

Committee Secretariat

Justice and Electoral Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Re: Inquiry Into The 2016 Local Authority Elections

The Henderson-Massey Local Board submits:

Postal Voting System

1. This Board supports abolishing the postal voting system.
2. The 2016 elections were held in the wake of a significant downsizing of postal services in New Zealand. Post boxes were removed from various locations, and deliveries reduced in frequency as well. This made the act of voting even more difficult than usual.
3. For most, the idea of posting anything is becoming a foreign concept. Most residents would not know where the nearest post box is, and to expect a voter to post their vote is an unnecessary step that drives turnout down through the extra effort required.
4. An alternative system needs to be investigated further and designed carefully. This Board supports circulating the candidate information as before, with an online code available for online voting, but use a system of a polling day with polling booths and an early voting option. This would also bring local election voting in line with central government voting.

Electronic Submissions and Online Voting

5. The Board supports online voting, subject to a sufficient finding of security. While not a panacea for systemic voter engagement issues, we feel this will make a positive difference to voter turnout.
6. The Board also notes that online voting is as a preferred option for resolving the issue of overseas voters not being able to post their ballots back.
7. The Board supports electronic submission of candidate profile statements, as a more workable and modern solution that aids in avoiding mistakes from candidates and staff.

Candidate Information

8. This Board submits that requiring a candidate to indicate in the information book that they do not live in the Board area is unfair and supports removal of this requirement.
9. The statement described above creates a significant electoral distortion in favour of candidates that live inside the Board area. This distortion cannot be justified as local board areas are largely arbitrary and historical constructs, especially at the margins.

By-Election Issue

10. The Board considers the Howick by-election issue an egregious waste of ratepayer funds, and also negatively affects the dignity of the office of Board member in the perception of the public. Being an elected member of Auckland Council is a deep honour, and this incident is a reminder that this honour should not be treated lightly and that the residents of the board area should be treated with the utmost respect.
11. This Board would recommend legislative change to allow the next closest candidate to be appointed within 90 days.

District Health Board Elections

12. This Board supports a consistent voting system across every electoral position, and thus supports removal of the STV voting system for District Health Boards. The Board strongly submits that the DHB elections should be conducted with a First Past The Post voting system.
13. To promote geographic balance on the DHB, this Board supports an investigation into a ward system for Waitemata consisting of a West ward and North ward.
14. This Board does not support holding DHB elections in a separate year or with parliamentary elections.

Licensing Trust Elections

15. In line with this Board's support of one electoral system for simplicity and ease of use, the Board submits that Licensing Trust positions should be elected on a First Past The Post basis.
16. The Board submits that the requirement of a licensing trust candidate to live in that particular area for the entire term of service is an anachronism that does not reflect the modern housing situation. It is a unique quirk, not replicated in any other elected position in New Zealand, and thus should be removed.

Communications and Community Engagement

17. This Board has particular concerns with the “Love Bus” mobile voting engagement vehicle. We are concerned that concentrating the bus into specific areas creates a real risk of distorting the voting returns to favour candidates that tend to be more popular in an area.
18. Dealing with voter engagement from the organisational perspective is a sensitive issue. It is not enough that there is no bias, there must also be an avoidance of perception of bias at all cost. For this reason, the Board recommends the mobile bus not be used for future elections.
19. This Board is concerned that Auckland Council spent \$1.2 million on advertising and promoting the election, a mismanagement of ratepayer funds when there are more pressing issues. Further, the information online was difficult to access and many of our ratepayers do not access the internet regularly.

Other

20. The Board commends those that administrated the 2016 election, a high performing organisation that were strong in engagement and handled a complex process without significant organisational issues.
21. This Board supports randomisation of names on the ballot papers, as a fairer method to reduce primary and recency bias when voting.
22. The Board agrees with allowing matai titles on the ballot paper and candidate information.
23. The Board agrees with moving the voting period to avoid school holidays.

Summary

Local government is an incredibly important civic role, and the electoral system should reflect that importance. Our Board submits that the process of elections should mirror as close as possible the central government requirements and electoral process.

Yours sincerely,

Shane Henderson BA. LLB.
Chairperson

Henderson-Massey Local Board