

Simplifying Local Government

The Government has announced a new voluntary Head Start pathway for councils that want to put forward local government reorganisation proposals, ahead of wider reform from 2028.

Under this pathway, city and district councils can work together to outline proposals for new unitary authorities for their areas (unitary authorities are councils that combine both local and regional functions into one organisation).

These proposals are due to the Government by 9 August 2026, with in principle decisions made in September 2026, and final decisions on detailed proposals due in 2027.

The Government says these changes are intended to make local government simpler, more efficient and more affordable, while also supporting the transition to a new planning system.

For regions that do not move ahead through Head Start, wider reform is expected after the 2028 local elections through a separate 'backstop' process.

Our approach

The Regional Council agrees there is room for improvement in how local government works, and is open to change where it leads to better outcomes, affordability and service delivery for our communities. Any future model must leave the Bay of Plenty the same or better than it is today, and do so fairly for communities across the whole region.

Under the Government's Head Start pathway, regional councils cannot submit outline proposals and are not the decision makers on whether a proposal goes forward.

Our role is to contribute evidence, explain how regional services work, support informed discussion, and work alongside city and district councils as the region considers its options.

The information in this document and survey is part of that process. We're keen to get your thoughts and make sure the regional voice is heard.

Survey details

Fill out the attached handout and return it to us, or visit our website at **www.boprc.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government** and let us know.

The survey closes on Sunday 12 July.

TOI MOANA
BAY OF PLENTY
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Who does what now

To help with thinking about what changes could be made to simplify local government, it helps to know what happens now.

Local government in the Bay of Plenty currently operates in two layers: Local councils (city and district) and a regional council. Each plays a different role in delivering services to communities.

Local councils focus on services close to home, where decisions need to reflect the needs of individual communities. The Regional Council focuses on services that work across the whole region, where coordination, consistency and scale matter.

This split exists because some systems don't stop at council boundaries. Rivers flow across districts, pests spread between areas, and transport networks connect communities. Managing these at a regional level helps avoid duplication and ensures better long-term planning.

Both levels work together, with local councils delivering community-focused services, and the Regional Council managing larger systems that benefit the whole Bay of Plenty.

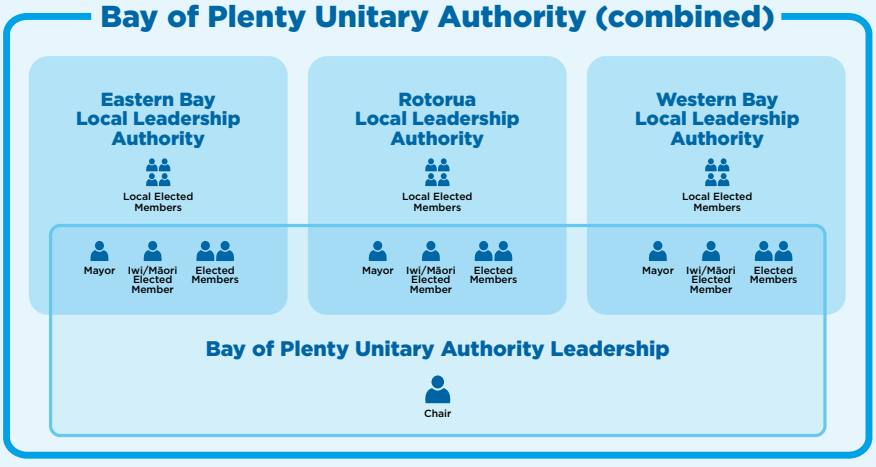
The models

There are many different ways local government could be organised in the Bay of Plenty in the future. To help with the conversation, we are interested in your feedback on these three models and how regional functions could be best delivered.

Each one changes how decisions are made, how services are delivered, and how costs are shared. There is no 'right' option as each model has different benefits and trade-offs.

Below we've presented three options to help understand what matters most to you about how local government is structured in the region.

MODEL 1 | One regional unitary authority



PREFERRED OPTION

In this model, one council would deliver both local and regional services across the whole Bay of Plenty.

This means decisions about things like roads, rubbish, public transport, flood protection and the environment would all sit within one organisation.

This approach keeps services together, and makes it easier to plan and deliver things across the whole region. It may also reduce replication of back-office functions and improve efficiency.

It also ensures that local communities still have a voice, but decision-making would be more centralised at a regional level.

Key implications

- **Keeps regional services together (not split up)**
- **Services stay the same or improve**
- **Strongest financially**
- **Keeps both local and regional voices**
- **Best long term financial option**
- **Iwi and Treaty Settlement areas/rohe not split**
- **Consistent with new planning system**

Local functions (close to communities)	Regional functions (across the whole region)
Local roads and neighbourhood streets	Public transport systems across districts
Rubbish, recycling and water services	Flood protection and river management
Parks, libraries and community facilities	Biosecurity (pest and disease control)
Local planning and development decisions	Regional planning and environmental monitoring
Community services and local amenities	Catchment, water and natural resource management

MODEL 2 | Three sub-regional unitary authorities



REGIONAL FUNCTIONS WILL BE SPLIT AND REPLICATED WITHIN EACH AUTHORITY

In this model, the region would be divided into three areas, each with its own council delivering both local and regional services.

Each council would make decisions for its own area, with a stronger focus on local control and local identity.

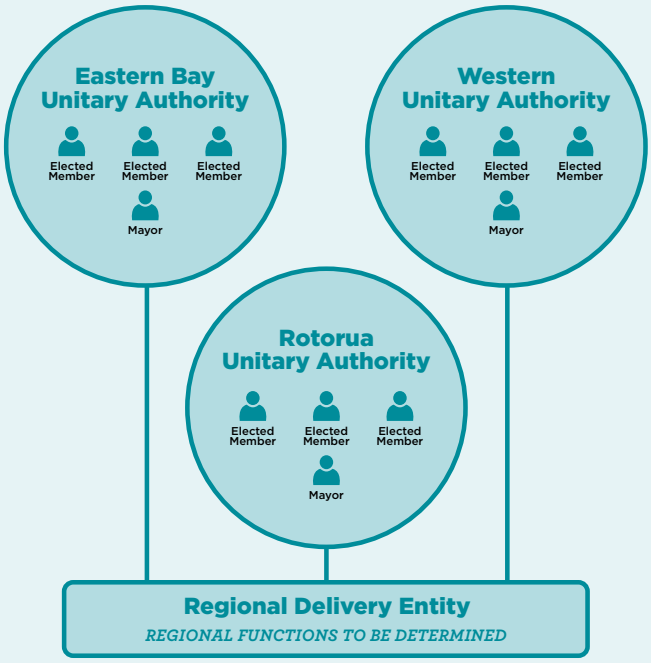
This means decision-making is closer to communities. It also means that services and planning that currently operate across the whole region may be split up.

This may lead to replication of back-office functions, higher costs, and less coordination across the Bay of Plenty

Key implications

- **Expensive and not viable for some areas**
- **Limited efficiency gains**
- **Regional services get split up**
- **Fewer benefits from simplifying the system**
- **Simpler structure**
- **Risk of losing a strong regional/national voice**
- **Some Iwi and Treaty Settlement areas/rohe may be split**
- **Greater cost to implement new planning system**

MODEL 3 | Three unitary authorities + one regional entity



In this model, there would be three councils managing local services, alongside a separate regional organisation responsible for delivering region-wide services.

What sits where in terms of regional delivery would still need to be decided.

This keeps a regional delivery layer, but splits responsibilities and decision making acrossmultiple separate organisations.

This can make coordination more complex and may affect how clearly decisions are made, how accountable organisations are, and how services are funded over time.

Key implications

- **Regional services are split across organisations**
- **Less efficiency and higher costs**
- **Regional decision-making is more distant from communities**
- **Less accountability for regional services**
- **Funding for the regional entity could be unstable**
- **Some Iwi and Treaty Settlement areas/rohe may be split**
- **Greater cost to implement new planning system**

Timeline

- Head Start proposals open: **May 2026**
- Regional Council survey opens: **29 June 2026**
- Regional Council survey closes: **12 July 2026**
- Outline proposals submitted to Government: **August 2026**
- Cabinet agrees proposals in principle: **September 2026**
- Final proposals submitted: **March 2027**
- Cabinet confirms proposals: **May 2027**
- Cabinet makes final policy decisions: **May 2027**
- Cabinet approves legislation: **Q3/Q4 2027**
- Legislation introduced: **Q3/Q4 2027**
- Legislation enacted: **Q1 2028**
- Proposal implementation begins: **May 2028**
  Nominations for local elections
- Backstop begins: **October 2028**
  Local elections

Please return your survey by **Sunday 12 July 2026** to your nearest Bay of Plenty Regional Council office or mail to:

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