

9 April 2026

Committee Secretariat
Justice Committee
Parliament Buildings
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Teena koutou katoa,

Submission from Waikato District Council on the Electoral (District Boundaries) Amendment Bill.

Introduction

Waikato District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Electoral (District Boundaries) Amendment Bill (the Bill). Council supports the Bill's intent to modernise electoral boundary setting processes through the use of updated Statistics New Zealand administrative data, recognising the need to align legislative frameworks with evolving national data approaches.

Council is compelled to highlight a closely related system issue with material implications for local government: the inflexible timing of statutory representation reviews amid ongoing reform and uncertainty. While this issue falls outside the direct scope of the Bill, its practical, financial, and community impacts are significant and required consideration in parallel with the proposed changes.

Provided as a supporting document to this submission is the Letter to the Minister of Local Government, Hon Simon Watts, outlining Council's position on this matter. Despite this, and earlier requests to the Department of Internal Affairs and the Local Government Commission, it has been advised that irrespective of merit, there is no ability to give relief or grant exception under the current Act.

Support for the Bill's Proposed Changes

Council supports the Bill's proposal to align electoral boundary determination with updated Statistics New Zealand administrative data, reflecting changes to census methodologies and data availability. Council notes that these changes are proposed to take effect from 2030, allowing time for further development and testing of the new approach.

Council supports the principle of strong, evidence-based decision-making in electoral boundary setting and recognises the value of administrative data in:

- Responding to changing census conditions.
- Improving responsiveness to population change between census cycles.
- Strengthening the evidence base used to inform electoral boundaries.

Council encourages the continued development of Statistics New Zealand's administrative datasets and modelling assumptions to ensure they remain robust, transparent, and fit-for-purpose, including clear communication of methodologies to councils and the public.

Importance for High-Growth Areas

Reliable and up-to-date population data is particularly important for high-growth districts such as Waikato, which are experiencing:

- Significant population growth and housing development.
- Ongoing spill-over, growth pressures from Auckland and Hamilton.
- Rapid change driven by fast-track consenting and major development projects.

Council supports electoral boundary frameworks that remain adaptable to these dynamics, ensuring communities continue to receive effective and equitable representation as growth patterns evolve.

Related System Impact: Timing and Redundancy of Statutory Representation Reviews

While statutory representation reviews are not directly amended by this Bill, Council considers the timing and rigidity of these requirements to be closely connected to the Bill's reform objectives, with significant practical and financial implications for local authorities.

Under current legislation, Council is required to undertake a statutory representation review in the near term. This is a complex and resource-intensive process requiring substantial staff time, elected member input, and comprehensive community engagement. This obligation arises, however, alongside active and well-signalled local government reform, including the Government's Simplifying Local Government proposals and anticipated changes to representation and governance arrangements.

Proposed reforms, including the introduction of Combined Territorial Boards and associated boundary and governance changes, are expected to materially reshape how local communities are represented. In this context, requiring councils to complete representation reviews now creates a high likelihood that review outcomes will be superseded or rendered redundant within a short timeframe.

Council notes that there is no discretion under the Local Electoral Act for councils to defer or appropriately sequence representation reviews, even where reform is imminent. This legislative rigidity compels councils to undertake statutory processes that may deliver limited public value and risk unnecessary duplication of effort.

The consequence is the imposition of avoidable costs on ratepayers at a time of acute affordability pressure, alongside consultation fatigue for communities asked to engage in processes that may soon be overtaken by reform. This situation risks undermining public confidence in both local and central government decision-making.

Council raises this issue to emphasise the importance of better coordination, sequencing, and transitional arrangements across the local government reform programme, to ensure efficient use of public resources and to avoid unnecessary burden on councils and communities.

Conclusion

Council supports the intent of the Electoral (District Boundaries) Amendment Bill and its focus on improved data use and modernisation of electoral boundary-setting processes.

Council also encourages the Justice Committee to consider the wider system impacts on local government statutory obligations alongside this reform, particularly in relation to representation reviews, to ensure reform programmes are aligned, efficient, and sustainable.

Council thanks the Justice Committee for the opportunity to make this submission.

Further information

Should the Justice Committee require clarification on the submission or any additional information, please contact Maggie Ford, Strategy Manager email Maggie.ford@waidc.govt.nz

Ngaa mihi,



Aksel Bech
Mayor

Council Approval and Reference

This submission was approved by the Mayor and Chairs Forum on 9 April 2026