



Friday 3 July 2026

9:00am-12:00pm, Network Waitaki Events Centre
2 Centennial Park Road, Ōamaru

Chair: Mayor Melanie Tavendale

Time	Item
9:00am [10']	1 Welcome Apologies – none received Minutes from the previous meetings on May 22 and June 19 (attached) Agenda confirmation
9:10am [20']	2 Update from Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport Hemi Smiler, General Manager Reform and Deals, Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport, will update the Forum on the Head Start approach, options for Otago, and where next.
9.30am [10']	3 Whakaaro ā mana whenua Edward Ellison will share reflections from a mana whenua perspective on the reorganisation process and discussions to come.
9:40am [50']	4 Otago options analysis – presentation and Q+A Alice Grace and Stuart Cross, both Morrison Low, will present their analysis of local government reorganisation options for Otago.
10:30am [15']	- Morning tea

- 10:45am 5 **Discussion on reorganisation options**
[45'] Linda Falwasser and Campbell Barry will facilitate a discussion on Otago's reorganisation options, drawing on:
- The Government's criteria
 - Morrison Low's analysis
 - Otago principles (from 19 June, attached p. 9)
 - Otago's community engagement findings (from 22 June, available for download here: www.otagomayors.org.nz)
 - Leaving space for Rūnaka priorities (from Te Rōpū Taiao Otago hui)

- 11:30am 6 **Outlining next steps**
[30']
- Council discussions and direction setting
 - Timing – Head Start or slow down
 - Proposal development
 - Upcoming Hui for Otago on Local Government Simplification
 - Further Otago Mayoral Forum on Friday 31 July in Cromwell (TBC)

12.00pm - **Meeting close**
Lunch to follow
Te Rōpū Taiao Otago commences at 12.30pm

2:00pm 6 **Outlining next steps**
Conversation to continue if required.

3.00pm - **Meeting close**

Minutes of a meeting of the Otago Mayoral Forum
held on Friday 22 May at 9.00am, Queenstown Lakes District Council
10 Gorge Road, Queenstown and via Zoom

Present

Mayor Melanie Tavendale	Waitaki District Council (Chair)
Mayor John Glover	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Mayor Sophie Barker	Dunedin City Council
Mayor Tamah Alley	Central Otago District Council
Chair Hilary Calvert	Otago Regional Council
Deputy Mayor Michele Kennedy	Clutha District Council
Chief Executive Alex Parmley	Waitaki District Council
Chief Executive Michelle Morss	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Chief Executive Sandy Graham	Dunedin City Council
Chief Executive Richard Saunders	Otago Regional Council
Chief Executive Steve Hill	Clutha District Council
Marianna Brook	Principal Advisor, Mayoral Forum Secretariat
Saskia Righarts	Group Manager – Governance & Business Services, CODC
Kylie Darragh	Governance Support Officer, Otago Regional Council (minutes)

1. Welcome

Mayor Tavendale opened the meeting with a karakia at 9:03 am.

1.1. Apologies

Resolution

That the apologies from Mayor Jock Martin and Peter Kelly be accepted.

Moved: Mayor Tavendale

Seconded: Mayor Glover

CARRIED

1.2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolution

That minutes of the meeting of 6 March 2026 be confirmed as true and accurate.

Moved: Mayor Glover

Seconded: Chair Calvert

2. MCERT and DIA Officials

Jeremy Lightfoot, incoming Secretary and Chief Executive of the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT), and Warren Ulusele, Regional Partnership Director at the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA), attended to discuss the Government's recent reform announcements and their implications for Otago.

Mr Lightfoot introduced himself and outlined his three focus areas: relationship building; understanding the criticality of current work programmes as the new ministry takes shape; and thinking beyond day one of the transition from three agencies into MCERT.

Warren Ulusele provided a high-level overview of the Simplifying Local Government process, covering both the Head Start Pathway and Backstop options. He described the Head Start pathway as a genuine call for action that the Government wants councils to actively explore. The Backstop process is yet to be refined, with enabling legislation expected to be in place by 2027. Mayors and Chief Executives had the opportunity to ask questions.

Key points from discussion:

- No Cabinet decisions have been taken on the Backstop process — it remains undefined. Some options may no longer be available depending on Head Start approvals.
- Guidance materials with further exploration of each of the criteria are due for release at the end of May.
- Financials will be critical, with the regional council expected to be a key resource for this.
- Aligning local government reform with spatial planning reform is under consideration. The current advice is to stay the course on spatial planning for now.

At 9:53am the reps from the DIA/MCERT left the meeting.

3. Simplifying Local Government

The Forum considered a paper setting out a region-wide approach to Simplifying Local Government, in light of the Government's Head Start announcement. The paper was authored by Amanda Vercoe, Otago Regional Council Deputy Chief Executive, who attended this part of the meeting.

Members committed to a collaborative process for exploring reform options, within a timeframe that keeps the Head Start pathway open. The Forum also committed to being open to cross-boundary considerations to achieve the best outcomes.

The chair indicated that the conversation on this paper would continue later in the meeting.

At 10.19am the Forum adjourned for morning tea.

At 10.31am the Forum reconvened.

4. Advocating for Otago's Economy

The Forum considered a proposal brought forward by the Otago Regional Economic Development working group (ORED) to develop a coordinated Otago economic narrative and advocacy platform. The proposed approach is supported by Angela Davis of Collective Strategy Ltd, who joined this part of the meeting online, along with Shelley Winsor, Partnerships Manager at Waitaki District Council.

Resolution

The Forum:

- a. **noted** the progress of the ORED Coordinated Economic Development Plan to date;
- b. **agreed** to the proposed approach, framework, and process outlined in the accompanying discussion document;

- c. **agreed** to the proposed criteria for selecting regional priorities; and
- d. **provided** feedback on key stakeholders for engagement, adding regional airports to the existing list.

Mover – Mayor Alley

Seconded – Mayor Glover

CARRIED

5. Simplifying Local Government (continued).

The Forum returned to the paper setting out a region-wide approach to Simplifying Local Government. Members identified possible high-level options for the regional wide analysis. They also reviewed draft survey questions, agreeing to remove two and make minor changes to others.

Resolution

The Forum:

- a. **agreed** to lead a local government reform conversation for Otago,
- b. **agreed** to progress work within a timeframe that leaves open the door to a Head Start proposal,
- c. **directed** the Otago CE Forum on next steps for local government reform in Otago, including:
 - i. establishing a programme of work, associated timeline, coast sharing arrangement
 - ii. writing to Rūnaka Chairs and neighbouring Mayors to invite their involvement,
 - iii. launching an early engagement community survey,
 - iv. commissioning analysis of options against government criteria,
 - v. commencing work on potential local criteria in addition to government criteria
 - vi. drafting a shared update for Mayoral Forum members to send to their own councillors following today's discussion,
 - vii. preparing a media statement outlining today's decisions, and
 - viii. scheduling weekly Otago Mayoral Forum 'check ins' throughout the Head Start period

Moved Mayor Glover

Seconded Mayor Barker

CARRIED

11:54am Alex Parmley left the meeting.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Resolution

The Forum:

- a. **noted** the updates on *Climate resilience* and *Minimising waste* in a regional context; and
- b. **agreed** to endorse the Local Government Waste Policy Manifesto 2026 by way of a letter to relevant Ministers.

Moved Cr Calvert

Seconded Mayor Alley

CARRIED

At 11:58 Alex Parmley returned to the meeting.

6. Initiating Regional Spatial Planning

Richard introduced the Regional Spatial Planning in Otago agenda paper. Possible candidates for an independent chair role were also discussed; Richard indicated that he would be happy to receive suggestions.

Resolution

The Forum:

- a. **noted** 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. **endorsed** the approach agreed by the CE Forum, including an interim governance group and high-level planning and prioritisation steps;
- c. **agreed** to progress an interim governance group (the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group) to provide elected member governance and political leadership;
- d. **approved** preparation of a proforma paper seeking the nomination of elected representatives to the Interim Regional Spatial Planning Governance Group; and
- e. **noted** that further advice would be sought from Kāi Tahu regarding appropriate governance and operational arrangements for mana whenua partnership and participation.

Moved Mayor Alley

Seconded Mayor Glover

CARRIED

7. Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal

Mayor Glover provided a brief update on the status of the Otago Central Lakes Regional Deal. Mayor Alley suggested that the partnership focus would be helpful for the region. Once approved by Cabinet, the Deal will go to partner councils for ratification.

At 12:11 Sandy Graham left the meeting.

At 12:15 Sandy Graham returned to the meeting.

CLOSE OF MEETING

There was no further business, Marianna provided a karakia, and the Chair declared the Forum closed at 12:15pm.

Signed



Date - 3 July 2026

Otago Mayoral Forum – Meeting Notes

Friday 19 June 2026, 12:00–4:00pm

Kākā meeting room, Otago Regional Council, 180 High Street, Dunedin

Chair: Mayor Melanie Tavendale

Item 1 – Welcome (12:00pm)

All members and chief executives present. Warren Ulusele, Amanda Vercoe, Marianna Brook and Linda Falwasser attending.

Item 2 – Update from Department of Internal Affairs (12:10pm)

Warren Ulusele, DIA Partnership Director for Otago

Warren provided a brief update on aspects of the Simplifying Local Government Head Start process, now underway across the country. He noted that Ministers have a strong interest in the council conversations taking place. Warren will be overseas from 23 June to 15 July. Otago councils' contact through that period will be Sarah Polaschek.

Item 3 – Community engagement survey (12:30pm)

Ian Telfer (ORC Manager Partnerships and Engagement) and Natalie Richards (Versus Research)

Ian and Natalie led a presentation and discussion on the Forum's early engagement survey, which closed the previous Sunday. The survey sought to understand community priorities for local government ahead of any consideration of specific reform options or amalgamation models.

Forum members agreed to release the summary report, subject to final revisions. It was agreed that all illustrative quotes be removed – these will be available in the verbatim responses. The media release was also approved with minor changes.

Item 4 – Morrison Low update (1:00pm)

Alice Grace and Stu Cross, Morrison Low

Morrison Low presented the first outputs of their analysis of structural options for Otago. The presentation covered: demographic and economic data, environmental considerations, and key local authority characteristics (number of councillors, community boards etc). Financial modelling, governance options and an assessment against Government criteria are to follow at the next Forum meeting.

Item 5 – Workshop: What's important to Otago? (2:20pm)

Facilitated by Linda Falwasser

Linda Falwasser facilitated a workshop in which Forum members were invited to develop 'Otago principles' for local government reform in the region. The conversation was built around two questions:

1. What are your three most important principles for guiding future local government arrangements in Otago?
2. Regardless of what future governance arrangements emerge, what is the one thing that Otago, as a region, absolutely cannot afford to lose through reform?

Members responded to the questions, building draft principles throughout the sessions. Linda undertook to summarise the workshop outcomes – this document was circulated in the week following.

Item 6 – Preparing for next Otago Mayoral Forum and beyond (3:20pm)

A discussion on what is coming at the next Otago Mayoral Forum (3 July 2026, Ōamaru), alongside individual council updates and decision-making approaches. Members provided an overview of workshops, meetings and other activities at their respective councils, and discussed options for discussions across councils. A tentative Otago Mayoral Forum is in diaries on Friday 31 July.

Meeting closed: 4:00pm

**Local Government Simplification
Draft Working Principles for Otago
June 2026**

These draft principles were identified through a workshop of the Otago Mayoral Forum on 19 June, facilitated by Linda Falwasser.

They provide an initial foundation for future discussions and offer a common lens through which future reform structures and proposals can be considered and assessed.

The intention is not that these principles determine a preferred reform outcome. Rather, they provide a common reference point that can help guide future discussions and decision-making as options for Otago are developed and assessed.

1. Protect and Enhance Otago's Environment

- Otago's environment, including its water resources, is fundamental to the region's identity, wellbeing and prosperity.
- Future arrangements should protect and enhance these natural assets, recognising their importance to communities, industry and future generations.

2. Local Voice, Representation and Otago Identity

- Local voice, representation and Otago's unique identity are fundamental to strong communities, effective local democracy and maintaining a sense of place.
- Future arrangements should maintain strong local representation, ensure communities continue to have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them, and preserve the unique character, diversity and sense of place that make Otago distinctive.

3. Value, Affordability and Long-Term Sustainability

- Otago communities need confidence that services and infrastructure can be delivered in a way that is affordable, sustainable and provides value over the long term.
- Future arrangements should deliver value for communities, remain affordable and be financially sustainable over the long term.

4. Innovation and Future Focus

- Otago's future success will depend on its ability to adapt, innovate and respond to emerging opportunities and challenges while planning for future generations.
- Future arrangements should encourage innovative thinking, effective service delivery and solutions that support Otago's future needs and aspirations.

5. Equity, Fairness, Transparency and Integrity

- Equitable and fair outcomes are important to maintaining trust and confidence across Otago and ensuring communities are treated fairly regardless of their size, location or circumstances within the region.

- Future arrangements should support equitable outcomes across the region, recognise the differing needs and circumstances of communities, and demonstrate transparency, accountability and integrity in how decisions are made and implemented.

Applying the working principles: The Otago Test

- Does it protect and enhance Otago's environment and water resources?
- Does it preserve local voice, representation and Otago's identity?
- Does it provide long-term value, affordability and sustainability?
- Does it support innovation and help Otago respond to future opportunities and challenges?
- Does it deliver equitable and fair outcomes across the region, while demonstrating transparency, accountability and integrity?

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