



eXplore PARLIAMENT



What are the links between Parliament and local government?

Do you have a park, library, or swimming pool in your community? Do you get clean water when you turn on the tap? Is your rubbish collected every week? Does your community have sealed roads, paved footpaths, and street lighting? If so, you can thank your local district council, city council, or regional council!

In New Zealand, we have two levels of government. The first is central government ("the Government"). It has the job of running the whole country and is located in Wellington. The second is local government. Local government is made up of the councils (district, city, and regional) and boards that serve communities. The public votes every three years to choose their representatives for local councils and boards. Voting for local government can be done by post or in person at a polling booth. If people live in one area and pay rates in another, they can vote in both areas.

Local government responsibilities are delegated (or given) by Parliament. There is even a government Minister responsible for local government. Local government makes and carries out decisions on behalf of communities. It maintains local infrastructure (such as roads and drainage) and provides public services (such as libraries and rubbish collection). Parliament provides the law around how local government operates.



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What is local government?

Elected councils and boards (“local bodies”) manage specific areas or regions of New Zealand.

- Regional councils usually manage large areas or regions.
- District councils and city councils manage districts, towns, and cities.
- Community boards are part of district and city councils. They represent smaller geographic areas and carry out specific jobs.
- Health boards manage government-funded health services for regions.

What does local government do?

Local government is responsible for making sure that communities have the services they need, places for relaxation and enjoyment, public transport, and safe roads. Council and board members also try to solve local issues (for example, roading problems and water shortages).

Each layer of local government has its own responsibilities.

Regional councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage natural resources such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – rivers and lakes (including flood control) – coastal areas and regional parks – environmental resources (including air and water quality) • Manage pest control and biosecurity • Deal with pollution and contaminated waterways • Manage public transport and bulk water supply.
District and city councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage local services such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – roads – water supply, sewerage, stormwater, and waste collection and disposal – libraries, parks and reserves, and recreation services • Manage local rules.
Community boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report community concerns to the council • Make sure that the council’s services are working well • Investigate community issues for the council.
Health boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage services for sick, injured, and disabled people in their regions using tax money provided by central government.

HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

In 1846, New Zealand was divided into two provinces called New Munster and New Ulster (named after two Irish provinces). The South Island and lower half of the North Island to the mouth of the Patea River became New Munster; the rest of the North Island became New Ulster. After just seven years, these provinces were abolished and replaced with the six historic provinces of Otago, Canterbury, Nelson, Wellington, New Plymouth (Taranaki), and Auckland. Over the next eight years, Southland, West Coast, Marlborough, and Hawke’s Bay also became separate provinces. In 1876, provinces were abolished as a form of government.

DID YOU KNOW ?

Every person who owns land or property regularly pays his or her city or district council a sum of money called “rates”. Money from rates is used to pay for household services such as rubbish disposal, sewage disposal, and water supply, as well as public facilities such as libraries, parks, and swimming pools, and infrastructure such as roads and street lighting.

Central and local government – what is similar and what is different, and how are they connected?

Central government decides how tax money will be used to benefit the country – local bodies decide how money from rates and from central government will be used to benefit their communities. There can be interaction between the two levels of government. Sometimes MPs bring local issues in their electorates to the attention of central government and sometimes central government provides help to a city or region. Local government can ask central government for help if it feels that a problem is too big to handle locally.

When it comes to law, central government makes laws for the whole country – local government makes “by-laws”. By-laws are rules that apply only to a particular town, city, or region. They may say where

dogs can be walked, where people can camp, where people can build houses or factories, where people can drink alcohol, and what the speed limit will be. People can be fined or face other consequences for breaking such rules, but by-laws do not have the same force as the laws made by central government. Central government can sometimes make laws on behalf of local government, but these must be put forward by an MP.

Both local and central government must work within the law, just as everyone else must do. This table summarises some of the key similarities and differences between the two levels of government.

	Central government	Local government
Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General elections every three years • MMP voting system • People vote for representatives • Voting in person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local body elections every three years • Each council chooses its voting system • People vote for representatives • Postal voting.
Raising funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes are collected from workers and businesses, and through GST. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates are collected from land and property owners and businesses.
Spending public funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationwide areas of responsibility such as health, education, justice, social security and welfare, police, transport, railways, and major highways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local areas of responsibility such as water supply, sewerage, stormwater, rubbish collection and disposal, parks, reserves, environmental care, libraries, pools, and local roads.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable to the people of New Zealand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable to local communities.
Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliament makes laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils make rules called by-laws.
Working with Māori	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Crown has obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi to Māori. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local governments consult Māori and actively seek their participation in decision-making.
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly budgets and estimates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual plans and long-term (10-year) plans.

Discussion and activities



1. Complete the statements

Work in pairs or small groups to complete the following statements. The information you need can be found in the card.

1. *The first level of government is central government, the second level is ...*
2. *As well as managing services, councils are required to ...*
3. *District and city councils make rules called ...*
4. *People vote for local governments every ...*
5. *Rubbish disposal, parks, pools, and libraries are funded through ...*
6. *Management of regional rivers and lakes is provided by ...*
7. *New Munster was the name given to ...*
8. *Parliament delegates responsibilities to ...*
9. *Local government makes decisions on behalf of ...*
10. *Health boards manage funds and provide services for ...*

2. Organise and group

Copy this grid into your books.

City councils	Central government	Community boards	Regional councils

All the words and phrases below relate to central or local government activities. Discuss their meanings with your group or partner. Group the words under the four headings. Some words will belong under more than one heading.

rates, GST, community concerns, actively encourage participation, education, environmental management, sewerage, Crown obligations, report on community needs, coastal management, postal voting, by-laws, accountable to the community, accountable to the nation, working with Māori

3. Try this

Work with a group or a partner to brainstorm and list at least 20 services and facilities (for example, school, phone, roads, doctor, skateboard park) that you use in your community. Create two columns alongside your list. In the first column, describe who uses the service or facility. In the second column, state whether it is provided by local government, central government, or a private organisation or business (you may need to do some research to find out).

PUBLISHED BY



PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE
Te Ratonga Whare Pāremata

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ISBN: 978 0 7903 4838 4