Council Report
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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Full Council

19 March 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [7]

Department: Strategy & Policy

Title | Taitara: Queenstown Lakes District Council Advocacy Priorities

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to present information and options to Council and seek its decision on external advocacy priorities for the triennium.

Executive Summary | Whakarāpopototaka Matua

Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) exists in a rapidly changing legislative environment, where the roles and responsibilities of local government are shifting dramatically. Officers and elected members play a crucial role in advocating for and on behalf of the organisation and the community to ensure these legislative settings are fit for purpose and provide efficient and effective solutions to the district's unique challenges.

In order to better focus available resources for advocacy and improve outcomes for the district, it is proposed that Council agree to four priority topics for the triennium. These are:

- regional spatial planning;

- new funding models for growth and infrastructure;

- value capture from tourism/visitor economy; and

- Local Government system change.

If agreed by Council, the focused list of topics will facilitate a shift from resourcing a large number of submissions spread across a diverse number of topics, to a more proactive and targeted form of advocacy, broader advocacy methods, and better sharing of advocacy outcomes.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the contents of this report;

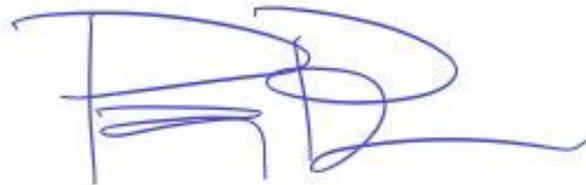2. **Agree** to the following advocacy priorities for the triennium:

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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He Wāhi Tūhāhā. He Āmua Whakaohooho.

QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

    a.   regional spatial planning

    b.   new funding models for growth and infrastructure

    c.   value capture from tourism/visitor economy

    d.   Local Government system change.

3. **Agree** that Council reassess these priorities in March 2027, noting that it is open to Council to reassess them at any time.

4. **Note** that if agreed by Council, officers will report back with a framework for implementation of advocacy priorities.

Prepared by:

Reviewed and Authorised by:

Name: Carrie Williams
Title: Policy Manager
25 February 2026

Name: Pennie Pearce
Title: Acting GM Strategy and Policy
25 February 2026

Council Report

Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Context | Horopaki

1. External policy making processes, whether at local, regional or national levels, can significantly impact both QLDC and the district's community. Targeted and effective advocacy can influence changes in external policy to ensure the best outcomes for the district, as well as efficient and effective implementation.

QLDC's approach to advocacy currently focuses on submissions

2. Currently, submissions are QLDC's key advocacy tool. On average over the last triennium, QLDC made 30 submissions per year, and have been reactive to these consultation processes. The number of submissions made by QLDC has been steadily increasing and are significantly higher than they were in 2019 and materially higher than other councils. Table 1 below shows the number of submissions made per year by QLDC since 2021 and a selection of other jurisdictions, based on information available on councils' websites. This selection is based on information available on councils' websites to include a cross section of other growth councils that have similar issues to QLDC, as well as city and regional councils.

Table 1: Submissions made per year by a range of New Zealand councils.

Council	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Queenstown Lakes District Council (DC)	23	23	28	29	35
Selwyn DC	-	-	-	-	4
Timaru DC	10	10	13	3	12
Manawatū DC	-	6	16	1	14
Waipā DC	14	7	7	-	-
Hurunui DC	8	4	4	4	4
Waimakariri DC	-	-	1	-	-
Dunedin City Council	21	23	21	17	10
Hamilton City Council	-	-	30	31	15
Hutt City Council	1	8	6	14	15
Waikato Regional Council	22	18	17	21	11
Otago Regional Council	-	-	-	-	11

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

3. Theoretically, submissions can be a strong and effective method for advocacy, but this can be highly variable between agencies and topics, and the return on investment or impact can be difficult to measure. Different agencies have different reporting requirements and processing obligations when considering submissions on their policy proposals. This makes it challenging to understand how QLDC may or may not have influenced a process. For example, local government has more robust reporting requirements regarding submissions as compared to central government. The preparation of submission is resource-intensive and often occurs under tight deadlines, limiting opportunities for broader engagement or deeper analysis. The increasing volume and breadth of submissions leaves little room to improve the impact and quality of advocacy with the finite resource available. Refining and rationalising what submission processes QLDC participates in, and seeking to improving overall advocacy outcomes is therefore necessary. An additional element is that agencies increasingly rely on AI for the analysis of submissions, rather than being individually read and considered.

Prioritising advocacy topics will facilitate the most efficient use of existing resources and improve outcomes

4. The beginning of the triennium provides the opportunity to consider QLDC's advocacy and improvements that could be made to ensure the best outcomes and use of resources. A key objective of prioritising advocacy topics is to narrow the scope to ensure that available resourcing can be targeted where it will have the most impact.

5. It is considered that an agreed set of priority topics will provide clear direction for staff to focus and strengthen advocacy by developing more strategic and proactive positions, deepening expertise in key areas, broadening the advocacy methods used and engage with elected members earlier in the process. These priorities for external advocacy are not intended to be representative of QLDC's core functions but will likely impact Council's ability to deliver these functions (i.e. network infrastructure, community facilities) and should be consistent with achieving QLDC's strategic priorities.

6. Two workshops were held with Council on 29 January and 10 February 2026. Feedback from those workshops has directly informed the options presented in this report to determine advocacy priorities for the triennium ahead.[1]

7. Whilst there are numerous considerations, some of the common themes that were voiced at the workshops centred around:

    - issues where there is the most opportunity to influence change in the context of the timing of current central government reforms;

    - prioritisation of issues affecting people in the QLD more so than elsewhere, and relying more on the advocacy of sector-wide groups for matters affecting councils equally (i.e. Local Government NZ (LGNZ) and Taituarā);

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[1] 29 January and 10 February workshop materials are available at https://www.qldc.govt.nz/your-council/council-meetings/

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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He Wāhi Tūhāhā. He Āmua Whakaohooho.

QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

- honing in on topics that do not currently have an established system and/or expertise for advocacy; and

- consideration of whether a topic is a priority for external advocacy, or whether QLDC has its own policy tools to influence change.

8. The materials for the 10 February 2026 workshop show the outcome of the 29 January 2026 prioritisation exercise. From a long-list of topics, discussion and trade-offs refined this to four topics that were clearly identified as priorities:

- regional spatial planning;

- new funding models for growth and infrastructure;

- value capture from tourism/visitor economy; and

- Local Government system change.

9. These topics take into specific account issues that are externally driven and critical at this time for Council to address. The topics that were identified as 'nice to have' were agreed as being important but not core. They include: economic development and diversification, local energy infrastructure for future growth, community, inclusivity and wellbeing, and local health infrastructure. These are topics where staff would keep a watching brief and progress work with less intensive councillor involvement in comparison to the four priority topics.

10. The four priority topics are interconnected, impact activities across Council, the district's communities and vary in scope. Explanations of what each topic entails at a high level are outlined in the paragraphs below.

Regional spatial planning

11. This topic is about agreeing to the "big picture" for the wider region, so that there is a united direction forward on issues that don't stop at district council boundaries. Regional planning includes:

- where major growth should happen across the region;

- how to regulate subdivision, land use, development and natural resource use, including the management of transport, infrastructure, water, and natural hazard risk;

- protecting significant landscapes, waterways and productive land; and

- coordinating long-term investment and funding.

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

12. There is a strong natural synergy between the issues facing the inland Otago and the Otago Central Lakes sub region, which differ materially from those in the balance of the wider Otago area. Advocating for and enabling a sub-regional approach that aligns with, and builds upon, the Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal would better reflect functional relationships and common challenges, improve planning outcomes, and support timely and effective implementation.

New funding models for growth and infrastructure

13. This topic includes securing fair, sustainable, and growth-responsive ways to fund infrastructure beyond rates and traditional debt so that growth, development, and the visitor economy contribute appropriately to the infrastructure they depend on, while keeping costs fair, affordable, and sustainable for residents.

14. It reflects QLDC's position that current funding tools are no longer sufficient to meet the scale, timing and complexity of growth pressures in the district, and includes several tools and mechanisms:

    • value capture mechanisms (growth pays for growth);

    • Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act (IFFA) tools;

    • ensuring Council's role and voice are heard in the shift from development contributions to development levies;

    • shared funding and delivery models (needed where infrastructure is outside QLDC's direct control, such as state highways, schools, and public transport); and

    • value capture from tourism/visitor economy (see below).

Value capture from tourism/visitor economy

15. This topic is one of the new funding models for growth and infrastructure listed above and entails enabling visitors and visitor-driven activity to contribute fairly to the cost of infrastructure and services, with that value reinvested locally to support sustainable and regenerative growth.

16. It is not about discouraging tourism, increasing rates for residents or generic economic development. It is about targeted tools that align cost recovery with impact.

17. The main tools include a visitor levy (a Local Visitor Levy collected by accommodation providers), linking tourism revenue to infrastructure funding.

Local Government system change

18. This is an umbrella term used to describe structural, governance, funding, and service-delivery reforms to how local government operates in New Zealand. Particularly those currently being consulted on under the Government's "Simplifying Local Government" (SLG) reform programme.

Council Report

Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

19. A broader term than just SLG is deliberately used to encompass future:

- structural and governance reform;

- devolution of powers and autonomy;

- funding and resource model changes, such as rates capping (noting that this is linked to the new funding model topic); and

- changes to service delivery and electoral settings.

20. Funding is a common theme across these topics, as robust regional spatial planning is not possible without new funding models for growth, and value capture from the tourism / visitor economy is one funding model tool. Further, Local Government system change has the potential to change the way that local government operates to deliver its functions, that would clearly link to how regional spatial planning is done.

21. It is relevant to note that the 2027-37 Long Term Plan early engagement summary presented to Council at its workshop on 17 February 2026 aligns closely with these topics. People who provided feedback said that the QLD should prioritise spending on basic infrastructure, that visitor charges are a key opportunity for the district and that growth is a main challenge. General feedback reinforced a focus on new or diversified funding models.

Next steps

22. If agreed by Council, a focused list of topics allows for a shift from a reliance on submissions spread across a large number of topics, and staff will work to the following objectives for each topic:

- Proactive advocacy - Increasing expertise in priority areas, desired outcomes, and increasing the involvement of councillors in the early development of QLDCs position, rather than reacting to a specific process;

- Broader advocacy methods – more staff participation in internal and external working groups, where there is more opportunity to influence policy outcomes at the early stages of a process, identification of key decision makers and engagement opportunities; and

- Sharing advocacy outcomes – Fostering better understanding with the community as to how QLDC is advocating for issues that the community deeply care about, which may include an engagement plan.

23. The main objective of this process is to identify priorities, so that staff are able to focus resources and support Council to achieve the outcomes and objectives identified above. If Council agrees to advocacy priorities, staff will proceed to develop how this will be operationalised and report back to Councillors. This will include identifying the external linkages for Council as between both elected members and staff that are specific to each topic to inform the various avenues for advocacy.

Council Report

Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

24. Staff submissions that are approved by general managers or the chief executive on operational, technical, and implementation focused matters will continue as determined by general managers and the Executive Leadership Team.

Review period for advocacy topics

25. As identified above, the timing associated with these topics has been a key determinant in their selection. It is recognised that issues will become more or less pressing for this district, and that this depends on a number of factors. At the same time, certainty is needed in order to build internal capability, and changing priorities during the triennium would have the potential to negate some of the desired gains in this area.

26. On this basis, it is recommended that a workshop is held with councillors in March 2027. This would provide information on progress made (advocacy reach, methods, successes, as well as changes to the number and approach to Council submissions), as well as an assessment of factors that may indicate a change to the priorities. This timing would also allow high level policy direction setting following the central government election announced for 7 November 2026.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

27. 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.

28. **Option 1**: That Council agree to the following advocacy priorities for the triennium, noting that it is proposed to re-assess these in March 2027:

- Regional spatial planning;

- New funding models for growth and infrastructure;

- Value capture from tourism/visitor economy; and

- Local Government system change.

Advantages:

- Allows advocacy resources to be focused on the issues that are the most important at this time, rather than spread more thinly across numerous topics.

- Staff can increase expertise in priority areas and involve councillors in the early development of QLDC's position, rather than reacting to a specific process.

- Facilitates a shift from submissions as the primary form of advocacy to broader advocacy methods where there is greater opportunity to influence policy outcomes at the early stages of a process.

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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- Will enable better communication as to how QLDC is advocating for issues that the community deeply care about.

Disadvantages:

- There may be a perception that topics not selected as high priority are not important.

- Some people may disagree with the priority topics that have been identified by Council.

- It will be necessary to continue to assess the priority topics to ensure that no modification is required.

- Legislative settings are changing rapidly and may continue to change following the national election in November 2026.

29. **Option 2**: That Council agree to a modified list of advocacy priorities for the triennium.

Advantages:

- Allows advocacy resources to be focused, rather than spread more thinly across numerous topics.

- Staff can increase expertise in priority areas and involve councillors in the early development of QLDC's position, rather than reacting to a specific process.

- Facilitates a shift from submissions as the primary form of advocacy to broader advocacy methods where there is greater opportunity to influence policy outcomes at the early stages of a process.

- Will enable better communication as to how QLDC is advocating for issues that the community deeply care about.

Disadvantages:

- A modified list would not be reflective of the outcome of feedback from Councillors and may not accurately show the high priority topics for the triennium.

- There may be a perception that topics not selected as high priority are not important.

- Some people may disagree with the priority topics that have been identified by Council.

- It will be necessary to continue to assess the priority topics to ensure that no modification is required.

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

A unique place. An inspiring future.
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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

- Legislative settings are changing rapidly and may continue to change following the national election in November 2026.

30. **Option 3**: That Council does not agree to the following advocacy priorities for the triennium and retains the status quo approach:

- regional spatial planning;

- new funding models for growth and infrastructure;

- value capture from tourism/visitor economy;

- Local Government system change.

Advantages:

- The status quo approach to advocacy, primarily through submissions, is known across the organisation and by Council, and would require no change to existing practices.

- There is no risk of a perception that some topics are not as important as others.

- The status quo may be more flexible and responsive to dynamic legislative settings, including in relation to a national election in November 2026.

Disadvantages

- If the status quo is maintained, the way that advocacy is approached will continue to be reactive and not necessarily be in relation to the issues that matter the most to the district.

- As Council will continue to be reactive to specific policy proposals, officers will be unable to increase expertise in priority areas.

- Submissions will remain the primary form of advocacy, which may not be the most effective method.

- With resources spread across many topics, it will not be feasible to improve communication on what advocacy is occurring, other than sharing written submissions.

- Councillors will have fewer and more constrained opportunities to input into advocacy efforts.

Council Report
Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

31. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because it allows for a better use of existing resources, including a shift from a reliance on submissions spread across a large number of topics to proactive advocacy, broader advocacy methods and better sharing of advocacy outcomes with the community.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

32. This matter is of low significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024. Whilst the proposed advocacy topics are of high importance to the district, a decision to focus and prioritise advocacy on these topics is not in and of itself a significant decision.

33. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are residents, ratepayers and visitors of the district.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

34. Council did not engage with Iwi or Rūnaka in relation to this report.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

35. This matter relates to the Strategic/Political/Reputation risk category. It is associated with the following within the QLDC Risk Register:

- RISK10009 Strategy for growth fails to meet objectives. This risk has been assessed as having a high residual risk rating;
- RISK10019 Central Government reforms impact on Council achieving its objectives. This risk has been assessed as having a moderate residual risk rating; and

- RISK10056 Ineffective provision for the future planning and development needs of the district. This risk has been assessed as having a moderate residual risk rating.

36. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to retain these risks at their current level. It will support Council by allowing it to implement additional controls for these risks. Being more proactive on key issues that impact the district and agreeing to key external advocacy topics will enable Council to improve outcomes for the district by focusing advocacy resources on the issues that are the highest priority. This includes proactively monitoring proposed changes in government policy, legislation and regulations so that those that affect the district are addressed.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

37. There are no budget, cost or resource requirements resulting from this decision. Resourcing for this programme of work will continue to be met within existing budgets.

Council Report

Te Rīpoata Kaunihera ā-

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QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

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

38. The recommended option is consistent with the following Council policies, plans and strategies:

- Strategic Framework and Vision Beyond 2050: Our Strategic Framework | Queenstown Lakes District Council

- Grow Well | Whaiora Spatial Plan

- Queenstown Lakes Destination Management Plan, Travel to a thriving future

- Queenstown Lakes Economic Diversification Plan, New pathways to a thriving future

- 2024-34 Long Term Plan.

39. Provision for policy team functions is included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan.

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

40. 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. Agreeing to key external advocacy topics will enable Council to improve outcomes for the district by allowing for a shift towards more proactive advocacy, broader advocacy methods outside of written submissions, and communicating progress made to the community. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

41. 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.