

Full Council

25 June 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [9]

Department: Strategy & Policy

Title | Taitara: Regional Spatial Planning – Interim Governance and Representation

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to:

- Establish an Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group to provide early elected member oversight of regional spatial planning across Otago; and
- Nominate two elected member representatives to represent Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) on the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the contents of this report;
2. **Approve** the establishment of the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group, noting that this is informal and not decision making, is an interim arrangement only and will remain in place until the Planning Bill is enacted and formal statutory arrangements are confirmed;
3. **Appoint** Councillor Cody Tucker, Chair of the Smart Growth Committee, and Councillor Jon Mitchell, Deputy Chair of the Smart Growth Committee, as QLDC's representatives on the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group;
4. **Delegate** authority to the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group to appoint an independent Chair at its first meeting; and
5. **Note** that Kā Rūnaka will be invited to nominate representatives for the Interim Group, should this be their preference, at the Te Rōpū Taiao Otago hui on 3 July 2026.

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9 June 2026

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9 June 2026

Context | Horopaki

The legislative context

1. The Government is undertaking a significant reform of the resource management system. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill were introduced to Parliament in December 2025 and are currently before the Environment Select Committee, whose report is due in late June 2026. Royal Assent is expected in September 2026.
2. Under the Planning Bill, all local authorities within a region are required to jointly prepare a regional spatial plan covering at least a 30-year horizon. The regional spatial plan sets the region's strategic spatial framework for urban development, infrastructure investment, environmental limits, and land use. It will be a statutory weighted document that sits above land use plans.
3. The Planning Bill requires all local authorities in a region to establish a statutory Spatial Plan Committee (clauses 71–73) to develop and oversee the regional spatial plan.
4. As a starting point, all local authorities within a region are required to enter into a “process agreement” covering scope, roles, decision-making arrangements, dispute resolution and engagement with iwi.

The Otago Context

5. Otago is a large and diverse region facing significant spatial planning challenges. These include rapid growth pressures, infrastructure constraints, climate adaptation and natural hazard risks, as well as cross-boundary issues with Canterbury, West Coast and Southland. The regional spatial plan will need to address all these matters in a coordinated way.
6. Work has been underway at the officer level for some time. The Otago Planning Managers Group met with Southland counterparts in February 2026 and has met monthly since, with meetings focused solely on regional spatial planning. Representatives from Kāi Tahu (via Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Inc) have participated in all Otago Planning Managers meetings.
7. The work is now moving next step is to move from officer-level coordination to a formal project with governance, leadership, and resourcing in place. All arrangements being established now are designed to be adaptable as the legislation is finalised.
8. Regional spatial planning is one of the five regional focus areas identified at the Otago Mayoral Forum on 6 March 2026. The Otago Chief Executive Forum met on 24 April 2026 to progress a region-wide approach, and agreed to establish a formal programme of work, including a dedicated project lead. This will be a fixed term position jointly funded by all councils to lead and project manage the formation of the regional spatial plan. This role is being advertised shortly.

9. On 22 May 2026, the Otago Mayoral Forum considered a paper focused on governance and leadership for regional spatial planning. Members resolved to take forward a Council paper (this paper) asking Otago's Councils to establish and nominate elected members for an Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

10. The Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group (the Interim Group) is designed to bridge the gap from now until enactment and the establishment of the formal Spatial Plan Committee under the Planning Act.
11. The Interim Group's primary task in the early phase will be to develop a draft process agreement as described above (paragraph 4). It would also progress a terms of reference for the Spatial Plan Committee. The process agreement and terms of reference would not be finalised until the Bills are enacted and a formal Spatial Planning Committee is established. The Interim Group will be supported by a project structure involving executive-level, planner and technical staff from Councils across the region.
12. It is intended that the Interim Group operate informally rather than as a formal joint committee, providing elected member oversight while remaining adaptable. The group would operate by unanimity, reflecting the partnership nature of the regional spatial planning process. It is an informal group with no decision making authority, with its only proposed delegation being to appoint an independent Chair.
13. The Otago Mayoral Forum noted that further advice will be sought from Kāi Tahu regarding appropriate governance and operational arrangements for mana whenua partnership and participation. Accordingly, Kā Rūnaka will be invited to nominate representatives to the Interim Group, should this be their preference, at the Te Rōpū Taiao Otago hui on 3 July 2026.
14. The proposal anticipates the appointment of an independent Chair. The Chair will preside over and facilitate meetings, help the Interim Group navigate competing priorities and maintain momentum, and provide an independent, neutral perspective as the programme moves from interim to statutory arrangements.
15. Otago's Chief Executives are in the process of identifying candidates for the independent Chair role. It is proposed for the Interim Group to be delegated authority to appoint its Chair from this list of potential candidates.

QLDC Representatives – Smart Growth Chair and Deputy

16. Other Otago councils are expected to nominate either portfolio leads and their deputies, chairs and deputy chairs of their relevant planning committees, or those that are involved in planning committees. For QLDC, the equivalent representatives are Councillor Cody Tucker, Chair of the Smart Growth Committee, and Councillor Jon Mitchell, Deputy Chair of the Smart Growth Committee. As a result, these two Councillors have been put forward to represent QLDC in the Interim Group. Each council will consider its nominations at its respective June 2026 Council meetings.

Relationship to Simplifying Local Government and City and Regional Deal

17. The Government's May 2026 Head Start announcement does not change the need to progress regional spatial planning. Even on the most optimistic Head Start timeline, any reorganisation will not be in place before the Planning Bill's regional spatial plan notification deadline. The Planning Bill currently requires the first draft regional spatial plan to be publicly notified within 15 months of Royal assent or 6 months after the first national policy direction is issued. It must be decided 6 months after it is publicly notified.
18. The Government has confirmed that any subregional unitary authorities formed through Head Start must continue with spatial planning at the regional level at the time of enactment of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. The Bills allow for subregional plans to feed into the broader regional spatial plan where appropriate.
19. A future Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal is likely to address many of the same growth-related issues as the regional spatial plan, including infrastructure, housing, transport, climate adaptation and growth sequencing. Any governance arrangements for implementing the Regional Deal will therefore need to align with regional, and where appropriate, subregional, spatial planning. This reinforces the need for the interim arrangements to remain informal, flexible and adaptable while both processes continue to develop.
20. The interim governance arrangement is considered the recommended response regardless of how the Head Start and Regional Deal processes are resolved. It will provide a flexible way to maintain momentum on regional spatial planning. The arrangements are deliberately non-prescriptive about the final form of future governance, adaptable to the outcomes of local government reorganisation and Regional Deal processes, and designed to transition smoothly into whatever statutory or implementation structure ultimately emerges.
21. 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.
22. Option 1 Approve the establishment of the Interim Group, and the nomination of two Council representatives Councillor Tucker and Councillor Mitchell.

Advantages:

- Ensures QLDC is actively engaged in the Regional Spatial Planning Process. QLDC would have elected member representation in early discussions about the scope, priorities, interim process arrangements and transition to the future Spatial Plan Committee.
- Queenstown Lakes has significant growth, housing, infrastructure, visitor economy, climate adaptation, and cross-boundary issues. Participation helps ensure these matters are reflected in regional discussions from the outset, consistent with the Regional Deal discussions.

- Enables QLDC to be better prepared for the upcoming reforms. The Planning Bill is expected to require all local authorities within a region to jointly prepare a regional spatial plan. This option helps QLDC prepare for those future statutory obligations before the legislation is enacted.
- Will help strengthen regional relationships and alignment. Participation would help QLDC build trust and maintain effective working relationships with Otago councils and Kāi Tahu before the statutory process begins. It is also consistent with the Regional Deal negotiations, where Otago Regional Council, Central Otago District Council and QLDC have been working more closely together.
- Supports more efficient use of officer time with early governance and direction. Early elected member oversight should help provide direction, reduce uncertainty, and avoid rework once the formal statutory arrangements are established.
- Provides a flexible, low-risk pathway. The Interim Group is informal and transitional, so it allows QLDC to stay involved without committing to a final governance model before the Planning Bill, local government reform, and Regional Deal processes are resolved.

Disadvantages:

- Would result in additional short term elected member workload. Participation will require two elected members to commit time to meetings, preparation and followup actions.
- Additional officer support is likely to be required to help support elected member participation.

23. Option 2 Decline the establishment of the Interim Group and the nomination of two QLDC representatives Councillor Tucker and Councillor Mitchell.

Advantages:

- Delays additional elected member workload in the short term.
- As the Head Start, Regional Deal and resource management reform processes are still evolving, Council could avoid investing time in arrangements that may need to be changed.

Disadvantages:

- Reduced influence on the regional spatial plan and its governance. QLDC would not have elected member voice in early discussions about the scope, priorities, process and governance arrangements. It would be a lost opportunity for QLDC to work more closely with Otago Councils and Kāi Tahu.
- Risk that QLDC's district-specific issues are not fully reflected in the early discussions regarding the regional spatial plan. Queenstown Lakes has significant growth, housing, infrastructure, tourism, climate adaptation, and cross-boundary pressures. Without participation, these issues may not be as strongly represented in the early regional work.

- Less preparedness for the new planning system. The Planning Bill is expected to require all local authorities within a region to jointly prepare a regional spatial plan. Declining to participate now could leave QLDC less ready to transition into the statutory process.
- Missed opportunity for stronger regional alignment. Non-participation may reduce opportunities to strengthen working relationships with Otago councils and Kāi Tahu before the statutory process begins.
- Potential for more catch-up work later. If QLDC joins the process later, elected members and officers may need to spend more time understanding decisions already made, revisiting earlier work, or aligning QLDC's position with a process already underway. This could result in delays across the region.

24. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because it enables QLDC to participate actively in the development of regional spatial plan, maintain influence over matters that will affect the district, and prepare for the upcoming resource management reforms. It also supports closer collaboration with Otago councils and Kāi Tahu, while retaining flexibility to adapt to the final form of the legislation, any local government reorganisation, and the Regional Deal process.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

25. This matter is of low significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because it is for the interim governance arrangements only.
26. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are residents/ratepayers of the Queenstown Lakes district community.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

27. Representatives from Kāi Tahu (via Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Inc) have participated in all Otago Planning Managers meetings and are actively engaged in the process. Kā Rūnaka will be invited to nominate representatives to the Interim Group, should this be their preference, at the Te Rōpū Taiao Otago hui on 3 July 2026.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

28. This matter relates to the Strategic/Political/Reputation risk category. It is associated with RISK10056 Ineffective provision for the future planning and development needs of the district within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having an insignificant residual risk rating.
29. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to implement additional controls for this risk. This will be achieved by working in partnership with Otago Councils and Kai Tahu to ensure that the region is ready for the upcoming reforms.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

30. There are no financial obligations for Council.

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

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

- Vision Beyond 2050: Our Strategic Framework | Queenstown Lakes District Council
- Queenstown Lakes Spatial Plan 2021
- 2025 Climate and Biodiversity Plan
- 2024-2034 Ten Year Plan
- Queenstown Lakes Proposed District Plan
- Queenstown Lakes Economic Diversification Plan 2024: New Pathways to a Thriving Future

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

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

Legal Considerations and Statutory Responsibilities | Ka Ture Whaiwhakaaro me kā Takohaka Waeture

34. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill have been introduced but are not yet enacted. The proposed Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group is therefore an informal, non-statutory arrangement intended to support preparation for the future regional spatial planning framework. It does not replace the statutory Spatial Plan Committee anticipated under the Planning Bill, nor does it have authority to make statutory decisions or bind Council to future regional spatial planning outcomes. Any formal statutory arrangements, process agreement, terms of reference, or substantive decisions would need to be considered once the legislation is enacted and, where required, brought back to Council for approval. The recommended option is consistent with Council's decision-making obligations under the Local Government Act 2002, including consideration of reasonably practicable options, significance and engagement and the purpose of local government.

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

35. 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. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

36. 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.