MINUTES
Extraordinary

TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O WHAKAAHURANGI
STRATFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

F25/96/005 – D26/29529

Date: 4 August 2026 at 10.00am
Venue: Council Chambers, 63 Miranda Street, Stratford

Present

The District Mayor Neil Volzke (the Chairperson), the Deputy Mayor Amanda Harris, Councillors: Steve Beck, Jaime Bertie, Grant Boyde, David Chadwick, Annette Dudley, Jono Erwood, Ellen Hall, Katherine Sextus, and Mathew Watt.

In attendance

The Chief Executive – Sven Hanne, the Director – Environmental Services – Blair Sutherland, the Director – Corporate Services – Raelene Johnson, the Director – Community Services – Kate Whareaitu, the Director – Assets – Victoria Araba, the Governance Advisor & Executive Assistance – Gareth Hancock.

1. Welcome

The opening karakia and H&S message was read.

2. Apologies

THAT the apology from Councillor Josh Best be received.

ERWOOD/DUDLEY
Carried
CL/26/68

3. Declarations of Members Interest

Elected members were asked to declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest relating to items on this agenda. There were no conflicts of interest declared. None.

4. Decision Report– confirmation of preferred option.

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Recommendations

1. THAT the report be received.

VOLZKE/CHADWICK
Carried
CL/26/69

2. THAT Council approves in principle, the draft Head Start Pathway Outline Proposal attached to this report.

BOYDE/HALL
Carried
CL/26/70

3. THAT Council notes South Taranaki District Council's decision on this matter, (to be) made on 3 August 2026.

VOLZKE/DUDLEY
Carried
CL/26/71

4. THAT Council authorises the Chief Executive to work with the Chief Executive of South Taranaki District Council to finalise the draft and submit it by 9 August 2026 to the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport for assessment and approval by Cabinet.

HALL/BECK
Carried
CL/26/72

5. THAT Council authorises the Mayor to approve the final proposal on behalf of Stratford District Council, before it is submitted.

SEXTUS/HARRIS
Carried
CL/26/73

Recommended Reason

On 21 July 2026, Council resolved that its preferred option for a Head Start proposal was to form a two-unitary council and amalgamate with the South Taranaki District Council to form a unitary council for central and south Taranaki.

The Chief Executive and District Mayor noted the following points:

- The Chief Executive noted that elected members have been involved throughout the process. Council decided two weeks ago to progress a proposal to amalgamate with South Taranaki. This is a draft document, and while minor corrections are still to be made, none are considered material changes. It is recognised in Recommendation Four that further amendments will be required before submission on Sunday; however, the aim is to finalise it by Friday. The recommendation authorises the Mayor to make any necessary final changes that do not alter the intent of the proposal and to keep the process moving. This is a high-level and flexible proposal that does not commit Council to specific details, as those will be worked through over the next six months. If Council endorses the proposal, the Chief Executive will finalise it in consultation with the Mayor.
- Council will need to wait approximately four to eight weeks before finding out whether the proposal has been accepted by the Government. If accepted, the six-month work programme will begin for the detailed design. This work will involve engagement with iwi, the regional council, and other stakeholder groups, and is expected to be a busy period. The Chief Executive reiterated the process to elected members.
- The District Mayor said it has been an interesting journey to reach this stage and that Council now has a document that can be submitted to the Government. The Mayor expressed a desire to see the proposal progress from today's meeting and noted that discussions have taken place with elected members, iwi, stakeholders, and the wider community. The general view is aligned with what these groups said, and there has not been a significant amount of dissent, which provides some assurance. The Mayor emphasised that this is not the final proposal but rather intended to get Council through the first gateway of the process. A number of aspects still need to be worked through, and this remains a light-touch, high-level document. Several areas require further development. An important point to remember is that Council can still pivot or stop the process if that is the majority view. This is part of the process, not the end outcome. The Mayor also referred to the Federated Farmers submission that had been circulated to members.
- The Mayor noted to members that while there may be points with which members disagree, it is unlikely that any document will align with 100 per cent of everyone's views. Some changes will be made, but these are not expected to be material.

Points noted in the discussion and questions:

- The Deputy Mayor referred to the joint committee arrangement and queried whether specific legislation would be required. The CE advised that joint committees are well established under the Local Government Act. However, where a joint committee is responsible for significant functions mandated by legislation, it may be preferable to pursue bespoke legislation to establish a dedicated entity with a clear statutory mandate, safeguards, and legislated governance arrangements. The CE noted that bespoke legislation would formally recognise and authorise the entity to undertake those mandated functions.
- The Deputy Mayor sought clarification on whether the Council had been in discussions with Horizons regarding the boundary section, and whether any formal dialogue had taken place. The CE advised that there had been informal discussions; however, Horizons had not yet confirmed their proposal.
- The District Mayor noted a statement within the proposal that "unitary by default, regional by exception". This point was further elaborated on during the discussion.
- Councillor Boyde referred to the governance and representation section of the proposal, particularly the reference to Māori wards, noting that all three councils had removed those wards. Councillor Boyde queried how the community might respond to the inclusion of this wording. The CE advised that this point had also been raised by others and noted that iwi representation and involvement would be important moving forward. The CE further commented that, at this early stage of the proposal, the wording could be amended, as these matters would form part of the second stage of the proposal. The District Mayor also spoke further to this point.

- Councillor Hall noted the detailed design process and how the proposal is currently worded. It relates to iwi partnerships and acknowledges that iwi do have a role. She noted that a referendum had been held, but where significant changes occur, there is an opportunity to revisit the matter.
- Councillor Beck noted that it is very important to respect what the community has voted for. He stated that the community has placed its trust in Council based on the little information provided, and that the referendum result showed they did not support Māori wards. He considered that including this would be a disservice to the community.
- Councillor Chadwick noted the need to review the partnership through the Treaty relationship and, by design, include Māori in the journey. He stated that this would benefit both the partnership and Taranaki, and that there is a good opportunity to strengthen that relationship. While a referendum had been held, he noted that matters are revisited. He suggested the wording could be amended by members, but it would be transparent to acknowledge that further discussion may occur.
- Councillor Hall noted that the consultant had included wording indicating the proposal would not be declined solely on that basis, and queried whether the issue of Māori wards would be considered a negative factor. The Mayor noted that the proposal would not be judged solely on this matter, as there are five criteria that must be met and assessed.
- The Deputy Mayor noted that Council needed to be mindful that it was a football in a political game, and that the game is called the election. She stated that she was comfortable with asking the question again but supported softening the wording in the agenda.
- Councillor Erwood sought clarity regarding the South Taranaki decision and whether any recommendation had been included in its adoption. The CE noted that South Taranaki had held a similar discussion. He added that South Taranaki is committed to Māori representation. He emphasised this was more about the timing of the conversation.
- Councillor Beck noted that if the aim was to get the proposal across the line with the Government, he would prefer to leave discussion of the ward system out of it, as there would be plenty of opportunities to discuss that matter in future.
- Councillor Erwood noted that the proposal referred to Māori representation rather than specifically to Māori wards. Further discussion took place over the matter and wording.
- Councillor Hall referred to the Mayor's comments regarding an email from Federated Farmers about the Natural Environment Plan. The CE noted that there would be an opportunity to revisit the matter and that it could be included in the next phase of work. Members agreed to this approach. Councillor Hall noted that this highlighted the importance of the design phase.
- Councillor Hall noted that the biggest decision was made two weeks ago and that the document needs to reflect that decision. She stated that she is particularly interested in the next phase of the project. While the report discusses information gathering and investigation, Councillors are interested in how it will be implemented. She expressed thanks and confidence in the work undertaken by staff and consultants to date. The Councillor was interested in understanding how Elected Members will be involved in the design phase, and in the discussions around how that will occur.
- Councillor Beck noted the need to prioritise work other work. The CE advised that the key focus of the LTP is the delivery of projects, and that there is limited overlap with this work. He noted that different resources will be utilised where possible and that efforts will be made to minimise the impact on projects.
- The District Mayor noted the next steps, which included the Mayoral Forum in the afternoon.

5. Closing Karakia

The closing karakia was read.

The meeting closed at 10.52 am.

N C Volzke
Chairman

Confirmed this 8th day of September 2026.

N C Volzke
District Mayor