

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 not: What level of average annual increases would you consider acceptable instead?
No, I want to get us back to Rates Affordability not exceeding 5% of household income as per the recommendation from the 2007 “Shand Report” (Independent Inquiry in Local Government Rates).

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?***

We need staffing to ensure that we can do the work that we are legislated to do and what our community is wanting us to do. We rely on Council’s CE and Senior Management to provide the appropriate advice on what staffing levels are needed. We approved a cap of 436 FTE staff and currently sit at about 415. We are already one of the most efficient Councils in terms of OPEX but an ongoing challenge for KCDC is the competitive staffing environment we operate in – Wellington can offer higher salaries – we must balance our salaries with other benefits to hold onto our skilled & experienced staff. I will continue to keep a close watch on this area of Council.

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 not: What level of spending would you support instead?
We must invest wisely and ensure that the support we give to our local businesses is effective and efficient. A key part of that is Council listening to business, learning from them, setting things up well, enabling their success, and then Council knowing when to get out of the way. I believe local businesses and their people are a key foundation for a thriving future across the district, because when businesses do well, so do livelihoods, families, and the wider community. That will require some investment from Council to help achieve that. I want to see the proportion of ED expenditure from residential rates decrease.

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?

Arts and creativity is an important part of the Kāpiti Coast community as shown by the Kāpiti Arts Trail. Toi Mahara is a nationally recognised Art Gallery which has been built for only \$2m of ratepayer funding yet it is on our assets at \$6.5m. It profiles many local artists and generates significant visitor interest from outside the District. The \$605k is the capped amount of funding from Council. The Trust raised \$211k of external funding in the last year. The Council's contribution is modest compared with our neighbours' contribution to their public art galleries. In the current year, the Porirua City Council have budgeted \$4.287 million for Pataka and the Upper Hutt City Council \$2.758 million for Whirinaki Whare Taonga. In the last year, to July 2025, Toi MAHARA attracted over 15,300 visitors to 13 exhibitions and 147 workshops, talks, demonstrations, openings and tours. This produces economic benefit for local cafes and other parts of the hospitality sector, and the earnings by local suppliers and creative sector workers. A cost benefit report done in 2019 for a Waikanae Community Board grant estimated a return of \$13-60 on every dollar invested.

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?

I support reduction in debt but this must be balanced with Rates affordability. There is over \$50m of the current debt that was borrowed to cover OPEX, primarily depreciation, over 10 year prior to this year. Council now covers it all it's OPEX from income. The cost of servicing debt is high so reducing it is one way of reducing pressure on rates.

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?

By asking the question: is this essential or a nice to have? Is this what the community wants and are they fully aware of the cost?

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

This Council has already taken \$100m of CAPEX projects out of the LTP over the 3 years 2024-2027. The conversation would continue about this with the new Council. One project that would be on the chopping block for me – Arawhata to Ihakara Link Rd.

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 don't, in principle. I think it is a very blunt tool and there is currently no detail to what it would look like in NZ. Examples from Australia where it has been tried has resulted in negative

medium to long term outcomes for those States. It would also potentially affect our Credit Rating and therefore our cost of borrowing would increase. I still have lots of questions about how it would work for Kāpiti. Council needs to be able to respond to local demands and our community needs – rates capping may limit that. If we got back to the 5% rates affordability as our “cap” then I think we’d have more flexibility and responsiveness to needs as they arise in the future.

Transparency

8. Public Engagement

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

- We have improved our consultation this triennium but there is still room for improvement. Helping our community understand the complexity of Council processes and decision-making is important. Making our communication/consultation documents simpler to read and understand would be good too.

9. Flood Mapping Consultation

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

- I think we have learnt some things through this process. Creating the opportunity for individual property owners to speak with a staff member has been well received. I thought we could have done better in helping people understand the purpose of the review and what the maps will be used for in future.

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?

We already have minimal "public excluded" sessions for decision making and only when necessary under the appropriate reasons. I always pay close attention to the feedback that comes from the public consultation processes – it influences my thinking about decisions. I can't say what other Councillors do.

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

I don't think I need to advocate as this already happens although I will keep a close watch on it.

11. Improving Transparency

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

- This Council has improved transparency and increased public engagement. I would like to improve this further by opening other opportunities for engagement across a wider range of times. There is the potential challenge with this of the increased cost of staff working outside of normal working hours.

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?

- Yes, but only for our Iwi partners. Local Government is legislated under the Local Government Act to ensure that all Māori have a voice in local decision-making, this is one way of ensuring that.

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?

Central government has had Māori electorates as a response to the Treaty of Waitangi since the 1800s. Local Government is legislated under the Local Government Act to ensure that all Māori have a voice in local decision-making. A Māori ward is one mechanism by which we can ensure fulfilment of that requirement beyond our partnership with local Iwi.

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: Rates Affordability 5%

2: Improved communication

3: Increased engagement by Councillors with community

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 have served in the Social & Community sector & Education sector on Boards. This gives me understanding about the real financial challenges that exist in people's lives in this community. It also gives me experience about Risk Management, Financial Oversight and Governance skill.