ORDINARY MEETING

of

Council

AGENDA

Supplementary Report 7.5

Time: 9:30 am

Date: Wednesday, 10 December 2025

Venue: Waiata House, 27 Lincoln Road, Masterton

MEMBERSHIP

Mayor Bex Johnson (Chairperson)

Councillor Craig Bowyer
Councillor Gary Caffell
Councillor Waireka Collings
Councillor Jamie Falloon
Councillor Brent Goodwin
Councillor David Holmes
Councillor Stella Lennox
Councillor Tim Nelson

RECOMMENDATIONS IN REPORTS ARE NOT TO BE CONSTRUED AS COUNCIL POLICY UNTIL ADOPTED

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7 REPORTS FOR DECISION

7.5 MAYOR'S REPORT - INFORMATION REQUEST RELATING TO SIMPLIFYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

File Number:

Authoriser: **Bex Johnson, Mayor**

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council

1. **Receives** the Information Request Relating to Simplifying Local Government Report.
2. **Agrees** to write to the Local Government Commission and the Ministers for the Environment and Local Government to express our interest in amalgamation of councils in Wairarapa, and to seek further information on process and timelines as set out in the draft letters in Attachment 2.

PURPOSE

This report seeks Council agreement to write to the Government to express an interest in the amalgamation of councils in Wairarapa and to seek further information on process and timeline in light of the Government's draft proposals on Simplifying Local Government.

CONTEXT

Masterton District Council (MDC), Carterton District Council (CDC) and South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC) have previously been part of reorganisation proposals under the Local Government Act. In 2013, a proposal from the councils for a unitary authority for the three councils and a 2013 proposal from the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) for a unitary authority covering the Wellington region were initiated with the Local Government Commission (LGC). These led to a draft proposal from the LGC for a region-wide unitary authority which was not subsequently progressed due to a lack of support. In 2017, the LGC proposed amalgamation of the three Wairarapa district councils which the community opposed at poll. Further information is available on the LGC website.[1]

In October 2023, MDC and CDC Mayors met with the LGC to discuss the legislative process for amalgamation under the Local Government Act and the next steps the Councils need to consider. The minutes of that meeting are attached (**Attachment 1**). The discussion highlighted two paths towards any potential amalgamation; one path is council-led and the other is led by the LGC. The council-led process could take 1 to 3 years and would not require a reorganisation poll of the community. An LGC-led process is likely to take 1.5 to 2.5 years, and full consultation and a poll would be required.

On 25 November 2025, the Government released a discussion document *Simplifying Local Government: A draft proposal*[2] to consider local government institutional arrangements as part of reforms to the Resource Management Act 1991. The proposals seek to replace regional council

[1] 2017: Wellington Region reorganisation - Local Government Commission
[2] Simplifying-Local-Government-a-draft-proposal-November-2025.pdf

elected members with a Combined Territories Board (CTB) composed of the local mayors from each territorial authority, or mayors and additional commissioners, or commissioner-only boards. The CTB would take over the current regional council's roles and obligations and develop a Regional Reorganisation Plan for long-term future delivery. This includes considering options for sharing services, creating CCO's, combining councils and providing for community input into delivery. The plan would be consulted on and approved by the Minister of Local Government on advice from the LGC.

The Government is seeking feedback on the draft proposal by 20 February 2026 and intends to introduce legislation mid-2026, with enactment targeted in 2027.

ANALYSIS AND ADVICE

The policy announcement provides an opportunity for local Wairarapa councils to look again at amalgamation, ahead of, or as part of, the Government's proposals. Councillors indicated support at the Wairarapa Combined Council meeting on 26 November 2025, for writing to the Government to express our interest and to seek information on the process and timelines given the policy proposals are not yet implemented. Councillors were also interested in investigating sources of funding to support any amalgamation proposal. Draft letters to the LGC, and Ministers for the Environment and of Local Government are attached at **Attachment 2**.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

A summary of the options considered is included in the table below.

Option		Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Agree to write to the Government on amalgamation proposals	Enables the councils to consider if, and how best to progress amalgamation proposals. Does not commit the councils to any course of action. May attract funding from the Government.	None known
2	Do not agree to write to the Government on amalgamation proposals	None known	Opportunities for early engagement in the reorganisation process and potential funding may be lost.

RECOMMENDED OPTION

Option 1 is recommended.

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic, Policy and Legislative Implications

The legislative requirements for the reorganisation of local authorities are in Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act 2002. That provides that the purpose of those reorganisation provisions is to promote good local government by enabling and facilitating improvements to local governance.

The Government released its draft proposals for Simplifying Local Government to "make local government simpler, clearer and more cost-effective for New Zealanders".

Significance, Engagement and Consultation

The decision sought in this report is not a significant decision. Any decision in the future to proceed with amalgamation would be a significant decision under Council's Significance and Engagement Policy and consultation with the community would be undertaken. The Government's proposals include consultation with the community.

Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications relating to the decision in this report.

Implications for Māori

There are no implications for Māori for the decision sought in this report. It is envisaged that iwi would be involved in the development of any amalgamation proposal. The Government's proposals do not propose to undermine Treaty obligations or settlements and existing engagement arrangements and participation are proposed to continue.

Communications/Engagement Plan

There is no communication or engagement plan required in relation to the decision sought in this report.

Environmental/Climate Change Impact and Considerations

There are no environmental or climate change impacts or considerations in the decision sought in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

1. **Minutes of a Meeting with the Local Government Commission October 2023** ⇩
2. **Draft letters to the Local Government Commission and the Minister for Local Government** ⇩

Record of a meeting with Local Government Commission

Monday October 9 2023 at Carterton Events Centre commencing at 2pm

In attendance:

In-person: Brendan Duffy (Chair Local Government Commission), Penny Langley (CEO Local Government Commission), Courtney Hayward (Local Government Commission), Ron Mark (Mayor CDC), Dale Williams (Deputy Mayor CDC), Geoff Hamilton (CEO CDC), Gary Caffell (Mayor Masterton District Council), Craig Bowyer (Councillor MDC), Kym Fell (CEO MDC)

Carterton District Council

CDC outlined their desire to merge as they view the current model as unsustainable, and the Future for Local Government recommendations suggest a combined Wellington and Wairarapa Council will be the result of doing nothing;

Masterton District Council

MDC want to continue with the conversation regarding future options but want to ensure there is community support for any proposed merger or combination of Councils.

South Wairarapa District Council

SWDC have advised via Gary Caffell that SWDC wish to be part of the ongoing conversations with MDC and CDC and LGC;

Local Government Commission

Brendan Duffy talked through the two potential paths Councils can follow to merge or combine.

1) Council led process – likely to be able to meet 2025 Local Government Election timeframe. Needs to start with a resolution from all three Councils reflecting the exact same wording. Also needs a funding commitment to start the process. Needs someone to lead the work and requires public and mana whenua engagement at all steps of the process. LGC can advise but don't lead this work – Councils do. LGC will review the work and ensure public support for the proposal. LGC has limited options to refuse if all steps followed. No formal public vote / referendum required if all steps followed.

2) LGC led process – likely to take three years – so probability it will miss the 2025 Local Body elections. Slower process as LGC have to engage with everyone and anyone and look at all possible options. Funded by LGC, but potential for LGC recommendation which don't work for the Wairarapa (i.e. can result in failure – like last time)

LGC strongly recommended the two (or three) Councils start the process with formal Council resolutions of the same wording, along with a funding commitment – if that doesn't get over the line the potential for any merger or combination is slim indeed.

LGC made it clear they will only advise when asked. They will not lead the process, and will not get involved unless specifically asked a question.

Issue with all three Councils finding funding to support the Council led process – could be an initial investment of $100k each. LGC unable to help with this – maybe DIA can support the work or the new Local Government Minister?

Suggested next steps

Suggestion on the next steps is Councils pass formal resolutions to:

1) Investigate the formation of a Wairarapa Council, and

2) Form a Committee made up of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, one Councillor and the CEO of each Council to progress the work and regularly report back to Council, and

3) Require the Committee to appoint an Independent Chair to lead the investigation, and

4) Commit funding (to be agreed) towards the investigation.

The meeting closed: 3.45 pm

DRAFT – letter to Local Government Commission – Brendan Duffy

Re: Information required to enable Wairarapa Councils to consider possible future amalgamation

Dear Mr Duffy

We are collectively writing to you to express our interest in having future discussions on the potential amalgamation of the three Wairarapa District Councils.

At this point, we remain open to whether this would include Tararua to align with our water services entity (that decision would be made by Tararua) and/or be a unitary authority.

To enable each council to have a robust discussion at the council table and with our communities in the future, we require the following information from you as soon as possible.

1. The detailed process that we would need to follow from inception through to adoption if that is the outcome of consultation with our communities.
2. The timeline within which you envisage this could occur, both if we were to commence as soon as possible, but also if we were to consider waiting until the Government had fully formed its proposal for Regional Councils.
3. If the three Councils agreed to acting now rather than waiting for the outcome of the Regional Council proposal, we would be seeking financial support to enable that process to commence.

Any previous information that may exist from prior proposals would need to be updated and this would coincide with the significant work also underway to transition to the Government's flagship proposal for the delivery of water services. We are committed to a joint entity across Wairarapa for future water delivery.

The area encompassed by Wairarapa is large but with a small population that would struggle to support the resources required to work at speed on an amalgamation proposal.

As the Mayors of all three councils, we acknowledge that a discussion regarding amalgamation is necessary and our Iwi partners are supportive of such a discussion.

As with anything, the devil will be in the detail, and that is why we are seeking your assistance to enable as much data as possible to be available for us and the public.

We look forward to a positive response to our requests.

Yours sincerely

(Signatures)

Cc Minister for Local Government – Hon Simon Watts MP

Hon Simon Watts MP
Minister for Local Government
Parliament House
Wellington

Dear Minister

Enclosed is a letter we have sent to the Chair of the Local Government Commission regarding a potential work programme on amalgamation of the three Wairarapa territorial authorities.

You will see that we have requested information regarding process and timelines but have also asked for funding to assist with the work programme required to enable us to compile the information needed to make an initial decision and consult with our communities.

We acknowledge that the Government is currently consulting on a proposal regarding the future of regional councils, a proposal that is likely to trigger future amalgamations of territorial authorities and the formation of new unitary authorities. However, this process may take until the 2031 election and we are interested in examining whether is a case for us to act earlier than this.

Wairarapa is a very large rural area (approx. 842,300 ha) with a population of only 53,000 and approximately 27,169 rating units. Our council budgets are fully committed and we have significant financial challenges relating to water infrastructure and rural roads. We have agreed to form a regional water entity that will also include the Tararua District Council, but the water users are also our ratepayers which means costs will simply shift from rates to water charges.

We are not aware of any budget that the Local Government Commission may have for assisting us with this work but thought it important to let you know of our request and ask you to facilitate if possible so that we are able to begin the work programme in a timely way.

Yours sincerely

(signatures)

Cc Mr Brendan Duffy, Local Government Commission