

## **Council Briefing Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** Tuesday, 27 April, 2021  
**Time:** 9:00 a.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 Jayne Golightly  
Cr Phil Halse  
Cr Greg Innes  
Cr Anna Murphy  
Cr Carol Peters  
Cr Simon Reid

**Not in Attendance** Cr Greg Martin

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### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cr Martin.

The Mayor convened the briefing at 9:00am and handed over to Tony Collins (Manager – District Development).

### **2. Reports**

#### **2.1 Business Friendly Council April 2021**

Tony Collins commenced a presentation which covered business friendly guidelines, the 6 principles these guidelines are based on, what other councils have done, potential actions, case studies within LGNZ Business Friendly Council Guidelines, context, culture and capability, and a request for feedback on action points outlined.

### **Elected Members feedback and discussion included:**

- Regarding “what good looks like,” an Elected Member noted WDC being both shortlisted and winner of awards recently and being in the top 10% for dealing with the 3 Waters, along with acknowledging Council’s successes over the years. They felt that compared to other councils WDC is doing well, but one of Council’s weaknesses is proactiveness and not looking from “outside in.”
- Tony Collins said businesses appreciate certainty and clarity around what is happening and when.
- *What, in your view, do we need to change to improve Council?* Tony Collins said building strong relationships with communities and consistency from Council would help.
- Sandra Boardman (General Manager - Community) said that currently “good” looks like meeting legislative requirements from an internal perspective; however, that is not a good experience for the customer. She said Council has taken a parental role and should shift to a partnership stance.
- Tony Collins noted that sometimes frustration from members of the public can inadvertently be directed at WDC, when in fact the legislation has come from central government. He suggested some push back in this area by letting people know what has come from central government.
- Her Worship also mentioned this but reiterated that many of these central government edicts were introduced to keep our communities safe.
- Some Elected Members felt there was a disconnect between Council and communities, as Council are winning awards for some things, but receive complaints from members of the public that contradict this.
- There was discussion around staff availability and what department managers can do to facilitate this.
- Tony Collins said that frustration from local businesses is high, but from a small number of them. The majority of businesses were satisfied with Council.
- Tony Collins said Council should encourage people to hold Council to account if they fail to do as outlined in the coming action plan.
- Sandra Boardman said some areas of the organization have been improved with small changes; however, areas such as building consents are in need of significant change, but this will take time to implement.
- Tony Collins agreed with Elected Members that being “good” is not all about winning awards, it is about making it as easy as possible to operate within the framework given. He reiterated pushing back on misinformation.
- An Elected Member felt that the focus should be about being “everyone friendly,” not just business friendly and fundamentally, Council and staff should have a culture that is open and shows respect for ratepayers.
- *How can Council push the boundaries, within the legislation, to make things easier for the people?* Tony Collins said being honest with people as an organisation around what the framework is and advising that Council has to

work within it. Council needs to make an uncomfortable journey as comfortable as possible for people. Council can provide more clarity where possible and can shift focus from customer support to customer success. WDC does not currently have advice readily available to potential businesses looking to open e.g. which local ecosystem they would suit best.

- Regarding building consents, Tony Collins said he and a member of staff are currently working on how to make pre-application meetings more useful to both staff and applicant. He said staff can provide more information around what stage they should be at for the meeting to be useful and what information they should bring.
- Tony Collins suggested that partnering with schools or in-house training could be useful with regards to staff recruitment. He also said it was part of a department managers role to ensure staff development.
- An Elected Member noted that the workloads of staff and funding levels must be considered in order to effect real change.
- Tony Collins said department managers need to be conscious that when central government increase demand, they are required to do more with the same level of staff.
- Tony Collins said one of his priorities is dealing with how culture is embedded in staff, as a few small problems can snowball.
- An Elected Member said Council have incrementally made improvements since the initial business friendly council guidelines were developed in 2014 and though Council will never be perfect, they can continue trying to be.
- Discussions were had around an action plan being developed going forward from today, with some Elected Members feeling Council already had the answers with just action needed, and other Elected Members valuing the information that could be obtained in a survey study of local businesses.
- Her Worship noted the positive change in the local economy since 2013 and the businesses that are thriving. She also noted the change in WDC itself and that it now attracts a higher quality of staff, though some areas can be improved, this can be achieved with an action plan. By way of example, Her Worship spoke of how current actions will ensure Whangarei is safe and better off for future generations.
- Tony Collins summarised the briefing by reiterating that good relationships are the key to success and hoped today's feedback and support would allow for progress.

### **3. Closure of Meeting**

The briefing concluded at 11:01am.