MINUTES
Extraordinary

TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O WHAKAAHURANGI
STRATFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

F25/96/05 – D26/19436

Date: 26 May 2026 at 2.00 PM
Venue: Council Chambers, 63 Miranda Street, Stratford

Present

The District Mayor Neil Volzke (the Chairperson), the Deputy Mayor Amanda Harris (partial meeting), 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 Deputy Mayor Amanda Harris be received, noting that she may be present via Zoom for part of the meeting.

VOLZKE/BOYDE
Carried
CL/26/44

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.

4. Decision Report– Heads of Agreement - the Government's Head Start Process.

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Recommendations

1. THAT the report be received.

VOLZKE/BERTIE
Carried
CL/26/45

2. ~~THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference, or~~

~~THAT the Council approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference with amendments, or~~

THAT the Council does not approve participation in the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships Programme, Heads of Agreement and associated Terms of Reference.

BOYDE/HALL
Division 12 For 0 Against
Carried
CL/26/46

3. *Agrees to participate in the Central Government Head Start pathway;*
Notes that this does not commit the Council to submitting a proposal;
Authorises the Chief Executive to allocate appropriate resources to developing a Head Start proposal; and
Notes that any financial contribution to this work is unbudgeted.

ERWOOD/DUDLEY
Carried
CL/26/47

4. *Authorises the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to finalise a suitable agreement with one or more councils in Taranaki which outlines how they will work together to develop a proposal for council adoption under the Head Start Pathway.*

BOYDE/BECK
Carried
CL/26/48

Recommended Reason
The matter for consideration by the Council is the Taranaki Future Local Government Partnerships (FLGP) Programme, Heads of Agreement and the associated FLGP Oversight (Joint) Committee Terms of Reference.
Not agreeing to participate in the Head Start pathway would result in the Council being subject to the backstop approach, whereby the Government would determine the future structure and arrangements for the Council.

The CE and Mayor noted the following points:

- The CE noted that no recommendations are being made by officers, as this is considered a political matter and therefore a decision for elected members to make.
- The CE further clarified the wording around the backstop process and the intent of the recommendation, noting that the Council will still have other options should they choose not to adopt the terms of reference. If not adopted, alternative mechanisms would be sought. The CE also noted that the agreement relies on multiple parties agreeing to it, and that every council in Taranaki is making its decision today. By the end of the day, all decisions should have been made.
- The District Mayor noted that today's decision is whether to sign the document included in the agenda. This is not the first version of the agreement and dates back to December last year. It was previously declined to be put to Council by both himself and the South Taranaki District Mayor. Today's version is the most recent and has changed slightly. If not adopted, further recommendations will be sought to establish a pathway ahead, should that be the Council's decision.

Questions/Points of Clarification:

- Councillor Boyde stated that he could not support the heads of agreement document and believed this should be a decision made solely by territorial authorities. He noted that the triennium agreement should be used instead, and that too much power is tied to the Regional Council. The Councillor highlighted that the Chair has a casting vote, the Regional Council CE has two votes (three including a casting vote). In effect, this creates three votes for the CE as is acting for the New Plymouth District. He expressed concerns about his level of trust with NPDC and the Regional Council, and stated that the Regional Council should not be involved. He emphasised that this is a decision for elected members to make, with voting rights resting with Mayors rather than Chair and Chief Executives, as no one elected those individuals. He asked the Mayor whether the Heads of Agreement was necessary. The Mayor responded that it may not be required and that progress could instead be made through the triennium agreement and under a "no surprises" approach. The Councillor also sought further information on costs. The Mayor noted that the total cost had previously been indicated as approximately $1.5 million over a number of years. Under the Heads of Agreement proposal, costs would be split according to the usual share arrangement, with Stratford contributing 8 percent as part of the council funding split.
- Councillor Hall raised a query regarding item 4.13 and the difference between the Mayoral Forum, which was clarified as having joint decision-making power. Further clarification was sought around community engagement and what this would look like. The CE noted this is something to be worked towards, and it is not feasible to achieve full community engagement within the four-week timeframe; instead, it is likely to be more focused engagement. The Mayor noted there will be some engagement as part of progressing through the first gateway, and that there is another pathway for full community engagement as part of the following six-month process. It was further queried why there are two groups, with the CE explaining that it is easier to bring staff together opposed to Elected Members.

The Councillor also questioned why meetings are scheduled every six weeks, with the Mayor suggesting this is likely a hangover from an earlier version. The Councillor queried the dispute resolution provisions in section QB, particularly the reference to "senior suitable officers," with the Mayor noting this should instead be an elected members. Further clarification was sought on whether an independent chair for the governance group had been considered. The Mayor noted that, as the role is rotational and currently sits with the Regional Council, no consideration has been given to an independent chair, and that this should remain an elected member. The quorum requirement was noted as being only half rather than a majority, with the Mayor indicating this is likely consistent with standing orders. The Councillor also asked whether membership of the oversight group had considered extending the delegation, with the Mayor noting he was not aware of any.

- Councillor Beck noted, on page 13, the importance of public participation and stated that nothing should fall short of a referendum. In his opinion, the Chair of the Regional Council should not have a say.
- The District Mayor then provided members with further clarity on the Head Start process and the role of a unitary authority.

Points noted in the discussion to recommendation two:

- Councillor Hall, this does not preclude us from participating in the process, nor does it mean we are opposed to working together. However, there would need to be significant amendments to the agreement. TRC should not be involved, and elected members should be part of the process. Financial information should be known and made to Council and reported. This is a significant matter, and we are being rushed. There has not been sufficient engagement with our communities, and there is no clear focus on engagement. We must prioritise meaningful consultation with our communities and uphold strong localism. And was happy to work together as neighbours but there needs to be changes.
- Councillor Watt noted that there has been no consultation with iwi, and that iwi have been left out of the process. He expressed concern that this is pushing toward amalgamation and that the agreement is weighted in favour of TRC, giving them too much power in the process.
- The District Mayor supported a number of the points raised, particularly around financial costs. He noted that it is unclear what is being purchased and what services are included. He also raised concern that the Regional Council has appointed a policy analyst without consultation. He shared reservations about the concentration of power in a single individual, particularly the Chief Executive role, and how this would need to be managed, noting that decisions could effectively be made independently. He acknowledged that some engagement with iwi has occurred, but their views have not yet been shared, and there has been no iwi input into the TORs. He also raised concerns about the haste of the process and the expectation to choose a pathway quickly, which does not support good decision-making. He emphasised that public engagement may be compromised and a pathway suited to the district is needed.
- Councillor Dudley noted that she felt bullied into making a decision. She also raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest within the TOR.
- Councillor Sextus expressed support for the concerns raised, stating that the process feels rushed, and noted scammers make people rush.
- The Deputy Mayor noted that, based on what she has heard since joining, there is nothing new in the proposal and therefore cannot support signing the agreement. And highlighted perceived irony in the HOA, particularly regarding dual roles and no surprises, and raised concerns about the financial implications for council.

A division was called, with all members voting in support of the recommendation.

The District Mayor noted a follow-up question regarding the next steps. He had prepared some recommendations to assist with this and passed them to the Chief Executive, who read them to the members. These were as follows:

> *Agrees to participate in the Central Government Head Start pathway;*
> *Notes that this does not commit the Council to submitting a proposal;*
> *Authorises the Mayor to finalise a suitable agreement with the other councils in Taranaki which outlines how they will work together to develop a proposal under the Head Start Pathway;*
> *Authorises the Chief Executive to allocate appropriate resources to developing a Head Start proposal; and*
> *Notes that any financial contribution to this work is unbudgeted.*

Points noted in the discussion to recommendation three and four:

- The District Mayor noted that there is already a group of Chief Executives undertaking work, and that this proposal would provide authorisation to engage with another territorial council to work together on a pathway forward.

- Councillor Hall noted some ambiguities in the wording of Recommendation Four, particularly regarding authorising the Mayor to enter into an agreement. She stated that expertise could be sought from the Regional Council but should not be involved, but expressed concern about engaging with only one territorial authority, emphasising that all parties should be involved. The Mayor elaborated on the intent of the wording, noting that collaboration would lead to better outcomes. Councillor Beck spoke in support of the amendment. Councillor Hall further noted that there should be clear parameters for success for the Mayor within the wording and suggested that representation include the Deputy Mayor and one other member.
- The Deputy Mayor noted that they were not opposed to cross-regional collaboration, while acknowledging that other options still exist.
- Councillor Hall sought clarity on the phrase "one or more," asking if one council declined, work could proceed with another council and potentially lead to a recommendation for a single unitary authority. This was confirmed.
- Councillor Boyde noted that all councillors are committed to working together.

5. Closing Karakia

The closing karakia was read.

The meeting closed at 3.14 pm.

N C Volzke
Chairman

Confirmed this 9th day of June 2026.

N C Volzke
District Mayor