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How well four
councils are
responding to a
changing climate



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How well four councils are responding to a changing climate

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Contents

Auditor-General’s overview	3
Our recommendations	7
Part 1 – What we looked at and why	8
Why we did this work	8
What we looked at	9
How we did our audit	10
Part 2 – Understanding the impacts and risks of a changing climate	11
All four councils have taken steps to be informed about climate-related impacts and risks	11
Christchurch City Council and Nelson City Council are using an interactive online risk mapping tool	13
Part 3 – Implementing and monitoring climate actions	15
Councils should clarify how climate change strategies drive prioritisation	15
All four councils are actively responding to climate-related impacts and risks	18
Use of performance monitoring and reporting frameworks was mixed and could be improved	19
Part 4 – Governance	22
Governance arrangements vary	22
Part 5 – Informing and involving communities	25
All four councils have supported meaningful community engagement	25
Some of the councils need to improve how they inform the public about progress	29
Engaging with iwi and hapū on climate change presents common challenges	31
Appendix – The council actions we looked at	35
Environment Canterbury	35
Christchurch City Council	36
Nelson City Council	37
Whanganui District Council	38
Figures	
1 – Membership of Christchurch City Council’s Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning Coastal Panel	26
2 – Excerpts from Ngā Ringaringa Waewae’s March 2024 report to Whanganui District Council about community engagement	28
3 – Christchurch City Council’s Smartview application, showing monthly CO ₂ emissions	30

Auditor-General's overview

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā karangarangatanga maha o te motu, tēnā koutou.

As a country, we regularly see the damaging consequences of a changing climate. These affect our lives, our livelihoods, our environment, and our way of life. They are challenging and expensive to address and it is probable they will continue to worsen, at least for the foreseeable future. For councils, climate change and its impacts are likely to be the most enduring and pervasive challenge they will face, extending beyond council boundaries and across multiple electoral terms. Clear strategies, a constancy of purpose, resourcing, and community support will be needed over many years – and decades – to come. Responding to climate change will also require co-ordination between central and local government, and with business and communities. None of this is easy.

Legislative frameworks to guide councils in their climate response are still in their formative stage. Nevertheless, most councils recognise the importance of acting now to help reduce their own, and their communities', greenhouse gas emissions and to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate.

I wanted to know how well councils are moving from talking about climate action to taking action. I wanted to understand how well they were gathering information about climate risks, how they used strategies to prioritise actions, how they worked across territorial boundaries, how they involved communities in the process (including iwi, hapū, and Māori), and how they monitored their progress.

Four councils were chosen for this performance audit – Canterbury Regional Council (Environment Canterbury), Christchurch City Council, Nelson City Council, and Whanganui District Council. These include large, small, regional, territorial, and unitary councils. Our intention was that good practice and recommendations in this report would be useful for all councils.

What we found

Councils identify climate change as a strategic priority

All four councils had identified climate change as a strategic priority in some way. They have all declared a climate emergency. Work to address climate change is under way, but identifying climate change as a strategic priority has not always translated into treating it as one. Strategic priorities should clearly drive council activities, and be seen to do so. They need to be integrated into planning and resourcing and visible in governance decisions, community engagement, and reporting about progress and performance.

The councils we looked at have climate-related initiatives under way and we saw good examples of climate change considerations being embedded in council processes. Some of the climate-related initiatives are especially important for addressing future impacts, such as coastal inundation or inland flooding.

Despite the absence of a legislative and financial framework to support some of the more significant climate adaptation options, councils are getting on with the important task of talking with their communities about what matters to them and what adaptation options look like. These are important conversations that all councils should be having.

Governance arrangements over climate change programmes varies

Governance arrangements have a critical role in ensuring good organisational performance. We found the approach to governance over council climate programmes varied and was not always clear. For governance to work well, the arrangements need to be clear. Governing bodies need to be adequately resourced and receive timely, accurate, and relevant information to monitor progress and make informed decisions.

Councils are actively seeking information on climate risks

All four councils were taking steps to ensure that they are well informed of the potential localised impacts of climate change. All had climate risk information from central government organisations and had supplemented it with detailed risk assessments tailored to their local areas.

The councils are also working together to understand climate risks. Environment Canterbury has been supporting other Canterbury councils with technical advice on climate-related risks and impacts, and we were told that Christchurch City Council is also using its online risk mapping technology in joint work with other Canterbury councils. Nelson City Council is partnering with neighbouring Tasman District Council on its climate risk assessment. This type of collaboration – and leadership from larger councils – is important because climate impacts do not respect council boundaries. Collaboration is particularly important for smaller councils, which are less likely to have the resources and technical expertise of larger councils.

Engaging communities is an important part of a climate change response

The councils had varied – but generally effective – approaches to engaging with their communities on key climate issues. Communities are the primary stakeholders in council climate responses, and council efforts to seek community input and feedback reflect that.

Through this work, we saw positive engagement with iwi and hapū, but also challenges. For engagement to be meaningful, councils need to give careful thought to how they can reflect te ao Māori concepts in their approach to climate change as well as their approach to engaging iwi, hapū, and Māori. Te ao Māori perspectives of climate change as one aspect of a wider dialogue about environmental care and protection will likely challenge traditional council approaches to problem solving. That challenge is exacerbated by the limited capacity of iwi and hapū to engage with councils on these matters alongside all the other matters on which councils and others seek engagement.

As in previous work, we heard about the pivotal role of personal relationships and connections, the importance of mutual respect, and the need for engagement to be mutually beneficial. These are findings we comment on frequently in our wider work.

Keeping communities informed of progress with climate actions is important for “closing the loop” on community engagement. We saw useful information being published. There were also gaps. Maintaining community support is critical to the success of climate actions and, in my view, keeping communities well informed is fundamental to maintaining that support.

Formal reporting on performance is also important for community engagement. It is a critical part of the accountability process and has a role in making sure that councils achieve their objectives. Some councils have added new climate-related performance measures into their long-term plans. These are positive steps, but they still represent only a small portion of what the councils are doing to meet their climate-related objectives. I encourage all councils to make greater and better use of formal public performance reporting frameworks and measures that reflect their climate-related strategic priorities.

Final comments

All four councils are making progress with their responses to climate change and doing so in an uncertain and evolving national policy environment. Even so, communities at risk of climate change need to see sustained momentum – from both central and local government. For councils, the immediate tasks include keeping a focus on clear climate strategies, effective governance arrangements, meaningful engagement with communities, particularly with iwi, hapū, and Māori, and robust progress monitoring.

The impacts of a changing climate will affect council operations and strategies for many years to come. Understanding the long-term nature of these impacts – and establishing enduring strategies and commitments – is important now if councils are to effectively play their part in how our country adapts.

I have made five recommendations to support the positive efforts of the four councils we looked at, and for all councils to consider when preparing and implementing their responses to climate change.

The fieldwork for this report was carried out when council staff were busy preparing their 2024-34 long-term plans. I thank the staff and councillors of the four councils who contributed to our audit, as well as the iwi, hapū, and rūnanga representatives and other community leaders who volunteered their time to support this work.

Nāku noa, nā



John Ryan
Controller and Auditor-General | Tumuaki o te Mana Arotake

23 October 2024

Our recommendations

Although our recommendations have been informed by our findings across the four councils, we consider they will be relevant to achieving climate change objectives and demonstrating accountability for all councils. We encourage all councils to consider these recommendations.

We recommend that councils:

1. take opportunities to collaborate with and assist each other to understand the current and likely impacts of a changing climate on their infrastructure and communities;
2. make clear in climate strategies what their climate-related objectives are, how they intend to achieve those objectives, how they will use their strategies to set priorities, and how they will measure and report on progress in implementing their strategies;
3. strengthen the use of performance measures that reflect climate-related strategic objectives and priorities;
4. clearly set out how climate-related activities will be governed and ensure that staff understand what information the relevant governance body needs to govern effectively; and
5. report publicly on progress with their climate change strategies and work programmes, to support accountability and so communities are well-informed, engaged, and supportive.

1

What we looked at and why

- 1.1 In many ways, councils are at the front line of a wider response to climate change. Councils are largely responsible for civil defence, regional and district land use, planning, and major community infrastructure. They are the owners of significant assets, some of which are at risk because of climate change. They also have a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- 1.2 Councils have obligations to keep their communities and assets safe from the impacts of a changing climate. They also have a responsibility to consult and keep their communities informed about the scenarios they are planning for and the steps they are taking to protect people and property.
- 1.3 In this report, we use the term climate **effects** to mean the changes from rising global temperatures, such as rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events. Climate-related **impacts** are the consequences of those effects, such as coastal inundation and flooding. Climate-related **risks** are impacts that are not apparent yet but could arise.

Why we did this work

- 1.4 Most councils in New Zealand have identified responding to climate change as a strategic priority. Most have strategic plans that refer to initiatives designed to prepare for or implement a response to climate-related risks.
- 1.5 We wanted to understand how well councils were moving beyond high-level climate change commitments and strategies towards taking action.
- 1.6 We also wanted to make a positive contribution to climate response momentum among councils. This report aims to do this by:
 - sharing lessons and insights that might help other councils; and
 - publishing our findings to give New Zealanders an independent view of the steps that four councils are taking and to support public accountability of council climate actions.
- 1.7 It is important to acknowledge that the timing and extent of the future impacts of climate change are uncertain. Councils around the country are at various stages of preparing climate change scenarios and understanding what risks climate change poses to their communities and assets.
- 1.8 In addition, councils are operating in a changing legislative and policy environment. In the past few years, changes to resource management legislation were passed by Parliament and then repealed. A climate adaptation bill was anticipated under the previous Government but not introduced, and a select committee inquiry into climate adaptation has recently been completed.

- 1.9 We were interested in the extent to which councils were able to progress their climate responses despite uncertainty both about the impacts of climate change and within the policy environment.

What we looked at

- 1.10 We wanted to find out how well councils have moved from climate change strategies, commitments, and expectations to actions.
- 1.11 Our audit had three lines of inquiry:
- How well have councils identified climate change actions?
 - How well have councils implemented and managed their climate change actions?
 - How well have councils made themselves accountable for their climate change actions?
- 1.12 We audited climate actions at four councils:
- Canterbury Regional Council (Environment Canterbury);
 - Christchurch City Council;
 - Nelson City Council; and
 - Whanganui District Council.
- 1.13 We chose these councils mainly because they are different sizes and types. We wanted our sample to include regional (Environment Canterbury), territorial (Christchurch City Council and Whanganui District Council), and unitary (Nelson City Council) local authorities.
- 1.14 We were interested in actions that were under way or had been completed in the last three to four years and were a response to the impacts of climate change or climate-related risks.
- 1.15 We did not examine every climate-related activity that each council has carried out. For a sample of activities in each of the four councils, we looked at how actions were identified; whether they aligned to strategic priorities; how well they were planned, implemented, and governed; and how well councils reported their progress to communities. The Appendix has more information on the activities that we looked at.
- 1.16 Given the various stages of implementation, we did not evaluate the effectiveness of specific actions. We also did not assess whether the actions were the right or best ones to take – those are policy decisions for councils to make.

- 1.17 We did not, through this work, audit the four councils' 2024-34 long-term plan (LTP) development, which was under way at the same time as this audit. LTPs are subject to a separate audit process.
- 1.18 However, we did liaise with auditors of LTPs to test the consistency of our findings. We expected that, where councils had identified climate change as a strategic priority or committed significant investment, this would be apparent in their LTPs.

How we did our audit

- 1.19 We collected and reviewed publicly available documents as well as additional documents provided by each council. Documents included strategy and policy papers, risk assessments, decision papers, minutes of meetings, internal briefings, evidence of financial plans, management and governance reports, and analysis of community feedback.
- 1.20 We interviewed key staff and some elected members at each council. We also interviewed stakeholders external to each council, including representatives of iwi, hapū, and rūnanga who had been involved with the councils' climate change work.
- 1.21 This report groups our audit findings in four themes, which broadly cover the criteria in our three lines of inquiry. The four themes are:
- **understanding** the impacts and risks of a changing climate;
 - **implementing and monitoring** responses to those impacts and risks;
 - **governance** of a council's responses to climate change; and
 - **involving and informing** communities about the responses.

Understanding the impacts and risks of a changing climate

2

- 2.1 Climate-related actions are likely to be more effective if they are based on an understanding of how climate change will affect councils and communities. We looked at how the four councils were informing themselves about the impacts and risks of a changing climate.
- 2.2 We expected to see the councils ensuring that they had a robust understanding of current and likely effects of a changing climate for their region and the potential impacts on council infrastructure and their communities.
- 2.3 We found that all four councils have taken steps to be informed about the current and likely impacts of a changing climate on their infrastructure and communities. These steps included commissioning expert advice and, for councils that have in-house expertise, carrying out their own modelling. Two councils – Nelson City Council and Christchurch City Council – use an interactive online risk mapping tool to identify and communicate climate-related risks. These types of tools could be useful for other councils.

All four councils have taken steps to be informed about climate-related impacts and risks

- 2.4 All four councils have taken steps to understand the current and likely impacts of a changing climate on their infrastructure and communities. The climate change risk assessments completed provide a good basis for the councils to work with their communities to develop priority responses to risks for the short, medium, and long term.
- 2.5 All four councils have taken steps to supplement climate and sea-level rise projections provided by organisations such as the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) with other information. All councils have commissioned climate change risk assessments for their specific region or locality.
- 2.6 Environment Canterbury commissioned, in partnership with the Canterbury Mayoral Forum,¹ the Canterbury Climate Change Risk Assessment. The risk assessment, published in 2022, rates climate-related risks in 11 domains: biodiversity, water, infrastructure services, energy, prosperity, well-being, equity, sense of community, historic heritage, knowledge, and governance.

1 The Canterbury Mayoral Forum comprises the mayors of the 10 territorial authorities in Canterbury and the chairperson of Environment Canterbury. The Forum's functions include being a mechanism for councils in Canterbury to identify and prioritise issues of mutual concern and foster co-operation, co-ordination, and collaboration to address them. The Forum meets quarterly and is supported by a permanent secretariat hosted by Environment Canterbury. The mayoral body is supported by a Chief Executives Forum and technical working groups comprising staff in the member councils. A Climate Change Working Group, for example, co-ordinates climate change policy work among the 11 councils.

- 2.7 Environment Canterbury also commissioned its own organisational climate change risk assessment, focusing on how climate change might affect Environment Canterbury's operations.
- 2.8 Environment Canterbury carries out its own flood modelling. This modelling explicitly considers the effect of climate change scenarios on sea-level rise and rainfall in severe weather events.
- 2.9 Christchurch City Council supplemented the Canterbury Climate Change Risk Assessment with its own climate change risk screening for the Christchurch district. This risk screening considers risks across both the natural and built environment. It provides, for each locality, a level of detail that is not available in the Canterbury Climate Change Risk Assessment. It includes analysis of impacts and the implications of changes in factors such as temperatures, sea levels, rainfall, and wind.
- 2.10 Christchurch City Council also commissioned a detailed Coastal Hazard Assessment to provide updated information about the potential effects of coastal erosion, coastal flooding, and rising groundwater, and how this might change over time with sea-level rise. This information has fed directly into the Council's Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning (CHAP) programme. Again, the analysis provides additional detail to what is included in the wider regional assessment.
- 2.11 Nelson City Council's risk assessment – prepared in partnership with Tasman District Council – takes a similar approach to that of Christchurch City Council. It considers the impact of a changing climate across five "well-being domains" on eight distinct geographic areas. These localised approaches recognise that climate risks and capacity to adapt can vary significantly throughout a region.
- 2.12 Whanganui District Council's local climate change risk assessment was still being prepared at the time of our audit. Whanganui District Council's risk assessment is expected to initially focus on council assets. Subsequent work will cover the wider community and district. Horizons Regional Council commissioned a wider, regional Manawatū-Whanganui Climate Change Risk Assessment in 2021. However, like Christchurch City Council, Whanganui District Council recognised that it needed a more detailed and localised risk assessment.
- 2.13 Whanganui District Council also carries out modelling of severe and frequent rainfall events caused by climate change. This modelling has helped the Council to assess and confirm priorities in its stormwater management programme. The Council has also identified where it needs further specific data, especially on how sea-level rise will affect the Whanganui River.

Christchurch City Council and Nelson City Council are using an interactive online risk mapping tool

- 2.14 Both Christchurch City Council and Nelson City Council are investing in an online risk mapping tool to help them understand climate-related risks at a more detailed and local level. This tool is tailored to each council's territory, infrastructure, and community. It provides detailed hazard impacts and vulnerabilities for different scenarios, including erosion, sea-level rise, coastal flooding, and earthquakes.
- 2.15 Both councils use the tool in their coastal hazard adaptation planning work. The tool helps with community engagement on climate-related impacts and risks by showing their vulnerabilities to a changing climate. It also helps the councils to design and prioritise climate responses.
- 2.16 Christchurch City Council used the tool to inform work on its housing portfolio and to help rūnanga understand the vulnerability of their assets to coastal flooding over time. We were told that the Council has also used the tool to inform long-term planning for council assets and in preparing its 2024-34 LTP. We were also told that the Council has agreed through the 2024-34 LTP to invest in further developing the tool. The Council anticipates that the extra investment will allow for additional hazard models and vulnerability assessments to create a "one-stop shop" for understanding climate risks.

Other councils might find these types of tools useful

- 2.17 We understand that each council's version of the online risk mapping tool has data relating to hazards and assets only within that council's boundaries. For example, Christchurch City Council staff told us that their tool showed rūnanga asset vulnerability in relation to only the Council's own information and geographic boundaries. Staff were aware – and concerned – that information about rūnanga assets might be missing or incomplete when those assets extend into a neighbouring council's boundaries.
- 2.18 This example highlights an opportunity for councils to work together on tools that are jointly populated with local information to provide better information to communities and to inform regional adaptation planning. We were told that councils in Canterbury were already collaborating using the online mapping tool.
- 2.19 Nelson City Council is also investing in an online risk mapping tool in partnership with neighbouring Tasman District Council.

- 2.20 There is clear benefit in the wider use of these types of tools. Other councils that are beginning climate-related risk identification might want to find out more about Christchurch City Council's and Nelson City Council's experiences and consider whether there is benefit in using similar online risk mapping technology, potentially in collaboration.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that all councils take opportunities to collaborate with and assist each other to understand the current and likely impacts of a changing climate on their infrastructure and communities.

Implementing and monitoring climate actions

- 3.1 We considered whether each council had clearly identified a response to climate change. We were interested in the role of climate strategies in shaping and prioritising climate actions. We were also interested in the performance monitoring frameworks that the councils established for monitoring and reporting on those actions.
- 3.2 We expected councils to have strategies and implementation plans, and we expected to see them using those strategies to prioritise their climate actions. Where councils did not have specific climate strategies, we expected to see strong alignment of a council's climate actions with its overall strategic priorities and for those actions to be prominent in the council's strategic plans.
- 3.3 We also expected to see councils using robust performance monitoring and reporting frameworks to show the progress of key actions.
- 3.4 All four councils had identified climate change as a strategic priority in some way. All had declared a climate emergency. Two councils had climate change or climate resilience strategies, and a third council was preparing one.
- 3.5 All four councils were actively responding to climate-related impacts and risks and were carrying out specific activities to address them. They were at varying stages of embedding climate change considerations into organisational policies and core functions.
- 3.6 In our view, all four councils could make better use of performance monitoring and reporting frameworks, particularly given the prominence they have given to responding to climate change in their strategic objectives or priorities.

Councils should clarify how climate change strategies drive prioritisation

- 3.7 We have previously said – in the context of council infrastructure strategies – that strategies should tell the story about where councils are, where they expect to be, and how they intend to get there.² Having clear strategic objectives helps with understanding challenges, prioritising resources, and maintaining momentum.
- 3.8 A climate change strategy can be valuable if an organisation is at a relatively early stage of embedding climate change considerations into its policies, decision-making, and activities. Councils might also find them useful for other reasons, such as communicating intentions to the public and other stakeholders.
- 3.9 Two of the four councils (Whanganui District Council and Christchurch City Council) have a climate strategy document. Nelson City Council was preparing one when we spoke with them in late 2023 and early 2024. Although we did not audit

² Controller and Auditor-General (2022), *Matters arising from our audits of the 2021-31 long-term plans*, paragraph 3.13, at oag.parliament.nz.

these strategies, we did consider whether they clearly set the direction for the councils' action programmes.

- 3.10 In our view, the priorities for action in Whanganui District Council's 2021 climate change strategy are not sufficiently defined to guide the Council on a programme of climate actions. It was not clear to us the extent to which the strategy was setting the direction for, or assisting to prioritise, what the Council was doing in practice. Completing its local climate change risk assessment is an opportunity for the Council to clarify and refocus its climate change strategy so that it can more clearly set the direction for climate-related activities.
- 3.11 Christchurch City Council's 2021 Climate Resilience Strategy has a clear framework with 10 climate action programmes. Those programmes identify some initial actions for the Council to progress.
- 3.12 A "Phase 1 Implementation Plan" for the strategy focused on embedding climate resilience into the Council's processes, policies, and systems. The Phase 1 Implementation Plan also anticipated that the Council would write detailed action plans for each of the strategy's 10 climate action programmes.
- 3.13 Council staff told us that their focus has since moved away from implementation plans. They were instead identifying effective "implementation pathways" and influencing and supporting business units across the Council to fully embed climate resilience within their actions and the 2024-34 LTP, activity plans, asset plans, and infrastructure strategy.
- 3.14 Identifying delivery pathways for implementing the 2021 Climate Resilience Strategy is a new performance measure in Christchurch City Council's 2024-34 LTP. Council staff are making good progress on embedding climate resilience into the Council's processes, policies, and systems. For example, guidance on incorporating climate change into the LTP process was provided to staff during the 2024-34 LTP development, and the repair and rebuild options for Christchurch's South Library included a whole-of-life carbon analysis.
- 3.15 In June 2024, staff provided the first twice-yearly report to elected members about implementation of the 2021 strategy. This report noted 67 key climate actions under the strategy's 10 action programmes were under way or had been completed and 52 were planned for the remainder of 2024.
- 3.16 We saw evidence of climate resilience being considered at multiple points during the development of the 2024-34 LTP. However, LTPs tend to be reasonably high-level in terms of describing actions and structured around organisational delivery rather than the council's strategies. Christchurch City Council's LTP does not, therefore, refer to the 10 action programmes of the Climate Resilience Strategy.

- 3.17 In our view, the Council should clarify how the Climate Resilience Strategy – particularly the 10 action programmes – are reflected in the LTP and related strategic planning documents. The next twice-yearly staff report to councillors on the implementation of the strategy might be an opportunity to do so.
- 3.18 Nelson City Council’s climate change strategy was still being prepared when we carried out our audit. Once the strategy is completed and adopted by the Council, we expect it to set the direction of the Council’s response to climate change and provide long-term objectives and improved focus to a revised climate action plan (discussed below). In the meantime, Nelson City Council’s climate actions are well aligned with its broader organisational strategic objectives and priorities, which include a clear focus on climate change.
- 3.19 Environment Canterbury does not have a climate strategy document. However, climate resilience features prominently in its overall strategic framework and had, until recently, been reflected in its operational portfolio structure.³ This meant that climate resilience had been prioritised and resourced, and portfolio-level reporting had helped to provide accountability and maintain momentum. The documents we saw on climate-related activity consistently demonstrated how actions aligned to Environment Canterbury’s strategic objectives and what the actions were intended to achieve.
- 3.20 Because Environment Canterbury’s 2024-34 LTP organises its work around three core services, climate change is no longer explicitly identified like it was under the previous portfolio structure.⁴ We encourage Environment Canterbury to consider whether it, too, now needs a dedicated climate change strategy to maintain focus on what remains one of its four strategic priorities.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that all councils make clear in climate strategies what their climate-related objectives are, how they intend to achieve those objectives, how they will use their strategies to set priorities, and how they will measure and report on progress in implementing their strategies.

3 Under its 2021-31 LTP, the work of Environment Canterbury was structured into five portfolios: water and land; biodiversity and biosecurity; climate change and community resilience; air quality, transport, and urban development; and regional and strategic leadership. Each portfolio had its own set of service levels and performance measures. The 2018-28 LTP was similarly structured.

4 For the 2024-34 LTP, Environment Canterbury has moved away from grouping its work in portfolios and instead focuses on three core services: environmental regulation and protection, community preparedness and response to hazards, and public transport.

All four councils are actively responding to climate-related impacts and risks

- 3.21 Environment Canterbury has had a project under way to prepare a region-wide climate action plan that involves all Canterbury councils. It has also prepared its own climate action plan. It has already firmly embedded climate change considerations into its river resilience programme, and it provides technical support to other councils in the region with their work on coastal adaptation.
- 3.22 As noted above, Christchurch City Council has reported many climate actions that are completed or ongoing. These span a broad range of the Council's operational activities. They also include embedding climate change considerations into organisational processes.
- 3.23 Nelson City Council has similarly documented multiple actions in a 2021 climate action plan. These actions encompass risk identification, emission reduction, and adaptation and include council processes and operations as well as community-focused activities. We understand the 2021 climate action plan has been updated concurrently with work on the Council's upcoming climate change strategy.
- 3.24 Whanganui District Council has a more discrete programme of climate change activity, with staff reporting against 21 initiatives. The programme covers both emission-reduction and adaptation initiatives.
- 3.25 All four councils were carrying out some similar activities. For example, all four councils were engaged in some way in coastal hazard adaptation planning – possibly one of New Zealand's most challenging climate-related adaptation issues. How each council is involved in coastal hazard adaptation planning differs according to each council's role, local environmental challenges, resources, and preferences.
- 3.26 Christchurch City Council, for example, has engaged a community-based coastal panel to provide informed recommendations to the Council on adaptation options in the Lyttelton/Port Levy areas. Nelson City Council is leading its community engagement. Whanganui District Council is supporting a community and hapū collective – Ngā Ringaringa Waewae – in the first round of coastal action planning. Environment Canterbury supports other Canterbury councils' coastal adaptation work (including Christchurch City Council's coastal panel) with technical and specialist expertise.
- 3.27 Councils told us that the lack of a national legislative and financial framework governing major climate adaptation was a challenge. We heard that certain adaptation options currently lacked sufficient legislative basis to manage legal

risks,⁵ or that the public might lack confidence that plans made now would be followed through by future councils. Although a legislative and financial framework might ultimately be necessary for carrying out some adaptation options, in the meantime councils are getting on with having important conversations with at-risk communities and exploring what matters to them and what adaptation options look like.

- 3.28 These conversations are an important prerequisite to decisions that will need to be made about adapting to the impacts of a changing climate. Although central government has a role in providing appropriate legislative frameworks, in our view councils need not see the current absence of a legislative and financial framework for adaptation as a reason not to begin adaptation planning.
- 3.29 Some of the four councils' climate-related activities were well advanced. As noted above, climate change considerations are well embedded in Environment Canterbury's river resilience programme. Similarly, both Christchurch City Council and Nelson City Council have made good progress in working through the Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning process in their climate adaptation planning.⁶
- 3.30 On the other hand, each council also had actions at an early stage of development. For example, the Canterbury Climate Partnership Plan – a regional climate response to identify joint action plans in which both Environment Canterbury and Christchurch City Council are involved – was in its early stages during our audit.⁷

Use of performance monitoring and reporting frameworks was mixed and could be improved

- 3.31 Councils need good performance information on their activities so they can monitor progress and provide a high level of accountability to their communities. A performance reporting framework should provide clarity about what the council plans to achieve in the short term and provide an indication of its plans and performance in the longer term.⁸

5 For example, protection of existing use rights under the Resource Management Act 1991 has been seen as presenting potential challenges to local authorities in implementing managed retreat.

6 Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning is an iterative process described in Ministry for the Environment guidance on managing coastal hazards and climate change (Ministry for the Environment (2024), *Coastal hazards and climate change guidance*, at environment.govt.nz). The process is intended to help communities understand what is happening with climate change, what communities value, options to address change, and how to implement a strategy and review its effectiveness. See Appendix 1 for more information on this action area.

7 The Canterbury Climate Partnership Plan has since been finalised.

8 Controller and Auditor-General (2024), *Local government planning and reporting on performance*, page 14, at oag.parliament.nz.

- 3.32 Because all four councils had identified climate change as a strategic priority, we expected them to have frameworks in place to monitor and report on their progress in implementing key climate actions. We looked at service-level performance measures⁹ in LTPs as well as any available governance and management-level performance reporting.
- 3.33 We saw examples of both service-level measures and internal performance monitoring, but there is scope for most councils to improve how they formally report on their progress with key climate actions.
- 3.34 Some of Environment Canterbury's climate-related activities were identifiable in performance measures in its 2021-31 LTP. Staff also included other climate-related "key initiatives" alongside internal governance reporting on the LTP measures as if those key initiatives were part of the LTP performance reporting framework.
- 3.35 However, although climate change continues to feature prominently in Environment Canterbury's strategic priorities, fewer climate-related LTP performance measures were included when Environment Canterbury shifted from its portfolio organisational structure to its three core services structure for its 2024-34 LTP. We encourage Environment Canterbury to consider how it might give prominence to measuring and reporting key climate-related activities under its new core services structure.¹⁰
- 3.36 We saw good internal performance monitoring of some climate-related activities at Christchurch City Council. A Capital Programme Performance Report that staff prepare for the Council's Finance and Performance Committee provides useful performance updates about the major cycleway route construction as part of the capital projects portfolio. Major cycleway routes are a component of the Council's climate strategy. The updates allow councillors to see, at a glance, overall progress, performance against project budget, risks and issues, and how risks and issues are being managed.
- 3.37 Christchurch City Council's CHAP programme also had good management-level performance monitoring and reporting, showing the status of the programme's finances, schedule, scope, and resources. Key risks are identified along with

9 **Service levels** are the attributes of services that a council commits in its LTP to formally report against in its annual reports. Each service level has a **performance measure**, which is how the service attribute will be assessed. For each performance measure, there is a **target**, which is the level of performance that the council aims to achieve.

10 Environment Canterbury has since told us that work has begun on a monitoring, evaluation, and reporting plan for the newly adopted Environment Canterbury Climate Action Plan. This includes identifying performance measures and determining how to integrate them into organisational reporting, including LTPs, annual plans, and annual reports.

mitigations or updates from previous reports. However, we did not see this information feed into governance-level reporting.¹¹

- 3.38 As noted earlier, Christchurch City Council has introduced a new performance measure in its 2024-34 LTP to identify implementation pathways for its Climate Resilience Strategy, replacing a previous measure about preparing the strategy. It also has several performance measures related to its goal of reducing vehicle emissions by encouraging non-car modes of transport.
- 3.39 We also note that, in its 2024-34 LTP, Christchurch City Council has introduced a new service level and performance measure for its CHAP programme. The measure is to “work with communities and rūnanga in low-lying coastal and inland communities to develop adaptation plans that respond to the current and future impacts of coastal hazards caused by climate change.”¹² We consider that this new measure reflects an important and expanding climate response activity and is a useful addition to the Council’s performance reporting framework.
- 3.40 Nelson City Council and Whanganui District Council have also introduced their first climate-related performance measures in their 2024-34 LTPs. Both measures relate to reducing emissions. We support these new additions. However, other than these new performance measures, we saw little other performance measurement related to Nelson City Council’s and Whanganui District Council’s other key climate actions.
- 3.41 In our view, greater use of performance measures is needed by all four councils for key climate-related initiatives, given the prominence that climate change has in their strategic frameworks and priorities and the impact it has on their communities.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that all councils strengthen the use of performance measures that reflect climate-related strategic objectives and priorities.

11 A Council Coastal Hazards Working Group operated during the previous council term and may have received relevant performance updates. It has recently reconvened and had not received any reports at the time of our audit.

12 Christchurch City Council (2024), *Our Long Term Plan 2024-2034*, Volume 1, page 150, at ccc.govt.nz.

4

Governance

- 4.1 Governance refers to the systems and processes for leading and guiding an organisation. It is about how an organisation sets its direction and manages its operations to achieve its goals and fulfil its accountability obligations.¹³
- 4.2 In our view, governance arrangements have a critical role in ensuring that climate actions are consistent with a council's strategic objectives and priorities. Those arrangements are also critical to overall accountability for a council's performance in achieving climate-related objectives.
- 4.3 We expected arrangements to be consistent with our guidance on good governance, specifically that governing bodies:
- receive regular reports that provide a clear and objective view of an organisation's (or project's) performance;
 - are provided with enough detail to support performance management and decision-making, while avoiding unnecessary details about operational matters; and
 - are provided with information that enables progress to be compared to strategy, monitoring of risks, and monitoring of financial implications.¹⁴
- 4.4 The four councils we looked at have different governance arrangements for their climate-related programmes.

Governance arrangements vary

- 4.5 Three of the councils have clear structures in place for elected members to effectively govern the council's climate change response.
- 4.6 Nelson City Council has moved from the previous term's committee structure to several "taskforces". The climate change taskforce comprises five elected members, including the mayor. It has no decision-making powers and therefore is not required to meet in public or make public any agendas or minutes.
- 4.7 Nelson City Council's climate change taskforce meets frequently – usually monthly. Meeting notes indicate that members are well engaged with staff and give regular guidance on strategic issues, such as the preparation of the Council's climate change strategy and community consultation on emission reduction targets.
- 4.8 Although Nelson City Council's taskforce approach enables more frequent and in-depth engagement between members and staff, it is less transparent to the public. The previous committee meetings were held in public and livestreamed, with agendas, minutes, and recordings publicly available on the Council's website.

13 Controller and Auditor-General (2016), *Reflections from our audits: Governance and accountability*, page 5, at oag.parliament.nz.

14 See "Good governance" at oag.parliament.nz/good-practice.

- 4.9 The climate change taskforce can invite members of the public to make presentations at meetings and has done so. Staff also report on the wider climate change programme to the Council every six months. Decisions are debated and made in public at full council sessions. Based on the evidence we have seen, the taskforce approach is a way to meet several of our expectations of effective governance. It also presents a workable alternative to a committee approach. Nevertheless, we encourage the Council to consider what steps it could take to make the taskforce’s activities more transparent to the public.
- 4.10 Environment Canterbury and Whanganui District Council both have traditional council committees that oversee climate-related programme activities. The committees meet between two and four times a year and receive a range of performance information on relevant programme activities.
- 4.11 From the evidence we saw, Environment Canterbury and Whanganui District Council have adequate structures for effective governance. However, we heard mixed feedback about whether staff reporting about climate-related issues adequately met councillors’ needs. In our view, staff reporting was, at a high level, adequate. However, councillors could have particular interests from a governance perspective that might not be covered in normal staff reporting. We encourage all councillors to set clear expectations with staff about the matters they need information on and how frequently they need that information.
- 4.12 There were conflicting views about how Christchurch City Council’s climate change programme is governed, particularly in terms of the role of the “climate change portfolio”. After the 2022 local body elections, several “portfolios” – including a climate change portfolio – were established instead of the committees that had been in place before the election. Each portfolio has one elected councillor as the assigned portfolio holder.
- 4.13 The portfolio role’s terms of reference describe portfolio holders as largely having an advocacy role with no governance responsibilities related to their portfolio beyond those which they ordinarily hold as an elected member. However, they also state that the portfolio holder has oversight of effective implementation of relevant council strategies, plans, and policies (in particular, the 2021 Climate Resilience Strategy in the case of the climate change portfolio), suggesting some governance-related function.
- 4.14 As portfolio holders do not have any council decision-making authority, governance over climate change ultimately sits with the full elected council. However, some we spoke to saw the climate change portfolio performing at least some governance functions. In our view, the climate change portfolio is not

sufficiently equipped to perform an effective governance function in terms of staff support and access to information.

- 4.15 We consider that it would be helpful to all elected members if the governance arrangements over the climate change programme were clarified, including clarifying the climate change portfolio terms of reference if necessary.
- 4.16 In terms of governance reporting, we saw the full Council receive various reports relating to activities with a climate change focus or dimension. However, Christchurch City Council has a substantial programme of climate-related activities to deliver its Climate Resilience Strategy.
- 4.17 If the twice-yearly implementation progress reports are to be the main source of governance reporting on the Climate Resilience Strategy as a whole and on progress against its goals, in our view it will be critical that the reports include information on:
- whether implementation of the strategy is on track;
 - when key actions are expected to be completed;
 - whether there are any implementation issues or risks for the strategy as a whole and how they are being managed; and
 - any financial issues given the high number of reported actions.
- 4.18 We remind all councils that effective governance requires governing bodies to be provided with information that helps governors compare progress to strategies, monitor risks, and understand financial implications.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that all councils clearly set out how climate-related activities will be governed and ensure that staff understand what information the relevant governance body needs to govern effectively.

Informing and involving communities

- 5.1 A high level of community support, including from iwi, hapū, and Māori, is critical for a council's climate actions to be successful. Community consultation on plans is important, but communities also need to be involved in implementing certain actions.
- 5.2 Providing timely and meaningful updates to communities on council activities and progress is also an essential part of public accountability.
- 5.3 We expected to see councils carrying out meaningful engagement and taking consultation feedback seriously – for example, adjusting proposals and plans where feedback indicated changes were needed.
- 5.4 We also expected public-facing information to enable the public to stay well-informed and engaged in what the councils are doing.
- 5.5 All four councils have supported their communities to be meaningfully engaged in climate action. Some of the ways that councils have done that vary. Although we saw good examples of progress updates on council websites, we also saw gaps.
- 5.6 Engaging iwi and hapū about climate-related issues was challenging, to varying degrees, for all four councils.

All four councils have supported meaningful community engagement

- 5.7 All four councils had taken meaningful steps to inform and involve their communities in climate actions. They provided consultation exercises and surveys for the public to have input in identifying climate responses. They also provided opportunities for community members to be directly involved in planning or implementation through collaboration on specific projects or participation in official advisory bodies.
- 5.8 We saw all four councils take seriously the value of public consultation about climate change. Between the four councils, consultation has covered:
 - identifying climate-related risks to communities;
 - the approach the council should take to managing climate-related risks;
 - what communities valued and wanted protected from climate-related risks such as coastal inundation; and
 - community support for the council proactively addressing climate-related issues.
- 5.9 We examined how the councils dealt with public feedback to see whether they treated climate-related consultation seriously, and saw that councils consistently gave genuine consideration to public feedback. They frequently modified their

approaches or decisions as a result of the feedback they had received (for example, in climate change strategies and LTPs).

- 5.10 Below we highlight good examples from each council of different approaches to community engagement.

Christchurch City Council's coastal panel

- 5.11 We noted earlier that Christchurch City Council's CHAP programme involves the use of a coastal panel, a group of community representatives tasked with analysing and identifying preferred adaptation options for their local area. The panel submits those options to the elected members for a decision. Membership of the panel is drawn primarily from the local area that the adaptation planning work is currently focusing on – in this case, Banks Peninsula (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Membership of Christchurch City Council's Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning Coastal Panel

The coastal panel in the CHAP pilot is drawn from communities around Christchurch:

- two representatives each from Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke and Te Rūnanga o Koukourārata;
- one representative from the Banks Peninsula Community Board;
- one representative from the Banks Peninsula Zone Committee;
- one representative from the Coastal-Burwood Community Board; and
- six community representatives, including three from the broader Christchurch community to bring wider perspectives and knowledge.

The panel is headed by an independent chair, funded by the Council, and supported by the Council's CHAP team.

A Specialist and Technical Advisory Group comprising Christchurch City Council staff, Environment Canterbury staff, and external expertise supports the panel with technical information and advice.

- 5.12 Council staff provided the panel with information about coastal hazard risks. Although detailed and technical, members of the panel who we spoke to said the information was understandable and of high quality.
- 5.13 Council staff also ran local engagement events about the coastal panel's draft adaptation pathways for Lyttelton Harbour and Port Levy. Information provided to the community included coastal flooding scenarios for different levels of sea-level rise.

- 5.14 We were told that feedback from these engagement events helped the CHAP programme team ensure that it was including the assets most valued by the community alongside the Council's priorities.
- 5.15 By recording those assets in the Council's online risk mapping tool, we were told that the staff were able to understand the assets' exposure and vulnerability to climate change impacts and other hazards. That understanding could then inform conversations with the community about the future of those assets, including possible local adaptation pathways under the Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning process.
- 5.16 We were told that, although it was not easy, equipping the panel with enough technical knowledge was important to its success. We were told that council staff worked hard early in the process to upskill the panel, provided an effective code of conduct, and made independent specialist and technical advisors available to answer questions.

Christchurch City Council's Major Cycleway Route programme

- 5.17 Activities that encourage non-car modes of transport, such as the Major Cycleway Routes, are a priority response for Christchurch City Council's climate work. The Major Cycleway Route programme has been under way for more than a decade. In that time, the Council has evolved its approach to seeking public input based on its experience of what has or has not worked well previously. For example, the Council now tailors information packs to specific localities rather than providing extensive detail on an entire proposed route.
- 5.18 The Council has also found that "pre-engagement" communication with communities is helpful to prepare communities for consultation exercises and to help avoid consultation being misunderstood.

Whanganui District Council's coastal action planning with Ngā Ringaringa Waewae

- 5.19 Whanganui District Council is trialling an approach of empowering and supporting the community to lead elements of coastal action planning. In 2023, the Council endorsed Ngā Ringaringa Waewae¹⁵ to lead community engagement on the rejuvenation of the North Mole area and the Castlecliff portion of the Council's Coastal Action Plan.¹⁶
- 5.20 The community engagement aims to establish a consolidated vision for protecting the Castlecliff area and to inform future actions to build resilience to climate

15 Ngā Ringaringa Waewae is a community and hapū co-operative, formed in partnership with the hapū collective working on Te Pūwaha, the Whanganui Port revitalisation project.

16 The North Mole is the northern side of the Whanganui River mouth breakwater. Castlecliff is the stretch of coastline just north of the Whanganui River mouth.

change. Council staff told us that they intend to use what they learn through this process to inform how they can work more closely with the community in other parts of the Council's climate change response. There will be lessons in this for both the Council and the community. Some reflections from Ngā Ringaringa Waewae about the process are set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Excerpts from Ngā Ringaringa Waewae's March 2024 report to Whanganui District Council about community engagement

Ngā Ringaringa Waewae – kawa-based community collaboration

While more time consuming than the more transactional prescriptive engagement of previous phases, invariably what we learnt from these interactions was far richer, nuanced, robust and ultimately helpful. We were able to understand not only the direct aspirations of our community but the fundamental values behind those aspirations, the deep 'why' that is so easily missed when we only ask for 'what'. We were able to record the small changes conveyed by community, often overlooked. All of this, documented, will likely prove invaluable for future phases of this emerging process. . . .

Importantly our process has encouraged continued community engagement, empowerment, involvement and ownership of rejuvenation outcomes as and when they appear - accepting that when the environment is rehabilitated and empowered, so are the people, and when the people are empowered and engaged so is the environment. Mouri Ora, Mouri Awa, Mouri Tangata.

Source: Ngā Ringaringa Waewae (2024), *Adventures in a Time of Transformation: Delivering Hapū-Led, Community Based Aspirations in Te Kaihau o Kupe | Castlecliff*, at ngaringaringawaewae.org.

- 5.21 Community-led engagement is also one way that councils can seek to provide a climate-related initiative with limited resources. Other councils might be interested in how this could inform their own approaches.

Nelson City Council's Community Carbon Insight Project

- 5.22 Nelson City Council has actively involved community groups on climate-related issues, including the Nelson Tasman Climate Forum (NTCF).¹⁷ As well as providing Nelson City Council with a greater understanding of community views about climate-related impacts and council actions, the NTCF helps the Council to draw on community capacity and expertise in progressing the Council's community-oriented climate-related initiatives.
- 5.23 One of those initiatives is the Community Carbon Insight Project. Nelson City Council collaborated with several organisations on this initiative, including the NTCF, Tasman District Council, the Nelson Regional Development Agency, an accounting service provider, and an independent sustainability assurance provider.

17 The NTCF is a community-led climate action initiative. Its aim is to empower the community to take urgent climate action. Nelson City Council signed the NTCF charter as a partner organisation. That obliges the Council to act in good faith within its functions and capabilities to support the NTCF in achieving its goals. Tasman District Council is also a member of the NTCF.

- 5.24 We heard that the initiative drew on the strengths and capabilities of the other organisations to measure the carbon footprint of the Nelson-Tasman region at a detailed level. For example, NTCF’s research and development group helped identify the methodology, a Tasman District Council officer assisted with data analysis, and others provided free carbon accountancy and assurance services for the project.

Environment Canterbury’s rating district liaison committees

- 5.25 Environment Canterbury uses “rating district liaison committees” to plan and prioritise river management and flood protection initiatives for 58 river and drainage rating districts.¹⁸ Large rating districts have dedicated liaison committees. Community representatives are elected to the committees at a public meeting every three years.
- 5.26 The committees enable community representatives to liaise directly with councillors and council officers on matters relating to setting targeted rates and to help plan and prioritise river control works, flood protection, and flood plain management. They advise and inform Council staff about the state of their district’s rivers and the proposed works for the coming year.
- 5.27 Environment Canterbury’s rating district liaison committee meeting notes are publicly available. They indicate a good level of transparency by the Council on work carried out, financial management, and work programme options.
- 5.28 Rating district liaison committees also make recommendations to the Council on the level of targeted rates (including rate increases) and how those funds should be spent. Although the Council makes the final decisions, we were told that, in relation to one liaison committee, the Council had not rejected a committee recommendation in 30 years.

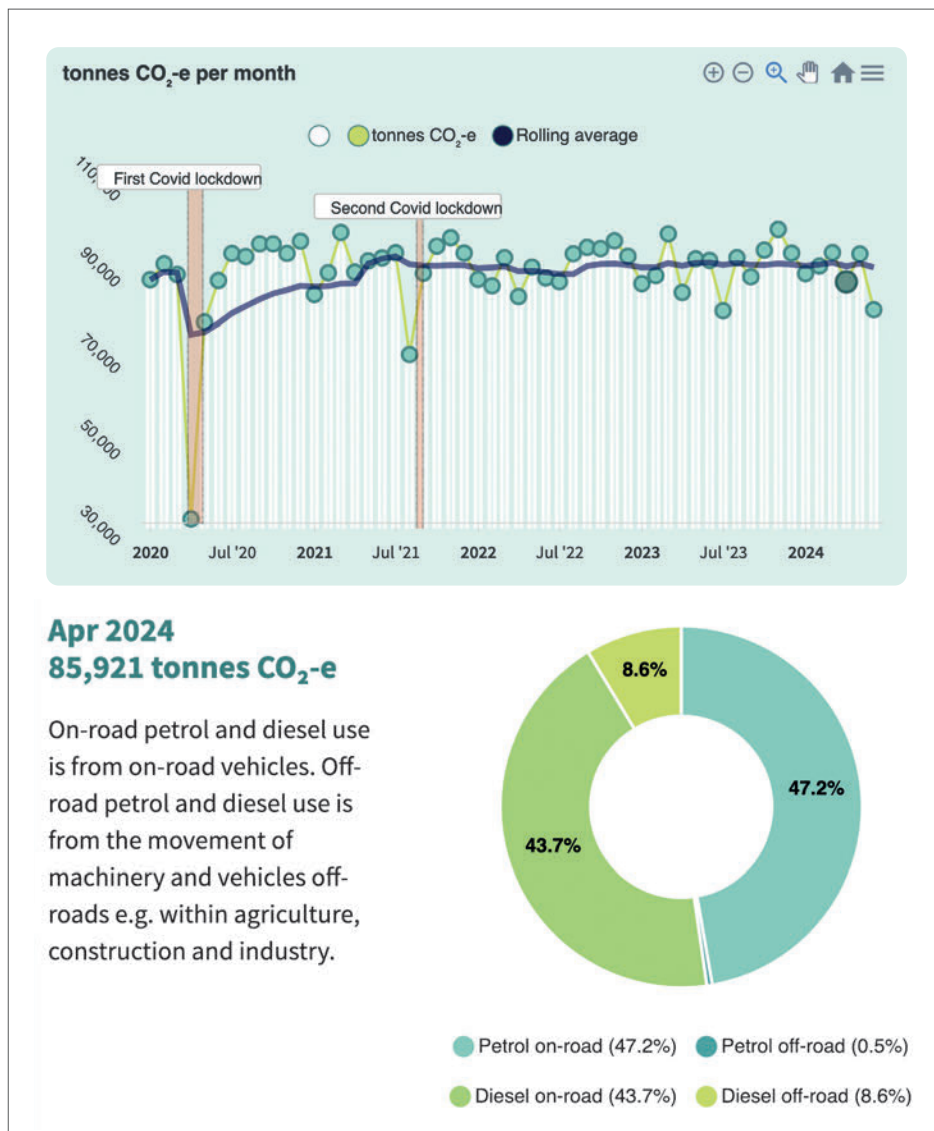
Some of the councils need to improve how they inform the public about progress

- 5.29 We saw examples of councils providing engaging and informative public updates on climate-related initiatives. Both Christchurch City Council and Nelson City Council provide useful information on their greenhouse gas emissions initiatives and achievements. Both provide at-a-glance information on their websites, supported by detailed, downloadable analysis and data.

¹⁸ Rating districts are specific areas within a council’s boundaries that attract targeted rates to fund works or services exclusive to that area.

5.30 Nelson City Council’s graphical information portrays emission reductions since 2017/18. Christchurch City Council’s “Smartview” website application provides interactive graphical information on a range of activity counters, such as cycleway usage, to measure the success of its emission-reduction initiatives. Figure 3 shows the Smartview visual for the monthly trend in transport emissions.

Figure 3
Christchurch City Council’s Smartview application, showing monthly CO₂ emissions



Source: Adapted from smartview.ccc.govt.nz.

- 5.31 Christchurch City Council also publishes extensive information about its coastal hazards adaptation planning work. The information includes analysis of what Lyttelton Harbour and Port Levy communities said about what they valued in their coastal environments and what they want the future of their environment to look like.
- 5.32 Environment Canterbury publishes a range of material about its climate change response. We found the public progress reporting particularly informative in relation to Environment Canterbury’s river resilience programme and the rebuilding of flood protection infrastructure after extreme weather events. Flood recovery updates are reported publicly every few months. They are comprehensive and accessible, and cover both physical works as well as financial information. An interactive flood recovery job-map provides high-level status information.
- 5.33 However, other climate actions that we looked at lacked sufficient public progress reporting. Information was limited, focusing on relatively few initiatives, and was not up to date. Nelson City Council and Whanganui District Council in particular need to consider how – other than emissions reporting – they keep their communities informed of progress with key climate-related initiatives, particularly on climate adaptation planning where communities often have the most interest.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that all councils report publicly on progress with their climate change strategies and work programmes, to support accountability and so communities are well-informed, engaged, and supportive.

Engaging with iwi and hapū on climate change presents common challenges

- 5.34 The Local Government Act 2002 requires local authorities to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to the decision-making processes of the local authority. Iwi, hapū, and Māori can also bring valuable knowledge about local vulnerability to climate-related issues.
- 5.35 Our recent report on freshwater quality noted the benefits that strong relationships with iwi and hapū can bring to councils’ management of natural resources.¹⁹ We expected the four councils to have enduring and meaningful relationships with iwi and hapū and to understand their values, interests, and aspirations so that all parties could work towards shared long-term goals for managing the impact of climate change.

¹⁹ Controller and Auditor-General (2024), *Regional councils’ relationships with iwi and hapū for freshwater management – a follow-up report*, at oag.parliament.nz.

- 5.36 All four councils demonstrated progress and positive outcomes in their engagement with iwi and hapū on climate-related issues. For example:
- we heard strong endorsement from iwi and hapū of Christchurch City Council's efforts on coastal hazards adaptation planning;
 - we heard strong endorsement from Ngāti Apa of Nelson City Council's Te Taihu Capability Initiative, where the Council aims to support Te Taihu (top of the South Island) iwi groups to measure and understand their operational carbon footprint;
 - Whanganui District Council's support of community-led engagement by Ngā Ringaringa Waewae on coastal action planning appears to be serving the Council and its communities well; and
 - we saw positive changes in how Environment Canterbury engaged with rūnanga in the second phase of its regional climate change risk assessment, building on experience from the first phase of that work.
- 5.37 We also identified some common challenges the four councils face when engaging with iwi and hapū on climate-related issues.

Everything is connected

- 5.38 Councils' general approach to framing climate change, often perceived as being siloed, can be at odds with the fundamentally different relationship with the environment in te ao Māori, where everything is connected.
- 5.39 We were told that Māori often do not see climate change as the distinct issue that councils tend to present it as. Rather, climate change is part of care and protection of the environment in a more general sense. Iwi and hapū we spoke with would prefer to engage on climate change as part of a wider dialogue about interconnected matters. That approach might not necessarily fit with the way that councils are structurally organised.
- 5.40 Given this, all councils wanting to engage with iwi, hapū, and Māori on climate-related issues could usefully ask what a workable approach might look like for all parties.

Limited capacity for engagement and competing priorities

- 5.41 We were told that iwi and hapū have limited capacity to engage with councils on climate change, particularly when they have competing priorities. This issue is well-documented already. It was clearly identified in the Ministry for the Environment's 2019 framework for the national climate change risk assessment.²⁰ Our previous work has also found that frequent requests from the public sector

²⁰ Ministry for the Environment (2019), *Arotakenga Huringa Āhuarangi: A Framework for the National Climate Change Risk Assessment for Aotearoa New Zealand*, page 35, at environment.govt.nz.

and others for Māori and iwi input and involvement in projects places pressure on their capacity.²¹ As we have said about public organisations generally, councils need to be mindful that they typically have more capacity than iwi and hapū. This can affect the timeliness, level, and quality of the input that iwi and hapū are able to provide.

- 5.42 However, we did see examples of councils and iwi and hapū trying to make it work within the resource constraints that each has. In some cases – for example, those noted above – outcomes were positive.
- 5.43 In others, we heard of dissatisfaction with councils’ ability to understand and accommodate the constraints or processes that iwi and hapū often have. These include providing unreasonably short time frames for iwi and hapū representatives to consult with their communities and prepare a considered response.
- 5.44 We were encouraged by one council’s staff awareness of the demands that can be made on some iwi and hapū representatives, recognising that they are “being torn in a million directions with responsibilities for being on multiple out of hours committees and the like for whānau as well as a day job and busy homelife.”
- 5.45 We saw examples of two councils using local consultants to support iwi engagement on the iwi’s behalf. That might be a useful model, although exactly how it operated would need to be tested with iwi. We also saw examples of council staff working with iwi representatives directly about how they wished to be involved in upcoming climate-related work.
- 5.46 We encourage all councils to consider the voluntary nature of iwi and hapū engagement and the imbalance of resources, and to work with iwi and hapū to identify modes of engagement that work for all parties.

Relationships are important

- 5.47 Iwi and hapū representatives consistently raised the importance of mutually respectful relationships. They confirmed that enduring and meaningful relationships are important to effectively engaging iwi and hapū on shared goals for managing the impact of a changing climate.
- 5.48 We found three dimensions of council–Māori relationships to be particularly worth highlighting.
- 5.49 For Māori, relationships with the four councils are **underpinned by personal connections**. That means that effective working relationships can be disrupted by elections that bring in a change of elected members and mayors. The biggest

21 Controller and Auditor-General (2023), *Four initiatives supporting improved outcomes for Māori*, page 35, at oag.parliament.nz.

challenge for some is continual change in council staff – effort is put into building relationships over time, only to have to start again when staff move on to other roles.

- 5.50 All four councils need to consider how to embed relationships with iwi, hapū, and Māori so that connections can be sustained over time, including going beyond the cyclical nature of elections and normal staff turn-over.
- 5.51 Engagement was seen as positive where there was **mutual respect** and where it was designed to be **mutually beneficial**. Mutual respect can be reinforced, for example by council staff investing the time and a genuine willingness to work with iwi and hapū on climate-related issues. It can be undermined by not acknowledging the input that was sought from and provided by iwi and hapū, or a perceived lack of effort to understand and incorporate Māori values.
- 5.52 We heard examples where councils invited iwi and hapū representatives onto consultative working groups that appeared to be designed to serve primarily council purposes.
- 5.53 We have noted these themes in our other work, such as in our May 2024 follow-up report on regional councils' freshwater management, which identified the benefits that strong relationships with iwi and hapū can bring to councils' management of natural resources.
- 5.54 A 2022 report we commissioned, *Māori perspectives on public accountability*, similarly noted the importance that Māori place on personal relationships over interacting with a system. "Trust ... is built with the people inside an organisation rather than the organisation itself."²²

Appendix

The council actions we looked at

We drew on evidence from a selection of council climate-related activities with a particular focus on those detailed in this Appendix. We selected activities based on the:

- amount of council involvement;
- extent to which the activity had progressed;
- extent to which climate change was the reason for the initiative; and
- relevance to themes of interest to the audit (for example, collaboration).

Some actions were at an early stage of implementation so we could not always assess their success or elements within them (such as the outcome of community input). We also looked at other activities that we came across in our fieldwork that helped to show how well each council has identified, monitored, or managed climate change actions.

Environment Canterbury

Climate resilience and flood protection

Environment Canterbury's climate resilience and flood protection programmes were part of its *Climate Change and Community Resilience* activity portfolio. The programmes include a range of flood protection projects to build, maintain, or replace infrastructure that directly reduces the risk of river flooding.

Canterbury regional climate change risk assessment

Environment Canterbury led work within the Canterbury Mayoral Forum on preparing a Canterbury climate change risk assessment. The risk assessment was intended to provide a shared understanding and awareness of climate change risks across the region.

Climate change action planning

Climate change action planning is another activity in Environment Canterbury's *Climate Change and Community Resilience* portfolio. We accept that, given that climate-related impacts can be uncertain, long term, and complex, action planning is a climate-related action in its own right.

Environment Canterbury's work on action planning is in two workstreams. One is the Canterbury Climate Partnership Plan (CCP Plan). The CCP Plan aims to detail how Canterbury councils will form partnerships on climate actions to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on Canterbury's communities and ecosystems. The CCP Plan is carried out in collaboration with the 10 other councils

in the Canterbury Mayoral Forum (all 11 Canterbury councils are therefore involved). The Mayoral Forum provides overall direction, although Environment Canterbury continues to lead the work.

The other workstream is Environment Canterbury's Climate Action Plan. That workstream is intended to guide how Environment Canterbury will act to reduce emissions and increase community resilience to climate change risks.

Christchurch City Council

Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning

Christchurch City Council has initiated a Coastal Hazard Adaptation Planning (CHAP) programme for low-lying communities at risk of coastal hazards that will be exacerbated by climate change. The CHAP programme uses the Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning approach, based on guidance from the Ministry for the Environment. Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning is an iterative process that helps communities understand what is happening with climate change, what it is that communities value, options to address change, and how to implement a strategy and review its effectiveness. Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning is intended to account for the relative uncertainty about when coastal hazards reach a critical point.

Christchurch City Council is piloting the CHAP programme in the Whakaraupō (Lyttelton Harbour) and Koukourārata (Port Levy) areas.

The CHAP programme includes the development of an interactive online risk mapping tool.

Cycleways

Christchurch City Council is constructing a network of 13 Major Cycle Routes (MCRs) connecting the outer areas of town to the central business district. The Council sees the cycleways programme as a key action for responding to climate change. It is expected to reduce vehicle emissions by encouraging other modes of transport.

Of the 13 MCRS, we looked primarily at the Quarryman’s Trail MCR. This MCR had the highest post-construction approval rating for the greenway section of four MCRs and, being a more recent project, we expected it to benefit from lessons that the Council had learned over the previous decade. The Quarryman’s Trail MCR received national recognition for construction quality in the New Zealand Transport Agency On the Go Awards for outstanding walking and cycling projects.

Nelson City Council

Te Taiuhu Capability Initiative

Through the Te Taiuhu Capability Initiative, Nelson City Council aims to support Te Taiuhu (top of the South Island) iwi to measure and understand their operational carbon footprint. The project started with council staff sharing internal knowledge with Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō (Ngāti Apa) so that the iwi could produce its own carbon footprint inventory. The initiative is intended to be a “pay it forward” arrangement. The knowledge and insights gained from the training provided by the Council is intended to be shared with other Te Taiuhu iwi, facilitated by staff from Ngāti Apa and the Council.

Community Carbon Insight Project

The Community Carbon Insight Project was a Nelson City Council collaboration with multiple organisations to measure and provide an analysis of greenhouse gas emissions for the Nelson-Tasman region. Using local emissions data and a tool from Palmerston North City Council, a city carbon model was developed to model emissions out to 2050 and assess the effects of emission reduction policies. The project received support from private firms, which provided carbon accountancy and assurance services. Statistics New Zealand, the Ministry for the Environment, and Port Nelson also provided support.

Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning

Like Christchurch City Council, Nelson City Council has also initiated coastal adaptation planning using the Dynamic Adaptive Pathways Planning process.

Whanganui District Council

Castlecliff Coastal Action Plan

Whanganui District Council is preparing a Coastal Action Plan to make Whanganui's coast more resilient to natural processes, including those affected by climate change. Initial stages of the Coastal Action Plan incorporate the beach bordering the Castlecliff suburb and adjoining work to reinstate and repair the North Mole. The beach has several issues, including wind-blown sand and dune accretion, which might be exacerbated by climate change.

The Council is supporting a community-led consultation process on the beach's issues and the way forward. Ngā Ringaringa Waewae – a community and hapū collective – is leading this consultation.

Stormwater network upgrade

In 2017, Whanganui District Council started a 30-year Stormwater Upgrade programme to upgrade Whanganui's stormwater network. The network's current entanglement creates contamination risk and exacerbates flood risks. Works are being progressed in areas that are prone to flooding in extreme weather events.

The Stormwater Upgrade includes the Healthy Streams Initiative, where the Council supports the community to lead work on keeping waterways – including creeks, wetlands, and bowls – clean and tidy.

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