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Council leaves Local Government NZ, Mayor Brown says partying not helping ratepayers

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Mayor Brown said he and his band once played a gig for an LGNZ conference and he was not impressed with what he saw - claiming members were "completely pissed, all night long." Photo credit: Newshub

By Finn Backwell for RNZ

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Auckland Council has voted to leave Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ).

The votes were tied at 10-all before Mayor Wayne Brown used his casting vote in favour of leaving.

In favour of leaving were Mike Lee, Daniel Newman, Greg Sayers, Desley Simpson, Sharon Stewart, Ken Turner, Wayne Walker, Maurice Williamson, John Watson and Mayor Brown.

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Voting to remain part of LGNZ were Andy Baker, Josephine Bartley, Angela Dalton, Chris Darby, Julie Fairey, Alf Filipina, Loti Fuli, Shane Henderson, Richard Hills and Kerrin Leoni.

Arguments over the pros and cons for staying or leaving went back and forth for about an hour before the vote.

The mayor said he did not see much benefit to being part of LGNZ.

Brown said he and his band once played a gig for an LGNZ conference and he was not impressed with what he saw - claiming members were "completely pissed, all night long" with no benefit to ratepayers.

He viewed leaving as an easy cut, saying it gave Local Government Minister Kieran McNulty too much power over the council.

"It makes it really easy for [the minister] to dispense with consultation, by going to a meeting of mayors in Wellington and making a one-hour speech," he said.

Other councillors were concerned with the impact a move like that would have on the supercity's image.

Councillor Andy Baker believed the council was not up to the challenge of focusing more on its rural sector.

"The opportunities for us to actually learn how to do rural is given to us by LGNZ," he said. "We do not do rural well."

A main theme of councillors' arguments to stay was a desire not to cut Auckland off, with some urging their colleagues not to turn their backs on the rest of the country.

Chris Darby, who voted to stay, said the move was cold-hearted and contributing knowledge to other territorial authorities was important.

Wayne Walker said it made sense to get out. Local government was nothing but a hindrance when it came to addressing the important issues council faced, such as climate change, he said.

He said the council should take a more international approach, looking to cities like Seoul for guidance.

The supercity council is currently facing a budget hole of nearly \$300 million.

What's LGNZ?

LGNZ is a representative group for local government across Aotearoa and provides advocacy and support for local councils.

As a non-partisan collective it also provides a connection between central and local government, professional development, networking and events, and consultancy.

It has been around since 1988 and its strategy is to "be local democracy's vision and voice".

Policies are set and guided by the national council, made up of members of local government.