

# CONCERNED RATEPAYERS KAPITI: CANDIDATE QUESTIONEER 2025

## Affordability and Financial Management

### 1 Projected Rates Increases

The Long-Term Plan (LTP) 2024-2034 outlines average rates increases totalling 115% over 10 years.

If elected would you support these planned increases?

**No- I do not support these planned increases.**

Projected rates increases of over 115% per annum, on average, through the Long Term Plan are unaffordable. Rates can be capped at 3% per annum, on average, if we implement cost neutral budgeting along with revising the LTP so that we identify and cut unnecessary spending.

### 2 Council Staffing Costs

Between June 2022 and June 2025, the Kapiti Coast District Council's (KCDC's) total staffing costs are projected to increase by 50%. This includes a 15% increase in staff numbers (FTEs) and at least a 24% rise in average cost per FTE.

Do you consider this level of increase acceptable and if not how would you address it if elected?

**No- this level of increase is unacceptable**

- I understand that not only have overall staffing numbers increased, but so too have the salaries paid. So, our rates are paying for more people at higher rates.
- This is one example of uncontrolled council spending. Instead of applying cost neutral budgeting across staffing, council has continued to increase its staffing, rather than considering what it should prioritise in its work programme in order to keep costs under control.
- A LGOIMA response dated 21 March this year detailed an overall increase in personnel costs of over \$12 million (\$12,496,000) between 2021/22 and 2024/25 (REF: OIR2425/1285).

### 3 Economic Development Spending

The LTP plans to spend an average of \$3.1m per year on “economic development” over the next decade, mostly funded by residential rates.

Would you support this level of spending?

**No- this level of increase is unacceptable.**

- I support economic growth for the Kapiti District. We want people to come here, to live here, to enjoy the vibe we have to offer and to do that, we need business and economic growth. The role of Council is to make sure that entrepreneurial activities can be supported effectively and efficiently through its regulatory functions.
- The current economic development strategy goes beyond the reach of the Council. We have questions about many of the activities the strategy is focused on.
- **We will continue to provide funding for major events** in our district. These events are the life-blood of our community- they make us what we are. Examples: Kapiti Food Fair, Māori Land Film Festival.

### 4 Toi Mahara Gallery Funding

Funding to the Toi Mahara Gallery increased from \$218,600 in 2022/23 to \$671,300 in 2025/26- a 207% rise.

Would you support this level of funding continuing over the next three years?

**No.** The Gallery's annual report identifies that its operating costs rose in the last financial year from \$436,472 to \$784,813 due largely to increased staffing costs.

- A new partnership agreement separates out ongoing cost responsibilities with the Toi Mahara Trust looking after exhibitions, educational and public outreach programmes. The Council is responsible for the building and equipment maintenance, energy costs, cleaning and security. The partnership agreement seeks to build an operating model that is 'effective, resilient and sustainable' (LGOIMA, REF 2425-1275).
- Sustainability takes more than increasing the level of grant funding year on year from Council. The Toi Mahara Gallery has potential to attract more user pays income to supplement operating and staffing costs.

## 5 **Debt Reduction and Rates Burden**

KCDC plans to reduce its debt from a peak of \$345m in 2030 to \$262m by 2034, largely funded through higher rates.

Do you support this debt reduction strategy?

**No.** The current debt reduction strategy is a key lever in the cumulative 115% rates increase. KCDC tells us that we need to reduce debt to pay for 'unplanned shock events' and 'to respond to growth and/or enrichment opportunities across our district' (Financial Strategy 2024, page 12).

In reality we are paying back debt at an aggressive rate. Council talks about intergenerational equity- achieved 'when ratepayers pay their share and only their fair share of the costs of the assets' they use today. Council also states that by paying more now, it will reduce the debt burden on future ratepayers. This means that ratepayers now are paying more than they should right now. This is not equity for the generations paying rates right now.

Of arguably more importance to Council is the rising costs of our capital works programme (see below) and the impact that has on interest and depreciation costs. Repaying current debt will only have limited impact over time if we do not reduce overall operating costs.

## 6 **Capital Expenditure Programme**

The LTP proposes \$799 million in capital spending over 10 years – about a third of the Council's current fixed asset value – putting considerable upward pressure on rates, especially through increased depreciation costs.

If elected, how would you prioritise infrastructure spending to balance affordability and essential services?

We will get under the hood of the capital works programme to determine what's really required by when. It's a bit opaque to us right now. We want to understand:

- *When existing assets need to be replaced.* Costs should be funded from depreciation but we note Council has not been fully funding depreciation through rates and won't start this until 2025/26.
- *Additional needs to meet population growth estimates*
- *Where levels of service should be improved- e.g. storm water, flood protection*
- *Different requirements of new legislation e.g. quality of water under LWDW*

## 7 **Rates Cap proposal**

The Government is exploring the possibility of capping local authority rate increases

Do you support the idea of capping rate increases.

**Yes**, but with some provisos. Ratepayers nationally are seeking a reality check from their councils. KCDC is right up there in this regard. But it needs to be nuanced. Some Councils have more infrastructure work to do than others. A nominal, nationally imposed figure may not support the amount of essential work that needs to be done in some districts.

We will cap future rate rises in Kapiti to no more than 3% per annum, on average. We have done our homework to arrive at that figure based on what we have gleaned from information in Annual Reports and LGOIMA processes.

We know it won't be easy to keep rates affordable but we will communicate and make the hard choices needed to stay on track.

## Transparency

### 8. Public Engagement

Do you believe KCDC currently engages well with the community on key plans like the LTP?

- If not: What would you do differently?

**No.** Consultation starts too late- well after options have been explored by staff and either agreed and presented to Council or discounted. Discounted options have little or no explanation about why they were discounted.

Once Council has endorsed what the staff recommend, it seems that consultation documents are prepared with little or no detail- they communicate general information only. If more detail is asked for, staff have said that the information is too complex or you can find a detailed report on line. That suggests that the background work has not been done in a way that makes information easily accessible to those who are being consulted.

Consultation processes use 'drops-ins' - usually one to one discussions with staff, often during work hours. On-line surveys are constructed with limited space for actual feedback.

We will invite community participation before options are drafted. We will provide clear and comprehensive analysis of the options. We'll provide for open forums where groups can come together to discuss ideas at times that suit a wide range of participants.

### 9. Flood Mapping Consultation

Are you satisfied with the Council's recent consultation process on the revised flood hazard maps?

- If not: What should have been done differently?

**No.** This is a clear example of poor consultation. It came out of the blue, it was based on flawed data and served to create anger because the assessment of risk was so wrong or concern because it wasn't clear what would be done with the information.

It's important to know where flood hazards exist but this not an end in itself. We are more interested in putting in place mitigation strategies to minimise the effects and impacts of known flood hazard areas.

## 10. Decision-Making Behind Closed Doors

Concerned Ratepayers Kapiti has raised concerns that decisions are effectively made before public consultation and often behind closed doors and, as a result, little if anything changes through public consultation processes.

If (re)elected:

- a) What will you do to minimise the use of "public excluded" sessions?

The Local Government Act is quite clear. Unless there is something that is confidential under the provisions of the LGOIMA, then Council must make its business open and transparent. We have heard that sometimes the public is excluded so that elected members can have free and frank discussions. All elected members are there to provide a voice for their community members and should do so in public whether it is a *meeting* or a *workshop*. If it is the latter, it would be helpful for the community to know and understand the range of views and options that are discussed before anything is put to a formal meeting for a decision.

b) Will you advocate for prompt public release of decisions made in secret once confidentiality is no longer necessary?

**Yes**, we are committed to making all information available to residents as soon as we can. We do know that sometimes, it won't be possible to release information for privacy or commercial reasons. Those instances are clearly laid out in the Act 1982.

In general, people need to know what has been decided and why. The Ombudsman's office advocates for a culture of openness and transparency and the proactive release of information by government agencies. We think the same should apply to local government councils.

## **11. Improving Transparency**

If (re)elected, would you introduce new measures to increase Council transparency and public participation?

- If yes: What would these be?

**Yes**. All meetings and workshops involving all elected members, unless confidentiality is required, will be notified and open to the public.

## **Governance and Accountability**

### **12. Voting Rights for Non-Elected Members**

Some non-elected individuals currently have voting rights on KCDC committees. In other councils, non-elected individuals attend in an advisory role only.

Do you support continuing voting rights for non-elected committee members?

- If not: Why not?

**No**, I do not support continuing voting rights for non-elected committee members. Non-elected committee members may bring valuable perspectives and expertise and their role should be to provide advice for elected members to consider. As non-elected members they do not have to seek and represent the views of the community. Elected members on the other hand, have been elected to serve the community in their ward or area.

### **13. Māori Ward Referendum**

KCDC established a Māori ward without a referendum, which was later mandated by central government. The Government has since required Councils to hold a referendum on the establishment of Māori wards.

Do you believe this decision should have been put to a local referendum regardless? Why or why not?

**Yes**, this decision should have been made after a referendum. We know that Council did not have to hold a referendum under the law at the time, but holding a poll and then not following overall result of the feedback that the community was not OK. At that time, the community was not in favour of a Māori ward. This time we will honour the democratic decision made by the Kapiti community.

## **14. Top Three Priorities**

What are the three most important changes you would want to see from the next Council compared to the current one?

- 1: Affordable rates
- 2: Common sense spending and decision making
- 3: Democracy not bureaucracy

## **15. Your Experience**

What relevant experience do you bring to help address the financial and affordability challenges facing KCDC over the next three years?

For over twenty years, I managed significant budgets and projects in a central government agency. I have had experience leading internal and external teams to develop business cases and procure multi-million projects. My roles also involved governance oversight of those projects to ensure quality outcomes were delivered on time within budget.

I bring a leadership style and a service ethic that listens and plans common sense solutions with the community. I will actively promote and support actions and decisions that will help keep costs under control while maintaining quality community services.

And most importantly, I bring a commitment to serve and represent the interests and views of the Paraparaumu community as we work through the challenges that lie ahead.

NAME: Chris Harwood, We Love Kapiti

DATE: 15 August 2025