### Questions and Answers: draft proposal for Wairarapa District Council

**Q:** Why is this happening?

**A:** The application by the three Wairarapa district councils for a Wairarapa unitary council (performing the roles of both the regional council and the district councils) in May 2013 triggered a formal reorganisation process. It was quickly followed by an application for a unitary council for the entire Wellington region from the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

**Q**: What happened to those applications?

**A**: In June 2015, the Commission decided not to proceed with its own resultant proposal for a unitary council for the whole region. Instead it decided to return to the community to consider with it other proposals for change. This draft proposal for a Wairarapa District Council is a result of the community engagement and consultation that subsequently took place.

**Q**: Why did the Commission do that?

**A**: Although the weight of public opinion was very firmly opposed to a “Super City’’ about 40 per cent of submitters sought some form of change either in the form of smaller mergers or shared service arrangements.

**Q:** What happens in the rest of the Wellington region?

**A:** Although the release of the Wairarapa draft proposal means that the formal reorganisation process in the rest of the region is now at an end, the Commission has continued to work closely with councils on jointly identified priority projects. It has completed technical reports on transport, water, economic development and spatial planning for the Wellington region. The fate of these and whether they will lead to substantive work in the future now lies with various councils.

**Q:** What happens next?

**A:** The Commission is asking for submissions on the proposal and will hold hearings throughout the Wairarapa district beginning on 23 May for those who wish to be heard in person. If, after considering all submissions, the Commission decides to go ahead it will issue a final proposal.

**Q:** Has there been local input into the draft proposal?

**A:** The Commission has worked closely with the affected councils in developing the options, has had these options assessed using agreed data, and conducted public surveys to identify the option most preferred by the Wairarapa community. The draft proposal has emerged out of this consultative process.

**Q:** How can people have a further voice?

**A:** The Commission is now calling for submissions on the draft proposal.There will also be opportunities for submitters to address the Commission in person at hearings in the Wairarapa in late May.

**Q:** Would there be a poll?

**A:** If, having considered the submissions, the Commission decides to release a final proposal, a poll is highly likely. Rightly, this would put the final decision in the hands of the Wairarapa community.

**Q:** How is a poll triggered?

**A:** If10 per cent of the eligible electors in any of the affected districts (South Wairarapa, Carterton or Masterton districts) petition for it, a poll of all electors in the Wairarapa will result.If more than 50 per cent vote for it, the proposal will proceed. Otherwise the process comes to an end and the status quo remains.

**Q:** What is the process for electing a new combined council?

**A:** A Transition Body comprising a transition board and an implementation team would oversee transition arrangements for the formation of the new combined council.The first election of the new combined council would take place between October 2018 and October 2019. If the new council were elected in 2018 it would sit for an initial four-year term before returning to the usual three-yearly election cycle.

**Q:** Would there be job losses?

**A:** The structure and staffing levels of the Wairarapa District Council would bedetermined in the first instance by theTransition Body and interim Chief Executive, and after that by the new council. There are expected to be some senior management redundancies reflecting the fact there would be one council instead of three. However the case for the reorganisation does not require staff cuts at other levels.

**Q:** How would rates be calculated?

**A**: The Commission’s proposal requires that the current rating arrangements would remain in place until the new council and the community have had the opportunity to consider any changes

**Q**: How would the new council take account of different council debt and asset levels?

**A**: Targeted rates for assets such as wastewater services would remain for 5 years so that ratepayers would continue to pay for only for the scheme to which they are connected. After that period it would be up to the decisions of the new council. If any additional debt commitments were made before the new council was formed the Commission would consider similar arrangements.

**Q**: Why was Masterton chosen as the new principal public office?

**A**: It is important to note that a principal public office is not the same as a “head office’’. It is primarily an address for service and can be changed by the new council if the community wants that. It does not imply an office at which all council staff work or where all meetings are held. Masterton was chosen, in the first instance, because it would be the economic centre of the new district.

**Q**: What about people in Carterton or South Wairarapa?

**A**: In terms of access, the new council would retain area offices in Masterton, Carterton and Martinborough for at least five years. For representation, in addition to the mayor, and 12 councillors from seven wards, there would be five community boards, one centred round each Wairarapa town.

**Q**: What would be the advantages of combining the councils?

**A**: Overall the Commission considers that a single combined council would be better equipped to meet future challenges than the current three separate councils. The full list of advantages and disadvantages is set out in the Commission’s draft proposal document which can be found at [www.lgc.govt.nz](http://www.lgc.govt.nz). These include:

* better advocacy for the district as a whole
* better financial resilience
* improved ability to recruit and retain specialist technical staff
* more effective delivery of infrastructure
* one set of council rules
* simplified decision-making

It is also expected that there would be modest financial savings.

**Q:** What are the expected savings?

**A:** About $10 million over 10 years after transition costs.The proposal is not primarily driven by cost cutting and these expected savings are only part of a broader picture.

**Q:** So where would the savings come from?

**A:** The total savings represent the savings across a variety of areas of council operations, including:

* Roading and utility savings as a result of collaboration between New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and the council
* Sale of surplus property
* Reduction in duplication of senior management positions
* Reduction in number of mayors and councillors (after allowing for an increase in the number of community board members)

**Q**: Are there some disadvantages?

**A**: The change process could be unsettling for some council staff, there would be reduced representation on regional committees and forums, the transition costs would outweigh the savings for the first two years.

**Q**: Could the new mayor be from anywhere in Wairarapa?

**A**: Yes.