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## “What Does It Take To Get A Response From Your Council?”

*Confused staff, insulting CEOs, and two thirds of Councils potentially breaking the law... welcome to local government in New Zealand*

A report released today by Council Watch highlights a lack of knowledge of the law amongst many local body Chief Executive Officers in New Zealand.

The research, which set out to measure the compliance of local authorities with the Local Government Act 2002, turned up serious issues in the way Councils deal with official information requests.

According to the report two thirds of Councils could not or would not provide a copy of their Standing Orders when requested, within the timeframe allowed by the law.

Jim Candiliotis, the group’s Local Democracy Advisor, says the result is shocking – but not surprising. “Councils around the country seem to be struggling to engage with their constituents,” says Mr Candiliotis, “Voting turnout is down, people are less involved in local government affairs, and it is not surprising considering how hard it is to deal with a Council.”

Candiliotis highlights one instance where a CEO emailed a colleague and said he had “no time for groups like these”.

“Who does this person think he is? He has to have time for groups like us... we’re out there being the enemy of apathy!

“Communities are seen as an unpleasant by-product of being in power by some Councils,” says Candiliotis, “Sometimes they feel less like ratepayers and more like toxic waste.”

Council Watch has been in touch with the Office of the Ombudsmen about some of the obstructive behaviour and will be writing this week to the Auditor General and Minister of Local Government.

They are also calling for an investigation by the Minister of Commerce into the behaviour of Standards New Zealand, who hold copyright on a set of Model Standing Orders adopted by some Councils.

“We have been told by some Council staff that Standards New Zealand – a government agency – said they would be breaching copyright if they released their Standing Orders. For one part of the government to force another to withhold official information without legal cause is disturbing,” says Candiliotis.

The research – which is available online at [www.councilwatch.org.nz](http://www.councilwatch.org.nz) – shows a need for Councils to train their staff better in dealing with information requests and in the understanding of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

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### About Council Watch

Council Watch is an initiative started by the New Zealand Resilience Trust with the aim of improving community outcomes across the country. The NZRT believes that strong communities come from improving leadership, developing networks and improving the standard of democracy at a local level. The only agenda is to improve the relationship between citizens and the local government sector. Council Watch’s role is to support residents’ groups, educate the wider public on their rights and responsibilities, and provide unbiased research on the state of the local government sector in New Zealand.

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