

**Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Gore District Council, held virtually by Zoom, on Wednesday 22 April 2020, at 4.43pm**

**Present** His Worship the Mayor, Mr Tracy Hicks JP, Crs Bolger, Davis, Dickson, Gardyne, D Grant JP, N Grant, Highsted, MacDonell (from 4.44pm), McPhail, Phillips and Reid.

**In attendance** The Chief Executive (Mr Stephen Parry), General Manager Infrastructure, Roading Asset Manager (Mr Peter Standring), HR/Administration Manager (Susan Jones) and Communications-Marketing Manager (Sonia Gerken).

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**1. PROPOSED COVID-19 SHORT TERM RATES DEFERRAL POLICY (SC0110)**

A report had been received from the Chief Executive following the imposition of an alert Level 4 lockdown in New Zealand in response to the Covid-19 pandemic having created economic uncertainty and hardship due to many sectors of the economy being effectively side-lined and unable to operate. A copy of a proposed Covid-19 Short Term Rates Deferral Policy had also been circulated with the agenda.

Cr Dickson asked if rates deferred would be in full. The policy indicated the deferral did not include water rates and those businesses that could not open. His Worship said the new policy related to a deferral of rates, not remission of rates. The Chief Executive confirmed it was deferral. A ratepayer could opt to defer the entire instalment for the fourth quarter of this financial year and the first quarter for the next financial year. The policy only applied to the ratepayer.

Cr Highsted said the country was in extraordinary times and some people who may benefit would not be used to asking for assistance. He would prefer to see the policy amended to having a declaration of hardship or loss of employment. The Chief Executive said there was no legal impediment to that suggestion. It had been considered by the Council staff and on balance some evidence of hardship without being onerous would be preferable.

Cr Reid agreed with Cr Highsted. She thought it could be a big issue for some people to admit they were struggling financially. The Government had not asked for much evidence in return for the payments it had made to date. She also supported having the penalties being waived.

Cr Bolger said those who did not take advantage of the policy would be carrying others which was fine. However, he supported having evidence of hardship being provided.

Cr McPhail thought the policy was a good one. The reference to whether evidence of hardship was required he thought would be a form of gatekeeping.

Cr Davis agreed with Cr Highsted. If people were going to apply they would already be at a disadvantage. She did not think they should go through too many hoops to take advantage of the policy.

Cr Dickson said because it was a deferral and not a remission the Council did not need to be too onerous. She asked if the Council had to be accountable for the deferral. Was there a criteria to meet for people's finances so that the rates were being deferred for the right reasons? His Worship thought it was laid out in the policy.

Cr Phillips asked whether the Council was in a financial position to be able to defer the rates. The Chief Executive said it was a step into the unknown and the amount of uplift was unknown. He had suggested it may be necessary to borrow short-term to cover the amount of rates that may be deferred.

Cr Gardyne thought it was a good policy and the key would be discretion and management by the staff.

Cr Reid asked if the staff who would be dealing with ratepayers about the policy could mention the rates rebate scheme. Some may not be aware of their entitlement to it.

There was general consensus to have "evidence" replaced by "declaration" in the policy.

**RESOLVED on the motion of Cr Davis, seconded by Cr MacDonell, THAT the Council consider and approve the Covid-19 Short Term Rates Deferral Policy,**

**THAT the Council note that this policy will come into effect on 24 April 2020,**

**THAT the Council note that the Covid-19 Short Term Rates Deferral Policy is a further announcement of the broader Remission of Rates Policy within the Council's 2018-2028 Long Term Plan,**

**THAT the Council note that this policy will remain in place until 31 August 2020,**

**AND THAT the Council note that a review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the new policy will be undertaken prior to its intended expiry date.**

**2020/38**

The meeting concluded at 5.05pm