



**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

# Head Start Pathway

**Simplifying Local Government**

May 2026

# Recap - Simplifying Local Government

Public submissions on the Simplifying Local Government proposal closed on 20 February 2026. More than 1,100 submissions were received from councils, sector groups, iwi/Māori and the public. The proposal outlined a two-step process:

## Step 1

Mayors would form a board to lead regional issues and govern the regional council. This would replace regional councillors and take over their roles and obligations. We asked about options to involve Crown commissioners.

## Step 2

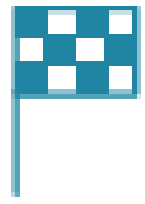
Regional boards would develop a reorganisation plan for how councils in a region could work together more effectively and efficiently. Plans would be developed with public consultation, examined independently, and approved by the Minister of Local Government.

# Head Start pathway

- New voluntary, streamlined option for councils that are ready to progress change now.
- Open to councils (two or more territorial and unitary authorities) that want to come together to form new unitary authorities.
- Instead of developing a regional reorganisation plan, councils will submit an outline proposal focused on structural change by 9 August 2026.
  - Proposals can cover all or part of a region, and may include the formation of one, or a small number of, unitary authorities.
- Officials will assess proposals against the criteria on the next slide. For proposals that progress further, officials will work with councils on the detailed design of the proposal for Cabinet consideration in early 2027.
- Delivering the new planning system remains core business for all councils.

# How will proposals be assessed?

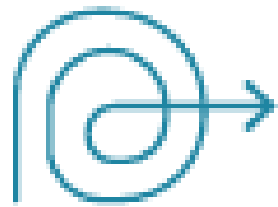
Five criteria will be used to assess the proposals:



**Deliverability:** Proposals are realistic and demonstrate how new arrangements can be implemented in a timely manner.



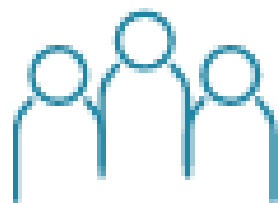
**Supports the new planning system:** Shows clear support for implementing the new planning system - including progress on spatial and natural environment plan development - and avoids or minimises disruption to that work.



**Simplifies local governance:** Proposes more efficient regional governance arrangements, consolidating decision-making and improving alignment between a region's councils.



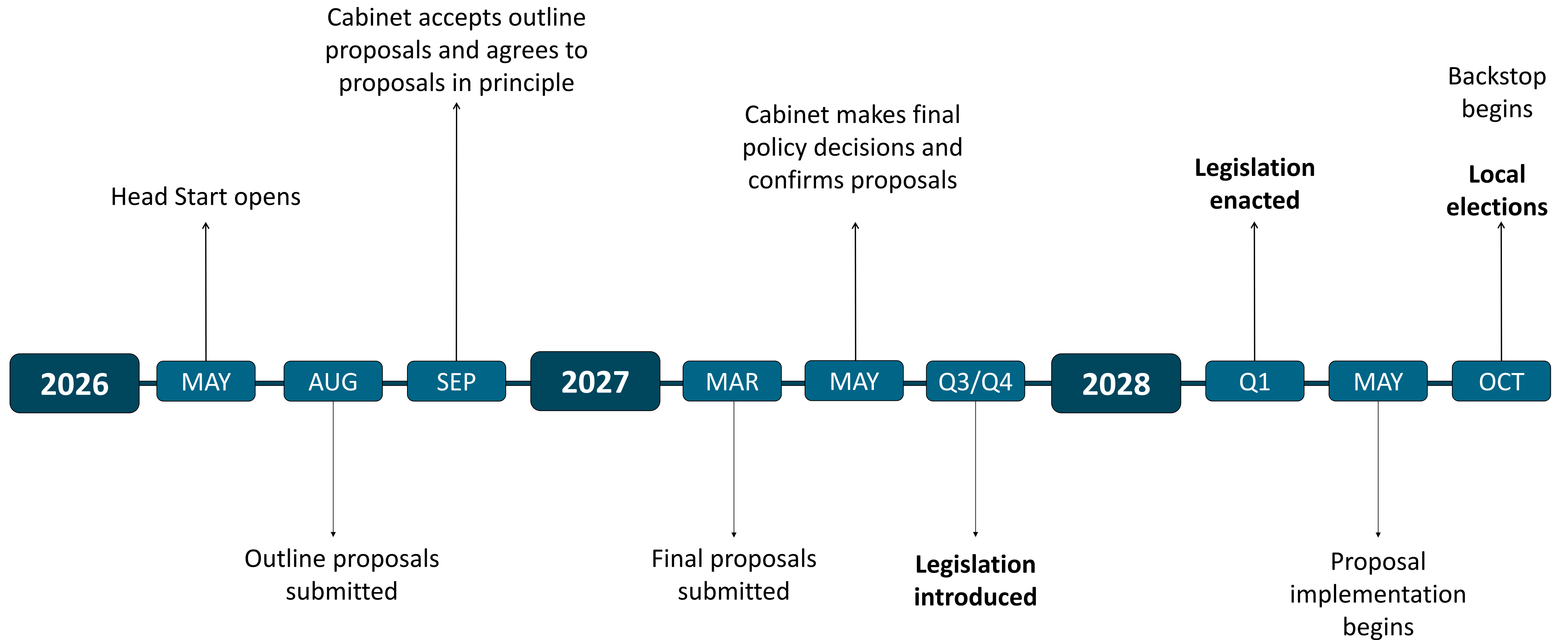
**Economies of scale:** Supports regional strategic planning and effective delivery of key regional functions (such as transport and catchment management), and demonstrates responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment, and service delivery.



**Maintains local voice:** Demonstrates fair and effective representation for communities of interest and how decisions will be made at the local level, balancing urban and rural interests.

# Backstop approach

- Councils that do not progress through the Head Start pathway will go through a compulsory backstop process.
- The backstop process would begin following the 2028 local elections. Regional councillors will not be elected in 2028.
- A new interim body would be formed to govern regional councils and develop plans for regional reorganisation. The specific membership of the interim body is still being considered (e.g. board of mayors, Crown commissioners, or hybrid model).
- The backstop model will be confirmed in 2027. The model will reflect feedback received through public submissions and learnings from the Head Start process.
- Legislation for the backstop will be enacted before nominations open for the 2028 local elections. This will ensure that candidates understand the roles and responsibilities expected of them.





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