

Council Briefing Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 8 December, 2020
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
(Chairperson)
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Greg Martin
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid

Not in Attendance Cr Jayne Golightly

Scribe Sue Reid

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cr Golightly (absence) and Cr Couper (early departure).

Her Worship the Mayor convened the briefing at 1:00 p.m. and handed over to Mr Dominic Kula (General Manager – Strategy & Democracy) for the presentation.

2. Reports

2.1 Long Term Plan 2021-31 Draft Supporting Documents and Draft Consultation Document

Mr Kula said this was the final in a series of Council briefings on the development of the draft Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 for consultation which will go to Audit on 17 December.

He acknowledged it was a long process with a number of moving parts and there had been trade-offs and decisions along the way, particularly around prioritising what Council can deliver.

The review of the Draft Infrastructure Strategy will be sent to Elected Members electronically at the end of today for discussion at the Council Briefing on 10 December.

Mr Kula gave a recap of the previous Council Briefings and covered the minor changes as a result of feedback from the Council Briefing on 19 November.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

- There was lengthy discussion around pensioner housing and Her Worship said the consultation document would seek feedback from the community as it has been looked at but not allocated special budget. She said prioritisation was an important process, especially for those Elected Members who have not been through it before and that Council Briefings are not decision-making forums.
- In response to a request, Mr Kula said he would look at the wording under Capex for the preferred theatre options around Oruku Landing, Forum North and Hihiaua.
- There was discussion around the ability to rearrange funding to respond to government initiatives should they come up.

Mr Kula handed over to Mr Alan Adcock (General Manager – Corporate) to cover Rates.

Mr Adcock said WDC are able to compare their rates with other councils from The Taxpayers' Union report released for the 19/20 financial year. He explained the graphs showing the average rates and comparable rates for both residential and non-residential properties and said WDC is not out of line with other councils.

Ms Delyse Henwood (Manager – Finance) covered the Draft Financial Strategy which sets the boundaries used by Council to determine its financial envelope and sets an overall direction for the financial management of council and an end state for council's finances..

She said Elected Members would have received the draft which captured the main content of the strategy itself and explained what the strategy will address and took Elected Members through the changes.

Ms Henwood clarified the increase in wastewater rates and said commentary would be put in the strategy as they will need to look at what will happen going forward and to give enough capacity to do what is needed in the future.

She explained the items still in progress and the need to move public toilets to Parks so that it aligns funding to policy.

Interest rates will be looked at again in January as they are constantly changing.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

- In response to a query, Ms Henwood said that population growth does not necessarily correlate to rates and they have also covered growth in the financial strategy so they can look at it then.
- Ms Henwood was asked if there was any merit in separating out the external funding visually in the balanced benchmark to show the percentage round it. She responded that benchmarks are very prescriptive but they can put in a comment.
- In response to a comment that DIA should have been asked if they would give a narrative that all councils could use, Mr Kula said he was not sure about DIA but there is sector advice.

Ms Alison Puchaux (Manager – Revenue) explained the factors impacting the sector splits and said the sector splits should enable the most equitable spread of the 6.5% rates increase (+1% growth), together with the incorporation of the Refuse Rate.

There was some discussion around Sector Splits and Mr Adcock said it's complicated and they are still working through the detail but there will be a shift along these lines.

Mr Kula continued with the presentation and covered what they are aiming to achieve with the Consultation Document and the direction received on the key issues and significant items to be included in the Consultation Document.

He recapped the key points from instruction notes taken at the 25 November briefing.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

- Referring to rural residential sectors and the sealing of roads, Mr Kula was asked if the terminology could be changed to reflect they are residential roads that are being sealed. He acknowledged this and said the narrative can be changed.
- It has to be made clear that “upgrading roading network” needs to give a clear message that, despite central government not subsidising the sealing, we have prioritised this.

- Congestion was discussed, along with the 4-laning of Riverside Drive and Mr Kula said the options around congestion were looked at in 2018 and 4-laning was the most feasible option at that point.
- There was discussion around the \$60 million investment from central government and that it will cost WDC.
- Pensioner housing was discussed again at length and that housing renewals and improvements were less than in other years. Was there sufficient interest around the table to have some finance in the budget for a joint option with central government for pensioner housing?
Her Worship responded that, whilst she was a supporter of improving housing options in the district, as Chair she had not heard a groundswell of support for change or the momentum to challenge.
It was suggested that \$2 million could be put in the budget to match central government if there was a joint venture and that in the future in terms of local government reform it was likely that councils will pay more of a role in the social aspect.
Placemaking is getting more sophisticated and will be a component to housing. Part of that is facilitating discussion with central government on housing for the elderly and to encourage a better approach and partnership with central government.
In addition, the Plan Change and Urban Services Plan Change actively apply intensification.
Her Worship responded that she understood the comments but needed to say that we live in a country that has a social welfare system with taxpayer responsibilities and ratepayer responsibilities.
- There was an amount of \$3.2 million for water meter renewals and Mr Kula as asked if council would look at going electronic. He responded they will use this as a segway, but it had been cut from the priorities.
- In response to a query about the dog pound, Mr Kula responded they had budgeted what was needed to build it properly.
- Mr Kula said he would check on the amount of \$12 million for the refurbishment of the Forum North site. It was also asked if the timing of this could be co-ordinated with council moving out to their new building and Mr Kula responded that would depend on what is happening with the Forum North site.
- There was a query around the budget for traffic lights and whether it included an intersection upgrade. Mr Calvin Thomas (General Manager – Northland Transportation Alliance) said this covered the renewal and maintenance of existing traffic lights.
- Traffic lights at intersections were discussed and Mr Weston confirmed that improving intersection functionality is included in their programme. This investigated optimising the options which may include taking away traffic lights.

- The climate change section had a good introductory statement with a timeline showing the work done so far. Mr Kula was asked if more budget could be included to fund waste minimisation and if the community could be asked if more money needed to be put into the climate action plan.
- Mr Kula was asked about Maori participation and he said would be addressed and the plan will be bilingual.

Mr Kula said he was still hearing still some tensions around the process, but there appeared to be a general level of comfort around the narrative. He said they would work on the feedback and have a review of the Draft Infrastructure Strategy on Thursday to finalise the Draft LTP documents the Council meeting on 17 December.

3. Closure of Meeting

The briefing concluded at 14:53.