

# 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?

Council needs to distinguish between what is essential and what is simply nice to have. These priorities must be discussed and agreed on with all newly elected councillors, as the Mayor has only one vote. Setting an arbitrary figure is not a sensible way to make decisions, but I will put a stop to frivolous spending

### 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?***

Council needs to cut its cloth to suit the tough economic times, especially when households and businesses are already under pressure. While some growth in staff numbers may be justified to meet community needs, we need to be prudent. That means distinguishing between what is essential to deliver core services and what is discretionary. If elected, I would ensure staffing levels and pay increases are carefully scrutinised, benchmarked, and justified from a governance position. Any growth in costs must clearly demonstrate value for ratepayers. My priority will be to rein in unnecessary spending while protecting the frontline services our community relies on

### 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?

Without clear metrics or genuine community consultation, spending on vague ‘economic development’ initiatives cannot be justified. The current budget is unrealistic and should be scaled back. Kāpiti is already experiencing strong growth that does not require this level of ratepayer-funded investment. What we need instead is better coordination—bringing major stakeholders together to plan strategically, rather than continuing to work in silos.

#### 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?

Although the figures are disputed, during the last triennium councillors discovered that the now-Mayor, in her portfolio role, failed to disclose the rising costs of operating the upgraded Mahara Gallery. This lack of transparency denied council the chance to properly debate whether a fully professional gallery or a mixed model of paid and volunteer staff would be more sustainable. The result was higher annual rates—an unacceptable outcome for our community. Robust, transparent decision-making is essential to avoid repeating such mistakes.

#### 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 it is prudent to reduce debt where possible, this must be balanced against the need to keep rate increases affordable. At present, that balance is not being achieved.

#### 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?

7. Capital expenditure decisions must be guided by up-to-date assessments of asset condition and lifespan. While fully insuring every asset can be prohibitively expensive, I believe Council is already self-insuring where practical. What is essential, however, is ensuring that assets are

properly maintained - something that could have saved the community considerable costs, as seen with the Waikanae Library. One way to reduce pressure on expenditure is by moving away from fully funding depreciation, effectively sweating assets longer before renewal, and by deferring non-essential capital projects - such as the proposed indoor sports centre

## 8. 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?***

The evidence on rates capping shows that while it may deliver short-term relief, it often leaves infrastructure underfunded - creating costly problems when assets eventually fail. What's needed is a smarter, more responsible approach to how Council spends ratepayers' money. That starts at the top: decisions such as awarding the CE a \$50,000 pay rise after just one year, or approving a \$43,000 Harvard course, must not be repeated. At a time when many residents are losing jobs and struggling to pay the bills, such spending - backed by two Mayoral candidates was tone-deaf and out of touch

## 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?

Council needs to improve ensure clear and timely disclosure of

Kāpiti Coast District Council can always do better. The recent decision to prevent the Waikanae Board Chair from attending a briefing on a housing development highlights a concerning lack of openness. Far too many decisions are made behind closed doors, and key processes such as the Long Term Plan are often rushed, leaving councillors little time to debate and make informed decisions. Council must work for the community, but that requires a Mayor who is transparent, accountable, and committed to clear communication with the public.

### 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?

To restore ratepayer confidence, Council should fund and commission an independent peer review, particularly given that the recent consultation on the revised flood hazard maps was narrower than it could have been.

### 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 meetings should be used only as a last resort and strictly for legal reasons. I believe in openness and clear communication with the public. I want a Council that works for the community, not one that operates in secret.

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

I will advocate for the timely public release of decisions made in private as soon as confidentiality is no longer required.

## 11. Improving Transparency

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

- If yes: What would these be?.

Council should share plans and reports as early as possible to allow thorough review.

Consultation periods must be long enough to give ratepayers meaningful opportunities to engage and provide feedback. The public should also be kept informed about when reports will be discussed, and tools such as time-coded minutes should be provided to make council meeting videos easier to search and follow.

- 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?

There are valid reasons to include non-elected members on committees to ensure technical expertise. With the introduction of Māori wards, it is also important to revisit iwi representation on committees to ensure it is appropriate and effective.

### 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 establishment of a Māori ward should follow the same process as the creation of other wards, as outlined in the council's representation review.*

### 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: Transparency
- 2: A council that works for you
- 3: Quality decisions that are made public

### 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 experience in both the private and public sectors, often managing significant budgets. I believe that too often councillors can be overly influenced by council staff, which can prevent them from making the best decisions for ratepayers. I will ensure that council works for you!

**NAME: Rob McCann**

**DATE: 20/08/25**