



**Matamata-Piako**



te kaunihera ā-rohe o  
**matamata-piako**  
district council

Change is coming to how  
councils work

# Central government is moving fast on local government reform

It wants fewer councils and has made it clear that regional councils, like Waikato Regional Council, will not continue in their current form after 2028.

City and district councils, like us, have until 9 August 2026 to respond with a proposal for how local government could be reorganised. If we don't, central government will decide for us.

This matters. It will affect who makes decisions, how our communities are represented, and how services are delivered.

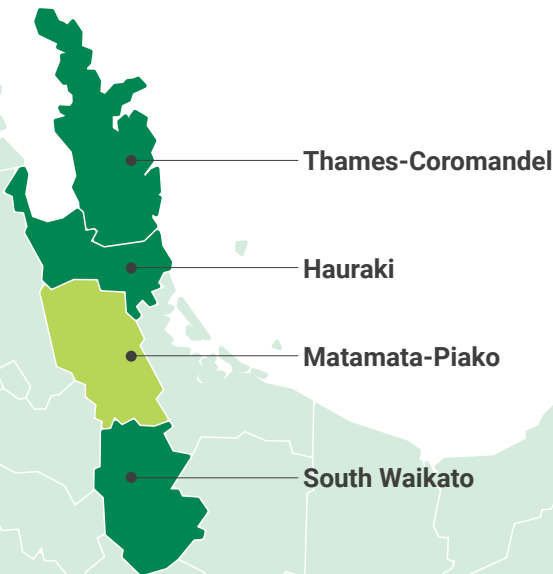
We've been given a very short timeframe. So we are focusing on the options that are most likely to meet the Government's criteria.

But we also want to be clear about what is at stake for Matamata-Piako.

For us, the key issues are local voice, and local decision making, and the risk of our ratepayers carrying costs that do not reflect our district.

## Option 1: Eastern Waikato unitary authority

Preferred



## Option 2: Waikato-wide unitary authority



5 May 2026

Central government opens the Head Start pathway

15 June 2026

Our community survey opens

30 June 2026

Our community survey closes

9 Aug 2026

Councils submit their proposals

May 2027

Central government decides on unitary authorities

7 Nov 2026

General election

Sep 2026

Central government agreement in principle

## Option one: Eastern Waikato unitary authority

Preferred

A smaller unitary authority that could be made up of Matamata-Piako and any or all of the following neighbouring districts: Hauraki, South Waikato, and Thames-Coromandel.

These are areas like ours, with rural and provincial communities and shared interests.

We already work together.

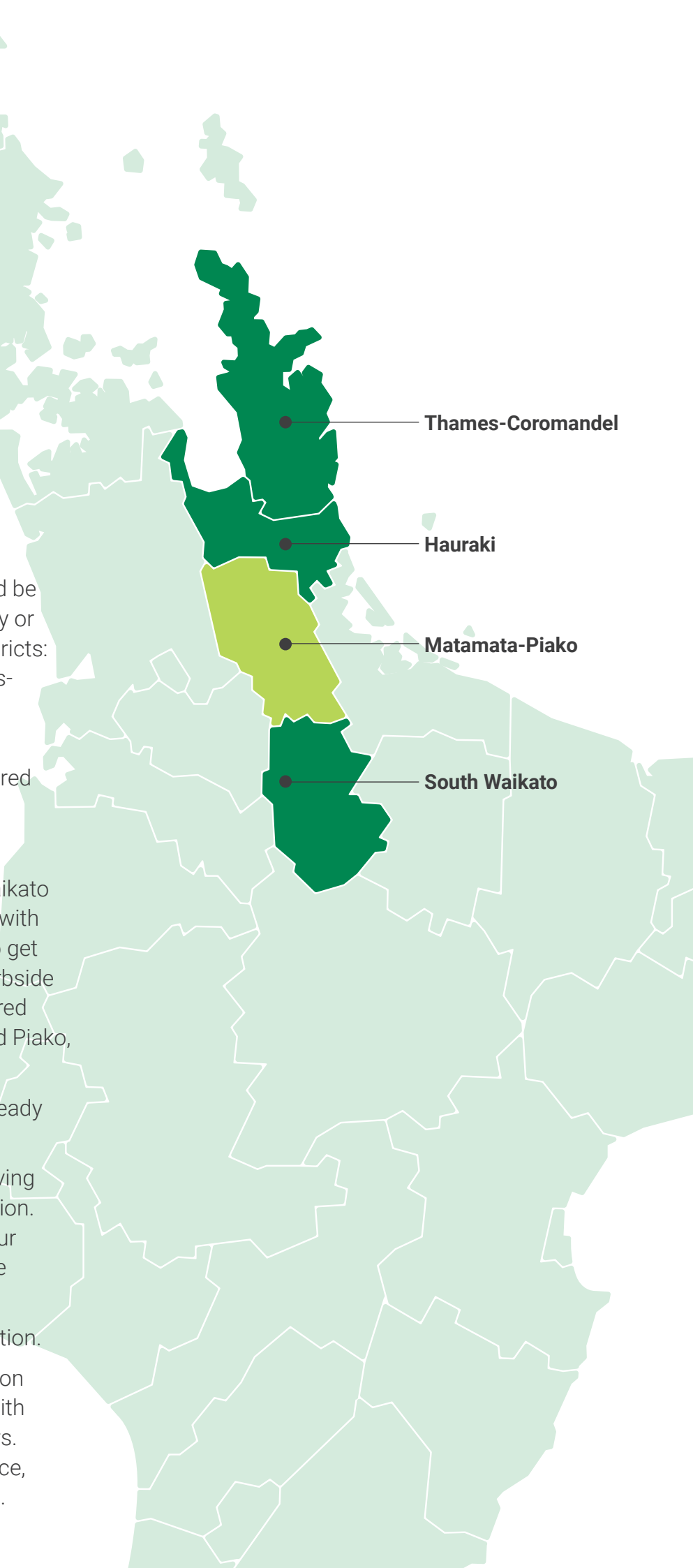
We work with Hauraki and South Waikato on civil defence. We have partnered with Hauraki and Thames-Coromandel to get better outcomes for services like kerbside collection. We also work across shared river catchments like the Waihou and Piako, and into the Hauraki Gulf.

This option builds on the way we already work together.

It allows shared services without giving up local voice or elected representation. It keeps decision making closer to our communities while still delivering the benefits of working together.

At this stage, this is our preferred option.

Our preference is to also keep decision making close to our communities, with our own Mayor and elected members. This is to maintain a strong local voice, representation, and decision making.



## Option two: Waikato-wide unitary authority

A single council covering the whole Waikato region, including Hamilton City and other districts.

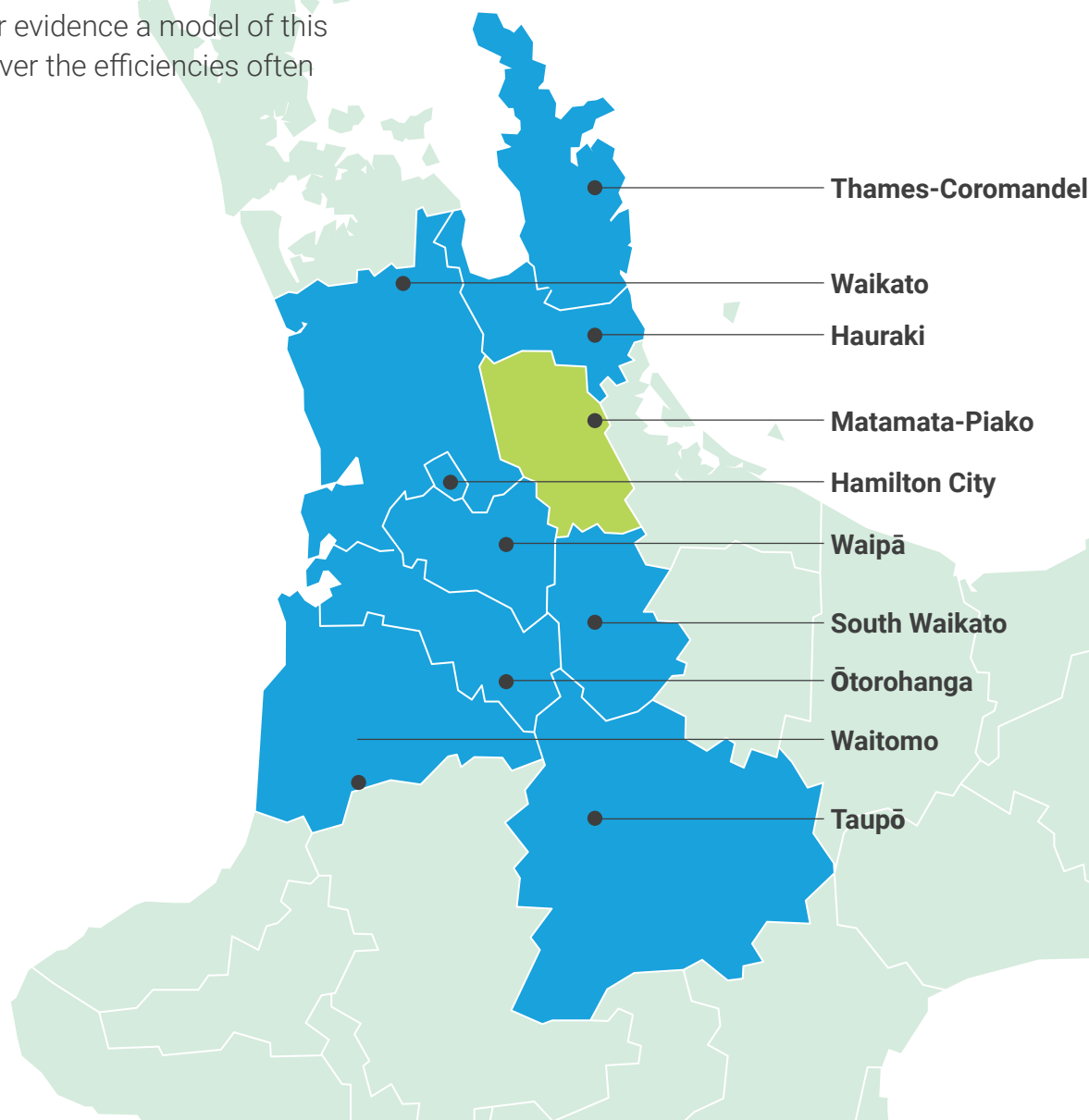
This would mean one council and potentially one mayor for the whole region.

The main argument for this model is scale. In theory, it could support region-wide planning, shared services, and stronger organisational capability.

But the trade-offs are significant.

At this scale, local voice is at risk. Decisions would be made further away from our communities, and large urban centres could outweigh the needs of smaller rural districts like ours.

There is no clear evidence a model of this scale would deliver the efficiencies often expected.



# Our position

We are in a difficult position. We'd prefer to stay as we are. But that is not an option.

We have been given a short timeframe and a clear direction from Government. If we do not put forward an option, we risk being included in a structure that does not represent our community.

So we are trying to steer the best possible outcome for Matamata-Piako.

At this stage, we think Eastern Waikato is the best way to:

- keep decisions closer to home
- protect local voice and representation
- keep working with councils that are similar to ours and we already work well with
- reflect shared catchments, communities of interest, and common goals

This is an important discussion. We want to make sure we hear clearly from you, before we decide which proposal to put forward to Central Government.

## Which option do you prefer, and why?

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Where do you live?

- Matamata ward       Morrinsville ward       Te Aroha ward       Outside the district

### Do you have a preferred option?

Option 1: Eastern Waikato unitary authority

Option 2: Waikato-wide unitary authority

Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

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**Do you have any feedback on any of these options?** \_\_\_\_\_

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# Questions and answers

**What is local government reform?** Central government is changing how local government is structured across New Zealand. It wants fewer councils, and it's asking groups of councils to consider joining together to form larger councils that do both local and regional work.

**What is a unitary authority?** A single council that does the work of both a district council and a regional council. It looks after local services like roads, parks, pools, libraries, and rubbish collection, alongside the wider work currently done by the regional council, like flood protection and environmental management.

**What is the Head Start process?** Head Start is central government's pathway for councils to put forward their own preferred proposal before wider reform begins. The deadline is 9 August 2026.

**Has Matamata-Piako made any decisions?** No. We're sharing our current thinking and asking what matters most to you. Your feedback helps shape what we put forward to central government.

**Why is this happening now?** Central government has set a short timeframe. Councils have until 9 August 2026 to put forward a proposal. We'd rather take part in that conversation than have a structure decided for us.

**Can we stay as we are?** Remaining as we are is not a realistic option under the current direction from central government. If we don't put forward a proposal, central government decides what happens through the Backstop process.

**What happens if we don't put forward a proposal?** Central government decides through a process called the Backstop. The details are still being worked through, but change is expected regardless.

**Why hasn't financial analysis been done?** The timeframe central government has set does not allow for detailed financial modelling of every option before the proposal is due. That work happens once a preferred option is confirmed. We expect to begin it later this year.

**When would any changes happen?** Central government will make its decision on unitary authorities in May 2027. A general election is due in November 2026, which could affect the direction reform takes.

**What does this mean for our services right now?** Nothing changes for now. Roads, rubbish collection, pools, libraries, and the rest of our services carry on as usual while this process runs.

**Will communities still have a local voice?** Protecting local voice is one of the things central government will weigh up when it assesses proposals, and it's one of the things we most want to hear from you about.

**What if there's a change in government?** A general election is due in November 2026. A change in government could affect the direction of reform. For now, we're working with the direction we have.

**How does this connect to the Long Term Plan?** Our confirmed Vision and Community Outcomes will guide both the Head Start proposal and the next Long Term Plan, which takes effect from mid-2027. The community will have another opportunity to provide feedback on the Long Term Plan before it's finalised.