



Final opinion of the Chief Ombudsman

**Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act
compliance and practice in
Wellington City Council**

June 2025

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Terminology and methodology

Wellington City Council (the Council) - When we use the term 'the Council' this primarily relates to the operational arm of the organisation, unless the context suggests otherwise. When we are referring to the governance function, we use the term 'elected members'.

This investigation involved consideration of the Council's supporting administrative structures, leadership and culture, policies, processes, practices, decision-making and record-keeping.

Our investigation included a review of:

- publicly available material;
- relevant complaints to the Ombudsman;
- an agency questionnaire seeking internal documents and commentary relating to official information processing and practice (referred to throughout this report as the '*agency questionnaire*');
- an online survey of the public (referred to throughout this report as the '*public survey*');
- an online survey of Council staff (referred to throughout this report as the '*staff survey*');
- an online survey of elected members (referred to throughout this report as the '*elected member survey*');
- a sample of LGOIMA request files; and
- a sample of media information request files.

This investigation also included interviews with a number of key people to assist our understanding of each agency's LGOIMA culture, processes, and practices:

- my investigators spoke with a selection of staff and managers in different departments/teams involved in making decisions about, and preparing responses to, official information requests;
- the former Chief Ombudsman spoke with the Chief Executive of the Council during his tenure.

My opinion relates to the Council's practice during the period in which my investigation took place, being September 2024 to June 2025.¹

Legislation referred to in this report

- [Local Government Act 2002](#) (LGA)
- [Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987](#) (LGOIMA)

¹ On occasion, we may look at material from outside the investigation period where particular issues warrant further investigation.

- [Ombudsmen Act 1975](#) (OA)
- [Public Records Act 2005](#) (PRA)
- [Bill of Rights Act 1990](#) (NZBORA)

Note from Chief Ombudsman John Allen

Since Peter Boshier’s term as Chief Ombudsman ended on 28 March 2025, I have assumed responsibility for the self-initiated investigation into the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA) policies and practices of Wellington City Council. Reference in this report to ‘my predecessor’ refers to former Chief Ombudsman, Peter Boshier.

Summary

Leadership and culture

Strong leadership is an important factor in ensuring a council achieves the principles and purposes of the LGOIMA, and develops a culture that promotes openness and transparency.

During this investigation we have seen examples of the Council's senior leaders demonstrating commitment to the Council's obligations under the LGOIMA. However, the results of our staff survey show that a significant proportion of respondents did not know the senior leaders' views on openness and public participation or thought that they were silent on the issue.

In our view, the Council's senior leaders should make clear, regular statements to all staff promoting the importance of the LGOIMA and reminding staff about their obligations including that responding to LGOIMA requests is core business. Senior leaders must also role model open and transparent behaviour by ensuring that Council practices and processes for conducting meetings and workshops are transparent and promote accountability.

We are encouraged that in response to the provisional opinion, the Chief Executive noted that he will be taking the opportunity to reinforce to everyone at the Council the importance of openness and transparency.

It is pleasing that the Council has many positive practices around providing the public with access to information to enable meaningful participation in the Council's decision making. For example, the recently implemented software '*Mātai Manapori*' allows users to quickly search the Council's decisions published on its website without having to go through lengthy PDF documents. The Council also signals its commitment to openness and transparency through statements included on its website, and proactively releasing large amounts of official information, such as reports on its LGOIMA performance and responses to LGOIMA requests.

The Council's '*Information requests*' webpage is generally helpful and informative. We suggest that it should be amended to include a statement promoting the importance of the LGOIMA, an outline of the principle of availability, and a link to the Council's internal rules on making decisions on LGOIMA requests. The link to the webpage should be placed on the website's homepage or no more than two clicks away from it, under an appropriately titled link.

It was pleasing to see that a statement of commitment to openness and transparency was included in the Council's Long-term plan. In our view, this can be expanded to describe how the Council intends to achieve:

- compliance with the LGOIMA;
- good practice;
- a culture of openness and continuous improvement; and
- participation and access to information by the public and stakeholder groups.

The Council's decisions have recently become a focus of the media following a number of widely publicised events reporting political tensions within the Council.

It is pleasing that the Council had acknowledged the negative public perceptions and introduced a number of measures aimed at improving community engagement. These include the implementation of *Mātai Manapori* and a forum called '*Citizens' Assembly*'.

To help identify areas of high public interest, the Council's executive leadership team has oversight of the public queries sent to elected members. The Official Information team (OI team) also sends regular updates to senior staff and conducts meetings with the Customer Services team and the team responsible for social media and web content. These practices help ensure that the Council publishes information in accordance with the public's information needs.

Action points: Leadership and culture

Senior leaders, elected members and the Chief Executive to role model positive LGOIMA practices through their behaviour and actions, and to make clear regular statements in support of the principle and purposes of official information legislation, reminding staff of their obligations.

Amend the Council's '*Information requests*' webpage incorporating our suggestions.

Expand the Council's strategic statement in the Long-term plan to include more information about how the Council intends to achieve strategic intentions in relation to the LGOIMA and openness more broadly.

Organisation structure, staffing, and capability

Councils should organise their structure and resources in a way which is appropriate for their size, responsibilities, and the level of public interest in the information held, and ensures that they meet their LGOIMA obligations.

From the Council's sample LGOIMA reports and meetings with some staff, it appears that the Council's OI team is adequately resourced. Under the Council's mixed model of processing LGOIMA requests, complex requests are processed by the OI team, and low risk or quick turnaround requests are processed by other business units.

The processing of LGOIMA requests is clearly outlined in the Council's internal guidance and facilitated with the assistance of '*LGOIMA champions*' appointed within most business units. When processing large requests, the OI team engages the Information Management Support team to conduct searches of the Council's information systems.

In relation to the LGOIMA process, some staff advised our investigators of instances where decisions of delegated signatories for LGOIMA requests were overridden by more senior staff after a disagreement on how the Council should respond to a particular request. In the Council's sample LGOIMA files, we also saw examples where there were significant delays in the LGOIMA process, but no records of attempts to escalate these delays.

To help ensure transparency, staff should keep adequate records of the process of making decisions on LGOIMA requests, including who made the decision and who was consulted. The process for escalating any disagreements or delays should be outlined in a written process and consistently adhered to by staff. The Council should also ensure that staff are aware of the Council’s responsibility under the LGOIMA to communicate responses to LGOIMA requests as soon as reasonably practicable. This concept should be embedded into the Council’s culture through senior leaders’ messaging and role-modelling of positive LGOIMA practices.

Having reviewed the Council’s LGOIMA training, we were pleased to find that it is mandatory for all staff, provided during induction to new employees, with refresher training delivered regularly. The training includes introductory training for all staff and specialist training delivered to members of the Official Information and Democracy Services teams. Training is also delivered as needed to individual business units and staff. Finally, training on information management and record keeping covers a wide range of aspects, along with some positive messaging on the importance of responsible information management.

In our view, the Council should ensure that the following matters are included in the training:

- a clear description of the steps that are required before the Council can be considered to have made a decision on a LGOIMA request;
- more information on refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA, applying the withholding grounds under the LGOIMA and considering the public interest test;
- instructions for staff to consistently document steps taken to search for information within the scope of LGOIMA requests, and to create and maintain full and accurate records of spoken discussions in relation to LGOIMA decision making;
- instructions to record descriptive plain English reasons for excluding the public from Council meetings, and to consider the public interest test whenever considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA to hear an item in a public excluded meeting; and
- instructions for preparing written summaries of the Council’s informal meetings, and publishing these (along with information on closed meetings) on the Council’s website.

The LGOIMA training should also clearly convey the concept of ‘*as soon as reasonably practicable*’ to all staff throughout the organisation, and that responding to LGOIMA requests is part of the Council’s core business.

Finally, the Council may wish to survey elected members on their training needs, and consider implementing formal refresher training to be delivered to them at appropriate intervals.

Action points: Organisation structure, staffing, and capability
Implement a formal documented process for escalating delays in the LGOIMA process and/or disagreements between staff on responding to LGOIMA requests.
Ensure staff receive LGOIMA training appropriate to their role and involvement with the LGOIMA process, incorporating our suggestions.

Action points: Organisation structure, staffing, and capability

Consider surveying elected members on their training needs to ensure adequate training and guidance is available to them.

Consider implementing regular LGOIMA training for elected members to be delivered at appropriate intervals, including elected members' responsibilities in relation to information management and record keeping.

Internal policies, procedures and resources

Any organisation subject to the LGOIMA should have resources, policies and procedures that enable it to meet its obligations under the LGOIMA successfully and in a timely manner.

The Council's LGOIMA guidance and templates cover all stages in the LGOIMA process, and appear to be consistent with the Ombudsman's published guidance and templates (with some exceptions). We were pleased to find that the Council has tailored guidance for staff outside the OI team ('Contact Centre – Requests Guidance' and 'Media Policy and Guidelines'), and recently introduced the 'Decision Memo' template to help improve record-keeping and the quality of the Council's substantive decision-making on LGOIMA requests.

As an area of further improvement, we suggest that the Council's guidance on assessing risks for various types of LGOIMA requests should be amended to emphasise the principle of availability of information, and that official information cannot be withheld solely because it presents a reputational risk for the Council, its staff and/or elected members.

The Council should also ensure that its LGOIMA guidance and templates include:

- a description of the steps required before the Council can be considered to have made a decision on a LGOIMA request;
- (when considering withholding information), more guidance on assessing the strength of the harm in releasing information to the requester, and balancing it against the strength of the public interest considerations in releasing;
- references to the requirements of sections 17A and 17B of the LGOIMA;
- instructions for staff to take adequate records of the decision-making processes, such as written summaries of spoken conversations and the rationale for seeking an extension;
- instructions for staff to consistently document the steps taken to search for information; and
- the principle of making a decision on a request '*as soon as reasonably practicable*'.

The guidance should outline the Council's approach to dealing with challenging requesters, and managing broad requests and multiple requests from the same requester. Once finalised, this should be published on the Council's website to help demonstrate openness and make the Council less vulnerable to criticism when applying the guidance.

In addition, the Council's *'Media Policy and Guidelines'* should make it clear that information requests are subject to the LGOIMA regardless of the channels through which they are submitted. The Council's media and social media policies should include guidance on refusing requests and withholding information.

Finally, we suggest that the Council review some of its templates to align with good practice (that is, the template for notifying an extension and consulting with third parties).

In relation to the Council's internal guidance on Council Meetings, we were pleased to find that it contains instructions for staff that promote openness and transparency (including releasing information from 'public excluded' meetings). In our view, the guidance should include more information about the requirement to set out descriptive, plain English reasons for 'public exclusion' and apply the public interest test when considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA. The Council's *'Standard minutes template'* should also include prompts for staff to provide summaries of any public input made during a Council meeting.

The guidance on the Council's informal meetings (workshops and briefings), while includes many positive aspects, should also be expanded to cover:

- the process for publicising workshops and briefings;
- factors to consider when making a decision to close a workshop or briefing;
- how to keep good records of workshops or briefings; and
- handling LGOIMA requests for information on the contents of closed meetings.

The Council's *'Information and Data Asset Management Policy'* appears to be comprehensive and includes high-level statements of the Council's commitments, which is positive. In our view, the policy can be improved further by including more information to cover the following:

- information stored in personal email, instant messaging platforms, and text messages;
- a guide to determining which records systems exist and what information each holds; and
- regular quality assurance processes and/or audits of record keeping practices.

In relation to proactive release, the Council has formal documents titled *'Proactive Release for information requests'*, and *'Proactive/reactive process to high-risk events'*. We suggest that the Council implement an overarching policy for all types of official information, for example, information on the Council's workshops and briefings, or its LGOIMA policies. The policy should be published on the Council's website and include the following:

- a high level commitment to proactively releasing official information, highlighting the principle of availability;
- the types of information that will be proactively released;
- processes for identifying opportunities for proactive release; and
- processes for preparing information for proactive release.

Action points: Internal policies, procedures and resources

Review and update guidance and templates on risk assessment in relation to LGOIMA requests incorporating our suggestions.

Amend guidance and templates incorporating our suggestions.

Amend internal LGOIMA guidance to include more information on dealing with challenging requesters, and publish it on the Council's website.

Amend guidance on requests submitted through media and social media channels incorporating our suggestions.

Review internal LGOIMA templates and amend where required.

Amend guidance to include more information on the Council's decision-making when excluding the public from Council meetings, in line with our suggestions.

Amend '*Standard minutes template*' to incorporate our suggestions in relation to recording discussions held during Council meetings.

Review internal guidance on workshops and briefings incorporating our suggestions.

Expand information management and record keeping policy incorporating our suggestions.

Implement overarching proactive release policy to cover proactive release of all types of official information held by the Council (including information in line with our suggestions), and publish it on the Council's website.

Current practices

To assess the Council's current practices we considered whether they demonstrate understanding and commitment to the principle, purposes and requirements of LGOIMA. We also considered whether the Council is coping with the volume and complexity of its LGOIMA work and is compliant with the Act.

Based on the Council's reporting, the use of extensions of LGOIMA requests is reasonably high. The Council should consider undertaking some analysis of its reasons for extensions to assure itself that they are compliant with the LGOIMA, and there are no underlying capacity or capability issues that might be driving the increase in the use of extensions.

In our review of the Council's LGOIMA files we saw examples where the Council advised the requester that it had decided to provide the requested information, however, the Council's records showed consultations about withholding information from the response continued even after the 'decision' was communicated to the requester.

It appears that the Council has, on occasions that we saw, purported to make a decision and meet the timeframe obligation when, in fact, the necessary work to make a decision had not taken place. It is my opinion that the Council has acted unreasonably by communicating a decision on a LGOIMA request when it was not open to the agency to do so. I recommend that

the Council review its practices around communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests in advance of providing the information, to ensure that before the Council claims to have made a decision on a LGOIMA requests, it is able to demonstrate that it has:

- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

In response to the provisional opinion, the Council provided further context, noting that during the period under review when the Official Information team was managing these requests it coincided with a time of heightened demand. The Chief Executive went on to say that he accepts the finding and is committed to moving quickly to implement the recommendation. We look forward to receiving updates on the Council's progress implementing the recommendation.

The sample files included some incomplete records of the Council's decision-making process when withholding information under the LGOIMA. We suggest the Council amend its practices to ensure that such records are consistently retained by staff. In addition, when refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA, some of the Council's responses did not fully explain the Council's reasons for refusals, including whether the Council had considered the requirements of sections 17A and 17B of the LGOIMA. The Council should review its practices when refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA.

In relation to the Council's interactions with the elected members when processing LGOIMA requests submitted to the Council, the Council may wish to agree on a document or protocol with its elected members. This should provide guidelines on consulting with elected members, notifying them of the Council's responses to LGOIMA requests, as well as handling information held by elected members (including the concept of '*as soon as reasonably practicable*'). The Council may also wish to implement guidance on elected members' access to Council information both under the LGOIMA and under the common law '*need-to-know*' principle.

Once agreed on, the guidance or protocol should be published on the Council's website to help ensure that the Council's interactions with its elected members are transparent and well-understood by the public.

During this investigation we reviewed a sample of the Council's responses to media information requests handled by the Media team. We found some records to be incomplete, and others including statements that '*[n]o WCC record of the email exchange exists*'.

The Council should amend the Media team's practices to ensure full and accurate records of substantive correspondence with requesters, and any material internal discussions, are created and maintained. The Council should seek advice from Archives New Zealand to ensure its

practices are compliant with section 17 of the PRA. These measures should be supported by providing training to the Media team, as well as messaging from the senior leaders to reinforce that the Media team's practices must adhere to the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.

There are opportunities for the Council to improve its record keeping practices as an essential enabler for proper access to information.

Two Council staff members advised our investigators during meetings that some staff may be wary of recording information fearing that the record may be released under the LGOIMA and portray the Council and/or its staff in a negative light. We note that the Council's sample LGOIMA files appeared to be missing records of meetings and/or spoken discussions.

To promote compliance with section 17 of the Public Records Act 2005, the Council should ensure that staff take adequate records of the Council's decision-making processes (including substantive spoken conversations). The Council's senior leaders should reinforce the importance of good information management and record keeping.

Based on the review of the sample files, we also encourage the Council to ensure that staff consistently document the steps taken to conduct a '*reasonable search*' for information requested under the LGOIMA. These records can include, for example, which systems were searched, search terms that were entered, and any difficulties in searching.

From the sample of the Council's Meeting agendas, the Council appears to be compliant with the statutory timeframes under Part 7 of the LGOIMA for notifying meetings, and making available agendas for these meetings. Information about the Meetings is published on the Council's website showing upcoming meeting dates along with links to agendas and minutes.

We were pleased to see that the Council considers ways in which it can make it easier for the public to participate in the Council's decision-making processes. These include, for example, delivering information sheets to residents' mailboxes and conducting Council meetings outside working hours. In relation to the physical accessibility of its meetings, the Council's measures include providing wheelchair access, a hearing loop, and publishing information to assist individuals with learning difficulties.

To help improve further, we suggest that the Council review its practice around taking minutes of Council Meetings to ensure that they reliably contain a clear audit trail of the full decision making process, including any relevant debate and consideration of options.

The Council maintains a number of practices to promote the robustness of its decisions to exclude the public from its Meetings. For example, proposals to exclude the public are approved by the Council's legal team, vigorously debated by the elected members, and the Council will frequently consider whether a portion of a meeting proposed to be held in 'public excluded' can be held in the open section of the Meeting. There are also formalised processes in place to ensure that information from 'public excluded' meetings is regularly published.

We note, however, that during the public and elected members' surveys some respondents expressed concern about the Council's practices around its 'public excluded' meetings, particularly the use of '*commercial sensitivity*' as a ground to exclude the public.

Having reviewed the Council’s sample resolutions to exclude the public, we found them to be broadly consistent with the Schedule 2A form of the LGOIMA. However, we encourage the Council to ensure that its resolutions provide detailed plain English reasons for the Council’s decisions, including the specific harm the Council was trying to prevent by excluding the public, and the consideration of the public interest in open discussion.

It is pleasing that the Council’s informal meetings (workshops and briefings) are open to the public ‘*by default*’. Information about open informal meetings is published on the Council’s website, including the scheduled time, date and venue, along with materials presented at the meeting and links to livestreams, where available. Proposals to hold a closed informal meeting are approved by the Council’s legal team, and staff are instructed to consider whether a portion of the closed informal meeting could be held in public.

Most Council staff who met with our investigators had a favourable view of the Council’s workshops and briefings, stating that no debate or decision-making occurred during informal meetings.

However, to help increase public trust in the Council’s decisions, we suggest that the Council publish more information about its informal meetings. This should include written notes of meetings, and information about closed meetings, such as reasons for closing a workshop or briefing to the public and an explanation that members of the public can request information about a closed informal meeting under the LGOIMA.

Recommendation: Current practices

Review practices around communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests to ensure that before the Council claims to have made a decision on a LGOIMA requests, it is able to demonstrate that it has:

- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

Action points: Current practices

Amend practices to ensure that staff consistently retain records of the decision-making process when withholding information under the LGOIMA, incorporating our suggestions.

Amend practices in relation to refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA, incorporating our suggestions, to ensure compliance with the Act and align with good LGOIMA practice.

Action points: Current practices

The Council should continue to work with elected members towards developing a clear protocol or guidance to help guide interactions between the Council and elected members, incorporating our suggestions, and publish the document on the Council's website once finalised.

Amend Media team's practices to ensure that full and accurate records of substantive correspondence with requesters, and any material internal discussions, are created and maintained.

Seek advice from Archives New Zealand on how to ensure Media team's practices are compliant with section 17 of the Public Records Act 2005.

Ensure messaging from senior leaders reinforces that media information requests handled by the Media team must adhere to the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.

Provide targeted LGOIMA and information management and record keeping training to the Media team to ensure they understand their obligations under the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.

Amend practices to ensure full and accurate records of substantive telephone, face-to-face and other spoken discussions in relation to LGOMA decision making are created and maintained.

Senior leaders to support changes in record keeping practices by promoting the importance of good information management and record keeping

Consistently document steps taken to search for information when processing LGOIMA requests in line with our suggestions.

Review practices for minute-taking at Council Meetings in line with our suggestions.

Amend practices to ensure that Council's Schedule 2A resolutions set out detailed, plain English reasons for excluding the public from a particular meeting.

Adopt the practice of regularly recording relevant public interest considerations supporting open discussion in its Schedule 2A resolutions whenever considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA to exclude the public from a Council meeting.

Amend the '*Workshops and briefings*' webpage to include more information in line with our suggestions.

Amend practices to ensure that written records of workshops and briefings are retained, in line with our suggestions, and published on the Council's website.

Performance monitoring and learning

Although there are no specific requirements under the LGOIMA for the recording or assessment of information requests, there is an expectation that Councils should hold

meaningful information around decisions made. To assess the Council’s performance monitoring and learning, we considered how the Council captures meaningful information, reports performance and undertakes data analysis.

It is commendable that the Council regularly reports aspects of its LGOIMA performance through its website, including such indicators as *‘LGOIMA decision sent within statutory timeframe’*, *‘[m]eeting and committee agendas (%) made available to the public within statutory timeframes’*. We suggest that the Council consider also including analysis of the quality of its responses to LGOIMA requests, for example, reasons for extensions.

While we were pleased that the Council’s reporting includes set targets for its LGOIMA performance, we note that the target for the timeliness of its responses to LGOIMA requests is set at *‘95 percent on time (meeting the statutory deadline for making a decision on a request i.e. 20 working day or extension date)’*. This target should be changed to 100 percent, because compliance with the maximum 20 working day statutory timeframe is a legal requirement under the LGOIMA.

The Council’s LGOIMA reporting to senior leaders includes analysis of the Council’s performance indicating that the reporting informs the Council’s decisions around resourcing of its LGOIMA function. To help provide a complete picture of the Council’s LGOIMA performance and workload, we suggest that the Council consider ways of reporting data on all official information requests managed by business units outside of the OI team (including, for example, quick turnaround requests and requests handled by the Media team).

In addition, to promote ongoing improvement of LGOIMA response quality and increase the efficiency of the LGOIMA process, we encourage the Council to include more qualitative data in reporting to senior leaders (for example, reasons for extensions). The Council may also wish to conduct regular internal audits of its LGOIMA practices by, for example, reviewing a random sample of closed LGOIMA files and reporting the outcome of the review to senior leadership.

Finally, we were pleased to find that, to help maintain up-to-date knowledge of best LGOIMA practice, the Council’s LGOIMA specialists participate in initiatives to help share and discuss this practice externally, that is, with other local government agencies in the country. We encourage the Council to ensure that learnings obtained through these networks are shared with other staff throughout the Council.

Action points: Performance monitoring and learning
Amend the performance target for LGOIMA requests to 100 percent timeliness.
Include all information requests processed by business units outside of the OI team (including the Media team) into the Council’s statistical reporting of its LGOIMA performance.
Consider collecting more comprehensive data on LGOIMA request handling so that opportunities for performance improvement can be identified, and include this in reporting to senior leaders.

Action points: Performance monitoring and learning

Consider implementing a practice of conducting quality assurance of a sample of completed LGOIMA requests and reporting outcomes to senior leaders.

Implement processes whereby learnings obtained by the Council's LGOIMA specialists is disseminated more widely throughout the organisation to reach all staff involved in the LGOIMA process.

My opinion

Through the investigation process, we have identified a number of areas of good LGOIMA practice relating to LGOIMA request processing, and Meeting and workshop practices. For example, we were pleased to see that the Council recently implemented a system called 'Mātai Manapori', which helps improve the accessibility of the Council's information to the public, and strongly signals the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.

We have also identified areas of vulnerability that we consider the Council should address, which have resulted in 37 suggested actions that we consider will improve the Council's practices.

During review of the Council's LGOIMA files we were concerned to see examples where the Council advised the requester that it decided to provide the requested information, however, the Council's records showed consultations about withholding information from the response continued even after the 'decision' was communicated to the requester. In these instances, because the Council had not completed the steps necessary to make a decision, the Council's claim to have made a decision was premature.

It is my opinion that the Council has acted unreasonably by communicating a decision on a LGOIMA request when it was not open to the agency to do so.

I recommend that the Council review its practices around communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests in advance of providing the information, to ensure that, before the Council claims to have made a decision on a LGOIMA request, it is able to demonstrate that it has:

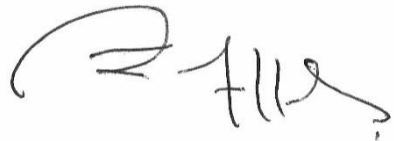
- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

In its response to my provisional opinion, the Council advised that it accepted the finding and action points and was committed to moving quickly to implement the recommended actions. The Chief Executive noted that '*any shortcomings have either already been addressed or are being remedied promptly*'. The Council advised:

As a leadership team, we will focus on implementing your findings and strengthening our approach. This is vital and aligns with our broader objective of building public trust and confidence in the Council.

This response from the Council is very encouraging and we look forward to following up on its progress over the coming months.

I extend my thanks to the Council for engaging positively with my Office throughout the investigation. We look forward to further productive engagement with the Council in the months to come as it works through my suggested action points.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Allen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Allen
Chief Ombudsman
June 2025

Leadership and culture

Achieving the principle and purposes of the LGOIMA depends significantly on the culture of a council, and the attitudes and actions of its senior leaders. Elected members, chief executives, and senior managers, should take the lead in developing an environment that promotes openness and transparency within the organisation, with external stakeholders, and importantly, with their constituents. This environment should champion positive engagement with those who want to know and understand the work a council is doing.

To assess the Council's leadership and culture, we considered whether:

- elected members, the Chief Executive, senior leaders and managers demonstrated a commitment to the Council meeting its LGOIMA obligations and actively fostered a culture of openness;
- senior leadership had established an effective strategic framework which promotes a culture open to the release of information; and
- senior leadership demonstrated a commitment to proactive disclosure, and public participation with clear linkages to the Council's strategic plans creating a public perception, and a genuine culture, of openness.

When it is clear to staff that their leaders view compliance with LGOIMA as an opportunity to operate in a more transparent, engaging and accountable manner, they will follow.

Internal messaging and culture

The Council's internal culture of openness and transparency appears to have many positive aspects. However, we consider that more can be done to promote a culture where all staff are aware of the importance of the LGOIMA and the part they play in making information available to the public.

While we note that the Council could not provide specific examples of clear messaging to staff about the importance of LGOIMA, as we discuss further below, the Council's former Chief Executive² did express the Council's attitudes in her response to the notification of this investigation:

Wellington City Council welcomes this review. We take our LGOIMA obligations very seriously and will always be open to opportunities to test our practices and take any opportunities there may be to improve.

This sentiment was echoed by another member of the Council's executive leadership team who said that they would love to learn from this investigation how the Council can 'evolve' and improve its practices.

² Barbara McKerrow was the Chief Executive Officer of the Council since 1 March 2020 and during the period of this investigation. Her contract of employment expired on 1 March 2025, and the Council appointed Matt Prosser as the new Chief Executive.

During review of the Council’s sample LGOIMA files (discussed in [‘Current practices’](#)) we noted examples of the Council’s senior leaders modelling positive LGOIMA practice and demonstrating a culture of openness when handling LGOIMA requests. In one instance, a member of the executive leadership team provided *‘reasonable assistance’*³ to the requester by offering that they meet with the requester to help ameliorate the need to refuse the request. In another example, a tier two manager appeared to push back on staff’s proposal to withhold information stating that the Council *‘can do better’*.

However, there are some opportunities for the Council to improve its internal culture of openness and public participation. This is based on the results of the online survey of staff⁴ conducted during this investigation where respondents were asked as follows:⁵

What is your impression of the Council’s overall commitment to a strong culture of openness and public participation?

Strongly or moderately pro openness and public participation	Strongly or moderately anti openness and public participation	It is silent on the issue or ‘I don’t know’
85%	10%	5%

We note that 85 percent of staff consider the Council is strongly to moderately pro-openness and public participation. This is less than the average of 90 percent across the other agencies in this investigation.⁶

Staff survey respondents also indicated their impressions of the senior leaders’ communications (for example, emails, publications or informal statements made to staff) regarding the Council’s commitment to promote openness and transparency in its Meetings:

Staff’s impressions of senior leaders’ communications regarding the Council’s commitment to promote openness and transparency in its Meetings

Leadership level	Strongly or moderately pro openness and public participation	Strongly or moderately anti openness and public participation	‘They are silent on the issue’ or ‘I don’t know’
Chief Executive	71%	4%	25%

³ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘The LGOIMA for local government agencies – A guide to processing requests and conducting meetings’](#) – pages 14 and 15.

⁴ There were 261 individually verified responses to the public survey in total, however respondents were not required to answer each survey question and the number of responses per question varied.

⁵ Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁶ These agencies are Auckland Transport, Wellington Water, Queenstown Lakes District Council and Marlborough District Council.

Senior Leadership	77%	6%	17%
Elected members	46%	7%	47%

The same question, but in relation to responding to LGOIMA requests, was asked in the survey. The responses were as follows:

Staff’s impressions of senior leaders’ communications regarding the Council’s commitment to promote openness and transparency in its responses to information requests made under the LGOIMA

Leadership level	Strongly or moderately pro openness and public participation	Strongly or moderately anti openness and public participation	‘They are silent on the issue’ or ‘I don’t know’
Chief Executive	65%	3%	31%
Senior Leadership	74%	5%	22%
Elected members	32%	5%	63%

The above results indicate that a significant proportion of respondents did not know the former Chief Executive’s views on openness and public participation or thought that the Chief Executive was silent on the issue (25 and 31 percent respectively). An even higher percentage of respondents did not know the elected members’ views on openness and public participation or thought that they were silent on the issue (47 and 63 percent respectively).

As staff rated the elected members’ commitment lower than that of the Council managers, one respondent commented as follows:

There are some elected members who often display an unreasonable level of combative behaviour when it comes to gathering information in scope of a request. I hear a lot of ‘this is just an info gathering exercise’, push back and often lengthy emails as to why they don’t want to provide us with the information.

Some respondents in the staff survey also had concerns about attitudes to the Council’s responsibilities under the LGOIMA (when processing requests for official information). For example:

... [Wellington City Council] is a mixed bag. Some teams/business units have a strong ethic of transparency, and some seem to default to a position of looking for reasons to withhold information. I would say the closer to the CE you get the more likely you are to find anti-openness in practice (but certainly not in communications).

Interdepartmental relationships don't foster open communications. It can be very hard to get information out of other departments within Council... On a large number of occasions, no response is received.

We are often left chasing business units for the information requested and more often than not information is provided at the very last hour...

A staff member said during a meeting with our investigators that it was their perception that for many staff processing LGOIMA requests is seen as a *'burdensome activity'* to which people often respond that they do not have capacity for it. This may suggest a lack of clear messaging from senior leaders to staff that compliance with relevant legislation including the LGOIMA is part of the core role of all staff.

During this investigation the Council and its staff were also asked to provide examples of statements from senior leaders promoting the importance of the LGOIMA and clearly expressing the Council's support of the principle and purposes of the LGOIMA. The Council's response to the agency questionnaire did not include many clear examples of such messaging. The responses of staff who attended meetings with our investigators were consistent with the Council's response, as most meeting attendees could not recall any examples of regular and explicit messaging from senior leaders.

It appears from the above that there are opportunities for the Council to improve its internal culture around LGOIMA, and openness and transparency more broadly.

Councils' senior leaders must role model open and transparent behaviour by ensuring that council practices and processes for conducting meetings and workshops are transparent, and promote accountability. They should demonstrate clear knowledge and support for their obligations set out in the LGOIMA.

Council chief executives must make clear, regular statements to staff in support of the principle and purposes of official information legislation, and remind staff about their obligations including that responding to LGOIMA requests is core business. Consistent, clear messaging and behaviours communicate a real expectation that councils are committed to openness and transparency.

The Chief Executive, senior leaders and elected members can actively promote a culture of openness in their regular communications via, for example:

- statements published on intranet pages;
- as standing items in internal meetings; and
- high-level statements included in written guidance.

It is important for the Council to actively foster a culture of openness by ensuring that messaging is consistently delivered to all levels and business areas in the organisation.

It is positive that, in response to the provisional opinion the Chief Executive noted that:

I will be taking the opportunity to reinforce to everyone at the Council the importance of openness and transparency. Prior to your report, we had already taken steps in this direction including the nomination of the Chief Strategy and Finance Office as the ELT sponsor to champion LGOIMA. Together, we will continue to emphasise the importance of sound decision-making and the spirit of LGOIMA, with the aim of progressively increasing public access to official information.

In addition, the Council currently employs a mixed model of processing LGOIMA requests (discussed further in [‘Organisation structure, staffing and capability’](#)) and for the model to operate successfully, all staff need to be knowledgeable of the Council’s obligations under the LGOIMA and regard it as core business. Appropriate messaging on the LGOIMA in combination with LGOIMA resources and training, must reach all staff throughout the organisation.

A local authority’s LGOIMA culture is also shown through its practices, such as its compliance with LGOMA obligations in relation to official information requests and Council Meetings, and in its practice around workshops and other informal meetings. We will discuss these further under [‘Current practices’](#).

Action point

Senior leaders, elected members and the Chief Executive to role model positive LGOIMA practices through their behaviour and actions, and to make clear regular statements in support of the principle and purposes of official information legislation, reminding staff of their obligations.

External messaging

The public’s perception of a council’s openness is heavily influenced by how easy people find it to participate in elected members’ decision making, and by how easy it is to find records of the key proceedings related to those decisions. More generally, the public’s experience of navigating council websites to find information relevant to them, and the helpfulness of a council’s overall messaging about accessibility and openness, are also key to this perception.

In order to participate meaningfully in democratic processes – including elections and consultations – residents must have access to relevant, timely information about work the Council is doing. Councils provides access to information through open workshops and Meetings, responding to LGOIMA requests, and proactively releasing information.

One of the strongest testaments to the Council’s commitment to openness and transparency has been the recent implementation of a software called *‘Mātai Manapori (TrackDem),’* which won an award last year for *‘Web, Digital & Communications Project of the year’* presented by the Association of Local Government Information Management (ALGIM).⁷

Now, with the help of the new software, instead of going through lengthy PDF documents of meeting agendas and minutes, users are able to simply enter keywords and/or dates into the

⁷ Link to the ALGIM webpage [‘Recapping our 2024 Annual Conference’](#).

Council's website⁸ and view associated reports considered by the Council and decisions made at Council meetings. The search results will include the origins and history of the Council's decisions, as well as any progress on their implementation ('completed' or 'in progress').

At the time of writing this report, the Council advised our office that it is continuing to expand the operation of *Mātai Manapori*, as it is currently uploading data for the 2019-2022 triennium into the Council's decision register published on the Council's website.

We commend the Council for implementing *Mātai Manapori*, especially as the Council stated on its website that *'the project was driven with feedback from the public, interviews, and usability tests with a diverse group of Wellingtonians'*.⁹ This initiative not only improves access to the Council's information and makes its decision making more transparent, it also demonstrates the Council's commitment to its values, that is, *'...we listen to our customers...'* and *'...[w]e're always improving...'*.¹⁰

During this investigation we found more examples of messaging to the public illustrating the Council's commitment to openness and transparency in its work.

The Council's 'Meetings' webpage states:¹¹

Wellington City Council makes decisions that affect people across the city. We're committed to doing this in a manner that is open, transparent, and facilitates accountability and public participation.

More messages are included in the Council's *Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1*:¹²

...we seek to be as transparent as possible to build public confidence in the way the Council operates. This means, clearly communicating the reasons for the things we do and encouraging public participation in decision-making processes.

In relation to processing LGOIMA requests, we found that the Council's 'Information requests' webpage¹³ was helpful and informative, including a wide variety of means by which a request for official information can be submitted. We were also pleased to see that the webpage included information on urgent requests and stated that the Council will communicate its decision *'as soon as possible'*.

To improve further, we suggest that the 'Information requests' webpage should be amended to include a statement promoting the importance of the LGOIMA, an outline of the principle of availability,¹⁴ and a link to the Council's internal rules on making decisions on LGOIMA requests (discussed in ['Internal policies, procedures and resources'](#)). The link to the webpage itself

⁸ Link to the Council's webpages '[Reports](#)' and '[Council meeting decision register](#)'.

⁹ Link to the Council's webpage '[Stepping up transparency around Council decisions](#)'.

¹⁰ Link to the Council's webpage '[Our purpose, vision and values](#)'.

¹¹ Link to the Council's webpage '[Ngā Hui | Meetings](#)'.

¹² Link to the Council's '[Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1](#)'.

¹³ Link to the Council's webpage '[Information requests](#)'.

¹⁴ Link to [section 5 of the LGOIMA](#).

should be placed either on the website’s homepage or no more than two clicks away from the homepage, under an appropriately titled link which makes it clear to a website user that it contains information on LGOIMA requests.¹⁵

In relation to accessibility of information, the Council’s website states¹⁶ that it ‘*aims to: ...meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 at Level AA, as per the NZ Government Web Accessibility Standard.*’ The website outlines the Council’s ongoing efforts to help improve accessibility, such as conducting audits of accessibility, and delivering accessibility training to staff. Our investigators also reviewed a sample of documents published on the Council’s website, and found them to be ‘searchable’ PDFs, which makes them more accessible.

More messages of the Council’s commitment to transparency and openness are included in the Council’s Long-term plan where the Council states that its ‘*decision-making processes are evidence-informed [and] transparent*’.¹⁷ We suggest that the Council consider how this sentiment of transparency can be expanded on and reflected in a strategic framework describing how the Council intends to achieve:

- compliance with the LGOIMA,
- good practice,
- a culture of openness and continuous improvement, and
- participation and access to information by the public and stakeholder groups.

Action points
Amend the Council’s ‘ <i>Information requests</i> ’ webpage incorporating our suggestions.
Expand the Council’s strategic statement in the Long-term plan to include more information about how the Council intends to achieve strategic intentions in relation to the LGOIMA and openness more broadly.

Proactive release of information

Local authorities have a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 2002 to release a range of information about their work, including Long-Term Plans, Annual Plans and Annual Reports.¹⁸ Under the LGOIMA there are requirements to release information about Meetings held under Part 7 of the Act, including agendas and minutes. Releasing information

¹⁵ The link to the ‘*Information requests*’ webpage is currently located under the ‘*Do it online*’ and ‘*Contact us*’ links on the homepage. It is not obvious from the names of these two links that they contain information on LGOIMA requests. Also, when a website user clicks on ‘*Do it online*’, the link to the ‘*Information requests*’ webpage is not visible until the user scrolls down a long list of other links.

¹⁶ Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Accessibility](#)’.

¹⁷ Link to the Council’s ‘[Long-term Plan 2024-34, Volume 3](#)’ – page 10.

¹⁸ Link to the [Local Government Act 2002](#).

about the work being done is crucial for councils to build public trust, and helps residents to meaningfully participate in decisions about the future of their district.

As the Council releases large amounts of official information, overall, it appears to have a largely positive attitude towards proactively releasing its official information.

We were pleased to find that the Council acknowledges that strong proactive release practices benefit both the Council and the public. The Council said in its response to the agency questionnaire, that proactively releasing information – for example, on the recently reviewed District Plan¹⁹ – has resulted in fewer LGOIMA requests being submitted to the Council. A senior member of staff also said during an interview that the culture within the Council is such that *‘[i]f information exists, then there is no reason for it not to be available’*.

The Council is required to publish some of the information under the local government legislation,²⁰ including information on public consultation processes.²¹ We were pleased to see that, to help promote community engagement, the Council recently delivered hard copy information sheets to Wellington residents’ mailboxes. These included helpful summaries of the matters on which public consultations were being held, and outlined a wide variety of ways in which the public can make their submissions (including filling out online forms, completing a hard-copy submission form available at a local library, or making an oral submission through the Council’s website).²²

The Council also proactively releases the following information:

- The Council publicly reports its performance around processing LGOIMA requests on its webpage *‘Responses to information requests’*²³ (also discussed in [‘Performance monitoring and learning’](#)). The webpage also includes responses to LGOIMA requests *‘that are of wider public interest’*. The webpage is easy to use, and responses can be searched by year and their subject.
- The Council stated that it regularly creates dedicated webpages on subjects of *‘significant interest’* to the public.²⁴

¹⁹ This information included all briefings, versions, reports, submissions and evidence on the District Plan, as well as livestreams of all hearings before the Independent Hearing Panel (IHP), the Briefing of the Council by the IHP, and the consideration of recommendations by the Council.

²⁰ See, for example, link to the Council’s [‘Significance and engagement policy’](#), and link to the Council’s [‘Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1’](#). The latter document includes the outline of the Council’s organisation structure, along with some strategy, planning and performance information.

²¹ Link to the Council’s webpage [‘Attending and speaking at meetings’](#) and [‘Have your say’](#).

²² For consultations on the amendment of the Long-term plan, this information is also available via this link to the Council’s webpage [‘Long-term Plan 2024-34 amendment and Annual Plan 2025/26’](#).

²³ Link to the Council’s webpage [‘Responses to information requests’](#).

²⁴ For example, link to the Council’s webpage [‘Shelly Bay development’](#).

- The Council maintains an Open Data Portal²⁵ which was said to include 288 Open Data Sets ‘to provide its residents...an easy way to know more about our community and to encourage development of civic-orientated applications’.

Public perceptions of transparency and openness

The Council and its decisions have recently become a focus of the media following a number of widely publicised events reporting political tensions within the Council.²⁶ We note this because such an environment can impact how the public perceives the Council’s openness. The public’s perception of a council’s openness is fundamental to their trust in the council and its decisions. A perception that the views of the public are not taken into account in council decision making, can be corrosive to public trust, whether or not the perception reflects reality.

As part of this investigation, our office conducted a survey of the public which asked respondents about their impressions of the Council’s LGOIMA practices. We note that there were only 74 respondents to the survey, a very small (and self-selected) percentage of the population of Wellington. However, although the pool of respondents was small, their views should not be overlooked.

Of that small sample, most respondents in the public survey thought that the Council had a strongly or moderately negative approach to openness and transparency.²⁷ Many respondents also commented negatively on the transparency of the Council’s decision making processes more generally, for example:

... [the Council] has a reputation for being dismissive of feedback.

...[the Council] presents its predetermined position and doesn't listen or change.

... it's very clear that the decisions are made already and they are just rubber stamping things.

...Decisions [are being] made in advance of consultations.

The Council has acknowledged the negative public perceptions and the relationship with Wellington residents. The Council’s *Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1*²⁸ described the organisation’s current approach to community engagement as follows:

The main challenge in this area [‘Governance’] continued to be how we improve our community engagement to build trust and confidence in Council decision making

²⁵ Link to the Council’s [Open Data Portal](#).

²⁶ See, for example, link to ‘The Post’ articles [‘What is coming down the line at Wellington City Council?’](#) and [‘Councillors behaving badly? WCC class of 2025 take the crown’](#).

²⁷ Eighty six percent of respondents thought that the Council had a strongly or moderately negative approach to openness and transparency. Eleven percent of respondents thought that the Council was strongly or moderately committed to openness and transparency. Two percent indicated ‘I don’t know’.

²⁸ Link to the Council’s [‘Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1’](#).

and the relationship we have with our residents. This has been trending down in previous years.

As an example of the recent measures aimed at improving community engagement (and in addition to *Mātai Manapori* discussed above), the Council advised in its correspondence to our office that it introduced a forum called ‘*Citizens’ Assembly*’ as part of an ‘*expanded [Long-term Plan] public engagement*’. During the Council’s first Citizens’ Assembly held at the end of 2023, invitations were sent to 10,000 randomly selected postal and email addresses of Wellington residents. The participants were then invited to meet over four Saturdays, and were offered financial and other support for volunteering their time.²⁹

The Council stated in its response to the agency questionnaire that ‘*Citizens’ assemblies... provide the opportunity to...make an informed decision on a complex topic where there is a lot of public interest...*’ A staff member described the Citizens’ Assembly as a ‘*good feedback loop*’, because it engages portions of the community that do not normally make submissions during public consultations.

We note that to help facilitate community engagement, the Council also regularly conducts the annual ‘*Residents Monitoring Survey*’, where a representative sample of Wellington City residents are asked about their ‘*satisfaction with the Council’s provision and delivery of services and facilities*’ including ‘*public views on Council decision making*’.

The recent results of the Residents Monitoring Survey highlight an area of improvement that while ‘*[s]atisfaction with Council decision making process is improving steadily*’, ‘*some still “don’t feel listened to”*.’

The Council publishes the survey results on its website,³⁰ which is positive and helps promote transparency. The practice of conducting the survey itself also clearly signals the Council’s expressed commitment to ‘*ensuring that every community voice is heard*’.³¹

In addition to the above survey, we were pleased to see that, to help monitor public’s information needs, some of the Council’s webpages include pop-up surveys asking webpage users ‘*How satisfied are you with the functionality and content of this page?*’³²

The Council also has a number of internal practices aimed at identifying areas of high public interest and promoting community engagement.

For example, the Council’s executive leadership team has oversight of the public queries sent to elected members through the Council’s ‘*Elected Member Queries*’ process. Using this process, elected members can escalate the queries through dedicated Council staff (Elected

²⁹ Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[How will the selection process work?](#)’

³⁰ Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Latest Residents Monitoring Survey results released](#)’.

³¹ Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Vision](#)’.

³² See, for example, link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Vote to Enter Public Excluded 2024-09-05 – A report to Te Kaunihera o Pōneke | Council on the 05 September, 2024](#)’.

Member Support Advisors), which in turn allows the Council's senior staff to monitor any recurring themes in these queries and identify areas of increased public interest.

In addition, a list of high-risk and/or complex LGOIMA requests is distributed weekly by the Council's Official Information team to all senior staff with the purpose of keeping them informed of any trends in LGOIMA requests, which a staff member described as a *'pulse check on what the community are interested in and what agitates them'*.

The Official Information team also conducts regular meetings with the Council's Customer Services team and the team responsible for the Council's social media and web content. Staff said during meetings with our investigators that these help monitor *'trends and patterns'* in areas of public interest and ensure that information is published on the Council's website and social media channels in accordance with the public's information needs.

We acknowledge the Council's efforts as outlined above and commend it for its ongoing work towards improving community engagement. We encourage the Council to continue on this trajectory.

In addition, improving the Council's practices in line with our suggested action points in ['Excluding the public from Council Meetings'](#) and ['Workshops and briefings'](#) may also help to further promote public trust in the Council and its decisions by fostering public perceptions of openness of the Council's practices.

Organisation structure, staffing, and capability

It is expected that councils will organise their structure and resources to ensure they are able to meet their legal obligations under the LGOIMA in a way that is relevant to their particular size, responsibilities, and the amount of interest in the information they hold.

To assess the Council's organisational structure, staffing, and capability, we considered whether:

- the Council had the capacity to discharge its LGOIMA obligations with clear and fully functioning roles, accountabilities, reporting lines, delegations and resilience arrangements; and
- the Council had the capability to discharge its LGOIMA obligations.

Staff roles and responsibilities in the LGOIMA process

The Council has a team dedicated to responding to LGOIMA requests, called the Official Information team (the OI team). This team is located within the Governance and Information group, whose tier three manager reports to the Chief Strategy and Finance Officer. Located within the same group is the Council's Democracy Services team, responsible for the administration of Council meetings and workshops (discussed in '[Council Meetings](#)' and '[Workshops and briefings](#)', respectively).

The OI team is the Council's centre of LGOIMA expertise, and appears to be held in high regard by Council staff, as evident from our surveys and meetings with staff. For example, during a meeting with our investigators, a member of the Council's executive leadership team described the Council's OI team as '*astute*' and '*values driven*'.

While we did not interview every member of the OI team, the two members of the team who met with our investigators said that, in their view and experience, the team is adequately staffed and resourced.

This view appears to be supported by the practice observed through the review of the Council's sample LGOIMA reports provided as part of this investigation (discussed further in '[Performance monitoring and learning](#)'). The sample reports show an example where the Council was able to promptly address an increase in its LGOIMA workload (and the resulting dip in LGOIMA timeliness),³³ by providing additional resourcing to the OI team. As a result of the added support, within less than three months, the OI team was able to increase the timeliness of responses to LGOIMA requests from 90 percent in the third quarter of the 2024 financial year to 94 percent in the fourth quarter.³⁴

³³ '*LGOIMA timeliness*' means compliance with the maximum statutory timeframes for making and communicating decisions on official information requests under the LGOIMA.

³⁴ Based on the most recent reporting published on the Council's website for the period 1 July – 31 December 2024, the Council's LGOIMA timeliness compliance currently stands at 96 percent of LGOIMA requests

The Council currently operates a mixed model of processing LGOIMA requests whereby some requests (for example, low risk or quick turnaround requests) are processed by business units outside the OI team, and requests deemed complex or requiring input from multiple business units are handled by the OI team. We were also advised during meetings with staff that the OI team often manages requests where the Council is considering refusing a request or withholding information.

The Council's guidance and training documents clearly outline the OI team's process, including that requests are processed with the assistance of '*LGOIMA champions*'. These staff are business support officers (who are also subject matter experts) appointed within most business units throughout the Council, particularly those that have high LGOIMA workload. '*LGOIMA champions*' act as liaisons between their business unit and the OI team, and are typically responsible for searching and collating information for responses to LGOIMA requests. During interviews with our investigators, a member of the OI team said that having LGOIMA champions helps business units balance their LGOIMA workload with other '*business as usual*' work.

In addition to LGOIMA champions, the search and collation stage of the LGOIMA process is also facilitated by the Council's Information Management Support team. This team has the ability to conduct searches across all of the Council's information management systems, and is typically engaged by the OI team to assist with processing large LGOIMA requests. Staff said during interviews that this practice helps ensure that all information within the scope of a LGOIMA request is retrieved and considered by the Council.

Overall, it is pleasing that the Council has clear written processes in place to help facilitate the processing of LGOIMA requests by staff.

Decision making and escalations in the LGOIMA process

During our interviews with staff, two interviewees expressed concern that the delegated signatories on the Council's responses to LGOIMA requests are not always the decision makers on these requests. Staff spoke of instances where decisions of Senior Official Information Advisors (delegated signatories under the Council's register of delegations)³⁵ were overridden by other, more senior, staff. This occurred after the signatory and the other staff disagreed on how the Council should respond to a particular request, for example, what information should be withheld.

We recognise that in making a decision, LGOIMA advisors may have to seek input from other more senior staff, and at times there may be some disagreement with the direction of a LGOIMA request. To help ensure transparency of its decision-making processes, we encourage

completed within the maximum statutory timeframes under the LGOIMA. Link to the Council's webpage '[Responses to information requests](#)'.

³⁵ The Council's delegations are outlined in documents titled '*Register of delegations (Locosoft)*' and '*LGOIMA Operating model 2022 – Locosoft linked document*'. These designate Senior Advisors Official Information and Team Leaders Official Information as signatories on many responses to LGOIMA requests managed by the Council's OI team.

the Council to keep adequate records of the process of making decisions on LGOIMA requests, including who made the ultimate decision on the request, who was consulted (particularly when engaging elected members in the process), and how their views were considered when making a decision on the request.

Keeping adequate records of the decision-making process, particularly of who the ultimate decision maker is on the request, supports the principles of natural justice whereby requesters have a right to know who has made a decision that affects them (such as a decision on a LGOIMA request).³⁶

We discuss keeping records of the decision-making process further in '[Current practices](#)'.

We also consider it is important that an appropriate, clear escalation process exists to provide support to staff in the event of any disagreements between staff and/or if there are any delays in the LGOIMA process.

During review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files, we saw instances where there were significant delays in the LGOIMA process because the OI team waited for input and/or information from staff or elected members. In many of these cases, however, we saw no records of attempts to escalate these delays through, for example, approaching a more senior member of staff (other than the OI team following up on the input or information, sometimes repeatedly).

From meetings with staff and the sample LGOIMA files it appears that there is an expectation to escalate delays or disagreements to the Council's executive leadership team. However, from the Council's internal guidance provided during this investigation, it was not clear that the Council has a formal process for an internal escalation support measure for staff to ensure appropriate decisions on LGOIMA requests are made by sufficiently senior staff. We suggest, therefore, that such a process is documented in LGOIMA guidance and used consistently when escalation is warranted. We also suggest that, if staff do escalate, a record is kept of any subsequent discussions.

Finally, in relation to delays in the LGOIMA process, we suggest that the Council ensure that staff are aware of the Council's responsibility under section 13(1) of the LGOIMA to communicate responses to LGOIMA requests as soon as reasonably practicable. During review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files, we found that this requirement is not routinely referenced in staff's internal communications, for example, when requesting staff or elected members to provide information within the scope of a LGOIMA request, or seeking approvals of draft responses to LGOIMA requests.

In addition, staff's awareness of the Council's responsibility under section 13(1) of the LGOIMA also appeared to be mixed. Sample files showed some staff communicating promptly, while

³⁶ In *The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development v L* [2018] NZHC 2528 [26 September 2018], the High Court found that anonymous decisions were contrary to principles of natural justice, as people could not detect or challenge bias if they did not know who the decision makers actually were.

responses from other staff were delayed and had to be repeatedly followed-up by members of the OI team.

As stated above, the Council operates a mixed model of processing LGOIMA requests. For this model to work well, all staff involved in the LGOIMA process must have adequate knowledge of the LGOIMA and understand the importance of the Council's compliance with the LGOIMA, including adherence to its timeliness obligations. As a large number of LGOIMA processing tasks are completed by staff in the wider agency – not just by staff in the Council's OI team – providing adequate guidance and training helps ensure that these staff understand the importance of the Council's compliance with the LGOIMA and adherence to its timeliness obligations.

To help embed the concept of '*as soon as reasonably practicable*' into the Council's internal culture and practice (discussed in '[Leadership and culture](#)'), senior leaders (including elected members) should role model positive LGOIMA practices and regularly deliver messaging to all staff about communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests as soon as reasonably practicable, and that responding to requests is part of the Council's core business.

We discuss the Council's LGOIMA training and guidance in '[Training on the LGOIMA and information management and record keeping](#)' and '[Internal policies, procedures and resources](#)', respectively.

Action point

Implement a formal documented process for escalating delays in the LGOIMA process and/or disagreements between staff on responding to LGOIMA requests.

Training on the LGOIMA and information management and record keeping

My predecessor has outlined in previous investigations expectations for LGOIMA training, which include:

- training at induction offering introductory basic awareness of key official information principles;
- regular, on-going refresher courses;
- advanced material for relevant staff covering, for example:
 - proper application of the public interest and harm tests;
 - dealing with broad, complex requests covering a large volume of information; and
 - training for LGOIMA decision makers.

LGOIMA training seems to be an area of strength for the Council, as it is mandatory for all staff, provided as part of the induction processes for all new employees, with refresher training delivered every two years.

The training appears to be well-attended by staff as we found that 78 percent of respondents in the staff survey indicated that they completed LGOIMA training less than 2 years ago.³⁷ Also, all staff who attended meetings with our investigators appeared to be aware of the Council's mandatory regular training on the LGOIMA.

The Council's dedicated learning management system, *Whare Kura*, includes the following:

- the Council's '*LGOIMA module*' provides introductory knowledge of the LGOIMA to all staff and includes messaging on the importance of the LGOIMA, which is commendable;
- specialist LGOIMA training is delivered to members of the OI team including advanced LGOIMA knowledge, such as guidance on refusing LGOIMA requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA.

Ongoing training is also delivered by the OI team to individual business units throughout the organisation. It was pleasing to see that the OI team has a system for recording and tracking this training via a spreadsheet including information on which business unit was trained, when, how long, and what '*triggered*' the training (for example, '*Requested by [OI team]*' or '*Requested by [business unit name]*').

In relation to the administration and management of Council meetings under the LGOIMA, members of the Council's Democracy Services team undergo induction training that takes them through the Council's Standing Orders and Council meeting processes. In addition, staff responsible for preparing reports for Council meetings are offered the opportunity to have a one-on-one training session with a member of the Democracy Services team.

Effective information management is a key component of good LGOIMA practice, so that any information requested can be easily located. Training on information management and record keeping is provided to staff via a module titled '*Managing information at WCC eLearning*'. We were pleased to see that the module includes useful guidance on a wide range of important aspects, such as:

- an outline of the Council's obligations under the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005, instructing staff that compliance with these will be met by staff following the Council's '*Information and Data Asset Policy*', '*Privacy Policy*' and official information guidance;
- the creation and maintenance of records, along with the outline of the Council's record naming conventions and the importance of adhering to these;
- the Council's information management systems are listed along with a brief description of each system; guidance on using these systems is also included.

It is pleasing that the module messages the importance of responsible information management:

³⁷ Five percent of respondents indicated that they received training between 3-4 years ago; four percent indicated 'more than 4 years ago'; and 13 percent said that they have not received any training in the LGOIMA since working at the Council.

- *We need to show evidence of what we have done and how.*
- *We need to ensure we have the trust of the public to get their confidence.*
- *We need to be transparent in what we do.*

The module also states as follows:

We need to make our information accessible so staff and contractors can easily find information and know what has happened in the past.

Overall, having reviewed the Council's LGOIMA training systems, we commend the Council for implementing regular mandatory training for all staff throughout the organisation.

However, in light of our suggestions in '[Current practices](#)', we encourage the Council to ensure that the LGOIMA training covers the following aspects of the Council's LGOIMA practice:

- a clear description of the steps that are required before the Council can be considered to have made a decision on a LGOIMA request (discussed in '[Communicating a decision on a request](#)');
- more information on refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA, as well as more information on applying the withholding grounds under the LGOIMA and considering the public interest test (discussed in '[Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA](#)');
- instructions for staff to consistently document steps taken to search for information within the scope of LGOIMA requests, and to create and maintain full and accurate records of spoken discussions in relation to LGOIMA decision making (discussed in '[Record keeping of LGOIMA process](#)');
- instructions to record descriptive plain English reasons for excluding the public from Council meetings, and to consider the public interest test whenever considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA³⁸ to hear an item in a public excluded meeting (discussed in '[Excluding the public from Council Meetings](#)');
- instructions for preparing written summaries of workshops and briefings, and publishing this information (along with information on closed workshops and briefings) on the Council's website (discussed in '[Workshops and briefings](#)').

In addition, to help manage delays in the LGOIMA process (discussed in '[Organisation structure, staffing and capability](#)'), the Council should ensure that its training clearly conveys the concept of '*as soon as reasonably practicable*' to all staff throughout the organisation. The Council should also ensure that all staff understand that responding to LGOIMA requests is part of the Council's core business.

Finally, the Council stated during this investigation that LGOIMA training is provided to the elected members via the following:

³⁸ Link to [section 7\(2\)](#) of the LGOIMA.

- training session during post-election Orientation (most recently in 2022);
- Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) Elected Member Induction (10 Nov 2022);
- the Council’s dedicated staff (Elected Member Support Advisor), can provide training to elected members.

Elected members were asked via an online survey their views on the adequacy of LGOIMA and governance training they received. Of nine elected members who responded, three respondents said they felt they could benefit from more in-depth training, and two said they felt they could benefit from more frequent training.³⁹

Respondents also commented as follows:

Training at start of triennium and that’s it, nothing ongoing.

...some additional training on the more advanced aspects of meetings (and especially chairing meetings) after six months would greatly help. For myself, I have often found out some more advance aspects (e.g. key parts of Standing Orders and Delegations) by doing it wrong. In other words, as a new Councillor you have to ‘walk before you can run’. We are trained to walk but some training on running would also help.

In light of the above, we consider it may be of benefit for the Council to survey elected members on their training needs to ensure adequate training and guidance is available to them.

As the Council does not appear to have formal refresher training for elected members, we would suggest that the Council consider implementing this to be delivered at appropriate intervals. It is important that regular training is available for elected members on their responsibilities under the LGOIMA and in relation to information management and record keeping.

Elected member attendance at regular training sessions would send a clear message they are committed to the principles and purposes of LGOIMA, and of openness and transparency more generally.

Action points

Ensure staff receive LGOIMA training appropriate to their role and involvement with the LGOIMA process, incorporating our suggestions.

Consider surveying elected members on their training needs to ensure adequate training and guidance is available to them.

³⁹ Five respondents in the elected members’ survey indicated that they thought they received adequate training on the LGOIMA.

Action points

Consider implementing regular LGOIMA training for elected members to be delivered at appropriate intervals, including elected members' responsibilities in relation to information management and record keeping.

Internal policies, procedures and resources

While it is not a legislative requirement, nor an assurance that compliance with LGOIMA will occur, we do expect as a matter of good practice that councils develop or adopt policies and procedures that will assist staff and elected members to apply the requirements of the Act consistently.

In addition, staff should be supported by good systems, tools and resources in their work that will enable agencies to effectively process requests and make good decisions consistent with the provisions in the Act.

We considered whether the Council had accurate, comprehensive, user-friendly and accessible policies, procedures, and resources that enabled staff to give effect to the Act's principle, purposes and statutory requirements. This includes policies, procedures and resources in relation to:

- dealing with official information requests, the administration of Council meetings and workshops, and producing LIM reports;
- records and information management; and
- proactive release of information.

Guidance for staff on processing LGOIMA requests

Written LGOIMA policy and guidance anchors a local authority's LGOIMA handling process and practices. It promotes good and consistent practice, and helps to safeguard the LGOIMA process in the event that key staff leave the organisation, taking valuable institutional knowledge with them.

Ideally, LGOIMA policy and guidance are living documents that are regularly reviewed and amended as appropriate to embed lessons from the process of handling LGOIMA requests, including the outcome of Ombudsman investigations.

Good policies and resources should be available to staff which clearly describe the agency's approach to matters, including:

- consulting with and assisting requesters, e.g. who is responsible for this and under what circumstances this is a duty under the LGOIMA;
- criteria for considering requests for urgency;
- managing potential delays;
- managing requests for high volumes of information, including the Council's approach to charging for the supply of official information and factors to consider around the remission of charges;
- considering whether a request is trivial or vexatious;

- making a decision whether to release the information requested and how to consider the refusal grounds in the LGOIMA;
- engaging with elected members on LGOIMA requests, including detailing the distinction between a request under the LGOIMA and the common law right of elected members to access information;
- making a decision on the format in which information is released; and
- how and where to record details about the agency's decision making process, including its application of the public interest test.

The Council has a suite of LGOIMA guidance and templates, accessible to staff via links on the Council's intranet, *Pokapū*. The intranet page dedicated to official information requests provides introductory knowledge of the LGOIMA, for example, explaining to staff that a LGOIMA request can come in any form and through various avenues for example, social media.

The Council's LGOIMA guidance and templates appear to be consistent with the Ombudsman's published guidance and templates (with some exceptions outlined below), and cover all stages in the LGOIMA process.

We were pleased to see that the Council has LGOIMA guidance for staff outside the OI team which is tailored to their particular role in the LGOIMA process. Having such guidance is key as it helps maintain LGOIMA awareness throughout the organisation, which is particularly important in the context of the mixed LGOIMA processing model operated by the Council (discussed in ['Organisation structure, staffing and capability'](#)).

For example, a guidance document titled *'Contact Centre – Requests Guidance'* outlines the principle of availability of information, and the Council's timeliness obligations under the LGOIMA. The guidance on handling media information requests is included in a document titled *'Media Policy and Guidelines'*, which instructs staff to be *'mindful of our responsibilities under LGOIMA'*. We were also pleased to find that the Council's *'Social-media-strategy-2022'* makes it clear to staff that information requests received through social media channels *'will be facilitated under the [LGOIMA]'*.

Among the Council's extensive suite of LGOIMA templates, we particularly note the recently implemented *'Decision Memo'* (which is a part of a template *'sign-out email'*). We were advised that the template was introduced to help improve record-keeping and substantive decision-making on LGOIMA requests. This is a positive initiative as it sets strong foundations for ongoing improvement of the quality of the Council's decisions on LGOIMA requests.

There are opportunities for the Council to improve its LGOIMA guidance and templates.

Firstly, as already discussed in ['Organisation structure, staffing, and capability'](#) in relation to the Council's LGOIMA process for handling LGOIMA requests, we consider that the Council should implement clear formal guidance for escalating disagreements between staff and/or any delays in the LGOIMA process.

Further, from the Council's extensive and detailed guidance on assessing risks for various types of LGOIMA requests it appears that the Council may have adopted a risk averse approach to handling LGOIMA requests, including instructions for staff to consider 'reputational' risks when handling LGOIMA requests. While this is not necessarily negative, we caution that the guidance may foster an excessively risk averse culture among staff where they may be reluctant to release official information. Information can only be withheld if there is valid reason under the LGOIMA which is not outweighed by the public interest in its release.

To help provide a more balanced approach for staff on assessing risk, Council's guidance should be amended to emphasise that official information cannot be withheld solely because it presents a reputational risk for the Council, its staff and/or elected members and that the first consideration is the principle of availability.⁴⁰ As the Council's *'Decision Memo'* template includes consideration of *'[r]isk and communication implications of response'*, it should also make it clear to staff that official information cannot be withheld solely because releasing it presents a reputational risk.

In addition, as we discuss further in ['Current practices'](#), we encourage the Council to amend its LGOIMA guidance and templates to include the following:

- the Council may wish to provide a description of the steps required before the Council can be considered to have made a decision on a LGOMA request (discussed in ['Communicating a decision on a request'](#));
- when considering withholding information under the LGOIMA, the Council should provide more guidance on assessing the strength of the harm in releasing official information to the requester, and balancing it against the strength of the public interest considerations in releasing⁴¹ (discussed in ['Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA'](#));
- the Council's guidance and templates should include references to the requirements of sections 17A and 17B of the LGOIMA⁴² (discussed in ['Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA'](#));
- the Council's guidance should include instructions for staff to take adequate records of the Council's decision-making processes on LGOIMA requests such as written summaries of spoken conversations and the rationale for seeking an extension (the Council's template *'Decision memo'* could be an appropriate place to capture these discussions); we discuss this further in ['Record keeping of LGOIMA process'](#) and in ['Extensions'](#);

⁴⁰ Link to [section 5 of the LGOIMA](#).

⁴¹ The *'Decision memo'* template can include prompts for staff to identify and assess the specific harm in releasing information and balance the strength of these interests against those of the specific public interest considerations (where appropriate).

⁴² Links to [section 17A](#) and [section 17B](#) of the LGOIMA.

- the guidance should include instructions for staff to consistently document the steps taken to search for information requested under the LGOIMA (discussed in [‘Record keeping of LGOIMA process’](#)).

As discussed in [‘Organisation structure, staffing and capability’](#), template emails for the OI team’s interactions with business units and elected members should clearly outline the principle of making a decision on a request *‘as soon as reasonably practicable’*.

Several Council staff expressed frustration with some LGOIMA requests they viewed as *‘vexatious’*, with a disproportionate amount of time spent on supplying information to a small number of frequent requesters. One staff member observed that their overall impression was that the majority of broad requests (*‘fishing expeditions’*) come from requesters who have a *‘grievance’* against the Council. The issue of broad requests was also raised in the elected members’ survey, where one respondent said that they noticed an *‘[i]ncrease in fishing requests that are very broad in scope’*.

The Council should ensure its LGOIMA guidance clearly outlines its approach to dealing with challenging requesters, including a strategy for ensuring staff safety without compromising requesters’ fundamental right to request information.⁴³

It is also important that the policy does not conflate challenging **requesters** with *‘vexatious requests’*. Our office’s guides to managing unreasonable complainant conduct,⁴⁴ and dealing with frivolous, vexatious, or trivial requests⁴⁵ may assist in developing a policy for managing challenging LGOIMA requesters.

We also encourage the Council to ensure that staff have adequate guidance on managing broad requests and managing multiple requests from the same requester,⁴⁶ including the Council’s obligation under section 11 of the LGOIMA to provide *‘reasonable assistance’*.⁴⁷

In relation to refusing requests on the grounds of substantial collation or research (further discussed in [‘Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA’](#)), the Council’s LGOIMA guidance should make clear that, before refusing, the agency must consider whether consulting the requester, and/or charging or extending the timeframe for response would enable the request to be granted.⁴⁸

As discussed in [‘External messaging’](#), we consider that the Council should publish its LGOIMA policy once it is finalised. In addition to being a sound demonstration of openness, there are other benefits to be gained from publishing official information policy. For example, where agencies have clear and reasonable policies articulating their approach to considering requests

⁴³ Link to [section 14](#) of the Bill of Rights Act 1990.

⁴⁴ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘Managing unreasonable complainant conduct’](#).

⁴⁵ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘Frivolous, vexatious and trivial: A guide to...section 17\(h\) of the LGOIMA’](#).

⁴⁶ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘The LGOIMA for local government agencies’](#), pages 47 and 48.

⁴⁷ Link to [section 11](#) of the LGOIMA.

⁴⁸ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘Substantial collation or research’](#), page 4.

for urgency, charging for the supply of information, and dealing with vexatious requests or challenging requesters, they will be less vulnerable to criticism when they apply these policies.

In relation to requests handled by business units outside of the Council's OI team, we suggest that the Council review its guidance for processing official information requests received through the media and social media channels.

The Council's guidance titled '*Media Policy and Guidelines*' should make it clear to staff that information requests are subject to the LGOIMA regardless of the channels through which they are submitted, for example, social media, text or instant messaging platforms such as Signal. In addition, the Council's media and social media policies should include guidance on refusing requests and withholding information. The Council may wish to ensure that this is consistent with guidance published by our office.⁴⁹

Finally, while the Council's LGOIMA templates appear to be largely consistent with the Ombudsman's published templates,⁵⁰ there are some exceptions, and we suggest that the Council review its templates in these respects. For example:

- the Council's template for notifying an extension of a LGOIMA request should be expanded to include a section on extending a time limit to transfer a request;⁵¹
- the Council's template for consulting with third parties should add a statement advising the third party of the Council's responsibility under the LGOIMA to make the final decision on the request.⁵²

Action points

Review and update guidance and templates on risk assessment in relation to LGOIMA requests incorporating our suggestions.

Amend guidance and templates incorporating our suggestions.

Amend internal LGOIMA guidance to include more information on dealing with challenging requesters, and publish it on the Council's website.

Amend guidance on requests submitted through media and social media channels incorporating our suggestions.

Review internal LGOIMA templates and amend where required.

⁴⁹ Link to the Ombudsman's guidance ['Requests made online: A guide to requests made through fyi.org.nz and social media'](#).

⁵⁰ Link to the Ombudsman's webpage ['Resources and publications'](#).

⁵¹ Link to the Ombudsman's template ['Extension letter'](#).

⁵² Link to the Ombudsman's template ['Consultation with third parties'](#).

Guidance and resources for Council meetings, workshops and briefings

The Council provides extensive and useful guidance to staff on the management and administration of Council meetings.

We note that the Council's guidance document titled '*Public Excluded Process*' contains a number of instructions for staff that encourage increasing transparency and openness of the Council's practices. For example, when proposing to hold a Council meeting (or part of it) in 'public excluded', staff are prompted to consider whether information proposed to be discussed in 'public excluded' can be split so that parts of it can be discussed 'open to the public'.

In addition, it is positive that the Council has formal processes in place that help ensure information from 'public excluded' Council meetings is consistently released to the public when the 'public exclusion' grounds under the LGOIMA no longer apply.

There are, however, some opportunities for the Council to improve its internal guidance on Council meetings.

To align with our suggestions in '*Current practices*' the Council may wish expand its guidance to include more information about the requirement to set out descriptive, plain English reasons for 'public exclusion'. This should include the requirement to apply the public interest test when it considers relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA to hear an item in a 'public excluded' meeting.

As we will discuss further in '*Council Meetings*', we note that the Council's '*Standard minutes template*', the section titled '*Public participation*', should include prompts for staff to provide summaries of any public input made during a Council meeting.

The Council's guidance on informal meetings includes '*Councillor Q&A process*' and '*Staff guide for running workshops*'. In addition, the Council's '*Public Excluded Process*' instructs staff to think carefully before proposing a closed workshop or briefing (using LGOIMA grounds for 'public excluded' Council meetings) as '*Councillors want as much business as possible to be held in public*'. This is a positive messaging for staff and helps promote openness and transparency of Council's informal meetings.

Even so, the requirement under the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) to '*conduct...business in an open, transparent, and democratically accountable manner...*'⁵³ applies to all aspects of council business. Decisions on closing workshops must therefore be made reasonably, and reasons for closure may be tested by our office, in response to a complaint.

We encourage the Council to review its guidance on informal meetings to ensure that it includes the following aspects:⁵⁴

⁵³ Link to [Section 14\(1\)\(a\)\(i\)](#) of the LGA.

⁵⁴ Link to the Ombudsman's report '[Open for business: A report on the Chief Ombudsman's investigation into local council meetings and workshops](#)'.

- the process for publicising workshops and briefings, including time, dates, venues and subject matter including the rationale for closing a workshop or briefing, if applicable;
- factors to consider when making a decision to close a workshop or briefing;
- how to keep good records of workshops or briefings to ensure they include details of information presented, relevant debate, and consideration of options (this should also provide guidance on including summaries of workshops and briefings into Council meeting agendas); and
- the process for handling LGOIMA requests for information on the contents of closed workshops and briefings.

Action points

Amend guidance to include more information on the Council’s decision-making when excluding the public from Council meetings, in line with our suggestions.

Amend ‘*Standard minutes template*’ to incorporate our suggestions in relation to recording discussions held during Council meetings.

Review internal guidance on workshops and briefings in line with our suggestions.

Information management and record keeping systems and guidance

As a high-level information management and record keeping policy, the Council implemented a document titled ‘*Information and Data Asset Management Policy*’. We found the policy to be a comprehensive document which covers such important aspects as creating, storing, and disposing of records (both manual and electronic). Importantly, the Council expresses its commitments in the following high-level statement included in the policy:

The Council will foster proactive sharing of information with the public and third parties where appropriate and will observe the New Zealand Data and Information Management Principles (NZDIMP) as outlined in the NZ Government Open Data Policy (‘...data and information should be open, readily available, well managed, reasonably priced and re-usable unless there are necessary reasons for its protection’).

In our view, the policy can be improved by including more information on the following:

- how to manage electronic records of official information stored in personal email accounts, instant messaging platforms (for example, *Zoom, Signal, Microsoft Teams*), and text messages;
- a guide to determining which records systems exist and what information each holds;
- how to conduct regular quality assurance processes for record keeping or regular audits of the Council’s records to help ensure their accuracy, compliance with the legislation, and adherence to standards and regulations (this can include regular spot check of a

random assortment of files, or staff being regularly reminded to check their desktops and personal drives for any information that should be saved in the Council's primary IM system).

Action point

Expand information management and record keeping policy to include aspects in line with our suggestions.

Proactive release policy and guidance

We were pleased to find that the Council's strong proactive release practices (discussed in ['External messaging'](#)) are underpinned by a policy document titled *'Proactive Release for information requests'*. Having reviewed the policy, we found that it includes high-level statements of the Council's commitments and outlines benefits of proactive release for both the public and the Council:

...(the Council) is committed to comply with the initiatives to increase the availability of official information to the members of the public...

...Proactive release of information promotes good government, openness and transparency and fosters public trust and confidence in agencies. It can also help reduce the administrative burden on individuals to make requests for information, and on agencies in responding to requests.

In addition, the Council's guidance document titled *'Proactive/reactive process to high-risk events'* prescribes that upon the occurrence of events deemed *'major'* or *'severe'* risk, the Council is required to proactively release information to help manage these events. This guidance also includes a high-level statement expressing the Council's commitments:

The purpose of this guideline is to assist...(the Council) manage high risk events using the...proactive release method. Using these processes holds our leaders accountable for the work we provide the community ensuring that we put people at the heart of what we do. Using these practices provides good governance, openness and transparency and fosters public trust and confidence in agencies while reducing administrative burdens.

While we acknowledge the above positive aspects, we note that the Council does not appear to have an overarching policy on proactive release. The current documents provided by the Council, titled *'Proactive Release for information requests'* and the *'high-risk events'* policy and process appear to be restricted only to responses to LGOIMA requests and proactive releases to manage high-risk events, respectively.

We suggest that the Council develop a proactive release policy to cover proactive releases of all official information. Proactive release is not just about publishing responses to information requests, and the Council's overarching policy can include proactive releases of, for example, information on the Council's workshops and briefings (discussed in ['Workshops and briefings'](#)), or its LGOIMA policies (discussed in ['Internal policies, procedures and resources'](#)).

The Council should ensure that its proactive release policy covers the following:

- a high level commitment to proactively releasing official information, highlighting the principle of availability;⁵⁵
- the types of information that will be proactively released;
- processes for identifying opportunities for proactive release;
- processes for preparing information for proactive release, including managing risks around personal information and information subject to third party copyright.

When implementing its proactive release policy, the Council may wish to refer to guidance published by our office.⁵⁶

We also suggest that the Council publish the policy on its website.

Action point

Implement overarching proactive release policy to cover proactive release of all types of official information held by the Council (including information in line with our suggestions), and publish it on the Council's website.

⁵⁵ Link to [section 5 of the LGOIMA](#).

⁵⁶ Link to the Ombudsman's guidance ['Proactive release – Good practices for proactive release of official information'](#).

Current practices

The effectiveness of LGOIMA is largely dependent on those who implement it on a day-to-day basis and how they apply the resources available to them to manage the realities of giving effect to the Act.

To assess the current practices of the Council we considered whether:

- the Council's practices demonstrate understanding and commitment to the principle, purposes and requirements of LGOIMA;
- Council staff have a good technical knowledge of LGOIMA; and
- the Council is coping with the volume and complexity of its LGOIMA work and is compliant with the Act.

Information requests handled by the OI team

Extensions

The Council's reporting published on its website indicates that extensions of LGOIMA requests have increased⁵⁷ from 12 percent in the third quarter of the 2023 calendar year to 41 percent in the fourth quarter of 2024 calendar year.

A staff member also said during a meeting with investigators that over the last two years they noticed a steady increase in '*complex LGOIMAs*' that often require the involvement of the Council's executive leadership team.

The Council's high use of extensions may be justified by the complexity and/or volume of the LGOIMA requests submitted to the Council, and the Council may be extending its LGOIMA requests for valid reasons.⁵⁸

However, having reviewed the Council's sample LGOIMA files, we were unable to determine whether every instance of an extension was justified under the LGOIMA. We note that some files where LGOIMA requests were extended, contained no records of decision making activity for periods of up to 20 working days.

We would be concerned if the Council over-used extensions to manage its LGOIMA workload or to address failures to manage LGOIMA requests effectively, as this may indicate systemic issues such as staff's lack of capacity or capability to respond to LGOIMA requests. Therefore, in our view, the Council should consider undertaking some analysis of its reasons for the use of extensions to assure itself that:

- extensions are made only in accordance with the LGOIMA;

⁵⁷ Link to the Council's webpage '[Responses to information requests](#)'.

⁵⁸ The LGOIMA states that a request can be extended if a request is for or requires a search through a large quantity of information, or consultations are necessary that cannot be made in the original time limit.

- there are not any underlying capacity or capability issues that might be driving the increase in the use of extensions.

We discuss this and other suggestions for improving the monitoring of the Council's resource and capacity issues in '[Performance monitoring and reporting](#)'.

To help improve record-keeping practices and ensure robustness of decisions to extend, the Council may also wish to implement a template for recording its decision making process, including where a decision is made to extend a LGOIMA request. The Council could use the template *Decision memo* as discussed in '[Internal policies, procedures and resources](#)' for this purpose.

Communicating a decision on a request

The LGOIMA states that agencies must make and communicate a decision on a LGOIMA request '*as soon as reasonably practicable*' and not more than 20 working days after the date the request is received. For an agency to validly claim it has made a decision on a request, it should generally be able to show that it has:⁵⁹

- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

In our review of the Council's LGOIMA files we saw examples where the Council advised the requester that it had decided to provide the requested information, however, the Council's records showed consultations about withholding information from the response continued even after the 'decision' was communicated to the requester. In these instances, because the Council had not completed the steps (consultations and reviews) necessary to make a decision, the Council's claim to have made a decision was unreasonable and apparently contrary to law. This is because all necessary consultations should have taken place in order for the Council to assert that it has made a decision. I would be concerned if this practice was or becomes routine, and is being used as a way to give the impression that the agency has made a proper a decision within 20 working days.

Based on our review of the sample LGOIMA files, it appears that the Council has, on occasions that we saw, purported to make a decision and meet the timeframe obligation when, in fact, the necessary work to make a decision had not taken place.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Link to [Kelsey v The Minister of Trade](#) [2015] NZHC 2497, para 108.

⁶⁰ Link to [section 13](#) of the LGOIMA.

It is my opinion that the Council has acted unreasonably by communicating a decision on a LGOIMA request when it was not open to the agency to do so.

I recommend that the Council review its practices around communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests in advance of providing the information, to ensure that before the Council claims to have made a decision on a LGOIMA requests, it is able to demonstrate that it has:

- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

In response to the provisional opinion, the Chief Executive explained that:

Unfortunately, the period under review, when the Official Information team was managing these requests coincided with a time of heightened demand. This was driven by Long-term plan deliberations, increased media scrutiny, and growing community engagement in response to wider cost pressures. These factors led to increased organisational demands and spikes in request volumes.

The Council went on to say:

That any shortcomings have either already been address or are being remedied promptly.

We acknowledge the Council's explanation and note that the Council accepted the finding and is committed to moving quickly to implement the recommended actions. We look forward to receiving updates on the Council's progress with implementing the recommendation.

Recommendation

Review practices around communicating decisions on LGOIMA requests to ensure that before the Council claims to have made a decision on a LGOIMA requests, it is able to demonstrate that it has:

- collated and reviewed all the information within the scope of the request (or identified where that is not possible);
- identified any information that it considers should be withheld and the reasons under the LGOIMA for refusing it, balanced against any countervailing reasons in the public interest to release the information where necessary; and
- completed all necessary reviews, internal and external consultations, and approvals that are required before confirming the decision.

Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA

Section 18(a)(i) of the LGOIMA requires that local authorities give the requester the reason for withholding information.⁶¹ Often, agencies fulfil this requirement by giving the section number of the reason relied on, and the wording given in the legislation. Better practice is to provide, in addition to this, a plain English reason with direct reference to the specific issue.⁶²

Our review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files illustrated that while they contained some records of the Council's decision-making process whenever withholding information under the LGOIMA, some of these records appeared to be incomplete.

For example, in relation to 'commercial' or 'privacy' withholding grounds under the LGOIMA, some of the Council's records did not include the process whereby the Council considered the relative strengths of the specific interests in withholding information, and balanced them against the strengths of the countervailing public interest in releasing this information.⁶³

Therefore, we suggest the Council amend its practices to ensure that records of the decision-making process are consistently retained by staff. As discussed in ['Internal policies, procedures and resources'](#), the Council's recently developed 'Decision memo' template may be an appropriate place to capture these records. The Council should ensure staff use this template consistently for this purpose.

The Council may wish to expand its internal guidance and training documents to provide more information on how to apply the withholding grounds under the LGOIMA. This should include the consideration of the public interest test whenever applying section 7(2) of the LGOIMA (including factors that can affect the weight of the public interest, for example, the level of public interest or debate, or the amount of public money involved).⁶⁴

In making the above amendments to its practice, the Council can refer to guidance published by our office.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Link to [section 18\(a\)\(i\)](#) of the LGOIMA.

⁶² Noting that, while in all cases the reason for refusal must be given, under section 18 of LGOIMA, when the requester asks, the grounds in support of that reason must also be provided.

⁶³ For example, if, when considering withholding under section 7(2)(a) of the LGOIMA, the Council finds that the privacy interest is relatively low and is outweighed by a relatively strong countervailing public interest in release (for example, the subject of the request has been a significant matter of public debate and commentary), then the Council cannot withhold information under section 7(2)(a) of the LGOIMA.

⁶⁴ For example, in relation to some 'commercial' grounds, staff can be instructed to record their consideration of whether and how the release of information presents a risk of unreasonable prejudice to a third party's commercial position. The relevant factors considered by staff should also be recorded, including the nature and content of the information, the extent to which the information is in the public domain, the age and currency of the information, and the commercial context.

⁶⁵ Links to the Ombudsman's guides [Privacy – A guide to ... section 7\(2\)\(a\) of the LGOIMA](#), [Commercial information – A guide to ...sections 7\(2\)\(b\) and 7\(2\)\(h\) of the LGOIMA](#), ['Public interest: A guide to the public interest test'](#).

We have identified another area of potential vulnerability for the Council in relation to the Council's use of 'administrative' refusal grounds under the LGOIMA where the Council may wish to align with good LGOIMA practice.⁶⁶

From our review of the sample LGOIMA files it appears that a number of the Council's responses to requesters did not fully explain the Council's reasons for refusals made under section 17 of the LGOIMA:

- In three files where the Council refused parts of requests under section 17(e),⁶⁷ the responses did not explain what steps the Council took to try to locate the information, and the outcomes of any attempts to consult the requester (as required by section 17B of the LGOIMA),⁶⁸ or why no such attempts were made.
- In two files where the Council refused parts of requests under section 17(f),⁶⁹ the responses did not include the following information:
 - any difficulties involved in meeting the relevant request, including details about the volume of information involved, the estimated time required to find and bring it together, and the impact on the Council's operations;
 - whether the Council considered charging the requester for processing their request or extending the timeframe for responding to the request (section 17A of the LGOIMA),⁷⁰ and explanation why charging or extending would not help the Council fully grant the request;
 - whether the Council consulted or considered consulting with the requester (as required by section 17B of the LGOIMA),⁷¹ along with the details of any attempts at consultation; and
 - whether the Council considered alternative ways of meeting the request that would help ameliorate the need to withhold information or refuse the request.

From the review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files, it was not clear whether or not the Council had considered the requirements of sections 17A and 17B of the LGOIMA. In our view, the Council should ensure compliance with the requirements of these sections, and as a matter of good practice, communicate its considerations to the requester. We suggest that the Council review its practices when refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA.

⁶⁶ Link to [section 17](#) of the LGOIMA.

⁶⁷ The requested information did not exist or could not be found, despite reasonable efforts to locate it.

⁶⁸ Link to [section 17B](#) of the LGOIMA.

⁶⁹ The requested information could not be made available without substantial collation or research.

⁷⁰ Link to [section 17A](#) of the LGOIMA.

⁷¹ Link to [section 17B](#) of the LGOIMA.

The Council's LGOIMA guidance and training materials should be expanded to include more information on section 17 of the LGOIMA, which may include amending relevant templates.⁷²

Action points

Amend practices to ensure that staff consistently retain records of the decision-making process when withholding information under the LGOIMA, incorporating our suggestions.

Amend practices in relation to refusing requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA, incorporating our suggestions, to ensure compliance with the Act and align with good LGOIMA practice.

Elected members' involvement in the LGOIMA process

During review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files we saw instances where the Council either consulted an elected member on proposed responses to LGOIMA requests addressed to the Council, or notified them of the Council's response as an FYI (without seeking an elected member's input into the response).

One LGOIMA file included an email where a Council staff member, while consulting with an elected member on the Council's proposed response to a LGOIMA request, clearly stated that the Council, through its Chief Executive and the delegated staff, is the ultimate decision-maker on the request. This is positive because it aligns with the Council's obligations under section 13(5) of the LGOIMA.⁷³

In another file, staff members discussed informing the elected members and the Mayor's Office of the Council's response (after it is signed by a member of the executive leadership team), *'so they can prepare themselves before it is released and media contact them'*. Again, we were pleased to see that the Council understands its responsibility as the decision-maker on LGOIMA requests addressed to the Council. For example, the file included internal correspondence where a staff member stated that *'[t]he Councillors... aren't happy about some of the release... however we remain confident in the decision to release.'*

While the above are positive practices, we also saw an example in the sample LGOIMA files where the Council consulted with an elected member and there was some disagreement as to the direction of the request. It was unclear from review of the file whether the situation had been appropriately escalated to the Chief Executive. We consider the Council would benefit from a clear documented escalation process in the event of a disagreement when consulting elected members, as discussed in [Organisation structure, staffing and capability](#).

⁷² It may be useful to consider the Ombudsman templates. Link to the Ombudsman's webpage ['Resources and publications'](#) (templates), particularly templates 11 (*'substantial collation or research'*), 19 (*'[d]ocument does not exist or cannot be found'*), and 20 (*'[i]nformation not held'*).

⁷³ Link to [section 13\(5\)](#) of the LGOIMA.

We also note that the Council does not appear to have a formal document to help provide guidance around its interactions with the elected members when processing LGOIMA requests submitted to the Council.

It is important that the Council has a clear and transparent process that details roles and responsibilities when dealing with LGOIMA requests that involve elected members. Elected members hold information that is subject to the LGOIMA, and they can be requesters under the LGOIMA. Elected members may also be consulted or notified about a LGOIMA request.

The Council may wish to agree on a document or protocol with its elected members to provide clear guidelines on:

- the Council's approach to LGOIMA requests in which consultation with elected members and/or notification of the responses to elected members is appropriate, and how that will be carried out and recorded by the Council; and
- handling information held by elected members in their official capacity,⁷⁴ including an explanation that, when asked to provide information within the scope of a LGOIMA request, elected members must do so in line with the Council's obligation under the LGOIMA to communicate its decisions on LGOIMA requests '*as soon as reasonably practicable*'.

The Council may also wish to implement guidance on elected members' access to Council information both under the LGOIMA and under the common law '*need-to-know*' principle (that is, information that is reasonably necessary for the elected members to perform their duties as such).

The subject of the elected members' access to information under the common law has been raised with our office a number of times recently. We consider it would benefit councils to provide clarity to staff and to elected members on elected members' rights and obligations when requesting information, particularly the onus on elected members to show why it is necessary to access it under the '*need to know*' principle. It may prove a point of frustration or tension between the Council and elected members, if this distinction is not drawn.

Elected members do not have unfettered access to all information they desire under either the common law or the LGOIMA. In either case, there are appropriate limits. Any request for information will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, on the facts at hand at that time, with reference to the appropriate considerations. In commenting on the common law right, Kenneth Palmer observed:⁷⁵

Concerning the disclosure of documents to a councillor by a local authority, the legal principle has been established that a member is entitled by virtue of the office

⁷⁴ Information held by elected members in their official capacity is information 'held' by a Council and therefore covered by the LGOIMA.

⁷⁵ Kenneth Palmer, *Local Authorities Law in New Zealand*, Brookers, 2012. He cites *R v Birmingham City Council, ex parte O* [1983] 1 AC 578 (HL); *R v Hackney London Borough Council, ex parte Camper* [1985] 1 WLR 1229, [1985] 3 All ER 275 (QB).

to have access to all documents for which there is good reason for such access. The principle is stated in the 'need to know' test, with the onus upon the councillor or member to show that access to the information is necessary to enable proper discharge of duties...

During this investigation, we understand the Council, in collaboration with elected members, has been working to clarify and improve the processes by which elected members access information under the common law or LGOIMA.

We encourage the Council to continue working with elected members to develop clear guidance to support elected members in accessing official information. This protocol or guidance should incorporate our suggestions as outlined above.

Once implemented, the guidance or protocol should be published on the Council's website to help ensure that the Council's interactions with its elected members are transparent and well-understood by the public.

Action point

The Council should continue to work with elected members towards developing a clear protocol or guidance to help guide interactions between the Council and elected members, incorporating our suggestions, and publish the document on the Council's website once finalised.

Information requests handled by the Media team

A request to a local authority for information the agency holds⁷⁶ is, by definition, an official information request.⁷⁷ This means the request for information must be handled in accordance with the LGOIMA, irrespective of who is making the request or whether it is submitted to the Media Team, the Democracy Services Team, or any other part of the agency.

As part of this investigation, we reviewed a sample of the Council's responses to media information requests. During the review we found that the Council does not maintain a filing system for its media requests. Instead, when requested by our investigators, the Media team staff had to compile records of these requests by copy-pasting emails pertaining to selected media requests into a Word document.

Importantly, records for five requests included in the sample did not contain any emails or other records, but only a brief description of staff's recollection of the request and the Council's response to it. These records also included a statement that '*[n]o WCC record of the*

⁷⁶ Media Teams also field requests for the agency to generate fresh comment on an issue, and requests to interview officials. Requests of this type are *not* covered by the OIA as they are not requests for information *already held* by the agency.

⁷⁷ With some exceptions detailed in section 2 of the LGOIMA; and information requests for personal information made by that person or their authorised representative, which are considered under the Privacy Act 2020.

email exchange exists'. A record for one request only included a link to the article published by the requester.

Records for several other files included in the reviewed sample also appeared to be missing important correspondence such as consultations with subject matter experts, and the Council's responses to the media requests.

We acknowledge that the above practices may have developed as a result of the fast-paced media environment and the Media team's wish to facilitate fast turnaround of information requests submitted by the media requesters. However, it is also important for the Council to be aware that media information requests handled by the Council's Media team must be dealt with in accordance with section 17 of the Public Records Act 2005, which requires the Council to maintain records in an accessible form to enable use for subsequent reference.

We suggest that the Council amend the Media team's record keeping practices to ensure full and accurate records of substantive correspondence with requesters, and any material internal discussions, are created and maintained. Keeping such records is important for understanding the Council's rationale for its decisions on LGOIMA requests, to maintain consistency and to enable the Council to respond to an Ombudsman in the event of an investigation.

We encourage the Council to seek advice from Archives New Zealand, the regulatory stewards of the Public Records Act 2005 (PRA), to ensure its practices about keeping records of the Council's responses to media information requests are compliant with section 17 of the PRA.

We understand that our suggestions may require a change of culture and attitudes to media information requests within the Council. Therefore, we suggest that the changes in the Media team's record keeping practices are supported by providing appropriate training to the Media team, as well as strong messaging being delivered to staff by senior leaders to reinforce that the Media team's LGOIMA processes and responses to media information requests must adhere to the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.

Action points
Amend Media team's practices to ensure that full and accurate records of substantive correspondence with requesters, and any material internal discussions, are created and maintained.
Seek advice from Archives New Zealand on how to ensure Media team's practices are compliant with section 17 of the Public Records Act 2005.
Ensure messaging from senior leaders reinforces that media information requests handled by the Media team must adhere to the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.
Provide targeted LGOIMA and information management and record keeping training to the Media team to ensure they understand their obligations under the LGOIMA and the Public Records Act 2005.

Record keeping of LGOIMA process

Effective information management and record keeping is an essential enabler for proper access to information.

It is also important, for a number of reasons, for agencies to keep comprehensive records around decision making on LGOIMA requests. Doing so:

- will enable the agency to provide grounds in support of its reasons for refusing a LGOIMA request, if they are sought by the requester;⁷⁸
- will enable the agency to more easily and accurately respond to an Ombudsman in the event of an investigation of a complaint; and
- provides an opportunity to create a repository of knowledge about how the agency makes decisions on LGOIMA requests, thereby developing a consistent approach.

There are some opportunities for the Council to improve its record keeping practices.

During meetings with staff conducted by our investigators, two meeting attendees said that some staff may be wary of recording information or *'writing things down'* fearing that the record may be released under the LGOIMA and portray the Council and/or its staff in a negative light.

In our review of the Council's sample LGOIMA files we saw no direct evidence of this direction. However, the staff members' perception that some Council staff might keep things off the written record is concerning, and also highlights a misunderstanding about the LGOIMA. The LGOIMA is drafted in such a way that not only written information, but also information simply known to the Council, is able to be requested.

The Council's sample LGOIMA files included communications between staff where meetings and/or spoken discussions were referenced, yet there were no file notes or written summaries from meeting and/or discussions outlining what was discussed during the relevant meeting and what was the outcome. During meetings with our investigators, staff also said that they do not typically prepare file notes or written summaries of spoken conversations or discussions.

We remind the Council that, in accordance with section 17 of the Public Records Act 2005, agencies *'must create and maintain full and accurate records of (their) affairs, in accordance with normal, prudent business practice...'* It is important that full and accurate records are kept in order to maintain a full audit trail for the consideration of all issues that contribute to the decisions of the Council, both as an organisation and as the governing body. In the LGOIMA handling context, this means that the Council should ensure that its staff keep notes from substantive meetings and discussions where those relate to the Council's decision making on a LGOIMA request.

In light of the above, we suggest that the Council amend its practices to help ensure that staff consistently take adequate records of the Council's decision-making processes, including

⁷⁸ See [section 18\(a\)\(ii\)](#) of the LGOIMA.

written summaries of substantive spoken conversations. As discussed in [‘Internal policies, procedures and resources’](#), the Council’s template *Decision memo* could be an appropriate place to capture these discussions.

The change in the Council’s record keeping practices must be supported by the Council’s senior leaders reinforcing the importance of good information management and record keeping in their regular office communications to staff.

As another point of improvement, we found during our review of the sample LGOIMA files that the Council does not consistently document the steps taken to search for information requested under the LGOIMA.

To help align with good practice, we expect agencies to conduct a *‘reasonable search’*⁷⁹ to find information requested under the LGOIMA, and retain records of this process to help ensure the Council’s compliance with the Public Records Act 2005.

These records should include the following:

- staff member who searched for information;
- which information management and records systems were searched;
- search terms that were entered into the information management systems;
- when the search was conducted and the time taken to search for information;
- the results of the search (for example, in the form of a screenshot), and
- any difficulties in searching, and reasons why certain information was not found.

Recording these aspects is particularly important for the Council in light of our findings on its practices around refusing LGOIMA requests under section 17 of the LGOIMA (discussed in [‘Refusing requests and withholding information under the LGOIMA’](#)).

Action points

Amend practices to ensure full and accurate records of substantive telephone, face-to-face and other spoken discussions in relation to LGOMA decision making are created and maintained.

Senior leaders to support changes in record keeping practices by promoting the importance of good information management and record keeping

Consistently document steps taken to search for information when processing LGOIMA requests in line with our suggestions.

⁷⁹ Link to the Ombudsman’s guidance [‘Information not held’](#) – pages 13-14.

Council Meetings

From the sample of Meeting agendas reviewed as part of this investigation, we found the Council's practices around its meetings were compliant with the statutory timeframes under Part 7 of the LGOIMA for notifying meetings, and making available agendas for these meetings.

The Council's compliance with these timeframes is regularly monitored and reported through its annual reports. We discuss the Council's reporting of its LGOIMA performance in ['Performance monitoring and learning'](#).

Information about the Council's meetings is published on the *'Meetings'* webpage,⁸⁰ including the *'Meetings calendar'*⁸¹ showing upcoming meeting dates along with links to agendas and minutes. The Council's decisions can be easily accessed and searched on the Council's website with the help of the recently implemented software *Mātai Manapori* (discussed in ['Leadership and culture'](#)).⁸²

During this investigation we were pleased to see that the Council considers ways in which it can make it easier for the public to participate in the Council's decision-making processes.

For example, the Council recently delivered information sheets to residents' mailboxes throughout Wellington outlining current public consultations (including on the amendment of the Long-term plan). This positive practice helps engage members of the public who do not regularly access the internet or prefer to receive information in hard-copy format.

The information sheet provided helpful and concise summaries of the matters on which consultations were being held and outlined various ways in which the public could make their submissions. The latter were extensive and included such easy and convenient ways as filling out online forms, completing a hard-copy submission form available at a local library, or simply making an oral submission through the Council's website.⁸³

To assist individuals who wish to speak at Council meetings, the Council has a dedicated webpage *'Attending and speaking at meetings'*⁸⁴ which provides helpful and detailed information. This information is also provided in all agendas for Council meetings.⁸⁵

In addition, where Council Meetings are held primarily for the purpose of oral submissions, the Council considers such options as holding meetings in the evening so members of the public can attend outside of their working hours. For those public submitters who may be daunted by the formal atmosphere of a Council meeting (especially first-time submitters/speakers), the Council offers the option of attending a less formal meeting called a 'forum'.

⁸⁰ Link to the Council's webpage ['Meetings'](#).

⁸¹ Link to the Council's webpage ['Meetings calendar'](#).

⁸² Links to the Council's webpages ['Reports'](#) and ['Decisions register'](#).

⁸³ Link to the Council's webpage ['Have your say'](#).

⁸⁴ Link to the Council's webpage ['Attending and speaking at meetings'](#).

⁸⁵ See, for example, link to the Council's [Ordinary Meeting Agenda of 5 September 2024](#).

The Council also appears to be strongly committed to ensuring the physical accessibility of its meetings to the public.

The Council advised our office that an accessibility review was undertaken shortly after moving to the Council's current offices in 2019 and again in 2021. Council Chambers are wheelchair accessible and are fitted with a hearing loop for meeting attendees who are deaf or hearing impaired. Some chairs with arms are available to assist people with physical impairment. As required, the Council also books translators or interpreters to assist people wishing to speak at Council.

Finally, we were pleased to see that the Council published a social script about attending Council meetings for individuals who are neurodiverse or have other learning difficulties.⁸⁶

Among these positive aspects, we note some areas of further improvement.

Having reviewed a sample of the Council's minutes of Council Meetings, we found that they included details of the resolutions made during the Meeting (for example, the names of elected members voting for or against a motion), however, most minutes contained little to no detail about any discussion, debate, or questioning, that may have taken place during the relevant meeting.

We suggest that the Council review its practice around taking minutes of Council Meetings to ensure that they reliably contain a clear audit trail of the full decision making process, including any relevant debate and consideration of options.

Keeping good Meeting records:

- helps ensure transparency of council decision making by providing a complete and clear record of reasoning;
- provides a reference for the Council in the event of issues around decision making processes that may arise internally or externally;
- provides an opportunity to create a repository of knowledge about how the council makes decisions, and so develop a consistent approach.

Action point

Review practices for minute-taking at Council Meetings in line with our suggestions.

Excluding the public from Council Meetings

Having reviewed the Council's practices around 'public excluded' meetings, we found many positive aspects that help promote the robustness of the Council's decisions to exclude the public from its Meetings.

For example, staff's proposals to exclude the public from Council Meetings are approved by the Council's legal team to help ensure compliance with the LGOIMA. A senior member of

⁸⁶ Link to the Council's document ['Social Story – Visiting the Wellington City Council Chambers'](#).

Council's staff also said that these proposals are vigorously debated by the elected members, and the Council will frequently consider whether a portion of a meeting proposed to be held in 'public excluded' can be held in the open section of the Meeting.

We were pleased to find that the Council has formalised processes in place which help ensure that information from 'public excluded' meetings is regularly released to the public where the 'public exclusion' ground under the LGOIMA no longer applies. The Council's recently implemented *Mātai Manapori* (discussed in '[Leadership and culture](#)') also includes a tracking system where future information releases are recorded to be actioned by staff, where appropriate.

Despite the above positive practices, some respondents in the public survey expressed concern about the Council's practices around its public excluded meetings (although we note that there were only 74 respondents to the public survey, a very small (and self-selected) percentage of the population of Wellington).

For example, 61 percent of respondents thought that the Council's reasons for excluding the public are often unclear and do not seem reasonable.⁸⁷

Respondents frequently commented on the Council's use of '*commercial sensitivity*' as a ground to exclude the public, with some respondents stating that they were confused with the Council's reasons for doing so:

WCC habitually vote to have meetings that relate to financial expenditure and the reason often appears to be more driven by mayor and councillor's political concerns than any reasonable commercial sensitivity concerns.

WCC seems to exclude the public frequently but no reasons are given.

The councils over willingness to use "commercial sensitivity" or "privacy" as a reason for secreting meetings undermines transparency...

Possibly too much use of 'commercial sensitivity' to exclude from some meetings...'

Similarly, in the elected members' survey, some respondents expressed concerns about the Council's 'public excluded' meetings:

They use the expression, "Commercially sensitive" when there really isn't any reason for this...

There has been a tendency to go to PX on basis of elected members might feel more comfortable asking questions if public aren't watching. This isn't a valid criteria...

...the need for the meeting to be held in PX is questionable... just as concerning have been meetings where the entire report is withheld from the public but only a small amount of the information in the officer report would be considered PX...

⁸⁷ Seven percent of respondents said that the reasons for excluding the public are always clear and seem reasonable. Twelve percent said that the reasons are always clear, but do not always seem reasonable. Eighteen percent indicated '*I don't know*', and two percent indicated '*Other*'.

To help inform our understanding of the Council’s practices around ‘public excluded’ meetings, we reviewed a sample of the Council’s resolutions to exclude the public published on the Council’s website, as well as sample minutes for three ‘public excluded’ Council Meetings provided by the Council.

While the resolutions were broadly consistent with the Schedule 2A form of the LGOIMA,⁸⁸ we found that when outlining the reasons for hearing items in a public excluded part of a meeting pursuant to section 6 or section 7 of the LGOIMA, the resolutions simply recited the wording of the relevant sub-section. The resolution did not include a plain English explanation of the reason and the specific harm that may arise from conducting the meeting ‘open to the public’ that the Council deemed necessary to prevent by excluding the public.⁸⁹

We suggest that the Council amend its practices to ensure that its resolutions include detailed plain English reasons for the Council’s decisions. This should include explaining why the Council thought it was necessary to exclude the public, the specific harm the Council was trying to prevent by doing so (except where explaining the harm itself might create a prejudice to the protected interest), and the reasons why it is considered the public interest in open discussion does not outweigh the harm.

As discussed in [‘Leadership and culture’](#), transparency supports accountability, and increases public trust and confidence in Council decision making. A transparent and clear decision making process allows the public to understand a council’s reasoning.

We also found that the resolutions we reviewed did not include any references to the Council applying the public interest test. Therefore, we encourage the Council to adopt the practice of regularly recording public interest considerations supporting open discussion in its Schedule 2A resolutions whenever considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA to exclude the public from a Council Meeting.

Action points
Amend practices to ensure that Council’s Schedule 2A resolutions set out detailed, plain English reasons for excluding the public from a particular meeting.
Adopt the practice of regularly recording relevant public interest considerations supporting open discussion in its Schedule 2A resolutions whenever considering relying on section 7(2) of the LGOIMA to exclude the public from a Council meeting.

⁸⁸ Section 48(3) of the LGOIMA requires that local authorities who wish to make a resolution to exclude the public from whole or parts of council meetings must complete a form set out in Schedule 2A of the Act. Councils are permitted exclude the public in certain circumstances only; reasons must be supported by a specific ground or grounds pursuant to section 48(1) of the LGOIMA.

⁸⁹ See, for example, link to the [Minutes of Ordinary Meeting of Te Kaunihera o Pōneke | Council](#) of 5 September 2024 (page 13), and link to the [Minutes of Ordinary Meeting of Unaunahi Māhirahira | Audit and Risk Committee](#) of 14 August 2024 (page 8).

Workshops and briefings

Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) describes workshops in its *Guide to the 2025 LGNZ standing orders templates*,⁹⁰ in the following way:

Workshops are best described as sessions where elected members get the chance to discuss issues outside the formalities of a council meeting. Informal hui can provide for freer discussions than formal meetings, where standards of discussion and debate apply, such as speaking time limits. There are no legislative rules for the conduct of workshops, and no legal requirement to allow the public or media access, although it is unlawful to make decisions at workshops or briefings where the LGA and LGOIMA requirements have not been satisfied.

The Council regularly holds two types of informal meetings – workshops and briefings.

Briefings (also known as ‘*question & answer sessions*’) are held in advance of Council meetings and are meant to help elected members better understand the issues on which Council decisions are to be made. In comparison, workshops are held with the purpose of helping Council staff understand elected members’ views on particular issues to help shape the direction of staff’s work on agenda items for upcoming Council meetings.

While the Council’s informal meetings are open to the public ‘*by default*’, and live streamed on the Council’s YouTube channel,⁹¹ some may be closed to the public where there are grounds under the LGOIMA for ‘public excluded’ Council meetings. We were pleased to find that proposals to hold a closed workshop or briefing are approved by the Council’s legal team, and that staff are instructed to consider whether a portion of the informal meeting could be held in public.

The Council regularly publishes information about open informal meetings on its webpage ‘*Workshops and briefings*’.⁹² This includes the title of the workshop or briefing, along with the scheduled time, date and venue. For those who are unable to attend the informal meeting, the webpage includes information, such as materials presented at the workshop or briefing (for example, presentation slides) and links to the YouTube livestreams, where available.

We were pleased to see that most Council staff who met with our investigators had a favourable view of the Council’s workshops and briefings.

When asked whether the Council made any decisions during these informal meetings, all meeting attendees said that no debate or decision-making occurred during informal meetings as these were reserved for formal Council meetings. One staff member said that members of the Council’s Democracy Services team and the executive leadership team always attend workshops and briefings to ensure that the discussions do not turn into decision-making by the Council.

⁹⁰ Link to LGNZ webpage ‘[Guide to the LGNZ 2025 standing order templates](#)’.

⁹¹ Link to the Council’s playlist on [YouTube](#).

⁹² Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Workshops and briefings](#)’.

However, we note some negative public perceptions as an area of vulnerability for the Council. A number of respondents in the public survey conducted by our office expressed concern about workshops being used to debate issues outside of the public domain.

One respondent in the staff survey also stated the following in relation to perceptions that workshops may create among the public:

Some workshops involve feedback from councillors to inform subsequent decisions that are to be brought to councillors, and it could be seen that the subsequent decision is rubber stamping an earlier informal decision.

We understand that perceptions expressed in the public survey may not reflect the reality of the Council’s practices. However, to help increase public trust in the Council’s decisions and decision-making processes, we encourage the Council to take steps to address the existing negative perceptions and to ensure that there is little opportunity for such perceptions to develop in the future.

Firstly, we suggest that the Council publish information about closed workshops and briefings on its webpage ‘*Workshops and briefings*’⁹³, including reasons for closing a workshop or briefing to the public and an explanation that members of the public can request information about closed workshops or briefings under the LGOIMA. Publishing this information may help manage perceptions that exist around closed workshops and briefings that issues have been predetermined before an open (formal) Council meeting.

As the Council does not currently take written records of workshops and briefings, we would caution that having information from these only in audio format (as a livestream) poses challenges for deaf and hard of hearing communities, as well as people who are neurodiverse or have other learning difficulties. For the latter, presenting lengthy information only in audio format can be hard to follow and understand. A written record can provide structure which aids the digestibility of content, as well as making it easily revisited.

We suggest that, as a matter of good practice, the Council adopts a practice of regularly preparing written, plain English notes of its informal meetings, and publishing these on its website to improve accessibility. These records should include, among other aspects, the summary of the discussion held during the informal meeting and consideration of any options that were presented at the meeting.

Action points
Amend the ‘ <i>Workshops and briefings</i> ’ webpage to include more information in line with our suggestions.
Amend practices to ensure that written records of workshops and briefings are retained, in line with our suggestions, and published on the Council’s website.

⁹³ Link to the Council’s webpage [‘*Workshops and briefings*’](#).

Performance monitoring and learning

The LGOIMA does not impose specific requirements on Councils in relation to record keeping and management of requests they receive for access to information. However, Ombudsmen have consistently advocated maintaining a full audit trail in respect of any decision made by an agency. Formulating a decision on a request for access to official information is no different. Once this information is recorded, agencies have a wealth of data and information they can use to inform business planning and future decisions regarding access to information – but only if it is captured in a way that is meaningful, facilitates subsequent analysis, and is used for regular monitoring and reporting purposes.

To assess performance monitoring and learning of the Council in respect of its LGOIMA obligations, we considered whether:

- the Council had an established system for capturing meaningful information about its LGOIMA activities and appropriate and relevant performance measures;
- there was regular reporting and monitoring about the Council’s management performance in respect of LGOIMA compliance; and
- the Council learned from data analysis and practice.

External reporting on LGOIMA performance

The Council regularly reports some aspects of its LGOIMA performance through its webpage ‘*Responses to information requests*’⁹⁴, through Quarterly Reports published on its website,⁹⁵ and by regularly publishing its data in annual reports.

We note that the Council’s external reporting mostly focuses on quantitative indicators such as ‘*LGOIMA decision sent within statutory timeframe*’, ‘*[a]verage working days taken to make decision*’, and ‘*LGOIMA extensions*’. The Council may wish to include some analysis of the quality of its responses to LGOIMA requests, for example, analysis of its reasons for extensions. The latter aspect is particularly important for the Council in light of its reasonably high and increasing use of extensions (discussed in ‘[Extensions](#)’).

The Council’s ‘*Annual Report 2023/2024 – Volume 1*’⁹⁶ provides further data such as ‘*[m]eeting and committee agendas (%) made available to the public within statutory timeframes*’,⁹⁷ and ‘*[p]ercentage of residents satisfied with the process by which Council makes decisions*’.⁹⁸ These

⁹⁴ Link to the Council’s webpage ‘[Responses to information requests](#)’.

⁹⁵ See, for example, link to the Council’s [Quarterly Report 2023/2024 Quarter 3](#) – page 16.

⁹⁶ Link to the Council’s [Annual Report 2023/24 – Volume 1](#) – page 47.

⁹⁷ The statutory timeframe is defined as at least two working days before every meeting as per the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

⁹⁸ This indicator is based on the published results of the Council’s Residents Monitoring Survey (discussed in ‘*Leadership and culture*’).

percentages are compared with the set 'target' and marked as either 'Met' or 'Not met' in relation to the target.

The Annual Report also allows viewers to track the Council's performance over the preceding years by providing results for the above indicators as published in annual reports for 2022/23 and 2021/22. Importantly, the Annual Report includes analysis of the data indicating that the reporting informed the Council's decisions on its LGOIMA performance.

While we commend the Council for setting targets for its LGOIMA performance, we are concerned that the Council's performance target for the timeliness of its responses to LGOIMA requests is set at '95 percent on time (meeting the statutory deadline for making a decision on a request i.e. 20 working day or extension date)'. This target should be changed to 100 percent, because compliance with the maximum 20 working day statutory timeframe is a legal requirement under the LGOIMA.

Action point

Amend the performance target for LGOIMA requests to 100 percent timeliness.

Internal reporting on LGOIMA performance

In addition to external reporting of its LGOIMA performance, the Council provides quarterly reports to its senior leaders which include statistics on the timeliness of the Council's responses to LGOIMA requests.

We were pleased to find that the sample reporting provided by the Council included some useful commentary on how the results for the relevant quarter compare with the set performance target for timeliness. For example, the reported decrease in timeliness for the third quarter of the 2024 financial year, was accompanied by the following explanation:

There was an increase in LGOIMA requests and a significant volume of complaints and correspondence related to the Long Term Plan and District Plan processes over the last quarter; this coupled with resource challenges [high staff turnover and staff absences] contributed to the result.

It is positive that the reporting, while currently only limited to timeliness, appears to inform the Council's decisions around resourcing of its LGOIMA function, enabling the Council to swiftly respond to challenges. The commentary for the fourth quarter of the 2024 financial year outlined the Council's addressing of the previous quarter's decrease in timeliness as '[s]taff resource has been increased' and 'people are now in role'. As a result of the added support, the timeliness of the Council's responses to LGOIMA requests increased from 90 percent in the third quarter of the 2024 financial year to 94 percent in the fourth quarter.

The Council's reports on its LGOIMA performance are compiled using the reporting function within the Council's LGOIMA workflow tool, *Jira*, which includes LGOIMA requests processed by the Council's OI team. The Council also maintains a register of LGOIMA requests in an Excel document, which may provide a back-up to *Jira*, and is generally an effective way to keep track of LGOIMA requests and responses to them.

We commend the Council for maintaining the above systems as they provide strong foundations for ensuring adequate monitoring of the Council's LGOIMA performance to help inform decisions on resourcing the organisation's LGOIMA function. However, we have identified some areas where these systems can be improved.

We note that *Jira* mostly includes LGOIMA requests processed by the Council's OI team. Requests processed by business units outside the OI team are typically not logged into *Jira*, unless they come to business units through the OI team⁹⁹ or the business unit reaches out to the OI team for assistance in handling their request.

Similarly, requests for official information handled by the Council's Media team are not included in *Jira*; neither are they included in the Council's LGOIMA statistics and reporting. A separate, '*Media register*', is maintained by the Media team which records basic information about a media request such as the date of receipt, requester and a brief outline of the subject matter.¹⁰⁰

We suggest, therefore, that the Council consider ways of collecting and reporting data on all official information requests managed by business units outside of the OI team (including the Media team). This should include '*business as usual*' information requests and/or those processed without the OI team's involvement.

Collecting data on all official information requests, regardless of the avenue through which they were submitted, their risk levels, or how quickly they are processed, will provide a more complete picture of the Council's LGOIMA performance to help adequately inform planning, resourcing and capability building decisions. In addition, including this data in external reporting will paint a truer picture to the public of how much work the Council is doing to provide official information to requesters.

In addition, having reviewed sample LGOIMA reporting provided by the Council, we note that the data included in the reports is focused on compliance with the maximum statutory timeframe under the LGOIMA. While timeliness is important as a quantitative indicator, at times, undue focus on timeliness may incentivise swift, but poor quality decisions. The Council may wish to collect additional data and include this analysis in reporting to senior leaders. Analysis of this data can promote ongoing improvement of LGOIMA response quality, increase the efficiency of the LGOIMA process, and identify business areas within the organisation where additional training and/or other support is required.

We encourage the Council to collect and report LGOIMA data including (but not limited to) the following:

- the type of request (Part 2, 3 or 4 of the LGOIMA);

⁹⁹ The Council's template emails titled '*Transfer to [business unit]*' and '*Follow up with [business unit]*' prescribe a process whereby the OI team is able to transfer '*low risk*' requests to business units outside the OI team for processing. The business units are then asked to provide updates to the OI team advising the latter of the progress of the transferred request.

¹⁰⁰ In addition to requests for official information, the Media register also includes requests for comment which are not subject to the LGOIMA.

- the number, length and reason for extensions;
- the outcome of the request (granted in full, granted in part, refused in full);
- the reason for delays;
- whether any elected member was consulted or notified of the decision.

To help promote the efficiency of the LGOIMA process, monitoring reasons for extensions (among other indicators) may help ensure that these are used correctly. This is particularly important for the Council due to the reasonably high and increasing number of extensions (discussed in [‘Extensions’](#)).

In relation to monitoring the quality of the Council’s responses to LGOIMA requests, the Council may wish to conduct regular internal audits of its LGOIMA practices by, for example, reviewing a random sample of closed LGOIMA files and reporting the outcome of the review to senior leadership. Assessing the quality of LGOIMA responses in closed files may encompass factors such as a robust and adequately documented decision making process and the inclusion of contextual information to assist requesters.

Action points

Include all information requests processed by business units outside of the OI team (including the Media team) into the Council’s statistical reporting of its LGOIMA performance.

Consider collecting more comprehensive data on LGOIMA request handling so that opportunities for performance improvement can be identified, and include this in reporting to senior leaders.

Consider implementing a practice of conducting quality assurance of a sample of completed LGOIMA requests and reporting outcomes to senior leaders.

Sharing official information learning and experience

We were pleased to find that, to help maintain up-to-date knowledge of best LGOIMA practice, the Council’s staff participate in initiatives to help share and discuss this practice externally, that is, with other local government agencies in the country.

During interviews held by our investigators, one interviewee said that members of the Council’s Democracy Services team are actively involved in an online discussion group of governance and democracy services specialists from other councils. The interviewee described this practice as positive and said that a lot of useful knowledge is shared through this network.

Our investigators were also told by another interviewee that the Council maintains a ‘community of practice’ with Auckland City Council and Christchurch City Council. Within this initiative, participants conduct quarterly forums to discuss issues and challenges faced by large councils in New Zealand.

These are positive practices, and we encourage the Council to ensure that learnings obtained by the Council's LGOIMA specialists through the above networks are shared with other staff throughout the Council.

Wide dissemination of LGOIMA knowledge is particularly important in the context of the mixed LGOIMA processing model currently operated by the Council. For the model to operate efficiently, LGOIMA knowledge (including any changes to guidance and/or best practice) should be available to all staff involved in the LGOIMA process.

This measure should be promoted and supported by the senior leaders' increased messaging to staff on the importance of the LGOIMA, and openness and transparency more broadly (discussed in '[Internal messaging and culture](#)'). This will help generate discussion of various LGOIMA issues throughout the organisation, promote ongoing learning among staff and further signal the Council's expressed commitment to continued improvement of its LGOIMA practices.

Action point

Implement processes whereby learnings obtained by the Council's LGOIMA specialists is disseminated more widely throughout the organisation to reach all staff involved in the LGOIMA process.