Voter turnout was 43.9% of residents on the electoral roll in the QLD, which has slightly higher than the national average of 40.9%². This continued a declining trend since 2010 for voter turnout for local elections in the district. Rates of enrollment on the electoral roll for the QLD are higher among those aged 45+ when compared to the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand but lower for those in younger age brackets³. The exception is people in the 18 to 24-year age bracket that is higher than the national average⁴.

2.0 The public's understanding of local government and why it's important

- 2.1 Elected members agreed that civic education is important to build public understanding of local government. There was support for strengthening civic education through the school curriculum to provide consistency and structure across the sector. There was support for more formal collaboration on aspects of civic education, including youth councils and/or youth elections, elected members delivering civic education components, youth representatives on community associations, or running back-of-house council tours for schools. Part of this will be helping communities to see how local government is relevant to their lives and what matters to them. However, elected members did not support civic education becoming the responsibility of local government.
- 2.2 Councils generally have communications teams who are experts at finding alternate and effective ways to communicate with local communities and to promote its role, work and value. This includes using available media avenues, clear and concise press releases that keep ahead of issues, closing the loop on resolved issues and projects, and owning any shortcomings. Furthermore, building constructive working relationships between central and local government to deliver for communities is a key tenet of improving people's view of the value that local government brings.
- 2.3 Greater use needs to be made of participatory tools to get greater depth of engagement with the community in policy development and decision-making, but note that the resource, timeframes and skill required can be an impediment to this.
- 2.4 There was no support for a new local government institution being formed for stewardship, as this is already within the remit of Local Government New Zealand.

3.0 Understanding candidates and their policies

- 3.1 Elected members considered it the responsibility of candidates to provide information to the community in a way that conveys their policies and what they have to offer. However, the current format of a candidate book is unlikely to be the most effective or equitable way to communicate information about a candidate with the community and more flexibility to use other communication modes and media is needed. Elected

¹ <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/population-and-demand>

² [Local Authority Election Statistics 2022 - dia.govt.nz](https://www.dia.govt.nz/elections/local-authority-election-statistics-2022)

³ [Enrolment by local council - all | Elections](https://www.dia.govt.nz/elections/enrolment-by-local-council-all)

⁴ [Enrolment by local council - Queenstown-Lakes District | Elections](https://www.dia.govt.nz/elections/enrolment-by-local-council-queenstown-lakes-district)

members noted that Tauranga City Council's use of short-form videos in candidate profile information was a useful however, the modes need to be broader than written or video format. Importantly, the communication modes need to support an even playing field for candidates, whether a new candidate or incumbent.

- 3.2 QLDC has seen benefits from holding council meetings in each of the district's wards, as it has helped to raise the visibility of QLDC across its large geographic area, and builds understanding of candidates' priorities and policies.

4.0 Voting methods

- 4.1 Elected members supported continued use of the postal vote but with improved accessibility of drop-off points and/or voting booths at locations such as supermarkets, community centres, libraries, and recreation facilities. Locations for reissuing voting papers also need to be more accessible for the community.
- 4.2 The voting method should continue to be decided locally as discretion can be applied to the method that is likely to work best for the community. First past-the-post remains the simplest voting method for communities to understand.

5.0 Administration and promotion of elections

- 5.1 The preferred approach is for local government to continue to administer elections, with the Local Government Commission and councils promoting elections. The formation of a national umbrella organisation to promote local elections was not supported.

6.0 Four-year term

- 6.1 A four-year term has a range of benefits that would be most effective if implemented as part of a broader framework of improvements. Elected members had a strong preference for four-year terms with central and local government elections one year apart. Councils' budget and planning could be adjusted to a four-year cycle, including long-term plans (supported by annual plans).
- 6.2 There was also support expressed by one elected member for strengthening status quo accountability measures to improve accountability over a four-year term, as the checks and balances that hold elected members to account for any breaches of codes of conduct over the electoral term will become even more important.