

Council Briefing Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 1 June, 2021
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
(Chairperson)
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Jayne Golightly
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid
Aorangi Kawiti (Te Kārearea)
Len Bristowe (Te Kārearea)

Not in Attendance Cr Greg Martin

Scribe N. Pestana (Team Leader Democracy)

The briefing was facilitated by Her Worship the Mayor.

1. Apologies

Cr Greg Martin, Deborah Harding (Te Kārearea).

2. Reports

2.1 Representation Review 2021 - Preferred Option

Dominic Kula (General Manager, Strategy and Democracy) recapped the process and discussions that have been held to date, which have led to three options for the initial proposal for discussion at today's briefing.

- Feedback from Te Kārearea and Te Huinga supports the establishment of one Māori ward across the district.
- Feedback from the Council and Te Kārearea briefing on 12 May indicated support for two of the options (Options 1 and 2).
- Feedback from the Te Kārearea hui on 19 May indicated a preference for the third option (Option 3).

The purpose of the briefing is to confirm a preferred option for the initial proposal for consultation. Council will adopt this preferred option on 24 June 2021.

Emily Thompson (Manager, Democracy and Assurance) ran through the presentation which covered the detail of the options, as follows:

Option 1 - overview

- Mayor (elected district wide).
- 12 councillors in total.
- 10 general councillors elected from 6 general wards:
 - North Coastal General – 1 councillor
 - Whangarei Heads General – 1 councillor
 - Whangarei Urban General – 5 councillors
 - Bream Bay General – 1 councillor
 - Hikurangi and Rural North General – 1 councillor
 - Maungatapere and Rural South General – 1 councillor
- 2 Māori ward councillors elected from 1 district wide Māori ward.

Option 1 – points for discussion

- Retains wards.
- Creates new ward names to align to communities.
- Reduces councillor numbers to 12 providing for an uneven number of councillors (13).
- Focuses on communities of interest (inclusion of Ngunguru Ford Road (currently in Whangarei Heads ward) into North Coastal General ward, inclusion of Hikurangi (currently in Hikurangi Coastal ward into Hikurangi and Rural North ward, creation of one Whangarei Urban General ward which combines current Denby and Okara wards).
- Assumption that wards cover communities of interest so community boards not required.
- Two proposed wards (North Coastal and Whangarei Heads) do not meet the +/- 10% rule but compliance would split communities – this would create automatic review by the LGC.

Option 2 – overview

- Mayor (elected district wide).

- 13 councillors in total.
- 11 general councillors elected from 6 general wards:
 - Denby General – 2 councillors
 - Whangarei Heads General – 1 councillor
 - Okara General – 3 councillors
 - Bream Bay General – 2 councillors
 - Hikurangi Coastal General – 2 councillors
 - Mangakahia-Maungatapere General – 1 councillor
- 2 Māori ward councillors elected from 1 district wide Māori ward.

Option 2 – points for discussion

- Retains wards.
- Retains current ward names.
- Retains total councillor numbers (13).
- Splits communities of interest from Okara and Denby which may prompt review by LGC.
- Assumption that wards cover communities of interest so community boards not required.
- Meets the +/-10% rule.

Option 3 - overview

- Mayor (elected district wide).
- 8 councillors in total.
- 6 general councillors elected from 1 district wide ward.
- 2 Māori ward councillors elected from 1 district wide Māori ward.
- With or without community boards.

Option 3 – points for discussion

- Two ward structure - 1 general district wide ward and 1 Māori district wide ward.
- Removes current wards and ward names.
- Reduces councillor numbers to 8.
- May require establishment of community boards as communities of interest not adequately represented.
- +/-10% rule does not apply for district wide general or Māori wards.

General discussion

There was discussion on the effects of upcoming Local Government reform and whether this is the right time to be making extensive changes to representation. Consistency and solidarity is key at this time. Others felt that the community needs to get accustomed to Māori wards before making substantive changes to representation. However, opposite views were that if reform favours becoming more regional, then a district wide approach is a step in that direction.

Feedback - Option 1

- There was strong support for one Whangarei urban ward and for the inclusion of Ngunguru Ford Road into a Coastal ward.
- Identified disadvantages of this option:
 - One representative for urban and coastal wards will be challenging.
 - Some parts of Hikurangi see themselves as part of the coastal ward.
 - Waipu, Ruakaka and Portland are three substantial and different communities.
 - Separating of Mangakahia to the side would create a divide in the Bream Bay area which currently works well as a ward.
 - The two rural wards are too extensive and workloads for councillor will be too much.

Feedback - Option 2

- There was strong support for the two urban wards to be combined into one urban ward.
- Some favoured this option as being the option with the least change thus likely to receive the least number of objections.
- Identified disadvantages of this option:
 - Urban growth issues with areas on the fringes of urban areas cutting into rural wards.
 - Boundaries of urban areas change dramatically.
 - The street splits in the urban area could be problematic.

Feedback - Option 3

- There was some support for this option but only if community boards are established.
- There was some support for the numbers of councillors to be increased to 10 in total.
- Identified advantages of this option:
 - This option is the most democratic as it allows voters to choose the six people they want to represent them on Council and allows electors to be able to vote for multiple councillors.
 - If there were community boards, Council would not have to be involved with operational issues and could focus more on strategic issues.
 - Numerically, this option is the most indicative of the population of Whangarei and is more reflective of a partnership.
 - This option provides for more agile decision making.
 - This option provides an opportunity for a more Whangarei district view.
 - This option allows for the best person for the job and is most reflective of the oath taken by councillors.
 - This provides better representation for Māori.

- Identified disadvantages of this option:
 - This option does not allow for diverse thinking as it does not ensure that there will be a range of views across the district.
 - Fewer councillors does not mean better decisions, just faster decisions.
 - This option could allow for the election of a lot of urban councillors, leaving out rural councillors. This would result in an unbalanced Council.
 - This option could possibly reduce ratepayers identification with councillors.
 - The cost of campaigning district wide would be prohibitive to candidates standing for election.
 - This option works well in theory but would not work well in practice.
 - This option would exclude part time councillors as the workload would be too much.
 - Dropping the number of councillors will lead to the community feeling abandoned, people need to feel part of the district and the decision-making process.
 - Community boards would add another level of governance which have to be funded by the rate payer and would be difficult to implement.
 - This option would be most effective with the SPV electoral system.

Dominic Kula and Emily Thompson summarised the discussion. There is some appetite for change, but others also feel that now is not the right time for too much change. There is a balance between the two ward options. There is an interest in Option 3, specifically the detail on community boards in the district. Staff will work on a recommendation to Council based on feedback received at today's briefing.

3. Closure of Meeting

The briefing concluded at 11.45am.