

**From:** Information Management Team  
**Sent:** Thursday, 9 December 2021 10:39 am  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: LGOIMA Request - Hutt Radio Limited

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

We refer to your information request dated 15 November.

We have previously released information on this matter, see these responses published on our website [here](#) and [here](#). Outside of this there is only one other email in scope of your request, please find this attached.

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

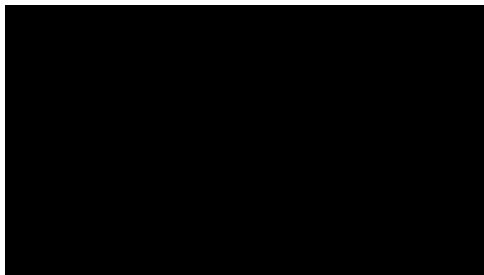
Nāku noa, nā

**Kate Ostapowicz**  
Senior Advisor, Official Information

Hutt City Council, 30 Laings Road, Private Bag 31912, Lower Hutt 5040, New Zealand  
M 027 265 5849 W [www.huttcity.govt.nz](http://www.huttcity.govt.nz)

**From:** contact mailbox <[contact@huttcity.govt.nz](mailto:contact@huttcity.govt.nz)>  
**Sent:** Monday, 15 November 2021 4:34 PM  
**To:** Information Management Team <[informationmanagementteam@huttcity.govt.nz](mailto:informationmanagementteam@huttcity.govt.nz)>  
**Subject:** LGOIMA Request

**Name**  
**Organisation**  
**Address**  
**Telephone**  
**Mobile**  
**Email**



**Response By** Email

**Information requested** Dear Hutt City Council, Under the provisions of the Local Government Information and Meetings Act I request that you provide: - Any correspondence in any form, from or on behalf of the Mayor Mr Campbell Barry to the former CEO of Hutt City Council Mr Tony Stallinger relating to an interview with Mr Stallinger broadcast on Hutt Radio in 2020, which canvassed the topic of Council finances and budgeting; any response from or on behalf of Mr Stallinger to that correspondence; any internal communication(s) from or on behalf of the Mayor to councillors or staff relating to this interview; any response(s) to that communication(s). - Any correspondence in any form, from or on behalf of the current Chief Executive Ms Jo Miller to Mr Stallinger relating to that interview; any response from or on behalf of Mr Stallinger to that correspondence; any internal communication(s) from or on

behalf of the CEO to the Mayor, councillors or staff relating to this interview; any response(s) to that communication(s). Yours faithfully, [REDACTED]

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2021-11-15 16:32:50|

**From:** [Jo Miller](#)  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fwd: Hutt Radio interview - Tony Stallinger  
**Date:** Friday, 17 April 2020 2:56:35 PM  
**Attachments:** [Hutt Radio interview - Tony Stallinger.docx](#)  
[ATT00001.htm](#)

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Transcript as promised  
Will send paper TS published at HR request on seperate email .  
Thanks Jo

Ngā mihi nui

**Jo Miller**  
Chief Executive

Hutt City Council, 30 Laings Road Private Bag 31912, Lower Hutt 5010, New Zealand  
T [04 570 6773](tel:045706773) M [REDACTED]  
W [www.huttcity.govt.nz](http://www.huttcity.govt.nz)

Follow me on Twitter : [@jomillernz](https://twitter.com/jomillernz)



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Begin forwarded message:

Former Hutt City Council chief executive Tony Stallinger spent over a decade at council working in senior roles before taking on the top job in 2007 and holding it until May of last year. Prior to that, his roles included working in audit for one of the big four accounting firms. He has a BCA from Victoria University and has studied at the Institute for Strategic Leadership. Initially, he wasn't planning to comment on Council's proposed rates rise, but when the need for it was justified by blaming poor planning and risk management under his administration, he broke his silence in an exclusive interview with Hutt Radio.

Although this interview was recorded before Mayor Campbell Barry indicated the council had finally accepted the need to review a cross city rise of 7.9 per cent, much higher in some places, mostly those least able to pay, Tony Stallinger's explanation of how and why previous rises were kept in line with inflation and how he believes significant rate rises aren't justified even with the infrastructure costs Council now faces, are still relevant. After all, council has not agreed to a nil rise, nor to one that is pegged to inflation. And next year we may be facing a similar proposal to the rates rises proposed for this year. The graphs he refers to in this interview are available along with the podcast on our website at [huttradio.co.nz](http://huttradio.co.nz).

- 1.20 Thanks for having a chat although I had no intention actually of making comment on what the councils up to. It's not really my business other than as a ratepayer now. But having just now read some of the comments about the performance of the council when it was under my leadership as chief executive, I think I really do need to respond.
- 1.36 Let's start by looking at some of these capital projects, listing them off. They've said they need \$10.7m over 10 years for water, reservoir, seismic strengthening, and \$23m over 10 years for wastewater and Petone Collector Main outfall, \$2.5m for seismic strengthening of council properties. These are all being presented as shock, horror. They've just landed on our desk. Surely they would have been known about and therefore budgeted for, long ago.
- 2.02 I'm very supportive of increasing the quality of the infrastructure in the city, so those items you mentioned, more money for waters, reservoirs, seismic strengthening the Petone Collector Main and outfall pipeline as examples. A very good use of money, I believe, for a long term future. Now, both of those initiatives have been worked on for some time. A number of reservoirs already been strengthened. As far as that, Petone Collector and outfall pipeline overflow project's concerned; the only reason that wasn't accurate in the budgets already was we were waiting for the outcome of the consent process with the Regional Council to determine exactly what solution was required. So, yeah very supportive of what the council is doing with those.
- 2.47 But the point being prudent business operation would foresee those sorts of things and start putting money aside so that there would already be presumably some allowance, some capital fund, somewhere to cover those sorts of things.
- 3.01 Certainly when I left the council, there was sizeable amounts of money in the budget for future earthquake strengthening of reservoirs. As I say, a number have already been done as well as bridges. And there also was a provision in the budget for the outfall overflow a project. Now what I'm taking from this is that the solution that Regional Council's accepted must be a more expensive solution than what the officers were previously recommending.
- 3.20 Naenae Pool. Was nobody aware that it was an earthquake risk until some years after the Kaikoura earthquake, and suddenly it seemed overnight, literally it was closed down? What's the story behind that?
- 3.42 Yes, the council commissioned some new reports just given the ever increasing knowledge and expectations in terms of earthquake strength. They revealed that the building was in worse

condition than it was previously thought. And so with the knowledge of course, that the building's used pretty much for the public, children and otherwise, that it wasn't appropriate to keep it open. An unfortunate turn of events, but one that was going to be unavoidable at some point.

- 4.09 Another of these capital expenditures. \$10.8m over four years for digital transformation. Presumably, with the idea of being part of the cost saving of a million dollars, which will come to as a separate question shortly, but does council need to spend nearly \$11m? I mean, are they doing things with quill pens and ink at the moment?
- 4.32 No. In my time at the council we went through full IT replacements twice. They didn't quite cost quite that much, but they always are expensive and time consuming processes. The most expensive element we had in the past was \$6 million, which we spent on a digitising old council records, blueprints, microfilms and so on. Now at those times, we did not require any extra rate funding to do those replacements. We funded through the savings which were generated as a result and other savings that officers were able to identify. I was aware before I left that this budget was coming up. All the councillors were informed that was the case prior to the last budget I signed off on. But the quantity was not known at that stage. We knew it would be millions as to how much was yet to be worked through in a business case, was yet to be presented fully to the executive team. So unfortunately, I think that is something that is needed, but I would hope that savings would be sufficient to offset the cost, at least in the majority.
- 5.34 How then, in your view, is the current infrastructure hampering council operations?
- 5.40 Not much, but there comes a time where, and I think the time is fairly soon, where that the software systems that the council has will no longer be supported by the suppliers. They've moved on to new versions. Unfortunately, it's not just an upgrade which is easily implemented. It's a whole new basis using the cloud and so on. So, that replacement in itself is unavoidable. There probably are some options round the extent of deployment to option modules and so on, but I'm not too familiar with the detail on that.
- 6.10 So sounds like most of the big ticket capital items, asset replacements or improvements... You approve of? That they should be happening?
- 6.19 Yeah, I took from some of your questions that, you know, why weren't these things all accounted for before? The fact is, every single year the council does an Annual Plan. There's a lot of new items that come up. Over my time, hundreds of millions of new items were put on my table during the planning process. The difficult job you have as the chief executive, as the executive staff and the councillors is determining which of those you're going to fund in any one year. And balancing that up with how much you're prepared to impose upon ratepayers in terms of increases.
- 6.48 Now in a business you'd be depreciating your existing assets and I know councils are... just found out now our preliminary discussion that there is a depreciation on roads. And to somebody even with a business background like myself, that was news. This is a difficult topic but there are claims now out there that insufficient allowance had been made for asset depreciation and of course, people are meeting that with counterclaims that no, that was that was done properly. In terms that hopefully anyone can understand, can you explain how council handles asset depreciation and why you believe that it has been done properly up to this point?
- 7.30 The first point, of course, is that all the calculations for depreciation are subject to audit by Audit New Zealand, and signed off ultimately by the office of the auditor general. That's happened every year, and they've always accepted that what council has reported is appropriate. So any suggestion that depreciation was calculated incorrectly is wrong, as far as I'm aware, and the auditors were aware as well. When it comes to gathering rates funding to cover those

depreciation costs, there's always been more than adequate collected by council. I've seen some graphs published by the new chief executive in news and presented to the council explaining that there is a big hole, that there has been a big hole. I've looked at them. I've looked at the annual reports published by council in the past, and it's a completely misleading presentation that's been given. If the council was to increase rates to cover that so-called \$18m hole, it will result in a massive, massive overcharging of rate-payers in the city.

8.39 So there is, I presume as in business, a set depreciation schedule for each of these assets, the value of the asset when it's first constructed or purchased or whatever is known. So then you've got either flat line or whatever depreciation. I mean that you can't get that wrong, can you really?

8.59 No, you cannot. And I think the accountants at Hutt City Council and across the country are well aware of the rules for calculating that. The only area of contention is to what extent you need to fund depreciation.

Now the problem arises when you have very long term assets. They are revalued 10, 20, 30 times over their life because councils typically revalued assets every three years. Now, if you buy an asset for \$5m you revalue it 20 or 30 times over its life and you depreciate those revalued amounts and then you seek to collect those revalued amounts from the ratepayers. You collect from them many times more than you actually spend on the asset in the first place. So the only way to come up with appropriate rate charges that include depreciation on revalued assets is to credit the ratepayers for the revaluation amount in the first place. So the graphs presented are very misleading and I'd be happy to show anyone graphs showing the very substantial operating surpluses that the Council generated throughout my tenure and has continued to generate in the years I left.

10.12 I'm guessing the counter argument to that may be that I don't know anything about the costs of building roads, but the cost of building buildings goes through the roof almost every year. Shouldn't you then if you've built your \$5m road, should you not be allowing for the fact that in 100 years that that is going, in whatever money we're dealing in then - probably bitcoin - it's still going to be exponentially more expensive to do that?

10.46 That's a very good question. And the answer to that is you can't charge the current ratepayers twice. You can't expect them to pay for the assets they're using and for the assets that are yet to be built in the future for others to use. So in the case of a road, they should pay for that asset over the life of the components of the road. They should not also, as well as paying off that debt, have to put money aside for the new road to be built in 50 - 100 years' time.

11.12 That's a very understandable answer. So thank you for that. It's a small amount in the whole scheme of things, but it could have a big impact on Council operations. The CEOs indicated she's going to seek to save operational costs of a \$million in this year alone. She's signalling that's going to be across improved business processes, better use of technology, better procurement and tendering processes, which is quite interesting and I want to explore it a little bit, and controlling growth in core operating expenditure. Again, it kinda suggests that whilst you were there, those things weren't under control. Can you see a million dollar savings in council operations?

11.44 Well, I can't see **of** the Council operations now, but I'd be very surprised in a \$100m plus budget that you couldn't find one percent of savings. In fact, this is what used to happen every single year, not after we've presented budgets to council, but before. So that officers, I have a great team of staff helping me work very hard for months leading up to the budget, would identify savings and we'd incorporate them in the first draft that the council got to see. That's why council got to see budgets proposing increases only at the level of inflation, not 7.9%. So, to put out an

inflated budget and then to come along and say we want another \$7.9m from ratepayers, I'm going to find \$1m worth of savings, that's not very impressive in my book.

- 12.37 That's interesting. So I've heard the current CEO say to meetings of ratepayers, yes, we need this more money from you but we are, if you like, sharing the pain. We're cutting operating costs by a million dollars, which to anybody sounds like a lot of money. You're saying this was, just...happened anyway?
- 12.55 Yeah. I mean every year we're trying, we were trying to do our best to deliver value to the rate payers. And there's always new things the councillors, the community wants. And the only way to fund them while keeping the rates at a level of inflation is to find efficiencies. And that's what we always did. All I'm seeing at the moment is increasing the number of general managers. I hear from the staff there, you know, there's more advisors being employed. This is being expanded. It looks like it's been expenditure is going up rather than going down.
- 13.27 Yeah. Be interesting to see the figures when they do come out. Coming back, I guess just touching on depreciation again, but this graph that's being put out, it's been put in front of councillors, it's in the paper, which we'll put a link to online as well, that briefs them on the financial position. And it's quite alarming if you look at it on face value. It's got the three lines of the financial statements, LGA balanced budget and LGA balanced budget excluding NZTA capex. They're all in the negative up until 2027. And in fact, the balanced budget excluding NZTA capex is in the negatives till about 2030. First of all, this is that graph right? And second, is that a fair representation of a council that is living beyond its means and needs to ask its ratepayers for more?
- 14.23 Well, look I'm sure that graph has correctly pulled numbers from the council's new forecast plans, but it's a complete nonsense to suggest those figures need to be funded by the ratepayers. I saw it described in the press by a council representative as the bottom line. If you look at the council's annual reports, these figures are not the bottom line. They're a middle line in the report. They exclude certain items of significant items of revenue and expenditure. That if you take the true bottom line of the council and average it out over years, it's in a very healthy position, generating surpluses.
- 14.53 And I'm sure a lot of people who are running businesses can at least get their heads around the fact that you may have a deficit of just basic operation. But then if you've got interest income or whatever you end the year with a better looking result. So that's what we're talking about here. That this is halfway up the page, the graph that all the figures that make up this graph and the ones that matter are at the bottom of the page and they're good. That's the story for those that are familiar with this.
- 15.21 Some of them just to try and concisely state the essence of it.
- 15.26 Right
- 15.27 Above the line that is being used in these graphs is the depreciation expense, which includes depreciating a revalued amount. The revalued amount, the credit for that is below the line or been excluded. There's a mismatch. So a massive mismatch.
- 15.43 A person who balances their cheque book and the household budget and that's about it would look at that and go, well if I was ending the year with minus 10% of my income, I'd be broke. But that's not the situation. And presumably Audit Office would have rung the bell long ago if that was the situation.

- 15.56 Of course. And there are other ways of checking that this is misleading a set of information the council's put out. The first is to look at the operating cash flows of the council. There's another statement in the audited accounts which showed operating cash flows. If you look there, you'll see that each year there's a net surplus of 2027, \$30m dollars. Now that's used to fund asset replacements, but it's more than sufficient for that. And even after deducting that, there are very substantial operating cash surpluses produced by the council every year. So it's a real shame that this council has chosen, and I have a lot of sympathy for elected members cause it seems to be coming from the executive, it's a real shame that they've chosen to misrepresent the council finances in this way and impose such massive and unnecessary increases on the ratepayers of the city.
- 16.51 There's also mention and this is, again, something that's a little bit above my pay grade and probably a lot of people listening too, our proposal to increase the debt to revenue limit to 180 per cent flat line. What's that mean? And is that a good idea?
- 17.10 Well look, I've been a bit critical of the way this information is presented in terms of the way the council's try to blame me and past managers for the situation they're in. That's not to say I'm against rates increases and borrowing increases when they're needed. And I think there are some arguments that right now, there are some more borrowing could be undertaken to fund more investment in infrastructure. And I'd be entirely supportive of that. I've expected that level of debt, the council would still be managed prudently. They'd probably still maintain the credit rating from Standard and Poor's. But, you know, they'd need to check that. So in itself I don't have anything against that
- 17.46 Could that go higher and fund some of these expenses that they're asking ratepayers to fund?
- 17.52 Potentially yes. But I think there comes a point, as we know personally, where you know you're not going to borrow too much and then you know, you're interest costs start going up and then you get yourself in a bit of mess and it makes it more difficult for future councils or future generations to afford the improvements they might want to acquire.
- 18.20 **Only** a small amount of money in the overall picture, but one of the most contentious decisions of recent history was the backing the hotel construction and the Events Centre. And then I think we found out later to underwrite its losses.
- 18.33 Essentially the transaction was or the major components involved council acquiring the land, selling that at an amount which was less than the cost, and enabling that payment to be over some years rather than upfront. The reason being was to make the hotel construction economic because it was not economic and there is no one prepared to build a hotel in the Hutt. Mr Sarin and his family, who I've a great amount of respect for, was the only one prepared to invest. And as far as I can ascertain, and I firmly believe, he's not making any money. I think he's... it is a difficult project for him. One of the reasons why it's taken too long is just trying to make it affordable for the family. And, you know, I think the city, even though commentary is to the opposite, probably taking a view which many might dispute, I think at the end of the day, the city owes that family a great deal of credit for being prepared to invest when no one else was.
- 19.28 But leaving aside the current situation where I don't know whether any business is going to be viable and then nobody really does anymore, even if that hadn't happened, doesn't the fact that it has struggled for so long and it has needed subsidies from council and that's ratepayers suggest it was a stupid idea in the first place... if it's not a viable proposition to stand on its own two feet should it ever have been started?



- 19.52 Again a good question and that was a discretionary decision which some would disagree with. We've got to go back quite a few years now to the time these decisions were being made. At the time, the city was in a very long period of stagnation. Decades. Jobs weren't growing much, far less houses were being built than needed, suburban shopping areas, Central City rundown. You've still got a lot of room for improvement. Council took a very bold move at the time to do something different. In the past, council would've spent 3-4 million similar amounts to \*\*\* used to support the hotel, putting new pavers in new seats, some new trees, lights down on high street. The council at the day took a different approach and thought, well, let's not do that again. We've seen that it doesn't work. It doesn't rejuvenate the area. Let's try and show some confidence in the city, rebuild our own civic area, which needed to happen anyway earthquake risk, provide some incentives to developers, which in almost every case, except for the one we're talking about, wasn't any money handing over. It wasn't waiving of fees. And we'll see what happens. Now, the result has been a massive uptake of new construction, housing and also some, to a degree commercial as well. Population's growing. More people want to come and live here. Community facilities being rejuvenated. There's been a massive turnaround in the city. Now, whether people agree with every aspect of every decision was made to make that happen. I don't know. It's easy with the benefit of hindsight to criticise some. I still think the city needs a good new hotel in it and it's taken too long but when this one is finally finished as I'm still picking it will be one day, I think we'll be glad for it.
- 21.29 The Events Centre itself. Now I understand that we're underwriting the losses and that were always going to be losses in the first.... That's... I guess, the first question. How long was it projected there were going to be losses for?
- 21.41 Just for about two years? In fact, the underwrite only lasts for that long. So regardless of what happens after the first two years, my very strong recollection is that that's the end of the Council underwrite and that from that point on, the operator is paying a lease to council.
- 22.00 From what I've heard, it's a lot higher than was budgeted for. The figure of \$700,000 has been mentioned, I guess, for just the first year of operation. Is that in fact, substantially more than was allowed for?
- 22.13 Yes, and it's certainly substantially more than the figures I was advised of at the time I was there, and particularly more than the figures which the consultant assessed in our business case. So that's unfortunate.
- 22.31 I think also there's some confusion over whether when we say the Events Centre, we're including Tutaki in that or is that considered separately. So in other words, some of the cafe owners in town have said to me, well, hold on, nobody comes along and subsidises my cafe if we make a loss. Are we also subsidising the operation of that?
- 22.50 That's a very good question. And I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think it was just the centre as a whole including the cafe. The thing to remember I suppose though it is just for two years.
- 23.00 The danger then, I guess, is that if it's still not profitable, especially not profitable to that extent in two years, is that we may end up with a facility that either counsellor's is settled with. Is there an out clause for Sarin to say, sorry, it's not working for me? Or is he in the invidious position of being forced to run an unprofitable business?
- 23.21 I can't recall any out clauses and I actually can't remember the term of the lease. You know, it's been probably four years ago now since I was closely involved with the document negotiations, maybe three.

- 23.38 But there was a lot of secrecy around. I mean, I remember asking questions of the then mayor and basically being told, look, there's a blanket commercial confidential non-disclosure clause in there somewhere. And I know that that's been repeated to me by a couple of council officers. So, again, I know that's quite common when you're dealing with commercial enterprises, but you're also dealing with ratepayers money. So I don't know what part you had in negotiating that but looking back, was that a wise clause?
- 24.08 It is fairly common and the approach that councils is normally to include such clauses, not as a standard matter, of course, because most businesses are just an open kind of book basis. But there usually comes a point in time where the reasons for the confidentiality are now passed. And so the practice that the council has been at that point to release it. And you realise now that much more is being said about the terms of the original negotiation than was said in the early years. It's just... it is a bit unavoidable if you want to do business on best possible terms for the ratepayers. Sometimes the people you're dealing with can't afford to have every aspect of their business in the public arena. It's a balancing act. What's often forgotten is that before the thing was built, there was a town hall and a horticultural hall - a centre there. Now both of those facilities required council subsidies just to have their doors open and it was not a small amount. So to think that the council is now admittedly a bigger figure has been used to subsidise it seems, but just for two years. After that, council will be receiving less revenue. In the past on an ongoing basis, we were subsidising the Town Hall and Horticultural Hall.
- 25.27 Can you recall from memory what kind of a figure? Because I think in common with most people, I would have thought just keeping the doors of the empty, mostly empty, building open would not have been costing a lot of money whereas the Events Centre is staffed and to have all those overheads...
- 25.41 Yes, there certainly was a lot, lot, lot less to run than the Events Centre. And then, of course, the revenues coming in with the lease as well. The figure was between \$100k and \$200k a year.
- 25.51 I've spoken to retailers in the south end of High Street and that area is still dead. They're still struggling. They certainly would of rathered pavers and seats and lights or something to make their frontage look a little bit better. And now they're finding that their message is, well, there's no money from council for anything else down that end. And the hotel, if and when it happens, will take care of all this. Now, somebody said to me, look, it's a 50 room hotel, assume 50 percent occupancy or something. You got 25 rooms full. Those people are walking off to the Events Centre for their conference and they're walking back. And then they're going to be spread amongst all these restaurants down, and there's quite a few still surviving somehow, down that end of town. So I'm going to get one sitting in my cafe. What use is a hotel to me? Is that the way it's going to work out or is there some is there some plan that hasn't been well-publicised that's going to help those people along somehow?
- 26.48 Well, a hotel in itself is a nice to have. It will bring more economic activity to that end of High Street or to the city as a whole with conferences, small conferences coming in, somewhere flash to stay and so on. But in itself is not a silver bullet. The CBDs got a long, long way to go and my own view is that this gradually we're seeing a couple of other developers invest - Ian Cassels picking up the old BNZ centre, and there's one or two others starting to work on buildings. I see one on Dudley Street work's started on as well. Kevin Melville is developing the old post office/centre. Gradually, gradually things are starting to be redeveloped. I think it'll take at least another 10 years. I think what it really needs is more residential accommodation just to create the vibrancy, to support cafes and retail. Now, unfortunately for the retailers there at the moment, there's no silver bullet. Now as to whether the council should be putting some more money on pavers and the like, maybe. It's up to the advocacy of those retailers, some of whom I know

myself, and the decision of Council.

27.57 I want to touch on...now you touched earlier on the change at the top. There's five new managers starting all at once. I think two of them are from overseas. There's a couple of internal appointments, which is good from the point of view that they'll know the city, but they're new to their jobs. I don't know how much you want to talk about this, but I am told that Council's not a happy place for people to work. I mean, do you want to talk about why you left and what you're aware of in terms of morale?

28.33 Look, all I can... am happy to comment as far as myself. I've been there 12 years in the role. I was actually keen to carry on. The council thought it was time for someone new and Jo was a great candidate from overseas. So it's a decision. I've got no trouble with that. It is a great pity to see every one of the general managers that worked for me now departed. May well be good reasons for them leaving and moving on. I don't know so I've got no comment to make on that. As to the morale, I'm not going to make any comment on that, it's not really my business. I don't know.

I do know three of the five new appointments and two of them worked for me there. Andrea and Helen - both are fantastic staff members and they'll do a great job. The other one I know is Kara Puketapu-Dentice - not to a great degree, but we've interacted a number of times on business around the region and he's a very impressive chap, so a great person to come into the Council. So I've got a lot of hope. Hopefully the other two are similarly skilled. But it's difficult for Jo with a you know, a whole new team. Herself only being here a short period of time. It's a lot of loss of knowledge. When I think about our previous team of three general managers and myself, we probably had 60 years' experience at the Hutt City and now down to one or two years' experience. It's not easy so if there is anything I could do to support I'd be happy to offer it, but I doubt that's the case. It's up to her now and the new team to get on with the job and I wish them every luck.