



TOITUU PAANUI

TE PUTANGA TUAWHITU #7
JULY 2026

Featuring

Toituu Marae Launch
Mayoral update
Executive update
Head Start
IAWAI
Councillor insights

Waikato
District Council
Te Kaunihera aa Takiwaa o Waikato



Tumu Whakarae Craig Hobbs & Mayor Aksel Bech

LEADING OUR DISTRICT WITH MAYOR AKSEL

Maanawatia a Matariki!

I begin acknowledging Maaori New Year which we celebrated with stunning skies and crisp days, surrounded by whaanau and friends. The Kaupapa for this year, Herenga Waka – the welcoming of diverse perspectives, carries many similarities with some of our current mahi at Council.

With central government's Head Start wero; a proposal joining with other councils to simplify local government, we have made the most of the short time available. Most importantly we have met and heard from hundreds in our communities, through over 30 in-person hui across the district, and our online feedback channels. There are many voices, and whakaaro shared, it is a lot to consider.

A special and important highlight of the past month was gathering for Toituu Marae and the signing of Kii Tapu. A new two-way relationship, where we hear directly from marae about what matters most and gives marae a direct way to engage with Council respectful of mana and the role marae play in our communities.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

WITH CE CRAIG HOBBS

Maanawatia a Matariki!

Belonging, connection, sharing and togetherness are strong representations of Matariki Herenga Waka. When on 29 June, the launch of Toituu Marae and the signing of Kii Tapu began a new era of genuine partnership for marae and Council to interact. As I said at the launch:

Collective effort and belief in what can be achieved when we work together with our people at the heart of our mahi, we can draw together whaanau, communities and generations. It is an exciting time.

The mahi of Head Start was shared at Toituu Marae, and we have been really impressed with whakaaro we have heard kanohe ki te kanohe in talks with iwi leaders and marae representatives, alongside ten written feedback submissions from iwi and marae across the motu.

Whether Toituu Marae and the beginning of a deeper relationship together, or with Head Start and the mahi to look for a way forward in joining with other councils. Lasting change is built on understanding the past, appreciating the present, and intentionally shaping the future. Together we can be successful in what we build together, for those who will come after us.

Maa te kotahitanga e whai kaha ai taatau. In unity, we find strength.



Elected members, Executive Leadership Team and staff in waiata in the Kii Tapu signing ceremony.



HEAD START

THE BIGGEST SHAKE-UP OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SINCE 1989 IS COMING

Kia ora mo teenaa whakaaro – your voice is helping shape the future of our district, and an update on the Reserves and Beaches Bylaw mahi.

In May, Central Government announced changes to how local government is organised across Aotearoa. Simplifying Local Government* asked councils to consider whether there should be fewer councils in each region. They have offered a voluntary Head Start Pathway to give councils that are ready, the opportunity to put forward an early proposal on joining with other councils, for the Government to consider.

Making the most of the time available, Mayor Aksel and Councillors moved quickly to raise community awareness, asking our people for whakaaro and feedback on how Waikato District could be shaped in the future, before they submit a proposal on 9 August.

Feedback has now closed. Mayor Aksel and Councillors connected kanohi ki te kanohi with hundreds in our communities, through over 30 in-person hui around the district, and through our online feedback channels.

They have had many talks with Iwi leaders and marae representatives, other councils, and key stakeholders such as Federated Farmers.

Mayor Aksel and Councillors are now reflecting on your feedback and carefully considering all views to help shape their thinking and are working hard to meet the 9 August 2026 proposal deadline.

It is important to speak to The Reserves and Beaches Bylaw mahi that Council has been engaging in. Mayor Aksel and Councillors are thankful for your valuable whakaaro and maatauranga on this important piece of legislation.

For now, they have made the tough decision to pause this work so they can focus on meeting the Head Start Pathway proposal deadline. While paused for now, please know your contributions remain important, and will help shape this review when it resumes.

No matter what piece of Council work you share feedback on, sharing your whakaaro is always important. It means that together we are shaping the best decisions for our district's future.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.

(My strength is not that of an individual, but that of many.)

*www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/simplify

TOITUU MARAE

OFFICIAL LAUNCH MARKS A NEW CHAPTER IN PARTNERSHIP

The official Toituu Marae Forum launch was a significant milestone, bringing together marae representatives and their whaanau, elected members, Council staff and partners for an evening of shared aspirations and meaningful koorero about the future of our communities.

The launch marked the beginning of a renewed partnership between Waikato District Council and the Toituu Marae Forum, grounded in a shared commitment to work together on the priorities that matter most to marae and whaanau across the district.

A highlight of the evening was the signing of the Kii Tapu by Forum members, Mayor Aksel Bech and Chief Executive Craig Hobbs. The Kii Tapu affirms the partnership between the Toituu Marae Forum and Waikato District Council and will be displayed in the Council Chambers as a lasting symbol of this commitment.

Councillors also formally affirmed their support for the partnership, acknowledging the important role marae play in the social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of our district.

Forum Chairs shared the priorities identified by marae including marae infrastructure, safer communities, road safety, water and flood management, whenua and marae aspirations, and building stronger partnerships with Council.

Mayor Aksel Bech addressed the enormous programme of change facing local government through the Head Start reforms.

He acknowledged the shared frustrations of both Council and communities with the limited timeframes provided by central government for engagement and feedback, while reaffirming Council's commitment to ensuring the voices of marae, mana whenua and communities are heard.

Despite the challenges, Council remains focused on creating opportunities for meaningful participation and advocacy on behalf of the district.

Updates on the Whenua Maaori Rates Remission Policy Review* and the development of the Long Term Plan (LTP) were also provided.

The evening also looked to the future, with Kandi Ngataki sharing an inspiring overview of Ngaati Aamaru Katoa Trust's new two-year Marae Capability and Readiness Programme, generating enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead to strengthen marae resilience and capability across the district.

The evening was a celebration of collaboration. The conversations, laughter, kai, ideas and commitments shared throughout the forum reflected the shared desire to work together to support thriving marae, strong communities and a prosperous future for our district.

The successful launch has created positive momentum for the mahi ahead. A sincere mihi to everyone who attended and contributed their whakaaro.

*www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz/whenuamaaori



NEXT TOITUU MARAE FORUM 6PM, 28 SEPTEMBER 2026 COUNCIL CHAMBERS, NGAARUAWAAHIA



LONG TERM PLAN UPDATE WHAT MATTERS MOST?

While Council has been working at pace to meet the deadline for the Head Start Pathway of Simplifying local government, there has also been work underway to prepare for the coming Long Term Plan (LTP).

The LTP is the district's 10-year roadmap which will span 2027 to 2037. At its roots, this is the community's contract with Council.

Because the LTP is the blueprint for how our services, projects and investments are planned and paid for, the koorero we have with our communities are key in making sure we have our plan right.

We have been incorporating whakaaro and insights we have already heard from councillors and from our communities.

We are now planning a series of events across the motu hosted by Mayor Aksel and Councillors, which are an opportunity for you to waananga the shared paatai: "What matters most here?"

We will soon share dates and details of hui starting late-August through September. Hearing what you think is one of the most important parts of making our Long Term Plan.

True wisdom and wellbeing for our people begins with the humble act of listening.

Maa te whakarongo, ka moohio; maa te moohio, ka maarama; maa te maarama, ka matatau. Through listening comes knowledge; through knowledge comes understanding; through understanding comes wisdom.

Ngaati Aamaru Katoa Trust

Two-Year Work Plan

Marae Capability and Readiness Programme

June 2026 – June 2028

 Working in partnership with Toituu Marae, Waikato District Council and key partners for the benefit of our people, marae, hapuu and iwi.

1. PROGRAMME PURPOSE

-  Strengthen the capability, readiness, compliance, and leadership of marae across the Waikato District.
-  Support up to 40 marae through engagement, readiness assessments, governance support, compliance planning, hosting readiness, waananga participation, and stronger pathways into Council and funding processes.
-  Build a coordinated, capable, safe, and future-ready marae network across the district.

2. HOW THIS ROLE WORKS WITH WAIKATO DISTRICT COUNCIL

-  Connect marae aspirations with Council planning and opportunities.
-  Support access to information, funding pathways, and practical advice.
-  Strengthen communication between marae, hapuu, iwi, Council and partners.
-  Help create locally led solutions that improve resilience, readiness and long-term wellbeing.

3. FIVE PROGRAMME WORKSTREAMS



Compliance and Safety Readiness

Assessments, templates, practical planning for safe and compliant marae.



Governance and Capability Uplift

Waananga, planning, systems, financial and risk support.



Hosting Readiness

Training, role cards, skills and systems for high-visitor events.



Equity and Participation Support

Prioritised support for higher-need marae using an equity approach.



Whānau and Community Engagement

Intergenerational activities, cultural activation and stronger participation.

4. ROLE FOCUS

-  **Programme Coordination and Delivery**
Lead implementation, maintain timelines and deliverables.
-  **Relationship Building and Engagement**
Build strong, respectful relationships and partnerships.
-  **Marae Capability and Readiness Support**
Provide tools, guidance and practical support.
-  **Governance and Community Development**
Strengthen governance, leadership and capability.
-  **Reporting and Accountability**
Track progress, evaluate outcomes and report regularly.

5. TWO-YEAR DELIVERY PATHWAY

YEAR 1

June 2026 – June 2027

-  Build relationships and trust
-  Complete marae assessments and identify priorities
-  Develop action plans, tools and templates
-  Begin governance support and early waananga
-  Establish reporting systems and programme tracking

YEAR 2

June 2027 – June 2028

-  Deepen support and follow through on plans
-  Strengthen systems, capability and readiness
-  Grow whānau participation and community engagement
-  Support stronger links to Council and funding processes
-  Deliver final reporting, outcomes and future recommendations

6. KEY OUTCOMES

-  Improved capability, confidence and readiness across 40 marae
-  Stronger governance, systems and processes
-  Improved compliance and safety planning
-  Increased hosting readiness and operational preparedness
-  Fair and practical support for higher-need marae
-  Stronger whānau and community participation
-  Sustainable tools and resources for future use

FROM THE FRONTLINE WITH YOUR MAAORI WARD COUNCILLORS

E mihi ana ki Te Arikunui e noho nei ki runga i te Ahurewa Tapu o oona maatua tuupuna. Whakaaro pai ki te iwi nui tonu. Paimaarire.

There is much happening across our Waikato District and wider Waikato Region at present. One significant development is the "Head Start" process, through which councils across the Waikato Region have been given three months to consider and determine potential partnerships for amalgamation into a future Unitary Authority – what some have described as "The Mighty Waikato."

This process has been influenced by the changes and outcomes achieved through the establishment of the Auckland Super City, particularly in strengthening relationships between local government and central government.

For our people, this is not a new concept. Our tribal boundaries have always been defined by our ancestral rivers, waterways, and coastlines, with our tuupuna exercising responsibility and care for these interconnected ecosystems. We thank you for the whakaaro you provided at the hui and online.

We also extend our congratulations to Toituu Marae, which is now entering its launch phase. Over the coming months, you will hear more about this important initiative and how it will develop. This work is particularly timely given the current discussions around local government reform and amalgamation.

Regardless of which council structure Waikato District Council ultimately partners with, Toituu Marae provides an important framework for ensuring marae and Maaori voices are represented within any future Unitary Authority structure.



Tai Runga Takiwaa Maaori Ward Councillor Tilly Turner

We encourage everyone to support your marae delegates and the hardworking executive leadership team:

- Tai Raro Chair: Koroki Waikai (Waahi Paa Marae Delegate)
- Secretary: Destiny Lord (Te Kaharoa Marae Delegate)

This marks an important first step towards establishing an enduring and meaningful relationship between our 40 marae and Waikato District Council.

There is still much work ahead, but together we can strengthen and cement this relationship for the benefit of current and future generations.

Kia kaha, kia toa, kia manawanui. Paimaarire ki a taatou katoa.



COUNCILLOR PROFILE

TAMAHERE-WOODLANDS GENERAL WARD COUNCILLOR

I was conceived in Waikato but born in Whangarei. When I was 8 my family moved to Australia for financial reasons then returned to Aotearoa and Waikato when I was 15.

At 8 years old I did not own any shoes, although it seemed ok to me at the time. This gave me some understanding of being poor and of being an outsider, as in Australia I was teased for being a Kiwi and on return after picking up an Aussie twang I was hassled for being an Aussie.

I am a student of history and know of the injustices visited on Waikato hapuu during the Waikato wars. I also have some understanding of the intertribal challenges pre Te Tiriti and of my own Scottish ancestry and our troubles with the English.

I have some awareness of the greatness of Te Wherowhero and the grief of Tawhio. I have supported the Maaori Wards as to me Article Two of Te Tiriti speaks of Maaori involvement in Local Government. This is particularly relevant in the Waikato where Maaori make up 25% of our rohe.

I stood for council because I want to make change. Our local government systems are inefficient. Internationally we spend at a high levels on infrastructure in line with other rich nations but we achieve at a low level.

That means for the money we spend we get little as a result. This needs to change as it is wasteful and we are no longer rich.



Tamahere-Woodlands General Ward Councillor Mike Keir

Our rates are too high because of this inefficiency. I want to work with government, with our people and with iwi to increase our productivity and gain more value for every dollar spent. This will benefit all including Maaori. I want to simplify our consenting processes so that it does not cost so much and take so long to get things done.

This is not easy, systems and culture are entrenched, people are resistant to change and afraid of risk. I embrace risk, life is a challenge, risks need to be understood and managed, the best way to deal with risk is to be competent.

My focus as a councillor is on keep future rate rises down while providing a quality service in maintaining our roads, parks and reserves, dealing with our waste, ensuring our dogs are controlled and safe, managing our waters and ensuring we treat the Waikato as the treasure that it is.

I hope you will help me with these aims.

Ngaa mihi
Mike Keir
Tamahere Woodlands Ward Councillor





REVIEW OF MAAORI FREEHOLD LAND RATING STATUS NOW COMPLETE

Waikato District Council has adopted a new Whenua Maaori Rates Remission Policy to meet updated legal requirements and better support the needs of whaanau Maaori.

The policy brings all rates relief options for whenua Maaori into one place, making them easier to understand and access. It recognises that whenua Maaori has unique legal and cultural characteristics and is governed differently from general land.

Rates relief is available for situations such as unused or inaccessible land, land under development, non-commercial community use, papakaainga on general title land, and historic rates arrears.

The policy was developed following consultation with the community, including more than 400 Maaori landowners, iwi, hapuu, marae and other Maaori stakeholders. Council received 55 submissions, with most submitters supporting the policy.

A small change was made after consultation, reducing the repayment period for historic arrears relief from three years to two years.

The policy is part of a wider Council review and responds to changes introduced through the Local Government (Rating of Whenua Maaori) Amendment Act 2021, which aims to remove barriers to the use and development of whenua Maaori, including housing.

Tai Raro Takiwaa Maaori Ward Councillor Endine Dixon-Harris says the policy establishes a more transparent approach to rating, with expected benefits including improved equity, greater support for the retention and use of whenua Maaori, and strengthened relationships with Maaori communities.

Things you can apply for remission for:

- Part 1 - Partially used / hard to get to / waahi tapu
- Part 2 - Remission to Adjust Rateable Land Values
- Part 3 - Maaori Freehold Land under development
- Part 4 - Community benefit for Maaori (not for profit)
- Part 5 - Removal of historic arrears (a clean slate)
- Part 6 - Papakaainga on general title

Reminder: The proposed new policy does not remove the ability of Maaori landowners to apply for remissions under the existing policy.

SCAN TO
LEARN MORE





THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CHAPTER

FOR WATER IN WAIKATO DISTRICT AND HAMILTON CITY

The IAWAI team gathered at Tuurangawaewae marae on 1 July to mark the first day of new, publicly-owned water services organisation established by Hamilton City Council and Waikato District Council, in partnership with Waikato Tainui.

A highlight of the day was the 'pure' ceremony at the edge of the mighty Waikato River.

Led by representatives of Waikato-Tainui, Tuurangawaewae, Hamilton City Council, Waikato District and IAWAI, it served as a clearing and resetting – creating space for a new beginning and reminding us of the significance of water as a taonga.

The launch was also a chance to acknowledge the years of community consultation, planning, and collaboration that brought us to this point.

While day-to-day services will not change for customers, what is changing is the focus: one team, one kaupapa, dedicated to caring for our water and shaping sustainable water services for the future.



IAWAI

YOUR NEW WATER PEOPLE

Everything we do relies on water. From brushing our teeth, running factories, having a swim, flushing the toilet, or making a cuppa – water is at the heart of daily life.

From 1 July, IAWAI, the new publicly owned water company formed by Waikato District and Hamilton City councils and working in partnership with Waikato-Tainui, became responsible for delivering our drinking water and wastewater services.

Stormwater services will remain council-owned, operating under contract. We have seven water treatment plants and 27 reservoirs across the district.

What does this mean for you? For now, you won't see a lot of change.

You will continue to receive the same water services.

- You will see two separately itemised IAWAI charges for water and wastewater along with your rates invoice
- You will still get water meter bills twice a year
- You can continue to pay for water using the same payment options
- If you have any water-related issues, please contact council.

For more information about IAWAI go to www.iawai.co.nz

230 TONNE CRANE

TO REMOVE TREES FROM THE INTAKE SCREEN

We use scuba divers for our three-monthly inspections and cleaning of the Ngaaruawaahia water treatment plant intake screen, which helps keep the system running efficiently and reliably, reducing the risk of disruptions to our water supply operations.

Trees and logs often get caught against the intake screen after storm events, and normally our divers are able to dislodge them using an hydraulic chainsaw.

However, we had to call on the help of a 230-tonne crane to remove two large trees following recent storms, one of which moved the intake pipe, so we've installed a concrete collar block to stabilise the pipe.

We're also looking into options for a physical barrier, such as deflector plates, to reduce the risk of future damage to this vital infrastructure.





MAYOR HONOURS COMMUNITY

2026 MAYORAL AWARDS

Nineteen local organisations, community groups and volunteers have been recognised for the difference they're making across the Waikato district from local coaches and environmental champions to youth leaders and support organisations.

Hosted by Mayor Aksel Bech, the annual awards recognise the outstanding individuals, groups and organisations whose dedication, generosity and service help make our communities stronger, more connected and better places to live.

"Our communities are built by people who choose to give their time, energy and skills to help others. They don't do it for recognition, but it is important that we take the time to thank them and celebrate everything they do." Mayor Aksel said the willingness of people to support one another is one of the Waikato District's greatest strengths.

Strong communities don't just happen. They're built by people who step forward when something needs doing, and that's exactly what we've recognised tonight."

The 2026 Mayoral Award recognise contributions across a wide range of categories, including community service, youth, sport and recreation, environmental action and support for older people. The recipients are:

- Ataria Jay Tahapeehi
- Cleveland Mugg
- Di Morris
- Environment Action Tuakau
- Hine Timothy
- Julie Lynch
- Lee Watson
- Luca Grilli
- Margaret Rice
- Nga Mako Totorewa
- Pastor Andre van der Merwe
- Predator Free Tamahere
- Ray Knight
- Richard and Sally-Ann Riddell
- Russell Gibbs
- Taurikura – Doctor Kirsty Barber and Kawena Jones
- Te Awa – The Great New Zealand River Ride
- Whaaingarua Weedbusters
- Whitikahu Tennis Club



WORLD SURF LEAGUE

A HUGE TEAM EVENT

Two months on from the World Surf League Championship Tour event in Whaaingarua Raglan, we want to acknowledge and thank mana whenua, iwi, local residents, businesses, community groups, volunteers, and everyone who supported the event.

Your manaakitanga, patience, local knowledge, and willingness to work together helped make the event a success and created a memorable experience for athletes, visitors, event teams, and the local community who came along to watch.

We're grateful for the contribution the Whaaingarua community made before, during, and after the event.

DOG REGO REMINDER

REGISTRATIONS DUE 31 JULY

Don't let your dog miss out - register on or by 31 July to lock in the reduced registration rate.

If you haven't received your invoice, our awesome kaimahi are ready to help. Give us a call on 0800 492 452 and we'll get you sorted.

And don't forget - this year we're ditching plastic and rolling out a new metal dog registration tag, available in two sizes, designed to last forever.

You'll still need to register your dog every year, but once your new tag arrives, it's here to stay.

NEVER MISS BIN DAY AGAIN

DOWNLOAD ANTENNO

Download the Antenno app and stay informed about the places you care about!

Make reports and get notifications about bin days, water, events, road closures, and more.





CYCLONE VAIANU

COMMUNITIES PREPARED AND CONNECTED

In April, Waikato District Council activated its Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in response to Cyclone Vaianu and the severe weather forecast for the region.

Working alongside the Waikato Civil Defence Emergency Management Group, Council monitored developing conditions, coordinated public information, prepared welfare arrangements, and supported a precautionary evacuation.

Over the course of the response, 59 Council staff supported the EOC across six shifts, helping ensure the district was ready to respond if impacts escalated.

While the weather event ultimately had a relatively low impact on the Waikato district, the activation provided an important opportunity to test systems, readiness, and coordination under uncertain conditions.

A standout feature of the response was the strength of community preparedness and leadership. Across the district, marae and Community Response Groups stood up to share important safety messaging, check in on their communities, and prepare to support whaanau if required.

Their readiness demonstrated the important role local networks play in supporting community resilience during emergencies.

The response highlighted the values of manaakitanga, kotahitanga and whanaungatanga, with communities, marae, emergency services and Council working together to keep people safe and informed.

Although the worst impacts did not eventuate, Cyclone Vaianu serves as a reminder of the importance of being prepared.

Council encourages whaanau to have an emergency plan, keep emergency supplies on hand and stay connected to official information channels.

Make a plan today by visiting www.getready.govt.nz.

Ngaa mihi to the marae, Community Response Groups, volunteers and partner agencies whose preparedness and willingness to help strengthened our collective resilience.



TOITUU PAANUI

He koorero. He kaupapa. He whai waahitanga.

Keep up to date with the stories, kaupapa, events and opportunities shaping our communities.

Every three months we'll send a paanui straight to your inbox, featuring:

- Community stories
- Opportunities to get involved
- Important updates
- Upcoming events
- Celebrating local successes

Join our mailing list



Scan the QR code below



Nau mai, haere mai.

Be part of the koorero. Stay connected with Toituu

