



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 4 March 2026 commencing at 1:00 pm.

1. Present

Mayor – Mr S M Gilmore, Crs S M Wards (Deputy Mayor), A J Amboy (online), 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 C Haines	- Chief Executive
Mrs K Tani	- Group Manager – Strategy and Information
Ms S Lowe	- Group Manager – People, Capability and Customer Engagement
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
Mr K van der Oord	- Communications Team Manager
Ms K Stevens	- Community Engagement and Social Media Lead
Ms S Fountaine	- Community Engagement Officer
Mrs S Anthony	- Democracy Support Officer

2. Apologies

Nil

3. Reports

It was agreed to change the order of the reports to present 'Big Issues and Opportunities' first.

3.1 Big Issues and Opportunities

Group Manager - Strategy & Information gave a presentation noting the environmental scan has been adopted; focus now is on forecasting assumptions, opportunities and challenges.

Officers were encouraged to brainstorm the opportunities and challenges, and feed ideas into priority issues for the LTP to give a good indication of where to focus.

Outputs will inform what officers take away, develop further, and bring back to Council.

All opportunities/issues must align with community outcomes, strategic direction, and risk appetite, with a major focus on affordability which presents a range of opportunities and challenges.

Rates are the main revenue stream for service back to the community; fees/charges are also relevant. A need to focus on rates and ensuring fair distribution of service across the district.

Options for a slant towards more of a user-pays model to reduce rate burden.

Group Manager - Operations noted some assets are “not fit for purpose” (e.g., Pahiatua Solid Waste - use of Pahiatua weighbridge). Industrial zone land looks promising; business case being developed. Huge cost-per-tonne disparities in Woodville/Eketāhuna. Need to consider district-wide balancing of levels of service.

Encouraged broader thinking; examples:

- Parking meters (unlikely, but possibility to explore under rate capping).
- Solid waste and transport – revisit past Council decisions; large savings possible.

Consider building and staffing integration (one location, shared services). Opportunity to consolidate jobs/services for cost control.

Need for Clarity on Previous Council Decisions - Some matters were already democratically decided by last council. New Council should be provided all previous information on service integration to understand context and reconsider where appropriate.

Affordability and Efficiency Community Outcomes ideas raised:

- o Integrated customer service.
- o Kiosks for simple requests.
- o Improved website usability and self-service.

- o Better access reduces community frustration.

The Chief Financial Officer advised that the new rates portal is scheduled to go live end of May 2026; significant improvement for ratepayers. We must still support residents uncomfortable with digital tools. A great communications plan built around this portal and will go out to the district to encourage customers to take up the option.

Integration of services, pensioner housing and electricity discussions still to come.

AI may reduce job requirements; must consider social impacts and district growth.

Shared Services investigation - Needs significant time and investment; complex. Needs to be agreed at a mayoral level, keep Council sustainable. Opportunity to start discussions at CE level.

Previous 17A reviews are dissolved; need to individually assess departments, including for in/out-sourcing. Still awaiting central government direction. This would need to be undertaken on top of BAU leading to a slow process. Include Council discussions, hold each other to account; a priority.

Need clarity on what counts as core service. A lot of work to do in the background, affordability cross checking with Council before finalising. Also consider Systems Improvement Bill removing choices once passed.

Online Services, Customer Access - automating services reduces cost and frees staff time.

Questions raised about:

- o What burns staff time
- o Library opening hours, include weekends for better overall service.
- o 24/7 library access as offered in other districts

Members reminded to send questions through via the form on the Hub

Digitisation of records is now complete; next focus is front end access with new portal.

Can consider automating hall bookings, parks/reserves info, carry out assessment of what is available.

Have digital strategies, future focussed systems and processes, need to invest in core services, operational budget can be debated. Teams were complimented with what is happening within current operational budgets

Insight into shared services - investigate incoming revenue and volume increases,

need to be resourced appropriately, ensure we get it right from the start. Capacity to investigate further may require extra investment to complete.

Growth Community Outcome - District has large growth potential; need intentional investment.

Economic development, active council representation through attendance at events now completely gone; stakeholders asking for Council involvement.

Avoid duplicating services - other organisations are already covering certain aspects

Link to solid waste, recycling, and enabling industry through consenting, supporting business growth and bringing in new businesses.

Staff currently lack resources and mandate for growth-related actions.

Strengthen relationships with iwi, who offer long-term planning insight for district growth and economic development, provide good discussions, they know the people and the land.

Facilities and District Assets - Opportunity to improve use of district facilities (e.g., aerodrome), e.g. "Wheels with Attitude" now a long-term event with 700+ cars attending at last event.

Members to feedback via the form on the Hub for ideas and questions; list will be prioritised and detail analysis carried out. More workshops scheduled to discuss further. Keep the thinking going, this is an opportunity to be creative.

3.2 **Big Issues and Opportunities**

A presentation was provided by the Communications Manager, Community Engagement and Social Media Lead, and Community Engagement Officer. Setting the scene, it was emphasised the need for early community buy in, seeking ideas, solutions, and clear direction for staff.

It was noted that some deliverables from the previous workshop have been incorporated. Today's focus is on key messages and early engagement planning.

Key Messaging – Themes & Objectives

- Developed messaging based on comms strategy experience; applies to early engagement and future consultations.
- Make feedback easy, worthwhile, and meaningful.
- Ensure the community feels heard, understands decisions, and rebuilds trust.

Three layers of key messages:

1. Overarching message.
2. Early engagement message.
3. Phase specific messages for the LTP.

Today's session focused on the overarching theme.

Messaging Discussion:

- A constrained LTP, expected change, and affordability to be considered, but also encapsulate a can do attitude.
- Suggested themes – “We all accept the status quo is not an option.” Used during 3 Waters development; “Everyone accepts the change...” as used in central government submissions
- Questions on how to embed can do: should we? Will we? Can we? When?
- Learn from last LTP—messaging was underused; need stronger, more provocative prompts to drive clear community feedback.
- Suggestion – “LTP built with the community.” Tagline must be genuine and reflect the passion of the community.
- Encouraged thinking about the long-term (10-year horizon) and legacy; involve the community in shaping the future.

Stakeholder Analysis

- Review of stakeholder list; emphasised adding any group directly impacted (e.g., by fees and charges, cemeteries, funeral directors).
- Marae engagement underway; seeking guidance on how Māori want to be consulted.
- Engage with non mana whenua groups, ensure everyone is heard. Include neurodiverse communities (e.g., autistic individuals), ethnic communities (Asian, European newcomers), youth: Tararua REAP partnerships, political education particularly with upcoming general election, school outreach.
- Farmers & rural communities—build on relationship between Horizons and Council; appetite for positive joint conversations, demonstrate working together to rural community. Challenge of reaching rural communities; need events they want to attend.
- Consider suppliers, older residents, and tenants in rental properties.

Extraordinary Ideas - Investment Game Tool

- Early engagement must be transparent and “extraordinary,” addressing perceptions that Council wastes money and isn't clear about what it does. Focus on rebuilding trust
- Highlight and celebrate the “good stories.”
- Be open to extraordinary ideas if they align strongly with strategy, cost,

and district needs.

A presentation was given demonstrating newly developed Investment Game Digital tool (≈ half a day development time) using AP 25/26 data.

Features:

- Shows what each segment of rates pays for.
- Lets users adjust spending and see impacts on other services.
- Allows users to indicate where they want growth or reductions.
- Includes “Keep / Start / Stop” options.
- Allows for additional comments
- Generates a full submission for review.
- Provides a shareable link for users to share on social media and with family/friends to promote further engagement.

Strong enthusiasm from members - tool is innovative, engages new audiences, helps community understand trade-offs. Positive feedback on age range feature.

Physical Engagement Tools were presented as practical, low-barrier options:

- Investment jar activity (10 counters to allocate), visual, intentional, reflective offering live snapshot.
- Blank wall for open community input, space to write ideas.
- Physical versions of the investment game for face-to-face events or for homes published in local newspaper encouraging family participation and option to bring in to Council Service Centres. Also, a business card with QR code that can be handed out to the community by staff and councillors.

Additional Tool Considerations:

- Visual of rates amount.
- Translation into Te Reo is being explored.
- Questions on whether corporate overheads can be included.

Balanced approach recommended: mainly digital, supplemented by in-person events. Appetite to include video content (e.g., TikTok) — strong opportunity to reach new audiences. In-person community evenings will still occur

Engagement Period & Timeline

- Discussion on engagement window: proposed 20 April – 31 May (6 weeks).
- Must consider other simultaneous consultations; timing appropriate.
- Annual Plan messaging will help prepare the public.
- Need a strong narrative to support meaningful engagement.
- Next Council meeting: review feedback and finalise engagement plan.

- Branding work paused; materials to be prepared by 25 March.

Strong appreciation for the innovative direction and tools.

Encouragement to refine and “get it right” for this LTP.

Reminder: Weblink to tool is not yet public; do not share.

Tool will be especially powerful for youth engagement.

Ongoing commitment to a can do attitude and creative engagement approach.

Cr Keshaan Te Waaka closed the workshop with a closing karakia.

The workshop briefing session closed at 3:27pm.