



Community Connections Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Connections Committee held in the Council Chamber, 156 High Street, Dannevirke on Wednesday 20 May 2026 commencing at 9:30am.

1. Welcome and Meeting Opening

Cr E L Peeti-Webber (Chairperson), Crs E F Kennedy (Deputy Chairperson), A J Amboy, C L Corlett and K E R Te Waaka.

In Attendance

Cr S M Wards

Mr C Haines	- Chief Executive
Mrs K Tani	- Group Manager – Strategy and Information
Mr H Featonby	- Group Manager - Operations
Ms S Lowe	- Group Manager – People, Capability and Customer Engagement
Ms T McDonald	- Chief Financial Officer
Ms F Chase	- Facilities Manager
Mrs D Burnett	- Customer Engagement Manager
Mrs A Howell	- External Communications and Intelligence Lead
Ms K Stevens	- Community Engagement and Social Media Lead
Mr J Vince	- Mayors Taskforce for Jobs Coordinator
Mrs A Dunn	- Manager – Democracy Services

2. Public Forum – Tararua Health Group

2.1 Ravin Abeysekera and Mark Willis from Tararua Health Group attended the meeting to speak about the Tararua Health Group's Dannevirke Acute Care Clinic. Their presentation outlined the clinic's advanced onsite facilities, specialised care, inpatient support and 24/7 clinical services, as well as the dedicated community acute response and the value these provide for Tararua residents.

Questions were raised regarding the Community Primary Care Programme, a partnership between Tararua Health Group, Rangitāne and Ngāti Kahungunu contracted by Health New Zealand. It was noted that the contract has been extended to 30 June 2026, after which it will continue without the involvement of Tararua Health Group.

In response to questions about wait times at the clinics, it was explained that separating acute patients from general practice patients has helped ensure scheduled appointments are not delayed by urgent cases.

When asked how the Council could support Tararua Health Group's efforts to extend services to the community, the Group advised that advocacy with Health New Zealand, and with both local and central government, would be particularly valuable.

Further clarification was provided on clinical governance oversight and the process for referring patients to a doctor when their care needs fall outside the scope of Nurse Practitioners.

Information was also shared about training opportunities for clinicians interested in providing ADHD treatment services.

Regarding wait times at the Pahiatua Clinic, it was acknowledged that routine appointments currently have long delays. However, Pahiatua patients are able to access the Dannevirke clinics, and the availability of the Acute Care Clinic is helping free up routine appointment slots. Tararua Health Group advised that they are actively recruiting additional providers and working to ensure each site has an appropriate number of suitably qualified clinicians.

It was also noted that during recruitment, candidates often seek information about the social and lifestyle offerings within the district, and the Council's support in promoting these aspects would be helpful.

3. Apologies

- 3.1 ***That the apologies from Mayor Scott Gilmore be accepted and leave of absence granted for the meeting.***

Corlett/Amboy

Carried

4. Notification of Items Not on the Agenda

Nil

5. Declarations of Conflicts of Interest in Relation to this Meeting's Items of Business

Nil

6. Confirmation of Minutes

- 6.1 *That the minutes of the Community Connections Committee meeting held on 18 February 2026 (as circulated) be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.*

Amboy/Corlett

Carried

7. Reports

7.1 Management Report

The Community Connections Committee considered the report of the Group Manager – Strategy and Information dated 13 February 2026 that provided an update on key activities and items of interest over the period since the last report to the committee. The report included updates from the Communications, Facilities, Customer Engagement, Mayor’s Taskforce for Jobs and Community Engagement activities.

Communications

Updates were provided on several high-profile communication matters, including the Dannevirke Deer Park and the amalgamation process. Media enquiries had increased compared with the previous reporting period. A positive trend was noted in Facebook engagement, with breaches decreasing from 14 to two, indicating improved online interactions.

Council’s website ranked 24th out of approximately 80 councils in the recent ALGIM web audit.

In response to a question about whether insights were available as to the age groups engaging with Council’s posts, and whether there was an appetite for moving into Instagram and Tiktok, it was advised that Council’s Instagram page launched late last year, and a social media strategic plan has been developed. Officers are exploring how TikTok could be used effectively and will engage Youth Portfolio members on Instagram engagement strategies.

Regarding the annual community survey, officers noted that while it informs Long Term Plan performance targets, it does not specifically measure the Communications function. The Community Voice survey is being promoted regularly through the website, social media, the Bush Telegraph, and Antenna. Response numbers remain low, and an extension may be required.

The process for responding to private social-media messages was clarified. Messages received outside business hours receive an automated reply. During business hours, the social media officer responds directly where possible. Queries requiring additional information are treated as LGOIMA requests, and complaints are referred through the formal complaints process.

Facilities

Officers reported on ground stability issues at Mangatera Cemetery. Urgent assessments are underway to determine the extent of berm subsidence, with a report expected within weeks. The affected area appears to relate mainly to burials from the 1970s. Members requested that a future report be provided once the scope of work is known. The value of experienced contractors identifying the issue early was acknowledged.

An image showing the affected area will be provided to members. Communications are planned for early June once the number of impacted plots and required remedial work are confirmed. This information will also be shared with Customer Services.

Members requested that whānau of affected plots be contacted before public communication. Officers advised this would depend on the scope of the issue and the availability of contact information.

A brief update was provided on Deer Park. Public enquiries have been received, and a site visit was undertaken with a community group interested in forming a management team. It was great to see the level of interest from the community, who were putting together a proposal to bring to the Council. It was noted that the current caretaker was willing to stay on board while the community looked at alternatives to closing the deer park, however Council needed to be mindful of his future intention to retire.

Regarding the playground audit, members asked about continued use of equipment identified as high-risk. Officers confirmed that additional monitoring is in place and that project managers are working with community groups. Most playgrounds pre-date the 2015 standards, and while Council aims to move toward compliance, current conditions are considered satisfactory.

Facility booking data was clarified: only bookings recorded in the calendar are counted, so informal use by groups with independent access is not reflected.

On vandalism, officers noted that design changes are being explored to reduce damage.

For the S17A reviews, officers reported that TACT declined to take on the Woodville facility, preferring to focus on their own operations. The new Pahiatua Pool is intended to provide support to other outdoor pools.

Regarding Camping grounds it was noted that a recommendation through the s17A review was to implement a booking system. Officers had been investigating this and landed on product called Bookable, and also looking at whether it can be implemented for all bookable spaces. Due diligence had been completed and awaiting procurement processes. It was noted that Altitude provide a bookable system.

With regard to the Woodville Camping Ground, Council had applied for an exemption rather than deregistering the Woodville Camping Ground.

Customer Engagement

An increase in calls was noted. The longest wait time occurred when three staff were away sick and only one or two staff were available during a lunch period. Recruitment is underway for parental leave cover at the Pahiatua Library and other vacancies.

Information Centre enquiry statistics currently exclude the Dannevirke Information Centre, which Council brought inhouse in July 2025. Officers are developing a method to track and report this data. Bus enquiries and show ticket sales remain the most common requests being undertaken in that service. Further analysis will be included in the next report.

A decrease in children's visits to the Eketāhuna Library was discussed, with feedback suggesting fewer available activities as a contributing factor.

Clarification was sought on whether the Pahiatua Information Centre is primarily used by locals. Officers will obtain this information from the group providing the service.

A community survey on library hours will be conducted in June, with results to be presented at the next committee meeting.

Mayors Taskforce for Jobs

The programme has shifted from a broad youth-employment focus to supporting 18–24-year-old job-seeker beneficiaries.

Previously the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs service was for anyone aged 16-24 coming out of school and wanting to get into employment. The target of 27 Ministry of Social Development outcomes had been reduced to 14 placements, with 10 being achieved as at the end of the third quarter. Challenges included limited entry-level job availability, MSD staffing changes, and no referrals during the first half of the year. There are now 40 referrals to work with in the final quarter.

Progress has been made in driver licensing, forklift training, and traffic-management training. Converting referrals into placements is the current priority. Funding for next year has been confirmed.

Youth teams at iwi providers are aware of the programme, though their own funding is limited. Tararua's service covers Eketāhuna, but youth may also access the Wairarapa programme due to proximity to Masterton.

Collaboration with REAP and Youth Services is ongoing for licensing support, though limited for training, as referrals are directed to appropriate course

Community Engagement

The Community Engagement role is currently vacant, with recruitment underway. In the interim, the Group Manager – People, Capability and Customer Engagement is overseeing the workload, with a primary focus on the EECA solar project, which must be delivered by the end of July to enable community access to solar funding.

That the report from the Group Manager - Strategy and Information dated 13 February 2026 concerning the Management Report be received.

Peeti-Webber/Te Waaka

Carried

8. Items not on the Agenda

8.1 Nil

There being no further business the Chairperson thanked those present for their attendance and contributions, and declared the meeting closed at 11:25am.