



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 Tuesday 21 April 2026 commencing at 1:00pm.

1. Present

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

In Attendance

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Ms L Hopa | - Iwi Representative, Rangitāne o Tamaki nui-ā-Rua (online) |
| 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 |
| Mrs B Kawana | - Corporate Planning and Reporting Advisor |
| Mrs S Walshe | - Finance and Revenue Manager |
| Mrs B Fowler | - Senior Financial Business Partner |
| Mrs S Anthony | - Democracy Support Officer |

2. Apologies

An apology was noted for Cr Steve Wallace and Cr Keshaan Te Waaka

3. Reports

3.1 Activity Grouping and Overviews

After look at activity overviews, understanding what each activity is about, collect thoughts on grouping, form and come back with endorsement. Input - strategic

framework, focus on questions previously raised. Community outcomes to be aligned with framework pillars. All activities to align with the Systems Improvement Bill. Climate resilience is not to be treated as a standalone activity and must be embedded across all activities. Support activities will be presented in a later session.

Key Activities presented by Group Manager - Operations:

Roading and Footpaths - Key risks include network decline, safety, and reputation. Total cost \$8.9m (29% of rates post-waters). Noted that cutting roading funding extends asset deterioration. Visible changes (e.g. grass mowing) deliver limited savings relative to impact.

Solid waste - Includes recycling, transfer stations, landfill, and waste minimisation programmes. Staffed by 9 FTE. Cost \$2.6m (8.6% of rates). Risks include regulatory compliance, landfill consent expiry, market volatility for recyclables, cost escalation, and reliance on central government policy settings. Activity well managed with prior savings from insourcing. Ability to cut could change level of service, user pays is an option. Being managed very well, opportunity for further savings with big decisions.

Item 7 on page 32 - Urban kerbside collection (\$321k in 2026/27) noted as challenging to outsource due to low district volumes and limited market interest.

Animal control - Covers dog control, enforcement, ownership, and after-hours response (contracted). Risks include public safety incidents and capacity across a large district. Cost \$128k (0.4% of rates) not including fees and charges. Minimal opportunity for reduction as small activity with big responsibility.

Building control - Includes consents, inspections, and accreditation. 5 staff; processing of consents contracted. Delivery risk includes loss of accreditation and reliance on qualified staff. Cost \$1.0m (3.3% of rates). Considered lean and reducing would cause risk to the organisation. Fees and charges to be reviewed, noting Tararua is slightly below peer councils, but Officers will investigate this further. Potential to collaborate with other councils, increase fees and charges in some areas. Monitor other Councils as they develop LTP's. Some reform on the way, we need to gain understanding for us, Building team leader heavily involved in that. Regional BCAs (Building Consent Authority) forming, investigate what other councils doing re: private vs public for this service, may not be much choice.

Parks and reserves - 7 staff; maintenance largely contracted. Covers parks, reserves, sports fields, playgrounds, and open spaces. Cost \$2.4m (7.8% of rates). Service reductions would be highly visible, with community satisfaction and reputational risk. Noted that domain boards manage some reserves at minimal cost to Council. Reality of cuts is it's not just about cuts, how will we deliver differently, some will come with risk, some have happened in Facilities space already, public didn't see the savings although it did have a rating impact, team took heat but did make a difference.

Page 79 notes a 0.35% cost involved for pensioner housing, it is thought that this is self-funded. Will need to come back with further detail on this.

Aerodrome - includes operation and maintenance of runway and aviation infrastructure, delivery risk - 1 staff member who is an expert who is very helpful. Currently covered under parks and reserves activity. Not a lot of opportunity for cuts as risk safety/compliance issues.

Public Conveniences (Toilets) - Contracted cleaning; risks include vandalism and public health concerns. Cost \$467K (1.5% of rates). Options include changes to service levels or closures, however, highly visible impact.

Community Buildings - Includes halls and facilities; cost \$950k (3.1% of rates). Portfolio noted as inefficient, generating limited revenue (\$57k fees and charges). Most of cost is insurance, depreciation, and maintenance. Options include rationalisation, renewal deferrals, and review of pricing levels, which may currently be suppressing utilisation. Further discussion required.

Swimming Pools - Aging assets with H&S and water quality compliance risk. Cost approx. \$1.3m (4.3% of rates). Renewals and depreciation require further review through the LTP. Preventative asset management plans are in place. Options to reduce hours or increase fees. Any service changes would be highly visible and induce public reaction. This represents a significant portion of the budget and requires further discussion to determine what options are available and, where change is not possible, the reasons why.

Cemeteries - A long-term land management activity with one shared manager, capacity constraints, and limited land availability. Cost is \$539k (1.8% of rates). This is a highly sensitive service area, with limited opportunity for change without long-term consequences. Previous bylaw reviews and past facility damage have demonstrated the level of community sensitivity, and any changes risk causing undue distress. Interment fees generally cover initial burial costs when plots are purchased; however, perpetual maintenance costs create an ongoing financial impact. Caution is urged regarding fees and charges, noting that significant increases proposed in the last LTP were reversed following strong public feedback. Cemeteries are not a revenue-generating activity, and fees should remain affordable. Consideration should be given to how other councils are managing this service, particularly in a rates-capped environment.

Pensioner Housing – A self-funded activity with one staff member providing tenant wellbeing support. The portfolio includes aging assets but has no net cost to ratepayers. Potential options include efficiency improvements, alternative delivery models, or divestment, with any savings able to contribute to debt reduction and support core services. The activity carries social and reputational risks and is not a core council function. Any change would require consultation, likely as a standalone matter. More objective viewpoint requested as risks are subjective. Need to consider alignment with Systems Improvement Bill and potential future central government direction. Previous divestment decisions and

subsequent reversal were noted and should inform consideration, particularly in the context of achieving a 4% rates increase without over-reliance on roading savings.

District Planning and Consents – Covers the district plan, resource consents, and contracted planning advice. Key risks include legal exposure, staff capacity constraints, and ongoing reform. Cost is \$883k (2.9% of rates). Regulatory change increases complexity and risk of delay or poor decisions. Regional spatial planning is progressing collaboratively with other councils. Opportunities were noted to improve efficiency through workflow redesign, shared services, ERP upgrades, and the introduction of AI to support administrative and customer service functions under the proposed digital strategy. It was requested that Cr Naylor be involved in reviewing early drafts of the digital strategy. Schedule 1 plan changes present cost pressures; while an exemption allows work to continue, funding sufficiency and consultation requirements remain and will be reported back to Council. Costs may increase due to delays and competing priorities.

Compliance and Monitoring – Covers bylaw enforcement, consents and regulatory functions, and alcohol licensing. Delivered by four staff, with key risks including legal exposure, limited capacity, and competing priorities. Cost is \$587k (1.9% of rates). While the function supports community safety and compliance, any shift from proactive to reactive delivery would result in reduced service standards. The activity relies on specialist capability, with recruitment challenges in key areas such as environmental health, and shared service options warrant consideration. AI also to be considered for administration assistance. An after-hours service is currently being procured; changes since the previous contract, increased noise and animal control demand and higher fuel costs, may impact future costs.

The workshop adjourned at 2.39pm and reconvened at 2:52pm.

Strategic Activities presented by Group Manager - Strategy and Information:

It was noted that a late decision has seen Forestry taken out of Parks and Reserves activity where its in the current LTP and it is prosed to remove it from this activity and treat it as a separate activity and will be presented at a later stage.

Strategic Planning and Policy – Not clearly visible in the current LTP and included this time to reflect the volume and complexity of change. The function covers long-term and strategic planning, legislative reform, and compliance. Key risks relate to capacity and capability, with specialist skills required to respond to reform and a current vacancy adding pressure. Ongoing change and shifting priorities make long-term planning challenging, with a need to better integrate policy into business-as-usual service delivery and streamline policy and planning direction. Managing rising expectations within static resources remains a key challenge. Trade-offs between affordability and evolving policy direction are difficult, with long-term benefits not always visible to the community.

Opportunities include reducing reliance on external consultants (except for specialist or technical work), noting use of an external project manager for the LTP and contracts for environmental scans, surveys, and design. Shared services with neighbouring councils should be explored, given similar policy and LTP functions across councils. Cost is \$374k (1.25% of rates). Vacancy utilisation and regional alignment opportunities should be further considered. Lisa Hopa (Interim CEO, Rangitāne) queried whether the vacant policy position and increasing reform-driven change present an opportunity to consider Māori policy advisory capability. It was noted that advice is currently sought from iwi through multiple channels, and that this remains an important consideration. Lisa suggested exploring whether such capability could be provided through shared services. It was noted the potential to broaden access to specialised advice across councils.

Democracy Services – Supports the Mayor, Councillors, and Community Boards to govern effectively, including elections and representation reviews, LGOIMA administration, privacy compliance, and publishing agendas and minutes to enable transparent decision-making. No specific risks were initially identified, which was noted as a potential gap. The service provides strong support to elected members, particularly new members, and to the community. Key challenges include maintaining full transparency and statutory compliance across all meeting cycles, and managing increasing volume and complexity of LGOIMA requests, which can place pressure on resources during staffing constraints. Managing openness alongside privacy obligations remains critical and is currently handled effectively. The activity must remain robust and politically neutral while supporting elected members through change. Opportunities for efficiency include increased use of AI to assist with LGOIMA processing and continued use of digital tools such as livestreaming and reduced printing. Recent changes to committee structures and community board meeting frequency are expected to positively impact workload. Cost is \$2.3m (7.3% of rates), including election contracts and meeting administration software.

Communications activity - includes monitoring public, emergency management communications, council brand management. This was a standard LTP activity and was previously an internal support service. Key risks include information quality (rely on accurate information from council), incorrect information can damage reputation, and social media issues erode public trust. Affordability pressure limiting ability to inform community effectively.

The team consists of 1 manager, 3 staff members. Aim to manage inhouse, misinformation is key challenge and public sentiment, hard to gain back trust with public, social media has amplified, proactively managing and responding. Timeliness and accuracy a challenge at times.

The team collaborates with other councils and is exploring more streamlined approaches, including shared services and improved alignment of communications software. Ongoing improvement is the primary focus.

Council benefits from strong in-house capability, including design, proofreading,

document production, and printing, which many other councils do not have. The team supports consultation through community committees and continuously reviews methods for promoting services. Current initiatives include monitoring social media engagement rules and promoting the LTP Investment Game, with learnings drawn from other councils. Posting frequency, response capacity, and level of service are regularly reviewed.

Members noted the Communications team is performing strongly, plays a key role in protecting Council's reputation, and delivers innovative, effective engagement (including radio communications). Radio effectiveness should be quantified, for example by measuring behaviour change such as Antenna app subscription increases, to support evidence-based decision-making.

It was discussed that other councils often outsource communications at high cost, while Council delivers in-house. Members requested comparative cost data, including indicative Communications team costs relative to peers, and consideration of shared services or selling capability to other councils. The potential hidden costs of outsourcing were noted. Consultants may still be used where appropriate, but there was support for upskilling the team to reduce reliance on them. Options such as engagement tools, cost savings, and a possible internal charge-back model for large-scale design work were discussed.

The Communications activity budget is \$594k, representing 1.8% of rates.

The workshop adjourned at 3.45pm, and reconvened on Wednesday 22 April 2026 at 9:30am in the Dannevirke Council Chambers, 156 High Street, Dannevirke.

1. Present

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

In Attendance

- Ms L Hopa - Iwi Representative, Rangitāne o Tamaki nui-ā-Rua (online)
- Mr C Haines - Chief Executive
- Mrs K Tani - Group Manager – Strategy and Information
- Ms S Lowe - Group Manager – People, Capability & Customer Engagement
- Mr H Featonby - Group Manager – Operations
- Ms T McDonald - Chief Financial Officer
- Ms J Smith - General Counsel
- Mr P Wimsett - Chief Strategic Advisor (online)
- Mrs B Kawana - Corporate Planning and Reporting Advisor
- Mrs S Walshe - Finance and Revenue Manager (online)
- Mrs B Fowler - Senior Financial Business Partner
- Mrs S Anthony - Democracy Support Officer

Activity: Community

Presented by Group Manager – People, Capability & Customer Engagement

Emergency Management

This activity includes Civil Defence and Emergency Management, for which Council has statutory responsibility to reduce risk and prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency events. The Emergency Management Manager has mapped all role activities against the 4Rs (Reduction, Readiness, Response, Recovery) and confirmed there is no discretionary work.

Key risks include proposed legislative changes through the Emergency Management Bill (submissions closed February 2026; outcomes pending). The reforms aim to strengthen iwi and community roles, clarify responsibilities across national, regional and local levels, lift minimum standards, minimise disruption to essential services, and improve agencies' ability to respond effectively. These changes may require increased engagement, stronger relationships, and enhanced record-keeping to demonstrate capability.

Resource constraints are a significant risk during major or prolonged events, including limited availability of trained staff and the potential for multiple districts or regions to be affected simultaneously. While mutual aid arrangements with neighbouring councils can support localised events, capacity is more constrained during large-scale emergencies. Emergency events also draw staff away from business-as-usual activities (e.g. LTP development).

Emergency events are increasing in frequency and complexity (e.g. storms, flooding, drought), placing additional pressure on resources. Recovery coordination relies on central government funding, which has enabled robust recovery outcomes that would not otherwise be possible.

Cost: \$343,000 (1.1% of rates, post-waters).

It was noted that the current FTE differs from the LTP, as an additional FTE was not replaced. A Community Engagement Officer is funded at 0.25 FTE from the Emergency Management budget and primarily supports welfare and recovery activities. This arrangement is working well due to the trusted relationships the role has established within the community.

Key risks discussed included the impact of Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activation on business-as-usual activities and the potential risk of central government recovery funding not being approved. In such cases, Council would follow standard processes to assess whether funding could be met locally if required.

Recent events over the past six months highlighted the importance of understanding the true cost and frequency of EOC activation. It was noted that

cost tracking was undertaken for larger-scale events to understand financial impacts and pressures on BAU activities, while smaller-scale events have not been consistently tracked but can be obtained. Greater transparency and cost-sharing with the community were noted as important.

The operational impact on staff was acknowledged, particularly where multiple events occur in a short period. Opportunities to share services and resources regionally were discussed. Council has reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring councils, with staff providing support in other districts when capacity allows and where impacts on BAU can be managed.

Community Engagement

The Community Engagement activity supports Council's role in engaging with and enabling communities and ensuring statutory consultation requirements are met. It is closely linked to Emergency Management, with the effectiveness of the role largely driven by relationship-building undertaken during non-emergency periods across the district.

The activity includes community engagement, support for community-led development, and administration of grants and funding programmes. This budget line also covers several self-funding or externally funded programmes, including the Mayor's Taskforce for Jobs, Sport Manawatū funding, crime prevention cameras, visitor information services grants for the Pahiatua and Eketahuna communities, contestable funds, community committees, and Creative Communities grants.

The role is funded at 0.75 FTE, with the remaining 0.25 FTE allocated to Emergency Management activities. A significant portion of the work involves grant funding, with demand and funding requests continuing to increase. It was noted there is a potential synergy with the Economic Development activity, which could strengthen engagement with external funders and attract additional funding into the district, subject to member interest.

No high risks were identified for this activity; however, it presents a strong opportunity to enhance Council's reputation through trusted relationships and community confidence. The Long-Term Plan provides an opportunity to consider how this function is shaped, including alignment with the Economic Development activity. Concerns were raised about capacity to pursue external grant opportunities, highlighting the need for capability within the role to effectively promote the district and support sustainable growth as planning changes are implemented.

The activity has strong links with the Communications function, including representation in community initiatives such as Strengthening Families, iwi engagement, and community committees. Funding options for the activity were discussed, including whether elements could align more closely with Economic Development, noting that the Systems Improvement Bill still references economic

development, primarily through a regulatory-enabling lens.

The role reports to the Group Manager – People, Capability & Customer Engagement and will become vacant from this Friday.

Cost: \$636,000 (2.1% of rates).

Economic Development

The Economic Development activity was scaled back in the last LTP. This included reduced grant funding and the introduction of a contestable funding process, as well as operational cost reductions. As a result, Council was no longer able to meet certain performance measures, including the development and maintenance of new business partnerships and the number of government funding applications submitted on Council's behalf.

The rationale for scaling back was that the activity was not considered a core local government function and that the existing delivery model did not provide best value for ratepayers. This approach was supported through community consultation, with 46 of 68 submissions in favour.

Consequently, activities reduced included proactively seeking funding on behalf of the community, actively identifying community groups and Council projects for funding support, and providing business support for new owners related to regulatory or infrastructure-led growth. While some of this activity continues to occur, it is no longer coordinated by a single, dedicated role.

Some costs remain attributed to Economic Development, largely relating to the operation of the i-SITE while the tourism function still sits within this activity. Officers are currently reviewing the budget structure to move tourism into a separate budget line to better distinguish the two functions.

The total budget is \$902,000 (2.9% of rates). Internal allocations are relatively high, based on headcount and floorspace, and include building operating costs. It was noted these allocations were set prior to the removal of the Denmark Street lease and can be revisited as part of the LTP process.

Given the activity has been deprioritised and is not significantly staffed, members expressed interest in gaining a clearer understanding of the expenditure prior to final adoption, noting the overall budget appears high. Members queried whether other organisations or businesses could deliver aspects of this activity. There are several external organisations that may be able to undertake this work.

Questions were raised regarding the Tararua Business Network, including current membership numbers, community awareness of the service, and whether Council is still providing funding support. Due to the earlier scale-back of the activity, information on uptake and utilisation was not available at the meeting; officers will follow up with further detail. A detailed breakdown of the \$902k budget was requested, including comparison with other activities such as Emergency

Management.

Members noted there may be a future role for Economic Development to support district growth and that some provision for this should be retained. Opportunities to explore alternative funding approaches were discussed, including more specialised or commission-based models. The potential for iwi involvement as a co-development partner was also noted, with ideas sought for further exploration.

Libraries, Customer Services, Visitor Information

This activity is delivered by the Customer Engagement team. Three roles provide library services (including digital services), frontline customer support for back-office functions (such as reception, applications, and payments), and visitor information services as part of the tourism function. Services are delivered across six sites throughout the district.

Key risks include staffing challenges across multiple locations and ensuring sufficient cross-training to maintain service coverage. As facilities increasingly integrate multiple services, it is important to ensure sites remain fit-for-purpose to deliver these services effectively together.

The service is delivered by 15.6 FTE. The Libraries budget is \$1.9 million (6.2% of rates), the Customer Services budget is \$1.2 million (4.0% of rates), and Visitor Information is not considered a core service under the Systems Improvement Bill. Libraries, however, are identified as a core service Council must deliver.

Council has service agreements with community groups in Eketāhuna and Pahiātua to deliver local visitor information services, with the Customer Services team in Dannevirke also providing this service locally.

Members discussed opportunities to review library and customer service opening hours, including shifting hours to better match demand (e.g. more weekends, fewer weekdays), co-location, and alternative delivery models to improve service while reducing costs. Door counters are currently used to track visitor numbers, and a customer survey is proposed to better understand preferred hours and service use. Survey results will be validated against door counter data to identify trends and inform decisions.

Potential co-location with iwi was discussed, noting alignment through community outcomes, centrally located facilities, and possible cost savings. While service functions are specific and privacy requirements must be maintained, shared or co-habitated spaces could deliver positive outcomes. Other non-iwi co-location options may also be explored.

Engaging the community on library hours and service levels was supported, consistent with pre-consultation approaches (e.g. the LTP investment game), including transparency around service costs to support informed feedback.

Changes made since the last LTP, including reduced FTE, were noted, with further changes presenting risks related to access and reputation. Site locations and hours may be adjusted, but community accessibility remains a key consideration. Benchmarking against other councils, analysing customer centre busyness (including outside standard hours), and understanding value for money were identified as important inputs.

Examples from other councils, such as unmanned open-access libraries, were noted. Officers are also reviewing which services could be moved fully online to support future service delivery decisions.

Activity Grouping

The Group Manager – Strategy and Information presented a proposed activity grouping framework. The Systems Improvement Bill identifies a set of core services that Council is required to deliver; however, Council retains discretion over how these activities are grouped and monitored within its service structure. This presents an opportunity to review activities through a governance lens rather than an operational one, with the aim of improving oversight and monitoring.

Emergency Management was identified as a core and increasingly significant activity. While Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activation occurs as required, preparedness, readiness, and ongoing capability are continuous obligations under the legislation. Members noted that Emergency Management warrants its own distinct service grouping, while acknowledging it will continue to intersect with other activities.

Members expressed no issues with the proposed structure at this stage, noting that it does not yet reflect the full picture, as not all activities have been reviewed. The grouping may change once the full suite of activities has been considered. Members were comfortable for the operational team to progress the work.

It was agreed that the Executive Leadership Team will further consider the proposed activity groupings and bring a refined proposal back to members for approval.

Cr Erana Peeti-Webber closed the workshop with a karakia.

The workshop briefing session closed at 10.50am.