



TOITUU PAANUI

TE PUTANGA TUARIMA #5
DECEMBER 2025

Featuring

Mayor Aksel Bech
IAWAI - Flowing Waters
From the Frontline
Our District, Our Stories

Waikato

District Council
Te Kaunihera aa Takiwaa o Waikato



LEADING OUR DISTRICT WITH MAYOR AKSEL BECH

*Tuia te rangi e tuu nei,
Tuia te papa e takoto nei,
Tuia ngaa aituaa e ngaro nei,
Tuia te aroha ki te Arikini a Kuini Nga wai
hono i te po!
Tuia ngaa taatai herenga ki a koutou katoa*

When a new Council is elected, people often wonder what happens next. Do we jump straight into making decisions? Start new projects right away? The reality is, getting a Council up and running takes a bit more groundwork.

Right now, our newly elected councillors and community board members are taking part in an induction programme; learning about how Council works, the big challenges and opportunities ahead, and the difference between governance (the “what” and “why”) and management (the “how”). **We are also shifting to better empower communities through voice, choice and control, as I talked about on the campaign trail.**

A new Council is like a new team so time and care is required to understand each other's perspectives, to build trust, and to agree on shared priorities. The early months are about listening, learning, and setting the tone for how we will work together as elected members and with our communities over the next three years. The reset to genuinely empower communities also requires review of formal delegations along with a mindset shift inside Council itself. That has been a key priority for us all.

As part of strengthening trust and deepening our relationships, our team had the privilege of spending time at Toituu Marae at Waahi Paa in November. It was a chance to listen, to learn, and to reaffirm our commitment with our marae communities.

Experiences like this reflect the shift we're making as a Council, moving towards relationships that create space for community voice to guide our direction.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS WITH CE CRAIG HOBBS

As we head into the festive season, it feels like the perfect time to pause and reflect. With a new Council in place, new executive leadership at the helm, and new kaimahi joining our organisation, the new year will see our operational transformation continue, to ensure council is best set up to operate in a way that is effective, efficient, and delivering best value to the diverse communities of te takiwaa o Waikato.

Change is never easy. It challenges us, pushes us out of our comfort zones, and asks us to see things differently. It is in these moments that we learn, adapt, and lay the foundations for real, lasting impact in the communities we serve.

This year, we have taken steps to listen more deeply, to build stronger relationships, and to shift the way we work, both within Council and alongside our communities.

We are committed to creating a space where voices are heard, where ideas are welcomed, and where action follows insight. **And we're preparing ourselves for a future where partnership, trust, and courage shape the way we work.**

As we wrap up the year, wishing you all a safe, joyful, and restorative festive season. We'll see you in the new year, ready to move, to lead, to turn momentum into meaningful action!



**Tumu Whakarae,
Craig Hobbs**



IAWAI FLOWING WATERS BETTER WATER TOGETHER

IAWAI is a publicly-owned water company formed by Waikato District Council and Hamilton City Council.

Our purpose is simple, to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable water services for our growing communities. That's why we work closely with Waikato-Tainui and are building relationships with hapuu, marae, and the wider community across the region - so water remains a taonga for future generations.

Over the last month, we've been engaging with our communities and partners as we shape IAWAI's Water Services Strategy —our 10 year plan that sets out our priorities, projects, and investment. Hui such as the Toituu Marae Forum at Waahi Paa in Raahui Pookeka and the Taiao Forum hosted by Waikato-Tainui have given us the chance to koorero about the work ahead.

Looking forward, in March 2026 we'll reconnect with communities to share the Water Services Strategy and hear your feedback.

Over the next decade, we'll invest more than \$3 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure, including upgrades to treatment plants and new services for growing areas. Right now, our priority is a safe and seamless transition of water services from councils to IAWAI for 1 July 2026.

IAWAI was created because things needed to change. Expectations are high - from government, councils, mana whenua, and every household and business that relies on water. Strong relationships and transparent engagement will be vital as we navigate this journey together.





WAIKATO-TAINUI AND COUNCIL JOURNEY FORWARD NEW HOMES & TE MATATINI 27

Our Joint Management Agreement with Waikato-Tainui is now well into its stride. Since its establishment in 2010, this partnership has continued to strengthen, and together we are stepping into some of our most significant mahi yet.

At Hopuhopu, we're proud to be working alongside Waikato-Tainui on a major development that is now taking shape. By enabling new housing opportunities that reflect iwi aspirations, we are helping support warm, healthy, affordable homes for whaanau, homes that nurture thriving futures, not just provide shelter.

But our focus extends far beyond the present. With Taakiri Tuu Te Matatini coming to Waikato in 2027, the world will soon arrive on our doorstep. Hopuhopu will be the heartbeat of this global event, welcoming thousands, and we are working closely with Waikato-Tainui to ensure our marae, hapuu, iwi, towns, roads,

communications, and wider infrastructure are prepared to shine on both the local and international stage.

Our shared goal is clear: that every manuwhiri who visits feels the warmth of manaakitanga that Waikato is renowned for genuine, unforgettable, and delivered with pride.

Our early message to the community is simple:

We are a proud district, part of a proud iwi and a proud waka, ready to welcome manuwhiri with kindness, compassion, and a celebration of everything that makes our landscape, our businesses, and our people so uniquely special.

Get excited, e te iwi—this is a journey we're all part of.





TOITUU MARAE BRINGS TOGETHER COUNCILLORS, IAWAI, AND WAIKATO-TAINUI



Toituu Marae was hosted at Waahi Paa in November, bringing together Council, Waikato-Tainui, IAWAI and marae from across the district to reaffirm a shared commitment to working in partnership.

Created to build an enduring relationship between Council and marae, the forum marks a meaningful step toward decisions shaped by tikanga, whaanau voices and community.

Marae asked strong, clear paatai about Council's Treaty commitments, support for kaupapa Maaori events that contribute to the economic growth of the district, coastal representation and relationships.

Council confirmed the Toituu Marae Forum as a dedicated pathway to strengthen relationships and respond to the aspirations of marae communities.

Waikato-Tainui shared their challenges and experiences in working with the Crown and local government to help marae prepare for Toituu Marae.

IAWAI introduced themselves as they begin to engage with our whaanau on the Water Services Strategy.

In ***On the Couch with the Honorable Nanaia Mahuta***, she highlighted the value of Maaori relationships and reminded us that Maaori contributions are central to the prosperity of our communities.

The Kii Tapu has returned to marae trustees and whaanau for further koorero, with marae to signal their direction in the new year. Manu Taaiko and elected members will drive Toituu Marae Forums with those marae who choose to take the journey.



OUR DISTRICT OUR STORIES

*The journey and the
destination!*

FROM THE FRONTLINE WITH YOUR MAAORI WARD COUNCILLOR



Endine Dixon-Harris

He hoonore, he korooria kii te mata o te whenua, he
whakaaro pai kii ngaa tangata katoa
Rire rire hau, Paimaarire

What I am committed and looking forward to is working closer with our communities. There needs to be a better way to encourage our communities to engage with their local community board and/or community committees directly who can support local solutions and/or advocate for them to Council.

A highlight was the Toituu Marae hui held at Waahi Paa in November, a great start to connect with the 40 marae within the district and to directly hear the issues our Marae whaanau are facing and more importantly the response to create solutions together with an outcome of building the trust and confidence back in Council.

As we head to the Christmas break, the Council remains focussed on rate control through efficiencies and better accountabilities for this triennium, which I absolutely tautoko.

I look forward to working with our communities, stakeholders, councillors, Mayor and our Council CE and staff in 2026.

Maa te Atua, hei manaaki, hei tiaki i a koutou e te whaanau.

Teenaa taatou katoa,

It is a privilege to represent Tai Raro Takiwaa as your Maaori Ward Councillor. It is fair to say that the job began the day after being confirmed.

Inductions and workshops were scheduled and once we were sworn in in late October, there were three more swearing in ceremonies with the community boards within my rohe namely Raahui Pookeka, Rural Port Waikato and Tuakau.

Attending community board meetings, local ceremonies and Council workshops/meetings certainly fills up the diary but I am enjoying learning the role, meeting community members and the diversity of the district.

RECLAIMING TUNA TRADITIONS: WAAHI WHAANAU LEADS RESTORATION AT LAKE WAAHI

A powerful new chapter in environmental and cultural restoration is unfolding at Lake Waahi, Raahui Pookeka (Huntly) where the Waahi Whaanau has been granted a lease application by Waikato District Council to develop tuna (eel) ponds.

The pond, to be located at Lake Waahi in Raahui Pookeka, is more than a conservation initiative. It is a living embodiment of whakapapa, kai rangatira, and intergenerational stewardship.

Dr Rangimarie Mahuta explains, "Waahi Paa Taiao is about rejuvenating the waterways of Maaori. The tuna pond is a vital reconnection to our whenua and wai - it defines our history and reclaims our story."

Named by Te Putu (Paramount chief of Ngaati Mahuta) in the 1700s, the site carries the legacy of Raahui Pookeka, a name that recalls the historical ban placed on tuna harvesting when stocks were diminishing.

A pookeka or a rain cloak was wrapped around a pou to mark the raahui, symbolising protection and reverence for the taonga species. This act of guardianship is now being revived through the construction of the ponds.

Tuna, revered as kai rangatira, are central to the Waahi Paa identity. The pond will serve as a sanctuary for tuna and a living outdoor classroom for students at Te Wharekura o Raakaumangamanga and other local schools.

Tamariki and rangatahi will learn traditional practices such as hiinaki (eel netting), while engaging in hands-on environmental education.

The pond's kidney-shaped design is intentional, it will function like a biological filter, helping to cleanse and revitalise Lake Waahi. This innovative approach reflects a broader revitalisation plan aimed at restoring the mauri of the lake and surrounding waterways.

The collective vision is intergenerational and involving local marae, schools, and community groups. As Dr Mahuta puts it: "This mahi is about restoring balance to our environment, our identity, and our future."

Former Waikato District Council Mayor, Jacqui Church says, "this project is a powerful example of what happens when cultural heritage, environmental restoration, and community education come together."

"The tuna pond at Lake Waahi is not just about revitalising our waterways, it's about restoring the mauri of this place and empowering future generations to carry forward the traditions of Waahi Paa. Waikato District Council is proud to support this mahi led by Waahi Whaanau" said Church.



COUNCILLOR PROFILE

WAERENGA-WHITIKAHU

GENERAL WARD

E rere ana ngaa mihi ki a koutou e piikau ana i ngaa kaupapa motuhake - e kore e mutu ngaa mihi.

Raised in Waerenga and a resident of Te Kauwhata, I am a mother of three adult children and a proud nana of two beautiful mokopuna.

My rural and marae upbringing provided me with a firm foundation and respect for hard work, resilience, and endurance. Such values have played an integral role in shaping my belief systems. The importance of family and community are embedded in and are inseparable aspects of my character.

My arrival into local government was by accident; prior experience with the former Manukau City Council, underpinned by a strong social-justice and political science background, propelled me into the local body sector at a time when the former councillor was retiring and was actively seeking her replacement.

I believe that it is vital that our communities are represented by strong, strategic and accountable voices.

Being a councillor of Maaori descent, in a general ward, was at the outset challenging. The geographical make-up of my ward is comprised of your traditional rural-farming sector and an emerging and growing urban and lifestyle populace. I've learned that a diverse community requires cooperation and understanding.

A willingness to work together to forge enduring relationships, is important. During my previous term, I facilitated sound connections, between community groups and mana whenua, that never before existed. I like to think that our tuupuna would be pleased about that.



Marlene Raumati

As a first term councillor, my greatest achievement has to be, negotiating a savings of \$27 million. Being the only Maaori councillor at the table at the time, responsible for weaving together two very distinct worlds, while seeking efficiencies, in our local water and environmental systems, was no mean feat. I'd say striking that balance, was quite an accomplishment.

Couple of quick facts about me: I love kai Maaori, especially smoked tuna, toroii, pork bones, puuhaa and motumotu. I'm also a cake decorator, and when I can, I love to travel. My two most favourite destinations thus far, have to be Japan and Utah. Japan is spectacular and Utah is heavenly!

If you can stay involved in local government please do e te whaanau. Those rugby fields that our tamariki and mokopuna play on, that's Council. The pedestrian crossings, the pools and parks, that's all Council. Your local library, public amenities, roads and reserves, that's Council. Get involved, stay involved.

RANGATAHI EXPLORE THE WORLD OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Aakonga from Te Wharekura o Raakaumanga in Raahui Pookeka (Huntly) recently spent the day at Ngaaruawaahia council office learning how local government works and the many careers that help communities thrive.

From roading and parks to communications and animal control, kaimahi shared their knowledge and experiences across a range of fields.

The students were attentive and engaged, asking thoughtful questions and showing strong leadership qualities throughout the visit.

'Ko te whai maaramatanga ki ngaa momo nekehanga me ngaa momo whakaritenga o i a tuuranga o te waahi nei, me oona piki me ngaa heke. Ahakoa i aahua roa te waananga tahi me te koorero tahi, i whai maaramatanga pai au ki ngaa kaupapa kei mua i te aroaro.'

The experience of hearing firsthand from staff about their roles and responsibilities gave us a good perspective about the realities of their jobs.

There was a lot to get through, but we gained some good understanding from the koorero that was shared.

Chief Executive Craig Hobbs asked the group whether they had drunk some water or been to the toilet that morning. When hands went up, he explained that they'd already used vital council services to do so.

He encouraged the students to consider a future in local government, where every role contributes to improving and serving communities.

It was a pleasure to be able to invite our rangatahi into Council, to begin building relationships and growing our collective understanding of the role of local government with our future leaders and members of community.

Encouraging youth to connect with local government is an ongoing focus, with plans to offer more opportunities like this for schools, kura, and young people across the district.

It was a day of inspiration and connection, nurturing curiosity and understanding among the leaders of tomorrow, and Council's commitment to living, thriving and connected communities.



NGAARUAWAAHIA COMMUNITY BOARD UPDATE

Our newly sworn in Ngaaruawaahia Community Board brings together familiar faces and new voices from our town: Chair Kiri Morgan, Deputy Chair Venessa Rice, and Dianne Firth, alongside Dale Maree Morgan, Steve Hutt, and Alicia Sunnex.

Our focus areas are Kotahitanga, Localism, Te Taiao, and Engagement. We represent the community to the council, and the council to the community.

This summer, we will again offer the pool entry subsidy to help keep our rangatahi safe from the risks of swimming in our waterways.



We're finding ways to reduce waste and share resources - like giving old roundabout plants a new home in our resident's gardens. Ngaaruawaahia is growing, with that comes new streets. The Board is ensuring that mana whenua names have priority.

Got ideas, challenges, and solutions? Bring them to us. Join a meeting in person at Waikato District Council office or watch the live stream (dates can be found [here](#)) or reach out anytime - we're here to help you collaborate with council.

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO BREAKS GROUND ON NEW MEDICAL SCHOOL

The University of Waikato has officially begun construction on its new medical school building, which will open in 2028 - only the third medical school in Aotearoa. The turning of the sod marked a significant step toward opening the New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine, which will be the country's first graduate-entry medical programme, designed to train more doctors for primary and community care.

In years two to four, students will be based in regional communities throughout New Zealand to undertake their clinical placement programme, which is an opportunity for Council to advocate for our district. More information can be found [HERE](#)



BEHIND THE SCENES @ WDC

Updates from the engine
room!

CONNECTING OUR DISTRICT

8 WARDS, 40 MARAE, 27 HAPUU, 2 JMA IWI

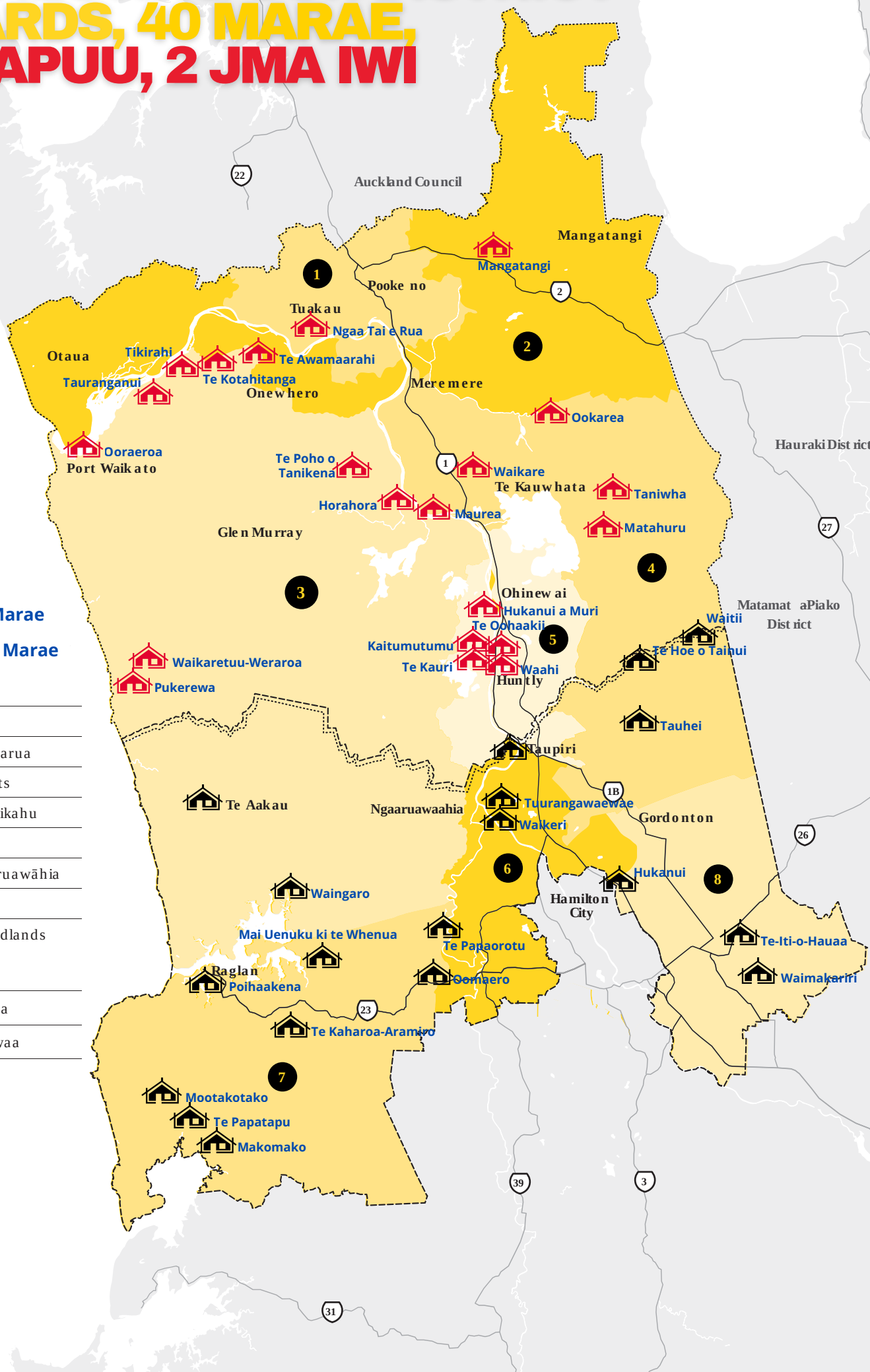
 **Tai Raro Marae**
 **Tai Runga Marae**

General Wards

- 1 Tuakau-Pōkeno
- 2 Awaroa-Maramarua
- 3 Western Districts
- 4 Waerenga-Whitikahu
- 5 Huntly
- 6 Newcastle-Ngāruawāhia
- 7 Whāingarua
- 8 Tamahere-Woodlands

Māori Wards

- Tai Raro Takiwā
 --- Tai Runga Takiwā





CALLING FOR A MAAORI REP FOR THE CREATIVE COMMUNITIES SCHEME

In partnership with Creative New Zealand, Waikato District Council invites applications for the vacant Maaori seat on the Creative Communities Scheme Assessment Committee for our district.

As a committee member you'll help distribute funding for local arts and culture projects, prioritising creative expression,

community participation, and cultural, diversity across the Waikato district.

Under the scheme, **arts include everything from kapa haka, weaving, theatre, film, festivals, visual arts**, to contemporary community-led cultural initiatives.

Role Responsibilities:

- Review applications and allocate funding in line with Council-defined local priorities.
- Promote the scheme locally and encourage Maaori participation.
- Monitor and support funded projects, attend events, and contribute to the annual evaluation report.
- Serve a three-year voluntary term, with the committee meeting twice a year.

We are looking for someone who:

- Has a passion for arts, culture, and Maaori creative expression
- Understands cultural and community context across Waikato — from grassroots marae-based art to regional cultural initiatives
- Can contribute thoughtfully and respectfully to decisions about funding and community support
- Can help shape the cultural landscape in Waikato, support local artists and Maaori-led projects, and ensure arts funding reflects the cultural richness of our communities.

If you're interested — or know someone who might be — please contact Dominique Thurlow, dominique.thurlow@waidc.govt.nz 0273271403.

We aim to have the new member in place by the end of January 2026.

INSIDE MANU TAAIKO WHERE INNOVATION MEETS ACTION

Just over a year since establishing our full Maaori Partnerships team, we are now known as Manu Taaiko. As we look back, we acknowledge and value the relationships that continue to guide our work. Your voices, lived experience, and

partnership strengthen every step we take, ensuring the outcomes we deliver reflect the communities we serve, today and into the future.



**NGAA
MIHI**

**O TE WAA
KIRIHIMETE**

*From all of us here at Waikato
District Council, enjoy whaanau
time, be safe and we'll see you
all in the new year.*

Waikato



District Council
Te Kaunihera aa Takiwaa o Waikato