

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. By spending ratepayers' money as carefully as we would our own.
2. By eliminating wasteful expenditure, tackling debt, and operating more efficiently.
3. By focusing on core services and priorities, not "nice to haves".

Comments

There's far too much evidence of wasteful spending by local government, and Hamilton CC is no exception: especially in our unpopular roading projects but also many poor decisions. I will lead a line-by-line review of all HCC expenditure to identify where savings can and must be made.

HCC must downsize, starting with a leaner and more efficient governance model. We do not need 15 councillors, but we do need a better balance of governance skills around the table.

The government has made it clear that rates capping is on the way, so we will have to deal with that, and make a number of tough choices - but not at the expense of core services. We must operate more efficiently and pressure central government to fix the broken local government funding model, because the demands of our high growth and urgently needed new infrastructure, and repairs to ageing and inadequate pipes in older suburbs, are expensive and must be addressed.

I will use my experience and contacts in central government to push as hard as I can for a better system.

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. By cutting expenditure to ensure we balance the books.
2. By lobbying central government to fix the broken local government funding model.
3. By spreading good debt over the lifetime of important assets and infrastructure

Comments

It is true that past rates increases did not match our rapid growth, inflation, and vital infrastructure needs and maintenance which are always costly.

But HCC has also become too big, bureaucratic, difficult to deal with, and careless with much of our recent expenditure.

This must change to ensure we become a leaner, more customer-orientated organisation which concentrates on delivering core services and projects efficiently and well, while eliminating the obvious waste that ratepayers report on a regular basis.

Too many current councillors and new candidates have argued that "we have a revenue problem, not a spending problem" - which is code for saying we don't need to rein in spending, we just need to keep hiking the rates that our residents are paying. That is nonsense. We have a major spending problem and it's well past time we committed to cutting our suit according to our cloth.

Ratepayers are crying out for relief, and I'm particularly concerned to hear of increasing numbers of older folk having to take out reverse mortgages in order to pay their rates and stay in their homes, while younger residents struggle to find affordable housing.

A forensic audit of all aspects of our budgeting is clearly needed to guide better decision-making and prepare us for the rates capping that central government is intending to impose on us. We cannot continue as we have been.

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. Opening the discussion would need to be agreed with neighbouring councils, and assisted by central government.
2. Previous research, a detailed business case, and a thorough understanding of the Auckland "super city" experience.
3. By ensuring that amalgamation is accompanied by improved central government processes, funding and expectations.

Comments

There should have been a third option in this question: it's not a simple yes/no answer, but I do believe NZ has far too many separate territorial authorities for a country of our size.

I've ticked "for" because I am keen to engage in the discussion and see some obvious benefits, but it would have to be based on local demand, a solid business case, and an assurance that central government will play its part in making an amalgamated Waikato council work. It can't be set up to fail.

We can start by looking again at the work the University of Waikato led in this area more than a decade ago, and the feedback that elicited. I see an obvious role for the Chamber to help lead this process, and the university again.

In the meantime, I would keep pushing for more shared services arrangements with neighbouring councils, to ensure that greater efficiencies, economies of scale, and much greater use of emerging information technology are secured and utilised wherever possible.