



Arotakenga o te Ture Whakatū o te Whanganui Regional Museum Trust

Review of the Whanganui Regional Museum Trust Constitution

Pūrongo Whakamutunga a te Rōpū Arotake ki te Kaunihera Tahi – Poutū-te-rangi 2026

Final Report from the Review Panel to the Joint Council - March 2026

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I hereby certify that this report represents the collective views of the Review Panel:

Mary-Ann Ewing, Review Panel Chair

Date:

The review was supported by Project Coordinators Terri Holland and Fiona McNish.

Whakarāpopototanga Matua - Executive Summary

Following a review of the Cost Effectiveness of the Whanganui Museum (August 2024), commissioned by the Whanganui District Council, it was proposed that the WDC and the Whanganui Regional Museum Trust Board (WRMT) negotiate to transfer the operation of the Museum wholly to the WDC, including responsibility for employing staff. The report also recommended addressing governance performance issues and that ownership of the Museum Collection should be retained with the WRMT.

The WRMT Board's initial position (December 2024) supported the recommendations, subject to the WDC meeting a number of conditions.

The CE of WDC at the time, David Langford, responded to "confirm, in principle, the Council is prepared to work with you to satisfy the conditions linked to your preliminary position."

To progress these recommendations requires changes to the WRMT Constitution via a prescribed review and consultation process. The WRMT Board established a Review Panel for this purpose. This document is the final report from the Panel to the WRMT Board and contains 21 recommendations including, in abbreviated form:

- That the WRMT Board retains governance responsibilities for strategy, policy, risk, performance and editorial oversight of the Museum and the Collection
- That the bicameral/two houses governance model is retained with changes to improve performance including reducing the number of trustees from each house from 6 to 4 with a transparent appointment process based on an appropriate governance skills matrix and a clear voting model.
- That the WDC be invited to appoint a member to the WRMT Board
- That the WRMT Constitution be revised to enable the changes to the governance model and outsourcing of operations to the WDC as well as general updates to current practice
- That the Trust Board seek clarity on the proposed benefits for transferring operations and staff to WDC prior to agreeing to action them – thus taking a phased approach with changes to the Constitution first, governance model second and then negotiating agreement with WDC for the future operations of the Museum third.
- The Panel considered four operational models for the Museum. After considering the pros and cons of each model, the Review Panel recommends that the WRMT Board negotiates a comprehensive bespoke agreement with the WDC to outsource operations to the WDC but retains fallback positions if negotiations are not successful.

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1. Horopaki - Background

The current Whanganui Regional Museum Trust (WRMT) Deed and Constitution was established in 2000/01 with a unique bicameral, or two houses, governance model for the Museum (1). The model is based on the principles of partnership and two cultures development arising from the Treaty of Waitangi. The Trust oversees the governance and operations of the Museum and care of the Museum collection. It is thus an independent entity under the Charities Act 2005. The Museum buildings and facilities are owned and maintained by the Whanganui District Council (WDC). Funding for Museum operations is now predominantly from the WDC supplemented with modest sales revenue, donations and contracts for services.

Due to a combination of long term financial stress and a one-off unbudgeted funding shortfall in 2024, the Trust Board (also known as the Joint Council) approached the WDC for emergency funding. This was provided under the agreement that the WDC would commission an independent review of the cost effectiveness of the Museum under section 17a of the Local Government Act 2002. The review was completed in mid-2024 and published in 2025 (2).

Rather than paraphrase the report, its executive summary is repeated here:

“Executive Summary

- 1. Whanganui Regional Museum (the Museum) faces resourcing pressures. The Museum is operated by an independent charitable trust. An important feature of the governance arrangement is that: “The principles of partnership and two cultures development arising from the Treaty of Waitangi will be fully implemented within the Museum.” This is expressed in the Tikanga House and Civic House model within the Trust.*
- 2. The Museum is housed and predominantly funded by the Whanganui District Council.*
- 3. The Museum ran deficits in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. A planned deficit in the 2023/24 financial year was exacerbated when a critical financial situation developed during that year. An urgent request to the Whanganui District Council for a cash injection to enable the Museum to meet its obligations in that year was granted.*
- 4. Consequently, the Whanganui District Council decided to undertake a review of the Museum using the framework provided by Section 17A of the Local Government Act 2002.*
- 5. The purpose of this report is thus to review the cost effectiveness of the current arrangements and consider options for the future.*
- 6. The Museum holds a significant collection. It is described as “an extensive collection of over 300,000 objects and artefacts. The emphasis is on items which tell the story of the Whanganui region; its landforms, its flora and fauna and its people, as well as reflecting its place in the wider world.” (Whanganui District Council, Annual Plan 2023-24 at page 40).*

7. *The Museum presents its collection well. There is limited ability under current arrangements to introduce new exhibitions from the collection due to resourcing challenges.*
8. *Staffing and associated costs comprise 70% of the Museum's expenses. Salaries are generally at the lower end of expected ranges. The Museum is staffed within what might be regarded as an expected range, although at the lighter end given collection size. Two key vacancies will be able to be filled following additional WDC funding for the 2024/25 year. This will lift staffing to within reasonable bounds given comparators, although still lower end for a museum of this size. It is arguable that more staff would assist some key deliverables – access to on-line records being one example. A small increase in numbers can make a large difference. The mix of paid staff and volunteers is one area for exploration to increase resourcing. Overall, the Museum is cost effective.*
9. *Trustees are volunteers. There have been some challenges with achieving full membership of the Joint Council. Governance and management capability could be enhanced. Training is planned to support this.*
10. *Options for consideration were developed and a series of criteria developed against which to assess options.*
11. *The reviewer recommends that the Whanganui District Council take over the running of the Museum, and that staff become WDC employees. This would significantly increase the corporate organisational support available to the Museum and its governors and would support senior staff to focus on developing the Museum.*
12. *A range of other recommendations are also made. Under any scenario, oversight and engagement between WDC as funder and the Museum should be enhanced.*
13. *All decisions require negotiation and agreement with those who hold decision rights and affected stakeholders."*

From "A Report on the Cost Effectiveness of the Whanganui Regional Museum, Hill and Waaka, 2024" (1)

The Joint Council of the Museum developed a preliminary response to the s17a review in December 2024 which included the following:

Initial position on recommendation one (adopting option 3 that the Council operates Museum and employs staff, while the Trust holds collection)

Our initial preference is that the Whanganui District Council take over the employment of staff, with the following conditions:

1. *Adequate and appropriate consultation.*
2. *Recognition of outstanding funding issues.*
3. *Addressing staffing issues.*
4. *Agreement on appropriate oversight and engagement with staff by the Trust.*

5. *Decisions uphold tikanga Māori, kaitiakitanga, and tino rangatiratanga.*

Adequate and appropriate consultation

In addition to any Whanganui District Council consultation that may be warranted, the Joint Council needs engagement to take place with the following groups before it can confirm a final position:

- *Iwi/hapu representatives that appoint the members of the Tikanga Māori House as outlined in the Whanganui Regional Museum Trust Constitution.*
- *Museum staff.*
- *Members of the Museum.*
- *Stakeholders.*

Recognition of outstanding funding issues

The significant lack of funding hampers the Museum's operations and further development. The level of funding the Museum is currently receiving is not sufficient for it to operate to a standard commensurate with the size of the collection and the importance this holds for the region, district and Aotearoa. The review report made clear that the Museum is managing the funding that it does receive cost effectively. The primary issue is a lack of revenue for a Museum of its size.

While there may be some savings from shared services under the proposal, it appears unlikely these would be sufficient to resolve the current funding issues of the Museum.

Further revenue will be required. An increased level of core funding from Whanganui District Council, on a par with the funding of the Sarjeant Gallery is necessary for the Museum to operate at an appropriate level for the size and importance of its collection.

Addressing staffing issues

We would have an expectation that salaries are consistent with market levels. The level of staffing should reflect the operating needs of an institution of this scale/importance.

There needs to be more staff for the Museum to be able to carry out all its obligations to its funders, communities and stakeholders. The Museum is still holding vacancies and does not have the appropriate and safe level of staffing for a collection and Museum of this significance and size.

Agreement on appropriate oversight and engagement with staff by the Trust

The changes would require an agreement be put in place between the Whanganui Regional Museum Trust and the Whanganui District Council, and amendments to the Deed of Trust, to ensure the appropriate level of engagement with and oversight of the Museum and Taonga going forward.

The key areas of protection the Joint Council currently considers are required are:

- *That the Trust's current bicameral governance model continues with its responsibilities adjusted as required.*

- *The Trust's ability to set policies/requirements to ensure the maintenance, protection and use (by way of displays etc) of the collection remains including the code of ethics to be applied.*
- *That any repatriation/sale/disposal/taonga access request for items from the collection remains the responsibility of the Trust and within the established protocols for items lent or gifted to a Museum.*
- *The Trust would retain an ability to input into the Museum's strategies and policies for how it stores, uses, or displays the collection, and those that relate to values and principles of the Museum.*
- *Agreement that any savings initially generated by the change will be retained for the benefit of the Museum to ensure it maintains at least the same level of baseline funding in coming years.*
- *Ongoing visibility for the Trust of the Museum's finances and management processes to ensure the collection is appropriately managed and well utilised.*
- *The Trust would retain an ability to provide input into Council processes that decide the funding for the Museum.*
- *That the Council and the Trust agree on an appropriate level of engagement and reporting between Museum staff and the Trust.*

Ensuring decisions uphold tikanga Māori, kaitiakitanga, and tino rangatiratanga

The Whanganui District Council's involvement in Museum staffing must prioritise genuine consultation with iwi/hapū as Treaty partners, ensuring decisions uphold tikanga Māori, kaitiakitanga, and tino rangatiratanga.

Outstanding funding and operational challenges must be addressed without compromising Iwi/hapū authority or the bicultural governance framework outlined in the Museum's constitution.

Engagement must centre the voices of iwi/hapū representatives, Māori staff, and members of the Tikanga Māori House to reflect their role as kaitiaki and Tiriti partners.

Governance or operational changes must preserve the mana and autonomy of iwi/hapū while safeguarding their authority in shaping the Museum's future and protecting taonga.

Governance moving forward

In addition, the Trust acknowledges the comments in the report regarding governance and the Trust will ensure systems and methodologies are in place to govern the collection in an appropriate manner, in accordance with some of the points raised in the review.

This could include looking at amendments to the Trust Deed such as amending quorum requirements for meetings.

Governance training has already been provided to existing members and needs to continue as new members are appointed.

The Chief Executive of the WDC at the time (David Langford) responded to these expectations with the following commitments:

“I want to acknowledge the joint Council’s preliminary position as conveyed in the letter dated 17th December 2024 and reaffirmed in your latest letter. I can confirm that, in principal (sic) the Council is prepared to work with you to satisfy the conditions linked to your preliminary position. I have the following comments for each of the 5 conditions:

Adequate and appropriate consultation – I support us doing this jointly wherever possible
Recognition of outstanding funding issues – these are noted in the review report and will be acknowledged by the Council when the final report is presented to the Council.

Addressing Staffing Issues – bringing the operation of the museum in-house to council will require a transition plan to be developed. A key aspect of this will be a resourcing plan so that we have the correct staffing levels. It will also require staff to move to WDC employment contracts – this will be an opportunity to address rates of pay to ensure parity with the market.

Agreement on appropriate oversight and engagement with staff by the Trust – I agree that this will be necessary and the bullet points on this topic included in the 17th December letter all appear sensible/reasonable points.

Decisions uphold tikanga Māori, Kaitiakitanga, and Tino Rangatiratanga – Agreed, these points align closely to the Councils obligations under the local government act and our commitment to upholding te Tiriti principles”

Following this exchange, the Joint Council sought a legal opinion on whether it would need to make changes to the Trust Constitution to enable it to effectively outsource operations of the Museum and employment of staff to the WDC. In short, the legal opinion was that yes, the Constitution would need to be altered to enable transfer of operations to WDC. In addition, if there were to be other changes relating to the governance model these would also require changes to the Constitution. Furthermore, under the new Charities Amendment Act 2023, all Charities are required to review their Constitution and governance arrangements at least three yearly and no later than October 2026 in the first instance.

The current Constitution has very prescriptive review requirements (Section 9) including:

... at the Joint Council's discretion, the method of governance of the Museum shall be reviewed. The review shall be undertaken by a panel of at least five and no more than seven people, the majority of whom are independent of the Museum. The panel must include persons with expertise in the museum sector, and people with expertise in governance practices.

... If the Joint Council is satisfied that during its deliberations the panel consulted with all of the Museum's major stakeholders and adequately took into account their views and that the recommendations of the panel are consistent with the underlying principles of Section 4 and Section 5 (b - h), the Joint Council shall implement the recommendations of the panel, and

make alterations, if any, to the Trust Deed - as per the following Clause 10:

Members of the Joint Council may, by resolution amend or revoke the powers authorities and discretions set out in this Deed provided that:

- (a) The consultative procedure set out in Section 9 has been implemented; and*
- (b) At least four members of each tikanga group within the Joint Council are present; and*
- (c) No change is made which would further limit the liabilities of members of the Joint Council or deprive the Museum of its character or nature as a charitable trust for Charitable Purposes in New Zealand (including without limitation, any change to the personal benefit or winding up provisions of this Deed).*

As the s17a review did not meet these requirements, the Joint Council of the Museum instigated its own review to follow the Constitution requirements. The Joint Council prepared a document to guide the review and the questions it was seeking the Review Panel to respond to (3).

2. Te Arotake – Focus of this Review

The Review Panel has essentially focused on three broad areas of work:

- Potential transfer of the Museum Operations and employment of staff to the WDC
- Review of the Governance model
- Changes to the Trust Constitution to enable the above and to update to current practice and laws.

The Panel was conscious of the requirement of the current Constitution that for the Joint Council to make any changes to it, the Review Panel must have consulted with the Museum's major stakeholders and adequately taken their views into account and, further, that the recommendations we make are consistent with the principles of partnership, participation and protection consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

3. Whakawhitiwhiti Kōrero - Consultation

As an expert panel we developed our preliminary thinking in parallel with various stakeholder consultations so that we would be able to share emerging ideas and better respond to questions and issues as they arose.

The Panel was grateful for the work undertaken to consult with the major stakeholder groups of the Museum by the Chair of the Joint Council and the Project Coordinator Terri Holland (in particular). In most, but not all cases, the Consultation sessions included John Smart, Mary-Ann Ewing and Marshall Tangaroa from the Review Panel.

The consultations included the following in-person group sessions:

- Friends of the Museum
- Electoral College
- Museum Staff
- Whanganui Regional Iwi

These groups fit the description of stakeholders in the Constitution as being *“those people or groups of people that have a special interest in the Museum greater than that of an ordinary member of the public”*.

In addition, we distributed a Questionnaire, relating to the review, to both these groups as well as a list of significant donors and to education and kaitiaki contacts of the Museum. The Questionnaire was also posted on the Museum web site and promoted through a Press Release to the general public. Museum staff were also consulted individually and confidentially with their collective views summarized to avoid identification.

The final element of the Consultation was mounting a stand at the Pakaitore Memorial day to engage directly with local iwi. As in all the face to face consultations the dialogue was constructive.

Overall, the engagement with stakeholders via these processes was disappointing in terms of numbers, although rich in feedback, and we recommend that the Joint Council hold a final open stakeholder meeting to outline the Panel recommendations prior to implementing them (see later in this report).

Nevertheless, we have listened carefully to the feedback received and it has aided us in our work. As expected, stakeholders hold a range of views. We have included some of them through the report. Notes from the various meetings are included in the Museum archives and we have illustrated the major feedback from the questionnaire in this report where it best fits. At a high level, the recommendations made by the Panel are consistent with the majority views of the stakeholders as we heard them. On this basis, we feel that the requirement to have taken account of the views of the Museum’s major stakeholders has been met.

4. Ngā Kōrero Tāpiripiri - Other Inputs

In addition to seeking the views of stakeholders through the consultations detailed above, we have also sought to gather insights from two other main sources: regional Museums with experiences relevant to the issue of being operated or funded by their local council plus local organisations that have moved under the WDC umbrella in recent times.

The list of interviews and discussion notes we considered were:

- a. Kirsty Milham, WDC HR Manager
- b. Lucy Thompson, Splash Centre Manager
- c. Karen Hiri, Splash Centre Front of House
- d. Tim Easton, Whanganui and Partners Manager
- e. Laura Vodanovich, Director MGT Hawkes Bay (Museum and Gallery)
- f. Frith Williams and Zara Stanhope, Directors Puke Ariki/Govett Brewster, New Plymouth

- g. Susanna Shadbolt, Director, Te Manawa, Palmerston North
- h. Paeora Tibble, Chair, Tairāwhiti Museum, Gisborne
- i. Director - Ashburton Museum
- j. Andrew Clifford, Director Sarjeant Gallery
- k. Libby Sharpe, Past Acting Director Whanganui Regional Museum

Notes from these discussions are included in the Museum archives and we have used a few snippets to illustrate various perspectives in the text of our report.

Our analysis and recommendations in the following sections address changes to both the governance model and the Constitution before addressing the operational model issues. This is largely as these changes must be made before any operational changes are implemented.

5. Ngā Tūtohutanga - Governance Model Recommendations

The current WRMT Constitution clause dealing with the Review of the Trust Deed and the method of governance specifies (Clause 9b) that:

The review shall be based on the following criteria:

- effectiveness of the governance structure;
- degree of harmony;
- ability to make decisions;
- effectiveness of day-to-day management;
- the extent to which policy and strategic planning has developed;
- effect of change in governance process;
- acceptance by community/stakeholders;
- Wanganui District Council satisfaction;
- the extent to which appropriate stakeholders are represented;
- any other criteria that the panel considers relevant and appropriate.

5.1 Ngā arotake o mua - Prior reviews

The Trust Deed or Constitution has been reviewed previously in 2006 and 2011.

Without repeating the 2006 review, here it is worth noting a few elements from its Executive Summary:

- *Consultation was carried out with the museum's stakeholders, including staff, by way of meetings and written invitations to comment. No negative feedback was received about the principles underpinning the constitution or the Broad governance structure. There were many positive comments.*

And also

- *In our judgement the museum's present governance structure is generally working well and, for the present-day situation of the museum the model is meeting the needs of the museum and its stakeholders.*

(Note – there were many recommendations suggesting improvements in practice)

The 2011 review took a more qualitative approach, drawing on 10 semi-structured interviews to explore internal and external perspectives on, and experience of, the bicameral structure of the Museum. The Executive Summary covers a range of issues and we just include a few snippets here:

- *There was consensus amongst research informants that the Joint Council and current governance structure are effectively managing the Museum and its key stakeholders.*
- *Within the governance structure, there is a supportive atmosphere which encourages robust debate and where iwi voices are heard. Informants who were external to the JC perceive that mutual respect prevails.*
- *While it was acknowledged that decision-making is sometimes slowed down, given the need for TMH members to gather iwi responses and input, informants also comment that there is greater confidence in the quality of these decisions.*
- *Relationships with the Wanganui District Council are perceived as being increasingly positive as a result of a more open exchange of information.*

The review made a number of recommendations including that the Trust “continue to operate with the present balanced structure with the JC comprising up to six members from each house, while making use of new technologies to maintain a strong record of meeting attendance and decision-making and to encourage full participation”

Notably, both of these prior governance reviews made no recommendations to change the Trust Deed or Constitution which thus remains as it was originally drafted in 2000/01 (1).

5.2 Tētahi mema o mua o te JC - Feedback from past JC member

One of the submissions via the review questionnaire was from a past Joint Council member who observed that:

“As a model, the bicameral governance arrangement reflects clear relationships with mana whenua and with the community at large. Where there have been perceived weaknesses with the model, it could be considered that this is more an issue with application – that is, without proactive leadership, there is potential for the model to appear ‘complicated’. Having been a member of Civic House and the Joint Council during a time where there was dedicated and consistent leadership across the two houses, the model worked clearly and well, with monthly meetings and high levels of engagement.” (Anonymous submitter)

5.3 Te Āhuatanga o Nāianeī - The Current Situation

Given this positive history of the bicameral model, it is disappointing to find various concerns and criticisms of the governance model now. These are evidenced from multiple perspectives:

- The s17a Report commissioned by the Whanganui District Council (WDC) on the Cost Effectiveness of the WRM in 2024 detailed a number of concerns with the governance of the WRM Trust including
 - *In practice the Joint Council has struggled in recent times to have the required minimum membership. This has resulted in challenges for decision-making due to the absence of quorum*
 - *Not all iwi/hapū within the region with links to the Tikanga Māori House participate in that House. Both Houses have not had full representation on the Joint Council for some time*
 - *The position of Chair of the Joint Council has in the recent past extended well past the term specified in the Constitution (presumably due to lack of alternatives)*
 - *Training and induction of Trustees has been suboptimal over recent years. This, combined with challenges in ensuring sufficient appointments are made, has resulted in the Joint Council being largely Director-led, rather than Chair/Trustees-led.*
- The Whanganui Regional Museum published Annual Reports from its beginnings in the late 1800s up until 2020. The last Business Plan was for the 2020-2021 Year. The last Strategic Intent document was published in 2020 for the 2020-2025 period. The failure to continue to produce these core documents is indicative of a significant governance and management problem.
- The current Director (up until late Jan 2026) was appointed in 2021. Her submissions to the Review Panel clearly indicated she had significant concerns regarding the effectiveness of the current governance model and argued that governance issues be addressed prior to any decisions to transfer the operations of the Museum to the WDC. Other notes from her submission relating to the governance model include:
 - Fragmented and overly complex governance structure with unclear accountability
 - Lack of strategic leadership and insufficient policy development
 - Governance size disproportionate to staff size
 - Tikanga Māori House has been unable to function effectively for some time
 - Example of Tairāwhiti Museum's unicameral governance structure, which uses a single skills-based board supported by experts in cultural responsibilities contrasting with the Whanganui Regional Museum current structure which she described as cumbersome and overly focused on representation rather than capability.

5.4 He panoni - Something needs to change

In summary, these concerns indicate that the current application of the governance model has deficiencies against many of the review criteria listed in clause 9a of the Constitution. Unlike the earlier reviews in 2006 and 2011, the Review Panel sees the need to make changes to the governance model and constitution that we will outline below.

The Panel was heartened however, to read in the last Annual Business Plan of the Whanganui Regional Museum 2020-21 under the heading Tikanga Rua – Governance:

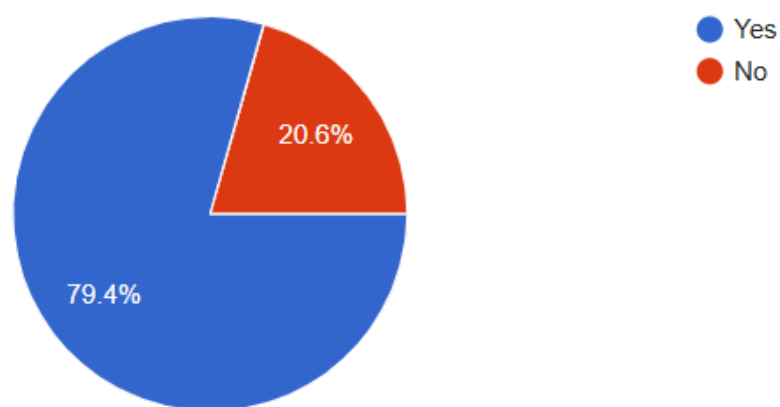
The Museum's bicultural governance structure is an internationally admired example of best museum practice. A strong commitment to proactive governance responsibility increases the Museum's credibility, strengthens our bonds with our stakeholders and builds goodwill in our communities.

This provides the Panel with a degree of optimism that the current governance issues are relatively recent in the Museum's history and with a considered resetting can be returned to sound, functional, effective, efficient and culturally appropriate performance levels.

Further, we have also been heartened by the strong support for the bicameral model from our stakeholder consultations and the responses from the questionnaire, as seen in the diagram below, in response to the question relating to the bicameral governance model:

1. Does this governance model best reflect a Te Tiriti partnership and two-cultures development that is currently the basis of the Trust Constitution?

34 responses



Other useful inputs have been from long term supporter of the Museum, Sir Hugh Rennie, and the Director of the Napier Museum (MGT,) Laura Vodanovich.

Sir Hugh notes that:

- The 12 person two “house” structure in the present constitution is unwieldy and complex to operate. The guardianship that this provides for the taonga of the collection of the museum could be achieved without making such persons part of the main operating team.
- Councils are not skilled in the operation and management of museums (as is perhaps confirmed by the pattern of control of other regional museums in this country) but neither should they be excluded from the management structure.

Further, Sir Hugh argues that there needs to be a balance between two components:

Operational: A board and system of administration which is solely focused on maintaining the viability of the organisation (especially financially) and delivering the environment with which the specialists (artists, writers, researchers etc) can achieve their highest and best results.

Creative: Headed by a leader with authority in all the areas which are the objectives of the organisation, these are the people for whom the entity exists

Laura Vodanovich, Director MTG Hawke’s Bay, has worked in independent as well as in council-controlled Museum environments. An insightful general comment from Laura was that the governance/management/operations models all have their pros and cons but with positive intent by those involved, all can work well.

Our discussions with Frith Williams and Zara Stanhope (Directors Puke Ariki/Govett Brewster, New Plymouth), Susanna Shadbolt (Director, Te Manawa, Palmerston North), Paeora Tibble (Chair, Tairāwhiti Museum, Gisborne), Director - Ashburton Museum reinforced this view that a diversity of governance and operational models will all have issues to be navigated but these can be managed with good relations between the Museum and local Councils. It is also evident that the bicameral model at the Whanganui Regional Museum is unique amongst the Museums we contacted.

5.5 Ngā whakaaro me ngā tūtohutanga - Our thinking and recommendations

5.5.1 Ngā take nui - High level Issues

Firstly, notwithstanding where negotiations with the WDC re the operational management of the Museum ends up, in our view there remains a clear need for strong governance for the oversight of the Museum Collection which will remain under the care of the Whanganui Regional Museum Trust. The collection is likely to be valued at approaching \$80M and described as, perhaps, the most significant regional museum collection in New Zealand. The collection includes significant Taonga with deep meaning to the diverse communities of the wider Whanganui Region.

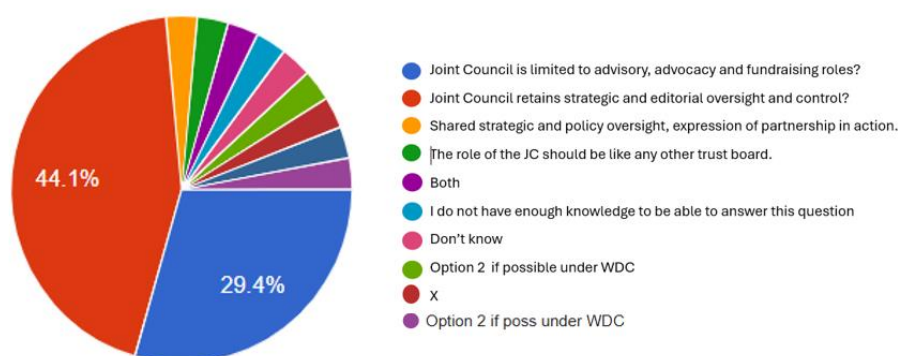
Recommendation 1: That the governing body, currently described as the Joint Council (JC), retains responsibilities for strategy, policy, risk, performance and editorial oversight of the Museum and the Collection.

By comparison, the Sarjeant Gallery is fully owned by the Whanganui District Council (WDC). This includes ownership of its collection. In the case of the Sarjeant, the governing body's responsibilities are largely advisory, advocacy and fund raising. Thus, the Sarjeant governance model is not a good comparator for the Whanganui Regional Museum.

This recommendation has been well supported in the feedback from the Consultations and Questionnaire to date:

6. In any change to the WRMT constitution how do you see the role of the Joint Council?

34 responses



Secondly, the Museum governance model under the current constitution is a unique bicameral model under the core constitutional “*principles of partnership and two cultures development arising from the Treaty of Waitangi*” (Clause 4 of the Constitution). This is “*interpreted in the manner of the Mihinare model of governance*” (Clause 5(a) of the Constitution). In practice this involves half of the members of the Joint Council being appointed by the Tikanga Māori House and half by the Civic House – representing the autonomous tribal collectives of the wider Whanganui region defined in the Trust Constitution and the civic stakeholders respectively. The Constitution does not allow for any changes to Clause 4 of the constitution but doesn’t prohibit changes to Clause 5 (a).

Notwithstanding the frustrations and performance issues with the current operation of the bicameral or two houses model in the Whanganui Museum outlined earlier, our view is that the issues that led to the formation of this model remain. These include ensuring equal Māori involvement in the governance of the Museum and thus kaitiaki of the taonga housed in the Museum. To move away from this model would risk significant push back from the Museum’s major stakeholders. This was supported across all stakeholder groups but particularly in the Iwi hui. We also see wider benefits in retaining a unique model which emphasizes the “*principles of partnership and two cultures development arising from the Treaty of Waitangi*.” as described in the current constitution and which builds on the Whanganui Museum history.

Recommendation 2: That the bicameral, or two houses, model is retained but changes are made to address performance issues and make it work better as well as give greater confidence to our

major stakeholders and the Whanganui District Council that the Museum governance is fit for purpose.

Thirdly, names matter. The current Museum Constitution defines the term Joint Council as meaning “*the Museum’s governing body (board of Trustees)*”. In practice, the term Joint Council can be confusing to many and may diminish Trustees’ understanding of their primary role in governance. We also feel there is complexity, and possibly confusion caused, by the various terms used to describe the two houses under the constitution. We feel these can be simplified, aligned and be made more descriptive of their functions.

Recommendation 3: That the governing body of the Museum should be referred to as the Board of Trustees (which may be shortened to the Board or Trust Board and the members as Trustees). That Tikanga Māori House Board be renamed Tikanga Māori House Representatives; that Civic House Electoral College be renamed Civic House Representatives; that the two Tikanga House Groups be renamed Tikanga Māori House Trustees and Civic House Trustees.

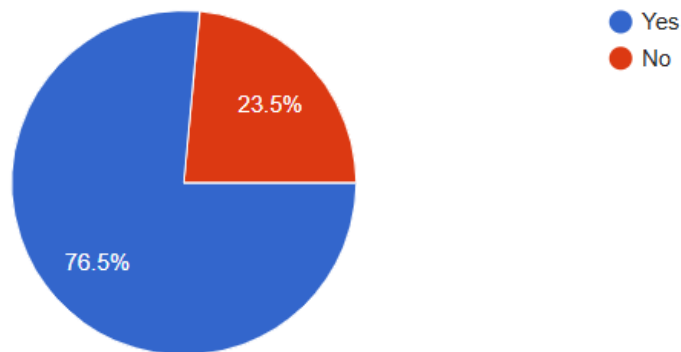
5.5.2 Ngā panoni whakapiki - Proposed Changes to enhance performance

5.5.2.1 One of the persistent problems affecting the Trust Board in recent times derives from its number of members. At 12, with 6 appointed by each house, it has proved demanding to recruit sufficient suitable appointees. In addition, the quorum for the Board meetings is set as 3 from each house or 6 in total. This has contributed to ongoing problems achieving quorums at Board meetings and thus the ability to legitimately carry out its role. An additional issue with such a large group of members is the reduced individual accountability for governance responsibilities (i.e. can leave it to the others). Such a large governance group is not currently best practice where governance boards are typically much less than 12.

The Review Panel initially proposed halving the number of trustees from each house to 3 (6 in total). However, feedback from the various hui suggested this was generating concern that the level of cultural experience on the Board would be diminished. As a result of this feedback, we have adjusted our recommendation to 4 trustees to be appointed from each house with the quorum set at two members from each house. The suggestion to reduce the size of the Board to increase its effectiveness was well supported in feedback through the consultations and Questionnaire:

4. Should the size of the Joint Council members be reduced from 12 members to make it more efficient and effective?

34 responses



Recommendation 4 : That the membership of the Board of Trustees be reduced to four members from each house which would tighten up the focus and ease the pressure on finding new appointees. This reduction in total members would be accompanied by reducing the quorum to two members from each house to ease the pressure on achieving a quorum.

5.5.2.2 Overlapping with the issue of numbers above is the skills mix of the appointees and the clarification of their governance roles. For an effective governance board, there needs to be a mix of governance, cultural and stakeholder skills and experience. To support the board, it would be beneficial for ongoing training and monitoring of governance performance to assist its focus on its primary role. In addition, the Panel received feedback raising concern that the Board should retain a strong cultural oversight responsibility.

Recommendation 5: That a Board Skills Matrix is developed to guide the appointment of new members to Board vacancies as they arise and that there is an annual session on governance responsibilities, training and feedback on governance performance (see later Recommendation 10). The functions of the Board would be focused primarily on governance and management while ensuring it retains a strong cultural awareness.

5.5.2.3 There is a risk that the bicameral model creates a split rather than a Joint Council. We note from the discussion with Paora Tibble, Chair of the Tairāwhiti Museum Board, that their unicameral model works well as a unified governance body. It will be incumbent on the WRM Trustees to seek agreement in the first instance and act collaboratively in the best interests of the Museum. However, in those situations where this isn't achieved, the bicameral model provides a way forward that prevents one house dominating the other. Maintaining the two houses model while also ensuring an integrated

governance board could be managed by making changes to the voting rules to seek consensus first but allow for separate house voting when consensus is not achieved. This would maintain the bicameral nature of the model while ensuring an ability to make decisions in real time in the meeting and only referring out when absolutely required.

Recommendation 6: That the following voting model is adopted by the Board:

Initial Vote: All motions approved by consensus of all members present

Second vote: If consensus is not achieved in the first vote then the Trustees of each house present vote separately. Each house can decide by majority vote (with the House Chair able to cast a deciding vote). Approval by both houses is then required to carry the motion.

In addition – at any stage, a majority of either house can seek a pause on a motion to seek further advice before finalizing the motion. Such advice could be via referral to one of either the Tikanga Māori House Representatives or Civic House Representatives including any Trustee members or to any other duly constituted Committee or Subcommittee of the Board

Notes to recommendation 6 – we encourage the Board to actively seek to work collaboratively together in the Museum’s best interests with the need to seek house votes on issues a rarity rather than the norm. We also encourage the Board to explore the establishment of both standing subcommittees and ad hoc committees to assist their work.

5.5.3 Te whakatūnga o ngā mema Poari - Appointment of Trustees (Board members)

Trustees are currently appointed by either the Civic House Electoral College or the Tikanga Māori House Board. These bodies appear to be constructs of the Museum Constitution with no other purpose outside the Museum. Both groups have at times struggled to find suitable candidates to appoint as Trustees. While this may become easier if Trustee numbers are reduced, it is still an unusual model to establish discrete bodies with the primary purpose of appointing members of another body. There are also frustrations that the processes to make appointments are not fully transparent and have, especially in the case of Tikanga Māori House, drifted away from the representation model defined in the Constitution.

It is relevant that the number of Iwi in the wider Whanganui region covered by the Museum has almost doubled in number since the formation of the Trust. This makes it difficult to have an equally representative model for Tikanga Māori House membership (See later recommendation about moving to a skills-based Board rather than a representational one).

If there were existing bodies that could assist in the role of appointing Board of Trustee members, it may aid the Tikanga Māori House Board and Electoral College in their role and provide an extra level of transparency. There are examples elsewhere where “Friends of the Museum” groups are incorporated and fulfill the role of appointing Museum Board members. The Whanganui Museum Friends group is not currently incorporated but perhaps it could be in the future and asked to fulfill this role. Similarly, Te

Ranga Tupua is a group representing the collective iwi of the South Taranaki, Whanganui, Rangitikei and Ruapehu regions and could potentially play a role in the selection of Trustees process.

We heard from the Tupoho Iwi consultation meeting that the current process for appointment to Tikanga Māori House needs to be improved. The Museum Kaumatua, John Maihi, stressed that instead of members representing the different Iwi and Hapū, the appointees need to be appointed to represent all Māori or to present a Māori perspective.

Recommendation 7: That the Museum Constitution be modified to allow for the roles of the Civic House Electoral College/Civic House Representatives and the Tikanga Māori House Board/Tikanga Māori House Representatives to be transferred to suitable alternate bodies should either house decide it would be beneficial. Further, that the TMH Board approach the Te Ranga Tupua leadership to seek their assistance in this matter.

Note 1: it is recognized that a trusted and transparent process for recommending who to appoint to the WRMT Board would need to be developed. This expectation should apply to both Houses.

Note 2: The Tikanga Māori House Board (as currently named in the Constitution) has played an active role outside of the Trust Board via referral or standing orders where advice can be sought as required or mandated. It may be timely to review the Standing Orders / Constitution of the Tikanga Māori House Board (Tikanga Māori House Representatives) following changes to the WRM Constitution to ensure their role in supporting the Museum is clear. Similarly, the Civic House Electoral College (Civic House Representatives) could review its standing orders and its role in supporting the Museum.

5.5.4 Te hononga ki te Kaunihera ā-Rohe o Whanganui - Strengthening the engagement with the Whanganui District Council

An underlying issue facing the Museum is its distant relationship with its principal funder, the Whanganui District Council. One mechanism to strengthen the WDC's confidence and engagement with the Museum would be to add an extra member to the Board appointed by the WDC. This would bring the Board members to 9 in total and would add extra skills to the Board relevant to the major funder.

Recommendation 8: That the Whanganui District Council is invited to appoint a member of the Board of Trustees of the Museum.

Note: a diagram of the proposed governance structure, voting and recruitment models of the Museum Trust Board is provided in Appendix 2.

5.5.5 Te hononga ki te hunga whaipānga - Strengthening stakeholder engagement

The current model has seemingly assumed that the engagement with stakeholders would occur through the Civic House Electoral College and the Tikanga Māori House Board. This has not been the case in practice. As outlined in Sir Hugh Rennie's submission, prior to the current model in 2000 the Museum had a membership model and held an annual meeting of members open to the public at which it presented its annual report. The loss of this relationship has impacted participation, ownership and revenue to the

Museum. We also note that there has been very strong support for the idea of an Annual Stakeholders Meeting for the Museum in the consultation sessions and via the Questionnaire. In our view, it would strengthen the Museum's engagement with its stakeholders if such an annual meeting was reestablished.

Recommendation 9: That the Museum Board of Trustees establishes an Annual Stakeholders Meeting to present its Annual Report of the year past and Annual Plan for the year ahead and discuss issues of interest to stakeholders.

Note: In addition to this more formal event, we encourage the Museum Board and Director to establish an ongoing dialogue with its main stakeholders in their own places. We also heard in our consultations the desire for a closer operational engagement between Iwi and the Museum in relation to their taonga. While this is outside the scope of a governance review we encourage the Museum to see this as an opportunity to strengthen its connection with Iwi.

5.5.6 Te whakapakari i te mahi whakahaere - Strengthening Governance performance

Ultimately, improving governance performance will rely on the Trustees themselves. The Review Panel is encouraged to see that the current Trust Board is embarking on a Governance reset to put in place the strategy, risk, fundraising, policy review, and performance monitoring functions that have diminished in recent years as well as plans to reestablish Annual Report and Annual Business Plan processes. There will be a need to clarify the roles of the Board as it moves forward with an arrangement with the WDC but in any scenario there remains a need for the Board to establish sound governance practices.

Recommendation 10: in addition to the earlier recommendation 5, that the Board should hold an annual Governance training and performance session, they should also set the Governance Plan for the year ahead. Note- If the operational management of the Museum moves to the WDC, there will need to be a clear separation and definition of governance and management functions.

6. Ngā panonitanga ki te Ture Whakatū - Proposed Changes to the Constitution

The working group considered three broad options for updating the WRMT Constitution:

One option is to completely rewrite the Constitution to both modernize it (using a Charities Trust Template for reference) and simplify it with respect to the complexities created by the bicameral model (should the bicameral model be abandoned).

A second option, if the Board determines to transfer full operational and strategic control to the WDC, is to develop a new fit for purpose Constitution for what would be new governance arrangements.

The Review Panel does not support these two options, preferring a third option as outlined in recommendation 11.

Recommendation 11: The Review Panel recommends a third option which is to seek to future proof the Museum via targeted and enabling changes to the existing Constitution which gives the Board flexibility to govern the Museum into the future – enabling it to outsource operations to WDC, make improvements in the governance model and ensures compliance with current practice and law.

We note that this approach was well supported in the consultations.

We have developed a worked-up version of the original 2000/1 WRMT Constitution with any changes highlighted in yellow/green and blue. This document contains our suggestions for improvements to the Constitution. The WRMT Chair has subsequently sought a legal review from the Museum lawyer John Unsworth and his suggested edits are included as tracked changes (*Renamed WRMT Constitution at 28 Jan 2026 wJU edits*) (accompanying document). This is the first step before any changes can be made to the governance model or to allow the transfer of operations to the WDC, and its finalization should be progressed with urgency. A clean copy of the WRMT Constitution is provided with all changes accepted (*Proposed Revised WRMT Constitution March 2026*) (accompanying document).

Recommendation 12: That the Board finalizes changes to the Proposed Revised WRMT Constitution March 2026 and seeks further legal advice on the steps required to enact the new Constitution.

7. Te tukunga o te mahi whakahaere - Transfer of Operations

The issue of transferring operations of the Museum, including employment of staff, was a recommendation of the review of the Cost Effectiveness of the Whanganui Regional Museum commissioned by the Whanganui District Council under section 17a of the Local Government Act.

7.1 Ngā raru me ngā rongoā - What are the underlying problems and is the proposed remedy appropriate?

The s17a review essentially finds the Museum is operating cost effectively but is financially constrained – i.e. it doesn't have sufficient funds to operate at the level it feels is appropriate. This results in challenges in digitizing the collection, mounting internally generated exhibitions and supporting travelling exhibitions, supporting tikanga Māori processes relating to Māori taonga to the extent desired (and many other issues) - due to insufficient resources (funding and staffing).

The review also found that the governance body of the Museum has been underperforming as discussed earlier.

Thus, the underlying problems stem from both insufficient resources and underperforming governance or oversight of the Museum. We have already made recommendations relating to improving governance performance and will now focus on the operational model.

The s17a review considered a range of possible remedies and then recommended that the Whanganui District Council take over the running of the Museum, and that staff become WDC employees. The Panel is conscious that the Trust Board sees the underlying chronic funding constraints as the major issue facing the Museum and have provisionally agreed to the proposal to outsource operations and staff employment to the WDC.

Subsequent discussions between the WRM Trust Board and WDC Management have not clarified the real likely benefits further beyond generalization.

This is of concern to the Review Panel. Any restructuring of the magnitude envisaged here which impacts all staff roles will inevitably be disruptive over a considerable time period.

Recommendation 13: That the Trust Board seeks clarity on the benefits of any change process prior to committing to transferring the operations and staff to the WDC. These should include clarity around funding and resourcing of the Museum to enable best practice operation. The agreed benefits should be substantial and clearly greater than the costs of change proposed. We note that transferring operations and staff first and then working through the resourcing issues second would result in significantly weakening the Board's ability to influence the outcome and should be resisted.

In addition, we suggest it would be helpful for the Museum to prepare a draft Statement of Intent that outlines its strategic objectives and significant risk mitigations for the 10+ year period ahead and seek agreement from the WDC to adopt it within its long term plans. This would be via negotiation and would ensure the Museum and WDC are aligned on the future direction of the Museum regardless of the operational management arrangements. This will require two way dialogue with WDC to achieve alignment.

As discussed earlier in this report, the Panel is recommending changes to the Governance model to strengthen its performance. Given the potential risks of making both governance and operational changes at the same time, it may make sense to stagger the change process: address the governance and constitutional issues first to allow the changes to bed in. This would allow time to reestablish governance performance and develop a long-term strategic agreement with the WDC prior to actioning any changes in the operational management of the museum. We believe this would give more confidence the risks of multiple changes at the same time can be avoided.

Recommendation 14: That the Trust Board consider a phased approach as follows:

Phase one: Governance reform including streamlining the current structure, reviewing functions and ensuring the WRM Board is fit for purpose now and into the future.

Alter the current WRM Constitution to enable both the changes to the governance model and provide the Board with the ability to outsource the operational management to the WDC in the future.

Phase two: Once these changes are in place and there is good agreement with the WDC re the issues identified in Recommendation 13 then progress to the changes to the operational model.

7.2 Ngā tauira kē - Alternative Operational Models

There are three broad strategic and operational models for regional museums in New Zealand we have considered as relevant to the WRM situation. In general, these can be described as follows:

1. Fully independent Charitable Trust with funding primarily from the District Council

This is the existing model for WRM, and it has the advantages and disadvantages outlined in the s17a review.

2. Council-Run Museum Model

Example: Ashburton Museum (Ashburton Art Gallery and Heritage Centre)

Governance: Operated directly by the Ashburton District Council.

Advantages:

- **Stable Funding:** Supported through council budgets, ensuring consistent operational funding.
- **Public Accountability:** Decisions are subject to democratic oversight and transparency.
- **Access to Council Resources:** Utilizes council services such as HR, IT, legal, and facilities management.
- **Alignment with Civic Goals:** Integrated into broader community development, education, and tourism strategies.
- **Employment Stability:** Staff benefit from public sector employment protections and benefits.

Disadvantages:

- **Bureaucracy:** Decision-making may be slower due to council processes and approvals.
- **Limited Flexibility:** Less autonomy in programming, fundraising, and partnerships.
- **Political Influence:** Subject to changing political priorities and budget constraints.
- **Innovation Constraints:** May be less agile in adopting new technologies or experimental approaches.

3. Hybrid Governance Model

Examples: Te Manawa Museums Trust (Palmerston North), MGT Napier/Hastings

Governance: Collections are owned by a trust; operations are managed and funded by the local council.

Advantages:

- **Preservation of Collection Integrity:** Trust ownership ensures long-term stewardship and ethical management.
- **Public Funding Stability:** Council support provides consistent operational funding and infrastructure.

- **Strategic Flexibility:** Trusts can make collection-related decisions independently.
- **Community Accountability:** Museums remain publicly accessible and aligned with civic goals.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Trust structures allow for culturally appropriate management of taonga and adherence to tikanga Māori.

Disadvantages:

- **Governance Complexity:** Dual oversight can lead to blurred responsibilities and requires clear communication.
- **Operational Constraints:** Council processes may slow down programming or limit innovation.
- **Funding Dependencies:** Trusts may rely on council funding, creating vulnerability during budget cuts.
- **Strategic Misalignment:** Differences in priorities between trust and council can lead to tension.

In the Whanganui context, Option 2 (the Council run model) is similar to the Sarjeant Gallery which operates essentially as a department within Council. A key difference from the WRM is that the WDC owns not only the Sarjeant Gallery buildings but also the collection. Art Gallery collections are also different in kind to Museum collections (without the significance of kaitiaki and the relationship to the relevant iwi that that entails).

The s17a review noted that the WRM collection would be retained and managed by the trust and this is taken as a given.

Given these examples, we see four options the Board could consider for the Whanganui Regional Museum:

Option 1 Stay as an independent Charitable Trust, reinvigorate governance, establish greater stakeholder engagement and implement major fundraising initiatives. WDC funding and support remain as is. (Independent Model)

Option 2 Do all as in Option 1 and contract WDC to supply corporate services such as IT/HR/Finance/H&S/Audit/Facilities. Director and staff stay employed by the Museum/Trust (Corporate Services Model)

Option 3 Do all above plus establish a long-term agreement with WDC to outsource all operations of the Museum including employment of staff while the Trust retains ownership of the Collection and full oversight/strategic direction of its care and presentation. (Outsource Operations Model)

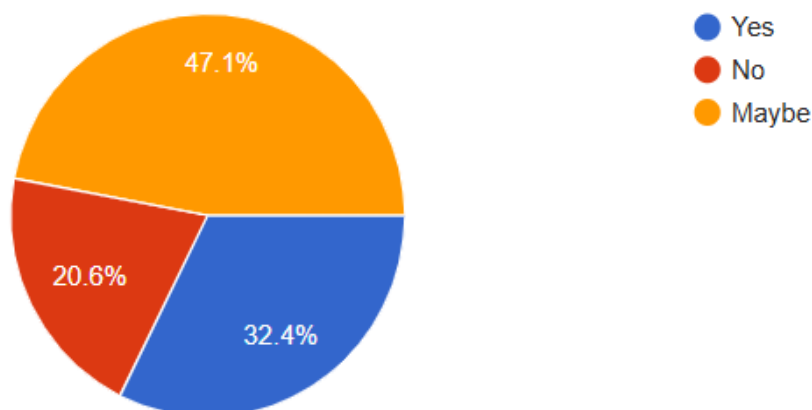
Option 4 As above but Trust Board relinquishes strategic oversight and becomes an advisory, advocacy and fundraising body only (similar to the Sarjeant model) (Handover Model)

The Panel ultimately sees this as a decision for the WRM Trust Board, and it will in part be determined by the agreement it is able to negotiate with the WDC. However, we provide the following observations and our suggested preferences.

Before we do so, it is worth noting that this was not seen as a straightforward matter by stakeholders in our consultations as can be seen in the Questionnaire results below.

5. Do you support transferring Museum staff employment and operations to Whanganui District Council?

34 responses



The high proportion of maybes were sending the message that there would need to be safe guardrails in any agreement with the WDC to ensure the collection is both well maintained and protected from political interference and that the staff are well supported. It is also notable that only 20% oppose transferring staff and operations to the WDC. So there is good support for finding a bespoke mechanism for any transfer to WDC.

From our discussions with staff at the Splash Centre and Whanganui & Partners, we are comfortable that the WDC has relevant experience in transferring organisations and staff into Council. That they take a careful and constructive approach in doing so and while there are always frustrations there are also upsides with more pluses than negatives.

From our discussions with Directors and Chairs from other regional Museums, we understand that there can be some inefficiencies with a hybrid model due to the dual reporting lines and being a small part of a larger organization. However, these are offset by the quality of corporate services, the ability to access high level expertise, the reliability of funding (including in crises such as Covid), access to staff training and being part of a wider institution with a bigger view. Nowhere did we hear concerns about political interference from the respective Councils. In MGT specifically, the issue of concern re separation of curatorial staff from the collection due to their employment by Council was not seen as material.

Given these observations, the Panel is comfortable in supporting a closer arrangement between the WRMT and WDC.

The Panel can see merit in Options 1, 2 and 3 but strongly opposes Option 4 (Handover).

Option 1 (Independent Model) has the appeal of maintaining the status quo with its perceived independence from political overreach. Lifting Governance performance, especially in fundraising would be a positive but in reality would not significantly address the chronic underfunding issues. It would thus still require agreement with the WDC on long-term funding of the Museum. It is a valid short term option if agreement on the operational model can't be reached with WDC.

Option 2 (Corporate Services Model) is clearly a viable option that would lessen the financial pressures on the Museum (assuming this doesn't result in budget cuts elsewhere) and provide the Museum with access to quality professional services and advice. We noted this support was appreciated by both the Managers in the Splash Centre and Whanganui and Partners as well as in other Museums such as MGT Napier and Te Manawa P Nth despite the general view that it added time burdens to their management workloads. It was also seen as a sensible next step by Hugh Rennie. On the downside – in itself, it doesn't address the chronic underfunding for the care and presentation of the Collection, it may not be acceptable to WDC and it may just be deferring the issue into the future.

Option 3 (Outsource Operations Model) is the option provisionally supported by the WRM Trust Board. It has the best prospects for being able to address the chronic under funding issues within the caveats previously defined by the Trust Board. If the Trust Board and WDC are able to reach agreement on a range of issues outlined here it would become the preferred option. Those issues include:

- Recognition of the ongoing ownership of the Museum collection by the Trust which thus requires ongoing governance and strategic oversight by the trust board.
- Acceptance of the revised WRMT Constitution as the primary governing document of the Museum
- Agreement of the long-term strategic plan (or Statement of Intent document) for the Museum and embedding it in the WDC 10 year planning process.
- Commitment to address the chronic underfunding of the Museum operations and its infrastructure deficits
- Commitment to address the material and operational risks described in the Museum Risk Management Framework
- Reaching a satisfactory agreement on all matters relevant to the outsourcing of the Museum Operations and employment of staff to the WDC. This should include:
 - How clearly roles and responsibilities are defined between the trust and council?
 - What mechanisms exist to resolve strategic differences between the WDC and the WRM JC?
 - How can both operational efficiency and cultural integrity be ensured?

Option 4 (Handover Model) is strongly opposed by the Review Panel as it would lead to the loss of effective oversight of the collection by the Trust.

While the Review Panel supports Option 3 in principle, it is heavily dependent on the agreement reached with WDC and the extent it addresses the matters defined above. If a satisfactory agreement is not reached at this time, then options 1 and 2 can be viewed as reasonable back-up options.

Recommendation 15: That the Trust Board seeks to negotiate a comprehensive bespoke agreement with the Whanganui District Council aligned with option 3 as outlined here but maintains options 1 and 2 as fallback positions if negotiations with WDC are not successful. The negotiations should include the following considerations:

- **Implications for Two Cultures Partnership Model**

An essential feature of the current governance model is the unique partnership of two cultures where the two Treaty partners develop together in parallel. There is no sense of how this would be affected should the operations of the Museum be transferred to the WDC. The Panel is aware of developments involving the WDC that are exploring fuller Kaupapa Māori frameworks and multi-stakeholder arrangements drawing on Te Awa Tupua and Te Kopuka models that could inform the relationship between WDC and the Museum Trust.

Recommendation 16: That the Principles of Governance as written in the WRM Trust Constitution are recognized and given effect in any agreement or transfer of operations to WDC. Further, that the WDC and WRMT explore relevant models of inclusive engagement that draw on Te Awa Tupua and Te Kopuka or similar.

- **Impact on Director Role**

The split of operations and strategic oversight between the WDC and the WRMT Board has the potential to be both complex and burdensome on the position of Director. It could result in effectively doubling the reporting workload for this role. This may make the role unattractive. It may be preferable to find a model where the Director reports to the WRMT Board for both operations and strategic oversight as is currently the case and the transfer of operations to the WDC is managed via an outsourcing agreement.

Recommendation 17: That the Trust Board and WDC explore a bespoke model for the operations of the Museum that maximizes the benefits while limiting the complexities and inefficiencies especially in regard to the role of Director. Clarification of the Director role and reporting lines will be essential to any future governance and management model.

- **Right Sizing the Museum**

A fundamental implied benefit of the proposal to transfer operations and staff employment to the WDC is it will enable the WDC to address the performance issues facing the Museum and better support it into the future. There has been little discussion as to how this would happen in practice nor what benefits might accrue. It would be prudent to have these issues clear before agreeing to make any significant changes. The major areas needing definition include 1. the staffing levels and operational funding required to achieve best practice standards for New Zealand regional museums, 2. the capital investment needed to upgrade the Museum infrastructure to ensure high quality environmental controls and storage or display of the collection also meets best practice standards

(the Sarjeant Gallery would provide a useful comparison for this) and 3. the working conditions for staff are brought to an acceptable standard.

Recommendation 18: That the WRMT and WDC commission an independent assessment of staffing requirements to achieve best practice as well as an independent assessment of the infrastructure remediations and investment needed to address the physical deficits in the Museum. Further, the terms of reference of these assessments are agreed prior to any decisions to transfer operations and staff employment to WDC and are included in any agreements between the parties.

7.3 Te tautoko mō ngā kaimahi - Ensuring staff support

The s17a review noted the Museum is well served by its staff. Museum staff are predominantly specialist roles and share a commitment to the Museum, its collection and its place within society. The prospect of change is likely to be unsettling to staff and it is critical they are supported through this process.

Recommendation 19: That the WRMT Board establish an open and ongoing dialogue with the Museum staff and keep them informed throughout the process. Once decisions on any transfer of operations and any change of employment is made, we recommend a bespoke process is developed to support them through any transition in collaboration with WDC.

7.4 Te whiwhi tautoko mai i te Kaunihera ā-Rohe o Whanganui (WDC) - Gaining the Support of the WDC

The WRM is perhaps the most significant Regional Museum in New Zealand with elements of its collection that are the equal of those in the main centres. It is a major cultural and heritage asset for Whanganui which forms part of a fantastic heritage cultural and arts precinct in Pukenui Queens Park. It is disappointing the Museum has not been seen as part of the “WDC family” and has missed out on support as a result. It is critical that the relationship between the WDC and WRM is strengthened through this process.

Recommendation 20: That the Trust Board engages positively with the WDC – both management and elected members – to develop a long-term collaboration agreement that supports the Museum thriving into the future for the benefit of the people of Whanganui and New Zealand.

8. Ngā mahi ka whai ake - Next steps

We also hear from our various consultations that stakeholders would like to know the final proposals emerging from this review process prior to implementation. We believe the Board should hold an open Stakeholders meeting in late March to present the emerging plans ahead and seek any final views before finalizing its decisions.

Recommendation 21: That the Board holds an open stakeholder meeting prior to finalising decisions to present the proposed changes to the Governance Model and Constitution and the proposed approach for the operational management of the Museum, in order to gain further stakeholder feedback to support its decision making.

A final comment: making all the changes we recommend here will likely help the Museum “future proof” itself. However, real improvement will only occur if all the parties involved work collectively and in good faith to raise the standard of support and care for the Museum

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

Footnote: The Panel was conscious of the questions the Trust Board was seeking guidance on in its document “Future Proofing our Museum” (3). These are listed in Appendix 1 along with a brief comment on how each question has been addressed.

Ngā Tohutoro - References

1. Whanganui Regional Museum Trust Constitution, 2000
2. A Report on the Cost Effectiveness of the Whanganui Regional Museum, 8 August 2024
3. Terms of Reference: Future Proofing our Museum, July 2025

Accompanying documents include the marked up and clean versions of the revised Whanganui Regional Museum Constitution 2026 plus a list of the Recommendations.

Tāpiritanga 1- Appendix 1 Ngā pātai - Questions from the Review Terms of Reference

Q1: Are all these potential benefits appropriate and would their achievement result in material and sustainable improvement in the performance of the Museum?

The proposed benefits are not well defined at present but are potentially worthwhile

Q2: Are there any obvious or important issues that are not captured in the potential benefits outlined here?

Our report outlines our view of the important issues to consider

Q3: Should the Trust transfer staff from the Museum to the WDC?

This is a decision for the WRMT Board to make. Our report indicates our preferences for the different options including transferring staff to WDC

Q4: If employment transfers to the WDC what protections should the Trust put in place in any agreement with WDC to ensure the collection is protected and well managed and the Trust Constitution followed to ensure it is able to fulfil its Charitable Purposes?

These have been well spelt out in the report and recommendations.

Q5: If employment transfers to the WDC what amendments to the Constitution are required?

We have provided a draft Constitution that proposes amendments that enable the Trust Board to outsource operations and transfer staff to the WDC.

Q6: What would be suitable arrangements for the relationship between the Museum Director and the JC should the position be transferred to the WDC to ensure the JC has sufficient influence and oversight of the operation of the Museum?

We have provided advice on this matter in the report.

Q7: What provisions should be included in any agreement between the JC and WDC to ensure the Museum remains free to independently manage and display its collections?

We have provided advice on this matter in the report.

Q8: What would be best practice financial management and reporting arrangements for the Museum to ensure it retains its Charitable Trust status?

This issue is not explicitly covered in our report and the Trust Board may wish to seek expert advice on this matter from a qualified accountant.

Q9: What steps could the Trust take to grow non-Council revenue for the Museum over time?

The Panel has recommended the Trust Board establishes a Funding Committee for this purpose.

Q10: What mechanisms or arrangements could be employed to ensure alignment between the JC and WDC on the strategic development of the Museum?

The Panel has recommended the WRMT Board agrees a long term Statement of Intent for the Museum and seeks for it to be embedded in the WDC long term plans.

Q11: What is the best way for the Joint Council to add value to the museum?

The role of the Trust Board remains critical to ensuring the Museum collection is cared for and celebrated over time in ways we would not be confident can be achieved in its absence.

Q12: What improvements to the Trust constitution should be made to reflect best practice governance?

There are a number of recommendations addressing this issue in our report.

Q13: What improvements to the Trust constitution should be made to reflect best practice in the museums sector?

We don't think there is one right model for Museums and believe the issues preventing achievement of best practice currently are primarily funding related.

Q14: What updates, if any, need to be made to the constitution to reflect amendments to the Charities Act?

The revised Constitution we have provide has included a legal review and we believe is consistent with the current Act.

Q15: What is the ideal size of the Joint Council? (6, 8, 10, or 12 members?)

We thought 7 but have been persuaded to lift that to 9.

Q16: What criteria should the Tikanga Maori House and the Civic House Electoral College employ when selecting members of the JC?

We have recommended a suitable Board skills matrix be developed for this purpose.

Q17: If the JC was to become a smaller group primarily selected for relevant governance expertise what mechanisms could be employed to ensure ongoing engagement with the relevant stakeholder groups (eg an annual stakeholders meeting)?

We see the two Representatives Groups playing an important role here but also recommend an annual stakeholders meeting as suggested.

Q18: What should the minimum quorum be from each House? (eg 1, or 50% of members?)

We are recommending 2

Q19: If the quorum for each House is lowered, should an additional protection be put in place to enable any Joint Council member to defer an agenda item if it affects the Museum's taonga and a relevant Joint Council member was not able to join the meeting for good reason?

We have allowed for either Trustees group to seek a hold on any motion and referral for further advice.

Q20: What are appropriate governance review and constitutional amendment requirements to enable future constitutional amendments and reviews to be undertaken at lower cost?

We have included a clause in the revised Constitution to give the Trust Board the option to develop a fit for purpose review in the future to avoid the need for the currently prescribed process.

Tāpiritanga 2 Appendix 2 Ngā hoahoa whakahaere - Proposed governance diagrams

