

# CONCERNED RATEPAYERS KAPITI: CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 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 (re)elected, would you support these planned increases?***

- If yes: Why do you believe these increases are affordable for ratepayers?
- If not: What level of average annual increases would you consider acceptable instead?

**No, I do not support the planned average increases of 115%.**

For many ratepayers, *no level of increase is affordable right now*. With households and businesses already under financial strain, the Council cannot continue to treat significant increases as the norm.

There should not be a target percentage for increases. Instead, the focus must be on keeping rates as low as possible by:

- Cutting unnecessary spending.
- Prioritising investment in core services and community assets.
- Maintaining essential infrastructure without compromising service quality.

Elected members' responsibility is to manage ratepayer money carefully, just as most families and businesses have to manage their budgets. That means a focus on cost control and efficiency, not simply passing costs on to the community.

### 2. Council Staffing Costs

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

- ***If you are a current councillor seeking re-election: Why did you support this level of increase, and what – if anything – would you do differently in the next term to manage costs?***
- ***If you are a new candidate: Do you consider this level of increase acceptable? If not, how would you address it if elected?***

**No, I do not consider this level of increase acceptable.**

A 50% rise in staffing costs is beyond what most households and businesses can sustain, it is not appropriate for the Council to grow its wage bill that rate.

If elected, I would push for:

- **A full review of staffing levels** to determine whether the current size of the organisation is justified, and to ensure any new roles are tied to core service delivery.
- **Tight controls on remuneration** and a focus on fair, sustainable pay that reflect the realities faced by our community.

- **Efficiency improvements** through use of cost effective technology and process streamlining, rather than increasing headcount.
- **Greater transparency and accountability**, so ratepayers can see where their money is going and what outcomes they are getting in return.

Council must lead by example. Many ratepayers are having to tighten their belts; the organisation itself must do the same.

### 3. Economic Development Spending

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

*Would you support continuing this level of spending?*

- If yes: Why?
- If not: What level of spending would you support instead?

**I do not support continuing economic development spending at its current level without evident results.**

The role of economic development should be to grow the local economy in a way that strengthens our community — by supporting existing businesses, attracting new ones, and ultimately increasing the share of revenue from business rates rather than relying so heavily on households.

In the future, any ratepayer funding for economic development must be **results-driven** and directly tied to measurable outcomes such as:

- Increased business rate revenue.
- More local jobs and opportunities.
- Tangible improvements to the business environment.

If economic development spending is not delivering these outcomes, then it is not fit for purpose and should not receive ratepayer funding.

### 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?*

- If yes: Why?
- If not: What level of funding would you support instead?

A 207% increase in ratepayer funding is unsustainable; rate payers should not be covering any staffing costs. Council should not be propping up operational expenses — cultural institutions like Toi Mahara need to develop stronger models of financial self-sufficiency through visitor revenue, external grants, partnerships, and fundraising.

More broadly, Council needs to review all arts and museum funding to ensure ratepayers are getting clear value for money. Support should focus

on helping these organisations stand on their own feet, not on making ratepayers the default backstop for ongoing costs.

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

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

***Do you support this debt reduction strategy? Why or why not?***

**While I support lowering debt, I do not support the current strategy.** The level of additional debt repayment proposed places too much burden on ratepayers at a time when many are already struggling with affordability. Simply loading higher rates onto households and businesses is not a responsible solution.

Instead, I would push for a **full review of the LTP capital programme** to identify savings and prioritise essential projects. By reducing the level of *new* debt being taken on, we achieve the same long-term outcome as the current debt reduction strategy, but without the same short-term pressure on ratepayers.

I am also concerned that future councils could use any “freed-up” borrowing capacity to take on more debt, cancelling out the sacrifices being asked of ratepayers today. Actual debt reduction requires both restraint in new borrowing and more intelligent capital planning — not just higher rates.

## 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 (re)elected, how would you prioritise infrastructure spending to balance affordability and essential services?***

Are there specific projects you would delay, reduce, or cancel? Why?

**The Council’s proposed \$799 million in capital spending is high, and it puts unsustainable pressure on rates. If re-elected, I would push for a full review of the programme to make sure we’re only spending on what’s genuinely needed, when it’s needed.**

When reviewing the capital works programme, we need to look closely at whether existing assets need to be replaced and ensure that depreciation funding is being used appropriately — noting that Council has not been fully funding depreciation through rates and won’t begin to do so until 2025/26, which is a gap that must be addressed. At the same time, we need to be clear on what additional infrastructure is genuinely required to meet population growth, and whether those costs are being fairly shared with developers rather than falling heavily on existing ratepayers. Investment should be concentrated on strengthening the services that matter most to people, with stormwater and flood protection a top priority given their importance for community safety and resilience. Alongside

this, we must also recognise that some spending will be unavoidable where new legislation dictates.

The focus must be on **core infrastructure first** — water, stormwater, wastewater, flood protection, and essential transport links. Nice-to-have projects, or those that don't directly deliver value to ratepayers, should be delayed, reduced, or cancelled.

By cutting back on non-essential capital spending and ensuring depreciation is adequately funded, we can reduce the need for new debt and take the pressure off rates — while still maintaining the essential services our community relies on.

## 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? Why or why not?*

**While I firmly believe that rate increases have become unsustainable — and are a real source of anxiety for many in Kapiti (myself included) — I do not think a blunt rate cap is the answer.**

A cap can be risky. If it's set too high, it risks becoming a target rather than a limit, encouraging Council to spend up to that level instead of working harder to control costs. If it's set too low, critical maintenance of core assets may be delayed or skipped altogether — which only pushes costs higher in the long run and puts essential services like water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure at risk.

Even where caps are introduced, councils can often apply to exceed them. For example, in Australia, the 2025–26 rate cap is set at 3.00 per cent, yet Hepburn Shire Council has been approved for a 10 per cent increase and Indigo Shire Council for 7.54 per cent. This shows that caps don't always stop significant increases — they can shift the debate.

What we need are stronger elected members who understand the real pressure rates place on households, and who are willing to push back when told there are “no more savings to be found.” Too often, elected members lack the skills and experience to challenge spending appropriately. I believe the answer lies in scrutinising every dollar, finding efficiencies, and ensuring ratepayers receive real value for money — not in relying on a cap that may mask poor decision-making.

## Transparency

### 8. Public Engagement

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

- If yes: Please explain.
- If not: What would you do differently?

**No, KCDC does not currently engage well with the community on key plans like the LTP.**

Too often, engagement occurs too late in the process, when most of the key decisions have already been made, and it can feel more like a box-ticking exercise than a genuine opportunity for the community to shape outcomes. This approach risks undermining trust and leaves many people feeling that their input does not truly matter.

If elected, I would push for **earlier and more meaningful engagement** — involving the community at the stage where options are still being developed, not just after decisions are largely settled. I would also advocate for clearer communication, making plans easier to understand, and ensuring feedback loops are in place so people can see how their input has influenced final decisions.

## 9. Flood Mapping Consultation

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

- If yes: Why?
- If not: What should have been done differently?

**No, I do not believe the Council's consultation on the flood hazard maps was handled well.**

Rather than building confidence, the process created confusion and frustration. Everyone was blindsided, the data behind the process was unclear, and there was little clarity about what the results would actually mean for affected properties. Instead of fostering trust, it left people either doubting the accuracy of the information or worrying about the consequences.

While it's necessary to understand where flood risks exist, it is only helpful if it's paired with clear plans for how those risks will be managed. The focus should be on practical solutions and mitigation strategies.

## 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?*

**Public excluded sessions should be used only where essential — for example, to protect commercial sensitivity or personal privacy.** A good example would be when Council is placing a closed bid on a property in the open market; making that public in advance would disadvantage ratepayers by revealing the Council's position to other interested buyers. Beyond these limited cases, decision-making should happen in open session so the community can see and understand how choices are being made.

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

**Yes, I will advocate for the prompt release of decisions once confidentiality is no longer required.** This should happen automatically — as soon as the sensitive element has passed, the information should be made public without delay. Transparency builds trust, and ratepayers deserve to know what decisions are being made on their behalf.

## 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, I would support new measures to increase Council transparency and public participation.**

We need to open up Council processes and make them easier for people to follow and engage with.

If elected, I would push for:

- **Earlier and more genuine consultation**, so the public can help shape decisions before they are effectively settled.
- **Clearer communication**, with plans and reports written in plain language so residents don't need to be experts to understand what's being proposed.
- **Automatic release of public-excluded material** once it is no longer sensitive, ensuring decisions are made visible without unnecessary delay.
- **Better use of technology**, including livestreaming meetings not just online but also at community spaces such as libraries or other Council-owned facilities, so those who can't travel to the chambers or struggle with technology can still participate. I'd also support online Q&A sessions and improved feedback platforms that make it easier for people to have their say.

Council belongs to the community, and transparency is essential to restoring confidence that decisions are being made openly, responsibly, and in the best interests of ratepayers.

- If not: Why not?

## 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 yes: Why, and would you extend this to other groups?
  - If not: Why not?

#### **No, I do not support voting rights for non-elected committee members.**

Decisions that affect our community must be made by members who are directly elected and accountable to the ratepayers.

While non-elected individuals can play a role in providing expert advice, recommendations and viewpoints, final decisions must rest with those elected through the ballot box. Accountability is fundamental to maintaining trust in local democracy.

### 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?***

I believe in strong community advocacy. Previous community engagement on the Māori ward showed overwhelming opposition to it. I believe this is a decision for the community to make through referendum.

### 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: Reduced Costs, affordable rates
- 2: Better and Earlier engagement
- 3: Maximum Levels of Transparency

### 15. Your Experience

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

I bring both governance and real-world financial management experience that is directly relevant to tackling the affordability challenges facing Kapiti. As the current Chair of the Paraparaumu Community Board, I have consistently advocated for responsible spending and stronger financial discipline. I have challenged council projects where costs were escalating without clear community benefit, and I have pushed for reducing organisational costs.

I am a local business owner, previously owned a successful company based in the UK, and I have held multiple senior manager roles. These experiences provide me with practical skills in governance, leadership, budget management, balancing competing priorities, and making tough decisions. I also hold a Master's degree in Leadership and Sustainability, equipping me with the skills to assess long-term impacts, find efficiencies, and ensure decisions are both financially prudent and future-focused.

In addition, I have been part of leadership teams that successfully restructured failing companies employing many hundreds of staff and holding multi-billion-dollar assets. This experience taught me how to turn around complex organisations under significant financial pressure — skills that are directly transferable to council as we face serious challenges around debt, affordability, and the need for smarter investment.

Importantly, I understand firsthand the pressure rising rates are placing on families and households across Kapiti. This gives me the drive to hold council accountable, to ask the tough questions of staff, and to push for better value for ratepayers.

**NAME:** Glen Olsen

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