

Communities of Interest - what are they?

The Local Government Commission describes communities of interest as a three-dimensional concept:

- perceptual – a sense of belonging to a clearly defined area or locality
- functional – the ability to meet with reasonable economy the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services
- political – the ability of the elected body to represent the interests and reconcile the conflicts of all its members.

The perceptual and functional aspects can be extended to define a community of interest as having:

- a sense of community identity and belonging reinforced by:
 - distinctive physical and topographical features (e.g. mountains, hills, rivers)
 - similarities in economic or social activities carried out in the area
 - similarities in the demographic, socio-economic and/or ethnic characteristics of the residents of a community
 - distinct local history of the area
 - the rohe or takiwā of local iwi and hapū
- dependence on shared facilities and services in an area, including:
 - schools, recreational and cultural facilities
 - retail outlets, transport and communication links.

Decisions relating to the representation of communities of interest (the political dimension) need to reflect these interests and needs.

People in our district intrinsically understand and acknowledge that there are distinct rural and urban groups (e.g. farmers and townies).

The district's population as at 30 June 2017 was 34,700 of whom 6,606 lived in the town of Morrinsville, 6,309 in the town of Matamata, and 3,768 in the town of Te Aroha.

There are a number of small towns in the area including Waharoa, Tahuna, Waitoa, Te Poi and Hinuera. These rural townships/villages are all considerably smaller than the three main towns (i.e. less than 1,000 population). Historically, rural communities of interest have been defined by hall rating areas and primary schools. The trend in the past 10 years or so has seen rural schools close, and use of rural halls decline.

Council is aware that the rural area includes a multitude of land uses including farming, cropping, lifestyle, industrial and residential uses. The main industries in the district is dairy farming and thoroughbred breeding/training, food manufacturing/processing with tourism playing an increasing role.

The three main towns are the main commercial and administrative centres for the district. Council's head office is based in Te Aroha with service centres (area offices)



in both Matamata and Morrinsville. The 'hub' for each ward is the three main towns (Morrinsville, Matamata and Te Aroha).

The Council itself provides services to the community as a mix of both district-wide (e.g. planning services) and local services (e.g. water supply, refuse) reflecting efficiency and effectiveness considerations.

The district has a number of active interest groups such as Federated Farmers, Grey Power and business associations which advocate to Council. Council has relationships with many of these organisations.

