

Report No.	25-90
Decision Required	

PRE-ELECTION PERIOD COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide a brief preliminary outline of the timetable for the 2025 Triennial Local Body Elections, note the advice from Taituarā 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 2025 elections.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

- a. receives the information contained in Report No. 25-90 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 11 July 2025 to 11 October 2025 (refer Annex C); and
- d. receives the relevant section attached from the Taituarā Code of Good Practice for the Management of Local Authority Elections and Polls (Communications in the pre-election period) document 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 2025 local body elections through national and regional publicity campaigns encouraging people to stand for council, 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. CLIMATE IMPACT STATEMENT

- 6.1. As this item deals with administrative matters, there is no direct climate impact statement.

7. COMMENT

- 7.1. The local body elections will be held on Saturday, 11 October 2025. The process of preparing for the elections has now commenced.

- 7.2. A timetable for the election processes is set out in Annex A. At the 25 March 2025 Council meeting (report 25-33), Horizons Regional Council appointed Warwick Lampp from Electionz.com as Electoral Officer for local council elections. This is in line with Section 12(1), 12(2) and 12(3) of the Local Electoral Act 2001. Horizons Regional Council Deputy Electoral Officer 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.
- 7.3. 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. It is intended that an electoral official from Horizons will also attend these meetings to answer any specific questions that may be asked. 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.
- 7.4. Following on from Council’s decision in May 2021 and the subsequent Representation Review completed in April 2022, Horizons Regional Council established two Māori constituencies: Raki Māori and Tonga Māori. These two Māori constituencies were part of the 2022 local body elections.
- 7.5. On 30 July 2024 the Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori wards/constituencies) was repealed which meant that Councils that had established Maori constituencies since 2021 had until 06 September 2024, to either:
- affirm the 2021 decision to establish Maori wards/constituencies and hold a binding poll at the 2025 elections, or
 - reverse their Maori wards/constituencies, with no requirement for a poll at the 2025 elections.
- 7.6. At the 27 August 2024 Council meeting, council resolved to affirm Maori constituencies for the 2025 election.
- 7.7. A referendum will take place along the 2025 local body elections on the future of these constituencies.
- 7.8. Advertising regarding the referendum has been included in the communications strategy (Annex C) and will include advertising on iwi and Māori radio stations. Staff will also work to communicate with tangata whenua via established relationships (e.g. iwi policy team). All advertising material prepared will be reviewed to ensure there is no undue influence favouring a specific party, candidate or binding poll outcome.
- 7.9. The TAs are responsible for maintenance of the ratepayer and residential electoral rolls and they also update and publicly notify roll qualification and procedures, and publicly notify 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 11 October 2025 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.
- 8. CANDIDATE INFORMATION PACKS**
- 8.1. At each election the Council produces a Candidate Information Pack (CIP) which consists of an Election Handbook and Nomination form. This year’s CIP will be issued to all persons intending to stand as candidates for election to Horizons. 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.

9. COMMUNICATION IN A PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

- 9.1. The pre-election period of three months for the 2025 local body elections, will cover the period from 11 July to 11 October 2025.
- 9.2. The relevant section of the Taituarā Code of Good Practice for the Management of Local Authority Elections and Polls relating to Communications in the pre-election period is attached at Annex D. These principles include:
 - 9.2.1. The operation of local authorities continues during the pre-election period. Elected members continue to have the right to govern and make decisions during the pre-election period.
 - 9.2.2. During the pre-election period, communities have the same legitimate need for information about their local authority's decisions and activities as at any other time; and
 - 9.2.3. Local authorities must not promote, or be perceived to promote, the prospects of any candidate, especially a sitting member. Using council resources for re-election of sitting members is unacceptable and potentially unlawful.
- 9.3. 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.
- 9.4. Mass communications planned for the period include news releases, advertising (newspaper, radio, bus backs, digital and social media), and Horizons' website. There will also be a national advertising programme in addition to that undertaken at a regional level.
- 9.5. 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.

10. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Cara Hesselin
ELECTORAL OFFICIAL

ANNEXES

- A 2025 Election Timetable
- B Electoral Officer Provisions - Local Electoral Act 2001
- C 2025 Communications Elections Strategy
- D Taituarā Communications In The Pre-Election Period