Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport

PROACTIVE RELEASE COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Simon Watts	**Portfolio**	Local Government
Name of package	Local Government System Improvements – proactive release of standing orders decisions	**Date to be published**	1 October 2026

List of documents that have been proactively released		
Date	***Title***	***Author***
19 March 2026	Next steps for standing orders	Department of Internal Affairs

Information redacted **YES**

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Summary of reasons for redaction

Some information has been withheld from the above documents under the following sections of the Official Information Act 1982:

- Section (9)(2)(a) – information withheld to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased natural persons.
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Priority Routine

Internal Affairs
Te Tari Taiwhenua

Local Government briefing

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government

Title: **Next steps for standing orders**

Date: 19 March 2026

Key issues
Standards New Zealand is finalising the update to the standard NZS 9202, *Model Standing Orders for Meetings of Local Authorities and Community Boards*. The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill creates a power for the Secretary for Local Government to issue a standard code of conduct and standing orders. We have previously indicated this could take place in the second quarter of 2026. While councils are generally supportive of a standard code of conduct, they are not similarly in favour of standardised standing orders, and have repeatedly expressed concerns about costs and the flexibility of the standard to take different council circumstances into account. There is an option to not make mandatory the new standing orders at this time. In this situation the new standard NZS 9202 could instead be published as a best practice guidance resource for councils to use.

Recommendations	Timeframe
Agree to the publication of the model standing orders standard, but not to make them mandatory at this time while monitoring of their uptake takes place.	By 27 March 2026

Contact for telephone discussions (if required)

Name	Position	Contact Number	Suggested 1st contact
Rowan Burns	Policy Manager	9(2)(a)	✓
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Return electronic document to:	Lisa Mackay, 9(2)(a)
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Classification Removed

Purpose

1. The process to update the standing orders standard is almost complete. This briefing provides advice on the publication of the standard and options for issuing it.

Background

2. The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill (LGSI Bill) creates the power for the Secretary for Local Government to issue a standardised code of conduct and standing orders which will be mandatory for councils to follow. Councils will not be able to make changes to the standardised documents.
3. Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) had previously taken responsibility for developing a template for councils and supporting guidance around implementation for both the code of conduct and standing orders
4. The Department of Internal Affairs entered into a contract with Standards New Zealand (StandardsNZ) to update the current standard, NZS 9202, in May 2025. This is the first update to the standard since 2006.
5. Commissioning StandardsNZ was chosen due to insufficient internal resource to develop an updated template standing orders in the timeframe available. The Department and sector had worked with StandardsNZ on updates to NZS 9202 previously.

Transparency and accountability in the LGSI Bill

6. We were directed by the previous Minister of Local Government to include provisions for a standardised code of conduct and standing orders in the LGSI Bill. These provisions are intended to provide greater consistency and certainty for councils across governance documents.
7. The Department considers that the case for standardising the standing orders is not as strong as it was for code of conduct. While there have been isolated examples of issues with the standing orders, they were primarily issues with interpretation, rather than a problem with the standing orders themselves.

Councils are concerned about the cost and flexibility of the standard

8. Councils have raised concerns several times about standardised standing orders, including through submissions to the Governance and Administration Committee, Taituarā industry group meetings with Departmental officials, and by Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) writing to the Secretary for Local Government.

Cost of accessing standard

9. The StandardsNZ model relies on users purchasing copies of standards to access them. This would require councils to pay to access the standard. While around one third of councils have an online library subscription and would be able to access the standard at no additional cost, the majority do not.
10. The price to access the current standard is $106.31 to purchase a non-transferable electronic copy. This copy cannot be transferred between users under copyright.

Councils are likely to need to purchase a number of copies to stay compliant with copyright law.

11. While it is unlikely to have a significant impact on council finances, it still represents an extra cost to councils who are already facing increased costs and financial stressors.

12. This model also makes it harder for the public to access the standing orders as councils would not be able to publish the standard on their websites for copyright reasons. Members of the public would have to purchase the standard directly from StandardsNZ.

Flexibility of standard

13. LGNZ has expressed concerns that the standard does not provide sufficient flexibility to cover local differences between councils, which is compounded by the inability for councils to make amendments.

14. The updated standard provides different options that councils can choose from for some meeting decisions, e.g., voting system for the elections of deputy mayors and committee chairs, if applicable; options for moving and seconding amendments during debate; and options for whether the mayor or chair has a casting vote in case of a tied vote. However, it provides more constraints than the current requirements in the Local Government Act 2002.

15. The standard may be impacted by other changes underway in the local government area, such as the Simplifying Local Government initiative. As councils will not be able to make changes to the standing orders in response to these changes, this risks the standard becoming out of date reasonably quickly, without an easy way to update it.

16. Updating the standard through the StandardsNZ process incurs costs and takes time. The review that has just been completed took around 10 months at a cost of 9(2)(b)(ii) (excluding GST), but due to almost 20 years passing since NZS 9202 had last been updated, a substantial update was required. If the standard were to be updated regularly, the costs and time it would take would likely be lower.

Sponsorship

17. The Department is considering sponsoring a limited number of copies to be available for download on the StandardsNZ website. However, there is no way to limit access to these copies and council members and staff may not be able to access them if the sponsored copies are used up quickly.

Changes underway to LGSI Bill allow for alternate options

18. The LGSI Bill replaces the current requirement for councils to develop their own code of conduct and standing orders with standardised versions of these documents which are to be issued by the Secretary for Local Government.

19. As you are aware, we are preparing an Amendment Paper to the LGSI Bill to allow councils to make updates to their current codes of conduct and standing orders until the standardised documents are issued. The Amendment Paper does this through delaying the commencement date of the provisions relating to the standardised code and standing orders until an Order in Council is made.

20. This approach provides a longer runway for issuing the standard code of conduct. In this scenario the updated standard NZS 9202 could still be published now as a good practice resource that councils could choose to purchase, but not as a mandatory document issued by the Secretary for Local Government that councils must follow.

21. If this approach is chosen, then because it is not mandatory, less councils will want to access the standard. This reduces the risk of councils struggling to access the standard and of central government being seen to create costs for councils.

22. The option to issue standardised standing orders at a later date would remain, as it is provided for in the LGSI Bill.

23. If you choose to continue with the original approach and timeline for the updated standard as the mandatory standing orders, the Department will proceed with sponsorship of the standard and work with StandardsNZ on a shared communications approach.

Recommendations

24. We recommend that you **agree** to the publication of the model standing orders standard, but not to make them mandatory at this time while monitoring of their uptake takes place.

Agree/Disagree/Discuss

Rowan Burns
Policy Manager

Hon Simon Watts
Minister of Local Government
22 / 3 / 2026.