

Regional Spatial Planning Roadshow

Briefing Note 6: Establishing a Secretariat –
likely options, requirements, and roles

July - August 2026



6. Establishing a Secretariat – likely options, requirements, and roles

This Briefing Note supports a RSP Roadshow presentation to chief executives, tier-two leaders, planning managers, reform leads, programme managers, and prospective RSP secretariat or committee support staff. Issues of organisational design, establishment choices, and key points for council managers, taking account of Head Start scenarios are covered.

This note draws on papers prepared to support Workshop presentations that are synthesised in this series of eight Briefing Notes on topics relevant to organisational readiness for regional spatial planning. It includes information and advice based on official sources prepared for Taituarā by Simon Markham Consulting Ltd as an advisory Briefing Note.

Its statutory framing is Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, on regional spatial plans, national instruments, process agreements, iwi consultation, spatial plan committees, public notification, hearings, adoption, implementation and review. It considers what the current Bill and subsequent legal commentary mean for council managers, in light of existing spatial-planning collaborations and wider regional collaboration experience.

This Note is current to 14 September 2026. It integrates the July 2026 report-back changes into the substantive text and adds subsequent Committee-stage changes reflected in Planning Bill 235-3, together with relevant interpretation from the Regional Spatial Planning Legal Commentary Paper as at 14 September 2026 that accompanies this series of Briefing Notes. The Bill has completed Committee of the whole House consideration but has not yet received third reading or Royal assent. All update material is fully integrated into the main text.

1. Executive Summary

The RSP secretariat should be treated as the operational engine room of regional spatial planning. Under the reported-back Bill, section 71 requires a spatial plan committee to appoint a chairperson in accordance with regulations, while section 73A separately requires a committee-directed secretariat that includes Ministry-chief-executive-appointed technical experts or advisers whose work for the secretariat is Crown-funded, and gives the committee roles that cannot be performed well without a capable programme, evidence, engagement, records, public notification, and hearings-support function. The secretariat is therefore not only meeting administration. It is the machinery that turns regional governance choices into a lawful, transparent, and defensible statutory plan-making process.

Section 73A expressly requires the spatial plan committee to appoint a secretariat providing technical and administrative support under the committee's direction. It must include one or more technical experts or advisers appointed by the Ministry chief executive, with their secretariat work funded by the Crown. This is now the statutory minimum rather than an expectation derived only from supplementary policy material.

Existing sub-regional spatial planning arrangements such as SmartGrowth, Future Proof, the Wellington Regional Growth Framework, Greater Christchurch, Nelson-Tasman FDS work, Dunedin FDS and Queenstown Lakes spatial planning show the value of dedicated coordination, technical working groups, partner relationships, and common evidence.

This Briefing Note sharpens the secretariat role from “support office” to transition engine room. The secretariat must be capable of supporting statutory RSP preparation, current-boundary continuity, Head Start scenario testing, evidence transfer, records preservation, partner commitments, and any Regional Function Continuity Schedule work at the same time.

The Supplementary Analysis Report¹ distinction is particularly important for secretariat design: central government may be represented on spatial plan committees, but must be part of spatial plan secretariats. The secretariat model should therefore include a CG secretariat interface, not just occasional agency attendance at meetings. Councils should engage with MCERT on central-government participation in/alongside the secretariat.

Planning Bill 235-3 is more precise than this earlier policy decision. The statutory requirement is that the secretariat include one or more Ministry-chief-executive-appointed technical experts or advisers, Crown-funded and subject to committee direction. A broader collective central-government secretariat interface may still be sensible and is signalled in implementation material, but it should be described as an operating-model choice rather than as an additional express section 73A duty.

Planning Bill 235-3 is now the consolidated pre-third-reading baseline. The report-back RSP machinery remains, with later Committee-stage changes layered onto it. The separate Climate Change Response Amendment Bill remains a separate source stream; importantly, Planning Bill 235-3 itself now requires RSPs to identify priority areas for planning adaptation to the effects of climate change. The Bill has not yet been enacted.

Given the complexity and uncertainty, a phased model should be treated as an active mobilisation option, not a fallback. A light pre-enactment coordination unit should be able to start now, support CE/senior-executive steering, build the evidence and partner registers, and then scale into the statutory secretariat when regulations and council decisions are settled. In light of Head Start uncertainties affecting some regions, the Secretariat acts as the source point for transition memory.

The phased model should now be “national-standard ready”: early secretariat effort should prioritise region-wide evidence, GIS/data governance, spatial alternatives, infrastructure/designation mapping, decision logs and consultation architecture that remain useful if national standards later prescribe RSP structure, methodology or standardised provisions.

However, those arrangements are generally partial by geography or strategic in effect. The Planning Bill requires secretariat capability that can scale to a whole region, support a statutory committee, and connect spatial planning to IHP, public notification, later implementation plans, LTPs, RLTPs and Implementation plans.

¹ https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Supplementary-Analysis-Report_-Replacing-the-Resource-Management-Act-1991-Further-Policy-Decisions_Redacted.pdf

The secretariat must support the implementation plan required by sections 73B-73D. The plan records actions, priority, responsible actors, timing and planned or secured funding, and the committee then monitors and reports annually on implementation. Secretariat capability therefore has to continue beyond adoption and connect with LTP, RLTP, water-services and infrastructure delivery systems.

2. What councils need to know now

2.1 The statutory trigger is simple, but the practical task is substantial

Planning Bill hook	Secretariat implication
Section 73A requires a statutory secretariat	The secretariat model should be designed now as a committee-directed technical and administrative function. Regulations may add detail, but section 73A already requires Ministry-appointed, Crown-funded technical expertise.
Committee role includes preparing the draft RSP and options assessment report	Secretariat must support programme planning, evidence commissioning, options/scenario documentation, and technical integration.
Committee role includes consultation and recommendation for public notification	Secretariat must coordinate engagement, document versions, consultation records, committee papers, and local authority approval pathways.
Secretariat must make draft RSP and options assessment report publicly available when approved for notification	Secretariat needs publication, submission, records, and communications capability.
IHP process and recommendations follow public notification	Secretariat needs hearings logistics, evidence packs, submissions management, advice coordination, and decision tracking.
Committee reviews/amends RSP and prepares implementation plan	Secretariat must be durable beyond first notification and support implementation, monitoring, and annual reporting.
Central government must be part of spatial plan secretariats	Design a CG secretariat interface that can facilitate active agency involvement in the SP development process, collect agency evidence, maintain CG action logs, support Ministerial escalation, and avoid inconsistent agency positions. Clarification from 235-3: the express statutory minimum is Ministry-appointed, Crown-funded technical expertise within the committee-directed secretariat. A wider CG officials/agency model is additional implementation design, not the wording of s 73A itself.
Head Start requires current-boundary continuity and transition management	Secretariat responsibilities should include assumptions registers, evidence-transfer logs, decision archives, RSP/Head Start continuity notes and Regional Function Continuity Schedule support. Also preserve national-standard assumptions and spatial-choice records so the evidence can transfer if institutional boundaries change while RSP methods/content are standardised nationally.
Senior regional leadership needs operational support	A CE/senior-executive steering or advisory layer may need frequent early cadence; the secretariat must have the capability to turn that guidance into papers, decisions, actions, and escalation.
National standards may prescribe RSP content/methods	Maintain a live national-instrument register; identify mandatory standardised provisions; support any authorised spatial/parameter choices; prevent teams from drafting bespoke content that the standard displaces.

Section 67C information discipline	Track evidence source, confidence, uncertainty, spatial scale and improvement needs so the committee can demonstrate robust/reliable and proportionate information and support later review.
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2.2 Secretariat design should follow the operating model

Councils should decide the secretariat model after, or alongside, the process agreement and RSP Committee terms of reference. The core design questions are: who hosts it, who funds it, what authority it has, how it serves the committee, how it works with all councils and partners, and whether it is a light coordination unit or a full regional programme office.

Design question	Why it matters
Host and accountability	A host council or shared entity must employ/contract staff, hold records, manage budgets, and provide systems. Perceived host bias must be managed.
Authority to commission work	Without authority or procurement support, the secretariat cannot assemble the regional evidence base in time.
Access to all councils and central government	The secretariat needs reliable access to planning, infrastructure, finance, GIS, engagement, and legal staff across the region, and with relevant national agencies.).
Relationship to RSP Committee	The committee should receive independent, region-wide advice, not only host-council advice.
Sub-regional workstreams	Large regions may need sub-regional streams, but the secretariat must preserve one integrated regional programme.
Iwi/Māori partnering and participation support	Secretariat capability must include relationship coordination, access to kaupapa Māori expertise, resourcing administration, evidence handling, and participation tracking.
Digital and records system	A statutory RSP requires robust document control, metadata, GIS layers, public notification, and submissions records. Records should identify which content is nationally standardised, which is a regional choice, the evidence supporting each choice and the uncertainty/review trigger attached to it.
Longevity	The secretariat may need to continue through adoption, implementation plan preparation, reviews, and monitoring, not just drafting (though the secretariat could be scaled back during this phase).
Phased mobilisation	A pre-enactment coordination unit can start no-regrets work now and scale into the statutory secretariat once regulations, funding and committee decisions are clearer.
CG secretariat interface	The model should specify how central-government officials, NZTA evidence, agency clearance, CG investment dependencies, and Ministerial escalation will be managed. This should be done in partnership with MCERT. Separate the mandatory Ministry-appointed expert/adviser role from any broader whole-of-government officials or agency workstream so mandate and accountability remain clear.
Head Start transition function	The secretariat should maintain information to support current-boundary continuity, relevant Head Start scenario related reconstitution assumptions, evidence transferability, and regional-function continuity documentation. Engagement with central government in this will be important.

CE/senior-executive steering support	The secretariat must be able to brief and support mayors, chairs, CEs, and senior executives on design choices that cannot wait for the formal committee.
National-instrument response capability	The first RSP must absorb NPD and national standards on a moving timetable. The secretariat needs fast legal/policy interpretation, change control, spatial-standard implementation and clear briefing routes to the committee/CEs.

3. Possible secretariat options

Option	Description	Strengths	Risks / controls
1. Regional council-hosted secretariat	Regional council hosts the core team, systems, procurement, and records.	Aligns with regional scale, combined plan publication role, and natural environment planning interface.	Can be perceived as regional-council dominated. Needs formal service agreement, council access protocols, and independent committee advice norms.
2. Lead territorial authority-hosted secretariat	A large territorial authority or unitary authority hosts where it has strong spatial planning capability.	May draw on urban/FDS capability, project office systems, and infrastructure planning experience.	Can narrow focus to metropolitan issues. Needs whole-region governance discipline and regional-council interface.
3. Distributed multi-council secretariat	Functions split across councils: programme, GIS, engagement, infrastructure, legal, and finance housed in different places.	Builds ownership and uses existing capability wherever it sits.	High coordination risk. Needs a single programme director, decision log, records system, and service-level agreements.
4. Independent/shared-service secretariat	A separate shared unit or jointly procured provider services the RSP Committee.	Can be perceived as neutral and scalable; may suit regions with contested host issues.	Requires procurement, funding, and accountability clarity. Must still connect tightly to council systems and statutory decision-making.
5. Contracted programme management office	A contracted PMO supports the committee and councils, with technical work provided by councils/consultants.	Fast to mobilise and useful for compressed timeframes.	May lack institutional knowledge, iwi/Māori relationships, technical capability, or partner relationships. Needs strong council sponsor and knowledge transfer.
6. Phased model	Light pre-enactment coordination evolves into statutory secretariat after regulations and council decisions.	Matches uncertainty: starts no-regrets work while preserving flexibility.	Risk of under-building early. Needs clear trigger points and transition plan related to options 1-5 above.
7. Phased pre-enactment coordination unit for immediate start-up	A small senior coordination group starts now to support process-agreement drafting, committee ToR options, CG/partner	Mobilises early without pretending all regulations and committee choices are settled; gives CEs and senior executives a	Must be clearly mandated and resourced; needs transition triggers so it does not remain a weak informal default.

	mapping, evidence audit and Head Start continuity, then scales into the formal secretariat.	practical operating platform.	
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4. What existing sub-regional spatial planning experience suggests

A recent stocktake shows that current spatial-plan-like arrangements are often FDS, partnership or sub-regional models. They provide practical experience with secretariat-like functions, but usually not the full statutory regional role required by the Bill. Managers should draw lessons from them without assuming they can simply be re-labelled as the RSP secretariat.

Experience base	Secretariat lessons	Caution for RSP
Future Development Strategies	Useful for evidence base, development-capacity analysis, infrastructure sequencing, consultation, and hearings experience.	Usually urban-environment focused and not sufficient for the whole-region core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D.
Wellington Regional Growth Framework	Shows value of a regional leadership/partnership platform, long-term spatial narrative, and central/local alignment.	Partnership framework must be converted into statutory committee, secretariat, and plan-making machinery.
Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan	Strong example of sub-regional spatial coordination, shared evidence, and partner governance around urban growth.	Does not cover whole Canterbury; a regional RSP secretariat must integrate non-metro districts and regional matters.
SmartGrowth / western Bay experience	Shows value of standing relationships, growth partnership, tangata whenua involvement and implementation focus.	Sub-regional success must scale to the full Bay of Plenty region and statutory content.
Future Proof Waikato	Provides collaboration experience and sub-regional growth/infrastructure evidence.	Large multi-council region still needs whole-of-Waikato secretariat capability and decision discipline.
Nelson-Tasman FDS	Demonstrates joint FDS governance and adoption across neighbouring unitary authorities.	RSP geography may require separate statutory plans with strong adjacent-region coordination.
Dunedin FDS	Show the value of place-based scenario testing, infrastructure alignment and partnership with mana whenua and agencies.	Otago RSP secretariat must integrate multiple partial spatial planning bases into one region-wide statutory process.
Queenstown Lakes / Central Otago and other place-based or corridor spatial planning	Shows value of place-based growth, infrastructure, tourism, landscape, hazards and agency evidence and the role of strong local narrative.	Useful input to a regional RSP, but still requires integration into one statutory regional evidence base and governance process.
Urban growth partnerships with CG and NZTA involvement	Shows the value of central/local alignment, transport business-case connections, and CG agency participation in spatial choices.	RSP secretariat design must formalise this through CG secretariat input, agency workstreams and escalation, rather than relying on partnership habits alone.

5. Core secretariat roles and functions

Core functions should include a Ministry technical-expertise protocol; implementation-plan data and assurance; annual monitoring/reporting; a new-information and s 74 review-trigger register; IHP attendance/hearing support; records that distinguish adjoining-region common content from a formal joint-RSP pathway; and a national-instrument register for standardised RSP provisions and methodologies.

Role/function	Likely responsibilities
Secretariat lead / programme director	Overall programme control, committee servicing, workstream coordination, risk/issues, reporting, budget, and escalation.
Governance advisor	Committee agendas, papers, minutes, decision logs, conflicts, delegations, local authority approval pathways, and statutory compliance.
Principal planning lead	Plan structure, statutory content, options/scenarios, interface with land-use and natural environment planning.
Evidence and technical integration lead	Evidence gap analysis, commissioning, peer review, methodology, quality assurance, and alignment with national instruments/standards. Include environmental-headroom/limit-risk and action-plan information, long-lived water infrastructure, hazard/adaptation evidence and national-standard methodology dependencies identified through the PB/NEB legal commentary.
GIS/data/digital lead	Common spatial layers, metadata, data confidence, digital platform, mapping, version control, and publication formats.
Infrastructure and investment lead	Interface with infrastructure providers, LTPs, infrastructure strategies, regional land transport plans, designations, and implementation actions.
Iwi/Māori partnering and participation lead	Partnering and participation register, iwi authority/customary marine title engagement, Mana Whakahono/joint management interfaces, cultural evidence, and resourcing support. May also include advice to the RSP on whether Treaty Settlements are upheld through spatial planning. Update registers for MWAR cessation after Royal assent, continuing Treaty/JMA/direct RSP duties and any later iwi participation agreement requested under ss 198A-198E.
Stakeholder and communications lead	Provider/sector/community engagement, public information, councillor briefings, media lines, and consultation material.
Legal and policy support	Advice on statutory process, regulations, public notification, IHP, disputes, information management, and risks.
Submissions and hearings manager	Public notification logistics, submission systems, IHP packs, hearing schedules, evidence flow and recommendations tracking.
Finance/procurement support	Cost sharing, budgets, procurement, contracts, payments, grants or capacity support and audit trail.
Records and document controller	Document versions, evidence library, decision log, official information readiness, publication, and archiving. Preserve a standardised-provision register, spatial-selection reasons and evidence uncertainty/review metadata for hearing, implementation and later s 74 review.
Transition and Head Start continuity lead	Current-boundary continuity statement, assumptions register, four-scenario impact testing, evidence-transfer log, reconstitution triggers, and Regional Function Continuity Schedule support.
CG agency and investment liaison	Central-government officials group liaison. CG evidence/action log, NZTA and other CG entity coordination, Government policy statement/national strategy interface, and Ministerial escalation tracking.

Senior leadership / CE steering support	Preparation of decision papers, issue escalation, fortnightly or high-frequency steering support during establishment, and action tracking for Mayors, Chairs, CEs, and senior executives.
NZTA / transport investment interface support	Coordination of RLTP, state highway, public transport, business-case, designation, and investment evidence while managing NZTA conflict or Board-decision protocols.
National instruments / standardisation lead	Track NPD and national standards under both Acts, identify standardised RSP provisions and permitted spatial/parameter choices, coordinate legal/technical interpretation and maintain the change-control record.

6. Establishment steps

Step	Managerial task	Output
1. Confirm mandate	Secure CE/Mayoral Forum and council mandate to design the secretariat alongside process agreement and committee ToR.	Secretariat establishment mandate.
2. Define functions	Translate Bill requirements, process agreement and committee roles into a function list and service levels.	Functional specification.
3. Assess existing capability	Map planning, GIS, engagement, infrastructure, programme, legal and finance capability across councils, Iwi/Māori and existing sub-regional partnerships.	Capability heatmap.
4. Choose model	Compare hosted, distributed, independent, contracted, and phased options against region size, capability, neutrality, speed, and cost.	Options paper.
5. Agree funding and authority	Determine cost sharing, procurement authority, budget holder, staff secondments, contract management, and approval thresholds.	Funding and authority schedule.
6. Set up systems	Establish document management, GIS/data standards and protocols, decision log, risk register, stakeholder register and reporting templates.	Operating toolkit.
7. Appoint key roles	Appoint lead, governance, programme, evidence/data, engagement, and possible IHP-support roles; fill gaps with secondments or procurement.	Secretariat staffing plan.
8. Integrate workstreams	Set up technical, infrastructure, iwi/Māori, engagement, data/GIS and sub-regional workstreams with clear reporting to the secretariat.	Integrated programme plan.
9. Prepare mobilisation pack	Create committee induction, councillor briefing, partner engagement map, evidence work plan and public narrative.	Mobilisation pack.
10. Review and scale	Revisit the model when regulations, national direction, funding, or workload change.	Review trigger register.
11. Mobilise a phased pre-enactment unit	Stand up a small coordination cell to progress no-regrets process agreement, committee, evidence, partner, and CG-interface work before the formal secretariat is appointed.	Pre-enactment coordination unit and mobilisation plan.

12. Build Head Start transition controls	Assign responsibility for current-boundary continuity, assumptions, evidence transfer, Regional Function Continuity Schedule support and reconstitution triggers.	RSP/Head Start continuity toolkit.
13. Design CG secretariat participation	Confirm how central government will be part of the secretariat and how officials, NZTA, RPSC roles, agency clearance and ministerial escalation will be handled.	CG secretariat interface model.
14. Establish CE/senior-executive steering support	Set the cadence, papers, decisions, escalation route, and action log needed to keep early establishment choices moving.	Senior leadership steering support pack.
15. Establish national-instrument control	Set up the NPD/national-standard register, legal interpretation route, standardised-provision schedule and decision/change-control process.	National-instrument control register.
16. Programme statutory milestones	Map Royal assent/NPD triggers, RSP notification/decision dates, implementation-plan publication, annual reporting, s 74 review and downstream LUP/NEP dates.	Integrated statutory critical path.

7. Main risks and mitigations

Risk	Why it matters	Mitigation
Secretariat under-scoped as admin support	The committee lacks evidence, programme and engagement support needed for statutory delivery.	Define full programme-office and evidence functions at establishment.
Host bias or perceived host bias	Other councils or partners may distrust advice or priorities.	Use service agreements, independent chair support, transparent decision logs, and region-wide staffing.
Distributed model without single control point	Workstreams drift, records fragment and advice becomes inconsistent.	Appoint a single programme director and common document/data systems.
Inability to commission evidence at pace	Draft RSP and options assessment report become weak or late.	Give the secretariat procurement authority or fast access to procurement support.
Small council participation overloaded	Participation becomes symbolic and region-wide legitimacy weakens.	Use secondments, shared technical pools and clear contribution expectations.
Iwi/Māori participation unsupported	Consultation and partnership obligations are not operationally enabled.	Seek advice from iwi/Māori on how best to create a dedicated participation function and capacity-support process.
Public notification/IHP capability left late	Submissions, hearings, and recommendations process becomes high-risk.	Build submissions and hearings management into the secretariat from the start.
Digital systems unspecified	Evidence, maps, versions, and public access become fragmented.	Adopt interim minimum digital standards while awaiting national standards.
Sub-regional capture	Existing metro growth partnership priorities dominate whole-region RSP.	Maintain regional programme oversight and require all sub-regional outputs to pass through common evidence and strategy tests.
No post-adoption capability	implementation plan, monitoring, annual reporting, and review duties fall between councils.	Design the secretariat as a lifecycle function, not a drafting-only team.

Phased model not mobilised early enough	Regions wait for formal regulations and lose time on evidence, relationships, committee options, and process agreement design.	Stand up a mandated pre-enactment coordination unit with clear scope, authority, and transition triggers.
Head Start evidence and records discontinuity	Evidence, assumptions, engagement commitments, and decision trails are lost or disputed if local-government structures change.	Maintain current-boundary continuity, evidence-transfer logs, partner registers, decision archives, and Regional Function Continuity Schedule support.
CG secretariat role missing	Central government participates inconsistently despite the SAR expectation that it must be part of spatial plan secretariats.	Design a CG secretariat interface, seek CG engagement to establish an officials group, agency action log, and Ministerial escalation pathway.
NZTA or RPSC role confusion	NZTA, or a Regional Public Service Commissioner is assumed to represent the whole CG without a mandate or clearance process.	Separate NZTA portfolio/investment/designating roles and any RPSC convenor role from collective-government representation.
Senior leadership not serviced	CE/Mayoral steering exists but lacks papers, actions, decisions, and escalation, so critical design issues drift.	Provide a senior secretariat function that can operate at political, executive, and technical levels.
National standards overtake local drafting	Secretariat resources are consumed producing content or methods later standardised nationally.	Prioritise durable evidence and spatial alternatives; maintain a national-instrument watch; delay avoidable bespoke drafting.
CG role described more broadly than the Act	Governance/mandate confusion arises if supplementary policy expectations are presented as section 73A legal requirements.	State the statutory Ministry-expert minimum separately from any wider CG officials/agency model agreed operationally.

8. Matters that remain uncertain

Planning Bill 235-3 itself requires the RSP to identify priority areas for planning adaptation to climate-change effects. The secretariat should coordinate the evidence, mapping, partner engagement and decision record for those strategic locations, while keeping that work distinct from any separate local adaptation-plan process under other legislation.

Uncertain matter	Why it matters for secretariat design
Regulations on chairperson and other secretariat matters	Section 71 requires appointment of the chairperson in accordance with regulations; section 73A already sets the core statutory secretariat duty. Regulations may affect further appointment, functions, or process detail. The existence and core composition of the secretariat are no longer uncertain; 235-3 fixes s 73A. Remaining uncertainty is in regulations, national instruments and operating detail.
National standards and digital requirements	Will shape data systems, plan form, evidence base, and public publication needs. Standards may prescribe RSP provisions and methodology, so the secretariat needs both data/digital readiness and policy/legal change-control capacity.
Central government working role	The secretariat may need to manage CG agency engagement and evidence flows, but expectations may evolve.

Funding model	Secretariat costs may start before all councils have budget approval aligned through annual plan or LTP processes.
Use of existing sub-regional entities	Existing partnerships may provide capability, but may not be region-wide or statutory enough for the RSP.
Head Start/local-government reorganisation	Potential structure/boundary changes may affect host choices, records, staffing, accountability, and Treaty settlement/iwi/Māori participation arrangements.
National direction timing	The secretariat must progress no-regrets work while knowing that later national instruments may change content and evidence needs.
How central government will be part of secretariats	The SAR indicates this is required, but the operating model, agency lead, mandate, clearance process, and resourcing are not yet settled. Distinguish the express s 73A Ministry technical expert/adviser requirement from the wider CG model signalled in policy/implementation material.
Current-boundary continuity and Head Start detailed design	The immediate RSP baseline is current-region based, but future transfer, reconstitution, residual-region, and cross-boundary arrangements may need bespoke design.
NZTA and Regional Public Service Commissioner roles	NZTA has transport, investment, Board, and possible designation interests; RPSCs may convene regional public service input but are not automatically the CG representative.
Senior leadership cadence and resourcing	The need for frequent CE/senior-executive steering is likely, but the secretariat capacity required to service it may not yet be budgeted.
Iwi participation transition	MWAR cessation after Royal assent changes the relationship register and process-agreement assumptions; any new iwi participation agreement is request-based and separate.

9. Key points for council managers to note

Suggested framing: "The RSP secretariat is the engine room: it turns regional governance into a deliverable statutory plan."

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
1	Start with the statutory role.	The Bill requires a spatial plan committee to appoint a secretariat; the committee role cannot be discharged through meeting administration alone.
2	Design the secretariat from the operating model.	Host, authority, staffing, funding, and systems should flow from the process agreement and committee ToR.
3	Use existing spatial planning experience.	FDSs, SmartGrowth, WRGF, Greater Christchurch and Future Proof provide relationships and evidence practices, but not full statutory region-wide machinery.
4	Consider a phased model.	A light pre-enactment coordination unit can evolve into a statutory secretariat once regulations and council approvals are clearer. Given complexity and uncertainty, this should be an early mobilisation option, not a late fallback.
5	Cover the full lifecycle.	The secretariat needs to support drafting, options assessment, consultation, public notification, IHP, adoption, implementation plan, monitoring, and review. Regional leadership will be needed early over critical design decisions; a CE Advisory Group or equivalent should be serviced by the secretariat.

6	Build evidence and data capability early.	Sections 67B–67D and the associated information requirements make GIS, data standards, and evidence quality core secretariat functions.
7	Provide participation capability.	Iwi/Māori, infrastructure, CG, adjacent-region, sector, and community engagement need structured support and records.
8	Avoid host bias and fragmentation.	Use region-wide staffing, transparent records, and clear authority to maintain trust across councils.
9	Do not forget hearings and submissions.	Public notification and IHP support need systems and people from the beginning.
10	Bottom line for managers.	Under-resource the secretariat and the committee will inherit unmanaged risk; design it properly and the RSP has an operating platform.
11	Start a phased coordination unit now.	A light pre-enactment unit can prepare the agreement, ToR options, evidence audit, partner map, and CG interface before formal appointment.
12	The secretariat is the transition engine room.	It should own assumptions registers, evidence-transfer logs, current-boundary continuity, Head Start triggers and Regional Function Continuity Schedule support.
13	Central government must be part of the secretariat.	The model should include CG secretariat input, an officials group, agency action logs, and escalation to Ministers where national interests are engaged.
14	NZTA is essential but role-specific.	Build NZTA into transport, RLTP, investment, state highway, and designation workstreams, without treating it as the whole CG unless expressly mandated.
15	RPSCs can help convene but need a mandate.	A Regional Public Service Commissioner may support regional public-service alignment, but substantive portfolio advice remains with agencies and Ministers.
16	The secretariat is the national-instrument translation point.	It should tell the committee what is nationally fixed, what regional choices remain, what evidence is needed and what assumptions must be revisited as standards arrive.
17	Section 67C makes evidence governance a legal readiness issue.	Record robustness, reliability, proportionality, uncertainty and improvement pathways rather than treating the evidence library as a static archive.
18	Separate statutory CG input from wider CG coordination.	The Act requires Ministry-appointed Crown-funded expertise in the secretariat; broader whole-of-government participation should be designed transparently as an additional operating model.

10. Bottom line for managers

Councils should establish the RSP secretariat as a regional programme and governance capability, not as clerical support. The right model may differ by region, but every region needs clear host/accountability arrangements, sufficient authority to commission and coordinate work, robust evidence and data systems, participation support, public notification and hearings capability, and a design that can scale from pre-enactment readiness through adoption, implementation, and review.

The secretariat should now be designed explicitly as the regional transition engine room - able to start through a phased pre-enactment unit, support senior regional leadership, integrate central government into the secretariat, manage NZTA and RPSC interfaces, and preserve evidence, records and participation commitments through Head Start uncertainty.

Appendix: Practical checklist for managers

Checklist area	Question for managers
Mandate	Has the region authorised secretariat design and identified who will lead the work?
Functions	Has the region translated statutory and operating requirements into a full function list?
Model choice	Has the region compared hosted, distributed, independent, contracted, and phased models?
Funding	Are cost sharing, procurement authority, and budget holder clear?
Staffing	Are programme, governance, planning, evidence, GIS, engagement, infrastructure, legal, hearings, Māori, and records roles identified?
Systems	Are document control, GIS/data, risk, issue, decision, stakeholder, and submissions systems in place or planned?
Partnering/participation	Does the secretariat include iwi/Māori and partner engagement capability?
Sub-regional inputs	Is there a process for drawing on existing FDS/spatial planning work without letting it dominate whole-region priorities?
Public notification/IHP	Has submissions and hearings support been scoped before the draft plan is notified?
Lifecycle	Will the secretariat continue through implementation plan, monitoring, reporting, and review?
Phased start-up	Is there a mandated pre-enactment coordination unit that can begin no-regrets work before formal secretariat appointment?
Current-boundary continuity	Does the secretariat have responsibility for current-region RSP continuity unless legislation provides otherwise?
Head Start transition controls	Are assumptions registers, evidence-transfer logs, decision archives, reconstitution triggers, and Regional Function Continuity Schedule support assigned?
CG secretariat interface	Has the region specified how central government will be part of the secretariat and how CG advice will be collected, cleared, and escalated?
NZTA interface	Are NZTA transport, investment, state-highway, business-case, and designation roles separately identified?
Regional Public Service Commissioner role	Has any RPSC convenor, adviser, observer, or officials-group role been expressly mandated and linked to portfolio agencies?
Senior leadership servicing	Can the secretariat support frequent CE/senior-executive steering with papers, decision logs, action tracking, and escalation?
National-instrument control	Is there a live register and clear legal/technical process for implementing NPD/national standards and identifying standardised provisions and permitted regional choices?
Evidence uncertainty / review	Can the secretariat show evidence confidence/uncertainty, improvement actions and s 74 review triggers for major spatial choices?
Statutory CG minimum	Does the model clearly provide for the s 73A Ministry-appointed Crown-funded technical expertise without confusing it with any wider CG officials/agency coordination model?

Source documents and official references

Primary source documents (prepared by SMConsulting)

1. Discuss Paper - Enabling organisational readiness for regional spatial planning, 20 March 2026
2. Info Paper - RMA Replacement Spatial Planning Implementation - Detailed Notes., 18 March 2026
3. Info Paper - Pl & NE Bills - Implementation Risk Synthesis incl. Spatial Planning, 23 March 2026
4. Info paper - RMA Instruments and Governance Transition to Spatial Planning, 27 March 2026
5. Info Paper - Regional spatial planning - New Zealand Councils stocktake v. Spatial Planning – Updated, 29 March 2026
6. Regional Spatial Planning under the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill - Legal commentary and implementation implications, as at 11 September 2026: current synthesis used for the further interpretive and organisational edits in this Note.

Official references

7. New Zealand Legislation, Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
8. New Zealand Legislation, Natural Environment Bill 234-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/234/en/latest/>
9. Ministry for the Environment, Better planning for a better New Zealand - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/better-planning-for-a-better-new-zealand/>
10. Ministry for the Environment, Transitioning into the new planning system - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/transitioning-into-the-new-planning-system/>
11. Te Uru Kahika, Spatial Planning under the Planning Act position piece - <https://www.teurukahika.govt.nz/media/5tuds14x/te-uru-kahika-spatial-planning-sector-position-piece-final-270825.pdf>
12. Wellington Regional Leadership Committee / Wellington Regional Growth Framework - <https://wrlc.org.nz/about/wellington-regional-growth-framework/>
13. Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan - <https://greaterchristchurch.org.nz/urbangrowthprogramme/greater-christchurch-spatial-plan/>
14. SmartGrowth Bay of Plenty - <https://www.smartgrowthbop.org.nz/>
15. Future Proof Waikato - <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/regional-growth-and-development/future-proof/>

September 2026 legislative-update status and sources

16. Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026: consolidated current pre-third-reading text incorporating the report-back and Committee-stage amendments - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
17. Climate Change Response Amendment Bill 2026 (Bill 334-1), introduced 15 July 2026, remains a separate legislative source stream. For this RSP briefing, Planning Bill 235-3 is now the primary statutory baseline and itself requires priority areas for planning adaptation to climate-change effects.
18. Planning Bill 235-3, Schedule 1 clause 21 and sections 198A-198E: all existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe cease to have legal effect on the day after Royal assent; one or more iwi authorities may request one or more local authorities to enter iwi participation agreements, with hapū able to join as parties. Direct RSP consultation and Treaty-settlement duties remain separate.
19. MCERT, New Zealand's New Planning System - Testing the Approach to National Policy Direction, 25 August 2026: illustrative material, expressly not Government policy, used only as an implementation signal for likely RSP emphasis on growth/infrastructure sequencing, natural hazards, environmental/cultural values and conflict resolution.