

ONLINE VOTING: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Who runs local elections?

Local councils are responsible for running their own elections, including deciding the voting system and method. Most councils contract specialist businesses to conduct their elections on their behalf.

However, for new voting methods the Minister must be satisfied they meet the principles of the Local Electoral Act. This is a democratic safeguard to ensure free and fair local elections.

What voting methods are used now?

All councils use postal voting now. Booth voting – similar to that still used in general elections – has been used in the past and last used in 1992 but postal voting has been used universally in local elections since then.

What is online voting?

The terms “online voting” and “e-voting” are sometimes used interchangeably. Here, online voting refers to the form of voting where a voter is able to vote using the internet, remotely and unsupervised by officials, on the voter’s own device. It is not intended to include the use of electronic voting kiosks but may include use of publicly provided devices, such as computers in libraries.

Why can’t councils choose to proceed with the trial?

Any trial of online voting must be approved by the Minister of Local Government to ensure public confidence in local election results. This is a democratic safeguard to ensure free and fair local elections.

The Local Electoral Act requires the Minister to be satisfied any proposed elections system meets the principles of the Act, which include the protection of freedom of choice and secrecy of the vote; and transparent elections producing certain outcomes; impartial methods for resolving disputes.

Why didn’t the proposals satisfy the Minister?

Government requirements for the trial were agreed in November 2015. Several key requirements have not yet been met, including:

- Whole-of-system penetration testing.
- End-to-end verification systems (to ensure votes have not been interfered with).
- Independent review of the source code.

This work needed to be done and checked before authorising regulations are made, by June at the latest. It is now clear that there isn’t the time for that work.

Who decided which councils could participate in the trial?

Councils chose themselves whether or not they wanted to participate in the trial. Many councils considered participating in the trial but chose not to.

Who would have paid for the trial and why?

Participating councils would have paid for their own trial as councils currently pay for their own elections.

Will a trial happen at a later date?

It is up to councils and the local government sector to consider whether they want to pursue online voting for future elections. The Government is open to looking at proposals for future trials of online voting in local elections provided they meet the requirements.

Where can I find further information on the Government's decision?

The Cabinet paper, and previous papers on the online voting trial, are available at www.dia.govt.nz/online-voting