

Mayor Campbell Barry
Mayor's Statement to Council, 24 March 2020

Introduction

- While this is an ordinary meeting of our Council, we are in extraordinary times.
- Before we go into the Council Agenda, I would just like to make a few remarks.

Coronavirus/lock--down

- I want to first acknowledge the anxiety and uncertainty people across our community are feeling, as we enter a four week lockdown period
- My heart particularly goes out to the many small and medium sized businesses that are under significant pressure, and people who find themselves out of work
- There is no doubt this will have a severe impact socially and economically for people right across our city, but I'm confident that we will all get through this together
- This is a difficult and unprecedented situation, but it's clear we need to act fast and aggressively in order to defeat COVID-19. If we don't, we're told that cases would overwhelm our emergency departments and tens of thousands of New Zealanders may die.
- If anyone across our communities and country hasn't been taking this seriously, that attitude must shift now. The only way we will get through this is by each and every one of us playing a role.
- Before I talk about what we've done to date, and what our plan is moving forward, I just want to acknowledge all the people across our community who are working in essential service roles. Our healthcare workers, our pharmacists, our supermarket workers and all the people working tirelessly to stock our supermarkets. Staff at service stations, public servants and all other essential staff. They all have spouses, kids and other family members that they will be away from as we get through this

What we've done to date

- On Saturday we took the decision to close all of our community facilities to the public.
- Yesterday we announced the temporary suspension of parking charges across our city - a compassionate and pragmatic response during a time where people are preparing to go into lockdown
- Council has significantly advanced work to prepare the organisation to be able to work remotely. I want to acknowledge the work of Lyndon Allot and his team for the extraordinary hours they have put in to make this happen.
- We've also established regular communication channels through live streaming, where I will be giving a daily update on local matters, and the CE and I will be providing a weekly update via the HCC Channels.

What we're going to do at this meeting

- It's clear that these are unprecedented times, and we therefore cannot continue with business as usual.
- Today we'll be considering a range of measures to support our community through these tough and challenging times.
- I want to acknowledge the work officers have done to pull together this work at pace. Many of the items we'll consider this afternoon are things we can implement immediately, and some will require more time.

Rates increases

- I want to be absolutely clear: the proposed 7.9% increase in rates will need to come down significantly, and it will.
- There has been significant misinformation about this process, and the decisions we're making. We are in a crisis, this isn't a time to play politics.
- None of us are blind to the fact that it will be untenable to continue down a path of rates increases without changes.
- We know we have big issues we have to front up to, and we will front up to them. But what we won't do is add to an already difficult situation for our people and businesses.
- But we need some time to re-think this, and to get this work right. Thankfully, we have time given that we have until June to approve our budget. The biggest disservice we can do is to make these decisions on the fly, without proper consideration to all their impacts.

Conclusion

- Finally, before we get into our agenda. I just want to reinforce that we will get through this. Our people here in Te Awakairangi, Lower Hutt are resilient, they are kind, and I know our entire community will support each other through these challenging times.