



Newsletter January 2026

Happy New Year to you all – we hope you are well rested and ready for a busy 2026! Government reforms are never far away from our thinking, along with supporting councils getting established following the 2025 elections.

We have worked with 30 councils since election day and are looking forward to sharing our experiences at next weeks Governance Professionals symposium. There is still time to register for this course – details below.

We have other courses planned and again, details are below for our New Governance Professionals, an online standing orders course and a District Licensing Committee workshop scheduled for Palmerston North. Our website has the registration forms for these events.

Several Democracy Advisors have raised questions about systems and processes used in the democracy support function of council.

One of the services we offer is a democracy assurance review. The review takes the form of an assessment of your current systems, documents and procedures to ensure that they are current and effective using the MAGS detailed audit report of core governance support systems and processes. These include delegations, report template, agenda, minutes, hearings processes, Standing Orders, conflicts of interest documentation, code of conduct, support relationship with the Mayor/Chair, LGOIMA process, elections related processes, etc.

If you would like more information on the assurance review, please drop us a note or call us to talk more about this.

Vern and Steve

Upcoming Workshops

Governance Professionals Symposium Wednesday 28 and Thursday 29 January 2026 - The elections aftermath and what is in store for 2026

Our annual Governance Professionals symposium is one of the highlights of our calendar. The symposium will provide an opportunity to debrief and review pre- and post-election governance-related activities. What worked well/not so well/key learnings?

Who should attend?

- Governance Advisors, Committee Administrators, and Executive Assistants

- Governance Managers / Team Leaders
- Managers responsible for Council, Committee and Community Board meetings
- Chief Executives and senior leadership team members

Registrations are now open - if you would like to reserve a place at the symposium, please complete the registration form which is on our website.

New Governance Professionals courses in 2026

Governance Advisors play an integral part in supporting the governance systems, processes and elected representatives within the local government sector. This role is highly professional, requiring skills and knowledge to support elected members in making good decisions in a framework that complies with legislation and good practice.

The following are the dates for our two-day introductory course for people new to the role.

Thursday 19 and Friday 20 February 2026

Wednesday 8 and Thursday 9 April 2026

Wednesday 22 and Thursday 23 July 2026

The programme will provide all the core elements of knowledge that a new Governance Advisor will need to undertake the role in their initial stages of development.

The information pack and registration form are on our website.

Online Standing Orders workshop – Monday 9 March 2026

Standing Orders are part and parcel of all formal meetings in local government whether Council, Committee, Sub Committee or Community Board. Being familiar with Standing Orders and being able to offer advice to elected members in the political meeting environment is a prerequisite for staff who attend and support elected members at meetings.

This workshop will also be of interest to reporting staff and senior staff that support political meetings. Elected members would also benefit from this workshop.

This workshop will be run online. The information pack and registration form are on our website under “upcoming workshops”.

Introduction to the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 - Workshop on the Function, Processes, and Administration of a District Licensing Committee - Thursday 12 March 2026

We have been asked to run a workshop for District Licensing Committees and staff that support the committees in the lower North Island.

The workshop details are:

Time 900am – 230pm
Date Thursday 12 March 2026
Venue Palmerston North City Council

This workshop will provide District Licensing Committee members, support staff, and inspectors an overview of the Act and the systems and processes that a Committee follows including the process in which meetings of the committee are undertaken.

The information pack and registration form are on our website under “upcoming workshops”.

Other Courses for 2026

Our next newsletter will have information on our “Taking Notes, Creating Minutes” course and the “Leading Effective Meetings for Staff” course.

Thank you for reading our newsletter.

About us



Steve McDowell – 35+ years local government experience. Former Manager Democracy Services at Auckland City Council. This role included responsibility for all council governance related services and processes. Since 2006, Steve has been providing targeted training and services to local government for elected members and staff.



Vern Walsh – 25+ years local government experience, former City Councillor (3 terms) and Community Board Chair (1 term), previous appointments to Council Controlled Organisations (CCOs), former chair Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Board (10 years), 6 years elected Licensing Trust member, and member of the Real Estate Authority (6 years). Currently a member of the Remuneration Authority.

Our Contact Details

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