Hon Simon Watts

Minister for Building and Construction
Minister of Climate Change
Minister of Local Government
Minister of Revenue
Minister for Auckland

letter sourced from other Councils. No letter sent to Govt. Another example of the contempt that Govt has for regional councils.
Dawn Parker 24/9/2026.

24 September 2026

Dear Mayors and Chief Executives

Update on Head Start pathway

We are writing to provide you with an update on the Head Start pathway, and recent Cabinet decisions. We acknowledge the considerable time, resources, and effort that has gone into developing outline proposals.

It is clear from the response we received that there is a genuine appetite for change in the sector. Head Start has shown that councils are up for the challenge, and ready to think seriously about the future of local government. We thank you for your leadership in driving these conversations forward and setting a strong foundation for local government reform.

While the overall quality of proposals was high, the assessment process identified several common issues that require further consideration. None came with the unanimous view of the region, and some needed further analysis before they can progress.

Particular areas that require further development include ensuring fair and effective representation with streamlined governance, and the transfer and delivery of regional functions. These issues were not unique to any one proposal and related to a number of key design areas.

After careful consideration, Cabinet has decided that it will not be making decisions on individual Head Start proposals at this time. The Government intends to take decisions on the next steps for local government reorganisation after the 2026 general election.

Rather than asking councils to commit further time and resources to finalise proposals now, the Government's priority is to ensure those common design issues are resolved upfront, and that future reform decisions are supported by strong regional collaboration. This will enable a smoother, more efficient reorganisation process for councils in future.

Officials from the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) will work closely with you, alongside sector groups, iwi and hapū, and stakeholders to resolve key design issues. We encourage councils to use this time to continue to engage with your neighbours, test ideas, share any lessons learned, and build off the excellent work you have already done.

In the meantime, the Government's expectation is that councils will focus on implementing the new planning system, with high-quality spatial plans as the first major milestone. Spatial planning will help establish a shared long-term vision for regions and inform future decisions about infrastructure, transport, housing, environmental management, and local government

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arrangements. Completed regional spatial plans will be an important input into any future reorganisation.

The Government remains committed to simplifying local government. Regional councillors will not be elected at the 2028 local elections, and the backstop process for regional reorganisation will still commence following the elections. The work that you have already done provides a strong foundation and will inform next steps for local government reorganisation and the backstop pathway.

Your Local Government Partnership Director remains your first point of contact. They will be in touch with you shortly to answer any questions you may have and provide information on next steps.

Thank you again for your leadership and engagement throughout this process. We look forward to working with you to build a stronger local government for your communities.

Yours sincerely,

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government

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