

7 August 2026

Phone +64 7 376 0899
30 Tongariro St, Taupō 3330
Private Bag 2005, Taupō 3352

Dear Ministers Watts and Bishop

Taupō District Council and the Head Start Pathway

We understand the Government's drivers of local government reform and agree that change can be beneficial for our community. We intend to be a constructive partner and are simply asking for the time to do this well.

Following the announcements in May, our council has worked hard to respond to Government direction, and to bring our community on the change journey. We have proactively engaged with our community and iwi partners to enable their input recognising there is more work to do.

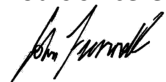
We have dropped other work for our community to prioritise work on Head Start. This work has been completed in-house to minimise cost to the ratepayer. We now have a better understanding of the potential trade-offs and position of neighbouring councils.

We have a desire to work with other councils in the central North Island (Ruapehu, Otorohanga and Waitomo district councils) but recognise that they need more time or have taken a different approach at this stage. We are seeking an additional eight weeks post Cabinet decisions on Head Start proposals to confirm an approach. That will enable us to understand whether other proposals have been approved and be able to present a plan back to Government on how we could proceed down the reform path.

We have attached our formal response to the Head Start process to help guide your officials when providing advice to Cabinet. We have been working with one of your Partnership Directors, Vanessa Blakelock, who has been excellent to work with. This has been a complex process to navigate with many changing variables. Given that, we think it is important that your officials continue to stay in contact and ask that you encourage that two-way communication.

Even though we are not lodging a completed Head Start proposal we are potentially impacted by proposals from others and believe it is critical that we can talk to your officials about those proposals ahead of Cabinet decisions.

Yours sincerely



John Funnell

Mayor, Taupō District Council

Copy to: Hon Louise Upston and Rawiri Waititi