



Te Kāhui Tohutohu mō te Pakihi Iti

Small Business Advisory Panel

End of Term Report 2022-2025.

11 September, 2025



Introduction

At the start of the term the Mayor decided to establish a new advisory panel to bring the voice of small business into Council. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of the New Zealand economy, accounting for 97 per cent of all businesses nationally and a significant portion of employment and GDP. Auckland is home to a large number of these businesses, representing a significant proportion of the nation's total business locations and employment, with 35 per cent of national business locations and employees located in the region as of February 2024.

Chaired by Councillor Turner the approach to the new panel was to bring together a group of business owners with wide business experience to provide the organisation and the Governing Body with direct access to, and insights from, business owners. Initial scoping sessions tested the appetite and potential availability of small business owners for a direct engagement mechanism at a strategic level with Council.

As a new panel, it took time to establish the right mix of members and cadence. By the end of the term, this started taking shape. There is an opportunity to identify common issues the panel can provide greater level of advice back into the council on. The panel agreed that if the organisation and Governing Body find it useful to engage with small business owners as a panel, they are prepared to commit time to do it. Members value and appreciate the opportunity to bring their unique perspectives to Auckland Council.

Panel member insight – while **“many of the council’s advisory panels have a very common theme that align them through their membership, the small business advisory panel is quite unique. Although we align in business, our opinions differ and I think that what makes us special.”**

Staff have been proactive in offering their views on the value of engaging with the panel including:

A practical ‘sounding board’ to hear business related ideas and practices.

A way for members of the small business community to connect directly to staff involved in relevant programmes and initiatives.

Purpose

This report summarises the panel's activities over the 2022-25 electoral term. Panel members presenting to Planning and Policy Committee on 11 September will provide the panel's insights on key issues and opportunities for small business in the Auckland region.

Membership

The membership of the Panel during the 2022-25 electoral term included a wide range of sectors including industrial services, hospitality & retail, legal & business services, education & community development, and creative & cultural industries. It reflects Tāmaki Makarau's cultural diversity and includes voices from different geographic areas across the region. This diverse makeup enables the panel to provide well rounded strategic advice to Council on matters that impact small businesses.

Chair:

- Councillor Ken Turner Auckland Council

Panel Members:

- Andrew Kennedy Prudentia Law
- Damian Smith Devamp Construction Ltd
- Dean Stuart HydroVac
- Jo Plant Exile Hair Design
- Manawaharepu Udy Ngahere Communities
- Raghbir Singh Radio Spice
- Rajesh Lal Stonex Jewellers Otahuhu
- Richette Rodger Otahuhu Business Association
- Robson Liang International Education Fund Ltd
- Sēmisi Potauaine Sēmisi Potauaine Artist Ltd
- Sunny Kaushal The Shakespeare

Support staff:

The Panel was supported by the following staff:

- Lead Officer – Robert Irvine, GM, Licensing and Compliance
- Governance Advisor – Lexy Turner
- Principal Advisor Panels – Victoria Wicks-Brown
- Elected Members:
- Chief Liaison Councillor – Councillor Julie Fairey.

Background and context

The panel provides a mechanism for engagement with diverse small businesses across the Auckland region. Auckland is home to approximately 227,380 businesses, with the vast majority being small enterprises. The Panel can provide advice to the council within the remit of the following topics:

- council policies, plans and strategies relevant to small business
- regional and strategic matters relevant to small business interests
- any matter of particular interest or concern to the small business sector.

The panel met five times since formal appointment in 2024. Their work programme was informed by topics suggested by panel members, panel staff, and by kaimahi, including Auckland Transport, who proactively identified they wished to seek the advice of the panel.

Key elements of the Panel's work programme included:

- Public safety and emergency management
- Compliance and regulation
- Governance and strategic planning
- Transport
- Technology and innovation with a focus on AI
- Economic development and business engagement.

Work programme priorities

A summary table of the presentations and topics provided to the panel is set out in [Appendix 1](#).

The following topics were of particular interest:

- The performance of the Council as key enabler or a hinderance to business
- Cost of doing business with Council and cost to business of Council processes
- Making it easier to do business with Council including ability to access staff
- Compliance
 - Resource Management Act reform
 - Enforcement capability of local government
- Business Improvement District Programme
- City centre small business environment and the on-the-ground reality for those businesses
- Economic development and how the Small Business Advisory Panel can contribute to the development on the new group Economic Development Strategy in 2026
- Resilience in changing business landscape.
 - Navigating shifts in urban planning and development such as city centre works impacts.
 - Responding to the impacts of climate change
 - Supporting small businesses to remain agile and competitive in rapid technological advancements, such as the introduction of artificial intelligence.
- International focus
 - Collaboration between international companies, local businesses and council
 - Tourism related opportunities.

Areas for consideration

At the 28 July 2025 panel meeting, members were asked to contribute any observations on how the panel is working and whether it's a valuable mechanism through the lens of small business. Noting the small business owners are busy running their own businesses and time is a critical resource. Panel members made the following observations about the value of the panel and observations for the future:

- The panel is new and it will take some time to become established and recognised especially compared to other long-standing panels.
- Recognition of the valuable opportunity to raise matters of interest or concern to small business directly with key departments and individuals within the Council organisation able to address or consider those matters.
- Appreciate what we've seen and heard so far and looking forward to being a change maker in the future.
- Provides a valuable insight into what is happening in Auckland Council.
- Need to understand how advice offered to staff impacts or is incorporated into Council decision-making.
- Importance of the organisation not seeing the panel as a substitute for effective engagement with small business across the region.
- An initiative which makes a lot of sense. It was required and it's the first time, probably that this kind of sincere effort has been done to bring these business owners together.
- To create this sort of relationship between the council and businesses has been very helpful.
- Opportunity for better integration in upcoming plans, overall helpful and heading in the right direction.
- Up to the council to determine if they see value in the panel and hearing our advice. Happy to contribute if it is going to make a difference.
- An opportunity exists to expand membership to include small businesses in the technology and innovation sectors, as well as start-up businesses.

Community involvement or engagement

Panel members maintain both formal and informal connections to their respective sectors through networks such as Ōtāhuhu Business Association. Several members were recruited during the terms via these established relationships. As the panel is still relatively new, opportunities to leverage members' wider networks were being explored.

Panel activities

In 2025, working with officers, the panel wrote to Ministers Hon Simon Watts (Minister for Local Government) and Hon Simeon Brown (Minister for Auckland) supporting legislative changes to enhance Auckland Council's enforcement capabilities. The letter was prompted by a briefing to the Panel on compliance and regulatory challenges Auckland Council was experiencing.

Key points made by the panel were:

- That the panel was supportive of specific legislative amendments to empower Auckland Council to issue infringement notices for minor breaches of bylaws and local regulations.
- That the council currently has no ability to issue fines for offences such as illegal signage, obstruction of public spaces, or ongoing storage of materials in town centres. These types of low-level breaches fall outside existing infringement regimes and must be resolved either informally or through costly and time-consuming prosecutions - neither of which is fit for purpose in a city of Auckland's scale. While each breach may appear minor, together they erode the safety, accessibility, and vibrancy of public spaces.
- That the panel was seeking a legislative amendment to enable Auckland Council to issue infringement notices for minor bylaw breaches, backed by the ability to set appropriate fine levels regionally, within agreed boundaries.
- The panel noted this approach would deliver faster resolution, better compliance, and a more consistent regulatory framework across local government statutes.
- That the panel requested discussion with Auckland Council on wider changes to legislation impacting licensing and compliance noting there are various pieces of legislation that provide undue regulations on business. Examples included council's compliance on hairdressers in the Health (Hairdressers)

Regulations 1980, and council's requirement to monitor amusement devices under the Amusement Devices Regulations 1978.

- The panel noted the suggested change would reduce red tape for responsible operators, support a more enabling environment for small businesses, and free up capacity in the courts. Most importantly, it would equip Auckland Council with the right tools to manage growth and ensure public spaces remain safe, accessible and well-maintained.
- The panel noted is also sends a strong signal that the government trusts Auckland to solve local issues with the right regulatory levers in place - an approach Aucklanders and the business community expect and support.

Engagement on Annual Plan

Panel members Richette Rodgers and Dean Stuart presented to the Budget Committee workshop on 30 April 2025. During their presentation, they provided feedback on the Annual Budget on behalf of the Small Business Advisory Panel, highlighting reflections from a small business perspective.

Notable reflections from the workshop included:

- The Small Business Advisory Panel were supportive of bed tax levies based on the beneficiaries of events contributing.
- The Small Business Advisory Panel were supportive of the use congestion charge measures for roads” to enable “reliable travel time cost savings for businesses across Auckland and significant improvement to the economy,” as seen in overseas evidence.
- After noting the current recession and the anticipated rise in receiverships, the Small Business Advisory Panel did not support the proposed rates increase to 5.3 per cent, citing concerns around input costs. One Panel Member commented:

“I think there has to be some smarter way of doing things. When you run a monopoly organisation to drive cost savings and you get a lot of inefficiency creep, but my observation is that there has got to be some better, smarter, innovative ways of doing things... I see a lot of inefficiencies from an outside business perspective.”

The Small Business Advisory Panel strongly urged Council “for future budgets to have focus on being innovative on how to reduce the costs.”



Appendix 1: Small Business Advisory Panel activities during the 2022-2025 electoral term.

Topic category and number of council staff reports received over the five Small Business Advisory Panel meetings (2022-2025 electoral term).

Category	Public Safety and Emergency Management	Compliance and Regulation	Governance, Strategic Planning, and Business Process	Transport	Technology and Innovation	Economic Development and Business Engagement
Auckland Emergency Management – Business and Partnership Programme (Nov 2024)	1					
Auckland Council Safety Updates (Regional - Nov 2024, Community -May 2025)	2					
National Retail Investigation Unit – NZ Police (May 2025)	1					
Compliance Approach (Update – Feb 2025, Letter to Central Government May 2025)		2				
Health and Hygiene Bylaw Review (May 2025)		1				
Resource Management Act Changes (July 2025)		1				
Whakawhanaungatanga (July 2024)			1			

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Category	Public Safety and Emergency Management	Compliance and Regulation	Governance, Strategic Planning, and Business Process	Transport	Technology and Innovation	Economic Development and Business Engagement
Panel Priorities (July 2024)			1			
Update from Principal Panel Advisor			1			
Annual budget (Feb 2025)			1			
Mayoral Update (July 2024, May 2025)			2			
Report back on panel activities (July 2024, May 2025)			2			
End of Term recommendations (July 2025)			1			
Room to move – Auckland Transport (July 2024, Nov 2024, Feb 2025)				3		
Council Use of Artificial Intelligence (Feb 2025)					1	
Auckland Economic Development Office (July 2025)						1
Business Improvement District Programme (July 2025)						1
TOTAL BY TOPIC CATEGORY	4	4	9	3	1	2