Local government decision-making

Local government decision-making in New Zealand: An interpretivist inquiry into influences and citizen preferences related to large capital investments

by

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A thesis

submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington

in fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Government

School of Government

Faculty of Commerce and Administration

Wellington, New Zealand

2018

Acknowledgements

Few, if any, great adventures or odysseys are truly completed alone – as this thesis attests. Having spent some time reflecting on this experience relatively late in life (well past 50), I have quickly realised, as no doubt others have before me, that this 'bit' I have done is much more about celebrating the things others have taught me – celebrating the endeavours of others who have invested in me to be the best I can possibly be – than it is to about sharing the story of my research with others.

In the spirit of that insight, my acknowledgement goes to all the family, friends and colleagues that found the time (and patience) to teach the young man I once was and still try to be those things that have led to this odyssey. I'd especially like to recognise my more recent colleagues at both Wellington City Council and Auckland Council to embark on and complete a dream I had long before set my sights on.

There are others. It's hard to fully express the extent of my gratitude to those elected members who gave up their time – some on two separate occasions – to tell their stories, which are the essence of this research. Not one declined my invitation to explore the challenges of their environment. The free, frank and fearless discussions are reflected in this research, and I have been as honest and forthright as we discussed and promised in my venture to understand and explain some of the challenges before you, my profession and our communities that we all work so hard on behalf of, at times with little reward. I salute you all.

On a more personal note, to Tania and Tanya who helped me in a way that is hard to describe other than to Tania Morgan, who in the first instance helped me see the trees in the woods, and then Tanya Tremewan, who showed me the intricacies of the wood in the trees. Your support will never be forgotten.

To Amanda Wolf and the staff of the School of Government at Victoria University of Wellington, I will never be able to completely thank you for your efforts to find a path for folk like me. The privilege of experiencing an odyssey such as this is mostly beyond explanation, so I will not try – other than to say thank you for finding a way.

To my supervisors, Associate Professor Karl Lofgren and Associate Professor Bill Ryan. I have an immense sense of gratitude to you both for your guidance, instruction and direction. I have had a blast. To both the ol' sage who saw my eyes light up like an excited child on the first day at the idea of something called deliberative democracy and at the same time had the patience to teach me how to control the fireworks show that followed; and the younger gun who helped see me through this to a point where the words in this thesis embrace all that I have known in such a way that others might seek some small measure of wisdom from it; I also say thank you.

And finally, to my darling wife Kay. Some who read this will understand how special Kay is. To me, she is everything. Supporting such an endeavour when working full time is not always (never?) easy; it's a sacrifice for both. I can honestly say Kay has supported me every second, of every minute, of every hour, of every day, of every week, of every month, of every year I (we) have committed to this thesis. Such complete support makes this odyssey seem much like a quiet walk down on the beach. So, here is a promise to you, my darling: more time to take those quiet walks down on the beach . . .

Haydn Read

Abstract

Citizens' active participation in local government affairs today is low, and no measurable signs indicate any improvement. To the contrary, evidence suggests citizen participation is deteriorating. Considerable debate has been involved in trying to establish whether its cause is citizenship deficits or democracy deficits. Alternatively, does another, yet-to-be-discovered driver explain the disconnection between local government and its citizens?

Of greatest concern is that, in the near future, significant investment decisions and the outcomes they provide are likely to set the tone for our communities for the next 100 years or more. In this context, the diminishing participation may beget further disconnection. Furthermore, if citizens are not really in a position to make an informed decision, who is? Can we be sure those decision-makers are making the right decisions? Has the intent behind our participatory or deliberative democracy in the local government sector established itself in practice, as we might expect?

Compounding this challenge is the complexity of the decision-making environment, which only enhances the gap between how citizens sense they are able to participate in these important long-term decisions and the political environments that struggle to find enduring solutions in which citizen preferences are weighted in a way that reflects community expectations. While the literature to date has covered citizenship and democracy deficits in some detail, understanding is more limited of the bureaucratic and representative deficits that are struggling with similar, if not identical issues.

This research examines the concept and practice of local government decision-making. Its focus is on the influences that elected members weight in this process, and

specifically the weight they give to citizen preferences in making their decisions.

Moreover, if these preferences are not being given due weight, what are the implications

for our deliberative democracy? And do the findings have any implications for how our

communities ought to view the current decision-making environment?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of citizens in democracy has been the focus of attention for many people across the globe in recent years. New Zealand has experienced a relatively recent shift in its democratic foundations from first-past-the-post to a mixed member proportional (MMP) voting system for its central government. This change has arguably drawn citizens into making a more concerted effort to understand the mechanics of their democracy and has brought many new questions into the debate about how we want those who represent us to govern our land.

However, notwithstanding the extensive discussion that has come with the new voting system, understanding remains limited about the workings of the machinery of central government and the role citizens are really playing in setting the direction of their country. Such understanding is even more limited in local government, where the politics and bureaucracy operate much more closely to citizens' lives on a day-to-day basis and where decisions influencing our communities are significantly more tangible to most of us.

Common to both central and local government is their need to grapple with complex, intractable and wicked problems that confront our society. Significant challenges include making large capital investments in infrastructure for underprivileged communities; funding and financing the development of social housing for the more vulnerable members of our community; and building affordable and sustainable social infrastructure for our community's wellbeing (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012a, 2012b). We all want these outcomes now, as we do no less for the following generations. The challenge involved in delivering such infrastructure is experienced globally (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

(1994a-j), not just in New Zealand (Michels, 2011). These types of problems seem to have only temporary, at best imperfect solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

The citizens who elect local government are obliging the sector to innovate and to venture into finding new and more insightful answers to these problems. Many people, moreover, feel the answers lie with the citizens themselves, whose engagement with local government has noticeably declined over recent years (Local Government New Zealand, 2016a, 2016b). With some notable exceptions, bureaucratic deficits are also all too obvious, and councils have continued to struggle with meaningful citizen engagement ever since legislation in 2002 offered local government the opportunity to mature into a deliberative decision-making environment.

Given the increasingly disengaged community, can we realistically expect elected members to provide outcomes in line with citizens' expectations? And what does that mean for the decisions they are making? After all, they also seem to be struggling with the increasing complexity of the environment that local government has become. Furthermore, they are simply and understandably 'normal folk'. Are our expectations too high for those normal citizens who take an active interest and participate in trying to build better communities?

The real challenge seems to be providing complex, intractable and wicked answers to match these difficult problems.

1.1   Frame of Reference

For the majority of the formative years of my career I worked in the manufacturing sector, particularly the steel industry. In that sector, asset values come to billions of

dollars and complex investment decisions are invariably made with reference to financial sustainability, economic viability and business continuity.

Local government has assets of a value similar to or sometimes greater than those of its private sector partners. The investment decisions in this sector, however, are unlike those of the private sector. They have a further level of complexity, which arises from the need to weigh up economic and social benefits – two aspects of the enigmatic concept that Moore (1995) refers to as public value. For decisions involving substantial investments of community funds, these considerations are especially important. This context confronts decision-makers in councils with problems that need more nuanced solutions – the longer-term economic and social wellbeing of people and communities is at stake.

In more recent years I have often reflected on whether elected members give sufficient weight to collective citizen preferences[1] at the time they make decisions of this type. My view raises two questions. First is the question as to whether local government's citizen engagement practices[2] are at a level of maturity commensurate with its citizens' ability to voice these preferences and submit them for consideration. The second question is whether, even in circumstances where the collective voice of their citizens has actually been captured; elected members who reflect on these preferences are giving them sufficient weight. That is, are their decisions being

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[1] Collective citizen preferences are defined as citizens' opinions both for and against any investment proposal, which elected members balance based on the information about citizen preferences that has been forwarded to elected members for their deliberation. From this point I will refer to these as just 'citizen preferences'.

[2] Citizen engagement practices are defined as how councils seek to understand citizen preferences. Examples of their methods include community consultation, surveys and deliberative polls.

sufficiently influenced by citizen preferences – and if so, how does this influence manifest itself?

It is no surprise to anyone that elected members are often confronted with complex and technically difficult decisions.

> *The difficulties of public policymaking in the complex milieu of modern society can hardly be overstated. (Dollery & Worthington, 1996)*

Many of these decisions also require substantial expert advice (e.g., a decision to amend a council's treasury policy, which entails complex financial considerations). My practitioner experiences suggest there are inconsistencies in how they apply this type of advice to their decisions, raising questions again as to how it influences a decision when they settle on a position.

Academics and professionals, in apparently increasing numbers, are arguing the local government sector would benefit from taking a more transparent and consistent approach to considering both expert advice and citizen preferences (e.g., Bäckstrand, 2003; Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014; Dollery, Byrnes, & Crase, 2007b; Dryzek & List, 2003; Dunleavy et al., 2005; Michels & de Graaf, 2010; Nabatchi, 2010).

The reason for this thinking will become apparent as this thesis explores this significant real-world problem that confronts the local government sector. Some evidence suggests unpacking and reconciling the influences on elected members' decisions ought to help inform better decisions.[3] This understanding may in turn indicate how to address this real-world problem (at least in part) in what are

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[3] The term 'better decisions' in this context means those decisions informed by citizen preferences. This will be explored in more detail in this thesis.

generally recognised as difficult circumstances. Some have even referred to these types of environments as organisational anarchies (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972).

Pilot research conducted to inform this thesis highlighted a substantial third influence. Namely, elected members themselves influence decisions their peers make. The extent of an individual elected member's political influence depends on how well they are able to argue a point to influence or negotiate with another elected member in the decision they might make.

In this context, a subtle distinction is drawn between the influences of peers (which I will from now on refer to as political influence) and individual or personal influences on a decision. The latter influences are likely to involve an elected member's personal values and beliefs and the nature and extent of their own personal experiences; for example, the kind of environment they were brought up in; their vocation; and the nature and level of their education. Personal influences on decisions by the individual decision-maker will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

These initial observations therefore point to three broad influences that elected members must position in their deliberations: citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinions. Many others have similarly highlighted the lack of understanding of how these influences are weighted in decisions, in a process that some have described as a decision-making 'black box' (Bächtiger, Steenbergen, & Tschentscher, 2012, p. 5; Morrell, 2015). If it is possible to unpack this black box to establish if and how these different elements influence decisions, other opportunities to explore decision-making more generally are likely to follow.

These initial observations also prompt questions about the place of citizen preferences in decision-making in a democracy more generally. To what degree do councils deliberate on and give effect to citizen preferences, and to what extent do

they have the capability to do so, when they make decisions on behalf of their communities? Put another way; is it possible to come to better decisions by understanding how weightings of citizen preferences versus expert technical advice versus political opinion might be applied? From an initial examination, it would seem that understanding these weightings might give some insight into how representative or how deliberative any particular elected member and/or council is. If so, what are these insights and is there any consistency in approach across the sector? Looking beyond the sector, does central government democracy reflect similar or different weightings in its decisions? If it differs, how does it differ? Also, what are the implications on New Zealand's democratic environment – if any?

Further to these three important broad influences, a layer of practice in local government prescribes the decision-making processes well before a large capital investment proposal is considered. Moreover, the practice is peculiar to local government and ordinarily agnostic to the investment being considered, and is as much about compliance with the local government legislation as it is about seeking good investment decisions on behalf of communities (Local Government Act 2002). The three pillars that describe this practice are the legislation governing the planning processes that enable decisions to be made in a council (Local Government Act 2002); the planning frameworks within that legislation, which describe when and how decisions are processed and published (e.g., a long-term plan); and the citizen engagement practices that seek citizen preferences to inform these plans (e.g., consultation workshops or focus groups). These three foundation stones underpin local government decision-making and will be explored later in this chapter.

Returning to the substance of this proposal, the decisions of particular research interest are those that specifically require large investments in community

assets. My research will consider influences at two levels of interpretation. The first level is how elected members themselves understand and interpret the influences on their decisions and how they position citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinion in this process. The second is an interpretation of the elected members' interpretations. For this latter analysis, I have selected a framework that has been shaped by legislation, normative debates for and against levels of influence, the sector's normative principles and wider non-specific community influences. This framework is set against a decision scholarship that has relatively recently taken a keen interest in trying to understand these decision environments. This will be explored in more detail in the literature review (Chapter 2).

With these two levels of interpretation, I intend to establish (at least in part) which normative arguments in the literature suggest consideration of citizen preferences delivers more informed decisions. It may also be possible to establish whether a consistent approach to deliberating on expert advice would similarly strengthen decisions. In the main, the current challenge to these arguments is that the empirical evidence to validate them is incomplete. This research represents an opportunity to develop a level of empirical evidence to substantiate some of these arguments – one way or the other. Moreover, it is an opportunity to explore the implications of these findings for decision-making in the future, a process that currently seems no less of a mystery to academics than it is to practitioners.

1.2   Characteristics of New Zealand Local Government

1.2.1   An Internationally Historical Context

There are 195 countries in the world today.[4] In modern terms, these countries are nation states. Politics within this network of nation states refers to the policies in each national jurisdiction and its relationships with other nation states (Hartwich, 2013). Historically however, nation states did not rule 'nations' per se; a city ran itself within one (city-state).

The birthplace of modern civilisation is not the nation, but the city. It was in the cities where citizens first came together to regulate their own affairs, to debate and discuss, to form coalitions, to promote the arts and public works, and to create an education system. The modern system of governance, law and democracy is derived from this ancient model (with the origins of the word *democracy* itself lying in two Greek words: *demos*, meaning 'the rule of the people', and *kratos*, meaning 'power'). And that model was based in the city-states of those times (e.g., Athens, Rhodes and Sparta).

More recently, however, the nation state has presided over its cities through a legislature and a series of principles informing that legislature. One of the earlier principles in which the 'more recent' state (central or federal) governments presided over city (regional or local) governments was described as Dillon's Rule in an 1868 case:

> *Municipal corporations owe their origin to, and derive their powers and rights wholly from, the legislature. It breathes into them the breath of life, without*

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[4] https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/how-many-countries-are-there-world-2018

which they cannot exist. As it creates, so may it destroy. If it may destroy, it may abridge and control.[5]

After Dillon's Rule came the Cooley Doctrine, or the doctrine of home rule, as another relatively recent example of this relationship. Cooley described a contrasting inherent right to local self-determination. In 1871 the Michigan Supreme Court judge stated, "local government is a matter of absolute right; and the state cannot take it away".[6]

It is no surprise, therefore, that a palpable tension has existed and will probably always exist in the relationship between these two principles and how to exercise the intent of each right. The tension may be best illustrated by the seemingly endless variations in which central governments have structured their respective local government sectors over the ages and the legislative frameworks that support them to undertake the activities entrusted to them. Central government demonstrates its level of trust through the extent and nature of responsibilities that it passes on to local jurisdictions.

While a plethora of theory tries to describe this relationship, the principle of subsidiarity is the one that best captures the inter-governmental relationship in the context of this research. The principle of subsidiarity regulates the allocation and/or use of authority within a political order where authority is dispersed between a centre and its various sub-units (Follesdal & Muñiz-Fraticelli, 2015).

The principle of subsidiarity derives from Catholic social teaching. It means that higher tiers of government should only fulfil a subsidiary function for those tasks

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[5] *Clinton v Cedar Rapids and the Missouri River Railroad* (24 Iowa 455; 1868).

[6] *People v. Hurlbut* (24 Mich 44, 95; 1871).

that lower tiers cannot adequately deal with. A slight extension to this definition includes the notion that decisions ought to be entrusted to those that will be most affected by them. It is a principle that is now often referred to, for example, in the context of the European Union, where it makes obvious sense. More recently, it is a general principle that has central and local government jostling over what it actually looks like in practice.

While the principle of subsidiarity can provide optics on the differentiation and allocation of responsibilities across jurisdictions, any global perspective on local government that compares New Zealand with different jurisdictions is far too diverse to even attempt an overarching definition (Hartwich, 2013). How and why this is so may be best evidenced by the great diversity of institutional factors, local leadership typologies and institutional arrangements (structures) that govern this responsibility across the globe.

1.2.2   Institutional Factors and Local Leadership Typologies

While central governments have structured their local government entities in various ways, Mouritzen and Svara's (2002) four models of local government leadership provide a useful insight into the roles that these structures have created, along with institutional factors and local leadership typologies:

1. *the strong-mayor form – the elected mayor is supported by majority of councillors, is fully responsible for executive functions and controls local administration; political leadership is emphasized here. This form of local leadership is practiced in South European countries*

2. *the committee-leader form – local leader doesn't necessarily have strong formal position, for example s/he can be a chairman/woman of the local council. Usually executive powers of a leader (if any) are shared with*

collegiate bodies (council, committees, community board). This form of local leadership is practiced in Denmark, Sweden and United Kingdom.

3. *the collective form – collegiate leadership of executive body with a strong position of a mayor who can build his own leadership position. It is practiced in Belgium and Netherlands.*

4. *the council-manager form – all executive functions are held by professional administrator (the city manager) who is appointed by local council. Although s/he is not a political figure, s/he has considerable influence on local policy making and its implementation. It is present in Ireland, Finland and Norway. (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002, pp. 55–66)*

Mouritzen and Svara based their forms of local leadership on the research done in the mid 1990s, but others suggest this framework does not entirely reflect the present trends in local institutions (Pawlowska & Radzik, 2002). Another proposition is to categorise three groups of states based on the changing landscape of local government empowerment rather than on the roles themselves:

1. *Where radical changes of local leadership towards empowerment of local executive took place (Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom)*

2. *Where structural changes were restricted to few municipalities, usually big cities (Norway, Spain, Denmark)*

3. *Where no considerable changes in local leadership took place (Switzerland, Sweden, United States, France, Belgium). (Berg & Rao, 2005, pp. 9–10)*

Pawlowska and Radzik (2002) suggest three further criteria:

1. *Institutional and legal conditions of local leadership*

2. *Raison d'être of local governance, i.e. is it basically brought to deliver services or express the will of local community*

3. *Adaptability of local structures to governance arrangements.*

Here they recognise the forms of local leadership, the changes being experienced by institutions (councils) globally where the leadership is administered and the relation of that leadership to the bureaucratic frameworks that support it. Further developing this thinking based on these historical approaches, Pawlowska and Radzik (2002) created three models of local government leadership structure that described this ever-changing landscape: technocratic, bureaucratic and transformative.

In Pawlowska and Radzik's (2002) version, the technocratic model is oriented towards service delivery, with a weaker political element. The local policy-making is based on searching for consensus and conducting pragmatic activities. This form of leadership can be characterised as *dynamic stabilisation*, where the rules of leadership are general and allow considerable independence in building institutions. Here endogenous factors dominate in the transformation of local leadership. This suggested model of local leadership is distinctive to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The second, bureaucratic model is characterised by strong institutionalisation of leadership and political relationships. Local leadership has stable political support from the majority party in the council and functions are performed as a state official. Most local functions are administrative. Institutional settlement of a local leader tends to be conservative. These features tend to prevent changes in local leadership and, if change occurs, the causes tend to be exogenous. Pawlowska and Radzik (2002) suggest the bureaucratic leadership model is distinctive to Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece Andorra, Gibraltar, and Monaco.

Finally, the transformative model is characterised by weak institutionalisation of leadership but it is reinforced with a clear separation of powers, including considerable executive powers in decision-making. While delivering services is

essential for a local leader, the political discourse seems to remain equally important. Furthermore, while the change under technocratic leadership is dynamic and stable, in transformative leadership it is uneven. Rather than being rooted in existing legal and institutional order, any change in leadership is an effect of either dissatisfaction and pressure of citizens or national policy (that is, it is a highly centralised model). Pawlowska and Radzik (2002) suggest this leadership model can be found in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

By way of an addendum, it could be argued that the diverse nature of the local governments within the United States of America exhibit traits that could be represented by any one of these models, depending on their location within that country.

The aim of Pawlowska and Radzik's (2002) three models, which is helpful for the international context of this research, is to describe these institutions in a similar way to historical institutionalism; that is, as "bounded social constructs of rules, roles, norms, and the expectations that constrain individual and group choice and behaviour" (Frederickson & Smith, 2003, p. 71). These influences are the essence of those that this thesis unpacks. Institutional arrangements make opportunities more or less available to elected members, depending on their compatibility with local economic and social conditions. Among the variety of councils in New Zealand, the influence of institutional arrangements also depends on their consistency with social and financial policy represented in legislation (e.g., Local Government Act 2002) and other mechanisms.

Moreover, Pawlowska and Radzik (2002) insist, institutionalism assumes leadership is central. Consistent with March and Olsen (1984, p .739), the institutional approach to leadership emphasises its role as that of educator and a

stimulus for commitments. Some would argue this is the direction of contemporary change in institutions of local political leadership more generally. If previous local leaders focused on networks of organisations, within which "the local authority is merely one player, and not necessarily the dominant one" (Leach & Wilson, 2000, p. 20), then the approach seems to be changing.

As this research highlights, several factors influence elected member behaviour in relation to this newfound responsibility (power). Of particular interest is how these new influences and the "framework of organisations within which the leader has to operate" (Leach & Wilson, 2000, p. 8) affect that behaviour.

Internationally, with the variability, fragmentation and complexity that is being suggested here, it seems the institutional factors and local leadership typologies are no less chaotic than what others have suggested in models that aim to understand local government through other lenses (e.g., Cohen et al., 1972). If there is no basis for the suggestion that strong leadership does not necessarily develop strong leadership and good decision-making practices, does this suggest any emerging best practices cannot happen without a wider range of formal powers and some yet-to-be-discovered institutional arrangements?

Following this line of thinking, suppose we establish that governance is the practice of linking:

> *the objectives of various and diverse stakeholders (e.g., citizens expressing themselves as voters, respondents to polls, and consumers; organized interest groups; and elected and appointed officials) with the activities that take place at the operational levels of government (Lynn, Heinrich & Hill, 2000, p. 4)*

On this basis, it is likely that a gap exists in defining what that is – if the variability, fragmentation and complexity are as described above.

Given the plurality of institutional approaches, a useful lens on the praxis of the operating environment of local government may come from Katzenstein (1997), who defines institutions as "a normative context that constitutes actors and provides a set of norms in which the reputation of the actors acquires meaning and value" (pp. 12–13). This definition narrows the notion of the institution (council) in as much as it will "provide a set of norms" that enable actors to "acquire meaning and value" when decisions are being sought. This research will also consider the councils as "the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions embedded in the organisational structure of the polity" (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 938).

Lynn et al.'s (2000) characterisation of governance as a "dynamic, interactive, and continuous process" offers further proof that this sector is not just fragmented but complex and somewhat chaotic as well. It is unsurprising to discover others believe the wider network of public and private sector institutions is frequently unclear and, although they act collaboratively to solve problems and meet society's needs, the more rudimentary challenge is that the relationships between them are indistinct, often informal and somewhat opaque (Pawlowska & Radzik, 2002). A lens on this institutional anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972) will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, if a number of the actors in the governance process are not democratically elected and cannot be called to account by citizens (Sullivan, Downe, Entwistle, & Sweeting, 2006), these influencers will also need to be explored in more detail. Chapter 2 also explores the role of citizens and technical experts who represent this reality. All this suggests, in line with Hartwich (2013), that localism in New Zealand in the global context is not as odd as it may initially appear.

Certainly some of the challenges local government in New Zealand faces are unique and the way other countries work may contrast with our own system. Yet the above discussion indicates that it is possible to make legitimate comparisons between some of the problems New Zealand local government faces and those of other jurisdictions (Hartwich, 2013).

1.2.3   International Comparisons

To put New Zealand's government 'structure' in perspective, it is useful to compare it with the structures in place in other countries. While countries may differ in population and landmass, for a meaningful comparison what they should share is a comparable level of economic development, as well as similar social and legal frameworks and institutional arrangements that govern them. The best reference group therefore comprises the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

It is worth noting one obvious difference among OECD countries. Namely some of the member states, such as Switzerland, Australia and the United States of America, are federal systems with three tiers of government, while others operate with only two tiers (e.g., New Zealand, Denmark and France). For comparability, the following analysis has calculated the amount of government activity at a local level by grouping together local and regional government. Furthermore, while it is true that the size of some state-level structures resembles the size of local governments in other jurisdictions (e.g., where both have a population of about 300,000), the canton – as the middle layer in the Swiss three-layered structure – may be treated as a form of local government as a useful comparator (Hartwich, 2013).

Comparative local government spending. The first international comparison focuses on the share of local and state government expenditure as a

percentage of all public spending. Kim and Vammale (2102) summarise their findings based on 2010 data.

The relative share of sub-central government spending in total public spending varies greatly across countries, ranging from 6% in Greece to more than 60% in Denmark and Canada. On average, sub-central government expenditure in 2010 represented about 30% of total public spending, or 14% of gross domestic product (GDP), but in three countries (Canada, Denmark and Switzerland) sub-central governments account for more than half of public spending. Spending decentralisation (the share of sub-central government expenditure in total public spending and in GDP) is higher in countries with three levels of government (federal and quasi-federal) and in north European countries than in unitary countries.

So, according to the OECD, sub-central spending accounts for about 30% of all government spending. At 11%, the figure for New Zealand is not even half of this international average and means, correspondingly, that the central government in Wellington controls 89% of all public spending (Hartwich, 2013).

What is somewhat surprising is that even the supposedly super-centralised countries like France have a greater devolution of government spending than New Zealand does. French local government accounts for about 21% of France's government spending.

Comparative public investment. New Zealand's local government is small by international standards. Its share in public investment is also relatively low at 44% compared with 60% across OECD sub-central governments. Most of this investment

in New Zealand is in core infrastructure of roading, three-waters[7] and recreational facilities.

Hartwich (2013) suggests the underlying reason for New Zealand's small local government is historical. Few early European settlers had money, and only the state could borrow from abroad to invest in services such as schools and hospitals. It seldom trusted local authorities to spend wisely the money it had raised. Some would argue this attitude has continued and is symptomatic of the tension between the two governments to this day. Most other OECD countries offer examples of how local government fulfils a greater variety of roles in public services than New Zealand local government. For example:

Education – OECD 50%, New Zealand 0%

Health – OECD 30%, New Zealand 0%

Police – OECD 25%, New Zealand 0%

In other areas of spending (e.g., economic affairs, recreation, culture and religion, environmental protection, housing, and community amenities), New Zealand is also below the OECD average (Hartwich, 2013).

Comparative local government revenue. Local government in New Zealand has lower revenue than local governments elsewhere in the OECD. Furthermore, the OECD member nations do not use property taxation as a significant revenue lever. Two-thirds of OECD countries have elements of personal income taxation at the local government level, something that has never been considered in New Zealand. Across the OECD, sub-central governments receive about 29% of all

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[7] Potable water, wastewater and stormwater.

personal income tax revenue (Hartwich, 2013). In New Zealand, all personal and corporate income tax goes to the national level.

New Zealand's local government circumstance. Comparing local government spending and revenue across OECD countries highlights how New Zealand is an outlier in the developed world. In essence, New Zealand is setting a benchmark for centralisation: "It is hard to find another country in which local government is as limited and marginalised as it is in New Zealand" (Hartwich, 2013). What is interesting is that local government in New Zealand attests to the good economic, political and philosophical reasons in favour of increased localism (Local Government New Zealand, 2012a).

As Sir Simon Jenkins (2004, p. 5) wrote some years ago:

> *I am a minimalist about all tiers of government. Free citizens need constantly to be on guard against them. But I am particularly sceptical of the upper tier of government because it is the most detached from private citizens and, by experience, the least efficient.*

The questions that result from these findings are best summed up in terms of why these circumstances have arisen and the perceptions resonating across other sectors that cast local government in such a way as to justify (at least in a central government sense) maintaining this high level of centralisation. A number of perceptions held by central government policy-makers who administer these relationships present some very real challenges.

1.2.4 New Zealand's Local Government Challenges

Prompted by the circumstances outlined above, central government policy-makers in New Zealand have formed certain perceptions about the performance of local government. Among these perceptions are that: local government spending is out of

control; council spending on 'non-core' activities is responsible for increasing rates; increases in rates are fuelling inflation; increases in property value will increase rates; central government spends too much on local government; central government needs to give councils more direction; there are too many councils; single, larger councils are always more efficient than many smaller ones; there are too many councillors; low voter turnout is a sign of a weak democracy and a disinterested public; councils are run by white middle-aged men; people don't trust local government; local government is not accountable; there is no point in making a submission, councils never listen; local government needs to be more consistent; the Local Government Act 2002 greatly expanded the scope of local authority powers; and councils have no role in economic development (Local Government New Zealand, 2012c).

The next section explores how decisions are made within this context and what foundations New Zealand's current political circumstance creates in practice.

1.3   Foundations of Decision-making in Local Government

As described above, three recognised foundation stones underpin the decision-making processes in local government that are peculiar to local government. These are the legislation that affects how, where and when decisions are made in local government (Local Government Act 2002), the planning frameworks supporting those processes in practice (e.g., long-term plans) and the citizen engagement practices that partly enable those processes (e.g., consultation workshops or focus groups). Each has its own set of influences on how the elected members will be guided through the decision-making processes about large capital investments.

Notably this set of influences differs from the influences elected members are exposed to from the range of stakeholders who provide input into any decision about

a proposed investment – that is, citizens and their preferences, technical experts and their advice, other elected members and their opinion.

The difference between the two sets of influences is subtle. The first set of 'foundation influences', as described in detail in Chapter 2, includes any influences that existed prior to any proposed investment, and will influence elected members in terms of *how, where* and *when* they will make a decision. The second set of influences comprises influences that only emerge with the surfacing of any proposed investment and, by definition, it involves cohorts of stakeholders who will only influence *what* elected members decide.

1.3.1 Insights into Legislation

Clearly this research is set in the sector of local government. Peculiar to this sector is legislation that governs how decisions are processed through a council when these investments are proposed. The legislation that defines this sector is the Local Government Act 2002. This Act establishes 16 local government regions in New Zealand, nine of which are in the North Island (Figure 1.1). Eleven of the regions across the country are administered by regional councils (the top tier of local government) and five by unitary authorities, the most recent of which is Auckland Council, created in 2010. Unitary authorities are territorial authorities (e.g., Auckland Council) that also perform the functions of regional councils.
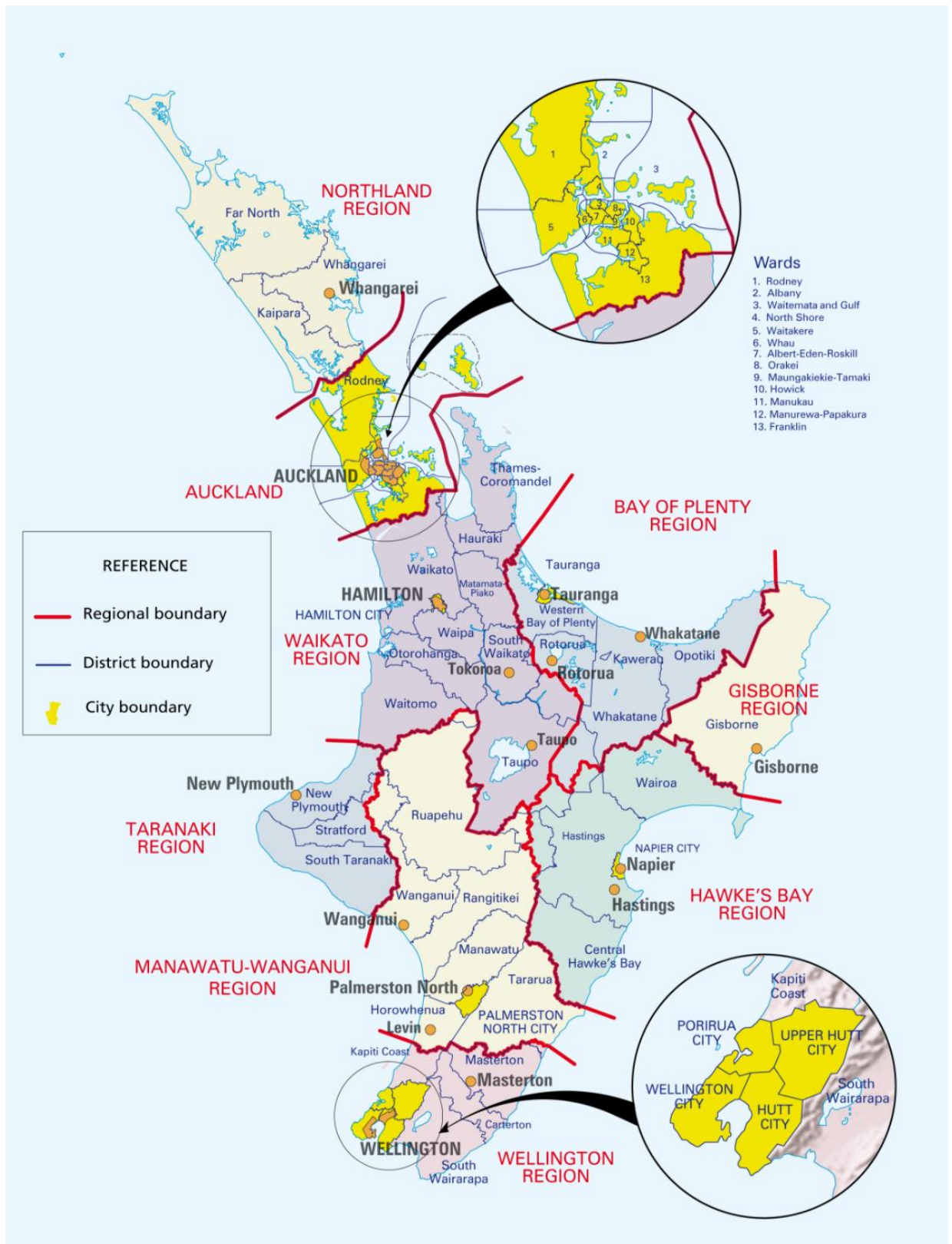
Figure 1.1. Local government boundaries in the North Island

Source: http://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/North-Island-PNG.PNG

The second tier of local government comprises territorial authorities. They consist of 13 city councils, 53 district councils and one special council for the Chatham Islands, a total of 67. A city is defined in the Local Government Act 2002 as an urban area with 50,000 residents.[8]

Councillors (referred to as elected members in this research) are generally elected within a ward system. In regional councils, the regional chair is elected by the successful elected members from the wards at the start of each term. In territorial authorities, the mayor is an additional member, elected at large by citizens who are identified within and defined by the boundaries of each authority. In addition to the obvious spatial influence that the local government legislation has on elected members in determining the extent of any council boundary, the resulting spatial areas define the first pillar of the context shaping to this research (e.g., rural versus urban councils). Recent changes to this legislation have had significant influences in some parts of New Zealand, most recently in Auckland through the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009.

Local Government Act 2002. The first element of the context for making decisions about large investments and expenditure priorities is predominantly set by the legislative frameworks that support a council's day-to-day activities (McKinlay Douglas, 2006). Before 2002, councils traditionally focused on providing network infrastructure (roads, wastewater, drinking water and stormwater), disposal of waste, and environmental regulation. This focus shifted somewhat when the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002 came into law (Leonard & Memon, 2008; Palmer, 2006). It is generally agreed the Act was a catalyst that shifted key responsibilities

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[8] Local Government Act 2002 No 84 (as at 1 March 2016), Public Act – New Zealand Legislation, Parliamentary Counsel Office, Retrieved 5 February 2017).

away from the basic service provision alone to services that provided for a community's more general "wellbeing"[9] (Leonard & Memon, 2008).

The LGA 2002 defines the purpose of local government as follows:

> *The purpose of this Act is to provide for democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities; and, to that end, this Act—*
>
> *(a) states the purpose of local government; and*
>
> *(b) provides a framework and powers for local authorities to decide which activities they undertake and the manner in which they will undertake them; and*
>
> *(c) promotes the accountability of local authorities to their communities; and*
>
> *(d) provides for local authorities to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of their communities, taking a sustainable development approach. (LGA 2002, section 3)*

When the LGA 2002 was enacted, it was heralded as enabling the consolidation of New Zealand's future (Reid, 2001). Councils were for the first time able to translate the range of principles described within the Act into a set of strategic planning processes that sought to embrace community aspirations (Knight, 2010). The other feature of specific interest to my research, which the strategic long-term planning focus emphasised, was a desire by central government for councils to engage with their communities (section 3(d)) in both developing these plans and achieving them (Memon & Thomas, 2006).

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[9] 'Wellbeing' as defined in the original LGA 2002, section 3(d).

More recently, when the LGA 2002 was amended in 2012, section 3(d) was replaced with:

(d) provides for local authorities to play a broad role in meeting the current and future needs of their communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions.

This amendment is seen as a way of minimising the rates burden on households and businesses by narrowing responsibilities of councils to the provision of infrastructure, service provision and regulatory functions, moving away from the four wellbeings identified in the original Act (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012a, 2012b). It was a deliberate change (Anderson Lloyd Lawyers, 2012) as a direct response to the central government's concern that councils' non-core activities were proliferating (Hide, 2010), although Local Government New Zealand (2012a, 2012b) strongly denied such a trend. For context, the Amendment Act 2012 was not new legislation in isolation. Rather, it was part of central government's wider set of reform legislation, aiming to cut costs and increase efficiencies across multiple sectors (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012a, 2012b). The crux of the issue was that central government saw local communities as less and less likely to be able to afford the proliferating activities that central government deemed to be outside local government's remit.

In the 2012 amendment, citizen engagement principles remained unchanged and they continue to be central to how a council is expected to manage its affairs with its communities. It is worth mentioning the LGA 2002 also prescribes the competency test for those who have reason to believe a council may not have met these principles. A number of judicial reviews of council decisions (Simpson Grierson

Lawyers, 2010) have tested the intent of sections 77, 78 and 79 of this Act.[10] It seems the intent here is to ensure councils attempt to maximise the opportunity for citizens to voice their preferences, and for councils to face substantial consequences if they fail to make such an attempt.

The relevance of the legislation for this research is that general citizen engagement practices are set within a wider legislative framework. Working within this framework may influence the approach practitioners choose to gain an understanding of citizen preferences. In these circumstances, it is likely their choice of the type and frequency of these practices may also influence the nature of the preferences they eventually secure. It is difficult at this point to establish whether and how these practices have specifically influenced any preferences. This issue is explored in some detail later in this research. What is also currently unknown is how this new legislation might have implications for or influence preferences in the future.

In summary, councils must operate within a general legislative framework to meet their obligations under the Act. In addition, a number of processes peculiar to local government enable this. This legislative framework is intended to inform the planning frameworks that councils use to seek citizen preferences, expert advice and their peers' opinions to inform their decisions. It is these planning frameworks that establish the circumstances that enable them to do so in practice.

1.3.2 Insights into Planning Frameworks

The second peculiarity of local government is the planning frameworks enabled by this same legislation. One aspect of this peculiarity is that the frameworks are

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[10] For example, *Whakatane District Council v Bay of Plenty Regional Council* [2009] 3 NZLR 799.

mandatory. This is an important pillar or support for what is sometimes referred to as local democracy (Reid, 2010).

The events that make up the planning frameworks are the most common and recurring opportunities for citizens to voice their investment preferences come through the long-term plan (LTP) and annual plan (AP) processes (e.g., Wellington City Council Long Term Plan 2015–25). This is a relatively recent phenomenon and has some bearing on the ability for citizens to voice preferences and for those preferences to be included in an elected member's deliberations. The first complete suite of LTPs to give effect to the 2002 legislative framework was developed in 2006.[11] Ten-year plans are reviewed every three years, with the most recent plans being completed in readiness for implementation from 1 July 2015.[12]

In the interim years of any two LTPs (i.e., years two and three of an LTP), APs follow a similar process (Ministry for the Environment, 2009). In special circumstances, councils and by default citizens gain further opportunities to consider large capital investment proposals on behalf of communities. The special consultative procedure in this instance and its application rules are set down in sections 83 and 84 of the LGA 2002.

While these planning frameworks provide an opportunity for citizens to engage with their council, there is no certainty citizens will choose to participate in them. It seems likely, then, that if citizens do not voice their preferences for any

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[11] While the first suite of LTPs was developed in 2004 by a large portion of the local government sector, many councils were not able to deliver their first plan until 2006, at which time a comprehensive set of plans was established.

[12] Recognised LTPs were delivered in 2004, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015; draft plans are now underway for adoption by 30 June 2018. (Before 2012, these plans were referred to as Long Term Council Community Plans – or LTCCPs.)

reason to reflect the community's position on important matters such as large investments in community assets, this will weaken the influence of citizen preferences on both political opinion and any final decision an elected member settles on. This possibility leads into the issue of the part that citizen engagement, citizen participation and engagement practices play in establishing citizen preferences. The impressions that elected members have of citizen preferences, as alluded to earlier, will in turn affect how much weight elected members give to citizen preferences when they make a decision. This is a difficult environment, and the discussion that follows offers some insights into the context affecting whether the preferences elected members seek are representative of their communities.

1.3.3 Insights into Citizen Engagement Practices

The third pillar is how local government chooses to engage with its communities and how citizen preferences are determined through the approaches it chooses.

While New Zealand's legislation enables citizen engagement as it does in other western democracies (e.g., Germany, United States of America, Australia and the United Kingdom) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1994a–j, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2013), implementing it in practice is not without its challenges. The dilemma is that citizen engagement does not necessarily reflect either a level of citizen participation commensurate with the significance of the investment decisions councils must make, or the burden of the financial crisis that has fallen most heavily (for elected members) on these types of decisions about local government infrastructure (Dollery, 2009). It also seems the relationship between the legislation that enables citizen engagement and actual citizen participation is hazy at best. The weakness of the relationship raises questions as to whether citizen patterns of political participation correspond to their process preferences, "that is, whether they are more

likely to participate if they like the method of participation" (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014). It also suggests this research must carefully assess what elected members think about citizen engagement practices if it is to deepen understanding of whether current citizen preferences are truly reflective of the communities from which they have been voiced. A pilot study that supported this research discovered only relatively small proportions of the community participate in these processes, often with their own specific agendas (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). This might suggest practice is disconnected from preference.

This circumstance would do little to resolve the current dilemma identified in this research's real-world problem. Even with burgeoning issues of financial sustainability (Dollery, Byrnes, & Crase, 2006; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006), there seems to be an inability to overcome a genuine disconnect between community awareness (described thus far as citizen engagement and participation) and significant council investments proposed (or more specifically the citizen preferences for these) that might influence the wellbeing of an entire community (F. Wilde, personal communication, 12 July 2013).

In this context, it is imperative to examine any factors that contribute to councils' seeming inability to encourage their communities to participate. The engagement practices themselves are recognised as one such factor (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, pp. 11–16). One intention in exploring citizen preferences in this research is to gain a better understanding of what underpins the low participation. Is it that citizens genuinely believe that their preferences have little impact on elected members' decisions (Acerete, Royo, & Yetano, 2009), or is it simply that they do not wish or are unable to respond to engagement opportunities that arise – and if either

or both of these reasons are involved, why? This so-called citizenship deficit (Nabatchi, 2010, p. 378) will be explored in Chapter 2 (p. 63).

The existence of a citizenship deficit suggests that, even if a council can glean citizen preferences through whatever citizen engagement practice it is using, it has no guarantee that it can or will determine the majority of citizens' opinions and majority preference. This would seem to have implications for how the balance might be found among the broad elements that influence key decisions for significant investments in community assets.

It is no coincidence these contexts seem to have a natural hierarchy in which the relationship between them is borne out in practice (Figure 1.2).
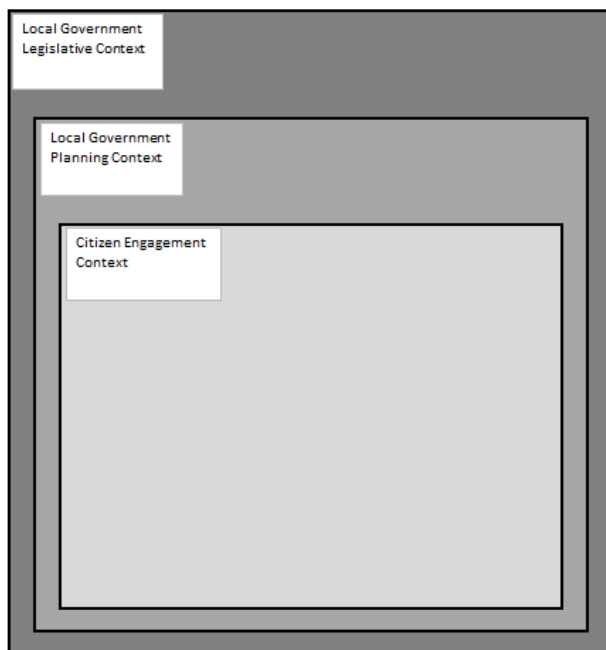
Figure 1.2. Foundations for council decisions in local government

1.4 Preliminary Insights into Decision-making Influencers –

the Stakeholders

As well as providing preliminary insights into the how the legislation, planning frameworks and citizen engagement practices set the foundations for decision-making in local government, the pilot research reaffirmed that citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinion (Figure 1.3) are likely to be central influences on elected members when they make investment decisions.

The context for this research has the three cohorts defined and described as follows: a *preference* is a desire[13] (therefore citizen preferences are desires); *advice* is guidance[13] (therefore expert technical advice is guidance); and an *opinion* is a judgement not necessarily based on fact[13] (therefore elected member opinion is a judgement that may not be based on fact).

These initial findings included the following observations and provided the guidance for more detailed analysis to support the research design, strategy and method (Chapter 3).

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[13] Online dictionary:

https://www.google.co.nz/search?q=definition+of+preference&oq=definition+of+preference&aqs=chrome..69i5 7j0l5.9019j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

https://www.google.co.nz/search?ei=nIMUW7naAoK2ogTLvL2oCQ&q=definition+of+advice&oq=definition+of +advice&gs_l=psy-ab.12..0i71k1l8.0.0.0.17769.0.0.0.0.0.0.0..0.0....0...1..64.psy-ab..0.0.0....0.SfimeRu3eng

https://www.google.co.nz/search?ei=rYIUW92YKNLs8AX307vABg&q=definition+of+opinion&oq=definition+of +opinion&gs_l=psy-ab.3..0l10.161496.165503.0.166899.9.9.0.0.0.0.747.747.6-1.1.0....0...1.1.64.psy- ab..8.1.746....0.3XEBGKFzLVM

1.4.1 Citizen Preferences

That a void exists between the desire to seek an understanding of citizen preferences and actually having access to information on those preferences is already well known. The problem is not new, and is by no means a revelation to either practitioners or academics interested in resolving these types of local government challenges (Dunleavy et al., 2005). What has become a pressing question in more recent times is what the implications for communities are if collective citizen preferences are not connected with nor influencing how decisions are made (Svara & Denhardt, 2010, pp. 52–56). This issue seems to be especially the case in these financially constrained times (Dollery et al., 2006).

Already a hotly contested debate is in progress as to whether citizen preferences collected and collated by council officials are truly representative. This is an important point, and one that elected members have voiced opinions on, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

It is therefore not unreasonable to promote citizen preferences as the first key element that may influence elected member decisions in our local democracy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009, pp. 2–4), even if establishing the proof of their influence is quite another challenge. Nor does this influence operate in isolation (Throgmorton, 1991), as the following discussion outlines.

1.4.2 Expert Advice

Expert advice is scientific advice (Bäckstrand, 2003, p. 24) that is used to support council decisions. It predominantly comes in two forms. Expert advice is more generally defined as specialised technical advice and not necessarily scientific alone. The first is recommendations from council officers. The second is advice from outside the council.

One rationale for gaining external advice arises when the council cannot source the knowledge it needs from its own officers. While the circumstances of each council will shape which areas of knowledge it may require outside advice on from time to time, many specialist skills (e.g., a geotechnical engineer) are not commonly found within a council.

In some situations, a council may seek independent advice even if it has the capability from within its ranks. For example, when it is obtaining resource or building consents (e.g., for its own development purposes), the regulator functions within a council may seek independent advice from outside the council. This is a common method to ensure there are no conflicts of interest (e.g., engineering or planning advice) in decisions that may require council approval (in practice, from 'itself').
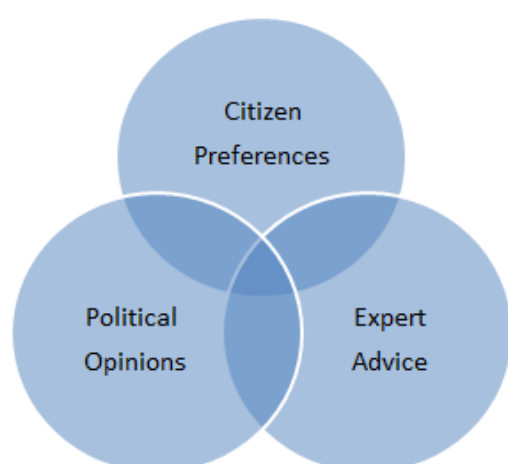
Figure 1.3. Broad influences on council decisions

Source: Adapted from Throgmorton (1991)

The area of contention revealed in the pilot research lies in the way this advice is administered. That is, it is not the advice per se that is at issue, but the transparency and consistency of the process that supports the delivery of the information to elected members for deliberation. As noted above, in decisions that are purely economic, testing the assumptions of proposed investments is not

especially complex. Large asset investment proposals in the socially constructed environments of local government are in an altogether different circumstance. Community preferences are substantially more difficult to establish.

One of my questions in this research is how elected members prioritise this advice when investment decisions in social infrastructure are more complicated than decisions based on economics alone. Part of the difficulty of establishing community preferences seems to relate to how preferences are collected, collated and used as the basis for recommendations (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014). Citizen preferences and expert advice need to be weighed in the decision-making process as many decisions that involve community infrastructure cannot be made through a wholly economic lens.

How elected members approach expert advice for their own deliberations is even less well understood (Acerete et al., 2009). This seems to be immensely difficult to determine, and my experience as a practitioner suggests there is little consistency in how they approach this advice for their own deliberations. Moreover, if the approach to expert advice is inconsistent, then the way the advice is prepared for deliberation may be no less important than the advice itself in terms of how it is deliberated on. If this is so, then what are the implications for how expert advice might influence, or fail to influence, decisions?

The influences of expert advice, therefore, seem to be subject to certain constraints or circumstances that are likely to affect how elected members consider this advice. The implications for elected members' decisions will be considered as part of the research design in Chapter 3, as well as in relation to the research findings in Chapter 4.

1.4.3 Political Opinions

Political opinions[14] are the third and final influence on which the pilot research provided preliminary insights. Regardless of the reasons for their influence, and even if some elected members might suggest the influence here is how well they are able to argue for or against any investment proposal (Erikson, 2013, p. 22), political opinions are likely to be the most influential. Curiously, these influences also seem to be the least understood of all three influences discussed here (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). At the pilot stage, without evidence, it was difficult before examining the evidence to surmise the reasons why this might be the case. One elected member offered the transient nature of elected members' tenure, the natural bias of the prevailing political view among current elected members and individual agendas are likely to be some of the elements that contribute to the strength of their influence (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013).

How elected member opinions influence decisions on large infrastructure investments specifically is a mystery. A number of commentators refer to these deliberations as a "black box" (Bächtiger et al., 2012; Dryzek & List, 2003; McDowell, 1980 p. 67; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008; Vigoda, 2003, p. 4). Other perspectives offer descriptions that move only slightly beyond the concept of the "black box" and its implication that there is no understanding of the influence of political opinions. In one such instance, Erikson (2013, p. 1) defines these opinions as the exchange of arguments.

Those who have attempted to look into the black box have made a range of observations to date (albeit with variable results). Authentic deliberative engagement

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[14] Political opinion in this context is defined as the influence an elected member's peers (other politicians) have on a decision that the elected member makes.

requires an open mind in a spirit of reciprocity (Benhabib, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), where deliberators do not privilege their own perspective above those of others. For Arendt (1961, p. 220), "enlarged thinking" means transcending "private subjective conditions" and taking into account the perspectives of others during the process of judgement. Deliberating citizens can ideally investigate generalisable interests informed by communicative rationality that emphasises mutual understanding (Habermas, 1971). This theory, however, is not well understood and seems to be somewhat at odds with the practice.

Initial evidence from the pilot research project supported this position. In the pilot, eight local government elected members were interviewed – mayors of city and district councils and chairs of regional councils. The single most important revelation from this pilot was the highly personal and individual nature of each interviewee's responses to the same set of questions. This result was so strong, it expanded the research proposal from a focus on what influenced elected member decisions per se to include the question of how their decisions were being influenced.

By adapting Throgmorton's (1991) conceptual framework for understanding the role of rhetoric in policy-making processes, this research settled on a foundation of scholarship that uses this thinking and extends it with evidence that deeply analyses the responses of elected members interviewed. Three main audiences are distinguished in these discussions – scientists, politicians and lay advocates – each with their own narrative.

Where these preliminary insights settled was on three key contexts in which elected members defined the elements of influence, specifically the legislative context (LGA 2002), the local government planning context (APs and LTPs) and the citizen engagement context (e.g., surveys, community meetings, deliberative polling, and

focus groups). These insights also highlighted three other key elements that elected members believed had an influence on their investment decisions, generally described as citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinions. Exploring the relationships between each has formed the substance of the thinking behind the research approach I have adopted to explore my proposed real-world problem (Figure 1.4).

In the wider context of the decision ecology, understanding the influence of decisions on elected members in local government is one task. Discerning the implications for how this might influence our understanding of decision-making within a wider context of democracy is quite another.

Democracy comes in many guises. At one end of the continuum is a representative democracy where elected members have the mandate to make all decisions; towards the middle is a participative (or deliberative) democracy where elected members balance political opinion and citizen engagement outcomes; and a direct democracy (everything by referendum) lies at the other end of the continuum. Extending Throgmorton's model, part of the thinking is to explore how these influences might be weighted and the implications of this weighting within the context of the local government democracy of New Zealand.

Finding what a balanced set of influences might look like when a balanced decision is reached (whatever the circumstance), and relating it to the democratic continuum, presents an exciting opportunity to get a glimpse of the very heart of our local democracy.
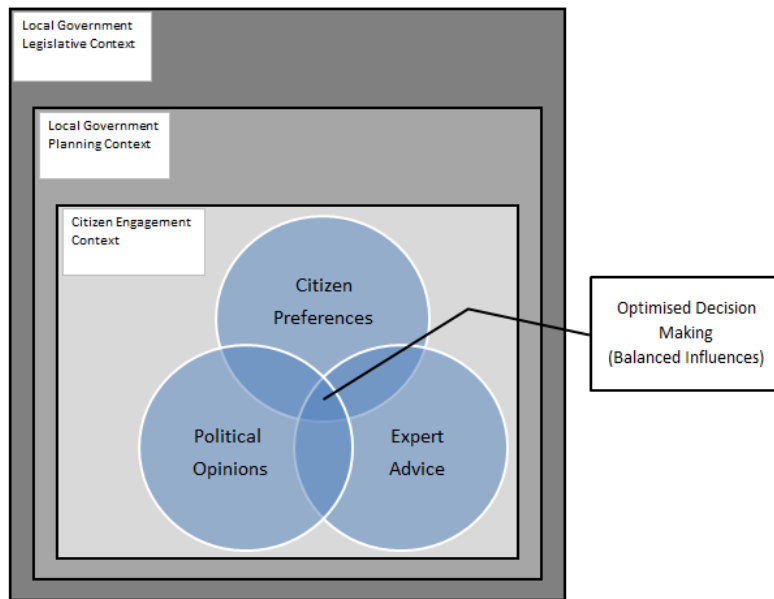
Figure 1.4. A framework to explore council decisions

Source: Adapted from Throgmorton (1991)

It also opens up the opportunity to explore these questions in relation to current and past mid-range theory, which has already explored similar approaches (e.g., Arnstein, 1969).

1.5   Preliminary Insights into Rationality, Power and Decision-making

In the context of this thesis, any discussion that considers a decision in political environments requires an understanding of the actors, the relationships between those actors (Ostrom, 2005), the influences brought to bear around them (Throgmorton, 1991) and the power struggles that ensue when making them (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Less clear is how important rationality is in these decisions and what power struggles it creates between the elected members making these decisions.

In this environment, rationality and power are bedfellows. Decisions made in such circumstances involve trade-offs and have consequences. While the literature gives some insight into the trade-offs (Flyvbjerg, 1998), in practice it is not clear what

they mean for the quality of these significant investment decisions and particularly what they mean for citizens (e.g., the loss of an improved social outcome).

As a counterfactual, it is crystal clear in practice that the elected members and their key stakeholders have growing expectations these types of decisions should be evidence-based (as the LGA 2002 and a myriad of council policies[15] testify). Another growing expectation is that hard evidence should support these decisions.[16] Such expectations, it is entirely feasible to imagine this will have the potential to create a dilemma (Krupp, 2016). Logically too, any evidence that is diametrically opposed to a political view and the power that is inherent within it is likely to produce tension.

Compounding this dilemma is a growing expectation that this evidence not only should inform these decisions but also must be shared at all times. Consequently, an underlying expectation appears to be that evidence-based investment decisions should be increasingly based on rationality rather than power (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Put another way, rationality over power is an emerging and expected foundation for local government decision-making. Furthermore, it seems these expectations are continuing to grow (Krupp, 2016) – in fact, the growing demand for participative democracy requires it.

If community demand for objective rational decision-making is growing, it follows that the power balance is shifting from those that make the decisions to those that provide the objective reality (rationality) for that decision. This trend also implies that this power is eroding and the balance is shifting from the elected

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[15] For example, Wellington City Council's Significance and Engagement Policy (November 2014).

[16] Hard evidence in this sense is 'normative', with an objective rationality.

members back to the communities they represent.[17] The very nature of this change must influence the sense of duty elected members feel towards their communities when they make decisions, and particularly the power they wield when making those decisions. Invariably much is at stake.

While this is not an altogether new revelation with the subsidiarity it infers (Follesdal, 2000), it remains uncertain the extent to which elected members (on behalf of citizens) have strengthened their expectation that their decisions should be evidence-based – that is, rational. The normative nature of these expectations seemingly indicates that the more significant a decision is, the less importance elected members attach to the 'politicking' that would have historically featured in such decisions.

At least two challenges follow from these circumstances. First, might an inherent standard for rationality at the extreme edge of normative resemble something akin to a 'gold standard' of expectation – purely driven by the significance of these sorts of decisions to those who make them and those they are making the decisions on behalf of?

Second, does power define the democratic reality of these decision-making environments where elevated expectations are now excluding politics (power) from that same reality? Given it is reasonable to assume such significant decisions involve significant exercises of power, how does an elected member now exert this power and does this challenge our local democracy where those expectations are being set at (un)reasonably high levels – best described and informed through mature, citizen-enabled, participative democracies?

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[17] A discussion about the influence circumstances such as being presented here and the democratic continuum that is inferred is provided in Chapter 2.

The literature gives some insights into the reasons behind such challenges. Nietzsche (1968, p. 60), for example, points out "the greater the power, the less the rationality" and also links power with stupidity: "power makes stupid". While this view may be somewhat extreme, elected members are ostensibly normal folk, doing their best in an extremely complex environment.

This decision-making environment has the potential to test our elected members. Does our democracy include an unspoken reality, of which elected members and the suite of key stakeholders are aware, that there is a growing desire to ensure that 'politicking' plays a lesser (or no) role in these significant investment decisions? Moreover, is this circumstance generating an expectation to pay more attention to evidence in a rationally constructed reality, notwithstanding the power that is inherently in the action arena of a decision environment like, but not limited to, debating chambers? Finally, the desire for the 'gold standard' growing when so much is at stake?

It seems reasonable to assume that, in this environment, any number of the stakeholders in local government seek normative (rational) investment decisions. Given the literature tells us that power has a clear tendency to dominate rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 325), what are the implications for large capital investment decisions that this research is examining? And when decisions of this nature are being made, what does this mean for citizens and the democratisation of their preferences?

Finally, if the practice or manifestation of power has real weight, the implications for decision-making are likely to be significant. The extent of this significance will be explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

With these insights in mind, what is the catalyst that has led this work to become a research project considering such issues, and what is the real-world problem we are trying to solve as a result?

1.6   The Real-world Problem

So far this chapter has set out a particular real-world problem that has catalysed this research to explore the importance of citizen preferences and expert advice in elected members' decision-making. The following describes the specifics of this problem.

A growing concern among a range of sectors in New Zealand is that local government is not financially sustainable (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012a, 2012b). Councils are struggling to respond to three unequivocal facts. The first is that significant investments in infrastructure were made nearly 70 years ago at the conclusion of the Second World War and then, approximately 25 years later, that infrastructure was replaced and expanded to meet the demands created by the baby boomer generation. A second, related fact is the natural lifecycle of assets, which defines when it is necessary to reinvest to renew or upgrade them at the end of their useful lives. The last relates to increasing community demands on councils to provide bigger and better facilities with what seem to be increasing levels of service. The challenge to local government is that it is considering these demands while attempting to remain competitive in local, regional and international markets (Wellington City Council Draft Annual Plan, 2013). Unfortunately, community expectations are well in advance of the ability to fund them.

Faced with a combination of difficult economic conditions resulting from the Global Financial Crisis and a general call from central government to stem local government rates increases to match the Consumer Price Index (Figure 1.5), a

number of senior local government practitioners and elected members are increasingly concerned.
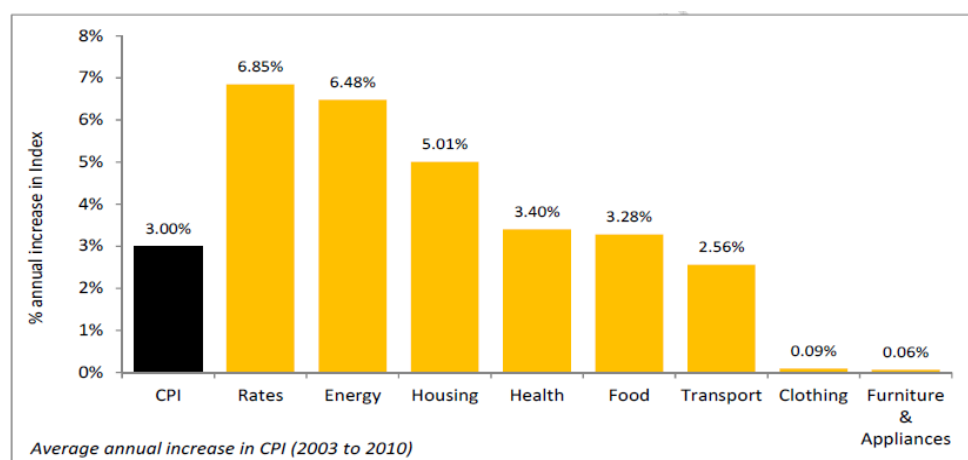
Figure 1.5. Components of annual increase in Consumer Price Index, 2003–2010
Source: Department of Internal Affairs (2012a)

> *Infrastructure – local government is responsible for developing and maintaining physical infrastructure for transport, water supply, and flood protection. Some local authorities face growing funding pressure as significant investment is required to upgrade or replace aging infrastructure. Extra investment will be needed to manage future stresses on infrastructure caused by an increasing population, land transport congestion, and the impacts of natural disasters. Questions to consider include whether local government can afford its share of the expenditure needed, and how it will pay for it. (Office of the Minister of Local Government – Hide, 2010)*

The extent of the investment required to meet these future infrastructure funding commitments has exposed a future prioritisation problem affecting the entire local government sector (Office of the Auditor General, 2011, 2012, 2013). While these increasing investment demands build financial pressure for increased funding allocations, the time is likely to come when communities cannot afford to meet these commitments. As a practitioner observer, I sense that the sector is moving closer to an

affordability crisis and that citizen engagement and the need to prioritise their preferences will play a key role in working through that crisis when it arises (Figure 1.6. The 'affordability problematic').
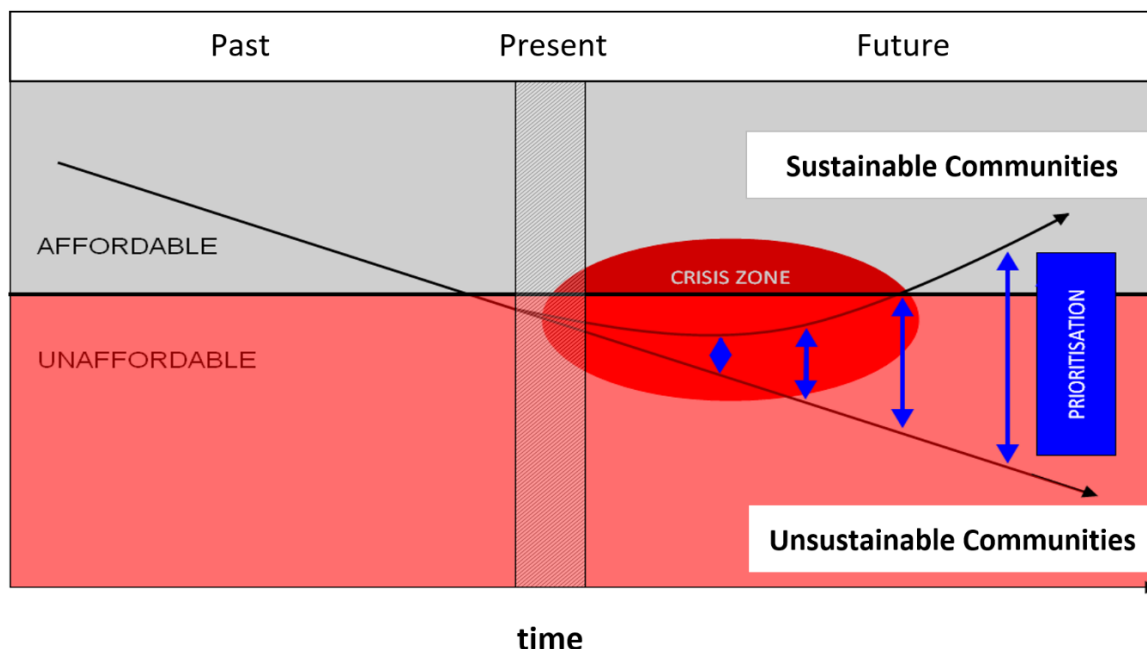
Figure 1.6. The 'affordability problematic'

One of the implications of this situation is that every investment decision (at least every significant decision[18]) has future affordability repercussions for citizens and the financial sustainability of their communities (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2012a, 2012b; Office of the Auditor General, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b). Unfortunately, even the process of finding a resolution to this dilemma has its own challenges. In particular, currently the biggest challenge for councils seems to be encouraging communities to participate in decisions that are likely to substantially affect their future wellbeing (Bouras, Katris, & Triantafillou, 2003; G. Smith & Wales, 2000).

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[18] As set out in section 90 of the Local Government Act 2002.

The imperative to consider citizen preferences gains strength from the normative argument that increasing citizen participation and reducing democratic deficits through "participative innovation" is likely to create better decision outcomes (Geissel, 2009) or more binding, accepted and acceptable decisions (Bland & Arnson, 2009, p. 29), in this case between councils and citizens.

In the context of this research, this argument suggests the real-world problem is inherently interwoven into local government legislative frameworks, collective citizen preferences and influences on decision-makers already in part introduced. This provides some level of comfort in that it not only suggests there are some connections between practice and this research's scholarship, but also points to an opportunity to expand this into a researchable problem with current research relevance.

1.6.1 Research Problem

The aim of this research is to understand how citizen preferences, expert advice and elected member opinion influence elected members in making significant large-scale investment decisions on behalf of their communities. The research problem begins by unpacking these influences in order to analyse how the research participants interpret each of them.

To accomplish this, the research must meet several challenges. First, it must establish whether these influences are in themselves subject to influences of their own. For example, what are the circumstances for establishing citizen preferences with regard to any substantial investment, and are the collective citizen preferences subject to bias that might skew any position established? To understand the sensitivities around these issues, the research will explore the citizen engagement practices that provide information on such preferences (Section 2.4.1). The rationale

implicitly applies to not only citizen preferences, but also two other important influences, expert advice and political opinions.

In addition, this research problem is embedded in a range of contexts (e.g., local government legislation, planning frameworks that support this and the citizen engagement practices that enable it). One of the key challenges will be to determine how elected members reconcile the sensitivities of the key influences against these contexts when they make their final decisions. For example, it will be necessary to establish if any recent or proposed legislation might have any other influences or bias on decisions (such as the amalgamation proposals the Local Government Commission is routinely processing for some territorial authorities, as in the Wellington region). This environment is highly dynamic, as the many recent and proposed changes to the LGA 2002 clearly demonstrate.

To address the research problem, the research needs to consider the influences and the contexts in which they are embedded and provide new understandings of decision-making in local government. On this basis, this research is expected to provide new scholarship and new insights into mid-range theory. It is expected that the research findings on the relationships between and the relative weightings of each of these influences will also inform this scholarship.

The expectation is that through the empirical evidence this research provides, we will know more about decision-making and about how and why citizens, experts and politicians might be influencing elected members. In gathering this evidence, it is envisaged this research will at least in part address a gap, already identified by academics, in the scholarship supporting the normative argument that citizens' input provides for better investment decisions. It may also give some insight into how it influences those decisions.

From a theoretical viewpoint, it is also intended that this research will give some insight into where local government rests on the democratic continuum. Local government is experiencing ever-changing citizen engagement demands and expectations from its local communities when it is making large investment decisions on their behalf. While some evidence indicates councils are increasingly engaging with their communities, little is understood of the extent to which elected members are adopting the results of this engagement and using it to inform their decisions. It sparks the question, how deliberative is deliberative? Or more precisely, how deliberative is our representative democracy? Even less clear are the implications of what seems to be an ongoing shift of these deliberative and representative elements away from one another.

From a practitioner viewpoint, this research is also intended to improve practitioners' understanding of how citizens can influence decisions that elected members make and the importance of these preferences in the deliberations of elected members when they make them. Practitioners in this context include other elected members, technical experts and citizens.

This discussion leads on to the question of how the intentions of this research will be achieved. What questions have been used to tease out these new understandings? And how did they inform the research approach designed to answer them?

1.6.2   Research Question

Are substantial investment decisions in local government reflecting established citizen preferences and, if so, how and why?

1.6.3   Secondary Questions

Are decisions able to be positioned to reflect citizen preferences that emerge from citizen engagement practices and, if not, why not? Are there any material implications?

What other influences act on elected members before they are able to reach a decision? Are there any material implications?

Is it possible to define a decision ecology across a deliberative democracy continuum and, if so, how?

1.7   Summary of Chapters

This chapter has explored how decisions in local government are subject to local government legislation, council planning frameworks and the citizen engagement practices adopted by councils; that is, its focus is on the decisions environment or action arena (Ostrom, 2005) in which this research is conducted. This background will provide some insight into the real-world problem this chapter identifies and into the research problem this thesis is tackling. It will also define the research question used to interrogate the research problem.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review to two areas of focus. The first part explores the scholarship that describes citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinion in the context of local government. This includes literature on how information emerges for elected members to consider in making a decision. Also covered is the scholarship on the nature of the influences of political opinion, which peers impose on this information when elected members gather their thoughts about their own beliefs, values and experiences. The second part explores the decision theory and how it applies to the task of determining elected member preferences set against these

influences. By establishing its own space in this scholarship, the research will identify where its findings will add value to current theory.

In Chapter 3 is the rationale of the theoretical framework and research design adopted for this research. It also describes how the scholarship gives context to the value this research seeks to provide. This chapter also sets out the research's strategy, method and model. This maximises the opportunity to develop insights into this research problem. It explains the thinking behind choosing these approaches and adopting two research methods – document reviews and interviews. This chapter also describes the model that brings these disparate elements into the debating chamber where these decisions are ultimately made. It fundamentally sets the foundations for following discussion of the rich data that come from the interviews with mayors, chairs and other elected members.

Chapter 4 analyses those rich data. The thematically coded transcripts give a structure to elected members' thoughts on how important citizen preferences are when deliberating on large investment decisions, along with a range of other influences. A deeper dive into the results of the thematic coding distilled from the literature reveals the weight of these preferences along with a deeper layer of influences not yet detailed in this context. These insights and weightings provide the evidence to answer the questions of how and why the elected members were influenced in making decisions about significant investments. This chapter also pairs the evidence from this thematic analysis with the normative arguments in the literature outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

I conclude in Chapter 5 with an examination of these findings and the proposed benefits of this research. In a practical sense, this discussion will cover the asset investment challenges that lie ahead for local government and how these

research findings provide insights that elected members might use in the future when they make these decisions and that point to the governance arrangements that might support them. Furthermore, it discusses how the normative arguments for informed investment decisions might help explain the democratic continuum on which local government resides and the implications of this research evidence for its place on that continuum.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

Classical theories of choice emphasise decision-making as a rational process (Dillon, 1998). They are part of the history of the study of decision-making processes, which has been evolving with contributions from a number of disciplines over the decades (Oliveira, 2007). Such contributions have ranged from providing mathematical foundations for economics to refining knowledge through routine applications in many areas such as finance, medicine, military and even cybernetics. As a result, decision theories have embodied several prevalent concepts and models, which exert significant influence over almost all the biological, cognitive and social sciences (Doyle & Thomason, 1999).

The way people can and do make decisions varies considerably. Much early research focused on the way we are observed to make decisions and the way in which we should theoretically make them; as a result, the theory is wide-ranging and diverse (Dillon, 1998). Until relatively recently, models within the theory could be classified as either descriptive or normative. Each possesses distinct characteristics, follows specific methodologies for individuals to select one course of action over another and contains its own acceptable principles (Oliveira, 2007).

In normative theories of choice, decision-makers analyse a number of possible alternatives from different scenarios before making their choice. Normative theories have been refined over the years so they more effectively explain this type of decision-making. Examples include prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) and subjective expected utility theory (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1947).

In the context of this research, normative theories translate into what elected members might describe as scenarios and scenario elements that can provide evidence that informs an investment decision. In practice, the New Zealand government is generally recalibrating the method of collating, storing and analysing information for decisions about public investments, as well as the extent to which those activities are conducted. This evidence-based approach is best illustrated by the significant attention being given to data and analytics to inform social investment decisions across the public sector of central government. This has culminated in institutions such as, among others, New Zealand Treasury's Social Investment Unit. There is a strong desire, as will become apparent, that similar evidence-based approaches become inherent in making decisions about the types of investments being researched here.

Descriptive theories highlight another set of acceptable principles, no less valid than those of normative theory of choice. These principles recognise the importance of perception or cognition in explaining how elected members, in the case of this research, make a decision. This focus introduces the concept of limited or bounded rationality[19] (Jones, 1999, 2001, 2003; Simon, 1957a, 1957b, 1972). As will be discussed later in this chapter, bounded rationality falls short of a 'rational' choice.

More recently, a third category of theory has been established. A prescriptive theory of choice is based on both the strong theoretical foundation of normative theory and the observations of descriptive theory (Bell, Raiffa, & Tversky, 1988).

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[19] Bounded rationality asserts that decision-makers intend to be rational; that is, they are goal-oriented and adaptive, but because of human cognitive and emotional architecture, they sometimes fail, which can include failure in making important decisions. Limits on rational adaptation are of two types: procedural limits, which limit how we go about making decisions, and substantive limits, which affect particular choices directly (Jones, 2003).

Several gaps between descriptive and normative models could not be explained in terms of varying task understanding or tendencies toward reflective thought. Stanovich and West (1999) demonstrated how the variation and instability in responses can be analysed to infer why descriptive and normative models of human reasoning and decision-making do not always coincide.

The following is a simple way of differentiating between these decision-making theories of choice (Oliveira, 2007):

Descriptive: What people actually do or have done.

Normative: What people should do (in theory).

Prescriptive: What people should and can do (in practice).

If normative processes of decision-making explain how decision-makers employ a particular set of alternatives to solve problems (Goodwin & Wright, 1998; Kunreuther, 2001), what happens when decision-makers follow no such process? Hoch, Kunreuther and Gunther (2001) affirm that people rarely adhere to logical models of choice, and suggest that variations in human behaviour might have no theoretical basis in normative models. It follows that where elected members make investment decisions of this kind, they may not meet the expectations of their citizens. Cognitive decisions that involve significant investments in, for example, public infrastructure do not on the face of it seem logical. If nothing else, what citizens and academics seek is an understanding of what influences elected members when they are making these decisions, and a logical basis to the practical and theoretical elements that describe how they do this.

This research then is generally describing the reasoning underlying elected members' decisions to establish whether these decisions include citizen preferences. In the theoretical context, as part of the process of determining a logical model of

investment choice, this research is establishing whether the agent (elected members) is recognising the citizen preference element of a decision (normative decision theory of choice) (e.g., Hansson, 1994).

2.2   Large Capital Investment Decisions and the Theory

Applying these models of choice, decision theory has framed this research within two particular areas. The first generally describes how the information is gathered and used in decisions and what influences that information (e.g., Abels, 2008; Fung, 2003, 2006; McKinlay Douglas, 2013; J. Thomas, 1995). The second describes how decisions are actually made and what influences the outcome of the decision (e.g., Boucher, 2005; Fishkin & Luskin, 2008; March & Olsen, 1998).

This second area is strongly correlated to the tense relationship that both normative and descriptive decision theories have (e.g., Hansson, 1994; Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007; Simon, 1972, 1991) and the decisions elected members actually make in this research (e.g., Wellington City Council Long Term Plan, 2015 [Adopted]; Whakatane District Council Long Term Plan, 2015 [Adopted]).

When these two bodies of literature are combined with the literature that supports the local government sector more generally, we also gain an explanation for the democracy that elects representatives (LGA 2002; Local Government New Zealand, 2016a, 2016b), the decision-making frameworks and processes for a decision once elected (LGA 2002, part 6), how information is collected and collated to inform their deliberations (e.g., Wellington City Council draft Long Term Plan, 2015; Whakatane District Council draft Long Term Plan, 2015), the type of decisions and nature of the decision-makers who are making the decision (e.g., Whakatane District Council Significance and Engagement Policy, 2015; Ostrom, 1990), how deliberations are practically undertaken (e.g., Whakatane District Council deliberations on the draft

Long-term Plan 2015–25), and ultimately the circumstances that have decision-makers settle on a position when making an actual decision.[20]

For the purpose of this research and within the bodies of literature noted, the scope of this review has been based on the following priorities. The first is a preference for any decision theory literature that pertains to the local government sector in New Zealand (e.g., Dillon, 1998; Office of the Auditor General, n.d.; O'Leary, 2014). This does not preclude international research (e.g., Dollery and the Australian context), but it does recognise the limitations of research conducted outside the specific legislative frameworks that administer local government in New Zealand.

A second preference is for any literature that relates to formal decisions made by the agents[21] in local government (elected members interviewed for this research in decisions either made in the past, or being considered for their 2015 long-term plans). Also prioritised is any literature that describes decisions involving large capital investments (Knight, 2010) – that is, significant rather than ordinary decisions (e.g., Whakatane District Council Significance and Engagement Policy). As the definition of significance in the LGA 2002 (sections 76–82) indicates, significant decisions are specifically different from what are referred to as common decisions.

A final focus is on the way theory is reconciled with practice. By design, this focus creates the framework that will ultimately inform the research design and analysis of large capital investment decisions. The following section puts these large capital investments in the context required to provide that direction.

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[20] Mayor/DeputyCC04204, CouncillorDC20842. See Appendix C for an explanation of the interviewee coding method.

[21] Agents in this research are members elected to local government in local government elections.

2.3   Decision Elements and the Theory

As described in Chapter 1, the influences that elected members must reconcile at some level before they cast their vote on a decision involve three broad cohorts of people (Throgmorton, 1991): citizens (and their preferences), experts (and their technical advice) and politicians (and their opinions). These three cohorts are the same three key decision elements or influences that provide the theoretical foundations for this research.

The literature that supports determining collective citizen preferences broadly describes the enabling environments of citizen engagement (e.g., Forester, 1999; Fung, 2006); the practices that establish citizen preferences (e.g., Hartz-Karp, 2007); and how those practices might influence the citizen preferences being sought (e.g., Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006; Svara & Denhardt, 2010). Embedded within this scholarship is literature that explores how the actors and institutions (Ostrom, 1986, 2005, 2010) and the behaviour of those institutions[22] (e.g., Cohen et al., 1972) of local government interact with these practices when citizen engagement opportunities are enabled (e.g., Fishkin, 2010, 2011; Gibson, 2006; C. Hendricks, 2005). This would include the legislative (LGA 2002) and planning (APs and LTPs) frameworks supporting local government in the processes that give guidance on how to administer decisions in this sector.

While the literature on establishing citizen preferences is extensive,[23] less common is literature that unpacks expert advice (e.g., Bäckstrand, 2003) and

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[22] Cohen et al. (1972) refer to institutions as organisations. For the purpose of this research, these two terms are treated as if they have the same definition.

[23] This long-standing attention from academics, practitioners and politicians alike is to be expected given councils hold stewardship for activities conducted on behalf of their communities.

political opinions (e.g., Erikson, 2013) in the context of local government. Moreover, any decision theory related to large capital investment decisions is somewhat removed from the specific environments of local government in New Zealand that this research is concerned with. For this reason, this research has identified important implications for decision theory in the decision-making environments of local government in New Zealand and the roles they play in this (Local Government New Zealand, 2016a).

The existing gap in the literature is particularly pertinent in addressing the current normative argument (Baron, 1985, 2004, 2006; Hansson, 1994) that elected members are able to reconcile and weight citizen preferences when they settle on a final position that reflects those preferences.[24] Namely, little empirical evidence exists to support or refute this argument. This environment will be explored in more detail below, but the nuances that appear to influence elected members' opinions are seemingly subtle and somewhat eclectic in nature.[25] It is not surprising that even less empirical evidence is available on what these nuances might be or how they might support the normative argument that establishing and adopting citizen preferences leads to better large capital investment decisions.

While this research and literature review tease out what underlies this complexity, the results of some pilot research to support this doctoral research suggested the influences of citizen preferences, expert opinion and political opinion (see Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1, adapted from Throgmorton, 1991) are interwoven with other, little understood influences inside what some refer to as a "black box" of decision-making (Bächtiger et al., 2012, p. 5). As will be explored further in Section

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[24] Chair/DeputyRC321161; Mayor/DeputyCC331231.

[25] Chair/Deputy351283.

2.6, such subtle influences or nuances include, but are not limited to, elected member values, beliefs and a strong sense of what is right for their communities (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013; F. Wilde, personal communication, 12 July 2013).

It follows that, if these first bodies of literature support theories explaining influences on information that set the foundations for decisions in local government (e.g., LGA 2002), they have also established the information elected members use up to the point of the council meeting where a decision is made.[26] This is a specific event and, in terms on the influences that manifest in this forum, it is subject to a significant amount of speculation.[27]

Decision-making in a council meeting is a formal process, where time is set aside for conducting the last of the deliberations and making the decision for or against investing. This event provides a further opportunity to collect empirical evidence on the strength of its influence on the final decision outcome.[28] Evidence that this thesis presents suggests it is an important event in the decision-making process; just how important is the subject of some of the analysis and discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

The second body of literature supports the theory behind the deliberations themselves and the decision ultimately settled on at that meeting. As will become apparent in later chapters on the results of the research, voting for or against a decision to make any significant capital investment arrives at what could be aptly

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[26] Chair/Deputy361350.

[27] CouncillorCC07381; Mayor/DeputyCC481771.

[28] CouncillorCC15708.

described as a flashpoint.[29] That is, it is the point in time when elected members are asked to vote on whether to proceed with investing significant community funds. This point in time has all the hallmarks that its combustible equivalent might suggest: anything can happen and it often does. When we truly believe in something, it becomes all too easy to follow our emotions and follow it through enthusiastically, making hasty decisions that we may eventually come to regret.[30]

In some ways, the essence of this research is to scrutinise the normative argument that elected members will give account to and weight citizen preferences in the heat generated by this flashpoint – rationally.

Most of the scholarship of this second body of literature falls into one of two categories. One relates to the processes of decision-making[31] leading up to a council meeting, or more specifically the relationships of the parts of the processes that lead up to a decision at that meeting (Simon, 1955, 1957 a & b, 1960; Witte, Joost, & Thimm, 1972). The other relates to the decision itself, or more specifically how and why certain decisions are preferred over others and are settled on at that time (Cohen et al., 1972; Dillon, 1998; Lau & Redlawski, 2001; Mekrungruengkul, 2012; Simon, 1955). Further literature also explores the relationships between these two aspects (Morcol, 2006).

As previously stated, while this thesis will explore these different areas of scholarship, the substantive thinking behind this research question is as much about the relationship between these areas as it is about the theories and findings of each of them. On this basis, the research question has been developed to explore the

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[29] CouncillorDC18791; Chair/DeputyRC24957.

[30] Mayor/DeputyCC331257.

[31] Decision-making is defined as deliberation by many scholars (e.g., G. Thomas & James, 2010).

environment in which decisions are reached as well as defining the influences on elected members when they finally settle on a position for or against investing. The research has drawn on literature from several different fields to explore this environment, including public administration, political science and sociology. The next section summarises the salient aspects of this scholarship, and describes the current mid-range theory it is seeking.

2.4   Decision Influences and the Theory

As stated, the first set of theories describes the nature of the information provided to elected members for them to use in making their decisions. Based on the adapted model of Throgmorton (1991), these influences comprise citizen preferences, expert advice and political opinions.

2.4.1   Citizen Preferences

In a representative democracy where elected members are democratically given the responsibilities to manage citizens' affairs, what is it that makes citizen preferences so important? One area this first body of literature explores is the normative argument that any opportunities for citizens to become engaged and participate in local community decisions will ultimately lead to more informed, or 'better', decisions (Michels, 2011). This argument is relevant to this proposal as it provides the foundations for establishing what and how citizen preferences might be determined to support better investment decisions when elected members make them on behalf of their communities.

It is the variety of engagement practices that is of specific interest to this research, and in particular on what basis council officials and elected members select them. This interest is also shared in the citizen engagement literature (e.g., Svara &

Denhardt, 2010). Of note is the literature pointing out that the process of selecting certain citizen engagement practices over others to collect and collate citizen preferences is seemingly subject to a wide variety of its own influences (Biegelbauer & Loeber, 2010, pp. 11–12). It seems the resulting outputs, even if they are on the same issue, can vary based on the engagement practices selected. The potential to produce different results about preferences in the same population is more than problematic (Fung, 2006). How these preferences are established and the performance criteria agreed to establish these preferences any decision might attract are other subjects of considerable debate (e.g., financial sustainability) (Dollery, 2009). These will be some of the nuances elected members are likely to need to form an opinion on across the spectrum of opinions when they are considering significant investment decisions (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). This research will unpack and consider such nuances further.

So what is citizen engagement, and how does it differ from citizen participation? Citizen engagement has been defined as an:

> *ability and incentive for ordinary people to come together, deliberate, and take action on problems or issues that they themselves have defined as important. (Gibson, 2006, p. 2)*

Roberts offers a similar view:

> *Public engagement is people's direct involvement in community affairs rather than reliance on indirect representation mediated by others such as subject-matter experts, elected officials or bureaucracies. Based on what people perceive to be important to them, they engage in problem-solving and decision-making in order to make a difference in their world. It is public in the sense that all, not just a select few, can participate if they choose to do so. . . . [I]t is engagement in the sense that people do not wait for others to do for*

them; they take action on their own to do what they believe is important and

necessary to do. (Roberts, 2004, p. 28)

Citizen participation has also long been a subject of active discussions in the field of political and administrative sciences. In the 1980s, it was defined as a citizen action that influences or seeks to influence policy decisions (Nagel, 1987), or as an action that incorporates the demands and values of citizens into public administration services (Zimmerman, 1986).

More recently citizen participation has been defined as:

a community based process, where citizens organize themselves and their

goals at the grassroots level and work together through non-governmental

community organizations to influence the decision-making process. Citizens

get most involved in this process when the issue at stake relates directly to

them. Furthermore, citizen participation occurs when all the stakeholders

cooperate to implement changes. (Holdar & Zakharchenko, 2002, p. 15)

From a somewhat different perspective, others define citizen participation as:

informing the public, listening to the public, engaging in problem solving, and

developing agreements, within a framework where the government officials

retain decision-making authority. (Creighton, 2005, p. 9)

As the definitions above indicate, the difference between citizen engagement and citizen participation is clear. In summary, for the purposes of this research, citizen engagement is when citizens have the opportunity to voice opinions on matters of local importance, whereas citizen participation is when citizens can

exercise the democratic right of voicing an opinion if they choose to.[32] It is the outcome from both of these processes that will assist councils in establishing citizen preferences. It is these same preferences that inform decisions elected members will finally settle upon, on behalf of their communities.

How citizen preferences are established is no less important. At the core of this body of literature is a growing desire among researchers and others (e.g., council officers) to understand the implications of greater opportunities for citizen engagement alongside exploring the challenges involved in increasing citizen participation.

In the literature on the public sector (the academic disciplines of public administration and public policy), there are currently two areas in which greater citizen engagement is proposed. One is the literature of participatory policy analysis, which proposes giving citizens a distinct voice at the earliest stages of setting direction for public programmes; that is, during the critical policy formulation stage (Benington & Moore, 2011; de Leon, 1992; Moore, 1995). The other is the literature on citizen participation (Forester, 1999), which generally advocates an increasingly permeable boundary for public organisations by allowing participation in organisational processes.

There are several ways to think about citizen participation and engagement and the forms it takes. Approaches range along a continuum from one-way communication at one end, to dialogue shared and processed among multiple participants at the other (International Association for Public Participation, 2007; Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006). Citizen engagement can occur through formal

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[32] It is not my intention to explore whether citizens have enough knowledge to be able to participate in these processes even if they want to (Acerete et al., 2009). However, I will consider this issue when I develop my research strategy to explore the extent of its influence on citizen preferences.

programmes related to making policy decisions, but may also occur in the context of day-to-day operations and service delivery (Svara & Denhardt, 2010).

In practice, citizen engagement is used for gaining information, assistance and support from citizens (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, p. 9); it offers opportunities for revitalising democracy, building citizenship and reinforcing a sense of community (Svara & Denhardt, 2010). From a democratic perspective, citizen participation is a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making (Michels & de Graaf, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001a, 2001b, 2013). Some also consider citizen engagement to be the *right thing* to do as a part of the democratic ideal or the *smart thing* to do to gain the information and involvement needed for effective, legitimate government (Catlaw & Rawlings, 2010). One of the research questions will focus on whether the decision-making processes elected members followed in this research did indeed reinforce the sense of community and just how democratic or legitimate their final decisions on investments were.

Alongside this rationale for engaging citizens because building citizenship and community is important for its own sake, others identify a more instrumental reason. That is, engagement may be specifically aimed at gaining approval for or implementing a particular policy or project (Svara & Denhardt, 2010).

Following this line of thinking, citizen engagement is part of a family of democratic reform ideas that includes public participation, public involvement, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and collaborative governance (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, p. 9). In what remains perhaps the most cited work in the literature on participatory democracy, Sherry Arnstein (1969) develops an influential typology in her paper "A ladder of citizen participation". She argues that

participation is valuable to the extent that it "is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens . . . to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). She also theorises a *ladder* of empowerment with eight rungs: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and, finally, citizen control (Figure 2.1).
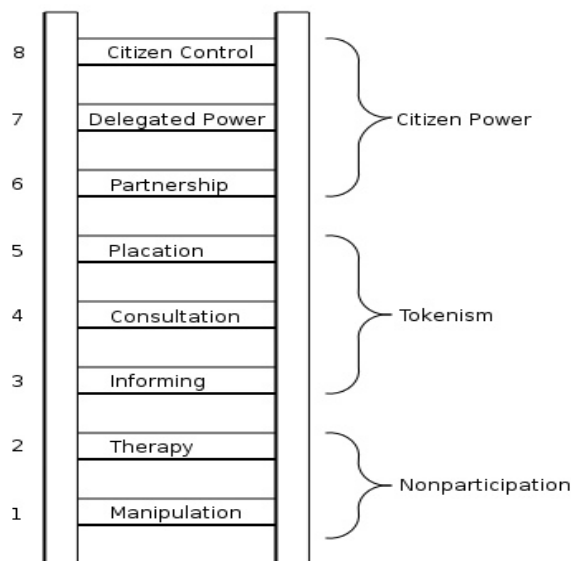
Figure 2.1. A ladder of citizen participation

Source: Arnstein (1969)

In addition to these practice opportunities, techniques or instruments enabling citizen participation have proliferated. "Over the past decades, many countries have gained experience with referendums, citizens' forums, citizens' juries, collaborative governance, participatory budgeting, and many other models in which citizens have a more direct say" (Michels, 2011, p. 1). Many countries have also gained experience with collaborative governance, citizens' advisory committees, and participatory budgeting (Cain, Dalton, & Scarrow, 2006).

These instruments principally support the normative argument. However, the normative argument has another side – one that purports increased citizen engagement and participation do not result in better decisions. Many oppose this

position, identifying its flaws on a number of levels. They believe many mitigating factors constrain citizens from being able to achieve stronger roles as citizens. This side of the normative argument is referred to as its deficits or more specifically its citizenship deficits (Acerete et al., 2009).

The implication of citizenship deficits for this research is that they may be subject to the outcomes of some sort of pre-determined bias. For this reason, we will briefly explore this critical concept, drawing on the increasing amount of literature related to it.

Citizenship deficits. The term citizenship deficit broadly refers to an erosion of civil society and civic engagement and more specifically to an erosion of civic skills and dispositions among the general public (Nabatchi, 2010). Evidence of a citizenship deficit comes from the numerous statistics that show a decline in the political engagement, civic dispositions and social capital of the public (Dalton, 2002; Dennis & Owen, 2001; Mathews, 1994; Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Rimmerman, 2001; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Wattenberg, 2002).

Many scholars claim there are citizenship deficits among the general public and democratic deficits within the institutions of government (e.g., Biegelbauer & Loeber, 2010; Carson, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Dennis & Owen, 2001; Durant, 1995; Fishkin, 2010; Frederickson, 2008; Nabatchi, 2010; Rimmerman, 2001). Specific elements diminish a council's ability to successfully engage to overcome this opportunity (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001a, 2001b, 2009). Although the level of concern about public confidence in government has varied over the years, confidence has now reached an all-time low (Campbell & Bertolini, 2013), the pervasiveness of these deficit problems requires local government to refocus its

attention on these issues (Acerete et al., 2009) and to find new ways of approaching them (Bächtiger, Neimeyer, Neblo, Steenbergen, & Steiner, 2010).

> *You can have politics without democracy . . . but you can't have democracy*
>
> *without politics. (Stoker, 2006)*

From an empirical perspective, councils are in democratic deficit when their citizens come to believe that they cannot use their participatory opportunities and resources to achieve responsiveness from their local government (Warren & Pearce, 2008). New Zealand is not exempt from this issue. Although the concern with public confidence in local government and citizen participation has ebbed since the local government reforms of 1989 (Brosnan & Cheyne, 2010; Local Government New Zealand, 2012a, 2012b; Palmer, Driver, Gardiner, & Jackson, 2012; Shand, 2007), current indicators of the citizenship deficit suggest it may be one of the reasons for local government's inability to deal with a number of complex issues (McKinlay Douglas, 2013). As concerns about financial sustainability increase across the sector, a number of academics suggest this motivates a rethink on how councils give effect to their citizen engagement practices (Dollery, 2009; Dollery, Walker, & Bell, 2011; Kelly, Dollery, & Grant, 2009).

If legislation enabling deliberative democracy and innovative citizen engagement instruments provide real opportunities to support better decisions, then the benefits associated with a reduction in citizenship deficits may also follow (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010; Uhr, 1999). One of the challenges for this research will be to explore how closely these might be connected. This focus will extend to the nature of relationships between them and any influences they may impose on elected members when they are deliberating on a decision.

One way to support both citizens and elected members in overcoming the citizenship deficit is for all to have access to a wide variety of expert advice where appropriate. This is the second key influence on elected members when they are reaching decisions (Throgmorton, 1991). As expected, it also comes with its own set of influences.

2.4.2 Expert Advice

Scientific (expert technical) advice has never been in greater demand; nor has it been more contested. At the same time, the authority and legitimacy of these experts are under increasing scrutiny, particularly in areas that tend to spark intense debate (Wilsdon, Allen, & Paulavets, 2014). Moreover, many examples show how these debates rage drawing on the type of advice that is important to large capital investment decisions (e.g., climate change).

How elected members seek, consider and apply expert technical advice seems to be no less of a mystery than the decision-making that they apply it to. To make matters more puzzling, the latter part of the 20th century saw the rapid emergence of fundamental and sometimes contradictory change in the philosophies and processes used to determine the investment decisions elected members used in the strategic processes that wrap around these types of decisions (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). With the changes that realised the strategic planning outcomes in local government of western democracies came a new order or approach, which was to fundamentally change how governments approached governing.

The New Public Management (NPM) approach was introduced in the 1980s (Kalimullah, Ashraf, & Ashaduzzaman, 2012) in response to perceived deficiencies in contemporary management practice, with an emphasis on improved efficiencies and controlled costs and with a greater cognisance of what were rather vaguely referred to as *competitive market forces* (Newton & van Deth, 2005). A concurrent effort was to

partner an overtly commercial and managerial stance with a complementary promotion of citizen-driven democracy through the principles of community governance (Reddel, 2004). This new way of thinking created an unprecedented a demand for technical experts and their expert advice to inform the decisions this new policy environment required.

Considering NPM and the new policy environment it created provides valuable background to this area of influence. Although authors differ in their label for NPM, descriptions of the direction of these reforms are remarkably similar across the scholarship. Differences in the way they are represented are simply a matter of individual emphasis:

> *NPM has variously been defined as a vision, an ideology or (more prosaically)*
> *a bundle of particular management approaches and techniques (many of them*
> *borrowed from the private, for profit sector). NPM is managerial thought*
> *(Ferlie et al., 1996:9) or based on ideas in the private sector and brought into*
> *the public sector (Hood, 1991, 1995). Many of these reforms have similarities*
> *with the modernization component of good governance (Grindle, 2004).*
> *(Pollitt, 1994, p. 1)*

Along with the focus on the substantial cultural changes these initiatives have introduced into the local government environment, much attention has been paid to the real and potential costs and benefits of change implementation (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). What this research seeks to understand is the influences created by and between the three key actors (Ostrom, 2005) in the local government domain with respect to these investment decisions.

Similar to Throgmorton (1991), Simpson and Bretherton (2010) show (Figure 2.2) this relationship has reflected a complex pattern of tensions between: the ability of technical experts to apply their professional expertise to the planned development

(investment advice) of a spatially defined community; the desire of local residents to access the greatest possible range of local services at the lowest possible cost (citizenship preferences); and the efforts of elected politicians to reconcile (elected member opinion) the wishes of paid professional planners with the demands of enfranchised community residents. Put another way, elected members must balance technical effectiveness with political legitimacy in the interests of continued popularity and consequent re-election (Silver, Weitzman, & Brecher, 2002). It is of little doubt that the changing face of public administration has been reflected in a corresponding adjustment to the conventionally accepted balance of power between these three entities (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Figure 2.2. Stakeholder influences on local government strategy

Source: Simpson and Bretherton (2010)

Though it has been historically fair to portray the expert and political vertices of Simpson and Bretherton's (2010) triangle (Figure 2.2) as protagonists in an ongoing debate about how best to develop and deliver local services to a largely passive *community*, some take the perspective that the weightings are shifting from one or more vertices to another (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). In the western world at least, the 21st century is increasingly reflects more direct interaction between expert and community, mediated and moderated by locally elected politicians—seen by the experts as the voice of community, and seen by community as the supervisory managers of those experts (Reddel & Woolcock, 2004). This thesis explores whether this trend operates in New Zealand local government and, if so, to what extent,

As expert advice is instrumental to the success of (local) government policies (Li, 2009), scientific assessments have become increasingly common in the landscape of global affairs due to, at least in part, the understanding that better and more widely shared information fosters better management of complex interactions between people (Mitchell, Clark, & Cash, 2006).

Some have called for a refashioning of scientific expertise into a more transparent, accountable and democratic enterprise. With NPM, has come participatory, civil, citizen, civic, stakeholder and democratic science catchwords that signify the ascendancy of a participatory paradigm in policy within the NPM paradigm. The participatory turn to expert advice can be interpreted as a resistance to the perceived *scientisation* of politics, which implies that political and social issues are better resolved through technical expertise than democratic deliberation (Bäckstrand, 2003).

Governments everywhere spend considerable amounts of money on eliciting advice from experts. Current trends in public policy suggest that local governments,

as agents of place, have an opportunity to work more effectively with expert advisors to support improved local outcomes. In addition to the opportunities for decision-makers to improve the way they elicit advice, the situation raises interesting questions for researchers to study by modelling the nature and benefit of this advice (Li, 2009).

In essence, current thinking about expert advice identifies the following main issues: how the practices involved in seeking expert advice change the effectiveness of decision-making; how the nature of issues and other factors affect the acceptability of advice to decision-makers; and how the advisors should be held accountable for the consequences of their advice (Baron, 1990, 1994; Li, 2009). The first two issues are a focus of this research.

Figure 2.3. Deliberation context

Alongside these issues, seeking advice (e.g., consultancies, think tanks, commission inquiries, or roundtables) depends on a variety of factors: the nature of the issue (Hrbek, 1986), political considerations (Steytler, 2005), the timeframe of policy-making (C. Saunders, 1998) and other factors (Li, 2009; Verrelli, 2008). For this research, such a context applies no less to citizen preferences and political

opinions than it does to expert advice. It is structured in the context of a decision-maker's (elected member's) balancing or reconciling of the three elements that they must consider at the time of the decision, as Figure 2.3 illustrates.

Worth noting is that the expert advice and related issues arising in advising policy instruments (the input into or influence on decision-making that gives effect to policy advice) have long attracted the attention of economic theorists. Theorists have spent considerable effort on identifying ways to address conflicts of interest of the experts (e.g., diversified committees, multiple rounds of communication, and disclosure requirements). For practitioners, the implications are more about how expert advice manifests itself in the decisions elected members make, as much as they are about what to prepare in advance so they can make those decisions. For theorists, reading the expert advice against practitioners' accounts offers valuable contextual knowledge and perspectives to explain these circumstances. The emphasis is on establishing where, in making their political considerations, decision-makers find the balance in accepting or rejecting experts' recommendations (Li, 2009).

The specific nature of the relationship between elected members' decisions and expert advice varies on a case-by-case basis. Pragmatic reality continues to play an important role in reconciling the expert view of council staff (for example) with the politically driven perspective of elected members. Similarly, community opinion on the effectiveness of elected members can range widely, from enthusiastically supportive to cynically dismissive, perhaps reflecting more on the concept of political acumen than on that of techno-managerial competence (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). As such, in terms of its value in securing significant stakeholder agreement on strategic planning at the local level, the Figure 2.2 triangle has been proven to work best when the expert and community voices are largely in accord (Barbaro, 2006).

Following this line of thinking, and accepting that effective decision-making relies on good technical advice, it seems to follow that the best decision comes from an informed use of evidence both in developing information to support a decision and in evaluating its effect once implemented (Gluckman, 2013). In this way, the value of government's performance to the benefit of citizens is maximised. However, the relationship between evidence and decision-making is neither linear nor unidirectional. Decision-making (policy advice) is a complex process that incorporates many factors in addition to evidence (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010).

The complexity of decision-making stems from at least two issues. First is the need to balance the many inputs into the process (such as rigorous analysis of a problem, social values, political context and economic impacts).

Second, the process is further complicated by the variability of uptake capacity and the appetite elected members have for such information. The public service does not always have the culture and capability to seek out appropriate evidence and to critically appraise and apply it when making a decision.

Simpson and Bretherton (2010) argue this complexity has been at the heart of a major global shift in decision-making within democratic societies over the past 15 to 20 years, as the concept of 'evidence-based decision-making' began to gain currency. With this currency has come some general recommendations about access to and consideration and use of expert advice.

- Develop a standard set of protocols across government about obtaining expert scientific advice.
- Extend the use of technical experts more broadly across government.
- Use the community of technical experts to assist central agencies with longer-term planning, risk assessment and evaluation.

- Improve and make more explicit the use of government funds for research to help with evidenced-based decision-making.
- Provide greater transparency when using (or not using) data in complex and controversial areas of decision-making where the public is directly or indirectly consulted.

Throughout the 1990s, evidence gained an increasingly stronger role in decision-making that informed policy. Since then, scholars have added nuance, reminding us that investment decisions must take into account both robust evidence derived from research and an understanding of social values. Hence, in their contemporary iteration, evidence-based investment decisions are more accurately recast as *evidence-informed investment decisions*.

The challenge is to build a public service culture that has the attitudes, capabilities and internal processes to support the generation and use of high-quality evidence derived from formal research. The interface between science, decision-making and policy is, after all, an interface; it demands as much capability from knowledge providers as it does from knowledge users. That is, there must be a culture of policy making that, as a matter of course, recognises the need for rigorous evidence to justify policy directions and decisions (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010).

Any such organisational cultural shift, Simpson and Bretherton (2010) suggest, where expert advice is enabled and included in decision-making, requires:

- *Skilled leadership of experts embedded within government departments;*
- *Access to well-developed scientific and research expertise outside of government;*

- *Expertise in translation ('brokering') between researchers and policy experts;*

- *Concerted efforts to lift capabilities within public service communities of practice so that there is capacity to evaluate such evidence without bias and with rigour;*

- *Enabling practices and administrative infrastructures that can accommodate robust processes of data collection and analysis, whether intra- or extramurally.*

The extent of the success of this cultural shift, and the weightings that elected members apply to large capital investment decisions, will be explored in the following chapters.

2.4.3   Political (Elected Member) Opinions

Theorists of deliberative or discursive democracy (e.g., Fishkin, 2006; Dryzek, 2010) are in general agreement at least that political decision-making should be *talk-centric* rather than *voting-centric.* That is, outcomes should be determined by reasons rather than numbers (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p. xiii; Chambers, 1999, p. 1, 2003). In discursive politics, political and societal actors (Haruta, Radu, & Radu, 2009), instead of merely aggregating their initial preferences and isolated interests, should listen to each other, reasonably justify their position, show mutual respect, and be willing to re-evaluate and eventually revise both their initial preferences in a reasonable deliberation and the claims they make when they take a stance (Dryzek, 1990; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1992; Mainsbridge, 1992).

Findings from behavioural organisation theory, behavioural decision theory, survey research and experimental economics leave no doubt about the failure of rational choice as a descriptive model of human behaviour (Jones, 1999). Evidence

shows that elected members often fail to make optimal choices. Even well-informed politicians may exhibit systematic departures from welfare-maximising behaviour. This evidence reflects one of the main tenets of behavioural economics. The homo economicus (economic man) of classical economic theory (Mill, 1836) is an over-simplified description of human behaviour (McDowell, 1980). Rather than being consistently selfish, rational and independent agents, elected members exhibit a strong interdependency and limited or bounded rationality.

Two broad (theoretical) views attempt to explain how decision-making will work in local government environments (e.g., Besley, Pande, & Rao, 2007). First are those (e.g., Weingast, Shepsle, & Johnson, 1981) that emphasise the possibility of a cooperative outcome (universalism) in which allocation of public resources is relatively equal. Others, such as Riker (1962) and Baron (1991), have emphasised the incentive for a minimal winning coalition. The result seemingly favours policy (and decisions that support policy) skewed in support of the ruling coalition. Practically this suggests elected members are subject to political coalitions that, at least in local government, set the tone for how decisions might be guided by those who inform and administer the coalition.

Given this realisation, many other dimensions to the influences on elected members have been identified. One such challenge for elected members is to manage optimism bias (Siemiatycki, 2009; Weinstein, 1980). Strong political peer pressure can be applied to elected members to adopt optimism bias in making large infrastructural investment decisions where a certain powerful section of the community will benefit from that bias. The implications of this bias will be explored in Chapter 5.

Understanding the complexity of how and why elected members influence one another in their decisions is one key challenge for this research. It might well be the greatest challenge.

In summary, three broad influences operate on decisions made by elected members. As stated earlier, the relationships between these influences are no less important to this research than the influences themselves. The results from this research confirm the logic of this perspective. However, there seems to be some as yet undefined causality between them. One compelling aspect of this research is the complexity in the layers of literature and scholarship that must be worked through to get a clear picture of this phenomenon.

By unpacking some of this complexity, this research will ensure the research design will have the reach and the framework to deliver the outcomes sought. The importance of this contextual knowledge is to determine how elected members themselves understand and interpret the influences on the decisions they settle on. It also might well offer the opportunity for practitioners to think through the operational activities that ought to be enabled so they provide both opportunity and information to support elected member decision-making about large capital investments.

To complete the picture, the research also explores the literature that supports the detail of the general decision theory outlined at the start of this chapter, and how this might be reconciled with current understanding.

2.5   Rationality, Power and Decision-making

As noted earlier, any discussion that considers a decision in political environments ought to be considered against the notion of power and its tensioning agent, rationality. Although a substantial amount of literature explores rationality and

power (Dahl, 1961; Foucault, 1984; Glaser, 2010; Habermas, 1987; Nietzsche, 1968), it could reasonably be argued that Flyvbjerg (1998) has gained the most attention.

> *One of the privileges of power, and an integral part of its rationality, is the freedom to define reality. The greater the power, the greater the freedom in this respect, and the less need for power to understand how reality is 'really' constructed. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 229*

In the age of enlightenment,[33] rationality is well-defined and independent of context. We understand what rationality is and its meaning is constant across time and space. Flyvbjerg (1998), however, shows that rationality is context-dependent and that the crucial context is determined by a decision-maker's power. Power is said to distort the dividing line between rationality and rationalisation. The result is a rationality that has very real social and environmental consequences.

Flyvbjerg's account of politics focuses on a specific circumstance of rationality, the policy-making environment, planning and administration in the Danish City of Alborg. Aalborg is to Flyvbjerg what Florence was to Machiavelli (1981, pp. 51–52): an opportunity to understand power and what it means for our more general concerns of social and political organisation. Flyvbjerg's examination of policy-making, administration and planning provides a rare, in-depth understanding.

His narrative draws on the ideas of Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Foucault and Habermas. Flyvbjerg reads the Aalborg case as a metaphor of modernity and of modern politics, administration and planning (Falk, Rocha, & Warnick, 2009). Uncovering the interplay of power and rationality that distorts policy deliberation, he

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[33] In the western philosophical tradition, enlightenment is seen as a phase in cultural history marked by philosophical methodologies that employ knowledge and reason (albeit usually accompanied by the rejection of a faith – e.g., Christianity, Islam and Judaism).

demonstrates that modern 'rationality' is but an ideal when confronted with the real-world rationalities involved in decision-making by central actors in government, economy and civil society. Flyvbjerg then elaborates on how this problem can be dealt with so that more fruitful deliberation and action can occur.

In assessing rationality and power, he summarises the "basic relations of rationality and power [that] have shaped the Aalborg project and have led to its lack of balance, fragmentation, and lack of goal achievement" (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 226). His 10 propositions about rationality and power proposed as guidelines for considering rationality and power in other settings are:

Proposition 1: Power defines reality

Proposition 2: Rationality is context-dependent, the context of rationality is power, and power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization

Proposition 3: Rationalization presented as rationality is a principal strategy in the exercise of power

Proposition 4: The greater the power, the less the rationality

Proposition 5: Stable power relations are more typical than antagonistic confrontations

Proposition 6: Power relations are constantly being produced and reproduced

Proposition 7: The rationality of power has deeper historical roots than the power of rationality

Proposition 8: In open confrontation, rationality yields to power

Proposition 9: Rationality-power relations are more characteristic of stable power relations than of confrontations

Proposition 10: The power of rationality is embedded in stable power relations rather than in confrontations (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 233)

The challenge for this research is to explore how this rationality and its bedfellow, power, are manifest in the context of the insights the elected members have offered into how they make large capital investment decisions.

Flyvbjerg's insights are all valuable in the local context. New Zealand local government is subject to the same tensions that Flyvbjerg describes in relation to Aalborg. However, New Zealand is not Denmark, and the objective rationalities Flyvbjerg describes as applying nearly 20 years ago are not subject to today's normative decision-making environments. Contrary to Falk et al.'s (2006) claims, this research produces evidence that Flyvbjerg's work may not be timeless.

Given the relatively recent surge in data, analytics, artificial intelligence, augmented reality tools and machine learning algorithms, evidence and its manifestation through technology like mixed-reality visualisation, tools to support 21st century normative decision-making are becoming more accessible. Moreover, they seem to be creating what has earlier been described as a 'gold standard' of objective rationality – and these carry an altogether different power to objective rationality's 'weight ratio'. The democratisation of decision-making with these new tools is a brave new world for many. And, if this 'new reality' is here to stay, what does this mean for elected members and the new expectations citizens have to ensure their voices are heard.

This research will surely test this type of evidence – political or not – against what might seem like some of the 'first principles' of the decision-making environment of a local government democracy.

2.6   Decision Theory in Practice

Putting aside the relationships of power and rationality for the moment, through a more practical lens decision theory has two distinct elements. The first is the legislative processes associated with what and how decisions are made (Hammond & Knott, 1996; Hansen & Ejersbo, 2002; LGA 2002). The second, non-legislative lens describes how and why decision-makers actually make decisions. An initial observation is that the literature on legislative processes and outcomes seems to reflect the decision theory more akin to some of the early decision-making scholarship of how decisions are constructed (e.g., Simon, 1960), whereas the more recent decision theory seems to resonate more strongly with the literature on the decision-makers and the decisions they make per se (e.g., Bächtiger et al, 2010).

In this context, the scholarship on decision-making makes a clear distinction between normative and descriptive decision theories (e.g. Baron, 2006). In principle, the difference is uncomplicated (Oliveira, 2007). Normative decision theory concerns how decisions should be made, and a descriptive theory is about how decisions are actually made (Hansson, 1994). While considerable debate among academics continues over the extent of normative theories, decision scientists are in virtually complete agreement that normative decision theory is about how decisions should be made in order to be rational (Hansson, 1994). In practical terms, this suggests normative theory would assume that large capital investment decisions ought to be rational and would indicate how they should be made. Specific to this research, this intuitively also suggests that citizen preferences add to the quality of any large capital investment decision. The research will test this position.

To delve more deeply into this thinking, rational choice theories assume that political actors (Ostrom, 2005) are goal-driven (utility-maximising) and have

consistent (transitive) preferences (Warntjien, 2009). It would follow that elected members potentially make choices based on outcomes over personal preferences. It is not unreasonable to posit the idea that citizen preferences and maximising utility could be uneasy bedfellows.

From this interesting perspective, therefore, citizen preferences are likely to be at odds with this very notion of rational choice. In certain circumstances, and using the idea of utility-maximising, it will be relevant for this research to explore examples of what might be generally regarded as emotional investment decisions (descriptive theory) to test the extent of purely rational decisions (normative theory). It seems likely the conclusions will depend on the type of investment decision being considered. The implications for this research are that if the outcomes are determined not just by elected members' own behaviours and if they follow their own *logic of consequences*, then it is likely the preferences are typically either fixed (based on a cognitive imperative), or are unlikely to be determined (exogenous).[34] The detail of if and why this might be so will be explored in Chapter 5.

Constructivist theories posit that the behaviours of agents (in this case, elected members) are shaped by their identities and social norms. Therefore, agents are more likely to follow the *logic of appropriateness* (March & Olsen, 1989) or *logic of arguing* (Risse, 2000). Identities, interests and norms are all socially constructed and thus subject to change.

Both rational choice and constructivist theories are institutionalist theories that study how institutions (e.g., local government) enable and constrain the

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[34] An exogenous variable is a factor that is outside of an economic model; it has an impact on the outcome of the model, but changes in the model do not affect it. Put simply, it is something that affects a particular outcome without being controlled by that outcome in return (Engle, Hendry, & Richard, 1983).

behaviour of their actors (elected members) with rules, norms and patterns of expectations (Haruta et al., 2009). If these are treated as analytical tools or methodological approaches rather than ontologies, it is reasonable to assume they are not mutually exclusive (Warntjien, 2009). For clarity, if this research does not treat them as ontologies (which it does not) and seeks confirmation of constructivist theories that individual identities shape cognitive decisions of preference (e.g., bounded or limited by perception), then any findings of decisions shaped by rational choice in line with normative arguments might seem contradictory. Nonetheless this research will explore what appears to be an inherent paradox.

By way of an alternative explanation, there are many different ways to theorise about decisions, and therefore many different research traditions (Hansson, 1994).

> *Classical theories of choice in organisations emphasise decision-making as the making of rational choices on the basis of expectations about the consequences of action for prior objectives, and organisational forms as instruments for making those choices. (March & Olsen, 1986)*

The starting-point of the modern discussion is generally taken to be John Dewey's ([1910] 1978) exposition of the stages of problem-solving (Hansson, 1994). According to Dewey, problem-solving consists of five consecutive stages: (1) a felt difficulty; (2) the definition of the character of that difficulty; (3) suggestion of possible solutions; (4) evaluation of the suggestion; and (5) further observation and experiment leading to acceptance or rejection of the suggestion.

Herbert Simon (1960) amended Dewey's five stages to accommodate some of the then more recent thinking that provided the context of decisions in organisations. In this instance, he proposed three phases of the decision process: "finding occasions for making a decision; finding possible courses of action"; and "choosing among courses of

action" (p. 1). The first of these phases he called intelligence or "borrowing the military meaning of intelligence" (p. 2), the second design and the third choice (Figure 2.4).
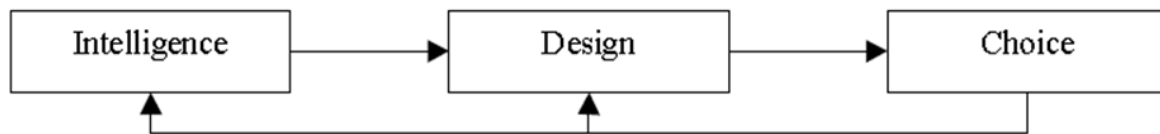
Figure 2.4. Simon's model of the decision process

Moving on, several authors, notably Witte et al. (1972), have criticised the idea that decision processes are all sequential and can be divided into parts that always follow the same order or sequence. A more realistic model should allow the various parts of the decision process to come in a different order in different decisions (Hansson, 1994). A question that has escaped researchers and practitioners alike is whether the sequencing suggested is as the above theories suggest. This research will provide empirical evidence to address this question.

One of the most influential models that at least partially addresses the concern about linearity was proposed by Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Théorêt (1976). In this model, the decision process consists of distinct phases, but these phases do not have a simple sequential relationship. The model adopts the same three phases outlined by Simon (1977), but with new names: identification, development and selection.

This research also explores a wide range of alternative models with supporting scholarship that practitioners have developed, including the recent *instrumental rationality model* proposed by Max Weber (March & Simon, 1993). In this research, Weber describes how decision-makers' decisions are determined by the least cost option. Simon (1955), in his earlier *satisfying model*,[35] proposes using the model of

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[35] A decision-making strategy that aims for a satisfactory or adequate result, rather than an optimal solution.

administrative man[36] as an alternative to *economic man* (as noted earlier in this chapter) to explain the behaviour of human individuals or of groups of individuals who are making decisions in an organisational context. Specifically, he rejected the theory that decision-making is made under conditions of certainty and that the economic man is completely rational, in favour of a theory in which human and organisational limitations make it impossible for people to make perfectly rational decisions (administrative man).

In his *incremental model*, Lindblom (1959) describes the incremental, pluralist policy analysis method of decision-making. This contrasts the rational-comprehensive method and the *garbage can model* of organisational choice (Cohen et al., 1972). This latter model deals with the problem of organisational survival, as organisations deal with complex, intractable and wicked problems, or problems with only temporary and imperfect solutions (Marmon & Mayer, 1986; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Roberts, 2006). It also set the scene for a remarkable amount of published literature that was to follow, aiming to explain the variety of elements in and insights into what the literature generally refers to as normative decision theory.

This line of thinking in this scholarship has taken the form of literature focusing on multiple streams models. Kingdon (1984) proposed a new approach to the analysis of public policy decision-making. He developed the theory of the timely confluence of 'three streams': the problem stream, the policy stream and the political stream.[37] It is this confluence, in his view, that creates the momentum necessary to place an issue on

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[36] According to Simon (1955), people have only limited, simplified views of problems confronting them. He proposes there are numerous reasons for this (e.g., people do not have the full information about the problems)

[37] Kingdon's approach, as he acknowledged, was influenced by the work of Cohen, March and Olsen (Cohen et al., 1972; March & Olsen, 1979) on decision-making processes in complex administrative environments.

the public policy agenda – to move it from the 'government agenda' (or 'under discussion') box to the 'decision agenda' box, and to lead (local) government finally to change public policy (make a decision) (Howlett, McConnell, & Perl, 2014)

Howlett et al. (2014) also provided a useful hypothetical example of the application of Kingdon's three streams.

> *The example is the case of road transportation in an urban area where traffic congestion has made it onto the agenda. The streams would be:*
>
> - *A politics stream (e.g., a set of evolving neoliberal market-based transportation governance norms);*
> - *A policy stream (e.g., a set of instruments or possible solutions to road congestion issues such as toll roads or congestion charges); and*
> - *A new process stream (e.g., practical attempts to resolve road congestion by advancing the problem through discussion and implementation of a solution). (Howlett et al., 2014, p. 6)*

Kingdon's (1984) initial thinking has also been expanded into multiple streams models with stages (e.g. Howlett et al., 2014). These include: the three stream model; the three stream – two stages model; the four stream model; and the five stream confluence model.

The five stream model is unlike any of the other potential streams models (Howlett et al., 2014) in terms of the degree of complexity it exhibits. This complexity is recognised because the five streams can be nested within each other to help explain different types of policy-making and the way in which one particular stream can in effect set an agenda, establishing the parameters for other streams within it (Figure 2.5).
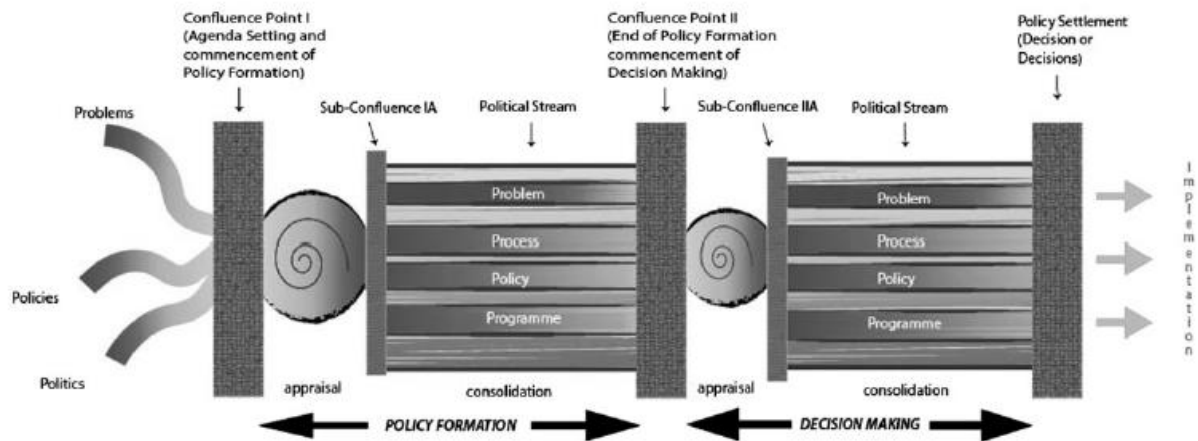
Figure 2.5. Five stream confluence model

Source: Howlett et al. (2014, p. 9)

Subsequently Cairney and Weible (2015) have explored the theoretical

contribution of Kingdon's multiple streams approach and the way in which the

streams can be viewed as a critical component of a broader literature on 'ideas'

(Baumgartner, 2014; Cairney, 2012, pp. 182–187, 279; Hall, 1993, pp. 291–292;

Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, pp. 44–45; Kettell & Cairney, 2010, p. 301; Majone,

1989, p. 2).

Cairney and Weible (2015) suggest the first theoretical contribution is that the

universal concepts of these models are abstract enough to apply to any case study.

Those concepts are described as:

1. *Ambiguity (there are many ways to frame any policy problem);*

2. *Competition for attention (few problems reach the top of the agenda);*

3. *An imperfect selection process (new information is difficult to gather and*
   subject to manipulation);

4. *Actors have limited time (which forces people to make choices before their*
   preferences are clear); and,

5. *Decision-making processes are neither "comprehensively rational" nor linear. (Cairney & Weible, 2015 p. 3)*[38]

The other sources of theoretical value they identified included: explaining the policy process and contributing to wider policy theory; the theoretical development to modern empirical applications; and a renewed focus on analysis and methodology – all of which lead to a coherent, theory-driven literature. They also state, "there is no immediate prospect of turning the multiple stream approach into a detailed theory or model with hypotheses that are tested in multiple cases" (Cairney & Weible, 2015, p. 17).

It is not my intention to further interrogate why such a detailed theory might not be forthcoming, but the findings come with an implicit understanding that the complexity and/or elements within it are yet to be discovered or understood. This realisation, and the specifics of the body of literature that supported Kingdon and that has followed over the next 30-plus years, lay the foundations for my rationale to refer back to Cohen et al. (1972) for this research. That is, this research is drawing on its supporting scholarship's 'first principles'.

The second reason for this approach lies firmly with what I feel is missing from the literature described here and more generally to date. The current theory is process-centric (Figure 2.5). What appears to be generally missing is what Ostrom (1990) refers to as "the actors" in the process, or more specifically what influences them. Of particular interest to this thesis is what influences them within the process, not the process per se. In the operating environment of this research, it is the elected members in local government who ultimately are responsible for making the decision on behalf

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[38] Of interest here is the almost complete lack of reference to the 'actors'' influence on a decision (except for time in the process to make a decision). This omission became one of the reasons for my decision to return to first principles literature for this research. This discussion follows shortly.

of their communities (or policy decision, in the vernacular of the literature). Ultimately it is these actors making such decisions that the scholars need to understand if their research is to improve understanding of investment (policy) decisions.

The third reason for going back to first principles, which supports the first observation, is an observation that has always resonated with me as a practitioner in the local government sector. This operating environment can best be described as organisational anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972). The onerous legislative frameworks (Local Government Association, 2013) could easily be rationalised as a way in which central government has guided local government through this anarchy, as discussed in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Finally, I have turned to Cohen et al. (1972) because in the fullness of time, if this research is to be considered on its merits against models such as, but not limited to, Kingdon's (1984) or any other more recent interpretations (e.g., Howlett et al., 2014), it would seem appropriate to return to the same foundations from which these insightful earlier pieces of work have been crafted.

In combination, therefore, these reasons have formed the rationale to return to the thinking behind a model that can be used to best describe the intractable decisions and wicked problems of local government. Furthermore, the garbage can model, with its insights into the nature of the organisational anarchy of local government and the decisions elected members are asked and expected to make within it, is of particular interest to this research. The more specific thinking behind this focus will be explored next.

2.6.1   The Theory of the Garbage Can Model

The challenge for councils, and elected members no less, is that the decisions being sought are invariably in response to the need to find solutions to complex, intractable, even wicked problems (e.g., housing the homeless). To trade off priorities of investment capital to meet the demands created in population growth – for example, in water supply, transport and community facilities – elected members must have a deep understanding of the organisational constraints of councils. Armed with this requisite knowledge, elected members must then manage the variety of influences elected members have on their decisions on behalf of the community and, by default, the organisation they represent.

Here we explore in more detail how the garbage can model can shed some light on local government decision-making in relation to large capital investments.

In essence, rather than portraying decision-making in public administration as a matter of rational choice, some theorists (e.g., Kingdon, 1984, 1995) have described it as a process characterised by organisational anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972). Councils[39] do not function like computers solving optimisation problems. Rather they function like garbage cans into which a mix of problems, information to assist in dealing with those problems and possible solutions are poured, with the precise mix determining decision outcomes. The mix reflects how many decision areas are handled by the council, how people have access to the council, the decision load of the council, and the council's level of resources, time, energy and attention (Garson, 2008).

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[39] While Garson (2008) was describing organisations more generally, councils seem to provide an apt example of this context.

Processes in a council's 'garbage can' include those associated with problems, politics and policies (Evers, 2012; Kingdon, 1984, 1995). The problem stream revolves around agenda-setting processes. The political stream revolves around contention over alternatives and reflects public opinion, interest groups, experts, elections, partisan forces, and legislative, judicial and executive bodies (key elements of the environment associated with a council in a local government context). Finally, the policy stream revolves around defining policy solutions (often by expert advice), which can often be described as a process in which favoured solutions are looking from appropriate problems, as much as it can be described as a process in which problems lead to solutions (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 1).[40]

An important implication of this model is that decisions cannot be understood in purely rational terms. Rather, they must be seen in the context of these three process streams, which determine the precise mix in the garbage can and need not be rational. This means the expert advisor must look at how problems coming to the council's attention reach the top of the agenda. In addition, they must consider how

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[40] Cohen et al. (1972) suggest that an interrelationship of the type proposed here must concern itself with a relatively complicated interplay among the generation of problems in an organisation, the deployment of personnel, the production of solutions, and the opportunities of choice. The garbage can model describes organised anarchies as organisations characterised by problematic preferences, unclear technologies and fluid participation. A decision is an outcome or interpretation of several relatively independent streams within an organisation. Attention is limited to interrelationships among four streams: problems; solutions; stream of choices; and stream of problems. Of all the literature that has explored the nature and type of environment that is local government, the thinking behind this model seems to resonate with the practice of the environment that it is trying to model (i.e., local government in New Zealand). However, the proposed model that Cohen et al. use to substantiate the deeply insightful thinking behind decision-making in this environment does not fit this decision environment well. This will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. The thinking itself, however, will remain an important touchstone for this research.

various players (mayor, elected member, interest groups, media, policy communities,

policy entrepreneurs, public opinion, interest factions within the organisation)

contend with possible solutions in the conflict-ridden whitewater of multiple streams

of problems, interests and options channelling toward policy formation (Garson,

2008). Moreover, many of these streams are not entirely rational either; they exhibit

limited or bounded rationalities.

It seems to follow, if judgement and choice are at the core of all politics (Lau &

Redlawski, 2001) and given Easton's (1953) definition of politics as the "authoritative

allocation of values" (p. 190), that a central theme of how authoritative allocation

decisions are made is likely to apply to the political environment of councils. This

seems to fit neatly into some of the same issues this research explores in later chapters,

which identify with this scholarship. Figure 2.6 illustrates how this research's

particular focus reflects the literature that contributes to the principles outlined in the

garbage can model.
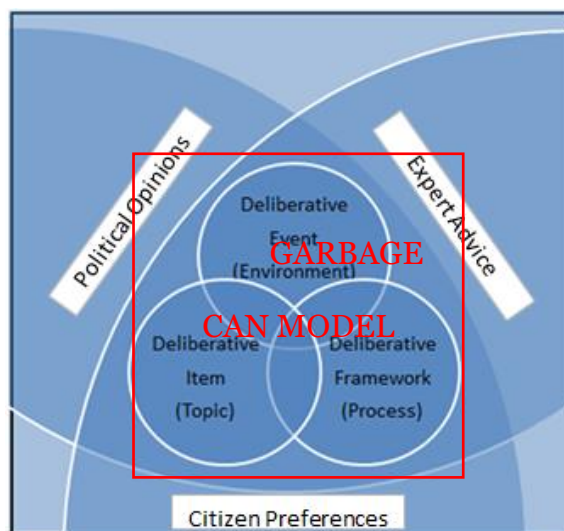
Figure 2.6. The garbage can model – an applied approach

Exploring this approach further, this research has viewed the decision

environment and representative decision-making as falling broadly into two domains.

One concerns how individual political actors, whether elected members, bureaucrats

or ordinary citizens, make decisions. From this first perspective, decision-making is a question of individual psychology, individual preferences, values and beliefs, information search, valuation and choice (Lau & Redlawski, 2001).

The second domain considers how the institutions of politics, the legislative, executive, judicial and bureaucratic branches of government, as well as organisations that interact with them when they are making decisions (Lau & Redlawski, 2001), influence the first domain when decisions are being considered. All institutions (e.g., councils) are constructed and confirmed by the actions of individuals, but all institutions also have their own particular ways, laws and traditions for gathering information, aggregating preferences and taking actions. In many instances, institutional norms and procedures override individual decision-making processes. Some of the research on this domain questions when and why this occurs.

March (1994) tries to capture this difference in perspective by asking whether decision-makers are generally seen as autonomous actors or as being primarily guided by the "systematic properties of an interacting ecology" (p. 16). The basis of this research rests on an inquiry into whether decision influences encourage an interactive ecology. Moreover, if they do, how do they encourage such an ecology? Alternatively, if they do not, why not? Is the substantive consideration of a decision instead the individual perspectives and preferences of the decision-maker, as described by March (1994) – and if so, what are they, and why do they have this influence?

Assuming that in the issues and policies regarding public affairs, ambiguity and lack of clarity are common, the garbage can model can be successfully extended to all public institutions (Haruta et al., 2009, p. 75). The model has received considerable attention, and several studies have empirically verified it, or parts of it

(Anderson & Fischer, 1986; Levitt & Nass, 1989; Lipson, 2007; Masuch & Lapotin, 1989; Padgett, 1980; Waguespack, 2006; Weiner, 1976).

This scholarship invariably leads to further scholarship about actual decisions. Interestingly one recent development is a theory that highlights the lack of understanding of these same types decisions, through a similar but different lens: the theory of the black box.

2.6.2 The Theory of the Black Box

The challenge for researchers ought not be understated. Their challenge has been to understand the influences on elected members' decisions on investments, which represent attempts to find solutions to complex, intractable, even wicked problems.

It is unsurprising, then, that many who consider decisions made in representative environments to be a decision-making 'black box' (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Dryzek & List, 2003; McDowell, 1980, p. 67; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008; Vigoda, 2003, p. 4). As noted above, the decision-making process seems no less of an enigma for scholars who are exploring decisions and its relationship with scholarship and/or practice (Figure 2.7).
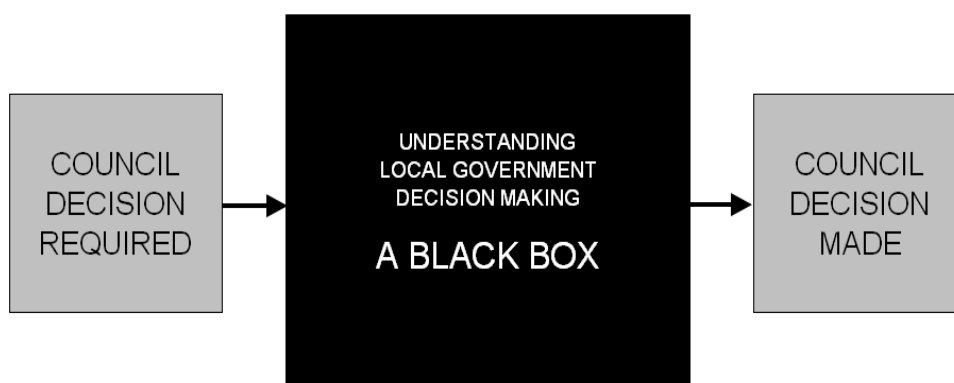
Figure 2.7. Local government's 'black box' of decision-making

Source: Adapted from Easton (1965)

Peeling back the layers of the literature that support the black box theory has provided an opportunity to dismantle, at least in part, this black box. Considered together, the literature that struggles with the enigma of what is inside the black box (Garson, 2008) and March's (1994) notion of a decision ecology suggest two levels that need interpretation. First is how elected members themselves understand and interpret the influences that affect their decisions and how they position citizen preferences, expert advice and political (elected member) opinion.

The second level in this ecology is to interpret the elected members' interpretations. Figure 2.8 is a graphic interpretation of March's (1994) ecology. To move towards an understanding of the final decision's ecology as intended, it also aims to determine if there is a way to place the resulting decision within a democratic context. If so, does this mean the collective consciousness of the decisions of council can be placed within a democratic context on that continuum? This leads us into one further area of interest, preliminary to further discussion in Chapter 5. As noted in Chapter 1, this research and the decision-making that is being explored within the context of a democracy point to an opportunity to explore what insights into democracy the findings might provide.
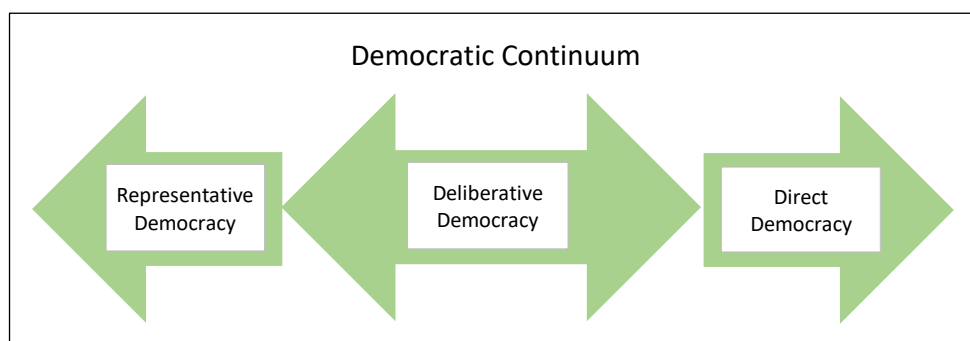
Figure 2.8. The democratic continuum

The democratic continuum. On a democratic continuum, democracy can be and is legitimately described by the degree to which citizens are able to influence decisions, particularly after elections (Figure 2.8 and Figure 2.9).

At one end of this continuum is a representative democracy, in which citizen engagement has little or no material influence on decisions after an election (Hartz-Karp, 2005; Uhr, 1998).

At the other end of the continuum lies direct democracy (also known as pure democracy). Direct democracy is an umbrella term for a variety of decision processes by which ordinary citizens pass laws directly and, in some extreme versions, without using representatives (Leib, 2006).

Floating loosely between these two outer limits resides deliberative (or participative) democracy. At this point of the continuum, elected members have a general agreement the citizens should be given a voice in their governance (Fung & Wright, 2003; Hendriks & Michels, 2011).

What is of interest to this research is how the theoretical framework of a constructivist uses an interpretivist methodology and normative arguments to support a proposition predicated on rational theories of choice *and* cognitive principles in decision-making. The only way in which these different elements may be derived is with a deep understanding of how the way elected members construct decisions affects those decisions and of how important elected members think this process is for citizens (and their preferences) and the decisions they make on citizens' behalf.
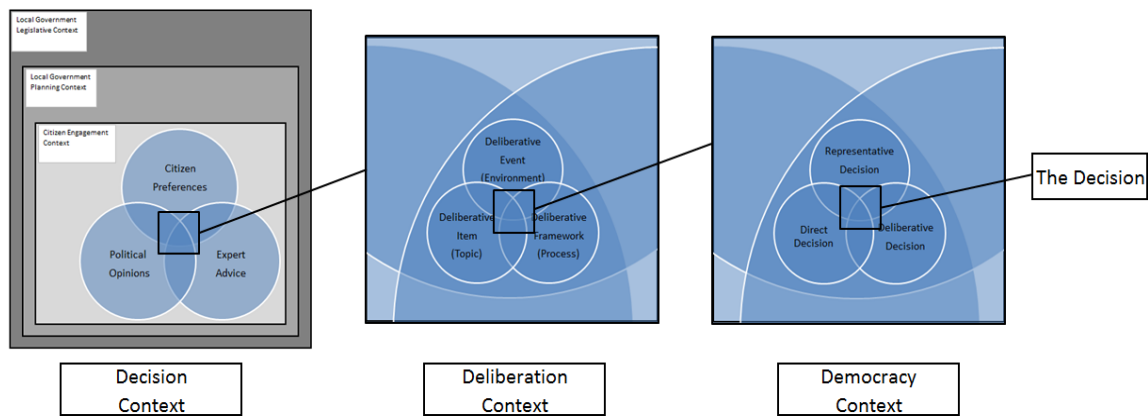
Figure 2.9. Decisions, deliberations and democracies – the ecology of a decision

2.7   Integrating Rational Choice and Interpretivist Perspectives

… interpretivist and rational choice theory stands as complements rather than rivals. Interpretivist accounts illuminate the power of ideas, the influence of history, the significance of intellectuals, and the persuasive power of political rhetoric and dramaturgy. Rational choice analysis helps to explain the mechanisms that account for the impact of these political forces. (Bates, Figueiredo, & Weingast, 1998, p. xx)

The contention noted here has spurred a never-ending debate as to whether social sciences can have the explanatory and predictive power that natural sciences can promise and attain (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Flyvbjerg (1998) advocates that social sciences can one day mature to the status of the natural sciences and that the "social sciences are strongest where the natural sciences are weakest" (p. 3), His way out of this intellectual jam is the concept of phronesis, developed by Aristotle.

Phronesis, in its Aristotelian version, means 'practical knowledge' or 'prudence'. It "goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical know-how (techne) and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor" (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 2). Exploring the social science

practice, and reinterpreting this concept, Flyvbjerg proposes the purpose of a *phronetic social science*. In this discipline, he states:

> *the goal is to help restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis. (p. 5)*

The uniqueness of Flyvbjerg's argument lies in his attempt to bring questions of justice to the heart of all social scientific and political endeavours.

Bringing his analysis to the context of this research, a delicate but natural balance of these two seemingly disparate perspectives is involved in presenting and representing the interpretations of the elected members interviewed for this research. The first perspective concerns the rationalist choice, along with the decision theory and the local government practice environment to which it is applied. The second, interpretivist perspectives are informed in two ways. One way is the insights of the elected members (one type of practical knowledge) into their practice of making decisions. The other is my interpretations (the other type of practical knowledge) of their insights in relation to the research questions and the collective consciousness of those interpretations.

2.8   Summary

The main thrust of this research is to explore and understand the decision ecology[41] within the political environments of local government noted above. To explore these and related concepts in the literature discussed in this chapter, the research question provides the instrument through which these interrogations can focus on the problem

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[41] As defined above by March (1994).

to be solved. The sub-questions outlined at the end of Chapter 1 have been designed to interrogate the complexity – particularly in the practitioner's environment of an elected member. One of their purposes is to explore the insights into local government's wider democratic environment that might result from these findings, with an emphasis on any insights into the democratic continuum. Another is to explore the context (e.g., the influence of power) in which these decisions are being made – decisions that are unique by their nature.

While the precise mix in the garbage can model is not yet well understood (even if the thinking behind it seems well founded), and the black box only highlights our poor understanding of how large asset investment decisions are being made, these models and the context in the scholarship seem to offer the most natural fit for describing some of the results of this research. Looking at how these decisions come along the council's pipeline and how various players (elected members) contend with possible solutions is part of the rationale supporting this fit. The way the results of this research can attempt to overcome the conflict-ridden decision-making environments of local government is another.

Finally, the normative argument within the scholarship that supports establishment of whether citizen preferences are being sufficiently weighted is also a natural fit for this research. Elected members are challenged daily with making decisions for which they not only must draw deeply on their own personal value sets, but also are charged with an expectation from their community to act in the best interests of the community – whatever those interests might be. And these expectations may well be in conflict with their individual values. Put simply, are elected members being rational when they make large capital investment decisions, or is their rationality bound? If their rationality has limits, how does power affect that

rationality and the gold standard expectation that elected members act in a rational way – an expectation that is unquestioningly emerging (if not being demanded) when such decisions are being made?

By adopting these approaches, this research will be able to construct a set of typifications for decisions of this nature and explore the influences on elected members in making those decisions. In turn, it is hoped these will further inform decision-making mid-range theory with the new knowledge this brings.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Research Strategy

Do not sentence me completely to the treadmill of mathematical calculations –

leave me time for philosophical speculations, my sole delight. (Johannes Kepler)

3.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the scholarship that underpins this thesis. Its first focus is the theoretical framework and the thinking behind the choice of that framework, before it explores the role a researcher can play as a passionate participant (Lincoln & Guba, 2005, cited in Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2007) and as the interpretivist constructing a reality (Crotty, 1998). This chapter also outlines the methodology and method employed in this research. It explains how comparing data and codes with analytic categories, constructing theoretical concepts from abstract categories and comparing category with concept will inform the interpretations of this research (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2012). Finally, this chapter describes the research strategy, explaining how it will weave the thinking through the theory and its practice, the research approach and the richness of the information it makes available (Silverman, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998).

3.2   Theoretical Framework

The objective of the scholarship for this thesis is to set the theoretical framework in which the meanings behind an elected member's decisions can be discovered. Following on from the recent upsurge in attention to the theory and practice of local government decision-making, this research is based on a desire to understand the influences on decisions about large, localised capital investment (such as a proposal

for a new stadium) or on more generalised expressions of vision and preferences (such as the 10-year plans published in and enabled by a council's LTP) that in turn have a wide range of influences on those decisions.

Constructivist grounded theory reflects the basic beliefs of constructivism as a paradigm of inquiry (Mills et al., 2007). Mills et al. (2007), citing Lincoln and Guba (2005), suggest it is "ontologically relativist, epistemologically transactional, methodologically dialectical, and the researcher is a 'passionate participant' as facilitator of a multi-voice reconstruction" (p. 196). This research adopts a theoretical framework that mirrors this paradigm. Moreover, in this research the researcher is no less of a passionate participant. This chapter outlines the logic for such an approach.

Charmaz was the first researcher to define and cite constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2005, 2006). In this literature, Charmaz situated the relationship of the researcher to participants by rethinking the role of the researcher as author (Mills et al., 2007). She began by engaging with what she saw as a postmodern critique of traditional grounded theory by making a case for a form of constructivist grounded theory that is situated somewhere between positivism and postmodernism (Mills et al., 2007). She argues that taking a constructivist approach to the "interactive nature of both data collection and analysis, resolves the criticisms of the method, and reconciles positivist assumptions and postmodernist critiques" (Charmaz, 1995a, p. 62). This research specifically opts for the freedom to explore the interactive nature of data collection and analysis with the elected members and their thoughts throughout the processes adopted for this research.

3.2.1   Constructing a Reality – an Epistemological Lens

The epistemological approach of this research is constructionism (Table 3.1). Constructionism is defined by Crotty (1998) as:

> *the view of that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is*
>
> *contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction*
>
> *between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within*
>
> *an essentially social context. (Crotty, 1998, p. 42)*

This conveys the idea that meaning is constructed rather than discovered.

The reality of decision-making in local government is that it occurs in an exceedingly complex environment. The wide variety of influences in this complexity, therefore, ought to be rationalised into a cogent form so that they can be extracted from the research findings and interrogated. The theoretical framework for this research is set unambiguously in the context of the research question and sub-questions designed to determine the specific influence or influences citizen preferences have on elected members' decisions. This context is also about how we legitimise this meaning that we will construct.

Table 3.1. Overview of the theoretical framework of this research

Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Objectivism Constructionism Subjectivism (*and their variants*)	Positivism (and post-positivism) Interpretivism • Symbolic interactionism • Phenomenology • Hermeneutics Critical inquiry Feminism Postmodernism *etc.*	Experimental research Survey research Ethnography Phenomenological research Grounded theory Heuristic inquiry Action research Discourse analysis Feminist standpoint research *etc.*	Sampling Measurement and scaling Questionnaire Observation • participant • non-participant Interview Focus group Case study Life history Narrative Visual ethnographic methods Statistical analysis Data reduction Theme identification Comparative analysis Cognitive mapping Interpretative methods Document analysis Content analysis Conversation analysis *etc.*

Source: Crotty (1998)

Chapter 2 has started to explore how meaning might be constructed in a practical sense. The literature in this chapter outlines some of the known realities that offer some limited understanding of the influences on the decision-making environments of local government. It is expected the theoretical framework and research design will allow for the discovery of the answers to the research question and sub-questions, as well as providing the freedom to explore the interactive nature of the data collection and analysis. Moreover, the research will be able to uncover the unknown unknowns and subsume them into the current understandings of the theories outlined in Chapter 2, where appropriate. To recap, the research question states:

> *Are substantial investment decisions in local government reflecting established citizen preferences and, if so, how and why?*

One aim of this research is to discover what influence citizen preferences have on elected members when they make large capital investment decisions on behalf of their communities. What in reality elected members need to deal with is a large, complex array of influences, which they must consider and then reconcile before they make that final decision. Reaching an understanding of the context, the weight and the adoption of the influences abounding when elected members make decisions and what bearing they have on the final decision is inherent in answering the research question. In other words, what are the human practices, constructed through interactions between human beings, that will inform how elected members weight citizen preferences when they are considering large capital investment proposals?

This leads into the need to understand how to tease out what decision-makers know of these influences in their own deliberations or, more specifically, how decision-makers position these influences against what they know and must decide.

Part of the challenge of achieving this approach will be to interpret what elected members think they know to establish what they actually know.

According to Crotty (1998), "epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (p. 8). It is concerned with:

> *providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate. (Maynard, 1994, p. 10)*

Chapter 2 explained how the scholarship on decision-making draws a clear distinction between normative and descriptive decision theories (Hansson, 1994). It seems that a similar distinction can be made with the choices elected members make based on their preferences for certain outcomes. When outcomes are determined by factors beyond just their own behaviour, determining other possible influences is typically difficult, if not impossible. That is, unless there is a mechanism that creates a way of constructing an understanding of the influences of these choices, it is unlikely they ever will be identified.

As noted earlier, constructivist theories posit that the behaviour of elected members is shaped by their identities and social norms. They follow either "logic of appropriateness" (March & Olsen, 1989, p. 160) or "logic of arguing" (Risse, 2000, p. 7). Because identities, interests and norms are socially constructed, they are subject to change. This research is deeply embedded in establishing elected member identities and the influences that underpin the social norms they inherently refer to when making a decision. How these identities have been deconstructed is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Putting the mechanism in place for constructing the meaning of these choices, while still recognising that ideas, interests and norms are as variable as the unknown

extent of the choices this research might uncover, is what makes this research significant. Here is why.

The approach of this research is to explore how elected members perceive decision influences and how they most readily apply those influences to their decisions in the social world of local government (M. Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Schwandt, 1998). As these constructions exist in the minds of each of the elected members, it is the intent of the research to understand, reconstruct, analyse and critique their views in a way that leads to constructing meaningful findings and outcomes for each of them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In framing this research, I propose to play an active part in the construction of meaning. One of the key underlying assumptions is that the social world is without meaning prior to one's experience of it. Constructionism also implies that both the subject and object are actively participating in the creation of the meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

This approach has been used in this research, and the extent of constructing the meaning has been structurally framed by the literature outlined in Chapter 2. This in turn supports the framing for this research outlined in this chapter.

3.2.2   Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) asserts a theoretical perspective is the "philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (p. 3).

This research is to be conducted among people rather than objects. It is based on the understanding that social reality can be constructed "based on a constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the intentional, meaningful

behaviour of people – including researchers" (J. K. Smith, 1989, p. 85). In common

with constructionists, interpretivists in general focus on the process by which

meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt, 2003). In using

social inquiry, the intention is to interpret and construct meaning from the thoughts

and views of elected members. That is, the meaning is not discovered, but more

constructed from the point of view of the elected members living it to reveal the

meanings embodied in their actions (Schwandt, 1998).

Therefore, this research has two purposes. The first is to construct an

understanding of elected members' interpretations of how they use different sources

of information in making their decisions. The second purpose is to construct an

understanding of their interpretations – that is, to interpret elected members'

interpretations.

Expanding on this line of thinking, the intent is to explain the subjective

meanings or realities that catalyse elected members' actions when they are

considering and reaching a decision about large capital investments. It is important

for this research to understand these actions[42] in a meaningful way (M. Saunders,

Lewis, & Thornhill., 2005).

In this sense, the data collected are based on perceptions and actions of elected

members and how they make sense of the world around them. The research point of

view is that of an observer looking in and seeking to understand the dynamics creating

the interactions between the various actors (Haruta et al., 2009; Ostrom, 2005).

Given the actors in this research are elected members, it follows that, if for no

other reason than that this research has been conducted in a political environment, it

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[42] Action in this sense is the process and thinking behind reaching a decision.

has been necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach to gathering this information. It also became self-evident early in the research that a similarly pragmatic approach was required to record, capture and analyse the interrogations and interpolations of the information from the interviews with each of the elected members.

Furthermore, a pragmatic approach was plainly necessary in relation to the specific topic being explored – that is, understanding the influences elected members are subject to when making large capital investment decisions.

Interpretivist thinking, then, is the theoretical perspective of this research. Moreover, the research design has been modelled on a similarly pragmatic decision to plan and enable a mirroring of this approach. This links neatly to a certain methodological approach to support how the scholarship is being represented here. That approach is grounded theory.

3.2.3 Methodology and Method – the Theory

In her constructivist revision of classical grounded theory, Clarke (2003, 2005) explicitly builds on its pragmatist foundations and incorporates postmodern perspectives (Alasuutari et al., 2012). When emphasising the compatibility of pragmatism with contemporary epistemological developments, she reminds us that pragmatism's relativistic view of truth, its assumption of a multiplicity of perspectives, and its emphasis on partial views, situated actions and positional knowledge already align it with constructivist grounded theory (Alasuutari et al., 2012). This complexity, the nature of the approach and the themes of decision-making in local government are not unfamiliar to these constructs. The research practice builds on that perspective. Clarke (2003, 2005) offers situational analysis as a way to map decision-making positions, discourses and actions.

Several grounded theory guidelines are available for qualitative inquiry. The grounded theory emphasis on action and process, its comparative approach, and its particular coding and sampling strategies make the method unique. These guidelines have been discussed at length in the literature (Charmaz, 2005, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Charmaz (2006) defines grounded theory as a set of methods that consists of "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2).

In its simplest sense, what the above definition means for this research is that it will initially code the information within the interviews by word, sentence and paragraph and give temporary labels (codes) against a specific theme. The codes of these themes will then determine whether the codes generated by one data source (the transcripts of one elected member) can be found within another data source (the transcript of another elected member). These related codes can then be categorised and ultimately integrated into a theoretical analysis of a set of themes (a substantive area) that the codes reveal (Clarke, 2003).

Unlike most qualitative approaches, grounded theory provides explicit strategies for defining and studying processes (e.g., situational analysis mapping); this theory places priority on action (Alasuutari et al., 2012). This research treats the influences, the deliberation and the decision-making processes in the same manner. Glaserian versions of grounded theory build action into the analysis from the earliest coding. The comparative study of actions and codes advances an inductive analysis (Clarke, 2003). By invoking comparative methods throughout the analysis, grounded theorists define analytic properties of their codes. These metadata elements of the codes that describe the themes are inherent in the analytics that follow.

This research focuses on decisions about large capital investments. How and what influences the deliberations on these investments will be explored in the decision-making environment of local government and the weight elected members give to citizen preferences in reaching their final decisions. The acts of coding and analysing data to explain the action processes that inform these decisions bring the potential for determining theoretical meaning from the outset (Glaser, 1978); the like type of the significant like investments in this research will support this approach. In brief, grounded theory guidelines include the following comparative research practices (Alasuutari et al., 2012):

- Comparing data with data

- Labelling data with active, specific codes

- Selecting focused codes

- Comparing and sorting data with focused codes

- Raising telling focused codes to tentative analytic categories

- Comparing data and codes with analytic categories

- Constructing theoretical concepts from abstract categories

- Comparing category with concept

- Comparing concept and concept.

In a study based on traditional grounded theory, the key or basic social process is typically articulated in gerund form predicting ongoing action at an abstract level. Around this basic process are the particular and distinctive conditions, strategies, actions and practices engaged by human and nonhuman actors involved with and in the processes and their consequences (Clarke, 2003).

In detailing this approach, Clarke (2003) suggests basic grounded theory can be supplemented with situation-centred approaches. She proposes they are able to

enrich research by addressing the differences and complexities of social life. This thinking seems to resonate with the processes and environments that surround elected members making significant asset investment decisions in this research. She proposes the use of situational maps and analyses to enable this.

Situational analysis comes in three forms: situational; social world/arena; and positional (Clarke, 2003). All three kinds of maps are intended as analytical exercises, especially well-suited to contemporary studies from solely interview-based, multi-sited research projects (Clarke, 2003). The thematic outcomes sought from the cohorts of elected members in this research are proxies for the situational analysis Clarke (2003) suggests. This research has two such cohorts of local government. One is elected members of councils in strongly rural areas, specifically the Bay of Plenty region. The other cohort is elected members of predominantly urban councils, specifically the Wellington region.

This chapter will describe the two methods used in this research: interviews and document review. The benefit of using these two methods is that they complement the traditional grounded theory analysis, which is centred on framing the complexities of action over time – that is, the key elements and conditions that characterise the influences on decisions that follow the decision-making processes dictated by the Local Government Act 2002. In other words, this approach makes it possible to interpret the decision-making of selected situations (e.g., a proposed large capital investment in a civic building) across a number of councils (e.g., Wellington City Council) to interrogate how and why elected members reached their final decision. In addition, it is a way of determining whether elected members gave any weight to citizen preferences in making that decision.

Illustrating this point, elected members have often sought to embrace the various elements of their society in decisions they make on behalf of their communities (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013; N. Leggett, personal communication, 26 June 2013; F. Wilde, personal communication, 30 June 2013). In this research, it is who they are and their experiences that have shaped their understanding of the situations in which they are making decisions (Clarke, 2003). The approach of this research, using interview and document review, has resulted in thick analyses (Fosket, 2002), paralleling Geertz's (1973) thick descriptions (both authors cited by Clarke, 2003).

3.2.4   Methodology and Method – the Practice

The use of situational analysis in this research began by experimenting with situationally mapping the codes generated from the first 10 interviews based on the thematic model. The outcome of this initial work was two-fold. First, it encouraged a useful rethink of how the codes could fit together (Clarke, 2005). Second, it re-abstracted the existing data to understand the discourse about how citizen preferences were influencing elected members and any insights into how they constructed any weighting they gave to those preferences in making decisions about large capital investments.

This initial review had an immediate effect. It highlighted the existence of other influences, and the richness of the narratives signalled the research had much more to discover. This was more about understanding how and why elected members seemed to be weighting these influences in the way this data generation, collection and analysis indicated. With this realisation, the analysis pointed to the use of social worlds/arena maps to identify a range of new influences that elected members were exposed to or held innately. These insights led to the development of new codes to

reflect the wider influences that became self-evident through re-reading and re-analysing the initial interview transcriptions.

In some of the semi-structured interviews, as well as introducing the interview that was to follow, the interviewer described an early version of the situational map of the research to date. This approach helped to verify the early constructions of elected members' interview data that described these influences. In addition, it opened up an opportunity to continue to iteratively develop a dynamic model during the later interviews and then during analysis.

At this point an analysis was undertaken to consider how these discoveries entered into the social actions or interactions of elected members with their peers when they were taking decision positions and ultimately making decisions (e.g., in the debating chamber). This analysis fitted neatly as a method in the research design, slowly unpacking the discoveries about how elected members weighted citizen preferences among numerous other influences (primarily but not limited to expert advice and elected member opinion), notwithstanding that the question of weighting remained an issue to be answered more with further analysis.

Using a constructivist approach, methodologically the initial analysis of the transcriptions was less concerned with how decision influences on elected members were shaped. Instead, the main concern was with how "the changing conditions bearing on interaction, whether 'within the heads' of [elected members] or between [elected members], lead in turn to changing objects, meanings, and social universes" (Strauss, 1993, p. 27).

Clarke (2005) encourages grounded theorists to view her work as "analytic tools that can be used on their own with discourse data and/or along with and complementing other theoretic and analytic approaches" (p. 146). Others have also

provided some guidance that literature can be used as a secondary source of data and include "descriptive materials concerning events, actions, setting and actors' perspective that can be used as data and analysed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 58).

Combining situational mapping with this iterative analysis generated valuable, richly detailed, contextual data. This approach provided the theoretical sensitivity and an ability to think at a more abstract level while developing a theory about the weighting of citizen preferences in the significant investment decisions elected members are expected to make on behalf of their communities.

The above discussion, while providing an insight into how the theoretical framework applies pragmatically to this research, leaves open the need to explain the research design and strategy. The two are inextricably linked.

This research has selected and tailored its design and strategy to meet the research challenges of the environment it is focusing on. The following section includes a broad response to the non-reductive knowledge practices and the complexities of this environment. After all, failing opens up the potential of being deeply submerged into a complexity chaos (Clarke, 2003), or continuing to rely on a combination of the garbage can model and black box model as our best attempt to explain the decision-making environments of local government.

3.3   Research Design

According to Creswell (2003), explaining the research approach is an effective strategy for strengthening the validity of social research. In this thinking, Creswell aimed to provide the transparency social scientists seek to understand the context of the explosion in the research across the disciplines broadly referred to as the social sciences (e.g., sociology and public administration). This section is dedicated to

explaining the qualitative research approach this research has adopted and the key decisions that led to it.

The research design was influenced by Crotty (1998). As noted above, it has been founded on the four stages this design used to broadly approach social research: epistemology; theoretical perspective; methodology; and methods (Figure 3.1).
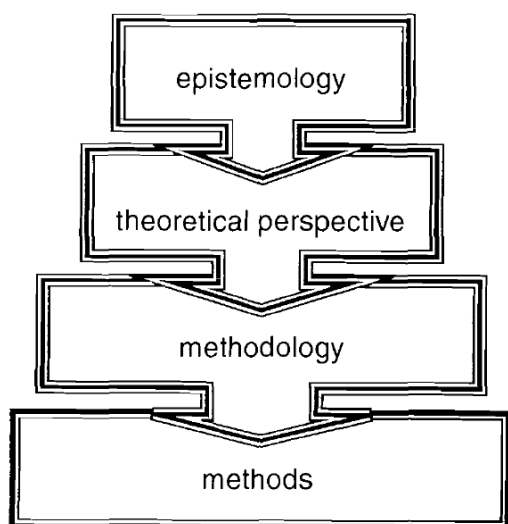
Figure 3.1. Theoretical framework

Source: Crotty (1998)

After adopting this framework, the next step was to clarify the methodology and methods (data collection and sampling techniques) adopted for this research. These will be described in more detail later in this chapter. Intertwined with Crotty's framework is a qualitative research design targeting the methods that have ultimately been selected to provide the data and information required to answer the research question set out in Chapter 1.

In the first instance, a pilot study was undertaken to inform the proposal of this research. It substantiated a number of important assumptions, among which were establishing the assurance elected members were able to participate as was planned, confirming the thinking behind the proposed geospatial cohorts of where

and who the data were to be collected from, and gaining the endorsement that

research on large capital investment decisions was of sufficient interest to pursue.

This approach also pointed to how to capture some of the potential richness required

from this research if it was ever going to provide the depth and understanding

required to address the research question. This and other decisions guided by the

pilot proved to be crucial to informing what would ultimately provide the outputs of

this research. How the pilot contributed to this research has also been described in

Chapter 1.

As a result of these initial interrogations and experiences, the qualitative

research approach introduced and verified in the pilot was also applied here. This

research has achieved this by focusing on the objectives to:

1. Undertake a critical review of literature to establish the context of the large capital

    investment decisions elected members are considering in the specific

    environment of local government

2. Undertake a critical review of literature on such decisions, as clearly articulated in

    LTPs of all councils where these decisions are published for all to see

3. Analyse and interpret the interviews of elected members to explore how they

    constructed these decisions and the weight they applied to citizen preferences

    when making these decisions.

The decision cases discussed with the elected members were not targeted at

specific projects per se, beyond focusing on large, complex investment decisions with

significant financial implications for communities (e.g., large infrastructure

investments). It was up to the elected members to choose the particular examples

they discussed in their interviews. As the elected members were selected from both

rural and urban local government, the projects reflected both these environments and

their capital plans. The projects were then verified from the long-term plans (both past and present) within the Bay of Plenty region and the Wellington region. This approach was taken based on my own personal experiences, which suggested the decision-making influences are likely to be similar but with slightly different nuances for the two types of regions. This hypothesis was, at least in part, verified by my pilot research project conducted in support of developing this research (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013).

3.3.1　The Theory behind the Research Design

Good research can be defined as a careful and diligent search resulting in trustworthy and useful knowledge (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). To achieve such knowledge, good research design is essential. This has been defined as:

> *a logic that links the data to be collected to the initial questions of a study. (Yin, 1994, p. 9)*

Several important steps, in a logical sequence, form the basis of a research design (Mouton, 2002).

> *There should be a clear link between the steps beginning with the purpose of the study and following through the literature review, the theoretical framework, the research question, the methodology section, the data analysis, and the findings. (Ryan-Wenger, 1992)*

Creswell (2003, p. 5) suggests three questions are central to the design of any research:

- What claims of knowledge are being made?
- What strategies of inquiry are informing the research?
- What methods of data collection and analysis are being used?

Reflecting on these three questions regularly was integral to exploring the research design. Specifically, first, what theory will this research use to explore the research questions? This has been established above. Second, will the research collect the data and information for analysis to provide the insights to build a (new) theory (Patton, 2002) or test a (new or old) theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007)? The response to this question will be discussed in Chapter 5. And finally, preliminary to establishing the answer to the second question, how might such insights be best achieved? The following steps are the basis for the research design:

- Research strategy

- Data collection methods

- Data collection instruments and processes

- Data sources

- Timing of analysis and instruments of analysis

- Analysis type and application.

The next section provides the detail of how these steps have been applied in the context of this research.

3.4   Research Strategy

Weaving the thinking through the theory and its practice, and the way in which the research is approached fundamentally, influences the richness of the information that is available to the researcher. The method and tools the researcher adopts to collect and analyse the data are no less important; they will also strongly influence the researcher's ability to deliver the intended outcomes.

The previous discussion has outlined the first part of this thinking as it relates to this research. This section addresses the second part by outlining the research strategy, the method of research and the model that has been developed.

According to Silverman (2000), before conducting research it is important to clearly set out the research strategy. From the literature and discussions on various traditions and approaches to good research, a number of different strategies might be considered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Walsham, 1995). This approach encapsulates the notion that the "theory is explicit within the research design" (M. Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2005, p. 87).

3.4.1 Inductive Research Strategy

To summarise the approach to the research as discussed above, the process has been to collect, analyse and then theorise from the data. The process consists of reading through textual data and identifying themes, coding those themes, and then interpreting their structure and content (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The techniques of analysis have been designed to identify categories and concepts within the text that are then linked into the formal theoretical model developed to explore large capital investment decisions. These processes and techniques are iterative (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998).

Furthermore, this process has been iterative within a number of iterative, non-sequential phases. Once an appropriate amount of data was collected through a phase or phases, a critical part of the approach was to step back to get a holistic view of the data and information collected as a way of developing a picture of what was influencing elected members when they made their decisions. By analysing the data, it was possible to develop a theory over time that could explain how elected members might reach their decisions, what was influencing those decisions, and what weight they were

applying to citizen preferences when making those decisions. The intent here was to develop a set of observations and move from the particular experiences of the elected members to a more general set of propositions about those experiences. In other words, it involved moving from data to theory or from the specific to the general.

As well as having a neat fit with this research, the inductive approach described by Clarke (2003) gained support as a choice in part from its successful application in the pilot research project. The pilot examined the problem of affordability and financial sustainability with elected members in a similar semi-structured interview process. It examined the decisions that underpinned the prioritisation challenges created by large, complex, future-oriented investment decisions in local government. It gave useful insights into these complex problems. The evidence from the pilot also suggested an approach that allowed the researcher to explore and capture what was in the hearts and minds of the decision-makers at the time they were making decisions, in line with the demands of this research. According to M. Saunders et al. (2005), the inductive approach includes:

- Gaining access to understanding of meaning to the actors in action situations

- Having a close understanding of the research arena

- Collecting qualitative data

- Having a flexible structure to allow for a shift in emphasis in the research as a consequence of the research process

- Being less concerned with the need to generalise.

One of the characteristics of an inductive research strategy is that the researcher continuously and iteratively moves between data generation, collection and analysis (M. Saunders et al., 2005). This aspect typifies how this research was conducted and aligns with the thinking above. The primary purpose of the inductive

approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (G. Thomas & James, 2006). Inductive coding begins with close readings of text and consideration of the multiple meanings that are inherent in the text (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The significance of this process will be explored in the research method section below.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that elected members are seen as social actors engaging within a socially constructed reality (Ostrom, 2005). They were asked to describe their thoughts and opinions during a specific set of actions. The actions mirrored the processes that inform decisions about large capital investments as prescribed, or not, by the Local Government Act 2002 (Dollery, 1998; Dollery & Worthington, 1996).

The detail of the interviews included open-ended questions with flexible question structures (Eisenhardt, 1989). This enabled the necessary shifts in the research processes, with these techniques of the inductive research strategy meeting difficult demands of gathering information for this research. How this was linked together is described from start to finish in next two sections of this chapter, covering the research method and model.

3.5   Research Method

Research methods provide a way of finding empirical data about the world and involve the particular forms of data collection, analysis and interpretation used in any research (Myers, 2009, p. 24). This research included the use of two qualitative data collection methods.

3.5.1   Data Collection Methods

The two data collection methods were:

- Document review

- Interviews.

Document review. Having a good understanding of the literature that supports this thesis is essential. The document review was completed in two parts. The first part involved a literature review to consider the theoretical and normative approaches of elected members in their decision-making, as well as the decision-making theory itself. This literature review is described in Chapter 2. The second part, providing the first of the two data sources for this research, was a review of the documents that supported the investment decisions that elected members either were making or had made in the past. These documents contain detailed descriptions of the processes and decisions within those processes. These documents included, but were not limited to long-term plans (e.g., Opotiki District Council 2015–2025 Long Term Plan), annual plans (e.g., Tauranga City Council Annual Plan 2014–2015), community consultation strategies, communication plans, project plans, stakeholder meeting minutes and action plans, council reports, consultant reports, assessment of environmental effect reports, cultural impact assessments, pre-feasibility cases and business cases.[43]

Interviews. The second and by far the most substantive data source for this research was the interviews. As noted above, these interviews were designed with open-ended, semi-structured research questions. The interviews represented more

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[43] A significant number of primary sources have been used to inform the thinking that supports this research: see Appendix A.

than 60 different data collection events, including the pilot interviews. Across these events, the methods of collection remained constant. The data sets obtained included interview notes and digital recordings of the interviews. All interviewees agreed to having the interviews audio recorded. All elected members also agreed that any statements or quotes gleaned from these interviews could be used to support the interpretations they might have made. This includes references for my own interpretations of those interpretations once these have been codified and explained.

Chapters 4 and 5, covering research analysis and discussion, use elected member observations to support the thematic analysis. They identify interpretations based on seven general categories of elected members: chair of a regional council, deputy chair of a regional council, mayor of a city council, deputy mayor of a city council, councillor of a regional council, councillor of a city council, and councillor of a district council.

The rationale for identifying interviewees by role rather than by name is that interrogations of the research findings ought to be about what elected members said rather than who said it. Depersonalising the elected members' thoughts therefore focuses the readers on the essence of what influences apply to elected members. When I shared some of the early findings with others where the participants were identified by name, they responded with some bias that seemed to detract from their attention to the findings themselves. It is for this reason that the referencing is agnostic to the individual who has voiced the opinion. The source of any reference can be discovered and verified in the data sets, if and when required.

3.5.2   Data and Information Sources

The choice of what data to collect and where to collect them from has followed a specific approach. As noted above, the data sources are the interviews with elected

members who agreed to participate in this research. These elected members were purposefully selected as representative of the councils and then the regions in which they work. All elected members interviewed can be found within the following councils in two regions in New Zealand:

- Bay of Plenty region

    o Bay of Plenty Regional Council

    o Tauranga City Council

    o Western Bay of Plenty District Council

    o Rotorua District Council

    o **Whakatane District Council**[44]

    o Opotiki District Council

    o Kawerau District Council

- Wellington region

    o Greater Wellington Regional Council

    o **Wellington City Council**[36]

    o Upper Hutt City Council

    o Hutt City Council

    o Porirua City Council.

Using these regions (as shown in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1), this research has a specific opportunity to explore the influences on elected members through a number of different lenses (e.g., urban versus rural).

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[44] Whakatane District Council and Wellington City Council elected members have been selected as the core councils for this research.

The first lens ensures the sample of interviewees is representative of the types of elected members in New Zealand local government. This has meant elected members were selected from councils from both tiers of local government – that is, from regional councils and from city councils and district councils.

The rationale for getting this particular range of representation is that these two tiers of local government have a well-known but at times awkward relationship (e.g., Whakatane District Council versus Bay of Plenty Regional Council in 2010), and the drivers that operate on large investment decisions can differ between some councils, especially between regional councils and district or city councils (J. Cronin, personal communication, 30 June 2013). All regional developments are investments within one or more local government authority boundaries (e.g., large roading projects under the regional land transport capital plans). This circumstance helps to explain some of the conflicting challenges and influences in relation to strategic thinking and projects that support regional outcomes rather than local ones (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). That thinking, and the local priorities that councils, particularly district councils, sometimes struggle with (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013), will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

The research is also more likely to be representative of all councils across New Zealand if it includes elected members from both city and district councils – that is, those that make up the second tier of local government. Two councils, one from each region, have been selected as the core or backbone of the research, providing approximately half of the interviews selected. These interviews and the thinking from elected members within these councils were then sense-checked with a number of other elected members from the other councils of the two regions. This provided

necessary context to the information captured from these core councils within each cohort. The rationale for this approach was to capture any peculiarities specific to rural or urban local government environments in a form and format that could be analysed. This will also be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

As New Zealand's local government landscape is complex in so many ways,[45] the nuances that prevail because an elected member interviewed is from a regional council, a city council or a district council are recognised.[46] Moreover, the differences in thinking between elected members from these different tiers have been more obvious than some might expect (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013). The nature of the council they are working in is an important influence on how elected members feel about some circumstances and the nature of its influence may vary from that for other elected members in other types of council, as will be discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The scale of this research (the number of elected members interviewed) also typifies and captures the diversity of elected members interviewed. Alongside its deep dive into each of these three local government environments, this research has a similarly unique opportunity to analyse the nature of elected members making these large capital investment decisions. What is also important to this research is the influences of their individual self and what that means or brings to bear when they make these types of decisions.

Teasing out the influences related to where elected members are from, their role in local government and the challenges and conflicts they feel with regard to who they are in a private sense is an important method of discovery in this research. The

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[45] Chair/DeputyRC351286.

[46] Chair/DeputyRC361390.

results of these observations and early understandings of this complex environment will be explored at length in Chapters 4 and 5.

In summary, 12 interviews were undertaken for the pilot and a further 50 interviews across the two spatial cohorts defined by local government's Bay of Plenty and Wellington regions, and the representation of regional, city and district councils within these two chosen cohorts (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1).

The resulting diverse data set for the research recognises the spatially varied circumstances of both urban and rural councils. It also recognises the different investment proposals across personal and public health and wellbeing that celebrate cultural diversity and consider access to public infrastructure that supports social outcomes like health, education and housing. For reasons that became more apparent through the interviews themselves, this research focused on influences on decisions that involve substantial council investments in specific types of community assets (J. McKinnon, personal communication, 10 July 2013). Examples of these large capital investments are a wastewater treatment plant (F. Wilde, personal communication, 12 July 2013), a community swimming pool (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013) or similar stadium (A. Foster, personal communication, 24 June 2013), and a library or a museum (G. Hanlen, personal communication, 30 June 2013). They did not include a pavement rehabilitation on a road or the renewal of a mains water pipe or an upgrade to a wastewater pipe (J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013).

While these investments involved either tens of millions or hundreds of millions of dollars, it should be noted the quantum can vary significantly depending on which council the elected member was representing. What Opotiki District Council considers large is somewhat different in scale to, for example, the level of investment that Wellington City Council would put in this category. The significance

of projects is mostly determined by the size of the investment relative to a council's ability to fund the repayment and its ongoing commitments to its investment.

In their interviews, elected members referred to many past, recent and future (proposed) decisions, which have established the basis for the data sets in this research (e.g., the Matata disaster recovery projects and Opotiki harbour transformation projects in the Bay of Plenty region, and the ASB sports centre project and the project to earthquake-proof the town hall in the Wellington region). Elected members chose to draw on a wide variety of experiences to describe what influenced them in any given circumstance. The interviews were designed to provide them with the freedom and opportunity to do that.

In practice, this interview design has also meant the data from each elected member were coded in relation to important individual attribute and metadata elements that described who the individual was, where they were from and, as noted above, the type of council they worked on. This information was as relevant as the circumstance of the investment they were discussing.

Another part of this phase of the research was to transcribe each interview into a Word document in preparation for codifying the interviews, which would form the basis of the thematic analysis in the next phase. Section 3.6 will detail the model developed to capture elected members' important insights.

It is the information held within this model and its thematic analysis of the types and degree of influences on elected members when they make decisions that is the essence of this research. The privilege of gaining the rich data that elected members have provided freely to inform this research cannot be overestimated.

3.5.3   The Rationale of the Cohorts

The characteristics that define a community in New Zealand also define who we are as a nation. It is reasonable to assume that, if we can unpack who we are as a nation, we can systematically ensure that these 'aspects of us' as a community are represented in this research as a nation.

In this sense, and for the purposes of this research, it is my responsibility as a researcher to ensure the councils and individuals selected for this research collectively reflect the voice of the nation. Although that responsibility precludes attempting to weight any voice by that selection, it does extend to ensuring that the elected members get a chance to exercise that voice on behalf of the people or peoples they represent. In this way, this research will have, within the council cohorts and the individuals within those councils, the voice of the nation to describe who we are. So, who are we?

Defining who we are is not as complicated as it might first appear. Economically, we are a nation of farmers of the land of one type or another as much as we are urbanites making our livings by providing products and services in the towns and cities – in collectively what we call New Zealand. The first criterion to ensure this research represents such diversity is to have participation from elected members that represent both urban and rural territorial authorities.

Culturally we are a nation of mixed race, but the one that defines us internationally is our first nations people, the tangata whenua – better known as the Māori people of New Zealand. It is this diversity that some would say defines who we are as a nation. A second criterion for representation of this diversity, therefore, is to include ethnically diverse elected members and councils (best represented by our larger town and cities, for example, Wellington City Council) along with communities that have

significant Māori populations (best represented by the smaller communities in rural New Zealand, for example, Opotiki District Council).

Socially we are a nation that embraces this diversity and celebrates the ideals of egalitarianism, or perhaps more accurately equalitarianism when we consider how we might like to live as individuals. We are an educated nation and our values and beliefs are celebrated internationally, even if this challenges us when we exercise the rights that those values and beliefs create. Like many other nations, we have an ageing population, creating challenges that are implicit in this research. As noted above, it is my responsibility to gain representation from elected members who reflect this type of diversity.

Environmentally too we are a nation of great diversity. In this research, this diversity is best represented by the physiography of the landscape that these decisions are made in (the geosphere[47]), as much as it is by the quality of the environment that we have stewardship over (biosphere[48]). In practice, this means that the elected members and councils elected are representative of councils that are grappling with issues such as climate change and sea-level rise, water quality and water supply, natural hazards and community resilience.

Finally, in term of this research, politically we are a democracy. It is reasonable to assert two types of democracy are operating in New Zealand. At a central (federal) level, New Zealand is a representative democracy. At a local level (including regional or state/provincial), it is that plus a deliberative or participative democracy.

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[47] Geosphere is the collective name for the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, the cryosphere and the atmosphere.

[48] Biosphere is the global ecological system integrating all living beings and their relationships, including their interaction with the elements of the geosphere.

These 'aspects of us' define much of who we are and how we approach the kind of decisions this research is exploring. By selecting the two regions and the councils within those regions, this research gains representation from all the aspects of New Zealand that are material to who we are economically, culturally, socially, environmentally and politically (see summary table in Appendix D).

3.5.4   Data Collection Instruments and Processes

Data collection instruments included a range of electronic media, with the choice of instrument depending on the workstream (e.g., electronic documents, digital voice recordings, tables and spreadsheets). This includes a purpose-built data warehouse for all coded information derived from the transcriptions. A standard Microsoft Office suite of products has been used to digitise, collect, record and store all data created from these various streams where information was gathered or generated in some form.

Notably a wide range of information has been collected from council records. The majority of reports are published documents and freely available (see Appendix A). As a practitioner I can also, with the appropriate authorisation, search for and retrieve information through normal practitioner channels. No references in this thesis have been subject to privilege or public-excluded[49] decisions.

This research has been afforded a substantial amount of support from the mayors and chairs across regional, city and district councils. As noted earlier, the two regions

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[49] From time to time, councils hold "public excluded" discussions, consistent with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2002. No information referenced in this research has privilege of this nature.

that are the focus of this research provided a sample of data for the pilot research project completed in 2013,[50] and this usefully informed the thinking for this research.

All analytics were conducted from the warehouse noted above. The genesis of all interpretations came from the thematic interrogations provided by these analytics.

The information and data sets were also visualised in graphics and schematics to allow the rich and complex data sets to be viewed with some coherence. This included the model and coding interpolations prepared for analysis and interpretation that underpin the findings set out in Chapter 4.

The model was developed from a combination of the information provided by the literature, and the revelations from the interviews. How this model was developed and the rationale for its saturation and the decision to wind up the interviews will be detailed in Section 3.6.

The data model was formed using a standard thematic method (e.g., NVivo 10 for Windows). This included:[51]

- Sources – research materials including documents, PDFs, data sets, audio, video, pictures, memos and framework matrices

- Coding – the process of gathering material by topic, theme or case; for example, selecting a paragraph about political influence and coding it at the node ("political influence")

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[50] M. Campbell, personal communication, 29 June 2013; J. Cronin, personal communication, 30 June 2013; J. Forbes, personal communication, 28 June 2013; G. Hanlen, personal communication, 30 June 2013; C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013, N. Leggett, personal communication, 8 July 2013; J. McKinnon, personal communication, 10 July 2013; C. Wade-Brown, personal communication, 12 July 2013; F. Wilde, personal communication, 12 July 2013.

[51] Source: NVivo10 for Windows – QSR International.

- Nodes – containers for coding, which involves gathering related material in one place to look for emerging patterns and ideas

- Source classifications – record information about sources; for example, bibliographical data

- Node classifications – record information about people, places or other cases; for example, demographic data.

3.5.5   Analysis Type and Application

Once the classification had been developed enough from the literature to proceed (and this process was iterative as the unknown unknowns became known unknowns), the analysed contents of the elected members' views and the indicated distribution of their thoughts were codified to the model. This iterative process (Figure 3.2) included running iterative queries to inform how the thematic coding was being matched against the model.

Examples of these types of queries included:

- Finding and analysing the words or phrases in the transcriptions or in the annotations made against those transcriptions. This analysis included identifying specific words and/or those words that occurred most frequently (e.g., "citizen preferences")

- Asking questions and finding patterns based on coding metadata schemas and checking for coding consistency among data sets.

As noted earlier, the first phase used an inductive coding analysis technique. Codes were built up from the literature that informed the preliminary outline of the model. As the literature analysis deepened (as outlined in Chapter 2), the text segments and coding options that contained meaningful data sets built up the model. Where new themes were identified, a new label was created in the model and the new

theme for the text segment was assigned to it. Additional text segments were added to the categories to which they were relevant, building evidence for that category. By the time all the relevant literature had been worked through and coded, the initial outline had gained some substance.

The second phase replicated this process. The only difference was that, instead of using the literature to build up the model, it took the coded transcriptions and the rich array of themes described by elected members in their interviews and applied these to the model to add to its substance. By the end of this second phase, a detailed model of the types of influences operating on elected members when they were making large capital investment decisions had been established.

The meaning of each category in the model and how this is linked to any other categories are described in Section 3.6, along with the implications of those links and the intricacies of the model (G. Thomas & James, 2006).

Following the procedures that G. Thomas and James (2006) describe, this research has taken the same inductive research approach to analysing these two data sets. The process was as follows.

- Preparation of the raw data: Translate the raw data (interviews) using the transcription templates to prepare for data digitisation and formatting (cleaning). Transcribe the interview files in a common format into the prepared templates (e.g., font size, margins, highlighting questions or interviewer comments). Print and back up each raw data file and the transcription to be coded.

- Close reading of the text: Read the raw text in detail until the meanings within the transcriptions are understood. Codify the text. Prepare the thematic model to populate the new themes against the codified transcriptions.

- Creation of decision elements: Derive the upper-level or more general decision elements from the literature review as outlined above. Derive the lower-level or specific decision elements from multiple readings of the raw data (transcriptions), into what has been referred to as a data warehouse. In line with the inductive research strategy, coding elements were created from actual phrases or meanings in specific text segments.

- Mapping of decision elements: Match the codification of elected members' interpretations to the codification of notes made against those interpretations. That is, codify elected members' interpretations against my interpretations of those interpretations. Use specialist, digitally enhanced search engine tools to speed up the coding process with these large amounts of text data (Durkin, 1997).
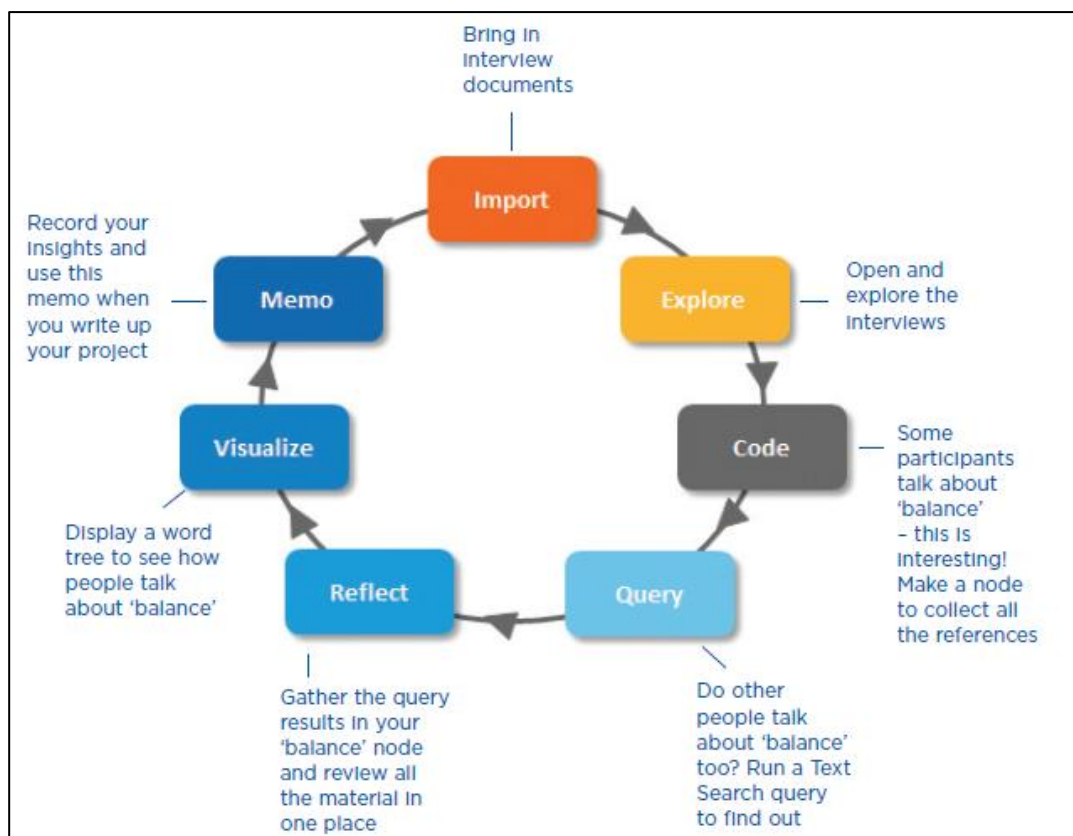
Figure 3.2. A 'suggested approach' for qualitative analysis

Source: NVivo10 for Windows – QSR International

- Overlapping coding and uncoded text: Among the commonly assumed rules that underlie qualitative coding are two rules typical of quantitative coding: (a) one segment of text may be coded into more than one category; and (b) a considerable proportion of the text (e.g., 50% or more) may not be assigned to any element, because much of the text may not be relevant to the evaluation objectives. The approach to coding follows both of these rules.

- Continuing to revise and refine the elements that define the influences of large capital investment decisions: Within each element, search for themes, including contradictory points of view and new insights. The model elements may be combined or linked under superordinate elements when the meanings are related (G. Thomas & James, 2006).

After completing numerous scenarios with the queries developed for this analysis in the data warehouse, the metadata schemas framed and filtered views of the raw and coded data from which the themes had been identified (see the example in Table 3.2) to prepare for analysis and discussion.

Once an appropriate amount of data had been identified, it was possible to develop a set of themes and descriptions of those themes by the elected members who made them. It was from these derivative or interpolated data sets that the interpretations were made and the research findings were recorded.

Table 3.2. Data query sample

Query	Description	Examples
Text Search	Find all occurrences of a word, phrase, or concept.	Find and analyze all occurrences of the phrase *citizen engagement*. Find the words *policy* or *legislation* and code them at the new node *council*. Find content where the terms *citizen prefrerences* and *decisions* occur within 20 words of each other. Find all references to *affordability*, and find similar words such as financial *sustainability*, *economically viable*, *appropriate*.
Word Frequency	Find the most frequently occurring words or concepts.	Look for the most frequently occurring words in a set of interviews. Find the most frequently occurring themes in a document—where similar words are grouped into concepts.
Coding	Find all content coded at selected nodes, a combination of nodes, or a combination of nodes and attributes.	*What do bureaucrats say about financial sustainability?* —run a query to gather content that has been coded at *social outcomes* and at nodes with the attribute councillor. Show me where content coded at *financially sustainable* is near content coded at collective citizen preferences.
Matrix Coding	Find a combination of items (usually nodes and attributes) and display the results in a table.	Compare what *citizens, bureaucrats* and *politicans* say about *financially sustainable*. Compare how the terms *sustainable*, *social wellbeing* and *economic development* are used by different stakeholders groups—run text searches and create a node for each term and then use the nodes in the matrix criteria.
Compound	Use a compound query to Combine a text search query with a coding query Search for two words that occur in the same paragraph (or other specified context).	Find content where the term *financially sustainable* precedes content coded at *social outcome.* Find content where the words *decisions* and *sustainable* occur in the same paragraph.
Coding comparison	Compare coding done by two users or two groups of users. This query measures the 'inter-rater reliability' or the degree of agreement for coding done by selected users.	Compare coding between users in different locations or from different disciplines.
Group	Find items that are associated in a particular way with other items. The items could be associated by coding, attribute value, relationships, 'see also' links or models.	Find the nodes that have used to code *Interview with Mayor* and *Interview with Bureaucrat.* Which interviews have been coded at *values* and community outcomes? Which sources or nodes have a certain set of attribute values—for example, who are the survey participants from *Urban and Rural*? List any 'relationship' nodes that include *environmental or cultural outcomes.* Find any models that include citizen *ratepayers* or *commercial ratepayers (or both).*

Only then was it possible to draw out the implications of the findings and perhaps offer some normative theorising about new mid-range theory the research has uncovered. How this was accomplished is best described with reference to how the model has been developed to analyse these interpolations.

3.6   Research Model

3.6.1   Defining the Model

How elected members in local government make decisions is not well understood. The complexity of the decision-making environment makes the process difficult to unpack. When a lot is at stake – for example, when elected members are making a large capital investment decision on behalf of their communities – considerable emotional capital is required to work through this complexity. Alongside this is the reality of the size of these investments. The challenge for this research is to unpack the environment in which large capital investment decisions are being made and to tease out the main elements that influence the thinking of the decision-makers at that time. The first step in meeting this challenge is to establish how these types of decisions are being made.

In the literature on the scholarship of decision-making theory, as outlined in Chapter 2, decision-making is described as a simple enough process, in principle. It involves a decision context, several inputs within that context, several considerations to those inputs, several influences on those considerations, a reconciliation of all those (ideally, according to normative decision theory) and then an output – 'the decision'. Similarly, the Local Government Act 2002 provides clear guidance to councils and elected members on the decision process – as well as on the planning process that enables their decisions (e.g., a council's annual or long-term plans) (see Chapter 1). Beyond these high-level conceptual frameworks that are relatively simple in principle, however, there is little understanding of the practice of local government decision-making. This is local government's decision-making 'black box', as noted in previous chapters.

A crucial part of this research has been to construct a model to unpack the contents of that black box. Its purpose is twofold. First, the model captures the decision-making process and its main elements, as explored in detail below. Second, the model unpacks each of these elements, which vary greatly from one another, and describes their core features and attributes. Of significance for decision-making purposes is how these elements and their respective features and attributes might relate with one another – if they do at all. An added benefit of the model is that it has been constructed to allow the thematic nature of the research to be considered against these elements.

3.6.2 The Model

How the model has been developed is important. It must capture the rich tapestry of what is influencing the heart and mind of an elected member when making a decision. To be fully successful, it must also tease out the nuances of the relationships between these influences. As first indicated during the research and development phase of the model, grasping these nuances will be germane to developing a deeper understanding of the decision-making process and the decision that comes from that process.

Unsurprisingly, the first of these stakeholder groups is the citizens. In general terms, citizens are individuals, groups of individuals or communities of interest. This group includes the silent majority who do not vote or engage in council activities. It includes those who pay rates and those who do not; those who use council facilities and those who do not; and the visitors who pass through our communities, whether on business or for pleasure. All are affected by the decisions elected members make, whether it relates to the road they are driving on, the park bench they are sitting on, or the water in the cup of coffee they are purchasing.

The quid pro quo also applies. Elected members are privy to the performance of our transportation networks. Any decision about improving these networks will have implications for the participation of every individual in the community who has used or might use them. In terms of roads, that means nearly everyone, one way or another. Elected members will consider this participation (or demand, as it is known within the asset management discipline) as part of their deliberations. These examples show that it is hard to avoid engaging with local government decision-making or influencing how elected members might make a decision, whether citizens are conscious of it or not.

The second broad stakeholder group influencing elected members comprises technical experts. These specialists provide advice to elected members as part of the suite of information gathered to support a decision. Technical experts include both bureaucrats and officers[52] of the council and technical specialists who are brought in from outside the council. External expert advice tends to be highly specialised and needed intermittently at most. Of course, numerous exceptions to this observation apply. For example, given that local government operating environments are highly diverse with many entities providing a variety of services, it is impossible for a council to have officers with all the skills for the variety of specialist technical advice it requires, all of the time. Another obvious exception is where advice from internal specialist officers is peer reviewed by a like external specialist.

The third and final broad stakeholder group is the elected members themselves. The literature describes this influence as operating in two layers: elected members' influence on each other as peers and on themselves as individuals. Peer

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[52] Any person employed as an 'employee' of the council is defined here as a council 'officer'.

influences relate to the nature of the political environment in which decisions are being made. In this environment, decisions of this nature are not unaccustomed to backroom deals of support and the political grandstanding of the opposition. While this is the extreme version of the debate (or lack of debate) within the chamber where decisions are made, elected members can and do influence one another during deliberations. The second, much more personal set of influences relates to who elected members are, what values they have embraced, their cultural construct, their level of education, their vocation, their political ideology, their demographic characteristics and other characteristics that define them as an individual.

The fully developed decision model contains eight key elements:

- The global decision environment

- The decision context

- The project type

- Decision influencers

- Attributes of decision influencers

- Decision deliberation and debate

- Final considerations

- Decision consequences.

The following discussion outlines each of these elements in turn, introducing their main features and attributes before considering the relationships among them.

3.6.3   Global Decision Environment

Even before they deliberate on a decision, elected members will have a wider context in which to consider it. These global influences are common in all decision-making, although how they influence any particular decision varies significantly. Perhaps the most prominent example of the global environment's influence is the influence of

global economic conditions on the local economy, as illustrated clearly through the Global Financial Crisis. Concerns about an impending economic recession may also influence decision-making. These influences are likely to feature in any elected member's suite of considerations when making a large capital investment decision.

Climate change is another aspect of the environment that can influence at least some decisions. For example, it is likely to have a substantial influence on a large stormwater upgrade project. Even for decisions such as building a sports stadium, where climate change might not appear to be material to that decision, the global context has a strong bearing on the decision if the preferred option is for a coastal location.

Consideration of future technology is another influence on decision-makers. Talk of, and pending, disruptive technologies can substantially influence an elected member. In this technological age, it is only a matter of time before data science and disruptive computer technologies, such as driverless cars, start to press decision-makers to look more closely at alternative solutions to infrastructure demands. Technological developments that enable 'sensing cities' are also likely to influence elected members' decisions. Real-time condition, capacity, demand and utilisation analytics already have an influence. Future investments in libraries and library facilities are another good example; many of these services are available online. The influence of technology will only increase in the coming years.

Some 'global' questions are shaped by the conditions of the local environment. Wider questions about what a council's role should be can influence elected members' decisions. Decisions about economic development investment, such as whether to partially fund a conference centre or hotel complex, fall into this category. Such

decisions certainly prompt some elected members to question a council's role more generally in making these types of investments.[53]

Perhaps one of the most compelling global considerations of a local nature is population demographics and the challenges elected members face when making decisions that consider population growth and/or population decline. Elected members from a council in an area with significant population growth will have a set of considerations that is substantially different from that for elected members making an investment decision for a council whose population growth is either static or even in decline. Historically, large capital investments have mainly been paid for by growth. For example, investments to generate construction are invariably paid for by the citizens who follow those who made the decision. Elected members are now keenly aware of a range of considerations in view of these consequences, such as long-term affordability, sustainability and inter-generational equity.

3.6.4 Decision Context

As noted above, three features of the decision context fundamentally influence the way elected members make decisions in local government. First, the Local Government Act 2002 provides elected members with guidance on the rules and structures within which they will make decisions. Several amendments to the Act since 2002 have altered some of this guidance. How this has influenced elected members' decision-making is discussed in the second phase, where a more detailed analysis explores the nuances of the effects of legislation. For now, it suffices to note

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[53] Recent legislative changes to the Local Government Act (in November 2014) suggest central government would prefer councils to think more closely about their responsibilities, particularly in relation to the investments they have historically made on behalf of their communities.

the legislation is one of the foundational influences on elected members' decisions. Any shift in these foundations has implications for the decision-making process.

The second key feature is the planning frameworks. The legislation sets its expectations of elected members by requiring them to establish and maintain these planning frameworks as part of the normal course of a council's business. The planning frameworks can be described as those activities that relate to long-term plans and district plans. These include processes around agreeing to financial strategies, 30-year infrastructure strategies, 10-year plans or long-term plans, and a range of other important decisions about putting up projects within those plans. The processes include the opportunity to consider technical advice and citizen preferences relating to any of those decisions. They also include decisions about whether to proceed with those investments.

The third key feature is the citizen engagement practices that elected members adopt to learn more about citizens' preferences. Some concerns and considerations relate to how elected members engage with their community. A considerable amount of literature describes how the information provided to a community is too disconnected from the community. Citizen engagement practices are generally agreed to be at the centre of that disconnection. Elected members are influenced by citizens, community groups and other types of community interests. The engagement practices influence elected members' decisions; the question is, by how much?

The model recognises these core features. It recognises the context of these features is founded on and within the scholarship of decision-making theory. It also recognises this context forms the substantive backbone of what, how, why and when decisions are likely to be made within a council. In this regard, the model will enable a

thematic analysis of these key features and provide insight into how strongly they may influence an elected member when making a large capital investment decision.

3.6.5   Project Type

Because of the nature of local government, elected members must make investment decisions across a wide variety of projects, which come in two broad types. The first is core infrastructure: projects that deliver potable water, wastewater, stormwater and transport-related infrastructure services (e.g., road pavements, curb and channel, and footpaths). The second type of project involves investments in social infrastructure – facilities in which the community can enjoy a range of social, cultural and sporting activities (e.g., town halls and other civic facilities, libraries and museums, swimming pools and sport stadiums).

There is growing understanding that the type of project being considered for investment has a substantial influence on how elected members consider investments. The context of these projects and their influence on elected members are strongly linked to several other considerations. Prioritisation of scarce resources across the investment portfolio is one of these influences.

Several specific project-related attributes also influence elected members' decisions. One example is what access part or all of the community has to the benefit of any investment proposed. The level of community access to a public swimming facility has different implications from the question of access when a council makes an equivalent investment in water infrastructure to provide drinking water to all properties within a community. In rural communities, however, this distinction is less clear-cut. This is a particularly important consideration in many investments in rural environments where communities can be spread over large areas.

Within the project type, specific attributes will also influence elected members. The quality of the information, the size of the fiscal commitment, and how much research has been done are but a few of these. The model also captures these nuances.

3.6.6   Decision Influencers

The three stakeholder groups who influence decisions, as described above, form an element that is founded on the scholarship of decision-making theory. Several observations are made here to complement that earlier discussion on the influence of citizen preferences, expert technical advice and elected members' own political opinion.

As the first feature of this element, citizen preferences are at the centre of New Zealand's democracy. As might be expected, many elected members are keen to understand the thoughts and aspirations of their community before making a decision. It cannot be overstated how important the link is between establishing citizen preferences and the citizen engagement practices adopted to uncover them. While the complex relationship between these two aspects is explored in detail later, the model will be challenged to unpack their dependencies. Traditional citizen engagement practices (e.g., submissions to the long-term plan) generally have had difficulty in capturing either the imagination of the community or its aspirations for making the investments to enable these. While focus groups and more recent initiatives (e.g., 'pop-up shops') have had more success, the sector continues to struggle to inspire its citizens to participate in these processes.

Technical experts, the second feature of this element, comprise officers of the council (internal) and consultants or contractors (external), as noted above. Their advice is as varied as the range of disciplines within the sector. It falls into three broad themes: engineering/scientific; spatial/planning; and commercial/financial (see Figure 3.3).
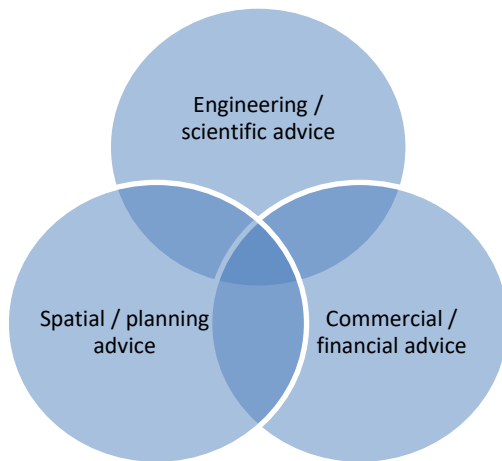
Figure 3.3. Types of advice

Engineering/scientific advice generally concerns construction projects and any associated processes relating to them. It includes the professional disciplines associated with engineers and scientists (e.g., structural engineers, building scientists, hydraulic engineers, electrical engineers, coastal geomorphologists, soil scientists, geotechnical engineers, chemical engineers and climatologists).

Offering spatial/planning advice are the professional disciplines that support the development, publication and daily management of the district plan, the long-term plan, and the suite of strategies and policies a council uses to manage the interface with its community and their aspirations (e.g., planners, policy analysts, researchers and strategists).

The professional discipline that gives commercial/financial advice is associated with ensuring organisational risk and financial prudence expectations are met (e.g., financial analysts, procurement specialists, actuaries and auditors).

While this list of technical experts who can influence elected members' decisions is not exhaustive, it does give insight into the complex nature of local government activities and why elected members seek technical advice both from within the council and externally.

In considering the influence of technical experts, it is important to note, first, that these broad themes are not mutually exclusive, and several disciplines are able to offer advice freely across one or more of these themes (e.g., legal advice). Moreover, advice is always contestable. How elected members are influenced by conflicting advice is important to this research and will be teased out by the thematic analysis. The model has been designed to recognise the nature of this conflict and unpack how this might influence an elected member's decision. Finally, elected members are likely to rely heavily on this advice. The model is designed to analyse to what degree.

The third important feature of this element that is highlighted in the literature is elected members' opinions. As discussed above, elected members must ultimately make the decision to invest – or not. Several important influences exist in addition to those described above. Perhaps one of the most significant is the tenure of an elected member. Experienced elected members are expected to have a substantial influence on peers who are in their first term. This is not surprising given some newly elected members are likely to be daunted by the council chambers, the enormity of some decisions they are being asked to make and the public nature of the role. The extent of this influence will vary greatly and over time within any one council. In the 2013 local government elections, for example, seven out of the ten elected members of Tauranga City Council were newly elected members in the 2013 local government elections. Little is understood about how much tenure influences decision-making.

A fourth influencer, not recognised in the literature, also applies – the media. The media is unusual in the context of the model. Elected members, council officers and, perhaps to a lesser extent, citizens are keenly aware of the influence the media can have on an investment decision. Herein lies a question: to what extent does the advice provided to elected members remain politically agnostic, knowing the

implications of how it might play out in the media? Although it might seem obvious that the media influences elected members in their decisions, the extent to which it does is not well understood. Even less clear is the influence the media has on other broad stakeholder groups. The model has been constructed to unpack and explore these influences in more detail.

3.6.7   Decision Influencer Attributes

As outlined above, broad stakeholder groups are identified within the scholarship of decision-making. However, little is understood about the attributes that help describe the nature of this influence within each group. It is these attributes that form the detail within the model and help to unpack the nature of the influences on elected members.

Given the nature of local government decision-making, expert technical advice has been given within four main themes (attributes) that, until recently, could be best described as the four wellbeings (economic, social, environmental and cultural). Within each wellbeing are many attributes elected members are likely to consider. As an example, economic considerations might include initial capital investment to treasury limits, along with whole-of-life affordability in the operating account. Another consideration might be hedonic pricing models, in an attempt to explore a community's willingness to pay for a certain investment. Velocity of money analytics might even be considered to gain a sense of the ability of a particular investment to act as an economic enabler. This is not an exhaustive list, and economic considerations comprise just one of the attributes outlined in the model.

While the specifics of the four wellbeings were recently removed from the Local Government Act, elected members still consider them in making any investment decision. This is unsurprising as elected members almost by definition are

seeking improvements to social outcomes. The evidence suggests this amendment will be problematic for local government, particularly until it is tested in a legal sense.

The model has also identified a fifth attribute for technical experts: political influence. In a Westminster democracy, officer advice is expected to be 'free, frank and fearless', without any form of bias. Any perception of political influence[54] on what is deemed to be independent advice is likely to create several issues for elected members. The model captures the nuances of these attributes in the thematic analysis that will unpack them.

The attributes for citizen preferences are similar to those for technical experts. The model caters for them by distinguishing between individuals, groups of individuals and communities of interest. These groups might represent interests beyond any local interests; they might also include both regional and national interests. Of particular note with regard to the model and the research it supports is its ability to capture the agendas of each of these attributes that describe citizen preferences. The interest extends to the nature of these agendas and how elected members reconcile them when making a decision.

As noted under the discussion of decision influencers above, the attributes that influence local government elected member opinions are highly complex. How these attributes influence the personal characteristics of elected members and the peers who surround them (literally) has not been extensively researched. It follows that this area is not well understood.

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[54] All advice of this nature is expected to be independent. The challenge for elected members is to be able to identify any bias within the advice and consider any investments with this in mind. Ideological bias seems to be of particular interest in certain environments.

The model can unpack these attributes and the complex array of relationships between them. Although it is likely the opinions of elected members are the most influential of all the stakeholder groups, little is known about whether elected members choose to exercise this influence.

3.6.8   Decision Deliberation and Debate

The decision-making process ultimately leads to the council chamber, where elected members debate the pros and cons of an investment opportunity and make a decision. Several influences are involved in and around the debating table itself, which suggests that the role of this element is significant.

First, the environment can engender debate. The extent to which it does so is purely a reflection on the type of leadership in a particular council. In some environments, many opportunities exist for making deals and decisions well before the council meeting commences. It would be impossible to count how many times both politicians and officers alike ask their peers, "Do we/they have the numbers?". The model captures this nuance.

Although the environment described above is an extreme example, other environments celebrate the ideal of a democracy. In these instances, some elected members are significantly disadvantaged. Some elected members are good at debating and others are not; some are swayed by debate and others are not. This research looks at how elected members feel about the debating chamber and how their peers influence their decisions as a result of the debate. The model can record these nuances for future analysis.

3.6.9   Final Considerations

As an elected member reaches a position on which way to vote, they will consider several strategic or high-level matters before their final vote. These are likely to include broader community benefits like affordability, sustainability and liveability – or what are generally referred to as "higher living standards".[55] The sheer complexities of these themes can weigh heavily on some elected members.

Less obvious is the influence of the expected timeframe for making these types of decisions. When elected members are asked to make a decision to coincide with the triennium election cycle, it may have a substantial influence on how they position themselves for re-election. Timing may or may not influence the final outcome, but it is not unheard of for projects of this nature to become a 'political football' and a platform for 'electioneering'. Through the model, it is possible to analyse how expected timeframes might influence an elected member. The model also recognises the 'cooling off' period that is created for the last weeks and, in some cases, months leading up to an election. Any weighting of the nature of this influence can also be unpacked by future thematic analysis.

In certain situations, an unusual influence on the decision an elected member makes is whether general consensus is needed to reach a decision. The method of decision-making may be important, particularly in regard to a council's reputation

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[55] NZ Treasury define higher living standards through a 'Four Capitals' approach. The vision is focused on higher living standards for New Zealanders. Achieving this requires growing the country's human, social, natural, and financial/physical capitals which together represent New Zealand's economic capital. Retrieved from http://www.treasury.govt.nz/abouttreasury/higherlivingstandards

and credibility. This implies elected members know each other's positions before the final vote, which is not such a rare circumstance.

3.6.10 Decision Consequences

There is a sense around the decision table that a council's reputation is important. When making any decision of the nature discussed in this research, elected members will consider the wider consequences of their decision on a council's reputation. The consequences might reflect well or poorly on the elected members themselves, the council as an institution and, in more extreme cases, the wider community.[56] The weight of such consequences is a potential challenge for some elected members.

Elected members are aware that their citizens are judging how well they (local government) perform. Sector performance surveys are not altogether flattering.[57] Numerous customer satisfaction surveys demonstrate similar assessments of elected members as individuals.[58] Because they are working in a democracy, and when decisions are made and consequences are understood, elected members will carefully consider the consequence of their decisions for these perceptions. Whether they then choose to act on this basis is another question. Seasoned elected members will know time is a great healer, so the stage at which the decision is being presented can have an influence. Of course, decisions can always be revisited. Numerous examples exist where a council's decisions have been overturned at a later date.[59] While the same council (group of elected members) may not do so in the same term, a future council might, with the benefit of hindsight, address the consequences of earlier decisions if

[56] OAG Report into Kaipara District Council – Mangawhai Waste Water Treatment (2012).

[57] LGNZ – Perception Survey 2015.

[58] Whakatane District Council – Perception Survey 2010.

[59] Whakatane District Council – Disaster Revenue and Financing Policy (2012).

the desire for such a review is strong enough. The model can capture these nuances and assess the weight of any influence in the thematic analysis that follows.

3.6.11 Elemental Relationships

The model recognises several salient points from both the decision-making scholarship in the literature and the semi-structured interviews that supported the abductive development of this model. The decision-making process, which is input and output driven, involves the eight elements described above and, significantly, the relationships among them. For this reason, while the model recognises an almost stepwise mechanical process-driven decision practice, it also recognises the nearly random association of elements, features and attributes that are likely to influence an elected member's decision. As an added benefit, through the model the thematic nature of the research can consider how significant these attributes might be in influencing any decisions.

This is local government's first comprehensive decision-making model (Figure 3.4).

3.6.12 The Analytical Approach

After the interviews were transcribed, each of the transcriptions was thematically coded according to the type of influence the elected member discussed. With each coding instance, a record was also made of the circumstance of the elected member (interviewee) making the observation. Each coding instance was then collated into a database.

The following analytical approach has been specifically developed to support a staged analysis of the database. The rationale for a staged approach was based on an early observation that the interviewee's individual circumstance was just as

important to consider as the theme in relation to the influence under examination. Several important considerations stood out, such as the elected member's length of tenure and whether they were working in an urban or rural area.

With this background in mind, the first stage serves three purposes. First, it is anticipated the initial analysis will provide insights into the decision-making process and what the thematic coding results have uncovered about its relationship to that process.

Second, it is anticipated the results of thematic coding will give some insights into how the circumstance of any particular elected member might influence these same insights. It is not unreasonable; for example, to hypothesise a Pākehā elected member's observations on what has influenced their decisions are likely to differ from those of a Māori elected member.

Finally, it is anticipated the insights and their weightings will also provide clues as to where to seek answers to the questions of how and why the elected members were influenced in those circumstances, backed by the evidence from the interviews.

3.7   Summary

Chapter 3 has set the theoretical framework and research strategy that have been adopted for this research. Having considered this conventional wisdom, I am now in a position to explore some of the thinking of past scholars in terms of how it relates to the challenging environment of normative decision theory in the context of local government in New Zealand. Alongside this scholarship, this chapter has also set the scene to explore some new thinking that might provide new context to that same environment.

Invariably challenges exist in unpacking the scholarship in complex environments. Nevertheless, this chapter has laid the foundations for giving this

research a place within the current scholarship. Finding some simplicity in returning to Cohen et al.'s (1972) original thinking has provided some of the much-needed clarity in such a complex environment.

Merging this complexity into the practice environment this research seeks to improve, and the normative decision theory it challenges, is likely to have as yet undisclosed implications for the deliberative democracy we enjoy today. Of particular interest will be establishing whether these large capital investment proposals are achieving the social (policy) outcomes and improving community wellbeing as our elected members aspire to do, and whether these decisions and outcomes are in line with citizen expectations when they do. The following chapter explores the research findings to establish whether this might be the case and the influences that either enable or constrain that opportunity.
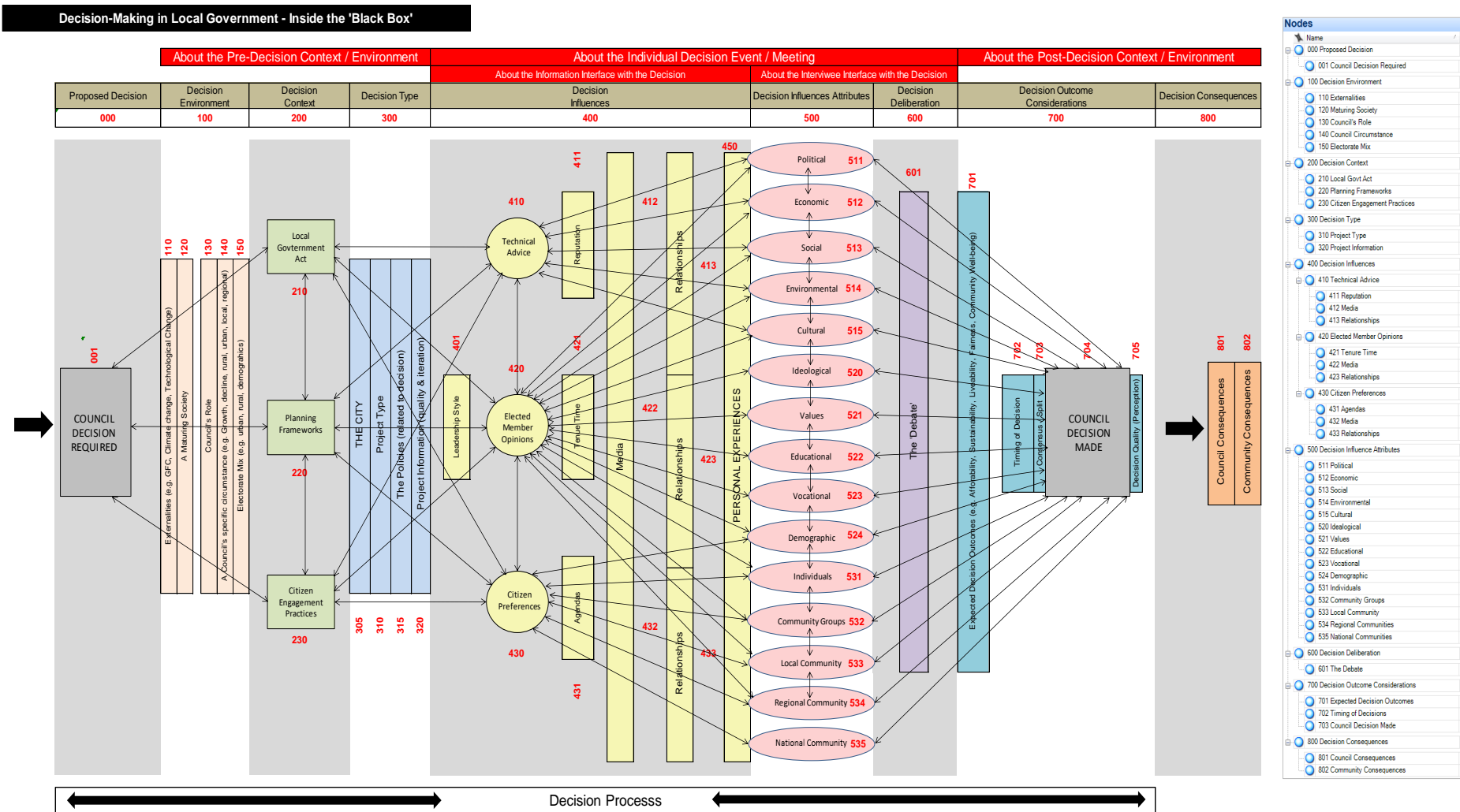
Figure 3.4. Decision-making – influences inside the black box

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction: The Analytical Approach

The following analytical approach has been specifically developed to support a staged analysis of the database. The rationale for a staged approach was based on an early observation that the interviewee's individual circumstance was just as important to consider as the theme in relation to the influence under examination. Several important considerations stood out, such as the elected member's length of tenure and whether they were working in an urban or rural area.

With this background in mind, the first stage serves three purposes. First, it is anticipated the initial analysis will provide insights into the decision-making process and what the thematic coding results have uncovered about its relationship to that process.

Second, it is anticipated the results of thematic coding will give some insights into how the circumstance of any particular elected member might influence these same insights. It is not unreasonable; for example, to hypothesise a Pākehā elected member's observations on what has influenced their decisions are likely to differ from those of a Māori elected member.

Finally, it is anticipated the insights and their weightings will also provide clues as to where to seek answers to the questions of how and why the elected members were influenced in those circumstances, backed by the evidence from the interviews.

4.2   First Findings – Phase 1

As described above, the first phase uses a high-level analysis that weights the relative frequency of the combined results of all the themes and all the elected members' interviews. As these observations were thematically coded within the decision-making process, it is now possible to make some initial observations about the relationship between these themes and the decision-making processes of local government in New Zealand.

4.2.1   Decisions – An Overview

When elected members consider a decision during deliberations, the influences on that decision present themselves in three broad stages: themes that are evident before deliberations;[60] themes that manifest during the deliberations; and themes identified during deliberations that elected members might reasonably expect to manifest after the decision has been made (Figure 4.1).

Before	During	After
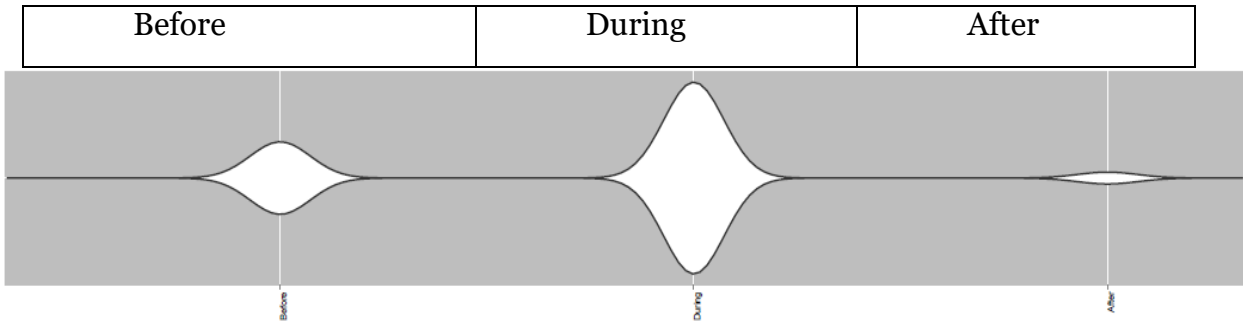
Figure 4.1. Decision chronology and weightings of high-level influence

The thematic analysis reveals the three groups of themes are not evenly spread, nor are they weighted in the same way. Large capital investment decision outcomes are reasonably strongly weighted by themes that are evident before

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[60] These themes might themselves have resulted from processes that produced the information ultimately provided to elected members for deliberation.

deliberations (e.g., Project Type or Citizen Engagement Practices). Compared with those pre-deliberation influences, the weighting is relatively high for themes that influence decisions during deliberations (e.g., Technical Advice, Elected Member Opinions and Citizen Preferences) and relatively low for themes that manifest after the decision has been made (e.g., Community Consequences).

4.2.2 Decisions – How They Work within Each Stage

Drilling down into the thematic analysis presents further opportunities to deepen the understanding of the themes that influence decisions before, during and after deliberations.

In deconstructing these influences, similar to the preliminary thematic analyses that showed themes are not evenly weighted *across* each the three stages, it appears weighting is inconsistent *within* each of the stages (Figure 4.2).

Before	During	After
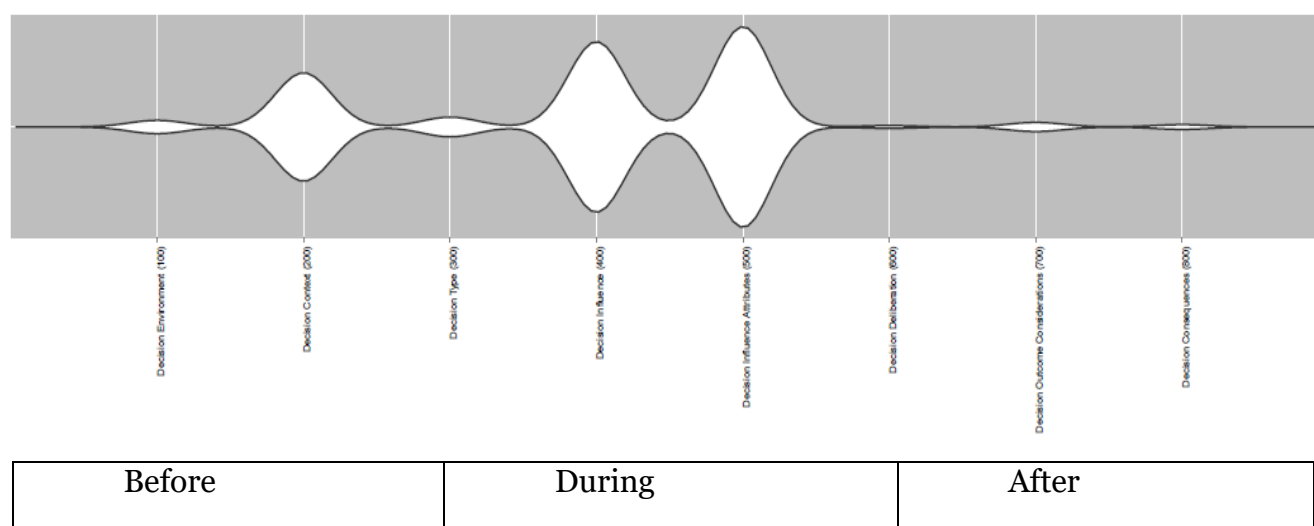
Figure 4.2. Decision chronology and high-level influence weightings within each stage

In themes that influence decisions before deliberations, decision context is proportionately more influential than either decision type or decision environment. Lastly, the themes that influence a decision after deliberations are generally less

influential, and both decision outcome considerations and decision consequences are proportionately lower in equal measure.

As Chapter 3 has explained, the research model has been structured to enable an analysis that digs deeply into the influences that have been identified either in the literature or more recently through the interviews. Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 describe the attributes that have been revealed through the research, and uses the same staging as a way of exploring the influences and the attributes that describe the relative weightings of these in two contexts: within each decision stage; and in the decision and all its stages (the entire process).

4.2.3 Decisions – Attributes per Decision Stage

This analysis weights the elements within each stage of the decision-making process relative to that stage. Its purpose is to use these results as an indicator for a more detailed analysis of each of the individual stages because each stage is important in its own right. It is also anticipated this analysis will give some guidance and grounding as to the direction to take in unpacking how and why these themes are influencing elected members' decisions.

If the weightings found are any indication of the relative importance of the themes that influence an elected member making a decision, then a Council's Role, Citizen Engagement Practices, the Local Government Act 2002 and the Project Type are all influential elements before deliberations. Technical Advice and Citizen Preferences, Political influences and the debate are all heavily weighted during deliberations leading up to the decision. Decision Outcomes and Community Consequences are weighted similarly to each other after deliberations (Figure 4.3).

4.2.4   Decisions – Attributes per Decision Process

This analysis weights the elements within each stage of the decision-making process in terms of their influence on a decision from the time when the decision-making process is initiated to the time when the decision is reached as to whether to proceed with an investment. As with the previous analysis, the results are to be used as an indicator of the wider context of the decision-making process itself, on the grounds that the decision-making process is also the sum of all its parts, including the influences of each stage on the final outcome.

If the weightings found are any indication of the relative importance of the themes of each stage, then it is envisaged the whole process is likely to provide some insight into how to manage these influences. This information might also give some insight into the most opportune time to manage them.

In the wider context of all results, Political was weighted as the heaviest influence (18.7%), followed by Citizen Preferences (11%) and Technical Advice (11%), Local Government Act (9%), Citizen Engagement Practices (8.5%) and Values (5%). Together these elements represented two-thirds of all the elements (Figure 4.4).
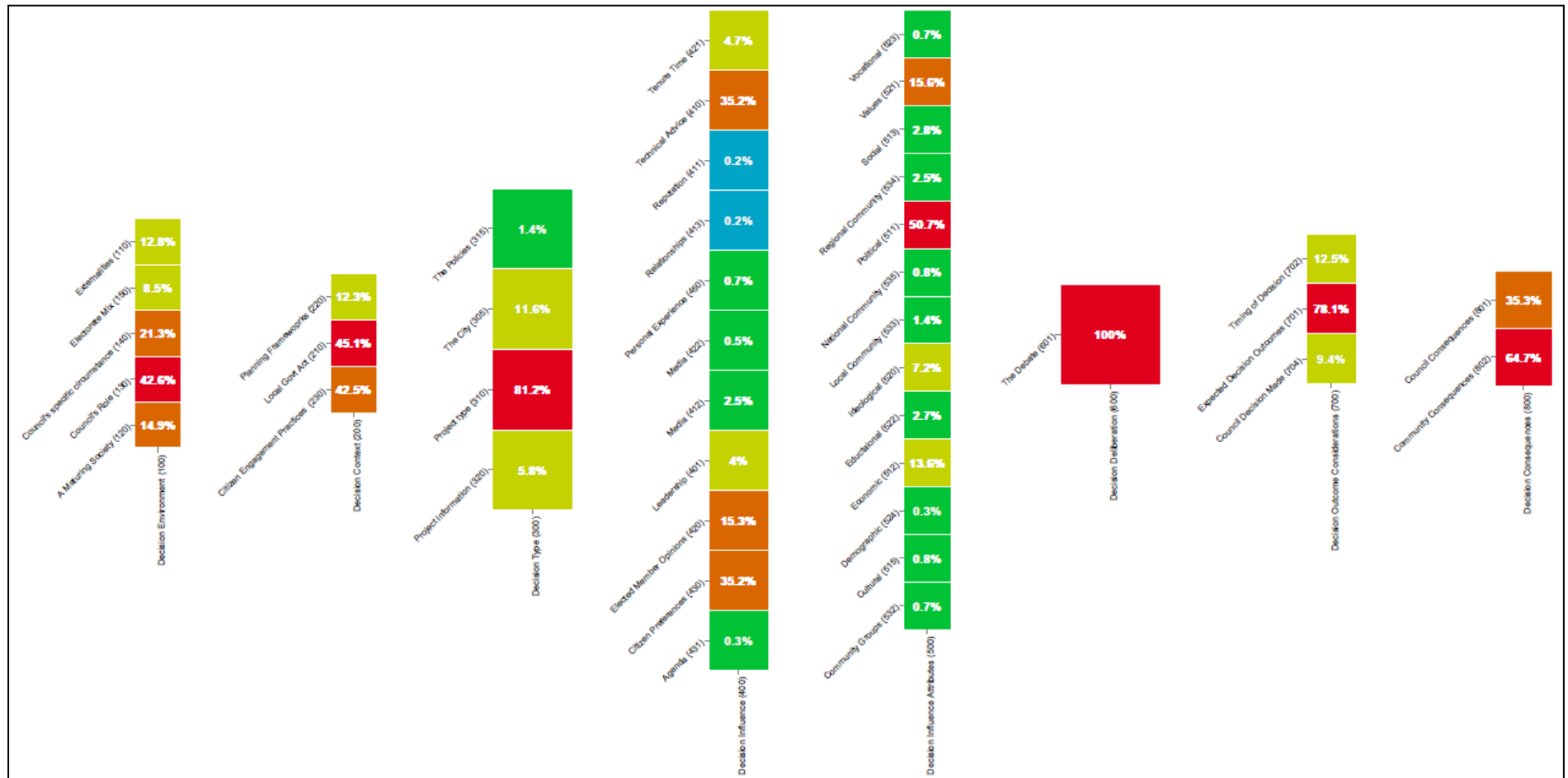
Figure 4.3. Decision chronology and low-level influence weightings – by Attributes per Decision Process (each stage)
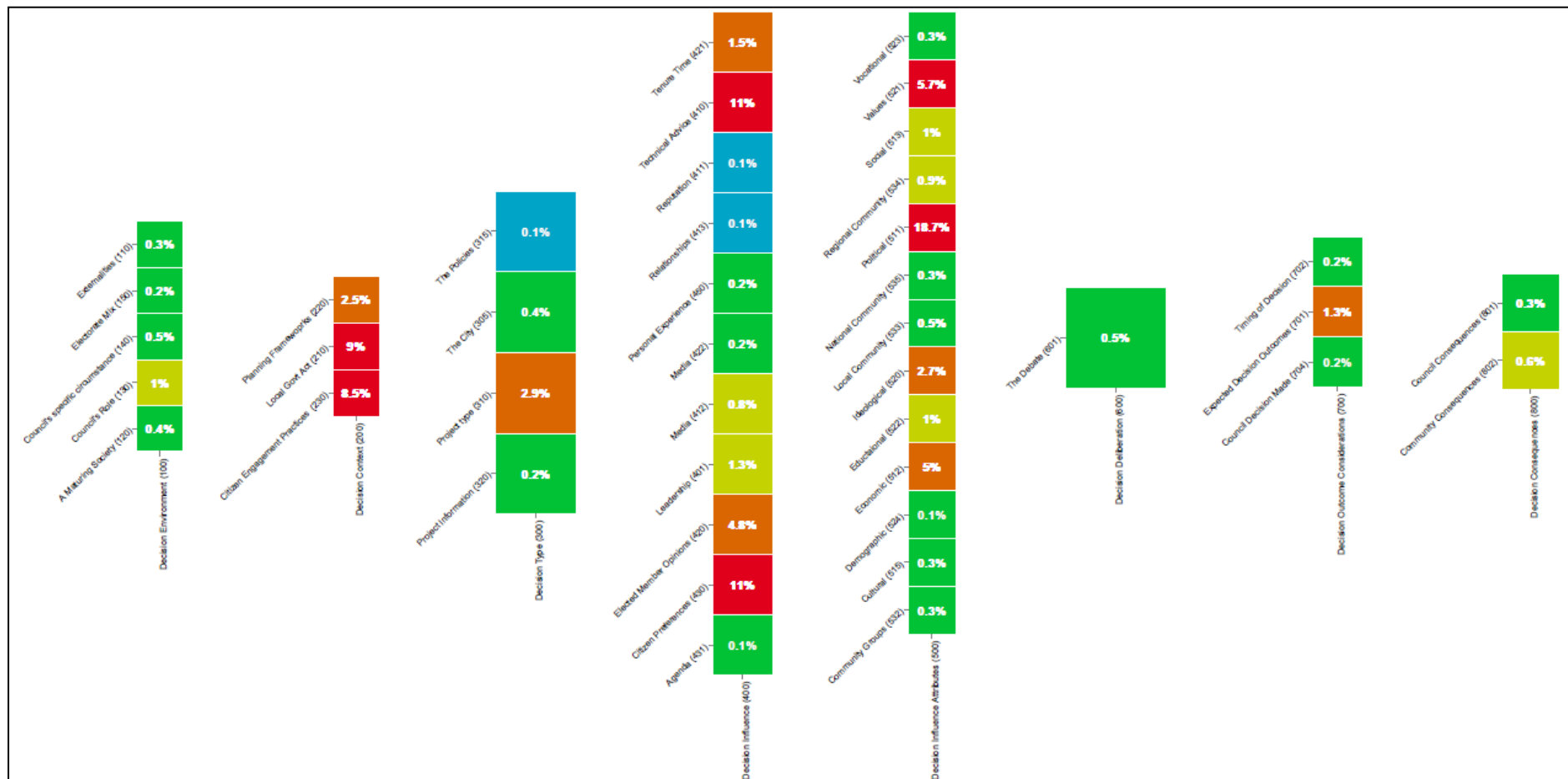
Figure 4.4. Decision chronology and low-level influence weightings – by Attributes per Decision Process (all stages)

4.3   Pre-decision Environment and Context

In this research, pre-decision environment and context are together defined as any circumstance in which local government processes and frameworks can influence large capital investment decisions.

The following themes were revealed from elected members' observations in relation to those influences. These results give insights into how much weight elected members give to the pre-decision environment and context and some of the nuances involved when considering them.

From an initial analysis, as the literature review revealed, the evidence confirms these influences fall within three broad themes: first, how the legislative frameworks that support elected member decision-making influence these decisions; second, how the planning frameworks and processes influence elected members in reaching the point where they are to debate and make a decision; and, third, how the way elected members choose to engage with their citizens to find out their preferences has an influence on their final decision.

On closer examination of the research evidence, the findings revealed two further themes. The first is the influence of global circumstances (for example, the global financial crisis). The second is the nature and type of project being considered for investment, which has a suite of altogether different influences. Both sources of influence add highly relevant contexts to the elements above. Elected members also suggest these influences are specific to each circumstance. For example, the influences related to any large capital investment decision to replace a wastewater interceptor (pipe) are substantially different from those involved in decisions about a project to build a wastewater treatment plant or a new library.

The following are the findings related to these themes.

4.3.1 Global Influences

While elected members seek to understand citizen preferences to inform their decisions, several global influences can also meaningfully influence large capital investment decisions. As discussed in Section 2.2, most large investment decisions in local government are related to infrastructure; unsurprisingly the nature of these investments seems to influence considerations that revolve around the construction and maintenance of those investments, as much as considerations in other areas such as the social outcomes being sought through these investments (e.g., by constructing a wastewater treatment plant).

Related to such influences is that New Zealand has been significantly affected by major natural events (e.g., the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011), which can contribute to substantial concern about infrastructure decisions. Yet although citizens' expectations for infrastructure following such events are relatively easy for elected members to conceptualise, it is much more difficult to understand their expectations surrounding the level of protection or resilience offered by certain investments for other types of event risk (e.g., environmental sustainability). The costs related to securing such protection in particular are much more difficult to reconcile for citizens who have not experienced these events first hand. It is in turn even more difficult for elected members to determine the specific level of protection citizens expect for the extra investment that may be needed to achieve this. Some have had a measure of success with meeting citizen preferences, even if other unrelated events appeared to create a burning platform that enabled them to make more difficult investment decisions.

I think for us it was quite an easy call, that we'd seen what had happened in Christchurch and we were being told it was an unsafe facility so, yeah, I think we made the right decision, I think the community were on board. Had we have maybe done that a few years before – before Christchurch – it would have been a harder sell but, you know, reality. This is life and this is what happened and we can never say it's not going to happen here, so I think people were on board with that. Had it been earlier I don't think we would have got quite a passionate, strong response. (Mayor/DeputyCC471753)

Important questions in other areas are even less likely to be conceptualised. For example, both citizens and elected members are asking or being asked about the proposed response to climate change. It is particularly difficult to rationalise significant cost increases in proposed infrastructure projects to accommodate protection against the effects of climate change (e.g., flood protection). Uncertainty is high and the associated costs are substantial.

The whole climate change thing – what's that going to mean? We, through our long-term plan process, have been saying to the staff, "Okay, what does this mean, for example, for the river schemes?" We're hearing from the technical people that we're going to get 0.8m sea level rise, what's that going to mean for Opotiki? . . . so that's the big thing that really worries me, it's about how can we plan for that when it's 30 years out. You either throw a lot of money to give you the facility to react and the flexibility to change or you do a more 'wait and see' and, you know, we get a three-year window and every time we can change it but I suspect it's going to be too slow. (Chair/DeputyRC361343)[61]

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[61] See also Appendix B, B.25.

Another important global influence has been the Global Financial Crisis, which elected members have had to contend with on behalf of citizens. Citizen preferences in relation to these sorts of global events are hard to determine with any confidence. Further, managing debt in the difficult financial climate like that experienced through the Global Financial Crisis can be divisive.

> *Debt was a bit of a passion of mine. . . . You've got to remember, this was around the time just before the recession. So, people are still in that happy mode of "Let's borrow!" (CouncillorCC07397)*[62]

Evidence suggests any thoughts citizens have about global issues are an important consideration and elected members are tasked with uncovering these as part of determining citizen preferences. The research highlights how difficult this can be for elected members, not just in determining what citizens' preferences might be, but also in applying that information when they consider decisions that ought to reflect those preferences. It also highlights how important the context of any capital investment is in determining the extent and importance of the global influences in any particular circumstance.

In conclusion, the specific context of any proposal will attract the influence of certain global issues (several in some instances) and not others. This naturally leads into a discussion about the characteristics of the specific context – in particular, the influences the actual type and nature of the investment is likely to have on any investment decision.

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[62] See also Appendix B, B.26.

4.3.2   The Proposed Project

Elected members confirm the type of project they are considering for investment can have a substantial influence on how to approach the proposal through the requirements of local government when making these decisions. The extent of this influence is summarised here.

What the elected members say. Broadly, local government has two types of projects. The first type relates to core infrastructure such as large three-waters (underground investments) and some transportation projects (road and bridge building, renewals or upgrades). The cost is often significant but, in terms of decision-making, they are uncomplicated in most other ways. The exception might be constructability, where the scale can have its own challenges. Core infrastructure projects also tend to be renewals of present projects, replacing old infrastructure with new. Any new decision is only about restating a decision to invest made many years ago – a perception common among elected members, who considered they had little if any choice over whether such investment would proceed. The replacement of a large water main is an example.

> *There is quite an interesting split. Anything under the ground, [it] seems that the level of interrogation and interest by the elected members is less. (CouncillorCC0105)*[63]

The second broad type of project relates to social infrastructure, predominantly sport and recreational facilities (e.g., parks and gardens), community facilities (e.g., public conveniences and community halls) and numerous types of facilities that deliver arts and culture (e.g., libraries, museums and art galleries).

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[63] See also Appendix B, B.9a–c.

The minute you build anything on the ground (for example, the ASB Stadium, a town hall, any community facilities or libraries), the interest [of elected members] just skyrockets. There is chalk and cheese in that domain. You build anything underground I don't believe there is the same level of interest. (CouncillorCC0105)[64]

Elected members suggest they understand some projects have an underlying assumption that only a portion of the community uses or has reasonable access to these facilities. By implication, therefore, they must assess the value proposition for that group against the rest of the population who may not have such access.

The wastewater thing, and also because the wastewater thing affects every single human being in the city. The town hall does not. (CouncillorCC02146)

Moreover, any projects that are technically complex present an altogether different suite of influences for some elected members, which they treat in a way that accommodates some of this complexity.

It's a very difficult area to engage the more technical it is; I wouldn't expect, for example, on a heritage building, to have a big discussion on the different technical options about how you strengthen a building. [However,] people will definitely give you some feedback on whether they think it should be kept or not. (CouncillorCC03184)[65]

The source of an investment proposal is a more nuanced influence. Projects that have begun with citizens tend to have different decision influences from those projects that other elected members or council officers have instigated.

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[64] See also Appendix B, B.10.

[65] See Appendix B, B.11.

Have any of them been triggered by anyone else other than officers?

Absolutely, often they will be from councillors advocating.

(Mayor/DeputyCC04239)[66]

One reason for the difference in response to the two types of projects is that many elected members feel core infrastructure is essentially a mandatory responsibility, whereas many of the social infrastructure decisions are optional. They also suggest these decisions depend on factors like, but not limited to, affordability and the notion of creating community spaces that those citizens can enjoy living, working and playing in.

Local government first and foremost should not be about sport centres, because they are realistically the nice-to-haves. Coming back to a civilised society, for a first-world country, we expect to have pipes, we expect to be able to flush our toilet when we get up in the morning, we expect to be able to turn on a tap and be able to have clean drinking water, and we are really lucky to be able to have it. And those are the base level of what civil society expects. (CouncillorCC06363)

It is also self-evident in how quickly some of these significant decisions are made.

The vote on, for example, infrastructure, massive amounts of investment, might be $180m to $190m into infrastructure, all the unsexy things would be done in a blink of an eyelid but there would be a couple of hours' battle over some project for $2m. It's just ludicrous stuff. (CouncillorCC07376)

Some elected members suggest a simple but important influence is wanting to leave the community in a better state than when they started their service.

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[66] See Appendix B, B.12.

> *Well I suppose that at a fundamental level it's to leave the city in a healthier*
> *state than when you arrived. What does that mean? Of course, that could*
> *mean all sorts of things to different people, but I think it's about core*
> *infrastructure; it's about economic activity, because without one we won't*
> *have the other. We can't afford it. It's about community wellbeing, you know,*
> *how other people actually feel about themselves. (CouncillorCC06366)*

In addition, with any project attracting a strong interest or reaction from citizens, elected members appear quick to respond.

> *The convention centre is about $4m a year tops, so it's not much (86*
> *submissions). But we are underwriting that development, essentially aren't we*
> *for the next 20 years? Then, if you compare that to the Island Bay cycleway*
> *decision, [that was] only $1.6m to $1.7m and that attracted 700 submissions.*
> *(CouncillorCC09494)*

And certain investments are relatively mundane. Elected members enjoy opening libraries and sport stadiums; they are less inclined with water pipes and reservoirs.

> *If there was an earthquake, the hospital only has two to three days of water*
> *supply, and no one cares. The Prince of Wales Hospital reservoir is a big piece*
> *of infrastructure that was going to be built. It went through consultation and*
> *no one cared. But it had a huge impact. . . . Now it won't be built. I want to*
> *bring it back online again. But that actually has a huge impact on our*
> *community. But people don't care, right? You paint a few green separated*
> *pathways down the parade and everybody is screaming. (CouncillorCC09501)*

Some elected members have a sense there are discrete engagement protocols that ought to reflect the type of project they are considering for investment.

There are projects that we should engage in to a much higher level and almost micromanage the engagement, and the engagement should not stop at the start of the project. The engagement should continue right through the project and then go back and we should review the engagement afterwards. (CouncillorCC14665)

The weighting of influences varies on a case-by-case basis.

It's hard because, I mean, again it comes down to a particular project or a particular issue. You could apply different weightings depending on the issue. I think again from an elected member's perspective you've got to collectively try and arrive at a decision that is agreeable across everyone's thinking so to hopefully serve that community or that sector of the community. (CouncillorCC291085)[67]

A geospatial influence appears to apply to certain investment decisions.

The differentiation is not between areas of expenditure in terms of whether it's in the arts, science or education or something like that, it's about the geographic area. (Mayor/DeputyCC311127)

One difficulty for some of these projects is that they are about the future.

I think people have a problem with thinking big-picture / long term. It doesn't affect them personally. (Chair/DeputyCC321159)

Communities know about certain facilities that they use consciously and are much more inclined to offer opinions to some investments over others.

But in terms of the difference between the two, we are much more likely – because we go to libraries and take out books, or don't, but we know about

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[67] See also Appendix B, B.13.

libraries – we're much more likely to have an opinion on the details of a

library than we are about a wastewater system because we feel we know more

about it, experientially. Whereas what the diameter of a wastewater pipe

should be and how it's treated at the end? We know we don't know that.

(Mayor/DeputyCC501900)

Discussion. A natural relationship exists between the type of project and how it is prioritised and managed through a council's investment processes. What was less obvious before this research was how the type of project affected these processes. Clearly, certain investments are of significant public interest (for example, a new library), whereas others tend to attract much less interest (for example, a new watermain). Of interest to this research is how these different perceptions have been influencing the approach that governs the inclusion of these investment proposals within a council's plans. How elected members are influenced by this approach and its relationship to the legislation that enables it are described next.

4.3.3   The Legislation

The legislative frameworks in which elected members make decisions are almost sacrosanct. Elected members must adhere to these frameworks. Local government spends extensive time and resource meeting its obligations related to the numerous pieces of legislation it operates under or administers as a regulator (e.g., the Local Government Act 2002, the Rating Valuations Act 1998 and the Resource Management Act 1991). Less apparent is how these legislative frameworks can be interpreted for any specific purpose. A large capital investment decision is one such purpose.

It therefore seems reasonable to assume elected members can, within certain bounds, interpret the legislation to apply to the specific details of any investment proposal. Evidence suggests they do so, but that elected members vary in their

understanding of how to interpret the legislation and, consequently, of how it can influence decision outcomes.

What the elected members say. The evidence highlights numerous challenges that elected members must overcome before they are able to influence these processes. To many, the legislation represents a hurdle that seems uncompromising and prescriptive. Others suggest it is compliance driven and of relatively low value.

> *I mean, central government legislation is central government legislation. You've got to do what it says, you can't breach it. (CouncillorCC05)*[68]

Some elected members have a limited understanding of even the simplest legislative requirements in decisions about large capital investments. Where they have little interest in learning about those requirements – seeing it as a hurdle – the difficulties become entrenched.

> *I have some sympathy with central government having to make some [of] the legislation because whatever organisation you're involved in there are always going to be quite extremes of competence and I'm talking about the whole organisation, and you're always going to have organisations that let others down and so, as we do in New Zealand, we tend to legislate for the lowest common denominator. (Mayor/DeputyCC331198)*[69]

Adding to this problem, many elected members have offered examples where they or their colleagues have poorly interpreted the legislation that drives these investment processes. Such interpretations seem to lead to a lot of rework and

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[68] See also Appendix B, B.1a–c.

[69] See also Appendix B, B.2a–c.

frustration for the many people who prepare information for decisions and for the elected members themselves.

> *I was naive because my first term I heard about the 10-year plan and didn't realise it happened every year. I thought the 10-year plan was something you did every 10 years. So, we had a huge term with the 10-year plan in my first term. With the number of workshops, I think there were 18 workshops during that time, it just took a lot of time and to be honest my brain really didn't take all of it in because it was happening so quickly. And now of course the second term has come along and we're into a 10-year plan again and I'm thinking, "I thought we already did that." (CouncillorDC431588)*

Furthermore, understanding these legislative frameworks and the legislation within this environment, even when the information presented is accurate, can be difficult to rationalise before making a decision. Part of the reason is that the information is complex – in the view of numerous elected members, unreasonably complex. They also feel powerless to do anything about it.

> *The planning arrangements in terms of the LTP [long-term plan] and the Local Government Act and the RMA [Resource Management Act] and Building Act are the three pieces of legislation that I work through; [they] are very complex. Very. (CouncillorCC030156)[70]*

Some elected members suggest the legislation is complex because it is broken. They argue it has been amended so many times since the modern version of the local government legislation was created in 1989, it needs a complete refresh to take account of the completely altered environment nearly 30 years on.

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[70] See also Appendix B, B.3.

> *I think it [the legislation] is past its use-by date, the government Act has been tinkered with so many times it's just completely broken now and needs redoing; someone is going to play with the legislation, I'm sure, very soon. I think the reason that it's broken is – in fact; there was too much political input now. (CouncillorDC18773)*

Moreover, the attempts to modernise it to keep up with the much-changed local government environments in the early 21st century are seen by some as only adding to its unrealistic complexity. They feel this makes it almost impossible for most of them to keep up to date with current requirements.

> *Well, of course we were working under slightly different legislation back there whereby local government had been empowered to pretty much do anything, slightly exaggerated here, but pretty much anything they wanted to do. The four wellbeings, it was very much a permissive environment. Where I still think it's quite a permissive environment now, but a few additional hurdles need to be crossed. (CouncillorCC06324)*

This complexity only adds to the influences that discipline elected members in certain circumstances to compromise their values in regard to meeting the commitments of both their ward and the city or district. The legislation is clear that the city or district takes precedence. This has the potential to cause rifts within a council over any decisions elected members are making.

> *For me, one of the big problems I had was that I represented my ward, albeit when you are sworn into office under the Local Government Act as a Wellington councillor, to act in the best interest of the whole city. Now in my ward, as I indicated to you, we didn't have the grounds for support. (CouncillorCC06340)*

Unsurprisingly, evidence suggests such circumstances lead these politically astute practitioners to compromise and find ways around legislation. This approach might be seen as less effective than addressing the problem directly.

> *Well, my approach was, I really didn't know much about the legislation, and I look more at the goal and then try to work out how to get around any problems that were standing in the way of any legislation. (CouncillorCC08421)*

Some elected members try to find ways around legislation because they strongly feel the legislation has a substantial negative influence on investment and economic development. Local government is notoriously slow, creating a hurdle in an environment where time is money.

> *I think legislation has a big impact on investment. . . . If anything, the decision-making in local government is too slow for the commercial sector and the local government sector needs to evolve a much more efficient and speedy decision-making process to allow economic development. Local government is one of the biggest spenders and employers in the economy so they have to have some checks and balances. But I think we overdo it and maybe we could do better. (Chair/DeputyRC351278)[71]*

As well as slowing down opportunities for elected members to provide value to their communities, the legislation has many layers that exacerbate the same problem repeatedly, which often has a range of negative influences. For example, it is rarely clear how the legislation applies to the specific circumstance of a proposal.

> *To be honest, I think a lot of things are over-legislated, and if you really want to [invest] in this day and age, you have to sort [different] legal approaches*

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[71] See also Appendix B, B.4.

and interpretations. You could find something that suggests you're not allowed

to do it, [just] as you could find something that suggests that you are. I just

decided whether I wanted something or not, and found the legislation [to be] a

damn nuisance. (CouncillorCC08425)

One reason elected members feel this burden is that the legislation suits some circumstances more than others. That has a consequential burden on cost.

I think the Crown [central government] has a bit of an idealism, and its

[approach is] probably 'one size fits all'. (Chair/DeputyRC24934)[72]

Moreover, the influence of central government is strong, imposing a burden that is difficult to accommodate or, where necessary, remove. Evidence suggests this creates a somewhat contemptuous attitude among many elected members, who feel that central government policy-makers, with little connection to their environments, are eroding their responsibilities.

I think what the [central] government legislates for, we have got very little

say. We can actually go to select committees, we can put our case, but we end

up getting what we get. We have to be nimble to work our way around that. I

think that one of the key areas that you can make that work is by having better

relationships and personal relationships with the government that happens to

be there on the day. We probably haven't got them. Well, let's be frank, we

don't have the strong government relationship that would enable us to do

more. (CouncillorCC14654)

The burden of the legislation, the evidence strongly suggests, is all the heavier because it is forced on local government. Given the deliberative nature of the environment they are working in, it seems paradoxical to be subject to a more

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[72] See also Appendix B, B.5a–b.

directive (representative) environment for working with their central government

partners. Elected members' comments highlight this problem.

> *These come to us because of the Local Government Act. "I need you to make*
>
> *decisions about this and that . . . " Make decisions? Jesus Christ, we didn't sign*
>
> *up to make decisions about that! What are you talking about?*
> *(CouncillorDC18774)*

Such comments also reveal a deeper contempt among local government

elected members for the overtly patriarchal stance that their central government

counterparts have adopted through some of the legislation that governs them. This

stance is particularly obvious where electoral boundaries are questioned and

amalgamation discussions have been considered and/or implemented.

> *I've had a long-held view that we have to make some really core philosophical*
>
> *decisions about the future of the district. But I've also reached the conclusion*
>
> *they'll be made for us. We won't even be able to make them and someone will*
>
> *do that through the amalgamation process or change in legislation.*
> *(CouncillorDC18794)*

The essence of this proposition applies no less to large capital investments,

particularly in regard to how they are funded and financed. Invariably, these sorts of

projects attract central government financial support, through either a subsidy bid as

part of a specific programme (e.g., the Ministry of Health's drinking-water assistance

programme in the early 2000s) or more regular funding from the New Zealand

Transport Agency for roading projects.

Elected members' comments suggest that, because it does not trust local

government, central government feels the need to legislate it – quoting one elected

member, "within an inch of their lives" – to ensure local government elected members act in a prescribed way.

> *The [central] government's mood [demonstrates] they were really scared that local government was moving away from their knitting and starting to get into a whole lot of social areas where they would rather not have them play in. (CouncillorDC19812)[73]*

A recent example is central government's legislated adoption of the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management (NPS-FM), underlining the somewhat contemptuous attitude the two levels of government have a towards each other.

> *I don't think some of the TLAs [Territorial Local Authorities, also referred to as councils] understand the impact that it's going to have on them as we start to implement some the requirements for the NPS on fresh water. Some of the standards and expectations that communities will have may well differ from the minimums that the Crown [central government] has put in place. So they have to get their head around that. (Chair/DeputyRC24933)*

Some of the concern seems to be that central government is not applying these constraints consistently. In 2015, for example, it set the requirement for a 30-year infrastructure plan as part of the suite of deliverables for the development of local government's long-term plans. Yet no such requirement applies to central government agencies that have similar asset (investment) portfolios (e.g., New Zealand Defence Force). Some elected members also consider this requirement is less relevant to their circumstance.

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[73] See also Appendix B, B.6.

You definitely need a plan. I wonder at the wisdom of – and this is central government telling us – that you've got to look to 30 years. But not them. (CouncillorDC21861)[74]

In addition, this suggests it is the very legislative frameworks, processes and outputs from these types of circumstances that create the citizen engagement and citizenship deficits within this environment.

I think [local government] have been absolutely over-regulated. I think when we've had to put out our long-term plans and our annual plans, [citizens] have had to have all the policies, they've had to have had all the financials etc. Just so much detail for the public, it's too hard for them to engage with. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC321154)

Yet some elected members argue local government can and does influence some legislation, when it suits.

I'm very cynical about the legislative process. I think that councils play fast and loose with legislation, they interpret it how they want, they obtain lawyers on tap to give them legal opinions to cover their asses. I mean, I'm going through it now with the Freedom Camping Act. So you've got the government on one hand saying, "Here is the legislation around this freedom camping . . .", and council is on the other hand twisting it and reinterpreting it to suit themselves, subject to pressures from camping ground operators. (CouncillorDC18783)

A different view again is that, central government involvement is the price to pay for democracy. Indeed, some think its influence is about right.

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[74] See also Appendix B, B.7a–b.

> *I know the price of democracy is high and we wouldn't have it any other way.*
>
> *I wouldn't have any other system, but it does need streamlining.*
>
> *(CouncillorCC17750)*[75]

Discussion. The general sense from the elected members is that legislation influences them in local government by disciplining how they develop communities and any investment opportunities that supports this desire. Notwithstanding the obvious benefits of the frameworks that support this sector, a rebalancing is in order, if for no other reason than that the last comprehensive review of local government legislation happened nearly 30 years ago. The comment below captures the essence of why many elected members support a rethink of the legislation.

> *The centralisation policies [legislation] of government just carry on taking the*
>
> *heart out of smaller communities. (Mayor/DeputyDC441660)*

How changes in legislation can fundamentally influence local government's role is best demonstrated by a 2012 amendment to the Act. Elected members have fresh memories of the deliberate attempt by central government to discipline the extent of local government's service and investment remit. Significant debate ensued with the proposed legislation at that time. Central government focused strongly on affordability, increasing demands on ratepayers (Anderson Lloyd, 2012; Department of Internal Affairs, 2012b) and the financial prudence of local government (Dollery, 1998), while local government was concerned with community outcomes (Svara & Denhardt, 2010), increasing wellbeing and connected communities.[76] To justify the change in legislation, central government used a number of 'poster-child' examples (e.g., Hamilton V8 super car racing, which required a $30 million ratepayer

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[75] See also Appendix B, B.8.

[76] Mayor/Deputy361370, CouncillorDC431610.

commitment) to demonstrate what it saw as poor investments by local government and a proliferation of non-core council activities (Hide, 2010). Against strong local government opposition, the purpose of the Act was amended in 2012, replacing section 3(d) with:

> *(d) provides for local authorities to play a broad role in meeting the current and future needs of their communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions.*

Local government rightly argued at the time that a council's role was not to provide 'bricks and mortar' solutions, but to build communities and community wellbeing.[77] In their various responses to this legislative change,[78] elected members conveyed some simple wisdom about the principles of subsidiarity and its manifestation of the theories of deliberative or participative democracy and its democratic bedfellow, direct democracy. Furthermore, they felt affronted by what they saw as a significantly eroded remit to build communities.[79]

> *While I see it help and guide, it can also be quite a hindrance I think at times. (Mayor/DeputyCC331196)*

A less apparent counter argument is that when investment decisions or their outcomes do not meet criteria that could be loosely described as good governance,[80]

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[77] CouncillorCC06324.

[78] Mayor/DeputyCC471728.

[79] CouncillorCC09468; Mayor/DeputyDC19831.

[80] Chair/DeputyRC24966; CouncillorCC05277.

they tend to have few, if any, ramifications for the decision-makers.[81] Also less emphasised is the obvious lack of transparency of the internal processes of these investment decisions to identify when and how they go awry, and the angst created that has triggered such circumstances. Collectively, local government elected members ought to have taken responsibility for addressing the perceptions held by central government, real or imagined,[82] long before Hide (2010) laid down the legislative boundaries to discipline the previous remit to build communities.

A further problem is the processes that would reasonably expect an audit (internal or external, or both) to expose these types of practices seem to have failed (e.g., Office of the Auditor General, 2013a). A growing number of examples indicate these processes are not investigating deeply enough to uncover poor governance of infrastructure and, by definition, investment in public assets. Worryingly, some have led to Department of Internal Affairs national enquiries (e.g., Mangawhai community wastewater scheme and Havelock North drinking-water enquiries).

Adding to this concern, some elected members express disquiet, considering our ageing asset base (Office of the Auditor General, 2014), that these examples might be the tip of the iceberg (G. Hanlen, personal communication, 30 June 2013).[83] They consider that, unless the way these investments are being managed changes, these extreme circumstances are highly likely to become more frequent (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013).

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[81] This does not include the extreme circumstances where significant breaches result in the appointment of commissioners or what is referred to as 'tagged audits' by elected members. Audits of this type are qualified by Audit New Zealand and noted within an Annual Report to the Council.

[82] Mayor/DeputyDC441695; Mayor/DeputyCC381392.

[83] Mayor/DeputyCC04249; CouncillorCC14669.

The auditing failures to prompt consequences for such significant capital investment decisions are linked with two troubling outcomes. First, the audit processes seem not to have had the necessary diligence to expose these poor investment processes and/or decisions to ensure the investments met citizens' expectations. Second, in each instance noted above, the event had gone through several annual plans and at least one long-term plan before the substantial problem was uncovered. Furthermore, little accountability seems to apply to those who have audited these processes.

If the legislation is what elected members must follow to meet the requirements about making these decisions, then it is the planning frameworks that describe how to do that. The following section explores the planning frameworks, the implications for elected members and how these circumstances interact with the legislative environment.

4.3.4   Planning Frameworks

As outlined in Section 1.3.2, the planning frameworks define the processes of the decision-making environment, how large investment decisions are administered through councils, and the number and type of interactions or engagements between citizens and elected members during that process. The research has raised questions for elected members about some aspects of these planning frameworks when applied to significant infrastructure projects.[84] These issues were reflected in the theory; for example, the frameworks were too slow (Rourke, 1984) and too costly (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). For some elected members, they simply do not make sense.[85]

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[84] CouncillorCC14660.

[85] CouncillorRC491847; CouncillorCC10524; CouncillorDC18775.

What the elected members say. As elected members describe them, challenges specific to investments in major infrastructure projects include that: a significant commitment of both time and resource is required to deliver them;[86] the financial circumstances are variable at best across the 'life of the investment', even up to when a decision to invest is required;[87] and advancing the project to a position where a decision on it is required can be inordinately problematic (e.g., earthquake strengthening of buildings).[88] As these types of investments often straddle several long-term plans, they have been described as tortuous, divisive[89] and creating destructive environments. In several relatively recent circumstances, the consequential risk was that a dysfunctional councillor or council, as some elected members described them, would lose their way and purpose (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). Such observations point to how difficult these environments can be, and how ill-equipped inexperienced laypeople can be to deal with them. This evidence raises the question of whether democracy is being well served in these circumstances.

Furthermore, the standard response from the literature – that in three years citizens can remove any elected member who is responsible for a poor investment decision – does not seem to resolve the problem. Elected members have highlighted clear issues of personalities and factions that have arisen because the tenure of such

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[86] Mayor/Deputy441653; Mayor/DeputyCC171747.

[87] Mayor/Deputy04221.

[88] Mayor/DeputyCC04197.

[89] CouncillorDC241065; CouncillorCC07378.

people has lasted for two or many more trienniums.[90] In the meantime, the affairs of a community have noticeably suffered.[91]

Notwithstanding these more extreme circumstances, because the challenges and the environment that can generate them are undeniably real, all elected members need to work through the complex council planning processes that enable these investments. The many fishhooks in the process can create the very circumstances in which poor investments are made. Here is how. Many major infrastructure investments (or projects in a practical sense) are many years in development,[92] moving from pre-feasibility to feasibility; then into preliminary design and rough-order engineers' estimates to support business cases and related diligence; followed by detailed design and final costings for sign-off for consent to construct; then what can be an arduous consenting phase (e.g., environment court or, in extreme circumstances, judicial review proceedings); and then a further sign-off for construction and delivery, often linked to a tender evaluation outcome with a preferred tenderer to proceed (NZS3910).

At any one of these stages, or 'tollgates'[93] as is the term in the practice environment (PRINCE2[94]), a council decision is required to proceed – or not – with

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[90] CouncillorCC07414; CouncillorCC11580.

[91] Chair/Deputy451691.

[92] Mayor/Deputy04232.

[93] A tollgate in this sense is a barrier or gateway that allow the progress of an investment proposal to move to the next step in the process or hold it at a particular level until the desired objectives are achieved.

[94] PRINCE2 (PRojects IN Controlled Environments) is a de facto, process-based method for effective project management. Used extensively by the New Zealand Government, PRINCE2 is also widely recognised and used in the private sector, both in the New Zealand and internationally. The PRINCE2 method is in the public domain and offers non-proprietorial, best-practice guidance on project management. https://www.prince2.com/nzd

the proposed investment. The challenge here is that any elected member who disagreed with the initial decision, or with a decision made at any other phase, sees this as an opportunity relitigate that earlier decision. In my view, this is a bewildering circumstance. Not only does it create an ongoing opportunity to have the project derailed at any stage, for any number of reasons, it also builds an inherent risk and sensitivity into the process that can make the delivery more than onerous. Although this argument might seem alarmist, some contentious projects have been derailed by elected members when the makeup of a council changes through a local government election. In one recent election, 70% of the elected members changed.[95]

Many suggest the electoral cycle is too short.[96] The three-year cycle seems especially problematic in relation to major infrastructure projects. Moreover, the complexities of getting such projects 'over the line' are exacerbated when they traverse local body boundaries. Any number of regional transport initiatives fall into this category (e.g., Transmission Gully motorway in Wellington, which serves the greater Wellington region more generally), as does any regional facility (e.g., the ASB Arena in Tauranga, which provides for the wider needs of the Bay of Plenty).[97] In these circumstances, any agreed regional benefit does not necessarily translate into a local benefit, real or perceived, in the opinion of the elected members in a local authority.[98] This tension continues to be a significant issue for local government. The poster-child example is what many regard as the dysfunction of the Auckland group

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[95] Mayor/DeputyCC381394.

[96] Mayor/DeputyDC391447; Mayor/Deputy501911.

[97] CouncillorCC0297.

[98] CouncillorCC0298; Councillor06338.

of councils before they were amalgamated in 2010. The effects are still felt today –
and will continue to be felt for decades (Shirley et al., 2016).

Moreover, the councils in the Wellington or Bay of Plenty region, as the focus
of this research, appear to be subject to these same challenges. It is only a matter of
time before these same issues present themselves – that is, if such issues have not
already emerged. An example in the eyes of some elected members in Wellington is
the 2015 decision to halt the New Zealand Transport Authority's State Highway
Basin Bridge project in Wellington City's CBD.[99] [100]

Partly as a consequence of this context, the challenges and risks related to
these types of projects are only exacerbated with the need to ensure the relevant
stages coincide with the planning timelines set down by the legislation described
above. Such projects invariably require a decision to proceed during, for example,
annual plan deliberations. If, for whatever reason, decisions miss the cut-off – which
has happened – one flow-on effect can be that the investment proposal loses
momentum, slowing by 12 months or more.[101] Another common effect is to constrain
citizen engagement to such a degree that elected members cannot consider citizen
preferences with the level of representation that many elected members seek.[102]
Subsequently progress with the decision can stall until elected members have sought

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[99] High Court Appeal, NZTA v Architectural Centre Inc and Ors., http://www.nzta.govt.nz/media-
releases/transport-agency-decides-not-to-appeal-high-court-basin-bridge-decision

[100] CouncillorCC05317.

[101] Mayor/DeputyDC391447.

[102] Chair/DeputyRC361361.

and gained an understanding of the citizen preferences, which they can then use to support their decision.[103]

If concern is growing that infrastructure investment proposals slip from initiatives that aim to achieve good community outcomes into proposals that lose their *raison d'être* as a result of going through a good process, this is a problem. Moreover, it fits with a growing trend that some elected members have observed and loosely describe as a bias towards *process over outcomes*.[104]

Certainly, these processes are required to enable community consultation to seek the same citizen preferences on the outcomes being investigated on the community's behalf. Getting the processes wrong is simply a tragedy: investments of true value can lose their momentum through the myriad of demands,[105] when the process ultimately takes over and the proposal is abandoned.[106] Some have suggested such proposals either stalled or 'ran out of steam'.[107]

Discussion. The planning frameworks and processes that councils must adhere to when making large capital investment decisions are rightly prescriptive, and it is generally agreed they create transparency for all. Perhaps the most important influence identified here is that unless a significant project is in the 10-year plan, it has little chance of ever reaching council for deliberation and sign-off for implementation.

Two exceptions apply. First, elected members can and do bring a new initiative 'out of sequence' for consideration through the 'special consultative

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[103] Chair/DeputyRC451688.

[104] CouncillorRC491835; CouncillorDC17762.

[105] Mayor/DeputyDC391447.

[106] Mayor/DeputyCC481759.

[107] CouncillorCC15694; CouncillorDC21864.

process'. They may do so at any time, but usually dovetail such initiatives into the annual planning processes. They might choose this approach for any number of reasons. Responding to a large development initiative from a second or third party is one example.

The second exception is when elected members must make investment decisions as a result of a natural disaster. These circumstances seem all too familiar.

In considering projects in the 10-year plan, or in either of the exceptional circumstances noted above, elected members need to navigate several influences if the outcomes from these projects are to meet their expectations.

Moreover, they need to measure the quality of these planning processes to ensure that they are meeting the intent of the legislation to capture citizens' voices and consider those voices in their deliberations. This is where the legislative intent pragmatically translates into processes that enable the projects to become mainstreamed for consideration and eventual adoption.

Unfortunately for many elected members, less obvious is how the planning frameworks and processes really work and when elected members can start influencing any decisions in the way they would like for a variety of reasons. The influence of the frameworks and processes can apply to decisions in the past or present, as well as any future decisions over projects in the capital plan pipeline.

> *For a person coming in now to do their first term in council, they won't*
> *actually feel they've achieved anything unless they get a second term because*
> *almost everything that happens in their first term of council has almost*

> *already been ordained. That would be very frustrating for a great many*
>
> *people. (Mayor/DeputyDC271027)*[108]

This structure does not come without a cost. Elected members indicate that the costs of the planning frameworks and, for example, putting together a 10-year plan represent a substantial burden to many (especially small) councils.

> *It takes a long time. . . . The long-term plan and how that operates, the new*
>
> *30-year infrastructure plan, the significant commitment that there is to a*
>
> *council obviously in terms of time and cost to deliver all these things. Is it*
>
> *worth it? No. (Mayor/DeputyDC441623)*

For this reason, elected members suggest long-term plan outcomes must be pragmatic. Yet a pragmatic outcome may not be the outcome they want. Typically the long-term plan has its constraints. Some elected members are not happy with that, especially when they sense a flaw in the process has left certain initiatives out of the plan or created risks in the plan.

> *What's gone in to the LTP [long-term plan] has been things that we*
>
> *realistically we can achieve. (CouncillorDC16714)*[109]

A different source of frustration is evident in the next example, when the council is working to include preliminary investigations in capital plans within the long-term plans. For several elected members, the amount of work involved seems excessive in these early stages, when they must still comply with the full planning processes.

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[108] See also Appendix B, B.14.

[109] See also Appendix B, B.15.

Long-term plans are a frustration because it specifies that if you want to have a project on the table it has to be on the long-term plan and yet you'll put a project in the long-term plan so just so you can research it, and it's highly unlikely to run and so therefore you end up having to create a whole framework around how you are going to finance it, how you are going to have to rate for it, who is going to do the design, the build. (CouncillorDC20842)

Elected members also believe recent changes in legislation have offered opportunities to improve the planning processes.

I think the previous regime that they put on the long-term plan was appalling, I couldn't believe how detailed it was and frankly we were not getting better at it, we're actually now – we've finally got some relief from how we've had to do it – which I think is most welcome by just bigger-picture, tell them what your strategy is but in terms of your internal planning, yeah probably local government is getting a bit more used to it and now we've got the 30-year infrastructure strategy I think it's really good making them think about that because these are life-long infrastructure decisions. (Chair/DeputyRC451701)

Yet strong evidence suggests the processes have a long way to go before they meet what those elected members feel is best practice. A number of senior elected members have had a similar experience to the one described below.

I don't see I've seen it done satisfactorily anywhere. If there is no obvious sign of resistance then that level of apathy can be interpreted as acceptance and it is the great weakness of governance, we all know that and you can put this in a draft plan. Draft plans are tricky, you can go out to the general public and say, "We've got so much money, we've got so many projects, tick the box you want." Is that the wisest way of proceeding? Is that demonstrating the right kind of leadership? (Chair/DeputyRC461707)

So far, evidence indicates the legislation that sets the foundations for large capital investment decision processes influences elected members; the type of project involved sets the tone for how elected members approach it; and the planning frameworks and processes influence how that practically happens. The last major early influence is the citizen engagement practices that elected members might choose to find out about citizen preferences. This is the subject of the next and final part of this section.

4.3.5   Citizen Engagement Practices

Evidence suggests citizen engagement practices[110] are an enigma to elected members. The reasons appear to relate to the complexity and diversity of the people and processes involved, as much as to the difficulty of establishing citizen preferences as such. Enigma or not, the evidence is strong that these practices can and do influence the decision to invest in a large capital project.

The evidence also points to a form of complexity that is less apparent in the three themes discussed above. That is, elected members can influence the citizen engagement practices adopted as much as they can be influenced by the processes and outcomes they are seeking from these practices.

What the elected members say. The first challenge the elected members identify is to determine what the right channels to communicate with their citizens are and how the channels should be established. Some seem to have tried everything.

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[110] See Chapter 1, footnote 2.

The challenge for me is how do I then take that [an investment proposal] to the community, and have that conversation with the community? (CouncillorCC0168)[111]

Local government has been exploring citizen engagement practices in earnest since its governing legislation was amended significantly in 2002. After a stuttering start in 2004, every three years since 2006 every council has developed a 10-year plan and in the interim years an annual plan tracking the 10-year plan. Inherent in the legislation and in developing each of those plans is the requirement that councils consult with communities on the draft plans. Yet, astoundingly, local government is still struggling to understand how to approach citizens to find out their preferences and what it wants to establish from such engagement. Even among some of the experienced politicians, such as this fourth-term councillor, the answer is not clear.

If I was ever to have the confidence to have the discussions about substantial development, I could do it now. And if you'd say, "How? How are you going to do it?" [I'd respond], "I'm still working that out." That's the hardest thing. And it's not about a brochure to every home. There is no silver bullet for this, there is none. (CouncillorCC0182)

One reason for this difficulty is that elected members are competing with other aspects of citizens' lives for their time and attention. The problem is at least in part a general reflection of society today.

We'd welcome more involvement but no one turns up any more, not even the press. It's a sign of the economic times, I guess, people are under a lot of pressure

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[111] See Appendix B, B.17.

and stress. They're not interested. Younger people just aren't engaged with their

communities, they are engaged with themselves. (CouncillorRC25989)[112]

Following this line of evidence, in the absence of any recognised best practice, every time councils engage with communities over these sorts of proposals, it seems like they are doing it for the first time. Even with almost 20 years of collective experience, how can elected members be expected to determine the best practices in each investment circumstance if these practices have not yet been established? Moreover, where more than one proposal is involved, what is the relationship between them to achieve the desired outcomes with any practices used to seek citizen preferences for each one?

The best [solution] is an amalgamation of a number of things. It is first of all

about coming up with a package of considerations that are as clearly laid out

as you can. And that's not always easy because we are facing this stuff all the

time, and we need [to be able] to see around corners and underneath things

and over the top of walls etc., as a metaphor. (CouncillorCC02122)

Nonetheless, evidence indicates local government is still best placed to determine what citizens preferences are. Elected members suggest a challenge for councils is to create environments in which citizen engagement practices can work for both elected members and citizens alike. They also consider that the attempts to date have not been altogether successful.

Local government are best enabled for determining with citizens what works

well. I haven't seen too many processes that work well. They need to have been

well researched and well planned, based on really sound advice, but once you

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[112] See Appendix B, B.18.

get past that it's in the public arena and that can count for nothing sometimes.

(Mayor/DeputyDC311116)[113]

Citizen engagement processes all make reasonable sense for those who are close to these processes, and for anyone who has one-to-one dealings with councils. Strong evidence indicates that local government's approach to these engagement practices is simply not working. Drilling down into the detail of the evidence, it appears the nature of the project is one of the first considerations in choosing an appropriate citizen engagement solution. If elected members are to construct an environment that entices engagement, they must have a clear strategy that matches the type of project involved. If the solution is not fit for purpose against something as simple as what type of project it is, it is difficult at best to secure citizen preferences that reflect the majority view.

It depends on what it is; so, for example, I have responsibility for water and waste. I would engage with that differently than I would with roading . . . on things like roading, that's quite straightforward. (CouncillorCC03169)

For some elected members, the essence of the problem has always been the need to engage with their citizens in a way they feel makes engaging worthwhile. Such engagement might require several iterations along with several different channels in order to establish what the citizen preferences are. One access point and one conversation are not enough.

Engagement is not necessarily [about] putting up a stand in public and waiting for people to come past, because they are not informed. (CouncillorCC04208)[114]

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[113] See also Appendix B, B.19.

Even if elected members understand and act on this knowledge, a successful process is not guaranteed. For most, using several different channels still produced disappointing results. Instead, the most consistently effective medium remains the news media.

> *Whether you like it or not, the local media is the best way, through just decent, constant media releases, constantly telling the community what's happening. (Mayor/DeputyDC441630)*

Existing approaches and communication channels, other than the media, have some inherent problems. Some elected members see the heart of the problem as the long-term plan and the processes for establishing citizen preferences. Many feel current channels do not allow citizens to participate on their own terms. A recurring reason given for this dilemma is that engagement with citizens is both time consuming and costly for the citizens themselves. Neither circumstance is helpful for elected members if they are trying to establish communication channels to seek citizen preferences for these investment proposals.

> *To be blunt, I find the long-term plan process useless. I actually don't like the process. I don't think it really engages people at a level that a) they feel comfortable about or b) that you get meaningful information [from]. (Mayor/DeputyCC501877)[115]*

Evidence also suggests elected members are yet to tap into new technologies to connect with many of their citizens. In a time when technology is not the constraint, it seems local government is decades behind. Local government cannot, for example, institutionalise electronic voting.

[114] See also Appendix B, B.20a–b.

[115] See also Appendix B, B.21a–b.

*There are so many more and better means of communication. All this
electronic capability and I think people just find it easier to actually have
opinions and says rather than the old necessary formats: "Here are your
submission forms, fill it out" and then [front up, potentially]. Whereas now
everything is online, here are customer service feedback forms, all of this sort
of thing, and I think councils generally seem to be a little bit more proactive at
getting those things done than they might have used to be.
(CouncillorDC221886)*

It follows that, if the process of developing the long-term plan is struggling to

provide the opportunities for citizens to participate on their own terms, and if it is

not seemingly providing citizens with the kind of information they are seeking, a

significant void needs to be filled. One solution is to use a narrative or story that

explains the purpose and circumstance of the proposed investment. As the evidence

has highlighted, the value and importance of getting this narrative right cannot be

overestimated for elected members trying to connect with their communities.

*It's the big-picture stuff, and that's part of our job, as a councillor, to tell the
tale of the big picture. (CouncillorCC06357)*[116]

Clearly, this inability to capture citizens' interests frustrates many elected

members. It has a marked impact on elected members when they are engaging with

their communities, given the legislative imperative for them to do so. Some elected

members seem to treat engagement as a straight 'numbers' game. That is, if they

think participation has been sufficient, then any decision that supports a proposal is

representative of the community and its preferences.

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[116] See also Appendix B, B.22.

This perspective brings with it a number of issues. Elected members are fully aware of the participation deficits local government is exposed to more generally and that any consultation is not with the majority of their citizens. The extent of representation is important to some.

> *Who generally engages with public consultation? It's not truly representative of your community because there is a silent majority, and quite often there is a very vocal minority. You can say, "Oh we've consulted." But have you actually got the finger on the pulse of your community if only 200 people may engage in a consultation process out of 2,000 [people], and out of those 2,000 people four of them may present oral submission? And do you take the opinion of four people out of 200,000 people? (CouncillorCC09473)*[117]

Others too have a genuine desire for citizens to get an opportunity to have their say, even if they are unsure how this might be achieved.

> *So we've got to be very careful with some decisions/discussions so I communicate with the Māori. (Mayor/DeputyDC341272)*[118]

This circumstance invariably leads to the next concern that elected members raise: if the way we engage and consult with citizens is questionable, then how well informed are citizens during such engagement and consultation?

Having a project involving large capital investments in significant assets is still no guarantee that elected members will get the level of certainty about citizen preferences that they need from current citizen engagement practices.

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[117] See also Appendix B, B.23.

[118] See also Appendix B, B.29.

Some elected members do hold on to the principle that more engagement will lead to better decisions.

> *Going back to democracy, if we could influence and get more voters out and more people interested in local government, I think it would be good for the community. (CouncillorDC19840)*

Some elected members have other reasons for shying away from engaging with their citizens.

> *I don't think they have engaged much as well. Because it's so big, nobody wants to think about it. The numbers are scary. (CouncillorCC09496)*

Notwithstanding all these challenges, some see a way forward.

> *The social licence that we've developed here has taken some doing. It doesn't just happen and you can't just wake up one day and headline your local paper and say, "We are going to build [this]" or "We are going do that". You've actually got to work through a process. Where things are multifaceted and they've got a lot of aspects to them, you've got to give people a lot of opportunity to ask a lot of questions and to get answers that satisfy them. You've got to be totally open and honest about it and people have got to fully understand. And, when they [do] fully understand, the communities, I think, become empowered to make decisions around yes or no. (Mayor/DeputyDC411513)*

The evidence suggests this situation is all too rare.

Discussion. Unsurprisingly, citizen engagement practices remain an enigma for elected members, just as they were when the Local Government Act 2002 came into effect. Chapter 1 has identified the dilemma that citizen engagement does not necessarily reflect a level of citizen participation commensurate with the significance

of the investment decisions councils must make and the principle of subsidiarity that enables this (Dollery, 2009; Kelly et al., 2009). As Dollery (2009) explains at a general level, and as this research has confirmed, even some extraordinarily significant capital investment decisions do not attract the attention of the vast majority of the citizens.[119] Elected members suggest part of the reason for this mismatch is the complexity and diversity of both people and processes involved.[120]

The dilemma extends to an inability to settle on meaningful engagement even if this complexity can be unpacked enough to give engagement options some apparent logic. Invariably engagement options are disciplined to a point where the intent is more to meet the legislative requirements under the LGA 2002 to proceed with an investment, than to establish what the community wants.[121] Imagine this. Imagine if any investment deemed 'significant' under a council's policy of significance required evidence that a certain percentage (e.g., 50%) of the citizens had voiced their opinion before that investment could be made. I wonder how that would electrify the local government environment to take on a sense of urgency. Or, more disingenuously, I wonder whether communities would eventually stop participating.

And here are the reasons why this very real dilemma is important to decisions about major infrastructure investments. Any citizen engagement practice must be cognisant of time (to meet the consultation timelines of processes such as annual plans), of cost (to have the relevant financial commitments to meet the costs of consultation) and of quality (to understand who the engagement is for and how to

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[119] Chair/DeputyRC321159.

[120] Chair/DeputyRC361352.

[121] CouncillorDC421555.

select an engagement protocol that motivates the key stakeholders to participate in these processes and provide meaningful feedback). Elected members have also identified the difficulty of determining the right channels – and how to establish those channels – to communicate with their citizens. Whether an elected member's lack of understanding influences a decision is unclear.[122]

Moreover, since the requirements to engage were set in 2002, local government has never seemed to have a way of capturing the feedback from one engagement exercise to another that would allow councils to improve their approach. Yet for many elected members, the experience of engagement is literally their first time. Length of tenure, which I will examine more closely in Section 4.7, is a yet-to-be-recognised democratic constraint that seems to be deeply embedded in many of these issues. Its significance is up for debate, but at a minimum an environment with a substantial turnover of elected members creates a substantial deficit in institutional knowledge. Practising meaningful citizen engagement is one situation in which that knowledge is essential to inform how connected the democracy is with its democratic commune. Furthermore, when it is not adequately connected, elected members might still feel the connection is sufficient; let's explore why.

In some cases, local government has gone to extraordinary lengths to try to engage with its communities.[123] The real dilemma is that the legislation enabling citizen engagement is only loosely related to actual engagement to ensure citizen participation. A potentially affronting question is whether the legislation has provided the vehicle for establishing citizen preferences even when evidence suggests

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[122] CouncillorRC491831.

[123] Chair/DeputyRC4606.

communities have engaged to inform those preferences. It is perhaps because of the absence of prescription in the legislation over matters such as hearing from the majority of citizens that there is no learning environment about getting more efficient and effective at engagement. It is normal for similar investment decisions to be treated with completely different engagement solutions, just as it is to have completely different investment decisions treated with the same engagement solution. Moreover, no measure of success is set in any circumstance.

Given the weak relationship between practice and engagement, do citizen patterns of political participation correspond to their process preferences; that is, are they more likely to participate if they like the method of participation (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2014)? Little is being done to try to answer this question. Most bureaucracies are too embroiled in the now to allow time to reflect on lessons learnt. Even when they try to do so, any lessons seem to be buried deeply in the operational environments that remain a mystery to elected members.[124]

Through carefully assessing elected members' views of citizen engagement practices, this research has reached the deeper understanding that current citizen preferences do not truly reflect the views of the communities from which they have been voiced, and that elected members are well aware that only a relatively small proportion of their community ever participates in these processes. Interestingly, in the view of some of their peers, some elected members seem to rely on this convenient truth, preferring the practice where councils remain disconnected from real citizen preferences.[125] This raises an important issue.

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[124] Mayor/DeputyCC331204; CouncillorDC421555.

[125] Mayor/DeputyDC411542.

As is generally recognised, the type of citizen engagement practice a council uses almost exclusively determines elected members' commitment to that practice. Some have specific thoughts on what that is, one on one, in their home.[126] At the same time, the reality is that the default option of engagement is time-efficient and often requires no more than a commitment to the long-term or annual plan deliberation processes. This will include reading any number of appended supporting reports, listening to and considering any written submissions on any proposal, and any time required to debate the finer details before making a decision for or against investing. Moreover, any given 10-year plan can contain tens if not hundreds of investment proposals, each of which is likely to be carefully detailed (especially in the first three years of that plan).

The inconvenient truth is that most elected members in local government hold down other jobs in conjunction with their council role. No elected member (other than those in their later years who are retired from normal vocational duties) can or ever will be able to give the necessary time to engagement practices to establish what citizen preferences really are. I suspect we have set up the majority of them to fail.

In the larger metropolitan local government authorities at least, it is argued the remuneration is in line with other vocations. It is clearly not the case in many district councils. In reality, political tenure is fickle at best (equivalent to having a three-year fixed-term contract with no right to renew – a challenging situation when you are in your mid-thirties or forties with children and a mortgage); maintaining any commercial interests and/or maintaining a private income in these environments is prudent. To do so takes valuable time and, depending on the

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[126] Mayor/DeputyCC381406.

circumstance, it is likely to inhibit the extent to which many if not all elected members can contribute to their council role. A number of elected members stated their business had suffered significantly during their tenure with their council. Some suggested democracy had to come second at times (M. Campbell, personal communication, 29 June 2013).

These circumstances do little to resolve the dilemmas identified in the real-world problem of this research. Even with burgeoning issues of financial sustainability (Dollery et al., 2006; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006), this research supports the view that councils are currently unable to overcome a genuine disconnect between community awareness and the significant council investments proposed to improve the wellbeing of an entire community (F. Wilde, personal communication, 12 July 2013). The findings here also support the literature's position that engagement practices continue to contribute to the seeming inability of councils to encourage their communities to participate (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, pp. 11–16).[127]

4.3.6   Summary

The research has provided clear evidence that global influences are at play when large capital investment decisions are being made (Table 4.1). The global economic conditions are one example, as explored above; climate change is another. It seems these sorts of externalities are specific to the circumstances in terms of both time and the type of investment being considered.

Following on from this, the type of project was found to be another, if unexpected, global (local) influence at a local level. Specifically, it had an important

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[127] Mayor/Deputy381409.

influence on the way that council would approach its processes, which includes giving special consideration to projects that attract significant public interest.

The discussion of how legislation influences the pre-decision environment made two further key points. First, central government can be and has been influential on how local government structures its relationship with its communities and the extent of that relationship. Second, some concern exists over what appears to be little accountability over legislative failures for governors or those who have audited these processes for investments that have resulted in poor decision-making (in this case, for capital investments or the processes that call for reinvestments to maintain or renew assets that result long after they have been built).

This research has also established that the planning frameworks of local government have numerous and substantial, yet previously unrecognised influences on these decisions. The process can contribute to the success or failure of any proposal. What has been less obvious in past literature is that the process can have a significant bearing on both individual elected members and the councils they represent. Of concern is the deep animosity among elected members that these circumstances can create, as are the ramifications of relitigating what can be deeply held convictions through the local government processes for enabling these investments.

Finally, the literature has already ascertained how citizen engagement practices influence the establishment of citizen preferences. However, this research has provided the clear evidence that this influence applies to the local government sector and is at least as strong when applied in that context. At a fundamental level, this research has highlighted how little is understood about citizen engagement practices. Less apparent is how the simplistic and consequently almost ruthless

approach to this crucial element of our democracy crushes the more delicate elements of our society and, inherently, those investments that would enable these. Arts, culture and the environmental derivatives of these investments often struggle against the economic imperatives many infrastructural investments are reduced to. A number of elected members have aired a concern that the voice of these more socially constructed investments seems to be drowned out by the financial fanaticism of bureaucrats, which they dress up as fiscal prudence. We will explore the implications of these findings in the following sections.

By way of an addendum, it is worth noting the influences above are more about *what* and *where* decisions are made, and less about *how* they are made. More specifically, this section has highlighted a predetermined process and bias that *indirectly* affects the assertions of citizen preferences when elected members are choosing to vote for an investment proposal. It seems that with the *how*, if it is referring to the final position voted on (yes or no), these influences are somewhat weaker, if not ineffectual.

With this in mind, the next section looks into *how* decisions are formulated when an elected member chooses to vote. The research is clear that the influences involved directly affect an elected member's final position and decision. Furthermore, the next section will look at these *direct* influences in detail and whether citizen preferences carry any weight in informing an elected member's vote.

Table 4.1. Summary of the Pre-decision Environment and Context

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Global influences	Major natural events; environmental sustainability; climate change; global economic conditions	Overwhelming; difficult to contextualise; irrelevant; not now; not us
The proposed project	Core infrastructure vs social infrastructure; constructability; renewal vs augmentation; placemaking; source of conception; mandatory vs optional; spatial considerations; extent of reach	Difficult vs easy projects; the media and its influence; choice is variable; citizen preferences can be hard to interpret
The legislation	The extent of legislation (e.g., Resource Management Act, Local Government Act, New Zealand Building Code); the complexity of legislation; National Policy Statements; the praxis; ever-changing; central government imposition; patriarchal	Uncompromising and prescriptive vs interpretive and subjective; imposed; relevance unclear; inconsistent; entrenched; interpretation of the praxis; impossible to keep up; inconsistency apparent
Planning frameworks	Administrative responsibility onerous (e.g. long-term plans, annual plans, policies, strategies, plans, bylaws, codes); siloed; interpretative; mechanics; costly; best practice; the praxis	Administrative complexity; unclear processes and variable requirements; outcomes iterative and non-committal; long-winded; risky; whether benefits will be realised is unclear; onerous; requires pragmatism
Citizen engagement practices	Channel options available; choice of engagement methodology; disengaged community and citizenship deficits; vocal minorities and the agendas of individuals, groups, stakeholders and communities; new technologies; participation rates driven by agenda; technical expert biases; engagement vs practice vs participation; cost and benefit of participation	Generally recognised as an enigma; engagement channel selection random; unclear citizenship preferences; no best practice; no established fit-for-purpose approach; impact of media bias; political livelihood at risk; citizenship deficits are a challenge to balance what is ultimately uninformed opinion; ideal that good participation = good decision; complexity; bureaucratic influence unclear; messaging instrumental for informed community input

4.4   Citizen Preference Influences

In this research, citizen preference influences are defined as any input that an individual or group (e.g., a ratepayer or a sports club) has on elected members' decisions.

The following themes were revealed from elected members' observations of their own actions in relation to those preferences and their insights developed from the consequences of those actions. These results also demonstrate how much (or how little) weight elected members give to citizen preferences and some of the nuances involved in considering them when they do – if they do.

4.4.1   Citizen Preference – throughout the Decision-making Process

In the first instance, the evidence supports the notion that citizen preferences can influence any phase of the decision-making process. Direct influences can occur at any time an elected member makes their time available to discuss preferences with citizens, right up to the point where elected members are walking into the council meeting in the debating chamber. The subtler, indirect influences occur when the elected member considers the decision and how to apply this advice, in deliberations where the citizens are likely to be sitting in the chamber or when reading local newspaper articles on the subject.

Although the level of influence varies depending on the circumstances, direct influence of some sort is evident before deliberations (e.g., gathering community support to fund an extension to the library), while influence may be indirect during deliberations (e.g., having elected members are aware citizens are watching proceedings) and even more indirect after deliberations (e.g., when the impact of any decision on citizens is likely to have ramifications for the elected member with their

constituents). Importantly, the research also gives an insight into the weight that citizen preferences have – or do not have – for elected members in making decisions.

4.4.2   Citizen Preference Influences – before Deliberations

Intuitively context is as much about whether citizens wish to engage with councils to convey their preferences as it is about the opportunities citizens have to do so and, when they do participate, how these preferences are captured for elected members to consider. This research has uncovered that in some circumstances elected members may question or even undermine information about citizen preferences, even when such information appears to have been clearly established. These circumstances arise in relation to three broad themes.

The first theme relates to how local government practically and pragmatically establishes – or does not establish – citizen preferences with its communities. The processes it follows are described as citizen engagement practices. As Section 4.3.5 has demonstrated, elected members have conveyed concerns about the way councils are and have been approaching citizens to establish these preferences – concerns that are reflected in the ever-decreasing levels of participation by citizens in local government activities.

Second is the theme of how local government establishes whether citizens are anywhere near well enough equipped to receive, discuss and consider information on a proposal and from there to voice their preferences. This concern remains even if citizens receive the information in a form and format that is conducive to generating an informed position about a proposal. In their interviews, elected members broadly reflected on the nature and ever-increasing complexity of the decision-making environment and citizens' inability to consider such complex problems.

Finally, elected members have concerns about the information that council officers present them after gathering it through questionable citizen engagement practices. Where information represents only the views of a minority, it is uncertain whether citizen participation has produced a sufficient mass of knowledge for elected members to make an informed decision about what citizen preferences are.

In setting the foundations for determining citizen preferences, the circumstances in which these preferences were established become important. The following discussion on citizen engagement practices delves deeper into these circumstances. It also explores elected members' thinking and how they treated these circumstances when dealing with citizen preferences in relation to the investment decisions they made. In addition, the discussion highlights some of the biases in decisions that eventuated through these circumstances.

4.4.3   Citizen Engagement Practices

Section 4.3.5 has described how establishing citizen preferences is notoriously difficult because most citizens demonstrate a low interest in becoming involved in local issues. Elected members in this research philosophically struggle with this construct. That is, they immediately form a biased position about what citizens' reluctance to participate means for them in practice, leading them to favour adopting a default position that erodes the weighting of citizen preferences. That weighting may erode to a point where elected members feel citizen preferences are, or are likely to be, 'entrusted' to the elected members who represent them.

> *The first issue that we struggle with is citizens being interested. That's true to a certain extent and most people just want to be able to turn the tap on and see that their water is running and they trust – trust plays a huge part in this –*

> *they trust that elected members that make the decisions and professional*
>
> *advisors are given the best advice. (Mayor/DeputyCC481771)*

This research provides some insights into what is driving elected members to form views of this nature. Clearly, this constraint weighed heavily on some elected members; it seemed perplexing, at a minimum, for many others. Moreover, it seemed the longer elected members were in office, the more entrenched their views became for minimising the influence of supposed citizen preferences in this circumstance.

Underlining these views were elected members' experience of the same citizen 'protagonists' trying to establish their views as representing citizen preferences in general on any given issue. Many of these protagonists seemed to be permanently against changing the status quo, rather than being opposed to any particular proposal. In the eyes of the elected members, some particularly frequent protagonists were also agnostic to any issue being discussed.

> *What does happen is a lot of social issues get brought to you, and of course a*
>
> *lot of representation from the public – although I did find, as years went on,*
>
> *the same people always came – no matter what the topic was. So there was a*
>
> *need to be objective. (CouncillorCC08419)*

Exacerbating the problem was elected members' inability to find the appropriate engagement practice or practices for any particular circumstance undermined any endeavours. If they lose the opportunity to establish the right type of engagement practice, elected members seem to struggle with creating the all-important narrative that brings communities together to make a decision through consensus. This is not an insignificant issue.

> *I think we need to be better at telling the story, I think we need to be better at*
>
> *accepting that one size doesn't fit all. I think we need to be accepting that to*

> *actually engage with the community you've got to do a whole lot of different*
>
> *things, because different communities need different tools to be used.*
>
> *(CouncillorCC06368)*

If taken at face value, elected members' stated support for obtaining citizen preferences, as established in Section 4.3.5, suggest that citizen preferences are an important consideration in any investment decision. However, in reality they do not necessarily have such a strong weighting. When pressured by evidence that appears to conflict with citizen preferences (e.g., conflicting technical evidence or financial evidence), elected members can and do sway towards positions different from citizen preferences. Unless councils are able to find a way to motivate the silent majority to participate in the decision-making processes, many elected members do not seem to feel any pressing desire to establish what citizen preferences are beyond the more limited information that is presented to them. Furthermore, if citizen preferences are not clear, or citizen representation from the community is low, elected members also seem likely to turn to other sorts of evidence to inform their decisions.

> *There are people who give a lot of weighing [to decision-making evidence] and*
>
> *there are the people who give less than a lot of weighing to it.*
>
> *(CouncillorCC47103)*

With the research findings, it is possible to unpack this circumstance further. A number of elected members stated that, with more input from citizens, they would be able to take on board more of their citizens' thoughts when considering a way forward. Conversely, they also offered that they would not be able to seriously consider citizen preferences until a reasonably broad representation from the community had conveyed their preferences.

It follows that, where some citizens have conveyed their preferences in citizen engagement processes from which a large percentage of the community has been disenfranchised (willingly or not), the information on citizen preferences that elected members receive is not given the weight that those who conveyed them had hoped.

Moreover, as they generally accept that a large percentage of the population chose to say nothing as the 'silent majority', elected members seem to have a concern for establishing 'actual citizen preferences', suggesting they have been elected to act on behalf of this silent minority. This situation creates frustration both for the elected members struggling to determine what their communities really want and for the minority of citizens who have taken the opportunity to convey their preferences only to find that elected members do not embrace those preferences.

> *Good, sound decision-making is to actually listen to the silent majority. I think that's the biggest thing. It's very easy to respond and react to your vocal minority, the ones who have your ear but you've got to realise that there are a lot of people who are not vocal. (CouncillorCC09508)*

Others have a different view, suggesting the silent majority will mobilise if and when they need or desire to do so. Elected members appear to have universally adopted the stance that citizen silence is some sort of acknowledgement of agreement.

> *I think we actually underestimate the silent majority; [they] do engage and tell you very quickly if you're not doing it properly or if something comes in that [will] affect them . . . (Mayor/DeputyCC331212)*

Furthermore, elected members feel justified, empowered and safe in adopting this stance, even if the minority who contributes is very small. Debating whether the silent majority agrees with them or not is somewhat academic. The percentage of citizens who participates is almost never, or possibly never, the majority.

> *For me there is a lot of political safety in good consultation, because then I feel*
>
> *confident in what the community is saying. (CouncillorCC10520)*

The other challenge is that, unless citizens are highly motivated for some reason, elected members perceive them as significantly less likely to become involved in the decision-making processes.

> *No one knows what citizens want. If they're not in a lobby group and you're*
>
> *failing to plan, then that's the only two ways you're going to find out.*
>
> *(Mayor/DeputyDC311137)*[128]

The silent majority, by virtue of being silent, can be somewhat disconcerting for some elected members.

> *One of the biggest frustrations from me is [when] you don't hear from a large*
>
> *percentage of the population, you've got to assume that they are either happy*
>
> *with what you are doing or they don't care, and if they don't care then they are*
>
> *trusting you, as the elected official, to make the wise decisions on their behalf.*
>
> *And then you've got all of the other ones and you go to a hearing and you see*
>
> *their submissions and you've got the noisy ones in your face against that large*
>
> *group of people that have either said, "Well, I trust you" or "I don't care".*
>
> *(Chair/DeputyRC361360)*

In summary, the evidence above suggests elected members do not necessarily think citizen preferences have a compelling influence on their decisions (Table 4.2). Although they apparently have an innate belief that it is important to consider citizen preferences as part of a suite of factors, they invariably seem to have reasons for not weighting them strongly in practice.

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[128] See also Appendix B, B.28a–b.

If this is the case, what are the other, stronger influences and why do they have such an influence? The next section looks at the contribution of the third theme, expert technical advice influences.

Table 4.2. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context - Citizen Preference Influences

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Throughout the decision-making process	Influences can occur at any time during the process through until deliberations; formal and informal just as valuable; who is gathering support for what reason; what is driving the intent; place in decision process gives weight to effort to engage with citizens; early public consultation important formal forum; knowledge of process gives an advantage to experienced representatives	Consideration varies based on the process; considerable formal information provided – value to elected member variable; informal influences (friends and colleagues) have some weight
Before deliberations	How preferences are captured; process dependent; citizen voice and representation; connection with citizens for establishing preferences; majority and minority views; collation methodology, bureaucratic interpretations; evidence with summaries for deliberations	Concerns with how representative the evidence is; the evidence often has either a specified or unspecified agenda; the evidence is not always balanced; many stakeholders do not participate; engagement from citizen is low
Citizen engagement practices	How engagement practices are established; type of engagement critical to outcomes being sought; experience of positive historical engagement holds significant weight, as does negative experience; disenfranchised communities not responsive to even good engagement practices; citizens' motivation to engage is historically low and decreasing; complexity of proposals makes engagement practices challenging; vocal minority is not well understood; triggers for motivating citizens to engage are not well understood	Wary of certain processes, trust can be low; previous experiences – irrespective of whether they are relevant or not – undermine validity of process; wary of some engagement methods over others; can be wary of how process is instigated; pressure low to listen when perceived practices flawed; views of silent majority are not weighted accordingly – listen to vocal minority; citizens are not always equipped to engage, even if they wish to; this influence is likely to be the weakest when decisions are made

4.5   Expert Technical Advice Influences

As reported in the previous section, when making large capital investment decisions elected members are not giving citizen preferences the weighting that citizens might expect. Some of the early insights into elected members' rationale for this behaviour suggested they gave more weight to expert technical advice than citizen preferences. This section looks into whether it can verify this initial finding

Expert technical advice is an important consideration when the decisions are, at least in part, underpinned by technical information. In this research, this advice is defined as any input that an individual or group with specific recognised expertise in the relevant subject matter has on these decisions (e.g., engineering advice).

The following themes were revealed from elected members' observations of and insights from their interactions with technical experts in relation to their decisions. These results also show how much weight elected members give to this advice, alongside some of the nuances involved when considering them.

A significant revelation from the interviews was the importance not just of the expert technical advice per se, but also of who the expert providing that advice was. What also became apparent was that the expert could influence the decision during the deliberations themselves.

4.5.1   Expert Technical Advice Influences – throughout the Decision-making Process

In the first instance, evidence supports the notion that expert technical advice can influence any phase of the decision-making process. Direct influences can occur up to the point an elected member is considering any advice in the debating chamber. Experts

can, for example, be called into a council meeting to answer any number of questions in relation to any advice they have provided.

Although the level of influence varies depending on the circumstances, direct influence of some sort is evident before deliberations (e.g., gathering information for consultation with the community) and during deliberations (e.g., being there for questions regarding any advice given). Influence from technical experts can also be much subtler: it can be seen to work indirectly on elected members during deliberations (e.g., when elected members are aware experts are listening to how their advice is applied during the deliberations) or after deliberations (e.g., in identifying the implications of any decision an elected member makes where they use or apply that advice).

Context. As noted in Section3.6.6, technical experts comprise officers of the council (internal) and consultants or contractors (internal or external). Their advice is as varied as the range of disciplines that can be found across the local government sector. Advice falls into three broad themes: engineering/scientific; spatial/planning; and commercial/financial.

Section 3.6.6 lists many of the kinds of technical experts who can influence elected members' decisions. Although not exhaustive, that list does give insight into the complex nature of local government activities and why elected members seek technical advice from both within and outside the council.

While elected members seek an understanding of technical experts' advice to inform their decisions, a number of global influences on large capital investment decisions contribute to the context for this advice. As discussed previously, given most large investment decisions in local government are related to infrastructure investment, it is unsurprising these influences involve considerations related to the

construction, maintenance and ongoing operations of those investments. Expert technical advice has some weight on how elected members might consider these influences.

Section 4.4 described global influences in relation to citizen preferences that are important for many if not all elected members. These include natural events, the levels of risk and design in any proposed capital investment within that and other environments, the costs related to securing various levels of protection, the effects of climate change, the Global Financial Crisis and debt management, to name a few.

Diverging substantially from citizen preferences, the influence of technical experts involves two further factors in relation to these global issues. First, the weight exerted by the technical expert is likely to be proportional to their individual mana or reputation. Second, when different sources of expert technical advice are in conflict, it seems the individual's reputation for knowledge of that subject is almost sacrosanct.

One further difference lies in the approach to the advice. Whereas with citizen preferences elected members try to establish what the views across communities really are, their role when weighing up expert technical advice is about ensuring the advice is sound and will stand up to the rigours of review, alongside considering whether it carries any weight for their own deliberations.

The research highlights how difficult it can be for elected members to determine not just the validity of a technical expert's advice, but also the implications of that advice for their decisions. It also highlights the importance of the context of any capital investment when determining the extent and weight of that advice and how that might influence any particular circumstance. The specific context of any

proposal will attract certain technical experts (several in some instances), and not others. We will explore this challenging area later.

The global issue outlined above is less about the subject the technical expert is providing advice on than about the prevailing global circumstance in which they are providing that advice.

Recognising this broader context, the following discussion presents themes identified from elected members' reflections on the way they apply expert technical advice and the weight they give it when deliberating on large capital investment decisions.

4.5.2   Expert Technical Advice Influences – before Deliberations

Whether expert technical advice is made available for elected members who wish to use it to inform their opinions depends as much on the opportunities technical experts have to deliver their findings, as it is does on their presentation of their findings to elected members to consider.

This research has uncovered a wide variety of complex permutations on how elected members might access and then reach a position on expert advice before their deliberations. Several explanations are possible.

In some circumstances elected members receive this advice one to one. This gives them an opportunity to question the expert if the expert advice conflicts with elected members' existing agenda or position. It involves a simple one-to-one relationship between what an elected member wants as an outcome and whether the expert advice supports that outcome.

More complex is any situation where an elected member genuinely wants to consider what citizens think about that expert advice as well. In this instance, elected

members need to establish not only whether citizens agree with the expert advice, but also what their citizens' position is and their own opinion on that position. Adding to the complexity is the potential for an elected member to reach an understanding of their citizens' position on any particular issue and then to have an altogether different opinion on the same point.

It is enormously challenging for elected members to find a rational position when their citizens appear to hold no clear single position so that there are no obvious citizen preferences. Factions within citizen groups are not uncommon. Furthermore, on the face of it, it appears impossible for elected members to reach a rational position when two or more experts offer conflicting advice on a way forward. In large capital investment proposals, this complexity is highly likely to be the reality.

And we are still yet to understand whether an elected member is likely to weight these deliberations to the extent that they adopt the advice, which thus influences their final decision. The following discussion unpacks the nuances of these difficult circumstances and provides some insights into what elected members think about such challenges and how they deal with them.

Internal expert technical advice (council staff). Council staff are the first layer of expert technical advice available to elected members and generally provide the majority of advice. Even where external advice is involved, they are involved in procuring that advice through one of their council's numerous procurement processes. They can also, where necessary, provide access to peer review or independent advice to substantiate external advice. Only in rare circumstances can elected members seek independent advice directly.

In local government, the council employs the chief executive to administer the Local Government Act 2002 and the processes that form the basis of New Zealand's

local government democracy. All council staff are subsequently employed by the chief executive, or a nominated representative of the chief executive, to provide that advice. The advice elected members seek is subject to these processes.

It follows that the responsibility for providing advice to elected members ultimately resides with the chief executive. Principles are in place to steer council staff on how to seek and provide that advice. Elected members are clear on one of these principles. Namely any advice provided by or on behalf of the chief executive ought to be without an agenda or, as some refer to it, "free and frank".

> *[Technical advice] can be shaped by the evidence. It can also be shaped by community support; that's why you go through the process, why it's so important. That's why it's all so important that it's free and frank and not slanted. What you don't want is that when you dig a little further, or scratch the surface, you find the information you are receiving is tilted in a certain way. (Mayor/DeputyCC04223)*

Other elected members go further, wanting the advice to be fearless as well.

> *I'm not sure that we always get free, frank and fearless. (CouncillorCC10530)*[129]

Such comments raise at least two questions. First, what is it that the elected member quoted above thinks there is to fear? Second, what ramifications does the fearful thing have for council staff? The evidence suggests this perspective is more widespread than one elected member making an isolated comment.

> *. . . it's really important that politicians say, "I want the naked truth – free, frank and fearless advice." I think you do [generally] but I think it depends on*

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[129] See also Appendix B, B.30.

the person, on the official concerned and also perhaps on how the politicians react when they hear stuff they don't like. (Chair/DeputyRC451677)[130]

This perspective also suggests council staff ought to have some level of resilience to deal with the elected members' response to their advice. It would then be naïve to suggest that somehow council staff are not accommodating these responses, even if it is only a perception. Herein lies a dilemma. As soon as there is a hint of political influence from council staff, elected members take a dim view of that advice. In extreme circumstances, they may dismiss it outright.

I'll be honest and say I think the CEO is quite political. I mean, I call him the 16th politician. And so, I'm considered when something comes through from the CEO I go: How is this politically hanging? Who is he pleasing? Where's he playing in? Who's he spoken to? (CouncillorCC0147)[131]

External expert technical advice (consulting advice). External advice is sought for two main reasons. The first is when the council staff do not have the expertise required to provide technical advice on a given subject. For example, for a small rural council with just a few employees, it is simply impossible to expect that those employees would have all the technical expertise required for all circumstances in local government (e.g., the expertise required for an optical limitation surface assessment the Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand's Part 71: CAA Consolidation – Designation and Classification of Airspace (2008) to designate and protect airspace around an airport). Logically, in this instance council staff would seek support from external technical experts to provide advice and input into any proposed capital investment.

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[130] See also Appendix B, B.31.

[131] See also Appendix B, B.32.

I am interested in getting commentary from external parties. [What sort of external parties?] That could be consultants, could be architects, and could be building construction people, looking at the town hall as an example. There is internal and external. (CouncillorCC0291)[132]

Second, in some circumstances, investment decisions are coupled with expert technical advice provided by other parties as part of a wider application. Where the proposals are also associated with large capital investment decisions, council staff can and do seek an independent peer review of that advice (e.g., an independent geotechnical review of the methodology for a particular building design).

Usually it is the intermittent nature of the requirement for the advice that sets the tone as to whether these skills are universally available or not – although such advice is more likely to be needed in smaller councils, as noted above. Whatever the circumstance, elected members provide evidence that they treat this cohort of experts differently from council staff. This in itself is interesting, as this research has uncovered that some technical advice is seen as more valuable than others.

In exploring their attitudes further, this research found some elected members are strongly supportive of the technical advice from consultants.

[We] rely on it happily, particularly for infrastructure and the water area. As governors, we rely on that technical advice, that they've got it right and they've got the timing right and, honestly, I'm not a civil engineer, I'm not a scientist; I'm not this and I'm not that. So we do rely on both staff and consultants to give us good advice to make good strategic decisions. (Mayor/DeputyCC381422)

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[132] See also Appendix B, B.33.

Some other elected members are less sure of the value of consultants' advice but recognise the risk of having few or limited options to seek advice.

> *I think it's mixed and again you get what you pay for and that's the issue. I think there will always be people who aren't very good but if you've got a bigger staff [pool] then they'll be taken along by the better ones. If you can only afford one person to do all of your infrastructure stuff you probably [have a] high risk actually. And then you get a consultant to capture [minimise] it. The councillors often don't know how to manage consultants. (Chair/DeputyRC451676)*[133]

As another group of elected members see it, common sense usurps expert technical advice and it is better to deal with issues 'in house'.

> *How can I say this without sounding a bit arrogant? I find common sense is the best thing. A little bit of common sense goes a long, long way and a lot of stuff, as I say, can be in a text book but that means nothing when that consultant has gone home and leaves us with the problem here. (Mayor/DeputyDC391456)*

4.5.3   The Advice

The rationale that elected members use to describe the benefits of expert technical advice is, in principle, simple. That is, their decisions ought to be made using the facts and other forms of evidence to inform their decisions.

> *Technical information enables you to at least deal with some fact. (CouncillorCC02106)*

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[133] See also Appendix B, B.34a–b.

This comment implies that elected members have a lot of information to deal with that is not fact. As we will explore further shortly, their response to this information seems to be more about trust than fact.

Evidence indicates that the facts from technical experts hinge on three themes that are at best subjective in nature: the quality of information provided by the technical experts; their reputation; and the level of trust elected members have in them. The following discussion explores each of these themes in turn to establish how elected members treat technical advice. It also explores how their approach to the advice influences their deliberations before making an investment decision.

Quality of information. Elected members believe the quality of advice they receive is at best variable. Some elected members believe the advice is first class.

> *We are blessed . . . some of the things we do are at the forefront of science and at the forefront of technology. In many ways with the farming practices, with air quality and flood protection, without the high-quality staff we have we'd be sunk and I think the regional council here is blessed with the staff it's got. I think they are magnificent, I really do. (CouncillorRC261006)*[134]

In other cases, the advice seems to be of a lower quality, for a number of reasons. One issue may be affordability, where there are trade-offs between the quality of advice the community is expecting and the reality of what the council is paying for. This is the first sign of the existence of a credibility issue.

> *I think that sometimes local councils cannot afford the best possible people to advise them. (CouncillorCC271034)*

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[134] See also Appendix B, B.35.

As pointed out earlier, however, elected members may not adopt even the best-quality advice, so it is unclear whether affordability offers a material argument. A second, concerning strand of evidence is that advice has been hidden from elected members. This is the second sign of a credibility issue.

> *Technical advice hasn't always been there. It has, by the look of it, been hidden from us. There were a lot of gaps in our financials that were there for a damn good reason because they hid or masked things, in my opinion. (CouncillorDC281059)*

The implication for elected members is that this credibility issue can and will erode positive attitudes like trust. The other circumstance that similarly erodes trust is just straight-out poor-quality advice.

> *The CEO also acknowledged that staff had to earn council's trust by the quality of their work. To be frank, some of the work that we did in those days was crap. I couldn't believe my first annual plan. It was just [a] joke. People [are] bullshitting all over the place. If you take it in its purest sense, when you sit there as a councillor you want good information and I felt, not only with this one, but I felt with some other projects that we were getting poor advice. (CouncillorCC07389)*

Elected members' questions about the quality of advice logically then pointed to the second theme. The quality of the advice – either good or bad – had a profound influence on the level of trust they had in the technical experts.

Trust in experts. As with their variable experiences of quality of their technical advice, elected members vary considerably in their level of trust in technical experts. Interestingly they seem to have far greater trust in science and engineering experts who have quantitative evidence to support their position.

> *Technical experts and council staff are very useful. I mean, let's face it, if you've got to make decisions on infrastructure you have to have a pretty comprehensive system backing it. I have great respect for officers, just regard them as colleagues really, the senior officers and I think by and large most of us out of the politicians have a very constructive relationship with staff members. (Mayor/DeputyCC3461715)*[135]

And on that trust, more can be built.

> *I've actually been incredibly impressed with the calibre of our staff. I think we've got a very talented and professional team in just about every area. So I do take council officers advice fairly seriously. I'm learning to trust officers. . . . I mean, it's an evolving process isn't it? (CouncillorCC10528)*[136]

In contrast, some elected members have no trust in technical experts at all.

> *I might get the answer that will satisfy me, that will give me back my confidence so I've sort of gone boomerang, I'll take the external [advice] any time. (CouncillorDC421569)*[137]

A number of elected members offered a simple way of addressing any issues of trust – namely, through a peer review.

> *As long as it has been peer-reviewed and external consultants/engineers have had a look at it, they've had their arguments and they come with, "Yes, we agree on this, we can now take it to councillors". (CouncillorDC02109)*

In the absence of peer review, elected members had to resort to considering an expert's credibility or reputation to establish their level of trust in the advice.

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[135] See also Appendix B, B.36a–e.

[136] See also Appendix B, B.37.

[137] See also Appendix B, B.38.

The fundamentals have to be comfortable for me and the risk has to be
measured and I can see where that is. [It's] probably the person themselves,
[and] the credibility that comes with that. I place a lot of credibility on
somebody who has done it before who has got skin in the game.
(CouncillorDC421571)

Ultimately, elected members seem to turn to the credibility and reputation of the technical expert to weigh their decisions. As the following discussion demonstrates, elected members may take account of many different factors when they are considering the reputation of those providing advice.

Reputation of experts. The reputation and credibility of expert technical advice is the last theme this research identified as guiding elected members' response to technical expert advice. Anyone offering subject-matter expertise must be independent. The political environment of local government is generally regarded as being extremely tough – meaning, in this context, that advice is put to the test. Furthermore, elected members have almost no boundaries as to how and when they might test this advice.

It's the evidence, but where has that evidence come from? Do I trust the parties
involved? Do I trust the evidence being presented? Has it been peer-reviewed?
Does it stack up? (CouncillorCC04236)[138]

The testing environment can manifest itself in several ways. It can simply involve a vote of no-confidence, where elected members do not agree with the advice as a way forward.

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[138] See also Appendix B, B.39a–b.

> *Unfortunately, with the ASB situation some politicians refused to accept the advice and then it was a delayed process. We then had hold-ups as a result of political opposition. (CouncillorCC4797)*[139]

Ultimately though, the reality is that a decision is still required, and a balance of conflicting expert opinion is a good example of where the expert's reputation is likely to lead elected members to value one opinion over another.

> *Well you have to take experts' advice, don't you, because they are experts? But some of the hearings I've been on there are experts covering the same problem with two different answers, two different versions. (CouncillorDC17751)*

These three themes above – the quality of information elected members feel they are receiving, their trust in expert technical advice and the reputation of technical experts – all have an influence on how elected members weight that advice.

4.5.4 Engagement with Technical Experts

The findings outlined above highlight a range of considerations elected members make when approaching, collating, discussing, deliberating on and ultimately determining whether to use this advice when making decisions. The evidence below gives some insight into how they weight that advice when they do decide to use it.

Part of this analysis focuses on unpacking why elected members appear to be replacing a citizen preference deficit with a technical expert bias or weighting. Another possibility, in keeping with the initial analysis, is that they may be turning to another decision influence for some altogether different reason than the one proposed in this section. This section also identifies those reasons and the

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[139] See also Appendix B, B.40.

circumstances in which decisions are being weighted differently. Furthermore, it offers a rationale for why elected members have that view.

In the first instance, elected members have identified that the advice council staff provide is substantially different from that of independent professional subject-matter experts. They also treat these two cohorts in significantly different ways.

> *Does it [expert technical advice] change through the process? Undoubtedly. Because, there will be officer and technical expertise that will go into a project . . . (Mayor/DeputyCC04217)*

Moreover, the perspectives of council staff and independent professional subject-matter experts are not necessarily the same as the advice from a council's senior management.

> *. . . but whether or not that is the same thinking as what you'll get from a senior management level can be quite different, about return, necessity, and priority for the city. (Mayor/DeputyCC04217)*[140]

These potential differences create an interesting circumstance for those providing advice. It would seem that some proposals from a technical expert are worth consideration, but also that senior council managers can influence that advice and arrest the progress of certain proposals. This creates some frustration for elected members.

> *In the context of a new project or an idea being shaped and formed in the embryonic phase, and if there is little officer support, it's much more difficult to try and get something off the ground as one or two people [council officers] can commence or kill a project, depending on what their own preferences are. (Mayor/DeputyCC04216)*

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[140] See also Appendix B, B.41a–b.

Furthermore, some elected members have some sense certain senior council officials do not hold them in high regard. Others think these officials see elected members' role as being to ensure the officials' projects are completed to their own plan.

> *Elected members are wildcards. They could undermine a project. They are not, generally, well respected. (CouncillorCC09484)*[141]

With this in mind, elected members have clear expectations of what information they require from their technical experts and how they receive it. Specifically they expect the information to be in context, accurate and credible, with options and some guidance through a recommendation, including a rationale for the proposed way forward.

> *For me, [the technical expert's role is] information gathering. Understanding an assessment of what infrastructure exists, putting it into the context of future requirements and creating that evidence that can be used as a platform for future decision-making. (Mayor/DeputyCC04211)*[142]

Yet advice meeting these expectations appears less forthcoming than elected members would like. In fact, some elected members are sceptical about whether expert advice is useful at all. The reasons for such views, which percolate through the research findings, are that the advice is often based on council staff ideology, subject to manipulation by both council staff and elected member peers, and not transparent or even misleading for those who are seeking information to support an investment decision.

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[141] See also Appendix B, B.42.

[142] See also Appendix B, B.43a–c.

It's so broad and so complex – that knowledge obviously moves on, so I'm sceptical about expertise to some extent because the ability to know is so complex for any human being, even for someone who does spend all of their life researching and gaining knowledge, so I come with that level of scepticism. (CouncillorCC03185)[143]

All too often these sorts of circumstances distance elected members from the technical experts. Another, somewhat darker set of circumstances that elected members have identified is when council staff (at least the decision-makers within a council) try to influence the process, the outcomes and even the elected members themselves to achieve what they see as the way forward for a proposal. As elected members describe it, this approach involves seducing elected members with information to suit a council officer's agenda, 'hooking in' and bullying elected members, using stonewalling tactics to achieve their own outcomes or simply blocking any emerging initiatives that elected members might like to consider.

You are quite reliant on experts to give you information. If an expert wants to garner the facts in a way that will help get you to reach the conclusion they want you to reach, you could be in trouble. (CouncillorCC19809)[144]

Elected members ultimately have the say. And having their say seems to be about elected members' values and the value judgements they form when making those final decisions. With these values and the privileges that come with their role, they are completely within their rights to consider expert opinion and then summarily dismiss it.

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[143] See also Appendix B, B.44a–f.

[144] See also Appendix B, B.45a–d.

> *There is no neutrality. I mean, officers will either have an unconscious bias or*
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> *a conscious bias; there is no value-free system out there. I mean, the*
>
> *recommendations that we will be getting from the staff will be based on,*
>
> *"Actually we think it's fine there are 10 homes flooded a year" or "We don't*
>
> *think it's fine." Actually, [elected members] will have to make a value*
>
> *judgement. (Mayor/DeputyCC501886)*[145]

In summary, the evidence above suggests that, as for citizen preferences, elected members do not necessarily think expert technical advice is highly influential on their decisions (Table 4.3). While they seemingly have a healthy respect for expert technical advice, in many circumstances they question it. The challenge for the experts is that these circumstances seem to be eroding the influence of their advice on large capital investments.

As with citizen preferences, elected members seem to support the idea that expert technical advice belongs to the suite of considerations they should take into account. Yet invariably, again, they seem to have reasons for downgrading the influence of this source.

The picture that is developing is becoming more intriguing. If neither citizen preferences nor expert technical advice has a strong weight in decision-making, what other influences might be more compelling? The next section considers this question with reference to the fourth theme, elected member influences.

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[145] See also Appendix B, B.46.

Table 4.3. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context – Expert Technical Advice Influences

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Throughout the decision-making process	Influences can come at any time during the process, including deliberations; the motivation for gathering information; reasons for seeking the advice; who will peer-review that advice and when; public consultation of any advice, how and when; knowledge of process gives an advantage to experienced representatives; the technical complexity of the advice; timing of advice in relation to citizen interpretations and preferences	Advice is not always balanced; some suspicion of experts providing advice; who sourced the advice for what reason has a bearing on its credibility; balancing conflicting technical advice is difficult for many; who provides the advice is important; advice should be good quality but it is not always easy to understand
Before deliberations	Reasons for seeking technical advice; the nature of that advice; the technical complexity of the advice and whether it is critical to the outcomes sought; how the advice is integrated into decision; how the evidence was gathered; whether enough time for thorough investigations was available; the experts' reputation; the global considerations or context of that advice; scenarios and sensitivities of any analysis of technical reviews; conflicting advice or options	Advice can be made to fit any agenda; concerns with how 'designed' the evidence is; the problem definition may or may not be accurately described for examination; the quality of the methodology and method/s is variable; the evidence is not always scoped well enough to answer the problem accurately; citizens' feedback on technical advice is limited; the materiality of that advice is variable; often the advice is contestable
Internal (council staff)	The positive or negative reputation of an advisor holds significant weight; ability to explain technical results is a skill; timeliness of advice and questions against that advice; if any agendas exist, what they are; free, frank and fearless advice ought to be the norm and is applied in this way	Trust is important and related to: who the expert is; the expert's track record; the expert's relationship to the elected members; alignment to community outcomes variable; suspicion of staff agendas; not always free, frank and fearless; resilience of staff is variable; inexperience often used as an excuse not to consider; support for staff is variable
External (consulting advice)	Using external consultants is questionable to many; positive or negative reputation of advisor holds significant weight; ability to explain technical results is a skill; timeliness of advice and questions against that advice have credibility; advice comes with no agenda and a sound rationale; assumptions are realistic; sensitivity of assumptions is understood	Trust is important and related to: who the expert is; the expert's track record; the importance of the advice to the decision is variable; reputational risk gives insight to credibility; advice that meets needs is variable; assumptions are questionable; do not necessarily think advice is highly influential on their decision

Table 4.3. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context – Expert Technical Advice Influences (continued)

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
The advice	Technically robust; referenced with evidence; repeatable and reproducible; the extent of the advice meets and solves the problem; the advice is from a reputable, trustworthy source; advice is not contestable; advice is low risk; advice is fit for purpose; positive attitude to advice; confidence in results and findings; advice would withstand a peer review	Struggle with establishing credibility if advice is contrary to expectations or hopes; technically sound advice loses credibility if contestable; other experts or peer reviewer would settle on similar assumptions; confidence in advice is essential, otherwise elected members feel exposed; advice is not necessarily seen as the most important consideration for a decision
Engagement with technical experts	Experts are approachable and respectful; opportunities to question assumptions; advice is logical, even if it does not provide the expected results; advice is independent of council staff; meets their demands to make an informed decision; how contestable the advice is; whether the advice can be influenced	Some variability with access to technical experts; various translation challenges from experts to elected members; usefulness is variable; often experts are perceived as aloof or too technical; questions over whether the expense justifies the requirement to seek advice; the technical advice does not meet the expectations set down in the problem being investigated; a necessary element for some decisions, but do the bare minimum

4.6   Elected Member Influences

This research has identified elected members can be strongly influenced by their peers. This section looks deeply into the political environment and how elected members' peers influence each other up to the deliberations and the final decision. Peer influence here includes the less common influence of elected members of other territorial authorities and central government politicians.

The following themes were revealed from elected members' observations of their own behaviours and insights developed from the consequences of their actions. This analysis also revealed influences they had on each other through their actions.

4.6.1   Peer Influences

Peer influences – throughout the decision-making process. In the first instance, evidence supports the notion that political influence can happen at any phase of the decision-making process. Although the level of influence varies depending on the circumstances, influence of some sort is evident before deliberations (e.g., gathering political support to fund a flood mitigation project, a new library building or town hall upgrade), during deliberations (e.g., seeking voting support in favour of the proposed investment) and after deliberations (e.g., seeking co-funding support from central government agencies or ministries for a proposed investment).

Peer influences – before deliberations. One inherent theme before deliberations centres on the requirements to initiate a proposed investment (e.g., how well elected members understand the legislative processes to ensure their decisions meet the thresholds set out in the Local Government Act 2002).

> *I really had to be guided by my colleagues. I did know the sector and [was] able to debate legislation, but when I came into local government I had very*

>   *little understanding of what its role was and how things sort of fit together.*
>   *(CouncillorCC12594)*

Peer influences – before deliberations (building up to the council meeting). Some other themes become apparent before deliberations for the first time. Several of these concern the nature and circumstance of any elected member in relation to any investment decision they may be required to make (e.g., how the length of tenure of some elected members affects the considerations of other elected members).

>   *Some days I think, "This is great, I've got the hang of it." Then the next day I'm*
>   *just so far out of my depth I wonder where I am. (CouncillorDC301108)*[146]

Related themes are elected members' views and opinions about their peers' opinions or views (e.g., the entrenched ideas that some elected members see in their colleagues) and the leadership style and nature of the cohort of elected members in the chamber (e.g., how strong leadership influences certain elected members and whether the elected members are brave enough to make hard calls if it contravenes that leadership).

>   *We weren't all that popular with the mayor at the time for doing that – she*
>   *saw us [as acting in a way that was] a sort of weakening but it wasn't a*
>   *matter of weakening, it was a matter of people and saying, "We are not going*
>   *to go out there and arrest any of our citizens over a bloody building". It wasn't*
>   *worth it. (Mayor/DeputyDC391453)*

Table 4.4 summarises how and when peers may influence other elected members.

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[146] See also Appendix B, B.87.

Table 4.4. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context – Elected Member Influences – from Their Peers

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Throughout the decision-making process	Peers from other councils (e.g., regional council); central government ministers; what the peer's involvement is, and when and why it is instigated; political factions within proposals to invest; the influence of the legislation in peer involvement and the peer's influences within that	Their peers often have agendas; central government involvement tends to be treated with suspicion; the motivation needs to be understood
Before deliberations	The peer's experience (e.g., tenure time); the background of the peer (e.g., a professional or not); the peer's engagement in the process; how entrenched their peers are in their views vs how much they listen to other positions; the leadership style through to deliberations to effect influence; the ward the peer represents	Wary of opinion from uninformed peers; wary of other peers agendas; political motivation for peer involvement

4.6.2   Elected Member Views

Elected member views – on their peers and of their peers' views. It is a natural transition from a discussion of how elected members are influenced by their peers to an exploration of how elected members see themselves as influencing their peers. Local government contains some big personalities, many with significant capabilities and experience. Many are notable leaders in their communities. The research found that, as much as the influences might operate in circumstances driven by process and procedure, it was the politics and people that left the strongest impression on the elected members who were making the decisions.

The views elected members had of one another in the decision-making process were not limited to the circumstances that forced them together to make a decision; more than that, they were an analysis of how other elected members made decisions in relation to the decision elements identified in the model, which provided a context for interpreting their descriptions. And the elected members interviewed were forthright in their descriptions.

Elected members' views of their peers generally fall into two categories. The first is about what information and arguments their peers used to secure a decision from them in relation to a particular standpoint – either for or against any investment proposal – albeit with the biases and/or persuasions any elected member had in their particular circumstance (e.g., a non-professional Māori male elected member from a rural ward within a district council in their third or fourth term). The second category concerns how the elected members acted in trying to secure a decision, as opposed to what they said. Put another way, the first category focuses on who the elected members are and what they said; the second is more concerned with

how they acted. Each deals with subjective views that were either for or against a particular outcome, or approached it in a positive or negative way.

Elected members feel they have a responsibility to lead. In fact, some elected members feel this is their first responsibility.

> *I think it is very important that the elected representatives are leading and are seen to be leading, and I think the system will break down [if we don't]. (CouncillorCC13637)*

How elected members choose to demonstrate these qualities seems to be based on a mixture of their own views and the prevailing circumstance in which they are considering a decision. Some elected members have a strong sense that the repercussions for making the wrong decision can be severe if they do not consider citizens' preferences.

> *If you fail to take your community with you, particularly on large ticket items, you'll crash and burn so there is always that political side of your job, where you have to reapply every three years. (CouncillorDC19805)*

Large capital investment decisions can be deeply emotional. An example is the recent focus on earthquake-prone buildings and the costs related to strengthening them to meet the New Zealand Building Code. A significant infrastructure investment, which can amount to tens of millions of dollars for a single building, is associated with many of these decisions. For example, to mitigate the risk of the old Wellington Town Hall, the council considered two options on the grounds of public safety: to strengthen the building at a cost in the order of $40m, or to demolish it and consider a new building. The circumstance and political pressure from some sections of the community suggested in reality only the first option existed: the building would never be demolished, even if for some it was the more fiscally prudent option.

There is a political imperative. If we decided to demolish the town hall there would be marches and we would be thrown out. It happened when the Michael Fowler Centre was built and the plan was to demolish the town hall so I think there is a pretty strong political awareness that we'd all be out in the street and it wouldn't get demolished. (Mayor/DeputyCC501894)

Testing the accuracy of this prediction was a risk neither this councillor nor the majority of others was prepared to take. The council decided to refurbish 'the old town hall'. Clearly, elected members feel responsible to their communities for the decisions they make. Of interest here is the declared motivation of this particular elected member (and others) for making this decision.

A converse view among other elected members is that a political imperative has had no part in any decisions in their experience. Their view is founded on the premise they were elected into a position to make decisions on behalf of the community, and that was simply what they would do.

You wouldn't give greater weight to citizen preferences. (CouncillorDC20854)[147]

As well as thinking about how the community influences their decisions, elected members recognise that they influence each other. Less obvious are when this influence starts and to what extent it occurs. This research demonstrates it can be manifest early in an elected member's representative career.

I was persuaded by the mayor and a number of elected members to stand for the community board and got myself elected with, you know, with quite a lot of support around me for a vacancy that was being created in my ward. So I

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[147] See also Appendix B, B.60.

stood and was elected and that's sort of the beginnings of my time as an

elected member. And look, I had to do my time. (CouncillorCC06321)

With this nomination comes an ever-present reality: representation of the communities that elected members act on behalf of is omnipresent in what they do and how they act. Moreover, some elected members will go to some extreme measures to see through certain promises or outcomes they have campaigned on once they are 'in office'. Observers describe these sorts of approaches, often linked to this initial affiliation, as being on the edge of the 'spirit of democracy'.

One of my darling colleagues organised a very large group of people to put

submissions in, and most of them were form submissions saying, "We want a

very expensive swimming pool". (CouncillorCC05263)

The elected member in question thought it was reasonable to pursue this course of action; a number of their peers did not. Not all political influences on a decision are so overt, however.

I found myself planting an idea and dropping the hint of a solution but always

[outwardly] remaining neutral. (CouncillorCC0122)

The challenge with these types of circumstances is that, when they are revealed to the affected elected members, a substantial cost in terms of loss of trust and goodwill can be involved. The research shows many are left disillusioned, sometimes angry, sometimes betrayed and sometimes even vengeful (utu). What manifests fundamentally is an environment that lacks trust.

And I've worked under two different mayors. So those positions, and your

ability to affect things, were directly related as to whether you'd say yes to

> *things. I just didn't trust some of the decisions they were making, and there*
>
> *were good reasons for that. (CouncillorCC07381)*[148]

Unpacking such circumstances further reveals how destructive political agendas can be, as numerous comments highlight.

> *Given all the agendas of the councillors, they often destroy good work.*
>
> *(CouncillorCC08447)*[149]

As the sources of influences are unpacked, as the weight of citizen preferences are given due regard (purposefully, artificially or not at all), as the costs of such actions are evaluated (e.g., the loss of trust) and as all agendas are exposed (e.g., positions on a decision are declared), the analysis rests on three broad types of voting positions elected members take: supporting an investment proposal; opposing it; and being truly undecided.

What happens next is at the crux of the process that underpins our democracy. It is at this point where the nature and personal style of an elected member will determine what actions they take to influence their peers with the aim of securing their vote – one way or another.

Conversely, the nature and personal style of an elected member who is being pressured to vote in a particular direction will determine how they feel and what actions they might consider in response to that pressure. Elected members' approaches to their peers and the responses to those approaches give an insight into the influences operating in the environment of these deliberations.

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[148] See also Appendix B, B.61.

[149] See also Appendix B, B.57a–b.

Some elected members are open to the democratic ideal. That is, they consider the other ideas and views of their peers as part of their deliberations.

> *I think you should be able to be influenced by your peers. (CouncillorDC19822)*

Others are less easily influenced.

> *If I'm ignorant of the thing and I can't get wised-up, I let myself be influenced by those who I assume know a bit more, but I can be a stubborn bugger. (CouncillorDC23921)*

As the comment above illustrates, when elected members have little experience they are more likely to be influenced by experienced elected members. This does not always occur with the approval of other elected members.

> *[The mayor] is a good mayor, don't get me wrong, he's passionate about it but he's actually disconnected a bit more from the community itself, from the reality of what's happening and he's quite influential on new councillors, which is a little bit frustrating from my point of view. (CouncillorDC401489)[150]*

Further, some elected members are more easily swayed than others.

> *It happens. You only need a council with a few very competent but very vocal individuals and they can sway a decision relative to the merits of their argument. If you don't have the similar skill set sitting around the table you tend to get swayed by the person who would appear to have the institutional knowledge. (Chair/DeputyRC24956)[151]*

Based on the view that some elected members find it difficult to make decisions, or that they are called out by their peers for appearing to struggle with the

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[150] See also Appendix B, B.63a–b.

[151] See also Appendix B, B.64a–c.

task, some elected members think a number of their peers are simply not 'cut out' for making hard decisions.

> *Big infrastructure projects are scary. It's easier doing nothing. I remember, this is the very reason I said before, "You're not actually cut out for this, mate because you are scared of responsibility. You took on the job, you stood for council knowing you have to make the decisions but you won't make them." Well, if you're not fair [and just maintain the status quo] you'll not make them and you'll decline to do anything because it's too risky to do anything, it's easier to do nothing. (CouncillorDC18796)*

Following this theme, many elected members voiced concerns about the competency of their peers, considering they were not well informed and did not have the skills to make good decisions. This capability question was raised many times. Opinions varied on whether it is difficult to attract good candidates to run for council, which some saw as the reason for the problem. Some elected members commented on the lack of education of their peers. Another deep concern for some is that many elected members lack the commercial skills needed for governing an effective council.

> *Commercial reality is not something that's readily understood by the majority of councillors, which is maybe not a fault of the legislation; it's more of a fault of the people who put their hands up to be elected and generally they're not commercial animals. It can be challenging for all, but applying commercial solutions to situations is near impossible. (CouncillorRC25969)[152]*

Some elected members suggest otherwise.

> *The role that your peers play in influencing decisions is they are a good sounding board. We are fortunate that we've got a reasonably coherent*

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[152] See also Appendix B, B.65.

council; we don't have political factions and personality conflicts. There's very

good interchange between the commercial people and the social people, and

some of the practical people. (CouncillorDC20850)

A further factor contributing to how elected members view their peers and to

what extent they are influenced by them is deeply interwoven into the specific events

in the debating chamber when deliberations to decide on an investment proposal are

initiated. The debating chamber is where democracy is put into action.

As part of this action, some important factors influence the debate, as the

elected members identified in the interviews. The first is the nature and type of

investment being sought and what type of decision the council officers need to make

within the range of decisions typically involved in a large capital investment.

The social projects are the ones that – the libraries, the civic centre – are the

ones that people want to get engaged about. They don't want to hear about a

mains sewers renewal or infrastructure under the ground; they just say get on

and do it – that's core business. (Mayor/DeputyCC471747)[153]

The second factor influencing a debate, as described by elected members, is

the quality of the information presented to support an informed discussion and an

evidence-based investment decision. Some observations are favourable.

Technical experts provide pretty good information and it's quite a wide variety

but we will still debate that. Again with the trolley buses we had different

experts giving us different advice so we still have to make a decision. It is

reputation, the work they've done before if they can talk knowledgably about

other solutions where they have worked. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC321169)

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[153] See also Appendix B, B.66.

Other observations are not so favourable.[154]

The third factor is the greater debating skills of one elected member over another, using the evidence provided to construct a sound argument for one investment preference. Some find the debating chamber intimidating.

> *Some councillors are much better, if you like, or much more eloquent speakers at the council table than others. And I put myself in the category as one of those who isn't especially eloquent at the council table. It can be a fairly intimidating arena. (CouncillorCC15706)*

Some evidence indicates that the debating chamber is not as democratic as some elected members would like. They contest that some important decisions are made long before they reach the debating chamber.

> *Many councillors have already made up their mind on a particular issue before they go in to vote. Does the debate at the table at that point actually serve a great deal of purpose? (CouncillorCC15707)*

A final factor relates to how the mayor or chair runs and manages these meetings and the deliberations where all elected members have an opportunity to voice an opinion. Unsurprisingly, this circumstance seems to be driven by leadership style. Some elected members give good examples of deliberations where they have plenty of opportunity to debate.

> *The debates are robust but it's interesting when you get . . . It's like any team, you've got a collection of individuals and you tend to find that the ones that want to push a few agendas and who are maybe a bit more strong-willed than the others will quickly try and take some under their wing for no other reason but to make sure they get their vote. (Mayor/DeputyCC331217)*

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[154] See also Appendix B, B.67.

Some elected members are less complimentary about the quality of debate when the basis for the debate itself seemed ineffectual.

> *The chair was very keen to have a very good consultative process, and it has been exhaustively comprehensive, but the thing is it is bullshit because there is no money to realign the road, and move this . . . There is no money to do that. So why are you offering people something that's not going to happen? Why not say to people – that's where leadership comes in – say, "This is what we are going to do; this is the only option we can afford." (CouncillorDC11566)*

In this research, elected member influences are defined as the personal view or views that each elected member holds on whether or not to support a large capital investment proposal. This section provides evidence that elected members are using a number of important influences to inform their views in making these decisions.

These views fall into two broad themes. The first reflects the elected members' upbringing and the type of person they are today. It is about the elements that represent who they are, their values and any ideological stances they have adopted. It also includes their personal circumstance (e.g., ethnicity and gender), their local government experience and the positions they have held (e.g., council committees) and their length of tenure. This theme includes other personal influences as well (e.g., level of education and vocational history).

The second theme reflects the type of council elected members represent (e.g., urban or rural, regional or local), the nature and circumstance of the council (e.g., a district, city or regional council). It also includes elements like the wealth of the communities that support the council and whether a community is predisposed to engage or participate in a council's operations.

Elected members had a plethora of views on how their behaviours can and do influence their decisions. Moreover, it is about not just how much weight these

influences had on their opinions during their deliberations, but also how they were influencing others when they conveyed these views.

Finally, this section helps to unpack who the elected members really are and what disturbed them so much that they felt a duty to become involved in local government politics. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 have highlighted how tough it is for both private citizens and technical experts (either council staff or professional subject-matter experts) to engage meaningfully with elected members. Unsurprisingly, the research also shows how tough the local government environment can be for elected members, both personally (including for their families and friends) and professionally. Through improving understanding of these themes, the research provides some insight into what has motivated a number of them.

Elected member views – on their peers' actions. It is from this point in the deliberations that an altogether different layer of political influence manifests itself. The focus shifts from what the elected members think of their peers to how they acted towards them when trying to influence their decision on how to vote.

Elected members describe a variety of actions others have taken in an attempt to sway their voting position, ranging from gentle persuasion to extreme bullying. The evidence also suggests the extreme peer pressure that elected members are sometimes exposed to is not uncommon in certain circumstances – notably, when large capital investments are at issue and when it becomes known the elected members are in opposition to the way forward that their peers are proposing. The pressure applied here included pressure from mayors, chairs or one of their fellow representatives who was knowingly acting on behalf of the senior member.

Some attempts to sway a peer's vote are subtle.

And at the time, I signed up to that motion [to vote], although I won't go into the circumstances, but it was all a bit rushed and seemed to make sense at the time. And then, so that became public but a certain number of councillors – in fact, it was quite a substantial number of councillors – were agreeing to this motion going through, then when it did finally go to a vote, having done further research and realising that I had kind of been pushed into it at the time. (CouncillorCC15695)

Other attempts are less than subtle. Some of these attempts are more insidious.

I think you should always have that right as a councillor, if you like, to express that different point of view or to raise concerns, and you shouldn't have to endure, in a good environment, those concerns that I raised when I thought I was getting ridiculed, and that wasn't just one or two times, it was a number of times. I don't think you should have to endure ridicule. I've been ostracised because you think differently or raise those concerns. (CouncillorCC07412)[155]

Some of the key drivers for these circumstances seem to be, in varying degrees, ideological differences. The influence of an ideological difference on an elected member's own stance can vary significantly from one elected member to another. Similarly, the way that elected members respond to pressure from what appears as an ideological position varies as much as the positions elected members take in trying to influence them.

Certain councils differ substantially from one another in terms of whether their elected members have any central government party affiliations. At one extreme, elected member seek and gain party 'tickets' (e.g., a Labour ticket for elected members in

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[155] See also Appendix B, B.69.

Wellington City Council); at the other, local government representation is independent

of central government party affiliations (e.g., at Whakatane District Council).

> *I believe I was one of the first to come in to this council . . . [as an]*
>
> *independent. (CouncillorCC02113)*

Some councils are not influenced by party political ideology. In these settings,

where it manifests itself, senior elected members actively discourage it.

> *I think we don't have any party politics so everyone elected, in the whole time*
>
> *that I've been a member here, every single person that's ever been elected has*
>
> *been elected as an individual, independent. (Mayor/DeputyCC331237)*[156]

The challenge of having ideology as an influence in decision-making in local

government is that decisions are on behalf of and for communities and, by definition,

are deliberative in nature. This research found the opinion that when political ideology

influences large capital investment decisions, it is, at a minimum, problematic.

> *I've seen it tried and I've seen it fail. I've tried to remain absolutely impartial*
>
> *in terms of my political, National political, views because I think that at the*
>
> *end of the day you are there to represent the district and you're managing a*
>
> *business. That's what it is about. It's actually not about politics, because you're*
>
> *supporting red, green, blue in all of the things that you do, it doesn't matter.*
>
> *It's about what you're doing best for the community. (CouncillorDC16724)*

Another key driver for these circumstances seems to be based on the range of

values elected members have.

> *We're reasonably fortunate in that we have got a range of permeable voices*
>
> *around the table but they are stable but they aren't too rigid. There are more*
>
> *people who are interested in solving homelessness than others, but there is*

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[156] See also Appendix B, B.70.

nobody who would dismiss it. There are others who are more interested in
biodiversity than others, but nobody would dismiss that either and all of us are
reasonably keen on increasing prosperity in a way that I haven't actually seen
on the council [previously]. (Mayor/DeputyCC501878)

Evidence indicates some elected members have had to fight to maintain their values in making decisions.

You're a person with many hats and faces, without selling your values out.
I think too many of my colleagues flip-flop or sell down their values. Why?
It's easier. That's all. If you want to stand up for your values, you have to
bloody . . . (CouncillorCC0130)

Some others have a different view.

One thing I can say for my colleagues is, in general, they are pretty darn
committed to it and they go above and beyond what they are paid for. They are
paid pathetically and they do a lot of really good work. (CouncillorDC19837)

Others see a darker side to what happens behind closed doors. Elected members talk of political gaming. They offer examples of someone choosing to play politics to get re-elected, with securing votes seeming to be the most important task at hand. In these examples, their colleagues appear to be driven more by self-interest and self-preservation than by what is best for their communities.

There are games that get played, who has more or less indicated that their
personal views on a given issue were different to the way they voted because they
have made a particular stand, politically or ideologically. (CouncillorCC15692)[157]

Table 4.5 summarises how and when elected members may influence their peers.

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[157] See also Appendix B, B.71a–c.

Table 4.5. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context – Elected Member Influences – Views of Their Peers

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Throughout the decision-making process	Peers from other councils (e.g., regional council); central government ministers; what the peer's involvement is, and when and why it is instigated; political factions within proposals to invest; the influence of the legislation in peer involvement and the peer's influences within that	Their peers often have agendas; central government involvement tends to be treated with suspicion; the motivation needs to be understood
Before deliberations	The peer's experience (e.g., tenure time); the background of the peer (e.g., a professional or not); the peer's engagement in the process; how entrenched their peers are in their views vs how much they listen to other positions; the leadership style through to deliberations to effect influence; the ward the peer represents	Wary of opinion from uninformed peers; wary of other peers agendas; political motivation for peer involvement

4.6.3   Elected Member Influences as Individuals

Every elected member is an individual. Each one has their own personal set of values and belief that makes them into the individual they are. If it is their peers that are so obviously influencing them as individuals, what those peers are likely to influence is their values and beliefs. This is not always easy.

This research has found that values and beliefs had a strong influence on elected members' decisions. This section describes the nature of that influence.

Values. Values have been one of the most fundamental tenets elected members have identified as influencing their decisions. These important and lasting beliefs or ideals about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable have a major influence on their behaviours and attitudes when they are making decisions on large infrastructure investments. They also serve as broad guidelines for elected members' decisions. These personal reflections on their needs and desires, reconciled against what they think is good for their communities, are ultimately what elected members care about most in life. Values, then, are how each elected member knits together their own identity to give some coherence to their decision-making. For the purposes of this research, values can be thought of as decision-making guidelines that help elected members connect to their true selves.

> *Your value base, to me, is fundamentally what shapes you. It's the fundamental shaper. And then that value base has to, like, I've had my value base tested in the past by one or two decisions I've had to make that I knew that holding on to an embittered viewpoint that I had was not fair. (CouncillorCC02138)*[158]

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[158] See also Appendix B, B.47.

These values manifest themselves in diverse ways. Yet the commonality in the evidence is that they are what elected members are turning to when they are seeking a way to establish that position or stance on any investment proposal. The research also helps to explain what brings these disparate values together to become the anchor for elected members making decisions. Furthermore, it helps to establish context for any stance elected members might adopt and the nature of that stance. After all, taking a stance is one thing; understanding why is altogether different.

Without question, the evidence from elected members tells us their deliberations have at least one common thread. That is, they are all there on behalf of their communities – they are public servants first. The question is how they apply this perspective to the decisions they must make.

> *There is a fair degree of what you believe yourself or what you think is good. (CouncillorCC08449)*[159]

Public service for some elected members seems to come naturally, while for others it seems more like an anathema. Good evidence suggests those who are in this role of serving also think they ought to be the ones being served. It is hard to divorce the two circumstances. After all, they are also citizens and experience cognitive conflict because of that.

> *My father was a Methodist Minister, he was an activist and we fought for those most in need so it was bound to always be – regardless of what I did – I would always have a strong urge to work in communities. (CouncillorCC0165)*[160]

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[159] See also Appendix B, B.48.

[160] See also Appendix B, B.49.

Service comes with another edge. Decisions of the nature being explored here can be significant and have substantial long-term influences on a community. Some elected members feel this weight of responsibility more than others. Elected members also offer a sense that the best decisions are not necessarily forthcoming from local government, for one reason or another.

> *You can't afford for it to fail. And some other projects, for example, that would be good projects for the city that won't necessarily go ahead, because of other considerations. (Mayor/DeputyCC04214)*

What also became much clearer through this research is that elected members needed to establish a way of making sense out of all this complexity. Many reflected on a state of mind that over time did not conflict with their values, but rather helped them in making a complex decision. They often referred to this state of mind as "being pragmatic".

This perspective gives the first hint of how elected members intend to make decisions, notwithstanding any evidence that might have been presented to them to help them in their deliberations. Assuming elected members think they are rational beings, they themselves are making other assumptions when they think they can cut through all this complexity. First, they have a strong sense of being right. Second, having clarified the meanings of difficult concepts such as truth, belief, certainty or knowledge, they gain comfort from doing the right thing – or, in this case, making the right decision.

> *There are three considerations: evidence, level of community support and personal experience. So, for any project, without any evidence whatsoever, we'll engage in a level of community support, you could ask any councillor what their take on it would be; some would say, "Oh I need more information."*

> *But ultimately, they will have a leaning on it based on their own experience*
>
> *and beliefs on where they would like you to sit, where they would likely sit.*
>
> *(Mayor/DeputyCC04214)*[161]

This line of thinking suggests elected members use one or more mechanisms to trigger some level of pragmatism when they make these large, complex investment decisions. The evidence points to some fundamental philosophical construct of these themes as predominantly values based. They include the notions that, alongside being pragmatic, elected members ought to be fair, do what is right, apply a high degree of common sense and do what is best for their community – in their view.

> *Make those things work; it's important to make the city work. And sometimes,*
>
> *that means you've got to break some eggs to make those omelettes.*
>
> *(CouncillorCC05272)*[162]

Evidence also suggests that the counterfactual applies when elected members resist proposals with the same firm level of pragmatism.

In contrast to the findings reported in the earlier sections, which show elected members treated citizen preferences and expert technical advice almost at arm's length, the evidence is strong that elected member opinions explain some of the context and rationale for their decisions. More importantly, the evidence suggests these opinions carry a reasonable amount of weight when they do make their decisions.

Clearly values form one of the foundational contexts for elected members when making decisions, alongside what appear to be the lesser influences of citizen preferences and expert technical advice. In addition to their concerns with being

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[161] See also Appendix B, B.50.

[162] See also Appendix B, B.51.

pragmatic, fair and right and acting with common sense, as observed above, other themes that appear to resonate with elected members include that decisions are sensible, balanced, in context and with a long-term vision or plan of what the community seeks to achieve as a community. No less important is their recognition of the type of community that will follow and the legacy they will leave for their tamariki and mokopuna (children and grandchildren).

The notion of being sensible in decision-making can take many guises, but elected members' comments suggest that being sensible equates to being balanced. Chapter 1 has described what are often referred to as the four wellbeings: the economic, social, environmental and cultural constructs that together form one recognised way of explaining how our world and its communities fit together. Others have referred to it as akin to understanding the relationship between people, place and planet. Whatever the view, balance is deemed to be important. It is almost the very rationale for having a disparate group of people (elected members) come together with a common goal and make decisions with their variety of views on behalf of their communities – using the political vehicle we call democracy.

> *The one weighting I will personally apply less to is the economic benefit. Because I think we are obsessed with it. We are constantly justifying things on economic benefit when I would much rather say what we could do – in this case there will be a cultural impact. (CouncillorCC0172)*[163]

One strong theme has been the relatively weak influence of the broader strategic context for these types of decisions and the underpinning policy that ought to inform them. Some evidence suggests this circumstance is driven by the seeming

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[163] See also Appendix B, B.52a–c.

lack of understanding of how to reconcile the lofty heights of strategy and policy with the practical aspects that inform these types of investment decisions.

As a result, and somewhat surprisingly from this circumstance, at least on the face of it, the evidence indicates that strategic policy has an even weaker influence on these decisions. We will examine how elected members have been reconciling informed investment decision-making with the right strategic context, and where this context fits into the right policy settings at that time.

One underpinning theme, which may help us to understand how elected members approach strategy, is that many of them question whether their strategic plans are useful or clear. They also have explanations for why such a significant decision-making touchstone is less valuable than they might have expected.

> *In my opinion, [there are] a lot of people around the table who don't really have the confidence or a good strategic vision of where we want to take the city. (CouncillorCC09488)*[164]

What is even more interesting is the rationalisation that allows elected members to set aside these important considerations in favour of their values, with a sense that if you do the best you can, that is good enough.

> *I just think you've got to be professional, and honest and committed. It is your responsibility, ultimately, at the end of the day to represent the people who have elected you. I think you've just got to be accessible and just do the very best you can with your decision-making to make sure it's actually in the interest of the whole city even though you are representing people who elected you. (CouncillorCC13652)*

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[164] See also Appendix B, B.48a–b.

Having established that values are embedded in how elected members are making decisions, we can move on to one further theme that the evidence highlights as underpinning their decisions. After all, local government is a political environment. In this environment, it is not unexpected that ideology in one or more forms will present itself and have some, as yet to be determined, influence on the decisions elected members are tasked with making. We will now explore this decision element.

Ideology. The term ideology has many interpretations. It is most simply defined as a person's world view. More specifically, it is the lens through which we see the world and how we each understand or frame our own position in the world. It includes our relationship with others, as well as our individual purpose, role and path in life. It is about how we interpret the events and experiences of our life and ultimately determines how we make sense of things. It gives each of us an ordered view of the world and ultimately establishes our sense of our place in it. It makes sense of our relationship to others. It is deeply important to our human experience and typically something that we cling to and defend, whether or not we are conscious of doing so. As a result, what emerge for each of us are our interpretation of social structure and social order, and the suite of social interests that are supported by both.

In the ideologically political environment of local government, strong evidence suggests elected members tend to reflect the same ideologies as those of the political parties in central government. There are others, as we will explore, but mostly they are an influence afterthought in comparison (e.g., socialist). This ideological link appears stronger in councils in the Wellington cohort of this research than in councils of the Bay of Plenty. Moreover, it appears to have emerged relatively recently in local government, which begs the question, what has changed?

> *Wellington is a very political environment. It has a pretty big impact, in so far*
>
> *as party political impact [is concerned]. I also think in the earlier years of my*
>
> *time at council, it's probably less so. (CouncillorCC06333)*

Before we delve further into ideological nuances, elected members fall broadly into three groups in terms of their attitudes to ideology. The first are those who feel there is no strong ideological influence (political or otherwise) on decisions on large infrastructure investments. Second are those who are aware of the influences such ideologies have on their own deliberations but choose to disassociate themselves from those influences when making decisions. Finally, some elected members are adamant that they are elected with strong ideological convictions and that their communities understand this is the case. As a result, they feel justified in making decisions based on those convictions. In fact, the elected members in this group seem to generally agree that they are duty bound to uphold those convictions when making decisions.

A fourth group exists as well, but this will be explored in Section 4.7. These are the elected members whose decisions revolve heavily around not what they think their own ideological responsibilities are and how their ideology influences their decision, but rather what they see from their peers' opinions.

From a holistic view, clear evidence demonstrates ideology is influencing elected members' decisions.

> *I see decisions being made that are made for ideological reasons.*
> *(CouncillorCC14672)*

In addition, individual elected members use political ideology as leverage to seek office. In some places, some elected member candidates seek and gain political 'tickets', based on these very real political ideologies. More concerning still for the

decision-making process, elected members themselves state they have a sense they vote along these lines.

> *There are some councillors you can more or less predict the way that they will vote on given issues because you know where they stand, ideologically. I got in as an independent and I did have a certain gentleman who was offering to provide some funding for me during the campaign and I turned him down because I didn't want to be beholden to anyone, basically and I wanted to be able to treat every decision – make every decision – based on its merits. (CouncillorCC15692)*[165]

The problem such ideological influences create for any elected member who tries to keep an open mind to any particular circumstance is that they are seen as a barrier to rational decision-making. In one 'off the record' discussion, one elected member drew on an analogy of war in describing political ideology as akin to selecting which mountain elected members would choose to die on "at any cost". Yet, this elected member pointed out, decision-making on behalf of communities does not resemble anything near requiring people to die on mountain and such a combative outlook is counter-intuitive to building harmonious communities in a deliberative democracy. The following 'on the record' comment echoes these sentiments.

> *I think one of the biggest impediments to good local government is the influence of party politics . . . communities should wake up to the fact that they don't want people there who are there to do anything based on political ideology, but to do things based on the future of the community. (Mayor/DeputyDC141529)*

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[165] See also Appendix B, B.54a–b.

It comes as no surprise, then, that those members who have a sense of duty to make decisions that do not compromise their ideological stance will not shift their views on any particular issue if they feel it compromises their position, and feel conflicted when they are pressured to move from their ideology.

> *I don't believe I have a right to represent the people who want the Flyover. That's not my job. You know, the ward always elects someone who will be the opposite of me in terms of politics, so they should go to them. . . . If I'd supported the Flyover, that would have been very dangerous, people wouldn't have been happy with me. (CouncillorCC03179)*

Reading between the lines, the above comment suggests the elected member feels no one wants them to make different decisions to the ones citizens have elected them to make. Furthermore, if they do change their position, then citizens can do something about it in the upcoming election – namely, vote them out.

Conversely, some elected members have a sense that ideological positions can be diametrically opposed to what is good for their communities, resulting in poor-quality decisions.

> *But I see some of my colleagues who get confused as to whether they are here for the Green party to be honest, or are they there for the community. (CouncillorCC0155)*

This circumstance has created a reasonable amount of angst for some elected members. And the evidence suggests elected members who choose to be influenced by ideological positions respond in a variety of ways. In the first instance are those senior elected members who recognise the influence of ideology is a real threat to good governance. Feeling strongly there is no place in local government for ideology, they have fought against it vehemently and told their peers as much.

> *We strongly try to keep it out; if anyone raises it, we take it out. We don't want*
> *it. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC351310)*

How, then, do elected members navigate the political landscape where ideological 'warfare' blossoms, and how do they resolve such entrenched positions, if they try to do so at all?

In starting to answer these questions, evidence demonstrates that elected members need to overcome at least two hurdles before they can address such difficulties. First, members need to recognise their own biases that result from their ideologies. Some find this more difficult to achieve than others.

> *There is a weakness in that people don't really know what they're voting for.*
> *We have a councillor who is (and there's nothing wrong with any of these*
> *things), a left-wing lesbian and Green. If the population here knew that's what*
> *she was, then she'd never get elected in a month of Sundays in City.*
> *(CouncillorCC261004)*[166]

After recognising this bias, some elected members feel it is reasonable to create ideological positions that reflect a stance they have made clear to both their peers and their communities. However, they are not so unyielding that they will refuse to consider what is best for the community within a wider context of a deliberative democracy that is built on compromise, agreement and reconciliation.

Interestingly, the evidence indicates two schools of thought on unpacking this dilemma and the one an elected member adopts is mostly driven by the type and nature of the council they are elected to. In Wellington councils, for example, and particularly Wellington City Council, the comments of elected members indicate

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[166] See also Appendix B, B.55a–b.

political ideology is a significant influence on their decision-making. Furthermore, this influence appears counter-productive to good debate and a democracy that seeks what is best for the community. It follows that the first order of business for a new council should be to expose the apparently extreme stances of some elected members as a way of establishing the conditions for a reasonable debate about what is good for the community.

At a regional level, another school of thought operates, with some recognition that this bias exists and a concern among the more senior elected members to keep it out of normal decision-making processes. For some elected members, the first sign that an issue is becoming ideological is that their peers can become abnormally emotional about a stance or position taken. Passion is one thing, but being driven emotionally to a point where normative decisions have a less than rational basis is quite another.

> *There are a few who are ideological. I mean, ideology and passionate . . .*
> *[they] are very close siblings. I don't really like passion, because if you are too*
> *passionate then you lose sight of the big picture and you are just dogmatic. I*
> *think that being ideological is not great. You have to be quite pragmatic.*
> *Pragmatic means that sometimes you have to have compromise. And if you*
> *are an idealist you'll die in a ditch over things, and then you can't do that.*
> *(CouncillorCC09506)*

This presents the second hurdle for many elected members in resolving the issue of ideology in their political landscape: that is, they need to recast their ideology to a point where it is one influence on their decisions along with other influences to appropriately consider. Until these changes occur, elected members (including the most experienced of them) suggest the best decisions that have the community at their centre are unlikely to ever be made.

*We do see with the Greens it's a party influence on their position which is a bit
frustrating at times because it seems inflexible. (Chair/DeputyRC321176)*[167]

Significant evidence indicates that political ideology is deeply seated within all
decision-making by elected members. At the same time, there is also reasonable
evidence that any conflict due to this circumstance is usually kept at a low level, with
other considerations prevailing in any specific investment decision.

These findings point to a significant dilemma. At a minimum, in a democracy
that ought to embrace citizen preferences and expert technical advice in its decision-
making processes, it seems ideologies have the potential to have a weighting that is at
least as significant as those two key constructs of a deliberative democracy. Evidence
suggests its potential weighting may be even more significant. The real dilemma is
that, as the evidence suggests, ideology is a sleeping giant that waits for a specific
circumstance to arise. That circumstance has no obvious triggers, creating an
uncertainty that is as much about not knowing these circumstances as it is about not
knowing which mountain elected members might choose to die on.

The last part of this section looks at how elected members form these views.
That is, what influences the influencers?

General influences. A wide variety of less significant influences surfaced
through the interviews when elected members were elaborating on what influenced
their deliberations on these types of investment decisions. The weight of these
influences seemed as much attributable to the type and significance of the decision as
to the nature of the decision of itself. They included education, cultural efficacy,

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[167] See also Appendix B, B.56a–b.

demographic background and vocational experiences. Others related to the specific local government circumstances the elected members were participating in.

Local government processes are complex, and elected members must consider the huge breadth of the subject matter related to large capital investments. Having a good higher education is a qualification a number of elected members identified as a prerequisite to being effectual in local government. Some elected members struggle with this.

> *Then there are people who say, "Oh well look I know that person never got*
> *past fifth form at school, how can they be on a city council?"*
> *(CouncillorCC02137)*[168]

Some elected members are increasingly concerned that, instead of having skills that are keeping pace with the ever-increasing demands and complexity of local government, those who are putting their names forward to govern are less equipped to deal with this than ever.

> *I think the trend, and I honestly believe it, the quality of councillor and it's*
> *harsh to say, over the 15 years that I was there [has] deteriorated. It's not*
> *attracting a diverse range now. (CouncillorCC08459)*[169]

Where elected members do have the right mix of skills, it is well understood that it makes a significant difference to their ability to manage significant investment decisions.

> *Playing with tens and hundreds of millions of dollars is scary for a lot of*
> *councils, absolutely. Like I said, I don't think it's as bad as it was but I think*

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[168] See also Appendix B, B.57.

[169] See also Appendix B, B.58a–b.

> *with some councils we're just shitting bricks about the responsibility being*
>
> *thrust upon us, just not used to it. (CouncillorDC15797)*[170]

In summary, the evidence above suggests that, of all the sources of influence explored so far, the most compelling influence on elected members as they explore and finally settle on an investment decision is the elected members themselves (Table 4.6). Elected members seem to believe that their responsibility and the democratic right they carry as an elected member give them every right to either take on board citizen preferences and expert technical advice, or choose some other stance.

The most surprising finding is not so much that the influence exists; it is more about its potential weight and the frequency with which elected members draw on it when making a decision. The results, significantly, suggest the local government democracy may not be as 'democratic' as many think it is.

The next section describes elected members' reflections on how all these different influences play out when they are actually making large capital investment decisions. It covers the full arc of the decision-making process, from when these influences first appear through to elected members' thoughts at the point when they are making a decision.

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[170] See also Appendix B, B.59.

Table 4.6. Summary of Pre-decision Environment and Context – Elected Member Influences – as Individuals

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Values	Elected members see them as a fundamental tenet; major influence on optics on their behaviour; what is actually best for the community, challenging values is dangerous; values underpin many positions taken, understanding values helps understand the position; serving (as elected members) is the antithesis of being served; reconciling values with the complexity of decision-making environment can be problematic, if not impossible; values are not necessarily rational; values can manifest as dogmatism, in conflict with proposed investments; values and pragmatism, finding a way forward; weighted more heavily than all other influences; values can require being sensible (or balanced) to achieve community outcomes; values can also be irrational and emotional; the strategic nature (and its manifestation) of values	Codes of conduct benchmark behaviours, how well they are managed can be challenging; values can be problematic, and certain personalities can engender difficult environments; working as a 'collective' for the collective benefit of all citizens within a council's boundaries is a challenge; values implicitly and explicitly make it more challenging; by their nature, values need to be aligned before any real decision is considered (this might translate into agreed principles for a way forward for an investment); values are essentially strategic, by definition operationalisation of strategy is challenging
Ideology	The importance of ideology (world view) cannot be overstated and can outweigh all other influences; elected members need to consider it as it describes their purpose, role and path in life; the world view is how they interpret events and experiences; people cling to and defend their ideology; a world view is a state that interprets our social structures, orders and interests; political ideology manifests itself in the same way; elected members give varying degrees of importance to ideology (including political ideology); some feel they are elected on ideological grounds; creates a strong influence base; elected members talk about ideological wars and ideological mountains to climb up or die on; significant personal conflict can be experienced (both internal and external); ideologically driven decisions can lead to poor-quality decisions; ideology is a type of bias and needs to be recognised as such; ideology needs to be set within a context of compromise, agreement and reconciliation (a challenging reality); ideological bias is often associated with emotion and non-rational (or irrational) behaviour	Ideology is a significant decision-making influence; ideology is important, but needs to be accompanied by a high degree of pragmatism to make decisions; without pragmatism, political ideology can be destructive when making decisions on behalf of communities; ideologies can be polarising; often others misinterpret transparent political ideology positions as a voting position, long before any position is asked for; weighting decisions ideologically is not an issue in itself – it only becomes so when ideology manifests itself in an extreme form, with the result that no one wins
General influences	General influences are numerous and varied, based on the type of investment and the quantum of that investment; they include, but are not limited to, education, ethnicity, tenure length, professional status, demographic status; vocational experiences; without certain skills, many elected members struggle, and can only offer only anecdotal or uninformed opinion; elected members believe they have the democratic right to use their experience to judge citizen preferences and expert technical advice, and either agree with it or not	Reconciling the normative decision environment with the wide variety of influences on each elected member contains an element of chaos; the project type and size exacerbate the complexity; the challenge is to make sense out of this to produce an informed investment decision; at certain times, each influence holds a different weight relative to the decision being made; such influences may have no material limit

4.7   Deliberations and Decisions

In preparation for the debate, council officers collate all the information for a decision into one document (alongside any necessary information that might be required to support the documentation on the day of the decision – for example, presentations or videos). The elected members read the information and, on the day, listen to any further evidence, after which they are prepared for the debate. The influences on the decision from this point relate to how the debate is conducted. And elected members have a range of views on the pros and cons of how a decision is debated and the way in which their peers influence them at this time (Table 4.7).

4.7.1   Peer Influences

Peer influences – during deliberations (during the council meeting). Other themes are inherent only during the deliberations themselves. One such theme is the actual debate in the deliberations immediately before making a decision (e.g., the ability to debate well and influence actual decision outcomes).

> *Sometimes there is a piece of evidence which is fairly compelling. Now I know, for example, one of my colleagues, when it came to the town build, he voted on it on the strength of one colleague's speech. He was listening carefully around the table and he finally made up his mind because somebody's argument just tipped the balance. (CouncillorCC10538)*[171]

Peer influences – at the decision and after deliberations. The final group of themes is inherent at the time the vote is cast or after the deliberations in

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[171] See also Appendix B, B.88.

which a final decision is made. These themes include the actual vote and the decision reached (e.g., whether each elected member's voting choice is revealed and whether the community would perceive the decision as rational or emotional).

> *Sadly, what happens in politics is the rational decision becomes an irrational decision, it becomes emotional and then you finish up again, at the end, making the wrong decision simply because the politics ignited something. (Mayor/DeputyCC331229)*

At times, this influence must be sustained well past the initial decision-making process. At times, decisions can be relitigated. The process of funding the Matata regeneration projects provides a good example, where the final (current) funding decision came three terms after the event and the first funding decision.

> *We are very supportive of Matata projects but it's a cost that's now being spread across the district, so it is just two dollars or something a year for me personally, and I've got a slightly over-average property [value for capital rate and rating calculations]. Not a big deal. But if it wasn't spread across [the district], it just isn't affordable. (CouncillorDC22905)*

In summary, the evidence on the decision-making process supports the findings from Section 4.6 that the strongest influence on investment decisions is elected members themselves. It underlines their apparently innate belief that they are entitled to exercise the democratic right they carry as elected members. The debating chamber is where they make those decisions formally. What the evidence suggests is how influential a few minutes of debate can be on months or even years of work to produce a decision by the elected members.

In this context, the question of the nature of local government democracy becomes even more pertinent.

Where Section 4.3 covered factors that can affect how an elected member makes a decision even before an investment proposal is scoped up for consideration (the pre-decision environment and context), Section 4.8 examines the factors elected members may consider before making a decision that relate to consequences that may continue long after they have made that decision (the post-decision environment and context).

Table 4.7. Summary of Environment and Context of Deliberations and Decisions – Elected Member Influences – Influences in Deliberations

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Peer influences – during deliberations (during the council meeting)	Debating is a skill and can be very influential; key elements of that skill are being able to construct a clear argument and convey an idea in a way that others understand it; who is debating, how well meetings are chaired; degree of discussion prior to a decision; a poor debate is one to which some elected members have not contributed	Elected members recognise this 'unfair' skill; personalities make an important contribution to their debating prowess; the have-nots feel a real jealousy towards those who have this skill; those who are proficient are often enlisted early into an idea to support any particular proposal when possible; less robust elected members can be easily swayed by the elected members; the chair needs to ensure the debate is well managed; those who are unable to debate well experience a palpable frustration
Peer influences – at the decision and after deliberations	How well meetings are chaired can influence the debate and the decision	The importance of the role of a mayor or chair can not be overstated

4.7.2 Elected Member Views

Elected member views – on 'the debate' in the chamber among their peers. The debate is the most important process of all the numerous decision-making processes leading up to when elected members make a large capital investment decision.

The debate itself creates opportunities for one elected member to influence others around the debating table. The research identified it is important for someone to take the lead in the debate on behalf of their community. In taking this lead, the elected member also faces the challenge of separating their responsibilities as an elected member from being a citizen, as they are obliged to do at this time.

> *I think that councillors have got to understand them [citizen preferences] really well and lead them. If there are things we're unsure about, you've got to ask the community to help you make that decision but the community has got to pay for them, at the end of the day they are the ones that pay. I think you've got to sort of lead the decision-making process of the community to some extent. It must be really hard if in your chamber you can't agree on anything and then who is leading what out there? (Mayor/DeputyDC411535)*

The issue that a number of elected members identified was the lack of opportunity before the debate for discussion that would lay the groundwork for having a good debate.

> *Sometimes decisions happen before they hit the table. I think we're starting to do that a little bit more because some of the things that we are dealing with are really, really complex. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC361366)*

It was noted above that elected members felt they need a good debate to get to a good decision and that large investment decisions often require difficult debates.

For this reason, elected members stated that, in the debate itself, they are seeking a free, frank and fearless dialogue. They want to hear from all of their peers, whose opinions they value. As a result, elected members require a level of trust in order to achieve a good debate.

> *I like debate and I think it gives the strength of a decision and I'm not sure there is enough of that and whether that comes because we are all on the same page. (CouncillorDC421575)*[172]

Elected members also described how some elected members with good debating skills could influence a decision.[173] This can be frustrating for some elected members who do not have the capability to debate like some others, even if they wanted to.

> *He's got the gift of the gab so when I'm debating with him; it's hard to debate against him. We get on a lot better now than what we used to. We've got a bit more respect for one another. (CouncillorDC401490)*

Some elected members considered themselves open to argument and to changing their mind with good debate. They observed the skills some had in communicating a position.

> *I guess part of our role as a councillor, it is to actually go to those meetings having got public thoughts, having read the material but we are not supposed to have made up our minds on decisions. We are supposed to go there quite open-minded, so I would like to think that if I had something to say about something, that the other councillors around the table are prepared to listen to what I've got to say – and vice versa, I'm prepared to listen to what they say. I*

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[172] See also Appendix B, B.76.

[173] See Appendix B, B.77.

think it's a case of the issue comes to the table, listen to the arguments around and then make your mind up. I think most of us would go in pretty open-minded. I might go in there with a view of something, but I'm quite prepared to listen to what others have to say and if maybe I learn something from what they have said, then I've thought, "Oh, well maybe my opinion wasn't right." (CouncillorDC22895)

Alongside these observations, many decisions are not clear-cut, even with good information and rational debate. Elected members described the level of pragmatism required to find a solution in such cases. A pragmatic approach is required throughout the debate as much as it is when the debate is coming to its conclusion for a decision.

If there was overwhelming support not to retain the town hall then, because I'm in that sort of pragmatic space, I would say, "Okay what do you want there instead, and what will it cost? What's the alternative because you can't just leave that building sitting there? What will we do? Would you be happy with that?" If the answer is no, then okay, we need to look at what we do with the town hall. (CouncillorCC14678)[174]

In this research, elected members described a range of factors in the nature and environment of a good debate that, in their opinion, translated into a good decision. They also described circumstances that led to a less satisfactory outcome.

Making decisions in local government is making decisions in a political environment. This can lead to political grandstanding and any other action that is likely to be linked to vote-seeking.

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[174] See also Appendix B, B.78.

Around the Bay of Plenty I would suggest there are big egos there, all about amalgamation and stuff. I'm more concerned about doing right by the district than covering myself in votes next time around. So I'm not going, "This is all here." But I'll say some in the bigger centres are more worried about keeping the vote than doing the job. (CouncillorDC21866)

This politicking, as some elected members have called it, is represented by specific political "antics" from certain elected members when the circumstance suits.

I got the feeling on a number of occasions there were some things outside of normal decision-making [that] were just the antics of some people. And they altered your view of people [their peers] around the council table. (CouncillorCC07391)[175]

Moreover, manipulating the political process can have severe repercussions, particularly if a civic leader uses the power of office to influence the decision process and its outcome.

One mayor used to try to be sneaky, often. If [they] saw the vote wasn't going [their] way [they'd] just adjourn it and go and lobby someone and try and get their vote changed and promise them some cushy job or something. I remember [they] did that with a councillor one day but she wanted to get on the mayor's taskforce for jobs or something, [and] needed the vote for something so [they] went out and brought it. That's not politics, I hate that. So all that happened was everyone else got pissed off. [They] couldn't help it, [they] started to lose focus on what the issue was and started to more focus on the personalities, and so we don't do that now, we just completely focus on the issues – people see that straight away. (CouncillorDC18792)

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[175] See also Appendix B, B.79.

Every investment decision in this research is important for a community in some way. This poses a particular challenge for elected members. Poor decisions weigh heavily on many elected members; they understand the importance of their responsibilities at this level of local government. Yet poor decisions (as opposed to poor process) are not uncommon, in their view.

Moreover, a number of factors in the debate have contributed to a poor decision, as elected members see it. The first is the poor quality of some debates.

> *I'm yet to be involved in a good debate at regional council where there is good, factual evidence about something; there is advice from staff – where it's actually a hard decision. We haven't had one. So the answer is, a lot of the decisions are made outside of the realm of good advice, good facts, good policy and good debate. [We] haven't had a good debate at all. (CouncillorRC311132)*[176]

In the view of some elected members, a poor-quality debate results when some elected members are not able to voice their opinions during the debate. Another factor is that the debate may not be material to the decision being sought.

> *So I just want to clear with you that it is terribly disappointing that after all this time – I've lived here all my life – that I'm seeing decisions being made that I'm not getting the input that ratepayers expect from me. (CouncillorDC281049)*[177]

To compound the problem, the emotional stakes are high. This does not necessarily translate into a good decision.

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[176] See also Appendix B, B.80.

[177] See also Appendix B, B.81.

> *Around the council table, it's very hard to get the emotion out of what is best to do. Councillors, I think, can be one of the most difficult parts of the equation. (CouncillorCC14663)*

More experienced elected members become reflective and philosophical about decision-making in these environments. They understand that winning or losing a debate is a natural occurrence. As one mayor observed, the challenge is to maintain composure no matter what the outcome.

> *One thing I tell people, and especially when they come in to local government and I see it happening so many times, especially for mayors – the hardest part of a mayor and I speak only for myself here in [our district] because we have a policy here that [after being] in that debating chamber we come out of there and we come out as one. You know what? The hardest part of my job is losing a debate because I have to now come out and tell the press where "we" as a council are going. It might not be what I wanted and that's been a tough one to swallow but I always say, "I've lost this one today but I'll win another one tomorrow." . . . People say to me, "What's the hardest thing?" The hardest thing is going out and telling everyone, "This is what we are doing as a council", knowing full well that I voted against it. (Mayor/DeputyDC391463)*

Elected member views – on their leadership and the decision chamber. Leadership in any context is an important factor when groups of people are seeking to achieve a common goal. This is certainly true of councils and the group of elected members that make up the council. Council meetings are chaired by their civic leader: the mayor of a city or district council, or the chair of a regional council (or their nominated representative in their absence, usually their deputy).

> *Leadership is actually groups of people coming together, challenging each other – lifting, provoking and elevating the thinking to get to new places. So*

> *it's about building good teams and good teams are about having the right*
>
> *people at the right place at the right time. (Mayor/DeputyDC411527)*[178]

This research also found that elected members view their thought leaders – not necessarily the mayor or chair – as the strongest political influence. Thought leaders in a council are individuals who for one reason or another are regarded as experts in a particular field (e.g., procurement if they are a contract lawyer or project management if they are an engineer). Often other elected members without the same vocational background will look to them for advice. While few in number, thought leaders can be problematic for the formal leadership.

> *I think in any council there are probably some thought leaders who influence*
>
> *others so in our council I would say there is probably just a handful. Others*
>
> *will go along with whomever, but the thought leaders ignore the [wider] group*
>
> *[of elected members]. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC321171)*

Evidence shows that elected members are influenced by the way the leadership conducts these deliberations in these environments, for a variety of reasons.

The leader's nature and style is the most common leadership-related influence observed by elected members. Their approach – strictly formal or more relaxed – is reflected in the degree to which the leader exercises their influence during the final deliberations. Some elected members have worked with civic leaders who have an inclusive and deliberative style.

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[178] See also Appendix B, B.72.

> *We actually all get on quite well and the meetings are actually quite different to when I was [first] there and I think people are allowed to have an opinion more than we were in the past. (CouncillorDC22897)*[179]

A more controlling leadership style can oppress debate. Typically mayors and chairs are among the most influential leaders within their communities. Many have strong personalities. This circumstance can alienate other elected members if not managed in a deliberative and democratic way.

> *It was a tremendously formal process and the mayor could control the way the discussion went through the process. He was a very strong man. So he would control the whole debate through the process so if you wanted to get something through you spent hours on the phone, phoning up your colleagues, talking to them and trying to get them to see your viewpoint so if you went in and you were going to speak to this, to try to get it through – especially if you knew the mayor was against it – you knew that you had to have your numbers sorted out, otherwise who was going to control the process?*
> *(Deputy Mayor/DeputyDC271035)*

A change in the leadership can quickly change the way elected members are able to engage with the debate and contribute to a decision.

> *It was very restrictive and so at that time it became necessary to do a lot of dealing and wheeling outside of the debating chamber because there wasn't much room within the debating chamber to do a heck of a lot. With the change of the mayor, it became a little more freewheeling, a little more modern, and a lot [of] structures that were there just for structure reasons were dismantled and we were actually able to have some good debates. My second term in council was*

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[179] See also Appendix B, B.73a–b.

very good. We actually had some very good debates. It was very restrictive to start with but improved as we went along. (Deputy Mayor/DeputyDC271022)

In these circumstances, elected members recognise harmony across their peers as an important aspect of making decisions in the way they think a good democracy ought to operate.

It's nice to be in the situation where you can argue the toss, vote, lose, go out to the morning tea and you're still mates. (CouncillorDC19823)

Conversely, some opportunities to debate are not met with a rational response, especially if the elected member ends up on the wrong side of the outcome.

I've always had the philosophy, and I remind councillors really, that in this game you're not going to win everything. And again that might just be my style but I remind them, even when the debate gets a bit thick and you know you've got a group that are really adamant, you say, "Well, look. You're not going to win everything but what you've got to be able to do is when you don't win on this one, let's support that because the very next one that comes up might be the one that you really want." And human nature is if you want to be difficult and you don't want to bend or compromise, the other five who are sitting over here are going to say, "Well, bugger you." (Mayor/DeputyCC331235)

A number of elected members observed the extent of influence of an incumbent mayor or chair changed substantially when the civic leader made it public that they were not standing again in the next election.

I think if the whole thing had played out different, I'd say [the mayor] would have been mayor for another term, if [the mayor had] wanted to. Perhaps another two terms if [the mayor had] wanted to. (CouncillorCC05319)

Recent changes to the Local Government Act have given the mayors new powers. It is too soon to judge the full implications of these changes. Nonetheless, some elected members are concerned about how influential their mayor can be with these new powers, as this mayor's observations appear to confirm.

> *The role your peers play in influencing some of these decisions are in two ways. If you're the only person interested in something on council, however important it is, it's quite difficult to get anything through. I can [now] introduce things. The mayoral powers have been more significant than I thought they would in that it's up to me to introduce things, even if they're not always exactly what the officers recommend. (Mayor/DeputyCC501876)*

Elected members also see the new mayoral powers as manipulating council committees. To some, this has raised concerns about decisions being made in committee but then not ever making it to the debating chamber. This research has found power struggles occur over appointments when these committees are being established and during the many debates that happen in committees, long before an issue gets to the debating chamber.

> *If you look at the transport committee, that's a committee with an enormous amount of power and built-in majority, because there are two Green councillors on it, the mayor, [a councillor] (who always votes with the mayor), and one other who is a known supporter [of the mayor]. (CouncillorCC11557)[180]*

The nature and style of the elected members during the debate in its turn has a strong influence on the leader's ability to maintain an orderly environment.

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[180] See also Appendix B, B.74a–b.

Tensions can run high in debates in some councils; in others the debates are much more collegial.

> *Some of them fight all the time. Hamilton would have been an example for me; they fill up the Waikato Times, [and] every issue would be full of [examples]. And they're writing letters about each other, and the fights and the scraps and the politics all going on. Who is that going to stand for council? People that like fighting and scrapping so you just keep getting more fighters and scrappers. That shit should never happen in a chamber. If they are not there for the good and the future of Hamilton, get out and let somebody in who is. (Mayor/DeputyDC411528)[181]*

Yet some elected members miss a good debate.

> *So we have a different mayor, and the mayor is more inclusive than anything. He doesn't really drive things really hard, economic development is probably his pet call and projects in the CBD around the economic development he'll push quietly but he definitely tries to get council to buy in to them. There is not really debate. I love debate. I'm just trying to put my finger on why that is, really. I miss the debates. (CouncillorDC18788)*

Elected member views – on the quality of their decisions with their peers. The final lens on how elected members view the decision-making process concerns their reflections on the quality of the decisions they make. These sorts of decisions are always incredibly complex. Recognising that this research has demonstrated the quality of the decision-making process is variable, it follows that the views of the quality of these decisions also vary.

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[181] See also Appendix B, B.75.

As this research highlights, all too often re-election considerations have a strong influence on decisions. Opportunities to "cut ribbons" and look good in the eyes of elected members' communities frequently outweigh the choices of doing the right thing and making the hard calls.

> *There's a hell of a lot of other things that we'd love to do and if you don't watch it, what we have to do gets diluted and the sexier things, the things we really love to stand and cut ribbons, or people can see, tend to creep in or conversely debt levels rise, you've suddenly got rate increases that are not palatable to anyone. (Mayor/DeputyCC331200)*

Other elected members have observed some of their peers are concerned more with how to advance the agenda of the political party they are affiliated with, irrespective of what might be best for a particular community.

> *What I observe in Wellington is that decisions around infrastructure are based on personality and party politics. We haven't had there here, even when this was . . . this was the last Labour-controlled council in the country in 1998. The big decisions might have been opposed by, say, the Labour bloc but then the big chunk of the independents supported the Labour bloc on those big decisions as well. (Mayor/DeputyCC781481)*[182]

Other evidence demonstrates elected members are sensitive to being exposed politically if they do not secure the backing they need from their peers. This in turn creates credibility issues for some elected members even if they think the decision is the right one.

> *Our credibility would be axed, completely destroyed, if we turned around and said, "Here is a category one building, one of the most significant buildings in*

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[182] See also Appendix B, B.56b and B.82a–b.

the city, we can't muster up the fund to save it, [and] we're going to knock it

down." (CouncillorCCO5293)[183]

This credibility issue can also manifest itself in decisions that elected members judge to be emotional, as opposed to rational. Taking a rational approach can be challenging with hard decisions.

At the end of the day I think the councillors really have to get on and make the

decisions. If somebody is in agreement with something, it's a good emotion but

it's not a driving emotion. If you are violently opposed to something, it's a

strong emotion and it drives you [to] get out there and do something about it.

(Mayor/DeputyDC271029)[184]

Moreover, they can really struggle to make an informed one.

What's the right debt equity ratio for our newly formed CCO [Council

Controlled Organisation] and should we have even have formed it anyway?

What's debt, what's equity . . . Suddenly you've lost 80% of the Kiwi

population. (CouncillorRC491798)

This emotion is often linked to the influence of media. This research highlights that elected members anticipate how the media will react to a decision. In some circumstances, this consideration influences their decision.

The local media plays a huge, huge part in the way that the local council is

perceived. Whilst the previous mayor was in place we had an editor at the local

newspaper who was anti everything that he wrote. (CouncillorDC271042)[185]

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[183] See also Appendix B, B.83.

[184] See also Appendix B, B.84.

[185] See also Appendix B, B.85a–b.

In extreme cases, elected members believe some decisions are simply made because certain elected members do not like one of their peers and will not vote on the same side as them.

> *I won't vote against somebody just because of who they are but I see that during a number of considerations where people will vote against somebody. Mayor/DeputyCC04228)*[186]

Lastly, in one extreme circumstance one elected member took their council (their peers) to the Environment Court because they opposed the decision to invest.

> *How can the councillor, who is involved with the governance decision to approve or disapprove a project, take an appeal against this council and then there is a deal done? I suppose they do this with other submitters, there is a deal done that the other councillors aren't [aware of]. That's what happened, and it's all in there. (CouncillorCC07403)*

Table 4.8 summarises the influences on elected members during the debate.

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[186] See also Appendix B, B.86.

Table 4.8. Summary of the Environment and Context of Deliberations and Decisions – Elected Member Influences – Influences in the Debate

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
'The debate' in the chamber among peers	The 'debate lead' has an important role in decision-making; good meeting protocols are essential to get a good decision; debate ought to be free, frank and fearless; debate is not always rational (or ordered); debate is necessarily pragmatic; political grandstanding is counterproductive; manipulating the process is not what democracy is about in New Zealand	This is a challenging environment for many elected members; many are never able to contribute their best because of the contrived environment of a debate; ultimately elected members will decide what they want to decide, and there is no measure of how well, or if, elected members considered any evidence or the debate that led to the point where they voted
Leadership and the decision chamber	Leadership in the debating chamber is very important; the most highly ranked elected member is not necessarily the most influential (e.g., a subject-matter expert can trump a chair); leadership style is an important factor in good debate and decisions; poor leadership often equates to poor decisions; change in leadership is very influential in the chamber; new mayoral powers need to be tested as their implications are not clear – may have no practical implications	Harmony generates good decisions, disharmony is more likely to generate poor decisions; positive tension is likely to generate the best decisions; impacts of new mayoral powers are little known, still need 'council support' from the majority of elected members; poor leadership disciplines community progress; no amount of debate will deliver good outcomes in environments of poor leadership
The quality of decisions	The quality of decisions is variable; political agendas to maintain office (ribbon-cutting) are important to some elected members; political party (national) affiliations can conflict with what is best for the community; credibility is an important consideration when the decision is actually made; normative (rational) decisions can be challenging when certain circumstances line up; protest votes are common	Poor decisions weigh heavily on some elected members; not all debates need to be won; the quality of a decision is never measured so it is unclear how elected members would know when a good decision has been made

4.8   Post-decision Environment and Context

In this research, post-decision environment and context are defined as any circumstance that has elected members thinking about the real or perceived future consequences that follow on from making a decision and that can influence that decision.

The following themes were revealed from elected members' own insights in relation to those influences. These results also show how much or how little weight elected members give to the post-decision environment and some of the nuances involved when considering them (see Table 4.9 for a summary).

The evidence suggests these influences fall within four broad themes. The first identifies how the weight of responsibility and the length of time involved in these decisions influence elected members to make the 'right' or 'best' decision. The second theme describes how their expectations about the potential consequences of their decisions, either the community at large or some group or cohort of citizens within that, may influence the decision. The third is a consideration of the real or perceived risk of how their decision might affect their reputation as elected members within their electorate or ward and as an individual or group.

The last theme of influences is something of an enigma. It is an enigma in as much as elected members for the first time have to consider the future and try to predict what their decision might mean for their community, their stakeholders and themselves, as both elected members and citizens long after they have retired from their governance duties as elected members. Specifically, they try to answer the question of whether they will make their world a better place through their decision. This theme links to the potential for elected members to, as some have referred to it, deliver the legacy they aspire to achieve while in office.

This section describes these themes and the influences that can arise through the processes that lead into the debating chamber, deliberations and debate and ultimately their final decision. It shows that the post-decision environment generally appears to have a low influence on an elected member's decisions. The research, however, revealed three intriguing exceptions, as explored in the final part of this section.

4.8.1 The Weight of Responsibility

The weight of responsibility elected members carry when making decisions varies according to the circumstance and between individuals. The evidence suggests the responsibility to make the 'right' decision forms the part of their rationale in considering the potential outcomes from any decision they make. And, on the face of it, this concept is simple.

> *I have a responsibility to make sure when I go from here that this place is left*
> *in the same, if not better condition, than when I first came on board.*
> *(Mayor/DeputyDC391442)*[187]

However, the weight such a responsibility carries is not as simple as it might first appear. Circumstances may rightfully and rationally divide elected members' responsibilities between competing loyalties. One such challenging circumstance is that elected members have both ward responsibilities and council responsibilities, which can be difficult to reconcile.

> *In my first term of council I can remember being chopped down – I think I*
> *even passed comment – I said something along the lines of, "I can't even*
> *believe that Ohope ward councillor would even vote in that direction." And I*
> *got sharply reprimanded and I never forgot it, but he does remind you of your*

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[187] See also Appendix B, B.89a–b.

oath to the district. You are voting for the district first as opposed to your ward – whatever is best for the district long term. (CouncillorDC17737)

As well as being a difficult task in many cases, achieving the real change involved in meeting their responsibilities may take longer than the tenure of elected members.

If you think you are going to change the world, you aren't. So, I've got a realisation that we are there to look after the district, as a whole, and make it work. (CouncillorDC21860)[188]

In addition, elected members face the difficult task of reconciling forward liability and intergenerational equity – that is, their decision should be sustainable for their community.

To be the guardians of the future, to create the foundation for future generations, not for short-term, unsustainable solutions, that's why I'm a great fan of investing in infrastructure. I resist hard populous politics as hard as I can. As a result, I struggle to get elected every three years. But so be it. I don't care. I can live with myself. If you don't want to elect me, that's fine, I'll go and do something else. (CouncillorCC18805)

Having a sense of pragmatism is helpful in meeting these responsibilities.

One of the things I've learnt in local government is that you need to listen and you need to listen and you need to listen. But at the end of the day you need to be able to make a decision and stand by it because, unlike central government, most of the knockers and most of the noise comes from very few people. So, unless at the end you're prepared to make a decision, then you're not going to move forward in doing things. (Mayor/DeputyCC331243)

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[188] See also Appendix B, B.90.

Coupled with pragmatism is a longer-term view of their responsibility.

I think [our responsibility] is to create the environment that people feel proud of in the area that they live in, basically. And there is the expectation that I and them, we as a council, make the right decisions. (Mayor/DeputyCC331243)

Furthermore, some elected members consider that some of their peers do not recognise the responsibility as they ought to, where other, conflicting drivers are operating.

I think for some it's just keeping the seat warm, it's just representation is the means in itself, just to be there. That doesn't suit me. (CouncillorRC25991)

Clearly elected members vary in their sense of responsibility in relation to large infrastructure investments. Yet they generally share a sense of the need to either maintain the current environment or improve it to meet the demands of proposed decisions. This research suggests a strong influence to do the 'right' thing certainly exists; however, it is less clear how that affects decision-making in practice.

4.8.2   Consequences for Affected Parties

This second theme is that elected members' thoughts about the post-decision environment typically focus on far-reaching events in which specific, targeted decisions have consequences for almost every citizen (e.g., a major wastewater plant development). In contrast, where decisions have consequences for sections of the community (e.g., an aquatic centre), they seem almost indifferent to any potential consequences.

Elected members generally seem to think they are doing a good job for the most part and making decisions that meet their responsibilities described above.

They also consider that, on the whole, they are reasonably pragmatic when they make those decisions.

> *At the end of the day, people elect you to make decisions. That's what they put you there for. (CouncillorCC07406)*[189]

However, a number of elected members were less proud of certain decisions or of the division that making those decisions caused within the council, even more so than within the community. Some see other councils making poor decisions on behalf of their communities.

> *I genuinely think it was the worst decision [the] council's made. Probably still is, in terms of its location. I think we could have got a much better outcome for the city, and we just didn't do that. (CouncillorCC05316)*[190]

Certain decisions seem to bewilder some elected members, where they see the consequences for their communities as negative. The following example illustrates how a council made a decision about the same asset again and again – differently each time.

> *I've been in this community now for 55 years or thereabouts. I've seen the library beside the council chambers, I've seen the library move to the second place that it had and now I've seen it move a third time and that's in 55 years – we've rebuilt it three times. (CouncillorDC20844)*

Some are aware of other examples with well-known negative consequences and consider that the kind of decisions involved ought to be avoided.

> *I still have a problem I suppose. I don't think we operate it to a maximum impact. I don't think we maximise revenue, I don't think that the customer*

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[189] See also Appendix B, B.91.

[190] See also Appendix B, B.92.

service experience is fantastic and we'll get to that. But to me, the problem

with a lot of people is that they think that building the asset is the achievement.

It's [actually about] running the asset really well to maximise the benefit for

the community. And I think that's something that's lost a little bit sometimes in

local government. Saw it with the pool down in the West Coast; they have

fundraised and now they can't afford to run it. (Mayor/DeputyCC481784)

Elected members rarely experienced any negative consequences personally for poor decisions or saw them occurring to their peers in other places. Even in extreme circumstances, of which some elected members gave examples, they have a general sense that no real consequences follow for them, the council or any particular cohort within the community. Or at least none they could not live with.

When I was mayor we tried to get [water] metering in because at that stage

we did need to conserve water, the conservation stuff was hopeless. I lost that

vote, just marginally . . . so we're voluntary water metering and people don't

pay their usage. It's bullshit. The council made a terrible decision. It was a

shocker actually. (Chair/DeputyRC451691)[191]

In a few 'poster-child' examples, elected members got it so horribly wrong they lost their democratic right to make decisions, with central government appointing commissioners to manage their community's affairs.

With our sewerage, for instance, we've got a good group, we've got the two

town councillors [who] are represented on that steering committee and we are

treading very carefully. We would have been building that solution, and I can

say for myself I was the one who moved for caution on this whole deal because

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[191] See also Appendix B, B.93a–b.

> *they had that Mangawhai thing up in Dargaville [where commissioners were*
>
> *appointed]. (Mayor/DeputyCC401482)*

Another extreme circumstance elected members point to as having significant consequences is when a council attempts to sell or demolish certain assets (e.g., pensioner housing or a town hall).

> *And I think the other thing is, if we did decide we are going to knock it down, I*
>
> *can see the fight against doing that being enormous. With half the council. And*
>
> *I'd be one of them in saying, well, "No way!" We would be marching the streets*
>
> *on this one. I think our heritage is a valued part of our city. It doesn't mean all*
>
> *buildings at all costs; we are going to have to make some choices amongst those*
>
> *buildings, but that one will clearly be right up the top. (CouncillorCC058294)*

But experiencing such consequences as those described in the examples above is rare. Bad decisions are by and large tolerated in a local government's democracy.

4.8.3   Reputational Risk

Strongly linked to the consequences for affected parties noted above is the reputational risk that goes with some decisions. The evidence suggests reputational risk is a consideration. Yet it does not seem to strongly influence elected members except in extreme circumstances like those described above.

In regard to reputational risk, elected members' comments indicate three distinct types are involved: the reputation of the council as an entity; the reputation of elected members in their role on the council; and the reputation of elected members as individuals.

Some investment opportunities can be challenging. The housing investment portfolio, for example, entails strong reputational risk with regard to investment and/or divestment with the purpose of funding other infrastructure

investments. Elected members have come up with novel solutions to some challenging housing decisions.

> *So, what we did was to actually get the leader of [the] march against [the sale] and invited him to become a member of the social housing committee. We also had the chief executive of the local iwi on there, myself, the deputy mayor and there were some staff members present as well. (Mayor/DeputyCC16731)*

The second type of risk to manage relates to their role as an elected member acting on behalf of their communities.

> *Everyone who knows me in the community knows I'm sort of a cautious person at the best of times so I'm not going to go out there and make a decision that I think are going to be too risky for the community to take on board. Communities know I'm pretty cautious, I won't make a major decision easily. (Mayor/DeputyCC401480)[192]*

Most elected members interviewed see their tenure as an elected member as the risk of greatest concern. If they feel strongly enough about maintaining their tenure, they will make a conscious decision to either yield to the pressure of a decision that removes the risk or not yield and to therefore expose themselves to the risk.

> *I'm going to mount a campaign and get that wall back. Why? Because those voters vote me back in. (CouncillorCC0126)*

In some instances, elected members stick to their values when they vote, whatever the risk. Some would describe this stance as acting with integrity. Others would suggest that, in a political environment, such a position can and will be challenged during their tenure.

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[192] See also Appendix B, B.94.

> *And again, it's, for me, it's having a resilience, if you like, to not be bullied or*
>
> *not be threatened by elections. (CouncillorCC0210)*[193]

This perspective leads into the theme of establishing the influences that involve elected members searching for or delivering a personal legacy. The evidence suggests they can gain a sense of contributing to a legacy either as part of the group of elected members who made the decision or through the sense of personal satisfaction of being present when they did.

4.8.4   Searching for and Delivering the Legacy

As noted at the start of this section, legacy is an enigma for most elected members. Furthermore, it is often driven by emotion and their need to find personal satisfaction in doing what they believe is a good job representing their community.

> *Firstly, it's about the environment and the wellbeing of the economy. There is a*
>
> *balance; it's the whole sustainable development thing. I guess what drives me*
>
> *is ultimately I want the world that my grandchildren are going to grow up in*
>
> *to be like [a better place]. If we can get it to be as good as we've got it, then I*
>
> *think that's probably going to be good enough for me. I'd really like it to be*
>
> *better but I just don't think that's realistic. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC361370)*[194]

Again, elected members describe these influences as being very real. When it comes to actually making decisions, however, the evidence suggests their influence is not strong, unless for specific events with specific circumstances.

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[193] See also Appendix B, B.95.

[194] See also Appendix B, B.96.

Table 4.9. Summary of Post-decision Environment and Context

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
The weight of responsibility	Doing the 'right thing', leaving the place better than you found it; competing loyalties to do the right thing; three-year electoral cycle makes some decisions difficult and can conflict with tenure and political cycles; making some decisions in this context requires a level of pragmatism; the importance of decisions needs to be clear to those making them	Competing loyalties make doing the right thing challenging; three-year cycles a dilemma for many of these decisions, which can span up to three long-term plans; tenure of elected members is an issue (eg, bringing newly elected members up to speed); low level of pragmatism causes difficulty in making decisions; most elected members struggle with the enormity of these decisions
Consequences for affected parties	Investments (both in what is built and in maintaining it) affect many generations; it is important to consider the 'reach' of any proposed investment; some investments provide betterment to all citizens, others to selected groups within a community; pragmatism ought to be high in reconciling the reach of some investments, even though they may be tailored to discrete groups within a community; a community will always contain sections that do not want any investment, for various reasons, but this alone is no reason not to proceed; if the correct process is followed, making a decision 'never' has any consequences; if the process is not followed, consequences can include, in extreme circumstances, the loss of any right to make democratic decisions	Almost without exception, elected members find it difficult to reconcile the enormity of the decision and the concept of meeting the demands of future generations for up to 100 years; they struggle with concepts of balancing investment and value across a few, some or many sectors of their communities; the difficulty is seemingly greater in smaller, geospatially disparate communities often associated with predominantly rural councils; decisions are often focused on process, not outcome, leading to some concern this can be at the expense of the outcome being sought; elected members can just push through decisions if they have the numbers and follow process – whether it is a good decision is almost irrelevant
Reputational risk	Although not always a strong influence, the reputations to consider can include 'the council', the elected members and the individual elected member; reputation can revolve around the nature of the investment (eg, investing in V8 Commodore racing events) or delivering a personal legacy (eg, meeting the promise of an election campaign)	Reputations can be a challenge, in both debate and more generally simply when a high-status person is present; some elected members are more influential than others, raising questions about how this influence democracy; power can corrupt; not a great deal of thought leadership, unlike what some have referred to as our founding 'mothers and fathers'
Searching for and delivering the legacy	The legacy is what some chase; often driven by emotion; struggle to find a common vision; legacies are less and less likely	Not necessarily in the best interests of the community; can be distracting; not as uncommon as some think

4.8.5   The Exceptional Circumstances

Once a decision is made, therefore, it seems 'life goes on' – that is, elected members usually feel the ramifications or consequences of their actions end at that point. However, as this research has discovered, three intriguing exceptions apply when making major infrastructure investment decisions: intergenerational equity; long-term sustainability considerations; and political survival (see Table 4.10 for a summary).

Intergenerational equity. Intergenerational equity of long-life assets in relation to who should finance them and how (e.g., whole-of-life costs and the circumstances that impose forward liability on their communities that stem from these significant investments) is an incredibly complex consideration. Elected members innately understand that such decisions entail the issue. [195] However, addressing it is tantamount to looking into a crystal ball to assess, as the best they can, the future implications of any large investment proposal on their communities. Moreover, the decision may influence many generations into the future – for at least 100 years if it involves long-life assets, such as the second bulk water pipeline across the harbour in Wellington.[196] The importance of such decisions to the current and future wellbeing of their communities cannot be overstated; in the case of the Wellington pipeline, it has the potential to increase the city's resilience in a seismic event.[197]

These sorts of proposals ought to weigh up both the cost and the benefit of the infrastructure investment. As I will explore further below in discussing costs, it is the

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[195] Mayor/DeputyDC19806; CouncillorDC281064.

[196] Chair/DeputyRC451697.

[197] Mayor/Deputy04203.

consideration of the benefit for the whole of the life of the asset that is inordinately challenging.[198] For example, New Zealand's citizens are understandably sensitive to a number of natural hazards. As the experience of the Canterbury earthquakes testifies, the benefit of investments in rebuilding is intergenerational, and substantial evidence indicates just how difficult it has been to make decisions about rebuilding Christchurch and its outlying areas since the earthquakes (Christchurch City Council, Christchurch Central City Plan, 2011).

Even with significant drivers of this nature (e.g., pure necessity to reinstate water to the city and maintain that supply), the challenges are enormous. The fiscal burden of such investments on Canterbury's citizens, notwithstanding the obvious benefits of reinstating water across the city and managing an ongoing network maintenance and renewal programme, is substantial (McKenzie, 2011).

Many of the decisions about other major infrastructure investments require a similar level of commitment. Their drivers can also be of a similar magnitude (e.g., Wellington City Council's Prince of Wales Reservoir project),[199] albeit without the added burden of recovering from a natural disaster. The substantive difficulty is that with significant fiscal burden comes citizen resistance to responses to sustainability (Dollery, Byrnes, & Crase, 2007a). The difficulty is even greater if the current state is seemingly serving its purpose, in this case by providing a high standard and service to the supply of drinking water to the city. This leads us into the second exceptional influence on elected members' decisions, which is related to this first one.

Sustainability, affordability and equity. Elected members are faced with long-term sustainability considerations for citizens if and when large capital

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[198] CouncillorCC07301; CouncillorDC16715; Councillor17768; CouncillorDC22907.

[199] CouncillorCC09501.

investment decisions eventuate (e.g., the implications of shifts of technology in an environment of accelerating change that may not be enabled or somehow constrained because of a historical investment commitment),[200] and any other economic (e.g., financing), social (e.g., health or education),[201] environmental (e.g., climate change) or cultural (e.g., treaty settlement) outcomes[202] that may arise at that time. Yet sustainability, affordability and equity are somewhat nebulous realities. For example, what is affordable for some may not be affordable for others.[203] Likewise, what is financially sustainable in one lens may not be environmentally sustainable in another, or conversely so;[204] and what might be considered socially equitable in one sense may not be considered culturally so in another.[205] Dealing with these realities is a constant challenge for elected members when they consider the implications of adding further burden on their communities, which for areas of high socioeconomic deprivation in some councils can be substantial.[206]

Elected members struggle with these concepts, specifically and generally.[207] Some abrogate responsibility in these sorts of decisions, in some cases for good reason.[208] This is not altogether surprising; the council's own officers and the expert

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[200] Chair/DeputyRC361385; CouncillorDC401492.

[201] CouncillorDC431607.

[202] Mayor/DeputyDC341249.

[203] CouncillorCC06336; CouncillorDC19817.

[204] CouncillorCC13639; Mayor/DeputyDC411525.

[205] Chair/DeputyRC24960.

[206] Mayor/DeputyDC481789; Mayor/DeputyDC271040.

[207] CouncillorDC17767; CouncillorCC07396.

[208] Mayor/Deputy311150.

technical advisors are also struggling with these universally difficult concepts,[209] as are those who hold some responsibility at other levels of government.

Even though the purpose of the LGA was amended in 2012 to explicitly remove the four wellbeings, the amendment has not removed the implicit intent from the practice of administering this legislation.[210] Moreover, it is unlikely to ever have this effect.[211] If nothing else, other processes ensure the original intent permeates throughout many normal processes in local government (e.g., annual plans, long-term plans, district plans, the Resource Management Act 1991 and building regulations).

Elected members are also becoming more aware of the important long-term considerations that accompany many of these sorts of investments. Historically, it was only the capital costs (capex) that they considered in deciding on such investments.[212] Consideration of something as singularly important as consequential operational expense (opex) was noticeably absent.[213] In an environment where repairs and maintenance costs are often significant, where financial liability includes fully funding depreciation among other financial instruments, these sorts of investments usually involve a significant long-term financial commitment. Some councils seem to continue to struggle with these constructs.[214] Perhaps the other growing burden for councils in this category is the amount of infrastructure being built in parallel with these developments (particularly water and transportation assets in these networks) and the

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[209] Councillor08441; Chair/Deputy461718.

[210] CouncillorDC21873; Mayor/DeputyCC471728.

[211] CouncillorC06324; CouncillorCC09471; CouncillorDC19831.

[212] Mayor/Deputy381402.

[213] CouncillorCC21874.

[214] CouncillorCC281059.

vesting of these assets on to the council's balance sheet on completion. This is still an altogether invisible forward liability many councils struggle with.

It is a real challenge to manage what you cannot measure.

Political survival. While this research has unpacked a variety of important influences, the pure politics of local government appears to be the strongest of them all. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this environment has its own specific idiosyncrasies. When it comes to political survival, these idiosyncrasies are seldom far from any elected member's consideration.[215] Politics is power, and as such is a significant influence and incentive for many if not all elected members (at least in part). Its influence is especially strong for those who show any desire to continue as elected members past the next local body elections.[216] Tightly coupled to this is that elected members wish to leave some sort of legacy, either a personal one or a more general community legacy enabled through their council.[217]

Political survival is subject to a complex set of circumstances. On the one hand, elected members have clearly communicated that they consider citizen preferences in making their decisions.[218] On the other hand, in somewhat of a contradiction, they have conveyed their opinion that political survival generally has the greater influence.

What is also clear is that this contradiction wavers quickly back to what citizen preferences are, when and if, for whatever reason, their citizens' views create a groundswell of affirmative action in which an elected member's position is at odds with

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[215] CouncillorCC06436.

[216] CouncillorCC03179; CouncillorCC006340.

[217] Chair/DeputyRC351335; Mayor/DeputyDC311149.

[218] Mayor/DeputyCC04200; CouncillorCC13649.

that of their citizens. This event is rare, and seems to get triggered when the community feels a social injustice (e.g., in response to the proposed sale of pensioner housing in the Whakatane District Council) (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013).

Elected members identified two clear circumstances linked to such events. The first is where citizens, en masse, demonstrate for or against a proposed action (G. Hanlen, personal communication, 30 June 2013). The second, more common circumstance involves preventing an event from ever happening, akin to the 'front page of the local newspaper test' described earlier in this chapter.[219]

The first circumstance has demonstrable evidence that elected members back-pedalled on a position on several occasions.[220] This response is more overt when the elected member is being targeted by citizens from their ward.[221] This kind of challenge can be significant in some circumstances. What is good for the district, the city or the region is not necessarily so for a single ward. Given that elected members ought to be acting on behalf of their entire council's jurisdiction, rather than for any particular part of it,[222] this can be a major challenge.[223]

It can be particularly challenging when an elected member's principles come to bear, for example, as a 'Green', 'Labour' or 'National' councillor. The pressure applied in these circumstances can be significant.[224]

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[219] CouncillorCC14659; CouncillorCC13641.

[220] Mayor/DeputyCC33125.

[221] CouncillorCC03179.

[222] Chair/Deputy451685; CouncillorRC491849.

[223] Mayor/DeputyCC501881.

[224] Chair/DeputyRC451681; CouncillorCC09506.

A concern arises that elected members may not bring up hard issues because they feel that doing so will motivate their citizens to voice an opinion. The concern has something to do with sanitising the risk of the real circumstances. This approach cannot be helpful or sustainable.

Table 4.10. Summary of Post-decision Environment and Context – the Exceptional Influences

Themes	Influences for Consideration	Elected Member Interpretations
Intergenerational equity	Investments ought to be paid for by those who benefit from them; intergenerational assets require a complex array of instruments (funding and financing) to give effect to the value being sought; because the fiscal burden of almost all intergenerational asset investments is significant, elected members need a substantial understanding of intergenerational equity if seeking equity; balancing sustainability, resilience, necessity and affordability is difficult and, over several generations, these considerations are unknown	Do not have the instruments to unpack the whole of life (lifecycle) of these investments; the question of intergenerational equity value is even more problematic given the inability to quantify the long-term costs and benefits; time adds further complexity; balancing the four wellbeings (economic, social, environmental and cultural) is another significant challenge
Sustainability, affordability and equity	Predicting the next technological revolution and its implications (e.g., digital revolution) is innately difficult; changing social norms drive shifts in social outcomes, to which targeted investments are subject; the location of the affordability nexus is inherent in the risk profile that is assumed within a certain affordability profile – and the relationship between frequency and consequence of that risk; capital costs are the only costs associated with large capital investments; private sector investments that may arise from these initial investments have implications	Many of these concepts are not yet well defined and each time they feature in a particular circumstance, their definitions seem to change; social norms (e.g., an ageing population) make it difficult to gain a common understanding; the widening gap of wealth complicates issues like affordability; sustainability has low maturity in many areas where a detailed understanding is needed to capture the expectations that these investments seek; integrating these sorts of investments into the wider context of both central government and the private sector is still immature, and 'leaking' value capture
Political survival	Pure politics, if it manifests for any reason, needs to be considered in context; political survival may be the driver, so an awareness of this is essential; linked to legacy; strongly coupled with citizen preferences, when a citizen groundswell is evident; the 'front page of the local paper test'; any conflicts in priorities between local board, ward and council; political leaning, and the expectations and influences of the party; anything that might put re-election at risk	Political influences are what is driving investment decisions in local government; the first consideration is political survival, not what is good for the community; elected members will invest an inordinate amount of energy to maintain their status as an elected member if they want to; can be a double-edged sword – political positions and posturing can ebb and flow with national circumstances; elected members struggle with conflicting responsibilities (e.g., ward vs council)

4.9 Summary and Reflections

As discussed in Chapter 2, normative decision theory concerns how decisions should be made, while descriptive theory is about how decisions are actually made (Hansson, 1994; Haruta et al., 2009). In practice, this suggests normative decision theory would assume that local government investment decisions ought to be rational and the decision-making process would indicate how they should be made. These findings suggest local government has a latent predisposition to do otherwise.[225] Normative theory also intuitively suggests that citizen preferences add to the quality of any investment decision, given elected members are making decisions on behalf of those citizens who have empowered them to do that. This research, however, struggles to find substantial evidence to support the idea that citizens are having any material effect on the quality of these types of decisions; bigger influences seem to be at play in these circumstances (e.g., the opinion of elected members). Chapter 5 explores why this might be so.[226]

This research has tested the practice against rational choice theories, which assume that political actors (Ostrom, 2005) are goal-driven (utility-maximising) and have consistent (transitive) preferences (Warntjien, 2009). In doing so, it has found the contrasting evidence that elected members are more inclined to make choices based on personal preferences over outcomes,[227] especially if they can justify their personal preference.[228] Political ideology is one such example.[229] Furthermore, the

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[225] CouncillorCC07370.

[226] CouncillorCC08459.

[227] Councillor01710.

[228] CouncillorCC03192.

[229] CouncillorCC08451; CouncillorCC14672.

research shows some elected members will go to extraordinary lengths to substantiate their personal preferences, logical or not.[230] We will come to this shortly.

My earlier position (Chapter 2) that considering citizen preferences and maximising utility could be uneasy bedfellows was well founded.[231] What was not immediately apparent was how uneasy both expert technical advice and elected member opinion were as bedfellows as well. Before I commenced this research, I had little more than a feeling about the possible importance of the role of elected members between and over these influencers. It is much clearer now, as a result of this research, that – uneasy or otherwise – elected members' opinions are the vehicle, in practice, that fashions the democratic gap between citizen preferences, expert technical advice and elected member opinion, on the one hand, and normative decision theory, on the other. Put another way, elected members seem to be more prone to adopt what they think or feel than what their communities and expert technical advice support. This is another matter to be addressed shortly.

Unsurprisingly, the frameworks that support councils' enabling legislation (LGA 2002), and the citizen engagement practices that are expected to give effect to it, remain no less of an enigma now than they appear to have been in 2002 when the Local Government Act came into force. In fact, some elected members suggest they have become still more perplexing.[232] The findings from this research, however, go some way in substantiating the specific elements of local government decision-

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[230] Mayor/Deputy04228.

[231] Councillor05243.

[232] CouncillorCC06308; CouncillorRC09472; CouncillorCC458; CouncillorCC10519; CouncillorCC12602; CouncillorDC18799.

making and the influences that presented at the time the research was conducted and more recently (e.g., current citizen engagement practices in local government).

In this research, the task of looking back with elected members at historical decisions made highlights that neither these influences nor the kinds of decisions elected members must make have materially changed since that time.[233] Similar pressures are presented, for example, in a decade of Wellington City Council's long-term plans: 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015. A wider detailed review of Whakatane District Council reveals similar pressures for this community (e.g., Whakatane District Council long-term plans, 2009, 2012), albeit slightly different to those in Wellington.

The research also confirmed its consistency with many of the findings reported in the current literature and the influences elected members might feasibly be exposed to at these early phases of the decision-making processes.[234] One fundamental concern for elected members about these phases is their limited engagement with their communities. Many elected members clearly see this issue as raising significant questions about representation and the role citizens are playing in enabling New Zealand's democracy.[235] An obvious example is the low participation of citizens in the local government elections. Some elected members argue that, given the voter turnout for elections in 2010 (49%), 2013 (41%) and 2016 (42%), the results represent a 'Clayton's' democracy (C. Holmes, personal communication, 1 July 2013). Hamilton City was New Zealand's least engaged community, where less than 34% of its residents voted in 2016 (Local Government New Zealand, 2016a, 2016b). In a recent election, one unnamed mayor was voted into that role to represent their

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[233] CouncillorDC23917.

[234] CouncillorDC291086; Chair/Deputy321162.

[235] Chair/Deputy361390.

community with support from less than 10% of the voting public. Many queried the validity of such a result in terms of the 'moral right' to govern.

While this research detected more detailed evidence supporting the earlier research in citizen participation (e.g., Michels & de Graff, 2010; Warren, 2009a, 2009b), it also produced new evidence of a complexity of previously unidentified broad decision-making themes. Examples of these themes are the type of investment,[236] the political ideology in a local government environment and its specific effect on local government decision-making,[237] and/or the length of tenure of an elected member and the common influence of experienced elected members on newly elected members in decision-making.[238]

The point here is, where these influences do prevail, they are likely to apply in certain phases in the decision-making process of local government and not necessarily within others. This new evidence is (until other research proves differently or unless other jurisdictions develop similar models) peculiar to local government in New Zealand, where the effects and phases are framed within the legislative context described in Chapter 1.

Following this line of thinking, Chapter 1 described these pre-existing foundation influences in terms of *how, where* and *when* elected members will make a decision. The conventional view in the literature suggests the materiality of these influences reasonably rested on *how* the decision-making processes were influenced (Buckwalter, 2014; List, 2012; List, Luskin, Fishkin, & McLean, 2013). The legislation

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[236] Mayor/DeputyCC381417.

[237] Mayor/Deputy411529.

[238] CouncillorDC421572.

literature provides evidence that the early changes to the Local Government Act 2002 were traditionally focused on what must be done (McKinlay Douglas, 2006, McKinlay, 2010), a view supported and understood by the majority of elected members in this research.[239]

This research has also uncovered a deeper evidence that explains *where* and *when* these influences are manifest in the decision-making processes, which are also significant in the context of decision-making. Elected members hold a view that *where* citizen preferences are established and *when* this happens in the decision-making processes are other influences on an investment decision to proceed or not, framed by legislation (LGA 2002),[240] and seems to be fit for purpose,[241] sometimes.[242]

The information from elected members, as reported in this chapter, is extensive. Because many elected members have shared their knowledge and experiences with no apparent reservations, numerous insights that were previously inferred and largely unsubstantiated now have an evidence base to support an informed discussion. As the final chapter will elucidate, the evidence also offers important new insights that need context in this difficult environment.

It has become clearer to me that these findings identify significant challenges ahead for the local government sector. These challenges stretch across the nature of the environment in which elected members make these significant capital investment

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[239] See Appendix B, B.98.

[240] CouncillorCC06358; CouncillorCC08430.

[241] CouncillorDC22882; Mayor/DeputyDC271025.

[242] CouncillorDC23916.

decisions. These can weigh heavily on elected members. How every elected member personally and individually accounts for and settles on actual decisions is arguably the most difficult challenge of them all.

These new learnings point to important implications for the practitioners and participants across the local government sector. They show clearly that it is not just elected members who face real challenges ahead; expert technical advisors and citizens must also meet the challenge of playing substantial roles in the future. Their roles are especially important if our communities are to receive the kind of outcomes they seek and expect (e.g., social outcomes in health and education).

Equally this new evidence has implications for the scholarship that supports decision-making in local government. It offers insights to reflect on for those scholars who seek a better understanding of local government and the decision-making that is required within this sector.

Notwithstanding all of these challenges, another issue is noteworthy. Specifically, local government – representing the people in this environment – is incredibly tough. The folk who put their names forward for this job do an incredible service to the best of their abilities. Granted, some of them come into conflict, often with diametrically opposed positions on many of the types of investments being researched here. Sometimes the decisions or circumstances that follow on from these conflicts do not end well. Nonetheless, this is the gift of the democracy we enjoy in New Zealand in all its machinations. I have not met any elected member who did not have the best interests of their town, their city, their 'place' in their heart.

This research highlights how difficult acting on these interests can be, and how great leadership is required to provide a balanced and objective view of all

proposals about major infrastructure investments. In view of the ever-increasing technical and political demands involved in decisions about these investments, I wonder if we are not asking too much of our elected members, who are for the most part normal folk – that is what our democracy is all about. The implications of this idea will form the substantive part of the conclusion.

Furthermore, while this research has given significant insight into decision-making in a local government democracy and some challenges for the sector to consider more generally, it has also raised many more questions about what these insights might mean for a practical response to this understanding.

This is where the theory meets its praxis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1   Introduction

At the conclusion of Chapter 1, the research question asks, "Are substantial investment decisions in local government reflecting established citizen preferences and, if so, how and why?" This implicitly questions whether decisions are giving due weight to and reflecting these preferences.

This final chapter concludes with insights that can, at least in part, offer answers to different aspects of the question. Its initial conclusions on the research question are followed by some nuances in the context of theoretical considerations. The chapter then moves to a series of more in-depth conclusions that lead into a discussion of what the findings of this thesis might mean for the local government sector in the future.

5.1.1   Initial Conclusions – a Touchstone

By interpreting the elected members' interpretations, it is possible to find a position and way forward to apply these findings to current mid-range decision theory (against, e.g., Bächtiger et al, 2010; Cohen et al., 1972; Dryzek & List, 2003; McDowell, 1980, p. 67; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008; Vigoda, 2003, p. 4). The answers to the research question that follow are interpretations against that theory.

Some contributors to the literature (e.g., Biegelbauer & Loeber, 2010; Dryzek & List, 2003; Fishkin, 2003; Forester, 1999; Kearns, 1995; Michels, 2011; Michels & de Graaf, 2010; G. Smith, 2005, 2007) assert decisions made in a context comparable with New Zealand's local government democracy provide for and encourage the circumstance where: **citizen preferences influence elected**

members when they make large capital investment decisions. This is mirrored in the evidence from the elected members outlined in Chapter 4, albeit the influences are likely to be variable.[243]

Unsurprisingly, the literature recognises this same variability (e.g., Biegelbauer & Loeber, 2010; Carson, 2007a, 2007b; Dennis & Owen, 2001; Durant, 1995; Frederickson, 2008; Nabatchi, 2010; Rimmerman, 2001). It qualifies the first answer by recognising: **citizen preferences are not necessarily adding the weight to these decisions that citizens might expect.**

> *I'm not getting influenced by the community. (Deputy Mayor/DeputyCC04201)*

Furthermore, opinions in the literature are mixed about what weight citizen preferences can bring to bear on elected members making investment decisions even if weightings are applied (see Bland & Arnson, 2009, p. 29 and Geissel, 2009; versus Fishkin, 2010, 2011; Gibson, 2006; N. Hendricks, Oritz, Sugie, & Miller, 2007). This answer to the question recognises a further qualification: **even if elected members give citizen preferences what they believe to be enough weight, it is uncertain whether those preferences will influence the final decision**. Again, this is mirrored in the evidence provided by the elected members.

> *I think technical decisions are best framed and evaluated by people with the skills. I don't think the people from the community can do that and I don't think the elected members, generally, have that skill . . . (CouncillorRC491826)*

Strong evidence in the literature suggests elected members face numerous challenges relating to what they feel are representative citizen preferences;[244]

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[243] See Appendix B, B.97.

whether this will necessarily lead to better investment decisions is still open to debate (Gibson, 2006, p. 2). The summation of this circumstance identifies that: **elected members cannot always be relied on to make normative decisions when presented with these types of investment decisions**. This position is supported by the research findings.

> *I think councillors are just a little bit inexperienced. If you get to the board of directors for a serious company and you've got some seriously influential or skilled people with skilled competencies whether it is finance, engineering, or the work that their business does. They [expert advisors] are pretty skilled in local government; you have extremely skilled local government officers, but not necessarily extremely skilled elected members. (CouncillorRC351281)*

In summary, the literature and the current research give evidence that citizen preferences influence elected members when they make large capital investment decisions. However, evidence uncovered also identifies that citizen preferences are not necessarily adding the weight to these decisions as much as citizens might expect. The question is why, and what are the influences on this circumstance? Furthermore, the research findings suggest that even if elected members give citizen preferences what they believe to be enough weight, it is uncertain whether those preferences will influence the final decision. Again, the question is why, and what are the implications for local government in making these types of decisions, and for New Zealand's democracy more generally?

The following discussion draws on the findings reported in Chapter 4 to explore a deeper sense of individual resolve among elected members in regard to

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[244] Representative in this sense means representative of all citizens, a substantial challenge for all elected members and councils across New Zealand's local government rohe (regions).

making these decisions. This insight helps build the rationale for my conclusion that it is elected members themselves who are creating the decision deficits that are in part outlined by the literature, but more specifically are described by elected members in discussing their own experiences of making decisions. These conclusions can be viewed through a number of lenses, as this concluding chapter demonstrates in the sections that follow.

5.1.2   The Theory

Chapter 2 explored a wide range of alternative models that practitioners have developed with supporting scholarship to try to understand decision-making more generally. Some of those models have suggested, in the context of local government, how elected members' decisions are determined by the least-cost option, or the most financially prudent one (March & Simon, 1993).[245] This research found strong evidence for the validity of these models.[246] It also identified support both for models that suggest it is possible for individuals or groups to make rational decisions under conditions of certainty (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p. 322; Simon, 1957a, 1957b, p. 254)[247] and for others that propose human and organisational limitations mean it is impossible for them to make perfectly rational decisions.[248] The research identified examples of both types of behaviour in local government where decisions happen in practice in both kinds of conditions, as noted above.

Irrespective of these circumstances, the realisation is growing that local government is dealing with complex, intractable and wicked problems, or problems

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[245] CouncillorCC261010.

[246] CouncillorRC261010; Mayor/DeputyCC481759.

[247] CouncillorDC23920.

[248] CouncillorCC07397.

with only temporary and imperfect solutions (Marmon & Mayer, 1986; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Roberts, 2006).

In exploring the descriptive theories in more detail, this research concludes it is essential to have a model that can describe these intractable decisions and wicked problems of local government. Such a model would help explain the sheer random nature of some of the decision outcomes that elected members have identified.

Furthermore, in practice, the range of decision models currently described in the literature can provide only limited understanding of local government's investment decisions and decision-making outcomes across all decisions. This shortcoming suggests that a model free-for-all operates, or that any one model will do when it suits the circumstance. Such a situation is obviously problematic for this research.

In Chapter 2, consistent with Fardal and Särnes (2008) and Evers (2012), I acknowledged a model that emerged more than 40 years ago with its insights into the nature of the organisational anarchy of local government. Cohen et al.'s (1972) garbage can model is better placed than many others to be applied to the decisions elected members are actually making. The model assumes that decisions are made in a non-rational, random, chaotic way and that if problems, solutions and people align correctly, decision-making occurs almost at random (Haruta et al., 2009); this point of view fits well with the evidence elected members provided about capital investment decision-making in local government.[249]

Furthermore, this model has been used to explain decision-making in universities, public schools, military operations and government agencies (March &

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[249] CouncillorDC421581; CouncillorRC491809; Mayor/DeputyCC331229; Chair/DeputyRC351319.

Olsen, 1979; March & Weissinger-Baylon, 1986; Sproull, Weiner, & Wolf, 1978). Local government is not so dissimilar to these examples. This connection was also supported with some more recent decision theory (Throgmorton, 1991), as will be discussed shortly. When Cohen et al. (1972) proposed the garbage can model to clarify decision-making in what they referred to as organised anarchies, they defined the model with three characteristics: problematic preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation.

The first characteristic, problematic preferences, refers to ambiguity with problems and goals where ambiguity is distinguished from uncertainty in that it is not being resolved by additional information (Zahariadis, 2003, p. 3). Elected members may be uncertain as to both the nature of problems they face (e.g., improving community wellbeing) and what they hope to accomplish (e.g., intergenerational equity); they may, in fact, discover their preferences through acting, rather than acting to achieve their preferences. This circumstance reverses the rationalist models of decision-making as described by Lipson (2007).

In relation to the second characteristic, where local government has unclear technology, elected members are uncertain of the rules, structures and processes by which decisions are made, or even of how they are established to function effectively.[250] The term 'technology' is used in the sense of how it is defined in the organisational theory literature. That is, it does not refer to technological artefacts per se, but rather to the local government processes and methods that enable decision-making (Hatch, 1997, pp. 127–160) Thus, in organised anarchies, elected members do not fully understand the workings of their local council in order to effect

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[250] CouncillorDC421568; CouncillorDC301088.

influence over those decisions and information that might be required to make them.[251] More specifically, they do not fully understand those essential decision elements on which technical experts provide advice to ensure elected members make informed decisions (e.g., council officers and those who support them).

Finally, fluid participation means that different actors (Ostrom, 2005) are involved in different decisions, or in the same decision at different times (Lipson, 2007).[252] This arises through turnover, coincidence and local government rules that introduce changes in participation (e.g., local body elections or changes in committee structures),[253] and makes the council's boundaries variable (e.g., changes in budgets from one annual plan year to the next with a shift in priorities and funding that supports those).[254] The mix of citizens and their preferences, and how this interacts with problematic preferences and unclear technology to produce distinctive patterns of the decision-making, is opaque.

> *There are a lot of people in Tauranga, so they are well represented and so they have to get a big chunk of the budget and they've said that, and that's one of the issues, I've said, "Environment has very little to do with population." But they've come back and said to me, "This is where the rates are gathered, this is where we are going to spend the money." And that's morally corrupt, but that's the way they do it. (CouncillorRCC1128)*

It is not unreasonable to conclude that parallels exist between the environment of local government and the way that the garbage can model conceives of decision-

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[251] Chair/DeputyRC321154; CouncillorCC06236; CouncillorCC0124; Mayor/DeputyCC04198.

[252] CouncillorCC12606.

[253] Mayor/DeputyDC381394.

[254] CouncillorDC07371.

making in organised anarchies in streams of problems, solutions, participants and decision opportunities (Kingdon, 1995, pp. 222–230; Mucciaroni, 1992; Olsen, 1979).

It is interesting, on reflection, to identify some strong similarities between Cohen et al.'s (1972) work and the later work of Throgmorton (1991) that identified three broad cohorts of people as involved in decision-making: citizens (and their preferences), experts (and their technical advice) and politicians (and their opinions). Throgmorton's (1991) citizen preferences as a cohort appear closely related to the fluid participation Cohen et al. (1972) described nearly 20 years earlier. Furthermore, their other descriptors have similar strong associations: expert technical advice and unclear technology; and the politicians' (elected members') opinions and problematic preferences. The thinking between the two seems to be closely aligned.

These associations add further weight to reaching a conclusion that people are rational to a point – or, more specifically, rational to a point of view. Moreover, points of view are inherently based on the problem that each person thinks any investment proposal ought to solve. But herein lies a dilemma. There seem to be as many points of view or opinions (or, using Cohen et al.'s equivalent term, streams) as there are ways in which problems might be resolved.

Furthermore, it follows that there are likely to be as many problems as opinions to do with any one of these significant investment decisions – and problems that people expect to be solved if and when the decision is made to invest. Yet neither all problems nor all solutions could possibly be rational. This is more obvious when a single problem has two diametrically opposed solutions. And here is the real conundrum in practice. Even if each of the diametrically opposed solutions is rational, the proponent of the solution that is not taken forward is unlikely to

consider the accepted solution to be so. Any elected member will tell you citizens' responses are all too often emotional rather than rational. This might be considered a reasonable example of the thinking that went into Cohen et al.'s (1972) garbage can model of decision-making.

Moreover, in contrast to rational choice theory, this model identifies that solutions are chosen for their optimally efficient resolution of pre-existing problems, but are also independent of those problems (Lipson, 2007). Elected members struggle with these types of problems, especially when solutions are, for example, unconnected or disparate capital intention plans to meet the expected investment outcomes of their communities. The problem is that the solutions are often built in silos and independently of one another,[255] which again seems to reflect some of the thinking behind the garbage can model.

Finally, where solutions or inherently preferred decisions exist before any problem emerges, their supporters (e.g., citizens) will seek to attach them to any problem that provides the opportunity for a decision that promises to serve as a vehicle for the outcome they are seeking (e.g., proposed capital investments in recreational facilities and improved health outcomes for communities). The linking of problems and solutions is determined more by what Lipson (2007) describes as temporal sorting; that is, problems and solutions that arise at the same time become linked in decision opportunities, rather than by rational fitting of solutions to problems. A common example in local government occurs after a flood, at which time elected members have observed that it is far easier to secure funding for improved stormwater investments (a solution for flood protection), even if it contravenes

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[255] Chair/Deputy321187.

current policy settings (e.g., 1% AEP[256]). If the flood had not occurred, such an investment would never have been considered, let alone funded. It is not rational if these circumstances usurp the policy settings specifically designed to inform these types of decisions, but they do.[257]

The set of observations made in the garbage can model concludes with an ability to process problems and solutions as elected members move from one opportunity to make a choice to another in such a way that the nature of the choice, the time it takes and the problems it solves all depend on a relatively complicated intermeshing of elements. These include the mix of choices available at any one time, the mix of problems that councils might have optics on, the mix of solutions looking for problems, and the outside influences on any one or more of the elected members (Cohen et al., 1972).

It is also clear that the garbage can process is unlikely to resolve problems well. But the model does suggest it will enable choices to be made and problems resolved, even when a council is plagued with goal ambiguity and conflict, with poorly understood problems that wander in and out of the system, with a variable environment and with elected members who may have other things on their minds (Cohen et al., 1972).

As insightful as Cohen et al. and later Throgmorton were, I conclude they did not link their thinking into a framework that reflected how the decision might reasonably be made in practice. Subsequently the outstanding challenge has been to

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[256] AEP is the probability of a certain size of flood flow occurring in a single year. A 1% AEP flood flow has a 1% or 1-in-100 chance of occurring in any one year, and a 10% chance of occurring in any 10-year period.

[257] Mayor/DeputyCC381428.

establish some order from the anarchy, as it has been described. This research has identified that the influences of the decision framework and any number of influences from others (e.g., citizens, technical experts and other elected members) are essential elements of any model trying to describe decision-making, as it is the decision frameworks that support the decision-making processes.

This research has offered a way forward. In addition, although likely to be specific to the local government context, this anarchy has at least in part been given some sort of order with the Local Government Act, the planning frameworks enabling that legislation and the citizen engagement practices that seek to establish citizen preferences in this local democracy. It also appears the cohorts of influencers that are exposed to or part of the decision-making processes in local government are particularly important.

Moving on from a process focus (with the garbage can model), the following conclusions are more about what is in the heart and mind of the decision-maker (the elected member) when a decision is being made. In this research, the decision-making black box (Figure 2.7) has been adapted to reflect the sum of the machinations that exist in elected members' collective consciousness when deliberating a proposed investment decision (Figure 3.4).

Easton (1965) broadly conceived of the political decision-making process, "that system of interactions . . . through which . . . authoritative allocations are made and implemented" (p. 50), as a conversion mechanism wherein political inputs (demand and support) are transformed into outputs (decisions). That is, the inner workings of this mechanism are not visible. As a result, elected members do not know the precise rules under which decisions are made (excluding the vote) other than by systematically comparing variation in input with variation in output. Elected

members have struggled with this decision-making environment, through any number of lenses (e.g., the debate)[258] or the information provided to assist with a decision[259] or the complexity of an investment decision.[260] Furthermore, I can conclude that, even if the inputs and the outputs are known, the workings of the conversion mechanism (the debate) that turns the inputs into an investment decision (the vote) remain largely invisible (Veen, 2011) – the black box.

This suggests, alongside the importance of the cohorts of influencers that are exposed to or part of the decision-making processes in local government, there is room for understanding what the drivers for decision-making are and, more specifically, what the relationships of these influences are in the processes outlined above. The models that describe the decision-making foundations in this research have gone some way to explaining this (Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4), at least in a local government context. The theory leaves us with two fundamental propositions in the conclusions to this complex decision-making environment: reworking the garbage can and providing optics on the inside of the black box.

Reworking the garbage can. It is acknowledged models that have been used to describe decision-making more broadly can and do reasonably apply to local government decision-making. We could establish decision-making examples or use cases in practice for every model described in the literature. It is reasonable then to conclude that normative decision theory can, in some limited circumstances, even apply to major infrastructure investment decisions.

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[258] Mayor/DeputyDC441622.

[259] CouncillorDC17739.

[260] Chair/Deputy361353.

Apparently too, when the decisions are set among the evidence from the elected members as decision-makers, these types of decisions are predominantly fraught in practice. They invariably "fall far short of the idea of maximising postulated in economic theory, . . . organisations adapt well enough to satisfice, they do not, in general, optimise" (Simon, 1957b, p. 198).

Comparing descriptive decision-making theory with the evidence from elected members about these same types of decisions in practice establishes a compelling argument for accepting the thinking behind the model that is flexible enough to accommodate the real, almost anarchistic decision-making environments of local government (Cohen et al., 1972). However, that is where the argument ends: with the thinking only. As noted above, this research suggests a different application of this thinking to a model that in part stems this anarchy.

Following this line of thinking, even if the garbage can model is flexible enough to link some of the elements in this random decision environment and focus on the imperatives within the decisions – that is, the intent and influences that shape them – it still does not provide for a number of key elements that influence an actual investment decision. Furthermore, decision-making in local government is not anarchistic; to the contrary, it has a formal structure (LGA 2002). It is just that everything else about decision-making in local government seems to be, at least to the elected members making the decisions, some sort of undisclosed anarchy, better described as "random" (Bächtiger et al., 2012). By disciplining the decision-making processes with frameworks that support and enable decisions, it only leaves the actors (influencers or decision-makers) who are or act as anarchists. This leads to the second proposition.

Optics on the inside of the black box. The environment Cohen et al. (1972) described has revealed that little is understood about the apparent influences on elected members when they are deliberating on or making a decision. As well as the chaos that seems to be at work in the problematic preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation of the decision environment, there is the enigma of the three most influential elements of the decision – citizen preferences, expert technical advice and elected member opinion (Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1).

This black box, as it is increasingly referred to in the literature (Blindenbacher, 2010; Veen, 2011), is what this research goes some way to unpack. In particular, it has uncovered how certain cohorts have a specific, direct influence on elected members when they are deliberating on a position to invest in a proposal. The following conclusion shines some light inside the black box – at least within the context of making infrastructure investment decisions in local government (Figure 3.4).

Also, evidence is growing for the argument that, based on Rittel and Webber's (1973) observation, these circumstances create investment proposals that are complex, intractable and wicked answers, or answers with only temporary and imperfect solutions. Exploring the actors (influencers or decision-makers) who are or act as anarchists, given the actors are acting in some sort of undefined anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972), takes us deeply into the research and establishes possible reasons for these outcomes. Furthermore, it provides evidence that the cohorts of influencers and/or decision-makers in the local government environment seem to be, when the opportunity arises, this time drawing on Cohen et al.'s observation, masquerading as anarchists in this local democracy – and getting away with it.

The next section explores how and to what extent these cohorts of influencers or decision-makers influence these types of decisions, while continuing to

acknowledge that material influences are here inside the black box with the benevolent anarchists who control it.

Citizen preferences. The evidence suggests elected members do not necessarily think citizen preferences have the strongest influence on their decisions.[261] Although they apparently innately believe that it is important to consider citizen preferences as part of a wider set of factors, they invariably seem to have reasons for not weighting those preferences strongly in practice.[262] What is odder, or more disconcerting, is the seemingly growing move for elected members, as a default position, to impose more weight on citizens' acceptance of the political circumstance, rather than to establish what investment citizens might be likely to support. This is more generally referred to as the "front page of the local newspaper test".[263] That is, so long as the actions of a council on behalf of the citizens are not controversial enough to end up on the front page of the local "rag", for better or for worse,[264] then councils (elected members) can do pretty much what they want to, irrespective of what citizens really think.[265][266]

Picking up on this dilemma, and assuming elected members are rational beings and trying to represent their communities as they say they are,[267] what is it about establishing and adopting citizen preferences that has them walking away from these in practice? It seems that a series of common events or circumstances

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[261] CouncillorDC391450, 431612.

[262] Chair/DeputyRC451690.

[263] Mayor/DeputyDC271042.

[264] CouncillorCC11569.

[265] The opposite also applies for those who are seeking the attention – both citizens and elected members.

[266] CouncillorDC281061.

[267] CouncillorCC13652; CouncillorCC15709.

confronting elected members erodes their sense that citizen preferences are important – a sense that they have obviously felt but then generally struggle to find a strong enough reason to adopt those preferences. Two questions arise here. First, what are the reasons for the erosion of the essence of representation[268] to the extent that it is cast aside in deciding on large capital investments? Second, why does it seem to be cast aside so easily?

One of the causes of the erosion of the essence of representation, specifically taking the form of failing to consider citizen preferences, is that global influences and the complexities of the context and implications of proposals for investment (e.g., their impact on climate change)[269] seem to present themselves as a dilemma early in the debates or deliberations with citizens. Everyone has an opinion, generally unsubstantiated, about these sorts of global issues. It is hard to see reason among such a plethora of public opinion. Even if citizen preferences are almost entirely opinion based, the elected members in this research consider that citizens have a real influence on their decisions. However, other evidence shows clearly that their influence tends to be outweighed by other factors, such as: fiscal pressures or highly technical attributes that laypeople are not so likely to know;[270] low participation by citizens and/or the participation dominated by citizens with agendas that they tend to present repeatedly irrespective of the issue;[271] citizen engagement practices that woefully fail to capture the imagination of citizens to participate (which called out

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[268] Some confusion seems to exist between the concepts of a loss of democracy, which some refer to, and a loss of representation, as described here. If elected members choose not to accommodate citizen preferences, this is a loss of representation, not of democracy. I will explore this issue more shortly.

[269] CouncillorCC03168.

[270] CouncillorCC14664; CouncillorRC261004.

[271] Mayor/Deputy331210.

real concerns of representation);[272] and finally citizenship deficits, where citizens lack the technical wherewithal to have an informed position even if they do want to participate (which underlines that citizen preferences tend to be opinion, based on anecdote rather than any substantive evidence).[273]

Such findings indicate that, against the backdrop of an ever-decreasing involvement of citizens in local government affairs, the approach to establishing citizen preferences for any particular investment proposal, whatever specific approach is taken, does not seem to be working, even in a general sense.[274] If citizen participation is any measure of success for elected members and the citizens they represent, that success could only be described as marginal at best.

As a counter argument, considerable anecdotal evidence suggests elected members believe that citizens feel their councils do a pretty good job,[275] and, on the whole, that citizens establish and authorise the local government democracy to "get on with it".[276] This same sentiment suggests that, when extraordinary issues arise, citizens' reaction will be to allow elected members to respond to those circumstances to meet those demands.[277] This would include, for example, having council officers creating citizen engagement plans with more detailed information sets when required to meet any information deficits as they might arise. In this approach, which is more common than might be expected, a deliberative democracy seems

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[272] CouncillorCC09494; CouncillorCC11562.

[273] CouncillorCC0138.

[274] CouncillorDC16737; CouncillorRC1000.

[275] Chair/DeputyRC361371.

[276] Mayor/Deputy441655; Chair/DeputyRC24940.

[277] Chair/Deputy451691.

nothing more than an aspiration. Yet a disconnect between what elected members think they are doing and what they are actually doing is problematic.

If local government is serious about wanting to reverse this circumstance as soon as possible, then elected members (and, only to a marginally lesser extent, the bureaucracy that supports them) are and always have been responsible for doing so (LGA 2002).[278] Yet, according to some elected members, little has changed since 2002 when the enabling legislation was passed with fiscal prudence as one specific purpose.[279]

In some way, it reminds me of the awful illness, alcoholism. The first step in addressing this affliction is to recognise you are an alcoholic. Until you do, the generally agreed position of those who treat this illness is that it is unlikely the alcoholism is treatable. This unfortunate analogy is purposefully provocative to demonstrate that, until elected members recognise the extent of their responsibilities to enhance citizen participation, deliberative democracy's equivalent of alcoholism will persist.

One interesting aspect of the research findings, which supports the principle of really listening to the voices of citizens as a whole, is that a small, vocal minority of citizens, led by one or more elected members, can have strong and direct influences on investment proposal outcomes. Moreover, according to some elected members, that influence is far more than it ought to be.[280] When apathy towards citizen engagement and participation is riding high, as it is among the communities of many local government authorities, a council can come up with some of the most perverse

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[278] Councillor09509.

[279] Councillor09497.

[280] CouncillorCC11578.

solutions based on a complete misunderstanding of what is best, not for the vocal minority, but for the silent majority.[281] An example of a decision that many still see in this light is the decision not to proceed with the New Zealand Transport Authority's State Highway Basin Bridge project in Wellington City's central business district.[282]

Focusing on why citizen preferences carry less weight in capital investment decisions, two main reasons seem to be involved. First is the existence of some other significant influences (e.g., perceived financial prudence) that carry weight,[283] along with a desire to rationalise away the citizen preferences that have been determined for the particular proposed investment (e.g., through citizen agendas driving positions for or against any proposal, and/or low rates of participation, which lead elected members to consider that the findings from consultation are not representative anyway).[284] The second relates to other important influences that require weighting alongside citizen preferences; that is, technical expert advice and elected member opinion.

As to the question of why citizen preferences can be cast aside so easily, at least in the minds of the elected members who represent the citizens expressing them,[285] this is perhaps the most perplexing issue. Those preferences are, moreover, eroded to some point where elected members believe they can legitimately opt for a different position with different outcomes, seemingly to respond to more powerful influences. What is becoming apparent is that citizen preferences – which in other

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[281] CouncillorCC09571.

[282] CouncillorCC03167.

[283] Mayor/DeputyCC04197; CouncillorCC05279.

[284] CouncillorCC07410; CouncillorCC09473.

[285] Chair/DeputyCC24943; CouncillorDC23914.

circumstances might be referred to as normal decision elements – have *high vulnerability* and *low resilience* (Read & Havakis, 2017). The sensitivity of this cohort might also suggest that only in rare circumstances are citizen preferences seen as having *high criticality* with a *high (political) risk* (returning to the 'front page of the local newspaper test' noted earlier).

Moreover, a real concern for both citizens and elected members is that, given major infrastructure investment decisions are getting more complex,[286] intuitively it would seem that representation is only going to erode further and trade-offs are to become more difficult.[287] The well-established trends of recent years suggest that, unless the local government sector finds a way to fundamentally shift how it manages this relationship with its citizens, the gap between meaningful citizen engagement and participation, on the one hand, and decision-making on these investment proposals, on the other, will continue to widen substantially.[288] This research supports the literature on this point.[289] The widening gap – which might be referred to as *citizenship poverty* – has all the hallmarks of what one might liken to the growing poverty gap in New Zealand and the wicked problem this represents. If this idea triggers emotions of loss from no longer being a citizen and having all the responsibilities that accompany that role, then the analogy might be even more pertinent than this research suggests.

Returning to the earlier analogy that describes decision elements from public infrastructure (Read & Havakis, 2017), citizen preferences with predominant traits

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[286] CouncillorDC291085.

[287] CouncillorRC25984.

[288] CouncillorDC281059.

[289] Chair/DeputyRC321158.

that reflect citizenship poverty, high vulnerability, low resilience, low criticality and low political risk do not form a recipe conducive to arresting citizenship deficits. Nor is it a recipe that can address elected members' tendency to give low weight to those citizen preferences in their investment decisions.

If this is the case, as these findings suggest, this research may also offer some insights into how to reverse this trend that is challenging the democracy we all hold dear. Furthermore, as alternative influences seem to be imposing more weight as time moves on, the findings on better representation in this context raise questions about the role of local government in regard to these types of investments.

The next section makes some conclusions about the influence of expert technical advice on large capital investment decisions, which, as we have seen, is not necessarily as strong as we might expect.

Expert technical advice. The layers of internal and external technical advice seem to be so fundamental to local government processes that it is as much part of the 'representative DNA' of democracy as the citizen preferences and the elected members voted in by those citizens to make decisions. If so, its central importance raises questions about who is using this advice and for what purpose. Other questions concern the independence of that advice and whether the essence of this knowledge ought to be protected and administered with some respect. From this perspective, the implications of elected members disregarding good technical advice are interesting. We will come to these issues shortly.

Returning briefly to citizen preferences, it is important to understand that when they are conveyed to an elected member (either indirectly or directly), they are presented in a relatively simple way. Generally they are presented as a binary message: yes, the investment proposal ought to progress; or no, it should not.

Although this description is somewhat simplified, there is widespread evidence of reports about how many people signed what petitions for or against a proposal. These are littered across council reports, which tout the number of signatures (for example) as evidence of support for or opposition to a decision. I recognise, however, that while each message in itself might be close to binary, the range of messages is incredibly diverse (e.g., from different individuals or groups representing a position in the community). The complexity lies in their diversity, as opposed to the nature of each message.

In contrast to such simple statements establishing citizen preferences, the information or evidence from experts that supports decisions about major infrastructure investments is often incredibly technical.[290] To put this information in context and use it in making their decision, elected members may require, in some instances, a reasonable understanding of some first principles (e.g., district planning rules, asset management principles, and financial or legal considerations). If complexity is the first challenge for elected members here, the second is the plethora of this type of advice.[291]

This research has shown that, as with citizen preferences, elected members do not necessarily think expert technical advice ought to be as influential as it is. While they seemingly have a healthy respect for expert technical advice in certain

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[290] CouncillorRC491831.

[291] The specialist skills required to inform investment decisions in the local government environment are enormously diverse– financial, legal, planning, engineering, urban design and resource management, to name but a few. Moreover, within each area is a huge range of further specialisation – for example, engineering includes structural, chemical, environmental, geotechnical, electrical and other specialties.

circumstances,[292] at times elected members dismiss or even attempt to undermine that advice prepared specifically for these decisions.[293] The challenge for the experts is that a growing number of circumstances seem to be eroding the influence of their advice[294] and correspondingly elected members are increasingly accepting that it is reasonable for them to operate outside this advice.[295] Moreover, the kinds of situations in which ignoring the advice is seen as acceptable seem somewhat random.

Digging deeper into the findings in Section 4.5, elected members seem to generally support the idea that expert technical advice, like citizen preferences, belongs to the suite of considerations they should take into account.[296] Yet they seem to have reasons for downgrading the influences from this source, almost at will.[297] Again, in practice, like citizen preferences, something seemingly erodes the essence of the role this type of advice plays in decision-making. This research has shown that, given the nature of a decision in this environment, every point at issue invariably has a counterfactual, a counter argument, a counter position, a counter determination, a counter opinion (even an expert one), and one or more actual circumstances that can be presented or drawn on as evidence describing that antithesis. This is more than problematic for elected members, especially if they are struggling to understand the advice anyway.

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[292] CouncillorCC0113.

[293] Mayor/DeputyCC04216.

[294] CouncillorCC09484.

[295] Chair/DeputyRC361352.

[296] Mayor/DeputyCC381422.

[297] Chair/DeputyRC351289.

This situation outwardly creates a deliberative gap in an environment that many elected members would lead us to believe is inclusive and conciliatory and invariably agrees on informed outcomes on behalf of its communities.[298] I am not convinced such a description really reflects the environment of local government, as revealed by this research.[299] Indeed, the counterfactual nature of the information in the decision-making process creates an environment that is set up to create conflicts or struggles – for example, over budgets.[300] It is not difficult to imagine what this kind of environment means for expert advisors. For example, evidence of conflicting expert advice is readily forthcoming; some elected members have stated you only have to pay to get the expert advice you want.[301]

The findings in Section 4.5 show clearly that elected members interviewed have struggled with the complexity of expert technical advice, and the risks associated with it, perhaps even more so than with citizen preferences.[302] As observed earlier, this circumstance seems to draw previously unrecorded parallels with the discussion on citizen preferences in the literature, which identifies the problem as citizenship deficits – an erosion of civic skills and dispositions among the general public (Nabatchi, 2010). Yet this seems unlikely to provide the whole explanation. A burgeoning question is: does this same deficit exist (and reasonably so) with elected members – who are, as noted earlier, also citizens? There is good evidence that it does.

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[298] Mayor/Deputy411520; CouncillorDC431594.

[299] CouncillorDC421549.

[300] CouncillorDC401479.

[301] Mayor/Deputy481774.

[302] CouncillorDC421571.

This connection leads me to wonder about human nature and this circumstance that puts elected members on the back foot with respect to information that is being presented to them for deliberation.[303] Fear of the unknown is one thing; fear of the unknown combined with the fear of looking foolish in public is altogether different.[304] For people in power, this prospect does seem to create some angst. First-term elected members really struggle with it.[305] It is especially complicated when the evidence is at odds with their own beliefs, almost irrespective of the circumstances.[306] This is expressly so with respect to large capital investment decisions when promises have been made to the public. Even more problematic situations arise when local place-making outcomes (e.g., within an elected member's ward or local board) are at odds with a wider district, city or regional outcome.

Such difficulties point to a number of conclusions to be drawn from elected members' observations in the interviews, where they seem to be seeking reasons why they need not follow the recommendations of the technical experts. Essential themes that percolate throughout the research findings include: how the advice was sought;[307] the quality of information experts provided in response;[308] the trust elected members had in these experts,[309] and finally the reputation of the expert and/or the company providing support for that advice.[310]

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[303] Mayor/Deputy481775.

[304] Mayor/Deputy04200.

[305] CouncillorCC10529; CouncillorDC16737.

[306] Mayor/DeputyCC04224.

[307] CouncillorDC281053.

[308] CouncillorCC11563.

[309] Chair/DeputyRC321168.

[310] CouncillorDC421571.

The research concludes that any one of these aspects of expert advice is open to challenge.[311] This in itself is not an issue; it becomes an issue when challenges to the advice are not founded on what is generally regarded as the best interests of the community.[312] This possibility leads to further concerns in relation to any circumstance where free, frank and fearless advice is either not presented (or hidden) for consideration or not considered objectively, as in numerous examples provided by elected members.[313] It raises questions as to the importance of independence, and specifically whether we have the assurance that an independent, apolitical voice is heard with these significant decisions. It has not been the intent of this research to unpack the local democracy construct as we know it, but these findings do challenge the status quo, at least for a portion of these types of decisions.

Following this line of thinking, a significant amount of evidence points to the importance of the types of investment elected members have been considering in these circumstances.[314] As noted earlier, the type of project involved has a recognisable influence on almost every aspect of the proposed investment,[315] from concept and consultation to deliberation and decision. Without question, this research demonstrates that large core infrastructure investments (e.g., three-waters and roading), which are often driven by regional imperatives, ought to be treated completely differently from investments in place-based projects that tend to be for the local community (e.g., libraries and community centres).

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[311] CouncillorCC10532.

[312] Mayor/DeputyDC341268.

[313] CouncillorDC281059.

[314] CouncillorCC14660.

[315] CouncillorDC22900; CouncillorDC301106.

Some elected members imply that core infrastructure investments ought to involve a governance arrangement with almost non-executive direction. The nature of these highly technical projects often precludes any material input from elected members other than agreeing to fund the major commitments they often draw on (e.g., a wastewater treatment plant).[316] I would equally emphasise that the research found no suggestion that the same arrangement should be applied to place-based projects. Social infrastructure seems to define communities; not unexpectedly, community involvement is high in any decision that is, at least in part, defining such projects. As observed above, these findings do challenge the status quo, particularly in relation to decisions on core infrastructure investments.

Next we turn to the conclusions about what gains a far greater weight in decision-making than either citizen preferences or expert technical advice.

Elected member opinion. Of all of the sources of influence on elected members' investment decisions that have been explored, this research concludes the most influential is the elected members themselves. Elected members seem to believe that their responsibility and the democratic right they carry as an elected member give them every right to either take on board citizen preferences and expert technical advice, or choose some other stance.

The most surprising finding is not that the influence exists; it is the weight it is given in practice and the frequency with which elected members draw on it when making a decision. The results significantly suggest the local government democracy may be less 'representative' than many think it is. In contrast to the deficits elected members apply in weighting citizen preferences and technical expert advice, as

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[316] Mayor/DeputyCC381458.

discussed above, the influence of elected members – what either they themselves or their peers think – seems substantially in surplus. That is, they are simply having too much of a say.

How can you have too much of a say? The thinking here is that elected members cannot be advocates (or politicians) and decision-makers (or governors) at the same time. At least, they cannot fulfil both these roles simultaneously if they are following good governance principles. In local government, where they hold a direct stewardship over communities, each elected member has the responsibility to ensure investment proposals put forward by citizens or bureaucrats (i.e., technical experts) are treated with and exposed to rigorous independent assessments of the type true governors ought to demand. Their role is not to champion (or dissuade) investment proposals. While their differences are substantial, the merging of the two roles seems to be a growing and common practice.

Some would suggest there are good reasons for having this demarcation. Local government faces some significant challenges if all elected members take an advocate's role into the decision chamber. I would like to think, as no doubt many citizens would, that elected members ought to weigh up each of the important elements of a decision on its merits and then make a decision. Evidence suggests this approach is less and less common, and that with the increasingly political nature of councils (particularly the city councils) elected members often seem to have far from open minds when entering the debating chamber to make a decision. Not only that, they have the power to do so.

For this reason, I have a sense that the focus on being a 'good governor' is seemingly declining for most elected members, who are instead getting emotionally tied to a position for or against an investment proposal and becoming 'good

politicians'. Championing an investment proposal is entirely different from making a good investment decision. And herein lies the problem: elected members ought to be much less emotionally tied to an investment, and a lot more independent of these proposals for which their support is sought. This might sound strange, like an attempt to take the politics out of the politician. But, in a way, that is exactly what I am arguing for. It seems we have swayed too much towards political interference in matters that require sound independent judgement on behalf of the whole community, and not political 'point-scoring' to determine whether any proposal is worthy of investment. It seems there is a real need to swing back to some first principles that would simply be recognised as good governance. Underlining my point above, for large capital investments elected members in local government ought to act less like politicians and more like true governors.

> *When people talk about [company] governance they're usually talking about the role of the board of directors. Boards exist to ensure a company is well run, and well governed so that shareholder value can be maximised and no 'funny business' goes on. (Institute of Directors, 2017)*

These are incredibly important principles. For large capital investment proposals (often commercially facing), the realisation is growing among elected members that a political lens only reduces the chances of making sound investment decisions for or on behalf of a community.

The research has come across a number of circumstances where being a politician rather than a good governor first has disturbed the foundations of a local government elected member's intended purpose. For example, from time to time

certain elected members play out, in a very public way, a campaign to influence others to either support or oppose a proposed investment.[317]

Furthermore, in more extreme instances, they are elected to office specifically to affect an outcome on these important decisions (e.g., to build a new stadium). In such highly charged environments, these elected members have been known to seek support from citizens to sway other elected members' decisions in favour of the outcome they are seeking.[318] One challenge that has emerged in such situations, as this research evidences, is that elected members can be driven by a specific, often politically ideological agenda. For example, taking one ideology only to illustrate the kind of thinking portrayed by some elected members from a range of political positions, statements follow this sort of logic: "I'm not going to vote to invest in a road (or overpass), because I'm 'green' and I don't like cars."

The issue here is that ideology is a bit like a principle; folk can and do 'die on the side of mountains' before they will shift from a position of principle,[319] even if what is being proposed is, by any other measure, a good investment for that community. Yet the task of running local government and building communities is not about dying on mountains. In fact, it is quite the opposite: it should be an environment of compromise, robust debate and seeking what is the best collective outcome for the community. I am sure these qualities are not what drives, for example, political ideology. Local government seems to be an unnatural fit for these,

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[317] CouncillorCC05263.

[318] Chair/DeputyRC24956.

[319] Mayor/DeputyCC451681; CouncillorCC09506.

at times, highly politically charged positions or circumstances. And there seems to be a genuine desire to eliminate these growing influences in local government.[320]

Some elected members will argue political ideology is part of what a democracy is all about.[321] While I accept that, I am also suggesting that if elected members are more concerned with building communities, when they are weighting political ideology or political principles they ought to carefully consider the implications of applying this uncomplicated and blunt tool to decisions in this type of environment. Less obvious is the apparently growing trend to integrate a biased political environment into local government (e.g., an environment rife with backroom deals, in which certain elected members can easily sway community outcomes and in which decision-making at best only loosely reflects 'principles of good governance').

A further challenge is that these entrenched positions do not seem to help a council to work through a process that creates objective diligence for an investment proposal.[322] A governor ought to be independent, rational and seeking what is best for a community generally (all of it, not just the elected member's ward or local board) and, more obtusely, should not be toeing the party line (green, red or blue). Ideally, these decisions are made with diligence in a way that ensures all the facets of an investment decision are clearly identified and then reviewed before a decision is made. This research suggests separating political ideology from local government decision-making presents significant challenges for some and this undermines any attempts to practise the sound principles of good governance and the diligence that

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[320] Mayor/DeputyDC471744.

[321] Mayor/DeputyDC411529; Mayor/DeputyDC481781.

[322] CouncillorCC15280.

supports this. A number of senior elected members (mayors and chairs) clearly stated they worked hard to dissuade elected members from applying party politics in their councils.[323] Their success in this endeavour, I might suggest, was variable.

Other revelations in this research are the level of influence that elected members have on each other (their peers) and the existence of a much subtler personal influence each elected member carries as a result of who they are, where they are from, how they were brought up and their wider life experiences. These influences become apparent when elected members draw on them to inform the debate that ultimately informs the decision being sought.

Also of interest are those influences that define the individual (e.g., their values or educational background). Other similar influences describe their environment (e.g., district councillors in comparison with regional councillors) or in some instances their place in it (e.g., elected members with four or five terms of experience compared with first-term elected members). For the most part, these influences manifest themselves in the debating chamber, as we will explore later in this chapter.

What seems to be the single most influential trait outside the influences identified to date is an elected member's length of tenure. Furthermore, it is apparent that while the importance of any number of traits can be elevated depending on the circumstance (e.g., project type and political ideology), they also draw on their own personal experience (e.g., their background in any number of relevant professions).

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[323] Mayor/ChairDC411529.

It is important to reiterate that this research is specifically referring to decisions that require significant capital investment. This point may seem disingenuous, but it is highly relevant given elected members have observed that, because of the complexity of some of these proposals, they struggle with many of the technical elements (e.g., planning, legal and/or financial considerations) that they must understand, especially if they are to make an informed decision when they do not have a background in these technical areas.

It is an interesting circumstance, even an anomaly, that when commissioners who sit on hearings panels – for example, for resource management applications – they require training and certification (note that many elected members are also Resource Management Act commissioners), yet no such requirement applies to an elected member of a council making considerably more important decisions. A reasonable conclusion is that we ought to explore options for introducing independent directors alongside elected members in these circumstances. Many elected members clearly need support with decision-making of this nature, or some other vehicle that reflects the importance of these decisions.

Interestingly, too, other traits of elected members identified and analysed during this research (e.g., gender and ethnicity) do not seem to have any substantial influence on elected members' decisions. The reasons might be as simple as that, if elected members are not going to recognise and weight citizen preference, then it is likely the 'people'-focused influences will become secondary considerations. Furthermore, this data is useful in that by better understanding elected members' individual circumstances (e.g., whether they are urban or rural councillors or district, city or regional councillors and/or the financial position of those councils relative to

the wealth of their communities), we gain useful insights into the black box, albeit just nuances to the substantive influences already discussed.

Notwithstanding the above conclusions, even the most rational decisions can become unravelled with one further outstanding influence: the ability to debate within the debating chamber. Those that shine here, some good examples of whom can be identified throughout this research,[324] can shift the centre of any debate and 'derail' any recommendations for a way forward. An elected member who has honed oratory and debating skills is vastly more effective than those who do not – but that is, as they say, politics.

Coupled to this ability is an elected member's political prowess. Prowess in this sense comes down to being able to manage relationships and, particularly important with some of these investment decisions, doing so in particularly difficult circumstances.

The next suite of conclusions offers some insights into the elected members' reflections on how all these different influences play out when they are actually settling on a capital investment decision in the often highly charged and emotionally sensitive environment of the debating chamber. It reinforces how tough this political environment can be, as life inside the chamber is not, nor has it ever been, black and white, but rather an ever-moving sea of grey.

The debate. The evidence on the decision-making process supports the initial findings that the strongest influence on investment decisions comes from

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[324] Mayor/Deputy501583.

elected members. It is underlined by their apparently innate belief that they are entitled to exercise the democratic right they carry as an elected member.[325]

Another surprising finding is that the influence of elected members is significantly stronger during the debate where they exercise that right. That is, their resolve only increases as a result of the debate. In this context, the question of how these decisions are made becomes even more pertinent.

The debating chamber is where elected members formally settle on capital investment proposals and decide whether or not to accept them[326] (LGA 2002). The evidence suggests a few minutes of debate can have a significant influence on months or even years of work to produce a decision by elected members.[327] Astoundingly, this influence is almost entirely driven by what elected members think – or how they act when they voice their opinion.

This might sound obvious, but the inference is that the thinking behind the opinion being discussed often struggles with dealing with the complexity of the proposal. If you like, it captures the difference between an informed opinion and an uninformed one. Significantly a small group within those interviewed were introspective or reflective enough to suggest they were struggling with these challenging decisions.[328] Moreover, those who had been in the role the longest had some of the best insights into feeling this way.[329]

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[325] Mayor/DeputyDC331217; Chair/DeputyDC361365; CouncillorDC401491.

[326] There are strict rules in the council's policies and processes reflecting the intent of the LGA that must be followed in the debating chamber to meet the tests of the LGA when these decisions are made.

[327] Mayor/Deputy471749DC.

[328] CouncillorCC0125; CouncillorCC02110; CouncillorCC03184; CouncillorCC06369; Mayor/Deputy04245; Chair/Deputy24955.

An interesting contrast came from the majority, who felt they were equipped to deal with the complexities associated with these decisions. The interesting turned into surreal when it became obvious that most elected members, other than those few noted above, felt that, while they were able to cope with the complexity, their peers were struggling with it to the extent that those making these observations wondered if their peers ought to be making these types of decisions.

Many elected members reflected on what their concerns about peers meant for them and how this influenced the way they felt about certain individuals, their perceived understanding of their capabilities, what this meant in the context of the wide variety of personalities that circled these capabilities, and how this all played out in influencing the final outcome of the decision. They seemed to have significantly deeper insights into any one of their peers than they did into the decisions themselves. This tendency may indicate a desire to be able to manage their peers and influence their decisions as much as they could, rather than a concern with the first principles of good governance and establishing whether the decisions would produce good investments.

In Section 4.6, I observed that local government contains some big personalities, many with significant capabilities and experience. Many within this small cohort are distinguished leaders even outside their communities (e.g., Fran Wilde) and many come armed with the reputation of being a notable orator and debater with many years' experience (e.g., John Forbes). The research found that, as much as the influences might operate in an environment driven by process and procedure in the chamber, it was the politics and people that left the strongest

[329] Mayor/DeputyDC391439.

impression on the elected members who were making the decisions at this time. This impression was particularly strong for those elected members who were, and will always be, recognised as normal folk in comparison (e.g., George Johnson).

This thesis concludes that councils are broadly made up of two types of elected members: those who tend to influence and those who tend to be influenced. It is especially when elected members have little experience (as well as low prominence) that they are likely to be influenced by other experienced, often distinguished elected members, either in the debating chamber or elsewhere.[330] For example, several elected members told me they often took counsel from one particular elected member in one council. The revelation was some elected members are known to focus on this counsel in making their decision. Their peers were aware of this practice and disapproved of it,[331] especially when they considered undue pressure was put on others to make a decision in a specific way.[332] With regard to large capital investment decisions, the evidence suggests this happens all too frequently, at every stage of the decision process.

This evidence leads to the conclusion that it is simply opinions that feed the anarchy described by Cohen et al.'s (1972) garbage can model. It is simply opinions that have created the black box model that followed and the murky optics of what is inside (e.g., Venn, 2011). It is understanding the role of opinions that has led to some of the most important learnings about how information is translated from what seems mostly ethereal into the praxis of a decision. It is a revelation that large capital investment decisions are mostly about the opinions of individual elected members

[330] CouncillorDC27036.

[331] CouncillorCC07412.

[332] CouncillorCC07392.

and the battle that ensues to capture these and turn them into votes to secure the decision they are seeking. And, on these grounds, it is a revelation and a reasonable conclusion that the chances of citizen preferences ever finding representative prominence in their own right is low.

The evidence from a number of elected members suggests they take positions on investments based on relationships with less than altruistic purposes first (e.g., town versus country, or political persuasions), rather than based on the merits of those decisions,[333] often linked to who is paying.[334] Many decisions therefore are seemingly disconnected from a strongly evidence-based, independent debate on the merits of any proposal and what is best for a community, and instead are shaped more by what is best for an elected member's political circumstance. The result is a sort of 'bloc voting' action based on an agenda or position (e.g., party political persuasion). This does little to support the type of representative democracy many elected members expect when they first arrive in some council chambers.[335] In fact, in some councils elected members run as independent candidates for this specific reason.[336]

Following this theme of elected members voicing concerns about the competency of their peers, opinions varied on whether it is difficult to attract good candidates to run for council, which some saw as the reason for the problem.[337] For example, some elected members commented that councils could not attract enough

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[333] Mayor/DeputyDC311129, DC311122.

[334] Mayor/DeputyDC311128.

[335] CouncillorCC08435; CouncillorCC08435; Mayor/Deputy451684.

[336] CouncillorCC02133.

[337] CouncillorCC03190; CouncillorCC08461; CouncillorCC11584; CouncillorRC25970; Chair/DeputyCC331218.

candidates with the education and experience[338] that many elected members felt were necessary to govern effectively in a council (e.g., a growing need for good commercial skills).

Reflecting on the myriad of machinations and influences in the debating chamber as described by elected members, two insights stand out if the answer to the research question is substantially about unpacking opinions. One is that it is always going to be about the people (in this case, the elected members). That is a given. The other, which has become clear to me through my interviews with the elected members, is that if it really comes down to their opinions, then establishing what those are is crucial to understanding what is inside the black box. Deepening this understanding, this research concludes two fundamental world views are at play.

The first world view is where elected members seem to start from a position of having formed opinions about almost everything that makes them who they are and the democratic right that they possess when they make a judgement call on that opinion, until any evidence comes along to sway them otherwise.[339] And, frankly, some elected members seem unlikely ever to be swayed (particularly with regard to major infrastructure investment decisions).

The second world view is where an elected member seems to start from an independent stance irrespective of their personal opinions, with no set or firm views either way, and make a decision based on the evidence of the proposal.[340] This is a

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[338] CouncillorCC07371.

[339] CouncillorCC13631; CouncillorCC15697.

[340] CouncillorDC21871.

significantly more mature view of good governance and is seemingly lost on a majority of elected members.

In summary, the first world view is mostly about an elected member having to change their mind while the second is about an elected member who has to make up their mind.

If this is so, then in the first world view changing the opinion of an individual elected member must be an almost forcible process – that is, something must be overcome before the elected member yields this opinion, or at least enough of it to change it. Ontologically it also has elected members feeling they have lost something when they do change their stance. Alternatively, they simply make it up.[341] Conversely, in the second world view an opinion is seemingly gifted by the individual elected member and is something they never owned with respect to the specifics of any decision. That is, somehow, they are able to divorce themselves from their personal views about the particular decision and share their opinion, and are willing for others to do likewise. The sum of this process, with all elected members acting in this way, might be described as the collective consciousness of 'the council'.

However, each world view is counterintuitive to the other.

Herein lies another challenge. Backed by the evidence, I conclude it is substantially harder to shift an elected member's opinion when they are operating from the first world view than when they are working from the second one.

What this distils down to is an environment in which elected members are expected to make inordinately important decisions with their peers, most of whom are ill-prepared to make these decisions, even though they have been elected to do

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[341] CouncillorCC07410.

so.[342],[343] To make such decisions, they also need to reconcile contrasting world views of how they form opinions and make decisions in an emotionally charged environment.[344]

Decisions about large capital investments seem to bring out the best and the worst in elected members, and the presence of what might look like anarchy is significant when emotion is running high.[345] While some attempts to sway a peer's vote are subtle, others are more blatant. The insidious nature of some of these attempts at influence that some elected members have described[346] raises some concerns.

It has been noted that leadership in any context is important when a group is seeking to achieve a common goal. This is certainly true of a council and the group of elected members that make it up. This research also found that elected members view their thought leaders – not necessarily the mayor or chair – as the strongest political influence.[347] Further evidence shows elected members are influenced by the way the leadership conducts deliberations in these environments.[348]

Given the debating chamber is where opinions are either changed or formed, leadership is about providing an opportunity for this to happen. As noted above, a variety of factors contributes to this influence. The leadership style of the civic leader

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[342] A vote count in a local body election does not miraculously overcome the knowledge deficits that exist in those who run for office in a popular democracy.

[343] CouncillorCC09492; CouncillorCC11585; CouncillorCC0163.

[344] Mayor/DeputyCC48781.

[345] CouncillorCC0110; CouncillorCC11579; CouncillorCC12614,

[346] CouncillorCC07394.

[347] Chair/DeputyRG321171.

[348] Mayor/DeputyCC331235.

can enable or oppress the debates around the debating table.[349] Similarly, the nature and style of the elected members during the debate have a strong influence on the leader's ability to maintain an orderly environment.[350] Tensions can run high in the debates where these opinions differ, especially in regard to these types of decisions. As one mayor observed, the challenge is to maintain composure no matter what the outcome.[351] Evidence suggests maintaining that composure is not easy.

When trying to establish optics on what is inside the black box, this is a complication that is likely to be specific to the circumstances of a particular council, even if it is possible to establish what and how opinions are formed and contribute to a decision. This is the nature of descriptive decision theory (Dillon, 1998; Hansson, 1994; Jones, 1999).

Giving these opinions a further edge, every decision on a large capital investment is important to a community. This poses a particular challenge for elected members where their opinions will influence the wellbeing of their communities for generations into the future (as many of these types of decisions do). Elected members in this research recognise that poor decisions weigh heavily; they understand the weight of their responsibilities at this level of local government. Yet poor decisions (as opposed to poor process) are not uncommon, in their view.[352]

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[349] Mayor/DeputyDC271022.

[350] CouncillorDC18788.

[351] Mayor/DeputyCC411528; Mayor/DeputyDC391464.

[352] Chair/Deputy45691; Mayor/Deputy481783; CouncillorCC07373.

5.1.3   Summary

In the final analysis it is clear that elected members' opinions are the most significant influence on any large capital investment decision. It also appears that, as a result of growing representative deficits, most elected members simply turn to what they know best, their understanding of things more generally, and from that form their own opinions. Evidence suggests they can form these opinions from deep within their personal self, aligned to all those influences on who they are and what they represent as individuals.

A different explanation of how they form their opinions also exists. A number of elected members demonstrated a world view that their role is to weigh up the evidence and form an opinion based on that evidence. This approach seemed to be somewhat less frequent than the first.

Reinforcing the influence of elected members is that, throughout the development of an investment proposal, and most importantly when they come together in the debating chamber, factions among the elected members work incessantly on one another to sway opinions. What this involves is the essence of the murky understanding of how the interchanges formulate the final decision made. It seems this is where the personalities, for the first time, become instrumental in shaping the decisions.

These circumstances seem a long way from the normative decision environments this research has expected to uncover. Citizen engagement practices also seem a long way from the centre of the considerations that are ultimately the focus of elected members when they make their decisions.

This research concludes with two further determinations on these significant decisions.

First, until the citizenship deficits, the bureaucratic deficits and the representative deficits identified in this research are overcome, the future generations have an elevated risk of being delivered poor investment outcomes from the decisions this generation is about to make.

Second, until decisions of this nature are removed, in whole or in part, from local government or supported by other sources within local government and alternative governance models are established to ensure whole-of-life outcomes for New Zealand's local communities, which include outcomes like, but not limited to, establishing intergenerational equity, the risk to our future generations suggests we ought to act in such a way as to manage this risk.

Now let's look at the reasons behind these conclusions.

5.2   The Practice

In Chapter 1, I described a real-world problem for local government. It amounted to an assortment of issues that, when distilled out, represented a growing concern that local government is becoming less and less likely to be able to meet a number of important service obligations agreed to with its communities. I referred to it as an affordability crisis.

At the heart of this concern is a number of complex issues that highlight how and why local government can make decisions that still require reconciliation in order to maximise citizen preferences and the public value they are expected or entitled to deliver. First, local government seems to have an untenable problem with long-term liability and intergenerational equity. For example, many councils are

unable to meet the infrastructural replacement (renewal) commitments in the short to medium term. Auckland Council's treasury borrowing caps illustrate this point: Auckland Council simply cannot borrow any more money to meet the demands that its significant growth is generating. New funding and financing models are being explored (e.g., Special Purpose Vehicles) to overcome the constraints that have been created by legislation seeking to manage local government affairs within certain fiscal limits, for a different purpose. These sorts of challenges are also strongly evident in rural New Zealand, as this research has shown with cohorts of councils where populations are either static or declining (e.g., Ohope District Council).

The second issue arises from conditions laid down in the past (e.g., investment patterns in infrastructure after World War Two), coupled with what are generally regarded as fixed fiscal envelopes[353] (i.e., rating increases limited to the CPI). The result has been a burgeoning crisis of short-term affordability and longer-term sustainability that is likely to impose significant constraints on public spending, if it has not already.

One consequence has been a significant dilemma about prioritising investments. Simply put, it is not possible for elected members to make all the decisions they might like to, in order to meet all the expectations of their communities. This is self-evident from the findings of this research. This in itself is neither unexpected nor necessarily problematic. But the real challenge that seems to be emerging is an ever-increasing pressure on what some elected members have referred to as 'core' infrastructure investment or reinvestment. Some elected

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[353] Where any increase in income is generally expected to match the consumer price index (CPI).

members have voiced real concerns that investments in what was in the past treated as almost sacrosanct (e.g., investments in water) are now at risk.

To compound this dilemma, the local government democracy that has been established over the last 100 plus years to act on behalf of its community is seemingly almost entirely disconnected from the very community it represents at a time when its connectivity is most needed and where the types of decisions being sought should have significant community input. The need to establish citizen preferences in an environment where participation is declining while so much is at stake has been, and continues to be, a significant concern.

What I conclude from this research is that citizen preferences are not the substantive influence, other than in certain, sometimes extreme circumstances. In general, elected members do not give citizen preferences the weight citizens might expect even when they have sought those preferences. It seems to follow, at least in some sense, that these decisions are descriptive rather than normative. That is, elected members tend to resort to what they think, as opposed to what is presented as fact (e.g., what a community wants as opposed to what it needs). As they are elected members of their community, this approach in principle seems reasonable, except that it seems these supposedly normative decisions are in reality descriptive decisions masquerading as normative. This revelation has me wondering what it means for the citizens who think their input is – or is not – significant. Moreover, what does it mean for the deliberative democracy that we expect but in all likelihood is at least in part a fallacy?

A further concern is what the implications are for the significant capital investment decisions that will undoubtedly emerge in the next generations. These decisions will be significantly larger, significantly more complex, and substantially

more difficult than local government has ever experienced in its various guises over the last 100 years. All investment indicators are that New Zealand will need to deal with investment demands unlike anything that has occurred since the investment boom in the 1920s and 1940s (especially) following the two world wars, or in response to the baby boomer population explosion and its subsequent investment response in the 1960s and through into the 1970s in the generation that followed. Are we sure we want descriptive decision-making with so much at stake, even if it is democratic in its origins? I conclude we do not. I further conclude this is more than problematic, as the complexity of the decision environment described throughout this thesis is only going to get worse.

5.3   The Complexity in Theory and in Practice

Life now is altogether more complex than in the earlier eras that local government operated in. As a consequence, I conclude we ought to be circumspect about how to make these decisions and who ought to make them. The popular democracy has watered down the relative competency of any local government of recent times, and any council within it. This is not meant to be in any way disingenuous; it is just simply the reality. Even if it could be argued a particular council had unusually talented elected members, the mere increase in the complexity of local government, from even as recently as the 1980s, makes it hard to counter the point.

I conclude the scholarship that has supported this research has offered a strong backbone to the thinking and ultimately the findings here. The value of Throgmorton's (1991) research and model cannot be overstated. The validity of the defining cohorts of influencers (citizens, technical experts and politicians) has been reinforced here (albeit

with a slight amendment to its naming convention). Two conclusions specifically apply to local government in New Zealand.

First, the foundations of decision-making in local government decision-making in any situation have their own set of circumstances. The research confirms the relative importance of the legislation, the planning frameworks that support the day-to-day activities of local government and the citizen engagement practices that are employed to capture the expectations and aspirations of its citizens to inform a decision when required. 'Relative' is used here for a purpose, which I will come to shortly.

Second, the decision-making processes of local government, within the context of these foundations, have been used to capture the thoughts of what influences the decision-makers when they make a decision. The decision-making process in local government is ultimately linear. It might not seem to be so on the surface, but this appearance really reflects the nature of this environment to relitigate, check in, confirm and ultimately authorise investments to proceed. As described earlier, even though the process can be highly iterative and sometimes torturously so, it remains linear.

The scholarship also provided substantial input into sense-making out of an environment that seemed, at first glance, nothing short of chaos. In view of the nature of the local government environment, this research explored the possibility that almost any decision-making model could be applied in any particular circumstance, at some time, when it suited. This possibility seemed, on the face of it, somewhat problematic. After I reflected on this for some time, however, it became apparent that it did not seem to matter.

Eventually, in addition to concurring that there is some merit to the chaos Cohen et al. (1972) set out in the garbage can model, I conclude that the models themselves are more an attempt to understand the specifics of what Bächtiger et al. (2012), among others, later described as a decision-making black box. My conclusion is that, even though the array of models over the last several decades might seem to explore the circumstance that dictates decision-making by elected members, these were more exploratory interrogations into the black box, focusing on some idea of a decision-maker's specific predisposition to make a decision. Less has been said about the underlying drivers of or influences on that decision-making. That is, historically the scholarship focused on a decision-maker's relatively simple predilection (e.g., welfare-maximising homo economicus (economic man) or rational, goal-driven, utility-maximising decision-makers) rather than on how the decision-makers are being influenced and the circumstance that created this predilection. To coin a phrase, this historical approach seems like putting the cart before the horse.

The appeal of the thinking behind the garbage can model (as opposed to the model itself) was its seemingly agnostic attitude to all bias (adopting the notion that true chaos has no bias). Almost because of or perhaps in spite of this, the research showed the thinking behind the garbage can model was underpinned by themes that eventually point to several important pieces of research. As a whole, that research provides an insight into what a more informed investment decision in local government might look like. I therefore conclude it is this complexity in the theory of these more recent frameworks, the growing gap in knowledge and capability of the decision-makers as a result of this complexity, and its praxis that are driving these growing deficits.

5.4   The Deficits

In essence, the gap is growing between the two most important elements that lead to an informed investment decision in our local and deliberative democracy. First, decisions about large capital investments are so complex that even some of the more experienced or professionally equipped elected members struggle to consider them in anything but a descriptive, or at best, prescriptive context. Usually they rely on or revert to their own personal opinions when confronted with information that is mostly too complex to reconcile – after all, they are simply and understandably normal folk.

The second, related element is the gap in the knowledge required to have an informed opinion that has been created between the citizens (citizenship deficits), the machinery of government and its bureaucracy (democratic deficits) and what this research recognises for the first time as *representative deficits*. Furthermore, the gap is seemingly increasing exponentially. Picking up on the finding that many elected members struggle with the complexity and significance of these investment decisions, it is paradoxical that representatives elected in a deliberative democracy are themselves in deficit with the very function they are elected to office to perform. It is a paradox nonetheless worth exploring.

The current literature provides some insights into the citizenship and democratic deficits, as described in Chapter 2, and this research supports these insights in principle. Yet the literature makes almost no reference to what is described here as representative deficits. I conclude it would seem reasonable to argue that the scholarship surrounding this newly identified deficit, and the extent of this influence on these decisions, would likely come to some of the same conclusions that the research into citizenship deficits and democratic deficits has already come

to. I am sure other conclusions would also emerge. For example, should we be requiring elected members in a democracy to undergo some sort of means test to establish whether they were sufficiently equipped to hold office and represent the people? I stress I am not trying to reach any such conclusion here; rather, I am highlighting that the populist deliberative democracy is struggling to find the competencies needed to meet the growing demands of office.

However, whatever the outcome, this would need to be tested, and in an environment where democratically endorsed elected members are almost never held to account for decision performance. I am unconvinced such accountability is ever likely to happen with decisions about major infrastructure investments, unless the way we govern fundamentally changes.

This research has uncovered a challenging nuance that tests the core of the deliberative democracy we enjoy. Elected members are, almost without exception, people who work incredibly hard on behalf of and doing what they think is best for their communities. For good reason, other than through the electoral cycle, they are also almost untouchable once the local government elections give them the democratic right to make decisions on behalf of their communities. Fulfilling this responsibility can be incredibly difficult, as many elected members have pointed out. While they are in office, they have every right to settle on any decision as they see fit; that is the democracy they (and we) enjoy.

Notwithstanding these best of intentions, I conclude these intentions are simply not enough – at least, not any more. The stakes are too high, and the decisions we need to make now are likely to have consequences that last as long as the significant decisions of the 1920s, 1940s and 1960s. Just as those decisions of the past have set the tone for our community wellbeing up until now, it is without

reservation that I suggest the decisions about major infrastructure investments are also likely to influence our communities for the next 100 years, at least. This undoubtedly includes decisions to renew the investments of our founding mothers and fathers; it seems reasonable these decisions will have had a similar effect on as least as many generations in the past as they will have in the future when elected members come to ponder them once more.

As noted, most of the major decisions this research has explored have already been made by our founding mothers and fathers, many of whom were the then most educated people of their time. Almost without exception, they were successful business people in their own right, and folk of means. At the time they were deciding on capital investments, the legislative environment, the frameworks that supported local government and the citizen participation existed in an altogether different world to the one we now know. The complexity of the Local Government Act 2002, the Rating Valuations Act 1998, and the Resource Management Act 1991 and its construction equivalent, the Building Act 2004, represents an altogether different proposition today. While our democracy has largely remained constant, everything around it would be almost completely foreign to anyone transported from the past to try to exercise the same responsibilities.

I conclude that normative decisions are an ever-increasing challenge.

5.5   Normative Decisions

Anyone working in or with local government knows the complexity of this decision-making environment; this research has taken this characteristic as a given. This also implies Cohen et al. (1972) at least had an understanding of the type of environment local government operates in. Therefore, I conclude the first part of their research

and the themes they explored (rather than the modelling itself) seem to make good sense. However, beyond this thinking and somewhat contrary to this in a practical sense (perhaps the themes of the thinking as opposed to the thinking per se are what is most relevant here), I contend it seems possible to make some sense of this chaos in a different way than Cohen et al. suggest. Local government simply order the chaos with legislation and process. The findings of this research unsurprisingly suggest that solving this kind of complexity requires an altogether different approach (as opposed to identifying it as Cohen et al. appear to have done).

Before we explore this further, I recognise local government achieves order from the chaos using the legislation, its planning frameworks and citizen engagement practices to work through and inform large investment decisions. These structures and processes in practice produce some semblance of order (on a day-to-day basis). Yet what is not immediately obvious is that creating a circumstance for a normative investment decision does not necessarily mean a normative decision will eventuate as hoped or planned. This is self-evident even when these decisions reside inside the formal local government context of a council chamber and the protocols that support decision-making within it.

Evidence confirms there is seemingly no guarantee that a normative decision will eventuate even if the processes up to the point of a decision provide this opportunity (where elected members vote on any proposal). In fact, as noted above, the findings show the decisions themselves are invariably descriptive, not normative. The only logical conclusion that can be drawn from this revelation is it is not the decision process itself or the information that undermines normative decisions, but the decision-makers – in this case, the elected members.

The apparent reason why decision-makers are the key players here is that while the complex array of available information up to the decision itself has been reconciled reasonably well (as noted above), the information only ends up in an altogether different type of chaos – the chaos of influences and nuances that elected members must reconcile before they make the informed normative decisions their communities hope for. The irony is that for all the effort to provide the coherent information required to make these complex decisions, the decision only ever really moves from one type of chaos (now organised) into another (disorganised). That is, it is operating within the decision-making black box (Bächtiger et al., 2012).

It might appear unfounded to refer to the decision-making black box of local government as containing chaos, but it has been a mystery to academics and practitioners alike for as long as they have been trying to understand how decisions are being made. Therefore, it simply seems like chaos is involved.

By taking salient elements from the scholarship already published and knitting these into the thinking evident from the elected members' observations in this research, I have been able to reach some important conclusions.

The complexity identified in the ecology and ecosystem of the decision-making environment of local government requires a matching complexity in the scholarship to help me see through this. Put another way, it has been necessary to match complexity with complexity to make progress on understanding whether elected members are giving enough weight to citizen preferences in their decisions. Unsurprisingly achieving this outcome took an eclectic assemblage of thinking across scholarship that spanned the last 50 plus years before some order emerged from the complexity of these decisions.

To do so, I had to pattern the complexity against predefined and prescribed local government decision-making processes to unpack the chaos described by Cohen et al. (1972). I have concluded that it took this eclectic approach to establish and unpack some of the wicked problems supposedly being addressed by these types of investment decisions. Without that approach, it would have been impossible to uncover some new understandings of what goes on inside the black box.

By stitching some of Throgmorton's (1991) thinking into the key cohorts of influences that elected members have described in this research, then coalescing these influences into a number of key themes linked to the decision-making processes set out in the LGA 2002, I reached some new insights into what this might mean for the decision-making environment of local government. In particular, this research has gone some way to lifting the lid on Bächtiger et al.'s (2012) black box and has provided some optics on what is inside it.

5.6   Implications of Findings

In general, I conclude the LGA 2002 is somewhat out of touch. Furthermore, its recent amendments seem to send an array of mixed messages to councils about what their roles and responsibilities are and where those roles and responsibilities start and stop.

The most significant reforms of local government for more than a century occurred in 1989 with the fourth Labour government, and arguably they were also the last real reforms of substance to date. From that time, central government has continued to tinker with the legislation that has a direct influence on large capital investment decisions: significantly in 1996 (mostly to introduce new and more rigorous financial management of council activities) and again in 2002 (to counter a

loss of democratic control, and encourage greater participation in local body decision-making; for example, the new requirement to draw up and publicise long-term council community plans).

Numerous amendments after 2002 have been made to these more substantive reviews. These include the amalgamation of Auckland City into one local government unitary authority in 2010; the first phase of an eight-point reform programme for local government in 2012; and the 2014 amendment as part of central government's broader programme for building a more productive, competitive economy and better public services. However, central government has shown little desire to seriously review the role of local government since 1989.

The removal of the four wellbeings from the purpose of the Act in the 2012 amendment is a poster-child example of what local government would generally refer to as central government meddling in its affairs. Given New Zealand has changed significantly since 1989, a review that looked at how these significant long-term investment decisions are being made would be a good place to start to address the issues identified in this research. The LGA 2002 is simply out of date. As a starting point, the decision-making environment would benefit from improving clarity in legislation on the rules that inform elected members about how they should weight citizen preferences when making these types of decisions.

In contrast to the legislation, I conclude the planning frameworks seem to be mostly fit for purpose and work well generally. They include largely positive processes such as the preparation of both long-term financial strategies and 10-year plans outlining expected income and expenditure as part of the move towards greater fiscal responsibility. The more recent amendments requiring councils to prepare an

infrastructure strategy for at least a 30-year period and to incorporate this into their long-term plans are also generally seen as a positive step forward.

One obvious way of improving the planning frameworks would be to give some strong direction to improve engagement practices and to measure the success (or failure) of that engagement. Some have suggested that certain decisions ought not be made until a significant percentage (say, 75%) of the community has had a say. How practical such a requirement might be in the current environment is one question; the extent to which this would create an urgency to improve engagement practices in the planning cycles is another.

A less successful aspect of the current processes is the quality of the citizen engagement practices being used to establish citizen preferences. Many would argue they are no better now than they were with the introduction of LGA in 2002. This research has concluded that representative deficits create a need for significant decisions to reside centrally, not locally. In essence, with the growing complexity of these sorts of decisions elected members are declining in their ability to make a normative decision that will affect the current generations and those that will follow 100 years or more into the future. I conclude this situation offers strong support for the argument that local government ought not be burdened by these types of investment decisions alone. And, whatever the outcome, I further conclude citizen engagement practices in this deliberative democracy are under significant non-sustainable pressure.

Elected members are simply struggling and will increasingly struggle to make the type of normative decisions about infrastructure investments their citizens would reasonably expect. Evidence suggests elected members only loosely refer to citizen preferences or only generally weight it; expert technical advice struggles to gain

traction except with certain types of advice; and most of the elected member opinions that the elected members often heavily rely on come from what they think they know and how they feel about any particular circumstance, rational or not. This is not an appropriate environment in which to make these sorts of decisions.

Key questions necessarily follow from this argument. In particular, who would make those decisions in place of local government? Moreover, given it would be desirable to maintain these decisions within the construct of a local deliberative democracy, how could the legislation, the planning frameworks that support this legislation, and the citizens whose voice ought to be heard in this democracy be constructed to meet the demands of those decisions?

Making decisions that reflect a balance between citizen preferences, expert technical advice and elected member opinions, while managing the growing information or knowledge gap among decision-makers, provides several 'wicked' challenges. Yet they all seem to distil down to the two unassailable conclusions set out at the start of this chapter.

First, until the citizenship deficits, the bureaucratic deficits and the representative deficits identified in this research are overcome, the future generations are at an elevated risk of being delivered poor investment outcomes from decisions this generation is about to make. Second, until decisions of this nature are removed, in whole or in part, from local government or supported by other sources within local government and alternative governance models are established to ensure whole-of-life outcomes for New Zealand's local communities, which include outcomes like, but not limited to, establishing intergenerational equity, the risk to our future generations suggests we ought to act in such a way as to manage this risk.

These conclusions lead into two possible options. The first is to somehow make the step change required to bring citizens, technical experts and elected members closer together to make informed and democratic investment decisions, or come to a hybrid arrangement to achieve that. The alternative option is to re-engineer the decision-making framework to give the decisions to someone else or again make an equivalent hybrid arrangement in which to support elected members when they do.

Enabling either option (or options of this type) requires significant leadership. If I was to explore what the decision environment might look like in a brave new world that recognised the importance of decisions about major infrastructure investments, it would likely look something like this.

Large investments would be categorised according to their type. Most of the feedback from elected members pointed to core infrastructure decisions at scale (likely to be regionally important), which would reasonably include transportation and three-waters infrastructure. The research highlighted that, in contrast, decisions on place-based investments (e.g., libraries, parks and gardens) ought to reside with the communities in which the investments were being proposed. These decisions would be likely to also include those social infrastructure decisions where the investment needs to be considered or prioritised against large-scale core infrastructure proposals (e.g., a regional sports stadium).

The future environment would also incorporate one of the two main options I suggested above for addressing the three kinds of deficits this research has identified. The first is to somehow enable a step change in the understandings that citizens, in some cases technical experts and elected members need to make an informed

decision. Practically and pragmatically this might be a long-term strategy, but giving immediate effect to it is simply unrealistic.

I have concluded the second option, in particular the hybrid version, is more realistic. That is, these decisions require a new governance model that compels normative decision principles at all times, yet also recognises the local government deliberative democracy ideals the New Zealand public expect. This suggests a model in which a council has the legislative frameworks to maintain a democracy. Its decision-makers would be comprised of both elected members and technical experts (independent board members) who have the same voting rights on decision proposals (with the precise numbers of both groups to be set after further consideration of this model). The nationally appointed council members would have a strong mandate to be fiercely independent. In certain circumstances (e.g., if they were to hold the stewardship for and on behalf of central government to any access to significant investment funding), they would also have the right to get the answers to the deeply complex questions about these types of investments to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, locally, regionally and in some cases nationally.

Part of the issue is that the current frameworks do not manage scale. Too many short-term decisions are being made. Scale therefore does not just include the size of the investment alone; it necessarily ought to include time at scale. To answer the intergenerational equity questions with large capital investments is a must. So I conclude any hybrid council governance model for making these types of investment decisions ought to be able to provide optics on an integrated, long-term, intergenerationally equitable, evidence-based investment decision.

In this regard I will leave this last thought.

If nothing else, evidence-based investment decision-making is that quintessential element that will support and, where necessary, discipline future elected members in a normative decision-making environment. With regard to the current state of decision-making and its significant challenges, a new discipline is emerging that is almost certain to refocus evidence-based investment decision-making in the future. Data scientists and the emergence of their discipline of data science are likely to significantly influence normative decision-making in the 21st century.

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Appendix B: Supplementary Interview Excerpts

This research has, by its nature, generated a significant source of supporting evidence this thesis. The research is rich with the references provided by the elected members who provided the data for this thesis. In many cases a substantial amount of additional supporting evidence has been collected alongside those which are captured within the main body of the thesis. These supplementary interview excerpts have been captured and presented here to provide further evidence alongside those found within the main body of the thesis. The intention and purpose of including these additional references is to demonstrate the weight of opinion and the nuances of those opinions that is unable to be established with a single reference alone.

B.1

a. While I see it [central government legislation] help and guide, it can also be quite a hindrance I think at times. (Mayor/DeputyCC331196)

b. The National government really prescribes very closely what we have to do. And, because of a couple of rogue cases and indeed because of their willingness and requirement to control everything, control us, to the nth degree . . . they especially control what we can spend and how we raise money. We are very much constrained to carry out their programme. (CouncillorRC26992)

c. Just the other thing on that is the audit officers' attitude to it, and wanting to audit indicators as well as financials and getting right down into things that we then have to pay for. (CouncillorCC321157)

B.2

a. I had absolutely no idea about any legislation at all and the training that we received was quite brief and we were presented with some small booklets, about three of them, I recall. One of them was to do with the local government. At that point in time I resolved not to read any of them because I figured they would only give me reasons to stop me doing things and I was really fired up and wanted to do things. I just thought, "Nah, if you read the rule book, the rule book will only give you 100 good reasons to get into line and not do anything and when I step out of line everybody will dump on me but by that time I've already got my point across." So I did have a cursory look through them but to this day I've never read the Local Government Act. (Mayor/DeputyDC271121)

b. I had no idea about the structures, the frameworks I had to work under on this side [of local government]. (CouncillorCC0123)

c. The elected member has to have a good understanding of the legislative framework or the process for operating. I say that because many of my colleagues don't. They will say, "Oh I've only been here a year". (CouncillorCC0123)

B.3

Okay, what's my role here? I feel powerless, at the governance table, because I don't know the legislation. (CouncillorDC421551)

B.4

What you found here in the small communities is that central government actually has quite a significant impact, much more because they have to, for example, counts the number of cars, how many houses on that road and we don't match those count-backs. (Chair/DeputyDC341250)

B.5

a. I think government sometimes passes legislation which delegates responsibilities
to local government without providing the resources or the funding to enable them
to do it and then they criticise [local government] because rates keep going up.
(Deputy Chair/DeputyRC321153)

b. So a lot of the legislative stuff is enabling. But it's got some constraints around it
as well because it's got to be fit for purpose and what's fit for purpose in Auckland
may not be fit for purpose here [in Wellington]. (Chair/DeputyRC24935)

B.6

So [central] government has got to realise that we [local government] are partners
and not the 'wallies' down the road. That's what they think, and they [think we] can't
do stuff without them. There is a mentality at the moment, and [a certain Minister]
would be one of the ones to say, "We [local government] can't do it." Now I've been to
National party conferences and there is a mentality, "We [central government] can
do it better than anybody else." Which is bullshit. (Mayor/DeputyDC441626)

B.7

a. I don't think it's [a 30-year plan is] as useful as people make out. For example,
Opotiki could grow. The harbour project goes ahead, the mussel project goes
ahead. The long-term plan does allow for that possibility, but what you will end up
with will be so widely divergent, say 25 years from now. (CouncillorDC23913)

b. I think 30 years is ridiculously too far out. It's good to have a bit of vision when
you're putting infrastructure in. For me, too, it takes up a lot of staff time in this
council and a lot of it is wasted time because it's only a guideline, you're not

committed to it, aye, it's not like a charter or a constitution, it's only a guideline. I think we waste too much money on it, too much time – I think we could simplify it a bit better. (CouncillorDC401478)

B.8

I think [legislation] gives it structure. There are a lot of legal requirements within the local government act in that whole decision-making process. It's a pretty stringent guideline. I probably think it's about right. (CouncillorDC22882)

B.9

a. I would prioritise health over pleasure . . . It would come back to health over a luxury item – the needs versus the wants. (CouncillorCC0291086)

b. When times were tough through the Global Financial Crisis, we'd just sunk $100 million in the ground and no one came along. Open spaces and community stuff just got cut. (Mayor/DeputyCC381429)

c. The social projects are the ones that – the libraries, the civic centre – are the ones that people want to get engaged about. They don't want to hear about a mains sewers renewal or infrastructure under the ground, they just say, "Get on and do it" – that's core business. So if we consulted heavily on those sort of things . . . The only one I can think of that would be an exception to that would be Black Creek in Wainuiomata where we were doing a major infrastructure upgrade of the stormwater system there because there had been substantial flooding and the safety of the community was at risk. So that was one that I spearheaded and the community turned up in droves because it was fear of loss of their property. (Mayor/DeputyCC471747)

B.10

When infrastructure spend comes up [for consideration], you would almost give priority by default to the underground horizontal [water] infrastructure. We can't get underground to see it, so there is a high level of trust. (CouncillorCC0107)

B.11

People understand a sports centre and a library; they don't understand the intricacies of a microfiltration water treatment station and the network that goes to it or from it. (Mayor/DeputyCC381418)

B.12

So the ones [projects] that aren't by the community you've got to immediately assess what the community thinks around those things. (CouncillorCC05266)

B.13

I think decision influences is specific to the project you are talking about. (CouncillorDC301105)

B.14

Now that I understand the legislative framework of things, you have to get them [capital projects] in the long-term plan ... They've got to be in there otherwise if they are not then you can't, if things changed, so you've got to line them up in there, I think. (CouncillorDC21877)

B.15

I don't think it's a bad decision but I do think it's a bad process, and there is risk in

that. I don't think it's a dreadful decision. It's not a high-risk decision in that the parameters of the expense were reasonably well understood but there still were more risks in it than I would have liked to have seen. (CouncillorCC10525)

B.16

Evidence points to some additional processes that can improve the planning process for elected members. We always, before anything comes in a report, we always have a workshop so that we can really talk through the issues without being constrained by having the public there or having to follow rules of speaking or whatever. So I think that's helpful for getting that 'free, frank and fearless' because when you get to the public meetings you've got some people that are just aware of the press and will just speak to get a headline. (Chair/DeputyRC321172)

B.17

Engagement mechanisms included public meeting, forums, community surveys, telephone polling, research company and through the community boards. (Mayor/DeputyCC471752)

B.18

Most people wouldn't have a clue about what local council is doing and they're not interested. They are only interested in having water come out of their tap, toilet to be flushed – that things are going in the right direction. Because life is too busy. When it affects them personally, then they'll likely take some notice. (Mayor/DeputyDC441657)

B.19

I think council tries really hard to engage, but I just don't know why that doesn't

work. (CouncillorDC431592)

B.20

a. Talking to people. It's the best way to do it. Talking to people. But doing it, not just as a small set of five to ten [people], but doing hundreds if not thousands [of people]. And that's when you get the feel for it. I mean, a few projects like the Johnsonville library, which is a million-dollar project by all accounts in the long-term plan, required a series of consultation meetings and engagements. (CouncillorCC04207)

b. Local government are not very good at telling the value story though. The thing I've learned about telling the story is that you have to tell it, and tell it, and tell it and tell it until people click. (CouncillorDC19835)

B.21

a. It's not consultation. As much as 90% of the bulk of the money that comes in from rates is spent before we get it. So really the debates that we have are around the little chunk that we have left. By the time the mayor's agenda has been put up, what you're talking about is the even smaller little bit on top of that again, and so you really are finessing a small little bit. (CouncillorCC12606)

b. The council engages with the community okay, I'd give it a five out of ten. I'd like to see more. (CouncillorDC431589)

B.22

I think we need to be better at telling the story, I think we need to be better at accepting that one size doesn't fit all. I think we need to be accepting that to actually engage with the community, you've got to do a whole lot of different things, because

different communities need different tools to be used. (CouncillorCC06357)

B.23

Just generally how much consultation has gone on with and around the convention centre with our communities? I thought it was poor. We only had about 70 responses. There were six from my ward. We didn't really have the information to go out and sort of stimulate discussion. (CouncillorCC10519)

B.24

I think the process [of engagement] is very flawed. Because if you look at the Island Bay cycleway as a prime example, because most Wellingtonians were against it. If you got to Island Bay residents, even more of them were against it, if you got to residents on The Parade where it's going in then 80% were against it. So what is the point of having submissions? And what was the point of that whole submission process? (CouncillorCC11565)

B.25

What the modelling showed us is that there are places up in Papamoa that, given a decent-sized earthquake on the Kermadec trench, there is major inundation. We had a debate at Smart Growth to say, "Should we be putting this information on LINZ?" And they, "No". They didn't want to go there. Instead they did a much softer sort of, "Well, you know there might be a tsunami . . ." The council [says], "Yes and we'll build a few little bridges and we'll plot some escape paths." At what point do you get really brave and say, "Actually we shouldn't be putting people there"? It's a massive problem. (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC361351)

B.26

I think the thing that frustrates me the most are most of them [citizens] are not really aware of the big trends that are happening. (Chair/DeputyRC361346)

B.27

I think for some things the quality of communication is such, is it's an ass-carrying exercise, so the elected members can blame the community if the whole goes bad, I don't like that so my issue is I don't think the community get to make many of the decisions, they don't get that many options. (CouncillorRC49835)

B.28

a. Facts of life are that 95% or more of the people out there don't really give a toss one way or the other what council does. It doesn't touch their daily lives – well, it does but they don't recognise it because the water turns up when they turn their tap on, they drive down the road in their car and they might mutter if they hit a pothole or something but by and large the council doesn't impact on anybody's lives until three or four times a year the council sends out their rates bill . . . (Mayor/DeputyDC271026)

b. Ninety-nine percent of people just go with the flow, so they've elected us to do the business and let us get on with it. There are some there that we are never going to get right, and as [the] mayor of Ipswich told us recently, don't worry about the 10-% because you are never going to make them happy, and you can spend too much time on that 10% that are either not going to vote for you or are never going to be where you want to be. (CouncillorDC21863)

B.29

Going back to democracy, if we could influence and get more voters out and more people interested in local government, I think it would be good for the community. (CouncillorDC19840)

B.30

So I think that's helpful for getting that 'free, frank and fearless' because when you get to the public meetings you've got some people that are just aware of the press and will just speak their mantra to get a headline or whatever. (Chair/DeputyRC321172)

B.31

We need to be able to rely on good-quality technical advice, so I've always certainly had the philosophy and encouraged the culture that, if the councillors did [receive good-quality technical advice], they [council staff] should feel they can give free and frank advice without any fear of retribution from councillors going ape. (Mayor/DeputyCC471741)

B.32

The other level of scepticism I have is that I do not accept, generally, that public officials are neutral in their viewpoint. No sometimes they are, some are more neutral than others, but we are given this myth, and I do call it a myth, that we get free and frank advice and that it's not corrupted by ideology. (CouncillorCC03186)

B.33

What I've learnt is that these are our in-house experts and if they choose to [seek]

expertise elsewhere to help build a case, then that's fine. (CouncillorCC0114)

B.34

a. So I'm cynical enough to see that consultants are often swayed by the person that pays them; they are not purely independent. They'll all sit there in front of me, they didn't put their hand on the bible, but they all read that bit in their brief that says that "I have read the code of conduct for professional witnesses, and I'm impartial . . ." "Yeah right, who is paying you?", "Oh the applicant is paying me.", "Would he be happy if you wrote something he didn't like?", "No . . .", "Would you get the sack?", "Yes . . ." So you're sitting there with your hand on your heart trying to tell me you're utterly independent? (CouncillorDC181785)

b. I think we are getting what we want but at times, when you read the reports, you've got to read in to it. It's like when you go to a lawyer: if you want the lawyer to defend you, then he'll do his best to put the right case up. A consultant has been employed to put up a story in the right way and there are some that I don't have much time for, through the past records of what they've done. (Mayor/DeputyDC441639)

B.35

I think a lot of the stuff that the officers produced was good stuff.

(CouncillorCC08444)

B.36

a. City engineering role, that historical role, there is lots of trust. (CouncillorCC0106)

b. Technical advice has a significant weighting on those core infrastructure projects, a total weighting. (Mayor/DeputyCC331234)

c. My view of the officers is that they are our experts, so I place a high degree of trust

and respect [in them]. (CouncillorCC0188)

d. On big projects, of course we'll get a number of technical reports so I guess we

trust the officers to get the right technical experts and their experience.

(Chair/DeputyRC321168)

B.37

I can honestly say that I have felt very comfortable with the senior staff.

(CouncillorCC281053)

B.38

There is a big credibility issue for technical experts when it comes to . . . And that's

not a problem for councillors, they know that, so they are being presented with

engineering options for the town and they just go, "Don't trust it, I just don't trust

them." And that's just bad news. (CouncillorDC18784)

B.39

a. I think, funnily enough and this probably won't come as a surprise, but just as you

make your assessments of us, we make our assessments of officers as well.

(CouncillorCC10532)

b. Internal expertise, external expertise and then the feelings people you encounter

to deal with that issue. (CouncillorCC4793)

B.40

It would be good if we could [accept the advice provided], but I cannot make a

decision on that until we have adequate information on what the consequences are

on either yes or no. (CouncillorCC02111)

B.41 **a.** I think sometimes we get advice at one level of council, which may be different to another level of council. (CouncillorCC05273) **b.** Some projects or some decisions I guess elected members feel that staff are sort of trying to lead us in their direction. (CouncillorCC291075)

B.42 So she's decided to get some runs on the board so she's hitched her wagon to CE's [the chief executive's] agenda. (CouncillorCC12611)

B.43 **a.** I rely on them [technical experts] to be giving us up-to-date, accurate information. (Mayor/DeputyCC331213) **b.** And I want to know what the options are, and there will be options generally within even an extreme price range. (CouncillorCC02114) **c.** Technical experts are there to provide very sound and robust advice and opinion. (CouncillorCC09480)

B.44 **a.** I don't think somebody [council staff] can necessarily take their background out of their advice. A lot of it is how people weigh up that advice, what factors they give more weight to, how they perceive the future going. (CouncillorCC10531) **b.** [Council staff] are making a recommendation, therefore they are going to be giving the information based on the way they want the [elected members] to

support them, if you like. Once [council staff] have formed a view on a given issue then they are going to make recommendations along those lines. (CouncillorCC15688)

c. It was noticed that there was a shift in the life of the assets that was put in there. Yeah, I think there was a clear determination that this was going to come to happen, come hell or high water. (CouncillorCC05307)

d. [Council staff] are in there, getting a very clear understanding of what the real needs are, what the real issues are … so [council staff] do see it first-hand but I don't really understand what's going on at the grass roots. (CouncillorCC06329)

e. I just heard there is a price consideration, but there is also a community [to] consider. Somewhere amongst all that tribalism you have to find some clarity around, "Okay, what's enough?" (CouncillorCC02116)

f. Like, for example, we didn't see the cycling documents either. I don't know why we didn't see these. [One elected member] just jumped up and down because we didn't see the cycling results. (CouncillorCC10548)

B.45

a. That's the seductive stuff that gets us on the hook, so the music hub and the town hall. . . . they seduced elected members to get us on to the hook. (CouncillorCC12619)

b. I remember when I first mentioned it to [council staff]. I mean I like them both but god, they gave me a one-pager on why we couldn't do this. It had never been done before, it was just out of the question. They weren't even subtle about it. (CouncillorCC08441)

c. There was a very interesting climate amongst the [council staff] as well. Even on

this [project], where there is an email in there where I was approached by [a

member of council staff]. She was a bit of a bully person. It was just no way to talk

to a councillor. . . . there were some pretty interesting people here.

(CouncillorCC07413)

d. And then every time we almost get to the line and think, "This is great, we've

cracked it", [council staff] come up with, "Oh we'll move the library across and

shut the library down." Or something like that. And I'd have to say "Don't bring

the library up, there will be marching in the streets." . . . from that point on it was

a personal crusade. (CouncillorCC08446)

B.46

I don't care. Council staff and the experts can talk all they like about the need to

consider this, but I will make a decision. And I do on some projects.

(CouncillorCC0127)

B.47

No one can separate themselves from the values that they were brought up with, [or]

from the training they get. (CouncillorCC03187)

B.48

But my personality type and the way that I operate in this role is very much a servant

role so I will always, nine times out of ten, take something and go back out and say,

"What do you think?", but that's not normal. (CouncillorCC0117)

B.49

You balance [decisions] by trying, as objectively as you can, supported by science

(and that's the word I'm going to use to cover all this stuff), to weigh up the pros and the cons and the consequential benefits and what, if any, are the consequential negatives. And we are charged with the decision-making for the wellbeing of the community as a whole and not a particular group. And that is what some councillors still do not understand. (CouncillorCC02105)

B.50

So, although there are some considerations that come into play when making a decision, I think within the government sector, certainly within the Wellington City Council, we are sometimes a little bit sensitive and could be a little bit more pragmatic. (Mayor/DeputyCC04214)

B.51

You do have to rely on, in some level, common sense. When we were elected and we had our declaration, the most significant words were that we "must serve in the best interests of Wellington City". (CouncillorCC09478)

B.52

a. I'm a bit of a romantic in terms of history too. I think the history of the city is incredibly important. (CouncillorCC08455)

b. So, there is that element, the economic rationality of it, and also the historic [value]. And I think that's probably where the hard decision lies. Of what value is the historic importance of that building, and that's really where that decision is going to be made. (CouncillorCC06346)

c. But I certainly don't bow to any political master on it and I certainly don't worry

about elections. (CouncillorCC02142)

B.53

a. Our City, Our Future and that was basically a grouping [of] individuals from across the city who came together to work alongside the council to develop strategic direction. And there was, actually, you might have found it actually, a really good report that was developed. It never managed to get adopted, because of course council couldn't agree to it, but I suppose where I'm going with this is that there was an attempt to really engage with the wider community, but when it came to the crunch actually it fell apart at the seams. (CouncillorCC06355)

b. I think you've got the overall strategic direction for the city, you know, what's really going to make a difference. Where I look at a decision is, does this look as though it's going to be good for the city? Is it going [to be] consistent with the strategic direction we are following? (CouncillorCC05286)

B.54

a. I got in on a ticket. I'm green. (CouncillorCC09507)

b. I do think they get in here on tickets, and I think they vote on it, [at least] partly. (Mayor/DeputyCC501888)

B.55

a. But the change to ideologies has been quite distinct, and it's probably been more distinct here because of the mayor and the Greens. (CouncillorCC08423)

b. I see myself as more pragmatic than ideological. So I am influenced by what I think will work. (CouncillorCC19825)

B.56

a. It's mixed depending on who they are, so if you get people who are completely fanatically Green with a capital G – because green with a little g is many people – then they will have pre-set views on things and they won't listen to evidence and ditto for some people on the other side of the spectrum. They'll have predetermined, pre-set views so you've got to understand where all your colleagues are coming from. (Chair/DeputyRC451681)

b. I'd prefer not to have party politics, I don't think it works, frankly. On this debate on local government reform our Green councillor was in favour of it until your Green councillor wasn't allowed to be. That's bullshit. (Chair/DeputyRC451682)

B.57

It amazed me the level, or the lack, of training of some of the people. Some of them hadn't even matriculated at school certificate and they were responsible for multi-million dollar budgets. It's funny; I was fresh out of the MBA [Master of Business Administration] programme then, so I had a reasonable idea of what was going on. (CouncillorCC07371)

B.58

a. I think the calibre of councillor is really disappointing . . . I've just been reading the book by the guy whose name I can't pronounce about the history of Wellington City Council, a really interesting book. I look at the calibre of the people we used to have on the council and calibre of the people we have on now, and most of the people we have on now would be more suitable being on a parish council. We have very few real city leaders. (CouncillorCC11584)

b. Some of them, quite frankly, are nuts. I wouldn't have them running a pipi stall in Papamoa. (CouncillorRC491803)

B.59

So I think we are quite a knowledgeable, experienced, old council. Most of us are university/tertiary educated and been around a long time. (Chair/DeputyRC321173)

B.60

I don't see the role citizens play in making the decisions as a large role at all. We are entrusted, this is my philosophy . . . We are entrusted with a bit of experience, a bit of common sense. I don't see a lot of engagement from other people, I don't really get lobbied. (CouncillorDC23917)

B.61

I tried to run [generate support for] artificial turfs and they got shot down, about three times. Not because they were a bad idea, not because it's the right thing to do at the time, [but for] utu [pay-back or revenge]. (CouncillorCC05314)

B.62

a. Anyway, that's [the Opotiki mussel farm proposal is] a good example – probably the worst example in the country right now of political interference into something that's never going to fly. (CouncillorRC25982)

b. The problem when you get into those controversial areas . . . is unless you are all in it together politically, just the politicians, then good ideas, rational decisions can get undermined from some political motive when one or two suddenly go, "This is going to get hot, I'm jumping". (Mayor/DeputyCC331228)

B.63

a. For an example, the mayor has formerly had my role [as a committee chair] so I'm going to talk to [the mayor] about some waste initiatives and get feedback about "Do you think this works? Should we do that?" and if [the mayor] says, "That's a silly idea", the likelihood is that I would drop it, if there was good reason to of course . . . Yeah, that does have an influence. (CouncillorCC03193)

b. Sometimes by the end of the decision you actually have no choices left because it's been a slow accumulation of decisions and that's really hard for people in their first term to realise, that actually they are rubber-stamping something because all of the previous decisions have come to this point. (Mayor/DeputyCC501903)

B.64

a. Councils can be swayed by very forceful people. I think one of the things that I see in the council, which I didn't see in corporate governance, was people tend to want to represent their stakeholders. For instance, there's a view that because you're elected by a certain group of people that you have to look after that group of people, that they are your parishioners. My view is the moment you enter the council room you are there for the good and the benefit of the organisation, which is everybody. (Chair/DeputyRC24957)

b. He changed his vote on notice of motion; now he's thinking of putting that notice of motion back again, and he's saying the reason he didn't support it last time, that he changed his mind is that he didn't really think it was about the cycleway, it was about political posturing. (CouncillorCC11588)

c. I was accused later – there were two of us who were accused – of changing our minds. But if more information comes to hand, you don't want to be accused of

flip-flopping or doing it too often but on that occasion I changed my mind.

(CouncillorCC15696)

B.65

… my experience says if they go in cold with some of those [decisions], where they have to make a controversial, big decision, keep in mind – and this isn't criticism of councillors, it's democracy – but the quality and the ability of people is wide and sometimes, particularly when you're talking about big ticket items, it's big money. (Mayor/DeputyCC331218)

B.66

I think there is a difference between underground and on top of the ground, that's been my experience. Underground – out of sight, out of mind you know. We've spent hundreds of millions of dollars in wastewater, water and other stuff under the ground. Do something on top of the ground people are all, "What are you doing that for, do you really need it?" This is particularly [with respect to] recreation and the arts etc. They tend to be the poorer relation to transport and three waters. [This is the] big difference in approach from the elected members and also from the community. (Mayor/DeputyCC381417)

B.67

Technical advice hasn't always been there. It has, by the look of it, been hidden from us. There were a lot of gaps in our financials that were there for a damn good reason because they hid or masked things, in my opinion. (CouncillorDC281059)

B.68

a. Well, if we don't do it now then we'll never get it [another opportunity to invest]. So we were put on a bit of pressure to do it. (CouncillorDC17760)

b. Then you went to the Environment Court and, because of the RMA [Resource Management Act 1991], the pressure is from the judge to settle, you settle before you get to the court because it gets very expensive. And so, for me as a politician who was on the hearing panel etc., you get really frustrated because suddenly it's not a balanced view any more, it's the ones who have the energy and the resources to push to get their thing and then suddenly you end up with someone that, well actually that's not what the bulk of the people wanted but that's what we've got now. So that's been my frustration on this side. (Chair/DeputyRC361358)

B.69

And I got all these pretty heavy phone calls. "You're not going to tell me what to do; I'm not going to be bullied. That's what I think, and I'm sick and tired of you lying to me." (CouncillorCC07394)

B.70

Councillors have always resisted what people perceive as being political ideology within the region or even in the city … we strongly try to keep it out, if anyone raises it we take it out, "We don't want it." (Chair/DeputyRC351309)

B.71

a. What happens is you get around the table and you get some councillors thinking, "I can't go to my community with that percentage rate increase." So some of us

would say, "Well, that's the cost of it and that's the cost of being brave." But some of them think, "Well, I just won't get re-elected." (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC361378)

b. Well, the other problem that you've got, in my opinion, is that you've got to remember that most councillors will vote and behave to preserve their own skin. (CouncillorCC08434)

c. Some councillors are career councillors and so they need to make a decision around their survival, not around what is best for the city. (CouncillorCC14658)

B.72

So our role, and I've always kept it really simple when I talk to people, our role as governors are to set the policy and strategic direction, monitor it and have a regulatory role. Keep it simple, those three things. Chief executive, staff, contracts execute it, we monitor it and if it's not working we'll fix it, keep it simple. Some people try to make it a lot harder than it really is but if you keep it simple, life can be a lot easier. (Mayor/DeputyCC381396)

B.73

a. A councillor has a power to help get things done, a bit of a voice, but it needs to be used with care, so I suppose to a certain extent I'm looking at things within my ambit where I think I can add value or make a difference, because I want council to get things done, make a difference and then move on. (Mayor/DeputyCC11578)

b. At least everyone understood that their arguments had been heard properly and that democracy will win at the end of the day. (CouncillorDC18791)

B.74

a. We do a lot of work with workshops and I think that's where a lot of the debate actually happens. Numerous, numerous workshops around the long-term plan and the process for that was, we sort of did strategic cases for all of the big issues and then we debated and people said, "Well this is what's really important to me and I would love it if we could go here and do this and do that." (Deputy Chair/DeputyRC361367)

b. We've got the two committees – policy and infrastructure, basically – and all councillors are on both. Now that's put a much bigger workload on us but what it's done, I think, is neutralised that situation where you have a certain number of councillors on policy; they make a recommendation to council and then the councillors that weren't on policy all of a sudden – and I actually think that's made a huge difference. You don't have that same divide. We're almost rubber stamping. That change has actually influenced how we behave in the chamber . . . I'm sure it has. (CouncillorDC16725)

B.75

I guess probably the single biggest influence to my mind, about how important [the role] peers play in influencing decisions, is or how well it works, how badly it works – if you get a poor result, is the leadership [poor]? If you've got senior management and chairmen who are happy to stick their necks out and say, "This is right. This is what's got to be done and this is why we are going to do it" and say it loud and clear, then the political environment within a council doesn't count for much but when that's absent it counts for everything. (CouncillorRC311125)

B.76

I think they've [their peers] got a right to be heard, and actually I think their points were very valid . . . (CouncillorCC13631)

B.77

Some councillors are much better, if you like, or much more eloquent speakers at the council table than others. And I put myself in the category as one of those who isn't especially eloquent at the council table. It can be a fairly intimidating arena. (CouncillorCC15706)

B.78

Sometimes you just have to get on and make the decision anyway, and trust it is the right one. (CouncillorCC15711)

B.79

I saw on the [road] link proposal, the bullshit politics that's played over that. I mean, you either decide that you need it or not. The evidence suggests that you need to invest in that, and now is the time to package it up and get the funding to do it and to mitigate possible further congestion, or you don't. To me the case was proved, but it was all about this sort of anti-roads philosophy plus regional council not wanting to assist growth of the city. (Mayor/DeputyCC481782)

B.80

What I try to do is make sure I have majority support of 8, 9, 10 councillors before it gets to the table, and for some issues you won't be able to because it's difficult and

then my take would be that it should probably be withdrawn and should not even get to the table if you're not confident, or you think maybe you could sway one or two, or if you think it's important to have the discussion in public anyway, then better off to have it closed vote. (Mayor/Deputy CC04245)

B.81

Most have made up their minds already. They've had the paperwork to wade their way through, there have already been briefings often and there have been discussions with other councillors also over coffee or whatever, so the vast majority have already made [up] their minds. I guess debate there [in the debating chamber] is presumably useful but I don't know how much it really does achieve in the end. (CouncillorCC15708)

B.82

a. So, I've been elected as a Green party candidate, so obviously I carry with me two main foci which is concern about environmental protection and commitment to eradicating inequality and celebrating diversity. (CouncillorCC03154)

b. I think one of the biggest impediments to good local government is the influence of party politics. I really think that. This is my personal view and look, I don't know that when you get to Auckland's size, [there is] wherewithal you need to get elected to be one of the 20 elected members that sit around the council table of a city of 1.5 million, you probably need some sort of organisation or something to get you there but communities should wake up to the fact that they want people there who aren't there to do anything based on political ideology, but to do things based on the future of the community. (CouncillorCC411529)

B.83

Now if you're really out of step, and I sometimes have gone against my ward on a couple of things, you will get [voted] out. (CouncillorCC03172)

B.84

Councillors don't want to be held responsible; they want to be seen to have done absolutely everything. I say to people, "If you think it's too hot in the kitchen, then get out, because this is the area that you moved in to." (CouncillorDC18787)

B.85

a. Well, they'll be able to submit on that in the long-term plan, but I must admit I haven't seen a huge amount of uproar on that idea and it was on the front page of the paper. (CouncillorCC13641)

b. I don't think they are being fed the right information. I think the press in this country are totally complacent with politics and there are gatekeepers everywhere. I mean, I find it all the time. Here we've got *Sun Live* but they're pretty open; *Bay of Plenty Times* is hopeless, they are just running a game. (CouncillorRC25980)

B.86

We've lost a lot of experience, you'd say that the council that we had prior to this one (so three years ago) was one of the most experienced councils in terms of time served. Were they good decisions? No, far from it because they were being made for personal political reasons and people were voting against people just because they didn't like them. [This was] on a very personal basis, for all the wrong reasons. (Mayor/DeputyCC04234)

B.87

There is an actual pecking order, and if the councillors have been here a long time they tend to be mature and have the reins on the other committees and so on, so forth. So with the changing of the guard, it's allowed you the opportunity and the personal growth. (CouncillorCC0181)

B.88

It's tedious; I go along to some of the meetings and it really is just cheap point-scoring most of the time, off each other. Some people love that and it can be quite entertaining but it's negative, it's corrosive, it misleads and confuses the public. (Chair/DeputyRC461720)

B.89

a. We are there to look after their [the community's] health and wellbeing, and make sure it functions and functions well. There are a whole lot of aspects to that, social and economic things. That's part of our management and we've got to look to the long term as well, so that's for the benefit of the community. (CouncillorDC21880)

b. My responsibility is to take a very active part and interest in all the issues that (a) involve the lives of the people of the district, which I see as being absolutely critical, and (b) the future for their grandkids, the future generation. That's the one that I'm terribly concerned about, I'm concerned that the future generations will not suddenly find themselves in the position where this is (a) unaffordable, and (b) not the kind of place they want to live in. (CouncillorDC281064)

B.90

[My responsibility is] to leave the city better than what I found it. And my aim was to provide work for the youth with an ongoing economic base. I've long thought that economics is about the future, but to get the future you've got to fix the past and the past hasn't given opportunity for young. Now, we're starting to get there. (Chair/DeputyRC351335)

B.91

Our council, of course, has had a good reputation over a number of years now for keeping rates to a minimum, keeping our debt controlled, which is good. (Mayor/DeputyCC471725)

B.92

The sad thing is that a lot of people do the job really well and it only takes another council somewhere else doing some bloody stupid thing and you get tarred with their brush. You just become a bit sensitive and a bit defensive, I guess, sometimes. (Chair/DeputyRC361383)

B.93

a. I've watched some of the decisions and I think there are some poor decisions being made, and I think this [the stadium] was a poor decision and I can tell you why. (CouncillorCC07373)

b. A lot of petty interests, a lot of poor decision-making. (CouncillorCC07411)

B.94

It's a democratic process. I won't always agree with a position of my ward, but I will try to reflect their considerations and certainly that influences the way I vote. (Deputy Mayor/DeputyCC04226)

B.95

Once I really got my head around it [my values], after a few years, I knew it was not defensible. And yet some hard-core left sections of the public called me up and said, "We're not going to vote for you because of that." And I said, "That's fine, don't vote for me." (CouncillorCC02139)

B.96

I can use an example of that. I don't care what anyone says, there is a bit of green in all of us. . . . the fact is when we looked at the dynamics of where that wall of rubbish would have been in 100 years it was unsustainable, it would be just unbelievable so we then made a conscious decision to say, "No, we are going to close our landfill." And we did and we . . . Although I have to say that to me it's not the bees knees as far as sending it somewhere else but we did actually close our landfill. It was a big call but from an environmental point of view and iwi's [local tribe's] point of view we got the thumbs-up. There was the cultural element at the end of the day; as I say, I've brought my family up here, I've got my grandchildren living here now and I wouldn't like my grandchildren going up River Road and saying, "That's not a dam, that's a wall of rubbish that my koru [grandfather] put in there." (Mayor/DeputyDC391465)

B.97

There are people who give a lot of weighing and there are the people who give less than a lot of weighing to it. (CouncillorCC02103)

B.98

I mean, central government legislation is central government legislation. You've got to do what it says, you can't breach it. (CouncillorCC05250)

Appendix C: Coding Research Participants

Coding

Council Type	Role	Code
District Council	Councillor	CouncillorDC
City Council	Councillor	CouncillorCC
Regional Council	Councillor	CouncillorRC
District Council	Mayor / Deputy	Mayor/DeputyDC
City Council	Mayor / Deputy	Mayor/DeputyCC
Regional Council	Chair / Deputy	Chair/DeputyCC

Mayor/Deputy	CC	39	1463
Councillor	DC	17	750
Councillor	CC	01	07

Role   Council Type   Participant   Reference Number
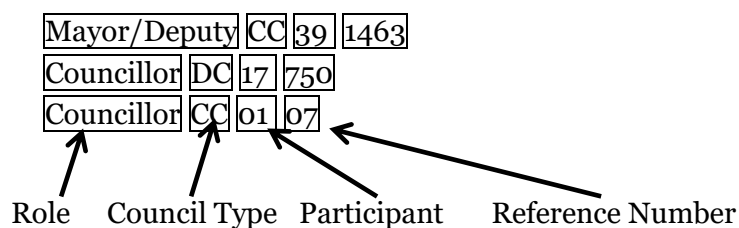
Participants

Alison Silcock	David Lee	Jane Knees	Ken Young	Ray Wallace
Andrew Isles	David Love	Jo Coughlan	Malcolm Campbell	Rob Goulden
Andy Foster	Doug Leeder	John Cronin	Malcolm Sparrow	Russell Orr
Arihia Tuoro	Doug Owens	John Forbes	Mark Peck	Sarah Free
Barbara Donaldson	Fran Wilde	John Morrison	Ngaire Best	Scott Jarrett
Barry Howe	George Johnson	John Pullar	Nick Leggett	Shona Brown
Celia Wade-Brown	Gerard van Beek	John Robson	Nicola Young	Simon Marsh
Chris Laidlaw	Graham Hanlen	Judy Turner	Paul Eagle	Stuart Cosby
Colin Holmes	Haki McRoberts	Julie Jukes	Paula Thompson	Tony Bonne
Dave Sheaf	Iona Pannett	Justin Lester	Ray Ahipene-Mercer	Wayne Guppy

Spread and Frequency of References

The chart below demonstrates the number of references made in the research by each elected member interviewed.

Total interviews = 50

Total references = 595

Frequency of References
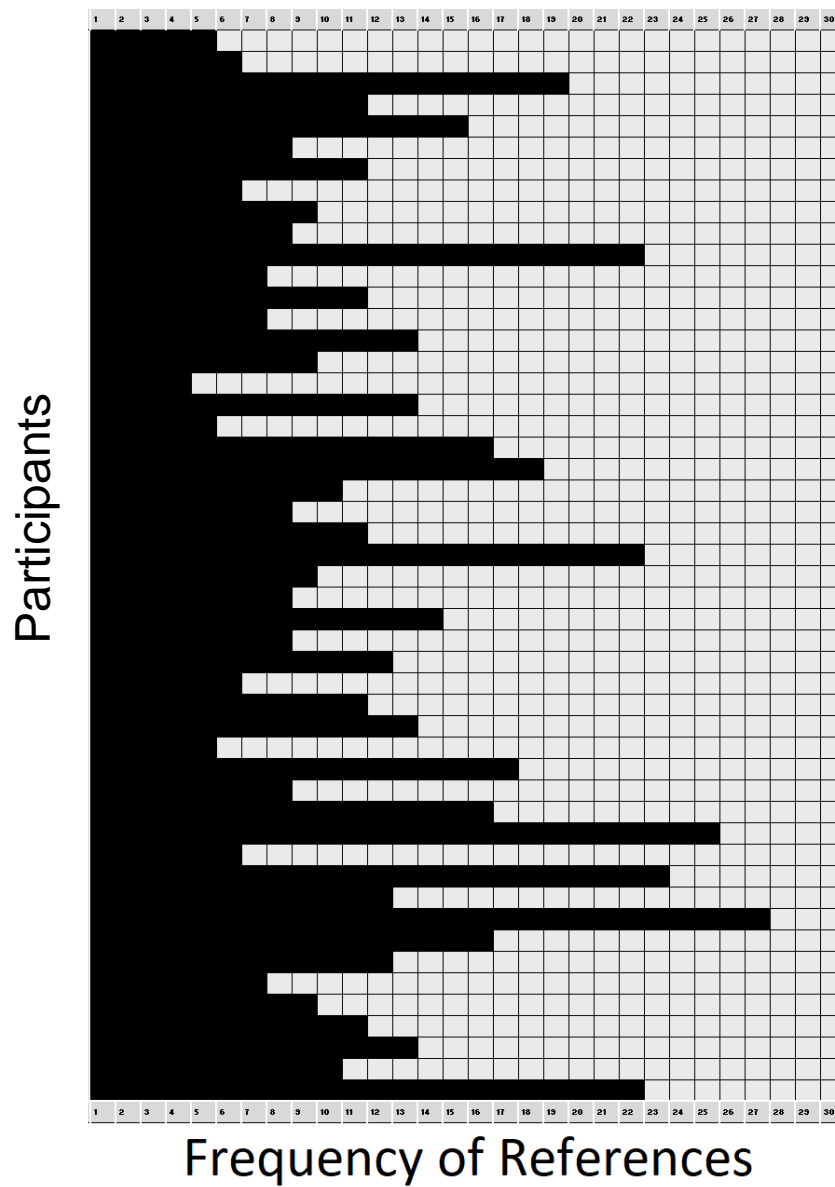
Appendix D: Coding Research Participant Attributes

Interviewee (Elected Member) Attributes

| Interviewee Number	Urban	Provincial (pop > 20,000)	Rural	Regional Council	City Council	District Council	Chair / Deputy	Mayor / Deputy	Councillor	Non Maori	Maori	Male	Female	in / completed 5th term or more	in / completed 3rd or 4th term	in / completed 1st or 2nd term	Professional	Non-Professional
30	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0
29	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
5	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0
42	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	0	-
32	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
40	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
50	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	-	-	0
46	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
31	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-
9	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	0	-
26	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
17	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
24	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-
25	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-
45	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-
28	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
20	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-
27	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
34	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0
3	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
36	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
13	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0
35	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-
41	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
49	0	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
8	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
21	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0
19	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
22	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
4	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0	-
23	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0
39	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0
15	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0
12	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0
6	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
48	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
11	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0
1	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0	0	-	-	-	0	-	0
37	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
47	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0
7	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
18	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
10	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
16	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0
43	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	0
14	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0
38	0	0	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-
44	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	-	0
33	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-
37	0	-	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	-