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**Committee** Policy, Finance and Strategy  
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## 2004 triennial local authority elections

### 1. Purpose

To provide Councillors with the timetable for the 2004 triennial local authority elections and to seek a decision on the order in which the candidates' names are to be shown on the voting documents used.

### 2. Background

The next triennial local authority elections will be held on 9 October 2004, less than 12 months away. The Council has already made decisions on the electoral system and the timing of the next constituency review, and planning for the elections themselves has commenced.

The territorial authorities in the Region carry out much of the work for the regional council elections. Decisions on the method of voting (i.e. postal or ballot box) and the early processing of votes can be made by territorial authorities but not a regional council. In terms of the former, the method used for regional council voting within the district of a territorial authority must be the same method used by the territorial authority. Territorial authorities are required to consult with regional councils on the method of voting and it would be appropriate for the Council to provide an indication of their preferred method, while recognising that it is the territorial authorities who make the decisions.

All territorial authorities in the Region chose the postal voting method for their 1998 and 2001 elections and it has been the preferred method of the vast majority of councils since its introduction. There is no move, that officers are aware of, for any authority to change back to the ballot box method. It is recommended that the Council indicate that postal voting is its preferred method of voting.

### **3. Timetable**

The timetable for the elections is set out in the Local Electoral Act 2001 and the Local Electoral Regulations 2001. A copy of the timetable is included as **Attachment 1** to this report. The critical dates are shown in bold.

### **4. Order of names on voting papers**

Prior to the enactment of the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 candidates' names were required to be listed on the voting documents in alphabetical order, by surname.

Clause 31(1) of the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 now allows the Council to decide whether the candidates' names are to be arranged on the voting documents in alphabetical order of surname, pseudo-random order or random order. In the absence of any Council resolution approving another arrangement, the candidates' names must be arranged in alphabetical order of surname.

The features of each arrangement are described as follows:

#### **Option 1 - Alphabetical order of surname**

This is the order which has been required to be used at previous local authority elections, and is self explanatory.

#### **Option 2 - Pseudo-random order\*\***

Under this option, the candidates' names for each election are placed in a hat (or similar receptacle) mixed together, and then drawn out of the receptacle, with the candidates' names being placed on all voting documents for that election in the order in which they are drawn.

(\*\*Note: Although the term "pseudo-random order" is used in the Local Electoral Regulations to describe this arrangement, this is a somewhat imperfect description, in that the term "pseudo-random" is understood by mathematicians and/or information technology specialists to have a quite different meaning.)

#### **Option 3 - Random order**

Under this option, the names of the candidates for each election are shown in a different order on each and every voting document, utilising software which permits the names of the candidates to be laser printed in a different order on each paper.

#### **Public notice**

The Regulations provide that if a local authority has determined that pseudo-random order or random order is to be used, the Electoral Officer must state, in the public notice required to be given, the date, time and place at which the order of the candidates' names will be drawn. Any person is then entitled to attend while the draw is in progress.

## **Comparative cost of each option**

The cost of printing the voting documents employing either Option 1 or Option 2 will be identical. Should the Council adopt Option 3 (random order) there will be some increase in cost, because of the need to individually laser print each voting document rather than having them pre-printed. While it is not yet possible to give an estimate of the likely additional costs if this option is chosen, these are not expected to be substantial.

## **Possible voter confusion**

The Regulations allow each local authority to determine, by resolution, which “order of candidate name” option it wants to employ. Because Regional Councils, Territorial Authorities, District Health Boards and Licensing Trusts are all local authorities, as defined under the Local Electoral Act 2001, each authority could potentially opt for a different name order option. If this scenario was to occur, a Regional Council voter could be faced with the order of candidates being different for all the main issues they are required to vote on.

This could be confusing for electors, particularly if there are a considerable number of candidates standing for election. It has the potential to discourage people from voting for more than a few candidates or, in the worst case scenario, stop them from voting at all.

No decision on this issue has been taken by any of the other authorities at this stage.

## **Comments on various options**

### **Alphabetical order**

This is the simplest method for the elector. It is the method they are familiar with and is the system used at the parliamentary elections. There is a suggestion that candidates with a surname starting at the top end of the alphabet have an unfair advantage over others with a “lower” alphabetic ranking.

While there is no research that we are aware of which confirms this view, we have sought advice from the Department of Internal Affairs as to whether this is the case.

### **Pseudo-random order**

This system could possibly be more difficult for the elector to locate the candidate they wish to vote for, especially if there are a large number of candidates standing for election.

Although it would resolve the issue (if there is one) of those candidates with a surname starting with the letter “A” or “B” etc having an unfair advantage over those candidates whose surname starts with a middle or later letter of the

alphabet, that advantage would then be given to the first few candidates whose names are drawn out of the hat.

#### Random order

This option suffers from the same (possible) difficulty for the elector as described under the “pseudo random” method.

Although it may not be particularly user friendly this method is possibly the fairest to all candidates.

### **5. Communication**

The Council’s decisions will be communicated to Electoral Officers in territorial authorities and to the public in the necessary public notices.

### **6. Recommendations**

*That the Committee:*

1. *note the timetable for the 2004 triennial local authority elections.*
2. *recommend to Council that:*
  - (a) *it advises territorial authorities in the Region that its preferred method of voting is postal voting*
  - (b) *the names of the Greater Wellington Regional Council candidates at the 2004 local authority elections are to be arranged on the voting paper in (choose one of the following):*
    - *alphabetical order of surname; or*
    - *pseudo-random order; or*
    - *random order.*

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**Attachment 1:** Timetable for the elections