

# Guide to Getting Vocal in your Local

## Updated February 2024



We don't **all** have the time or ability to stand up for our communities and represent the views of the people. But perhaps we can help in other ways.

### Let technology work for you

- Set a Google alert on your device to update you on any news relating to your local council. (NB: you'll need a Google account: <https://www.google.co.nz/alerts>)
- Follow your council's social media or YouTube channels.

### How does your council work?

It's not hard to work out the nuts and bolts of council rules and regulations... it just takes a bit of time. Why not get together as a group to work through your council's website?

- Use **search engines**: just ask the question and sift through the results for the answers. Stick to official national or local government websites which should be displaying accurate and up-to-date information.
- Basic information can easily be discovered online, or by phoning direct:
  - When and where does the council or community board meet?
  - How do you submit feedback or make a deputation (talk directly to council members)?
  - Make sure you use up all your allotted time; either with more of your information, or by sharing the slot with someone else.
  - The requirements around how long you can talk.
- Look to understand how your council fulfils its obligations which are to look after the economic, environmental, social, and cultural wellbeing of the community.
- Which CCOs (council-controlled organisations) are involved in the running of your council? And for what purpose?

## **Your council's schedule**

Another fun task as a group—or for someone who wants to be involved but for some reason is less active or able—is to keep updated on the council's schedule. Both council websites and local newspapers publicise meetings, workshops, and events at least 5 days ahead of time.

## **You've got a group of willing council action-takers? Now set up a 'ratepayers roster'.**

A ratepayers\* roster is a group of people who take turns to be present at council meetings. Why?

- Have a presence in the room (make sure councillors remember they're working for you!)
- Take notes on the meeting to share with others.
- Keep updated on upcoming projects or decisions.
- Get the opportunity to talk to council or community board members after the business concludes.
- Council meetings can be long... a roster allows you to be present in shifts if necessary.

*\* Roster members don't have to be ratepayers!*

## **Your council should be transparent**

There's been a widespread move in recent times to close off or deter the general public from viewing council meetings. However, this is in stark contrast **to the Chief Ombudsman's ruling in October 2023\*** which stated that all sessions should be open to the public by default—only unless a good reason exists to close them. Some councils run 'workshops' which are not open to the public, however the minutes of these sessions should be made available afterwards. If you have any difficulty getting the council documents you're entitled to see, use the **LGOIMA<sup>^</sup> (Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act) request process.**

\* <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/news/chief-ombudsman-calls-council-workshops-be-open-default>

<sup>^</sup> <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/lgoima-local-government-agencies-guide-processing-requests-and-conducting-meetings>

### **Do some research on advisory panels**

Councils and community boards are incredibly overworked. As a result:

- Much work on due diligence is now done through advisory boards.
- These advisory panels can easily be stacked with vested interest representatives, rather than Mr or Ms Jo Public.
- Rates-funded NGOs (non governmental organisations) can push agendas through the advisory mechanism, so it appears that more of the community want what they want than is perhaps the case.
- Big consulting firms often have a disproportionate voice also. Which ones are involved in or working for your council?
- Highlighting conflicts of interest can be an effective way to challenge this paradigm, as can making enquiries about how the community can be more accurately represented on each panel.

### **Don't discount the local body space**

Many of us are well-versed in national politics, but we may be overlooking what's in our backyard. Local body politics are where many of the critical decisions that affect our everyday lives are made. We have been sadly disconnected from this vital truth. And most importantly, local politics is much easier for us to influence compared to national politics.

*Thank you for all your efforts to reconnect and represent!*

“It does not take a majority to prevail... but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men.”

- Samuel Adams