

Regional Spatial Planning Roadshow

Briefing Note 5: Regional Spatial Plan Committees –
Briefing for Managers on Establishment and Operations

July - August 2026



Regional Spatial Plan Committees - Briefing for Managers on Establishment and Operations

This Briefing Note is framed to support a presentation to chief executives, tier-two leaders, planning managers, reform leads, programme managers, legal/governance managers, and prospective secretariat staff who may need to establish or service Regional Spatial Plan Committees. It focuses on committee establishment, governance options, terms of reference challenges, Head Start continuity, iwi/Māori partnership/participation, and risks for RSP formation.

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

Its statutory framing is the Planning Bill provisions as introduced to Parliament on regional spatial plans, process agreements, iwi consultation, spatial plan committees, public notification, hearings, adoption, review and coordination documents.

This version aligns with the 29 May 2026 Head Start guidance with respect to current-boundary RSP continuity under, transition-capable RSP organisational design. The Guidance confirms that outline proposals are light touch, high-level and strategic, but it materially clarifies RSP implications: current Bill-introduction regional boundaries remain the immediate RSP starting point and councils must move at pace to prepare RSPs on current boundaries following enactment.

1. Executive Summary

Regional Spatial Plan Committees (RSP Committees) are not simply another inter-council advisory forum. Under the Planning Bill they are the statutory operating platform for preparing the first generation of Regional Spatial Plans (RSPs), and they sit at the point where regional governance, iwi/Māori partnership/participation, CG involvement, infrastructure coordination, evidence, public process, independent hearings, and later implementation all meet.

The 29 May DIA Head Start Guidance strengthens rather than weakens the need to establish RSP Committee machinery now. Head Start does not pause, reset, or rebase first-generation RSP work. For outline-proposal purposes, “region” in the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill means the region that applied when the Bills were introduced, not a proposed Head Start boundary. Councils must therefore keep current-boundary RSP establishment moving while designing committees that can be reconstituted, transferred, or aligned if Head Start proposals later proceed through detailed design and legislation.

The key management task is therefore to establish committees that can actually function under pressure: clear enough to make recommendations and support statutory process steps; flexible enough to operate while final regulations, national direction, and local-government reform settings are still settling; and legitimate enough that councils, iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers, the CG, and communities can understand how influence and decisions flow.

RSP Committees appear to be exempt from the Government’s proposed Local Government Act voting-rights change that would restrict ordinary council committee voting rights to elected members. If enacted as announced, the exemption may preserve scope for non-elected members of an RSP Committee to vote or count for quorum, subject to the committee’s legal route, terms of reference and any final legislative settings. But it does highlight the issue of membership and voting rights as a deliberative decision by the Committee. This does not reduce the need for iwi/Māori governance-level influence; it makes the choice of committee route, membership status, advisory pathways, and terms of reference more consequential.

The source Information Papers for this Note point to a consistent conclusion: the highest risk is not lack of interest in spatial planning. It is weak regional governance design. If terms of reference, decision rights, secretariat authority, funding, iwi/Māori participation, Ministerial interface, Head Start reconstitution triggers, and local authority approval pathways are left vague, first-generation RSPs are likely to experience delay, rework, contested legitimacy and avoidable litigation risk.

A further design issue is the form of central government representation. The Planning Bill gives the Minister power to appoint one member, and additional members with local authority agreement. The RSP Committee may need more than a single CG seat if it is to receive a coherent, whole-of-government view. Committee design should therefore distinguish between: a Ministerial appointee with a clear mandate; a ministry/agencies advisory group behind that appointee; a CG presence in the secretariat; portfolio agencies participating as technical or investment agencies; and escalation to Ministers where spatial choices affect national infrastructure, funding or policy priorities.

2. What councils need to know now

2.1 The statutory task starts before the committee is formally operating

The Planning Bill requires every region to have a regional spatial plan, aligned to the region, with the Chatham Islands Territory excluded from that requirement. The purpose of the RSP is to set at least a 30-year strategic direction for development and public investment, integrate Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill decision-making, support coordinated infrastructure funding and investment, and promote integration of development planning with infrastructure planning.

The DIA Guidance confirms that, for outline-proposal purposes, current Bill-introduction regions are the immediate planning-system geography. This matters for committee formation: regions should not defer committee design because a Head Start proposal may later alter local-government structure. The starting assumption for first-generation RSP Committee formation should be current regional boundaries, with explicit transfer, reconstitution, and review triggers if Head Start proposals are accepted in principle or later legislated.

Before the committee can be effective, local authorities must work together on the process agreement and terms of reference. These are not minor compliance steps. Together they define the operating constitution for the region’s RSP process.

Establishment item	Why it matters	Managerial implication
Process agreement	Records key geographical areas, issues, roles, central government and adjacent-region relationships, iwi participation obligations, iwi consultation, infrastructure, location of identified Māori land and community engagement.	Start with the process agreement because it frames the committee’s work programme and relationships.

Terms of reference	Local authorities must work together to provide ToR to a committee to perform or exercise the functions, duties, and powers of a spatial plan committee.	Treat ToR as a risk-control document, not a generic committee template.
Chair and secretariat	The committee must appoint a chairperson and secretariat in accordance with regulations.	Design options now, but keep them adaptable until regulations are known.
Ministerial appointment	The Minister may appoint one member, and additional members if local authorities agree; Ministerial appointees may have full, limited or no voting rights depending on direction.	The ToR must anticipate CG interface, voting status, conflicts, papers, briefings, and escalation.
Local authority approval gates	The committee recommends the draft RSP for public notification; local authorities approve public notification and later make decisions on IHP recommendations and adopt the RSP through Schedule 2 processes.	Agree the council-by-council approval pathway before contested matters emerge.
Head Start continuity	The Guidance expects outline proposals to show how reorganisation will support the new planning system and avoid or minimise disruption to RSP and natural environment plan work.	Add current-boundary continuity, scenario-testing, reconstitution triggers, evidence transfer rules, and regional-function interfaces to committee establishment work.
Outline Proportionality	The Guidance does not expect detailed committee structures, formal delegations, process agreements or detailed plan-delivery programmes at outline stage.	Do not over-design the August outline proposal; do continue committee formation work and signpost what will be resolved in detailed design.
Collective central government representation	The process agreement must cover how local authorities will work with central government, including agencies and CG entities; the Minister may also appoint RSP Committee member(s).	Treat the CG interface as an operating model, not a single appointment. Specify the Ministerial appointee role, consider officials support for an appointee if made, CG secretariat support, NZTA/designating-authority interface and escalation route.
NZ Transport Agency / Waka Kotahi interface	Transport and land-use integration is central to RSPs, and NZTA has been closely involved in existing spatial-planning partnerships and transport investment decisions.	Do not assume NZTA can substitute for collective government. Build NZTA into the transport, designating-authority, RLTP, investment and evidence workstreams, with conflict protocols where NZTA has Board, funding or designation interests.
Other Agencies, including Regional Public Service Commissioner interface	RPSCs exist to coordinate and align central government decision makers in regions, but they are not automatically the statutory Ministerial appointee for RSP purposes. Other CG entities e.g., Te Waihanga/Infracom, Kāinga Ora, etc., are other possibly relevant agencies.	MCERT to work with RPSC, and explore ways to leverage existing role and relationships to support central government involvement in spatial planning (but ensure portfolio agencies and Ministers retain responsibility for national infrastructure, housing, transport, environmental and fiscal commitments).

2.2 The committee role is broader than plan drafting

The Planning Bill role of the spatial plan committee includes appointing a secretariat, directing the preparation of the draft RSP, and overseeing preparation of an options assessment report, consulting on the draft, recommending the draft RSP to all local authorities for approval for public notification, advising local authorities on Independent Hearings Panel recommendations, reviewing, and amending the RSP, preparing and consulting on the coordination document, and monitoring and reporting on that coordination document.

For managers, that means the committee must be designed as a continuing regional governance mechanism, not a short-term project group that disappears once the draft plan is notified. In a Head Start environment, the continuing function is even more important. The committee and its secretariat may need to preserve evidence, records, partner commitments, iwi/Māori partnering and participation arrangements, infrastructure assumptions and decision trails across a period in which successor authorities, regional functions, and local voice arrangements are being tested or redesigned.

2.3 Governance design is a first-order implementation risk

The implementation risk synthesis paper identifies spatial planning governance gaps as a significant risk: unclear committee design, representation and decision-making structures can lead to contested legitimacy, delay, and inconsistent governance models. The organisational readiness paper reaches the same practical conclusion: regions need clear sponsorship, role ownership, decision rights, programme discipline and templates for process agreements and committee terms of reference.

The governance transition paper adds the regional dimension: most existing spatial planning arrangements are sub-regional, urban-focused, or strategic/voluntary. The Bill requires formal whole-of-region governance, with local authorities, central government involvement, iwi/Māori participation, infrastructure-provider engagement, public notification, Independent Hearings Panel processes and implementation links.

The Head Start Guidance adds a formation test: committee arrangements should make the new planning system easier to deliver and operate, not harder. A committee model that depends on a prospective Head Start geography before that geography is legislated would increase risk. A committee model that proceeds on current boundaries but includes documented reconstitution, succession, and evidence-continuity rules is more likely to be robust.

3. What the 29 May Head Start Guidance changes for RSP Committee formation

The Guidance does not create a new RSP statutory process, but it materially affects how managers should design committee establishment during the transition period. It is best read as a practical design discipline for RSP governance while local-government reorganisation proposals are being tested.

Guidance point	Implication for RSP Committee formation	Manager response
Outline proposals are high-level and strategic	Councils are not expected to have fully formed RSP committees, process agreements, formal delegations or plan-delivery programmes in an August outline proposal.	Avoid over-designing the proposal; include a credible RSP governance direction, continuity statement, and list of matters for detailed design.
The new planning system criterion asks whether the proposal makes	RSP Committee design becomes part of the Head Start case for workability.	Show how the committee/governance model preserves current-boundary

the system easier to deliver and operate		RSP momentum and avoids fragmentation of planning, transport, catchment, and natural-environment work.
Current Bill-introduction regions remain the relevant “region” for outline-proposal purposes	A proposed Head Start boundary should not be treated as the first-generation RSP region unless later legislation provides for that.	Use current regional boundaries as the establishment baseline; record any successor/reconstitution assumptions.
Councils must move at pace following enactment to prepare RSPs on current boundaries	Waiting for Head Start decisions is not a safe default.	Stand up interim sponsor/steering arrangements, draft ToR, and scope the secretariat now.
Subregional unitary authorities must continue spatial planning at regional level	A subregional proposal cannot simply detach from the regional RSP.	Require subregional workstreams to integrate with the broader RSP; including residual-region and whole-region governance considerations
Detailed design may need to address RSP timing alignment and regional functions/services	Committee design and regional-function continuity will be tested further if an outline proposal proceeds.	Prepare a Regional Function Continuity Schedule and an RSP Committee reconstitution pathway for detailed design.
Treaty settlement arrangements must have the same or equivalent effect	Committee design cannot be separated from Treaty settlement and iwi/Māori participation continuity.	Map Treaty settlement redress distinct from general iwi/Māori participation ¹ .

4. Head Start scenarios: RSP Committee implications

The four Head Start scenarios used in Briefing Note No. 2 should now be built into RSP Committee establishment advice. The scenarios do not require councils to design four full committees. They do require committee terms of reference, process agreements, and secretariat instructions to be resilient to the relevant structural possibilities.

Scenario	Committee formation issue	Preferred committee response
1. Full-region unitary authority	Lowest RSP geography risk. The current region remains the natural RSP planning geography, but committee membership, records, assets, staff, iwi/Māori relationships and implementation responsibilities still need succession.	Proceed with current-region committee design; include transfer/succession clauses and local voice mechanisms.
2. Subregional unitary authority within a current region	Creates a mismatch between a future UA and the current RSP region. The Guidance says subregional UAs must continue spatial planning at regional level and may feed subregional plans into the broader RSP.	Keep one current-region RSP Committee or a shared statutory architecture unless later legislation says otherwise; create subregional workstreams feeding one regional process; include residual-region participation and whole-region tests.

¹ Proactive communication up front on the RSP and secretariat proposals and actively seeking an understanding of preferred models and arrangements will increase the chances of ending up with well-integrated, resourced and effective arrangements

3. Cross-current-regional-boundary unitary authority	The proposed UA may not fit any current RSP region. RSP/NEP/RLTP/CDEM/water/Treaty geographies may cross in different ways.	Prepare a cross-boundary RSP impact map; maintain current-boundary RSP work; identify where bespoke Head Start legislation or joint-planning mechanisms will be required.
4. Multiple unitary authorities within one present region	High fragmentation risk. RSP, transport, catchment, science, emergency management, biosecurity and environmental monitoring functions may be split.	Prefer one shared RSP Committee or a strong joint statutory committee if regional coherence is required; require a Regional Function Continuity Schedule.

5. Governance options for establishing RSP Committees

The Planning Bill appears to leave two broad routes open: a spatial plan committee may be appointed in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002 or may be an existing committee established under legislation. Within that broad choice, councils have several practical governance options. The right answer will vary by region, scale, existing collaboration history, unitary authority status, iwi/Māori partnering/participation arrangements, and whether Head Start or other local government structural change could alter future regional governance.

In light of Briefing Notes 2 and 3, the preferred option should be tested against two additional questions: can it survive Head Start reconstitution, and has an LGA-based, RSP Committee deliberately considered appointed members voting rights?

Option	Where it may fit	Strengths	Risks / design issues
1. New LGA joint committee for RSP	Most multi-council regions without an existing statutory committee that can be adapted.	Purpose-built; ToR can be aligned directly to Planning Bill functions; easier to specify membership, reporting, delegations, and secretariat arrangements.	Requires all local authorities to agree; can take time through council cycles; risk of duplicating Mayoral Forum, CE Forum, or existing growth partnerships.
2. Adapt an existing statutory committee	Regions with a Regional Planning Committee, joint committee, or legally established regional committee capable of expanded remit.	Builds on existing legitimacy, relationships, meeting practice, and administrative machinery. May offer a more durable route for statutory or Treaty-settlement appointment arrangements.	Existing mandate may not match RSP functions; membership may be incomplete; ToR and statutory basis need careful legal testing, especially if Head Start alters participating authorities.
3. Mayoral/Chair-led regional political committee	Regions where political mandate and whole-region trade-offs are central, especially large multi-council regions.	High political visibility; can connect RSP to LTP, infrastructure and regional priorities; familiar to CDEM or regional forums.	May be too large for technical plan-making; needs support from smaller technical and executive structures; voting and conflict arrangements need clarity. It may sit better as a sponsor/escalation group

			than the statutory RSP Committee itself.
4. Smaller statutory RSP Committee with wider reference group	Large or complex regions where a full regional political table would be unwieldy.	More workable committee size; can combine statutory decision workflow with broader Mayoral/CE/iwi/infrastructure forums.	Risk of perceived democratic, regional or iwi/Māori imbalance unless reference-group influence and reporting are explicit. Non-voting influence pathways need to be designed, not assumed.
5. Unitary authority committee / council committee with RSP functions	Auckland, Gisborne, Tasman, Nelson, Marlborough, and other single-council regional settings.	Institutionally simpler; avoids multi-council approval complexity; easier to connect to council governance and budgets.	Still needs statutory uplift, iwi/Māori and CG interface, infrastructure participation and adjacent-region coordination; should not be treated as BAU strategy committee.
6. Interim non-statutory steering group transitioning to formal committee	All regions before enactment/regulations are settled; especially where early work must proceed but legal settings are not final.	Allows no-regrets mobilisation; supports process agreement drafting, evidence audit and secretariat design before formal establishment; useful for Head Start continuity and scenario testing.	Must not overstep legal authority; needs clear transition trigger to avoid informal arrangements becoming a weak default.
7. Transition-capable current-region committee with reconstitution provisions	Regions where Head Start proposals are plausible, especially subregional, cross-boundary, or multiple-UA proposals.	Keeps current-boundary RSP work moving while recording what happens if successor entities, residual areas or cross-boundary authorities emerge.	Requires careful ToR drafting, common decision calendars, and a clear evidence/records archive. It should not be used to pre-judge Head Start outcomes or rebase the statutory region prematurely.

Practical conclusion: most regions are likely to need a hybrid architecture: an interim steering or sponsor group now; a formal RSP Committee once the legal pathway is clear; a secretariat/programme office; technical/evidence groups; iwi/Māori participation arrangements; infrastructure/CG engagement structures; and council approval processes that remain visible to all participating local authorities.

Where Head Start is active, the hybrid architecture should also include a Head Start/RSP continuity note, a Regional Function Continuity Schedule for any non-full-region proposal, and a current-boundary RSP establishment assumption unless later legislation changes that assumption.

6. Terms of reference: issues that should not be left implicit

The terms of reference should be prepared as the main governance risk-control document, although there is potential for some cross over with Process Agreements in this respect. It should not merely recite the Bill. It

should translate statutory functions into an operating model that tells members, council staff, iwi/Māori, central government, infrastructure providers, the secretariat and the public how the committee will work.

ToR issue	Why it is difficult	What should be specified
Purpose and statutory functions	RSP committees perform statutory functions across plan preparation, consultation, IHP advice, review, amendments, and coordination documents.	A plain-English statement of the committee's role across the whole RSP life cycle, including what is in and out of scope.
Working geography and current-boundary continuity	Head Start may propose future boundaries, but the Guidance confirms current regions are the immediate RSP starting point.	State that the first-generation RSP is being established on current regional boundaries unless and until legislation provides otherwise; record assumptions and review triggers.
Membership model	Regions vary from one council to 10+ councils, with different urban/rural balances and different existing partnership structures.	Number and type of local authority members, alternates, observer/advisory roles, appointment process, term, replacement, and attendance expectations.
Voting rights and quorum	While RSPs are proposed to be exempt, the proposed LGA voting-rights change highlights the difference between membership and voting rights that could still constrain non-elected appointed members of LGA-based committees.	State voting status, quorum rules, whether any exceptions apply, and how non-voting members/advisers influence agenda-setting, options, evidence and recommendations.
Chairing arrangements	Chair requirements may be influenced by regulations; regions may also need neutral or independent chairing to maintain trust.	Interim chair, formal chair process, deputy chair, chair authority, and relationship to the secretariat and sponsor group.
Ministerial appointee interface	Ministerial members may have full, limited or no voting rights. This can alter committee dynamics.	How Ministerial members receive papers, participate, vote, manage conflicts and communicate with central agencies.
Iwi/Māori partnership/participation	The Bill includes consultation duties and evidence requirements; formal committee membership may require regional choice and legal design.	How iwi/Māori participation, advisory groups, appointed members, non-voting membership, statutory appointments or parallel governance forums interact with the committee and decision points.
Head Start reconstitution	Current councils may not be the same entities after reorganisation.	Define triggers for review or reconstitution if an outline proposal is lodged, accepted in principle, materially changed, rejected, converted into detailed design, or legislated.

Decision-making method	Schedule 2 and proposed regulations will include consensus/dispute resolution for specified local authority decisions, but committee-level recommendation processes still need practical rules.	Consensus aspiration, voting rules where permitted, quorum, deadlock escalation, minority reports, and how unresolved issues are elevated. Its preparation will benefit from an understanding of tikanga based resolution processes
Approval pathway	The committee recommends the draft plan, but local authorities approve public notification, make decisions on IHP recs, and adopt the final RSP once any appeals are resolved. The Minister and designating authorities also have a decision-making role for certain matters.	Sequence of committee recommendation, council workshops, council decisions, approval thresholds, timelines and fallback if councils disagree.
Secretariat authority	The secretariat must do more than service meetings; it must manage programme, evidence, notification, records, and coordination documents. The secretariat is also likely to do the heavy lifting in terms of pre-notification consultation and preparing the draft RSP with oversight of the SPC.	Host, funding, staffing, procurement authority, document ownership, reporting lines, records, risk registers, and information release protocols. Sub working groups on particular matters may assist.
Regional function continuity	RSP choices depend on transport, catchments, emergency management, water, environmental science, biosecurity, monitoring and compliance functions.	Require a regional functions interface map and a Regional Function Continuity Schedule for non-full-region Head Start scenarios.
Sub-regional workstreams	Large regions may need sub-regional technical work but must still produce one regional plan.	How sub-regional groups are established, scoped, chaired, recorded, and integrated into the single regional programme.
Evidence and options assessment	The committee must prepare scenarios and an options assessment report, and evidence must be defensible for public notification and IHP review. It is intended that a RSP national standard will provide direction on these matters.	Evidence standards, quality assurance, peer review, confidence ratings, data ownership and protocols, transferability tagging, and responsibility for options/scenarios.
Infrastructure and CG engagement	RSPs are intended to align development and infrastructure investment, including central government and infrastructure providers.	Designating authority interface, infrastructure provider forums, CG agency working arrangements and escalation to central government.

Independent Hearings Panel interface	Local authorities assign an IHP and the committee later advises local authorities on IHP recommendations.	Panel appointment/funding process, secretariat support to panel, conflicts, committee advice process, and response timelines.
Conflict of interest and confidentiality	Members may represent councils with direct land, infrastructure, growth, hazard, or financial interests.	Conflict declarations, protocols for commercial and culturally sensitive information, confidential evidence, legal privilege, and public transparency.
Implementation and coordination document	The committee must prepare/adopt a coordination document within 6 months after adoption of the RSP and monitor/report annually.	Who owns the coordination document, how actions are assigned, how LTP/RLTP/infrastructure links are monitored, and annual reporting cadence.
Review and change control	Bill changes, regulations, Head Start proposals, national direction and new settlement/customary marine matters may require changes.	Review triggers, assumptions register, amendment process and mechanism for revising ToR without derailing the programme.
Collective central government model	One Ministerial appointee cannot by themselves represent all CG portfolios, CG entities, investment processes and national policy settings.	Indicate if and when practical arrangements for the formal CG appointee and their advisory support, CG secretariat support, briefing/clearance process, authority limits and escalation route to Ministers.
NZTA / Waka Kotahi role	NZTA is central to transport/spatial integration and may be a designating or funding agency with Board-level decision processes.	Separate NZTA's technical, investment, RLTP, designating-authority roles; include conflict and Board-decision protocols.
Regional Public Service Commissioner role	RPSCs coordinate regional public service alignment but may not hold portfolio authority over infrastructure, transport, planning, environment or fiscal decisions. Need to consider the interface with other CG entities?	State whether the RPSC is a formal member, observer, CG officials-group chair, secretariat adviser or escalation conduit; do not assume automatic statutory membership.

7. Central government representation: collective government position

Central government representation should be designed as a collective-government function, not simply as the attendance of one department or CG entity. The Planning Bill requires the process agreement to address how local authorities will work with central government, including relevant agencies and CG entities, and gives the Minister a power to appoint members to the spatial plan committee. The Supplementary Analysis Report is more explicit about the policy intent: central government may be represented on spatial plan committees and must be part of spatial plan secretariats. It also records the trade-off between central government direction and local authority responsibility and accountability.

For RSP Committee establishment, the practical model is likely to require several linked layers: a Ministerial appointee or appointed member who is the formal committee participant; a central-government coordination and support function (officials group that assembles and clears the collective CG position); a CG secretariat

contribution embedded (or tagged) with the RSP secretariat; portfolio and technical agencies participating in workstreams (e.g. housing and urban, transport, infrastructure workstreams); and an ongoing Ministerial advice (no surprises) and escalation route (through MCERT) where spatial choices affect national infrastructure, transport, housing, Treaty settlement, environmental, fiscal or funding commitments.

Layer	Likely role	Design implication
Ministerial appointee / CG member	Formal committee participant under the Planning Bill appointment power. Could hold full, limited or no voting rights depending on the Minister's direction.	Should not be left to personal judgement alone. The appointment should carry a clear mandate, reporting line, authority to speak for the CG on agreed matters, conflict protocol and escalation route.
Central government officials group	Led by MCERT. Collects and coordinates advice from MCERT, Treasury, Ministry of Transport, NZTA, HUD, MBIE, Te Waihangā, DIA, DOC, MPI, TPK, NEMA and others as regionally relevant.	Prepares the "one CG" position for committee papers, evidence, investment dependencies, national direction issues and IHP recommendation advice.
CG secretariat presence	Operational support inside or alongside the RSP secretariat, consistent with the SAR expectation that central government be part of spatial plan secretariats.	Maintains agency actions, CG evidence, briefing cycles, ministerial escalation logs, and alignment with infrastructure/funding processes. Likely to involve a central government lead to help coordinate.
Portfolio agencies / CG entities	Agencies participate because of their own statutory roles, assets, programmes, evidence or investment interests.	They should be built into workstreams, and evidence processes without being treated as the single collective-government representative.
Ministerial escalation	Some RSP choices may affect national infrastructure, funding, Government policy statements, national plans or strategies, or central-government owned/funded assets.	ToR should say when and how issues move from officials to Ministers before the committee reaches a contested recommendation or IHP response point.

NZ Transport Agency / Waka Kotahi has and will continue to play an *important* role in shaping regional level planning and outcomes. It has been a close participant in spatial planning and urban growth partnerships to date, and integrated land-use and transport planning is central to RLTPs, business cases and future investment decisions. The Greater Christchurch example illustrates that a joint spatial plan can provide assurance to the NZTA Board when considering transport business cases such as mass rapid transit.

However, NZTA should generally be treated as both a portfolio/investment agency and a potential infrastructure/designating authority, rather than as the whole-of-government representative. If a NZTA (or any other CG agency) member were to be considered for the central-government appointee in a particular region, the appointment should be explicitly framed as a CG mandate, not only a transport mandate, and conflict protocols should address any NZTA Board, funding, designation or state-highway interests.

Regional Public Service Commissioners may be useful but should not be assumed to be the default RSP Committee CG member. They are designed to coordinate and align central government decision-makers in regions, and to work cohesively with local government, iwi, Māori organisations, NGOs and regional stakeholders. That makes them well placed to convene the regional public service and support an officials

group. Other agencies also have an important city and region shaping role and input – Infracom, KO, DOC, MPI, HUD, etc.

But RSP decisions will often turn on statutory planning, transport investment, CG infrastructure, national direction, environmental limits, fiscal and Treaty-settlement matters. Unless the Minister explicitly appoints and mandates a Regional Public Service Commissioner for this purpose, the safer role is to work with MCERT to leverage their role and relationship as CG-convenor, secretariat adviser or officials-group chair, with portfolio agencies retaining their substantive advice and accountability.

A key terms-of-reference question is therefore not simply “who is the CG representative?” but “how is the CG position formed, authorised, communicated, conflicted and escalated?” Regions should seek early engagement with MCERT and relevant Ministers on the intended national model so that committee design does not create several different versions of central government representation without a consistent authorising framework.

8. Establishment steps for managers

Managers should approach committee establishment as a staged organisational design process. The aim is to create enough certainty to mobilise, while preserving the ability to adjust when final legislation, regulations, national direction and Head Start decisions are confirmed.

Step	Task	Key output
1	Secure regional mandate from CE Forum, Mayoral Forum or equivalent to prepare RSP establishment options.	Sponsor mandate and establishment timetable.
2	Map existing governance assets: regional growth partnerships, FDS committees, transport, CDEM, infrastructure, iwi/Māori forums, and statutory committees.	Governance asset map and reuse/retire/reshape assessment.
3	Confirm the current-boundary RSP establishment assumption and record any Head Start scenarios being tested.	Working geography statement and Head Start/RSP assumptions register.
4	Draft the process agreement topics required by the Bill, including geography, issues, council roles, central government, adjacent regions, Iwi entity obligations, iwi/Māori partnering and participation, infrastructure, and communities.	Draft process agreement / heads of agreement.
5	Choose preferred committee establishment route: new LGA joint committee, adapted existing committee, unitary authority committee, or staged interim-to-formal model.	Governance options paper for councils.
6	Test the preferred route against proposed LGA voting-rights changes and iwi/Māori partnership/participation options.	Legal/governance note on voting, non-voting participation, advisory structures and statutory/Treaty pathways.
7	Prepare terms of reference covering statutory functions, membership, chair, Ministerial interface, iwi/Māori participation, decision rules, secretariat, evidence, IHP interface, Head Start reconstitution and implementation.	Draft ToR and legal/governance review. Alignment is needed between Process Agreements and Committee ToR.
8	Design secretariat/PMO model, including host, funding, staffing, procurement, records, document control, meeting support, risk/issue management, evidence continuity and reporting.	Secretariat operating model and budget.

9	Design member appointment pathway, including alternates, remuneration, conflicts, induction, and any advisory/observer arrangements.	Appointments and induction plan.
10	Agree council approval pathway for notification/adoption decisions and committee advice to councils on IHP recommendations.	Council decision calendar and approval protocol.
11	Stand up technical/evidence and partner-engagement workstreams, including iwi/Māori, identified Māori land infrastructure providers, adjacent regions, and CG agencies.	Workstream structure and engagement architecture.
12	Prepare an RSP/Head Start continuity note and, where needed, a Regional Function Continuity Schedule for outline proposals.	Continuity note and schedule template for non-full-region scenarios.
13	Maintain an assumptions register, risk register and review triggers to manage legislative, regulatory, national direction, funding and Head Start uncertainty.	Change-control and risk management framework.
14	Seek early indication from the Minister/MCERT on the preferred central-government representation model, including whether the Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input and NZTA/RPSC roles will be nationally standardised.	Central government representation note and draft ToR clauses.
15	Establish a regional CG agency map covering agencies, CG entities, Government policy statements, national plans/strategies, designating authorities, funding programmes and major CG-owned or CG-funded assets relevant to the RSP.	CG agency and investment interface map.

9. Key risks and mitigations

The committee establishment phase creates risks before any spatial options are debated. The most important risks are governance legitimacy, decision deadlock, unclear accountability, under-resourced secretariat support, weak linkage to implementation, and committee design that cannot survive Head Start uncertainty.

Risk	How it may show up	Mitigation
Vague mandate	Committee is treated as a discussion forum and cannot drive statutory process.	Clear ToR, sponsor mandate, delegated work programme, and escalation route.
Current-boundary work is paused unnecessarily	Councils wait for Head Start decisions even though the Guidance says current-boundary RSP work must move at pace.	Adopt a current-region establishment assumption with review triggers and continuity mechanisms.
Premature rebasing to proposed Head Start geography	Committee design assumes a future UA geography before legislation confirms it.	Record that any proposed Head Start geography is a scenario, not the first-generation statutory RSP boundary unless legislation provides otherwise.
Slow council approvals	Each council uses different timelines and papers, delaying public notification or adoption decisions.	Shared decision calendar, common report templates, early workshops, and pre-agreed approval protocols.
Membership imbalance	Large/small, urban/rural, or regional/territorial tensions undermine legitimacy.	Transparent membership principles, alternates, reference groups, and clear reporting back to all councils.

Voting rights assumption fails	ToR assumes non-elected appointees can vote on an LGA-based committee, but LGA amendments constrain voting.	Take legal advice; separate voting membership from advisory/parallel influence; identify statutory or Treaty-settlement exceptions if relied on.
Ministerial interface uncertainty	CG appointee role, voting status or agency input is unclear.	Explicit ToR provisions for Ministerial members, central agency liaison, and information protocols.
iwi/Māori partnering and participation under-designed	Consultation occurs late or separately from governance and evidence decisions.	Partnering/participation map, early governance choice, resourcing principles, process-agreement clauses, and legally durable influence pathways.
Secretariat too weak	Meeting support exists but no programme control, evidence commissioning or records discipline.	Funded secretariat/PMO with authority, programme tools, risk register, document control and transition-monitoring functions.
Sub-regional fragmentation	Existing FDS/growth frameworks or Head Start subregional proposals pull in different directions and do not integrate into one RSP.	Single regional programme, common evidence base, sub-regional workstream protocols and integration checkpoints.
Regional functions fragmented	Catchments, transport, emergency management, biosecurity, science/data or compliance functions are split without governance architecture.	Regional Function Continuity Schedule and explicit governance model for functions requiring regional integration.
Evidence not defensible	Options/scenarios cannot withstand public, IHP or legal scrutiny, or cannot be transferred if structures change.	Evidence gap analysis, standards, data protocols, quality assurance, confidence ratings, transferability tags and legal review.
Funding and capability gap	Small councils or partner organisations (including iwi/Māori, cannot participate at the required pace.	Cost-sharing model, secondments, shared services, consultant support, and BAU workload reset.
Implementation disconnect	Committee prepares a plan but coordination document, LTP, RLTP and infrastructure links are weak.	Implementation actions and coordination document designed alongside the plan, not after adoption.
Legal/regulatory change	Final Bill, regulations, national direction or Head Start legislation changes assumptions after establishment work has begun.	Assumptions register, review triggers and ToR amendment mechanism.
Public confidence risk	Community sees the committee as technocratic or predetermined.	Transparent process agreement, public-facing narrative, accessible papers, visible options assessment, and clear consultation pathway.
Fragmented CG voice	Different agencies give separate or inconsistent positions on growth, transport, infrastructure, housing, conservation, emergency management, funding or national direction.	Seek MCERT engagement on any central-government officials group, CG secretariat support and Ministerial escalation pathway behind the formal committee appointee.
NZTA role confusion	NZTA is treated as the whole-of-government representative, despite also having Board, funding, state-highway, RLTP, designating-authority or technical interests.	Separate collective-government representation where agencies are representing the CG; use conflict protocols and require CG clearance where NZTA is speaking beyond transport matters.

RPSC mandate over-extended	A Regional Public Service Commissioner is expected to resolve portfolio or funding positions that sit with Ministers, departments or CG entities.	Use the RPSC for regional public-service coordination only if mandated; retain substantive advice and decision authority with the relevant agencies and Ministers.
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10. Council management implications

Councils should now treat RSP Committee establishment as one of the main readiness workstreams. It should sit alongside process agreement drafting, secretariat design, evidence-base work, iwi/Māori partnership/participation arrangements, infrastructure engagement, budget planning and elected-member communication.

The Head Start Guidance means committee formation should be both immediate and transition-capable: current-boundary RSP machinery should be stood up, but not in a way that becomes brittle if Head Start proposals later alter institutional succession, regional functions, or local representation arrangements.

The immediate council management tasks are:

- Establish a regional sponsor group or interim steering group with a clear mandate to develop committee options and ToR.
- Confirm that current regional boundaries are the RSP establishment baseline unless later legislation or regulations provide otherwise.
- Prepare a committee establishment options paper that tests the new LGA committee, existing statutory committee, unitary authority, hybrid, and transition-capable current-region models.
- Draft terms of reference early, using them to expose unresolved questions rather than waiting for perfect certainty.
- Include Head Start reconstitution, evidence continuity, current-boundary continuity, and Regional Function Continuity Schedule triggers in the ToR and process agreement.
- Design the secretariat as a regional programme office with governance, evidence, engagement, records, risk and transition-monitoring capability.
- Agree how committee recommendations will be translated into decisions by all local authorities in the region.
- Build iwi/Māori partnership/participation, Ministerial interface, infrastructure engagement, and adjacent-region coordination into the committee architecture from the outset.
- Test any proposed iwi/Māori committee membership model against the proposed LGA voting-rights restriction and identify legally durable influence pathways if voting membership is unavailable.
- Prepare an RSP/Head Start continuity note for any Head Start outline proposal, showing how current-region RSP work continues and what will be resolved in detailed design.
- Prepare an assumptions and review register so the committee design can adapt if the Bill, regulations, national direction, or local government structure changes.
- Define the central-government operating model early: Seek MCERT engagement on Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input, portfolio agency participation, NZTA and other key CG entity interface, RPSC role and escalation path.
- Do not rely on a single agency or regional commissioner to represent the whole CG unless that person has an explicit mandate, clearance process and escalation route.

11. Key points for council managers to note

Suggested framing slide: “RSP Committees are the governance engine for statutory regional spatial planning: if the committee design is weak, the plan process will be weak.”

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
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1	Start with the statutory role.	The committee is responsible for preparing the draft RSP, options assessment, consultation, notification recommendation, IHP advice, review/amendment, and coordination document functions.
2	The May DIA Guidance confirms the immediate geography.	For outline-proposal purposes, the relevant “region” is the region at Bill introduction. Councils must keep current-boundary RSP work moving.
3	Do not treat Head Start as a reason to wait.	Head Start changes the design test; it does not pause RSP readiness. Committee formation should proceed on a transition-capable basis.
4	Do not treat the ToR as boilerplate.	The ToR is the main risk-control document for membership, chairing, decision rights, Ministerial interface, secretariat, evidence, IHP advice, Head Start continuity and implementation links.
5	The process agreement and committee ToR must be designed together.	The process agreement sets how councils work with each other, central government, adjacent regions, iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers and communities. The ToR operationalises that architecture.
6	Governance options need to be tested region by region.	A new LGA joint committee, adapted existing committee, unitary authority model or staged interim-to-formal approach may all be valid in different places.
7	Test every option against the four Head Start scenarios.	Full-region UA, subregional UA, cross-boundary UA and multiple-UAs-in-one-region scenarios have different committee, reconstitution and regional-function risks.
8	Subregional proposals need a whole-region committee story.	The Guidance says subregional UAs must continue spatial planning at regional level. Subregional work should feed the broader RSP rather than replace it.
9	Ministerial appointments change the operating dynamic.	The Bill allows Ministerial members and variable voting rights; ToR should address papers, participation, conflict, voting and escalation.
10	Iwi/Māori partnership/participation is not just an engagement workstream.	Committee design must connect with participation mapping, process agreement clauses, evidence, advisory or governance arrangements, and the requirement to uphold <i>Treaty settlements</i> .
11	The proposed LGA voting-rights change still tightens the design question.	If enacted as announced, appointed non-elected members on LGA-based committees may be unable to vote or count for quorum unless specifically authorised in the ToR, or a statutory or Treaty-settlement exception applies.
12	Secretariat capability is decisive.	The secretariat must run a regional programme: papers, records, procurement, evidence, risk, partner coordination, public notification, Head Start continuity, and coordination documents. A senior officer/CE advisory group is needed for support.
13	Large regions need sub-regional machinery, but one regional plan.	Sub-regional workstreams are useful only if they feed a single evidence base, programme plan, and committee process.
14	Streamlined council approval pathways must be designed early.	The committee recommends; local authorities approve notification and adoption. Without a shared council decision calendar, statutory steps will stall. This must also accommodate other partner decision-making processes/timeframes

15	Regional functions continuity needs to be explicit.	Any non-full-region Head Start scenario should be supported by a Regional Function Continuity Schedule covering catchments, transport, emergency management, water, science, biosecurity and compliance.
16	Uncertainty must be managed, not ignored.	Use interim arrangements, assumptions registers and review triggers so the region can mobilise without locking in brittle design choices.
17	Implementation starts at establishment.	Coordination documents, LTP/RLTP links and infrastructure actions should be designed from the start, not added after plan adoption.
18	Bottom line for managers.	A functioning RSP Committee requires governance clarity, real regional leadership, secretariat capability, legitimate participation, defensible evidence, current-boundary continuity and a realistic regional work programme.
19	Central government representation needs a collective-government model.	The Ministerial appointee is only one part of the CG interface. Managers should design the officials group, secretariat input, agency workstreams and ministerial escalation route behind that seat.
20	NZTA is central, but not the whole CG.	NZTA should be deeply involved in transport, RLTP, state highway, designation, investment and business-case matters, but should not be assumed to speak for all central government interests unless explicitly mandated.
21	Regional Public Service Commissioners may be convenors, not automatic appointees.	RPSCs <i>can help coordinate regional public-service input and local relationships, but they need a clear mandate</i> and support from portfolio agencies if used in the RSP governance model.
22	Ask how the CG position will be formed.	The key ToR question is how central government advice is collected, authorised, communicated, conflicted and escalated before committee decisions and IHP responses.

12. Bottom line for managers

Councils should proceed with RSP Committee establishment as a deliberate governance design exercise. The committee will carry statutory weight, but it will only function if the region has agreed the operating architecture around it: process agreement, terms of reference, secretariat, council approval pathway, iwi/Māori partnership/participation, Ministerial and CG interface, infrastructure engagement, evidence standards, risk controls, funding, and implementation links.

The 29 May DIA Guidance clarifies the immediate formation posture: do not pause current-boundary RSP work while Head Start is tested. Instead, design committee arrangements that are clear enough to start, but flexible enough to handle accepted, rejected, altered, or legislated Head Start proposals without losing evidence, legitimacy, regional-function coherence or participation commitments.

The practical test is not whether a committee can be formally created. It is whether the committee can make and sustain recommendations through contested regional choices, support public and IHP processes, maintain legitimacy across all councils and partners, and survive transition if local-government structure changes while the first RSP is being prepared at pace.

Appendix A: Practical checklist for council managers

Checklist area	Question for managers
Regional mandate	Has the region formally mandated establishment work and identified a sponsor or interim steering group?

Current-boundary RSP continuity	Have we explicitly stated that current regional boundaries are the establishment baseline unless legislation provides otherwise?
Head Start scenario testing	Have we tested committee design against full-region UA, subregional UA, cross-boundary UA and multiple-UAs-in-one-region scenarios?
Governance asset map	Have existing joint committees, growth partnerships, FDS committees, CDEM/transport forums and iwi/Māori forums been mapped for possible reuse or alignment?
Committee option	Has the region selected or narrowed the preferred route: new LGA committee, existing statutory committee, unitary committee, smaller committee/reference group, staged interim-to-formal model, or transition-capable current-region model?
Terms of reference	Does the draft ToR cover statutory functions, membership, chair, voting, quorum, Ministerial members, conflicts, secretariat, IHP interface, implementation, Head Start reconstitution and review triggers?
LGA voting-rights change	Have we tested whether the preferred committee model depends on non-elected appointed members voting or counting for quorum?
Iwi/Māori partnership/participation	Have participation mapping, consultation requirements, evidence needs, iwi/Māori design preferences and any partnering/governance/advisory arrangements been integrated into committee design?
Treaty settlement continuity	Have Treaty settlement redress and statutory acknowledgements been mapped separately from general iwi/Māori engagement arrangements?
Process agreement	Is the process agreement being prepared in parallel with the ToR and does it cover the matters required by section 69, including Head Start change-control?
Local authority approvals	Is there a shared calendar and protocol for approval to notify, responses to IHP recommendations and adoption?
Secretariat model	Is the secretariat funded, hosted, and authorised to run the programme, not just service meetings?
Evidence and data	Is there a minimum evidence standard, data ownership model, options/scenario method, quality-assurance process and evidence-transferability approach?
Infrastructure and CG	Are relevant agencies, CG entities, designating authorities and infrastructure providers built into the work programme?
Regional Function Continuity Schedule	For any non-full-region Head Start proposal, is there a schedule covering RSP, NEP, RLTP, RPTP, CDEM/EM, catchment/flood, water, biosecurity, science/monitoring and compliance/enforcement interfaces?
Sub-regional arrangements	Do sub-regional groups have clear scope and integration points into the single regional committee process?
Outline proposal alignment	Does any Head Start outline proposal include a concise RSP governance and continuity statement without over-designing detailed committee structures?
Risk and uncertainty	Is there an assumptions register and review trigger process for Bill changes, regulations, national instruments, funding, digital settings, Head Start and local-government structural change?
Collective government model	Have we specified how the CG position will be collected, authorised, communicated and escalated behind the Ministerial appointee?

NZTA interface	Have we separated NZTA's transport/investment/designating-authority role from any possible whole-of-government representative role?
Regional Public Service Commissioner role	Have we clarified whether the RPSC is a committee member, observer, officials-group chair, convenor, secretariat adviser or escalation conduit?
CG agency map	Have we mapped central agencies, CG entities, national plans/strategies, Government policy statements, CG-funded assets and relevant designating authorities?

Source documents and official references

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- Discuss Paper - Enabling organisational readiness for regional spatial planning, 20 March 2026
- Info Paper - Planning and Natural Environment Bills - Implementation Risk Synthesis incl. Spatial Planning, 23 March 2026
- Info paper - RMA Instruments and Governance Transition to Spatial Planning, 27 March 2026
- Briefing Note 5. Regional Spatial Planning Committees - Briefing for Managers on Establishment and Operations, 25 May 2026.
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- Briefing Note 3. Iwi/Māori Partnership/Participation in Regional Spatial Planning - What Council Managers Need to Know, updated 4 June 2026.

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- Ministry for the Environment, *Resource management reforms* - <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/rma/rmreform/>
- Ministry for the Environment, *Better planning for a better New Zealand*
<https://environment.govt.nz/publications/better-planning-for-a-better-new-zealand/>
- Ministry for the Environment, *Supplementary Analysis Report: Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991 - Further Policy Decisions*, especially Matter 3 Spatial Planning, pp. 34 and 37, which records that central government may be represented on spatial plan committees, must be part of spatial plan secretariats, and that central-government involvement may improve plan quality but involves trade-offs with local authority accountability.
https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Supplementary-Analysis-Report_-Replacing-the-Resource-Management-Act-1991-Further-Policy-Decisions_Redacted.pdf
- *Planning Bill 235-1*, sections 69, 71 and 72 and Schedule 2 clauses 5, 7 and 19, including process-agreement requirements for working with central government, committee appointment options, Ministerial appointments, relevant Government policy statements, designating-authority applications and Ministerial decision powers on IHP recommendations affecting CG infrastructure or national interests.
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>

- NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, '*Integrated land use and transport planning*', as a current NZTA statement that integrated land-use and transport planning is an essential input into business cases and should drive RLTPs, with spatial plans providing context for optioneering.
<https://nzta.govt.nz/partners/planning-and-investment/funding-and-investing/optioneering/resources/integrated-land-use-and-transport-planning>
- HUD, '*Joint Spatial Plan for Greater Christchurch*' Cabinet paper, as an example of urban growth partnership practice in which the CG was represented by Ministers and officials, Waka Kotahi/NZTA was engaged, and the NZTA Board's transport business case decisions were linked to Cabinet endorsement of a spatial plan.
<https://www.hud.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Cabinet-papers/Joint-Spatial-Plan-for-Greater-Christchurch-and-Appendix-NO-REDACTIONS.pdf>
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