

2025-2028 Waikato Triennial Agreement

Purpose

1. The Waikato Triennial Agreement for the 2025-2028 triennium sets the context for partnership and progress. It is a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 2002 and represents the shared desire of local government in the Waikato region to work collaboratively within and across boundaries to maximise efficiency and effectiveness and to promote sustainable growth and development. It is intended to align collective efforts to work with central government, iwi Māori, and others committed to building a strong, cohesive and prosperous region, thereby contributing to New Zealand's economic growth and development. The Waikato Mayoral Forum will be critical to the successful execution of this agreement. Such collaboration will result in measurable improvements in the way the region positively competes for resources and talent, and the manner in which it leads its communities.

Strategic context

Waikato key to New Zealand's economy

2. The Waikato region is a cornerstone of New Zealand's economy. The region's location as a critical national transport, freight and logistics corridor supports a diverse economy spanning agriculture, advanced manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, aquaculture, tourism, forestry and healthcare. The region is home to significant natural resources including major river catchments, geothermal energy, 10,000km² of coastal marine area, 1,200km of coastline and \$1.1B in flood protection infrastructure. These strengths are bolstered by an expanding Māori economic base and the longstanding cultural and regional leadership of the Kingitanga.
3. Despite its strengths, the region faces environmental and social challenges. Whilst increased development and population growth across some parts of the region provides opportunities for the wider regional economy, it also introduces challenges including inequities in housing, health, education, transport and significant impacts on the environment that need to be managed. Addressing these issues is essential to ensuring a resilient and prosperous future for Waikato communities.

Navigating national and global waves of change

4. The New Zealand Government has launched a programme of legislative reform aimed at enabling growth and infrastructure development. Key reforms include:
 - Replacement of the Resource Management Act 1991 with the Natural Environment Act and the Planning Act, which will respectively manage environmental protection and enable land-use planning for development.
 - Amendments to the Local Government Act 2002, refocusing councils on core infrastructure and essential services, enhancing financial discipline, and increasing transparency and accountability.
 - A proposal to simplify local government by removing elected regional councillors and replacing them with interim Combined Territories Boards (CTBs) comprising the city and district council mayors in each region. The CTBs would be charged with developing regional reorganisation plans designed to identify the best way councils can work together to deliver effective and efficient services in the region.

5. These reforms will significantly reshape governance, operating models and structures of Waikato local authorities.

Connected regional leadership

6. Regional leaders must navigate the acceleration of global and national change to deliver best outcomes for the people and places they serve. Geopolitical fragmentation, climate change, demographic shifts, digital disruption, and resource competition are contributing to ongoing structural challenges like inflation and affordability. These pressures require a shift toward permanent transformation and a continuing focus on partnerships, relationships and collaborative governance models that support responsive decision-making in financially constrained environments.
7. In this evolving context, Waikato’s anchor institutions—including local councils, iwi, and community-based organisations — play a key role in providing economic stability, social cohesion, and identity. Their deep-rooted presence and shared interest in the region’s future positions them well to collaborate and guide strategic investment in infrastructure, housing, health, education, and employment.
8. Waikato councils have a proven track record of working together, including through initiatives such as Local Water Done Well (LWDW), which addresses water service delivery and infrastructure funding challenges. Building on this foundation, through the Waikato Mayoral Forum, the Waikato councils are committed to strengthening partnerships with iwi Māori and engaging constructively with central government to align on long-term strategic objectives that deliver enduring benefits for the Waikato region and New Zealand as a whole.

Current legislative context

9. The Waikato Triennial Agreement codifies how the region’s mayors will work together. Under the Local Government Act 2002, all local authorities in each region must enter into a Triennial Agreement no later than 1 March after the election. The Agreement details protocols for communication and coordination among the members. Proposed changes to the Local Government Act (not yet enacted as at March 2026) intend to remove reference to the ‘four wellbeings’ and restate the purpose of local government to include democratic decision-making, infrastructure, public services, and supporting economic growth.

Role of the Mayoral Forum

10. The Waikato Mayoral Forum is a central governance and leadership body for advancing the region’s collective interests. It plays a pivotal role in shaping the future success of Waikato’s diverse communities by leveraging interdependencies and connections across council boundaries to foster economic growth, social resilience, and regional cohesion.
11. Through the Forum, councils are expected to champion a shared regional vision, develop a coherent and inclusive development plan, and collectively position the Waikato as an attractive destination for public and private investment. The Chair of the Mayoral Forum acts as the region’s principal representative, ensuring Waikato is well-positioned to collaborate with central government, neighbouring regions—particularly Auckland and Bay of Plenty—and other strategic stakeholders, to identify and pursue investment opportunities at scale.

12. The Forum is responsible for guiding decisions on significant regional programmes and partnerships with central government. Key areas of focus for the term of this agreement include (but are not limited to):

- Responding to and capitalising on opportunities arising from **Local Government reforms**.
- Advancing a **City and Regional Deal**, building on positive feedback from the region's initial proposal and leveraging strengths in water, energy, and intergovernmental collaboration.
- Strengthening collaboration established through the region's response to **water reform initiatives**.
- Collaborating in the development of a **Regional Spatial Plan** to guide long-term land use and infrastructure planning.

13. Each agreed work programme will be formally included in the Mayoral Forum's agenda and will be led by Mayors, supported by Chief Executives and designated working groups. This structure ensures strategic alignment, progress and accountability, and coordinated delivery across the region.

Role of Waikato Chief Executive Forum

14. The Waikato Chief Executive Forum (CE Forum) is a key group supporting the Mayoral Forum. In conjunction with elected members, the CE Forum identifies and develops the regionally significant and strategic programmes of work that comprise the Mayoral Forum agenda. Through their staff, the CEs will identify topics for the Mayoral Forum agenda, sign off work and present work to the Mayoral Forum for feedback, endorsement and approval through each council's own decision-making processes, if required.

15. Funding decisions will be made by CEs, consistent with their delegations, or via recommendation to the Mayoral Forum and then on to each council's Long Term Plan or Annual Plan processes.

SIGNATORIES

16. The parties:

- Hamilton City Council
- Hauraki District Council
- Matamata-Piako District Council
- Ōtorohanga District Council
- Rotorua District Council
- South Waikato District Council
- Taupō District Council
- Thames-Coromandel District Council
- Waikato District Council
- Waikato Regional Council
- Waipā District Council
- Waitomo District Council.

Principles

17. Signatories to this agreement recognise that:

- a) While the communities within the region are diverse and encompass a range of desired outcomes, it is important for local government to collaborate on strategic regional issues and opportunities. On occasions, issues and opportunities that are shared by some councils might be of lesser importance to others. The Triennial Agreement therefore acknowledges that it will be appropriate to have a range of sub-agreements that address more localised or sub-regional matters between and among councils depending on what is best for the people and places we serve.
- b) Collaboration can aid in effective and efficient planning and encourage shared services and a collective approach to reduce costs, increase available resources, and help to make strategic judgements about the allocation of resources.
- c) Collaboration can assist councils promote outcomes consistent with the purpose of local government.
- d) There is a need for open communication, information sharing and seeking agreement on strategic issues.
- e) We will speak as one voice when there is unanimous agreement and in good faith attempt to reach unanimity on issues of regional and national significance critical to the wellbeing of the region and its communities.
- f) We acknowledge that it might not always be possible to achieve common direction on all strategic issues brought before the Forum given that each party to the agreement has functions, obligations, and rights to make decisions for their area which may conflict with the position of other signatories to this agreement. However, we commit to working through regionally significant programmes of work requiring collaboration and a common direction.
- g) Where appropriate, aligning with and influencing Central Government policy is important to the delivery of good quality, cost effective infrastructure, public services, and regulatory functions to promote and enhance the wellbeing of our communities. The forum will play an active role negotiating with Central Government on common, agreed, positions on national policy that affect Local Government and their communities and, where regional functions can be better convened, governed and or implemented at a regional level, such as when they require Local Government relationships, knowledge, expertise, and support.

Protocols for communication and coordination

18. Signatories to this agreement recognise that:

- a) Each council has accountability to different communities and will work together on issues where it is agreed that the region will benefit from a collaborative approach.
- b) When a council has a significant disagreement with the position of the others, the other councils will make every effort to respectfully accommodate, acknowledge and fairly represent the dissenting view.
- c) When a significant decision or issue affects a particular council then that council should be consulted in formulating the region's response.
- d) Councils agree to act in good faith and in a transparent manner on issues of information and disclosure.

- e) Councils should provide early notification of decisions that may affect other councils in the region. Communication protocols may be developed between councils where it is agreed better communication is desired.
- f) All formal public communications from Mayoral Forum meetings will be circulated to all councils for comment prior to their release, unless otherwise agreed by the Mayoral Forum in order to meet urgent and unforeseen deadlines.
- g) Councils will apply a 'no surprises' approach whereby early notice will be given over disagreements concerning policy or work programmes before critical public announcements are made.
- h) If councils make decisions that are inconsistent with the agreement, they must explicitly note that inconsistency and the reasons for it and notify the other councils that are parties to the agreement.

General approach to collaboration

19. Signatories to this agreement should:

- a) Share resources for the purpose of preparing background information on the various communities within the region. Such information may include demographics, survey data and scientific studies and the analysis of social, economic, environmental, and cultural trends.
- b) Seek to attract investment and Government support in the region by aligning community interests, working collaboratively through Waikato Mayoral Forum work streams and other options, developing agreed positions on matters of importance to the region and continuing to develop and strengthen existing joint approaches to engage with Government agencies and other organisations.
- c) Actively identify opportunities and projects to collaborate; building upon the approaches that were used to bring about Waikato Waters Ltd and IAWAI - Flowing Waters.
- d) Promote communication and cooperation among the region's councils with respect to shared services and other collaborative opportunities.
- e) Make draft strategies, policies and plans available to all councils in the region for discussion and development.
- f) Provide guidance on the implementation of strategic collaborative projects and monitor progress of collaborative initiatives.
- g) Utilise the Waikato Mayoral Forum work streams and other collaborative options to ensure that all councils can participate in identifying, delivering, and funding regionally significant projects and programmes, facilities, and services to more than one council.
- h) Invite Government Ministers, relevant officials, corporate, community and iwi leaders to meet to discuss issues of strategic importance to the region.
- i) Advocate for strategic investment in the region and promote the strategic benefits and advantages of the Waikato as part of the nationally strategically important upper North Island.

- j) If necessary, establish one or more joint committees or other joint governance arrangements to give better effect to communication and coordination or to assist with identifying, delivering and funding regionally significant projects and programmes, facilities, and services to more than one district, or to consider proposals for new regional council activities.

Mayoral Forum meetings

20. Signatories to this agreement will endeavour to hold a meeting of Mayors and the Regional Chairperson (supported by their Chief Executives) at least quarterly to discuss any pertinent issues and to review the performance of workstreams within the agreement. These meetings will be under the banner of the Waikato Mayoral Forum.
21. The Waikato Mayoral Forum is not a formal committee constituted under the Local Government Act, and therefore meetings are not public. Recommendations from the Mayoral Forum are for members to take to their respective councils for consideration and decisions.
22. The Chief Executives' Forum will also meet regularly to advance initiatives as requested by the Mayors and Regional Chairperson.
23. Special meetings may be called at the request of four members.
24. The secretariat will prepare an agenda for the Mayoral Forum meetings in consultation with the Chair and the Chief Executives' Forum.
25. Agendas for meetings will be issued and minutes will be taken and circulated.
26. The appointed Mayoral Forum Chairperson will ensure minutes are taken, approved, and circulated.
27. Any public communications from these meetings will be approved by the Mayoral Forum prior to their release, unless otherwise agreed by participants to delegate to the Chair in order to meet urgent deadlines.
28. The Waikato Mayoral Forum shall have the power to invite people to attend and participate in its meetings on a permanent and/or issues basis.

Secretariat support

29. The Mayoral Forum will appoint Co-Lab to carry out the secretariat function.
30. As part of that role, Co-Lab's functions will include preparing agendas (in consultation with the Forum Chair, workstream leads (refer below), and the CE Forum Chair), arranging venues on the day of meetings, taking minutes and actions, keeping any books and accounts and attending to any other business required to support the forum.

31. Councils will fund Co-Lab for the secretariat role on the following basis:

Council	%ages
Hamilton City	20.6%
Hauraki District	5.1%
Matamata-Piako District	5.6%
Ōtorohanga District	3.2%
Rotorua Lakes District	10.4%
South Waikato District	4.7%
Taupō District Council	7.8%
Thames-Coromandel District	7.8%
Waikato District	11.1%
Waikato Regional Council	10.7%
Waipā District	9.2%
Waitomo District	3.8%
	100.0%

32. Co-Lab will also undertake the activities noted above in relation to any programmes of work agreed by the Mayoral Forum. The basis of funding the secretariat for these programmes will mirror the (yet to be agreed) funding allocation for other costs associated with each programme.

Significant new activities proposed by the regional council

33. If the regional council or a regional council-controlled organisation proposes to undertake a significant new activity then section 16 of the Local Government Act 2002 shall be adhered to.

34. The regional council agrees to discuss the issues involved at one or more of the existing fora and to provide preliminary draft proposals to the affected councils for early comment, including any amendments to the regional council's Significance and Engagement Policy.

35. Where the regional council proposes to undertake a significant new activity that involves one or more territorial authorities within the region the following protocols will apply:

- a) The regional council will as soon as practicable inform all councils within the region of the nature, scope, and reasons for the proposal.
- b) Councils will be given a reasonable period but no less than 40 working days, to respond to any such proposal. The regional council will fully consider any submissions on the proposal made by councils within the region.
- c) Should there be substantive disagreement between the councils on whether the regional council should undertake the activity, the parties will refer the matter to mediation as set out in the process in s16 (4)-(6) of the Local Government Act for resolving disagreement.

Significant new activities proposed by councils

36. New activities of regional significance proposed and or led by a council or councils, and agreed by the Mayoral Forum, will follow the spirit and intent of the protocols set out for the regional council and regional council-controlled organisations when new regional activities are proposed.

Consultation in relation to the Regional Policy Statement

37. To meet the requirements of clause 3A of Schedule 1 to the Resource Management Act 1991, the consultation process to be used by affected councils in relation to any further changes to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement will be developed and agreed to by all the councils. Protocols will be developed that ensure affected councils have full and effective involvement in the scoping and drafting of any changes to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement.

Strategic priorities of regional significance

38. As noted above, the Mayoral Forum makes decisions about significant programmes of work undertaken at regional scale. For the 2025-2028 triennium, these include, but are not limited to:

- Responding to and capitalising on opportunities arising from Local Government reforms.
- Advancing a City and Regional Deal, building on positive feedback from the region's initial proposal and leveraging strengths in water, energy, and intergovernmental collaboration.
- Strengthening collaboration established through the region's response to water reform initiatives.
- Collaborating in the development of a Regional Spatial Plan to guide long-term land use and infrastructure planning.

39. The Mayoral Forum, through the CE Forum, will develop and agree a work programme for the triennium to implement these initiatives following adoption of the Triennial Agreement by all councils.

40. The Mayoral Forum will exercise governance oversight over this work programme.

Term of the Triennial Agreement

41. The Triennial Agreement will continue to operate until such time as it is either amended by the accord of all parties or is renewed following the 2028 local government elections.

Other (sub-regional) agreements

42. This Agreement does not prevent councils from entering into other agreements among themselves or outside the Waikato region. The Mayoral Forum recognises that it may make sense to collaborate and partner at a sub-regional level. Nothing in this agreement should be construed to prevent councils addressing issues, or capitalising on opportunities, at a sub-regional level. However, any other such agreement should not be contrary to the purpose and spirit of this Agreement.

Resolving disagreement

43. In the event of a disagreement over the terms of this agreement, the parties agree to refer the issue to mediation for a resolution. In the absence of an agreement to mediation between the local authorities, the matter will be referred to a process as specified by the Minister of Local Government.

AUTHORITY This agreement is signed by the following on behalf of their respective authorities:

Council	Mayor/Chair signature	Date
Hamilton City Council		
Hauraki District Council		
Matamata-Piako District Council		
Ōtorohanga District Council		
Rotorua District Council		
South Waikato District Council		
Taupō District Council		
Thames-Coromandel District Council		
Waikato District Council		
Waikato Regional Council		
Waipā District Council		
Waitomo District Council		