

24 February 2020

Committee Secretariat
Justice Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

By email: ju@parliament.govt.nz

DCC SUBMISSION ON THE JUSTICE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Introduction

1. The Dunedin City Council (DCC) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on the Government's *Inquiry into the 2019 Local Elections*.
2. The DCC supports the Government's Inquiry, and this submission outlines the DCC's position on the recommendations given in the Justice Committee's report on the *Inquiry into the 2017 General Election and 2016 Local Elections*.
3. The DCC has also contributed to development of the submission made by the Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM).

Centralised delivery of local elections

4. The DCC does not support the recommendation that the Government consider giving responsibility for running all aspects of local elections to the Electoral Commission.
5. The DCC supports the position that specific local election publicity functions could be more effectively achieved by a centralised agency, such as national advertising campaigns to encourage voter turnout.
6. The DCC supports the position that responsibility for specific local election administration functions should remain with each local authority, including running candidate evenings, undertaking the nomination process, and issuing special votes.
7. The DCC believes that local authorities are best placed to determine the most appropriate approach for their communities and is concerned that a standardised approach may not address local issues and needs. The appointed Electoral Officer has legal responsibility for the election, has the working relationship with the local authority, and understanding of the local needs.
8. The DCC supports the recommendation for consistency between Maori and general wards by leaving the final determination in the hands of the Local Government Commission.

The same voting system to be used in all local elections

9. The DCC supports the broader view that the Government consider encouraging or requiring the same voting system to be used in all local elections, however acknowledges that there are advantages and disadvantages with both voting systems.
10. The DCC has used the single transferrable voting (STV) system since 2004, following receipt of a poll from the Dunedin community wishing to change from first past the post (FPP). The DCC has been supportive of locally determined decision making, including the local community determining the voting system that best suits their needs.
11. The DCC believes that STV, the method chosen by Dunedin residents, provides a more representative voting system than FPP.

Voting method

12. The DCC supports the recommendation that the Government investigate what is the best voting method (or combination of methods), as an enduring solution for increasing turnout at local elections.
13. The DCC notes that ongoing changes to the postal system are impacting local elections, and anecdotal feedback suggests that postal delivery challenges are placing pressure on current voting processes. Given the postal system changes, an investigation into voting methods is timely.
14. The DCC notes that voting methods for those travelling overseas need to be considered. Neither postal voting nor booth voting meet the needs of these voters.
15. The DCC only supports the online voting systems where the specific methods are demonstrably secure.

Conclusion

16. The DCC supports the Government's Inquiry into the 2019 local elections, and welcomes a collaborative central and local government approach to address issues of voter participation and civic engagement.

Yours faithfully,

Aaron Hawkins
Mayor of Dunedin

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Hawkins', is written over the printed name and title.