

WHAT IS DRIVING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

January 2023

With local body elections over, this quarter started with a lull in social media chatter.

Prior to the weather events, the most popular story over this quarter was the decision by Kaipara Mayor Craig Jepson to ban karakia at council meetings. This was met with a distinct backlash from the local community and in many online spaces.

Comments made by new Auckland Mayor, Wayne Brown, on the future of the city's assets caused a distinct spike in discussion levels. This was followed up by concern around reports of upsetting comments in the workplace.

The most significant event of this quarter was the Auckland floods, coming right at the end of our reporting period. Initial conversation has been dominated by a backlash against the way the mayor and council handled the disaster. We will keep an eye on this for the April report.

January's survey took place before the weather event. The results provide a more positive outlook than we have seen in the last two quarters of the survey. Perceptions of satisfaction in the key areas are back up to the levels seen in April last year.

The information presented here provides a holistic view of public perceptions by combining data from a nationally representative sample of New Zealanders with social media trend analysis.

If you would like to unpack this more, get in touch with Liz Morley liz@researchfirst.co.nz



-46%

Discussion levels relating to local government have risen compared with the previous quarter

Discussion relating to local government.

Wellington: A story by Andrea Vance on Stuff accusing the Wellington City Council's Tik Tok page of being "everything that is wrong with local democracy" caused a debate about the role of social media in local government.

Auckland: The floods and the mayor. Many have been critical of the disaster response. The timeline of the response was of particular interest, as most seemed to think the state of emergency had been declared too late.

Canterbury: Christchurch City Council Chief Executive Dawn Baxendale's \$16,000 pay rise was the most interacted with story of the quarter. Rates remain a frequent topic of conversation.

Otago: Emissions pricing and other environmental regulations were the most discussed topics. Views were polarised.

Northland: Higher discussion levels than usual. Backlash against the decision of Kaipara Mayor Craig Jepson to ban karakia at council meetings led to a 300-strong hīkoi.

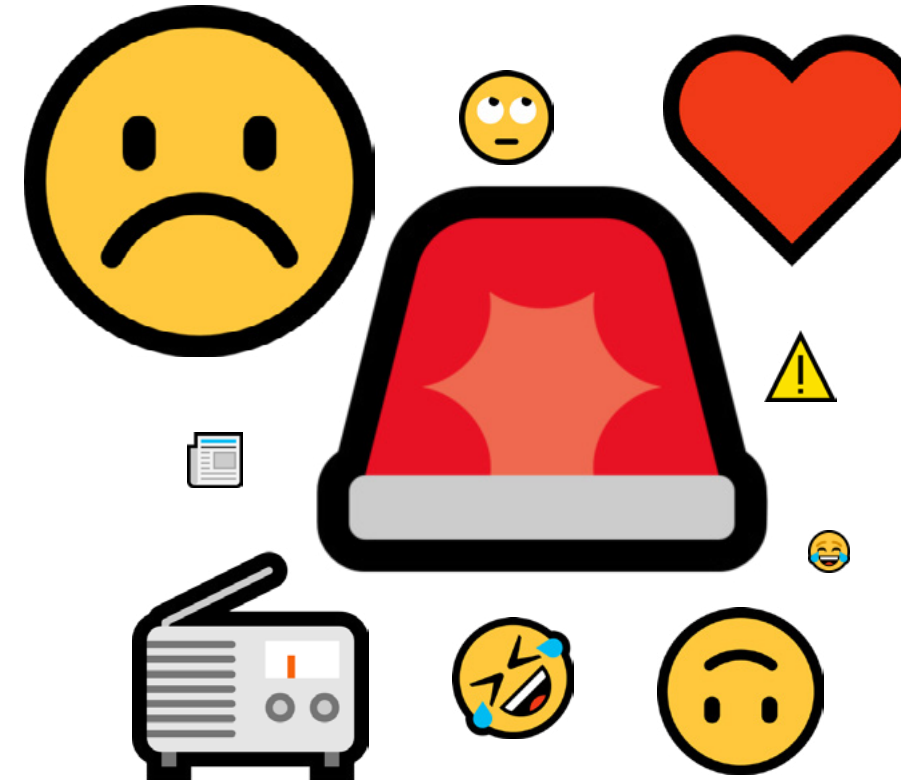
We also asked residents whether they think their councils are **getting better or worse** in these areas. The results are more positive than we have seen so far. Perceptions of value for money are still a risk area but the impact of rate rises being confirmed appears to have dropped off.

Proportion who think these services have got worse over the last year	Aug-21	Dec-21	Apr-22	Jul-22	Oct-22	Jan-23
Information on decisions that affect your area	20%	23%	21%	27%	30%	13%
Opportunities to have my say	20%	23%	22%	26%	37%	12%
Value for money	35%	41%	37%	46%	46%	34%
Overall satisfaction	27%	29%	29%	38%	35%	19%

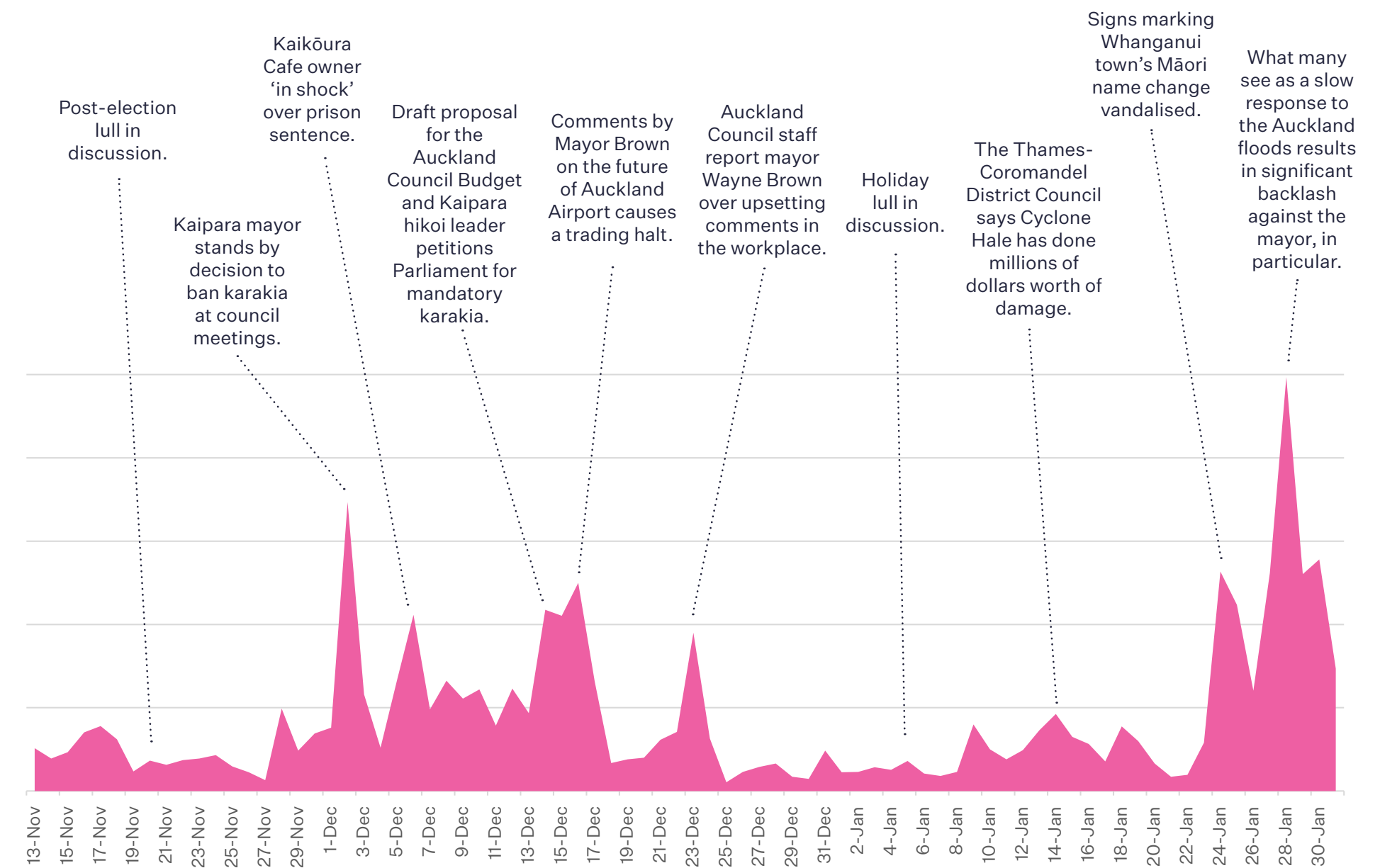
Top trending emojis and keywords

The top trending emojis for this quarter swung at the end of the reporting period to reflect the Auckland floods. The emergency alarm, a sad face and a number of laughing emojis, representing the disaster and the way people perceived the response.

Keywords really focused on Mayor Brown in relation to the flood response and comments on the future of Auckland Airport. Brown has been widely criticised.



Discussion levels by location: weighted for population



Improvement areas: Engagement, Comms and VFM

Perceptions of engagement, communication and value for money are the common key drivers of overall negative perceptions resident feedback surveys.

The more positive perceptions recorded outside of Auckland in April are back. Auckland's downward trend could also be over; results were much more positive this quarter. Surveys were completed before the floods though, so the April results will be interesting.

