

12 February 2026

Justice Committee
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Via email: ju@parliament.govt.nz

Tēnā koe

DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE 2025 LOCAL ELECTIONS

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections (the Inquiry).
2. The Dunedin City Council (DCC) comprises one mayor, 14 councillors, and six community boards.
3. The DCC's territory extends from north of Waikouaiti to the Taieri River in the south and inland to Middlemarch and Hyde, covering 3,340 square kilometres of land area.
4. 85.5% of eligible voters in Dunedin city are enrolled to vote on either the general or Māori electoral rolls.
5. The 2025 voter return for Dunedin City was 45.47% (43,310 voting papers returned from 95,259 eligible voters).
6. The DCC employed electionz.com to manage the 2025 elections in Dunedin City, and information from electionnz.com has informed the DCC's response to the Inquiry.

Voting Processes

Reports of people being removed from rolls or switched between them

7. The DCC notes that this is a recurring problem where electors report being incorrectly removed from the parliamentary electoral roll. It notes that removal is actioned by Electoral Commission staff and is then reflected in the roll build for the council election, with the affected electors then not being mailed voter packs.
8. For the 2025 election, electionz.com received approximately two dozen calls or emails to its election helpline noting this problem for electors in Dunedin City. There were higher numbers of reports of this across social and printed media channels.
9. Electors are encouraged to follow up directly with the Electoral Commission. When the DCC was able to investigate this during the 2025 election the removal was triggered by an address change or mail being returned undelivered from the elector's address.

10. Special votes were able to be issued in most instances (when the elector was prepared to supply the required details).

The number of disallowed special votes

11. Approximately 14% of special votes were disqualified in Dunedin City in the 2025 local elections, which the DCC understands is relatively low for council elections in Aotearoa New Zealand.
12. The main reason for disqualification of special votes is that the elector has not updated their enrolment details with the Electoral Commission before the close of voting.

Outcomes of recent changes to the delivery of voting papers and returns, such as increased use of DX mail and orange bins in supermarkets

13. The DCC notes that additional days in the 2025 voting period makes it hard to compare effects of changes to delivery and return arrangements.
14. DX Mail handled the majority of the outgoing mail deliveries, with the bulk of those deliveries achieved within four days, which was within target.
15. DX Mail also provided a clearance service for some of the DCC orange bins and engaged NZ Couriers to clear the balance up to Thursday 9 October 2025.
16. To counter changes in the postal system, DCC increased the number of orange bin locations within Dunedin City to 25, including libraries and book buses.
17. Initial return volumes in Dunedin City were low and it was feared the high number of candidates — 16 for Mayor, 54 for Councillor, 59 for Community Boards — was inadvertently creating voter apathy.
18. A concerted media campaign over the last week of voting resulted in 25,528 (26.8%) of votes received over last 5 days with 11,358 votes (11.92%) received on the final day prior to noon.
19. Just under 5,000 fewer votes were returned for the 2025 DCC election, compared to 2022.
20. The final voter return rate for the 2025 DCC election of 45.47% was below the 2022 election return rate but comparable to the 2019 and 2016 elections.
21. Overall, feedback received about the use of the orange bins and the bin locations was positive.

Use of telephone dictation voting for voters who are blind, vision-impaired, or physically unable to mark their voting paper

22. To meet the Local Election Amended Requirements 2023, a telephone dictation service was set up by electionz.com to handle requests from blind or vision-impaired electors or disabled electors within its contracted councils who were unable to mark their own voting papers.
23. The service was available from 9 September to 10 October 2025 via a dedicated 0800 number.

24. Details of the dictation service were circulated to appropriate disability support groups to pass onto their members. It was noted in that circulation that the service would only cover vote dictation and not extend to assisting with candidate selection by reading candidate profiles etc.
25. Overall, 20 vote dictation calls were received by electionz.com during the 2025 election period, one of which was from a Dunedin City elector.

The appropriateness of the use of mobile voting booths

26. The DCC operated seven pop-up voting booths, at the University of Otago campus and DCC Libraries across the city.
27. The pop-up voting booths only operated on certain days of the week and were provided to fill either potential high-volume areas or areas beyond easily commutable distance from the main special vote issue point in the DCC Civic Centre building in the Octagon
28. The DCC notes that the pop-up voting booths were not well patronised but add to the principle of encouraging elector participation, including supplying enrolment forms to those on the unpublished roll or who are not enrolled at all, which is important with declining voter participation patterns.

Electoral integrity, including disinformation or misinformation

29. The DCC supports the view that the election process for local body elections in New Zealand is well regulated and ensures a high level of electoral integrity. The legislation allows provision for post-election judicial reviews, which are rarely taken up.
30. The DCC notes that the increased use of social media and other online forums has brought with it an increase in instances of reported misinformation, disinformation and trolling. The bulk of the reported cases involve inaccuracies with posts about candidates.
31. Unfortunately, electoral officials have very little control over social media or other online content so the opportunity to take corrective action is extremely limited.
32. In the case of the DCC and its provider electionz.com, candidates are typically notified of that and advised to follow up the issue with the person or group concerned or seek external advice through organisations like Netsafe or their own legal representative.

Consideration of the role of councils and their staff when determining voting arrangements, and their relationships with the electoral agencies responsible for conducting the voting

33. The DCC notes that to maintain electoral integrity, elected members are very limited in how much input they have into setting voting arrangements.
34. In the case of the DCC, oversight of that function falls to the Deputy Electoral Officer and other electoral or communications staff. Those staff are in regular contact with the contractors and electoral agencies to ensure a credible voting process is delivered.

Conclusion

35. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on this consultation.
36. The DCC would welcome the opportunity to provide feedback at any hearings for the Inquiry into the 2025 Local Elections.

Nāku noa, nā



Sophie Barker
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TE KOROMATUA O ŌTEPOTI

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