

# 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?

I do not accept these increases and repeatedly I have seen projected increases rise further in the very next plan process. KCDCs' net debt was \$163M in December 2021. In May this year it is \$270M in the election report, although I have seen it reported at \$282.1M. The Government/ LGFA raised council debt headroom in 2024, enabling councils to borrow up to 500% of their operating costs, twice the previously available amount allowed. The unsustainable and unaffordable assumption for this debt to be serviced by rates is an absolute folly and a sign of an utterly broken system. I agree with the 5% advice from Shane until another option is visible. I also expect the Government to accept responsibility for driving rates up and provide far more funding for rates hardship remissions. I will continue to actively lobby into the Local Government reform process for a more realistic funding plan. In my three triennium on council I only voted in favour of one out of nine annual or LTP plans because the majority were unaffordable.

### 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?***

Staffing costs are expected to rise in all sectors due to inflationary pressures, understandable although not affordable. KCDC staff numbers are up from 361 ( 263 FTE's ) in 2022 to 436 today. Council needs to constantly analyse all work streams to ensure staff productivity is optimised. The other side of this analysis will be more contractors being utilized and at what cost? Longer term, Local Government reform direction appears to be a slimming down of council work streams which could give rise to redundancies amongst staff.

### 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 was an instigator of a separate business rate, with aim that the income generated by the sector be utilized for the economic development spend, not ratepayers. I am still a strong supporter of this method of determining what is an affordable spend and I am a strong supporter of the council table being fully informed and able to make final ED budget decisions at all times.

### 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.
- I know exactly why the council contribution hiked from \$218,600 in 2022/2023 to \$671,300 in 2025/26. The council table was strongly opposed to being told ratepayers were expected to fund all ongoing operating costs of the gallery into the future. This was not part of any deal and definitely not something we had agreed to. Libraries, galleries and the arts are great for Kapiti, but this was an inappropriate burden on ratepayers that I did not support.

### 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?***

Let me repeat - KCDCs' net debt was \$163M in December 2021. In May this year it is \$270M in the election report, although I have seen it reported at \$282M. This is wrong. For the Government and LGFA to allow raising of the debt headroom, a big mistake. I plainly do not support this level of debt for the simple reason that council budgeting needs to be managed with the same care we manage our own family budgets. But this message seems to have been lost to KCDCs' table, the sector and the Government. I'm a back to basics sort of person. But I have been at the table for a decade and I will safely say the debt in 2030 will be far more than \$345M and by 2034 I very much doubt there will be a dent in it. A manageability tipping point has been exceeded and that has to be acknowledged now and acted on.

## 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?***

Putting all proposed projects on the table and reprioritising, is the first, urgent business of the incoming council. I am not sure what has happened in the last three years I have been away from the table, but I am appalled at the debt level, increases in staff costs and size of the bow wave of imminent projects. Simply unsustainable compared to the last ten years of careful tracking prior to 2022. I am the first one to say our pipe renewals must be done. I was 10 years old, watching our town supply being installed, when my father told me it would be my responsibility as a young Kapiti coaster to ensure its done and done on time, and I listened to him. I got it. But there is a feeling of recklessness in the way borrowed money is being spent right now that just does not sit well with me at all.

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

## 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?***

No I do not support a rates cap because it is a far too blunt a tool to use and will cause more problems than it will solve.( If only it was so easy) One needs to look at the causes, the upwards trend in debt, the wrong assumption that the current and propose infrastructure projects are affordable, and household incomes and costs to see that this is a very very complex situation that the Government has to play a part in addressing and funding solutions to.

## 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?

•  
Yes, I would encourage shorter and simpler council document language all round and more use of roll over plans, ensuring the expensive and duplicitous annual planning and reporting processes are streamlined when possible while still meeting legislative requirements, and it is very possible to streamline this, there is just no need for the weighty plan documents currently produced or plan decision making over a series of meetings to confuse submitters.

### 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?
- I am satisfied council have done due diligence in the flood mapping to ensure all property owners are as well informed as possible. I also understand the legislative requirement to do this work and appreciate the contribution to the GIS mapping tools available on all council websites to help property owners understand risk levels.

### 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?***

It is important that when councillors notice a notified public excluded session that they know to query the reason. Often in the past this has resulted in sessions being opened up, and it is my standard practice. In my experience, we do not make decisions in public excluded meetings, and we stop any attempt at steering us to make decisions. I am not sure that what has happened in the past three years as I have been excluded too.

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

Yes, I have already successfully advocated for transparency in public excluded sessions for 11 years and routinely ask officers what the status is of information before meetings conclude, and whether or not it can be released, either immediately or in what timeframe.

## 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, we instigated groundbreaking improvements in transparency, bringing in live-streaming of meetings, utilising remote access technology, public speaking at meetings and councillor kōrero before all meetings. I am keen on introducing night council meetings to improve accessibility. I would re- instigate the public speaking and pre- meeting councillor hui before all meetings.

## 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?***

I have found the use of external committee member participants in the Audit and Risk committee to be hugely beneficial in an advisory capacity. I do not see any benefit in any external un- elected members of committees, especially in the CEPEC committee, being eligible to vote if we have a quorum, to be honest

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

### 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?***

The question is a little unnecessary as the Government has since required all councils to hold a referendum on the establishment of Māori Wards.

### 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:** Analyse and re-prioritise the infrastructure improvement works programme with view to reduce proposed debt funded costs.

**2:** Turn the annual planning process around so budgets are not initially based on the council departmental budgets and are instead based on the realistic affordable income projections, then see what fits. And ensure decision making lies with the elected members representing their communities.

**3:** Getting it right now for the future - More focus on elected member access to impartial and non-political information about the Local Government reforms and the need to contribute to submission processes.

**15. Your Experience**

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

After three previous terms as a Districtwide Councillor from 2016-2022, you know that the proof of my voice is in my actions not just my words.

Uncontrolled rising debt and keeping Kapiti an affordable place to live is paramount. The recent annual rates hike has been hard hitting for many households including mine. Previously I have voted NO to eight out of nine annual rates hikes, often in the face of an otherwise unanimous vote.

I have made KCDC decision makers keep copies of the real accruing annual rates rise ranges, not just the average rates % number constantly quoted, (the highest so far this year is 20.5%). I have tallied up consecutive plans watching them constantly rejigging rates rises from year to year to get them higher and higher and I have exposed it.

I have kept you all informed with media releases, especially on topics where information is being hidden. I have faced down consecutive council Mayors and CE's head on over important issues, often facing the consequences. Our local Government system is dysfunctional and you are all paying for it. I actively lobbied Parliament for 8 years for a review. There is much yet to do people to get more improvements implemented.

I have been a Districtwide councillor for three triennium, and seek a fourth. Am currently in grassroots democracy on the Otaki Community Board, am an RMA hearings commissioner and member of the District Licensing Committee and have been the Greater Wellington rep on the National Community Boards Executive Committee for three years.

So that's me, proudly a fifth generation Kapiti Coaster watching our district grow. I wish to continue doing my best to ensure Kapiti grows well, not just big.

**16. NAME: Jackie Elliott**

**DATE: 25 August 2025**