



Council Workshop Briefing Session

Notes of a workshop briefing session of the Tararua District Council held in the Council Chamber, 156 High Street, Dannevirke on Wednesday 25 February 2026 commencing at 1:00pm.

1. Present

Mayor – Mr S M Gilmore, Crs S M Wards (Deputy Mayor), A J Amboy, C L Corlett, P A Johns, E F Kennedy, P M Naylor, E L Peeti-Webber, K E R Te Waaka, and S A Wallace

In Attendance

Mr M Alexander - Chief Executive
Mrs K Tani - Group Manager – Strategy and Information
Mr H Featonby - Group Manager – Operations
Ms T McDonald - Chief Financial Officer
Ms J Smith - Legal Counsel and Procurement Manager
Mrs B Kawana - Corporate Planning and Reporting Advisor
Mrs S Anthony - Democracy Support Officer

2. Apologies

Nil

3. Briefing Papers

3.1 Forecasting Assumptions

The Group Manager – Strategy and Information presented a PowerPoint overview of the forecasting assumptions. She used the aging population as an example of how environmental scans inform these assumptions. Current data shows that older residents make up 21% of the Tararua District's population, with this expected to increase to 26% by 2034. This trend must be factored into the LTP, particularly in relation to impacts on infrastructure, finances, and levels of service.

It was noted that changes to the District Plan or potential rezoning—particularly

in areas such as Woodville experiencing urban growth—may influence the age profile of specific towns.

The assumptions document is a living document, and it was acknowledged that even with predicted growth, the district will continue to have a significant proportion of older residents. Council will need to consider facilities and services for older people, and maintain context around this demographic trend.

Under the Local Government Act 2002, councils must clearly identify all significant forecasting assumptions, especially those related to asset lifecycles and funding sources. Assumptions must be realistic, reasonable, evidence-based, internally consistent, and quantifiable. These include growth, inflation, interest rates, asset life, and potential reform impacts. Councils must also explain why each assumption is significant, the evidence supporting it, and the risks and uncertainties if the assumption changes or proves incorrect.

Incorrect assumptions can lead to inappropriate rating levels, under- or over-investment in infrastructure, financial sustainability issues, and misalignment with community needs.

This is the first-pass review and Council officers have contributed input. Two further workshops are scheduled, and major comments are welcomed. Officers research the information to ensure the best assumptions are selected, particularly from environmental scans.

A suggestion was made to improve the report format, as it was difficult to follow. It was recommended that section headings be arranged vertically down the page in portrait orientation to avoid having to rotate pages. The Mayor will discuss report orientation (portrait vs landscape) with the team.

A question was raised about why there is a risk that Tararua Alliance-based unit prices may not reflect fair asset values. This relates to the varied types of work undertaken, which are converted into unit rates. The contract is repriced annually, with valuations based on the previous year's actuals, so figures fluctuate slightly. It was noted that annual revaluation provides more consistency, and although the Alliance contract has not been market-tested in around 10 years, auditing provides an additional check. It was acknowledged as a highly probable risk but may be revisited.

It was noted that there are risks relating to funding sources for significant asset replacements, particularly where depreciation may not fully fund long-term renewal needs. This assumption has been categorised as highly probable and may be revisited with a focus on the balance between capital investment and depreciation. Further calculations for the LTP workshop may influence the assessed risk level.

For resource consent renewals, levels of uncertainty were discussed, including the upcoming expiry of the Dannevirke wastewater consent. The CCO will manage this, with preparatory work undertaken in the meantime. Interest rates were

noted as “XXX” pending further detail—draft 1 identifies these areas, with draft 2 expected to provide clearer information. CCO debt transfer will be completed by draft 2, allowing for improved assessments. The 2026/27 Annual Plan will remove three waters, improving context.

The impacts of AI and robotics were raised as an emerging consideration. Although timelines are uncertain (potentially 5–15 years), change is occurring rapidly and could affect local employment—currently at 7% unemployment—potentially increasing default risk. This topic was not included in the previous LTP, but inclusion is now considered necessary given the pace of technological change and the value of a 10-year outlook.

Council should remain open to alternative approaches, such as new energy generation options, addressing recycling challenges (e.g., batteries and lithium), supporting district and business growth, and encouraging innovative thinking.

The early start to this process was acknowledged as valuable for enabling more informed and constructive discussions. The structured approach provides helpful context, and the significant work undertaken by staff to compile the material was recognised and appreciated.

Members were encouraged to submit questions in relation to the LTP via a form located in the Hub.

Cr Keshaan Te Waaka closed the workshop with a karakia.

The workshop briefing session closed at 3:04pm.