



**Rewarding, interesting, and frustrating:  
How elected members feel about their time in local  
government  
January 2020**

## Preface

New Zealand needs good public leaders, not just in central government but also at the local level, in our district, city and regional councils. It is for this reason that LGNZ is committed to supporting our locally elected representatives to ensure that they not only have the knowledge and skills to undertake their responsibilities but also a working environment that is supportive, which enables them to fulfil their community's ambitions, and is safe.

“Rewarding, interesting, frustrating: how elected members feel about their time in local government” is designed to give us the information we need to shape our training programmes and advocacy campaigns to make local government an attractive public service option. It is an example of LGNZ's wider commitment to support elected members and give them the skills and knowledge so that they can fulfil their community's mandate. The survey, undertaken in September 2019, asked members how they felt about their roles and what could be done to make their time in local government more fulfilling, not only for those who currently sit around the governing table but for those still to come.

The findings complement those from a previous survey undertaken in 2006 by LGNZ and the Research and Evaluation Service of the Department of Internal Affairs. The 2006 survey was undertaken to look at identifying what could be done to make the role of a member more rewarding and to better understand their needs for information and guidance. The results of that survey contributed directly to the establishment of the LG Know How programme, which evolved into today's EQUIP.

EQUIP is LGNZ's business arm, providing professional development services to councils and elected members throughout New Zealand. The findings of this report will be used to inform the EQUIP's professional development offering as well as shaping LGNZ's advocacy and policy priorities as they apply to the role of elected members and their “working” conditions.

Stuart Crosby  
President

LGNZ

Author: Dr Mike Reid

Published by LGNZ, January 2021

Available from [www.lgnz.co.nz](http://www.lgnz.co.nz)

For further information please contact Dr Mike Reid at [mike.reid@lgnz.co.nz](mailto:mike.reid@lgnz.co.nz)

## Table of contents

Preface .....	2
Introduction.....	4
Summary and recommendations.....	6
Did being an elected member meet your expectations? .....	9
The nature of the experience .....	12
What needs to change? .....	15
Remuneration.....	18
Major challenges facing councils.....	21
Suggestions for resolving the challenges.....	234
Improving how councils work – what members told us in 2006 and 2013 .....	26
Councils’ ability to strengthen well-being .....	27
Information about local government.....	30
Information priorities.....	32
Assessing performance .....	36
Profile of respondents .....	38
Further Reading.....	41

## Introduction

New Zealand's success as a society, whether social, economic, cultural or environmental, is closely tied up with our ability to nurture and support good leaders, across all our sectors – public, private, Iwi/hapū and community. This includes the leadership in our towns and cities, communities of place, where people live, work and play. Our democratic project will only succeed to the degree that citizens are prepared to participate in local civic life and stand for public office.

We can no longer take our democracy for granted. Recent elections overseas have highlighted the importance of sound rules and processes. Campaign financing, voting age, the way in which electoral boundaries are set and voting technology have all been in the news and rightly so. When it comes to choosing governments it is essential to ensure that elections are fair, competitive and transparent. Only in that way will citizens have trust in the outcomes.

Much of recent media attention has been on national elections but local democracy is just as important as the quality of local governance depends upon the skills, knowledge and direction of locally elected representatives. On this subject, the Report of the Councillors Commission (2007) provides a helpful set of principles:

- Local authorities are key to promoting local democratic engagement;
- Promoting a sense of efficacy – the feeling that an individual is able to influence the democratic process and the course of events – is key for better engagement;
- Councillors are most effective as locally elected representatives when they have similar life experience to those of their constituents;
- Key to effective local representation is the relationship and the connections between councillors and constituencies; and
- It should be less daunting to become a councillor, better supported once elected as a councillor, and less daunting to stop being a councillor.

New Zealand's parliamentary and local elections are subject to parliamentary select committee inquiries which examine electoral processes and make recommendations for improvement. Not surprisingly matters of enrolment and voter turnout feature strongly in those inquiries, particularly inquiries following local authority elections. Ongoing reflection about the state of our democracy is important, however little attention is

## Quick Facts

Almost 75 per cent of respondents stated that being an elected member met their expectations, up from 61 per cent in 2007;

Members of regional councils were most likely to say that their expectations were met (83 per cent) with members of unitary councils less likely (60 per cent);

Most respondents found being an elected member both rewarding and interesting but 15 per cent found it thankless and underwhelming;

56 per cent of members were satisfied with their level of remuneration. Satisfaction was highest amongst regional council members (80 per cent);

Most members stated that they had enough information when deciding to stand as a candidate (77 per cent); however only 60 per cent had enough information in the first three months after being elected;

The most important information members needed in their first three months was information on financial oversight and how to set strategic direction;

Councillors were more likely to want information about corporate governance and financial oversight than local or community board members.

paid to the role of locally elected representatives (noting also the lack of a statutory role description) and whether, as currently defined, our representatives have the ability and authority to achieve the objectives on which they stood, including the necessary support.

At the parliamentary level a bevy of state agencies exist to encourage citizens to stand for office and provide support those who are successful. These include the Electoral Commission, Parliamentary Services and political party organisations themselves. The same is not true for citizens elected to local government.

Local representatives have no equivalent to the office of parliamentary services which looks after parliamentarians' welfare or administrative support. They have no office in which to work, no policy or secretarial support, no superannuation scheme or employer KiwiSaver contributions and, when their career is over (voluntarily or involuntarily) their remuneration stops at midnight on polling day. Nor are there authoritative mechanisms, such as that provided by the Speaker of the House, charged with ensuring that their workplace is safe – a concern given that bullying and intimidation appears to be on the rise.

In short, we take our elected representatives for granted.

For the sake of our democracy and the good governance of communities it is important that the way in which our governing arrangements are structured and operate enables citizens elected to public office to meet their expectations and make constructive contributions to improving the quality of life and well-being of their communities. Changes are required and, based on the results of the survey, a number have been recommended.

This report summarises the results of a survey of elected members undertaken shortly before the 2019 local elections. Members were asked how they felt about being an elected member and what they would change if they had the opportunity. Questionnaires were sent by Survey Monkey to elected members in all territorial, unitary and regional councils, as well as community and local boards. The response rate was 17 per cent (see the respondents' profile on p.39). The report also draws on the findings of a similar survey undertaken in 2006 as well as a more limited sample survey undertaken in 2013. Where practical, the results have been compared.

*“The role of the elected representative is to seek to reconcile, or if that is not possible, to balance and to judge. This task requires that they be informed by citizen participation. A participatory democracy can only be built at local level. That is where citizens are most involved. The task of local government should be to foster a habit of citizenship.” (Jones 1997)*

## Summary and recommendations

### Did being an elected member meet members' expectations?

Approximately 74 per cent of respondents indicated that being an elected member met their expectations. However, these views were not shared by the remainder. At least 15 per cent of respondents found it frustrating, thankless and underwhelming. Even those who found the experience positive frequently qualified their answers by noting difficulties faced, such as the time it took to "get up to speed" or problems experienced with the behaviour of other members.

Under-pinning the responses is the fact that the role of an elected member has largely been ignored in legislation despite the rapid social and economic changes that have occurred in New Zealand since the last major reforms of local government in 1989 and 2002, changes that have a big impact on what is expected of elected members.

Recommended actions to increase the chances that expectations will be met:

1. That future amendments to the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) include a description of the multiple roles elected members are expected to play; and
2. That any legislation setting out elected members' role is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its continued relevance.

### The nature of the experience

The majority described the experience as rewarding, more interesting than expected and enlightening, however a number found it to be disappointing, frustrating and "a nightmare".

Recommended actions to improve members' experiences:

1. That councils adopt a charter (based on a national template) setting out the levels of support members can expect while in office. This should include, relevant to the size of the councils, information covering:
  - o Access to policy and operational advice to assist members to participate fully in meetings;
  - o Access to administrative support;
  - o Office, or desk space at the council offices, available to members to work on council business;
  - o The level of IT equipment and support available to allow a member to fulfil their duties; and
  - o Assistance in terms of logistics and publicity to assist members to engage regularly with their wards/constituencies.
2. That councils regularly assess the degree to which elected members' conditions of work enable their positive participation, in particular the time of day at which meetings are held; the ability of members to join by audio-visual means, and the opportunity for members to engage informally outside formal council meetings.

### Changes sought by respondents

Respondents identified a broad range of matters that, in their view, needed changing. In broad terms these involved decision-making, the governance/management relationship, capability building and standards of behaviour.

Recommended actions to address members' issues:

1. That councils support members to develop their skills by offering:
  - o A stand-alone training and professional development budget for elected members;
  - o Personal development plans so that members can self-assess their specific training needs and find courses to meet those needs;
  - o The option of refresher and ongoing training;
  - o Opportunities to be partnered with mentors within or outside members' own councils;
  - o Self and peer review schemes leading to tailored support packages for members; and
  - o Training on members' obligations as "good employers".
2. That a re-designed Code of Conduct process be developed, including the option of a national process for assessing and ruling on complaints and stronger sanctions for members found to have not complied with the Code;
3. That an appropriate helpline be made available for members; and
4. That opportunities for new elected members to meet and share experience be facilitated within regions and sub-regions at least once or twice a year.

## Remuneration

Members were asked for their view on their level of remuneration; 54 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their remuneration while 46 per cent were dissatisfied. Nearly 80 per cent of regional council members were satisfied with their remuneration. Reasons for dissatisfaction included the failure of remuneration to reflect levels of responsibility, the amount of time spent on council business and the belief that some members worked harder than others.

Recommended actions to increase the level of satisfaction with remuneration:

1. That the Remuneration Authority periodically review its formula for setting remuneration levels to ensure it is sensitive to factors such as growth, that create pressure on members;
2. That elected members remuneration include KiwiSaver contributions;
3. That on standing down from office member remuneration continue for a further four weeks to assist members' transition (as is the case for members of parliament);
4. That councils review committee and decision-making structures to ensure that work is spread evenly across all members; and
5. That councils develop ways of working to reduce pressures on elected members through greater use of delegations, including delegations to committees and management.

## Major challenges faced by elected members

The top four challenges identified by respondents were funding and affordability, the governance/management relationship, waste water, and council capability (both governance and managerial).

Recommended actions to assist member resolve challenges:

1. That councils make a commitment to regularly review the culture of their governance bodies, including the perception elected members hold about their councils;
2. That an active policy to encourage greater understanding of Te Ao Māori in both governance and administration be adopted; and

3. That Significance and Engagement policies are reviewed so that they become a mechanism for authentic engagement with communities, rather than a means to manage that engagement.

### Councils' ability to improve well-being

In response to the question “what, if anything, would you change to strengthen the ability of your council to improve your community’s well-being?” respondents’ replies included improving council processes, more central and local government collaboration and joint processes, and better community engagement. Some noted that their council was already “doing well”.

Recommended actions to help councils strengthen well-being:

1. That additional guidance is provided on the nature of well-being, the different ways in which local governments can contribute to improving well-being, and the role of participation and engagement in strengthening well-being; and
2. That focused training programmes are developed for elected members on the issue of how to take a “well-being” approach to their work.

### Ensuring members have sufficient information to achieve their objectives

Just over three quarters of respondents stated that they had sufficient information when thinking about standing for election and the nomination process. However, only 60 per cent stated that they had enough information during their first three months in office. Once elected, members wanted more information about undertaking financial oversight and setting strategic direction.

Recommended actions to address information gaps:

1. That a comprehensive induction programme is provided following each triennial election. Induction needs to include:
  - o Generic courses involving members from a mix of councils;
  - o Council-specific orientation organised by each local authority; and
  - o Content relevant to both councillors and community board members.
2. That induction programmes include:
  - o An opportunity for members to discuss their collective vision, including goals and objectives and expectations in a form that is capable of regular review; and
  - o An opportunity to agree on the manner in which members will work together, including matters such as collective responsibility and operating style.
3. That candidate information provide a realistic assessment of the time required of elected members considering the nature of their positions and type of council/board, and information about the role of an elected member and the type of pressures they are likely to face, including the opportunity to hear from former local politicians.

### Enabling members to assess performance

Respondents were asked whether or not their council was part of CouncilMark™ (a programme that provides an assessment of council performance) and if not, where they received objective information on the performance of their council. The percentage of respondents who were part of a council that had taken part in CouncilMark™ was 47 per cent. In relation to other forms of performance information,



replies ranged from Audit NZ and Standard and Poor’s, to their own council’s survey of citizen satisfaction as well as feedback from ratepayers and residents.

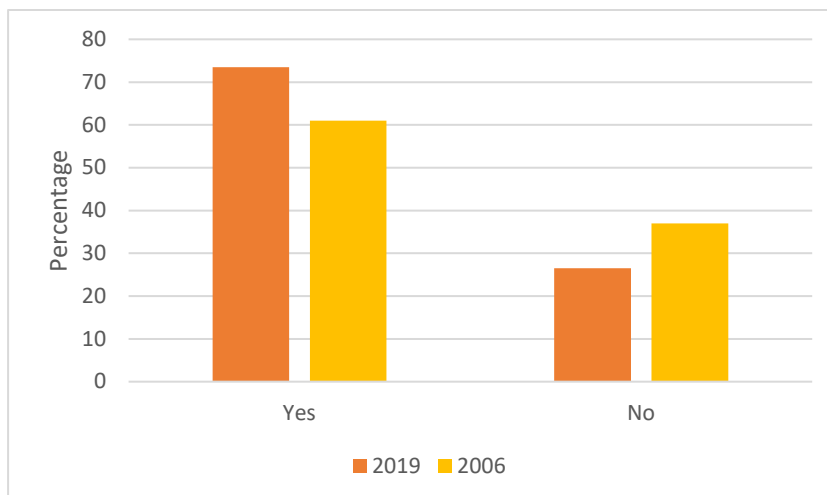
Recommended actions to assist members in assessing performance:

1. That training and professional development courses for elected members include a segment on the subject of assessing the performance of their council.

## Did being an elected member meet your expectations?

When asked whether the experience of being an elected member met their expectations, the majority of respondents (73.5 per cent) answered in the positive. Just over a quarter of respondents (26.5 per cent) stated that the experience failed to meet their expectations. The proportion who found that their expectations were met was significantly higher than when previously surveyed in 2006, when 61 per cent answered in the affirmative (LGNZ 2006), see figure 1.

**Figure 1: Did the experience meet expectation**



When analysed by type of council the responses showed that regional council members were much more likely to say that being an elected member met their expectations (83 per cent). Unitary council members were least likely to say that the experience met their expectations (69 per cent) along with local board members (60 per cent).

Key challenges identified by members in 2013 were:

- Lack of vision and planning for elected members;
- Staff not understanding their role in relation to elected members;
- The amount of reading;
- How to find out what the community wants/needs;
- Balance the books – financial management;
- Providing good quality affordable infrastructure;
- Elected member collaboration/behaviour and putting in a 100% effort; and
- Access to training to improve competence and skills.
- Getting the public to understand the role of elected representatives.

The reasons given for the experience not meeting expectations in 2019 included:

- Much more interesting and intellectually demanding than I anticipated;
- Lack of resourcing from the territorial authority (TA), meaning we are unable to actually perform our roles effectively;
- More time required than expected;
- Too process driven and lack of collaboration between management and governance.
- Overestimated my ability to persuade other politicians of the worth of my ideas;
- I did not realise the percentage of selfish and dishonest people in the council; and
- Social media trolling was worse than expected.

The major themes reflected in the reasons given for the experience not meeting expectations were largely:

- A belief that it took too long to “get things done” due to bureaucracy and red tape;
- A belief that governance was dysfunctional;
- A belief that relationships between governance and management were breaking down; and
- A belief that central government was imposition of central government rules, regulations and duties on councils was increasing.

Community board members highlighted a different range of factors, such as:

- I felt powerlessness;
- I thought that a Community Board would have more influence in decision and have more respect from the District council;
- I am on a Community Board and the Council does not provide all relevant information, they only tell you what they want you know in order to get the decision they want.

Not being heard, mayor not properly listening and considering all opinions.

Division amongst councillors with a 'majority wins' approach.

Pre-meetings happening before council meetings with CEO calling the shots.

CEO and managers interfering with governance.

Not being 'allowed' to see full budgets or to question assumptions.

Overall, a real battle – not pleasant at all.

## Analysis

The finding that over 70 per cent of elected members found that the experience met their expectations, up significantly from 2006, is important. It tells us that the current policy and governance settings are broadly okay, assuming members did not have extremely low expectations. However, despite this feedback, the fact that nearly 30 per cent of members, almost a third, found that the experience failed to meet their expectations is concerning and it is important to understand why that was the case. The reasons why nearly a third of members found that the experience failed to live up to what they expected tended to fall into a few broad categories:

*The role turned out to be quite different to how I perceived it from the outside.*

*There were also more opportunities than I expected in terms of professional development via LGNZ.*

- **A structural question** – focusing on the complexity of local government and the time taken to get things done;
- **A role question** – concerning the tension between governance and representative roles and in particular the difficulty of the relationship between governance and administration;
- **A behaviour question** – describing the challenge of working in an environment in which members may not have felt safe, were unable to express their views or found the culture uncomfortable; and
- **An information and support question** – dealing with whether or not members have the information, support and advice to perform their role.

The responses that mentioned tension at a governance level, poor relationships with the chief executive and poor leadership, such as a lack of chairing skills, reflect the importance of these factors to actually getting things done. There were also a few replies noting the complexity of the task and a lack of support for elected members. The number of responses that remarked on the length of time taken to get things done suggests a need to provide better information to candidates about how public agencies work, and the implications that fully engaging with communities has on time frames.

The concerns expressed by many community board respondents about their lack of power and respect are not new. They are also found in the history of community board relationships with governing bodies since 1989. In addition, community boards seldom have the same access to policy advice as councillors and governing bodies.

Recommended actions to increase the chances that expectations will be met:

1. That future amendments to the LGA 2002 include a description of the multiple roles elected members are expected to play; and
2. That any legislation setting out elected members' role is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its continued relevance.

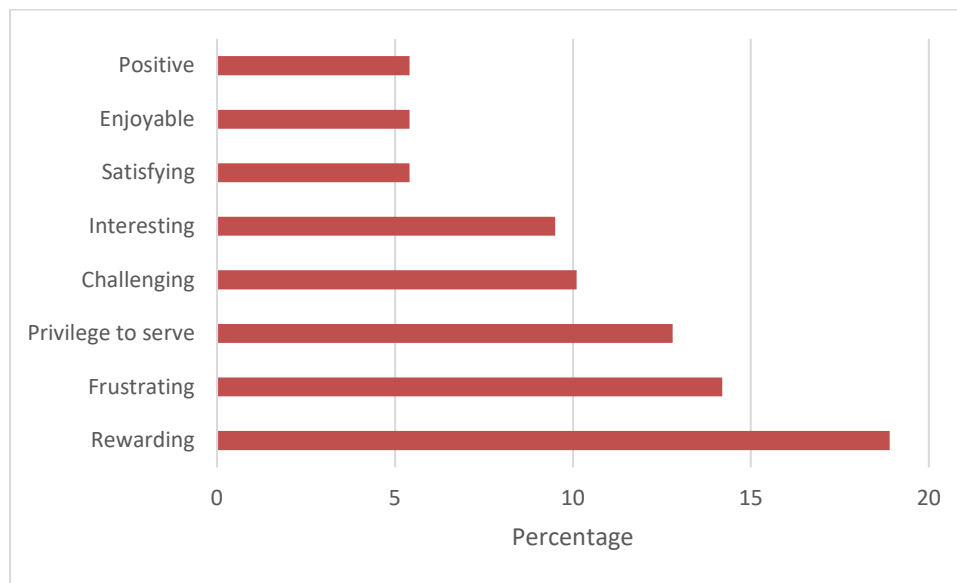
In 2006, the most common reasons (given by 33 per cent of respondents) for local government not meeting councillor expectations were concerned with attitudes within councils and amongst councillors, for example:

- Too many hidden agendas;
- Because of the mindset of certain councillors, including the mayor;
- It was hard to break into the cliques and hard to change attitudes of long serving councillors living in the past and holding onto their control;
- I felt some staff had set attitudes – rejected lateral thinking and feared innovation;
- The council was reluctant to take on board social issues; and
- Community initiatives were more difficult to achieve because they were resisted by council on the grounds that they were not a core service.

## The nature of the experience

When asked to describe their experience in more detail responses varied, with a majority of members describing the experience in favourable terms, such as rewarding, more interesting than expected, and enlightening. Many described the experience as rewarding even though they said it was also challenging and required hard work. At least 15 per cent of respondents had a less positive view, describing it as frustrating, thankless and underwhelming. See figure 2.

**Figure 2: My experience as an elected member**



## The good

Amongst the specific comments that reflected the overall sense of it being a rewarding experience were:

- It has been exciting, draining, liberating and tense; I love looking forward on behalf of my family and seeing how I can support my communities' future.
- Busy, interesting, enjoyable, challenging, educational – sometimes all at once!
- A massive learning curve but incredibly rewarding now I'm pretty much up to speed.
- It's a roller coaster with enormous highs and lows.
- My first term as an elected member was an interesting and comprehensive experience.
- Some days are diamonds, some days are stone.
- I have been Mayor for twelve years and it has been an awesome privilege.
- Excellent experience that I would encourage others to do.
- A rewarding opportunity to make the most appropriate choices to make enhancements to the district in accordance with my principles and the views of local communities.

*"I learned a lot including how rigorously local body finances are controlled (a good thing), how tightly regulated by central government some things are (a neutral thing) and how slow it takes to do anything (a bad thing)."*

- I have found council very interesting, challenging & often exhausting with full day meetings, community association meetings in the evenings, agendas to read & community activities to attend.

## The not so good

Some members did not enjoy the experience. Reasons given ranged from finding that the interests of the community were being over-looked to a concern at the behaviours encountered amongst other members. Typical comments included:

- One of the worst experiences of my life, due to ongoing bullying and ganging up of elected members with the Mayor often leading. Shocking behaviour.
- Disappointing; as the focus was on all things Council and there was little consideration for how decisions affected our community.
- A total waste of time; very disappointing.
- FRUSTRATING – Democracy is not a skill test.
- Revealing, frustrating and Machiavellian with frustration being the biggest issue.
- As a community board member I feel undervalued sometimes.
- My experience is one of frustration.
- I enjoy working with the community and getting things done but Council is a nightmare.
- The most challenging journey of my life.
- Underwhelming with much decision making made away from Council.

In 2013, members were frustrated by:

- Grandstanding by other elected members;
- The snail's pace of local government;
- Legislative roadblocks;
- Difficulty in getting community involvement;
- The amount of reading material;
- Entrenched, bureaucratic attitudes of senior staff.

LGNZ survey 2013

## Other comments

Many replies described both the challenges and the rewards coming from working on behalf of the community and making a difference. For example:

- A most positive experience but with some tough experiences and decisions to be made;
- When we get it right it's the best job in the world; when we get it wrong it's the worst;
- A most positive experience but with some tough experiences and decisions to be made;
- More good days than bad days with a positive difference the ultimate outcome; and
- Rewarding when something is achieved, but frustration at the process in trying to get there at times.

## Analysis

A number of respondents noted that being elected was a privilege which gave them an opportunity to work on behalf of their community, despite the complex, and often difficult, choices they were required to make. This feedback was consistent to the findings of the survey of elected members undertaken in 2019 (LGNZ 2019) which found that the two most popular reasons for standing were “to serve my community” and the belief that “they had skills to offer”.

*A privilege that has allowed me to help my community in many different and rewarding ways.*

The 2006 survey of exiting elected members similarly found that members valued the experience of representing and helping people (see table 1). It also highlighted the friendships made and experience of working with staff. Those that found the experience less than positive gave two types of responses. One focussed on their personal experience of working with other elected members while the other reflected concerns with how the council was working. Understanding them in more detail is vital if councils are to attract and retain people as talented elected officials.

In the first category, respondents highlighted working environments that were not only unsupportive but also tolerated bullying behaviour.

In the second category concerns appeared to focus on two factors. One involved a belief that there was insufficient transparency and openness and a sense that decisions are made “behind closed doors” at the expense of inclusiveness and pluralism. The other involved a frustration at the time it took to “do things” and sometimes the question of capability, both in governance and in administration capability.

**Table 1** What members liked and disliked about being in local government in 2006

Liked best	Liked least
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with/for and representing the community, helping people;</li> <li>• Getting things done;</li> <li>• Involved in decisions;</li> <li>• Meeting different people;</li> <li>• Working with staff and or council, good relationships, friendships;</li> <li>• Access to information, knowing what is going on in the community;</li> <li>• Feeling valued/making a difference;</li> <li>• Helping city/community grow and improve;</li> <li>• Learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillor attitudes/skills/understanding;</li> <li>• Time to get things done;</li> <li>• Too much paperwork;</li> <li>• Central government legislation/demands;</li> <li>• Internal politics/interests and agendas;</li> <li>• Difficult and unreasonable people;</li> <li>• Meetings;</li> <li>• Staff incompetence/performance;</li> <li>• Being ignored;</li> <li>• Complex procedures/bureaucracy;</li> <li>• Impact on personal life.</li> </ul>

These concerns were also reflected by members in their answers to the 2006 survey, some of whom also highlighted “internal politics” as a concern (see table 1).

To increase the proportion of elected members who find the experience rewarding and commensurately decrease the proportion who find the experience disappointing (or worse) a number of initiatives could be considered.

Recommended actions to improve members' experiences:

1. That councils adopt a charter (based on a national template) setting out the levels of support members can expect while in office. This should include, relevant to the size of the councils, information covering:
  - o Access to policy and operational advice to assist members participate fully in meetings;
  - o Access to administrative support;
  - o Office, or desk space at the council offices, available to members to work on council business;
  - o The level of IT equipment and support available to allow a member to fulfil their duties; and
  - o Assistance in terms of logistics and publicity to assist members engage regularly with their wards/constituencies.
2. That councils regularly assess the degree to which elected members' conditions of work enable their positive participation, in particular the time of day at which meetings are held; the ability of members to join by audio-visual means, and the opportunity for members to engage informally outside formal council meetings.

## What needs to change?

While almost three quarters of respondents found that their time in local government met their expectations, virtually all respondents had suggestions for making the experience better. Many of these suggestions involved providing elected members with more support, including having more time to fulfil what they saw as their elected member role, and extending the term of councils to four years. The comments are discussed below under common themes.

### Decision-making

- Less consultation (frustration with what is seen as “over-consultation”);
- Empower community groups with less red-tape and more delegations, including to local and community boards;
- Consensus decision-making as against 'majority rules', more analysis and discussion. Much greater transparency and 'common sense' in financial reporting;
- Fewer councillors and tighter agendas;

- Have greater role in setting the agendas, issues and options for decision-making; and
- More public referenda.

### The governance management relationship

- Hope that other elected members would be prepared to question officers more than most do;
- Culture change for management and governance to work together more constructively and collaboratively;
- Change the role of CEO so that he (sic) does not control everything;
- More open transparent governance. Less staff dominance & disregard for public opinions;
- More time with CEO and more Councillor only time; and
- Making sure all stakeholders fully understand the difference between governance and management and don't abuse the position.

*"I would find a way to close the gap between Governance and Operations without either interfering with the other. After all, we are all there with a common purpose, to serve our ratepayers and make smart decisions to ensure they get good value for their ratepayer dollar.*

*Across the country I see Governance and Operations coming to blows as it is often perceived that Governance is a nuisance to operations and that they would prefer to be left to get on with the business of, running the "business".*

*Closer collaboration I believe would enhance everything for our ratepayers. Working as a team has got to be better than working against each other."*

### Building capability

- An induction that is more hands on and a mentor outside of the area of council that could be a go-to person to seek advice from;
- Better networking with elected members nationally who share an interest/portfolio – to understand best practice, get ideas, support each other;
- Access to training earlier in the term with more emphasis on professional development;
- Training for candidates;
- Encourage professional development as a matter of course in first twelve months including attending zone and/or regional hui and LGNZ Conference;
- I would have argued more vociferously to uphold sections 79 to 82 of the Local Government Act 2002 and challenged the flawed decision-making more adroitly. I would also have ensured that the cultural competency education was delivered to the new council ASAP after election;
- More training etc, six months before deciding to stand for council;
- Pushed harder for progress on important issues instead of being polite and waiting for the system to work;
- Talk more with existing elected members beforehand, for their insights, have longer induction and take up more professional development opportunities; and

*"The role is getting more challenging and less enjoyable. There is so much pressure from ratepayers frustrated at rising rates. Property values cannot continue to deliver core services as well as fund central government requirements, such as compliance, audit, consultation, plans, resilience, climate change etc."*



- Make sure that the electing public were made aware of the skill sets that candidates need to have on Council and that the “150 words” in the election booklet were honest and accurate.

## General comments

- A fairer and more appropriate system of funding with central government paying for the costs that they impose;
- A four year term;
- More time for working on the councillor role;
- More support and better resourcing for elected members;
- Community Boards have been cut out of the representation of residents and residents are encouraged to go direct to councillors;
- Code of Conduct changes to 'unmuzzle' councillors;
- I would like to see the easing of so much “red tape”;
- The council needed to give us more tasks or jobs to do so we could be more useful; and
- Better understanding by communities of council processes and by staff of communities’ expectations and how they can be raised unnecessarily.

When asked in 2006 what changes would have made it easier to fulfil their role, the most common answers concerned the skills and attitudes of other elected members and the cohesiveness of council (18 per cent) followed by a need for better coordination and support from staff and management, including access to information and greater staff competence (16 per cent).

## Analysis

Underpinning the comments received were a number of common themes. One is a very clear request for more support and “professional development”. Too many elected members found themselves unprepared for their new role and felt unsupported during the term. Solutions proffered by respondents included training for candidates, more emphasis on inductions and the opportunity to access mentors. There was also a suggestion that there should be more opportunities for members to network and learn from each other.

Require Council staff to automatically notify/consult with community boards on any issues that directly affect their catchments.

Better education of staff and elected members around localism and awareness that community boards represent an important part in actioning localism at Local Government level.

Lack of support and knowledge often led to feelings of powerlessness and impotence for elected members, particularly with regard to their ability or otherwise to influence decision-making processes, such as being able to influence council agendas. One member was quite upfront in saying “to be honest I would probably try to achieve my goals outside of Local Government”. Community board members, in particular, often found it difficult to raise local concerns.

There was also a consistent theme to the effect that the governance/management relationship was not working, with a sense, expressed by a number, that management had too much influence. Some respondents saw this as a result of colleagues being unwilling to properly scrutinize the advice they

received from officers. For some, the issue was less technical knowledge than understanding and competence at “politics”, such as being able to form alliances with fellow members.

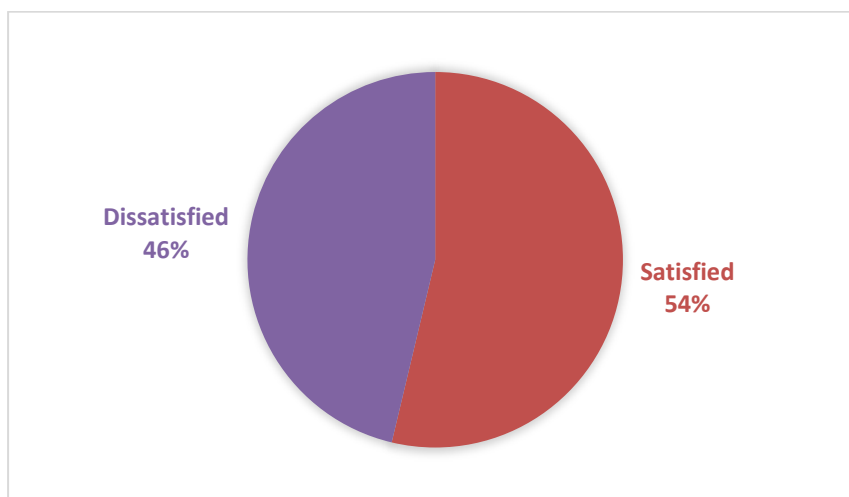
Recommended actions to address members’ issues:

1. That councils support members to develop their skills by offering:
  - o A stand-alone training and professional development budget for elected members;
  - o Personal development plans so that members can self-assess their specific training needs and find courses to meet those needs;
  - o The option of refresher and ongoing training;
  - o Opportunities to be partnered with mentors within or outside members’ own councils;
  - o Self and peer review schemes leading to tailored support packages for members; and
  - o Training on members’ obligations as “good employers”.
2. That a re-designed Code of Conduct process be developed, including the option of a national process for assessing and ruling on complaints and stronger sanctions for members found to have not complied with the Code;
3. That an appropriate helpline be made available for members; and
4. That opportunities for new elected members to meet and share experience be facilitated within regions and sub-regions at least once or twice a year.

## Remuneration

The level of elected member remuneration is often given as a factor affecting the willingness of people to stand for election or remain as an elected member. The survey sought members’ views about the remuneration they received. More than half of respondents (54 per cent) believed that the level of remuneration they received was appropriate for the level of their responsibilities See figure 3).

**Figure 3: Satisfaction with levels of remuneration**



Amongst the reasons given by the 46 per cent who were dissatisfied were:

- To reflect levels of responsibility – such as the multi-million dollar decisions made by elected members;
- The time it takes to represent sparsely populated rural areas;
- To compensate for the unfair distribution of duties resulting in some members working harder than others;
- To reflect the time involved;
- To better represent community diversity; and
- To attract the necessary skills and experience required to perform the role.

*“As Chair of a Community Board serving a relatively small population which includes a lot of small communities all with very different needs it takes more time to attend all the community events, drop-in sessions and meetings to be able to effectively represent and advocate for them all.”*

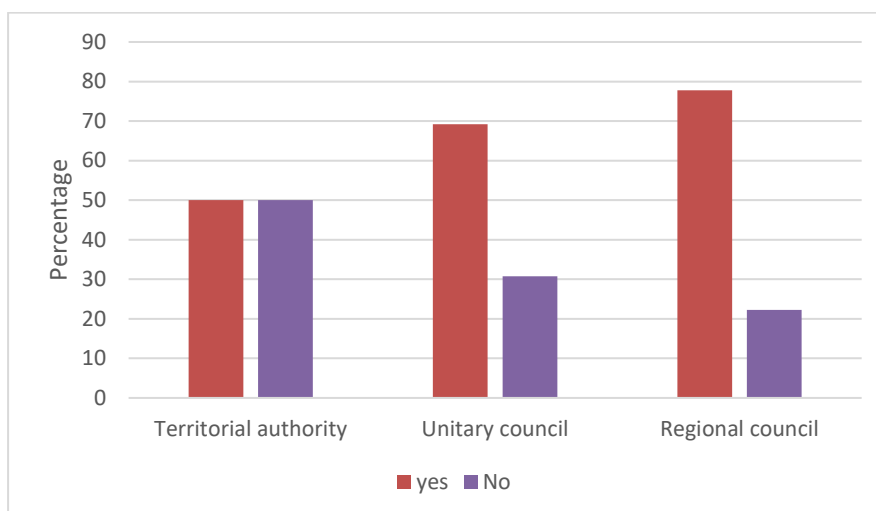
A number of respondents felt that the remuneration system should reflect the level of work and commitment of individual members, for example:

- Some councillors work harder than others – remuneration should reflect effort and commitment;
- We all get the same base salary but some of us have additional portfolio roles and are Council reps to other boards but still get paid the same as the Councillors who attend the bare minimum.

Community board members in particular felt that remuneration levels failed to adequately compensate them for the workload and large distances many of them had to cover, for example:

- As a community board member of long standing in an area with sparse interest from the council decision-makers, overworked and undervalued, means remuneration would need substantially increasing. Unfortunately community board remuneration has been kicked back yet again into the too hard basket;
- Remuneration should be tied to a percentage of a councillor's basic remuneration (such as 25 per cent). The size of a council's jurisdiction and population doesn't give an accurate guide to the level of work undertaken;
- We probably worked as many hours as Councillors in a nearby city and they got a lot more money. Also, our community board worked harder and was engaging more with its community than the other community board in the district and we all got paid the same – that said the other board is starting to learn from our community board so things are improving there.

**Figure 4: Appropriateness of remuneration by type of council**



When views on the appropriateness of remuneration are examined according to the type of council that the respondent came from there was quite a divergence (see figure 4). Respondents from territorial authorities were evenly split, with 50 per cent indicating support and the same number expressing disappointment. Support for the existing level of remuneration was high in unitary councils (nearly 70 per cent) which is surprising since members of those councils are responsible for both territorial and regional council functions. Nearly 80 per cent of respondents from regional councils considered remuneration levels to be appropriate.

**Figure 5: Appropriateness of remuneration by role**

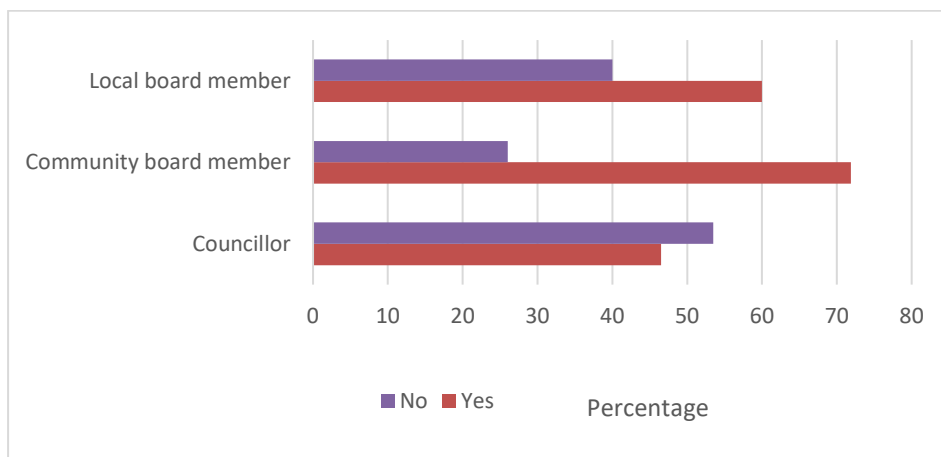


Figure 5 shows how attitudes to remuneration vary according to role. Interestingly, community board members, who receive the least remuneration, are most likely to say that the level of remuneration is appropriate (72 per cent). Councillors are the group that is least happy with the level of remuneration (46.51 per cent). Recommendations from those wanting an increase in remuneration ranged from a desire to double existing levels to tripling the amount. For example:

- Any increase would be appreciated;
- It should be increased by about 30 per cent;
- More in line with central government would be appropriate;
- At least 50 per cent more to make it a worthwhile independent role;
- 100 per cent increase; and
- Elected members should have access to council contributions to superannuation and KiwiSaver.

### Analysis

Although a majority of elected members were happy with the remuneration they received, it was a small majority. Almost half of the respondents saw remuneration as too little and sought an increase, in some cases they believed remuneration should be doubled.

Elected member remuneration is set by the Remuneration Authority and is based upon a number of criteria, including population and expenditure. More work is needed to better understand the challenges

faced by those respondents who believed that levels of remuneration should be increased although it is likely many come from councils facing additional challenges, such as population growth.

Recommended actions to increase the level of satisfaction with remuneration:

1. That the Remuneration Authority periodically review its formula for setting remuneration levels to ensure it is sensitive to factors such as growth, that create pressure on members;
2. That elected members remuneration include KiwiSaver contributions;
3. That on standing down from office member remuneration continue for a further four weeks to assist members transition (as is the case for members of parliament);
4. That councils review committee and decision-making structures to ensure that work is spread evenly across all members; and
5. That councils develop ways of working to reduce pressures on elected members through greater use of delegations, such as delegations to committees and management.

## Major challenges facing councils

The survey asked respondents to describe the three biggest challenges that they faced while being an elected member. Answers are grouped, according to category, in Table 2. The most common challenges identified were to do with the ability to fund the services communities required, three waters, and governance related matters.

**Table 2: Major Challenges**

Issues	Responses %
Funding/affordability	0.10
Governance/management relationships	0.09
Waste water	0.09
Council capability (both managerial and governance)	0.09
Drinking water	0.09
Managing growth & related infrastructure	0.06
Council and governance culture	0.05
Roads	0.05
Community engagement	0.05
Cost of regulations & unfunded mandates	0.05
Iwi/Māori representation	0.02
Debt	0.02
Long-term leadership	0.02
Community knowledge of local government	0.02

Lack of competition – infrastructure sector	0.01
Code of Conduct	0.01

The challenges identified extended from the way in which a council operates to the external issues that members had to address during their term in office. Looked at in more detail the issues falling within “governance” ranged from relationships between members and management to elected member behaviour.

### Governance:

Amongst the specific matters were:

- Delegations not matching expectations;
- Deciding how to work together;
- Being engaged at the beginning of processes rather than being 'consulted' after many fundamental decisions have already been decided;
- Chief Executive performance review and remuneration;
- Having more council decision-making in open meetings instead of working parties;
- Trying to work with our Iwi;
- Too many decisions made outside of Council that then needed approval;

*Community, industry and business expectation of an increased level of service and a decreased level of rates.*

*In short, we cannot provide what some in our community demand while still keeping rates affordable for low and fixed income earners.*

- Lack of in-depth questioning about the financial decision around capital investment and increasing levels of service;
- Lack of governance experience; and
- Lack of leadership.

### Behaviour/personal context

- Existing elected members opposing anyone new;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Having no penalty around breaches of Code of Conduct;
- New ‘one issue’ councillors who do not understand the role;
- Behind the scenes politics;
- Putting aside parochialism and working as a team for the good of the district;
- Over half of the new Council were new to the role; and
- I am working full-time so it was difficult to go to meetings that would have allowed more involvement.

### Legislative context

- Legislative framework for local government;
- Getting the council organisation and CCO’s to recognise our role and powers.

## Relationship with staff

- Lack of operational support;
- Lack of Council and councillor support;
- Staffing capacity and intransigency;
- Council and staff not understanding the meaning of consultation; and
- Council staff not listening to what elected members were working to achieve.

## Analysis

When asked about the challenges facing their councils respondents highlighted, in the main, issues that have been well publicised, such as climate change, water services and population growth, along with the funding needed to address them. Also amongst the challenges that received the most support were council capability; council and governance culture; community engagement and Iwi/Māori relationships.

### External challenges

Many of the challenges identified related to matters that were outside council control, ranging from the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes to the East Coast floods. Frequently mentioned challenges included:

- Freedom camping;
- Housing/homelessness;
- Freshwater;
- Climate change/resilience;
- Earthquake strengthening;
- Economic development;
- Solid waste;
- Managing growth;
- Coastal erosion;
- Unfunded legislative mandates from central and regional government;
- Finding and implementing an appropriate and effective response to homelessness;
- Withdrawal of central government from service provision in our province so the responsibility shifts to Local Government;
- Attracting new residents/where to house them if they choose to come;
- Damage to rural roads caused by logging trucks; and
- Increased NES and regulatory requirements from central government without corresponding financial support or even thought about how they will be paid for.

## Suggestions for resolving the challenges

Having identified the major challenges they faced while elected, respondents were asked what changes were required to resolve them. Most of the replies highlighted policy and/or legislative changes necessary to give councils the required power or resources. Answers also touched on the need to change some practices as well as reinforcing points made about capability. The answers have been grouped under four headings; status of local government, capability, tools and levers and representation.

### Status of local government

- A constitution that enshrines democratic rights for local government;
- Better relationship with central government officials and policy makers;
- Devolving more tax back to local government to spend on local needs, so council has more control to ensure a strong community;
- Introduction of localism in order to increase local decision-making representation to central government by LGNZ;
- Central Government support for localism; and
- Councils endorsing localism to shift decision-making to community boards and communities.

*Immediately after the final election results are announced a COMPULSORY SKILLS ANALYSIS MUST be done for EVERYONE and then every council should be able to co-opt independent experts where there are gaps on their committees – like Finance & Risk.*

### Capability

- Establishing an accreditation system for prospective Councillors who have completed essential governance and financial training modules;
- Independent external advice – available and accessible to Councillors that is part and parcel of meeting structure. Not left up to individuals to seek out and then have to grandstand;
- Teach civics in schools and in evening classes, and in workplaces so that there is a sound understanding of the role of local governance and how to access it;

A levy on EFTPOS transactions in a district would help those small councils funding increased tourist numbers

- Strengthen sanctions against elected members who breach the Council's Code of Conduct. Some members are derogatory and critical and breaches of the Code of Conduct result in a slap with a wet bus ticket, at best;
- Make sure governance managers and Chief Executives are given independent training in their role to uphold the LGA 2002, in the face of political pressure;
- Need for much greater transparency to ratepayers with clear accountability lines. Changes to Code of Conduct;
- Reduced remuneration;
- Clarity on the skills required to be an elected member and level of accountability (some just agree with everything from officers and no analysis/debate);
- A better rule book to make it easier to understand regulation;
- A more robust policy for community boards including; delegations, remuneration/localism.



## Additional tools, resources and policy levers

- A greater variety of revenue sources from tourists and visitors; by users, particularly people who exacerbate and pollute;
- A willingness to use rates and borrowing to catch up on infrastructure provision; and an ability to gain income from value uplift on properties as a result of infrastructure provision;
- More authority on options for freedom camping;
- We need local government to have more say in central government and how government expenditure is distributed to the regions. Central government seems to have lost touch with how difficult it is to do our job with such limited resources;
- Giving territorial authorities a share (even small) of taxes and rates that are collected within our area;
- A methodology by which Central Government fairly and transparently fund some of the infrastructure or significant issues facing low ratepayer, large geographically-spread regions;
- Central government should provide some funding when they implement upgraded standards that will impose significant costs to the ratepayers; and
- Reform of the RMA.

## Representation and leadership

- Address the Māori Wards clause in legislation;
- Introducing STV as a required voting system;
- A respect for the residents elected by the community to do a good job rather than an appearance of consultation and feedback;
- Introduce a maximum three terms for elected members (term limits);
- Set up future vision team of community leaders;
- Four year election cycle;
- Two professional Directors, as on DHB's;
- If local boards in Auckland are part of the Council there should be less delegations and more autonomy for local boards with a population of four or five times that of other district councils.

*“For a more diverse range of councillors to be around the table less white tight middle class business people, younger people and proper Māori representation.”*

## Analysis

Amongst the common themes, the most consistent involved giving councils both additional forms of funding and additional responsibilities, with localism identified a number of times. Members also wanted to have some influence on how central government spending in regions and localities is prioritised. The notion of “equalisation”, which involves central government assistance to councils in poor communities so that they can provide a similar standard of amenities to that enjoyed by better off communities, was also raised.

Suggestions were also made on how to improve governance capability – such as the appointment of independent experts to standing committee to complement existing skills, and even a suggestion that councils should be similar to District Health Boards, by the introduction of appointed members.

Recommended as a solution (highlighted by both community and local board respondents), and being amongst the changes that councils themselves are able to make, was greater use of delegations.

In response to concerns that councils end up paying costs imposed by central government at least one respondent argued that councils needed greater constitutional recognition and the enshrinement of local democracy as a right.

Recommended actions to assist member resolve challenges:

1. That councils make a commitment to regularly review the culture of their governance bodies, including the perception of elected members hold about their councils;
2. That an active policy to encourage greater understanding of Te Ao Māori in both governance and administration be adopted;
3. That Significance and Engagement policies are reviewed so that that they become a mechanism for authentic engagement with communities as opposed to a means to manage that engagement.

## Improving how councils work – what members told us in 2006 and 2013

The 2006 survey of elected members invited respondents to provide suggestions about what was needed to improve the way councils work. The replies covered a broad range of factors, including more diverse representation, more responsive decision-making processes and better training. As in 2019 there was a strong recognition that more investment was needed to improve capability.

- Improved consultation and communication;
- More information to community board members. Often functions and meetings were held and some board members knew nothing about them;
- Stop government passing on responsibilities to local government, especially as no finance accompanies those extra duties;
- Less bureaucracy. The 2002 Local Government Act has imposed strong demands for asset management plans, long term plans etc. While these are great for strategic planning they can be too controlling. Looking out beyond five years is probably impractical;
- By the government paying rates on the land they own;
- More effort to improve the quality of candidates standing for election;
- More recognition and authority for community boards;
- Need to break-up the old boy network;
- Good induction for new councillors;
- Candidates standing for election should be required to complete a training course on the requirements of local government;
- Better political leadership and team alignment between politicians and management;
- Better compensation for councils to attract qualified people;
- Greater transparency at meetings; and

*“Council needs a more visible presence if they are taking unpopular decision; it needs to be able to communicate reasons for taking particular options to the community (and) should be prepared to front at public meetings.”*

- The ability to make good, fast decisions and act on them in shorter time-frames.

*“A more streamlined system. Too much repetition on the same items, for example, community board recommendations, committee recommendation, council vote. Each step means duplication of reports, outlines, officer time etc.”*

The 2013 survey of councils, which was of limited scope, asked respondents to identify three things that could be changed to make their council more effective. Answers reinforced many of the suggestions made nine years earlier and included:

- Better communication with the community;
- More precise and succinct meetings;
- A dire need to restrain expenditure;
- Better candidates;
- A focus on the community rather than a political party;
- More training and education at the start of the term;
- Meeting times that suit elected members not the staff schedules;
- Make elected members more accountable to the community; and
- Revisit at regular periods – are we still informed, motivated, action plans on line and on task.

## Councils’ ability to strengthen well-being

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire was to get respondents’ views on whether any changes were required to strengthen their councils’ ability to improve their community’s well-being and quality of life. Many of the answers reinforced or elaborated on answers give to previous questions. In addition to matters highlighted in previous answers, such as funding and localism, two other themes stood out, community engagement and stronger central/local government collaboration.

### Policy and process

- Affordable housing;
- Change the culture toward having more empathy towards ratepayers with a little more risk taking and less backside covering;
- Concentrate on core services not nice to haves;
- For every decision there needs to be risk analyses for the Social, Cultural, Environmental and Financial aspects of the subject requiring a decision;
- More local decision-making, village planning and place-making; and
- We are undertaking a Liveability/Affordability study to measure these. Collecting both data and personal stories. Working particularly with Iwi who have offered full support. Then be able to make sound cases to government for support in certain areas.

*We have embraced our Health & Wellbeing responsibilities by forming a District Governance Group.*

*I believe our particular Council needs more focus on Youth and the Elderly. Infrastructure is always our #1 priority and sometimes I wonder whether we are neglecting youth and the elderly.*

*Housing shortage is another huge issue - we have multiple families living in dwellings fit for a family of no more than five, we have homeless people. There needs to be more focus on social housing and this should be led by Central Government.*

*We have just flipped the system and undertaken a 'Blueprint' or masterplan with our communities.*

## Central/local collaboration

- Better government assistance to provide housing for rough sleepers and low income pensioners;
- Build interagency working relationship particularly the health, justice, police, education sectors and also NZTA;
- Give more control to local government to distribute and guide local spend to meet local needs such as housing;
- Stop central government imposing more regulatory functions to territorial authorities without giving the required funding to carry them out; and
- The ability to get Central Government's attention on localised social issues.

## Engagement

- A comprehensive strategy is resourced and driven from the community up and not the council down;
- Let initiatives come from the community – work with them, and aim at a good result for all;
- Achieve better engagement with the community, especially through online channels;
- Better and more focused consultation with the public. We consult but sometimes it feels like it is just because it is the thing to do and we haven't focused in on the actual issue;
- More time for councillors to work with the community; and
- A lot of work has been achieved in this area. Just keep listening to the community board.

## Other changes

- A better cross section of society representing council and greater awareness of social issues;
- A total overhaul of local government, to receive much more authority and funding that gives maximum incentive for long-term investments and decision-making;
- Find some other funding mechanism other than rates;
- Less central government direction;
- Increase staff resource to address these issues as many Councils only have one or a few people working in social areas related to well-being;
- Our council is performing extremely well and has received awards in acknowledgement of this;
- Remove all property developers from elected roles and senior council roles;
- The calibre of elected representatives; and
- The whole idea of localism needs to be supported by all councils and a real push by local government to get more money from central government is critical, especially with all the compliance laws on 3 waters and climate change expected to really start to bite.

## Analysis

Respondents highlighted areas of improvement as well as noting, in some cases that they believed their council was already doing well.

When considering their impact on well-being a number of respondents highlighted the challenge of having

*As the most centralized of the OECD countries in terms of the available revenue for actioning results - there needs to be a more modern & equitable split of those revenue streams as local government is much closer to the needs of the people.*

to make difficult choices between services they saw as essential and those they saw as more discretionary, given that budgets are always constrained. A few members focused on the question of how to pay for services and recommended that focussing on core services and doing them well was the best way to promote well-being.

In terms of specific services it was not surprising that social housing was commonly mentioned, given the damaging social impacts caused by the cost of housing on whanau and individual welfare. It was not surprising that the reintroduction of central

government support to enable councils to increase their provision of social housing was highlighted –the case was also made at LGNZ’s annual conference in 2019.

A number of respondents focused on policy and decision-making processes. Comments included collecting better information about the state of well-being in their areas as well as applying a “well-being lens” to new policy and spending proposals, such as a “well-being risk analysis”.

Many respondents endorsed the importance of community engagement in order to identify local needs and preferences. Common to this view was the suggestion that setting well-being priorities should be a “bottom-up” exercise. With one respondent highlighting the need for a comprehensive strategy. The need to “listen” to communities was highlighted along with giving councillors more time to engage properly. The taking a “bottom-up” approach was also associated with those respondents who supported greater focus on localism.

The opportunities for better well-being outcomes through central local collaboration and a placed-based approach to public policy were also noted. Interestingly, the role of the Long Term Plan and community outcomes was not mentioned which raises the question of how well members understand its role. Neither were the Sustainable Development Goals. Other responses touched on whether officials and elected members had the capability to meet the well-being challenge.

Recommended actions to help councils strengthen well-being:

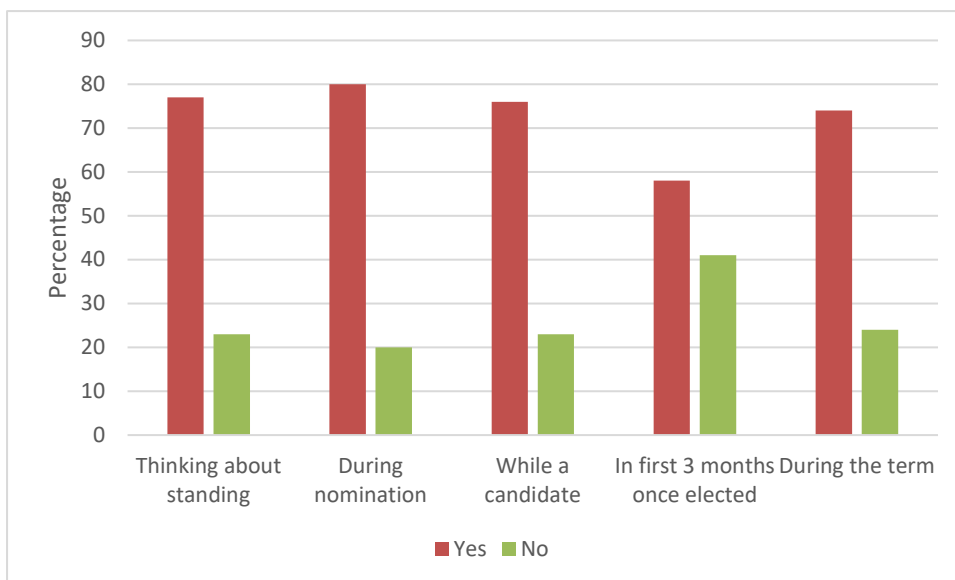
1. That additional guidance is provided on the nature of well-being , the different ways in which local governments can contribute to improving well-being, and the role of participation and engagement in strengthening well-being;
2. That focused training programmes are developed for elected members on the issue of how to take a “well-being” approach to their work.

## Information about local government

A frequent issue raised by respondents was their need for more information, particularly about the nature of local government and the requirements necessary to provide effective governance. Members were asked a number of questions designed to identify what they knew about local government at each of the different stages required to be an elected member. Where shortcomings were identified suggestions on how they might be addressed were sought.

Respondents were asked whether they had enough information about how local government worked at different stages in the process of becoming an elected member and after their election. The results showed that when it came deciding to stand or not 77 per cent stated that they had enough knowledge, although 23 per cent stated they did not. The best understood part of the process was during the nomination phase, with 80 per cent of members saying they had enough information. Not surprisingly, it was within the first three months after they had been elected that members discovered the limits to their knowledge, with 40 per cent stating they did not have enough information. Midway through the term, however, that figure had dropped to 24 per cent (see figure 6).

**Figure 6: Did you have enough information?**

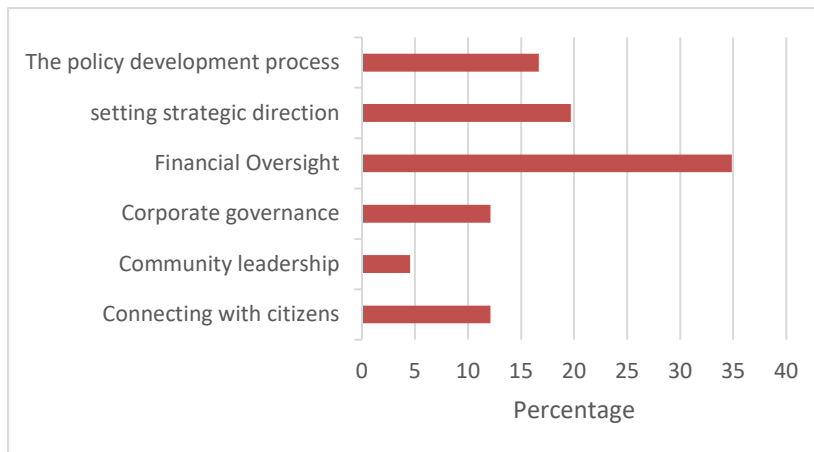


The answers to this question also varied according to the role that respondents played, for example:

- Local board members were more likely to say they sufficiently lacked information than other members when thinking about standing, when nominated and while being a candidate.
- Community board members were more likely to identify their first three months in office (56 per cent) as the period when they needed more information than other members were.

Amongst the members who stated that they did not have enough information in their first three months as an elected member, the most commonly mentioned need for more information was on “providing financial oversight,” see figure 7.

**Figure 7: Priority information needs first three months**



The desire to get up to speed quickly with the responsibility to provide financial oversight was followed in importance by the need to learn more about “setting strategic direction” and the “policy development process”.

### Filling information gaps

Common themes that emerged from the answers to this question ranged from having more information about the expected time commitment to better induction programmes once elected. A number of replies also highlighted the length of time it takes for new members to get “fully up to speed”.

- A better assessment of the time commitment would have helped. We were told that there was one short meeting every third Thursday. In reality, counting workshops etc, there has been an average of 60 meetings per year, lasting most of the day and, apart from council meetings, likely to be on any day of the week – making it all but impossible to fit around another part-time job;
- A mentor before and after being elected, such as a past councillor;
- A more comprehensive induction to local issues and the delegations given to community boards;
- A more transparent communication channel between governance and operations with regard to council processes;
- There are often a range of things taking place that elected members don't know or only learn about after they have been involved for more than one term. This is not necessarily deliberate but it happens a great deal and makes it very difficult for newly elected members to understand the big picture;
- Although we had a three week training period the nuances of how to influence decisions were never explained;
- Better induction processes (non LGNZ), and more contact/support from officers;
- A more structured approach to professional development, especially targeted at councils experiencing a big turnover of elected members, new CEO and new mayor;
- I didn't do my homework as well as I should;

*Better information as to what really is involved in becoming a Councillor, even holding a mock meeting for potential candidates with associated reading to actually experience what being a Councillor involves.*

- I think candidates should get at least an information pack explaining what their responsibilities will be as elected members, with workshops held for newly elected councillors;
- Independent (i.e. not from within your own council) policy advice. Better connections for sharing information and strategy with other councils, not just in the same region but with councils of similar size and with similar issues.
- Looking back 15 years, support is far better now;
- Need more training for community board members specific to their role as well as automatic training for chairs; and
- Information on simple issues, like how items get on an agenda.

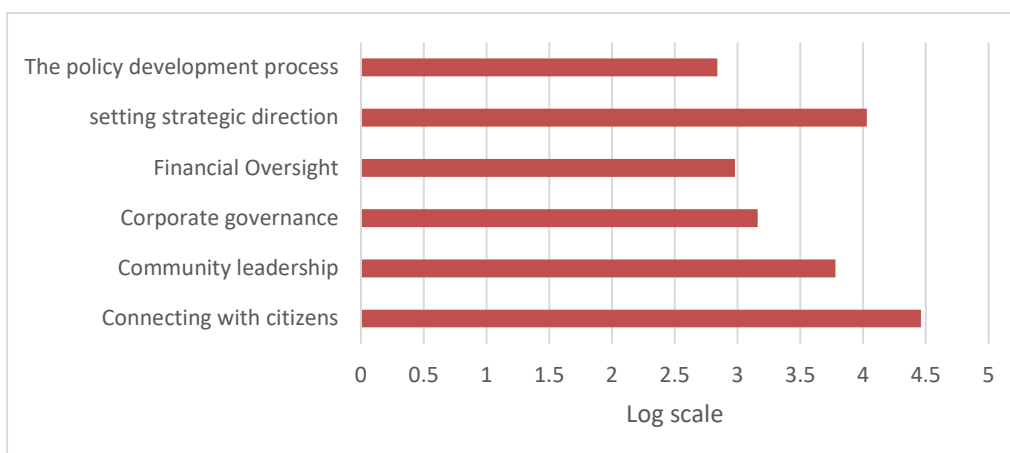
**What members said in 2006**

- More training and support from council officers;
- More help from more experienced councillors;
- A workable buddy system in the first few months;
- More information on the time required;
- Crucial to know who is responsible for what on council i.e. staff; and
- An orientation day.

## Information priorities

The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the relative importance of the major roles that elected members play. It then asked respondents to indicate what information they needed to adequately fulfil those various roles and whether that information was available. The two roles that were judged the most important were “connecting with citizens” and “setting strategic direction”. The lowest ranked role was “financial oversight”, even though it was also the area about which members sought the most information, see figures 8 and 9.

**Figure 8: Importance of elected members’ roles**



Not surprisingly, the relative importance given to each role varied according to the member’s local government role. For example, councillors ranked financial oversight higher than community or local



board members, while local board members ranked setting strategic direction and participating in the policy development process higher than the ranking given by other members. Interestingly, when it came to identifying their information needs respondents identified “financial governance” as their greatest need.

**Figure 9: Information needed**



The desire for more information and assistance was similar for respondents across all three types of councils, with one exception. Amongst respondents from regional councils, 50 per cent wanted more information/assistance with “connecting with citizens and local organisations” than other categories compared to less than 8 per cent wanting the same information in territorial and unitary authorities.

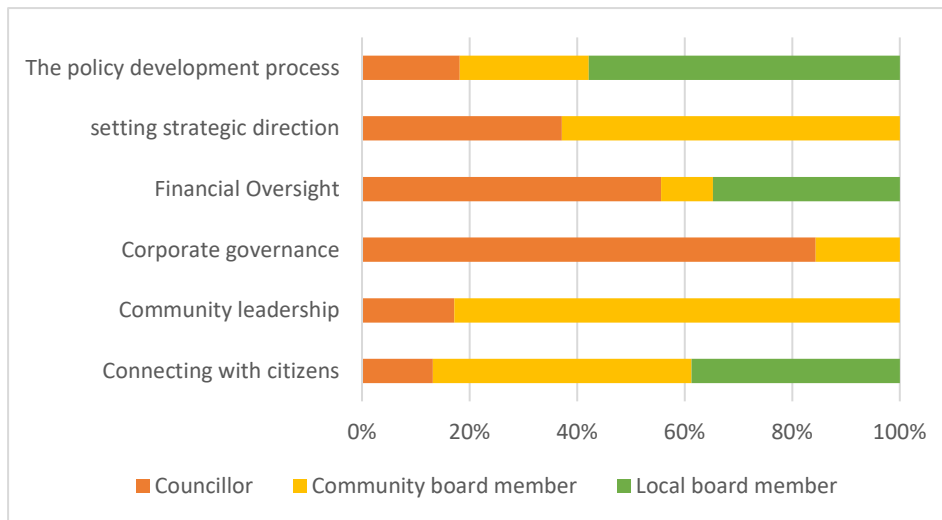
When analysed from the perspective of the three different elected member roles, namely councillor, community board member and local board member, it showed that councillors placed more importance on information about corporate governance and financial oversight than board members, see figure 10.

*How to access council services. What services are available? How the organisation works. How your board works (and its members)?*

*An unbiased historical context to your board and its legacy concerns.*

*A personality assessment workshop for working well together on a board. Where to go to for help. An org structure. Information on how to use intranet.*

**Figure 10: Information needs by role<sup>1</sup>**



In addition to the six categories discussed above, respondents were also invited to identify any other information needs; their answers have been grouped together under the following headings.

### Meetings

- Facilitation skills;
- Chairs training;
- Training about the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders; and
- More information on council processes.

*It would be good if all new elected members were gathered together for one big training session, one not run by their own council officers"*

### Governance

- Governance versus operations;
- How to engage constructively and avoid personal attacks;
- The principles behind working as a team;
- Electoral rules, which are often confusing and not easily accessible or explained, particularly related to social media; and
- Lack of training for board members was very apparent in first three months – only one day of induction, which was very light in content.

### Finance

- Financial management;
- Rating systems;
- How different rates influence outcomes and how to design rating strategies to meet specific goals; and

<sup>1</sup> Local board responses need to be taken with caution due to the small number who answered this question.

- More on accounting – a lot of councillors do not understand debt and the future costs of interest charges.

## General

- Cultural competence particularly for migrant communities;
- Media engagement and interview techniques;
- How to develop good policy;
- How Council can improve housing supply and address climate change;
- Resource Management Act 1991; and
- The larger political context and current trends.

*Getting the support I asked for, better information and sufficient time to make informed decisions around the council table.*

*Would have been great to receive a questionnaire asking in which areas we needed support/training.*

## Analysis

Overall, the majority of members (more than 70 per cent) believed that they had sufficient information to be an effective elected member, except for their first three months as an elected member. It is something of a paradox, one that might be explained by the gap between understanding a process in theory and having to put it into practice.

The first three months in a new elected member's life is frantic, as formal processes, such as being sworn in, selecting committee chairs, adopting standing orders and determining delegations are addressed within the first few meetings. Not only is the pace of learning rapid, but most of the decisions made at those first meetings will impact on the efficacy of the council's performance over the next three years, especially decisions on the council's governance structure – which is inevitably the same structure employed by the outgoing council and adopted without question. Such decisions are also intimately political.

*“To start with, I had little idea what elected members did and I didn't know any of them personally so felt I couldn't approach them. When I was first elected, there was so much to learn that even though we had a good induction process I still didn't feel confident in my role”*

While satisfaction was generally high, the fact that more than 20 per cent of respondents believed they need more information and/or support cannot be overlooked. Communities need all their elected representatives to be active participants, contributing fully to the best of their ability.

Respondents' information needs were influenced by the nature of their role. Councillors, reflecting their larger governance role, gave more weight to the need for information on corporate governance and financial oversight than community board

members gave. One need common to all respondents was the need to learn more about decision-making in local government, such as the running of meetings and the relationship between governance and operations.

The frequency with which governance-related issues were raised highlights a need for ongoing assistance, ranging from training, mentoring and regular refresher courses.

Recommended actions to address information gaps:

1. That a comprehensive induction programme is provided following each triennial election. Induction needs to include:
  - Generic courses involving members from a mix of councils;
  - Council-specific orientation organised by each local authority;
  - Content relevant to both councillors and community board members.

2. That induction programmes include:
  - o An opportunity for members to discuss their collective vision, including goals and objectives and expectations in a form that is capable of regular review; and
  - o An opportunity to agree in a manner in which members will work together, including matters such as collective responsibility and operating style.
3. That candidate inductions provide a realistic assessment of the time required of elected members considering the nature of their positions and type of council/board, and include information for candidates about the role of an elected member and the type of pressures they are likely to face, including the opportunity to hear from former local politicians.

## Assessing performance

One of the governance responsibilities that councillors have, in particular, is to monitor the performance of their council in terms of its ability to achieve its objectives and improve the lives of the district or region's residents. One question sought information about CouncilMark™, an independent programme, established by LGNZ, to improve the public's knowledge of the work councils are doing and to support individual councils to further improve the service and value they provide.

The programme incorporates an independent assessment system that assesses council performance and the work they are undertaking. An Independent Assessment Board provides each council with an overall performance rating which is assessed against indicators grouped under four headings – governance, leadership and strategy; financial decision-making and transparency; service delivery and asset management; and communication and engagement. The proportion of respondents that had heard of CouncilMark™ was 66 per cent with 47 per cent being members of a council that had taken part in the programme.

In addition to the question of whether or not respondents had heard of CouncilMark™, they were asked to specify how they assessed the performance of their council. Replies included:

- Audit NZ, Standard & Poors' Ratings, Resident Surveys, CEMARS Audit and other various compliance reports or audits over waters, infrastructure, building, environment, sport & rec and health;
- Assessment made by community and elected members;
- Community feedback;
- Consultants arranged by council e.g. PWC;
- Council's Communitrac survey (customer satisfaction) and the many and varied feedback we receive;
- Observation of nearby councils and public feedback;
- From our officers;
- Ratepayers and residents;
- Researching best practice outside of Local Government, as we are running large businesses;
- Independent consultants - although I question their actual independence when instructed by the chief executive, given that elected members aren't allowed to see the terms of reference;
- We ask for benchmarking against Australian councils;

Through the selection of indicators from surveys undertaken across a range of councils that we are comparable to. In addition we use the Baldrige assessment (only once so far), and compare our rates increases to other councils.

- We do some benchmarking of key ratios on council organisational performance. Otherwise informal; and
- I don't know/unsure.

## Analysis

The issue of how to measure whether or not their council is operating efficiently or effectively is one that new and experience elected members commonly raise, as they should. They are elected to govern organisations that own and operate infrastructure worth millions, and even billions of dollars and are responsible for making decisions that directly affect social, economic and cultural well-being and environmental sustainability. Members must acknowledge that monitoring performance is a critical governance role. However, it is far from easy. While councils are required by law to put in place an abundance of performance measures, from the statement of service performance to the Government's financial prudence benchmarks, none, by themselves, allow a member to assess whether the council is operating as efficiently as it might or that it is providing the services citizens want as effectively as possible.

In addition to CouncilMark™, the most commonly mentioned sources of information on performance were:

- Advice from external agencies;
- Comparisons with neighbouring councils;
- Audit NZ;
- Feedback from residents;
- Audit and Risk Committees; and
- Information from staff

The diversity of replies suggests that this question, how best to assess the performance of my local authority, lacks a substantive answer. Yet its importance is not diminished.

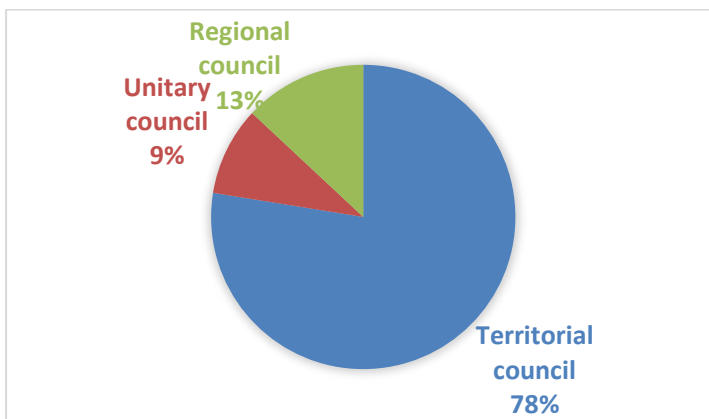
Recommended actions to assist members assess performance:

1. That training and professional development courses for elected members include a segment on the subject of assessing the performance of their council.

## Profile of respondents

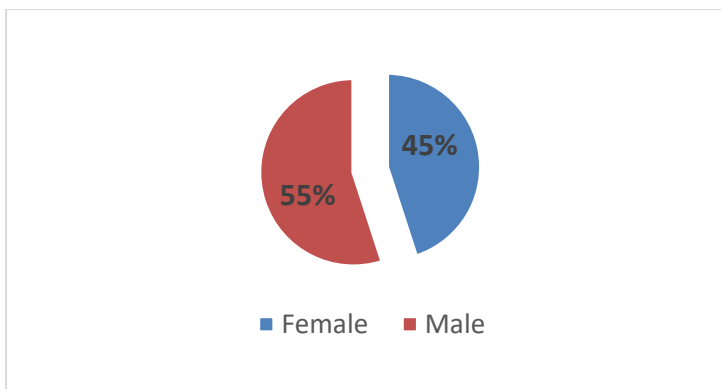
The questionnaire for the elected members' satisfaction survey was sent to all elected members (councillors, community board members, local board members, mayors and chairs) in September 2019. The number of respondents was 148, a response rate of nine per cent. Respondents reflected the diversity of local government with all three types of councils represented, territorial, unitary and regional, see figure 11.

**Figure 11: Survey respondents**



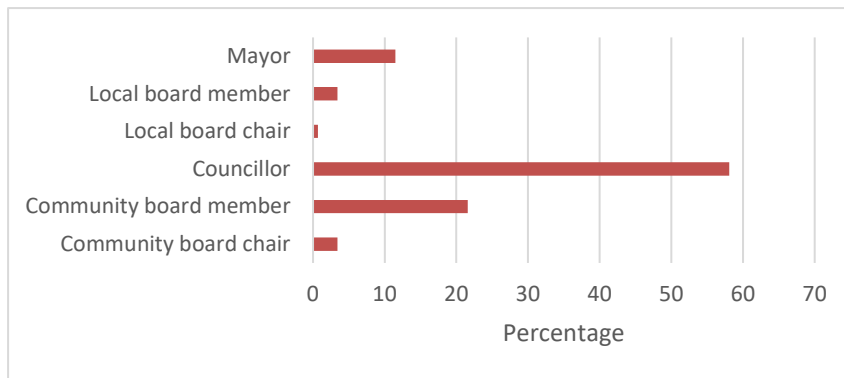
Female elected members were over represented amongst respondents, making up 45 per cent of replies (compared to 39 per cent of elected members in the 2016 – 19 cohort, see figure 12).

**Figure 12: Gender of respondents**



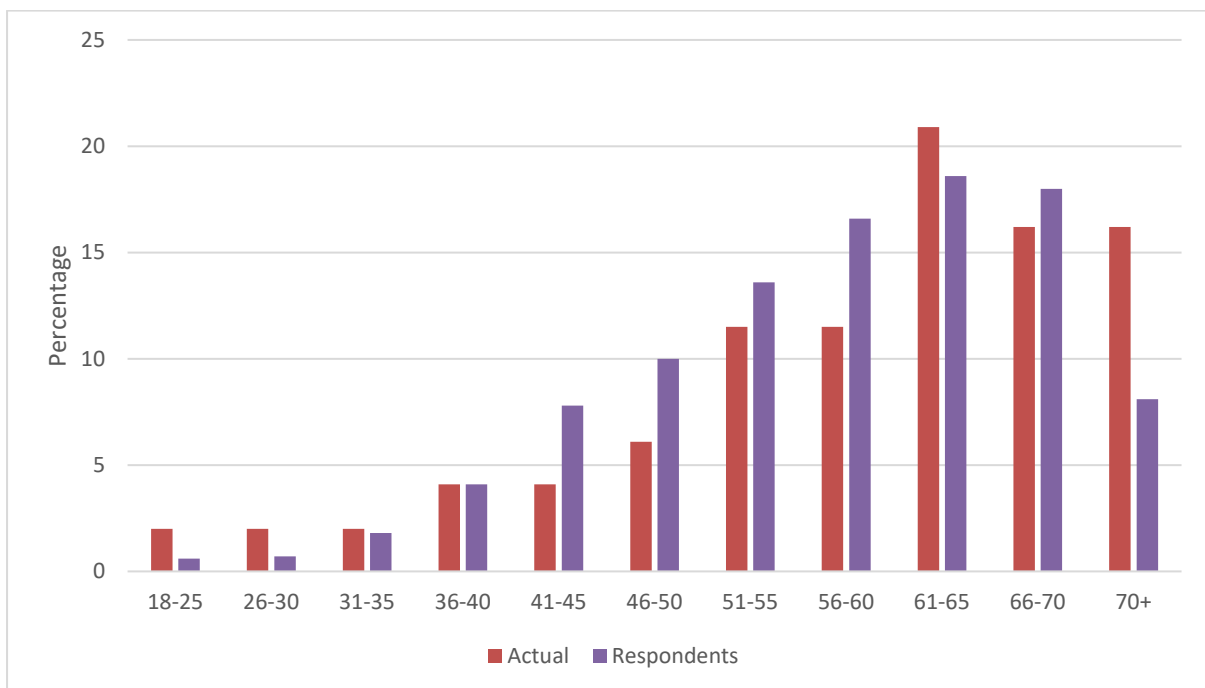
Respondents reflected the full range of roles found amongst elected members, with good representation from councillors and community board members in particular (see figure 13).

**Figure 13: Roles**



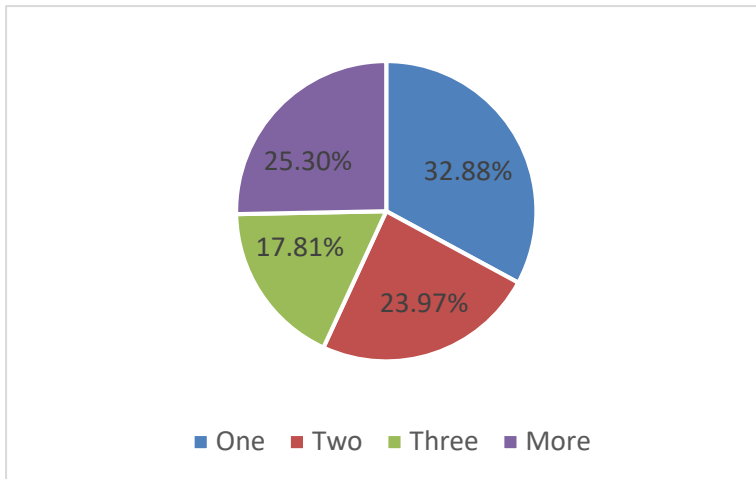
Respondents also reflected the typical age profile found in local government with the number of elected members in each age band increasing until they reach 65 years. Compared to the actual age distribution there is a slight weighting in favour of the 41-60 age group and under-weighting in the under 31 category, see figure 14.

**Figure 14: Age of respondents**



The number of years that each respondent had spent as an elected member was relatively equally distributed between those elected for a first term (32.8 per cent) and those that had served more than three terms (25.3 per cent), see figure 15.

**Figure 15: Length of service (years)**





## Further Reading

Councillors Commission (2007) Representing the future, accessed from <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080908190606/http://www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/> (now archived)

LGNZ (2006) Survey of Exiting Elected Members, Report prepared by LGNZ and Research and Evaluation Services, LGNZ, Wellington.

LGNZ (2019) New Zealand's elected members 2016 - 2019: A profile available from <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/e41e5fb07f/Elected-Members-Profile-Report-FINAL.pdf>

LGNZ (2020) Elected members' profile 2019 – 2022: A description of New Zealand's elected members and their reasons for standing, available from <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/Elected-member-profile-2019-2022.pdf>

LGNZ (2020) Candidates and their views: LGNZ's survey of candidates standing for the 2019 local authority elections, available from <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/Uploads/Candidates-Survey-Report-2019.pdf>

Roberts, L (2020) Auckland Local Elections 2019: The demographic characteristics of candidates available from <https://www.knowledgeauckland.org.nz/publications/auckland-local-elections-2019-the-demographic-characteristics-of-candidates/>