



Stakeholder Forum: Let's Talk Reorganisation

1 July 2026

Activity 1: What must be kept local no matter what?

Summary:

Across all tables, there was remarkable consistency in what participants valued most. The strongest themes centred on retaining local decision-making, ensuring communities continue to have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them, protecting Lower Hutt's unique identity and diverse communities, and maintaining local control over community facilities, assets and funding. Participants also highlighted the importance of visible and accountable local representation, strong partnerships with mana whenua, equitable access to services, and ensuring any future governance arrangements strengthen, not weaken, the ability for communities to shape their own future.

Key themes:

- **Local decision-making and autonomy** – Decisions should be made as close to communities as possible, with genuine local influence over priorities, funding and services.
- **Strong local voice and representation** – Communities want elected members and decision-makers who are visible, accessible and accountable, with meaningful opportunities for local voices to shape outcomes.
- **Identity and sense of place** – Participants valued Lower Hutt's unique identity, heritage, culture, diversity and connection to place, and wanted these protected.
- **Community assets and services** – Libraries, pools, parks, hubs, sports facilities, community centres and local services were repeatedly identified as assets that should remain locally governed and accessible.
- **Community funding and local investment** – There was strong support for funding decisions being made locally, with investment benefiting local communities and retaining economic value within the Hutt.
- **Partnerships with mana whenua and diverse communities** – Participants highlighted the importance of honouring Te Tiriti relationships, strengthening partnerships with mana whenua, and ensuring all communities are represented.
- **Accountability and accessibility** – Local governance was seen as important for transparency, responsiveness and ensuring people know who to approach when issues arise.

- **Planning for thriving communities** – Participants wanted governance arrangements that support vibrant local economies, community wellbeing, environmental stewardship and long-term resilience.

Activity 2: What would success look like?

Summary:

Across the activity, participants did not simply describe success as a larger or smaller council. Instead, they consistently described success as achieving better outcomes for communities: retaining a strong local voice while collaborating regionally where it delivers better infrastructure, services and value. The overarching aspiration was for governance arrangements that are locally informed, regionally coordinated, financially sustainable, and focused on improving quality of life for all communities.

Key themes:

- **Strong local voice and decision-making** – The strongest theme was the desire to retain local decision-making and ensure communities continue to influence decisions that affect them. Participants consistently wanted local identity, local autonomy and local priorities to remain central, even if services are delivered more regionally. There was strong support for community-led planning, local boards or representation, citizen assemblies, and meaningful opportunities for local people to shape decisions.
- **Communities that are connected, engaged and heard** – Many groups described success as communities feeling connected, represented and involved. This included stronger community participation, better engagement, people feeling listened to, active neighbourhoods, thriving community hubs, stronger community networks, and greater trust between councils and communities.
- **A clear regional approach where it makes sense** – Participants recognised there are benefits to regional collaboration, particularly for strategic planning, infrastructure and major services. Many supported regional planning, shared long-term plans, coordinated infrastructure investment, regional resilience, and consistent approaches across the Wellington region, provided local needs continue to inform decisions.
- **Reliable infrastructure and essential services** – A recurring aspiration was investment in well-maintained, future-focused infrastructure. Participants highlighted water infrastructure, transport, roads, housing, digital infrastructure, emergency preparedness, community facilities and climate resilience. Many wanted infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose, reliable, accessible and planned for long-term growth.

- **Housing, affordability and cost of living** – Affordable housing featured strongly throughout the discussions. Participants also linked success with warm, dry, healthy homes, affordable living, living wages, lower rates, better funding models and reducing financial barriers to accessing services and facilities.
- **Accessible and equitable services** – There was strong emphasis on ensuring services are available to everyone, regardless of where they live. Participants highlighted equitable funding, accessible community facilities, public transport, health care, social housing, disability access, services for young people, Māori representation, and ensuring all communities receive the support they need.
- **Better transport and regional connectivity** – Transport appeared on almost every worksheet. Participants wanted integrated public transport, safer roads, improved walking and cycling infrastructure, better regional connections, transport options for everyone, and systems that are reliable, affordable and designed around community needs.
- **Stronger governance and simpler systems** – Many participants described success as having clearer governance, less bureaucracy, more accountability and faster decision-making. This included streamlined organisations, clearer roles and responsibilities, stronger partnerships between councils, and more efficient delivery of services without losing local influence.
- **Economic resilience and opportunity** – Participants wanted thriving local economies supported by innovation, employment opportunities, business growth and investment. Several groups saw Lower Hutt becoming a regional leader in areas such as technology and innovation while maintaining vibrant local centres and neighbourhoods.
- **Identity, belonging and culture** – A strong sense of place emerged across many discussions. Participants wanted local identities retained, suburb and village character protected, Māori representation and partnerships strengthened, local history recognised, and communities where people feel a genuine sense of belonging.
- **Health, wellbeing and social outcomes** – Success was frequently described in terms of improved quality of life. This included better health services, mental health support, reduced homelessness and poverty, stronger community wellbeing, safer communities, nutritious school lunches, community programmes, and environments where people of all ages can thrive.
- **Environmental sustainability and resilience** – Participants consistently linked success with sustainability. Themes included climate resilience, carbon reduction, renewable energy, flood resilience, protecting green spaces, environmental preparedness, and planning that supports future generations.

Activity 3: What do you want to tell the Mayor and Councillors?

Summary:

Across the activity, participants consistently asked elected members to lead with courage, transparency and integrity. The strongest message was not necessarily opposition or support for a particular governance model, but a request that Council remain firmly focused on protecting local communities, maintaining meaningful local representation, communicating openly, and advocating strongly for Lower Hutt's interests throughout any future change process.

Key themes:

- **Protect local voice, identity and representation** – The dominant message was that any future changes must preserve Lower Hutt's identity, local voice and ability to influence decisions. Participants wanted Lower Hutt to remain well represented, with proportional decision-making that protects smaller communities and ensures local priorities are not overshadowed by larger centres.
- **Keep communities at the centre of decision-making** – There was a strong expectation that people—not structures—remain the focus. Participants repeatedly emphasised listening to communities, actively engaging with marginalised groups, keeping Mana Whenua at the table, considering vulnerable people, and ensuring decisions reflect what communities want rather than simply what central government expects.
- **Be open, honest and communicate often** – Transparency emerged as one of the strongest recurring themes. Participants wanted regular communication throughout the process, honest conversations about costs and trade-offs, clear explanations of decisions, and ongoing feedback loops that demonstrate community input has been heard and acted on.
- **Retain local decision-making and autonomy** – Many participants expressed concern about increasing centralisation. They advocated for local decision-making, devolved powers, local financial autonomy, and retaining the ability for communities to influence local priorities. Several comments called for decisions to be made at the lowest practical level and for Council to retain strong local control wherever possible.
- **Be strong advocates with central government** – Participants encouraged elected members to take a confident leadership role with central government. This included pushing back where necessary, protecting local interests, advocating for better funding arrangements, securing policy stability, and ensuring local government has sufficient resources to deliver on expectations.
- **Prioritise fairness, equity and inclusion** – There was a strong expectation that future arrangements should be equitable across communities. Comments

highlighted fair funding allocation, equal representation, inclusion of Māori and Pacific voices, Te Tiriti as a foundation for decision-making, and ensuring vulnerable and underrepresented communities have meaningful opportunities to influence outcomes.

- **Focus on outcomes rather than structures** – Rather than debating organisational models, participants consistently encouraged Council to concentrate on achieving better outcomes for communities. Suggestions included putting outcomes ahead of governance structures, investing in local infrastructure, protecting essential services, living within financial means, and ensuring any change delivers tangible benefits for residents.
- **Plan carefully for the future** – Participants wanted any change to be well planned, evidence-based and financially sustainable. They called for clear implementation plans, transparent modelling, long-term funding certainty, spatial planning, learning from other regions, and avoiding rushed decisions or commitments before adequate consultation.
- **Preserve the character of Lower Hutt** – Many responses reflected pride in Lower Hutt and a desire to retain what makes it unique. Participants spoke about protecting the city's history, whakapapa, culture, sense of belonging, community relationships and distinct identity regardless of any future governance arrangements.