

3 June 2021

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for Information – Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987

We refer to your official information request dated 30 May 2021.

Your request:

“Just working through my inbox and read your letter to your predecessor. I must say it is one of the most bizarre correspondence I’ve seen from a CEO. Don’t you have better things to do?

I’m fascinated though. Precisely what were the comments you considered defamatory? On the basis of the letter, you appear to think that the allegation you produced reports to justify higher rates is defamatory. But CEOs do that all the time. It hardly brings you down in the eyes of the public.

Also, please provide me the responses to your correspondence (i.e. the whole chain) and the publications complained of.

Consider this a LGOIMA request.”

Our Response:

Here is a link to the article which contains the original interview:

<https://www.huttradio.co.nz/former-ceo-tony-stallinger-hutt-city-rates-rise>

We are releasing one email that is in scope of your request, you have previously been provided with the remaining emails in the chain. Please note an email address has been redacted under section 7(2)(a) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act to protect the privacy of an individual.

The annual report and other publications are available on our website. If your request relates to a publication that we have not included in this response please advise.

Nāku noa, nā



Euan Kyle
Corporate Information Manager

Caryn Ellis

From: 7(2)(a)
Sent: Monday, 20 April 2020 12:07 PM
To: Jo Miller
Subject: RE: Your Hutt Radio comments and follow up written note, published online

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Categories: Moved to FLAGGED

Hi Jo,

You left me with little option but to defend my performance and that of my team against the defamatory comments being made in mainstream media.

Some political comments are expected when there is a change at the elected level, such as criticism of previous policies. However, the deliberate narrative presented by HCC extended way beyond that. There was a deliberate attempt to taint the Council as having neglected core infrastructure and mismanaged finances.

And it was certainly no longer just political once you engaged in the media directly. You presented yourself as needing to fix a financial mess which was going to cause years of pain to ratepayers. Having observed many elected member and chief executive changes in the Wellington region, I have never seen such harmful comments coming from a new executive.

Comments alleging the council was left running such large deficits would lead any reasonable reader to assume financial mismanagement by me and my team. You did not contact me before telling the public they would have to face huge rates which were, in essence blamed on my administration. This was a direct and continued attack on my professional competence, and left me having to repeatedly explain myself to business associates and friends.

I'm sure you didn't explain these facts when seeking feedback from others as to the appropriateness of my actions. I have been very restrained in not going to mainstream media where I have many contacts, and only responded to a request from Hutt Radio. Actually, I received unsolicited comments from senior representatives in LGNZ and elsewhere all of which suggested I take stronger action than I did.

Even recently I was shown that the Council is continuing to infer the huge rates increases are due almost entirely to rectifying the past "deficits". As a result, I cannot give an outright promise I will not make any further comment. However, I did undertake to Campbell that I had no current intention to comment further, and that if that situation changed as a result of continuing to blame my administration for future rates increases, I would contact him to discuss first.

I remain gobsmacked by the deflection of attention from current decisions towards the so-called deficit. Perhaps those best placed to comment on Council's financial performance is S&P. Having just read their last report, they confirm my views precisely. They make it very clear that Council has been running "strong operating surpluses" and the potential need for more revenue relates solely to planned capital expenditure increases. Incidentally, capital increases that I would probably support, together with associated rate increases, if it were any of my business. These strong operating surpluses seem to have been ignored when considering the prudential requirements of the LGA, as have various accounting entries that don't result in a need to collect more cash from ratepayers.

So I reiterate, if it is being inferred that my administration is responsible for rates increases, I am given little reasonable option but to respond in some way. This is out of both self-respect and respect for my former work colleagues. After all, the vastly improved financial position and infrastructure enjoyed by HCC now is down to 20

plus years of hard work by many committed employees and elected members. They don't deserve to have that legacy belittled in the way that it has been.

Therefore, I have no intention to apologise for defending our performance against what you described as a failure in critical respects.

I'm sure you and the new team will bring a lot of great stuff to the City including improvements beyond what I may have been able to deliver. A fair-minded approach it would have been to talk about those initiatives rather than talk about having to fix what you inherited.

Regards,
Tony