

Full Council

20 March 2025

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [5]

Department: Corporate Services

Title | Taitara: Draft Policy on Council Meetings Across the District 2025

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to recommend for adoption the proposed Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) Policy on Council Meetings Across the District 2025 (Attachment A).

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

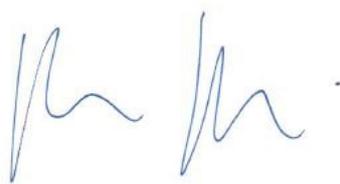
1. **Note** the contents of this report;
2. **Revoke** the policy *Council Meetings – Wanaka 1994* (Attachment B); and
3. **Adopt** the draft policy *Council Meetings across the District 2025* (Attachment A).

Prepared by:



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24 February 2025

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27 February 2025

Context | Horopaki

1. The Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) adopted a policy that addressed meeting locations for Council and its committees on 22 March 1994. This policy, entitled “Council Meetings – Wanaka” (Attachment B) consists of one line, which reads “That the Council and District Committees meet in Wanaka at regular intervals.”¹
2. In 1994 – when this existing policy was adopted – the Queenstown Lakes District comprised five wards: Queenstown East, Queenstown West, Wakatipu, Wanaka and Arrowtown. Arrowtown and Wakatipu wards were represented by two councillors each, Queenstown East by three councillors, and both Queenstown East and Wanaka were represented by four councillors each. At that time, the vast majority of meetings of Council and its committees took place in Queenstown.
3. Following a 2021 representation review conducted under the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Queenstown Lakes District currently comprises three wards: the Arrowtown-Kawarau Ward, Queenstown-Whakatipu Ward, and the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Ward. These wards have reasonably similar population sizes, which is reflected in the number of councillors that represent each ward: three for Arrowtown-Kawarau, four for Queenstown-Whakatipu and four for Wānaka-Upper Clutha.
4. In 2024, QLDC responded to an initiative from the Wānaka-Upper Clutha ward to leave the district and form its own local authority. While the initiative was not supported by the Local Government Commission, QLDC was required in its response to the initiative to prepare an action plan to increase engagement with the Wānaka-Upper Clutha communities. As part of that plan there were two actions specific to meeting location:
 - a) Ref A1 – Increase the number of regular Council meetings in the Wānaka-Upper Clutha
 - b) Ref A2 – Update the policy on Council meeting locations to reflect Council intent to hold regular meetings in Wānaka-Upper Clutha
5. This paper intends to fulfil action Ref A2 and support the implementation of Ref A1.
6. In 2023, two Council meetings and one committee meeting were held in Wānaka. In 2024, three Council meetings and two committee meetings were held in Wānaka, while one Council meeting was held in Arrowtown. The Arrowtown Council meeting on 24 October 2024 marked the first time that QLDC had held a Council (or committee) meeting in Arrowtown. Wānaka also hosted several hearings over this period: in 2023, a Hearing of Submissions on the Annual Plan 2023-24, and in 2024, the second day of the Hearing of Submissions on the Long Term Plan, two days of hearings on the draft Navigation Safety Bylaw, as well as two days of hearings on the Mt Iron Reserve Management Plan.

¹ At the time the policy was adopted, it was not common practice to recognise the official spelling of Wānaka (including the macron) instead referring to “Wanaka”. For this reason, this report omits the macron when referring to the name or content of this policy, i.e. the policy entitled “Council Meetings – Wanaka”.

7. Consistent with its status as the administration centre for QLDC, Queenstown is the primary work location for a majority of QLDC officers, as well as being the location of a dedicated meeting room (Council Chambers at 10 Gorge Road) where the majority of Council and committee meetings take place.
8. The main venue for QLDC meetings in Wānaka is the Armstrong Room in the Lake Wānaka Centre, which is a QLDC-owned and operated venue. Recent technology upgrades to the Armstrong Room have improved the capacity for remote attendance and the recording of meetings. However, the Armstrong Room is not a dedicated meeting room, and has disadvantages compared with Council Chambers in terms of being more resource intensive (e.g. requiring room set up and pack down) and less user-friendly (e.g. suboptimal acoustics and more challenging to manage remote attendance and to share presentations).
9. The October 2024 Council meeting in Arrowtown was held in the Auditorium at the Arrowtown Community Centre (ACC), a QLDC-owned venue that is home to the Arrowtown Rugby Club. This location is the most challenging of the three venues (Council Chambers, Armstrong Room, and the ACC Auditorium) with regard to hosting meetings: in addition to requiring room set up and pack down and having suboptimal acoustics, kitchen and IT equipment has to be brought in from outside, the latter of which entails the need for additional support from QLDC's Knowledge Management team.
10. Recognising the changes to the district outlined in paragraphs 2 and 3 above (with respect to wards, their relative population size and number of councillors), and the commitments made through the Local Government Commission Action Plan for Wānaka-Upper Clutha, there is clear need for a new policy on Council and committee meeting locations that reflects the current context and that does so in a principled manner.
11. Development of a new policy also presents the opportunity for QLDC to codify its commitments to accessibility in various other respects, for example, in terms of the location of hearings as well as in terms of provisions to enable remote access for members of the public to speak at formal meetings when they are unable to attend in person.
12. Development of the proposed new policy ("the draft policy"), entitled "Council Meetings Across the District 2025", was based on the following principles:
 - The Council is committed to transparent and accountable decision making and providing access to all members of the community to participate in that decision making;
 - The Council is elected by wards (based on geographic location and communities of interest) being the Arrowtown-Kawarau Ward, Queenstown-Whakatipu Ward, and the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Ward;
 - All three wards are of reasonably equal size in population, reflected in the number of elected members for each ward being three for Arrowtown-Kawarau, four for Queenstown-Whakatipu, and four for Wānaka-Upper Clutha;
 - Queenstown is the legislatively designated administration centre of the Queenstown Lakes District;

- Queenstown is the principal location for Council offices and staff. As such, it is the optimal location for Council meetings in terms of a venue that is cost-effective and fit-for-purpose (i.e. Council Chambers). The advantages of holding meetings in other wards – for example, to promote greater access for members of the community to participate in at least one Council meeting per year in person – must be weighed against the disadvantages associated with using a different venue in terms of operational and cost-effectiveness as well as fit-for-purpose facilities.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

13. Consistent with Queenstown’s status as QLDC’s administration headquarters as well as its being the site of the most cost-effective and fit-for-purpose meeting venue in the district (Council Chambers), the draft policy (Attachment A) proposes that – consistent with current and prior practice – the majority of Council and committee meetings will take place in Queenstown.
14. The draft policy proposes that, where possible and consistent with cost-effectiveness and fit-for-purpose venues, reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that at least three Council meetings and three committee meetings each year are to be held in Wānaka, with at least one Council meeting and one committee meeting to be held in Arrowtown. This is consistent with the slightly greater size of the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Ward relative to the Arrowtown-Kawarau Ward (in terms of population and number of councillors) but also, in particular, with the considerably greater logistical challenges associated with holding meetings in Arrowtown versus holding them in Wānaka. With regard to public attendance and access, it is also more accessible for Arrowtown-Kawarau residents to attend a meeting in Queenstown than it is for Wānaka-Upper Clutha residents. This provision is consistent with recent practice (2024) in terms of Council meeting locations, although the draft policy proposes more committee meetings to be held outside Queenstown than currently occur.
15. The draft policy proposes that, for multiday hearings of submissions on the Annual Plan or Long Term Plan, reasonable efforts will be made to hold at least one day of the hearing in Wānaka. Multiday hearings rarely run more than two days and the clear advantage of Wānaka over Arrowtown as a meeting location is a good reason for holding any additional hearing day (beyond one day) in Wānaka. This provision is consistent with recent practice (2023 and 2024).
16. The draft policy proposes that reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that hearings take place in a particular ward where the hearing a) either relates to matters of particular significance to that ward, or b) where the majority of submitters are from that ward. Under such circumstances, it is to be expected that the greatest number of submitters wishing to speak at the hearing will be from a particular ward, and holding the hearing in that ward will likely maximise the opportunity for those who wish to speak at the hearing to do so in person. This provision is consistent with current practice: the Hearing of Submissions on the Mt Iron Reserve Management Plan, which was an issue of specific interest within the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Ward and in which the majority of submitters were from that ward, was held in Wānaka.

17. The draft policy proposes that – with the chair’s permission – members of the public be provided with a link to ensure they can join a meeting remotely for the purposes of speaking at that meeting or hearing (either as a public forum speaker or deputation at a Council or committee meeting or when speaking to a submission at a hearing of submissions). The draft policy further proposes that, where a member of the public lacks access to a device to allow them to join a meeting or hearing remotely, access to a suitable Council facility will be provided to enable them to do so. This is consistent with current practices, in which a room at QLDC’s Ardmore Street office is reserved for anyone who may need remote access to speak at a Council/Committee meeting or hearing taking place in Queenstown or Arrowtown, while a room at QLDC’s Gorge Road office is reserved for anyone may need remote access to speak at a Council/Committee meeting or hearing taking place in Wānaka or Queenstown. This also fulfils a further action in the Local Government Commission Action Plan for Wānaka-Upper Clutha (Ref A4) to “Provide for remote participation in Council meetings.”
18. The draft policy only specifies proposals related to meetings of the Council, its committees and hearings. It does not include recommendations for meeting locations of the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board (WUCCB). As a community board, WUCCB is an unincorporated body which is neither local authority nor committee. In recognition of this status, the draft policy does not attempt to define meeting locations for the WUCCB.
19. The draft policy clarifies that the proposed targets for Council, committee and hearing meeting locations are aspirational and not to be read as goals to be achieved at all costs. The draft policy acknowledges that the inability to meet such targets may be necessary and justified, for example, where considerations of cost effectiveness, operational effectiveness and/or ensuring a fit-for-purpose venue are inconsistent with holding meetings according to the specified criteria within a particular calendar year.
20. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.
21. Option 1 – Adopt the draft policy on Council Meetings Across the District 2025 and revoke the 1994 Council Meetings – Wanaka policy.

Advantages:

- Officers would have clearer guidance on how to proceed when preparing or modifying the Annual Schedule of Meetings, as well as when scheduling hearings and making associated provisions for remote access.
- QLDC would have a policy that more accurately reflects the current circumstances of the Queenstown Lakes District in terms of the reasonably equal population sizes and associated councillor representation of its current three wards.
- Unlike the current policy, the draft policy is based on clearly articulated principles, including the key democratic commitment to transparent and accountable decision making and providing access to all members of the community to participate in that decision making.

- If adopted, the draft policy is likely to have the effect that future years will see greater numbers of committee meetings in Wānaka and Arrowtown, while also ensuring that the current commitment to holding Council meetings outside of Queenstown continues. Such an outcome would be a practical demonstration of QLDC's commitment to transparency, accountability and accessibility.
- By holding meetings in diverse locations and increasing the options for remote access – including from a Council office location – the policy would promote accessibility of meetings for all members of the community, but in particular for those who face physical or health barriers to attending particular meetings in person, for example those unable to drive long distances or who need to avoid direct contact with others for health reasons.
- Adopting the policy supports three of the actions detailed in the Local Government Commission Action Plan for Wānaka-Upper Clutha.

Disadvantages:

- Holding more committee meetings outside of Queenstown will require greater resources to provide the required logistical support.
- Greater resources will need to be put into the production of (and any amendments) to the Annual Meeting Schedule since the new policy imposes greater constraints (even if overridable ones) on desired meeting locations.
- The risk for technological issues (for example, problems with room acoustics or live streaming/recording) is greater when meetings are held outside of Council Chambers, and as such it can be expected that there will likely be more meetings where such issues arise (than would do were the current policy to remain in place).

22. Option 2 (Status Quo) – Do not adopt the draft policy on Council Meetings Across the District 2025, and do not revoke the 1994 Council Meetings – Wanaka policy.

Advantages:

- Retaining the current policy would avoid the greater resources that officers would need to invest in supporting committee meetings outside of Queenstown and in preparing/amending the Annual Schedule of Meetings.
- Retaining the current policy would minimise the risks (for example with respect to IT/acoustics problems) associated with holding more meetings (than QLDC currently holds) outside of Queenstown.

Disadvantages:

- Officers would lack clear guidance on how to proceed when preparing or modifying the Annual Schedule of Meetings, as well as when scheduling hearings and making associated provisions for remote access.
 - QLDC would retain a policy that is not only vague (for example, what counts as “regular” in the context of the directive to hold regular meetings in Wānaka) but also one that fails to reflect or acknowledge the current circumstances of the Queenstown Lakes District in terms of the reasonably equal population sizes and associated councillor representation of its current three wards.
 - QLDC would miss out on the opportunity to display its commitment to democratic principles. The current policy articulates no principles, while the draft policy is based on clearly articulated principles, including the core democratic commitment to transparent and accountable decision making and providing access to all members of the community to participate in that decision making.
 - Retaining the *status quo* policy makes it more likely that the *status quo* continues when it comes to where Council/committee meetings and hearings are held in coming years. As such, future years are unlikely to see an increase in the number of such meetings/hearings held outside of Queenstown. QLDC would thereby miss out on an opportunity for such a tangible demonstration of its commitment to transparency, accountability and accessibility.
 - Retaining the current policy does not support the actions in the Local Government Commission Action Plan for Wānaka-Upper Clutha.
23. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because it would implement an updated policy on Council meeting locations that provides clear guidance for officers, is principles-based, delivers on commitments in the Local Government Commission Action Plan, and would ensure that QLDC holds meetings outside of Queenstown in a way that better reflects the current character of the district while also demonstrating QLDC’s commitment to core democratic values.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

24. This matter is of low significance, as determined by reference to the Council’s Significant and Engagement Policy 2024 because it would not have any impact on rates or be likely to impact the decisions or recommendations reached by Council, its committees or hearing panels.
25. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are the residents/ratepayers of the Queenstown Lakes District community, and in particular those who would like to attend or speak at Council/committee meetings and/or hearings.

26. The Council has not consulted on this matter since the matter of low significance.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

27. The Council has not consulted iwi on this matter since such consultation is not required.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

28. This matter relates to the Strategic/Political/Reputation risk category. It is associated with RISK10020 Ineffective communication within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a moderate residual risk rating.

29. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to retain the risk at its current level. This will be achieved by ensuring that the community is more effectively engaged with Council and its decision-making processes.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

30. While the venues that QLDC utilises for meetings/hearings outside of Queenstown are QLDC-owned, holding more meetings outside of Council Chambers would impose additional financial costs associated with venue set up and pack down as well as greater travel costs for officers who need to attend in person.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

31. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- Significance and Engagement Policy 2024
- QLDC Disability Policy 2018
- Council Meetings – Wanaka (1994)

32. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies.

33. This matter is not included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

34. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. Adoption of the draft policy will promote this goal by enabling greater accessibility for community members to attend and/or speak at hearings as well as Council and committee meetings. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

35. The recommended option:

- Can be implemented through current funding under the Long Term Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not significantly alter the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	Draft Policy on Council Meetings Across the District 2025
B	Policy on Council Meetings – Wanaka (1994)