

Report No.	19-110
<b>Decision Required</b>	

## PRE-ELECTION PERIOD COMMUNICATION STRATEGY - COUNCILLOR PROFILES

### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide a brief preliminary outline of the timetable for the 2019 Triennial Local Body Elections, note the advice from the Office of the Controller and Auditor General about communications in a pre-election period and, having regard to that advice, recommend a Pre-Election Communications Strategy, with regard to councillor profiles for Horizons Regional Council in the run up to the 2019 elections.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 19-110 and Annexes.
- b. receives the preliminary timetable for the required procedures for the elections (refer Annex A);
- c. approves Horizons Regional Council's "Pre-Election Communications Strategy" through the pre-election period from 12 July 2019 to 12 October 2019 (refer Annex C); and
- d. receives the relevant sections attached from the *Good Practice for Managing Public Communications by Local Authorities* document produced by the Controller and Auditor-General's Office and agrees that Horizons' communication staff follow these guidelines to make decisions in the pre-election period (refer Annex D).

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 3.1. There is no financial impact.

### 4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1. The community will be widely informed about the 2019 local body elections through national and regional publicity campaigns encouraging people to enrol on the electoral roll, and reminding electors to vote in these elections.

### 5. SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS RISK IMPACT

- 5.1. There is no significant business risk associated with this strategy.

### 6. COMMENT

- 6.1. The local body elections will be held on Saturday, 12 October 2019. The process of preparing for the elections has now commenced.
- 6.2. A timetable for the election processes is set out in Annex A. The Group Manager Corporate and Governance remains as the Electoral Officer for the 2019 election. The Electoral Officer has appointed Kay Booth (Governance Advisor) as the Deputy Electoral Officer who will act as electoral officer if the current electoral officer "resigns, is dismissed

from office or becomes incapable of acting” (section 13 LEA 2001). A schedule of provisions applying to the electoral officer is provided at Annex B.

- 6.3. The Electoral Officer has considered what should be done in terms of publicising the fact of the elections, the role of Horizons, and candidate information. Because of the widespread geography of the Region it was not deemed practical to have meetings for prospective candidates on the role of councillors and Horizons Regional Council. However, the electoral officers for the territorial authorities (TAs) within the Region, have agreed to include this information on behalf of Horizons, when they hold meetings for potential candidates. Any requests for information about standing for Horizons will be handled by the Electoral Officer on a case by case basis, and an overall publicity programme is outlined at Annex C.
- 6.4. The TAs are responsible for maintenance of the ratepayer and residential electoral rolls and they attend to updating, publicly notifying roll qualification and procedures, and publicly notifying when rolls are available for inspection. The TAs prepare and despatch voting papers on behalf of Horizons. They also count the votes at close of polling on 12 October with provisional results being advised to this Council as they become available following close of polling. Public notification of the final results as to who has been elected to Horizons Regional Council will be made by the Electoral Officer as soon as is practicable.

## 7. CANDIDATE INFORMATION PACKS

- 7.1. At each election the Council produces a Candidate Information Pack (CIP). This year’s CIP will be issued to all persons intending to stand as candidates for election to Horizons when they apply for their nomination form. The CIP will also be available at Candidate Information meetings held by TAs, on the Horizons’ website, at Horizons’ Service Centres, and from local authorities within Horizons’ Region. The CIPs are designed to better inform any potential candidate with the necessary information about Horizons and the election process.

## 8. COMMUNICATION IN A PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

- 8.1. The Controller and Auditor-General’s office has produced the *Good Practice Guide for Managing Public Communications by Local Authorities (2004)*. They say it represents “what we believe is a code of good practice”.
- 8.2. The pre-election period of three months for the 2019 local body elections, will cover the period from 12 July to 12 October 2019.
- 8.3. The relevant sections of the Good Practice Guide relating to the pre-election period (Principles 12 and 13) are outlined at Annex D. The full document can be viewed at [www.oag.govt.nz](http://www.oag.govt.nz). These principles include:
  - 8.3.1. Promoting the re-election prospects of a sitting member, directly or indirectly, wittingly or unwittingly, is not part of the proper role of Council.
  - 8.3.2. A Council would be directly promoting a Member’s re-election prospects if it allowed the member to use Council communications facilities (such as stationery, postage, internet, e-mail, or telephones) explicitly for campaign purposes. A local authority must not promote, nor be perceived to promote, the re-election prospects of members in a local authority-funded publication;
  - 8.3.3. A local authority should exercise care in the use of its resources for communications that are presented in such a way that they raise, or could have the effect of raising, a Member’s personal profile in the community; and
  - 8.3.4. A local authority’s communications policy should recognise the risk that communications about members, in their capacities as spokespersons for Council, during a pre-election

period could result in the Member achieving an electoral advantage at ratepayers' expense.

- 8.4. Mass communications planned for the period include news releases, editorials, rates notice, advertising (newspaper, radio and social media), Horizons' website, and the legislated public notices. There will also be a national advertising programme in addition to that undertaken at a regional level.
- 8.5. Section 4.52 of Annex D states that "Routine Council business must continue... Council leaders and spokespersons need to continue to communicate matters of Council business to the public". Their guidelines go on to recommend in 4.54 that, "even if the Council's communications policy does not vest the power to authorise Council communications solely in management at normal times, it should do so exclusively during the pre-election period".
- 8.6 The Horizons website gives details of current elected members and will remain as current information during the election period. Other information currently available on the website will be retained.

## 9. SIGNIFICANCE

- 9.1. This is not a significant decision according to the Council's Policy on Significance and Engagement.

Craig Grant  
**ELECTORAL OFFICER**

Kay Booth  
**DEPUTY ELECTORAL OFFICER**

## ANNEXES

- A 2019 Election Timetable
- B Electoral Officer Provisions Pre-Election
- C Overview of Elections Communications Strategy
- D Communications in Pre-election period - Controller & Auditor-General's Office