

Rates

Local government rates are increasing well in excess of CPI. Ratepayers are in a cost-of-living crisis. Growth cannot be an excuse as it is simply a factor you will have to deal with.

How will you manage Rates increases?

1. Rates lower than national averages & neighbours
2. Corporate efficiencies - Staff realignment & scale & KPIs for all
3. 1st Waters CCO w Hamilton & New Road Contractors/Model after 10y Alliance

Comments

Rates hurt in this tough economy, we've done our job to rationalise, with much planned.
Council savings \$2m+, additional \$15m in government funds; no passion projects. Delivered promised late carried-forward projects.
"4th fastest-growing" and "8th 'lowest' of 67 councils" nationally: staff costs to population, with lower net debt/revenue proportion than high-growth councils. We're performing above our weight, including AA+ financial rating. I expect nothing less.
We're performing: Central Government DIA & Taxpayers Unions comparative statistics: <https://www.dia.govt.nz/local-government-performance-metrics>
Changing the same-old talkie-talkie politics; getting under the hood, fixing the issues and driving change, and sorting the do-ie.
First-time, real collaboration with the Chamber, promoting their inclusion with Future-Proof; with other providers, energy, gas and digital, to maximise planning synergy and ratepayer outcomes.
Instigated Co-Lab & Waters cooperative initiatives: <https://www.colabsolutions.govt.nz>
<https://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/services-facilities/water/iawai-flowing-waters>
Appointed new CEO after 20years+: Future-Smart alignment of the corporate organisational needs for our complex economy, businesses and communities.
Reducing the decade-old senior leadership from 11-6. Focusing on KPI's for all operational staff, not acceptable this hasn't been overseen by governance.
Roads, no KPIs for our 600km [1/4] network, nor internally-controlled asset-management, a fundamental building-block of business. Hence cleaning-up and investing a necessary internal team for roads and waters, our primary asset/cost areas.

JACQUI CHURCH

Debt

Debt has been the easy option for local government entities to resort to in order to hold rates down in the face of inflation, growth, and a need to be re-elected. Councils such as Hamilton have had rating downgrades pointing to a failure by Councils to prudently manage their finances.

How will you deal with debt?

1. WDC has retained AA+ Financial rating - we don't buy the groceries with debt
2. Growth & Debt & Local Government Act Legislation & CC Policies
3. Leveraging Fit-for-Purpose operational corporate council & levels of service

Comments

Leveraging Our 'General Rate:' lower than national average, vs Auckland [add Watercare rates] & Hamilton forecasting increases 2025/26 4.25%; 2026/27 3%; 2027/28 2.5%.

Councils LTP plan forward. New councils operate on previous council budgets and debt projections for over ½ their term. Our comprehensive assessment prior to our LTP25-34, with citizens of "level of service(s)" [LOS], and strategic directions wanted to ensure clarity-of-focus. Communities want "more delivered" with "less money" and "no reductions in service-levels."

Something in an inflationary, complex, highly regulatory, and uncontrollable economy environment has to give. We've rationalised, focused forward, building new-fit-for purpose structures, strategies and policies.

Firsts to mitigate these dynamics, creating an effective, corporate council environment to deliver more-for less, it's happening:

47% of our citizens, 50% of rates, 83% of roads are rurally-based. Yet previous to me, not 1 staff member represented rural-sector, rural-businesses, rural-lifestyle blockers; rural-hamlet communities. Debt; growth; voice, LOS and long term underinvestment in ageing-infrastructure isn't acceptable anymore. IAWAI 3Waters and Plan, manages debt, affordability and scalability this LTP25-34, with anticipated reductions in rates. Delivering outcomes, leveraging debt and costs inter-generally from 2027onwards.

Same with roads, asset management, costs to bring in-house, cost extraordinarily more not to; digitisation; Antenno:

<https://www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/report-it/download-antenno>; and AI.

JACQUI CHURCH

Amalgamation

The amalgamation of some or all of Waikato Councils has been an issue the Chamber has been canvassing for some years. Auckland has been amalgamated, and the net result is seen as positive for their community with little diminution of democracy.

"For the 2025/2026 rating year, Auckland Council has announced a total rates increase of 5.8%, equating to approximately \$223 per year for the average residential property."

What is your considered position on Amalgamation?

For amalgamation

Against amalgamation

If in favour of change, how would you implement it?

1. Ak rates 60% + User-pays model very different + add Watercare 3Waters
2. 3Waters+ & leveraging current shared working models operating
3. Decision of all the people - data not 'opinion-based' referendum

Comments

Auckland rates, please add Watercare LTP at 7.5%/year increases; plus their 2025/26 rates are 'confirmed average 5.8% increase':

<https://new.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/en/plans-policies-bylaws-reports-projects/our-plans-strategies/budget-plans/annual-plan-2025-2026.html>

It's a simplistic, not apples with apples proposition to compare. With 1.7million+ Vs 92,500 people in WDC; similar geographic size and differing rating-models etc. WDC has 17, 3Waters plants; Hamilton has 2. Comparison analysis needs robustness; check DIA's attempt. Amalgamation's healthy; inevitable and robust process of LG, many amalgamations have occurred over-time. Our history includes, Raglan; Franklin [2010, saw locals split 4+ways]; Auckland and 3Waters.

Smaller councils are often no larger in our region than my community boards. They need to decide what they want. South Waikato, where my CEO operated, investigated:

<https://www.southwaikato.govt.nz/repository/libraries/id:24rtvarkd17q9s3wxfn/hierarchy/our-council/strategies-plans-policies-bylaws/documents/annualreport12-13full%20%282%29.pdf>

The huge tasks the what, when, whom and how. If there's further mandate away from representative localism.

Let's have those referendums.

Amalgamations already ramping-up and being delivered, with increasingly multi-shared services: 3Waters; Co-Lab; Future-Proof Sub-regional works; my first Economic Takatini; Rural Strategy; Animal Control Assessment to name a few, are all active examples, collaboration and amalgamations ramping-up.

However, nationally Local Government investigated: people want "Localism" and a stronger voice. Now in Auckland, policy and politics is not set locally anymore, only by 20 councillors and Mayor.

<https://www.lgnz.co.nz/news/media-releases/poll-finds-people-want-more-localism-in-local-government/>