

Key factors for consideration

The Council must carefully consider the following three key factors when determining its representation proposal:

- Communities of interest
- Effective representation
- Fair representation.

1. Communities of interest

The Council must ensure that the election of its members provides effective representation of the community or communities of interest within the region.

The term “community of interest” is not defined by statute. It is a term that can mean different things to different people, depending on an individual or group’s perspective. Giving proper consideration to defining local communities of interest is, however, an essential part of the representation review process. It is a necessary precursor to determining effective representation.

Communities of interest may alter over time. Local authorities need, therefore, to give careful attention to identifying current communities of interest within their district or region when undertaking representation reviews.

In a general sense the Local Government Commission’s view of community interest is the area to which one feels a sense of belonging and to which one looks to for social, service and economic support. Geographic features and the roading network can affect the sense of belonging to an area. A community of interest can often be identified by access to the goods and services needed for ordinary everyday existence.

A community of interest usually has a number of defining characteristics, which may include:

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Similarities in the demographic, socio-economic and/or ethnic characteristics of the residents of a community
- Similarities in economic activities
- Dependence on shared facilities in an area, including schools, recreational and cultural facilities, and retail outlets
- Physical and topographical features
- The history of the area

- Transport and communication links.

For a regional council factors aligned to regional council functions may also be relevant, e.g. water catchments, public transport networks, pest districts, river rating districts.

2. Effective and fair representation

The number and boundaries of constituencies must provide effective representation of communities of interest within the region. Constituency boundaries must coincide with the boundaries of the current statistical meshblock areas as determined by Statistics New Zealand and, so far as is practicable, constituency boundaries must coincide with the boundaries of one or more territorial authority districts or the boundaries of wards. The Council is required to use the most up to date population figures when carrying out its review and these are the figures on which the fairness criteria must be based.

The LEA states that for representation to be considered fair the number of members is calculated by having regard to the population of every constituency within the region. The population of each constituency divided by the number of members to be elected in that constituency must not be more than 10% greater or smaller than the population of the region divided by the total number of elected members; this is commonly referred to as the “+/- 10% rule”.

However, the requirement for effective representation of communities of interest may in some cases override the population based calculations carried out under fair representation. Under section 19V(3) of the LEA the Council may only depart from the population formula required for fair representation where it is necessary to do so to ensure the effective representation of communities of interest. A decision by the Council not to comply with the population formula must be referred to the Local Government Commission for determination.

Questions relating to accessibility, size and configuration of an area also should be considered in determining effective representation, for example:

- Would the population have reasonable access to its elected member and vice versa?
- Would elected members be able to effectively represent the views of their constituency?
- Would elected members be able to attend public meetings throughout their area, and provide reasonable opportunities for their constituents to have face to face meetings?