



Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Tararua District Council held in the Council Chamber, 156 High Street, Dannevirke on Wednesday 10 June 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, P M Naylor, E L Peeti-Webber, K E R Te Waaka, and S A Wallace

In Attendance

Mr T Hynes	- Deputy Chairperson, Dannevirke Community Board
Mr R Wallace	- Dannevirke Community Board
Ms R Bell	- RB Consulting
Mr C Haines	- Chief Executive
Ms S Lowe	- Group Manager – People, Capability and Customer Engagement
Mr H Featonby	- Group Manager - Operations
Ms J Smith	- General Counsel
Mr P Wimsett	- Chief Strategic Advisor
Mrs S Walshe	- Finance and Revenue Manager
Mrs A Dunn	- Manager – Democracy Services

2. Apologies

That the apologies from Cr E F Kennedy, be approved and leave of absence granted for the meeting.

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

3. Reports

3.1 Local Government Reform: Community Engagement Outcomes and Options for Tararua District

The Tararua District Council considered the report of the Chief Executive dated 29 May 2026 that provided an update to the Council on the Central Government announcement and emerging policy direction regarding local government reform and report back on the feedback received through recent community

engagement activities regarding local government reform.

The Mayor thanked attendees of nine community meetings, noting the Council's early and proactive engagement. Appreciation was also extended to councillors, staff, and Horizons Regional Councillor Sally Dryland for their strong participation.

The Chief Executive spoke to his report, noting that any proposals to enter into the Head Start process were due by 9 August 2026. The alternative to the Head Start was the Back Stop process. He noted that although there was not a lot of detail about what that could look like, it could look like the originally proposed combined territories boards that had originally been set out by the Government in their Simplifying Local Government Proposal. He spoke about the meetings held throughout the district to share information with the community, and the invitation to the community to share their thoughts with the Council either online or via forms provided. He noted that 409 responses were received.

Questions for clarification were addressed as follows:

Funding and Costs: The Chief Executive confirmed that upcoming work will incur currently unbudgeted costs. Existing budgets will need to be reviewed to identify funding sources, but it is too early to estimate total costs. No central government funding is available, and any proposed funding approach will be reported back to Council.

Engagement and Significance: Officers advised that the level of engagement undertaken aligns with the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. Councils nationwide face similar time constraints, and efforts have been made to gather meaningful community feedback.

Head Start and Back Stop Processes: If the Council submits a compliant proposal through the Head Start process, the Government may accept or decline it. If declined, or if alternative options are pursued, these would move into the Back Stop process. There is no clear option to exit the Head Start process once joined.

Community Feedback and Representation: No demographic data was collected from public engagement, and some community perspectives may be missing. Separate engagement occurred with iwi partners and Federated Farmers. Despite local engagement, there is a risk that external decisions could override Tararua's local voice.

Future Engagement: Future community engagement will be determined by Council. The Mayor indicated that further consultation would be required before final decisions, with a personal preference for a binding referendum.

Workload and Resourcing: The same staff are supporting multiple major workstreams (reform, long-term plan, water reform), and this is being actively monitored by the Chief Executive.

Timeframes and Options: There is limited ability to develop alternative options

before 9 August 2026. Non-unitary authority proposals would need to proceed via the Back Stop process.

Collaboration and Models: Early discussions are underway with other councils. Possible models include federations or expanded shared services. Collaboration could improve efficiency, share workloads, and support equitable delivery.

In addition, the following was noted:

- No further information is held beyond what has already been shared.
- “Fight for a better option” remains a viable pathway, especially outside the Head Start process.
- Transparency and acknowledgment of community feedback are important considerations.
- Horizons Regional Council is preparing information to clarify its functions for each council.

The Mayor read out the amended motions, which he then moved, with the motions being seconded by Cr Wards.

The Mayor noted that feedback from the meetings highlighted significant community concern about the short three-month timeframe for decisions on proposed local government reforms. There was strong and consistent support for maintaining localism, local voice, and local decision-making.

He spoke about the two key themes that emerged:

- A preference to explore alternatives to simple amalgamation, with concerns raised about whether amalgamation would improve costs or outcomes.
- If amalgamation is mandated, a preference to consider options within the Horizons region, reflecting existing communities of interest and relationships.

He noted that engagement with iwi and stakeholders indicated differing geographic preferences but a shared interest in exploring options. Rangitāne o Tamaki nui-ā-Rua indicated a preference to go south, and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Tāmaki nui-a-Rua had a preference to stay coastal, either north or south. Federated Farmers supported investigating options within the Horizons region.

Discussions with the Minister of Local Government confirmed that non-amalgamation options would need to be pursued through the “Back Stop” process. The Minister indicated this would be collaborative, although he was clear that change was expected to occur. Confirmation of this position has been sought.

The Mayor emphasised the need to:

- Undertake detailed financial modelling of amalgamation options (Horizons and Wairarapa) to inform decision-making.
- Develop alternative proposals in preparation for the Back Stop process.
- Authorise the Chief Executive and Mayor to engage in substantive discussions with other councils.

Key principles for future discussions were outlined:

- Communities should have the final say.
- Local representation and decision-making must be protected and enhanced.
- Any proposal must deliver genuine efficiency and affordability.

In speaking in debate to the motions, members emphasised that any proposed changes should be supported by robust data and financial modelling. Concerns were raised that amalgamation into larger entities could weaken local democracy, particularly given New Zealand already has a relatively low council-to-population ratio.

The importance of maintaining strong local leadership was highlighted, along with potential negative impacts of amalgamation on Māori. Members stressed that decisions should be guided by what is best for the district's people, rather than settling for the "least worst" option.

There were also concerns about the rushed timeframe of the process and the need to carefully consider Tararua District's specific priorities in comparison to those of other districts.

In his right of reply, Mayor Gilmore stated that the motions provide an opportunity to advocate for a better option that reflects community wishes while retaining flexibility. He noted that while democracy can carry costs, amalgamation could result in even greater financial and social costs through loss of democratic representation.

He emphasised that the decision is significant and centred on the community, expressing pride in the strong engagement shown by residents. He highlighted the importance of having a clear benchmark, including investigating costs of alternative options, to properly evaluate choices.

Mayor Gilmore concluded by thanking councillors for their contributions and their passion for serving the community.

The motions were put separately as follows:

- 1.1** *That the report from the Chief Executive dated 29 May 2026 concerning the Local Government Reform: Community Engagement Outcomes and Options for Tararua District be received.*

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

- 1.2** *That the Tararua District Council notes the support for option four (go West to Manawatu Whanganui) as either a primary or backup option, confirms this option for further investigation, including financial modelling.*

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

- 1.3** *That the Tararua District Council notes iwi support and some community support for option two (go south to Wairarapa) and confirms this option for further investigation, including financial modelling.*

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

- 1.4** *That the Tararua District Council authorises the Mayor and Chief Executive to continue discussions on behalf of council with the relevant councils identified in recommendation 1.2 and 1.3 above.*

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

- 1.5** *That the Tararua District Council notes and endorses the community's support for option six (fight for a better option), including a desire to challenge the proposed reform timeframe while looking at alternative structures to improve local government.*

Mayor Gilmore/Cr Wards

Carried

4. Closure

There being no further business the Mayor thanked those present for their attendance and contributions, and the meeting closed with karakia whakamutunga at 2:04pm