

Item 1: Shotover Deliberative Poll

SESSION TYPE: Workshop

PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME:

This item will discuss the Deliberative Poll (DP) as a method of deliberative democracy, its application in the context of consideration of potential future options for the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant discharge, as well as receive guidance from Councillors to inform a more finalised process design. Councillors will be guided by an external presenter from the New Democracy Foundation (nDF), an expert in deliberative democracy.

DATE/START TIME:

Thursday, 30 July 2026 at 10.00am

TIME BREAKDOWN:

Presentation: 30 minutes

Questions or Debate/Discussion: 15 minutes

PRESENTERS:

Iain Walker - New Democracy Foundation (external)

Campbell Guy - Senior Policy Advisor

Pennie Pearce - General Manager, Strategy & Policy

Prepared by:



Name: Campbell Guy

Title: Policy Adviser

16 July 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Pennie Pearce

Title: General Manager,
Strategy and Policy

16 July 2026

ATTACHMENTS:

A	New Democracy Foundation (nDF) Concept Outline
B	Draft Deliberative Poll Questions (v.1) (page 8)

Deliberative Democracy Concept Outline

This document expands the original summary of the two main deliberative engagement options which can assist council decision-makers in identifying the best-fit model in the complex and controversial area of dealing with treated wastewater.

Understanding the preference for the Deliberative Poll option due to the stage at which the project is at, and understanding the project constraints, this document summarises the key design decisions where Councillors may wish to have input ahead of the full, formal Deliberative Poll Process Design being provided. This document also provides an indicative high-level budget.

1. Principles

The key starting point for understanding this work is that we work to a set of five principles, not a single model. The principles can be applied to greater or lesser extent depending on the political problem needing to be solved.

1. Representativeness, through stratified lottery selection (matched to Census by gender, age, geography and home ownership status – the latter being an effective proxy for income & education). In council contacts we are also likely to identify residential vs commercial ratepayers. This is in contrast to most forms of engagement which tend to hear from the most affected, most interested and most ‘energetic’.
2. Diversity of information sources, through wide and deep engagement with expertise. Citizens are given the chance to engage, question and request additional sources of their choosing. This is in contrast to the power of rumour and ‘catchy’ inaccurate information in a public opinion environment.
3. Extended time, as this is how people move beyond a reflexive opinion view and think through costs and trade-offs. Shortform formats (surveys, drop-ins etc) do not encourage people to understand the complexity and trade-offs embedded in complex problems. Shortform formats, such as surveys, should be retained for learning values, questions and concerns, but not for making recommendations.
4. Open question and free response: citizens write their own reports showing Recommendations, Reasoning and Evidence. The central output is not one produced by government or a consultant as this would erode public trust, and it is in earning public trust that deliberative engagement models have value.
5. Authority is pre-agreed (substantive response from the governing authority in 45-60 days) as this provides the incentives for citizens to read and immerse themselves in the task. No resident will read hundreds of pages about wastewater treatment without an incentive. The key incentive is that they will be heard. Make a person one among ~50, and inform them a Mayor and Councillors will respond, and the incentives to learn, read and seriously address the task are radically shifted.

2. Defining the Political Problem

While council officers can make recommendations, our experience has been that elected councillors are the essential audience to determine the level of political difficulty. Generally, nDF will conduct a workshop stepping through the principles and broad shape of a potential project, and in that meeting councillors will provide the clear direction on what type of political solution is needed.

In the case of finding a long-term solution to deal with treated wastewater in Queenstown there are two different types of solution:

- 1) **Citizens' Jury: Citizens "share the decision" and stand alongside elected decision makers.** For high controversy topic where *any* decision taken by a government will earn criticism.
[Example](#) – City of Melbourne
[Example](#) – SA Nuclear
- 2) **Deliberative Poll: Citizens offer insight in a forum which is highly publicly visible.** For topics where a limited amount of information and understanding about the topic is expected to lead to a significant change in opinion, as views are less deeply held.
[Example](#) – America in One Room (Deliberative Poll)
[Example](#) – Auckland Transport Deliberative Forum (Deliberative Poll concept)

We use media examples as that can be an effective barometer of (a) wider public reception and (b) the willingness of citizens to endorse the credibility of an engagement process.

The clear tension is a subjective political one: does council need to be "considering all options" (Citizens' Jury model) or having an informed conversation which "review the finite pool of options" (Deliberative Poll model). We cannot consider all options in the Deliberative Poll format.

2. Applying the Principles to the Political Goals

In this section we give a sense/outline of what deliberative engagement would look like on this topic and outline. We understand, running a citizen's jury into 2027 is not feasible at this stage of the project, due to risk surrounding the Environment Court enforcement order deadlines, while incorporating findings from workstreams to present to Councillors in March 2027 (such as engagement with Kāi Tahu and technical work undertaken by WSP).

It is presented here so Councillors can understand the difference between the models before engagement starts (all deliberative processes are not alike).

'Share the Decision' – Citizens' Jury Model

Representative	Lottery-select 35-40 people (Census stratified).
Information	Baseline information from council – e.g the 98pg Options 'Long List' Report Broad Stakeholder Reference Group to have opportunity to present, make submissions and be one source of answers to questions. Scope for site visits. Participants can request any source of their choosing. Technical/ cost assessment possible.
Time	6x all-day Saturday meetings, each spaced ~3 weeks apart. Generally 4-5 months to plan, and 3-4 months to operate. Holiday periods need to be factored into scheduling, which can extend this. Council staff have indicated that running a citizen's jury process into early 2027 would not be possible due to time and project constraints outlined above.
Open Question	e.g. 'What should we do with treated wastewater in Queenstown*?' <i>*we note the wording could be limited to the Shotover facility; in this example we are prioritising simplicity of wording in the knowledge that the reading will canvas that the Shotover facility is the central aspect.</i>

	Participants will self-write a report which they are prepared to stand behind and publicly explain . The report represents common ground <i>as a group</i> and confronts the <u>trade-offs</u> involved.
Authority	Report is public immediately. Council/ CCO to respond in detail in 45 days. Mayor & councillors to meet with jury within 21 days after delivery of the written response.

‘Gain Insight’ – Deliberative Poll Model

Representative	Lottery-select ~50-100 people (Census stratified).
Information	Information kit ~20-30 pages is appropriate to level of participant commitment. Stakeholders can have the chance to present as speakers. While there is no scope for additional speakers to be requested, some Q&A in each session is possible. Not all questions can be answered.
Time	One all-day Saturday meeting. Option also exists for 2 nd day of operations if breadth of stakeholders and options is extensive and /or desire of a site visit. No pressure on scheduling as preparation is straightforward. A late November date (e.g Sat Nov 21 st) would give ample opportunity for speaker curation.
Open Question	<u>8-12</u> questions within a policy topic can be tested. These will be ‘propositions’ and responded to (generally) on a 5-point Likert scale. Propositions are tested before and after learning more about a topic to observing change in view as information is added. In addition: i. a set of knowledge/ informational questions are separately asked to ascertain baseline knowledge ii. general public opinion surveys can be conducted to calibrate the closeness of the deliberative poll group to the population. Polled response (mass individualised, not group common ground). Key insight comes from measuring change in view as information is added . Pairwise questioning possible but tradeoffs contradictions remain possible.
Authority	The authority effectively derives from its ‘event based’ public nature as well as publicly communicating insight into how opinions change after participants learn more about a topic.

3. Recommendation

This paper is ideally of value to the elected Mayor and councillors to discuss the design of the political product needed. We have found that estimates of the level of controversy established by elect members yield greater project buy-in – thus making the entire spend on engagement more worthwhile.

Importantly, we noted some difference in views as to how finite the options are for dealing with wastewater. The Deliberative Poll will work best with a limited pool of options. While it is acknowledged that there are other workstreams involved in revisiting reasonably practicable options and engaging with mana whenua, looking at *all* options for wastewater disposal in the district through a deliberative engagement method is only possible in the longer format jury option.

4. nDF Role

newDemocracy exists to prove a point: that changing the formats by which we involve citizens to revolve predominantly around public judgment rather than public opinion yields more trusted decisions. We get involved in projects that allow us to demonstrate that.

We do not work as a consultancy. Instead, we seek a one-off, all-inclusive Services Grant where we are asked to be directly involved in a public way. Our advice is then used as the basis for procurement for the project facilitation.

Understanding that Council's preferred option is the Deliberative Poll, we are in contact with Stanford's Deliberative Democracy Lab (<https://deliberation.stanford.edu/>) as creators of the Deliberative Poll¹ for (a) advice and (b) with the option they could take over the newDemocracy process design role. As a philanthropic organisation with no commercial imperative, we are simply seeking the best fit and will be happy to step aside if they can do a better job within the budget available.

5. Deliberative Poll – Key Design Decisions

With the Deliberative Poll as Council's preferred option as the means of undertaking further community engagement, what follows are some of the more granular design decisions where council may wish to have input, this is shown below by design principle.

newDemocracy (or potentially Stanford) will produce a long format Process Design document, however, this will take ~3 weeks to produce. This summary is provided as an interim document to fit to timings for the July 30th workshop.

The purpose of a formal Process Design is for **public trust**: cynicism in public engagement tends to be high (as people think the decision is already made), so a 'show your work' document outlining how subjective decisions were decided and specifying how the process is designed to be open and non-leading is a worthwhile transparency exercise.

Having these decisions made by an organisation whose reputation is tied to transparency is also of value to the governments we work with: most in the community understand we do not have a stake in the outcome, and nor do we bill at rates which risk us being 'captured', where the inference is that a result is delivered to retain a billable client. newDemocracy will only work with any government entity twice in order to avoid that public perception.

A Deliberative Poll Model for Queenstown Lakes - Key Design Decisions

Representative	The 'pure' Stanford model calls for recruitment of 150 to 200 people as they are seeking <u>statistical</u> representativeness. We have had video calls and emails with them testing how much this can be varied in lower population areas. newDemocracy has concerns over the ability to recruit this number in a small population catchment of 20-30k people (those serviced by and thus paying for the service). Noting that the case can be made that the environmental reputation of the district for this issue which may necessitate selecting from the broader ~50k population catchment. Option: recruitment of those serviced by, and thus paying for the service, or recruiting from a wider catchment area. We understand the statistical claim and impact (essentially, it comes down to a question of confidence interval/ margin of error). Our preference is for the random-sample to be 50 people.
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¹ The Stanford Deliberative Democracy Lab have a trademark on the term 'deliberative poll' with a set methodology.

	At this number we can issue 3000 random, printed invitations and an estimated 8% response rate (240x RSVPs) is a sufficient pool for a second round random draw. Stratification will be used to match to population profile by gender, age, geography and homeownership status (owner/renter/ commercial ratepayer). The latter variable is effective in securing a mix of people by income and education level. We used printed invitations as they offer a chance to explain the process, and have a longer life than electronic communications. A random sample of addresses from council is all that is required. Option: the mass-individualised nature of response makes it possible to allow participation from self-selected groups or individuals <i>as results can be separated by cohort</i>. This could be an option to make available online. This would then provide council with two inputs into their decision-making: one from the random, representative group, and a second from the self-selected (which will skew toward and thus represent the more active voices). We lean toward offering this as a transparency option so more people can see the nature of content presented in the process.
Information	The information kit should give a basic factual grounding behind each of the questions being asked. For example: 1. When asking citizens about acceptable quality for treated wastewater, explain the scientific standard and give examples of measures in other water sources and treatment options. 2. When asking about preferred options, a plain language summary of the nature and cost of each option should be presented. Illustrations can be helpful, and costs should be clearly explained. 3. When asking about cost per household, ensure that current costs (and the number of ratepayers affected) is presented. Allocating space to active stakeholders and partners (e.g. iwi) to present information in their own words has a twofold benefit: it minimises the risk of accusations of bias through editing, and it removes council as an author (the actual author being directly identified). Stakeholders can have the chance to present as speakers. Speakers will appear as panels, presenting individually for ~10mins, then having Q&A as a panel together (~30mins). The number of required panels dictates the duration of the process (1 vs 2 days). Based on information provided by Council, we think the following panels are required. 1. <i>Technical panel:</i> Council, water regulator(s), consultants and/or contracted operators provide a baseline of information. This panel will likely have extended presentation time. 2. <i>Iwi/ Maori:</i> council has identified 2 organisations. 3. <i>Mayor & Councillors:</i> this will help to inform the room with regard to the array of informal views and concerns being aired with elected representatives. 4. <i>Community organisations, incl. business groups</i> Ideal panel size is 3-4 speakers. Option: if key groups have been omitted and councillors want additional panel(s) added, this can be accommodated. Option: allow stakeholders or online participation to nominate additional speakers.

Time	One all-day Saturday meeting. Option exists for 2nd day of operations if breadth of stakeholders and options is extensive and if there is desire for a site visit to the treatment plant. Trade-off in this design decision is that it impairs response rates for recruitment. Preference is for operating time to allow for small group (5-6) table discussions among participants to (a) share perspectives and (b) deliver questions. The latter is because questions filtered at table level tend to remain closer to topic. No pressure on scheduling as preparation is straightforward. A late November date (e.g Sat Nov 21st) would give ample opportunity for speaker curation.
Polled Questions	Council have drafted a list of potential questions that are highly suitable. These will be framed as 'propositions' and responded to on a 5-point Likert scale (generally). Decision: Councillors should be explicitly clear that the range of questions asked are sufficient to inform their decision in March 2027, as part of the wider engagement process set out in the March 2026 Council Resolution. Key insight comes from measuring <u>change in view as information is added</u>.
Operations	Facilitation for a Deliberative Poll is extremely straightforward (it is close to a 'hosting' role). Only 1-2 facilitators are required. Facilitators need to have familiarity with mobile phone based polling and questioning tools (Mentimeter, Poll Everywhere, Slido are equally workable).

6. Budget Outline

Two significant variables are not confirmed at time of writing: number of participants and whether we operate for 1 or 2 days (the latter being required if a site visit is deemed important for participant understanding).

Line-item costs (participant recruitment, facilitation, venue, catering etc) have been discussed with Council's project team.

Councillors are asked to note that participant payments (~\$150 per day) are essential to avoid skewing the random recruitment to those with an active interest in the topic.

A 1-day Deliberative Poll will cost \$80,000-100,000. The 2-day version would cost \$130,000-\$150,000.²

newDemocracy seeks a Services Grant (NZ\$8,000) and Research Grant (NZ\$5,000) for our design, advice and project oversight role. The former seeks to defray costs while not being at the level of a commercial consultancy. The latter is a contribution to evaluation work that seeks to identify ongoing methodology refinements we can derive from live projects.

Iain Walker

Executive Director – newDemocracy Foundation

July 9th 2026

² Much of these costs are related to participant compensation for their time (~150 dollars a day per participant), postal invitations printing and delivery, professional facilitation, third-party participant liaisons, catering and event curation costs e.g. catering.

Shotover Wastewater Treatment Solution

Draft Deliberative Poll Questions & Topics

To	QLDC Councillors
Subject	Long List of Draft Deliberative Poll Questions/Topics for Councillor Input

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

This briefing outlines draft questions proposed for deliberative polling on a long-term discharge solution for the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant (SWWTP) for councillor input.

The purpose of conducting a deliberative poll on this issue is to provide insight into how public opinion changes after learning more about the topic. This insight will be used to inform elected members decision making.

This briefing is accompanied by a high-level concept design outline by New Democracy Foundation (nDF). These documents should be read in conjunction.

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS A DELIBERATIVE POLL?

A deliberative poll is a deliberative democracy/engagement tool developed by James Fishkin from Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University¹. It shares design similarities with a citizen's assembly but ultimately produces insights into public judgement on an issue, as opposed to policy recommendations – which is the main output of a citizen's assembly.

It is worth noting that there are different variations of the deliberative poll format, with Stanford University having a trademark on the term 'deliberative poll' which utilises statistically representative polling as a baseline comparison; whereas other variations of the deliberative poll method focus on descriptively representative random selection and stratification – similar to a citizens' jury/assembly.

WHAT WILL A DELIBERATIVE POLL ON THE SWWTP PROVIDE?

A deliberative poll will provide elected members with a series of insights into public opinion and public judgement; and the difference between the two, this includes:

- What would a representative group of Queenstown/Whakatipu basin think about the options, process and trade-offs regarding the discharge of treated wastewater from the SWWTP?
- What would this group think about this topic after they have become better informed about the complexities and trade-offs?
- What are the main changes of opinion that occur after the public learn more about a topic and what opinions stay the same?

¹ [Deliberative Democracy Lab](#)

- What are the elements that observe the most significant changes?

Various other insights asked to participants regarding their baseline understanding of the issue, participants themselves and their evaluation of the deliberative process can be gathered (these will be asked through surveys separate to deliberative poll questions – typically on the in-person day).

DRAFT DELIBERATIVE POLL QUESTIONS FOR COUNCILLOR INPUT

Many questions within the deliberative poll (put forward as ‘propositions’) are responded to on a 5-point Likert scale.

The Likert Scale ranges from:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Draft questions fall into four overarching themes, these are:

- 1. Environmental & cultural values**
- 2. Discharge approaches / options**
- 3. Willingness to pay**
- 4. Trust in decision making & process**

A long list of draft questions is shown below.

The intention is to get feedback on these questions from elected members for their input. It is anticipated that questions and topic areas will be further refined as elected members continue to engage with iwi, GHD and WSP on this issue.

Briefing materials provided to participants at the deliberative poll will look to cover topics asked in the questions polled on. Therefore, having some certainty regarding topics covered will allow for work on the briefing materials to progress further.

Questions are intended to be phrased in such a way that they are easily understood and in everyday language, for example Queenstown is often used as a shorthand for the Whakatipu basin.

Section 1: Environmental & Cultural Values

Question 1:

“Agree that discharge of treated wastewater into the Kawarau River can be acceptable.”

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- This is the central question looking to test under what conditions the discharge of treated wastewater is acceptable (and if current discharge programme satisfies these conditions).
- Test how the participants’ view has changed after learning more about the issue
- Potential alternative: *To what extent do you agree/disagree that discharging treated wastewater to land is a better option than discharging to the Kawarau River when considering all relevant factors including environmental, cost, cultural values & future resilience.*

Question 2:

Placeholder question specifically regarding Kāi Tahu and their values / worldview in this issue. It is recommended that this question is left open and is drafted in partnership with ka Rūnaka, or after upcoming mana to mana engagements.

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- Placeholder for question specifically regarding Kāi Tahu, their role, and worldview regarding this issue. It is intended this to be an open placeholder if mana whenua request a specific question (or questions) to be included in the deliberative poll.

Question 3:

“The Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant treats wastewater to an acceptable standard for its environment.”

Likert (above)

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- If the public trust the Shotover Plant to treat and discharge wastewater and if opinion changes in response to learning more about the plant, how it functions, who works in it, etc.
- Highlights how the environment in Queenstown is highly valued and therefore argued it should be treated to a higher standard than the rest of the country.
- This question can potentially be phrased as *“To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant treats wastewater to an acceptable standard for its environment?”*

Question 4:

“The discharge of treated wastewater to land is preferable to discharge to another water (such as a lake or river).”

Likert (above)

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- Do the public fundamentally feel more comfortable with land disposal or not. Represents a key trade-off.
- Cultural & environmental elements of the question, testing the social licence to discharge.
- This question can be phrased as more of a catch all:
“To what extent do you agree/disagree that discharging treated wastewater to land is a better option than discharging to the Kawarau River, when considering all relevant factors including environmental, cost, cultural values & future resilience.”

Additional notes:

- This question is quite specific and might need an explanatory note e.g. most people won't know about the difference between land and water disposal before attending deliberative session or receiving the information materials.

Section 2: Discharge approaches / options

Question 5:

“That the disposal of treated wastewater into the Kawarau River should only be considered a temporary option until a more suitable alternative can be found’.”

Likert

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- The process of exploring the alternative options.
- Social acceptability of discharge into the Kawarau in the long run.
- May need to rephrase to be easier to understand for someone with little initial understanding of the issue.

Question 6:

“That a 35-year consent duration is appropriate for the discharge of treated wastewater from the Shotover WWTP.”

Likert

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- Social acceptability of consent length and conditions, e.g., the SWWTP should have a five-year discharge consent, Council has applied for a 35-year consent, is this appropriate.
- Participants might not have enough information to feel like they can answer this (initially), may need to be rephrased or have an accompanying explanatory note.

Additional notes

- This topic may overlap with question above and therefore be repetition.

Section 3: Willingness to pay

Question 7:

“Queenstown should pay more for a treated wastewater solution that delivers a higher level of treatment than is currently being achieved or is proposed.”

Likert

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- If the public are willing to pay more for a higher standard wastewater discharge solution
- Could potentially be expanded to include some dollar values to make it more tangible for residents to understand and place into context.

Question 8:

“Should Queenstown pay significantly more for disposing treated wastewater to land, as opposed to disposing to another water body (like a river or lake)?”

Likert or another scale to demonstrate relative costs

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- Willingness to pay for land disposal
- Again, may need to be expanded on exactly how much more for a land disposal option (understanding that this difficult to approximate and some degree of water disposal may be necessitated)
- Future version of this question may provide a range of how much more a land disposal options is anticipated to cost and explain that this is an indicative estimate.

Question 9:

“Queenstown should pay double, or more than double, than what it already pays to dispose of treated wastewater in the district.”

Likert or another scale/format

This question is looking to provide insight into:

- The extent / upper end of the willingness to pay argument highlighted above, individuals may be willing to pay more for a solution, but the question is how much more.

- There is potential for a likert or spectrum-based question on this issue to find the more accurate willingness to pay on a spectrum – again this would need to be put in terms easy to understand for ratepayers.
- This question will likely be refined through the engagement process and input from councillors.

Section 4: Trust

Question 10:

“The process Queenstown Lakes District Council has followed to find a long-term solution for wastewater disposal for Queenstown is robust.”

Likert

This question is testing:

- If the public think the process is robust, and/or comes across as robust once they learn more about the process as it is explained to them.
- Might need to be reworded, generalised or split into two different questions easier for lay person to weigh in on.

Question 11:

“I trust Councillors to make the decision on how best to discharge treated wastewater from the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant (SWWTP).”

Likert

This question is testing:

- If Council is trusted to make this decision, and the degree this changes, after learning more about the issue.