

Follow-up Community Survey – Future of Local Government

Overview

This document highlights the key themes and insights gathered from the follow-up survey on the Future of Local Government for Masterton, following the release of modelling for both a Wairarapa Unitary Authority and a Wellington Unitary Authority.

Background

In May 2026, the Government announced a proposed change programme to simplify local government through amalgamation into unitary authorities. As part of this, the Government introduced the *Head Start* pathway, giving councils 12 weeks to develop and submit their own amalgamation proposals for consideration. The Government will make the final decision on any proposals received.

Councils that do not participate in the *Head Start* pathway will fall under the *Back Stop* pathway. Under this process, central government will determine what amalgamation will look like for those councils following the 2028 local government elections.

Alongside independent benchmarking and discussions with elected members, Masterton District Council invited the community to provide feedback on its priorities for the future of local government. This engagement was undertaken to better understand what matters most to the Masterton community.

Following the release of benchmarking assessments and modelling for both a Wairarapa Unitary Authority and a Wellington Unitary Authority, based on several assumptions including the maintenance of current levels of service and existing operating requirements, Council returned to the community for a six-day engagement period. The survey asked whether the benchmarking assessments had changed people's views on whether Masterton should pursue a Wairarapa option, a Wellington option, or instead follow the Back Stop pathway.

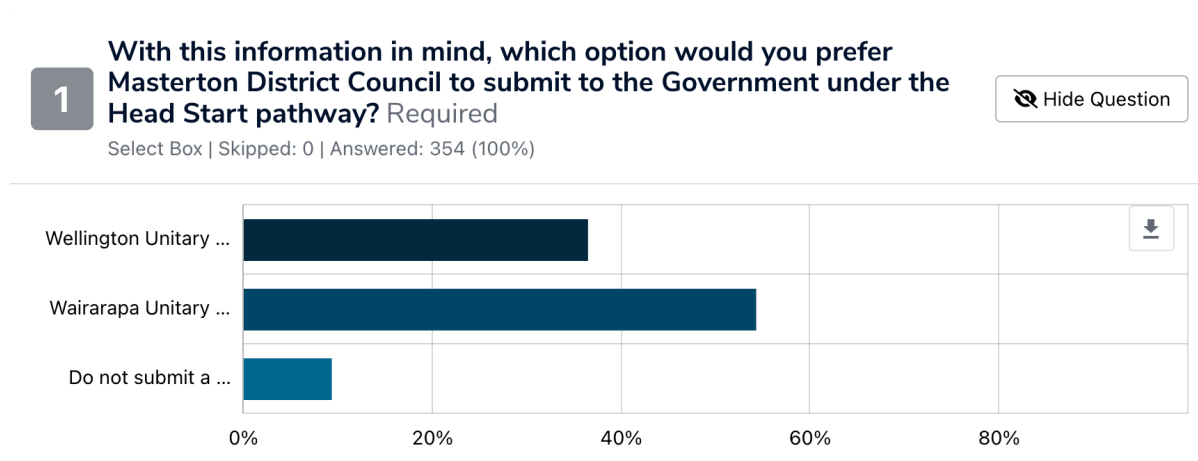
Results

Local representation remains a top priority, but there is growing interest in a wider option. The community was clear that maintaining a strong local voice is incredibly important, and a Wairarapa Unitary Authority remained the preferred option.

While the Wairarapa option continued to be the preferred model, compared with the first survey there was increased support for a Wellington-based model.

This is demonstrated by the following results:

- 54.2% supported a single Wairarapa authority with Carterton and South Wairarapa, down from 80.5% in the first survey.
- 36.4% supported a wider Wellington Unitary Authority, up from 11.5% in the first survey.
- The remaining 9.4% supported the Back Stop pathway, up slightly from 5.7% in the first survey.



The survey received 354 responses over the six days it was open. Question 3 originally asked respondents to indicate whether they were a Masterton resident. Following community feedback, the question was expanded to include Masterton ratepayers.

29 respondents (8.2%) indicated they were not Masterton residents or ratepayers. Of these, 12 identified themselves as non-residents before the question was amended. As this number would not have changed the overall preferred option under any scenario, these responses have been retained in the results.

The survey reinforces the community's strong preference for local decision-making and maintaining a local Wairarapa voice. However, the potential impacts on rates appear to have influenced some community members to consider a Wellington option from a cost perspective. Despite this shift, local representation remains a key priority.

Report

In total, 354 submissions were received from 310 submitters. Submitter numbers are based on unique accounts or devices. For example, if 10 submissions were made from a single device, this would count as 10 submissions but only one submitter. This difference is primarily attributable to paper-based submissions that were later entered online by council officers.

The purpose of this survey was to understand the priorities of Masterton residents and assess whether community sentiment had shifted following the release of the benchmarking reports.

A Wairarapa Unitary Authority remained the preferred option; however, there was increased support for a Wellington option following the release of the benchmarking assessments. There was also a small increase in support for the Back Stop pathway, although this remains the least favoured option. This suggests that the community would prefer Council to take a proactive approach through the *Head Start* process rather than rely on a government-led outcome.

As noted above, 29 respondents (8.2%) indicated they were not Masterton residents or ratepayers, with 12 of those respondents identifying themselves as non-residents prior to the amendment of the survey question. As this number would not have altered the overall preferred option under any scenario, these responses have been retained in the analysis.