

Notice is hereby given that an ordinary meeting of the Horowhenua District Council will be held on:

Date: Wednesday 25 June 2025
Time: 11:00 am
Meeting Room: Council Chambers
Venue: 126-148 Oxford St
Levin

Council

OPEN LATE AGENDA

MEMBERSHIP

Mayor
Deputy Mayor
Councillors

His Worship The Mayor Bernie Wanden
Councillor David Allan
Councillor Ross Brannigan
Councillor Sam Jennings
Councillor Paul Olsen
Councillor Clint Grimstone
Councillor Alan Young
Councillor Mike Barker
Councillor Rogan Boyle
Councillor Jonathan Procter
Councillor Nina Hori Te Pa
Councillor Justin Tamihana

Contact Telephone: 06 366 0999
Postal Address: Private Bag 4002, Levin 5540
Email: enquiries@horowhenua.govt.nz
Website: www.horowhenua.govt.nz

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www.horowhenua.govt.nz

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Horowhenua District Council Service Centre, 126 Oxford Street, Levin
Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom, Foxton,
Shannon Service Centre/Library, Plimmer Terrace, Shannon
and Te Takeretanga o Kura-hau-pō, Bath Street, Levin

Note: The reports contained within this agenda are for consideration and should not be construed as Council policy unless and until adopted. Should Members require further information relating to any reports, please contact the Chief Executive Officer or the Chairperson.

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File No.: 25/383

A.1 Supplementary Officer Advice

Author(s)	Monique Davidson Chief Executive Officer Tumuaki
Approved by	Monique Davidson Chief Executive Officer Tumuaki

PURPOSE | TE PŪTAKE

1. This purpose of this report is to provide additional advice to Council, following receipt of a Notice of Motion proposing the inclusion of non-binding community poll questions in the 2025 local body election. It outlines officers' analysis and highlights the potential implications and benefits of the proposal to support informed decision making by Council. This report acknowledges the summary of benefits provided by Councillor Jennings, and for completeness doesn't intend to repeat that but provide additional commentary for Councils consideration.

This matter does not relate to a current Council priority.

RECOMMENDATION | NGĀTAUNAKITANGA

- A. That Report 25/383 Supplementary Officer Advice be received and noted.

DISCUSSION | HE MATAPAKINGA

2. Officers acknowledge the intent of the Notice of Motion which seeks to gather indicative community feedback on a range of governance and representation related matters through the inclusion of non-binding community poll questions as part of the 2025 local body election.
3. Provided below is a high-level summary of the advantages and disadvantages of proceeding with a non-binding poll at the 2025 Elections.

Advantages

4. Engages the Community Early - Offers an opportunity to gather indicative public views ahead of the 2026 Representation Review.
5. Supports Democratic Participation - Encourages civic involvement and makes the election more relevant by involving voters in governance matters.
6. Informs Future Decision-Making - Provides a broad snapshot of community sentiment that can guide future policy and consultation priorities.
7. Cost-Effective Insight Gathering - Leverages the existing electoral process to collect feedback without needing a standalone engagement exercise.
8. Promotes Transparency and Trust - Demonstrates a proactive, open approach to decision-making and public involvement.

Disadvantages

9. Risk of Confusion and Misinterpretation - Voters may not clearly distinguish between binding and non-binding polls, affecting understanding and turnout.
10. Resource and Time Intensive - Requires significant staff time and effort for communications, preparation, and voter education.

11. Unfunded Financial Cost - No allocated budget; funding would require trade-offs in the 2025/26 Annual Plan.
12. No Legal Weight - Results are indicative only and cannot replace formal consultation under the Local Government Act.
13. Reputational Risk - Misaligned expectations or lack of follow-through could damage community trust in Council processes.
14. While this poll may provide a high-level indication of community sentiment on a range of governance and representation matters, officers advise Council to carefully consider the following key implications:

Resourcing and Organisational Impact

15. The inclusion of non-binding poll questions is not without operational and reputational risk. While the questions themselves are brief, officer time and resource would be required to ensure voters are well informed and able to meaningfully participate.
16. To uphold electoral integrity and avoid confusion, officers would need to develop clear, neutral, and accessible explanatory material to accompany the non binding poll. This will need to include neutral descriptions, background context, and a communication campaign to clarify the difference between the binding Māori ward poll and the proposed non-binding poll questions. This additional work will need to be undertaken as soon as possible as it is not currently programmed and would require reprioritisation of existing commitments.
17. The Pre Election report which has already been published, will require amendment. The Pre Election Report is a requirement under the Local Government Act, with the purpose of providing information to promote public discussion about the issues facing the local authority.

Voter Engagement

18. There is a genuine risk that voters could potentially misunderstand the status and implications of each poll, which could lead to disengagement, misinterpretation of Council's intent, or even a reduction in voter turnout.
19. The polls cumulative (Māori Ward Referendum and proposed community poll) may distract from the election itself and focus too much on these topics, rather than the candidates. Alternatively, the polls may encourage both candidates and voters to articulate more clearly policy positions on the polls, which may lead to more informed voting decisions.
20. Council should consider that there is potential for this initiative to create unrealistic voter expectations that as officers we unable to deliver on. The binding nature of the Māori ward referendum may be misinterpreted in contrast to the non-binding nature of the poll questions, particularly given both would appear on the same voting papers.
21. A comprehensive communications and engagement plan will be essential to mitigate the possible risks and provide clarity, ensuring that voters have access to information well in advance of receiving voting documents. Without clear messaging, there is a risk of damaging community trust and confidence in Council's decision-making processes.

Legal and Consultation Requirements

22. While the Local Electoral Act 2001 allows for non-binding polls, any decisions that may arise from these indicative results, including identification through the vote results on potential changes to ward boundaries, governance models, or voting systems - must still be progressed through formal consultation and statutory processes under the Local Government Act 2002.
23. Council will be required to undertake a full representation review in 2026, which involves consultation with the public, iwi, and affected communities. Officers caution that the inclusion of these poll questions must not be treated as a substitute for this statutory consultation process or be seen to pre determine outcomes. This process must incorporate formal

consultation on any proposed changes, including consideration of any indicative information gathered from the poll. In contrast though the poll results will form the basis for early insights on the democratic views of community, to inform Elected Members as they shape any approach to the legally required Representation Review.

Financial Implications

24. The indicative cost of \$25,000 and any cost associated to the non-binding poll will need to be met through internal reallocations within the 2025/26 Annual Plan. Officers note that there is no dedicated funding currently available for this initiative.
25. If Council proceeds, it must be clear that funding would require reprioritisation of existing projects or services. There is currently no unallocated budget line in the Annual Plan that can absorb this cost without trade offs elsewhere.
26. Officers suggest that if the systems improvement legislative changes currently before the House in July 2025 result in changes to the requirement to undertake Section 17A reviews, there may be opportunity to cease Section 17A review work and reallocate that budget to the non-binding poll. However, this is speculative and not guaranteed. Officers advice is that if this does not eventuate, the Chief Executive be given delegations to determine what other funding line this may be reallocated from.

Leveraging 2025 as Platform for Community Engagement

27. Beyond the implications Officers acknowledge the opportunities the poll presents to utilise the elections as an opportunity to gather broad community insights and preferences to inform an upcoming Representation Review and in doing so inform the transparency and engagement of that work. Officers encourage Elected Members to consider the advantages, disadvantages and additional considerations in the context of a wider question, what is it we are trying to achieve here, and do the benefits of that outweigh the risks.

Preliminary Advice from Electoral Provider

28. Officers have consulted with the electoral services provider, Electionz.com, regarding the proposed inclusion of a non-binding poll in the upcoming election. To ensure fairness and accessibility, and to provide voters with sufficient understanding of the poll questions, the following recommendations were made:
 - Amend the candidate handbook to include notice of the poll.
 - Include supporting or explanatory information within the candidate profile booklet.
29. While a full campaign is not required given the non-binding nature of the poll, it remains important that voters receive adequate context to understand each question. This can be achieved through explanatory materials distributed alongside the voting documents or engagement via other community channels.
30. In the 2022 election, the cost to count each additional poll question was approximately \$0.40 per vote. With five questions proposed and an estimated voter turnout of approximately 11,537 (based on the last election), this would amount to around \$4,615 per question. Including the voting count and design requirements, the total estimated cost would be approximately \$25,000. Electionz.com has advised that final costs are subject to confirmation once the exact number of questions is determined, and costs may vary if a larger number of questions are included. Additional expenses may also be incurred for the creation and setup of the voting file due to the volume of questions.
31. Key dates for consideration include:
 - One week required for additional vote document setup.
 - Final design work scheduled between 1 and 8 August.
 - Voting documents scheduled for printing on 8 August.

32. Given these timeframes, a Council resolution to proceed would need to be made at the 25 June Council meeting as early notification to Electionz.com is critical to allow completion of setup and file creation.

Summary

33. While the proposal is legally permissible and may offer value in terms of indicative community sentiment, officers reiterate that it will include considerable demand on officer time, organisational resources, and funding. Council is encouraged to weigh these considerations carefully before proceeding.
34. If Council chooses to progress, officers recommend the Chief Executive be given delegations to finalise content, messaging, and implementation in close consultation with Electionz.com ensuring electoral integrity, neutrality, and alignment with statutory requirements.

Confirmation of statutory compliance

In accordance with sections 76 – 79 of the Local Government Act 2002, this report is approved as:

- a. containing sufficient information about the options and their advantages and disadvantages, bearing in mind the significance of the decisions; and,
- b. is based on adequate knowledge about, and adequate consideration of, the views and preferences of affected and interested parties bearing in mind the significance of the decision.

ATTACHMENTS | NGĀ TĀPIRINGA KŌRERO

There are no appendices for this report