



## WAIKATO MAYORAL FORUM

### **Community welfare key focus for councils during and after COVID-19 lockdown**

07 April 2020

Waikato Mayors, Council Chief Executives, Members of Parliament, Iwi leaders and other regional powerbrokers met Monday [06 April] via video link. Rates, council's role in the economic recovery and looking after vulnerable people were the three main topics of discussion.

Speaking about rates, Chair of the Waikato Mayoral Forum, Waikato District Mayor Allan Sanson, said every council in the Waikato has unique challenges but that Mayors were working closely together in the best interest of their communities.

"Our role is crucial to society, both during crisis and recovery. Not everyone realises what we do or what their rates actually fund," he said. During the lockdown councils are responsible for providing services that are essential to keeping people safe and healthy, such as drinking water, wastewater, rubbish collection, burials, essential roading and safety repairs and flood protection.

During an emergency, councils carry out a major role in supporting the local, regional and national Civil Defence efforts. In the wider Waikato, this effort is currently focusing on ensuring the welfare of all residents throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

"Councils have been running meals to those most in need, setting up Community Based Assessment Centres for COVID-19 testing with the DHBs, and putting plans together to fund and deliver shovel-ready projects to get the economy moving after the lockdown."

"Rates are needed to fund infrastructure projects which will be crucial to the economic stimulus that we deliver jointly with central government, Iwi and the region, as we recover from the COVID-19 impact. There is a big role for many councils to advance capital expenditure programmes and the rates households and business pay are a critical part of the funding for those," he said.

Mayor Sanson said that the regions would play a key role in leading the economic recovery. "Here in the wider Waikato we're the food basket of the country. It's the export sectors, the primary industries, like farming and forestry, that will lead us out of this," he said. "It is worth noting that the farming and food production sectors have not stopped during this crisis."

Dennis Turton, Trust Waikato Chief Executive, told the Mayoral Forum that food was the number one welfare issue facing the community. The Community sector has

collaborated to meet the food needs of Waikato communities. He especially praised council and Iwi efforts in supporting food banks through their civil defence and welfare operations. “Welfare will continue a long time after we have entered the recovery phase, and councils and Iwi will play a big role in that,” he said.

Waikato Group Controller Julian Snowball joined the meeting from Wellington where he highlighted that accommodation for Kiwis coming home to New Zealand, particularly those returning from Australia, would become a key focus for the welfare response and that this would ramp up over the lockdown period.

Mr Snowball praised the response shown by Waikato councils, saying that councils “were responding to a need, not creating one, and were effectively avoiding duplication.”

The Mayoral Forum discussions, which will take place every Monday during the lockdown, provide a framework for forming a united and cohesive ‘Waikato’ approach, which will be crucial in leveraging Central Government support for initiatives on behalf of the region. Mayoral Forum members work towards having clear priorities that all councils agree on that are also supported by Local MPs, Iwi and other key delivery partners.

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