

# 7. DEMOCRACY

## DESIRED OUTCOME

A community that contributes to improving our quality of life through democratic participation

- a) Advocacy by community leaders for identified local concerns and issues at a local, regional and national level **(Priority)**
- b) The community is provided with opportunities to participate in local decision-making
- c) There is active participation in elections and consultation processes

## INTRODUCTION

Resident satisfaction with, and participation in, the local democratic process contributes to improving our quality of life. It is vital residents feel they are effectively represented by their decision-makers and that Council provides appropriate and accessible opportunities for community participation. This section measures our progress towards achieving the democracy goal of effective representation and active participation in public decision-making.

Two indicators and their measures are used here to gauge Ashburton Districts' progress towards achieving its democracy goal of active community participation that improves quality of life. These indicators are democratic participation and the quality of local government.

	State	Trend
<b>7.1 Democratic Participation</b>		
• Voter turnout in local government elections	😊	↓
• Voter turnout at Ashburton District polling places in central government elections	😐	↓
• Community involvement in decision making	😞	↔
<b>7.2 Quality of Local Government</b>		
• Information made available to the community	😊	↔
• Satisfaction with the performance of the Mayor and Councillors	😊	↔
• Satisfaction with the performance of council staff	😊	↑
• Satisfaction with Council's advocacy role for the district	😊	↑

### Key:

<b>State</b>	😊 Achieving our Target	😐 Close to Achieving	😞 Not achieving our Target
<b>Trend</b>	↑ Favourable / Improving	↔ No significant change	↓ Declining / Unfavourable

## 7.1 DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Every New Zealander over the age of 18 has the right to vote in local and central government elections and referendums. This ability to participate democratically in society is a sign of a well-developed community.

### VOTER TURNOUT AT LOCAL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

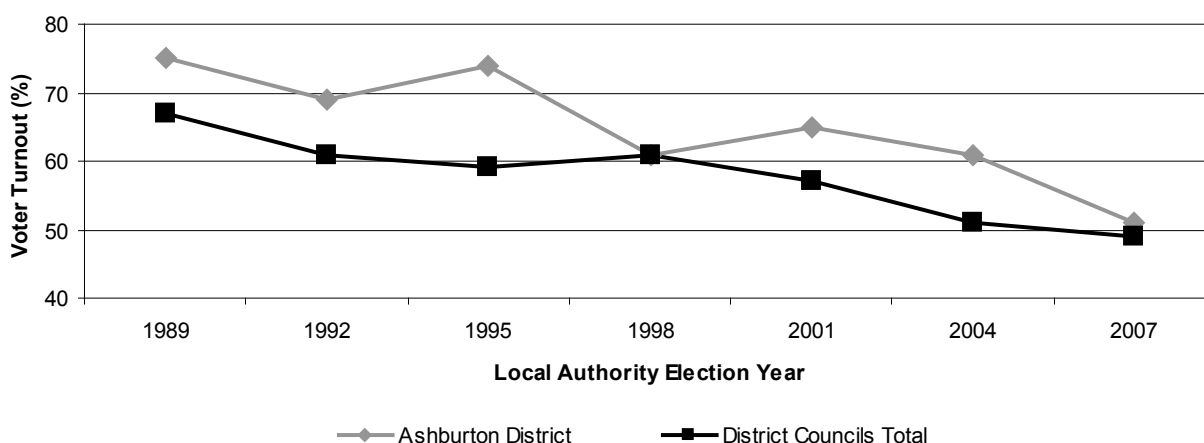
#### What is this about?

Voter turnout at local and central government elections identifies the proportion of Ashburton District residents and ratepayers who are enrolled to vote, and cast a vote in local body elections from 1989-2007 and in the 2008 general election.

Ensuring communities are well-informed and have their say in decision making processes is part of encouraging strong and positive communities. Voter turnout rates are a measure of this, indicating the extent of democratic participation of our residents. Voter turnout can be influenced by whether candidate positions are contested, and the level of confidence the public have in political authorities.

Voter participation was high for most territorial authorities in 1989, however, with each successive election since turnout has tended to decline (Amey, 2006). The high voter turnout in local authority elections in 1989 may have been due to local government reorganisation which saw the largest restructuring of local government arrangements ever undertaken in New Zealand.

Fig 66. Voter Turnout at Local Authority Elections



Voter turnout at Local Authority Elections 1989 -2007  
Source: Ministry of Social Development, 2008 Social Report

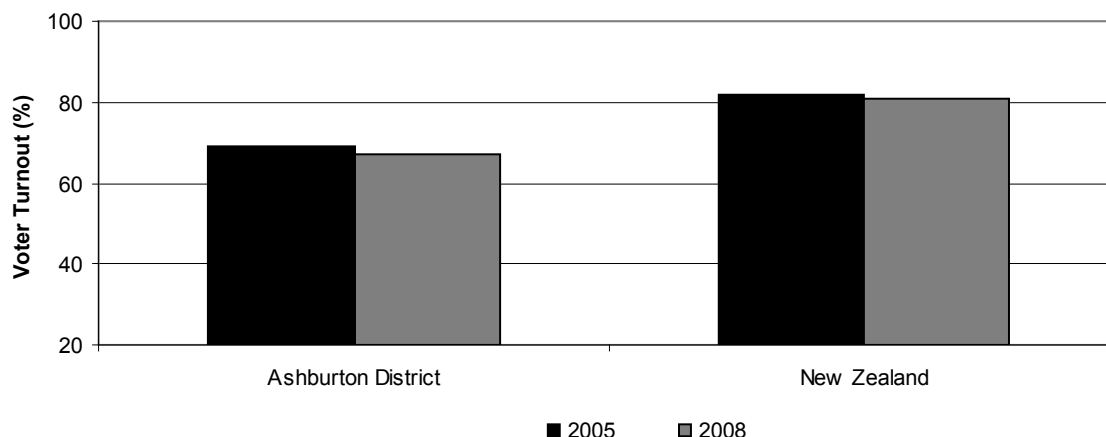
#### Key Points

- Voter turnout at local government elections has steadily declined since 1989 (75%); reaching the lowest rate of turnout at the 2007 local body election (51%)
- The most recent statistics show a higher percentage of voter turnout to central government elections than local government elections. 51% voter turnout was recorded in the 2007 local authority elections, compared to a 67% turnout at the 2008 general election
- In 2004, Ashburton District's local authority election voter turnout (61%) is significantly higher than the average for both the South Island (57%) and New Zealand (51%)

#### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
Ashburton District has a higher rate of voter participation in local authority elections than New Zealand as a whole	😊	↓

**Fig 67. Voter turnout at Ashburton District Polling Places – General Elections**



Rate of voter turnout at Ashburton polling places in the 2008 general election, compared to the rate of voter turnout for New Zealand as a whole (general electorates) 2005 - 2008  
 Source: www.electionresults.govt.nz

**Key Points**

- In 2008 Ashburton District had a high rate of elector enrolment, with 97% of the total Ashburton District population who were eligible, enrolled to vote
- Voter participation for the Ashburton District in the previous two general elections has been significantly lower than the rate for New Zealand as a whole. The level of voter participation for Ashburton District was 67% in the 2008 General Election, compared to 81% voter turnout for New Zealand as a whole
- The general trend for both the Ashburton District and New Zealand as a whole shows the rate of voter turnout has decreased since the 2005
- The number of residents who cast votes on Election Day in 2008 accounted for over one third (36%) of the total number of those who voted in the Rangitata electorate
- Voter turnout of Ashburton District residents, (67%), was lower compared to that of the Rangitata electorate as a whole (81%)

**How are we doing?**

Target:	State:	Trend:
Ashburton District has higher voter participation rates in general elections than New Zealand as a whole	☹️	↓

**Data Limitations**

It is important to note that parliamentary electorates are not aligned with territorial authority boundaries, and data for the 2008 general election is not yet available at the district level. In the case of Ashburton District, the Rangitata electorate covers Ashburton District, but also includes electors as far south as Timaru. The Ashburton District figure has been drawn from the Rangitata Electorate polling statistics, and is based on the 13,861 votes cast by electors at Ashburton District polling places. This means the figure excludes any Ashburton District residents and ratepayers who cast their votes outside the district. The data also excludes hospital votes, ordinary and special votes cast before polling day, special votes cast on polling day, overseas special votes, and Te Tai Tonga electorate votes.

For further information regarding electoral boundaries, see [www.elections.org.nz/mapping](http://www.elections.org.nz/mapping)

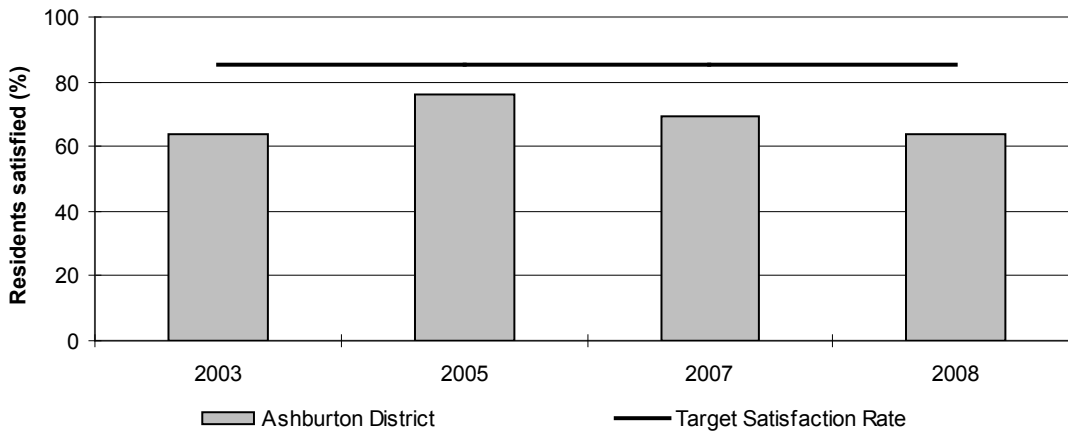
## RESIDENT SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

### What is this about?

Involving the community in decision making is an important part of modern local government. For public participation in local democratic processes to occur, opportunities to do so must be made accessible by Council. The public perception of how Council involves the community in decision making is one way of gauging if Council is providing adequate opportunities in a manner which is meaningful, effective and accessible to the community.

The chart below shows the proportion of residents who were satisfied with the way Council involved the public in the decision-making process between 2003 and 2008.

**Fig 68. Resident Satisfaction with Community Involvement in Council Decision Making**



Resident Satisfaction with Community Involvement in Decision Making (don't know responses excluded) 2003-2008

Source: Ashburton District Council NRB Communitrak Annual Residents survey

Note: The measure above (with Don't Know responses excluded) is the measure Ashburton District Council uses to measure resident satisfaction in Council's Annual Report.

### Key Points

- There has been a decrease in the number of residents satisfied with community involvement in Council decision making since 2005 (76%), with 64% of residents either very satisfied or satisfied in 2008
- In general, residents aged 60 years and over gave a higher rating of satisfaction than younger residents
- Dissatisfaction among rate payers increased from 9% in 2007 to 19% in 2008
- The proportion of resident satisfaction with community involvement in Council decision making has not reached the target rate of 85% for any of the years from 2003-2008

### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
85% or more of residents surveyed are satisfied with the way Council involves the community in decision-making	☹	↔

### Data Limitations

Resident satisfaction through the NRB Communitrak Survey results in data that is highly subjective as it is based on individual personal perception. These perceptions are largely determined by people's expectations and experiences. The NRB Communitrak Survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.9%, meaning that results may actually be greater or less than those shown.

## 7.2 QUALITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

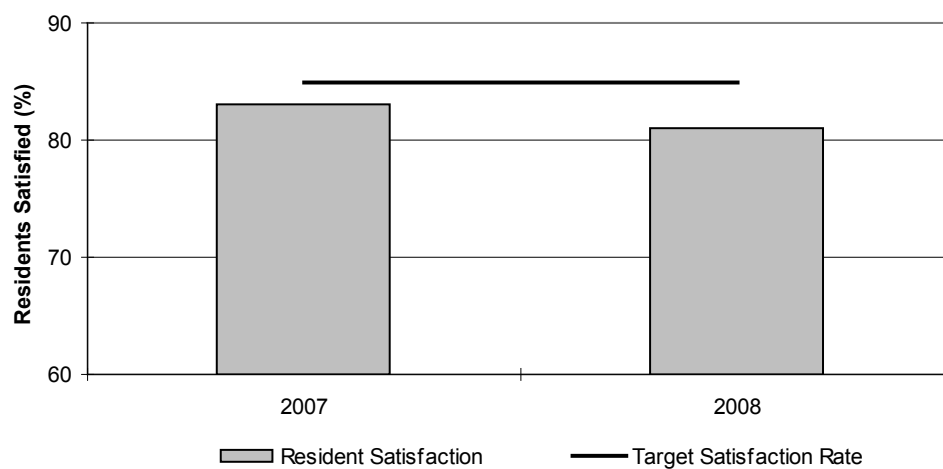
Our community signalled through the community outcomes process that they have an important role to play in participating in local decision-making. Strengthening the links between decision-making and the community will build a more transparent and communicative relationship between the two.

### AVAILABILITY OF COUNCIL INFORMATION

#### What is this about?

Accessibility of Council information is an important aspect of involving the community in local authority democratic processes. This indicator measures public perception of the amount of information that is made available to the community.

**Fig 69. Resident Satisfaction with the Level of Information Made Available to the Community**



Resident Satisfaction with the Level of Information that is made available to the Community (don't know responses excluded) 2007-2008  
Source: Ashburton District Council NRB Communitrak Annual Residents survey

Note: The measure above (with Don't Know responses excluded) is the measure Ashburton District Council uses to measure resident satisfaction in Council's Annual Report.

#### Key Points

- In 2008 a total of 81% of residents were satisfied that Council provided enough information, dropping slightly from 83% in 2007; however the proportion of residents who feel the Council provides 'more than enough' information increased from 6% in 2007 to 9% in 2008
- There was a slight increase in the proportion of residents who feel that the Council 'does not provide enough' public information rising from 17% in 2007 to 20% in 2008, with the 3% increase falling into the 'nowhere near enough' category

#### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
85% or more of residents surveyed are satisfied with the amount of information Council provides to the community	☹️	↔️

#### Data Limitations

Resident satisfaction through the NRB Communitrak Survey results in data that is highly subjective as it is based on individual personal perception. These perceptions are largely determined by people's expectations and experiences. The NRB Communitrak Survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.9%, meaning that results may actually be greater or less than those shown.

No historical data is available for comparison as this question was introduced to the survey in 2007.

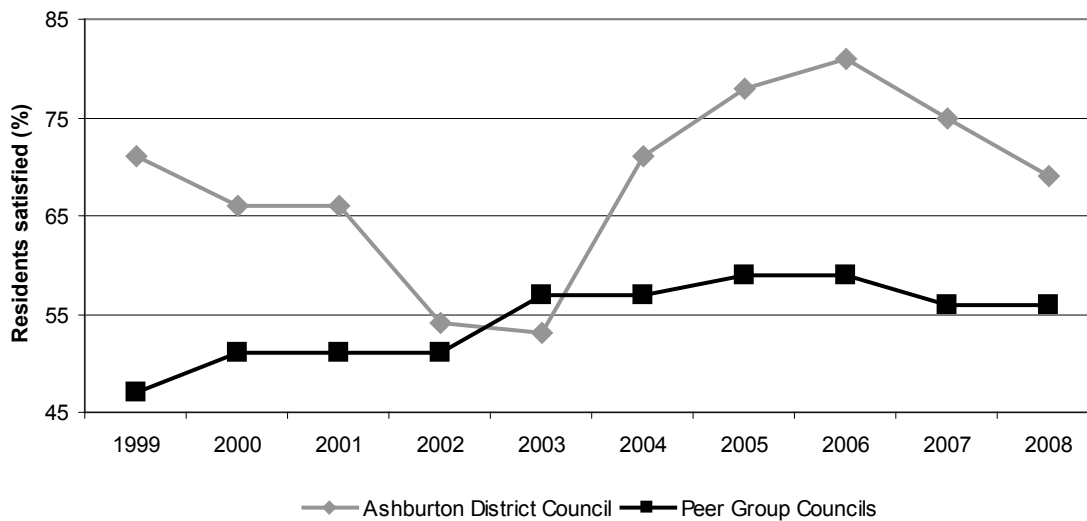
## PERFORMANCE OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

### What is this about?

The level of public satisfaction with the district's Mayor and Councillors indicates the level of community support and confidence in the decision-making of the local authority. It can also give indication of the level of public knowledge and involvement in democratic processes, which can help to determine whether the district's democracy goal is being achieved.

This indicator shows the percentage of Ashburton District residents who are satisfied with the performance of the Mayor and Councillors from 1999 to 2008. The data for our district is compared to a peer group of 32 councils, of a similar size, from throughout New Zealand.

**Fig 70. Resident Satisfaction with the Performance of the Mayor and Councillors**



Resident Satisfaction with the Performance of the Mayor and Councillors (including don't know responses) 1999-2008  
Source: Ashburton District Council: NRB Communitrak Survey

### Key Points

- Overall, the community has rated the performance of the Mayor and Councillors well. The highest rating since 1999 was recorded in 2006 at 81%, from which time the rating of performance has dropped slightly
- Compared to the performance rating average of similar sized councils, ratings of performance of the Mayor and Councillors of Ashburton District have been well above those of the peer group
- Last year's rating of 69% satisfaction is the third lowest recorded by Ashburton District since 1999, yet it is still well above the 56% average of similar councils
- There was a significant drop in rating for the years 2002 to 2003. A local authority election was held in 2004, which potentially explains the restoration in public confidence

### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
Ashburton District Mayor and Councillors maintain a performance rating above that of the peer group average of similar councils	😊	↔

### Data Limitations

Resident satisfaction through the NRB Communitrak Survey results in data that is highly subjective as it is based on individual personal perception. These perceptions are largely determined by people's expectations and experiences. The NRB Communitrak Survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.9%, meaning that results may actually be greater or less than those shown.

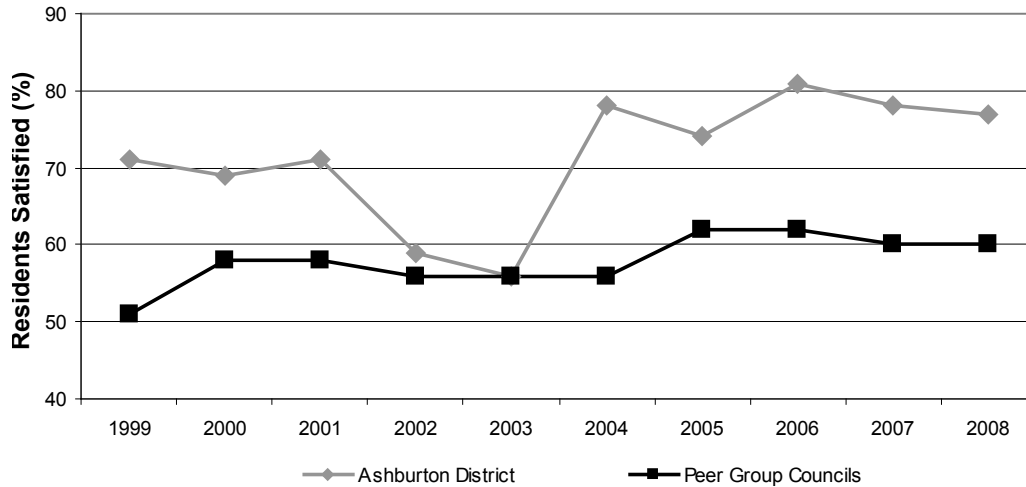
## PERFORMANCE OF COUNCIL STAFF

### What is this about?

The level of public satisfaction with the performance of council staff gives an indication of the level of confidence in the implementation and maintenance of council facilities and services.

This indicator shows the percentage of Ashburton District residents satisfied with the performance of Ashburton District Council staff, compared to the average of peer group councils for the years 1999 to 2008.

**Fig 71. Resident Satisfaction with the Performance of Council staff**



Resident Satisfaction with the Performance of Council Staff (including 'don't know' responses) 1999 – 2008

Source: Ashburton District Council: NRB Communitrak Survey

### Key Points

- With the exception of 2003 where the ratings equalled the peer group average, performance ratings of Ashburton District Council staff have remained significantly above both the peer group average and national averages
- The general trend of satisfaction with staff performance is closely linked to that of the Mayor and Councillors, both showing similar ratings across the 9 year period
- Excluding the 'don't' know' responses raises the 2008 result to a level of 82% resident satisfaction with the performance of council staff, just 3% below the target of 85% of residents satisfied

### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
Ashburton District staff maintain a performance rating above that of the peer group average of similar Council's	😊	↑

### Data Limitations

Resident satisfaction through the NRB Communitrak Survey results in data that is highly subjective as it is based on individual personal perception. These perceptions are largely determined by people's expectations and experiences. The NRB Communitrak Survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.9%, meaning that results may actually be greater or less than those shown.

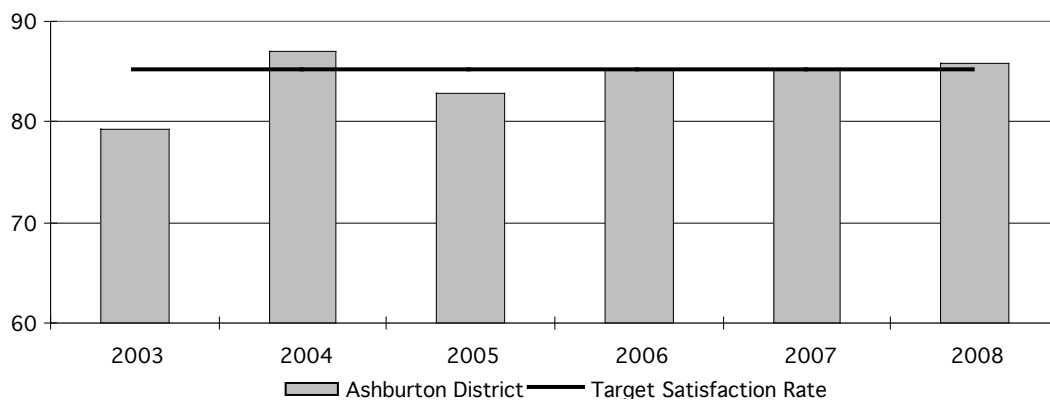
## COUNCIL'S ADVOCACY ROLE FOR THE DISTRICT

### What is this about?

Council represents the needs and views of the community at the local, regional and national levels on a wide variety of issues, including roading reform and hospital services. Monitoring resident satisfaction with Council's advocacy role provides a measure of the degree to which Council represents the community in a way which is effective and accurate.

This indicator shows the proportion of residents satisfied with the advocacy role Council undertakes on behalf of the district for the years 2003-2008.

**Fig 72. Resident Satisfaction with Council's Advocacy Role in the District**



Resident Satisfaction with Council's Advocacy Role in the District (don't know responses excluded) 2003-2008

Source: Ashburton District Council: NRB Communitrak Survey

Note: The measure above (with Don't Know responses excluded) is the measure Ashburton District Council uses to measure resident satisfaction in Council's Annual Report.

### Key Points

- Council has achieved a high rate of satisfaction undertaking its advocacy role, with the general trend increasing slightly over the past 5 years
- The lowest and highest rates of satisfaction with council's advocacy role were recorded in consecutive years, with the lowest satisfaction level reported in 2003 (79%), and highest in 2004 (87%)
- The target satisfaction rate of 85% has been achieved for the last three years, with the most recent level of satisfaction recorded in 2008 at 86%

### How are we doing?

Target:	State:	Trend:
85% or more of residents surveyed are satisfied with Council's advocacy role for the district	😊	↑

### Data Limitations

Resident satisfaction through the NRB Communitrak Survey results in data that is highly subjective as it is based on individual personal perception. These perceptions are largely determined by people's expectations and experiences. The NRB Communitrak Survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.9%, meaning that results may actually be greater or less than those shown.