Southland Local Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes

Date: Tuesday 1 October 2025 **Time:** 9.45am – 12.30pm
Venue: Ngā Kete Mātauranga Pounamu Charitable Trust, Level 1 – 92 Spey Street, Invercargill

Present:

Tracey Wright-Tawha	LAC Chair
Gary Tong (online)	LAC Deputy Chair
Tracy Hicks	LAC Member
Beryl Wilcox	LAC Member
Alastair McKenzie	LAC Member
Carla Harper	LAC Member
Chris Dillon	LAC Member

In Attendance:

Amit Prasad (9.45-11 online)	Fire and Emergency New Zealand - Board Member
Phil Marsh	Region Manager – Te Kei
Julian Tohiariki	District Manager – Te Kei
Delia Riley	Community Risk Manager – Te Kei
David Deedy	Pou Takawaenga - Te Kei
Michelle Bartlett (online)	Senior Advisor – Local Advisory Committees

Apologies:
John Twiddle and Himani Galbraith - LAC Members

Welcome

The meeting was opened with a karakia by the chair, followed by a welcome to committee members and District staff and an additional welcome to Amit Prasad Fire and Emergency Board member.

Committee operations

The minutes from the previous meeting 13 May 2025 were reviewed, amended and confirmed. There were no changes to the Interests Register for this meeting. Actions from the previous meeting were updated.

Update from Board LAC portfolio holder

All 16 LACs are now established and progressing well. The Fire and Emergency Board's recent Tauranga LAC visit was successful and highlighted some effective migrant community engagement. Amit noted the insight from Southland LAC that came through iwi about cultural competence and relational approaches with Fire and Emergency.

The November LAC Chairs' Forum between LAC chairs and the Fire and Emergency Board will focus on improving the feedback loop and demonstrating clear actions from LAC insights.

Chairs Update

The LAC Chairs' Hui was held on 17th of July in Wellington. This event allowed the Chair the opportunity to assess Southland LACs performance against other committee's along with some newly established ones and she felt the Southland LAC were making good progress.Verian researchers presented their findings from the Community Perceptions report, which includes six principles for effective LAC engagement.

The Southland LAC Chair is scheduled to meet with the Board at their next meeting on 30 October 2025.

Firefighting Water Supply Code of Practice Consultation: National consultation is underway on the firefighting water supply code of practice, which is aiming for uniform adoption across all New Zealand councils. Current requirements vary by district and shared water supplies and domestic sprinkler systems are identified as cost-effective solutions. Chris Dillon has been appointed as Southland LACs representative for the consultation process.

Review and Confirmation of Engagement plan for 2025-26

Schools: The LAC identified schools as key engagement opportunity, noting high false alarm rates and potential to reach diverse communities through school networks. One local school has students representing 25 ethnicities, providing access to migrant populations.

*Community Expectations***:** Discussion highlighted a disconnect between community expectations and emergency response protocols, particularly regarding:

- Ambulance response times exceeding one hour in rural areas
- Limited understanding of Fire and Emergency's response scope
- Only four Southland brigades provide first response under St John MOU
- 48% of callouts are false alarms, indicating a need for more community education

LAC Visibility Initiatives: Committee are exploring options to increase their visibility and provide community education:

- False alarm awareness at upcoming business 'After 5' event.
- Potential LAC column in Southland Express (quarterly for next year with education focus)
- Local Fire and Emergency Facebook pages

The Chair will develop an information paper/communications plan working alongside the district team and share it with the LAC for approval. Members agreed to aim for one engagement per month, with individual members encouraged to pursue initiatives independently while keeping the Committee informed. The first Facebook post/article will be developed by a member in collaboration with the district team. Engagement plan updated to reflect discussion.

LAC engagement review and analysis

Members reported on recent community engagement activities and observations:

Specific Engagement Activities:

- Valuable meetings conducted with volunteers and community members

- Connections being made with volunteer brigades through deputy staff after initial reluctance from some brigades who see themselves as already representing community
- Business ‘After 5’ event rescheduled to January 2026 due to industrial action; LAC members encouraged to attend
- Ongoing efforts to connect with migrant communities
- One member's engagement limited due to family illness

Community Issues Identified:

- Migrant housing maintenance concerns
- Carbon farming/forestation without fire breaks creating potential risks
- Community expectations misaligned with Fire and Emergency's actual remit (especially regarding medical and accident responses)
- Refugees in temporary accommodation with safety concerns, distrust of uniformed personnel was noted
- Younger firefighters lacking live fire experience due to changes in training practices
- Forestry industry practice changes reducing on-ground personnel contact over past decade

A South Invercargill emergency hub has been established in collaboration with Civil Defence following LAC meetings in the area. There is potential for collaboration with Otago LAC members on shared issues, particularly forestry risks. The Community Risk Managers also have existing forestry relationships that could be leveraged.

District update

New Strategic Direction (to 2030): Fire and Emergency is currently implementing new strategic direction focused on cultural competency, inclusivity, and collaborative community-based approach. The five strategic pou that set out the direction include: safe effective operations, effective regulation, strong stakeholder relationships, sustainable workforce support, and strong business foundations.

Cultural Change - Eke Taumata Programme: 19 of the 20 recommendations from the Eke Taumata report have been completed. This includes a new five-year appointment term being introduced for Chief Fire Officers (from November 2024) with structured development, support, and review processes to support a collaborative leadership approach.

*Financial Context***:** The Insurance levy income that funds Fire and Emergency has been declining due to reduced insurance uptake. Fire and Emergency need to achieve a $50 million annual savings target. Fire and Emergency manage over 600 buildings and has the largest vehicle fleet in country.

Organisational Restructure: The first phase at Deputy Chief Executive level has been completed. The next phase is expected around December, with final implementation of that phase by March 2026. Communication efforts are ongoing to support staff morale. The operational impact of this restructure is expected to be minimal. Current uncertainty primarily affecting Head Office staff.

Major IT modernisation projects are currently underway to unify systems, create a single source of truth, and improve the volunteer experience.

Industrial Action: Career staff are currently engaged in collective bargaining with unions. Industrial action may be visible through changed dress/signage. Bargaining occurs centrally in Wellington approximately every three years.

Community Risk Manager (CRM) Update

The team have been enhancing Southland's operational capability and personnel safety through strong community relationships and promoting safe burning practices.

Fire-Related Fatalities: Work on reducing fire-related deaths by targeting high and medium-risk communities through Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV). Fire and Emergency's KPIs require 60% of HFSVs to be conducted in medium to high-risk homes, though challenges exist when managing expectations (e.g., requests for entire apartment buildings).

Nationally, this year there have been 17 fire-related fatalities, representing an increase. Fatalities in homes without alarms are classified as avoidable.

Regional Statistics:

- Southland: Two avoidable fatalities
- Region total: Four fatalities (Two avoidable, two unavoidable)
- False alarm rates have remained steady over the past three years. Reduction efforts are ongoing through education.

Youth outreach activities:

The Risk Reduction team have been engaging with youth in the community through promotion at several events including:

- Agrikids event stall
- Mitre 10 stand promoting smoke alarm awareness
- Home Fire Safety Visits conducted with international students at Southern Institute of Technology and into Congolese community homes
- Firewise activities in schools

Fire Season Awareness: New road signage and an online tool "Check it's alright" have been launched today coinciding with fire season start. Product Safety Alert: Serene bathroom heater recall following 19 house fires nationwide; specific model now illegal to use.

Fire Investigation: A recent Volunteer Leaders conference addressed fire investigator referrals. Currently only 10% of fires in Southland have investigator attendance - identified as too low, requiring improved referral processes.

Recovery Support: A new compact recovery information guide has been developed locally for fire and other event affected residents; this is being distributed via brigades.

General Business

SharePoint Access: National LAC team working to provide all members with SharePoint access in preparation for new Board Management application. New login guidance has been distributed. Members experiencing access issues should contact IT Support on 0800 374 843.

Community Perceptions Report (Verian): The report included in LAC meeting packs highlight four engagement types, challenges, and six principles for effective engagement.

Previous Insights Report Follow-up:

- **2024/25 Insight - Operational Review Learnings:** Link to operational reviews provided in meeting pack (not previously visible to LACs)
- **2023/24 Insight - Carbon Forestry Fire Risk:** Link to information and research on carbon forestry fire risk provided in meeting pack

Next meeting:

4 March 2026 – venue to be a rural location, members to discuss options and confirm.

Closing

The meeting closed at 12.30pm with a karakia.

Action Log

Date	Action	Responsible	Due	Status
1 October 2025	Work with CRM and DM on an information paper on external communications, focusing on rural, urban, and educational outreach.	Chair	Next meeting	Progressing
1 October 2025	Check with FENZ regarding the official position and actions on carbon forestry and report back at the next meeting	DM	Next meeting	Progressing
1 October 2025	Send update of members term status and renewal dates	Senior Advisor	7 October 2025	Complete
1 October 2025	Fix spelling errors in Engagement plan	Senior Advisor	Post meeting	Complete
13 May 2025	Follow up with DM on initial findings from engagement as noted in the follow up actions	Chair/Deputy	Post meeting	In progress
13 May 2025	Draft template for brigade visits by LAC members	Chair/Senior Advisor	Post meeting	In progress

13 May 2025	Comms template for engaging with brigades	Chair/Beryl	Post meeting	In progress
13 May 2025	Find standard questions and send to LAC	Senior Advisor	Post meeting	In progress
4 Feb 2025	Invite committee to meet the Board when they visit Southland on 27th March.	Region Manager	Early March	Completed
4 Feb 2025	Invite committee to the Southland Leaders Forum in June (Group Managers Workshop)	District Manager –	T3 meeting May 13th	The Chair will follow up-with DM
4 Feb 2025	Draft a template of questions for members to use when engaging with communities, relevant to the LAC area of focus.	Chair	Following the meeting	Completed
4 Feb 2025	Complete draft of Southland Engagement Plan, including planned engagements for review	Senior Advisor	11 February	Completed