Mana Kāwanatanga ā Rohe
Local Government Commission

Frequently Asked Questions:

Reorganisation of local government in Southland – a new Southland Council

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About the Local Government Commission

The Local Government Commission is an independent statutory body established under the Local Government Act 2002.

Our purpose is to promote good local government in New Zealand and help ensure local government arrangements continue to meet the needs of their communities.

The Commission has three main areas of work. It:

- promotes good practice and provides information about local government
- investigates and makes decisions on proposals to reorganise local authorities
- reviews and makes required decisions about how communities are represented on their local councils.

When considering possible changes to local government arrangements, the Commission looks at how well different arrangements could respond to the needs and circumstances of an area, support effective and sustainable local government services, and meet communities' changing needs into the future.

Depending on the evidence, this may include determining that existing arrangements remain appropriate.

The Commission also talks with affected communities as part of its work. People's views and experiences can help inform its decisions, while responsibility for making those decisions remains with the Commission.

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Background to the Southland reorganisation

The Southland reorganisation investigation began after Southland District Council submitted a proposal to the Local Government Commission in February 2025.

It proposed replacing Southland's four councils with two unitary authorities: one for Invercargill and another covering the Southland and Gore districts. A unitary authority performs both district and regional council functions.

After confirming that the proposal met the legal requirements, the Commission consulted the four affected councils and engaged with Te Ao Mārama Incorporated, representing Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku.

In July 2025, it started a formal investigation, and in October 2025 it confirmed the process it would follow.

The Commission has since met with councils, iwi representatives, stakeholders and members of the community, and has gathered their feedback.

Following this first phase of this work, the Commission decided in May 2026 to continue with a more detailed investigation of the options.

Have your say on the future of local government in Southland

What is happening now (18 November 2026 – 5 February 2027)

The Local Government Commission is currently consulting on a draft plan to replace Southland's four existing councils with one unitary authority responsible for both local and regional council functions. Local boards would provide community representation and make decisions on specified local matters.

This is a draft plan, not a final decision. Public consultation is an important part of deciding what happens next.

The Commission wants to hear whether Southlanders support or oppose the draft plan, what benefits or concerns they see, and what they think should change.

Feedback is welcome on any aspect of the draft plan, including local representation, local board arrangements, community identity, council services and the transition to a new structure.

The Commission will consider every submission and the evidence presented at public hearings before deciding whether to adopt the draft plan, modify it or not proceed. Public views matter because the Commission must consider the level and distribution of support and opposition, alongside the draft plan's potential benefits, costs, risks and effects on communities.

Anyone with an interest in local government in Southland can make a submission through the online consultation form or by emailing **lgc.feedback@lgc.govt.nz**.

People who want to speak to their submission will also be able to take part in hearings in Southland or online in March 2027.

If the Commission adopts a final reorganisation plan involving council amalgamation or disestablishment, it will then be put to a public poll. The plan would proceed only if more than half of the valid votes cast support it.

How the reorganisation relates to the Government's – Local Government reforms

The Southland investigation was not initiated as part of the Government's Head Start local government reform programme. It started earlier, following a reorganisation initiative submitted by Southland District Council in February 2025.

The investigation is being carried out independently by the Local Government Commission under the Local Government Act 2002.

This is why the Southland process is continuing on its own statutory pathway, separately from decisions about the Government's wider reforms.

Find out more

Read the full ***Reorganisation of local government in Southland: a new Southland Council*** on the Local Government Commission website.

It explains in detail the draft plan to replace Environment Southland, Gore District Council, Invercargill City Council and Southland District Council, including the proposed council structure, representation and local boards.

Read the Southland reorganisation information

Frequently asked questions

What is local government reorganisation?

Reorganisation means changing how councils are arranged, represented or governed. It may involve changing council boundaries, combining councils or changing which council is responsible for particular functions. The purpose of an investigation is to consider whether different arrangements could improve local governance by providing effective, efficient and sustainable local government for communities.

Why is reorganisation being considered in Southland?

The investigation began after Southland District Council submitted a reorganisation initiative to the Local Government Commission. The original initiative proposed replacing Southland's four councils with two unitary authorities. One would cover Invercargill, while the other would cover the Southland and Gore districts.

What is the Commission now proposing?

The draft plan proposes replacing Environment Southland, Gore District Council, Invercargill City Council and Southland District Council with one Southland-wide unitary council. It includes local boards so communities continue to have elected representatives making decisions about specified local facilities, services and projects.

What is a unitary council?

A unitary council carries out both regional council and city or district council functions. This means one council is responsible for local services as well as regional responsibilities, rather than having separate regional and territorial councils.

Has a final decision been made?

No. The draft plan is a proposal for public consultation, not a final decision. Community feedback is considered before the Commission decides whether to issue a final reorganisation plan. The Commission could still change the draft plan or decide not to proceed with it.

Why has the Commission developed a draft plan?

The Commission has investigated different arrangements and considers there is enough evidence to put a proposed model before the community. Consultation allows the Commission to hear what people support, what concerns they have and what changes they think should be made.

Would this mean the four existing councils disappear?

Yes, if a final plan based on the proposal were approved and implemented, the four existing councils would be replaced by the new council structure. This would not happen immediately. Detailed transition arrangements would be needed before a new council could begin operating.

What would happen to local representation?

The draft plan includes councillors elected from wards to make decisions for Southland as a whole. It also proposes nine local boards with locally elected members. These boards would make decisions about specified local matters and receive funding for those responsibilities.

Would local communities still have a say?

Yes. Local boards are proposed to help communities retain meaningful influence over local decisions. Unlike community boards, which can be established or disestablished by councils and depend on councils for the decision-making powers they have, the existence and core decision-making role of local boards would not simply depend on the decisions of a future Southland Council. This would give communities greater certainty that important local decisions would be made locally

The consultation is also an opportunity for people to comment on the proposed wards, local boards and other parts of the draft plan.

Would council services change straight away?

No. Publishing a draft plan would not immediately change council services, representation or responsibilities.

If reorganisation eventually went ahead, existing councils would continue operating while detailed transition and implementation work was completed.

What would happen to rates?

The draft plan would not, by itself, set each household's future rates. Rates would depend on later decisions about budgets, services, rating policies and how costs were shared.

These matters would need to be worked through during transition and through the new council's normal planning and consultation processes. The Commission cannot indicate any potential changes to rates at this time.

What would happen to council staff, offices and facilities?

The draft plan includes that the principal office of Southland Council would be in Invercargill, and at least one service centre would continue in each local board area for at least six years. Beyond that, these operational details would be worked through during a transition process if reorganisation were approved.

A draft plan does not, by itself, decide the future of individual employees, offices or facilities. Information should be updated as transition decisions are made.

How can I have my say?

People can make a submission online. A written submission option is also planned for people who cannot or do not want to participate online. Submitters may also ask to speak at a public hearing. Hearings are expected to be available in Southland and online in March 2027. Submissions close on 5 February 2027.

Do I need to answer every consultation question?

No. The questions are there to help people consider the draft plan. People may answer some or all of them and may comment on any part of the draft plan.

What will happen to my submission?

The Commission will consider submissions and evidence presented at hearings before making its decision.

Public support is one of several matters it must consider. It must also consider potential benefits, costs, disruption, risks and effects on communities of interest.

Will the public make the final decision?

If the Commission issues a final plan that would amalgamate or disestablish councils, a poll of electors would be held.

The change would proceed only if more than half of the valid votes cast supported the final plan. If the poll did not support it, the reorganisation would not proceed.

Who can vote in a poll of electors?

Any elector on the electoral roll for any of the four Southland councils.

When could a new council begin?

It’s possible for a first election of a new Southland council to be in 2028. However, this would depend on consultation, the Commission issuing a final plan, the result of a public poll and the completion of transition arrangements.

Where can I find more information?

The Local Government Commission website is the main source of information about the investigation, supporting documents, consultation opportunities and future decisions. Information is also expected to be shared through councils, local media, libraries, service centres and community networks.

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