

Shaping Taranaki's Future

Summary of survey findings

Background

1. The Shaping Taranaki's Future survey aimed to gather an initial indication of what matters to our community when it comes to local governance and decision making. The findings of this survey will help to inform any Head Start proposal as well as the longer-term Future Local Government (FLG) programme.
2. The short values-based survey combined qualitative and quantitative questions. It did not ask people to choose between potential models, as that work was still in its early stages and there was not enough detail available for respondents to make well-informed decisions.
3. **Over the two weeks from 15 to 28 June 2026, 532 survey responses were received**, along with a written submission. Responses were generally well-considered and thoughtful, with clear themes emerging.
4. Community engagement in this phase was limited due to the time constraints of the Head Start process. This limitation has been acknowledged by the Department of Internal Affairs, which has indicated it is looking for councils and mayors to provide leadership for outline proposals.
5. Further detailed engagement with the public, iwi, hapū and Māori partners, staff and stakeholders will be a key part of the next phase of work and planning is underway to ensure we engage with, listen to and understand the views of all parts of our community. This will take place prior to March 2027.

Survey format and distribution

6. A page entitled '[Shaping Taranaki's Future](#)' was set up on the NPDC Have Your Say site. Along with an overview of the Simplifying Local Government and Head Start processes, FAQs and key dates, it hosted an online survey from 15 to 28 June 2026. During the survey period the page had 2,138 views from 1,639 visitors. This page will remain live and be regularly updated with project milestones and future engagement opportunities.
7. Printed copies of the survey were also available at the Civic Centre and NPDC service centres. No hard copy surveys were returned.
8. The survey was also promoted as follows:
 - NPDC Facebook posts on 15 and 23 June (boosted).
 - TRC Facebook posts 16 and 24 June.
 - TRC Instagram post 16 June, TRC Linked In post 24 June.
 - NPDC email to 1,400 stakeholders.
 - TRC email to 10,400 stakeholders and residents.



- Media releases from [NPDC](#) and [TRC](#) on websites, picked up by various news and social media outlets, e.g. <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/361023764/npdc-latest-taranaki-council-ask-feedback-future-amalgamations>
- Digital billboard on Vivian St and bus stops around New Plymouth
- Ad in Taranaki Daily News, 24 June
- Shared by various other people and groups on social media.
- TRC also set up a Simplifying Local Government [project page](#), with links to all district council surveys.

Interpreting the survey findings

9. The findings in this report provide valuable insight into the views of those who chose to participate in the survey. While the survey attracted a meaningful number of responses, it is acknowledged the demographic profile of respondents may not fully reflect the wider New Plymouth population. As a result, the findings should be considered as a useful indicator of community views alongside other sources of information.

Executive summary

10. The survey produced thoughtful feedback on local government reform, representation, regional priorities and Taranaki's future, with strong consistency in the issues and outcomes respondents care about.
11. A clear message was that reform must deliver better community outcomes, not just structural change. Respondents see reform as an opportunity to create greater efficiency, streamline council services across the region and reduce duplication through stronger regional coordination and shared services. They also want to see more prudent use of public money and more coordinated planning and infrastructure.
12. The main concern was the potential loss of local representation and community voice, particularly for smaller towns and rural communities. While there is general support for streamlining and/or amalgamating governance bodies in some way, it was consistently expressed that this must not be at the detriment of towns and areas outside of New Plymouth.
13. A strong local voice was described as fair representation, meaningful consultation, accessible decision-makers and visible influence on outcomes.
14. Key priorities for any future governance model were:
 - Financial sustainability and affordability
 - Strong local representation and democratic accountability
 - Focus on essential infrastructure
 - Long-term planning and investment
 - Economic growth and employment
 - Transparent decision-making
 - Environmental protection
 - Accessible local government services

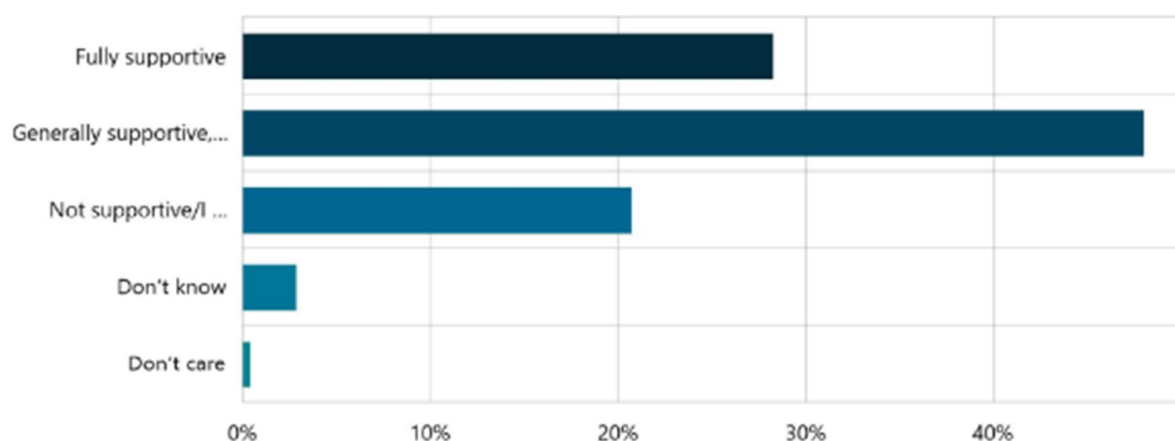


15. Respondents also emphasised rates, affordability, value for money, environmental stewardship, resilience, retention of specialist expertise and regulatory capability. Trust and confidence were recurring themes, with calls for better communication, transparency, accountability and meaningful consultation.
16. Many wanted clearer information on how any future model would work, how communities would be represented and how transition risks would be managed.
17. Overall, while views differed on structure (from those that expressed a preference), there was broad agreement that any future model must retain strong local representation while providing the leadership, coordination and long-term planning needed to support Taranaki's prosperity and resilience.

Survey findings

Question 1: How do you feel about the idea of change to local government in Taranaki?

18. There was general openness to change with 76% of respondents either fully or generally supportive. However, 21% (110) of respondents said they were not supportive or had concerns. Just under 3% (15 people) didn't know while two people didn't care.



Question 2: When thinking about local government change, what do you think is the biggest opportunity for Taranaki?

19. The biggest perceived opportunity is the potential to improve efficiency and reduce costs, particularly by removing duplication across councils and streamlining administrative functions. Many support some form of consolidation or shared services to lower rates, simplify systems and focus spending on core infrastructure and services.
20. Linked to this is a strong desire for greater regional coordination, with many seeing value in a more unified approach that enables consistent planning, clearer decision-making and a stronger collective voice when engaging with central government.



21. Alongside this, respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining local representation and community voice, highlighting a key tension between regional efficiency and local responsiveness. Other opportunities included improving service delivery and consistency, strengthening long-term infrastructure planning and supporting economic development across the region.
22. The overall feedback indicates that people see the greatest opportunity in creating a more cohesive, efficient and strategically aligned local government system that better serves the needs of all Taranaki communities.

Top three themes

Cost savings and efficiency

23. Reducing duplication across multiple councils, streamlining “back office” functions, cutting management layers and bureaucracy, lowering rates, controlling spending, and achieving economies of scale through amalgamation.

“Streamline services, cut beauracy (sic) and reduce costs.”

“Reducing duplication, pooling resources and expertise for the betterment of all Taranaki.”

“Focus on core services and stop wasteful spending.”

Greater regional coordination/one unified council

24. “One voice for Taranaki”, regional planning for infrastructure, transport, water and development and better alignment and collaboration. Some also saw it as an opportunity to have a stronger collective voice when dealing with central government.

“One region, one council.”

“A single voice to negotiate with central government.”

“Stop councils working in silos.”

Improved service delivery, consistency and simplicity

25. Opportunities identified include improving how councils work for people and businesses. Consistent rules across the region, simplified processes (especially consenting), faster decision-making and less red tape and a “one-stop shop” for council services.

“One set of rules across Taranaki.”

“Ensuring that similar activities - e.g. drinking water management, rubbish collection, building consents - can be delivered more efficiently through a single system.”

“Make it easier to live and do business.”

Other themes

- Desire to retain local decision-making and community voice, including support for community boards or sub-regional representation.



- Calls for better leadership, transparency and accountability. Concerns about wasteful spending and “vanity projects” and desire to focus on core services.
- Collaboration and shared resources.
- Economic development and a region-wide economic strategy.
- Infrastructure and long-term integrated planning.
- Community, inclusion, and iwi engagement. Note this was less dominant than financial/efficiency themes.
- There were also some mixed or negative views who said “No opportunity” or “Don’t support change”.

Question 3: When thinking about local government change in Taranaki, what is your biggest concern?

26. The most significant concern raised was the potential loss of local voice and representation, particularly for smaller towns, rural communities and minority groups. Many fear a centralised structure dominated by New Plymouth could marginalise local perspectives, reduce community influence and erode the identities of other parts of Taranaki.
27. Closely related to this is concern about the centralisation of power, with respondents highlighting the risk that a larger governing body may be harder to hold accountable and less responsive to local needs.
28. There is also strong scepticism about whether reform will deliver its intended benefits, with many respondents worried about increased costs, larger bureaucracy and limited efficiency gains. Additional concerns include the potential loss of regional council expertise and environmental oversight, uneven distribution of funding across the region, job losses and the risk that the process is being rushed without adequate thought and consultation.
29. Overall, while some see potential benefits in reform the feedback highlights a need to address concerns around representation, accountability and delivery to maintain public trust and confidence.

Top three themes

Loss of local voice, representation and identity

30. Concerns include smaller towns being overlooked, New Plymouth dominating decision-making, loss of direct access to decision-making, erosion of local identity and community-specific needs.

“Local voices could be lost if decision-making becomes too centralised.”

“Smaller communities will be swallowed up.”

“Everything becomes ruled by New Plymouth.”

Centralisation of power and reduced accountability

31. Many respondents fear reform could reduce democratic influence, even if it improves structure. Concerns include one large entity becoming harder to hold accountable, decisions moving further



away from communities, loss of checks and balances between councils, influence shifting to unelected officials and greater control from central government.

"Centralisation of power without matching accountability."

"Decisions made further from communities."

Costs, inefficiency and risk of "bigger bureaucracy"

32. There is scepticism based on past reforms (e.g. Auckland), with many doubting the financial benefits of reform. Concerns include high transition costs, risk of larger, more complex bureaucracy, doubt that savings will materialise, potential for duplicated services to persist and rising rates instead of reductions.

"It will cost millions and little will change."

"We'll end up with a bigger bureaucracy."

"Rates will continue to rise."

Other notable themes

- Risk to smaller communities and concern about an urban v rural divide
- Loss or weakening of regional council functions
- Process concerns (rushed, poorly planned, insufficient consultation)
- Governance quality and decision-making
- Potential loss of jobs, expertise and institutional knowledge
- Some were concerned iwi voices may be reduced and others were concerned about iwi influence increasing
- Service quality and disruption risk during transition
- General scepticism or opposition to change

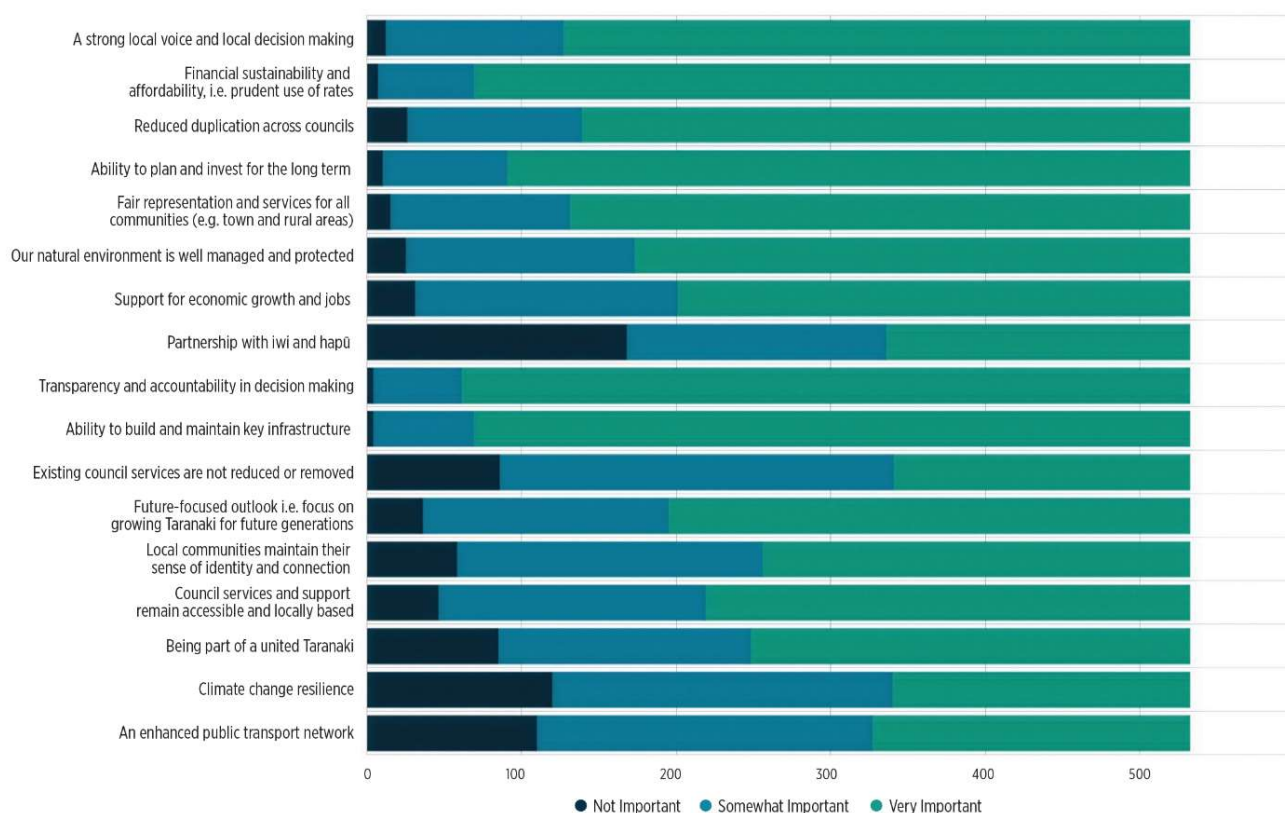
Question 4: When thinking about local government change in Taranaki, how important are the following outcomes? (Very important, somewhat important, not important)

33. The highest-rated outcomes were transparency and accountability in decision making (471 respondents rated this as very important), financial sustainability and affordability (463), and the ability to build and maintain key infrastructure (463), closely followed by the ability to plan and invest for the long term (441).
34. Outcomes related to local decision-making, fair representation, and reducing duplication across councils also received strong support, with more than 390 respondents rating each as very important.
35. In contrast, views were more mixed on partnership with iwi and hapū, climate change resilience and enhanced public transport, which recorded lower levels of "very important" responses and higher proportions of "somewhat important" or "not important" responses.



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See **Appendix A** for results ordered by importance.

Question 5: Is there any other important outcome we have missed?

36. Most respondents said no or reiterated themes captured elsewhere in the survey. From those that did complete this question, there were several clear themes:
- Accountability, transparency, and community influence
 - Affordability, rates restraint and value for money
 - Focus on core services and infrastructure
37. Other notable themes included improving transport connectivity, strengthening democratic participation and representation, building governance capability, ensuring equitable outcomes across the region and maintaining a long-term focus on environmental resilience and community wellbeing, including housing and services for older residents and those with disabilities.

Question 6: What does “a strong local voice” in local government look like to you?

38. The most common theme was that all communities are fairly represented and have genuine influence over decisions that affect them. This includes ensuring smaller towns and rural areas are not overshadowed by larger centres (i.e. New Plymouth) and that representation structures reflect the region’s diversity.



39. A strong emphasis was placed on meaningful engagement, with consultation that results in visible changes to decisions and priorities. Democratic accountability and transparency were seen as essential, with open processes and clear communication in decision-making.
40. Overall, a strong local voice is understood as both inclusive and participatory, where local knowledge is valued and communities are actively involved.

Top three themes

Genuine representation of all communities

41. Fair and meaningful representation for all parts of the community, not just the largest or loudest. Representation for rural, urban and smaller communities, avoiding dominance by larger centres, ensuring diverse groups are included and ward-based systems or community boards to ensure balance.

"Making sure that all voices, especially small communities are heard and ideas listened too."

"People from Opunake have as much say as people from Bell Block."

"Voices at the rural/village/town/city & regional level."

"Enhanced community boards with delegation and resources where appropriate."

Listening, engagement and real influence

42. Genuine engagement where community input influences decisions. People are not just heard but they have an impact. Councils listen and act on feedback, consultation is not pre-determined, there are numerous opportunities for input and communities see their views reflected in outcomes.

"Listening to public opinion and feedback on proposals and not ignoring it and carrying on anyway."

"A strong local voice means communities have genuine influence over decisions that affect them. Local boards or community councils should have meaningful powers rather than being purely advisory. Māori representation must be protected and strengthened. Public consultation should be accessible, transparent, and occur before major decisions are made. Working people, community organisations, and rural communities should all have opportunities to participate in decision-making."

"Things happen with us, not to us."

"The ability to vote on important issues, independent of elections."

Democratic accountability and transparency

43. Another theme was the importance of clear, democratic decision-making structures that are accountable to residents. Many respondents linked having a strong voice directly to trust in democratic systems. Common ideas included decisions being made by elected representatives (not unelected), "one person, one vote" principles, open and transparent processes (e.g. all meetings open to public) and accountability for decisions and spending.

"Democracy through voting and accountability."

"Only elected representatives making decisions."

"Democratically elected decision makers, no closed door meetings, no secret votes, no unelected votes. All council meetings open to public and ideally live streamed."



Other themes

- Local decision-making by people who understand the area
- Strong national advocacy for Taranaki
- Support for community boards and local structures
- Inclusion and diversity of voices
- Good leadership and capability
- Not driven by “loudest voices” or special interests
- Preference for balanced, evidence-based decisions
- A unified regional voice

Question 7: Thinking in general terms, what do you see as the biggest issues and opportunities facing Taranaki right now?

44. The most significant trend is concern about Taranaki’s economic transition, particularly the decline of the oil and gas sector and the need to replace lost jobs, skills and investment with new industries such as renewable energy, technology and tourism.
45. This is closely linked to persistent concerns about transport and connectivity, with unreliable access (especially via State Highway 3) seen as a critical constraint on economic growth, resilience and the region’s attractiveness.
46. At the same time, respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining and investing in core infrastructure highlighting ageing assets, rising rates and the need to prioritise essential services over discretionary spending. Supporting themes include the need to retain young people, improve governance coordination, diversify the economy and balance environmental sustainability with growth.
47. Overall, feedback reflects a region at a turning point, with significant risks tied to economic change but equally strong opportunities if infrastructure, connectivity and strategic direction are addressed effectively.

Top three trends

Economic transition and decline of oil and gas sector

48. This theme dominates responses and is clearly seen as the central challenge shaping Taranaki’s future.

“Decline of the oil and gas sector is a big economic issue and we need to vigorously seek a replacement.”

“The biggest issue is the rapidly falling gas reserves and the loss of jobs from the closure of industrial plants and companies from a significant sector of the local economy.”

“With the decline in oil and gas the NPDC needs to support initiatives to grow sectors that will retain local skills.”

Transport, connectivity and regional isolation



49. Transport is consistently framed as a make-or-break enabler for growth, resilience and liveability. Key issues mentioned are the ongoing unreliability of SH3 (particularly Awakino Gorge), frequent road closures and limited alternative transport and perception of Taranaki as isolated or cut off. Opportunities mentioned include investment in resilient roading solutions, reinstating or expanding rail services and improving public transport.

"SH3 is not just a road; it is a critical economic link."

"Taranaki's resilience is currently threatened by our heavy reliance on the existing highly vulnerable roading networks, specifically the fragility of Awakino Gorge and northern outlet routes. These failings frequently compromise our supply chains and connectivity."

Infrastructure quality, cost pressures and investment priorities

50. This reflects a strong expectation that councils should prioritise core services and financial sustainability. Respondents highlighted ageing infrastructure (water, wastewater, roading, stormwater), deferred maintenance and long-term asset risks, rising rates and cost-of-living pressure on households and perceived spending on "nice-to-haves" rather than essentials.

"Focus on the important stuff like sewage and other infrastructure."

"Focus on must haves in infrastructure and not the nice to have. Ensure basics are maintained - i.e. roading."

Notable trends

- Jobs, workforce retention and youth opportunities
- Need for economic diversification and growth strategy
- Desire for a clear long-term economic plan
- Calls for stronger, more cohesive leadership
- Environment, climate change and sustainability
- Regional identity, liveability and attractiveness
- Housing affordability and cost of living
- Population stagnation and ageing
- Regulation, red tape and business environment
- Tourism and natural asset potential

Question 8: Is there anything you would like to add?

51. The final comments mainly reinforce themes already identified throughout the survey, as well as unrelated issues. The most distinctive **new** insights relate to the process of reform itself, including concerns that change is being rushed, uncertainty about what a future governance model would look like, and the risk of losing technical expertise and institutional knowledge during any transition.

"I don't think NPDC should be pushing for a headstart without having the other two councils on board first. There is a potential for long-term damage to be done to the relationship if they insist on pushing ahead. I don't deny that a single unitary authority makes the most sense but it is important to listen and respond to

the concerns of rural areas in order to stand any chance of success.”
“Much less haste is needed if combining councils is to achieve better results.”

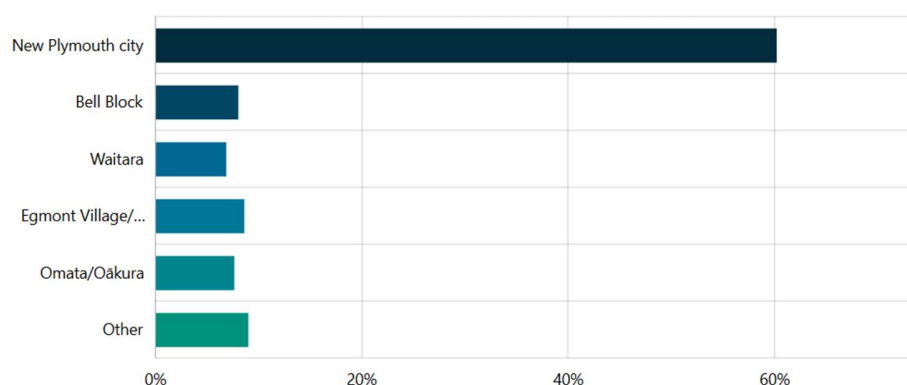
52. The largest category of relevant comments related to a preferred future governance structure, e.g. one council v multiple councils, unitary authority models, the future of the regional council etc.

Governance structure

53. This survey did not specifically ask for respondents’ preferred future governance model, however many shared their views across the open field questions – either explicitly or implicitly. Governance comments were heavily weighted toward some form of amalgamation, unitary authority or single Taranaki-wide council, often justified by reduced duplication, lower administration costs and a stronger regional voice. A smaller but still notable group preferred retaining multiple councils, strengthening local representation or removing only the regional council while keeping district councils. Only two respondents advocated extending governance beyond current Taranaki boundaries, referencing Waitomo, Ruapehu and/or Whanganui. See **Appendix B** for sample comments.
54. The above should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. Analysis of preferences was derived from open-text comments rather than a direct survey question, meaning some respondents may have had a view but did not mention it. Respondents were also commenting before detailed models had been developed and implications understood.

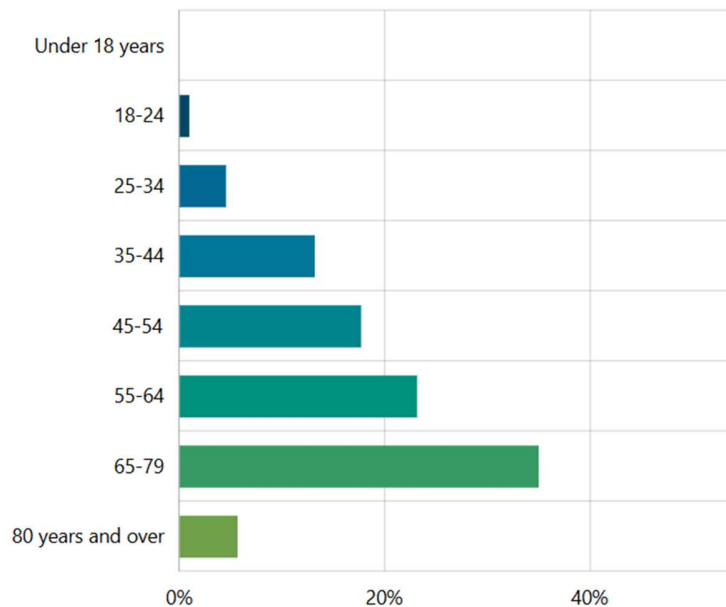
Demographic insights

55. More than 97% (518) of the 532 respondents live in the New Plymouth district, with nine respondents from South Taranaki and five from Stratford. Of those in New Plymouth, 60% live in New Plymouth city, with the remainder split quite evenly across the rest of the district.

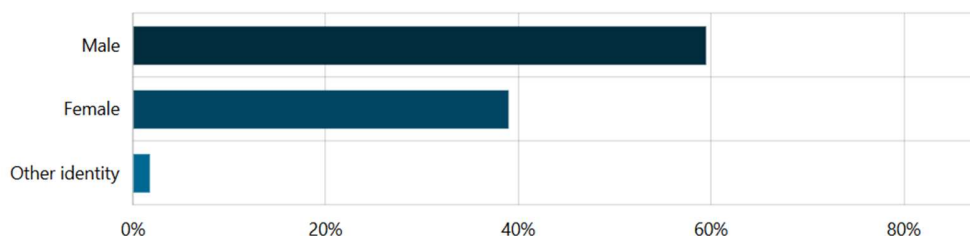


56. The survey sample was weighted towards older residents, with respondents aged 65 and over accounting for 40% of all submissions. Engaging meaningfully with younger residents will be an

important focus of the next phase of engagement, to address that imbalance and understand the views of all sectors of our community.



57. Finally, males accounted for almost 60% (316) of respondents, with 207 females and nine other identities.



58. A question on ethnicity did not appear in the survey due to an error. Future engagement will focus on reaching as diverse a range of residents as possible and this information will be recorded and reported on.

Appendices

Appendix A

Question 4: When thinking about local government change in Taranaki, how important are the following outcomes? (ordered by 'Very Important')



Category	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Transparency and accountability in decision making	471	57	4
Financial sustainability and affordability, i.e. prudent use of rates	463	62	7
Ability to build and maintain key infrastructure	463	65	4
Ability to plan and invest for the long term	441	81	10
A strong voice and local decision making	405	115	12
Fair representation and services for all communities (e.g. town and rural areas)	401	116	15
Reduced duplication across councils	393	113	26
Our natural environment is well managed and protected	359	148	25
Future-focused outlook i.e. focus on growing Taranaki for future generations	337	159	36
Support for economic growth and jobs	331	170	31
Council services and support remain accessible and locally based	313	173	46
Being part of a united Taranaki	284	163	85
Local communities maintain their sense of identity and connection	276	198	58
An enhanced public transport network	205	217	110
Partnership with iwi and hapū	196	168	168
Climate change resilience	192	220	120
Existing council services are not reduced or removed	191	255	86

Appendix B

Expressed preference: Single council/unitary

ID	Comment
9317	"Consolidate systems and create a stronger, single council." Later: "A single regional council, supported by democratically elected people..." and "A single council provides the planning and funding base to support this better than multiple fragmented council units."



9308	"By amalgamating the four councils into one unit we should get efficiencies of the system of local government." Later: "One authority covering the whole province."
9296	"The biggest opportunity is to amalgamate into one unit..." Later: "A unified province under strong Taranaki leadership..."
9261	"One council for the whole region to ensure efficiencies are gained and there is less parochial issues." Later: "Local as all of Taranaki speaking as one not urban vs rural vs north vs south."
9248	"To create 1 super council that covers the whole province, creating cost synergies and process efficiencies." Later: "Personally I think amalgamation is long overdue..."
9238	"Full amalgamation of all four councils to create consistency in plan rules, and create efficiencies in management functions, reduce running costs, and reduce rates."
9227	"One council. Share processes with other authorities... Too small a population to support 4 councils."
9219	"One District Council Taranaki wide..." and later "One Council, one Mayor and rationalization is the best way..."
9211	"One unified council for all of taranaki." Later: "Taranaki speaking as one."
9209	"The biggest opportunity is combining district council and regional council functions into a single unitary authority..." Later: "I don't deny that a single unitary authority makes the most sense..."
9191	"To have a unitary authority, one council for the whole of Taranaki."
9182	"To amalgamate to one central organization to look after the whole of Taranaki." Later: "I see amalgamation as a positive move forward."
9265	"Consider amalgamating the 3 district councils into the TRC. It is already a unitary body that serves the region..."
9255	"Designing a unified, locally led governance model that cuts bureaucratic duplication while fiercely protecting sub-regional community voices."
9177	"Making a council to cover all Taranaki..." followed by a detailed proposal for councillors, wards, community boards and iwi representation.
9176	"Group made up from all of Taranaki but minimum representation required..."



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9257	Supports one council response to regional issues but stresses that TRC expertise and functions must be retained.
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Expressed preference: Multiple councils

ID	Comment
9322	"The Taranaki area must be separated into a rural and a City authority..." "A single authority will have New Plymouth city making decisions for the rural areas..."
9241	"No loss of local councils. TRC merge into the three local councils but don't merge the three councils. Three mayors across the region."
9254	"No merging of councils."
9249	"After seeing what happened with Aucklands amalgamation no good... No amalgamation. Ever."
9174	"Local councils looking after their own districts."
9180	"All three existing councils having an equal say." "NPDC trying to take over the rest of Taranaki."
9234	"I think it makes sense to abolish the regional council to do away with duplication. Not so sure about amalgamation of district councils..."
9260	"There is no opportunity for anyone by merging councils. It didn't work for Auckland..."

Expressed preferences: Beyond current Taranaki boundaries

ID	Comment
9322	"There is opportunity to look further than existing arbitrary boundaries to areas like Waitomo and Ruapehu..."
9197	"The opportunity to go bigger and consider a larger council such as with Waitomo, Ruapehu and Whanganui as well."