



Friday 22 May 2026

9:00am-12:30pm, QLDC Council Chamber  
10 Gorge Road, Queenstown

Chair: Mayor Melanie Tavendale

Time	Item	Paper
9:00am [5']	<b>1 Welcome</b> Apologies – received from Mayor Jock Martin (Deputy Mayor Michele Kennedy attending); received from CE Peter Kelly (GM Saskia Righarts attending). Minutes from the previous meeting Agenda confirmation	p. 3
9.05am [30']	<b>2 MCERT and DIA officials</b> Jeremy Lightfoot, Secretary and Chief Executive, Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) and Warren Ulusele, Regional Partnership Director, Department of Internal Affairs (DIA), will join the Forum to discuss the Government’s recent reform announcements and implications for Otago.	
9.35am [40']	<b>3 Simplifying Local Government</b> <i>Regional focus area: LG Reform</i> Charting a path for Otago through the Government’s revised Simplifying Local Government process, including Head Start timeframes and provisions.	p. 5
10.15am	- <b>Morning tea</b>	

10.30am [20']	4	<p><b>Advocating for Otago's economy</b>  <i>Regional focus area: Otago's economy</i></p> <p>The Forum is invited to approve a coordinated regional economic development regional narrative and advocacy platform, in preparation for the general election later in 2026.</p>	p. 20
10.50am [20']	5	<p><b>Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal</b></p> <p>An opportunity to discuss progress towards the Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal and implications for the wider Otago region.</p>	
11.10am [20']	6	<p><b>Initiating Regional Spatial Planning in Otago</b>  <i>Regional focus area: Regional spatial planning</i></p> <p>This paper seeks the Forum's support for initial steps towards regional spatial planning in Otago, as discussed by the Otago CE Forum on 24 April 2026.</p>	p. 27
11.30am [60']	7	<p><b>General business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional focus area updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Climate resilience</li> <li>○ Minimising waste</li> </ul> </li> <li>• As arising</li> </ul>	p. 32
12.30pm	-	<p><b><i>Meeting close</i></b>  <i>Lunch to follow</i></p>	

**Minutes of a meeting of the Otago Mayoral Forum  
held on Friday 6 March at 9.00am, Otago Regional Council Chamber  
Level 2, Philip Laing House, 144 Rattray St, Dunedin**

**Members present**

Mayor Melanie Tavendale	Waitaki District Council (Chair)
Mayor Jock Martin	Clutha District Council
Mayor John Glover	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Mayor Sophie Barker	Dunedin City Council
Chief Executive Alex Parmley	Waitaki District Council
Chief Executive Michelle Morss	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Chief Executive Peter Kelly	Central Otago District Council
Chief Executive Richard Saunders	Otago Regional Council
Chief Executive Steve Hill	Clutha District Council

**Present**

Cr Kevin Malcolm	Deputy Chair, Otago Regional Council (for the Chair)
Scott MacLean	General Manager City Services, Dunedin City Council (for the CE)
Marianna Brook	Principal Advisor, Mayoral Forum Secretariat
Kylie Darragh	Governance Support Officer, Otago Regional Council

**1. Welcome**

Mayor Tavendale opened the meeting with a karakia at 9:06 am.

**1.1 Apologies**

Resolution:

That the apologies from Mayor Tamah Alley, Chair Hilary Calvert, Sandy Graham and Mayor Sophie Barker (for lateness) be accepted.

**Moved** Mayor Glover

**Seconded** Mayor Martin

**CARRIED**

**1.2 Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolution:

That minutes of the meeting of 5 December 2025 be confirmed as true and accurate.

**Moved:** Mayor Glover

**Seconded:** Mayor Martin

**1.3 Agenda confirmation**

The agenda was confirmed with no changes.

**2. Workshop session to develop the Otago Mayoral Forum Regional Focus Areas**

At its December 2025 meeting, the Forum agreed a process for developing regional focus areas, culminating in today's workshop. The Otago Local Authorities Triennial Agreement is now in place, and formally asks the Forum to confirm regional focus areas and a direction of travel for each. Regional focus areas are matters that either require or would benefit from a cross-council approach in Otago. The Forum's role is to own and oversee this work by providing high-level direction and escalating to councils as needed.

Otago's CEs spoke to each of the five proposed focus areas, providing background and context, outlining why Otago's councils need to work together on the focus area, and suggesting where next. Each presentation was followed by discussion among members.

At the conclusion of the workshop, Forum members confirmed all five proposed regional focus areas. Overall, members rated 'Local Government reform' their highest priority, and 'Regional spatial planning' and 'Otago's economy' second-equal. 'Climate resilience' and 'Minimising waste' round out the set. These priorities will inform the Forum's work programme for the triennium to come.

**At 10.18 am** the Mayoral Forum adjourned for a break until 10:43 am.

### **3. Otago submission on Simplifying Local Government**

Members received an agenda paper summarising Otago councils' submissions on the Government's Simplifying Local Government proposal. Drawing on the summary, the paper proposed common position statements and possible joint actions for the Forum's consideration.

Members generally agreed that focussing on outcomes and functions is better than moving straight to boundaries and amalgamation. It was suggested that all would benefit from understanding councils' collective long-term visions – "what is the direction we see ourselves going?". There are various existing documents that could assist with this. Two specific presentations were offered for future Forum meetings: one on CE Alex Parmley's experience of council reorganisation in the UK, and another on DCC's upcoming briefing on how unitary councils work.

**ACTIONS:** Rather than respond to the recommendations in the agenda paper (position statements etc), the Forum agreed that Otago's CEs would develop options for a forward work programme and bring these back to a future meeting. The Forum chair will consider the above-mentioned presentations for inclusion in future meetings.

### **4. Advocacy and Government engagement**

Members briefing discussed its role as an advocate for the Otago region, especially with regards engagement with Ministers and MPs. It was agreed that advocacy is most valuable when it draws on shared positions, including those expected to be developed in connection with the five regional focus areas.

### **5. General business**

The following matters arose under general business:

- The Otago Local Authorities Triennial Agreement 2026-29 has been ratified by all Otago councils and is ready for signing. [Note: members signed the document immediately following the meeting, on behalf of their Councils.]
- An Otago Mayoral Forum terms of reference was circulated with the agenda. This was approved without amendment.
- A list of meeting locations for 2026 was also circulated. These locations are included in the invitations for each meeting.

### **6. Meeting close**

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting with a karakia at 11:39am.

**Signed**



**Date** - 22 February 2026

Date: 22 May 2026

Drafted by: Amanda Vercoe, General Manager Strategy and Customer - Deputy CEO, Otago Regional Council

Endorsed by: Alex Parmley, CE lead for local government reform

## Otago discussion on the Government's Simplifying Local Government – Head Start pathway announcement

### Purpose

1. This paper provides an opportunity for an Otago-wide discussion on the Government's recent Simplifying Local Government – Head Start Pathway announcement.
2. The paper sets out some key discussion points for the Mayoral Forum to consider in response to the intended policy decisions from government. This is not the only place that discussions and conversations are taking place, but it sets out region-wide considerations, including opportunities and risks, to support conversations and to determine next steps.

### Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
  - a. **considers and discusses** how best to lead a local government reform conversation for Otago.
  - b. **considers and discusses** which timeframe for reform is likely to work best for Otago's communities.
  - c. **directs** Chief Executives on next steps for local government reform in Otago, including
    - i. programme set-up,
    - ii. engagement with mana whenua,
    - iii. early engagement with community,
    - iv. commencing analysis of options against government criteria,
    - v. commencing work on potential local criteria in addition to government criteria for assessing options,
    - vi. agreeing that a shared update will be prepared for Mayoral Forum members to send to their own councillors following today's discussion, and
    - vii. any other relevant matters.

### Background

4. In November 2025, the Government released a draft proposal for local government reform. All six Otago councils submitted feedback on the proposal.

5. At its meeting on 6 March 2026, the Otago Mayoral Forum asked the Otago Chief Executives Forum to identify practical ways to address the proposed changes within Otago.
6. On 5 May 2026 the Government announced its intended policy, setting out a “Head Start” pathway for local government reform, and a “backstop” pathway.
7. Government is clear in the decision document that the delivery of the new planning framework by local government is their priority. However, they recognise the desire of some regions to move ahead with local government reform.
8. The starting point for the Government’s reform is creating a unitary authority within a region, alongside disestablishing regional councils. The Government has also said it will consider more than one unitary authority in a region where:
  - a. The region is large and has more complex issues
  - b. The proposal clearly meets the criteria and doesn’t lead to the fragmentation of key regional functions where collaboration is required, such as catchment management.
9. To progress reform, two pathways have been established. Indicative timeframes for both have been mapped out in Appendix A. Until the legislation is introduced in late 2027, it will not be possible to advise on exactly what the process will look like.
10. The Head Start pathway has been designed to provide a voluntary streamlined option for councils that want to lead a reform transition early.
11. The alternative Backstop pathway enables councils to focus on delivering the planning framework in the short term and would allow more time to progress regional conversations about reform options. However, there is little detail on what the Backstop pathway will look like and how far Government will go with setting out the process, to mandating the new entities.

## Discussion

12. With the detail of the Government’s intended policy approach now available (albeit it with high level detail), the Otago Mayoral Forum can consider next steps with respect to local government reform in Otago with more clarity. Two key questions have been set out below for discussion.

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### ***1. How to lead the local government reform approach in Otago?***

- *Otago-wide approach led by the Mayoral Forum*
  - *Sub-regional or proposal-driven approach*
- 

13. One option for leading the conversations about local government reform in Otago is an Otago-wide process (whether Head Start or Backstop) by the Mayoral Forum. This offers the opportunity to have outcomes for Otago’s community at the heart of the process. An example leadership model is set out in Appendix B.

14. Region wide consideration of new governance options, supported by collection of information and data, would enable analysis of those options to be consistent and comparable. It would also support a collective approach to:
  - a. engagement with Ngāi Tahu and local Rūnaka,
  - b. engagement and consultation with the community,
  - c. assessments of a range of options and selection of a preferred option,
  - d. recommendations to Councils for final decision making, and
  - e. submission of a reorganisation proposal(s) to government.
15. Leadership by the Mayoral Forum fits under its current *Local Government reform* regional focus area and would enable support from the Otago CE Forum and a combined reform programme of work at staff level. Participation would not commit any council to a particular outcome, nor would it prevent any council from engaging in other regional processes or pursuing its own approach. The discussions could also include councils from outside of Otago when and where cross-boundary issues were relevant to discussions.
16. A region-wide approach would enable a consistent voice within Otago on reform, and confidence for Councils, the community and staff that that a clear process was being undertaken with appropriate opportunities for input, consultation and understanding of the various options and cost-benefit analysis. This potentially would also help when it came to implementing a new model of local government in Otago.
17. External facilitation could support Mayoral Forum discussions.
18. Alternatively, an Otago wide process may not be the preference for Otago to take forward reform planning. Councils may prefer to progress reform planning in Council sub-groups, or outside of the Mayoral Forum.

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## **2. What timeframe suits Otago best?**

- *Head Start – initial proposal due 9 August*
- *Backstop – legislation introduced late 2027 setting out the process*
- *Hybrid – Otago works with the government to confirm a reform-ready approach for Otago and timeframe for submitting a proposal (likely to be mid-2027 ahead of the legislation)*

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19. While the government has set out two options, those that progress to the next stage of the Head Start process are likely to be the regions who are well advanced in their reform conversations – with their communities, with their Councils and with government.
  20. There is potentially a hybrid option to consider, where Otago works with the government to confirm an approach that would enable it to be ready for reform in time for the back-stop legislation, but allows

more space to develop a process that engages the community and considers the best options that works for Otago.

21. In order to keep the Head Start pathway available, work needs to continue in the interim. This work could be slowed down to allow more time, should Councils not wish to aim for the Head Start pathway. However, it is important to consider undertaking some work now to keep this option open. The following steps are underway:
  - a. Early thinking about engagement with mana whenua. A letter from the Chair of the Mayoral Forum to Rūnaka Chairs to initiate a discussion either through Te Rōpū Taiao or another mechanism could be appropriate.
  - b. An early engagement approach is being designed by staff, for a short, sharp focussed engagement that seeks the community’s views on reform and the outcomes that are important (as opposed to options for consultation). Appendix C has a proposed approach and list of proposed questions for the Forum’s consideration.
  - c. Staff have sought a proposal from Morrison Low for support for options analysis, for CE consideration.
22. Funding has not been forecast or budgeted for this process. However, this would need to be worked through in the detailed programme design and a cost-sharing arrangement set up between Councils.
23. Below is a brief assessment of the high level workplan touchstones under each pathway. Note this is not a detailed work programme, and this would need to be developed once we have a clearer sense of likely timeframes.

	Who	High-level Tasks	Head Start	Backstop/Hybrid
Set-up	Mayoral Forum (MF)	Discuss how to lead local government reform planning will take place in Otago.	May	May
	CEs	Confirm programme structure Develop timeline and provisional budget Detailed project planning and resourcing	May – light touch	June-August 2026 (3 months)
Mana Whenua / Community Voice	CE/MF	Co-design an approach to work with Ngāi Tahu	June/July Light touch	June-August 2026 (3 months)
	MF	Early engagement Build understanding of how Unitary Councils operate Build understanding of Regional Council functions	May-June (3 weeks)	June-August 2026 (3 months)

Heart and Head	Programme (P'gm)	<p>Develop intended outcomes for reform.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early engagement feedback</li> <li>- Mayoral Forum workshops</li> <li>- Other inputs</li> </ul> <p>Assess options for future delivery models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governance (series of workshops with Mayoral Forum)</li> <li>- Delivery model analysis, including cost/benefit (staff/analytical consultant)</li> </ul>	<p>May/June – light touch</p> <p><i>(4-6 weeks)</i></p>	<p>August 2026 – March 2027: deeper design</p> <p><i>(6 months)</i></p>
Decision making	P'gm/ Council	Workshops with Councils to present information and understand options	<p>July 2026 (mid)</p> <p><i>(3 weeks)</i></p>	<p>Feb-March 2027</p> <p><i>(6 weeks)</i></p>
	MF/ Councils	Consultation with the community on options	-	<p>March/April 2027</p> <p><i>(8 weeks)</i></p>
	Councils	Preferred option agreed and endorsed by Councils and supporting evidence submitted to Minister	<p>Late July / early August 2026</p> <p><i>(2 weeks)</i></p>	<p>May 2027</p> <p>Proposal could include more detailed design.</p>
Implementation	MF	Proposal submitted to Minister	<p>9 August 2026</p>	<p>May 2027</p> <p>Proposal could include more detailed design.</p>
	P'gm	Develop detailed design	<p>Sep-March 2027</p> <p><i>(5 months)</i></p>	
	MF	Public consultation on draft RRP, consider feedback and finalise proposal	<p>Jan-March 2027</p> <p><i>(3 months)</i></p>	
	MF Councils	Consider feedback and finalise and submit recommended RRP	<p>March 2027</p>	

		(including supporting evidence) to Minister		
	Late 2027	Govt to introduce legislation to establish Head Start entities and back-stop process	Commence transition	Process to follow legislative steps.

Head Start – further information

- 24. Under Head Start, initial proposals are due on 9 August 2026. We are seeking further guidance from Department of Internal Affairs about what kind of detail would be required in the initial proposal. Guidance is expected to be available by the time of the Mayoral Forum meeting.
- 25. Any two or more territorial authorities may submit a proposal, if they represent a majority of directly affected TAs, or a majority of the population across directly affected areas. Individual councils cannot submit proposals alone. Councils will be expected to demonstrate how existing Treaty settlement arrangements could be transferred into the new unitary authorities with equivalent effect.
- 26. Outlines do not need to resolve all issues relating to any transfer of regional functions. But should:
  - Address the need to consolidate regional transport functions (Unitary/Joint Committee/CCO)
  - Propose interim arrangements for compliance, monitoring and enforcement (CME)
  - Explain how effective river catchment management can be maintained.
- 27. The advice in the policy on consultation says “given the short window for submitting, councils will be limited in how they consult on initial outline proposals. We are looking for mayors and councils to provide local leadership. Councils will have the opportunity to consult with communities before final decisions are made by Cabinet in May 2027.”
- 28. The criteria for assessing Head Start proposals are:
  - **Deliverability:** Proposals are realistic and demonstrate how new arrangements can be implemented in a timely manner.
  - **Supports the new planning system:** Shows clear support for implementing the new planning system – including progress on spatial and natural environment plan development – and avoids or minimises disruption to that work.
  - **Simplifies local governance:** Proposed more efficient regional governance arrangements, consolidating decision-making and improving alignment between a region’s councils.
  - **Economies of Scale:** Supports regional strategic planning and effective delivery of key regional functions (such as transport and catchment management) and demonstrates responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment and service delivery.
  - **Maintains local voice:** Demonstrates fair and effective representation for communities of interest and how decisions will be made at the local level, balancing urban and rural interests.

29. The Mayoral Forum may also want to develop its own specific Otago criteria to assess options against as well. The early engagement feedback could help develop what these local criteria would be.
30. For Otago Councils to recommend and for the government to assess a proposal, at the very least it would need to include an analysis of:
- A proposed new **governance structure** that provides for local voice, with the detail of devolution to potentially be worked through in the detailed design process.
  - A proposed new **operating structure** that demonstrates economies of scale, support for the new planning system, and how regional functions such as transport, CME and river management would be delivered.
  - A proposed **implementation plan** that demonstrates deliverability.
31. Below is a high-level assessment of some of the opportunities and risks around the two timeframes to support discussion.

Head Start: Opportunities and Risks ( <i>italics</i> )	Backstop/Hybrid: Opportunities and Risks ( <i>italics</i> )
<p><b>Commitment:</b> Creates a clear focus on deepening collaboration in a short time, to develop a credible, locally led initial proposal by August.</p> <p><i>Risk: Limited time to fully work through outcomes we want to achieve for Otago, develop and analyse options, assess costs and benefits, or consider regional issues.</i></p> <p><i>Risk: Limited availability of external resourcing to assist with facilitation, information gathering and data analysis.</i></p> <p><i>Risk: Funding to stand up a reform planning staff working group, and external support to deliver an initial proposal by August 2026 and a detailed design proposal by March 2027.</i></p>	<p><b>Stronger mandate:</b> More time to work across <b>Otago’s Councils</b> on reform processes, outcomes, options and analysis, which will support community engagement.</p> <p>Opportunity to work with <b>Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and Papatipu Rūnaka</b> to define enduring participation arrangements, resourcing, and environmental/catchment outcome expectations.</p> <p>Outcomes for the <b>community</b> enhanced through having more time for early engagement approach, followed by thorough consultation on options. There is also an opportunity to consider other models of engagement like an expert advisory group potentially alongside targeted stakeholder engagement (business communities, rural communities for example).</p> <p><i>Risk: Councils/community want Otago to progress quicker and aim for the Head Start.</i></p>
<p><b>Certainty:</b> Provides more certainty for the community, and for council staff around timeframes for transition and change (rather than waiting until late 2027 for more direction).</p> <p>Potentially avoids the need for transitional governance arrangements post-2028 local body elections.</p>	<p><b>Outcomes:</b> More time to develop outcomes framework, alongside options analysis, cost benefit analysis, regional services delivery.</p> <p><i>Risk: Uncertain what the Backstop process will look like until late 2027 and how much Otago would be able to influence the outcome.</i></p>

<p><i>Risk: Initial proposal may not get progressed through the Head-Start process, or General Election in 2026 may impact timeframes, and create more uncertainty in the short-term, or the need to then “start again” for Otago.</i></p>	<p><i>Risk: Funding to stand up a reform planning staff working group, and external support.</i></p>
<p><b>Cross-boundary:</b> Cross-boundary issues can be considered alongside relevant regions who may also be considering a Head Start pathway.</p>	<p><b>Workload:</b> Otago councils consistently flagged the proposed two-year RRP window, overlap with RMA/Planning, CDEM, water reform, rates caps, LTP, and the election cycle as risks in their submissions.</p> <p>A hybrid approach would enable more time to focus on the above, while progressing reform planning in parallel.</p>
<p><b>Wider sector:</b> As part of the Head Start process, Councils could undertake joint advocacy with other Head Start councils on funding/financing and transition resourcing, including setting expectations with government about transition funding, regulatory relief, and new revenue tools (especially for tourism/growth districts).</p> <p><i>Risk: Early mover disadvantage: The government will be building the model while the Head Start councils are going through it, so there are likely to be changes/uncertainty about next steps at times.</i></p>	<p><b>Learn from others:</b> The government has said it will adapt the process as they go for Head Start councils. This means we would be able to learn from others, and the process wouldn’t iterate as we worked through it.</p>

**Next steps**

32. Next steps are to be determined by the Mayoral Forum.

## Appendix A

### Indicative Head Start Timeframe

Government Timeframe	What's required	Time available
May, June, July 2026	Develop outline proposal Deliver new planning framework plus BAU	2.5 months Ongoing
9 August 2026	Submit outline proposal	
September 2026	Approval (or not) from Cabinet to progress	
Sep 2026 – March 2027	Develop detailed design proposal *Support required to develop detailed reorganisation plan will be determined by Cabinet/submitters	6 months Government anticipates community consultation here
7 November 2026	General Election	
March 2027	Final detailed proposal submitted to Cabinet	
Sep-Dec 2027	Legislation introduced/public consultation through select committee process (tbc)  *Establishes Head Start entities *Establishes Backstop process	
Jan-Mar 2028	Legislation enacted	
May 2028	Implementation of legislation begins	
October 2028	Local body elections, to include: *Election to Head Start entities *Election to Backstop Territorial Authorities, with regional reorganisation role and governance of regional council role	

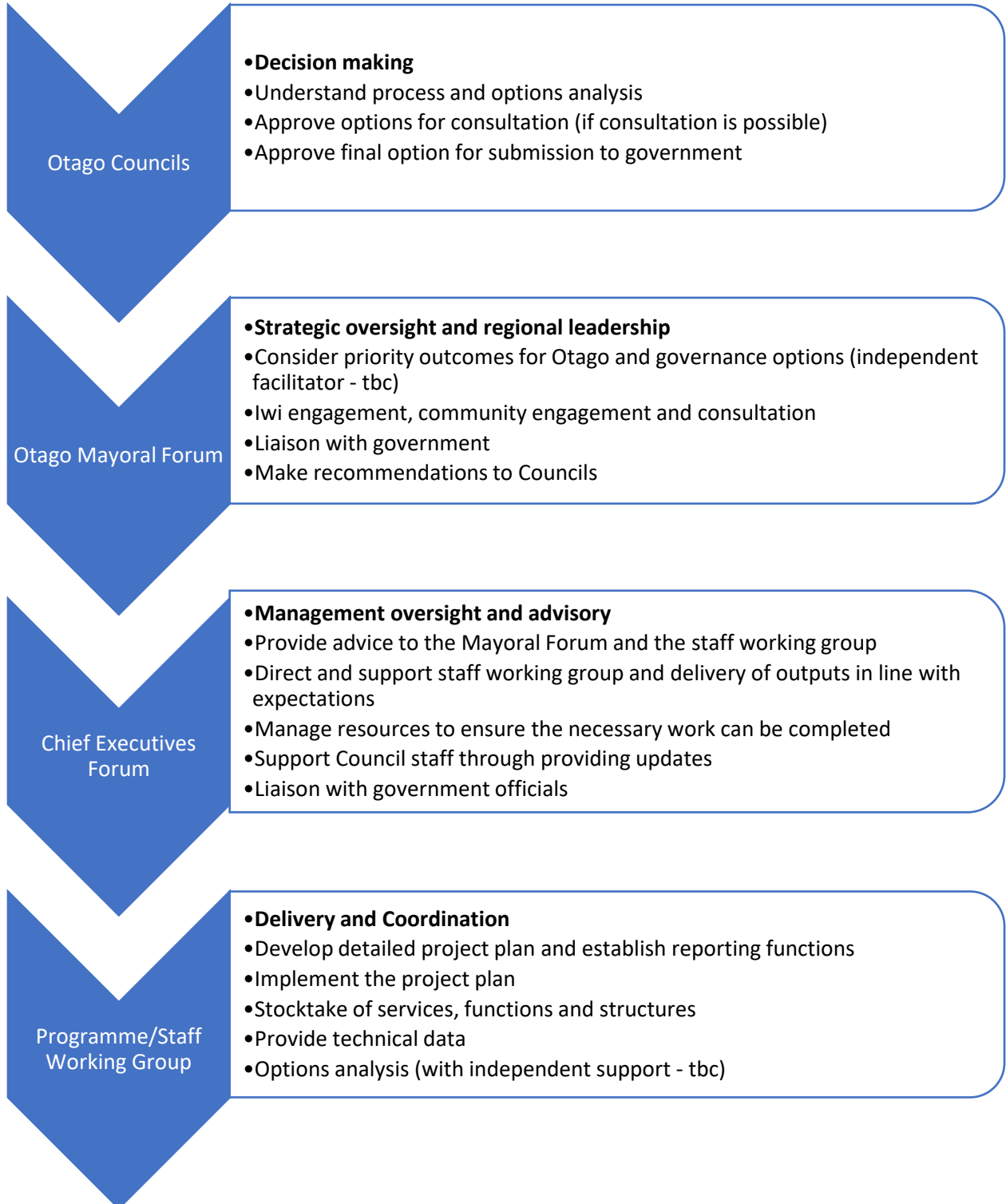
### Indicative Backstop Timeframe

Government Timeframe	What's required	Time available
May 2026 –	Deliver new planning framework + BAU *Opportunity to progress discussions and development of Otago options/proposal/reorganisation plan	
7 November 2026	General Election	
Sep-Dec 2027	Legislation introduced/public consultation through select committee process (tbc)  *Establishes Head Start entities * Establishes Backstop process	

Jan-Mar 2028	Legislation enacted	
May 2028	Implementation of legislation begins	
October 2028	Local body elections, to include: *Election to Head Start entities <b>*Election to Backstop Territorial Authorities, with regional reorganisation role and governance of regional council role</b>  No regional council elections	
TBC	Development/confirmation of reorganisation plan	TBC
	Implementation/transition to new model	

## Appendix B

### Possible Leadership model for Local Government Reform



## **Appendix C:**

### **Early engagement approach**

#### **Proposed early engagement survey from Otago's councils on Local Government Simplification**

1. Staff from all Otago councils have worked together at pace to co-create a short survey to gain a first sense of what outcomes are most important to the community from local government reform. As directed, we have avoided discussion of preferences for scenarios, options or models.
2. The survey would be open for 19 days, Wednesday 27 May to Sunday 14 June, unless major changes to survey are decided. This would be followed by an analysis period of 1 week, with the aim of reporting results in the last week of June.
3. Data would be provided broken down by district/city council area, and a regional summary.
4. The survey has been designed primarily as a digital, web-based survey able to be widely distributed and quickly completed. The survey would be a user-friendly survey of core questions able to be completed on a mobile phone or any computer browser. A paper-based version would be available with the same questions for those councils who wish to distribute it through their own channels (e.g. through service centres).
5. The staff recommendation is for the survey to be hosted centrally on the Otago Mayoral Forum website, with a generic link ([otagomayors.org.nz/survey](http://otagomayors.org.nz/survey)) that could be distributed and promoted by all councils in their own way and communications. This would aid with consistency, speed of distribution, data integrity and ease of analysis.
6. The alternative would be for each council to create the common survey in their own engagement platforms. However, this will lead to six sets of data that then need to be combined and analysed.
7. The proposed time frame is to go live with the survey on Wednesday 27 May, with accompanying media material and advertising. Media and advertising would be led by individual councils but with some regional coordination.
8. The staff group have agreed on six proposed questions. Some questions are styled as open free-text answers (Q3 and Q6), some with prompted ranges (Q1,2,4) and one outcomes ranking exercise (Q5).
9. The first question requires a choice of council district or city, with further choice to ward level (except for Dunedin). A further optional demographic section (likely to be age and ethnicity) at the end of the survey is recommended to test which demographics are heard from.

*Ian Telfer, ORC Partnerships and Engagement Manager*

*18 May 2026*

## Preamble / introduction

Significant change is coming for councils across New Zealand. Reorganisation discussions are happening in many regions, and Otago's councils are beginning our own.

The Government has told councils we have a choice between putting forward our own reorganisation plans in the next 3 months (called the *Head Start* process) or waiting for more information and a slower process (called the *backstop*). Either way Otago's councils will look different in the future.

Now is an opportunity for you to get involved and have an early say on what is most important to you.

The results of this survey will be shared with councils so your elected representatives can see what is important for you and your community.

Otago's mayors and councils want to know your views as they embark on this significant process.

### Q1 Where do you live?

[drop-down list choice]

Central Otago district

> then choose ward

Clutha district

> then choose ward

Dunedin city

> *further divisions to be advised by DCC*

Queenstown Lakes district

> then choose ward

Waitaki district

> then choose ward

Other

> then choose from

- I live outside Otago but am an Otago ratepayer
- Not an Otago ratepayer

### Q2 How aware are you of the Government's plan to simplify local government?

[choice from 3 radio buttons]

- Not at all – I don't know anything
- Somewhat knowledgeable
- Well informed

### Q3 How do you feel about how local government reform might affect you and your community?

[Open, free-text box, max 150 characters.]

**Q4 Do you support your council going into the Head Start lane in the next 3 months?**

Or: Do you support your council working with others to design our own plan in the next 3 months?

[5 radio button options]

- Strongly reject
- Reject
- Neutral
- Support
- Strongly support

**Q5 What is most important to you for local government reform?**

[compulsory list ranking or checkbox choice of up to 3 options – tbc]

- Keep decisions local
- More efficiency, less duplication
- Services are easy to access
- Affordable rates
- Healthy environment
- More transparency
- Quality services and infrastructure
- Rural areas and small towns are provided for
- Urban growth is properly planned
- Local character is protected
- Economic growth
- Other – please specify

**Q6 Is there any other feedback you want to give about local government reform in Otago?**

[Open, free-text box, max 150 characters]

**Optional demographic questions**

It's really helpful to understand who we are hearing from and who we aren't. Would you be willing to give us some information about yourself?

Yes – go to demography questions

No – ends survey and thank you

**Q8 How old are you?**

[drop down pick list of age groups, in line with Statistics NZ categories]

**Q9 Ethnicity**

[drop down multiple tick boxes - in line with Stats NZ standard categories]

**Interested in the results?**

Please provide an email address and we will send you the results of the survey once available.

[enter email address]

[Closing thank you statement with appreciation for their views and what will happen to the data, and next steps]

Date: 22 May 2026

Drafted by: Shelley Winsor, Partnerships Manager – Economic and Community Development,  
Waitaki District Council

## Coordinated Regional Economic Development Plan

### Purpose

1. This paper seeks the Forum’s agreement to develop a coordinated Otago economic narrative and advocacy platform, as outlined in the accompanying discussion document.

### Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
  - a. **notes** the progress of the ORED Coordinated Economic Development Plan to date;
  - b. **agrees** to the proposed approach, framework, and process outlined in the accompanying discussion document;
  - c. **agrees** to the proposed criteria for selecting regional priorities; and
  - d. **provides** feedback on key stakeholders for engagement.

### Context and Opportunity

3. At a time of increasing uncertainty - including signals from central government and ongoing discussions regarding potential local government reform - the need for a clear, coordinated Otago economic proposition has never been more important.
4. This work is not dependent on structural outcomes. Rather, it positions Otago to be proactive, aligned, and ready - ensuring the region is clearly articulating its priorities and opportunities ahead of, and alongside, an incoming government.
5. This positions Otago to lead strategically and with intent - rather than respond reactively - in our engagement with central government.

### Background

6. In November 2025, the Otago CE Forum initiated work to define shared regional economic development themes.
7. This work has been informed by central government signals for regions to present aligned economic priorities and a clear, investable proposition.
8. In January 2026, ORED presented a set of shared regional themes - *Thriving Businesses, Thriving People, and a Resilient Economy* - providing a common foundation across Otago’s diverse local economies. These themes were endorsed by the CE Forum, along with next steps.
9. In March, the Mayoral Forum identified “Otago’s economy” as a regional focus area for the triennium.
10. In April, ORED presented a plan to the CE Forum to move from themes to a focused set of shared regional priorities and a clear Otago narrative to support engagement with incoming Ministers in

late 2026. This work will be supported by Angela Davis (Collective Strategy). The CE Forum endorsed this approach.

11. Further detail on the proposed framework, process, and criteria is provided in the **attached** discussion document.

#### Next steps

12. Subject to today's decisions, ORED will begin the implementation and consultation phase, supported by Angela Davis, and will continue to provide progress updates via the CE and Mayoral Forums

# Discussion Document: Otago Economic Priorities Process

**TO:** Otago Mayoral Forum  
**FROM:** ORED (prepared by Angela Davis, Collective Strategy Ltd)  
**DATE:** 15 May 2026

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## Introduction

This discussion document outlines a proposed approach, process, and criteria to enable the Otago Mayoral Forum to advocate collectively to central government to unlock additional funding, regulatory settings, and partnerships to drive economic growth in the region.

Economic development is an enduring priority for the region. This work responds to requests from Ministers for aligned economic planning, priorities and an actionable proposition. It will be valuable for the next triennium, including in the context of amalgamation discussions and the general election at the end of the year.

The recommendations here have been informed by a review of current and historical ORED frameworks and strategic documents, recent reports from other regions, the Otago Regional Public Services Commissioner, economist Benje Patterson, and interviews with Great South and the Nelson (Tasman) Regional Development Agency on their process.

## 1. Proposed approach, framework and process

Economic analysis for the Otago region has so far not identified significant unified economic drivers. It is recommended instead to start with the drivers for the three local economies identified in recent analysis, Dunedin, Central Otago, and Coastal Otago and then build this into a regional narrative that is unified by common themes. More information on the local economies is provided in Appendix One.

**The three economic growth themes are:**

1. **Thriving Businesses** - *Lifting margins and exports*
2. **Thriving People** - *Where people build their future*
3. **Resilient Economy** - *Future-proofing our region*







### Proposed Framework



The Nelson Tasman briefing was shared with you by Minister Meager as an exemplar of this type of work. Drawing on that example, a proposed Otago framework is provided below.

This framework clearly shows what is needed from the government: funding, regulatory change, and/or partnership. It provides a regional narrative while allowing for projects to be led by one or more local economy leads.

Draft Framework for communicating Otago economic priorities to central government:

### Opportunities for Government to Partner with the Otago Region

Theme 1: Thriving Businesses		
Investments	Asks	Local Economy Lead
<i>Projects to be confirmed</i> Examples could include: Technology Queenstown, CODE, Film Otago Southland	\$  	Dunedin, Central or Coastal (for each project)
Theme 2: Thriving People		
Investments	Asks	Local Economy Lead
<i>Projects to be confirmed</i> Examples could include: Innovative housing models, Stronger Waitaki	\$  	Dunedin, Central or Coastal (for each project)
Theme 3: Resilient Economy		
Investments	Asks	Local Economy Lead
<i>Projects to be confirmed</i> Examples could include: Queenstown Electrification Accelerator, Waitaki Land Diversification	\$  	Dunedin, Central or Coastal (for each project)

**Key:**    \$ Funding     Regulatory and policy change     Partnerships

This framework would be presented in a short report and accompanied by an economic snapshot, more details on the listed projects, and examples of where the region is already investing in its own economic development. Several regions currently provide annual updates to Ministers to keep priorities relevant, communicate progress and encourage engagement.

#### Proposed Process

We propose the following collaborative process:

Timeline	Action	Responsible
22 May	<b>Agree approach, criteria, and stakeholders</b>	Mayors
June	<b>Compile known opportunities and identify gaps</b>	ORED
June - July	<b>Consultation</b> Meet with key stakeholders likely via 2-3 facilitated round-table meetings.	ORED / CEs / Mayors
21 August	<b>Draft priorities shared with CE Forum</b> Provide initial alignment and endorsement	ORED / CEs
18 September	<b>Final priorities provided to Mayors</b> The final report will include commentary on the economic context, opportunities and more details on	Mayors / ORED

	each project. It will be succinct and focused on actions.	
Late 2026	<b>Share with relevant Ministers</b> Can be pre-election and again post-election.	Mayors

## 2. Criteria for selecting priorities

It's important we don't end up with a long shopping list of every possible opportunity. We need evidence to show that the chosen projects will shift the dial in the region.

To help achieve a focused set of priority actions, we propose the following four criteria.

1. **Strategic contribution:** Does the project significantly advance one or more of the three economic growth themes?
2. **Enabling potential:** Does it unlock progress across multiple other initiatives across the region or for a local economy?
3. **Clear role for councils and/or government:** Is collective action required for the project to succeed?
4. **Implementation readiness:** Is the project ready to move with a clear lead and partners?

These criteria will enable enough flexibility to respond to changing government priorities.

ORED will continue to build collaboration as a key enabler for the region. This includes partnerships with neighbouring regions, as economic growth does not always fit with regional boundaries.

## 3. Key stakeholders for consultation

Discussions with other regional development leaders highlighted the importance of engaging with stakeholders throughout the process. While not everyone may agree with the final outcomes, it's important that they are part of the decision-making process.

We propose hosting several facilitated roundtable discussions to foster collaboration and identify new opportunities and we invite your feedback on this proposed list.

Proposed stakeholders:

Sector	Organisation	Person
Mana Whenua	Aukaha Rūnaka	Cory Neale TBC
Business	Business South Queenstown Chamber of Commerce Wānaka Chamber Technology Queenstown Primary Sector (e.g. Hort NZ, primary sector leaders)	Mike Collins Sharon Fifield Glenn Peat Sarah Russell/Roger Sharp Kate Scott (or others)

	Tourism sector productivity Manufacturing (Advancing Manufacturing Aotearoa) StartUp sector	TBC Sarah Ramsay  Grace Easterman
Education	University of Otago  Otago Polytech SIT Telford Campus	Grant Robertson and/or Greg Cook, Jessica Palmer Andrew McSweeney Hamish Small
Government	Regional Public Services Commissioner Kānoa InvestNZ NZTE	Steph Voight TBC Kenny Lau Ken Aitcheson

## Appendix One: Otago Local Economies and ORED History Snapshot

While the main drivers are unique, there are several areas of common interest.

	Dunedin (DCC)	Central Lakes (QLDC & CODC)	Coastal (WDC & CDC)
<b>Economic Driver</b>	<b>Public sector</b> Health, education & construction	<b>Private sector</b> Tourism and population growth	<b>Primary sector</b> Agriculture & manufacturing
<b>Population</b>	132,800	79,600	43,400
<b>10 yr Growth</b>	0.9%	4.6%	TBC
<b>Share of Employment</b>	48.8%	35.5%	15.7%
<b>Top Five Industries by GPD</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Health</li> <li>2. Education</li> <li>3. Construction</li> <li>4. Professional &amp; Scientific</li> <li>5. Retail</li> </ol> *Manufacturing also significant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Construction</li> <li>2. Hospitality &amp; Accom</li> <li>3. Rental &amp; Real Estate</li> <li>4. Professional &amp; Scientific (esp. remote working)</li> <li>5. Agriculture (Horticulture &amp; viticulture)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agriculture (Dairy, sheep &amp; beef), Forestry &amp; Fishing</li> <li>2. Mining</li> <li>3. Manufacturing</li> <li>4. Services</li> <li>5. Construction</li> </ol>
<b>Export Infrastructure</b>	Dunedin Airport, Port Otago, Rail	Queenstown Airport	Access to Otago & Timaru Ports, Rail

Data is drawn from recent ORED presentations and reports.

### Snapshot: Otago Regional Economic Development History

Early 2000's	Otago Forward established as a regional economic development body
June 2011	Otago Forward disestablished; responsibilities transferred to Mayoral Forum
July 2018	ORED Formed
July 2019	ORED Strategic Framework agreed
Oct 2021	Consultation with 28 Orgs, industries and businesses in Dunedin and Queenstown
April 2022	Updated Priority Action Areas agreed (Themes: People, Connectivity, Housing, Productivity, Sustainability. Action: Collaboration, Learn Otago, Lifetime value, Food Otago)
May 2025	Regional Growth Summit
January 2026	Three Economic Priority Themes agreed (Thriving Businesses, Thriving People, Resilient Economy)

Date: 22 May 2026

Drafted by: Marianna Brook, Principal Advisor, Mayoral Forum Secretariat

Endorsed by: Richard Saunders, CE lead for regional spatial planning

## Initiating regional spatial planning in Otago

### Purpose

1. This paper seeks the Forum's support for initial steps towards regional spatial planning in Otago, as agreed by the Otago CE Forum on 24 April 2026.
2. It also seeks approval for two specific actions that require elected member direction: establishing an interim governance group, and a proforma council paper seeking nominations to that group.

### Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
  - a. **notes** the decisions made by the Otago CE Forum on 24 April 2026 to initiate a joint spatial planning project, including appointment of an independent Project Lead;
  - b. **endorses** the approach agreed by the CE Forum, including an interim governance group and high-level planning and prioritisation steps;
  - c. **agrees** to progress an interim governance group (the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group) to provide elected member governance and political leadership;
  - d. **approves** preparation of a proforma paper seeking the nomination of elected representatives to the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group; and
  - e. **notes** that further advice will be sought from Kāi Tahu regarding appropriate governance and operational arrangements for mana whenua partnership and participation.

### The legislative context

4. The Government is undertaking a significant reform of the resource management system. Under the draft Planning Bill, all regional and district councils within a region are required to jointly prepare a single Regional Spatial Plan (RSP) covering at least a 30-year horizon.
5. The RSP will set the strategic spatial framework for urban development, infrastructure investment, environmental limits, and land use across the region. Land use plans prepared by territorial authorities and natural environment plans prepared by regional councils must implement relevant RSP provisions.
6. Schedule 1 Clause 5 of the Planning Bill gives a statutory notification deadline for regional spatial plans of 15 months after Royal Assent or 6 months after the first national policy direction issued (Royal Assent is expected Q3 2027), with decisions required within six months of notification (indicatively June 2028). These timeframes may shift through the Select Committee process, but they signal that meaningful preparatory work needs to begin well before the legislation is enacted.

## The Otago context

7. Otago is a large and diverse region facing significant spatial planning challenges. These include rapid growth pressures in parts of the region, infrastructure constraints across multiple districts, climate adaptation and natural hazard risks, and cross-boundary issues with Canterbury and Southland. The RSP will need to address all of these matters in a coordinated way.
8. Work has been underway at officer level for some time. The Otago Planning Managers met in-person in February 2026 with counterparts in Southland and has met monthly since, with meetings focused solely on regional spatial planning. Representatives from Kāi Tahu – Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Inc – have participated in all the Otago Planning Managers meetings.
9. The next step is to move from officer-level coordination to a formal project with governance, leadership, and resourcing in place. While the legislation is not yet enacted, waiting risks loss of momentum, fragmented officer-level work, and reduced readiness once statutory timeframes begin to run. This view is consistent with guidance from Taituarā and experience from comparable regions.
10. All arrangements being established now are designed to be adaptable. No substantive spatial decisions will be made at this stage. The immediate focus is on guiding preparatory work and progressing the process agreement that will be required once the legislation is enacted. Nothing done now will pre-empt the formal statutory process.
11. Under the triennial agreement, the Otago Mayoral Forum is required to identify ‘regional focus areas’ – areas that either require or would benefit from a cross-council approach. Regional spatial planning is one of the five focus areas agreed at the Otago Mayoral Forum meeting on 6 March 2026, with the first early action being to “explore and establish fit-for-purpose cross-council working and governance arrangements.”
12. The Otago CE Forum met on 24 April 2026 to progress this action and unanimously agreed to initiate the Joint Spatial Planning Project. The rest of this paper updates the Forum on the approach agreed by the CE Forum and seeks approval on two matters requiring elected member direction: establishing an interim governance group, and a proforma council paper seeking nominations to that group.

## Interim governance group

13. The recommended approach is to establish an Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group (Interim Group) comprising appropriately nominated councillors from each participating council – for example, those who already chair or sit on RMA or planning committees.
14. The CE Forum’s preference is that the Interim Group operate informally rather than as a formal joint committee, providing the elected member oversight needed while remaining agile and adaptable. The group would operate by unanimity, reflecting the partnership nature of the RSP.
15. Advice will be sought from Kāi Tahu – through Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Inc – regarding appropriate governance and operational arrangements for the programme. Early and meaningful engagement with mana whenua is essential to a sound and durable planning process, and partnership arrangements need to be embedded throughout.
16. The Planning Bill provides for central government representation on the formal Spatial Planning Committee. How this is reflected in the interim arrangements is yet to be worked through.

17. While the final shape of spatial planning governance in Otago may include sub-regional elements, there is a strong case for beginning with a single regional group. This avoids locking in boundaries before the scope of the RSP is better understood or the outcome of the Simplifying Local Government process is known, and ensures all councils start from a shared understanding of the legislative requirements and process agreement. Sub-regional arrangements can be developed if and when required.
18. The Interim Group will be supported by an Executive Steering Group of CE/GM-level representatives from each council, mana whenua, and a technical oversight group of senior planners and technical leads. Together, these form the delivery structure beneath the governance layer, ensuring that decisions made by the Interim Group can be efficiently translated into action. A diagram of the full structure is attached as appendix A.
19. The CE Forum indicated general support for an independent Chair for the Interim Group. This role and an appointment process are yet to be scoped in detail. The Chair will need to be politically neutral and seen as impartial across all participating councils and mana whenua. Key qualities include strong governance and facilitation experience, and the ability to build consensus across organisations with different priorities and accountabilities. Experience as an RMA commissioner could be an advantage.
20. The Interim Group's primary task in the early phase will be to develop a draft process agreement covering scope, roles, decision-making arrangements, dispute resolution, and engagement with iwi as required under section 69 of the Planning Bill. The agreement would not be finalised until the Bills are enacted and a formal Spatial Planning Committee is established.

## Project Lead

21. The CE Forum approved the appointment of a full-time independent Project Lead (Regional Spatial Planning). The role is designed to provide programme-level delivery leadership, working closely with a technical oversight group including members of the current Planning Managers Group, across all participating councils. The Project Lead will be responsible for maintaining momentum, coordinating workstreams, managing risks and dependencies, and preparing material for governance consideration.
22. The Project Lead will not make substantive spatial decisions – that authority rests with the Interim Group and, once established, the formal Spatial Planning Committee.
23. The Project Lead's primary reporting line is to the Executive Steering Group (comprising CE/GM-level representatives from each council and mana whenua), with a functional reporting relationship to the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Committee once established. For employment purposes, the Project Lead will be hosted by ORC initially, subject to review depending on the appointee's base location. The position is initially fixed-term for 12 months, providing flexibility to review the role and its resourcing as the legislative settings become clearer, and the programme evolves.
24. The proposed recruitment process is expected to take approximately 11 weeks from advertisement to offer, plus a possible notice period for the successful candidate. This lead time is part of the case for acting now. If recruitment is deferred until all legislative and reform questions are resolved, the region risks entering the statutory phase without dedicated programme leadership in place. ORC will manage the recruitment process, with a subset of the Planning Managers Group participating.

## Cost sharing

25. Initial costs for this work will be subject to a cost-sharing arrangement agreed by the CE Forum, consistent with the approach taken for other regional work. Overall programme costs and the cost-sharing model will be an early deliverable of the programme, providing councils with the information needed to inform long-term planning and budgeting.

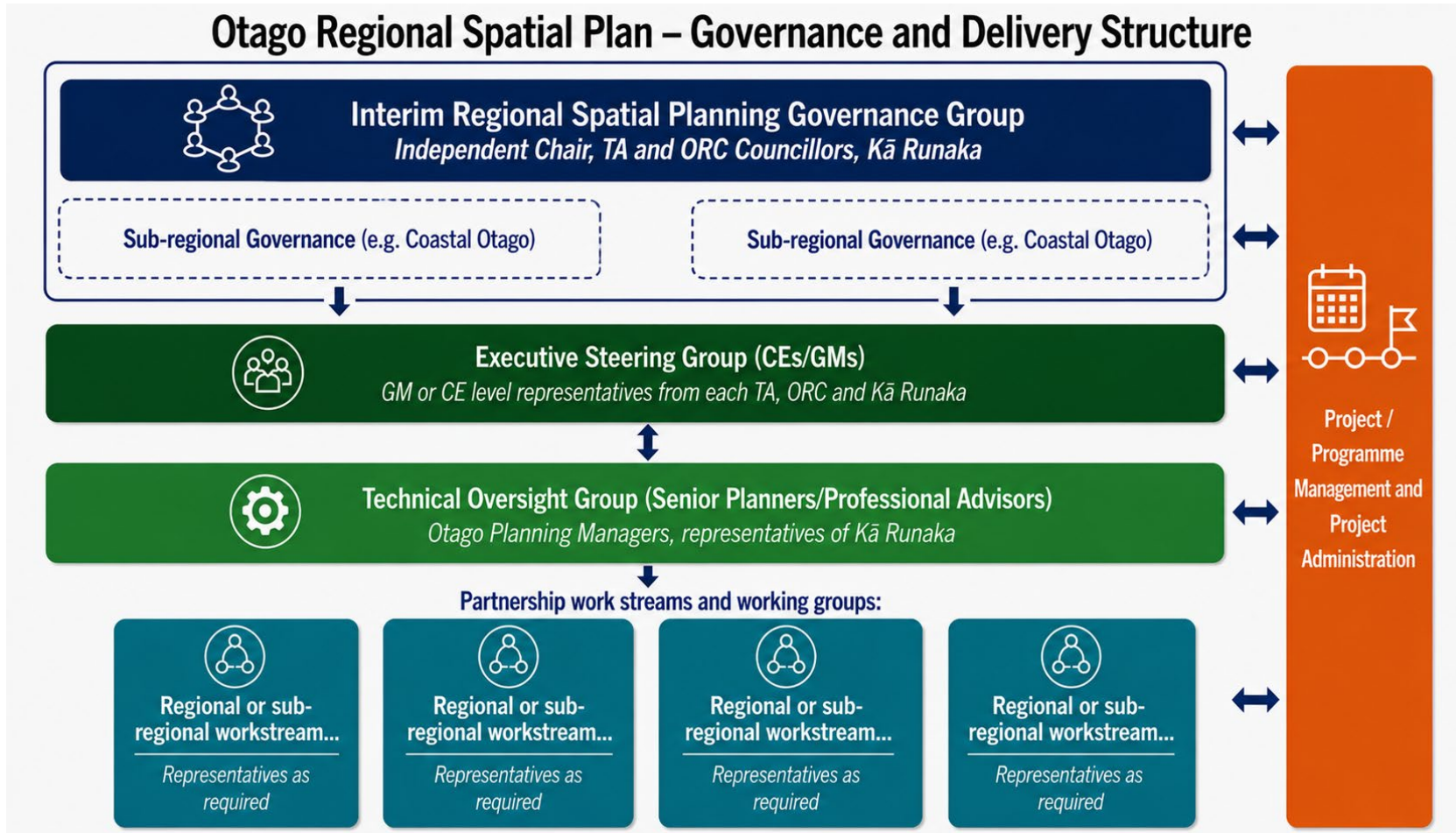
## Relationship to Simplifying Local Government Head Start announcement

26. The Government's 5 May 2026 Head Start announcement does not change the need to progress regional spatial planning now. Even on the most optimistic Head Start timeline (Cabinet consideration in September 2026, final proposals March 2027, legislation late 2027) any reorganisation will not be in place before the Planning Bill's RSP notification deadline. The interim arrangements recommended in this paper are deliberately informal and non-prescriptive about future governance form, and can transition into whatever structure ultimately emerges.

## Next Steps

27. Subject to the Forum's decisions, the following actions will be progressed:
  - a. ORC will progress recruitment arrangements for the independent Joint Spatial Planning Project Lead, with a subset of the Planning Managers' Group participating in the recruitment process.
  - b. The Mayoral Forum Secretariat will prepare a standardised paper for each council seeking the nomination of elected representatives to the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Group. This paper will allow each council to include content reflecting its own context.
  - c. Advice will be sought from Kāi Tahu (through Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Inc) regarding appropriate governance and operational arrangements for mana whenua partnership.
  - d. The Planning Managers' Group will continue to progress workstreams, including further scoping of mandatory matters, identifying key strategic issues for each territorial authority, and agreeing cross-council ways of working.

Appendix A:



Date: 22 May 2026

Drafted by: Ema Kurbos-Cooper, Advisor – Strategy, Otago Regional Council; Anna Robinson, Regional Waste Officer.

## Regional focus areas update

### Purpose

1. This paper updates the Forum on regional focus areas not otherwise covered at today's meeting.

### Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Otago Mayoral Forum:
  - a. **notes** the updates on *Climate resilience* and *Minimising waste* in a regional context; and
  - b. **receives** the Local Government Waste Policy Manifesto (The Manifesto) and considers endorsing the Manifesto by way of a letter to relevant Ministers.

### Climate resilience

3. The *Climate resilience* focus area is delivered through collaboration led by the Otago Climate Officers Group (OCOG).
4. OCOG is a cross-council working group under the Triennial Agreement, delivering the Mayoral Forum's climate resilience focus area for the triennium. The Group's work is grounded in a collaborative model that generates tangible benefits for all member councils. By pooling data, technical expertise and planning effort across the region, OCOG helps councils avoid duplication and achieve more than any single council could on its own.
5. The OCOG work programme currently comprises four main projects:
  - **Otago Climate Change Risk Assessment** — Resources are being prepared to communicate climate risks across Otago and by district for non-technical audiences, with these expected to be available later in 2026.
  - **Regional Natural Hazards Assessment and Prioritisation Programme** — An ORC-led project to systematically identify key projects and develop the overall Natural Hazards work programme to inform 2027–2037 LTP preparation. Stakeholder and ORC councillor input is expected to be sought in mid-2026.
  - **Standardisation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting** — Options for a standardised Otago-wide approach to localised greenhouse gas emissions inventories are under consideration, with a decision expected in FY 2026/27.
  - **Application of Local Government Sector Climate Scenarios** — Work is underway throughout 2026–2027 to apply the Local Government Sector Climate Scenarios to long-term planning and investment decisions, to inform LTP preparation.

6. Across these projects, a consistent theme is the value of a shared regional approach. Consistent evidence bases, common methodologies and joint capability building all reduce costs for individual councils while lifting the quality of climate decision-making across Otago.
7. The OCOG Terms of Reference were shared with the CE Forum at their 24 April meeting and have since been revised to incorporate CE Forum feedback.

### Minimising waste

8. The *Minimising waste* region focus area is delivered through collaboration led by the Otago Regional Strategic Waste Group.
9. The Otago Regional Strategic Waste Group is a cross-council working group established in early 2026 with endorsement from the CE Forum. The Group is convened by the Otago Regional Waste Officer, who also works to consolidate analysis, facilitate engagement, and report to the CE and Mayoral Forum.
10. The group's current work programme includes:
  - **Otago Region Waste Management Strategy**  
The Group is currently developing a regional strategy for waste management, with the intention of presenting this to the CE Forum later in 2026.
  - **Regional Work Programme**  
Development of a work programme to support the strategy, including an indicative budget and options for successful delivery.
  - **Data Collection and Standardisation**  
A consistent data collection methodology across Otago to better align and synthesise existing waste data. This work will:
    - i. **Inform** future infrastructure and investment planning
    - ii. **Identify** data gaps and opportunities to improve
    - iii. **Improve** the quality of regional waste data and information, including consideration of infrastructure capacity, lifespan and population growth projections.
  - **Advocacy and Central Government Engagement**  
Ongoing advocacy for secure policy settings and funding assurance from central government. The Local Government Waste Manifesto is a key advocacy tool, providing a clear and concise call to action that could enable and unlock planning and regional development for waste management across Otago.
11. At today's meeting, the Forum is invited to receive the Local Government Waste Policy Manifesto (the Manifesto) and consider endorsing it by way of a letter to relevant Ministers.
12. The Manifesto was developed by Waste MINZ through a reference group working under the Territorial Authorities Officers Forum. Three of Otago's council staff were part of this reference group. The Manifesto is a national advocacy document which seeks system-levels outcomes. The intention of the

document is to influence national policy and legislative settings, while aiming to strengthen local government's role as a strategic partner in the sector.

13. The Manifesto drew on information from council and other stakeholder submissions and policy platforms in waste related areas, for example the consultation on changes to the Waste Minimisation Act (WMA) and Litter Act, in May 2025. Further information was sought through discussions with Ministry for the Environment, and direction received from local government through the reference group, alongside consultant advice and facilitation from Versity Limited.
14. Otago faces ongoing challenges in the waste sector. Councils' functions are under pressure as national funding sources narrow, compliance requirements increase, and national policy and direction remains uncertain. As a result, there are critical gaps in infrastructure, varying levels of service available across our region and limited investment from the private sector in addressing effective, safe and resilient waste management. The Otago regional submission to the WMA consultation last year, the Otago Regional Waste Assessment 2023, and outcomes described in our councils' Waste Management and Minimisation Plans (WMMPs) reiterate these ongoing challenges.
15. The Waste Manifesto outlines four priority outcomes which would align and support our councils in their ability to deliver waste management and minimisation services for the benefit of communities and the environment.
  - a. **Shift responsibility and liability for problematic products and materials** – through stronger, extended producer responsibility settings, with a focus on products with potential to cause significant harm and high end-of-life management and disposal costs. The majority of costs and liabilities should sit with producers and consumers, not councils and ratepayers.
  - b. **A dependable levy allocation supporting local investment** – protecting the integrity and local government share of the levy to support its originally intended purpose of investment in waste minimisation activities. Any further amendment must consider distribution principles and scope of use that reflect affordability and resilience needs for councils and ratepayers.
  - c. **Resilient infrastructure planning and investment** – recognise waste infrastructure is critical, and strategically using 30-year and spatial planning, plus funding tools (e.g. levy and product stewardship) to unlock more public and private investment in modern, onshore solutions.
  - d. **Fit-for-purpose data, compliance and enforcement** – modern tools, smart use of existing data, clear and funded compliance duties so councils can target mismanaged waste and plan with confidence.
16. The four priority outcome areas outlined in The Manifesto would pave a way for central and local government to work in a collaborative partnership. A draft letter endorsing the Manifesto is attached for the Forum's consideration.

22 May 2026

To the Honourable Ministers:

Hon. Nicola Grigg, Minister for the Environment

Hon. Andrew Hoggard, Associate Minister for the Environment

cc.

Hon. Simon Watts, Minister of Local Government, Minister of Climate Change

Hon. Chris Bishop, Minister for Reform & Infrastructure

**Re: Local Government Waste Policy Manifesto (2026)**

I am writing on behalf of the Otago Mayoral Forum to formally endorse the Local Government Waste Policy Manifesto (2026).

The Forum recognises this document as setting out the critical steps needed to address the challenges facing the waste sector and to strengthen the role of councils as strategic partners in delivering effective waste management and minimisation outcomes.

Across Otago, councils are operating in an increasingly constrained environment – one characterised by limited and uncertain funding, rising compliance obligations, and uncertain policy direction. This is compounded by aging infrastructure, uneven service provision, and private sector activity largely focused on commercially viable parts of the waste sector, all of which place growing pressure on councils and ratepayers to fill system gaps.

The Manifesto responds to these challenges by setting out four priority outcomes that would enable meaningful and lasting improvement:

1. **Mandatory extended producer responsibility** would shift the cost and responsibility of managing difficult and high-harm waste streams away from councils and onto producers and consumers, reducing the need for local subsidies.
2. **A more dependable and equitable waste levy** would provide the certainty required for long-term planning and better reflect the realities of servicing rural communities and high-tourism areas.
3. **Coordinated infrastructure planning and investment** would address the fragmented and underdeveloped network evident across Otago, enabling resilient and efficient systems that are not disproportionately funded by residents.
4. **Modernised compliance tools**, supported by improved access to national data, would allow councils to target illegal dumping and high-risk waste activities while managing growing compliance expectations more effectively.

Together, these reforms would support a more balanced and collaborative system – one in which central government provides clear policy and funding frameworks, local government delivers services strategically,

and producers and importers bear greater responsibility for the end-of-life impacts of their products. The result would be a reduced burden on ratepayers and councils better equipped to deliver consistent, efficient, and environmentally responsible services for Otago's communities.

The Manifesto is well aligned with Otago's needs and priorities, and offers practical pathways toward a resilient, equitable, and future-focused waste system. The Otago Mayoral Forum formally endorses it and calls for its adoption at a national level.

Signed

Melanie Tavendale  
Mayor of Waitaki  
Chair, Otago Mayoral Forum