



Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Tararua District Council held in the Training Room, Business Network Building, 40 Denmark Street, Dannevirke on Tuesday 5 November 2024 commencing at 1:00pm.

1. Present

Her Worship the Mayor - Mrs T H Collis, Crs E L Peeti-Webber (Deputy Mayor), N L Chase, S M Gilmore, P A Johns, M F Long, K A Sutherland, S A Wallace.

In Attendance

Ms R F Bell	- RFB Consulting
Ms S Lowe	- Group Manager – People, Capability and Customer Experience
Mr R Suppiah	- Group Manager – Corporate and Regulatory
Ms J Smith	- Legal Counsel and Procurement Manager
Mrs A Dunn	- Manager – Democracy Services

2. Apologies

That the apologies from Councillor S M Wards and Councillor A K Franklin be approved and leave of absence granted for the meeting.

Crs Chase/Gilmore

Carried

3. Hearing

3.1 Hearing of Submissions - draft Rates Postponement Policy

Submission 019

Hamish Cameron, of Cameron Lawyers, spoke on behalf of his client, who was in attendance, and had an arrears balance as a result of the rates rebate direct debit error. His submission was about the draft policy and included suggestions for how the policy should be implemented.

His client's daughter was also in attendance and spoke about the personal impact from the direct debit issue on her mother, and shared how this had impacted her mother and their family. She noted that her mother was elderly with significant

health issues, and was a pensioner. She spoke about the call she received from her mother prior to Christmas advising of this issue, during which her mother was extremely upset. She spoke about the matters raised by her mother, and how an attempt was made to have her mother agree to a payment plan that was above her means, which she then had to make changes to on her mother's behalf. She spoke about how it had been a long drawn-out process of trying to understand how the issue happened, and asked Council to consider the impact on her mother's wellbeing.

Mr Cameron spoke about the technical aspects of his submission. He gave credit to the handling of this issue which showed the Mayor and Councillors genuinely were regretful that the error has happened. His view of the proposed Rates Postponement Policy was that it took too broad a definition of equality, noting the yardstick that had been used was the equality between every single ratepayer, and the view that if someone hadn't paid, then they should. However he felt that as the circumstances here were different, a different approach was required. He noted that the impacted people were a small number of ratepayers who were vulnerable, wouldn't have great reserves of money, and the amounts owing could be quite significant to them. He spoke about it being an egregious error in that it had continued for a number of years. His final point that he wished to make was that the impacted people were ratepayers that had tried hard to meet their obligations, they had set up direct debits, and they relied on the Council to ensure the direct debits were set at the right amount. His view was that these factors meant that taking a broad view of equity was not appropriate. He did not have an issue with a different treatment for ratepayers that failed to make payments because of a more flippant approach to meeting their obligations.

In response to questions, the following matters were covered:

- Regarding implementation of the policy, it currently envisaged an impacted ratepayer having to make an application to the Council. This would be another hoop to go through, and not every person would have access to someone to advocate on their behalf. Mr Cameron asked that Council consider amending the policy, so that if it was adopted, it would apply on a blanket basis to all those that were eligible.
- Clarification was provided that there would not be a caveat put on a property's title to secure the funds owing. The process that was undertaken when a property was sold was for the rates owing to be sorted between the vendor's and purchaser's lawyers.
- Suggestion that the layout of the rates invoices be made more clearer to understand, with an example provided of the Horizons Regional Council's rates invoices.
- In response to a request for Council to specify the cause of the problem, Her Worship the Mayor advised that an independent review and investigation

was currently underway, and the results of that review would be shared with the impacted people and made public.

Submission 12

Submitter 12 sought an explanation of the cause of the error, and believed there should be accountability for the error.

The submitter spoke about how the impacted ratepayers should not have to pay the arrears, due to the error being Council's error. However, the option of being able to postpone payment of the rates arrears would be useful.

Her Worship the Mayor responded about the independent investigation that was being undertaken, and once the review was complete it would be shared with the impacted people and made public.

In conclusion, the submitter noted their concern that they did not receive their dog registration notice this year, and believed a number of people were similarly affected. Her Worship the Mayor noted she would discuss this with the Regulatory Services Manager.

Submission 10

Submitter 10 noted that they had pointed this issue out a while back. The submitter provided history about when they set up their direct debit, and last year had queried the amount of the direct debit as it was incorrect. At this time they had visited the Council office with their rates demand, and asked for an explanation of why their payments had not been sufficient. At that time their direct debit was increased, yet they were still in arrears. The submitter spoke about their disappointment that they had been put into arrears through Council's mistake, and felt that the ratepayers should not have to pay for this mistake. They spoke about the tone of the letter received that said that legally they had to pay, and how they found that to be threatening. They felt that the responsibility was on the Council to set the direct debits at the correct level, and was concerned that the error was not picked up by the Council's auditors. In closing the submitter spoke about how it was a traumatic letter to receive, advising that they were in arrears when they had done their best to ensure that they were paying their rates on time.

As clarification, Her Worship the Mayor advised that there would be no interest or penalties charged for rates postponed. The process following the hearing would be for the Council to meet to deliberate on changes to be made to the proposed policy, in light of consideration of submissions, and then the final policy would be brought to Council for adoption on Friday 15 November 2024. At that point impacted ratepayers would be able to postpone their rates arrears should they wish to take that option. Her Worship the Mayor acknowledged that trust in the system had been broken.

Councillor P A Johns left the meeting at 2:16pm and returned at 2:17pm.

4. Reports

4.1 Hearing of Submissions - draft Rates Postponement Policy

The Tararua District Council considered the report of the Manager – Democracy Services dated 17 October 2024 that provided the Council with a copy of all submissions received in relation to the draft Rates Postponement Policy, including two additional submissions circulated separately.

Having heard from all submitters that wished to present their views to the Council in person, the Council was asked to provide direction to officers on any matters that they wished to be considered as part of the deliberations on matters raised through submissions.

That the report from the Manager - Democracy Services dated 17 October 2024 concerning the Hearing of Submissions - draft Rates Postponement Policy be received.

That the Tararua District Council provide direction to officers on matters to be considered at the extraordinary Tararua District Council meeting scheduled for 11 November 2024 as follows:

- ***Officer comment on the matters covered by submissions***
- ***The need to keep any process for application of the rates postponement policy simple;***
- ***External advice to be provided on application and interpretation of the policy, and any risk arising from the consultation***

Crs Johns/Long

Carried

5. Closure

There being no further business the Mayor thanked those present for their attendance and contributions, and declared the meeting closed at 2:43pm.

Mayor