

17 August 2017

Committee Secretariat  
Justice and Electoral  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

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## Christchurch City Council submission on the Inquiry into 2016 local authority elections

### Introduction

1. Christchurch City Council (the Council) thanks the Justice and Electoral Committee for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into 2016 local authority elections.
2. The Council notes that the revised time frame given by the Committee to provide a Council view on the law and administrative procedures for the conduct of local authority elections in the light of the 2016 local elections has provided some challenge.
3. The Council's strategic priorities include: *Enabling active citizenship and connected communities*. This priority is key to the points within this submission and Council action.
4. The Council is aware of the Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM) submission to the Committee in May 2017 and the recent Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) submission and acknowledges a number of the points and recommendations within those submissions are also raised by the Council. This submission does not intend to replace or detract from those submissions.
5. The Council would like the opportunity to be represented at any hearing of submissions by the Committee.

### Submissions

6. Electoral Rolls
  - Unpublished Roll  
The Council considers that the Electoral Officer should be provided with the detail of people enrolled on the unpublished roll to allow them to receive an ordinary vote. The systems and requirements in place for the conduct of the elections will allow for this information to be kept with the required security.

In 2016 the Electoral Commission advised the Council that there were approximately 2,500 people registered on the unpublished role in the Christchurch city. These voters do not receive an ordinary vote and are required to cast a special vote.

For the 2016 election only 311 special votes were issued to people who indicated they are on the unpublished roll. The Council considers the special voting process was a barrier to those people participating in the election.

- **Supplementary rolls**  
The Council considers that the Electoral Officer must be provided with a supplementary roll before polling day and access to the deletions file. This will result in efficiencies in processes to confirm the eligibility of people requesting special votes.

**The Council recommends that Electoral Officers to have access to the Unpublished Roll to enable people on this role to receive an ordinary vote.**

**The Council recommends that Electoral Officers be provided with the Supplementary roll and Deletions file ahead of polling day.**

## 7. Voting

- **Online voting**  
The Council considers it is essential that, along with postal voting, online voting is made available for local government elections. The Council supports that for the 2019 triennial election, postal and online voting should be available, at least on a smaller scale.

The Council acknowledges and supports that throughout the local government sector there continues to be significant work towards online voting. Council staff have undertaken to provide Council with further information regarding this and possible opportunities for involvement as appropriate.

- **Transmission of voting documents from overseas**  
The Council supports investigation into opportunities for voters overseas being able to electronically receive and return voting documents.

The Council acknowledges that this is a short term opportunity. Electronic transmission of voting documents is an appropriate alternative until online voting is available.

**The Council recommends that the legislation be amended to allow for online voting to be able to be used for the 2019 local authority elections.**

**The Council recommends that investigation be undertaken on changes required to allow for electronic transmission of special votes to and from voters who will be overseas during an election.**

## 8. Randomisation of names on voting papers

Every triennial election Councils are required to consider and make decisions upon the order of names on voting papers, if not to be alphabetical. It is supported that this requirement be removed and that the order of candidate names on voting papers be random<sup>1</sup>.

**The Council recommends that the legislation and regulations be amended to make the randomisation of candidate names on voting papers mandatory.**

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<sup>1</sup> Random – the order for candidate names is different on each set of voting documents.

#### 9. Barriers to Access

The Council considers that the legislation should support improvements to equity and access to information about local authority elections for people of all abilities and people living with disabilities. The Council's Disability Advisory Group has committed to continue working with the Electoral Officer to improve ease and accessibility to information on elections.

The introduction of online voting would provide another opportunity to promote equity and access to information.

**The Council supports changes to the legislation to increase equity and access to information for people of all abilities and people living with disabilities**

#### 10. Timing and duration of the election

The Council acknowledges ongoing national discussion about the relationship of the timing of the local authority elections with the timing of school holidays. The Council supports investigation into whether this has a negative impact on participation. If investigation proves that timing does have a negative impact, the Council offers support in principle for a change in the election date.

The Council considers that the current three week voting period is necessary for postal voting. Current New Zealand Post service would not support a reduction in the time available for voting papers to be delivered, considered and returned to the Electoral Officer. An adjustment to the three week voting period could result in barriers for those who are only able to access information or voting papers by post.

**The Council supports investigation into whether the relationship of the election to the school holidays has an impact on participation.**

**The Council recommends that the duration of the voting period should remain at three weeks while postal voting is in use.**

#### 11. District Health Board Elections

The Council acknowledges that currently voters in local body elections receive an overwhelming amount of information with their local authority voting documents, including the district health board elections. The Council further acknowledges the possibility for confusion in Christchurch between the different voting systems used within the voting documentation: First Past the Post for the Council and Regional Council and Single Transferable Vote for district health board.

The Council is not recommending that the local authority and district health board elections be split, but that investigation is required into the benefits of these elections being held together.

**The Council supports investigation into the benefits of the local authority and district health board elections being held together.**

#### 12. Nomination deposit

The Council considers that the required \$200 nomination deposit for candidates standing for local authorities may be a barrier to those who may wish to stand for election. The Committee should give consideration to recommending the nomination deposit be reduced.

**The Council recommends that consideration be given to reducing the required nomination deposit for candidates.**

### 13. Election Advertising

The Council considers that the legislation relating to election advertising (section 113) requires clarification to make it clear it also applies to advertising on social media and online. This will align with the Electoral Act 1993 for Central Government elections, where an electoral advertisement is an 'advertisement in any medium'.

**The Council recommends that legislation is amended to define election advertising includes advertisements in any medium.**

### 14. Transmission of Nomination Documents

The Council considers that the legislation relating to nomination documents (section 55) requires clarification to allow for the electronic transmission of nomination forms and documentation. It is acknowledged that receipt of nomination documents does not indicate acceptance of the nomination.

**The Council recommends that legislation is amended to allow for electronic transmission of nomination documents.**

### 15. Communication and Education

The Council is supportive of a local and national government approach to communication of the business of local authorities and of local authority elections. Participation, in elections and all council activity is a matter of interest and concern to all of government and actions should indicate this.

The Council supports a joined up approach towards local authority elections with local government, SOLGM, LGNZ and central government. There are opportunities for improvement with what has been happening to date, and communication and encouragement for these to be recognised is supported.

The Council in 2016, responded to the demand for different ways to access elections information, and developed a downloadable, app *Celect*<sup>2</sup>. This was a New Zealand first for local government enabling easy access to candidate information. This is an example of one of the many ways councils are working to engage their communities.

The Council joins others in the local government sector in recommending that civics education, including local government and local governance, should be a priority in the education curriculum. The Council has a *Learning Through Action* programme which offers a range of programmes free to schools, including an increasing range of programmes related to governance, the elected council and elections.

**The Council recommends that the communication of and education on local authority elections requires a local government and central government approach.**

**The Council recommends that the Electoral Commission campaign enrol to vote should commence earlier in the election year.**

**The Council recommends that civics education, including local government and local governance is a priority.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ccc.govt.nz/news-and-events/newsline/show/953>

16. Transitional Arrangements

There is a potential gap in legislation in relation to transitional arrangements following a representation review. For the Council, the issues relate to community boards, which have been in place for a long time in Christchurch. The number of community boards has changed over the years, a result of amalgamation with the Banks Peninsula District Council and the recent representation review. What is not clear from the Local Electoral Act 2001 or the Local Government Act 2002 is the extent of any transitional arrangements where new community boards are created in the place of previous community boards or community boards are amalgamated to form a new board.

**The Council recommends that it would be desirable for there to be some provision in the legislation that clarifies the extent of previous arrangements that bind new community boards.**

17. Ratepayer Electors

The Council considers that for local authority elections the entitlement to vote should be 'one person one vote'. To achieve this would require the removal from legislation the ability for enrolment of ratepayer electors and requirement of compilation of the ratepayer roll.

**The Council recommends that legislation be amended to remove ratepayer electors.**

18. Pre-election report

The Council acknowledges the purpose of the pre-election report, to provide information about the issues facing the local authority. There is the opportunity to streamline the requirement with regard to figures reported for the financial year preceding the election date.

**The Council recommends that local authorities be permitted to use annual plan estimates for the financial year preceding the election date in pre-election reports.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

For any clarification on points within this submission and with advice of hearings to be held please contact Jo Daly, Council Secretary, phone 03 941 8581 or email [jo.daly@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:jo.daly@ccc.govt.nz)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lianne Dalziel', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lianne Dalziel  
**MAYOR OF CHRISTCHURCH**