

Representation reviews:

**Guidance for local authorities whose
2028 election may be affected by
Simplifying Local Government**

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Introduction

Representation reviews: what are they?

The Local Electoral Act 2001 (LEA 2001) requires all councils to review representation arrangements at least once every six years. Representation arrangements include the number of elected members on a council, the way they are elected, and (for regional councils and territorial authorities (TAs) who adopt a ward structure) the boundaries for each ward or constituency. For TAs this also covers whether there should be community boards, and the representation arrangements relating to community boards. For more information on representation reviews, see [LGNZ's guide to representation reviews](#).

This guidance is for councils where it is unclear whether elections in 2028 will happen

The Government recently put a [pause on Head Start decisions](#), but says that if re-elected they will continue with their Simplifying Local Government policy. This would affect the 2028 local elections in two ways:

- new unitary authorities created under Head Start would have elections for the first time
- remaining regional councils would not have elections.

LGNZ and councils have called on the Government to exempt councils going through reorganisation in advance of the 2028 elections from having to undertake representation reviews in 2027. No changes have yet been made or announced; however, the Government was aware of our concerns and may address them in future.

Potential options for councils affected by Head Start

There remains a legal requirement to do a representation review – and the future of Simplifying Local Government is unclear. Even if an incoming government confirms an intention to proceed with this policy, the legal obligation to undertake a representation review would still exist until changed by legislation.

Given this, there are two broad options for councils potentially affected by Head Start:

- progress with a normal representation review, or
- hold off certain aspects of the review till either after election results or potential Head Start decisions early in the next parliamentary term (with the final deadline for adoption of initial proposals being 31 July 2027, there is some flexibility about when councils undertake parts of their reviews).

When is the future of Head Start likely to be known?

At the points in time below, more information is likely to be available from central government so that a more-informed decision can take place. You could align key decision points on how to proceed with elements of representations reviews with these dates.

7 November	Preliminary general election results released
27 November	Official results for the 2026 General Election declared
TBC (probably December 2026)	New government arrangements finalised, with coalition/confidence and supply documents released and who is in Cabinet announced
TBC (probably early 2027)	Cabinet decisions on what to do with local government reorganisation

What would be a compliant representation review process for councils that have been told by the Government they will not be having elections in 2028?

If an incoming government confirms the intention that elections in 2028 will not happen for some councils, then those councils may want to consider reducing resources and time spent on a representation review.

The table below sets out the key stages of a representation review and LGNZ's recommended course of action to minimise cost and resource implications for councils if it is unlikely that they would have elections in 2028. The deadline for councils to make decisions on the electoral system and Māori wards and constituencies for 2028 has already passed (12 September 2026¹) and so we do not cover that in this table.

Please note, this table is not legal advice nor is it advice on good practice. Rather, it sets out our view as to how a compliant representation review could be carried out by councils unlikely to hold elections in 2028.

Step	LGNZ recommendations and/or relevant timeframes
Preliminary engagement In normal circumstances, it is advisable to do preliminary engagement with the community before the development of the initial proposal.	To reduce cost and avoid raising community expectations that the process will be extensive, councils may choose not to undertake preliminary engagement with communities. Depending on the Significance and Engagement Policy of the council, it is probably justifiable to not undertake any engagement before adopting an initial proposal if a council will not exist in its current form come 2028 local elections.
Draft representation proposal Officers prepare a draft representation proposal for consideration by the governing body (or committee).	It is recommended that officers test the advice provided for the previous representation review as a first step. If officers can provide sufficient evidence that existing arrangements remain appropriate and statutorily compliant, councils can decide to retain some or all of the current arrangements as part of a proportionate approach. The key things councils may need to consider are: • Whether changes are required as a result of the disestablishment of Māori wards or constituencies. • Whether communities of interest have changed since the last review. • For wards, constituencies or subdivisions that no longer comply with the +/-10% rule, whether an exemption is justified under s.19V(3) or whether boundaries need to be changed. • For wards, constituencies and subdivisions that were previously non-compliant, whether the reason for non-compliance is still valid.

¹ Please note that this 12 September deadline for Māori wards does not apply to Tauranga City Council which, due to having had a bespoke election in July 2024, has a different time frame and process for decisions on Māori wards.

Adoption of initial proposal After consideration of the draft representation proposal, the governing body must adopt an initial proposal by resolution.	The final deadline for the adoption of the initial proposal is 31 July 2027, but it can be done anytime from 20 December 2026 onwards. Councils may wish to wait until closer to the deadline in July 2027 before adopting an initial proposal given that the Government may have removed their legal requirement to do so by this point.
Public notice and consultation Within 14 days of passing the resolution, the public must be informed by way of public notice of the initial proposal and invited to submit on it.	Public notice must be given within 14 days of the initial proposal resolution but no later than 8 August 2027. Date for closing of submissions is at least one month after public notice is given. Submitters must be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard by the council (if that person so requests), but otherwise councils do not need to run community meetings or proactively seek submissions (other than publishing the public notice).
Final proposal Governing body considers submissions received, amends, if necessary, its initial proposal, and adopts a final proposal. It then issues a public notice of the right to appeal/object.	This must be completed within eight weeks of the closing date for submissions. The governing body must consider and respond to public submissions in its report. We recommend a clear communications strategy alongside limited but compliant public engagement to manage the number of submissions.
Appeals and objections Publicise, by public notice, the governing body's "final proposal" and set a deadline for appeals or objections.	The deadline for appeals and objections must be at least one month after public notice of the final proposal and not later than 3 December 2027. If the council has not made any changes between the initial and final proposal, then there is no ability to make objections (albeit submitters on the initial proposal can still appeal).
Referral to Local Government Commission Forward any appeals and objections received.	Councils need to forward any appeals and objections, and any proposals with wards, constituencies or subdivisions that do not comply with the +/-10% rule, to the Local Government Commission by 20 December 2027. LGC considers final proposals and makes determinations by 10 April 2028.

More information

Local Government Commission: [Representation Review guidelines 2026](#) and [other resources](#)
[LGNZ's guide to representation reviews](#)