

HOW TO FIX COUNCILS

A guide to help concerned citizens organise for the next election

Andrew Bydder, Hamilton City Councillor

I spent 30 years working with councils from the outside as an architectural designer and property developer before being elected to Hamilton City Council in 2022. I fought the ever-increasing bureaucracy that transformed resource consents from simple 1-page applications to year-long 1,000-page multi-consultant expensive battles for no discernible benefit other than covering staff butts. Frustrated, I started looking into council structure, joining the Hamilton Residents and Ratepayers Association, and writing a weekly column for the Waikato Times on council failures. Since getting elected, I have dug deeper into the internal organisation, working out where the problems are, and how to fix them.

You have been hit with the first round of massive rates rises. There are more to come. You have read worrying figures of exploding council debt. You have noticed cost blowouts on everything the council touches. You have certainly been affected by speed bumps and realised that the worsening congestion is deliberately caused by council roading projects. And if you have ever had to deal with council directly on any building consent or resource consent, you will share my frustration! You know your council is no longer working for you. You know the system is broken.

The good news is that YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Ask around and you will find many people who are also wondering if they are the only ones who can see the madness and wondering why nobody is stopping it. Most good people, the practical & commonsense workers, are too busy keeping New Zealand functioning, paying taxes, and employing others, with little enough time for our own families to take much interest in council politics. This is why the bastards are winning.

This guide is to help YOU take on councils with whatever time you can spare. It is based on a team of good people sharing the work.

The October 2025 council elections are our best chance to fix councils. It is also our last chance. Another three years of woke indoctrination, rates rises, debt blowouts, speed bumps, and red tape will cripple our country. ***We need to work together to stop the rot and turn councils around.***

I have written this to share my experience so that you don't have to waste time working out the system. There will be follow-up information shared from experts working with me.

Those of you who can spare the time to stand for council will need to read and understand all of this and form a network with like-minded people. Some of you will prefer to help in the background within your own areas of expertise. Take from this guide as much as you need and link up with the good candidates. Most of you just need to support the network. You will know who to support because they will acknowledge this manual. Support can be financial, spare time, connections, marketing, and simply inspiring people to vote this time. It will be hard because most people have given up on councils listening to them, but we need you to try.

Even the National-led coalition government has realised the need for councils to get back to basics. That's great, but we can't rely on politicians to fix politics. ***We have to do it ourselves.***

SHORTCUT (Too long, don't read)

The Parts are:

- A. INTRODUCTION – why we need to do this.
- B. BACKGROUND – how we got where we are.
- C. WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS? – the root causes.
- D. WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS? – the policies the team needs to implement.
- E. HOW DO WE MAKE THE CHANGE? – getting a team elected and what supporters need to do.

If you can't spare the time to be part of the team but you want to support us, the last chapter is the important one for you. Skip the candidate bits, consider the External Experts if you have relevant skills, but read the Education Campaign and really try to help there.

PART A - INTRODUCTION

The singular purpose of councils is to allow local people to pool resources (e.g. money collected through rates) to work for the greater good of the local community. Acting together at a large scale is more efficient and productive than individuals doing separate systems for roads, water, libraries, and rubbish collection.

It has become clear that some aspects of council work are no longer achieving greater efficiency or productivity. \$700,000 to move a bus stop^{*1} is wasting the communities' limited resources. There are too many other examples to list. The bureaucracy is out of control.

It has also become apparent that other aspects of council work are no longer being done for the greater good. Speed bump "traffic calming" is intended to frustrate people out of cars, which is social engineering by unelected officials with their own agendas. ***Councils are using your money against you.***

Our elected representatives seem to be incapable of managing finances, holding staff to account, or even listening to the people. Rates rises are consistently higher than inflation, which means we are becoming worse off every year. For many, especially those on fixed incomes, it has reached breaking point.

Successive governments have recognised parts of the problem. The Key government tried to fix Auckland with the Super City amalgamation in 2010. A major part of that process was the establishment of Auckland Transport as a separate organisation – recognition that the councils had failed to manage roads properly. The Ardern government started the process to remove water services from councils for the same reason. The Resource Management Act is administered by councils issuing consents, which has stifled essential infrastructure development needed by the same councils, along with crippling delays and expense to private enterprise. These are the core services of councils, so failure in these areas demonstrates a fundamental failure in the system.

Prime Minister Luxon has criticised councils and is demanding a 'back-to-basics' approach. Legislation will follow in mid-2025 to strengthen this. While this is hugely positive news, it is an example of the old adage "If your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail". Parliament's only tool is to pass laws. Changing attitudes of staff embedded in councils is a different problem. The Local

¹ <https://www.waikatotimes.co.nz/nz-news/350125753/700k-move-sex-shop-bus-stop>

Government Act 2002 section 100 requires councils to ensure income covers expenses. Yet most councils run deficits every year, covering the shortfall with borrowed money. It is like a family living off a credit card, and any business director doing this would be prosecuted for operating while insolvent.

The level of anger in the community about outrageous project costs, plenty of asphalt for speedbumps but none to fill in potholes, fake consultation for predetermined decisions, and gaslighting media releases, is boiling over. The apathy that has marred previous elections (e.g. just 29% voter turn-out in Hamilton) due to the public being ignored post-election, is transforming into activism by people demanding change.

There are many other groups, such as Residents and Ratepayers associations, Challenging Councils, and CityWatchNZ.org who are looking at other ways to push back. I commend anyone who is trying to do so for the good of the community. Councils are resistant to change, so pressure from both inside and outside is needed. The reason councils have become corrupted is that the public has been divided. We need to work together on common ground, while recognising that we all have differences, interests, and areas of focus. This guide does not touch on issues such as fluoridation or regional councils using 1080 poison. These are important, but I am not an expert in them and will leave this to others to advise on. The structural change I am highlighting will allow communities to make decisions on these, and much more, later. My own desire is to fix the building consent system, but that will happen much further down the track after we have formed teams and fixed the core problems.

To achieve this will mean taking political control of councils. This requires a team with a majority of councillors to vote for the necessary change. The team needs to replace many of the current incompetent councillors with new candidates aligned to our goals. I know from experience that first-term councillors need support, so the team needs experts outside council to support elected councillors with advice to counteract the manipulation by council staff.

Most of the information in this guide is to prepare the whole team with a common understanding of the problems and solutions so they can work together. The final part of the guide is an outline of what is necessary to run a successful campaign. I am working with my own team on the details, and I will share our recommendations when we have developed them fully.

PART B - BACKGROUND

Councils were formed in 1876 by merging local water and road boards. Even today 2/3 of council spending is on these core services. Money for building and maintaining this infrastructure was obtained by rates, so-named because it is a form of land tax where the same percentage rate of tax is applied to every landowner. Early on, the councils comprised the affected landowners donating their time, with a single employee, the town clerk. Now, very few, if any, elected representatives on councils have expertise in either water or road engineering.

Councils expanded with construction and ownership of public assets such as parks and libraries. About half of council's remaining spending is on property assets, yet elected representatives have a shortage of expertise in building and property management. This began a trend to glamorous pet projects such as stadiums, theatres, and even zoos, largely done with borrowed money. Throughout most of the 20th century, councillors were paid a stipend (a small payment per meeting), and employed a handful of staff to manage contracts with local firms.

Additional collective services were added to benefit the whole community, most notably (and usefully for urban areas) rubbish collection. This began a trend towards new services for small special interest groups at the expense of the wider community. Councils collect money from ratepayers to give away as grants. Elected representatives like to take the credit for this largesse, rather than the people who actually paid the rates. Although a tiny part of council spending, the profile of giving other people's money away attracts social activists to stand for election, and for such people to then expand council staff in socialist areas without financial accountability, while being paid full-time salaries.

Central government uses local councils for a number of regulatory functions that are inefficient to run from Wellington. This doesn't mean it is more efficient to run them locally, rather government ministries' books look a little better by off-loading the administrative costs on ratepayers instead of taxpayers. Building consents, resource consents, liquor licensing, noise control, and dog control functions add layers of bureaucratic complexity with only indirect council influence.

The result is an ad-hoc Frankenstein's monster of assorted parts that is not suited to delivering its core functions, is inefficient, slow, cumbersome, and no longer aligned with the community. Instead, it is a target for loud-mouthed activists while the silent majority is ignored.

The infiltration by activists was exposed by the "Innovating Streets" initiative. It was rolled out by councils across the country at the same time, proving that officials were conspiring with each other. There was nothing innovative about it, the same ideas had been tried in Europe under different names, and as part of 15-minute cities. The battle is real – conspiracy fact not theory.



Ward Street in central Hamilton – part of the Innovating Streets initiative – saw a section of the road closed off which disrupted CBD traffic flows, removal of parking essential for the survival of small businesses, and furniture for the non-existent pedestrians.

PART C - WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

“It is so easy to be wrong – and to persist in being wrong – when the costs of being wrong are paid by others.” – Thomas Sowell

There are three key root causes of problems that I address in this document:

1. STRUCTURE – the way councils are organised controls how they function.
2. FINANCES – councils don’t have a rates problem, they have a spending problem.
3. PEOPLE – the inmates are running the asylum.

There are several specific problems that I will address in future documents. These include:

- THREE WATERS – the same staff who oversaw the current failures will run the new organisations.
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW ZEALAND – an association originally for elected representatives that has been taken over by woke council staff.
- RESOURCE CONSENTS & BUILDING CONSENTS – a major factor in the housing affordability crisis.

1 STRUCTURE

(a) Elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors)

Understanding councils begins with knowing that each council is two almost entirely separate organisations. This is set up by the Local Government Act 2002.

Your elected representatives (mayor and councillors) have very limited powers. They set policies, approve budgets, and pass bylaws. The scope for bylaws is restricted to specific government acts such as the Sale of Liquor Act, allowing councils to implement alcohol bans in some areas. Decisions are made by majority vote, with each councillor and the mayor having one vote. The mayor gets a casting vote in the event of a tie, which, as a rare event, means the mayor essentially has no more power than any other councillor. While the mayor has an important community role as a figurehead for ribbon cutting, handshaking, and speech-giving, most people are genuinely surprised at how restricted the mayor is as a leader. If a majority voting block opposes the mayor, then the mayor is effectively powerless.

The service provision, council operations, and infrastructure projects are all run by council management independently of elected representation. Council staff provide reports to elected representatives and lead briefing sessions, giving councillors all the information staff want them to know. ***This is different from information the councillors NEED to know.*** Staff get delegated authority to spend budgets as they see fit, manage their departments, apply policies as they interpret them, and employ more staff.

(b) Chief executive

The only crossover is that the elected representatives employ the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive employs everyone else, so councillors actually have no direct line of control to any other council staff. This means, at least in theory, the Chief Executive has the real power, and is typically paid 2-3 times as much as the mayor.

In practice, the Chief Executive has limited knowledge of what is going on in most of their organisation. Hamilton City Council, as a typical example, has 28 different business units, plus several council controlled organisations (CCOs). These range from the core services of roads and waters to community services such as libraries and theatres, legal functions such as dog control and building inspections, business functions such as computer services and human resources, and social assets such as an airport and a zoo. It is not possible to have expertise in, or even time to consider, so many diverse specialist functions. The Chief Executive is reduced to an administrative role liaising between staff and the elected representatives.

(c) Managers

The Chief Executive is reliant on a second tier of General Managers, each with half a dozen functions in their portfolio. The General Managers suffer the same fate. They may have a greater level of expertise across their portfolio, but are stuck in an administrative role of delegating authority - signing off reports and approving expenditure from the Department Managers.

It is the third tier, the Department Managers, that run the council operations. They are removed from accountability to elected representatives, and, as experts in their field, often unquestioned by the General Managers. Their performance is measured in non-financial criteria. This has a surprising effect – instead of freeing them to make decisions, the lack of being able to justify their choices by hard facts measured in dollar values, means they are reluctant to make decisions. Likewise, it incentivises covering up measurable mistakes.

This leads to the dreaded committees. In the private sector, a committee is selected to cover a range of relevant skills in order to get the best decision. In the public sector, a committee is selected so no one person can be blamed for a bad decision. The great socio-economist, Stanford Professor Thomas Sowell, summed up government by saying ***“It is so easy to be wrong – and to persist in being wrong – when the costs of being wrong are paid by others.”***

2 FINANCES

Councils don't have a revenue problem, they have a spending problem.

A recent press release from Local Government New Zealand announced that councils were exploring 20 new ways of raising revenue other than rates. This supposedly positive move ignores the fact that the same public will be paying these new fees and charges from their same limited income. There is no free money. More revenue is not a solution.

Council spending is best understood by splitting it between Operational expenditure (Opex) and Capital expenditure (Capex).

(a) Opex

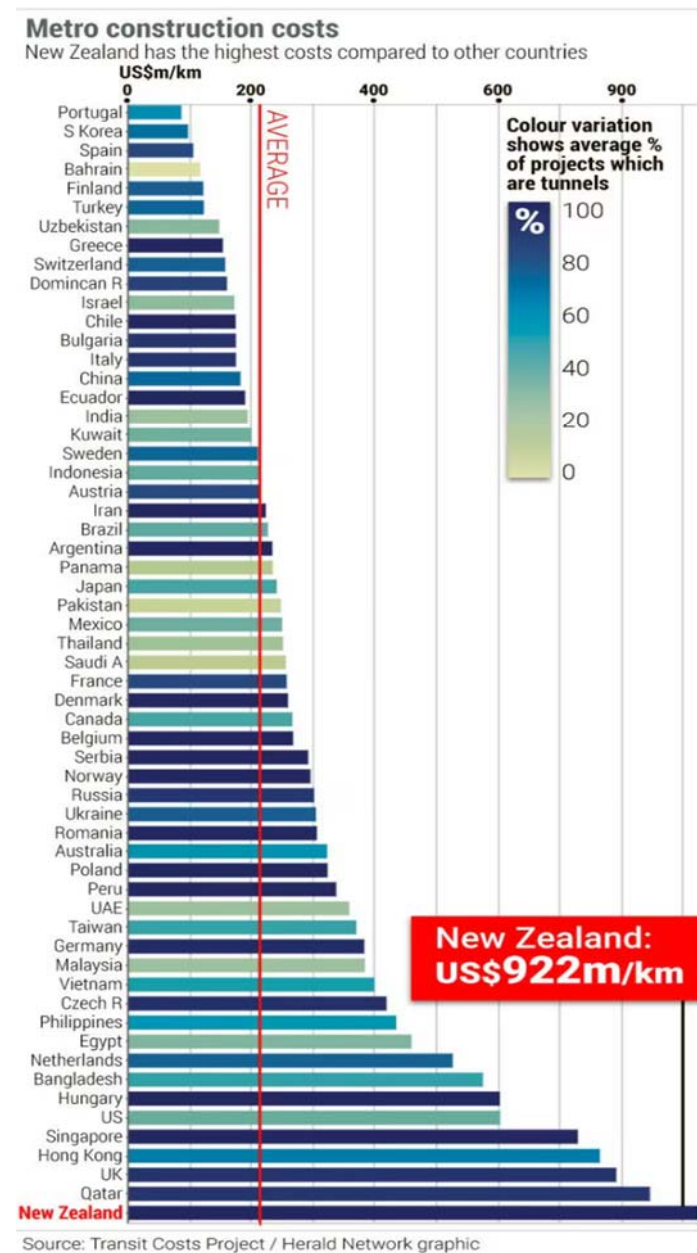
Operational expenditure is the day-to-day running of the council and providing services. This is fundamentally what rates are supposed to cover. In fact, the Local Government Act section 100 (1) requires councils to balance their operational budget i.e. ensure that each year's rates income covers that year's expenses.

The truth is that most councils are breaking the law by kicking the can down the road every year. Hamilton has failed to balance its budget in 19 of the last 20 years, and is not projected to do so in the next two years either. This is financial mismanagement. The shortfall covered by borrowing,

which means the burden is placed on our children to repay councils living beyond their means now.

The addiction to spending is driven by the easy credit of borrowing. Councils obtain loans from the Local Government Funding Agency (LGFA). If you or I go to the bank for a mortgage, the bank will look at both our income and our expenses to know whether we can afford to pay back the loan. The LGFA only looks at council's income. This is financial mismanagement.

The only way the LGFA gets away with this is that its loans are secured against future rates income, which **councils secure against your house**. In the event of a default, the Local Government (Ratings) Act section 69 allows councils to sell your house to recover the money that the council owes on a debt that you were not even told about, let alone agreed to.



(b) Capex

Capital expenditure is the money council spends on community infrastructure. Assets like sewage treatment plants are expensive but last a long time. There is a high up-front cost which is covered by borrowing. This is what debt should be used for, because the cost is repaid over the lifetime of the asset when future ratepayers use it.

The problem is illustrated in this graph from the New Zealand Herald about city rail infrastructure. New Zealand is the most expensive country in the world, four times the OECD average.

The way councils specify and manage infrastructure projects is grossly overpriced. The debt is crippling the country. Hamilton's 10-year plan projects a debt of \$10,000 per person, or \$50,000 for an average family.

Historically cheap interest rates since the GFC have encouraged a spending culture on projects with low or no return on investment, such as speed bumps. Prior to the GFC, as far back as 1960, New Zealand

averaged 10% mortgage rates. A return to that level would see \$5,000 added to the average household per year just in debt servicing.

As with Operational expenditure, the LGFA lends money for Capital expenditure based solely on council's income. There is no consideration for the return on investment. There is no registered valuation of the asset to compare to the inflated construction prices. The easy credit has let financially illiterate councillors buy glamour projects, "nice to haves", and pursue social engineering agendas that will burden ratepayers for a century.

3 People

(a) Elected representatives

As noted in the BACKGROUND chapter, councils are fundamentally engineering and property management companies. A brief glance at elected representatives across councils reveals kindergarten teachers, a bar maid, student activists who have never held real jobs, a preponderance of Maori-first separatists, union agitators, and cycle advocates. It should not come as any surprise that decision-making reflects a lack of competency. Not one of these people stood for council expressing any interest in efficiently run sewage systems.

This begs the question of why such people stand for councils? They have no interest in the core services, instead they see council as an opportunity to implement their social agendas. The system has been taken over and is being abused.

Currently, the National-led coalition government is working on legislation to prioritise a back-to-basics approach. The intention is vitally important, but it will need to overcome the political ideology of the people already embedded into councils to action the proper implementation. Benchmarking targets will expose the failure to carry out changes, but only to the extent that the figures are not fudged. To be blunt, I have seen the fudging first-hand. I fully expect many current councillors to work with staff to undermine the intention of the legislation.

(b) Chief executive

Council management is led by a chief executive (CE) employed by the councillors. This should mean the CE is answerable to councillors, and therefore accountable to the public. However, there are three weaknesses with the current arrangement.

The CE is employed collectively by councillors, so individual councillors have no authority over the CE. This is good for bad councillors and bad for good councillors. There is a self-preservation interest for the CE in dividing councillors and siding with the majority.

The CE is usually on a 5-year contract, so real control is extremely limited. The Local Government Act sets the rules for the CE, but does not set a minimum contract, only a 5-year maximum, after which the requirement is merely for the position to be readvertised. A good CE can be reappointed after the advertisement. It would therefore make more sense for a rolling 1-year contract to keep the CE responsive to the councillors. The default to 5 years is based on advice from a gravy train made up of a small group of roving external consultants advising most councils. They are typically former council staff and are appointed to consultant panels on high hourly rates by CEs.

The CE also has responsibility for managing a number of controls over councillors, including a code of conduct. This makes for an unusual employer-employee relationship where the employee is not immediately accountable to individual councillors while having some considerable power over them.

(c) Managers



Council managers, at both the general manager and department manager level, are insulated from voters (governance) and ratepayers (customers), with no clear publicly reported measures of performance. As a result, they appear focused on the process rather than the outcome. So long as the process is followed, they can defend bad outcomes such as mistakes and failures. This means the process doesn't get fixed.

Processes are administrative tasks. While they may be based on a series of checks and balances along the way to prevent mistakes, the practical reality is that each approval step is carried out by someone looking at an isolated issue not the end-to-end delivery, voiding them of responsibility.

Success is achieved by "yes" votes from councillors to accept reports and proposals, because that removes responsibility from the manager. To do that, managers tailor reports to obtain the desired decision, leaving councillors misinformed or uninformed. The result of this blinkered process is poor outcomes - which clearly points to a failed process, yet the process is never questioned.

(d) Staff

There are certainly many good people working for councils and it is simply unfair to tar them all with the same brush. It is equally unfair to pretend that all council employees are faultless. When exposed to complaints, a former chief executive of Hamilton repeatedly claimed he had 100% confidence in his staff. This is mathematically and evidentially blatant mismanagement. He had 1,400 staff, so even if just 1% made 1 mistake per year, that is 14 mistakes in need of fixing. I regard myself as a highly skilled and experienced professional, and I make far more mistakes than that every year. The chief executive failed his duties by refusing to acknowledge errors, and he was active in covering them up.

The fact is mistakes should be expected. It is human. Admitting them is part of the solution. Covering up means mistakes not only don't get fixed, they get systematised and repeated.

The lack of accountability should eliminate the fear of admitting mistakes because there are no consequences. Perversely, the opposite is true. The lack of accountability also manifests in an absence of measures for good performance. Employees with good track records who make occasional errors feel safe knowing their value outweighs the negatives. Without performance

measures, having to admit a mistake is the only consequence, and there is nothing to offset it, therefore it becomes the problem to be avoided.

This also leads into task isolation, sometimes called a silo mentality. A staff member given a goal of raising parking revenue will install more parking meters in the central business district. Payments and fines may increase, but so do collection and maintenance costs. As customers abandon the city centre for suburban malls, rates income drops by more than the parking revenue increase. The council is worse off but the staff member has done a 'good' job. Management will not admit the mistake.

Silo mentality grows into empire building. Council planning departments have expanded regulations, then expanded staff numbers to manage the regulations, then the new staff expand regulations in a cycle that strangles development.

Another common feature of bureaucracies is the Dilbert Principle (named after the cartoon). This states that in large organisations people rise to their level of incompetence. A competent person will get promoted as a reward, rising up through the ranks. However, when the person is no longer competent at the complex tasks of a current role, he or she will not get any further promotions and will be stuck in the incompetent role.

Finally, we must consider what type of person chooses to work for councils. It is a simple truth that people with creativity and initiative will avoid bureaucratic organisations. Others will use council positions as stepping stones to a career outside council – those with 'get-up-and-go' will get up and go. Without doubt, some people have seen councils as a position of authority and a resource to use for their social agendas. The lack of accountability protects them and gives freedom to spend other people's money. Once ensconced, they employ like-minded people. There has been a fundamental and coordinated culture shift in councils over the last decade that is not working for ratepayers.

PART D - WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

1 Structure

Councillors will work as a team to restructure the governance system. Committee meetings can be replaced by smaller working groups led by councillors with expertise in each area. A budget for external consultants engaged by and reporting to councillors rather than staff will allow for independent review and advice to ensure better decision making.

The councillors will work as a team to direct the chief executive on how to manage the operational side of council. This is likely to include appointing deputy chief executives from outside the council to restructure departments where the chief executive lacks either the expertise or the time to manage properly.

The restructure will enable staff to be accountable. Good people do not fear accountability when it comes with the proper authority to make decisions and do their job to the best of their abilities. Accountability also leads to greater recognition and reward for success. The purpose of this is to eliminate the committees and endless reports to speed up decision-making through individuals

taking greater responsibility and leadership. Performance will be measured on outcomes rather than process.

There will be a distinction between management (oversight, expert leadership, and decision making) and administration (trivial paperwork and box ticking) tasks in the senior management layer to reduce the number of managers by using staff more effectively. IT automation and AI can significantly improve repetitive administrative tasks.

External industry experts will be brought in to direct department managers on efficient operations. This will include eliminating bureaucratic tasks and time wasting. Overheads will be reduced. Where appropriate, processes will be simplified to suit the specific needs of the department and customer ahead of the administrative needs of the council.

A complaints procedure will be established to genuinely listen and understand feedback from the public. Staff employed as advocates for the complainant will be empowered to proactively solve problems. Mistakes will be admitted and addressed as an opportunity to learn.

Service delivery can be improved with a reduction in time and cost by streamlining the system.

2 Finances

The easy credit of the Local Government Funding Agency must be stopped. If the LGFA won't do their job responsibly, then councils need to impose their own financial discipline.

Operational budgets must be immediately balanced. This will force councillors to face reality with a choice between massive rates rises or cutting staff and services. There will be no more hiding a culture of excess behind borrowing.

Capital expenditure must be assessed on a project-by-project basis, not council income. Return on investment must be greater than the interest cost, or the project does not proceed. External experts must review the budgets for every project and compare to market rates for private enterprise costs. Project management will be monitored to ensure delivery on time and on budget. There will be no more gold-plating, over specifying, poor management, or contract variation claims that quadruple the cost.

3 People

(a) Elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors)

Part E details what is necessary to improve the quality of councillors with a team working together and a range of skills.

(b) Chief Executive

The chief executive must commit to working with the team or be removed. The position is powerful, so the role cannot be used to undermine the necessary changes. A good chief executive should have the confidence to work on a 1-year contract, knowing it can be rolled over if performance is good.

To carry out the fundamental restructure, the chief executive (following directions from the councillor team) may need to appoint deputies with the time and skills to focus on key areas. This has the advantage of isolating the chief executive from the baggage of redundancies.

(c) Managers

The second tier of managers can be streamlined by separating management tasks from administrative tasks, allowing them to focus on leadership and decision making. Having said that, this layer is responsible for many of the problems in councils and the social engineering culture. The restructure is a good opportunity to cut out the rot.

Likewise, departmental managers need to be individually assessed, and the activists culled. Bringing in local external industry experts will be the best way to do this by changing the department focus from process to outcomes with performance measures.

(d) Staff

General staff numbers can be reduced by boosting productivity through accountability. The increased responsibility is achieved by empowering good people to make decisions and get on with their jobs. Performance measures based on outcomes rather than process will encourage proactive go-getters to produce great results, while the low achievers need to be let go.

PART E - HOW DO WE MAKE THE CHANGE?

“Somebody has to start, so it may as well be you.”

To make the necessary change requires control of the council by a majority of councillors working with a common purpose. I will refer to this majority as our team. It is not a political party that dictates every decision. Members of our team can have independence on issues outside the core matters. The team will include people outside council, because to be effective, the elected members of the team need support.

While it is beneficial to have the mayor as part of our team, it is not necessary. The mayor is just one vote, same as any councillor, with the difference of having a casting vote in the event of a tie. If our team has a majority over an opposition including the mayor, then the mayor is irrelevant. We need enough good candidates for council to ensure a majority.

Our team can then direct the chief executive to implement the structural, financial, and personnel changes. It is possible that the existing chief executive, being part of the present system, will resist and undermine the directives. In this case, it will be necessary to replace the chief executive.

The directives will include oversight from team members outside council to ensure staff also implement the changes. The chief executive does not have the expertise or the time to oversee every function of the council, so will need the support of the team.

Forming the team

Most good people who can see the problems in council are too busy doing good work such as running businesses employing local people. We keep society functioning, which has become so hard that we don't have much time left for politics. The only way we can take on people already embedded in council with authority and resources to resist us is to share the load.

A personal message to anyone reading this – I have seen many good people get burnt out. Give as much as you can, but no more. Ultimately, the public need to do their part and support us. You can't do it by yourself.

The team will function best with four layers:

1. Candidates for election
2. Steering group
3. Experts
4. Supporters

1 Candidates for election

To anyone contemplating standing for election – it is the easiest job I have ever had. There is some time reading reports prepared by the staff. The council meeting allows me to ask a few questions. The decision making takes place in a debate where I get two minutes to speak. A vote is held. After that, the staff may have actions to carry out, but I can leave. In my professional career, I never left a meeting without more work to do! There is no stress, because there is no accountability for three years and you can always blame other councillors for bad decisions. It is also obvious that half the councillors do not read the reports, or worse (and more likely), do not understand them.

The mayor is a full-time position to do the public engagements, ribbon cutting, and speeches, but a councillor role is a part-time position. The hours vary from week to week, depending on meetings and how many optional engagements you attend. I average 20 hours per week because I spend a lot of extra time helping people with individual problems. The purpose of the team is to have support and expert advice so that the workload is shared. Having control of the council means some meetings can be replaced with smaller targeted working groups. The team should be able to support a councillor giving 10 hours per week. This means it is possible to run a business at the same time, as I have done.

The pay varies from council to council, and it is related to the population of the district. This is bizarre, because the issues facing councils are the same regardless of size, and small-population rural districts have complications from large geographical areas that do not affect urban councils. The pay is bulk funded, so the number of councillors affects the breakdown. As examples, Hamilton has 14 councillors with a base of \$81,000 per annum, Tauranga has a smaller population but fewer councillors, with a base of \$110,000, while Waipa with 1/3 of Hamilton's population has a base of \$40,000.

Mayoral salaries have a different system and are set by the Higher Salaries Commission. Hamilton is \$180,000.

Sadly, a lot of election voting is done on name recognition rather than policy. It helps to have a public profile, but as will be explained in the Election Campaign section of this guide, the team can overcome a lack of profile with effective marketing. What you will need is a thick skin. Left-wing media, social justice warriors, current councillors, and other nutters will attack you. I simply don't care what they think.

The key criterion for standing is recognising the need for change for the sake of the community, not just yourself. Ideally, the candidates will cover a range of core skills and practical experience

in such areas as business, law, accounting, engineering, management, property development, and information technology.

For the team, selecting candidates to support is a challenge. The steering committee has an important role here and some tough decisions might need to be made. A candidate with a higher profile might be more electable than a candidate with the best skill. I hate to say it, but we need to get candidates elected first in order to implement change, so if the steering committee doesn't choose you, it is not a slight on your abilities. You can still support the team. The key criterion for selection has to be commitment to the team strategy and goals, so if you want to stand, you have to be thoroughly committed to those.

2 Steering Committee

To Team organisers – gathering the team is your job. Start with the Steering Committee by getting a few others to kick it off. As your numbers grow, you can change the make-up of the committee, so don't feel burdened to lead it or stay on it if you don't have the skills or time.

Candidates need to be supported by a group of civic leaders with knowledge, experience and community networks. Good candidates will have specialist skills, but the team needs to cover a broad range of abilities. The Steering Committee needs to find the best balance to form a team on council and a team off council, and it will also coordinate the campaigns.



Small is good. 4-6 people is enough for a core group. Bigger can be less efficient and makes decisions harder. Bring in experts as needed for advice on particular topics, and delegate to professionals amongst the supporters.

The Steering Committee will interview and select election candidates who are committed to the team strategy and goals. The broad solutions are outlined in this guide but there will be local issues that need special focus as well.

Candidate selection criteria will begin with a commitment to the team strategy and goals. What you are offering to the candidates is an effective election campaign and post-election support, so you expect their loyalty. Other criteria include their own personal profile, skills, honesty, integrity, presentation, and communication. Current councillors who want to be part of the team have an advantage on re-election and bring value with an inside-view on staff and processes.

The Steering Committee also needs to lead the fund-raising for the campaigns. Bringing candidates together as a team is best done by bulk funding the team rather than the individual.

3 Experts

To Team organisers - the expert role is critical to the success of the whole team. You may think it will be difficult to find them. Not so.

Every council district will have experienced professionals with a long history in the area, a good reputation, and who care more about the future of their community than making a quick buck. These people are great at their jobs but do not have the time or skills to stand for election. They are frustrated because they absolutely know that what they are seeing councils do is wrong. As a property developer, I know the cost of building, and I see councils spending four times as much as I could do the same project for. This has gone on for so long that many experts have given up hope of councils changing.

Once word of your team building gets out, you are likely to get experts wanting to join. However, if your team lacks expertise in some areas, then it may be necessary to shoulder tap people. You will find most are honoured to be asked.

You need experts in local advertising and social media to help with the education and election campaigns.

You need experts in accounting, law, management, and community groups to either be on the Steering Committee or be available to support with advice and reviews.

You need experts in council core services such as roading, engineering, and property development to advise on local issues and solutions for educating voters and election candidates.

After the election, experts are needed to review staff reports to give independent advice to councillors. Councillors will receive reports a few days before a meeting or a briefing session. They need to be able to email the report to a relevant expert to get a couple of hours of help free of charge. Councillors do not have a budget for this, which is one way staff control them. The expert can give feedback or suggest questions to ask to get more information. In this way, councillors get to make better decisions and break free of staff control. If more than a few hours are needed, councillors could vote to instruct the chief executive to get a paid external review from the team's panel of experts, not the council's panel of pet advisers.

External experts can also be engaged to oversee specific departments and direct the departmental manager on how to work more efficiently. To avoid conflicts of interest, the team can have its own panel of experts in each area to rotate the workload.

4 Supporters

To anyone thinking of supporting our team - I never expected to be a politician. I am interested in policy, but I hate politics. I can't bring myself to play all the dirty games of behind the scenes deals. I speak my mind, and I don't hold back. I run my own business, and I already do a huge amount for the community. Being on council costs me \$100,000 per year in lost income. I understand why good and successful people like you would not want to do it. I happen to be at the stage of life and career where I can, but it may be too big a sacrifice for you.

The team needs support. Money is great. Think about the cost of uncontrolled rates rises on your family and business. Think about the debt burden on your children. This is our last chance to stop it. The team cannot do it without financial help. Please donate if you can.

Time and professional services are also great. There are two campaigns to run. If you can assist with those, we can reach more people and get more votes.

Your business and community networks are the key. Simply getting the message out that we can fix the council is a help. Voter apathy is the single biggest problem we need to overcome. Many people have given up on council elections because the councillors don't listen and nothing changes. This time is different. We need you to do our marketing.

Building the team

To Team organisers - For some people, the biggest reason for not speaking up is the belief that they are alone. You are not alone! ***Somebody has to start, so it may as well be you.*** Talk to people, let them know you want to fix your council. You will be surprised at how many people will thank you. Join up with anyone who shares your interest. Word will spread and small clusters will be drawn together to form a big group.

Share this guide. A lot of people will be scared of making a commitment, so make it clear that for most people, all we are asking is support in networking and promoting our candidates. The guide explains how those who want to contribute more can fit into the team.

The fact that you started talking doesn't commit you to being the leader. If you can, great! But getting the group started can be your best gift. You too can be a supporter and let others take on the candidate or steering group roles.

Being a good team member

All Team members - We have got ourselves into this mess by succumbing to the old tactic of Divide and Conquer. We have been led into a path of arguing about our differences. Diversity is not our strength. Identity politics is divisive. These are the tools of the social engineers trying to undermine us.

Not everyone of us will agree with everything the team wants to do. We will have different agendas, pet peeves, ideas, and methods. Nor is anyone of us perfect. We need to accept this and still work together. I have seen too many groups lose focus and argue amongst themselves, becoming ineffective. I agree with 80% of my group, and they agree with 80% of my ideas. That is more than enough. I am sacrificing focus on my pet issues of resource consents and building consents. I may get a chance to work on them once the team strategy and goals are achieved.

As a candidate for election, you will have freedom to vote how you wish on non-core issues. But you must put the team first on the core issues.

As a steering committee member, you must focus on achieving the outcome. It is a case of the ends justifying the means. We are stuck with a political system.

As an expert adviser, your help is valued, but the team is often forced to compromise.

As a supporter, the team may not be perfect but when you look at the alternative, we are the best option you have.

Key dates

- Candidate nominations open 1 July, close 1 August.
- Voting packs mailed to voters 9-22 September, voting opens.
- Mail-in voting closes 7 October
- In-person voting closes 11 October midday.
- Results 11 October.

Councils have their own rules on advertising and campaign budgets. For instance, Hamilton prohibits election signs prior to nominations opening, and councillors are not allowed to spend more than \$20,000 on their campaign.

Education campaign

We need voters to understand that they can make a difference this time. We need them to know what the issues are and that there are real solutions. We also need them to realise what the consequences of inaction are. We need to scare them into active participation.

This will take time - longer than the election campaign. The sooner we start, the better. The Steering Committee needs to lead this, with the help of experts and professional supporters, and financial supporters are essential to fund it. All supporters will need to use their networks to spread the information.

Much of the campaign information can be shared between teams across the country because the same issues affect all councils. Because the Steering Committee is focusing on issues and not candidates for this campaign, it is not subject to electioneering rules.

Election Campaign

Candidate advertising is restricted to close to election time. The Steering Committee needs to coordinate the candidates to get the message across that a team approach is necessary to fixing councils. Name recognition is important, so our team's candidates need to promote each other as well as themselves. Candidates have maximum campaign expenditure limits, but other people are allowed to express their opinions publicly through social media, and the team can use signage as long as local planning rules are complied with.

The whole team is needed to help. Those who can't donate money can donate time for door knocking, handing out pamphlets, waving street signs or anything else that may show your support. My Hamilton team will be getting some expert advice on the most effective way to campaign, and I am happy to share this with any teams across the country.

Voting Strategy

There are now a variety of voting systems across New Zealand's councils. Some are still the traditional First Past the Post (FPP), where there might be, for example, 4 seats in a ward, so you get 4 votes and the 4 with the most votes get elected. Other councils have different systems such as Single Transferrable Vote (STV), where you rank candidates in order of preference. There might be 6 seats in a ward, but you still only get one vote. If your first choice doesn't make it, your vote is transferred to your next choice. If that doesn't make sense to you, you are not alone!

The Steering Committee will need to work out the best strategy. Contact me if you need help and I can get my experts to look into your local system. This will need to be communicated to voters because a lot of votes are wasted.

Councils issue voter packs to registered voters, including a booklet with a short biography of each candidate. This bio is supplied by the candidate, so the Steering Committee can coordinate our team's candidates to include voting instructions, such as identifying the other team members and how to rank them under STV.

Post election

We can continue to share information and experiences with successful candidates and teams. But you need to be prepared to resist the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) indoctrination that will start immediately with council staff running induction programmes. One of the messages you will be given is that 'Governance' (councillors' roles) must be kept separate from 'Operations' (staff roles). This is a deliberate misrepresentation of the Local Government Act section 39 (C). Firstly, this clause refers to regulatory decision making, not governance, and secondly, LGNZ omits the words "so far as reasonably practicable" from their documents. It has become clear that it is no longer practicable to separate Governance from Operations. Therefore, you are legally allowed to make decisions affecting Operations, and in fact, you are obliged to do so for the good of the community.

This is part of a process I have termed "Staff capture". The staff will make councillors' jobs easy, giving them reports and briefing sessions from internal experts to make councillors believe they have all the information they need. Predetermined options will be nicely presented with a staff recommendation, which appears very easy to agree with. Unimportant issues will be left wide-open for debate to let councillors think they are in control and making big decisions. Staff capture is why most councillors have failed.

CONTACT FOR ADVICE

There will be teams all across the country this year, so we can share information. I am willing to give advice to any team and set up video calls to talk to team members. You can contact me via my personal email andrew.bydder@xtra.co.nz