

# Future for Local Government

## Draft Report Submission

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit the Future for Local Government Review and for the draft report provided by the Review Panel.

Kaipara District Council (KDC) supports the Panel's intention to strengthen local democracy, improve our relationships with hapū, iwi and Māori, focus on community well-being, more equitable funding, and creating more genuine relationships between central and local government.

We agree that there is a substantial amount of change on the horizon due to reforms, economic pressures, social challenges, and expectations. There was a feeling that should the 3 Waters and RMA reforms place, feedback may change.

KDC would like to note the key areas below for feedback.

### **Chapter 2 | Revitalizing Citizen-led Democracy**

KDC will require further clarification on how consulting in new and different ways, utilising technology and civics education would be funded and resourced.

While we already actively engage with the community, small Councils such as ours, do not have the funding nor the staffing capacity to carry out further civics' education. The delivery of the proposed consultation method has been constrained by the current allocated budget and ability to fund staff.

Central government will need to ensure adequate funding models are provided to allow for the change.

### **Chapter 3 | A Te Tiriti-based Partnership Between Māori and the Local Government**

KDC believes clarity and education in this chapter is key. We seek to have a clearer understanding of what is considered an authentic relationship with Māori and create a clearer set of expectations for Councils and governance.

### **Chapter 4 | Allocating Roles and Functions in a way that Enhances Local Well-being**

This proposal relies heavily on intensive initial work with the community and close relationships with region-wide organisations. If starting locally is at the heart of the operation, then place-based consultation is required to identify a work program led by local government.

It is important for the systems and processes of allocating roles to be robust and flexible to ensure members and local service providers of smaller communities are not missed.

The costs of the roles and functions would need to sit with the government that is delivering them. Central government would need to develop clear guidelines as to how roles and functions delivered by community groups and Māori are funded.

Central government will need to ensure adequate funding and communication models are available to help progress this approach.

### **Chapter 5 | Local Government as Champion and Activator of Wellbeing**

Communities expect local government to help deliver wellbeing-enhancing projects but with the current funding model, we are unable to do so. Smaller Councils like KDC do not have the assets to generate revenue nor the resources to support initiatives across the small rural communities and the large area of land.

The coordination of roles and functions requires a robust framework. There will need to be clear guidelines on how the roles and functions will be delivered by the members of the community to avoid feelings of inequality or preferential treatment.

Councils require sufficient funding and resources to enable their ability to enhance intergenerational community well-being. This supports the delivery of outcomes that benefit their residents and ratepayers.

## **Chapter 6 | A Stronger Relationship Between Central and Local Government**

For co-investment to be meaningful for our communities, and for the partnership to be genuine between local and central government, more weight needs to be given to what communities are asking for and what local government is trying to achieve, over what central government may think is best.

Each District in our country has different needs and wants, some of those needs and wants may align with other Districts, but their priority may be different. Therefore, it is paramount that co-investment arrangements are fed from the bottom (grassroots) up to central government. If communities feel truly engaged and heard, and outcomes are being delivered to benefit them, then a genuine partnership can be established. If communities feel that outcomes are being “done to them” and are “what someone in Wellington thinks is best for us”, then the genuine partnership is fractured and difficult to regain.

To further build on the relationship, it was recommended that alongside funding, central government provides resourcing to support implementation of key initiatives.

Adequate systems and solutions need to be adopted to ensure a joint communication approach has been obtained.

## **Chapter 7 | Replenishing and Building on a Representative Democracy**

KDC supports investigating improvements to voting options, however concerns were raised about the reliability, auditability and security of online solutions.

KDC supports a review of remuneration to allow for a more diverse range of candidates standing for election. Such a review could help to ensure that the most competent people for the role see value in running for Council, regardless of their employment status. KDC also notes that as we want to attract more members of the community to local government processes, we need to find a balanced approach to specific requirements roles should meet.

## **Chapter 8 | Building an Equitable, Sustainable Funding and Financing System**

KDC feels the most appropriate basis for allocating central government funding is to genuinely listen to concerns at the grassroots and regional level and to be led by those prioritised specific demands rather than appointing funding from a high-level pot, that is shared out according to the central government priorities or political goals.

KDC notes the report recommends rates as the main source of funding, with the addition that crown property and assets should start paying its share, we would also support this approach.

## **Chapter 9 | Designing the Local Government System to Enable the Change We Need**

### Example 1

Rural and provincial areas such as Kaipara (One council for the region supported by local or community boards) would alienate small rural communities with strong and/or specific requirements and needs, and make them feel disconnected from their local government and decision-making bodies.

#### Example 2

A regional Mayor/Authority and local Councillors rely heavily on strong frameworks and communication. It may be hard to prioritise focus as local Councillors may feel they need to compete for priority (see Northland Transport Alliance as an example), therefore achieving a strong aligned approach to represent communities across a vast geographical area with competing needs appears difficult to achieve.

#### Example 3

KDC prefers to continue to provide local, grassroots, representation for communities in rural and provincial areas, while still being able to maximise regional cost efficiencies. The “combined mayor” should have a different title, potentially Chair like Regional Councils currently have, to make it easier to differentiate between a local mayor and the leader of the combined Council.

Ensuring a local response whether it be via a phone enquiry or a building inspection should remain a priority. Capturing District Plans, and specific bylaws, and embedding the perception that customer services are “in the know” with current works. Projects, placemaking and local issues will be essential to be delivered at local level, alongside capable staffing to manage and escalates changes and delivery.