



Local Government Commission

Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe

Determination

on a decision of the Timaru District Council to adopt representation arrangements for the local authority elections to be held on 11 October 2025

Introduction

1. All territorial authorities are required under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 to review their representation arrangements at least every six years.
2. The matters for this determination by the Local Government Commission (the Commission) are limited to the Timaru District Council's decision to retain the boundaries of the Geraldine Ward with its current membership of one member, despite not complying with section 19V(2) of the Act (the '+/-10% rule').

Commission's determination¹

3. Under section 19V(6) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the Commission upholds the decision of Timaru District Council not to comply with section 19V(2) in respect of the Geraldine Ward, as compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing communities of interest between wards, being the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island communities from the Geraldine community, with which they share strong perceptual and functional connections.
4. Accordingly, for at least the triennial general election of the Timaru District Council to be held on 11 October 2025, the following representation arrangements will apply:

¹ Plans referred to in this determination that are preceded by LGC are deposited with the Local Government Commission; plans preceded by SO are deposited with Land Information New Zealand

- a. Timaru District, as delineated on Plan LG-064-2013-W-1 will be divided into wards and will be represented by a Council comprising the mayor and nine councillors elected as follows:

Ward	Councillors	Plan delineating area
Geraldine Ward	1	SO 19948
Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward	2	LG-064-2013-W-2
Timaru Ward	6	SO 19947

- b. There will be three communities with community boards:

Community/ Community Board	Area	Members*	Appointed members
Geraldine Community, comprising the area of the Geraldine Ward	As delineated on Plan SO 19948	6	1, representing the Geraldine Ward
Pleasant-Point Community, comprising part of the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward	The area comprising the former Pleasant Point Ward, as delineated on former Plan SO 19946	5	2, representing the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward
Temuka Community, comprising part of the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward	The area comprising the former Temuka Ward, as delineated on former Plan SO 19949	5	2, representing the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward

*number of members elected by the electors of each community

5. The ratio of population to elected members for each ward will be:

Wards	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Geraldine	6,240	1	6,240	799	+14.68
Pleasant Point-Temuka	9,930	2	4,965	-476	-8.75
Timaru	32,800	6	5,467	26	+0.47
Total	48,970	9	5,441		

*Based on Stats NZ Tauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

6. The community boards will not be subdivided for electoral purposes. The population they each represent will be:

Communities	Population*	Number of members^	Population per member
Geraldine Community	6,240	6	1,040
Pleasant Point Community	3,170	5	634
Temuka Community	6,760	5	1,352

*Based on Stats NZ Tauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

^Not including appointed members

7. As required by section 19T(b) of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the boundaries of the above wards coincide with the boundaries of current statistical meshblock areas determined by Statistics New Zealand and used for Parliamentary electoral purposes.

Background

8. Under sections 19H and 19J of the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) territorial authority representation reviews are to determine the number of councillors to be elected, the basis of election for councillors and, if this includes wards, the boundaries and names of those wards. Reviews also include whether there are to be community boards and, if so, arrangements for those boards. Representation arrangements are to be determined so as to provide fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.
9. Timaru District Council (the Council) last reviewed its representation arrangements prior to the 2019 local authority elections. Accordingly, it was required to undertake a review prior to the next elections in October 2025.

Current representation arrangements

10. The Council's representation arrangements have been relatively stable for some time. Timaru District has always been divided into wards; being four wards from 1992 until the 2007 representation review when the Pleasant Point and Temuka wards were amalgamated into a single ward, resulting in the current three-ward model. The Commission last made a determination in relation to the Council's representation arrangements in 2013, in which it upheld the same three-ward model but reduced the number of elected members to nine members plus the mayor.
11. The council's last representation review ahead of the 2019 local elections confirmed the current arrangements, which are:
 - a. A council comprising the mayor elected at large and nine councillors elected from three wards:
 - Geraldine Ward electing 1 councillor

- Pleasant-Point-Temuka Ward electing 2 councillors
 - Timaru Ward electing 6 councillors
- b. Sixteen members elected to three community boards:
- Geraldine community – 6 elected members plus 1 appointed member, being the Geraldine Ward councillor
 - Pleasant Point community – 5 elected members plus 2 appointed members, being the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward councillors
 - Temuka community - 5 elected members plus 2 appointed members, being the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward councillors

Current review

Preliminary considerations

12. The Council held three workshops in August and November 2023 and March 2024 to consider options for its representation review:
- The first workshop acknowledged that uneven population growth since the previous 2019 review had resulted in the current Geraldine Ward becoming under-represented as against the Pleasant Point-Temuka and Timaru Wards, such that the Geraldine Ward no longer complied with the +/-10% rule
 - The second workshop presented initial options for consideration to address the non-compliance of the Geraldine Ward, primarily by adjusting the boundary between the Geraldine and Pleasant Point-Temuka Wards around the Orari area
 - The third workshop presented further options for consideration, including models with different numbers of elected members, further options for minor boundary changes and 'blue-sky' options for different ward models, such as an urban/rural ward split.
13. At the March 2024 workshop, three options were identified by the Council for further consideration as potential initial representation proposals:
- A 'status quo' option, noting that the Geraldine Ward did not comply with the +/-10% rule and a determination from the Commission would be required should this option be confirmed
 - A 'modified status quo' option, retaining the same three ward structure, but moving the Orari, Kakahu and Rangitata Island areas from the Geraldine Ward to the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward to achieve compliance with the +/-10% rule
 - A two-ward system, with the district divided into north and south wards, following the Opihi River as the proposed ward boundary.

14. A workshop was also held with the three community boards in late 2023, and the community boards provided feedback to the Council on the three options ahead of its meeting to resolve an initial representation proposal.
15. The Council did not undertake preliminary engagement with the wider community ahead of the representation review.

The Council's initial proposal

16. On 7 May 2024 the Council resolved as its initial representation proposal the 'modified status quo' option for a council comprising the mayor and nine members elected from three wards, with an adjusted boundary that shifted the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas from the Geraldine Ward into the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward. The proposal retained the Geraldine, Pleasant Point and Temuka communities and community boards, with their current boundaries and membership.
17. The initial proposed ward arrangements were as follows:

Wards	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Geraldine	5,580	1	5,580	150	+2.76
Pleasant Point-Temuka	10,570	2	5,285	-145	-2.67
Timaru	32,720	6	5,453	23	+0.43
Total	48,870	9	5,430		

*Based on Stats NZ Tauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

18. The proposed community board arrangements were as follows:

Community Board	Area	Members *	Appointed members
Geraldine Community Board	Geraldine Ward	6	1, representing the Geraldine Ward
Pleasant Point Community Board	The former Pleasant Point Ward, as delineated on former Plan SO 19946	5	2, representing the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward
Temuka Community Board	The former Temuka Ward, as delineated on former Plan SO 19949	5	2, representing the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward

Submissions

19. The Council notified its initial representation proposal on 23 May 2024 and it was advertised on the Council's website and in local newspapers. In addition, the Council targeted a letter-drop to properties that would move from the Geraldine Ward to the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward under the proposal. A drop-in session was also arranged by the Geraldine Ward councillor.
20. The Council received 48 submissions by the deadline date of 7 July 2024. Three submissions supported the Council's initial proposal and 45 submissions did not support the proposal. Two submissions also attached petitions:
 - One submission attached two petitions, one signed by 105 individuals requesting that Orari 'remain with the status quo' and a second signed by 55 individuals stating that the signatories 'object to being moved to the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward'
 - One submission included a petition signed by 18 individuals, stating that 'the residents of Kakahu wish to oppose the proposal'.
21. Sixteen of the petition signatories also made individual submissions, resulting in a total of 210 individuals or organisations providing feedback either via direct submission or by signing one of the petitions.
22. In addition, one submission was unable to be considered as it was outside of the scope of the representation review.
23. Key themes in the submissions were:
 - a. There was a strong sense of perceptual connection between residents of the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas with the Geraldine community, with a number of submitters emphasising the strong historical ties these areas had with Geraldine. Many submitters noted that they were 'part of Geraldine' and did not feel an affinity either with Pleasant Point or Temuka. A common aspect of many submissions was that submitters noted they never went either to Pleasant Point or Temuka, other than to pass through these communities as they travelled into Timaru.
 - b. There were also strong functional connections between residents of the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas with Geraldine, with many submitters noting that they turned to Geraldine for essential services. Many submissions noted that the school bus routes from Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island went into Geraldine and that almost all students attended school there, rather than in Temuka or Timaru. Residents noted that they also did their shopping, sought farm supplies and used services such as vets, doctors and dentists in Geraldine. Several submitters added that they were part of the Geraldine phone exchange, and that landline calls to Pleasant Point or Temuka were toll calls.

- c. Many submitters also emphasised their links with community organisations in Geraldine, such as sports clubs, the Geraldine Men’s Club and the Geraldine Historical Museum Committee. It was noted further that residents in Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island turned to Geraldine for civil defence support during adverse weather events. In addition, the Geraldine Community Board emphasised that the recently adopted *Geraldine, Woodbury, Peel Forest, Orari and Surrounds Community Strategic Framework 2023-2033* had been widely consulted on and set goals for the entirety of the Geraldine Ward, including Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island.
24. The Council met to hear submissions on 30 July 2024 and considered them at a meeting on 13 August 2024. In considering submissions the Council acknowledged the strong perceptual and functional connections that residents of Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island had with the Geraldine community.
25. The Council rejected the three submissions in support of the initial representation proposal because, given the strength of submissions against the proposal, it was not satisfied that the proposal accurately reflected communities of interest in the district nor provided for fair and effective representation of them.
26. On 13 August 2024 the Council amended its initial proposal to the following final representation proposal, which confirmed the current representation arrangements.

The Council’s final proposal

27. The final proposal was for a council comprising the mayor and nine councillors elected from three wards aligning to the current ward boundaries, and three community boards.
28. The final proposal ward arrangements were as follows:

Wards	Population*	Number of members	Population per member	Deviation from district average population per member	% deviation from district average population per member
Geraldine	6,240	1	6,240	799	+14.68
Pleasant Point-Temuka	9,930	2	4,965	-476	-8.75
Timaru	32,800	6	5,467	26	+0.47
Total	48,970	9	5,441		

*Based on Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2023 population estimates (2018 census base)

29. The final proposal also confirmed the community board arrangements as set out in paragraph 18 above.

29. The Council publicly notified its final proposal on 15 August 2024, with appeals and/or objections able to be lodged by 15 September 2024.
30. No valid appeals or objections against the Council's final proposal were received. The Council was, however, required by section 19V(4) of the Act to refer its proposal to the Commission for determination as the Geraldine Ward did not comply with the fair representation requirement of section 19V(2) of the Act (the +/-10% rule).

Need for a hearing

31. For the purpose of making a determination, the Commission may make such enquiries as it considers appropriate and may hold meetings with the interested parties. There is no obligation on the Commission to hold a hearing. Rather, the need for a hearing is determined by the information provided by the relevant parties and the results of any further inquiries the Commission may wish to make.
32. In the case of the Council's final proposal, the Commission considered there was sufficient information in the documentation provided by the Council for the Commission to proceed to a determination. Accordingly, no hearing was required.

Matters for determination by the Commission

33. The matters for this determination by the Commission are limited to the Council's decision to retain the boundaries of the Geraldine Ward with its current membership, despite not complying with the +/-10% rule.

Key considerations

34. Based on the legislative requirements, the Commission's *Guidelines for local authorities undertaking representation reviews* (the Guidelines) identify the following three key factors when considering representation proposals:
 - a. communities of interest
 - b. effective representation of communities of interest
 - c. fair representation for electors.

Communities of interest

35. The Guidelines identify three dimensions for recognising communities of interest:
 - a. *perceptual*: a sense of identity and belonging to a defined area or locality as a result of factors such as distinctive geographical features, local history, demographics, economic and social activities

- b. *functional*: ability of the area to meet the needs of communities for services such as local schools, shopping areas, community and recreational facilities, employment, transport and communication links
 - c. *political*: ability to represent the interests of local communities which includes non-council structures such as for local iwi and hapū, residents and ratepayer associations and the range of special interest groups
36. All three dimensions are important and often interlinked. We note however, that there is often a focus on the perceptual dimension. That is, what councils, communities or individuals intuitively feel are communities of interest. It is not enough to simply state that a community of interest exists because it is felt that it exists; councils must provide evidence of how a sense of identity is reinforced, or how a community is distinct from neighbouring communities. Such evidence may be found by considering, for example:
 - how communities rely on different services and facilities to function as part of the wider district, city or region
 - demographic characteristics of an area (for example age, ethnicity or deprivation profiles) and how these differ from other areas
 - how particular communities organise themselves and interact with others as part of the wider district, city or region
37. The evidence provided by submitters has clearly indicated that there are strong perceptual, functional and political connections between the Kakaku, Orari and Rangitata Island areas and the Geraldine community. Given the strength of submissions on this point, we agree that the Geraldine community of interest extends to include these three areas.
38. We strongly encourage the Council to undertake preliminary engagement with the community ahead of all future representation reviews, to ensure that it has clear and up-to-date evidence of communities of interest on which it can base decisions on representation arrangements and consider whether non-compliance with the +/-10% rule is justified. Preliminary engagement also provides an opportunity for the Council to test different representation models if appropriate, including any 'blue-sky' representation options, with the community ahead of refining options for the initial representation proposal.

Effective representation for communities of interest

39. 'Effective representation' is not defined in the Act, but the Commission sees this as requiring consideration of factors including an appropriate number of elected members and an appropriate basis of election of members for the district concerned (at large, wards, or a mix of both).
40. The Guidelines note that what constitutes effective representation will be specific to each local authority but that the following factors should be considered to the extent possible:

- a. avoiding arrangements that may create barriers to participation, such as at elections by not recognising residents' familiarity and identity with an area
 - b. not splitting recognised communities of interest between electoral subdivisions
 - c. not grouping together two or more communities of interest that share few commonalities of interest
 - d. accessibility, size and configuration of an area including access to elected members and vice versa.
41. In this review, both the initial and final representation proposals confirmed nine members plus the mayor, being the same number that has been in place since 2013. At the March 2024 workshop, the Council considered whether the number of elected members could be adjusted to achieve compliance within the boundaries of the current ward structure, but to do so would have required an increase to 15 elected members plus the mayor. It was noted that this would be a drastic increase, and we agree that there is no evidence to support an increase in the number of members to this magnitude.
42. We also note that a number of submitters supported a council of nine members and few suggestions were made that the number should be altered. Accordingly, we are satisfied that a council of nine members plus the mayor is appropriate.
43. All options considered by Council for its initial representation proposal were based on ward representation. Given the long history of ward representation in Timaru and its familiarity with electors, we agree that a ward model is appropriate for the 2025 local election.

Fair representation for electors

44. Section 19V of the Act sets out the requirement for the Commission to ensure that electors receive fair representation. Section 19V(2) establishes fair representation as a population per member ratio per ward that does not differ by more than 10% across the district. This is also referred to as 'the +/- 10% rule'.
45. Section 19V(3) of the Act provides that, despite subsection (2), if a territorial authority or the Commission considers one or more of certain prescribed conditions apply, wards may be defined and membership distributed between them in a way that does not comply with subsection (2). The prescribed conditions are:
- a. non-compliance is required for effective representation of communities of interest within island or isolated communities situated within the district of the territorial authority
 - b. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by dividing a community of interest between wards

- c. compliance would limit effective representation of communities of interest by uniting within a ward two or more communities of interest with few commonalities of interest.
46. Section 19V(6) provides that on receiving a reference under subsection (4), the Commission must determine whether to:
- a. uphold the decision of the council, or
 - b. alter that decision.

Proposed non-compliance of the Geraldine Ward

47. The Council has proposed under-representation for the Geraldine Ward of +14.68%. At the 2019 representation review, the Geraldine Ward was under-represented at +9.51%, reasonably close to the boundaries of the +/-10% rule.
48. The Geraldine Ward is the northernmost ward in Timaru District. Its northern boundary begins just inland of the Rangitata River mouth and follows the Rangitata River along the boundary with Ashburton District deep into the Southern Alps. The western boundary of the ward borders Mackenzie District and its south-eastern boundary borders the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward. The geography of the ward is largely rural, stretching from plains nearer to the coast up to alpine country in the westernmost part of the ward. State Highway 1 traverses the eastern part of the ward, and State Highway 79, the main road through to Mackenzie District, traverses much of the southern part of the ward.
49. Most of the ward's population is located in Geraldine and its immediate surrounds, or in the small townships located between Geraldine, and Pleasant Point and Temuka. Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island are marginally closer to Geraldine than they are to either Pleasant Point or Temuka, each being within a 10-20 minute drive to Geraldine, and approximately 5 minutes' longer drive to either Pleasant Point or Temuka. There are no major geographic features tying these areas to Geraldine, Pleasant Point or Temuka.
50. To become compliant, the Geraldine Ward would need to decrease by 255 people. All other boundaries of the ward border either Ashburton or Mackenzie District, so the only option for decreasing the population is to transfer parts of the ward into the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward, as the Council did in its initial proposal with the transfer of the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas.
51. We do not think that the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas could be considered isolated areas for the purposes of s19V(3)(a)(i). Despite some local roads being unsealed, there are otherwise good transport links between these areas and the larger towns in the district, including two major state highways, and the travel times to each larger town are not long.
52. However, we acknowledge the strong sense of connection that residents of the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas feel with Geraldine. We agree that to transfer these areas into the Pleasant Point-Temuka Ward would have the effect of dividing a community of interest between wards.

53. We are satisfied that the proposed Geraldine Ward arrangements appropriately balance the requirements for fair and effective representation of the Kakahu, Orari and Rangitata Island areas by including these areas in the Geraldine Ward. We therefore uphold the Geraldine Ward boundaries proposed by the Council in this review.

Communities and community boards

54. Section 19J of the Act requires every territorial authority, as part of its review of representation arrangements, to determine whether there should be community boards in the district and, if so, the nature of those communities and the structure of the community boards. The territorial authority must make this determination in light of the principle in section 4 of the Act relating to fair and effective representation for individuals and communities.
55. The particular matters the territorial authority, and where appropriate the Commission, must determine include the number of boards to be constituted, their names and boundaries, the number of elected and appointed members, and whether the boards are to be subdivided for electoral purposes. Section 19W also requires regard to be given to such of the criteria as apply to reorganisation proposals under the Local Government Act 2002 as is considered appropriate. The Commission sees two of these criteria as particularly relevant for the consideration of proposals relating to community boards as part of a representation review:
- a. Will a community board have an area that is appropriate for the efficient and effective performance of its role?
 - b. Will the community contain a sufficiently distinct community or communities of interest?
56. In this review the community board arrangements proposed are a continuation of the arrangements that have been stable for some time. No issues were raised in relation to these arrangements, and as there are no subdivisions in any community, no issues arise in respect of the +/-10% rule. We uphold the community board arrangements as proposed.

Commission recommendations

57. The Commission recommends that for all future representation reviews, the Council undertakes sufficiently robust preliminary engagement to inform how communities of interest are identified and, if appropriate, to test representation models that differ from the current three-ward model that we have endorsed in this determination.

Conclusion

58. We have made this determination pursuant to section 19R of the Local Electoral Act 2001 having considered the information before the Commission and the requirements of sections 19T, 19W and 19V of the Act.

Local Government Commission

Commissioner Brendan Duffy (Chair)

Commissioner Bonita Bigham

Commissioner Sue Bidrose

21 October 2024