

Local Authority Elections 2025

Pre-Election Protocols for Candidates

On Saturday 11 October 2025, the Northland region will elect a new regional council. These protocols have been created to provide guidance on the use of council resources in the pre-election period for all candidates (whether current elected members or not).

Key dates

- Friday 11 July 2025 – Pre-election period begins (three months prior to election day)
- Friday 4 July 2025 – Nominations open
- Friday 1 August 2025 – Nominations close at 12 noon
- Tuesday 9 September to Monday 22 September 2025 – Voting documents delivered to households (voting starts)
- Saturday 11 October 2025 – Voting closes at 12 noon, progress and preliminary results available as soon as practicable after close of voting.
- Saturday 11 October to Tuesday 28 October 2025 – Period between election day and swearing in of new council.

Pre-election period

All candidates are impacted by the three month 'pre-election period'. This period is the subject of the good practice advice 'Communications in the pre-election period' (Included as **Attachment One**) issued by the Local Government New Zealand and Taituarā and peer reviewed by legal advisors from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) and the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA).

Candidates are encouraged to be familiar with this document, to ensure their own conduct during the pre-election period does not result in the guidelines being breached (or being perceived as having been breached). Particularly relevant sections are as follows:

Principle 1 – The operation of local authorities continues during the pre-election period. Elected members continue to have the right to govern and make decisions during the pre-election period.

There is no legal requirement that local authorities avoid making decisions in the pre-election period. Routine business must continue. However, it is best practice, where practicable, to make any significant decisions before the pre-election period commences.

Principle 3 – Local authorities must not promote, or be perceived to promote, the prospects of any candidate, especially a sitting member. Using council resources for re-election of sitting members is unacceptable and possibly unlawful.

Promoting the re-election prospects of a candidate, directly or indirectly, advertently or inadvertently, is not the role of a local authority and could result in an election result being overturned.

An elected member standing for office may not use council resources of any kind for campaigning purposes. This includes, but is not limited to council's logo and branding, all council marketing and communication channels (including social media), council-supplied business cards, stationery, computers, email, mobile phones, photocopiers, cars, council venues (other than those available for hire to the general public) and council's human resources.

Other uses of council communications facilities during a pre-election period may also be unacceptable. For example, allowing members access to council resources to communicate with constituents, even in their official capacities as members, could create a perception that council is helping sitting members to promote their re-election prospects over other candidates.

Other important factors to consider during the pre-election period:

Communications.

Ceasing all council communications during a pre-election period is not possible. Statutory council business must continue. However, care must be taken to avoid the perception, and the consequent risk of electoral irregularity. Two examples are:

- Journalistic use of photographic material or information that may raise the profile of a member in the electorate should be discontinued during the pre-election period; and
- Access to council resources for members to issue media releases, in their capacities as official spokespersons, should be limited to what is strictly necessary to communicate statutory council business.

As portfolio spokespeople (for example transport, environment, economic development), councillors often comment through media releases or in other ways on relevant issues of public interest.

However, to comply with best practice, from the beginning of the pre-election period, councillors must not be quoted in media releases or other council communications unless it is for a statutory purpose. Councillor attendance at public events (for example, Enviroschools) and tools such as regional newsletters, publications, the Chair's Report (other than basic factual information) or use of photographic material or information that may raise the profile of a member in the electorate will be suspended during the pre-election period.

Some mandatory and routine statutory council business can continue, such as the Annual Report, which would include information (including photos) about current councillors.

Council staff

Council staff should remain politically neutral at all times in their dealings with elected members and the public in general. This is even more important in the pre-election period when there is a heightened interest in council. Council staff will be briefed prior to the pre-election period to ensure they are familiar with the requirement for both councillors and staff.

It is not appropriate or acceptable for staff to align themselves to, or demonstrably support, a candidate in their capacity as an NRC employee. This could result in allegations of bias by council.

Social Media

A big part of being a councillor is engaging with the community – social media is a useful tool for this. However, during the election period, the following guidelines for candidates apply to your interactions with council social media channels.

Commenting on and sharing council posts

- Northland Regional Council (NRC) web and social media channels may not be used by anyone (candidates or members of the public) for campaigning or electioneering. These channels include (but are not limited to) Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube. Any such comments will be deleted immediately.
- Any post (positive or negative) made on NRC social media by an individual specifically relating to his or her own (or someone else's) nomination, intention to run for council or election campaign, will be removed immediately.
- Candidates may engage with NRC social media posts (react, share or comment), provided their engagement is not deemed to be campaigning. Any such activity will be removed immediately. This also applies when sharing NRC content to a candidate's own social media. You may be asked to remove this where it breaches protocol. Refer to the Taituarā guide, "Communications in the pre-election period" for examples.
- Resources that have already been produced and made available publicly through NRC digital channels may be shared to educate or inform people about what council does. However, we will not supply original versions of these assets to candidates.

Working with staff

- No candidate should approach NRC staff (in their capacity as a staff member) for advice or support with the set up or management of their social media accounts.
- Candidates must not actively solicit social media sharing, posting or any other form of endorsement from staff (in their capacity as a staff member). Council staff must observe political neutrality when performing their duties as an employee of council.

NRC will:

- Monitor all candidate pages during the pre-election and election period.
- Remain neutral during the election process but will encourage people to stand for election and encourage the general public to vote in the elections. These posts will not be associated with any candidates.

Requests for information

All requests for information should be lodged as official information requests (copied into the relevant Group Manager) and will be treated as such.