

Chairman and Members  
Local Government Commission  
**WELLINGTON**

## **Submission on the Proposal for the Establishment of Local Boards in Auckland**

### **Introduction**

This submission is presented by the Local Government Centre within the Institute of Public Policy at AUT University. The Centre is New Zealand's first university-based think tank focusing on research, teaching and research-informed consultancy for the local government sector.

The focus of this submission is on the implications the Commission's proposals for the establishment of local boards will have for local democracy within the Auckland region. This submission does not address the proposed arrangements for Auckland Council wards.

We first provide some background on the expected nature of local democracy in Auckland, then look at context, most specifically certain provisions of the Local Government Auckland Council Act as they affect the role and functions of local boards, and then address the substance of this submission, the number of local boards and what this implies for effective representation.

### **Background**

The Minister for Local Government has been consistent in his emphasis that the new arrangements for Auckland will strengthen local democracy.

In 'Making Auckland Greater' which announced the government's response to the Royal Commission report the Minister for Local Government made statements such as:

- The functions that are best performed at the local level should have advocacy and decision-making at that local level. That is why we intend to strengthen community representation;
- The new system for Auckland governance is much simpler, more co-ordinated and will provide for community **representation at the grassroots level** (emphasis added); and
- The local boards provide for strong community representation and the ability for residents and ratepayers to influence decision-making.

More recently, in his speech to the Passing Go conference on 20 November, he spoke of local boards in these terms:

- We need to make sure that boards both effectively represent and address their own unique character and issues. In this way, local views will be fed into the broader decision-making at the Council level; and

- Local boards will also engage with community organisations and special interest groups, and consider and report to the Council on any matter of interest to them.

Restructuring Auckland local government will affect more than just what are currently regarded as conventional local government activities. It is also a key element in a new approach to the way in which central government manages its approximately \$12 billion per annum expenditure on social services across the Auckland region. Government has agreed to the establishment of a Social Policy Forum chaired by the Minister of Social Development and including the Mayor of Auckland, relevant committee chairs and representatives of local boards.

The Minister has made it clear she expects the Forum to play a pivotal role in working with central government, Auckland's local government and its communities in determining how best to deploy central government's resources in delivering the services needed to improve community well-being, and address the many gaps in current provision.

In her words, it will have a focus on matters such as "Identifying social priorities for the region, and for neighbourhoods and communities." and looking "for gaps and overlaps in service delivery, and identifying things we do that undermine good social outcomes in Auckland."

Taken together these ministerial perspectives paint a picture of local government for Auckland which not only provides for stronger community representation at a grassroots level but also has the kind of intimate knowledge and understanding of neighbourhoods and communities required to assist central government in the better targeting and delivery of its services. To put this in perspective, it is useful to look at developments elsewhere and how, for example, the English government sees the respective roles of elected members and citizens. A recent consultation paper 'Strengthening Local Democracy' is useful reading (available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localdemocracyconsultation>).

First, in respect of the citizen the paper observes "There is a large and untapped pool of people who would like more say in what happens in their area. It is right that both central and local government do more to give them greater direct control over the decisions that affect their lives and their community and councils are doing much to help them explore the opportunities available to engage and participate. But we must also recognise that in today's time poor society, citizens only have limited time to give."

Next, what the paper expects of the future role of councillors: "councils are best placed to understand and respond to issue of local concern, and to bring all agencies – public, private, third sector – to tackle crosscutting issues which affect their residents and their community.

"We propose to strengthen their capacity to do this: specifically by giving them greater powers to scrutinise other services and how they spend their money. When they go to vote, citizens should be electing someone who can act on their behalf in relation to every aspect of local public service spending in their area. Our aspiration is that councillors should become a local point of accountability: the place where citizens can go to question how public money is being spent, how decisions are being made and how services are being delivered."

This is a vision of the role of councillors, and their relationship with people in their communities, which can be seen as a reasonable template for the future of Auckland local government, especially once it starts working effectively with central government on social issues. It reflects the fact that there are two different and complementary aspects to the role of the elected member:

- The traditional representative role in the Edmund Burke sense of someone who is elected to exercise judgement on behalf of the electorate, and who would be betraying his or her electoral mandate if rather than exercising judgement he or she simply followed public opinion.
- The engagement role, working with individual citizens, and groups within the community, to understand their issues and concerns and act as advocate, as broker and as monitor of the services which they receive. Amongst other things this role reflects the fact that many of the matters of most importance to individual citizens are not capable of being addressed through the electoral process - how do you elect a councillor on the issue of the siting of a bus stop, the placing of a pedestrian crossing, the hours of opening of the local library and the 101 other things which impact most directly on the lives of individual citizens?

## **Context**

As is widely recognised, the local board arrangements being put in place for Auckland are without parallel. There is no example either in New Zealand or elsewhere of a second tier of local government which is expected to make decisions on a wide range of matters important to its community, but which has no power to employ staff, raise funds, own assets or deliver services. This can be seen as having a number of drawbacks in terms of effective local democracy, but for the purpose of this submission, needs to be taken as a given. On the other hand, it also has certain advantages:

- **Capability and capacity:** it is the statutory obligation of the Auckland Council under the Local Government Auckland Council Act to deliver services over which a local board holds decision-making power subject only to there being adequate funding available either through the funding allocated by the Auckland Council, or through some form of local rate raised by the Auckland Council on the recommendation of the local board. Unlike the situation with independent standalone councils, especially smaller councils, local boards do not have to concern themselves with issues of capability and capacity - that is for the Auckland Council to resolve.
- **Funding:** the Auckland Council is the sole funder. Rates to provide local services will be raised through a single rating system which will apply across the whole of the Auckland region. Funding for local services within the area of an individual board will be allocated by the Auckland Council from a common pool set aside to meet the cost of local board decisions, with an obligation for the Auckland Council to "allocate funds between the local boards in a way that provides an equitable capacity for the local boards to enhance the well-being of the communities in each of their local board areas...". (Section 19 (4)). Effectively this means that individual local boards, for the purpose of considering the cost of the core services over which they hold decision-making power, have no need to concern themselves with the strength of their own local rating base. Instead their focus is on the adequacy of funding the Auckland Council makes available for the services over which they have the decision right. It also means that any decisions over funding additional services or services to a higher standard will essentially be at the margin, and unlikely to raise issues of the financial capacity of the community to meet the additional cost of the targeted rate or other funding mechanism

involved, especially as it can safely be assumed that any additional service will already have been approved by the community through the local plan process.

### **Number of Local Boards: Implications for Effective Representation**

The Local Government Auckland Council Act sets out the requirements which the Commission must follow in developing its proposals and subsequently determination for the number and constitution of local boards. Specifically:

- It should establish between 20 and 30 local boards, but with power to recommend a higher or lower number if it considers that effective representation of communities of interest so requires.
- Each local board should have no fewer than 4 but no more than 9 members.
- The plus or minus 10% rule does not apply to the size of local boards themselves (although it does apply to wards) but only to the size of subdivisions within local boards.

The Local Government Centre strongly argues that the Local Government Commission should give priority to ensuring effective representation and that this means, within the constraints under which it operates, ensuring the maximum number of elected members at the local board level. In the Centre's view this is essential if local board members are to be effective in performing the role expected of them. This role will include understanding the different circumstances and conditions of the communities they serve so that local board members are able to act as effective and informed advocates on behalf of those communities regarding what often be quite micro-level matters. Examples include:

- Ensuring that decision-making on the part of the Social Policy Forum on the effective targeting and delivery of services is well-informed on specific areas of need.
- Negotiating a wide range of local matters which will be handled by other agencies, for example, the Auckland Transport Agency with its responsibility for local roads and all of the complexities they raise.

Leaving aside the two small boards the Commission was required by statute to establish (Waiheke and Great Barrier), it proposes 17 local boards. Two of these are essentially based on the single wards which the Commission is required to establish for the rural part of Rodney district, and that part of Franklin district coming within the Auckland Council area respectively. Those can be seen as special cases in considering the Commission's overall proposal. This submission concentrates on the 15 local boards proposed for the balance of the Auckland region.

The fact that the commission has decided to propose fewer than the minimum number of local boards contemplated by the legislation goes to the heart of the role of local boards in promoting local democracy.

Significant weight is attached to the specific requirements of the Auckland Council Act including the Commission's views on matters such as the role of the mayor in establishing processes and mechanisms for engagement, and what the allocation of decision-making responsibility between the Council and local boards will mean in practice. The Centre is concerned that the necessary implication from the Commission

approach is that local boards, and by definition local democracy, should be shaped to meet the administrative needs of the Auckland Council rather than the other way around. The proposal document prefaces its comments on the Council's functions by asking "Will the total number of boards impact on the ability of the Auckland Council to meet its responsibilities?" and then comments "clearly a particularly large number of boards will affect the Council's ability to carry out these tasks efficiently and effectively" (local board agreements LTCCP etc).

There is some substance in the suggestion that a much larger number of local boards would create operational challenges for the Auckland Council and its mayor. However to accept this justification for a smaller number of local boards implies placing administrative convenience, and the presumed lack of capability of a future Auckland Council to discharge its statutory responsibilities, ahead of the importance of strengthening local democracy. This is especially unfortunate when government is clearly looking to Auckland's communities as an important partner in the better targeting and delivery of centrally funded social services. Arguably the Commission is undermining the potential for greater community engagement just at the time that the government itself is emphasising its importance.

The Commission set out the effect of the proposals for local boards in the following table:

Ward	Local Boards	Pop.	Subdivisions	Pop.	Number of members (% deviation*)
Rodney	Rodney	53,590	Wellsford-Warkworth Central Helensville-Kumeu	21,600 7,990 24,000	3 (-6.0%) 1 (+4.4%) 3 (+4.5%)
Hibiscus-Albany- East Coast Bays	Hibiscus-Albany- East Coast Bays	120,400	Hibiscus Albany East Coast Bays	41,800 36,100 42,500	3 (+4.2%) 3 (-10.0%) 3 (+5.9%)
North Shore	Glenfield- Birkenhead	85,000	Glenfield Birkenhead	40,800 44,200	3 (-4.0%) 3 (+4.0%)
	Takapuna- Devonport	59,600	Takapuna Devonport	35,800 23,800	3 (+0.1%) 2 (-0.2%)
Waitakere	Waitakere	166,150	Massey	39,800	2 (+7.8%)
			Henderson	81,100	4 (+9.8%)
			Glen Eden-Titirangi	33,400	2 (-9.5%)
			Waitakere Ranges	11,850	1(-35.8%)
Whau	Whau	80,900	New Lynn	36,300	3 (+4.7%)
			Avondale	44,600	4 (-3.5%)
Mt Albert-Mt Roskill	Mt Albert	84,600	Pt Chevalier- Morningside Epsom-Balmoral	47,700 36,900	4 (-1.3%) 3 (+1.8%)
	Mt Roskill	59,400	Waikowhai Three Kings	30,500 28,900	3 (+2.7%) 3 (-2.7%)
Maungawhau- Hauraki Gulf (Auckland Central)	Maungawhau	78,860	Not applicable		5
	Waiheke	8,300	Not applicable		5
	Great Barrier	840	Not applicable		5

Orakei- Maungakiekie	Orakei	87,200	Remuera Kohimarama	52,900 34,300	4 (+6.2%) 3 (-8.2%)
	Maungakiekie- Tamaki	74,200	Maungakiekie Tamaki	24,000 50,200	2 (-3.0%) 4 (+1.5%)
Manukau	Mangere	60,600	Not applicable		5
	Otara- Papatoetoe	81,800	Otara Papatoetoe	37,200 44,600	3 (+6.1%) 4 (-4.6%)
Howick- Pakuranga- Botany	Howick- Pakuranga- Botany-	121,700	Howick Pakuranga Botany-Flat Bush	42,100 41,200 38,400	3 (+3.8%) 3 (+1.6%) 3 (-5.3%)
	Papakura- Manurewa	44,000	Not applicable		5
Franklin	Manurewa	85,400	Not applicable		7
	Franklin	63,650	Clevedon Pukekohe Waiuku	20,500 29,800 13,350	3 (-3.4%) 4 (+5.3%) 2 (-5.6%)

\* '+' denotes under-representation and '-' denotes over-representation

Leaving aside the Great Barrier, Waiheke, Rodney and Franklin boards, the Commission's proposals produce local boards with an average population per elected member of 12,740. As the Centre will demonstrate later in this submission, representation at this level is completely out of step with current thinking on what is essential for effective local democracy. It will also impose an extraordinary burden on local board members in meeting the expectations on them for community engagement, and effective representation of the different interests within their communities - whether to the Social Policy Forum, to the Auckland Council, or to its many arms length operating entities.

A closer look at the Commission's proposals suggests that it has not given sufficient weight to the way in which the Auckland Council itself will operate. In practice the Auckland Council will, amongst other things, be a giant shared services entity. There is ample international research to demonstrate that the ability of shared services organisations to deliver services effectively is substantially independent of the number and size of the political bodies within whose territories it delivers those services.

The Commission set out three key criteria which it thought would contribute to effective local governance and allow all parties to meet their statutory responsibilities. The criteria, and the Centre's comment on them, are:

- The capacity of local board areas to generate resources for local decision-making.

*Comment:* the substantial role in generating resources is that of the Auckland Council (see the discussion of funding at page 3 above). There is no evidence to support the proposition that a significantly larger number of local boards would create any qualitatively different capability in raising resources within local board areas to pay for services which were not covered by core funding from the Auckland Council - even if the number of local boards were doubled, setting aside the Waiheke and Great Barrier local boards, the average population would still be in the order of 40,000.

- The ability of boards to engage effectively with the Auckland Council.

*Comment:* the one possible area of constraint is engagement with the Mayor of Auckland. Most engagement with Auckland Council will be with council administration (and the management of CCOs) over the detail of individual services. Much engagement through issues such as local board agreements and

local plans will be with the Auckland Council's equivalent of relationship managers - and it is the responsibility of the Auckland Council to ensure that there are sufficient people in those posts. It can be expected that the Mayor will take steps to ensure that a greater number of local boards will have only a minimal impact on effect of engagement. More to the point the trade-off in terms of greater engagement between local boards and communities is very much in favour of a larger number.

- An appropriate area for the boards to perform their functions, duties and powers.

The proposal does not define what is meant by this criterion. If the focus is on the actual delivery of services, the fact that the Auckland Council is the service deliverer makes the area of individual boards virtually irrelevant. If the emphasis is on an area appropriate for the local board in terms of engagement with its communities, development of the local plan etc, then this criterion would favour smaller rather than larger areas - in other words a greater number of local boards.

In addition, the Commission was also concerned "that boards will need to be a sufficient size to ensure that they can attract capable people to stand for the board".

This argument is of grave concern. It suggests that the Commission believes that any local government entity with a population much less than the 60,000-80,000 which it favours for local boards will have difficulty in finding between four and nine capable people to put themselves forward for elected office. This is an extraordinary proposition which should be of grave concern to most of New Zealand's councils and even more so to those well performing community boards which operate with substantial delegations.

Taken at face value, It suggests a preference for significantly reducing the number of councils currently in place, and resisting the further development of community boards outside Auckland despite the success of the few which have really been given the power they need to work on behalf of their communities, for example Wanaka; Southland District's community boards<sup>1</sup>. All of these examples are an order of magnitude smaller than the average Auckland local board could be under any feasible scenario, and all have demonstrated that capable people will put themselves forward, and add value for their communities. This argument also runs contrary to the strong public arguments put forward both to the Royal Commission, and to the select committee, in support of strengthening local democracy.

The Local Government Centre cannot believe that this is really what the Commission had intended its statement to mean and seeks clarification on this matter.

Local government is more than just the efficient delivery of services. It is also a critical element in governance; a means whereby local people engage in making decisions about their communities' preferred futures and how those are best pursued. This places a strong premium on the value of ensuring that communities have an adequate level of representation - elected members who understand the intimate details and drivers of local neighbourhoods, and who are readily accessible for the many conversations that collectively produce a shared vision of what individual communities need, aspire to and

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<sup>1</sup> To quote from the Southland District Council website, "Council actively promotes local input into decision-making through its 12 Community Boards, 16 Community Development Area Sub-Committees and various other committees." and "Community Boards can make decisions on water supply, sewerage, drainage, reserves, footpaths, street lighting, camping grounds, traffic management, waste management and many other local activities. They are also involved in the preparation of and recommendations on local rates."

can achieve. As well, increasingly local government is the enabler/facilitator between higher tiers of government, and communities, in improving the design, targeting and delivery of centrally funded services, and helping build the local networks and commitment to make those more effective. It is this which lies behind the government's agreement to establish the Auckland Social Policy Forum. It also reflects developments elsewhere. One elected representative to 12,740 offers no prospect of achieving this.

### ***International evidence on representation***

Contrary to popular belief, New Zealand is significantly under-governed at the local level, a situation which the Commission's recommendations will exacerbate. The Local Government Centre in its submission to the Royal Commission provided some background on international experience. It included a passionate commentary from one of England's most respected commentators on local government, Sir Simon Jenkins, who had this to say in comparing Britain's situation with that of continental Europe:

In my London borough, not only have we no neighbourhood council but we are not allowed to elect our own councillor lest he or she "represents" us alone. We are merged with neighbourhoods elsewhere. This is no incentive for civic leadership.

In France there is an elected official for every 120 people, which is why French micro-democracy is alive and kicking. In Germany the ratio is 1:250; in Britain it is 1:2,600. In France the smallest unit of discretionary local government (raising some money and running some services) is the commune, with an average population of 1,500. In Germany that size is 5,000 people. In Britain the average district population is 120,000, and even that body can pass the blame for any service deficiency to central government.

Cynics sneer at the "calibre" of local councillors. Yet nobody will exercise leadership in a community if denied the power to make it effective. I do not believe that British citizens are unique in Europe in being incapable of taking responsibility for their communities. They may prefer to sit at home and blame others but **if you reduce local institutions to consultative status, consultation is all you get, not leadership.**

Last year's English White Paper on Local Government, *Communities in Control; real people, real power* picked up on some of the concerns expressed by Simon Jenkins. It proposed further delegation of power to the local or neighbourhood level. The White Paper comments include:

There are already about 8,900 parish or town councils in England, with about 70,000 elected parish councillors, covering roughly 90 per cent of the geographical area of England. These parish and town councils can generate local income to fund their activities through a supplementary charge (called a 'precept') which is added to the council tax bill for the residents of their area.

Residents in every part of England can now seek to establish this form of local council, including in major cities such as London...We want to encourage the creation of more local councils especially in major cities, where there is local demand for them, and where they can be managed in a financially sustainable way, which is acceptable to local taxpayers. We intend to introduce a **right of appeal to the Secretary of State** where a community's proposal for a local council is denied by the local authority.

The English local government think tank, the New Local Government Network, in a publication 'Pacing Lyons: a route map to localism' lamented the under representation within English local government in the following terms:

Today there are 19,850 councillors in England. In the UK on average one councillor represents 2605 citizens. In France the average is one councillor for every 116 citizens; Germany 250 citizens; Italy 397 citizens; Spain 597 citizens; Sweden 667 citizens and Denmark 1084 citizens. England may have more councillors than it needs to lead local government executives, but it has barely enough to represent England's citizens.

What England does have on that calculation is approximately 5 times as much representation as the Local Government Commission is proposing for the citizens of Auckland at the local board level.

The number of local boards, and the ratio of elected members to the local population, is more than just a matter of democratic niceties. It also and crucially an essential issue in holding the Auckland Council itself to account (a matter which the Commission appears not to have considered). As the sole employer, asset owner and local government service provider across the whole of the Auckland region, it will be a major non-contestable monopoly. It is imperative that the arrangements for local representation provide some measure of assurance that local boards will have the capacity and capability to hold the Auckland Council to account.

In this respect, one of the most important roles of local boards will be representing the interests of individual residents and ratepayers who may believe that they have not been fairly treated by the Auckland Council. An average ratio of elected members to population of 1:12,740 is clearly inadequate for this purpose.

In the Local Government Centre's view it is essential that the Local Government Commission revisit its views on effective representation at the local board level. There are constraints in the legislation which will make it impossible for the Commission to put in place a level of representation which would reflect international good practice, but there is certainly scope to do much better than is the case with the current proposals.

Our submission has focused on what we have described as the 15 core local boards - those which are not directly influenced by specific requirements in the legislation as with Waiheke and Great Barrier and by inference Rodney and Franklin. Taking the Commission's own proposals, effective representation could be virtually doubled by making each of the proposed subdivisions local boards in their own right. The Local Government Centre has looked at what this would mean, board by board, in terms of representation. We have assumed that in terms of fairness of representation a board with a population of less than 30,000 would have four elected members, 30,000-35,000, five members, 35,000-40,000, six members, 40,000-45,000, seven members, 45,000-55,000, eight members and over 55,000, nine members. The table illustrating this alternative approach follows:

<b>Local Board</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Ratio of Residents to Members</b>
Hibiscus	41,800	7	5971
Albany	36,100	6	6016
East Coast Bays	42,500	7	6071
Glenfield	40,800	7	5828
Birkenhead	44,200	7	6314
Takapuna	35,800	6	5966
Devonport	23,800	4	5950
Massey	39,800	6	6633
Henderson	81,100	9	9011
Glen Eden-Titirangi	33,400	5	6680
Waitakere Ranges	11,850	4	2962
New Lynn	46,300	8	5787
Avondale	44,600	7	6371
Pt Chevalier-Morningside	47,700	8	5962
Epsom-Balmoral	36,900	6	6150
Waikowhai	30,500	5	6100
Three Kings	28,900	4	5780
Maungawhau	78,860	9	8762
Remuera	52,900	8	6612
Kohimarama	34,300	5	6860
Maungakiekie	24,000	4	6000
Tamaki	50,200	8	6275
Mangere	60,600	9	6733
Otara	37,200	6	6200
Papatoetoe	44,600	7	6371
Howick	42,100	7	6014
Pakuranga	41,200	7	5885
Botany-Flat Bush	38,400	6	6400
Papakura	44,000	7	6285
Manurewa	85,400	9	9488
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1,299,810</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>6565</b>

Overall, the resident: elected member ratio almost halves, from 12,740:1 to 6565:1. There remain some outliers.

Five boards would still have populations in excess of 60,000, Henderson with 81,100, Maungawhau with 78,060, Manukau with 60,600, Manurewa with 85,400, and Franklin with 63,650. We have not had the opportunity, within the very short time period permitted, to undertake an appropriate community of interest analysis to consider what smaller-scale boards within these five areas would look like. Franklin is relatively straightforward if a separate Clevedon local board with a population of 20,500 is acceptable - this would leave a Pukekohe-Waiuku local board with a population of 43,150. One option for Maungawhau could be to separate out the CBD as a distinct local board. The three other large boards would need further analysis by the Commission.

Assuming that each of these became two local boards, that Maungawhau and Franklin were divided, and Rodney were left as a single local board, the result would be 37 local boards rather than 19. There is, though, a case that Rodney itself should be divided into

two separate local boards, one representing the West Coast (Kumeu/Helensville) and the other the East Coast (Wellsford, Warkworth and central) with populations of 21,600 and 31,990 respectively. These would be within the lower end of the range proposed for local boards generally in this submission but would make sense on community of interest grounds. Adopting this recommendation along with the other recommendations we make, the total number of local boards would then be 38.

Servicing would involve some additional administrative effort, primarily on the political side. Given the way in which service delivery is to be managed, the impact on that side of the Auckland Council's activity should be relatively minimal - for example, the location of service centres should be driven by user convenience rather than by the number of local boards.

The overall impact, on balance, will be to enhance local democracy significantly at a relatively minimal cost. Amongst other things the benefit should include:

- Greater legitimacy in the eyes of the Auckland public for the new arrangements.
- A much greater ability for elected local board members to act as effective representatives of their communities to the Social Policy Forum, to the Auckland Council, and to its many arms length entities. The potential benefits for central government in improving its ability to target and deliberate services more effectively should be a particular strength of increasing the number of local boards and thus representation.

## Conclusion

The Local Government Centre has made this submission as part of its public good role in promoting effective local government, and raising public understanding of the role and current expectation that elected members should function not just in the classic Edmund Burke role, but as leaders in community engagement.

Finally, the Local Government Centre asks that it be heard in support of this submission.



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