

Full Council

27 August 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [2]

Department: Corporate Services

Title | Taitara: Local Electoral Act 2001: Choice of electoral system and review of the current Māori Ward status in the Queenstown Lakes District

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is:

- to set out the requirements of the Local Electoral Act 2001 in relation to the choice of the electoral system employed for local elections and polls, namely, either First Past the Post or Single Transferable Vote; and
- to review the current Māori Ward status in the Queenstown Lakes District (QLDC does not currently qualify under the Local Electoral Act 2001).

The report also summarises the process and critical dates for completion of the Representation Review in 2027.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the contents of this report;
2. **Note** the key milestones for completion of the Representation Review in 2027;
3. **Agree** to retain the First Past the Post electoral system for election of the Council and the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board for the next two elections, scheduled to take place in 2028 and 2031; and
4. **Note** that the Queenstown Lakes District does not currently qualify for a Māori Ward.

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6 August 2026

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Context | Horopaki

1. Under the Local Electoral Act 2001 (LEA), councils must undertake a review of their representation arrangements every six years but may do so every three years. The current representation arrangements in the district were established based on the outcome of the last representation review undertaken by Council in 2021. Council must now undertake a representation review in 2027, noting that this paper must assume business as usual with regard to any Local Government reorganisation outcome.
2. The choice of electoral system is not formally part of representation reviews, but the Local Government Commission recommends that it should be considered as part of the overall review of representation alongside a decision, if applicable, on the establishment of Māori Wards.
3. The LEA allows local authorities to choose either First Past the Post (FPP) or Single Transferable Vote (STV) for local elections. A change of electoral system can be achieved either by a council resolution or by the favourable outcome of a poll, which can itself be as the result of a council resolution or demanded by 5% of electors. A local authority's resolution to change the electoral system must occur no later than 12 September, two years before election year i.e. by 12 September 2026 for the next (2028) local election.
4. A decision by Council on the electoral system is not mandatory. A council can choose to do nothing, in which case the status quo (i.e. FPP in this district) will continue to apply unless changed by a council resolution or a poll of electors. However, Council must publish a public notice of the right of electors to demand a poll by 19 September 2026, and this public notice is required whether Council passes a resolution or not.
5. The LEA allows Māori Wards to be established, if applicable, either by a Council resolution or as the result of a poll. The poll can be required either by a council resolution or if it is demanded by 5% of electors. To apply to the next election any Council resolution must occur before 23 November, two years before the next election, i.e. 23 November 2026 for the next (2028) election. However, Council does not currently statistically qualify to establish a Māori Ward.
6. Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) and Dunedin City Council recently submitted a proposal under the Government's Head Start process for local government structural reform. While coming years may see a restructuring of local government that impacts QLDC and the district, local councils are nonetheless required to comply with existing legislation, which includes the LEA and its requirements as set out in paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 above, business as usual, as stated.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

Electoral System: First Past the Post or Single Transferable Vote

7. Under FPP, the voter places a tick next to the name/s of the candidates they wish to vote for. The voter can vote for as many candidates as there are positions available to be filled. The winner is the candidate/s with the most votes.

8. Under STV, voters rank candidates in their order of preference using numbers. A voter would write “1” next to the name of their favourite candidate, “2” next to their second favourite candidate and so on. Voters may give preferences to as few or many candidates as they wish. Candidates must reach a quota of votes to be elected (calculated by the number of valid votes, divided by one more than the number of vacancies). Surplus votes from elected candidates and votes from eliminated candidates are transferred according to voters' next preferences until all positions are filled.
9. FPP is a simple method of electing candidates and is widely used throughout the world. Although FPP is simple, one disadvantage of an FPP election is that it can lead to the election of a Mayor (or councillor in a single-seat election) with a minority of votes. Another disadvantage with FPP is that many votes may be “wasted”, that is, votes for candidates who are ultimately not elected.
10. STV provides the greatest benefit – in terms of better reflecting overall voter preferences than FPP – for single member elections and for elections within at-large or large wards (i.e. those with five to seven members). STV also reduces the number of “wasted” votes. However, if there is a very high number of candidates to choose from, voters may find it a more difficult task to rank their preferred candidates (although there is no need to rank all candidates). STV also has several potential disadvantages versus FPP when it comes to the counting of votes: the counting process takes longer, is more expensive, and is more difficult for voters to understand.¹
11. In New Zealand there are (currently) 78 councils and 16 use the STV electoral system (which equates to about 20%). Of these, two used STV for the first time in 2025 (Otago Regional Council and Whangarei District Council).
12. A table comparing the relative advantages and disadvantages of FPP and STV is included as Attachment A.

Māori Wards

13. The process for determining the number of members to be elected from both Māori and general wards is set out in the LEA and involves:
 - Determining the total number of members of the local authority (at present: 11, excluding the Mayor);
 - Multiplying the total number of members by the ratio of the Māori electoral population to the total (Māori and general) electoral population.
14. The LEA (Schedule 1A, section 2) summarises the calculation as follows:

¹ Advice on the advantages and disadvantages of FPP and STV is based on the work of the 2021 Representation Review Advisory Group, which still applies today. A benefits analysis produced by the Advisory Group (updated to reflect the fact that ORC used STV in the last election) is included as Attachment A.

$$nmm = \frac{mepd}{mepd + gepd} \times nm$$

where:

nmm – number of Māori ward members

mepd – Māori electoral population or estimated Māori electoral population of the district (1,370)*

gepd – general electoral population or estimated general electoral population of the district (52,500)*

nm – proposed number of members of the territorial authority (excluding the Mayor) (11)

*These figures - provided by Local Government Commission from 2023 census and 2025 boundaries – are for the estimated Māori electoral population and estimated general electoral population of the district.

15. This formula provides the following result for QLDC (using the estimated Māori electoral population and estimated general population figures provided by the Local Government Commission):

$$1,370 \div 52,500 \times 11 = 0.28$$

16. Based upon this result, the district is not currently eligible to have any Māori ward members (0.28 rounds to zero), and as such the district does not currently qualify for a Māori ward.² However, eligibility may change with future population increases in the district.
17. In the absence of any indication that a poll may be initiated or required, and given Iwi does not currently support the establishment of a Māori Ward and that the district does not qualify under the legislation for a Māori Ward, no decision is required and this issue is for noting only.

Representation Review 2027

18. Under the LEA, councils must undertake a review of their representation arrangements every six years but may do so every three years. As noted above, Council must undertake a review in 2027.
19. The process is commonly known as the 'Representation Review' and it enables the Council to take a fresh look at the structure of its membership and the way Councillors and Community Board members are elected. This includes the total number of members, whether they come from a ward or are elected 'at large' from across the wider district, where the boundaries of wards lie or ward name. The position of the Mayor is not part of the Representation Review.
20. The review must also consider whether there needs to be community boards, what is their nature and structure and if a community board should be retained in its current form or at all.

² As per the Local Electoral Act Schedule.1a, s.2(5):

"5. ...if the number of Māori ward members, as determined in accordance with the method of calculation in this clause, is zero (because the number of Māori ward members as so determined is a fraction of the whole number 1 that does not exceed one half), —

a. the district must not be divided into 1 or more Māori wards and 1 or more general wards..."

21. The representation review procedure includes a full public consultation and hearing process and will cover much of next year. A timeline showing key milestones is Attachment B. As stated, while the Government's Head Start process may potentially impact QLDC and the district, Council must comply with existing legislation, which includes the requirement under the LEA to undertake a representation review in 2027.
22. No decision on the representation review is currently required and so this matter is for noting only.

Options related to the Electoral System

23. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for achieving the objectives of the required decision, as set out in section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.
24. Option 1: Retain the First Past the Post (FPP) Electoral System for the next two local elections.

Advantages:

- Voters in the district are familiar with FPP, and there is a perception that FPP is easier to understand than STV, although it should be noted that the ORC used STV in the last election.
- The results of a FPP election are more immediate than an STV election and are generally easier for the public to understand.
- An FPP election is more affordable because of additional vote processing complexity with STV. The additional cost of STV for QLDC would be around \$12,000.
- Electors still have the option to seek a poll on altering the electoral system.
- Currently there is uncertainty about the shape of local government reform and how territorial authorities may be impacted in coming years, and therefore there may be benefit in retaining the *status quo* to avoid change fatigue and to allow those programmes of reform to progress.

Disadvantages:

- Implementation of the FPP electoral system is less likely to deliver a proportional result that reflects the make-up of the community.
- FPP can lead to the election of a Mayor with a minority of votes.
- There are likely to be more "wasted" votes under FPP.

25. Option 2: Introduce the STV electoral system for the next two elections to be undertaken in the Queenstown Lakes District.

Advantages:

- Potentially more diverse candidates may be elected under STV.
- Fewer votes are likely to be “wasted” under STV.
- STV avoids the possibility of a Mayor being elected with a minority of votes.
- STV is familiar to voters in the district, having been used by ORC in the 2025 election.

Disadvantages:

- STV can be more difficult for the voting public to understand, and voters may find it difficult to rank candidates (especially where there is a large number).
- STV is a more expensive than FPP. The additional cost for QLDC to move to STV is estimated to be around \$12,000.
- The results of an STV election are less immediate than for FPP (a progress result would be available several hours later on election day), and the results are more difficult to understand.

26. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because FPP is a familiar electoral system that is easier to understand and less expensive to implement than STV. In addition, retaining the *status quo* may be advisable given current uncertainty regarding local government reforms and their potential impact on QLDC.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi i kā Whakaaro Hiraka

27. This matter is of medium significance as determined by reference to the Council’s Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because it impacts how the community will vote in future local elections.

28. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are the electors of the Queenstown Lakes District.

29. The Council’s representation review proposal will be subject to full public consultation for at least one month in 2027, in line with requirements set out in the LEA.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

30. Council has consulted with Iwi on this matter. Iwi does not currently favour the establishment of a Māori Ward in the district but support continued engagement with Council via ongoing mana-to-mana hui with elected members.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

31. This matter relates to the Strategic/Political/Reputation risk category. It is associated with RISK10029 Ineffective compliance management practices within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a moderate residual risk rating.

32. The approval of the recommended option will support the Council by avoiding the risk through making decisions in accordance with the requirements of the LEA.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

33. There are no financial implications since the recommended option would retain the status quo. Public notification of electoral options is covered in existing budgets.

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

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

- Significance and Engagement Policy 2024;
- Local Electoral Act 2001; and
- Local Electoral Regulations 2001.

35. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the above documents.

36. Funding for local council elections is included in the Long Term Plan and Annual Plan.

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

37. Running local elections is a statutory responsibility of the Council.

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

38. 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. The recommended option will help ensure that local elections continue to be run in a fair and democratic manner. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

39. 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	STV and FPP Benefits Analysis
B	Key Milestones for Representation Review 2026-2027