

26 March

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

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

We refer to your official information request dated 24 March for all correspondence between Councillor Chris Milne and the New Zealand Taxpayers Union, or representatives of it.

One email has been identified in scope of this request; this is attached as Appendix 1. Chris Milne advises that he doesn't have any such correspondence in his private email or social media systems.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Council's website.

Yours sincerely

Hutt City Council

**From:** [Jordan Williams](#)  
**To:** [Louis Houlbrooke](#)  
**Subject:** Invitation to whistle-blowers and concerned insiders  
**Date:** Tuesday, 2 March 2021 11:44:27 AM

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Dear Sir or Madam,

This is an email to all Hutt City Council staff (the emails we have on file, at least).

No doubt, many of you have followed recent events with interest relating to the Council's legal action against a former elected official for making public a document relating to proposed staff changes at the Council.

For your information, we are forwarding the statement made on behalf of the Taxpayers' Union (see below). We'd like to emphasise the following:

*We are increasingly concerned about reports of more legal threats, legal action and intimidation by local authorities across the country seeking to silence criticism from the community and whistle-blowing within their organisations.*

*We're asking staff at Hutt City Council and councils across the country to send any information on such instances to [tipline@taxpayers.org.nz](mailto:tipline@taxpayers.org.nz). We keep our sources anonymous.*

As New Zealand's largest local government transparency organisation, we are disturbed with Hutt City Council's actions. It appears to us that the Council is more interested in figuring out who the leak/whistle-blower is and shutting down him or her (and Mr Shierlaw) than protecting what is (to be frank) hardly explosive information. The fact the document was provided to all staff shows that what we are dealing with is not nearly as 'confidential' or sensitive as the Council's lawyers claim.

We have a proud history of receiving information those in leadership positions within local government would rather keep secret. We have never compromised a source, and some of our best information has come from concerned insiders in public sector organisations.

Should you ever wish to send something to us, please know that we will take all lawful steps to protect your identity. In general, we work to verify information via official sources (usually the LGOIMA) in any case.

My telephone number is below. Louis Houlbrooke (in our Wellington office) is available on 04 495 7913. Please feel free to call anytime.

Regards

**Jordan Williams**

Executive Director | New Zealand Taxpayers' Union | Auckland Ratepayers' Alliance  
**DDI Wellington** +64 4 282 0301 | **DDI Auckland** +64 9 279 9968 | **Mob** +64 21 762 542 | **Email** [Jordan@taxpayers.org.nz](mailto:Jordan@taxpayers.org.nz)

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**Auckland Ratepayers' Alliance** | **Main** +64 9 281 5172 | 55 Shortland Street, Auckland 1010 | PO Box 133099, Eastridge, Auckland 1146 | [www.ratepayers.nz](http://www.ratepayers.nz)

We stand for Lower Taxes, Less Waste, and More Transparency across all levels of government. If you like what we do, join the [Taxpayers' Union](#) or the [Auckland Ratepayers' Alliance](#).

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**From:** Louis Houlbrooke

**Sent:** Tuesday, 2 March 2021 9:59 AM

**To:** All Staff

**Subject:** Hutt City Council's campaign of fear and intimidation

Media release from the Taxpayers' Union

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## MEDIA RELEASE

# Hutt City Council's campaign of fear and intimidation

2 MARCH 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The *New Zealand Taxpayers' Union* is condemning [Hutt City Council's legal action](#) against a former councillor, Max Shierlaw, who blew the whistle on a costly proposed restructure.**

Union spokesman Louis Houlbrooke says, "This reeks of a council exploiting its position of power to create legal costs and misery for one of its vocal critics. And the ratepayer-funded witch hunt for whichever staff member passed on the document will only serve to sow fear, distrust, and dysfunction among council employees."

"Information leaks of this kind are part and parcel of democracy. Journalists regularly publish leaked information without legal reprisal from control freak council bureaucrats."

"We understand the full paper was presented to hundreds of staff at the Lower Hutt Events Centre, and was made available to all approximately 550 staff (470 FTEs) on the

Council's staff intranet. Now the Chief Executive is indignant that it was passed around and part of it eventually ended up on social media."

"Let's be clear – this isn't some secret policy document with ramifications on the value of properties for example. It is a consultation document available to every single council staffer. The Council's action for an interim injunction speaks more to the culture within management, than the information itself."

The Union understands the material published by Mr Shierlaw – only one page of any substance – showed the proposed structure of the Chief Executive's office, with just job titles with no individuals named. It showed only minor adjustments to four job roles, and one new position: an assistant to the Council's solicitor.

"The new position will, presumably, better enable the Council to pursue more legal vendettas of this kind," says Mr Houlbrooke.

"There was nothing confidential in any real sense in what Mr Shierlaw posted to Facebook. It appears that the legal action may be based more on personal animus than on real damage to the Council."

The Union understands the proposed restructure would increase staff numbers by 40. This is in line with the Council's Long-Term Plan which shows salary costs increasing from \$37 million to \$40 million – an 8% increase.

"The leaked material reveals a continuation of the costly empire-building that has occurred within Council under the new Mayor," says Mr Houlbrooke.

"The new CEO has created a new 'Office of the Chief Executive', abandoning the previous CEO's open-plan desk where he sat amongst staff, commandeering the largest meeting room on the floor and installing a secretary outside."

"Meanwhile, the new Mayor has doubled his staff from two to four, hired his former campaign manager as 'Head of the Mayor's Office' (a new position). No previous Mayor at Hutt City Council has had a 'Mayor's office'. The Mayor also spent thousands knocking down a wall and converting an adjoining meeting room into a larger space to accommodate the doubled head count."

"We are increasingly concerned about reports of more legal threats, legal action and intimidation by local authorities across the country seeking to silence criticism from the community and whistle-blowing within their organisations."

"We're asking staff at Hutt City Council and councils across the country to send any information on such instances to [tipline@taxpayers.org.nz](mailto:tipline@taxpayers.org.nz). We keep our sources anonymous."

**ENDS**

**ENQUIRIES:**

Louis Houlbrooke  
021 950 191

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

The *New Zealand Taxpayers' Union* is an independent and membership-driven activist group, dedicated to being the voice for Kiwi taxpayers in the corridors of power. Its mission, *lower taxes, less waste, more transparency*, is supported by 40,000 subscribed members and supporters.

The *Taxpayers' Union* operates a 24-hour media line for comment on taxpayer issues. Representatives are available on [\(04\) 282 0302](tel:(04)2820302).

High-resolution images and logos are available on request or online at <http://www.taxpayers.org.nz/resources>

The *Taxpayers' Union* is a member of *World Taxpayers Associations* - the global network of taxpayers groups working together for lower taxes, limited and accountable government, and taxpayer rights all over the world.

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