



**PSA** 

# Local Government

Kāwanatanga-ā-Rohe

## PSA submission on the Upper Hutt City Council Long Term Plan 2024-34

### About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 95,000 members, including over 10,000 working in local government.

For over 110 years people have joined the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace, and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

### The PSA in Upper Hutt

The PSA represents approximately 1600 members who live and/or work in Upper Hutt, including around 60 members who work for Upper Hutt City Council.

All these members have a strong interest, as residents of Upper Hutt, in the Plan and its aspirations and intentions. Members employed by the council have an additional interest in how the Plan will affect their jobs, working conditions, and the important work they do for the benefit of their community.

### Overall comments on the proposed Long Term Plan

We do not support the proposed cuts to services set out in the proposed LTP.

We believe these services are important, and the cost of resourcing them is justified.

We support raising rates to allow the council to fully fund its public and community services, pay its workers fairly and resource them adequately, and maintain essential infrastructure rather than leaving future generations to pick up the bill.

### Comments on specific proposed cuts

#### *Activation*

We oppose the proposed cuts to the council's Activation services.

As the LTP consultation document states, this area of the council's work supports the improvement of health and wellbeing of the community. Evidence published by Sport New Zealand indicates sport and active recreation has a range of benefits relating to physical health, mental health, social

cohesion, educational outcomes and economic value;<sup>1</sup> and that play, active recreation, and sport is a cost-effective investment towards local government wellbeing outcomes with high return on investment.<sup>2</sup> Providing affordable opportunities for a wide range of young people to participate in active recreation will be especially important in building their wellbeing and will have benefits into the future.

The council currently organises an inter-school floorball league for primary and intermediate students. This is a programme beloved by families in Upper Hutt. Many of our members who work at UHCC have children who participate in this programme. It is one of the most popular inter-school sports leagues in Upper Hutt, partly because it has one of the lowest cost barriers to participate. Working class families are able to enrol their children in this programme because much of the operating cost is subsidised by the council. If the council no longer provided this programme then the cost barrier would likely increase, or those families would have to spend more enrolling their children in more expensive extracurricular activities.

A member who works directly with children for a government agency wrote to us about how important this programme is, and described it as “vital to the oranga of the community.”

### *Marketing and events*

We oppose the proposed cuts to the council’s marketing and events work.

The UHCC Marketing and Events team leads community communication and engagement. They bridge the gap between the council and the community by fostering communication and engagement initiatives by using creative channels to connect with the residents and encouraging community participation. This is a key focus area for council guided by the Communications strategy and Action Plan which was set to continue delivering its actions through to June 2025. This is also a key performance indicator (KPI) tracked in our Annual Report and measured through a community survey. There is a strong desire from the UHCC community who would like more and improved communication and engagement.

The proposed cuts amount to a gutting of the capacity of the Marketing and Events team. Their challenging work manages the perception of the Council among the community. If their capacity is reduced as significantly as is proposed, this will undoubtedly result in the Council’s image being worse among Upper Hutt ratepayers and electors.

### *Community development*

We oppose the proposed cuts to the council’s work supporting community development.

The Council’s role, as defined in the first two parts of the Local Government Act is to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities. The most tangible and effective way the council currently does this is by funding vibrant community activities and developing participatory democratic structures in the community. Having services provided by the council, or by viable non-profit organizations with little to no cost at the point of service is essential, especially in communities with large proportions of working families and other vulnerable people.

In the past community development funding has supported a wide range of not-for-profit community organisations that do valuable work in the community, often for groups within the community that are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Funding such organisations is a cost-effective way of building on and amplifying the social value these kinds of groups generate through volunteer activity; cutting back on this type of support would be short-sighted.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Value of Sport and Active Recreation to New Zealanders. \(Sport NZ\)](#) page 3-4

<sup>2</sup> [The value of play, active recreation and sport | Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa \(sportnz.org.nz\)](#)

We have heard from Orongomai Marae that the funding received from UHCC enabled them to provide critical services such as family counselling and youth employment support. Those will be at risk if they can no longer access the funding, and those services will be increasingly necessary as we enter a recession.

The proposal sent to staff suggests that the funding for the Community Development team is set to be reduced by 50%. This will have a devastating impact on our members, and the inevitable redundancies will result in the loss of a wealth of institutional knowledge for the council, as well as the relationships those staff have built with the community. As with the marketing and events cuts, this will mean that the council is seen as less connected to community stakeholders and the general public.

## Workforce matters

### *Pay and working conditions*

Keeping employees, their institutional knowledge and their organisational loyalty is vital to ensure that local government organisations can meet their responsibilities and keep providing high levels of service to our communities. The council's financial planning must allow for fair pay and model terms and conditions, including paying a Living Wage as a minimum standard, that makes the council an attractive place to work and keeps up with increases in the cost of living.

### *Safe workloads*

Safe workloads are critical for the health and wellbeing of workers, and the sustainable functioning of council services. Council decisions about workforce spending need to allow for sufficient staff numbers to meet the volume of work required without resorting to unsafe workloads.

### *Pay equity*

The PSA has an active pay equity claim to address gender-based pay undervaluation of library assistants working in New Zealand's six largest councils. The parties are currently in the bargaining phase of the claim, and although Upper Hutt City Council is not one of the councils covered by the claim, settlement of the claim will have cost implications for councils that will need to be considered in the planning process to ensure they can be met in the future.

We also recommend placing a priority in the LTP on working with the PSA to identify and close the gender pay gap.

## Views from wider membership

As mentioned in the first section, the PSA is made up of workers from across the government and community sector. Many of these organisations are based in Upper Hutt, and over 1600 members at workplaces across the region live in Upper Hutt. Our members have an interest in the proposed LTP as workers who provide public and community services, as well as as Upper Hutt City Council ratepayers.

One Upper Hutt resident and PSA member who is a frontline worker at a government department wrote to us about the importance of the community services which are proposed to have their funding cut. Vulnerable people are referred to Citizens Advice Bureau and Orongomai Marae in particular by government agencies, whos' capacity would be at risk if funding was reduced.

A member who works for a regulatory agency and volunteers for Age Concern, writes

“It is very concerning to hear that this service may be cut. The elderly are incredibly vulnerable, and our neighbourhood has a large proportion of retirees. As a ratepayer in Upper Hutt, I have read the councils proposal and while I do understand the financial issues they face and the costly infrastructure improvements they need to make, I would hate to see such valuable services on the chopping block.”

“I am deeply concerned about the proposed reduction in funding to community development activities. If anything, these should be increased substantially given the consistently poor and declining community consultation and engagement in democratic processes, particularly with generally underrepresented groups (e.g., in elections, long-term plan engagement and submissions, other key decisions).

Another member writes

[These proposals seek] to remove funding from community organisations that are already underfunded, despite them providing services that are essential to the community and in an ideal world should be provided by the council in any case.

This proposal fails to explore alternatives options for revenue raising (although I note that rates still need to increase substantially) - such as user charging (e.g., on-street parking, road-tolling, development), asset sales/leases (of the commercial holdings on Main Street), or increased council borrowing, which would be a fairer spread.”

## Conclusion

For decades, Upper Hutt has consistently had some of the lowest rates in the country. We are glad that the Council has decided that this is no longer sustainable, and regret that the only solution to this is a significant rates increase in a comparatively short amount of time. The proposed increase of 19.93% for this year averages \$13.62 per week per household. As rates scale according to property values, people living in higher value properties (who tend to be higher income) will pay more than those who live in lower value properties (and tend to be lower income).

The cuts as proposed will devastate community services in Upper Hutt, and seriously jeopardise the Council’s ability to deliver services. This will negatively impact the Council’s image among ratepayers and electors.

All the potential damage we have described in this submission is proposed in order to save the average ratepayer \$2.42 a week. As council funding of public and community services tends to be redistributive, the brunt of these cuts will fall on low income families and households, many of whom will spend much more than \$2.42 a week paying for services that the Council no longer provides.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit on the Long Term Plan. We would also like to make an oral submission. To arrange this, and for further information on our submission, please contact local organiser Ashok Jacob on [ashok.jacob@psa.org.nz](mailto:ashok.jacob@psa.org.nz) or 0272393357.