

Council Agenda 5 November 2025

Meeting will be held at Council Chambers, Level 2 Philip Laing House, Rattray Street, Dunedin and live streamed at [ORC YouTube Channel](#)



Members:

Cr Hilary Calvert (Chair)
Cr Kevin Malcolm (Deputy Chair)
Cr Robbie Byars
Cr Chanel Gardner
Cr Neil Gillespie
Cr Matt Hollyer
Cr Gary Kelliher
Cr Michael Laws
Cr Andrew Noone
Cr Gretchen Robertson
Cr Alan Somerville
Cr Kate Wilson

Senior Officer: Richard Saunders, Chief Executive
Meeting Support: Kylie Darragh, Governance Support Officer

05 November 2025 10:30 AM

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1. WELCOME	
2. APOLOGIES	
3. CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA The agenda to be confirmed as published.	
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Members are reminded of the need to stand aside from decision-making when a conflict arises between their role as an elected representative and any private or other external interest they might have.	
5. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES Confirming the minutes of the Council meeting of 29 October 2025.	3
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7. NOTICES OF MOTION

No notices of motion had been submitted at the time of publishing.

8. CLOSURE



Council MINUTES

Minutes of the inaugural meeting for the 2025-2028 triennium of the Otago Regional Council held in the Council Chamber, Level 2 Philip Laing House, 144 Rattray Street, Dunedin on Wednesday 29 October 2025, commencing at 10:00 AM.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xXK_Af_Mk7A?si=uOK2KAaIGJ4cQXgC

PRESENT

Cr Robbie Byars
Cr Hilary Calvert
Cr Chanel Gardner
Cr Neil Gillespie
Cr Matt Hollyer
Cr Gretchen Robertson
Cr Gary Kelliher
Cr Michael Laws
Cr Kevin Malcolm
Cr Andrew Noone
Cr Alan Somerville
Cr Kate Wilson

1. WELCOME

Chief Executive Richard Saunders opened with a karakia and welcomed Councillors-Elect, members of the public and staff to the inaugural meeting at 10:00 am. Staff present included Anita Dawe (GM Regional Planning and Transport), Nick Donnelly (GM Finance), Tom Dyer (GM Manager Science and Resilience), Joanna Gilroy (GM Environmental Delivery), Tami Sargeant (GM People and Corporate), Amanda Vercoe (GM Strategy and Customer, Deputy CE), Kylie Darragh (Governance Support), Cara Jordan (Governance Support), Dianne Railton (Team Lead Governance), Deb Stuut (Manager Customer and Governance), Andrea Howard (Chief Advisor to the CE and Chair) and Simon Anderson (Partner, Ross Dowling Lawyers).

2. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for this meeting.

3. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1. Declaration of Office by Councillors

[YouTube 20:00] Chief Executive Richard Saunders called for each Councillor-Elect to read and sign the declaration which he then witnessed. After all declarations were attested to and signed, Mr Saunders congratulated the Councillors and welcomed them to the Otago Regional Council.

3.2. Voting System for electing the Chair and Deputy Chair

[Youtube 33:36] This report informed Councillors of the two voting options for the election of the chairperson, and deputy chairperson, as defined by Schedule 7, Clause 25 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act).

Resolution CM25-215: Cr Laws Moved, Cr Somerville Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) **Resolves** a voting option for the election or appointment of chairperson and deputy chairperson, defined by the Local Government Act 2002, as Voting system A

MOTION CARRIED

Resolution CM25-216: Cr Laws Moved, Cr Somerville Seconded

That the Council:

- 2) **Agrees** that in the event of a tie under voting system A, the candidate to be excluded from the next round of voting shall be resolved by lot as described in paragraph 5 of the report.

MOTION CARRIED

3.3. Election of Chairperson

[YouTube 38:55] Once the voting procedure was determined, the Chief Executive then called for nominations for chairperson.

Cr Laws nominated Cr Calvert for Chairperson, and Cr Noone seconded. There was an opportunity for Councillors to ask questions of Cr Calvert. Cr Laws then spoke to the nomination of Cr Calvert.

Resolution CM25-217 Cr Laws Moved, Cr Noone Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) **Appoints** Cr Hilary Calvert as Chairperson.

MOTION CARRIED

Mr Saunders announced Cr Calvert as Chairperson of the Otago Regional Council. Cr Calvert attested to and signed the Chairperson's declaration which was witnessed by Chief Executive Richard Saunders. Chairperson Calvert then took the Chair.

At 10:22 am Cr Calvert Moved, Cr Wilson Seconded

That Council adjourn until 10:45 am.

MOTION CARRIED

3.4. Election of Deputy Chairperson

[YouTube 1:04:00] Cr Laws nominated Cr Malcolm as Deputy Chair, Cr Noone seconded. Cr Malcolm spoke to Council about his nomination. There was an opportunity for Councillors to ask Cr Malcolm questions. Cr Laws spoke to the nomination of Cr Malcolm.

Resolution CM25-218: Cr Laws Moved, Cr Noone Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) *Appoints* Cr Kevin Malcolm as Deputy Chair of Otago Regional Council.**

MOTION CARRIED

Cr Calvert announced Cr Malcolm as Deputy Chairperson for Otago Regional Council.

Cr Laws left the meeting at 11:35am.

Cr Laws returned to the meeting at 11:39am.

3.5. Councillor Legal Briefing

[YouTube 1:12:38] The purpose of this report was to provide the Council with a summary of the legislative requirements that the Otago Regional Councillors need to be aware of and understand as elected members of the council. Simon Anderson (Partner, Ross Dowling Lawyers) was available to respond to questions on the report.

Resolution CM25-219: Cr Kelliher Moved, Cr Malcolm Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) *Thanks, Mr Anderson, for his informative briefing and notes this report and the information contained in the attached Summary of legislation affecting Councillors.***

MOTION CARRIED

3.6. Meetings for 2025

[YouTube 2:01:30] This report set out meeting dates for the remainder of 2025. The Chief Executive was available to respond to questions on the report.

Resolution CM25-220: Cr Kelliher Moved, Cr Byars Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) *Notes* this report.**
- 2) *Agrees* that Council meetings will take place on 5 November and 26 November 2026.**
- 3) *Notes* that a Council meeting schedule for 2026 will be presented to the 26 November Council meeting for consideration and adoption.**

MOTION CARRIED

4. INTRODUCTION FROM COUNCILLORS

[YouTube 2:09:12] There was an opportunity for Councillors to introduce themselves.

Resolution CM25-221: Cr Laws Moved; Cr Malcolm Seconded

That the Council:

- 1) *Formally* acknowledges the service of former councillors Elliot Weir, Lloyd McCall and Tim Mephram for the 2022-2025 triennium to the Otago Regional Council.**

MOTION CARRIED

5. CLOSURE

There was no further business, and the Chief Executive gave a closing karakia and Chair Calvert declared the meeting closed at 12:06 pm.

Chair

Date

DRAFT

6.2. Councillor Remuneration Pool Allocation

Prepared for:	Council
Report No.	GOV2604
Activity:	Governance Report
Author:	Amanda Vercoe (General Manager Strategy and Customer), Deb Stuut (Customer Experience Manager)
Endorsed by:	Amanda Vercoe (General Manager Strategy and Customer)
Date:	5 November 2025

PURPOSE

- [1] To consider allocation of the ORC councillors remuneration pool, as provided for by the Remuneration Authority's Determination. To also consider the updated allowances and expenses policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- [2] The Remuneration Authority sets a remuneration framework via legislation for elected members in individual local authorities, and also sets the rules for reimbursement of costs met by members in undertaking their duties. This is updated annually.
- [3] Councils then adopt their own remuneration model and allowances and expenses policies within the legislated framework.
- [4] A proposed remuneration model for the remainder of 2025 and 2026 is attached. This proposes the Deputy Chair receives \$105,006 and remaining councillors receive \$75,847 per annum. An updated expenses and allowances policy is also attached for adoption by the new Council.
- [5] Once agreed, the worksheet will be sent to the Remuneration Authority for review and including in their next determination. No updated remuneration rates can be paid until the gazetting has been done (if submitted before 14 November 2025, this should be done prior to Christmas).
- [6] Regardless of the determination date, all remuneration rates for positions decided by councils to be positions with additional responsibility will be backdated to take effect the day after appointments were made.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council:

- 1) **Notes** this report.
- 2) **Notes** the Chair’s remuneration set by Remuneration Authority is \$173,309.
- 3) **Notes** the ORC’s governance remuneration pool is set at \$863,476 with the minimum councillor remuneration at \$61,677.
- 4) **Recommends** allocating the governance remuneration pool using the attached spreadsheet.
- 5) **Requests** the Chief Executive to send the attached spreadsheet to the Remuneration Authority by 14 November 2025, to be included in the Authority’s pre-Christmas amending determination.
- 6) **Adopts** the updated allowances and expenses policy, with or without changes.

BACKGROUND

- [7] The Remuneration Authority sets remuneration for elected positions in individual local authorities, and also sets the rules for reimbursement of costs met by members in undertaking their duties.
- [8] This is done through setting the remuneration rate for the Chair, setting a minimum remuneration rate for councillors, and allocating a governance remuneration pool for each Council. The pool excludes the Chair’s remuneration and must be fully allocated.
- [9] On the day after the day the official results for Council are declared, all elected councillors are paid the councillor minimum allowable remuneration rate.
- [10] Council needs to make decisions about the allocation of its governance remuneration pool and in particular its positions of responsibility and consequential remuneration, and on the base rate remuneration for councillors.
- [11] A link to the 2025 Determination is [here](#) and our figures are outlined below.

Otago Regional Council	
Office	Annual remuneration (\$)
Regional Council Chairperson	173,309
Councillor (minimum allowable remuneration)	61,677
Guidance note	
The governance remuneration pool for the Otago Regional Council is \$863,476. See the explanatory note to this determination for further information about the Remuneration Authority’s methodology when fixing members’ remuneration.	

DISCUSSION

- [12] As per the guidance from the Remuneration Authority, Council may choose to allocate additional remuneration for councillors who take on additional responsibilities (i.e. deputy chair).
- [13] Council can also increase the base payment to councillors.
- [14] A proposed remuneration model for the remainder of 2025 and 2026 is attached. This proposes the Deputy Chair receives \$105,006 and remaining councillors receive \$75,847 per annum.
- [15] An updated expenses and allowances policy is also attached for adoption by the new Council. The only change from the policy adopted in July 2025 is more detail has been included for consideration on how the new home security allowance is administered. This is based on an updated requirement for the policy to specify what happens if the elected member leaves their position (office) or is not re-elected, or if the elected member changes their primary place of residence.

OPTIONS

- [16] To consider how to allocate the full governance remuneration pool.
- [17] To consider the updated allowances and expenses policy.

CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic Framework and Policy Considerations

- [18] Not applicable.

Financial Considerations

- [19] Remuneration for elected members is set by the Remuneration Authority, and the rates are budgeted for in the ORC's annual budget.

Significance and Engagement

- [20] Not applicable.

Legislative and Risk Considerations

- [21] The Local Government Act 2002 provides for the Remuneration Authority to set the remuneration and expenses for Mayors, Regional Council Chairs, and other elected members on local authorities.

Climate Change Considerations

- [22] Not applicable.

Communications Considerations

- [23] Staff will let councillors know once the Authority's Determination has been finalised.

NEXT STEPS

- [24] Staff will send the approved spreadsheet to the Remuneration Authority to be included in the amending determination.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Copy of 251105 remuneration councillors dollar amounts from day after election [**6.2.1** - 3 pages]
2. Expenses Reimbursement and Allowances Policy DRAFT [**6.2.2** - 3 pages]

**Policy for Calculating and Allocating the Governance Remuneration Pool in the Proposal Covering Councillors (Elected Members)
Using DOLLAR Amounts**

The **DOLLAR** worksheet (see tab below) or the **RATIOS** worksheet must be used for submitting proposals to the Remuneration Authority on councillors remuneration following the 2025 local elections.

- Note:**
- the pool includes the remuneration for the councillor with no additional responsibilities position and all positions with additional responsibility such as deputy mayor, deputy regional council chair, committee chair, deputy committee chair, etc.
 - the pool does not include the remuneration of mayors, regional council chairs, local boards members or community board members.
 - the proposal must fully allocate the entire pool.
 - the remuneration proposed for a councillor with no additional responsibilities CANNOT be set below the prescribed councillor minimum allowable remuneration rate.
 - the Local Government Members (2025/26) Determination 2025 contains the remuneration pools and councillors minimum allowable remuneration rates for each council that applies from the 2025 election of members. The determination can be found on the Authority's website and on the New Zealand Legislation website.
 - the proposed new remuneration rate for a councillor with no additional responsibilities is effective on and from the day after the date on which the official result of 2025 election of members for the council is declared **or** in the case of the Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairperson(s) the day after the date of the Mayor's appointment using their powers under section 41A(3) of the Local Government Act 2002.
 - the proposed new remuneration rates for positions with additional responsibility, other than appointment of the Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairperson(s) positions made by the Mayor using their powers under section 41A(3) of the Local Government Act 2002, once approved by the Authority, will be effective on and from the day after the date on which the positions were confirmed by council resolution.
 - the council will need to wait until the amending determination containing its new remuneration rates is gazetted before it can pay (backdate) the new remuneration rates for the position(s) of additional responsibility and councillor with no additional responsibility position(s).

Use the **DOLLAR** worksheet to calculate and specify, using dollar amounts, the proposed remuneration for positions with additional responsibilities:

- You can only enter and change data in the cells that are shaded **green**
- Enter the legal name of local authority/council as listed in schedule 2 of the Local Government Act 2002
 - Enter the date on which the official result of the 2025 election for the council was declared under section 86 of the Local Electoral Act 2001
 - Enter the number of elected members (excluding the mayor or regional council chair) on the council
 - Enter the council's governance remuneration pool, as shown in the guidance note for each Council in schedule 3 of the Local Government Members (2025/26) Determination 2025
 - Enter the councillor minimum allowable remuneration that applies, as shown in schedule 3 of the Local Government Members (2025/26) Determination 2025
 - Enter the proposed remuneration for a councillor with no additional responsibilities as decided by the council (note: this figure must be equal to or greater than the councillor minimum allowable remuneration)
 - Enter title of the proposed position(s) with additional responsibilities (ie: the title to be displayed in the amending determination)
 - Enter number of elected members per proposed position with additional responsibilities
 - Enter the date that the position(s) and their proposed remuneration rate(s) were adopted / approved / confirmed /resolved by council **or** the date of appointment of the Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairperson by the Mayor using their powers under section 41A(3) of the Local Government Act 2002
 - Enter amount of proposed additional remuneration for the position
- If you wish to clear a cell shaded in **green** use the Clear Contents command within the Editing group on the Home Tab Ribbon or use the Delete key.
 - You cannot change the information contained in the cells shaded in **blue**.

The worksheet will calculate the proposed annual total remuneration per councillor and confirm that the governance remuneration pool is fully allocated. If the pool is over or under allocated the dollar amounts will need to be adjusted until the balance of pool shows 0 (zero).

Return the completed worksheet together with a copy of the public notice declaring the official result of the local election, a copy of the minutes recording the council's resolution, and a brief description of each position of responsibility to: info@remauthority.govt.nz

Proposed Remuneration for Councillors Following the 2025 Local Elections Using Dollar Amounts



Use this worksheet to calculate the proposed remuneration for positions with additional responsibilities and the proposed remuneration for councillors without additional responsibilities using DOLLAR amounts.
Before completing this worksheet, read the instructions sheet in the tab below for detailed guidance.

1) Enter the legal name of the local authority, as listed in schedule 2 of the Local Government Act 2002:

Otago Regional Council

2) Enter the date on which the official result of the 2025 election was declared for the local authority:

3) Enter the number of elected members (excluding the mayor or regional council chair) on the council:

11

4) Enter local authority's governance remuneration pool as shown in the current local government members determination (\$):

863,476

5) Enter councillor minimum allowable remuneration as shown in the current determination (\$):

61,677

6) Enter proposed remuneration for a councillor with no additional responsibility (\$):

61,677

7) Enter title of proposed position with additional responsibilities (ie: the title that will be displayed in the amending determination)	8) Enter number of members per position	9) Enter date of appointment or local authority's resolution	Effective Date*	Councillor with no additional responsibilities (\$)	10) Enter proposed additional remuneration (\$)	Proposed annual total remuneration per councillor (\$)	Total (\$)
Deputy Chair	1	5 November 2025	6 November 2025	61,677	43,329	105,006	105,006
Portfolio Lead	10	5 November 2025	6 November 2025	61,677	14,170	75,847	758,470
Councillor with no additional responsibilities	0		1 January 1900	61,677	n/a	61,677	0

Grand total (\$):

863,476

Balance of pool (\$):

0

* = For positions with additional responsibilities the effective date is the day after the date of either the local authority's resolution or the date of appointment of the Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairperson by the Mayor using their powers under section 41(3) of the Local Government Act 2002, and for councillors with no additional responsibility the effective date is on and from the day after the date on which the official result of 2025 election of members for the council is declared.

A brief description must be provided for each position of responsibility ie: specify the additional responsibilities over and above the councillor with no additional responsibilities role - covering duties, delegations, deputising and reporting obligations and the extra time involved in carrying out the additional responsibilities.

Return this completed worksheet together with a copy of the public notice declaring the official result of the local election, a copy of the minutes recording the council's resolution, and a brief description of each position of responsibility to: info@remauthority.govt.nz

Proposed Remuneration for Councillors Following the 2025 Local Elections Using Dollar Amounts

Example

Use this worksheet to calculate the proposed remuneration for positions with additional responsibilities and the proposed remuneration for councillors without additional responsibilities using DOLLAR amounts.

Before completing this worksheet, read the instructions sheet in the tab below for detailed guidance.

1) Enter the legal name of local authority, as listed in schedule 2 of the Local Government Act 2002:

Belmont Hills County Council

2) Enter the date on which the official result of the 2025 election was declared for the local authority:

13 October 2025

3) Enter the number of elected members (excluding the mayor or regional council chair) on the council:

7

4) Enter local authority's governance remuneration pool as shown in the current local government members determination (\$):

300,000

5) Enter councillor minimum allowable remuneration as shown in the current determination (\$):

32,000

6) Enter proposed remuneration for a councillor with no additional responsibility (\$):

35,000

7) Enter title of proposed position with additional responsibilities (ie: the title that will be displayed in the amending determination)	8) Enter number of members per position	9) Enter date of appointment or local authority's resolution	Effective Date*	Councillor with no additional responsibilities (\$)	10) Enter proposed additional remuneration (\$)	Proposed annual total remuneration per councillor (\$)	Total (\$)
Deputy Mayor	1	21 October 2025	22 October 2025	35,000	25,000	60,000	60,000
Committee A Chairperson	1	25 October 2025	26 October 2025	35,000	10,000	45,000	45,000
Committee B Chairperson	1	30 October 2025	31 October 2025	35,000	10,000	45,000	45,000
Committee A Deputy Chairperson	1	1 November 2025	2 November 2025	35,000	5,000	40,000	40,000
Committee B Deputy Chairperson	1	1 November 2025	2 November 2025	35,000	5,000	40,000	40,000
Councillor with no additional responsibilities	2		14 October 2025	35,000	n/a	35,000	70,000

Grand total (\$):

300,000

* = For positions with additional responsibilities the effective date is the day after the date of either the local authority's resolution or the date of appointment of the Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairperson by the Mayor using their powers under section 41(3) of the Local Government Act 2002, and for councillors with no additional responsibility the effective date is on and from the day after the date on which the official result of 2025 election of members for the council is declared.

Balance of pool (\$):

0

A brief description must be provided for each position of responsibility ie: specify the additional responsibilities over and above the councillor with no additional responsibilities role - covering duties, delegations, deputising and reporting obligations and the extra time involved in carrying out the additional responsibilities.

Return this completed worksheet together with a copy of the public notice declaring the official result of the local election, a copy of the minutes recording the council's resolution, and a brief description of each position of responsibility to: info@remauthority.govt.nz



Expenses, Reimbursements and Allowances Policy November 2025

The following is the expenses regime for elected members of the Otago Regional Council.

Principles

- Reimbursement of expenses incurred is available where required by virtue of membership for Council and Committee meetings, workshops, consent hearings, Council approved representation and Council organised events, and Chair-approved constituency activity including invitations from constituency groups, or general Council invitations.
- Reimbursement will be in line with the Remuneration Authority's latest determination – link [here](#).
- Claims are to be made by Councillors in the GO Expense claim system (GO). Expense claims will not be automatically generated by staff. Claims will be approved by the General Manager Finance.
- When an expense claim is submitted in GO the Councillor certifies that the expenses are incurred on legitimate Council business in accordance with Council policy, that the amounts were incurred and paid for by the Councillor and no claim for reimbursement of any sum will be made from another source for these costs.
- Travel shall be shared where practicable. Whereby virtue of private arrangements a Councillor chooses not to utilise Council provided or shared travel, expenses shall not be reimbursed.
- Accommodation and travel arrangements to be made through the Governance Support Officers or an Executive Assistant.
- The basis of reimbursement is actual and reasonable.
- Claims are to be supported by itemised GST invoices / receipts.
- No alcohol can be claimed, with the exception being a Councillor required to do so as a hosting requirement and the expenditure is pre-approved by the Chairperson.
- Costs of spouse/partner accompaniment to be met privately.
- Where Council provided transport is available and not used, mileage allowance is not claimable.
- Claims for travel are to be based on distance from normal residences, or such shorter distance as may be involved.
- Mileage is for travel in a private motor vehicle and by the most direct route that is reasonable in the circumstances.
- Travel time is to be by the quickest form of transport and most direct route that is reasonable in the circumstances.
- Claims should be made as soon as is practicable following the meeting or activity claimed for.



Specific Considerations

Hearing Fees

The amount payable to a Councillor who acts as Chair of a hearing panel is \$130 per hour. The amount payable to a Councillor who is a member of a hearing panel, but not the Chair, is \$104 per hour. Other conditions that apply to these payments including the hearings that apply and time that may be claimed are set out in the determination (Clause 16).

Motor Vehicle Mileage Allowance

The maximum motor vehicle mileage allowance authorised by the determination will be paid for qualifying travel (Clause 11).

Travel Time Allowance

A travel time allowance as authorised by the determination will be paid for qualifying travel (Clause 12).

ICT allowance

- iPads (or a similar device of Council's choice) will be supplied to each Councillor, with an appropriate data connection. Ownership is retained by the Council.
- An appropriate printer will be supplied on request for the use of each Councillor. Ownership is retained by Council. Cost of reasonable consumables for Council use to be met by the Council.
- Where a Councillor prefers to utilise their own equipment, allowances are available as per the determination (Clause 13). This equipment and internet connection must be of a standard acceptable to Council
- A communication allowance of \$550 per annum will be paid as per the determination (Clause 13). This covers:
 - use of personal mobile phone equipment \$150,
 - use of a member's own mobile phone service (call and data costs) \$400.
- The communications allowance will be paid 6-monthly in arrears (in April and October).

Childcare allowance

A childcare allowance as authorised by the determination will be paid when a member is engaged on qualifying Council business. Claims are to be on an actual reimbursement basis and need to be supported by itemised GST invoices / receipts (Clause 14).



Home security system allowance (available post-2025 elections)

Reimbursement will be provided towards a home security system to cover the installation and monitoring at an elected member's primary place of residence within the council's area as authorised by the determination.

If the elected member leaves their position (office) or is not re-elected:

- They will no longer be eligible to claim reimbursement for the \$1000 yearly monitoring fee.

If the elected member changes their primary place of residence:

- Reimbursement of the home security allowance is limited to once per triennium for each elected member.

The payment of this reimbursement allowance, following the completion of an authorised threat and risk assessment, is at the discretion of the council up to the maximum amounts shown in the determination. The local authority must have the Authority's approval before making any reimbursements above the specified maximum amounts (Clause 15).

Incidental Costs

Incidental costs such as accommodation, meals, parking, fares and other such costs incurred on Council business are recoverable on an actual and reasonable basis. Such claims are to be supported by itemised GST invoices / receipts and approved by the Chief Executive or General Manager Finance. As stated in the principles, it is Council's preference that accommodation and travel arrangements are booked by Council through the Governance Support Officers or an Executive Assistant.

Where a Councillor chooses to stay privately when otherwise Council provided accommodation would be provided, an allowance of \$65 per night is payable.

Unforeseen Expenses and Costs

Any unforeseen expenses or costs of any Councillor related to Council activities (except for constituency work which must be approved by the Chairperson) may be reimbursed at the discretion of the Chief Executive or General Manager Finance.

Chairperson

In recognition of the Chairperson's wider Council role, the following additional entitlements are available:

- Provision of a Council vehicle in accordance with the Remuneration Authority's use formula.
- Provision of a cell phone including call and data costs (if this is taken up, the communications allowance outlined above is not applicable).
- Membership of Air New Zealand Koru Club.

6.3. Telecommunications Resilience

Prepared for: Council
Report No. GOV2625
Activity: Governance Report
Author: Richard Saunders (Chief Executive)
Endorsed by: Richard Saunders (Chief Executive)
Date: 5 November 2025

PURPOSE

- [1] To review and approve a letter to Hon Paul Goldsmith, Minister for Media and Communications, regarding the need to improve telecommunications resilience during natural events.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- [2] The recent severe weather events in Otago and Southland have demonstrated the importance of telecommunications resilience and highlighted improvements required to ensure critical services can be re-established more quickly following significant and widespread natural events.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council:

- 1) **Approves** the draft letter to the Minister for Media and Communications highlighting the urgent need to improve the resilience of mobile communications infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

- [3] Telecommunications resilience is the ability of communication networks to withstand and recover from disruptions, maintaining an acceptable level of service during and after a significant event, most frequently a natural weather event.
- [4] During Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023, widespread telecommunications outages were caused primarily by prolonged power cuts and damage to fibre-optic backhaul links, not damage to the mobile towers themselves. The event highlighted significant weaknesses in New Zealand's critical infrastructure and triggered proposals for major resilience improvements.
- [5] In the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle, telecommunication providers, industry bodies, and the government have focused on a range of improvements to address the network's vulnerabilities. These improvements centred on:

- a. Enhanced power resilience
 - b. Network redundancy and diversity
 - c. Improved emergency response
- [6] The government has co-funded upgrades at 44 Rural Connectivity Group sites and 6 hub sites to provide at least 24 hours of battery backup. Further funding has been repurposed to increase the resilience of another 200–250 sites to a minimum of 24 hours of operation.

DISCUSSION

- [7] In late October 2025, a severe spring storm struck Otago and Southland, bringing destructive winds of up to 150 km/h, heavy rain, and periods of snow. The event caused widespread infrastructure failure across the lower South Island, with more than 25 000 homes losing power, some for several days. States of emergency were declared in Southland and Clutha districts as fallen trees, damaged powerlines, and blocked roads isolated rural communities. Communications and water supplies were also disrupted as backup systems failed, revealing serious weaknesses in regional resilience.
- [8] The impacts were felt most acutely in rural areas, where farms lost power to milking sheds, water pumps, and animal welfare systems. Emergency hubs were established to provide essential services such as showers, charging stations, and laundry facilities while repairs continued. The storm tested the readiness of local and regional emergency management systems and has prompted renewed discussion about infrastructure redundancy, particularly for telecommunications and electricity networks in remote parts of Otago and Southland.
- [9] Of relevance to this advocacy is pending major reform of New Zealand's emergency management legislation through the proposed Emergency Management Bill, which will replace the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. This reform is a direct response to the Government Inquiry into the North Island Severe Weather Events of early 2023, including Cyclone Hale, the Auckland Anniversary floods, and Cyclone Gabrielle. These events exposed significant gaps in the emergency management system, prompting 14 recommendations aimed at improving readiness, coordination, and resilience across all levels of government and community. The Bill reflects the Government's commitment to a more inclusive, responsive, and fit-for-purpose emergency management framework.
- [10] Among the key changes is a stronger focus on critical infrastructure resilience, including telecommunications. The Bill proposes expanding the definition of lifeline utilities to include digital services, recognising the essential role telecommunications play during emergencies.

CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic Framework and Policy Considerations

- [11] Improving telecommunications resilience supports the Council's strategic commitment to resilient communities and infrastructure. Reliable communications networks are fundamental to effective emergency management, particularly in rural and remote areas where isolation can delay response and recovery.
- [12] The recommendation aligns with the Council's priorities under its Long-Term Plan, the Otago Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Plan, and the broader national objectives for infrastructure resilience and climate adaptation.

Financial Considerations

- [13] There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- [14] Advocacy on matters relating to telecommunications resilience can be undertaken within existing budgets and staff resources. Should any future funding or partnership opportunities arise through government programmes, these would be reported to Council for consideration.

Significance and Engagement

- [15] In accordance with the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, the matter is assessed as being of low significance. It involves advocacy on a national infrastructure issue and does not have a direct impact on Council levels of service or rates.
- [16] Engagement is not required at this stage. However, community feedback received during and after recent storm events has demonstrated a high level of public concern regarding the reliability of telecommunications and power networks during emergencies.

Legislative and Risk Considerations

- [17] Telecommunications resilience is primarily governed through national legislation and policy led by central government. The Council's role is one of regional advocacy, ensuring the needs of Otago communities are considered in national resilience planning.
- [18] Continued advocacy reduces regional risk by encouraging investment in essential lifeline infrastructure and ensuring that rural and remote communities are not disproportionately affected during future natural events.

Climate Change Considerations

- [19] Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events in Otago. These events place greater pressure on energy and communication networks and increase the likelihood of prolonged outages.
- [20] Strengthening the resilience of telecommunications systems is consistent with the Council's climate adaptation objectives and supports regional preparedness for the impacts of a changing climate.

Communications Considerations

- [21] Following Council approval, a short statement may be prepared to accompany the release of the letter to the Minister, reinforcing the Council's commitment to supporting resilient communities and infrastructure across Otago.
- [22] The issue is of high public interest and provides an opportunity to demonstrate regional leadership in advocating for stronger national standards for essential services.

NEXT STEPS

- [23] Subject to Council endorsement, the Chief Executive will finalise and send the approved letter to Hon Paul Goldsmith, Minister for Media and Communications, with copies to the Minister for Emergency Management and other relevant agencies.
- [24] Staff will monitor any response from Ministers and report back to Council as appropriate.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Letter to the Minister - Telecommunications Resilience (06.11.2025) [6.3.1 - 2 pages]



From the Office of the Chairperson

6 November 2025

The Honourable Paul Goldsmith
Minister for Media and Communications
Email: P.Goldsmith@ministers.govt.nz

Cc: The Honourable Mark Patterson
Minister for Emergency Management (and Minister for Rural Communities)
Email: M.Patterson@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Goldsmith

Re: Strengthening Resilience of Mobile Communication Infrastructure in the South

The Otago Regional Council wishes to raise an urgent matter regarding the resilience of mobile communications infrastructure across Otago and Southland, following the recent severe weather events that caused widespread and prolonged disruption to power and telecommunications.

The October storm left many communities in the lower South Island without power and mobile coverage for extended periods after cell towers lost power within hours of the outages.

We understand that telecommunications providers have made progress on improving network redundancy, but recent events show that current backup standards remain insufficient, particularly in rural and remote areas. Most cell towers rely on battery power for only a few hours, and generator deployment is logistically difficult when road access is limited.

We therefore urge the Government to consider:

- Introducing a regulatory minimum standard for cell tower power backup systems to ensure that networks remain operational for an extended period during emergencies.
- Supporting a transition plan, backed by central government funding or incentives, to upgrade existing infrastructure across rural regions.
- Exploring interoperability and switching options between networks when one provider's coverage fails, particularly for emergency calls.
- Recognising mobile communications infrastructure as a critical lifeline service within the Civil Defence Emergency Management framework.
- Working collaboratively with regional and district councils, and emergency management groups, to identify high-risk areas and prioritise investment.



Our suggested actions strongly align with the recommendations contained in the *Telecommunications Resilience in Hawke's Bay* report (July 2024), commissioned following multiple communications failures during Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023.

We also note the importance of local radio broadcasting during such events. Many rural areas rely on community radio for updates when digital and mobile systems fail. We ask that the Government consider ways to support the viability of local radio stations, recognising their essential role in public safety and communication during emergencies.

Councillors from across Otago support this call and believe that improving telecommunications resilience is an essential part of building climate and disaster readiness in our regions. We are aware that some of the issues raised in this letter will be addressed through the proposed Emergency Management Bill (2025) and we intend on signalling our strong support for a much greater focus on critical infrastructure resilience through formal submission processes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials to discuss practical next steps and how local government can assist in strengthening network resilience.

Regards,

Hilary Calvert
Chair, Otago Regional Council