

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 support the planned rates increases of 115% over the next 10 years. I am also struggling to pay my own rates, and I know many others in our community are in the same position. If these increases go ahead, rates will become unaffordable for many households, forcing long-time residents out of the district simply because they can no longer afford to live here.

I believe an acceptable level would be in the range of CPI (inflation) plus 1–2% annually on average, with clear justification for any larger increases. Affordability must be the starting point, not the afterthought.

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?

I've asked for an Official Information request to get the exact details on council staffing costs, because right now it's difficult to make sense of the big increases we're seeing. From the information available, it does look like there's been a sharp jump in staff salaries and overall employee expenses, but without the breakdown it's hard to know why.

I don't want to jump to conclusions, but I do share the community's concerns. If salaries are increasing far faster than inflation, that's not sustainable for ratepayers. At the very least, the council needs to clearly explain where the money is going, why, and how it benefits the people paying for it.

Transparency and accountability are key here.

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 think Council should spend less on economic development - closer to \$1-1.5m a year instead of loading so much onto rates. The key is partnerships. For example, Council has already supported initiatives like the Mills Albert training hub, the Major Events Fund (which delivered a \$6.7m boost for just \$200k invested), and food beverage industry hubs co-funded by central government. These are excellent models of shared responsibility and shared reward.

Rather than Council funding 100% of things like tourism campaigns or training, the businesses who benefit most — hospitality, accommodation, local employers — should be co-funding. That way, ratepayer money stretches further and residents aren't left carrying the whole cost.

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?

I don't agree with a 207% increase being carried almost entirely by ratepayers, even though I recognise the council has already committed to the gallery's new building and operating costs. I would prefer to see funding held at a more sustainable level, with the gallery working harder to secure outside contributions — through donors, grants, sponsorships, and partnerships. Council funding should remain, but not as the default backstop for such large increases.

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

I believe council support should stay closer to the original level (inflation-adjusted) plus a modest increase for operating the new facility. Any further expansion should be offset by external fundraising, not automatically added to the rates bill.

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 reducing council debt — but not by forcing large rates hikes onto households. A smarter approach is needed:

- Stage and prioritise capital projects realistically.
- Review or pause non-essential projects until finances stabilise.
- Tighten financial accountability so spending is tracked, justified, and reported clearly.

Debt must come down, but not at the cost of driving residents out of their homes. Council needs to look hard at what can be staged or put on hold, rather than continually leaning on ratepayers. Beautification projects are valuable for our community, but they are not urgent necessities - they should only proceed when our financial position allows.

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?

\$799 million in capital spending is ambitious, but it needs prioritising. I would put core infrastructure first (water, wastewater, stormwater, roads, flood protection). I would delay or cancel non-essential projects that add to long-term operating costs without meeting immediate community needs. Every project should be judged by necessity first, with non-essentials delayed until finances allow.

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?

Yes, I support the idea of a rates cap. Without some form of limit, councils can lose sight of affordability. A cap would force councils to prioritise spending, just as households and businesses must. Rates that rise unchecked risk driving long-time residents out of their homes and make the district less affordable for new families or buyers. If we want a thriving, inclusive community, affordability must be a cornerstone of 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 engage well. Consultation for the community is often too late, too complex, and poorly communicated. If elected, I would push for meaningful engagement, not box-ticking. For example, I only recently discovered there is already a weekly council newsletter - despite being a long-time ratepayer. This shows how poor communication has been. Ratepayers shouldn't have to "sign up" for information when council already holds our contact details. It should be automatically sent out. Transparency means making it easy, not harder, for people to be informed.

If elected, I would:

- Ensure plain-language summaries of all major proposals are sent directly to ratepayers, with opportunities to give meaningful feedback on non-essential projects.
- Strengthen community forums so they are proactive, not just by request, and properly advertised district-wide.

- Expand digital engagement tools so residents can easily provide feedback and ensure Council actually listens to the results, not just ticks the consultation box.

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 not satisfied with the recent flood mapping process. While Kāpiti Coast District Council did seek feedback through drop-in sessions, webinars, and an online portal, many residents felt blindsided by the sudden appearance of flood risks on their properties without prior, widespread communication. Multiple community posts report distress over inconsistent notifications, outdated data, and extreme flood models being used, leaving families anxious about insurance and loan implications.

To improve trust and involvement, the process needs:

- Clear, accessible, science-based communication so residents understand why maps are being updated.
- Properly advertised before decisions seem final - not after the models are already released.
- Real opportunities for feedback that influence outcomes.

Good mapping should empower people to plan and protect their homes, not leave them questioning the process.

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?

I would push to ensure public-excluded sessions are the exception, not the norm, and only used when there is a clear legal requirement (e.g. privacy, commercial sensitivity). Decisions that affect ratepayers should be debated in the open so the community can follow the reasoning and hold council accountable.

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

Yes. Transparency is about trust. Decisions made in confidence should be released as soon as legally possible, with clear explanations. Recent example: the Council approved \$43,000 for its chief executive to attend a leadership course with limited involvement from the full council or public transparency. This highlights the urgent need for stronger accountability, more public

input, and ensuring major spending decisions are made in open forums, not behind closed doors. This approach shows the very issue I aim to address: decisions made in small circles leave both councillors and residents excluded. That's neither transparent nor democratic.

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 propose:

- **A Customer-Friendly Decision Tracker**
A simple online dashboard that shows where every major decision stands—published seamless from existing meeting data, not creating extra work.
 - **Plain-English Financial Impact Statements**
Short summaries for all major proposals, clearly explaining costs, funding sources, and effects on rates—so ratepayers don't have to dig through dense council reports.
 - **Cost-Effective Oversight for Major Projects**
Establish panels made up of internal staff and a minimal number of external reviewers only for big-ticket projects—maintaining oversight while keeping costs low.
- Transparency shouldn't be costly—it should be accessible, efficient, and trusted.

- 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?

I believe non-elected individuals can provide valuable advice but voting should be reserved for elected representatives. Advisory roles are appropriate, but accountability must remain with those directly elected by the community.

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, I believe this should have been put to a local referendum. Representation changes of this scale should always go to the people first. Personally, I would have supported the establishment of a Māori ward, as I believe Māori voices and perspectives should be

represented in council. However, I also believe such a change should have been made openly, with the community given the chance to have their say through a vote.

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:** Restore financial discipline and affordability to council spending.
- 2:** Improve transparency and communication so residents are genuinely informed and consulted.
- 3:** Prioritise core infrastructure (water, stormwater, roads) over non-essential projects.

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 community advocacy and real-world financial management experience as a homeowner, parent, and active local resident. I understand the pressure that rising rates and living costs place on households because I live it myself. Professionally, I have worked across administration, sales, and customer service roles where accurate budgeting, cost control, and accountability were essential. I have managed accounts, trained staff, handled purchasing, and supported businesses to run efficiently.

These experiences have given me a practical understanding of how to balance competing priorities, eliminate waste, and ensure money is spent wisely. I would also bring fresh eyes and independent thinking to council, with no ties to past decisions or entrenched approaches. I have a record of being transparent, approachable, and willing to challenge poor decision-making when it does not serve the community. If elected, I will bring the same focus on financial responsibility and accountability to council — ensuring ratepayers' money is managed carefully and always with the community's best interests at heart.

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