

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? It depends. There are a number of matters outside the council and councillors' control which apply when setting rates, such as increasing costs for infrastructure maintenance, increasing infrastructure needs (such as storm water) and central government obligations placed on councils. I would not support reducing rates in a way that is not sustainable in the long term and simply pushes the obligations for infrastructure onto future ratepayers.

That does not mean that I will simply accept rate increases without aiming to make them as low as possible. One way that I have previously been involved in doing this was in the 2014-2017 triennium. During that period I was very involved in a project which focussed on reviewing capital expenditure to ensure that amounts budgeted for reflected the work that was actually achievable so that rates were not set to budget for projects that were unlikely to be achieved. This achieved a real reduction in rates.

In my experience, there were councillors who would simply say that they did not agree with the proposed rate increases without making any suggestions as to how the rates should be lower. I am not going to simply promise lower rate rises without a plan as to how that can actually be achieved.

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 new candidate: Do you consider this level of increase acceptable? If not, how would you address it if elected?*** Again, my answer is that it depends. I have previously pushed for staff being employed rather than using contractors which are more expensive. If an increase in staffing costs reduces costs in other ways, then that is appropriate.

Staffing costs is a balancing act. I do not support underpaying staff as that results in an unhappy workforce which leads to reduced productivity and higher turnover which also have costs. I also do not support deliberate "understaffing" and expecting existing staff to have to do additional work to cover unfilled roles on a long term basis.

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? As the council has been undertaking spending in this area for a number of years now, I would like to know whether a cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken to consider whether this spending is beneficial.

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? Yes. I don't think that it is helpful to look at a percentage increase as that may simply indicate underinvestment in the past. This level of spending is relatively low compared to other councils in the region.

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 think that the council should not focus on a significant reduction in debt until the results of the government's three waters programme is available.

Before standing down from the council in the 2017, I raised an issue that I thought that one of the biggest risks for KCDC would be being forced into a three waters arrangement with an underperforming council (specifically Wellington) without being fully compensated for the infrastructure investment undertaken by KCDC in the past.

One of the reasons that Kapiti has a relatively high debt profile is because it has kept more up to date with drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. If KCDC is forced to merge with other councils who have not kept up to date with that infrastructure investment, then it is essential that KCDC is fully compensated for the investment made so that ratepayers do not end up being burdened with the debt for the work KCDC has already done as well as having to fund other councils to "catch up" with unfunded infrastructure.

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?

I was heavily involved in a project doing a detailed review and prioritisation of capital projects in the 2014-2017 triennium, which was referred to by councillors as "the green line project". I would like to see a similar review undertaken in this triennium.

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? I do not support this unless government is willing to reexamine the funding model for local government. Unless the government also caps the cost of services to council such as roading repairs or other infrastructure, then it is unrealistic to simply cap rates increases. The underlying issue is that rates funding is not an appropriate model of funding, especially when government regularly puts more requirements on local government through legislation.

Transparency

8. Public Engagement

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

- It does well within the limits set by government legislation. I would like to see the use of panel groups representative of a wide cross-section of ratepayers as it is important to get the views of all ratepayers, not just those who have the time and resources to engage in a more formal process.

9. Flood Mapping Consultation

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

- If yes: Why? Yes, because council needs to also take into account the costs of a process. Council could aim for a "perfect" process, but the costs for this would be much higher than the benefits.

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 essential to not abuse "public excluded" sessions, so I would always consider the merits of any matter being considered this way.

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

11. Improving Transparency

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

- If yes: What would these be? I would like to see the use of ratepayer panels to ensure participation of a wide variety of ratepayers.

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?

- No.

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 don't believe that this should have been put to a referendum and believe that Maori wards are appropriate. This allows for Maori representation to council being elected rather than appointed. It also recognises that Maori should have a voice in decision making and that the current system makes that very difficult.

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: A detailed review of capital expenditure as set out in the long-term plan.
- 2: A focus on managing how KCDC works within the government plans for three waters.
- 3: Development of a local alcohol policy so that locals can actually have a say on liquor licensing in a way that is not possible at present.

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 am a qualified lawyer who previously specialised in tax law. I have a solid financial understanding from my time working at KPMG and IRD. I was heavily involved a previous programme to review and analyse capital expenditure which resulted in real rates savings and would like to initiate a repeat of this review.

I will not make promises simply to be elected. My commitments are that I would push for a review of capital expenditure as this has been successful in the past.

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